THE QUESTION CONCERNING COMMERCIAL TELEVISION
AND THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN WORLD

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy

2008

University of Western Sydney
This work honours the more-than-human world. It is dedicated to Jean Fell.
Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor Dr John Cameron for his guidance, assistance, patience, support and encouragement in making this thesis a reality. Without his continued effort and expertise the challenge of conduction research that enriched my personal worldview would not have been possible.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by the staff at UWS.

I would also like to acknowledge the proofreading of Dr Ruth Bacchus.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support, patience, and understanding throughout my study.
The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signed ____________________________

Bruce G. Fell
February 2008
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between commercial television and the more-than-human world at a time when global ecological degradation challenges human well-being and the survival of other species. In the latter half of the twentieth century, television became the means by which most people got to know about society and publicly important events or issues. As billions of people the world over regularly view television the planet’s ice caps, rainforests, soil and oceans continue to be depleted. The research considers three questions aimed at a fuller understanding of the role of commercial television in Western society’s approach to global ecological degradation. What arises from being immersed in the more-than-human world? What arises from encountering the broadcast of commercial television? What arises from being immersed in the world of producing commercial television?

The literature on global ecological degradation is substantial; the reasons why Western society is having difficulty coming to terms with the issue is less understood. While quantitative studies of the environmental content of television output have been undertaken, there has not been research into understanding the relationship between ecological awareness, television viewing and commercial television production.

This research takes a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to the questions above. Firstly, the researcher immerses himself in the native woodlands and creeks of his immediate vicinity and gradually peels back layers of his perception. He then immerses himself in the world of watching contemporary commercial television and reflecting on his memories of Australian television since 1956. He juxtaposes the content of twenty-four hours of commercial television with personal recollections that reflect both the invisible and sedimented experiences of commercial television. Thirdly, the researcher observes a range of commercial television production environments (News, Advertising and Drama). In doing so he reflects on conversations with and between television executives, directors and scriptwriters who occupy this world.
The main findings are that commercial television scriptwriters and personalities hold the most available tools for delivering an Australian-based ecological message through the plot and actions of characters, via a ‘green mise-en-scène’. However, there are severe constraints on this process because of the over-riding importance of ratings. Commercial television is a ratings hungry ‘third parent’ that has increasingly occupied the everydayness of Australian homes since 1956. The invisible technological nature of television has created a particular dis-stance between the production of commercial television and how its mise-en-scène is perceived in domestic Australia, by a population that is technologically and procedurally removed from the more-than-human world.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Topic and Questions

a. The world problematique

The trail of ecological and social degradation leading from the planet’s foothills to the depths of her oceans leaves no inquiring mind in doubt about the severity of the global environmental crisis. In the early 1970s the Club of Rome identified a set of crucial problems (political, social, economic, technological, environmental, psychological and cultural) facing humanity; they named the outcome of this interacting dynamic the World Problematique:

The complexity of the world problematique lies in the high level of mutual interdependence of all these problems on the one hand, and in the long time it often takes until the impact of action and reaction in this complex system becomes visible (Club of Rome, 2007).

At stake is the well-being and the very survival of our civilisation. A joint statement was made by the organising committee following the 2005 ‘Science and Ethics: Can Homo sapiens Survive?’ conference held at the Academy of Science in Canberra. The multidisciplinary conference tapped into expertise in law, economics, medicine, politics, journalism, aboriginal affairs, earth sciences, religion, education, nuclear armaments, defence studies and ecology. In doing so, the conference reached the conclusion that:

… civilization as we know it will not survive beyond a few decades unless there is a radical change in human culture, from a society driven by the pursuit of material wealth to one focused on human well-being (Fenner, F., Boyden, S., Green, D., Glikson, A., and Clark, S. 2005).
This thesis asks questions based on the World Problematique regarding the viewing and the making of commercial television: What arises from encountering the broadcast of commercial television? What arises from being immersed in the world of producing commercial television? These questions lead to how commercial television — the television medium most viewed by most Westerners — might be able to contribute towards addressing the World Problematique. With the above questions in mind, I ask: What arises from being immersed in the more-than-human world?

In part, the question concerning our civilization, commercial television and global ecological degradation is a question concerning our civilisation and the ‘more-than-human world’ (Abram, 1995). There is a confrontational edge to the term ‘more-than-human world’; if the term were ‘less’-than-human, I dare say it would ring truer within our culture’s predominantly Cartesian, Western worldview. But the term is ‘more’-than-human; it names an entity that challenges Western metaphysics — it denounces the concept that the sub-species Homo sapiens sapiens is somehow separate from the earth and has a right to rule the planet.

Unlike the Cartesian appropriation of ‘nature’, the term ‘more-than-human world’ sets up a discussion that can’t be reduced to anthropocentric constructs. The more-than-human world is too slippery to grasp; its size and shape is indefinable; it is both vast and miniscule, observable and invisible, knowable and unknowable; in short, the more-than-human world exists beyond the scope of Western metaphysics: it is both possible and impossible to hold — none of which diminishes its relevance to human existence. The acknowledgement of a more-than-human world is an acceptance that soil and rock, grass and tree, insect and animal, bird and fish, creek and ocean, like breath and wind, have an innate integrity. It is therefore centrally important to ask, ‘what arises from being immersed in the more-than-human world’ when questioning the global influence of commercial television.
b. Commercial television

The allure of television across the sweep of our civilization can’t be denied. From the latter half of the twentieth century television, and in particular commercial television, ‘has become the place where, and the means by which most people have got to know about most other people, and about publicly important events or issues’ (Fiske & Hartley, 2003:xv). Centrally located in the daily lives of billions of people, the television receiver is one of the first things accessed in the morning and amongst the last at night. We arrange our domestic furniture to enable line-of-sight between the television screen and much of what we do in the home. Consequently, the television receiver is usually within view when we are chatting on-line, speaking on the phone, talking to the person beside us; indeed, the screen is viewed while cooking, ironing, reading etc.

A common misconception is that non-commercial and commercial television are fundamentally the same. Such a misunderstanding is understandable, especially when one considers that the same technological device, the television receiver, delivers both commercial and non-commercial programs. Indeed the same technological recording and editing devices are employed to make both commercial and non-commercial programs. The three free-to-air commercial networks in Australia are only a ‘click’ away from the non-commercial ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), and the semi-commercial SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) and in some locations, community television, as well as Pay-TV.

The remote control, like the television receiver, can be a deceptive device. For while non-commercial networks are only a click away from commercial networks, the majority of viewers for the majority of viewing-time click onto commercial television. To conceptualise viewers’ interaction with commercial television using the rubric applied to non-commercial television would lead to a misreading; conversations with professionals who have worked in both non-commercial and commercial television reveal that there is a substantial difference between the two in terms of both form and content. This in itself may not be of significance if it were not for the substantial numbers of persons regularly viewing commercial television as compared to non-commercial television. For example, in Australia alone, across the three commercial
national networks, there are over 15 million ‘viewer hours’ entered into each evening
during the most popular primetime programs. In addition, viewers dip in and out of
commercial television programming at all times of the day and night. That said, it is
not uncommon for non-commercial television to draw large numbers on certain
occasions, though non-commercial television is less likely to do so 365 evenings a
year. For example, the 2005 Ashes cricket series attracted unusually large numbers of
viewers to SBS, as has been the case when SBS has televised popular international
soccer events such as the World Cup. Equally, the ABC broadcasts a number of
programs throughout the year that draw big numbers, the Australian written and
produced The Chaser’s War On Everything being a case in point. However,
commercial television draws (and indeed requires) large numbers of viewers 365
evenings a year. Hence, the emphasis in this thesis is on the all-day every-day nature
of ‘commercial-television’, as distinct from ‘television’.

In some ways commercial television has slipped under the radar. Since 1938 in the
USA, 1956 in Australia, right up until 1999 when commercial television reached
Bhutan, commercial television has increasingly influenced our civilisation in subtle
and significant ways. The shift in lifestyle that commercial television has facilitated
can be easily underestimated; for example, the current promotional tag for my local
Network Nine affiliate WIN News claims, ‘More people in the Central West get their
news from WIN News than any other source’. It is not just the commercial content of
news programs that I am concerned with here, for as we are about to see, all
commercial television genres inform ‘all the time’. In an epoch of global ecological
degradation, this thesis asks questions concerning the relationship between the viewer
and the more-than-human world, in relation to the manner in which commercial
television informs the viewer.

The viewer is not obligated to view commercial television, and can choose instead
free-to-air non-commercial television as well as subscription Pay-TV. However
Australian television ratings data demonstrates that the viewer prefers commercial
television to non-commercial television and Pay-TV. While commercial television is
produced in a particular type of industrial place, it is by and large consumed in a
domestic place. Television, in particular commercial television, is for substantially
large numbers of people the dominant, if not only, window providing a non-urban view of the world. Increasing numbers of Australians have no embodied experience of a non-television (televisual) habitat. As a result, the new generation of commercial television personnel are, as it were, native to commercial television. Research shows that within Western cityscapes children increasingly have television receivers placed in their bedrooms from as young as two and three years old. Statistically, by the time a student has reached the documentary subject I teach, they have viewed around 25,000 hours of television — the majority of which is commercial.

c. Modern technology and the more-than-human world

There is no doubt that the ongoing sophistication of image technology has impacted on the day-to-day activities of civilisation, from still photography in the 1820s, to moving pictures in the late 1890s, to the advent of television in the mid 1900s. Now, a plethora of convergent mass media devices dominate screen-based communication: mobile phones send and receive text-based messages, snap photos, play MP3 music files, screen movies downloaded from the World Wide Web and access television. To this end, ‘Modern Technology’ (Heidegger, 1977) has positioned the screen before the everyday nature of contemporary existence — from early morning television through to cinematic billboards lining our commuting trail, to computer interfaces at work, school and recreation. Today, an evening’s viewing can incorporate viewing DVDs or YouTube movies, as well as our favourite evening television program. Indeed, in the case of my media students, it is not unheard of for all three image technologies to be on display within the one domestic location.

The technological aspect of my question is primarily directed towards the hub of the modern screen: commercial television. The price future generations will pay for the seemingly simple pleasures portrayed on the contemporary screen as ‘normal’, is only beginning to be discussed (see Jhally, 2006). For example, an actor dines on a fresh garden salad while snowflakes drift on the breeze beyond the restaurant window. This, like other simple pleasures shown in countless other apparently innocuous television scenes, is inextricably associated with the invisible nature of modern technology. It raises questions concerning the contemporary screen and its affect on the more-than-human world: a world that provides both the reality of the garden salad
and the energy required to enable the consumption of a spring salad before the snow. The television program makes no mention of the out-of-season food or, for that matter, that the actors portrayed wearing T-shirts before the snow can only do so due to the exploitation of the planet’s finite resources. While engaged in story, the viewer takes in the mise-en-scène (staging an action) of snow, salad and T-shirt; indeed, an entire industry of product placement has spawned around such an understanding — the snow falls before the banner of the snow resort, the logo on the coffee cup resting beside the salad advertises a brand, as does the ‘swoosh’ on the T-shirt. The question arises: what is the cost exacted on our global ecosystems by the screening of unsustainable images, as normal?

The warning to civilisation contained within the press release by the organising committee for the ‘Science and Ethics: Can Homo sapiens Survive?’ conference questions the long-term well-being of civilisation. Fenner et al., (2005) drew on a substantial array of global ecological facts in order to underscore their story. The ‘facts’ presented on commercial television represent particular values: story-laden values that are antithetic to the research-based stories of Fenner et al. In a sense, the thesis is asking how the two stories relate. In their seminal text Reading Television, Fiske and Hartley argue, ‘there is nothing natural about realism, but it does correspond to the way we currently perceive the world’ (1978/2003:128). The question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world involves asking what does ‘commercial-realism’ say about the planet’s biosphere? In practical day-to-day terms, how can commercial-realism work towards addressing global ecological degradation?

d. Invisibility and technology

Ihde (1990) helps us to appreciate that when technologies such as television become both sophisticated and commonplace, their function melds into our lifeworld in such a way that the technological process is overlooked. In this sense, television can be conceptualised as having become ‘in invisible’, as indeed have many technological processes and outcomes. An example may be useful. Once an automobile was started by physically hand-cranking the engine. As a young man, in winter, I often had to hand-crank start an old Massey Ferguson tractor. Then, when holding the ‘hand-
crank’, one had to position one’s thumbs in such a way that should the motor kickback (sending the hand-crank spinning vigorously in the opposite direction) one didn’t get one’s thumbs broken, literally. Like the tractor, the original process for starting a domestic vehicle required this type of physical engagement with and understanding of the automobile. In this sense, fundamental processes of the engine were both physically and cognitively ‘visible’. Now, the turn of a key sends a message to a computer chip, that in turn sets in train the technological processes required to start the automobile. Now, if the car doesn’t start we ring for help; there is no longer a hand-crank in the tool-kit of our automobile or our memory bank: the technology that operates the car has become invisible. My ten year-old automobile hasn’t broken down once; such reliability can have a down side.

Advanced technologies, while making day-to-day life processes less cranky, can also undermine our ability to cognitively and/or physically enter the fray should something either break down, or not work to our liking. Ihde helps us to appreciate that vast invisible technological processes influence contemporary civilization’s understanding of the world. In the case of this thesis, I am interested in the invisible processes and technologies behind the moving image of commercial television. If invisible technologies facilitate our contemporary existence, and if there is no longer a hand-crank in the toolbox, what hermeneutic signals should be taken notice of in order that we don’t break down?

‘The remote control doesn’t work Dad,’ declared my youngest child.
‘The batteries are probably flat,’ I replied.
‘I didn’t know it had batteries,’ came the response.

What are the consequences when a range of technological processes become invisible prior to birth? I am interested in what the user of invisible technology takes for granted when viewing commercial television. For, in the case of commercial television, an entire generation has no recollection of a pre-commercial television world.

The experience of ‘old’ technology by a ‘new’ generation of users is not conceptualised by the new user in the same manner that the original or old user
conceptualises it. The background processes contained within a piece of old technology can be more apparent or ‘less invisible’ to the old user than it is to a new user. Increasingly, the new user is placed before the interface of our commercial-culture without any, or a limited knowledge of the engine — the process that drives it. Here, the process that I refer to is the intersubjectivity of the more-than-human world — ‘phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects’ (Abram, 1995:38). The thesis asks questions concerning the new user at a time when commercial television is the dominant window on the world, a world that’s perilously close to ‘kicking-back’.

2. Personal Context

a. The revolution of ’56

There are several twists and turns in my understanding of television that inform the direction of this thesis. Firstly, television arrived in my home in 1956 when I was five years old; my family was included in the initial five percent of Melbourne households that purchased a television receiver that year. I have rich memories of the event — a procession of stars such as Lucille Ball, Phil Silvers and Jackie Gleason filled our house with stories of mirth and mayhem; in the process, my family fell silent before the screen. In 1956, television was yet one more progressive step towards the future. Advances around this time saw our daily billy of milk from the dairy farm across the paddock replaced by pasteurised bottled milk delivered daily to our door. As subdivisions replaced the dairy paddocks, bitumen roads replaced dirt tracks. Our daily bread shifted from being delivered by a horse-drawn baker’s cart to residing on a shelf at Coles and Dickens first supermarket (Coles ‘New World’) at Kew Junction.

In 1968, at seventeen, I slipped off the suburban map and into an alternative life of urban squats and rural communes in Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. For a number of years I didn’t live in places that had television, commercial or otherwise. During this period, whenever I did come across television, I was always aware of how ‘other’ television was in relationship to the life I was living. To this end, the experience of observing the relationship between persons and television remains vivid. By the time I re-entered mainstream society the television
receiver had drifted from being an exotic addition to the home, to being a component of everyday life. In terms of this research, it is the less noticeable (invisible) aspect of commercial television that interests me.

b. The revolution of ’86

Ironically, a background as a writer, director, editor and teacher of television production also informs my questioning. While I have directed and produced material for mainstream network television, my interest in television production has focused on community-based video and television production.

In 1986, with the help of several progressive social workers, the NSW Drug and Alcohol Authority provided funds for me to set up a television studio in the education unit at Bathurst Gaol, NSW. At the time, as a result of the Nagel Inquiry, Bathurst Gaol was a progressive institution. Then, inmates could undertake introductory literacy classes through to university subjects. The education unit had a functioning library, pottery kiln, a music department, gym and facilities for wood and steel work. Central to this story are the dormitories that had self-contained kitchens. The multinational inhabitants of Bathurst Gaol, and hence the flavour of the food they cooked meant that the evening meal was often the high point of the day.

Each cell in these dormitories had an inlet capable of receiving a VCR signal. Subsequently, I produced a weekly program called Crimbox that was cabled to the inmates each Friday evening. Crimbox presented inmate produced material: music clips, comedy skits, inmate news, HIV/AIDS awareness material and advertisements for the education unit. All this changed in 1988 when the Greiner Liberal Government came into power and subsequently dismantled the Nagel reforms. Internal barbwire was re-introduced creating prisons within a prison. The inmates initially tolerated these and other draconian measures. However, what deeply incensed the inmates was the decision to stop them from purchasing, at their own expense, fresh fruit and vegetables for the preparation of meals in dormitory kitchens. The inmates threatened to riot. In an attempt to quell the unrest the Governor of the Gaol agreed to be interviewed by inmates for Crimbox.
On arriving at Bathurst Gaol the Monday morning following the Governor’s interview being cabled, I was confronted with a vandalised and inoperable television studio. The interview with the prison Governor was the last television segment ever made at Bathurst Gaol. Within weeks my funding was cut. I had witnessed firsthand the consequences of technological empowerment. The ‘safe sex’, ‘safe needle usage’, ‘anti violence’ and ‘empowering’ videos I produced with the inmates, demonstrated to me how liberating technological empowerment can be. The destruction of the television studio demonstrated to me how confronting technological empowerment could be for those determined to hold power.

c. Teaching with dirty hands

From a childhood in suburban North Balwyn, where my mother knew the botanical names of all the plants in our garden, through my stints as a farm labourer — from battery hens to broad acre rice farming, from avocado plantations to an organic banana grove — right up to the present, I have always had contact with the elements. Whether raising native plants, collecting chook and duck eggs, turning their manure into compost or growing fruit and vegetables, having dirty hands, as it were, when combined with the lessons from Bathurst Gaol engender my questioning of commercial television. My experience as a teacher and television maker indicates to me that the vast majority of persons I come in contact with don’t have the ecological awareness or media literacy required to deconstruct the world as presented to them by the commercial screen.

In the summer of 1991-92 my family sold our 1920s red brick house in the main street of Bathurst and purchased a tiny fibro fishing shack at the junction of two creeks. When we acquired the land we didn’t know that there were platypus in the creek or wallabies in the woods or tawny frogmouths snoring in the yellow box overhanging the shack. We purchased the land for other reasons: a year-round water supply for the orchard we were going to plant, space for a large veggie patch and the opportunity to live out a dream of building with clay. Here, over the subsequent years I have changed; the creeks, the platypus, the tawny frogmouths, the wallabies, the air, the trees, the hills and more have collectively worked on me — as Abram (1995) might say, ‘a particular type of being washed over me as I breathed in its vapour’. As a
result of living in the particularity of this place I have become open and indeed vulnerable to its more-than-humanness; I feel as though I moved towards becoming ‘native’ to this land, attempting to attune myself ‘to its songs and moving to its rhythms’ (Rigby, 2004a:xii). It is hard not to bear witness to ecological degradation when the blood of the wounded drips over you, be it standing in an eroded gully beside the skeletal remains of native flora and fauna, or watching the chemical residue secreted by a crop dusting plane drift onto the surface of a creek. The creek in question fills a deep platypus breeding pool before babbling onwards into the dam that supplies water to many of the persons I work and socialise with, not to mention our eldest son and his partner.

As a result of commuting between home and work a questioning began. I began to notice that I was constantly moving between disparate worlds. The process of commuting takes me away from the world of platypus and wallaby; my journey across hill and dale places me in a world of degraded farmland. There, exotic animals pulverise the native soil; above, the tips of native trees recede inch by inch, year by year as dieback blotches the gum-green tree-scape, replacing it with the stark grey sentinels of trees reduced to skeletons. Having moved through the world of rural degradation, I drive into the hustle and bustle world of an inland city; there, at each corner produce spills onto the streets, billboards perpetually announce ‘Sale’, ‘Discount’, ‘Cheap’: inducements for the passer-by to acquire more ‘stuff’ (Suzuki, 2006). As I drive into the leafy grounds of the institution where I work, the lush green lawns and exotic trees catch me pondering the signs of mass consumption from the perspective of having just witnessed a degraded rural landscape. The chemical spray drifting from the nozzle of the crop-duster seems to morph with the dust rising from the plough that circles the dead trees; I perceive this substance as forming the very paint that so gaily inscribes upon the city’s billboards the prophetic catch cry, ‘Buy Now, Pay Later’.

3. Outline of the Thesis

In Chapter Two, I consider the influence that the screen has had in the shaping of contemporary society. The moving image has predominantly re-presented an imperial view of the world; it has by and large represented ‘other’ people and places in a
particular frame. As such, the question before this work is a question concerning ‘screen-truth’ in the context of Heidegger’s notions of technê, poiësis and alêtheia. By reviewing the lineage of the screen in its broadest sense, I document the disconnect that has occurred between the Western commercial screen and the more-than-human world. I do this by discussing the lineage of the screen and its relationship to well-being in the context of animist rock art, Italian Renaissance perspectival art, early film and the later sound and colour cinema before discussing the advent of commercial television. The link is developed between ‘screen’, commercial television, consumption, well-being and global ecological degradation.

The methodology discussed in Chapter Three strives to entice into conscious attention the overlap between commercial television and the degradation of the more-than-human world. My methodological approach draws on an elemental methodical structure for hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, one that complements Max van Manen’s (1997) inquiry into researching lived experience. The method of ‘direct perceptual experience’ undertaken here emphasises the notion of the centrality of the earth in all human experience. I employ rich, thick descriptions of various layers of my actions and interactions. Such layered experience ‘acknowledges actors (researched and researcher) have perceptual (pre) conceptions, (pre) constructions, (in) actions which are enacted via the different habitats/social conditions they inhabit (geographically/culturally)’ (Payne, 2005:428). My approach draws on ‘lived experience’; a philosophical position insisting that people cannot exist apart from the world; persons are intimately caught up in and immersed in the world. The methodology draws on Martin Heidegger’s notion of Dasein: of persons’ being-in-the-world.

I seek to demonstrate a range of experiences possible within the world that I live in; consequently, ‘from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings’ (van Manen, 1997:5). I consider my methodological approach to the world of both commercial television and the more-than-human world through the adage of Haraway (1984:79): ‘facts are theory-laden; theories are value-laden; values are story-laden’. My approach to the dominant storyteller of our time (commercial television) is via the values I have acquired since living in my little
shack at the junction of two creeks; ‘every form of research and theorizing is shot through with values’ (van Manen 1997:43); hence, the research is richly saturated in my story.

Chapter Four is a phenomenological investigation of my immersion in the native woodlands, creeks, nooks and crannies neighbouring my home. The research reveals a process of immersion that takes place over a number of years; in doing so it reflects on how this extended period of immersion works at peeling back layers of perception. From creek to woodlands we observe the unfolding of experience when immersed in the more-than-human. I establish a particular engagement with the world in which the more-than-human is understood as central.

So named by the television production professionals, ‘Viewerland’ is that difficult-to-describe terrain where the television signal ends. In Chapter Five I reflect on video recordings of a twenty-four hour cycle of a commercial television network, in conjunction with recollections of commercial television over the duration of my life. This is undertaken so that I can compare and contrast features of Australian commercial television since its inception in 1956. I juxtapose my observations of a twenty-four hour commercial network cycle with my memories of television as a means to reflect on the invisible and sedimented experience of commercial broadcast television. My memory of commercial television begins in 1956 when television was publicly displayed behind the window of the Myers Emporium in the city of Melbourne. This memory is followed by memories of television entering my street and subsequently entering my home; from here I branch out and draw on memories leading up to recent commercial television experiences. The reflections on the broadcasting of commercial television are designed to help conceptualise the slippery, messy concept of Viewerland.

Chapter Six draws on a series of observations undertaken within commercial television studios and production houses. It includes conversations with a range of commercial television production professionals, all of whom I knew before and know beyond this research. I reflect on my observations, overheard conversations and direct conversations with these professionals from a variety of perspectives: visitor, television maker, friend, and former teacher. I observe these people in a range of
locations, for as well as observing them at work, I also interact with them at restaurants, driving between my university and the airport, as well as in their homes. I strive to present a sense of the human aspect of commercial television, of persons whose work is situated inside the highly competitive, ‘take no prisoners’ world that is the workplace of commercial television. Combined, Chapters Five and Six enable a discussion and analysis that incorporates both the ‘viewer’ and the ‘maker’ into the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world.

In the final chapter I analyse and discuss Viewerland and commercial television production within a particular ‘more-than-human’ emphasis, one that is concerned about the warnings of Fenner et al. (2005). My intention is that such a discussion will ultimately contribute towards a better understanding of commercial television within the frame of World Problematique. Staying true to the methodology employed, the thesis makes no claims to solving the problem at hand; rather, the thesis advances the understanding of the dynamic between the more-than-human world, Viewerland and commercial television production. Chapter Seven concludes by identifying possible paths within commercial television that social activists, change agents and educators ought to consider when planning and designing campaigns, curriculum and messages concerning ecological sustainability.

The main findings of the research are that commercial television personalities (stars) within light entertainment, such as soap opera, hold the most available tools for delivering an ecological message through the plot and actions of their characters, and via a green mise-en-scène. However, there are severe constraints on this process because of the over-riding value given to television ratings. In addition, the invisible technological nature of television has created a particular dis-stance due to a combination of production imperatives collectively resulting in the mise-en-scène of commercial television being perceived by the viewer as ‘real’.

Commercial television is both technologically and procedurally removed from the more-than-human world. As a result of the compelling story-laden values adhered to within the production of commercial television, Viewerland is an anthropocentric domain. The challenge that lies beyond this research is how to incorporate
emotionally engaging stories that will enable the viewer to reflect constantly upon the more-than-human world, and hence upon a well-being that is ecological sustainable.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: SCREENING THE WORLD

In what follows we shall be questioning concerning technology. Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is a way of thinking. All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary. We shall be questioning concerning technology, and in so doing we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds.

Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*

1. The Screen

In a review of commercial television and the more-than-human world, the complex dynamic between screen and language is never far away. This chapter examines that dynamic and the subsequent influence screen language has had in shaping Homo sapiens sapiens’ well-being. I use the term ‘Homo sapiens sapiens’ to emphasise that ‘we’ are bipedal primates belonging to the mammalian species Homo sapiens — we are but one amongst countless entities dwelling upon the earth, hence my use of the term is not merely intended as a scientific classification. My meaning-making is located within a worldview (Weltanschauung) where neither man nor woman holds superiority within the larger dimension of the more-than-human world — I am extremely concerned about the relationship men and women have with the more-than-human world. To this extent, drawing on Max van Manen’s person-centred and ethics-sensitive approach to phenomenological inquiry, I use the terms ‘person’ and
‘persons’ to accentuate the fact that my research is one of observing individuals (including myself) rather than ‘people’, in general.

John Ralston Saul captures the depth and breadth of the idea of the screen when he links the traditional viewing of rock art of Lascaux with the contemporary viewing of television; he writes:

There are differences between the late-twentieth-century Western television viewer and the Palaeolithic inhabitant of Lascaux in Dordogne. The former sits in a half darkened room, holding a remote control device. The latter was equipped with some sort of rudimentary torch while he stared at his cave drawings. These and other differences relate more to social organizations than to the sensibility with which they see the images. If anything, the Lascaux viewers had a clearer, more conscious and more consciously integrated concept of what they were seeing than we do today (Saul, 1992:425).

The ancient images on cave walls at sites from Lascaux to Arnhem Land are, in a particular way of thinking, powerful indicators of the place the screen occupies in a person’s ‘lifeworld’ (van Manen, 1997:184). In many ways there is less difference between the ancient screens of Arnhem Land and the contemporary screens of Australian commercial television than might at first be supposed. Our concept of screen can be confused by both the structure of the surface and the technology employed to render the image. While there appears to be no substantial evidence that H. erectus or H. sapiens rendered onto a screen, a ground and possibly ochred section of mammoth tooth found at Tata, Hungary, in deposits between 78,000 and 116,000 years old (Morwood, 2002:7) leaves the question still open concerning the lineage of the screen. A coherent visual system associated with fully modern humans can be traced back about 45,000 years. It is generally accepted that there hasn’t been a significant change in human cognitive ability since the end of the Pleistocene period, around 10,500 years ago (Bednarik, 2007).

Cognitive Archaeology argues that the human brain has not increased in size for the past 500,000 to 350,000 years (Rose, 1976; Deacon, 1997, cited in Bednarik, 2007). That is not to say that the ‘need’ for a bigger brain did not exist; however physical
constraints did and do exist. The physical constraint of birth in relation to a baby’s head size is often cited as one reason that ‘a kind of surrogate cortex with unlimited capacity’ (Hodgson, 2000) was required and subsequently developed. The need for continued brain growth ‘would have been circumvented through the “discovery” of a means of “holding” information in a reliable, stable and relatively permanent form’ (Gregory, 1970, cited in Hodgson, 2000:8). In this vein, ‘art’ can act as a sign to compress enormous amounts of information into manageable proportions, hence, ‘expanding memory’ (Gamble, 1993, cited in Hodgson, 2000:8). Due to the asymmetrical nature of the cortex, where the left side is broadly devoted to language, the right more to artistic expression and visual perception (Hollinworth & Henderson, 1999; Kolb & Whishaw, 1996; Pylyshyn, 1999; Solso, 1993, cited in Hodgson, 2000:8), the more-than-human world (nature) provided Homo sapiens sapiens ‘with the creative capacity to bring a new order of entities into being, in the guise of works of art’ (Rigby, 2004a:103). For Hodgson evidence from brain morphology suggests that speech developed significantly ahead of, and separate to, depictive modes:

Speech as a first decisive step towards a pro-active concern with information processing would have had inherent practical limitations … only ‘art’ as an important alternative mode was able to take up, at this point, the reins in the form of an aide memoire par excellence (Hodgson, 2000:8).

I am reading the term ‘art’ in the context that Heidegger (1977) speaks of art and its relationship to technè, poiësis and alêtheia, as well as the complementary manner in which traditional indigenous people, such as Aboriginal Australians, call upon art to help sing-up the land — to care for country.

Rock art, personal adornment, portable art objects and music first appeared at about the same time in Europe, America, India, South Africa and Australia. The two principal explanations offered are ‘changes in the cultural sphere’ and ‘developments in human cognitive capacity’ (Morwood, 2002:179). Hence, when art found a permanent place on the walls of caves and other protected places, a screen-induced epistemology was set in train — ‘rock faces’ as screen became a significant component of the surrogate cortex, allowing people to:
… render permanent and tangible that which was formerly intangible and fleeting, the seeking of order in the midst of disorder, the expression of the sense of pattern, harmony and symmetry synthesised from the immediate, ambient confusion (Hodgson, 2000:3).

a. Screen as social system

For the screen to become a surrogate cortex it had to be rendered with tangible and preferably permanent information. Particular and specific conventions of meaning developed. Morwood draws on Spencer and Gillen (1899) to make the point that the screen can only be understood in terms of its interaction with other elements of the social system in which it exists. Drawing on Morwood, we can appreciate why screen language developed and how ‘meaning’ became affixed to the screen’s surface. The screen became central to a range of spiritual, educative and economic processes: it evolved and concretised ‘in human place’, signifying a range of mental constructs.

For example, generalized paintings of fork-tail catfish and mullet in Western Arnhem Land provided specific visual cues, including both external and internal features (that enable at least twelve species of fish to be identified); Patricia Vinnicombe (cited in Morwood, 2002:3), argues that such artists did not paint simply what they saw, but selected what was symbolically important to them. Morwood argues that thousands of traditional indigenous paintings were rendered by relatively few artists. Morwood’s research supports the notion that the screen must always be understood within the social context of its presentation. As he argues, ‘the choice of motifs could depend on who was present, their social relationships and negotiation between those participating’ (op. cit., p.188).

The surrogate cortex is integral to the presentation of cultural similarities and differences; it functions to connect and divide, to facilitate or restrict information flow. As a surrogate cortex, the screen is a primary means of taking possession, it enables Homo sapiens sapiens to cognitively attach themselves to a culturally constructed surface as a means of stimulating memory. It enables a process by which society can access and archive political and spiritual, social and religious dictums. Data rendered upon the surrogate cortex enabled and enables those with influence to reflect and prioritise future renderings. Cognitive Archaeology argues that the earliest
screen attempted to project Homo sapiens sapiens onto the universe, to make their mark upon it. Hodgson’s research supports Saul’s argument that a sophisticated language competence in vocal and written form together with an elaborate conceptual ability was in place for some ten thousand years from the Mesolithic period to the Italian Renaissance — before the laws of linear perspective began to dominate civilisation (discussed below). Many of the key qualities found in animist cultures concerning the reciprocity between the screen, language and the more-than-human world had, by the early modern period, been eroded.

b. Placing the screen in perspective

Here, we look at the screen during the ‘early modern period’, in particular the Italian Renaissance and the ‘Age of Enlightenment’ within European philosophy. This period saw the screen solidify as an instrument for the ‘project of man’ (Lipsitz, 1990) within the context of a ‘purely human world’ (McKibben, 1992). For historian Carolyn Merchant:

> Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth at its centre gave way to a mechanistic world view in which nature was reconstructed as dead and passive, to be dominated and controlled by humans (1989:xvi).

A substantial shift in the function of the screen took place during the Italian Renaissance, one that altered the relationship between the viewer and the more-than-human world. The technique of perspectival painting was mastered between 1400 and 1500, and ‘the image became real, as real as paint would ever make it’ (Saul, 1992:434). Raphael, Michelangelo and da Vinci made the final breakthroughs in the technique that enabled an accurate representation of reality — ‘making it possible to paint a perfect image’ (Saul, 1992:426). This new approach to the world ‘found its visual expression in the oil painting, and could not have found it in any other visual art form’ (Berger, 1972:86). As a result of perspectival oil painting, the centrality of people and commodities was significantly enhanced by a pictorial realism never before achieved:
What distinguishes oil painting from any other form of painting is its special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the lustre, the solidity of what it depicts. It defines the real as that which you can put your hands on … it can suggest objects possessing colour, texture and temperature, filling a space and, by implication, filling the entire world (Berger, 1972:89).

The early modern period saw the perfection of perspectival art in Italy at a time when substantial wealth flowed into Florence. Ocean trade routes were beginning to open up for the slave trade and the traffic of riches from other continents into Europe became substantial (Berger, 1972); these riches would later supply the capital for the Industrial Revolution (Wright, 2004). The combination of diverse developments in art and the natural and human sciences ‘created a subjectivity or point of view that has become synonymous to its adherents with the human subject’ (Lipsitz, 1990:27). The scientific advancements and artistic expressions of Europe are still considered by many as ‘the best that humanity has ever achieved, and the story of the world told from the European point of view is presented as total world history’ (op. cit., p. 27). The ‘West and the Rest’, argue Shohat and Stam, ‘organizes everyday language into binaristic hierarchies implicitly flattering to Europe: our “nations,” their “tribes”; our “religions,” their “superstitions”; our “culture,” their “folklore”; our “art,” their “artifacts”’ (1994:2). They contend that ‘Eurocentrism is a form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism’, and document how ‘the Rest’ was individually, culturally and ecologically degraded as ‘Eurocentrism, like Renaissance perspectives in painting, envisions the world from a single privileged point’ (op. cit., p. 2). In this context, ‘art’ is no longer a memoire par excellence for singing up land, it no longer resonates with how I read Bednarik, Heidegger, Hodgson and Morwood, for each in their own way refer to art in terms of a poietic revealing the more-than-human world, which is substantially different from the European art of the Enlightenment — one that places the human subject as central to existence and sanctions the unsustainable manufacturing and possession of the world.

While acknowledging that contemporary society has benefited from the early modern period in a number of ways, historians such as George Lipsitz (1990) stress that it has also placed us in a difficult scenario. Of concern is the instrumental view of nature
that contemporary society has inherited, one that has led to the exploitation of the natural environment. Perspectival induced realism, argues Saul, helped to build a boundary around our knowing that culminated in the elevation of science in the hierarchy of human knowledge and understanding.

The Italian Renaissance highlights a turning-point in the language that informed the screen — the lineage of our contemporary attitudes to property and monetary exchange can be seen as beginning to dominate Western thought. For example, Saul discusses how the content of the screen shifted from images focusing on the teachings of the Christian church, in which scenery containing religious figures dominated the screen, to a period where the powerful community leaders financing the screen began having their portraits incorporated into the periphery of the screen. Eventually, the screen became dominated by, and indeed the sole domain of, images of such powerful people; ‘as the painters inched closer to the perfect image, so society became ever more committed to having itself reflected’ (Saul, 1993:436). Berger takes up the story here, demonstrating via a series of Italian Renaissance oil paintings (1972:83-112), how the content of the images eventually came to be designed to flaunt personal wealth and European hegemonic supremacy. When illustrating this point, Berger describes Holbeins’ painting *The Ambassadors*, a work that depicts the ‘look’ of a class of men associated with early modern colonizing — their ‘stance towards the world’ presents men ‘who were convinced that the world was there to furnish their residence in it’. Berger adds that in its extreme form ‘this conviction was confirmed by the relations being set up between colonial conqueror and the colonized’ (1972:96). Drawing on Shohat and Stam we can name the ‘colonized’ as both the people and the natural resources those people lived amongst. Paintings such as *The Ambassadors* demonstrate the technical supremacy of the Italian Renaissance image over those that had gone before it and, in so doing, present to the viewer, in almost photographic quality, the wealth, and scientific and colonial supremacy of the time. Commenting on *The Ambassadors*, Berger writes:

Except for the faces and hands, there is not a surface in this picture which does not make one aware of how it has been elaborately worked over — by weavers, embroiderers, carpet-makers, goldsmiths, leather workers, mosaic-makers, furriers, tailors, jewellery — and how this working-over and the resulting
richness of each surface has been finally worked-over and reproduced by Holbeins the painter (Berger, 1972:90).

Berger is not saying this celebration of wealth was a new phenomenon; earlier artistic traditions celebrated wealth. Then, wealth was a symbol of a fixed social or divine order. Wright (2004) argues that the first significant evidence of ‘leisure born of food surplus’ can be seen on the rock screens of Lascaux and Altamira from around 17,000 to 15,000 years ago. This was a time when substantial game was available; technological advances, such as large spearheads and devices to propel them, meant that the hunters and gatherers were producing more than mere subsistence. The magnificent paintings that appeared on cave walls and rock faces, in a vigorous naturalism that would not be seen again until the Renaissance, demonstrate that people had time to paint the walls, make beads and effigies, play music and indulge in religious rituals, ‘for the first time people were rich’ (Wright, 2004:36). This has parallels with the Italian Renaissance in that both periods could ‘afford’ artistic expression to develop over a sustained period of time. What we see emerge in the early modern period is how the screen celebrated a new kind of wealth, one that emphasised ‘the supreme buying power of money’; hence, the significance of oil painting and the perfection of perspectival painting can be found in ‘the painting itself’; the painting style and the paint technology available ‘had to be able to demonstrate the desirability of what money could buy’ (Berger, 1971:90). Here, Berger is drawing on Lévi-Strauss, for whom Italian Renaissance oil painting was ‘not only an instrument of knowledge but … also an instrument of possession’, only made possible because of the immense fortunes amassed by rich merchants who ‘looked upon painters as agents, who allowed them to confirm their possession of all that was beautiful and desirable in the world’ (cited in Berger, 1972:86).

c. From oil paint to developing fluid

Perspectival oil painting ‘did to appearances what capital did to social relations’; Italian Renaissance art and Cartesian philosophy go hand in hand, in the sense that they ‘reduced everything to the equality of objects’; importantly, in terms of the degradation of the more-than-human world, ‘everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity’ (Berger, 1972:87). The early modern
period is one in which we see the beginning of a modality in which all reality is mechanically measured by materiality. Perspectival oil painting ‘conveyed a vision of total exteriority’ (op. cit., p. 87), that was not surpassed until the commercial availability of colour photographic equipment. Of particular interest to this work is the ‘moving’ picture, a technological adaptation of the photograph. It is also an ideological extension of Renaissance perspective art. Historian Eric Barnouw (1993) argues that the moving image was immediately aligned with science; similarly Denzin (1995) quoting Comolli (1971-72/1985), states that the camera displaces the human eye with the scientific image, it retains a commitment to the visual code that had been ‘laid down by Renaissance humanism’. The film camera became an ‘ideological instrument in its own right, it expresses bourgeois ideology. … It produces a directly inherited code of perspective built on the scientific apparatus of the Quattrocento’ (op. cit., p. 25). Citing Branigan, Comolli and Pleynet, Denzin argues that this code, which dominated Western painting for five centuries, perpetuated the hegemony of the eye.

We can draw a rough analogy between the two unconnected eras of Lascaux and the early modern period leading up to today. For while they constitute a very different length and complexity, there are nonetheless certain resemblances between the screens of Lascaux and that which has been represented on the still and moving screen over the past half millennium (Wright, 2004:37). Much of the power and influence of the motion screen can be found in the fact that ‘the ‘ontologically’ kinetic status of the moving image privileged the cinema not only over the written work but over still photography as well’ (Shohat & Stam, 2002:122). By the late 1890s, in both the USA and Europe, ‘motion’ became firmly associated with the screen; by 1898 the screening of motion pictures had reached the major centres of both the civilized and colonized world. The technology used to render those moving images, in particular the cinématographe, travelled beyond the centres of ‘civilization’ and into the ‘exotic’ worlds of the ‘other’. For Shohat and Stam (2002), the spread of the motion screen came at a time when the ‘excitement generated by the camera’s capacity to register the formal qualities of movement reverberated with the full-steam-ahead expansionism of imperialism itself’ (op. cit., p. 121).

The race to produce the first economically viable system for presenting moving pictures to the general public has a rich history and one that resulted in great wealth
being accumulated by its inventors. The two main players were Thomas Edison in the USA and Louis Lumière in France. Though there are technological differences in the patent of each camera, both technologies brought about similar notions within society of the moving picture as ‘screen-truth’, ‘a perfect tool for recording reality with precision’ (Branigan, cited in Denzin, 1995:16). The general public swarmed to see the moving image. In November 1894, James McMahon’s Kinetoscope Parlour at 148 Pitt Street, Sydney, attracted 22,000 customers to its doors in its first five weeks, each patron paying a one-shilling entrance fee (Shirley, 1989:3). The Kinetoscope apparatus required patrons to peer into an enclosed peep-show box — as the customer wound a crank handle, the film inside the Kinetoscope screened known activities: vaudevillian acts, dancers, jugglers, cowboy rope-twirlers, etc (Barnouw, 1993:5). Edison's Kinetoscope screened images of the known world, re-presentations of the viewers’ social horizon that served as proof that the technology of the moving picture rendered reality with precision.

In contrast to Edison’s studio-based, vaudevillian cinema, Louis Lumière developed a portable camera. The cinématographe weighed five kilograms — the world of the outdoors became its habitat. In terms of the more-than-human world, Lumière prophetically described the cinématographe as an instrument for catching life on the run ‘sur le vif’ (Barnouw, 1993:6). The suitcase size cinématographe had two additional features: it functioned as a film-printing (developing) machine and a film projector. Unlike Edison’s heavy camera, that required several people to move it, Lumière’s cinématographe required a single operator; the opérateur could easily be dispatched to a foreign place — they could render new films by day, develop them in the afternoon and screen them that evening. Subsequently, the social horizon of the viewers’ lifeworld could be filmed and screened back to them in a matter of hours. These motion screen re-presentations of ‘me’ in my community would, later on that evening, be screened alongside other films from other places. The phenomena of ‘my’ community watching ‘you’ in your community arose; though our individual communities may be situated on opposite sides of the world, we are both re-presented on the screen within the one time-frame — the sequential nature of the presentations helped to foster the notion of ‘screen truth’. The screen began to present the world in a way never before possible: in what it screened, to whom it screened and from where it was screened. For example, one has to physically travel to reach the screens of the
Sistine Chapel, just as one must travel to the vaults of Lascaux and the sacred places of Arnhem Land — the screens of these worlds require painstaking hours, months, years, perhaps lifetimes to render. To be physically present before these screens required and requires a dedicated sojourn, one that may require access rites, plus local/professional interpretation: with the advent of mass-produced motion screen images, a universal motion screen language appeared.

The emergence of disparate groups of people simultaneously experiencing the screen began in December 1895 when a Paris theatre with seating for 120 people screened a show-reel of sixty-second Lumière films, twenty times a day at half-hour intervals. Some 2,500 paying customers per day came to view the new phenomenon of the projected motion screen. Subsequently, over the course of twelve months or so, Lumière films were screened in England, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Siberia, Russia, Sweden, the United States, and soon thereafter in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey, India, Australia, Indochina, Japan and Mexico (Barnouw, 1993:9-11). By 1898 Lumière operators had travelled to every continent except Antarctica. Denzin (1995) talks about this period as the homogenisation of a national and international audience, an observation that falls in line with observations of scholars such as Lipsitz and Berger. Lumière's cinématographe marks a point in time when the screen as surrogate cortex first made available to a large audience, life-like images of worlds that existed beyond the horizon of the audience’s lifeworld.

Before the turn of the century, the motion screen presented the ‘truth’ about once distant and unseen places, ‘giving pictorial presentations of nature’s very self’ (Branigan, cited in Denzin, 1995:16). The Lumière films occupied the screen as the industrial revolution was in full flight, and there appeared to be no limits to what Western science could achieve. In a Cartesian sense, the Earth had been conquered. For the vast majority of the audience, both the places re-presented by the motion screen and the means of re-presenting other people and places were wondrous proof of sciences’ supremacy over nature.

For a moment, let us imagine that it is 1898, we live at Bondi, NSW; we have not travelled to the distant Blue Mountains, let alone to such places as Brisbane to the
north in Queensland nor Melbourne to the south in Victoria. Such ‘exotic’ places seem, in our minds eye, to be worlds away. Imagine then, going to the local theatre and viewing the following motion pictures:

Sydney Wheel Race / Breakers at Bondi / The Baby's First Lesson in Walking / The Electric Carriage Race from Paris to Bordeaux / A Gondola Scene in Venice / The Charge of the Austrian Lancers / Fifty-ninth Street, Opposite Central Park / A Scene near South Kensington London / The Fish Market at Marseilles, France / German Dragoons Leaping the Hurdles / A Snow Battle at Lyon, France / Negro Minstrel Dancing in the London Streets / A Sack Race Between Employees of Lumière & Son's Factory, Lyon / The Bath of Minerva, at Milan, Italy (McMurchy, 1994:13).

(Many of these and similar films are still available)

2. Mis-Understanding the Other

One has to pause for a moment to grasp the significance of these cinema programs. While such filmic diversity is part of the all-day every-day nature of screen language within contemporary society, it was definitely not the case in the late 1890s. Within the civilised world of New York, London, Berlin, Paris and Melbourne, considerable numbers of people began to think about the world beyond their lifeworld in a particular way, one in which thinking was connected to the colonial ‘screen-truth’ rendered upon the imperial screen. The actualités filmed by the cinématographe were neither trick nor illusion; though the technology of the time restricted each film to one minute, ‘I’ could see my place (Bondi) projected onto the screen alongside other people and places. The moving-screen set in train a particular way of thinking. For example, in 1898, the cinématographe opérateur Boleslaw Matuszewski wrote in his book, A New Source of History, that film would reveal liars (Barnouw, 1993:29). Ironically, as a result, the viewer came to mis-perceive the oppression of otherized people as liberation and the ecological exploitation of otherized places as progress (Shohat & Stam, 2002).

According to Shohat and Stam, the imperial representation of colonised people and places upon the motion screen of the USA and Europe underpins the contemporary
television screen. Such filmic travelogues came to render the imperial screen as a site where an ‘institutional ritual took place, a gathering of community’, a site where ‘spectators who share a region, language, and culture’ can be observed as a symbolic gathering of the nation, ‘a provisional “nation” forged by spectatorship’ (op. cit., p.120). Our interest is in what the spectators of the imperial screen saw, in light of our understanding that they invariably looked upon the imperial screen as a truth-telling-screen. Shohat and Stam argue that as the screen ventured into the world beyond the USA and Europe, it began to story a screen-based global hegemony. Not only did the screen back home in New York or Paris represent the other as the other, the screen in colonised places such as Africa and Asia represented the local as the other. Western values were presented as values to aspire towards. Such renderings of the screen came about due to both the difficulty that non-imperial filmmakers had in accessing screen-based technology, as well as legislation prohibiting the representation of the colonisers in any rendering other than complimentary. The complimentary colonial worldview rapidly became ‘the worldview’; this was possible due to the ‘realistic’ means by which the screen re-presented the world — unlike the novel the cinema is premised on visual literacy:

As a popular entertainment it is more accessible than literature. While there was no mass reading public for imperial literary fictions in the colonies, for example, there was a mass viewing public for imperial filmic fictions (Shohat & Stam, 2002:120).

The moving picture has had a profound effect upon colonised people and their encompassing more-than-human world: ‘the beginnings of cinema coincided with the giddy heights of the imperial project … where Europe held sway over vast tracts of alien territory and hosts of subjugated peoples’; the first Lumiere and Edison screenings closely followed

… the British occupation of Egypt in 1882; the Berlin Conference of 1884 which carved up Africa into European ‘spheres of influence’; the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee in 1890; and countless other imperial misadventures (Shohat & Stam, 2002:117).
The cinématographe enabled the screen to reinforce the imperial worldview — ‘the triumph of light over darkness, of good over evil, of civilization over brutish nature’ — Shohat and Stam argue that the imperial audience acquired ‘an exhilarating sense of visual power … transforming European spectators into armchair conquistadors’ (2002:120). The technology of the motion picture, in the hands of the colonisers, enabled the screen to render the colonial enterprise as a philanthropic civilizing mission:

Cinema combined travelling knowledge with travelling spectacles … the motion screen … represented alien topographies and cultures as aberrant in relation to Europe. Operating on a continuum with zoology, anthropology, botany, etymology, biology and medicine, the camera, like the microscope, anatomised the ‘other’ (Shohat & Stam, 2002:123).

The colonised were perceived of as inferior, and films were able to present the ‘other’ in a manner that would have been unacceptable if such images were representing a member of the imperial public. For example, white women could not be screened cavorting naked in the jungle, however an image of a naked African, Papuan or Australian indigenous woman could be screened. In a 1920s film by Matin and Osa Johnson, the filmmakers gleefully prod Pygmies (whom they called ‘monkeys’ and ‘niggers’) to get sick on European cigars’ (Shohat & Stam, 2002:122). Closer to home, Barnouw (1993) reports that the cinématographe was still ‘shooting’ people in ‘outback’ Australia in the 1920s, forty years before those persons were permitted to vote. Having been accredited by the scientific community in 1895, the cinématographe, within a colonial context, ‘demonstrated the power of science to display and even decipher otherized cultures’, for Shohat and Stam; the audience back home viewed a particular ‘portrait of the colonized’ and in this context the cinématographe enabled the screen to

… transform the obscure mappa mundi into a familiar, knowable world … more than a servile scribe, the camera actively popularised imperial imagery tuning it into an exciting participatory activity for those in the motherland (op. cit., p. 122).
a. The cinematic society

In terms of this discussion, much of what has come to underscore Australian commercial television in terms of visual language and content has its roots in the cinematic society of the USA. Cinema, in the sense of the cinématographe projections, arrived in the USA in 1896; by 1909 the USA had over 1,300 movie theatres, with an attendance of two and one quarter million admissions per day. By 1919 nearly every small town in the USA had a cinema. By 1935, 80 million people per week attended the cinema in the USA alone; there, dancing upon the screen were two types of films. The first rendered images of the naked ‘other’, ‘hiding behind the respectable fig leaf of ‘science’ and ‘authenticity’ — films such as the 1935 ethnographic film Sanders of the River ‘focused directly on the bouncing breasts of dancing native women’. At the same time, Hollywood films (often screened in the same theatres), ‘relegated native nudity to the background, or restricted the imagery to minimal ‘native’ garb (Shohat & Stam, 1994:108-110). Hence, the growing sophistication in screen production techniques was not accompanied by a growing awareness of the world portrayed. By 1941 the annual cinema ticket sale attendance in the USA was 2.1 billion (Austin, cited in Denzin, 1995:18).

Technicolour began in 1932; for Denzin (1995) it was not only ‘more scientifically accurate than Black & White films, it was also able to ‘repeat’ the dominant forms of the culture.’ Drawing on Branigan (1979/1985:137), Denzin argues that colour was responding to ‘a deeper structure – a realistic order of discourse’; that deeper structure, according to Allen and Gomery (1985), ‘begins (not with Technicolor) but the Renaissance’s interest in colour and linear perspective’ (cited in Denzin, p. 21). The period from around 1935 can be viewed as a particular point in time when Western hegemony can be observed as having taken on an obvious cinematic imprint. No longer was the cinematic screen a novelty; rather, the experience of being before the cinematic screen had become a regular weekly event. Cinema fundamentally transformed American society into ‘a culture which came to know itself, collectively and individually, through the images and stories that Hollywood produced’ (Denzin, 1995:24).
Within the context of a commercially driven marketplace, by the end of the 1930s, 
screen-language had become sophisticated; as opposed to the screen-language of 
earlier films such as the brilliant 1902 *Trip To The Moon*, written and staring George 
Méliès — while containing multiple sets and special effects, the film presented actors 
bowing to the audience (at this time, film actors often performed as if they were on a 
theatrical stage). What distinguishes the cinematic society from the audience watching 
films such as *Trip To The Moon*, can be found in the aesthetic advancement of screen-
based editing and directing, in combination with technological advances in audio and 
colour. Denzin draws on a series of interviews conducted with cinema patrons by 
Blumer in the 1930s, to reveal the influence that these sophisticated techniques had 
upon the emerging cinematic society.

When I discovered that I should have this coquettish and coy look which all 
girls may have, I tried to do it in my room. And surprise! … I learned the very 
way of taking my gentle friends to and from the door with that wistful smile, 
until it has become a part of me (Female, 19, white, college freshman).

The appearance of such handsome men … dressed in sports clothes, evening 
attire, formals, etc., has encouraged me to dress as best as possible … One 
acquires positions such as standing, sitting, tipping one’s hat, holding one’s hat, 
offering one’s arm to a lady, etc (Male, 20, white, college sophomore).

When I was sixteen years old I saw … The Ten Commandments … from that 
time on I have never doubted the value of religion. … Our race was portrayed 
so vividly and realistically that the feeling of reverence and respect for my 
religion was instilled in me (Male, 20, white, Jewish, college junior).

I saw a moving picture in which the heroine was a very young, pretty girl. In 
school she had taken a business course and after working hard she had been 
promoted to the position of private secretary. I used to sit and dream about 
what my life would be like after I had that position (Female, 16, white, high 
school junior).
I particularly liked pictures in which the setting was a millionaire’s estate … I would imagine myself living such a life … My daydreams would be concerned with lavish wardrobes, beautiful homes, servants, imported automobiles, yachts, and countless suitors (Female, 24, white, college senior).

The cinematic society is one in which an everyday relationship between the audience and the screen has come into play, one that continues to this day. It is useful to follow Blumer with two examples from contemporary Australian commercial television — the first from a newspaper article and the second from on-going research I’m doing with university students:

A Country Practice turned into a country tragedy in June 1985 when one of the series best-loved characters, Molly Jones … died after a 10-week drama-loaded battle with leukaemia. Her death made Australian TV history by attracting more than two million viewers, many of whom jammed Channel Seven’s switchboard with calls to express their distress (Van den Nieuwenhof, 2006).

My boyfriend’s mother and sister are avid Grey’s Anatomy fans. What I found interesting was their reaction to what they saw on screen during the show and the way they talked about it afterwards. Unconsciously, they had become so familiar (and emotionally invested) in the lives of the characters, that during the show they laughed and cried at the action and often reprimanded or defended the characters. Afterwards they spoke about the characters as they would real life friends or foes, for example, ‘Meredith really needs to hurry up and figure out what she wants before she turns around and Derek isn’t there for her anymore…’ (Fell, 2008:Forthcoming).

Fascinated with both the star and the world of the star, the cinematic society endeavoured to replicate the kissing, walking, sitting, dressing and speaking that they observed popular movie stars portraying. For mercantile reasons, the screen’s mise-en-scène increasingly became a habitat for mass consumption commodities — such products were endorsed each time the star came in contact with them: clothes, automobiles, food, cigarettes and so on. Hence, the audience’s desire to replicate the mise-en-scène was turned to economic advantage. As Denzin points out, with the
advent of high fidelity sound and technicolour, the screen became a dream machine: ‘the movies created emotional representations of self, sexuality, desire, intimacy, friendship, marriage, work and family’ (1995:33). For Denzin, the cinematic society represents a significant shift — the metaphor of the dramaturgical society, or ‘life as Theatre’ (Brisswtt & Edgley, 1990; Goffman, 1959; Lyman, 1990a), ceased to be just a metaphor, ‘it became interactional reality: life and art became mirror images of one another’ (1995:32).

The image of life and art becoming mirror images of one another is a significant descriptor. As the stories presented to the cinematic society became ingrained in the cinematic imagination, Denzin argues, ‘they became master tales, myths, which structured how lives were evaluated and judged’ (1995:33). Casting back to Shohat and Stam, we get a sense of how colonised people and land were incorporated into the master tales and myths. Hollywood stars such as Shirley Temple, David Niven and Basil Rathbone stood at the ramparts, ‘scanning the horizon for signs of native restlessness’. Colonel Williams in Wee Willie Winkie (1937) tells Shirley Temple: ‘Beyond the pass, thousands of savages are waiting to sweep down and ravage India. It’s England’s duty, it’s my duty, to see that this doesn’t happen’ (Shohat & Stam, 2002:126). Drawing on Ray (1985:56-9), Denzin stresses that this cinematic imagination ‘argued for stories with happy endings’. Such stories incorporated ‘the values of individualism, freedom, the frontier, love, hard work, family, wealth and companionship’ (1995:33). Barnouw (1993) agrees, though he observes that this has always been an aspect of cinema, pointing out that the box office failure of films such as the 1903 Native Women Coaling a Ship and Scrambling for Money, was due to its offence to colonial sensibilities. The film presented a panoramic view of a coal dock with a ship in the background. Tourists can be seen throwing coins onto the dock where a large group of ‘black’ men and women fight for the money. The film then shows between 200 and 300 black women coaling the S.S. ‘Prinzessin Victoria Luise’ of the Hamburg-American Line (Edison Catalogue).
b. Taking the story to commercial television

The subject matter and production style of the motion-screen rapidly shifted from Lumière’s 1890s actualités (that captured domestic and workplace activities, plus officialdom on parade), to that which we more readily associate with contemporary television. In order to maintain and then increase ticket sales, the motion-screen became less a place for ‘moving’ pictures and more a place of screen-theatre. Denzin (1995) and Lipsitz (1990) observe how filmmaking rapidly shifted from sideshow alley and returned to the primal function of screen as surrogate cortex. The screen as surrogate cortex has always been a site for myths, dreams and secular told tales; now, the dreams on the screen are placed within a Western industrial setting. Lipsitz draws on Jarvie (1986) to argue ‘motion pictures encouraged people to see themselves as detached and autonomous consumers by replacing ritualistic community celebrations with leisure that could be purchased as a commodity and shared with strangers’ (Lipsitz, 1990:10). All the major syntactical mechanisms for a fluent screen-language were set in place by the time the technological processes required for commercial television were developed. Commercial television shifted the dominant site of screen-language from the public domain to the domestic domain; television heightened the process of unifying the masses cultural values, hence, as Paddy Scannell asserts, ‘much of what we know and understand as public life is constituted in and by the activities of broadcasting’ (1995:13).

Television has existed in one form or another since around 1926 when John Logie Baird gave the world's first public demonstration of a mechanical television apparatus, though experimentation with television dates back to around 1918. Regular television broadcasts in England, the USA and elsewhere have taken place since the 1930s. However, television wasn’t able to financially compete with, nor technologically match, the fidelity of the cinema until after the Second World War. The initial foray into television was, according to Scannell, overwhelmingly about filling ‘empty’ time. Programs were produced any old way and transmitted any old how with little, if any, thought beyond the ever present and pressing dilemma of how to get something on air and then something else to follow it. The institutionalisation of broadcasting through the formation of networks in the United States and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in the United Kingdom brought about the
routinization of production; as a result, a particular way of constructing television output evolved, one that would be taken up in Australia and elsewhere. Historian George Lipsitz (1990) draws to our attention that ‘commercial’ television, as we know it today, began as an agenda item, a legislated act orchestrated by the USA Government and corporations that dates back to the 1944 Bretton Woods Accord. The resources required to develop the fidelity needed by commercial television came out of tax concessions and government funding (see Lipsitz, 1990:39-75). Though the television screen would not equal the fidelity of the film screen until the digital age of 21st century, by 1945, television was nonetheless able to re-present the world in a manner aesthetically acceptable to the general public.

Lipsitz argues that commercial television in the USA came about as a result of governmental decisions and not market forces; it was an orchestrated process to stimulate the economy. While commercial television received positive government support, non-commercial television was dampened; in some cases non-commercial broadcasting entities had their licence cancelled as the USA Government ‘established the dominance of commercial television’ (op. cit., p. 42). Such observations underpin the post WWII statement of retail analyst Victor Liebow:

> Our enormously productive economy ... demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and the selling of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in commodities ... We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced, and discarded at an ever increasing rate  (Liebow quoted in Durning, 1991:153).

Drawing on Scannell (1995) we are able to appreciate that while the idea of commercial network television is based around profit through the promotion of consumption, it does not follow that such programs will be viewed. So while a program might say what government and corporations want the program to say, it takes a particular set of planning and production skills to make a program, let alone a series of daily and weekly programs that appeal to ‘anyone and everyone’. Not only did commercial television require screen fidelity, it required a particular and distinct screen-language in order to tell the story it was legislated to tell. This ‘television’
language drew on the visual language of cinema and the routinization of ‘time and content’ developed in radio, prior to television.

c. Breaking ties with the great depression and WWII

The implementation of commercial television helped shift ingrained community attitudes; when it began, the collective memory of the USA, not unlike Australia, held vivid recollections of the recent World War, on the back of the 1930s Great Depression. Prior to the end of WWII, the Bretton Woods Accord came to the conclusion that Western economic powers had to find ways to maintain economic growth as well as world peace. In part, a solution was sought through substantially stimulating internal Western domestic markets. The problem faced by government and corporations was one of domestic confidence — for the individual citizen to become a mass consumer, persons needed to have confidence in the future. Lipsitz argues that commercial television’s ‘most important economic function came from its role as an instrument of legitimation for transformations in values initiated by the new economic imperatives of post-war America’ (1990:42). For viewers to feel confident about the future required a process that encouraged them to make a break with the past. Government and manufacturers had to find ways of motivating viewers into becoming consumers; viewers had to be encouraged to buy ever increasing amounts of commodities, and ‘television provided an important means of accomplishing that end’ (op. cit., p. 46). Lipsitz draws on Ernest Dichter to demonstrate that the physical location of commercial television in the home and the subsequent relentless images of consumption were in themselves not enough. What was needed in order that the general public of post WWII go into debt and spend was ‘permission’, to sanction and justify the idea ‘that the hedonistic approach to life is a moral one, not an immoral one’ (1990:47). For example, in one episode of the popular weekly soap opera The Goldbergs, the central character, Molly (a wise mother of two, who had successfully negotiated the Great Depression and the WWII), expresses disapproval at her future daughter-in-law’s plan to buy a washing machine on the instalment plan:

Molly: ‘Papa and me never bought anything unless we had the money to pay for it’.
Sammy (Molly’s son): ‘Listen, Ma, almost everybody in this country lives above their means and everybody enjoys it’.

Lipsitz says that Molly is expressing the concerns of a nation, while her son Sammy is expressing the hopes of government and industry. As the episode unfolds, Molly comes to learn about the instalment plan. The episode finishes with Molly announcing to the family that she is going to buy two automobiles on the instalment plan, in order to ‘live above our means, the American way’ (1990:43). Another example from this period further highlights the growing influence of television characters. When the actor Peggy Wood appeared on the television chat program *The Garry Moore Show*, questions from the audience had women asking Peggy Wood for advice about raising their families. Wood played the character Mama, who was portrayed as a competent and capable mother. Hence, when the audience were invited to ask Wood questions, they did so ‘as if Wood were actually the character Mama, rather than an actress playing that role’ (op. cit., p. 53).

The above examples are not intended to suggest that the ideology of capitalism became new to performance with the advent of commercial television. On the contrary, such hegemonic ideology was substantially established in nineteenth century theatre prior to the advent of the cinematic society and subsequently commercial television. What is being reviewed is the shift that comes about when the commercial screen physically shifts from the public domain of cinema to the private domain of home. Due to its physical presence in the home the commercial screen is able to influence persistently ‘all-day every-day’ in a way that no other screen has been able to do. In this sense, the personal PC and miniaturised consoles such as mobiles and MP3 players are versions of the commercial screen within our televisual society.

3. The Televisual

To name our society a televisual society is to name a direct connection between mass consumption and mass media. For Tony Fry, the televisual is ‘definable as an ontological domain’ (1993:11); where once we could speak of the West as a cinematic society (Denzin, 1990), it is now more accurate to say we are a televisual society, the lineage of which has the cinematic as its immediate forerunner.
The televisual names circumstances that take place beyond television, what has come to be as a result of the combination of commercial television and Victor Liebow’s creed of converting the buying and the selling of commodities into rituals for our spiritual and ego satisfaction. Such a label complements and stands parallel with the more widely used label the consumer culture (Jhally, 2006). While urban living is not new to civilisation, suburban living is very much a post-WWII construct. Government and corporations understood the connection between suburban growth and increased consumer spending. Lipsitz provides numerous examples of how the commercial television world of soap operas such as *The Goldbergs* moved from urban to suburban settings. Along with palatial homes and multiple automobile ownership, actors were screened doing ‘normal’ things in everyday situations such as attending drive-in food outlets. At first these ‘normal’ places predominantly occupied the on-screen world of television, however, increasingly the viewers were able to access places ‘just like the ones of TV’. As Davis (2003) demonstrates, the early drive-ins were later followed by shopping malls and finally by substantial condominiums. Initially the televised pictures of ‘living the American way’ were images of an ‘other’ world. Initially the ‘American Way’ (going into personal debt for the consumption of commodities), ran against the grain of USA citizens. However, there came a point in time when the pendulum swung from commercial television presenting a seemingly unattainable world of consumer goods, to that of reflecting attainable commodities and consumables — the high consumption, high household debt world that we now stand in. As a result of this complex shift, the Western world became a televisual world.

Because information and entertainment technology is integrated into the everyday reality of contemporary living, mass media’s social influence is not always recognised, discussed, or criticized — in societies where the overall standard of living is relatively high. ‘hegemony, therefore, can easily go undetected’ (Bausinger, cited in Lull, 2003:63). For Jhally (2006) the commercial language of the televisual is the ground on which we live, the space in which we learn to think, the lens through which we come to understand the world that surrounds us. Therefore, for Jhally, in seeking to understand where we are headed as a society, an adequate analysis of this commercial environment is essential.
Observing the proliferation of post-WWII suburbia and the inherent need for its inhabitants to commute, Juliet Schor (2003) observes that the design and location of suburbia invariably led to a decline in neighbourhood contacts; correspondingly, the workplace became a more prominent contact point: ‘Moreover, as people spent less time with neighbours and friends, and more time on the family-room couch, television became more important as a source of consumer cues and information’ (op. cit., p.185). Drawing on Martin Heidegger, Fry speaks of how television now ‘spreads across the world of our dwelling. The televisual has become part of the condition and means of the formation of our given understanding’ (1993:25). In a sense this notion of ‘our given understanding’ weaves back some 17,000 years. In animist shamanic Lascaux or Arnhem Land, the corporeal connection between the images on the screen and the world directly beyond the screen had a particular reciprocity. The wallaby depicted on the rock screen, and the wallaby grazing within eyesight beyond the screen were conceptualised in such a way that one informed the other. As Saul points out, a particular connection was formed between the image and that imaged (1992:425-465). The concept of the televisual taps into this notion of reciprocity, one that is now between the ‘consumable goods’ depicted on the television screen and the ‘consumable goods’ grazing within eyesight of home and condominium. Television is both designed and designs, ‘it is prefigured while prefiguring. Television is made by, and makes, the forms, language and meanings of lifeworlds in which, as itself, it comes to be active’ (Fry, 1993:12). In these new spaces, argues Davis, ‘the core cultural ideas are not only embedded by products, they are products. Citizens are collapsed into consumers, and loyalty is a technique that expands the bottom line. …’ (2003:168).

For Schor, within contemporary suburban and urban living, what has grown out of commercial television is a site where what is seen on the screen is also what is before viewers when they divert their attention from the screen, be that in the home, office or shopping mall. The elements re-presented on the screen of commercial television, such as food, clothing, shelter, technology and popular culture straddle all sites — the site of the screen, the site in which the screen is being viewed and the site one moves through between viewing the screen ‘here’ and viewing the screen ‘there’. The televisual names that which has emerged as a result of the legislation of commercial television. The televisual is the result of that imposition, a result in which ‘the
televisual subordinates to itself as an ontological domain the being of the medium’s content, spectatorship, social relations, sign, economy, technology, space, time and forms’ (Fry, 1993:12).

a. Three grafted bodies

The continuum of Western metaphysics finds our fast culture replete with multiple screens, all of which inter-relate via the central nature of the instant televisual. Paul Virilio, who characterizes himself as a critic of the art of technology (Virilio & Lotringer, 1997:172), is concerned with how the speed of modern technology has affected contemporary culture, including its complicity with the pollution of the more-than-human world. Pertinent to this enquiry are three of Virilio’s key themes: ‘Speed’, ‘Embodiment’ and ‘The Accident’.

Virilio argues that acceleration lies at the heart of the organization and transformation of the modern world. In the post-industrial age of the televisual, the absolute speed of light has superseded real-space — real-time has been replaced by mechanical-time. Critiquing Virilio, Armitage (2000) says, ‘in such circumstances, the geographical difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’ is obliterated by the speed of light’. For Virilio, television is closer to virtual reality than it is to cinema, the argument being that when we investigate beyond the screened image and consider the technological means and cultural processes by which the television image is before us, we can appreciate that the television image is both instantly and continually before viewers all over the world. Cinema, on the other hand, is located in a place, it has a beginning and an end — we enter and leave the experience. Television is always ‘on’, always screening virtual reality throughout the televisual: ‘there is a breaking point between photography and cinema on the one hand and television and virtual reality on the other hand’ (Wilson, interviewing Virilio, 1994:3). For Virilio, television and computer screens are vision machines, ironically, machines that bring about a ‘sightless vision’ (1994:59-73) due to the instant, repetitious and constant imaging of the world; one that enables the viewer to have ‘a vision without looking’.

By placing television, flight simulations, cybersex and wearable computers in the same virtual world, Virilio draws attention to the almost total collapse of distinction
between the human body and technology. His interest is in the relationship between the body and technology, and includes the environment in which the body dwells: ‘the body is the basis of all my work’ (Wilson, interviewing Virilio, 1994:6). His phenomenological inquiry is rooted in the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty; he recognises that there cannot be a human body in isolation from culture and territory. The territorial body for Virilio is the planet: humans come out of the earth and return to it.

Virilio describes the original state of humanness as having three bodies grafted over each other: the territorial body, the social body, and the individual animal body. Modern technology splits this unity, leaving the contemporary screen-induced individual and culture without a sense of where they are, what he calls de-realization. Virtual reality for Virilio is an accident, the accident of reality itself:

These new technologies try to make virtual reality more powerful than actual reality, which is the true accident. The day when virtual reality becomes more powerful than reality will be the day of the big accident. Mankind never experienced such an extraordinary accident (Wilson, interviewing Virilio, 1994:3).

Virilio is concerned that contemporary culture hasn’t adjusted to the virtual reality of modern visual technology, and as a result we are forgetting and losing contact with our body and the planet: ‘this is an accident of the body, a de-corporation … what is accidented is the reality of the whole world’ (Wilson, interviewing Virilio, 1994: 2-4). Due to virtual reality, orientation is no longer possible, for not only are our eyes and ears experiencing a different world to that in which our body is physically located, we also lose contact with the actual ‘real’ more-than-human world — hence for Virilio, the split of our three grafted bodies is the accident of the ‘real’.

Our urban and suburban epidermis can be conceived of as a screen, from plasma TV to laptop, from mobile phone to MP3 player, to the screens that line our commuting paths as we ‘speed’ to the screens of work, school and condominium — we have become a screen-induced culture. Most concerning, in an ecological sense, is how Virilio links virtual reality and global ecological destruction within his theory of ‘The
Accident’ — the split within the individuals’ three grafted bodies has wounded the world:

This phenomenon is similar to madness. The mad person is wounded by his or her distorted relationship to the real. Imagine that all of a sudden I am convinced that I am Napoleon: I am no longer Virilio, but Napoleon. My reality is wounded. Virtual reality leads to a similar de-realization. However, it no longer works only at the scale of individuals, as in madness, but at the scale of the world (Wilson, interviewing Virilio, 1994:4).

b. Inner and outer mind and world

In terms of the televisual and virtual reality, Davis (2003) demonstrates how theme parks, as well as components of local shopping malls developed by corporations such as Disney, evoke an ‘inner and outer mind and world’. What has emerged are media-filled spaces that ‘harmonize’ with the world of television, they change the relationships between public and private experience. Since the 1950s, the focus on media-product has become the central story of the retail space. At the beginning of the 21st century the media are ‘poised to weave the private realm together with the collective through the creation of dramatic and focused media-filled spaces’ (Davis, 2003:161). Old-fashioned ideas of place and community are seen as growth opportunities for these companies. Davis, Schor and Virilio draw to our attention just how complex the relationship between television realism and the real world has become. They help us to appreciate that when perceptions of realism are based on a storied corporate virtual reality, the persons enmeshed in that virtual world, be they at home or elsewhere within the televisual, are removed from reality. For Fiske and Hartley, the more realistic a television program is thought to be, the more trusted, enjoyable, and therefore the more popular it becomes — however, when both home and community are corporately constructed, realism takes on an added dimension:

Its ‘naturalness’ arises not from nature itself but from the fact that realism is the mode in which our particular culture prefers its condensations to be cast. There is nothing natural about realism, but it does correspond to the way we currently perceive the world (Fiske and Hartley, 1983/2003:128).
Fiske and Hartley point out that ‘a story may be fictional, but the way it is related tells it like it is. … realism requires that it be accepted not as one way of seeing but as the way of seeing’ (pp. 129-132). Davis indicates that the differentiation between realism and real, especially in urban environments, is becoming increasingly more difficult to define. She draws on Phillips (1995) and Hartnett (1993) to explain that shopping and regional specialty malls ‘are clustering new media venues and mini theatres near the familiar multiplex to try to create life, light, and a kind of busy, heterogeneous street of activity’ (Davis, 2003:161). This is a continuation of Denzin’s observation concerning the physical geography of the growth of cinema from 1900 to the 1930s; the distinction between the cinematic age and the televisual, is that now, one never fully leaves the theatre — there is a fusion between domestic entertainment, screen-based realism, and the physical experience of going to a place to shop, socialize or work:

… what is being used to get people out of the house is the material that has been invading it for 40 years. … what Disney chief executive Michael Eisner has called an ‘inside/outside’ strategy, encompassing both the inside (media consumption in private and domestic spaces) and the outside (traditional and new forms of media consumption in public) (Davis, 2003:164).

The inside/outside spheres of the televisual are mutually supportive. Davis enriches our way of thinking about the reciprocity between the commercial television screen and the commercial lifeworld that televisual people inhabit; she enables an appreciation that such ‘secretions’ are not restricted to the home. Fiske and Hartley (1983/2003) draw on Rapoport’s metaphor of ‘secretions’ (1969:36) to suggest we are produced by the environment of signification that we have collectively produced — just as all living organisms live in certain specialized environments that determine their lives. We ‘secrete’ languages into the environment around us and in doing so, we create an invisible semantic environment, the output of which does not merely passively reflect the complex social, political, and economic reality of Homo sapiens sapiens, but interacts with it as well. For Rapoport, these changes are largely responsible for the course of human history. Fiske and Hartley suggest that part of our contemporary environment comprises the constant stream of ‘secretions that emanate from the small screen’; they go on to say, ‘we cannot merely ‘ingest’ those secretions,
any more than we can merely ingest food’ (2003:50). The link between the ‘inside/outside’ modality of media space that Davis brings to our attention and Fiske and Hartley’s notion of ‘TV secretions’, is that supermarkets, shopping malls, work, school and amusement parks are domains where ‘television-realism’ materialises as televisual-reality — what Virilio suggests we conceptualise as virtual reality. The secretions of commercial television have congealed the ‘inside’ with the ‘outside’ creating one media space:

Just as our metabolic processes transform what we eat into material that can be assimilated, so our culturally learnt codes and conventions transform what we watch from mere external stimuli into actual communication, where the message is not only received but also decoded, understood and responded to. … Hence the awareness we bring to the television screen is a precondition for making sense of what we see, but that awareness is itself produced in us by what we have experienced hitherto’ (Fiske & Hartley, 2003:50).

c. Birds are the spirits of dead women

The televisual creates and maintains meaning in the world of the viewer; it defines existence and well-being. The subjective relationships and interpretations embroiled within the televisual are derived from within household, shopping mall, work, school and recreation (Davis, 2003; Fry, 1993; Jhally, 2006; Schor, 2004). It is useful to conceptualise the inside/outside modality of the televisual in terms of a physical life-support system. In this sense, the televisual can be understood in terms of Heidegger’s notion of ‘umwelt’ — an ‘environment’, ‘world around’ and ‘world about’ (1962:93-95). This is a phenomenological stance that resonates with the observations of Scannell (1995) — the nature of our individual relationship with television is an ‘all-day every-day’ relationship, what Heidegger calls our ‘average everydayness’ (1962:38): that which is closest to us in our concerns and activities. Embroiled within our televisual existence are the predominant ways of Being-in the umwelt, ways that involve a certain kind of ‘dealing’ [Umgang] (p. 95) with the world. In this context, the televisual describes the umwelt contemporary people are enmeshed within as they go about their daily interactions.
When thinking about the televisual as an *umwelt*, it is useful to draw on Giuseppe Mantovani’s psychological inquiry into culture: ‘it is not we who acquire culture but culture which acquires us and allows us to live inside its symbolic order’ (Mantovani, 2000:16, drawing on Bruner 1993). We are born into culture and, as such, ‘classification’ exists prior to our birth. Mantovani explains by drawing on the traditional Australian Dyirbal people and their classification of birds as the spirits of dead women. He argues that cultural belief has power over empirical experience, that a person’s experience is structured by a system of categories that has its roots in culture. The Dyirbal people do not put birds in the same category as other sentient beings, because, according to their traditional beliefs, birds are the spirits of dead women. Dyirbal children do not have a cognitive conflict between bird as sentient being and bird as spirit; put simply, a bird ‘is’ the spirit of a dead woman:

Every society supplies its members with a set of beliefs which direct both the judgements and the prejudices of those same members. … We explore ‘our’ reality by relying on the maps, the categories that our culture has given us (Mantovani, 2000:10).

For Mantovani, it is culture which states at the beginning of our journey, ‘what we must experience and how’ (p.11). As we have seen via Fiske and Hartley (2003) the viewer interprets situations by viewing a repertoire of pre-existing categories, categories that Schor (2003) and Davis (2003) demonstrate shape the televisual. Mantovani argues, ‘such categories are not produced in the recesses of individual minds but are transmitted by the communities in which those individuals began their social lives’ — in terms of the televisual, lives that have been shaped by commercial cinematic realism. As he explains:

if we ask ourselves how was it that we developed a certain version of the world, we can not answer unless we put forward as one of the causes the environment in which we grew up (2000:16).

The concept of the televisual-*umwelt* enables us to discuss commercial television as having outstripped any simple notion of it being a home entertainment device, a mere box in the corner. Lipsitz (1990) argues that our culturally learnt codes and
conventions transform what we watch from mere external stimuli into actual communication. Media-space colonizes the most intimate and personal aspects of our lives, ‘seizing upon every possible flaw in our bodies, minds, and psyches to increase our anxieties and augment our appetites for consumer goods, culture itself comes to us as a commodity’ (p. 4). He links the hegemonic discourse that Denzin observes within the cinematic society to the televiusal and says of commercial television:

Instead of relating to the past through a shared sense of place or ancestry, consumers of electronic mass media can experience a common heritage with people they have never seen; they can acquire memories of a past to which they have no geographic or biological connection’ (1990:5).

Echoing Davis (2003), Lipsitz says that commercial television programs ‘focus attention inward and undermine the psychic prerequisites for public life.’ The commercial television screen reflects ‘a society turned inward by the rise of consumerism and the demise of a healthy public life’ (p.19). Denzin argues that the cinematic society presented utopian stories, political fantasies and mythic narratives (1995:14); Lipsitz maintains that commercial television continued in this tradition; Davis (2003), Fry (1993) and Schor (2003) are saying that such screen-based stories are now not only being told on the small screen at home, they are being storied across the epidermis of the televiusal, a domain where Virilio insists a split has occurred between our three grafted bodies.

4. A Commercially Storied Existence

The meta-story secreted by the televiusal is a limited story, one in which there is no development of important ecological plotlines. As a result, the screen-based story the viewer is participating in is one in which ‘luxury, rather than mere comfort, is a widespread aspiration’ (Schor, 2003:185). Such an aspiration, argues Leiss (1976), is one born out of a quest for happiness. Drawing on Leiss, Jhally (2003) argues that every society has to tell a story about happiness, about how individuals can satisfy themselves and feel both subjectively and objectively good. For Jhally, the ‘cultural system’ of advertising offers a specific answer to the commercial television viewer about how to achieve happiness; commodities are presented as the means to make us
happy — this is the consistent and explicit message found within market communication. For Jhally, like Davis (2003) and Lipsitz (1990), the market place is the major structuring institution of contemporary consumer society; be that ‘market place’ the commercial screen at home or the televisual landscape beyond, both the home and public space have been taken over by ‘information’ about products.

Advertisements are a significant component of the televisual. As Jhally points out, it costs more per second to produce the average network advertisement than it does per second to make a motion picture; per second, advertisements are the most expensive and lavishly produced elements of the commercial screen. Commercial television programs are developed as a delivery system for marketers; a program’s prime function is to produce an audience, which is then sold to advertisers. What’s important for Jhally is not whether a particular advertisement is successfully selling the product, but the consistent stories that the advertising industry as a whole is presenting to the viewer — criticizing advertising as false and manipulative misses the point. He draws on advertising executive Jerry Goodis to argue that advertising doesn’t mirror how people are acting, but how they are dreaming; an argument that supports Davis (2003) and Schor (2003), whose commentary on the televisual observes Victor Liebow’s creed — we need to make consumption our way of life in order to grow Western economies.

Advertising enables commercial television to present the consumption of goods as rituals; the viewer finds spiritual and ego satisfaction in consumption, hence, consumers consumption based dreams keep the economy stimulated. The screen-language within advertisements speaks in the same tongue as the programs either side, though as Jhally points out, due to the financial resources that advertising production can draw upon, the language of the advertisement is often more eloquent than that of the preceding or following program. The combined secretions of advertising and program content connect the viewer to the world of televisual things. Advertising does more than reflect the dream-life of the televisual culture — advertisements ‘help to create it’. The story of mass over-consumption reveals a promise of a dream-world where ‘fantasy, play, inner desire, escape, and emotion loom large’ (Schor, 2003:191). Advertising talks to us as individuals and addresses us about how we can
become happy — ‘the answers it provides are all oriented to the marketplace, through the purchase of goods or services’ (Jhally, 2003:251).

a. Advertising and the more-than-human world

Schor contends that ‘environmental damage is typically not included in the price of the product that causes it (for example cars, toxic chemicals, pesticides)’, that commercial television has led to the over-consumption of environmentally damaging commodities and that ‘because all production has an impact on the environment, we over-consume virtually all commodities’ (2003:191). For Jhally, the interconnectivity between advertising, program content and the themed commercial world of the televisual ‘is the air that we breathe as we live our daily lives’ (2003:250). The notion of small screen ‘secretions’ looms large; ingesting the secretions of this ‘advertising air’ encourages a language in which audiences think of themselves as ‘markets rather than as a public, as consumers rather than citizens’ (Gitlin, cited in Lull, 2003:62). Thus the commercial screen secretes a meta-story in which particular myths and dreams dominate the content of both the advertisement and the program — a narrative continuum of the Enlightenment (see Berger’s analysis of Holbein’s, The Ambassadors). As Schor argues, ‘Consumption-induced environmental damage remains pervasive, and we are in the midst of widespread failures of public provision’ (2003:184).

In a similar vein Bill McKibben (1992) is concerned about the anthropocentric character of a society in which individuals and families find themselves enmeshed in commercial television:

It constantly reinforces certain ideas. It is less an art form than the outlet for a utility — like the faucet on a sink that connects you to the river, the TV links you to a ceaselessly flowing stream of information, and that very ceaselessness makes it different from a play or a movie. Television is the chief way that most of us partake of the larger world, of the information age, and so, though none of us owe our personalities and habits entirely to the tube and the world it shows, none of us completely escape its influence either’ (op. cit., p.17).
Reflecting on his own childhood experiences, McKibben offers a grounded approach to understanding an individual’s relationship with television:

TV was like a third parent — a source of ideas and information and impressions. And not such a bad parent — always with time to spare, always eager to please, often funny. TV filled dull hours and it made me a cosmopolite at an early age. I have great affection for it (op. cit., p.16).

In observing the ease of access to commercial television, McKibben points out that television receivers are, in Western consumerist terms, inexpensive; increasingly children have personal television receivers in their bedrooms. Since McKibben wrote his book, commercial television has become accessible from mobile cellular phones and personal computers. When reflecting on his research, McKibben provides numerous examples of how commercial television mis-represents the state of the more-than-human world, in particular, how the content of commercial television directs the audience towards the ‘purely human world’ (1992:93).

One of the first environmental activists to write about the ‘purely human world’ in the context of commercial television is the Deep Ecologist Jerry Mander. As a partner in a Madison Square advertising agency in the 1980s, Mander came to realize that the advertising copy he was writing was being embraced by the television audience as fact. He writes:

I realised that there had been a strange change in the way people received information and even more in the way they were exercising and understanding the world. In one generation, out of hundreds of thousands in human evolution, America had become the first culture to substitute secondary, mediated versions of experience for direct experience of the world. Interpretations and representations of the world were being accepted as experience, and the difference between the two was obscured to most of us (1980:24).
b. All day, every day

Scannell offers phenomenological insights that complement the observations of Mander. He enables us to explore how commercial television appears unproblematically and meaningfully available for anyone and everyone as part of everyday life. Scannell observes that ‘all day, every day, people everywhere watch television as part of the utterly familiar, normal things that they do on any normal day’ (1995:1) — as McKibben says, ‘it filled in time’. The scope of Scannell’s ‘all day, everyday’ thesis, when combined with McKibben’s notion of commercial television as a ‘third parent’, is substantial. Scannell enables us to appreciate that the ingesting of the secretions emanating from the commercial screen is one of the utterly familiar, normal things the viewer does everyday. Observing commercial television as part of the ‘utterly familiar’ evokes Lipsitz’ (1990) observation: ‘It might be thought a measure of the inescapable irony of our time that the most profound intellectual questions emerge out of what seems to be ordinary and commonplace objects of study’ (p. 20). Scannell leads us forward by asking:

‘Anything on telly?’ ‘No, nothing.’ It is not, of course, that there is, literally nothing to watch. Rather that what there is is nothing out of the ordinary, merely the usual programs on the usual channels at the usual times.


Scannell helps us to appreciate the influence of commercial television output, for like daily life, it is largely uneventful; both are occasionally punctuated ‘predictably and unpredictably’ by eventful occasions. The ordinary nature of television ‘is precisely the intended, achieved, and accomplished effect of broadcast output’ (op. cit., p. 1). In turning his focus to the very elements of the production of programs, Scannell inquires into how the viewers are able to ‘make and express’ the views and opinions that they have about what they see and hear in order that they can name the program boring, interesting, entertaining, funny, informative, true, false, etc. For such opinions to be reached they must have been understood or mis-understood as those things being presented on the screen. Scannell demonstrates how the viewer’s assessments of television ‘are there to be had in the form and content of output as intentionally so organized as to enable (indeed entitle) viewers to have the kinds of
personal views and opinions to which they give expression’ (1995:2). Scannell demonstrates the significance of commercial television not being a random jumble of things arbitrarily thrown together. The seamless nature of commercial television has enabled a site where consistent messages encouraging consumption are presented all-day every-day.

For a program to happen it must happen sometime, somewhere, through someone’s agency; these are the basic problems that broadcasters have to deal with in order to bring into being the continuous, unbroken and never-ending flow of output that we know as commercial television. Scannell demonstrates how such a modus operandi came to be via the serialization of production, the development of fixed scheduling and continuity techniques; combined, they culminated in commercial television becoming ‘user friendly’. Our knowing of what’s on has come about as a result of broadcasters understanding the value of network directed continuity techniques, of placing links and trailers between programs for what comes ‘next or later’. In this way, as viewers, Scannell says, we have a sense of the overall structure or flow of programs ‘as a regular, patterned kind of thing through the hours of each day and from one day to the next, and the next and the next’ (1995:4).

All programs on commercial television are, with rare exceptions, serial in character; as a result, ‘a single program has no identity: It is a transient thing that perishes in the moment of its transmission’ (Scannell, 1995:5). While content varies from one occasion to the next, the format remains the same. The net effect is that program output takes on a settled, familiar and taken-for-granted character that approximates the norms of ordinary, everyday, mundane interaction. Poignantly, McKibben adds a further dimension to Scannell’s research: ‘right to the last day of my grandmother’s life it [commercial television] continued to offer her the sight of Donahue discussing sex changes and Cosby making faces’ (McKibben, 1992:149).

Commercial television is constructed so that, as a viewer, ‘I’ do not perceive myself as an anonymous subject; ‘this shows up in the ordinary politeness norms of television that attend to the face-needs of viewers and listeners … me-in-my-particularity, me with my particular beliefs, tastes, and opinions’ (Scannell, 1995:17). He demonstrates how certain aesthetics required for effective television broadcasting
were originally ‘consciously sought for, technically achieved, and humanly accomplished’ devices that contributed to each and every viewer securing the effect of ‘I am being addressed’. Such processes enabled the program to be found ‘by those for whom they are made … in so doing broadcasting produced and produces itself as part of and as for the ordinary everyday world, for that is the world in which listeners and viewers ordinarily live’ (op. cit., p. 8). Scannell’s observation of the ordinary everyday all-day every-day nature of commercial television draws attention to the mise-en-scène of commercial television.

c. The mise-en-scène

Georges Méliès, having watched Lumière’s 1895 films, built a camera of his own. Shortly after, when filming the *Place de l'Opera*, his camera jammed; at the time, a bus was passing by. He repaired the camera and carried on filming; by now a hearse was passing by. Though Méliès initial intention was to film the *Place de l'Opera*, when he reviewed his days filming, it appeared as if the bus had transformed into a hearse. Hence, the theatrical notion of mise-en-scène entered the world of the screen. Up until then both Lumière and Edison had captured actions within self-contained events — ‘actualités’. Méliès subsequently developed and refined the notion of mise-en-scène, adding ever-increasing detail and filmic illusion to his productions over the course of some 500 films. Drawing on Scannell (1995) and Davis (2003), we can see how the mise-en-scene of media space has come to entrap the viewer of commercial television. Though not using the term mise-en-scène, Scannell speaks of the phenomenon thus: ‘we watch and listen with a background assumption that everything about the design of any program is meant as meaningful’ (p.9). The viewer reads the screen in the manner of Lumière’s actualités (as screen truth), unaware of the technological manipulations taking place before their eyes. They read the screen as a literal unfolding of events — one second a bus, the next a hearse. Through Scannell, we can appreciate the institutional nature of the mise-en-scène that commercial television presents to adults and children. For just as the imaging cogs within Méliès camera once transformed a bus into a hearse before the *Place de l'Opera*, today, news becomes sport, as soap opera becomes documentary, as automobile advertisements become shampoo promotions. The magic of Méliès mise-en-scène enchanted his and subsequent audiences; the magic of commercial television
is no less enchanting. This is not a fanciful trope — the language used to describe films of the 1890s and later television ‘expressed over and over again a sense of wonder at them as marvellous things, miracles of modern science. Their magic has not vanished, it has simply been absorbed, matter-of-factly, into the fabric of ordinary daily life’ (Scannell, 1995:13).

McKibben’s allegory of television as a ‘third parent’ provides further dimension to an appreciation that television is more than just a domestic appliance. He points out ‘television never even thinks about rejecting you … under the pressure of your thumb it comes instantly to life, cooing and making eyes’, just like a devoted parent. He says of television viewing ‘as every great teacher of every great faith has told us, what we do and see each day is what shapes us, not how we behave or pretend to behave on special occasions’ (1992:220). Taking into account that increasing numbers of viewers across all socio economic, cultural and ethnic spectrums have been born into households where the all-day everyday nature of commercial television existed prior to their birth, McKibben says ‘what you do everyday, after all, is what forms your mind’ (p.28). Indeed, research is now observing that an unborn child can build an association with a television program or programs that their mother regularly views. Professor Peter Hepper of the School of Psychology at the Queen's University of Belfast ‘found that babies whose mothers had regularly watched a television soap opera during pregnancy responded to the musical theme after they were born’ (Eason, 1999).

5. Modern Technology

Science fiction author Douglas Adams tells a story about his 6-year-old daughter pushing her doll’s baby carriage, while mimicking the family car’s GPS satellite navigation system, a system that was in place prior to the child’s birth — Adams concludes by saying, ‘anything that’s in the world when you’re born is considered ordinary and normal’ (Salon, 2001). Within the argument that the televisual is ontological, resides the understanding that technology is ontological; it is a constituent element of our human-being, our Dasein (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger’s concept of Dasein enables us to link particular ways of approaching both commercial television and the more-than-human world. Dasein or ‘being-there’ (Malpas, 2006:47)
as ‘being-in-the-world’ taps into what we have been looking at so far. It names the thriving circumstances that enable us to exist, that enable us to be born — it names the structure of human existence. Dasein is co-developed through being born human and through our life experiences and background. What is particularly pertinent about this Heideggerian sense of human ‘being’ is that ‘Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it’ (Heidegger, 1977:3). As Ihde (1990) points out, only in a utopia could persons exist without technology. To not associate technology with being-in-the-world, from the crushing of seeds through to the viewing of television, is for Ihde, to not appreciate the ontological character of technology. This sits comfortably with the gradualist philosophy of cognitive archaeologists such as Hodgson (2000); the refining and developing of technology enabled persons to render externally their cogitative processes, which evolved into a complex screen-language. Screen language is technological, it comes about within Dasein — Hodgson’s surrogate cortex is an element of being-in-the-world, it is both technological and ontological.

In terms of ecological sustainability and the integrity of more-than-human world, the distinction between cultural practice and subsequent worldviews surrounding ‘handwork’ and ‘modern’ technology is significant, the latter being ‘something completely different and therefore new’ (Heidegger, 1977:4). The following two examples help flesh out this distinction; we begin with Heidegger’s description of the hydroelectric power station on the Rhine:

The hydroelectric plant is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command (Heidegger, 1977:15).

Such images of modern technology, argues Wright (2000), present Homo sapiens sapiens as both removed from and victims of the technological process. In contrast to the hydroelectric mechanism imposed upon the Rhine, earlier uses of water
technology for industry were very different. For example, Dr Heather Builth has uncovered evidence dating back some 8,000 years to when the indigenous Gunditjmara people trapped young eels in the ocean and placed them in artificial waterways around the Lake Condah region of Western Victoria, Australia.

The Gunditjmara had a thriving eel industry that exported produce across what is now Victoria and South Australia. The industrial village consisted of hundreds of huts, with more than 100 square kilometres of artificial channels and ponds for farming eels. For thousands of years the Gunditjmara worked the grassy wetlands and dug channels to connect them — the whole scheme was systematically punctuated with eel traps. Some of the chains of channels and ponds stretched more than 30 kilometres. In addition the leaves from Blackwood trees were used to smoke the eels, and the ‘oil was captured and rubbed on the body or drunk for medicinal purposes’ (Builth 2006). According to Builth’s research the eel farms could have fed up to 10,000 people; ‘the area was naturally a wetland, with natural swamps, but they modified these with weirs, channels and dams to make the whole landscape eel-friendly’ (Builth, cited in Phillips, 2003).

Certainly an eel industry in the secluded Lake Condah area is, in a Heideggerian sense, a primitive means compared with the hydroelectric plant in the Rhine River, for in contrast to the older handwork technology there is something completely different and therefore new about modern technology. Unlike the seasonal and localised nature of handwork technology, modern technology is both continuous and global — from floating dragnet factories (unsustainably trawling the planet’s oceans), to around the clock air travel (unsustainably traversing the planet). Having converted wind, water, sunlight, coal and oil into continuous energy systems, modern technology never rests; as a result, the earth can’t catch its breathe between onslaughts. Handwork technology, like modern technology is a means to an end:

That is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, ‘get’ technology ‘spiritually in hand.’ We will master it. The will to mastery
becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control (Heidegger, 1977:4).

Builth is describing a very different technological mind-set to the ‘modern’ Rhine industrial complex; the Gunditjmara industrial system continued unbroken for some 8,000 years before colonial invaders destroyed it. Heidegger is describing an industrial approach that has in a few short decades damaged the natural climatic system of the planet. We can see via these two examples the concern that underscores Heidegger’s *Question Concerning Technology*:

> Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [Bestand] (Heidegger, 1977:16).

Handwork and its associated worldview have lost their resonance within contemporary culture, a culture that according to Heidegger has fallen prey to ‘Enframing’. (Enframing names a mind-set that ‘unlocks and exposes’, forever ‘driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense’ (op. cit., p.14). Enframing has ultimately reduced all things (including Homo sapiens sapiens) to standing-reserve. Both the person that harvests and the place of the harvest have been devalued by an Enframing worldview, as has the more-than-human world. Unlike the produce crafted through handwork technology, now whatever ‘stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object’ (op. cit., p. 5).

Heidegger is describing the contemporary world in a particular way, one that brings to this review of commercial television an acknowledgement of the substructure of being; we are born, and we are already in the world by the time we attempt to articulate our being-in-the-world. In this Heideggerian understanding, all people have always been, ‘already in the world’ prior to their individual recognition of ‘Being’. Today, increasingly, persons are before images of ‘standing-reserve’ prior to their recognition of the fact. Though persons have always been before the screen-language of the surrogate cortex prior to their individual recognition of being before the
surrogate cortex — a process that has been ongoing for around 45,000 years (Morwood, 2002:7) — the surrogate cortex hasn’t always presented the more-than-human world as standing-reserve.

a. Flung into everydayness

Each person is ‘flung’ into existence; we are thrown into the world, ‘our Being-in-the-world is a thrownness, [Geworfenheit]’ (Heidegger, 1962). Persons are flung with neither prior knowledge nor individual option into a world that was there before and will remain there after the individual has gone:

Thrownness is neither a ‘fact that is finished’ nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein’s facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the ‘they’s’ inauthenticity (Heidegger, 1962:223).

The surrogate cortex, like parents, community and culture, is a significant component of the ‘they’ we are flung into. We are flung into an existence where we initially experience all-things as one-thing. For Heidegger this is central to Dasein; subsequent points of reference allow us to tease out and differentiate over time and hence inform our thinking, our way of understanding (correctly or incorrectly) the world — our Being. People are flung into a world of primal things: ground, water, sky, family etc., as well as the technology associated with a particular epoch — resin on a stick; GPS navigation. As we have seen, persons are flung into an epoch where a particular type of screen dwells: cave painting, perspective oil painting, through to the cinematic and the current televisual. No matter which epoch and what place within that epoch we are flung, we experience our life one day at a time. Here we can draw on Heidegger’s (1962) theory of ‘everydayness’, a theory that sits comfortably with the work of Scannell (1995) and Mantovani (2000): ‘Everydayness is precisely that Being that is ‘between’ birth and death’ (Heidegger, 1962:276) — the complexity of everydayness is beautifully captured by Chatwin (1987):

A woman in saffron and green rode by on a black horse. Behind her, bundled up together on the saddle, a child was playing with a motherless lamb; copper pots
were clanking, and there was a rooster tied on with a string. She was also suckling a baby. Her breasts were festooned with necklaces, of gold coins and amulets. Like most nomad woman, she wore her wealth. What then, are a nomad baby’s first impressions of this world? A swaying nipple and a shower of gold (p 203).

Chatwin’s passage brings to mind the universal nature contained within living one day at a time — ‘The thinker only responded to what addressed itself to him’ (Heidegger, 1977:17). Though we are flung ‘individually’ into the world, a Heideggerian approach argues everydayness is not to be understood in the sense of the ‘I’ (me), but rather as the ‘they’ (culture/society/world). Physically ‘I’ am an individual entity; nonetheless, ‘I’ am bound to a community that existed prior to my birth — be it a functional or dysfunctional community. The notion of ‘they’ recognises that prior to an individual’s birth, ‘they’ already dwelt in the everydayness that each individual is flung into:

In this everydayness there are certain structures which we shall exhibit — not just any accidental structures, but essential ones, which in every kind of Being that factical Dasein may possess, persist as determinative for the character of its Being (Heidegger, 1962:38).

We don’t begin life certain of our self, because from the moment of being flung we are already enmeshed in ‘their’ everydayness — ‘I’ formulate a concept of ‘self’ and ‘world’ as a result of being flung into ‘their’ culture

… what first confronts us, in the sense of being ontologically primary, is not a sense of our own existence in some detached or abstracted form, nor of being presented with a field of sensory ‘evidence,’ but rather our being already involved with things in such a way that we do not even think of them as separate from us nor us from them, and in which things are encountered as already part of a meaningful whole’ (Malpas, 2006:52).

An individual interprets the world they find themselves within; commercial television is an integral component of the ‘they’ that constitutes contemporary everydayness. It isn’t a natural or primary state of thinking to doubt the everydayness we are flung
The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existing itself” (Heidegger, 1962:33). In terms of commercial television and the televisual, Heidegger’s notion of everydayness is insightful — it underscores Scannell’s phenomenology of television discussed above. The ontological nature of commercial television and the televisual for Schor, Jhally and Fry has created a commercial ‘existence’ (Heidegger, 1962:32) of ‘missing information’ (McKibben, 1992). These authors are concerned about the destiny of contemporary Homo sapiens sapiens in the epoch of modern technology, and in particular the mercantile mis-information billboarding the path that commercial television and the televisual is forging:

Since destining at any given time starts man on a way of revealing, man, thus under way, is continually approaching the brink of the possibility of pursuing and pushing forward nothing but what is revealed in ordering, and of deriving all his standards on this basis (Heidegger, 1977:25).

Heidegger clears the ground to question the ontic and ontological, in terms of the televisual-umwelt, as well as in terms of the more-than-human world. For Heidegger, we have no other access to Being than by way of entities. We start out in the world knowing individual entities, but not Being as such; for the most part it remains pre-ontological because it has yet to work out its ontology. In this finite sense ontology can say how things are but not necessarily why they are, because everyday understanding disguises these practices as ways of understanding. Our very familiarity with the practices and ways of interpreting existence are for the most part disguised because those practices and structures that define how we make sense of the world are usually made transparent by the familiarity of everydayness — hence we can see the Heideggerian underpinning of Virilio’s notion of sightless vision. In the context of commercial television and the televisual, Heidegger enables us to appreciate the influence of ‘pre-ontological everydayness’. It provides a vision of the world ‘without looking’ — a pre-ontological sightless vision.

For Heidegger, ‘truth’ is always both concealing and revealing, what he names as ‘alêtheia’. When one interpretation is opened up, other interpretations are necessarily closed off — as discussed above, in certain instances birds ‘are’ the spirits of dead women. In this sense our ontology is always provisional, always conditional on the
existence we are flung into. Hence, Heidegger’s *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977) facilitates an appreciation that contemporary commercial television viewers are flung into the ontic of a ‘modern technological world’, one where cultural practices are structured so as to make beings ‘optimizable and flexible standing reserves, i.e. things show up not as objects but as resources’ (Dreyfus, 2004:9).

b. Dis-stance

As visual technology evolved into television, a particular fracture came about between the viewer and the view. Within Heidegger’s notion of ‘Modern Technology’ (1977) the cinematic and later television screen is an aspect of a technological process that fractures ‘space and time’; a situation in which the content on the screen can be described as being both ‘near and far’— an abolishing of distance. Heideggerian scholar Heber Dreyfus (1991:x) developed the term dis-stance to describe Heidegger’s term *Ent-fernung*, a term that is sometimes translated as ‘de-severance’. The hyphen within *Ent-fernung* means the abolishing of distance. Adams (1993:48) says that *Ent-fernung* is used by Heidegger to mean both the establishing and overcoming of distance, the opening up of a space in which things can be near and far. When reviewing a visual medium, ‘dis-stance’ is a more manageable term than ‘de-severance’.

The concept of dis-stance enables us to better review the everydayness of the commercial television viewer, what McKibben names as a placeless place. For example, a child in Melbourne may view every day a favourite program set in New York’s Empire State Building. The child experiences the Empire State Building in a number of ways: in one sense the Empire State Building (on the screen) is just a few meters from the child sitting in the chair, though the actual building is thousands of miles away; in another sense, the Empire State Building (on the screen) is no-place. To complicate matters, the actual physical places in which the child’s favourite actor acts (the fictitious rooms supposedly inside the Empire State Building) could feasibly be located on a television set in a Hollywood studio or any other studio location anywhere in the world. In addition, popular culture (food, clothes, music) that exists in the child’s home and neighbourhood in Melbourne, is increasingly replicated, both
within the television story about New York’s Empire State Building, and in the homes
and shopping malls of other televisual domains. Increasingly, the screen-language of
television renders the program accessible to the reader (viewer) be they in Mississippi
or Melbourne. For example, within the popular music industry promoters strive to
have their artists’ music incorporated into popular programs as a global promotion
strategy. A viewer in New Zealand can sip the same brand of soft drink as the Empire
State Building star, while the program’s background music of Australian musicians
Cat Empire sets the mood. Like a viewer in Britain, the viewer in New Zealand can
instantly download the Cat Empire music via iTunes. Hence, the viewer in New
Zealand, Britain and Australia are equally (dis)connected: ‘We have lost our points of
reference to orient ourselves. The de-realized man is a disoriented man’ (Wilson,
interviewing Virilio, 1994:7). Commercial television operates within an everydayness
where the combination of dis-stance and ‘realism’ (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) has a
particular shaping power: ‘our understanding of the world is predicated upon how it
comes before us – the means of its unfolding is the moment of our enfolding’ (Fry,
1993:35).

Commercial television is an important part of that which is ‘there’ prior to a
knowledge of it ‘being here’; for Fry, commercial television has therefore become
elemental to the perceptual field of ‘what is’ our given condition  (1993:12).
McKibben (1992) speaks about this given condition in terms of the communicative
mechanism of television where ‘conversation’ is restricted to what people have in
common — commercial television’s contribution to everydayness is that of
manufacturing the common ground. For mercantile imperatives, a child viewing the
Empire State Building program must be at ease with the concepts storied in
Hollywood about New York, while living in Melbourne:

We can find subjects of interest to all only by erasing content, paring away
information — the things that interest me may not interest, or even be
comprehensible to you … the only solution is to simplify’ (op. cit., p. 48).

The world is a poorer and more hazardous place due to the simplification required by
modern communication technologies. The everydayness of commercial television’s
mise-en-scène, its routinization and scheduling in combination with the realism
enmeshed within dis-stance, does, for McKibben, all-day every-day speak about the world in a particular way:

A day of television reminds you that except for whatever specialty you earn your living with, you live in a vastly simpler place. A place where your physical location hardly matters (1992:53).

For a child in Melbourne, Sydney, New York or Hollywood to access the Empire State Building program, they must share the same dis-stance, what McKibben names as the same general ‘placelessness’ (1992:48). The unifying agent in the lifeworld of the contemporary viewer is a shared language that vastly simplifies, to the point where physical location hardly matters.

… to the list of neighbourhood and region and continent and planet we must now add television as a place where we live. And the problem is not that it exists — the problem is that it supplants. Its simplicity makes complexity hard to fathom (op. cit., p. 53).

In his own way McKibben is grappling with the question concerning technology, a question that incorporates commercial television, where the power to influence is found in the placelessness of everydayness, the very everydayness that for Scannell is one in which ‘broadcast output, like daily life, is largely uneventful’ (1995:1). In an Australian context, Peter Dodds, former producer of Neighbours, describes the premise of that program in a way that fits the context of Scannell’s research:

You pick the most ordinary suburb in middle Australia — it could be Sydney or it could be Melbourne. You pick a cul-e-sac — the kind of street where, if you pulled up in your car and just waited, nothing would happen. It might be three hours before Harold brings out the wheelie-bin and leaves it on the curb. Shock horror, nothing has happened for three hours and then suddenly this guy comes out with a wheelie-bin. A little while later, Lou comes out and takes Harold’s bin in by mistake. But off screen, and unbeknown to Lou and Harold, Julie has thrown an object into that wheelie-bin that belongs to Sam. Suddenly, from nothing, you have drama. There is the potential for comedy, for deceit, for
whatever storyline your imagination can devise. There is, in that ‘nothing happening’ scenario, a story (Sergi & Dodds, 2003:71).

The environmental crisis of our modern world is complex and multilayered, it cuts across both production and consumption issues associated with commercial television. Jhally argues that this is particularly noticeable in advertising:

It addresses us not as members of society talking about collective issues, but as individuals. It talks about our individual needs and desires. It does not talk about those things we have to negotiate collectively, such as poverty, healthcare, housing and the homeless, the environment, etc (2005:6).

c. The more-than-human world

McKibben is concerned about the state of the world’s environment and how the ‘simple language’ of commercial television is unable to articulate the ecological plight of the planet. In search of a language to describe the environmental blight McKibben takes to the forest; there he reflects on the experience of the more-than-human world compared with his experience before the placelessness of commercial television: ‘the mountaintop offers different information—there some grand order seems manifest and enormous, far larger than the purely human world’ (1992:97). As if quoting from Heidegger, McKibben says:

New technologies have removed from most of us in the Western world any need to spend time in contact with the physical, and hence erased much of the chance to experience the divine in its grandest manifestations (op. cit., p. 97).

Complementing McKibben’s concerns, David Abram (1996) moves beyond the televisual and becomes immersed in the more-than-human world for an extended period of time, during which he notices a shift in consciousness as the reciprocity between self and the more-than-human world evokes a particular language. While Abram is specifically asking questions concerned with sensuous perception within reciprocal relations with one’s surroundings, relations that give rise to utterances, to language, to literacy, his approach applies equally to interpretations of the Western
Screen. Abram’s demonstrates that the denial of reciprocity between contemporary people and the more-than-human world can be traced to literacy and language becoming detached from nature. Abram argues for a view of language as emerging from reciprocity with the natural more-than-human world; a view the cognitive archaeology of Hodgson (2000) appears to be sympathetic towards. Like perception and the other senses, for Abram, language is held to be inherently participatory. Language comes from our forebears being enmeshed in the wider ecology — beyond the realm of the strictly human. Abram discusses alternatives to literate consciousness by drawing on the oral traditions of Indonesia, Nepal, North America and Australia, and shows how the land speaks to these people. Complementing the sense of place put forward by Abram, Chatwin writes:

When an Aboriginal mother notices the first stirrings of speech in her child, she lets it handle the ‘things’ of that particular country: leaves, fruit, insects and so forth. The child, at its mother’s breast, will toy with the ‘thing’, talk to it, test its teeth on it, learn its name, repeat its name — and finally chuck it aside. ‘We give our children guns and computer games,’ … ‘They gave their children the land’ (1987:301).

Within such cultures language is still essentially connected to the ecology, to nature, to the physical more-than-human place of existence. Abram is concerned that language has come to eloquently describe humanness while clumsily describing the more-than-human world; this has brought about a collective perceptual disorder in our species, one ‘that encourages an unsustainable relation with the encompassing earth’ (1996:264). A genuine ecological approach Abram says, is not one that works to attain a mentally envisioned future, but rather, one that strives to enter ever more deeply into the sensorial present.

Abram acknowledges the need to apply his philosophy to television (1996:264), and Baird (1998) agrees: ‘what we need is an inquiry into — The Spell of the Cathode Ray Screen: Perception and Language in Cyberspace’. For Baird, in the context of Abram’s notion of reciprocity, ‘the only practical questions are: What will be the state of the emerging electronic human mind? Will it deepen our alienation from the more-than-human world or restore us somehow to a relationship with that world?’
The everydayness of a mutually beneficial community is one that lives in truth — as ‘alētheia’ (Heidegger, 1977). On the other hand, statements and beliefs that foster violence towards the land are ways of speaking that enable the impairment or ruination of the surrounding field of beings. For Abram, this type of language can be described as ‘false ways of speaking’ (1996:264) — ways that encourage an unsustainable relationship with the encompassing earth.

6. Language, Technological and Sustainability

Traditional indigenous cosmology tells us that the land (country) is central to the being-in-the-world for person, community and culture. In *Yorro yorro: everything standing up alive: Spirit of the Kimberley*, Ngarinyin tribal elder David Mowaljarlai provides first person accounts and insights into the ways of his people. Co-author Jutta Malnic’s photos reveal a snapshot of this indigenous life, culture and country. Mowaljarlai’s memories and descriptions of his and others’ physical and spiritual journeys provides an in-depth account of traditional Being, in particular that of Ngarinyin cosmology:

> When the human-totem Wandjinjas travelled to their designated sites, they painted [or merged] their Wandjina-selves and the particulars of their journey: how they formed the land by walking, travelling (Mowaljarlai & Malnic, 1993:137).

The personal, localised accounts presented by Mowaljarlai and Malnic complement the larger body of research undertaken by Morwood (2002) that inquires into Australian indigenous art and culture across Australia’s immense prehistory. The universality of such welling-up or singing-up of language and culture, in the more-than-human world, is captured by Chatwin: ‘In Aboriginal belief, an unsung land is a dead land: since, if the songs are forgotten, the land itself will die’ (1987:58). Chatwin’s inquiry reflects on the substantial correlation between ‘walking’ in place and maintaining contact with the more-than-human world, as Mowaljarlai and Malnic remind us, the relationship between indigenous people and earth is a ‘walking’ relationship: ‘it is important to remember that they all walked’ (1993:137). Within indigenous culture there is a reciprocity between walking, the more-than-human
world, handwork technology, art and cosmology — within contemporary culture we can argue that there is a reciprocity between commuting, the televisual, modern technology, commercial-art and cosmology. An appreciation of traditional and contemporary screen culture offers particular ways of approaching commercial television and the more-than-human world. Abram’s thesis gestures toward the simultaneous coming into being of language alongside human evolution; he presents the language of animism as one that reflects both the sounds and the bodies that inhabit the more-than-human world. The screen-language on the surrogate cortex of Lascaux and Arnhem Land echoes the language of that time — now, as Fry and Schor demonstrate, media space languages a different sort of reciprocity. For Abram, there has been a shift within the very elements that engender the reciprocity between person and place, to the extent that the more-than-human world is no longer an element in the all-day everyday world of the viewer.

Through Abram we can appreciate that the more-than-human world informs language, one that encompasses sustainability; Ihde and Hodgson enable us to appreciate that handwork technology enabled the initial rendering of that language upon the surrogate cortex. Contemporary language is predominantly informed by modern technology; it speaks of the more-than-human world as a resource aiding human progress: ‘modern technology trapped nature’, instead of allowing more-than-human things their own being; ‘it “sets upon” them, “challenging” them to be always completely present and, hence, at our command’ (Rigby, 2004a:89). Abram points to the danger of an overemphasis on anthropocentric technological-language as opposed to language produced as a result of being constantly in touch with the more-than-human world.

a. Screen-language

Drawing on the example of wildlife documentaries, McKibben (1992) demonstrates how the language of modern technology can unintentionally misrepresent the more-than-human world and hence perpetuate our misunderstanding. Wildlife documentaries present images of wild animals, even when the program is telling a story about an endangered animal. The visual conventions of television require constant images of the endangered plant or animal, hence a profusion of images of the endangered thing visually languages the opposite message to the original intention —
the endangered thing, within the language of dis-stance, can be ‘seen’ as plentiful. Such observations tap into a further element requiring review — television visual literacy and screen-language.

Drawing on her experience as a member of UNESCO’s Global Impact of the Arts Compendium, as well as a member of the Advisory Committee for the International Forum on New Literacies and Education, Bamford says, ‘contemporary culture has become increasingly dependent on the visual, especially for its capacity to communicate instantly and universally’ (2006:6). In a 2003 paper Bamford reminds us, ‘From the moment we turn on a TV, computer or DVD, we are in the world of imagery’ (p.7). Similarly, the USA-focused enGauge report on 21st century skills, places visual literacy as one of the key skills for the future. Advocates for visual literacy argue that in the 21st century visual literacy is as important as writing skills. Metros and Woolsey (2006) stress that visual literacy, much like written language, has its own syntax and vocabulary. Such arguments are grounded in the recognition of both the physical and cultural ‘place’ the screen has in disseminating information in the televisual age.

USA-based research reveals that pre-school children spend as much time with TV, computers, and video games as they do playing outdoors; one in four children under the age of two have a TV in their bedroom; video game playing has now surpassed both newspaper and magazine reading among young males and is at parity with print media consumption among all Americans aged 12 to 64 (Bleed, 2005:2). In 1995 Charles Brumback, then chairman of the Newspaper Association of America, said that the ratio of visual image to text is increasing, and that journalism is becoming embroiled in a culture of visual literacy: ‘more and more we will communicate visually and less through text’ (Fitzgerald, cited in Bamford, 2003). Brumback saw that within a society that wants its information ‘now’, images will play a larger role in catching our attention and holding our interest. Metros and Woolsey (2006) point out that visual literacy has been added to the once privileged ‘paper space’ as a primary organizing format for expressing and exchanging knowledge. Viewers require ‘visual judgment’, they need to be constructive critics of visual information, they must be able to judge accuracy, validity and worth in order to expertly deconstruct information
in our screen-induced society — ‘meaning is formed by seeing and thinking’ Bamford (2003:3).

My classroom observations reveal that unreflective consumption of visual language does not translate into a natural or instinctive ability to write visual language. Harking back to Heidegger’s notion of the pre-ontological, when the mechanisms behind the production of moving images are unreflectively experienced, the syntax and vocabulary required by students remain enmeshed in the glitter of the mise-en-scène — a friendly and familiar mise-en-scène that has not required questioning since birth (Fell, 2005). I have a considerable sample of student material produced over a fifteen-year period: news, music clips, short dramas and documentaries. What becomes obvious when comparing the initial video production assignment from each year is that the actual comprehension of visual literacy at point of entry to the subject has not significantly shifted in that time. Typically, students can’t transcribe the visual syntax and vocabulary found within the approximately 25,000 hours of television stories they have consumed since birth. Along similar lines, research coming out of the USA by Metros and Woolsey (2006) argues that being able to view an image does not equal the ability to create visual literacy:

As the class progressed, it became obvious that although these students were indeed visual learners and travelled seamlessly in a world rich with sight (and sound), they lacked the ability to express themselves visually (p.1).

b. Place

Abram’s sojourn into the more-than-human world, complements the inquiry into place and experience undertaken by Malpas (1999) — both philosophers argue that landscape and language are entwined. Each understands traditional indigenous people as having a grounded concept of life ‘as inextricably bound up with the land’ (1999:2). Drawing on Tony Swain’s A Place for Strangers, Malpas suggests that for Aboriginal Australians ‘life is an annexation of place’ (p.3), then argues this is so for all persons: Dasein is an annexation of the land. He draws on Gaston Bachelard to maintain that ‘the self is discovered through an investigation of the places it inhabits’ (p.5), and that an investigation of the places we inhabit is one where ‘the life of the
mind is given form in the places and spaces in which human beings dwell and those places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts’ (p.6). Like Abram, Malpas draws on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to develop an argument that ‘the spaces of inner and outer – of mind and world – are transformed one into the other as inner space is externalised and outer space brought within’ (p.6). There would appear to be particular resonances here with our review of media space and visual literacy, where the secretions of commercial television have congealed the ‘inside’ with the ‘outside’, creating one media space. Malpas brings to our attention the significance of ‘place’ and hence how place works on people, both in a ‘purely human world’ and in a ‘more-than-human’ world.

Drawing on Mark Johnson, Malpas discusses place in relation to modes of thinking. Like Wright (2004), Johnson points out that being a person is also being an animal, ‘our embodiment is essential to who we are, and to what meaning is, and our ability to draw rational inferences and be creative’ (Malpas, 1999:11). Malpas is adamant that ‘the stuff of our “inner” lives is thus to be found in the exterior spaces or places in which we dwell, while those same spaces and places are themselves incorporated “within us”’ (p.6). Drawing on Heidegger’s fundamental concept of human existence as ‘being-in-the-world’, Malpas makes a strong case for the centrality of place to our being. He argues that ‘it is not just persons who are tied to place … the very possibility of the appearance of things — of objects, of self, and of others — is possible only within the all-embracing compass of place’ (p. 14). Place exists before objectivity and subjectivity, and therefore it’s ‘through place that the world presents itself’ (pp.14-15). For Malpas, all our encounters with persons and things are always ‘taking place’ in place, and there is no possibility of understanding human existence, thought and experience other than through an understanding of place and locality: ‘the inquiry into the mind or the self will be identical with the inquiry into place’ (p.16).

Malpas enables an appreciation of the philosophy of place as the unifying agent underpinning any inquiry into commercial television, the televisual and the more-than-human world. To understand the relationship between the viewer and the screen requires an appreciation that language comes out of place. The placed-based philosophy of Malpas, in conjunction with the more-than-human inquiry of Abram, the cognitive archaeology of Hodgson, the rich culture of the screen (Morwood
through to Lipsitz), and an understanding that the viewer is removed via dis-stance from the more-than-human world, locates the problematique of being flung into an everydayness where the viewer lacks ‘visual-literacy’ (Bleed). Thus we can appreciate why environmental journalist McKibben is so concerned about commercial television and how it ‘speaks’; for when Scannell’s phenomenology of television is combined with Lipsitz’s history of commercial television, we can appreciate that a confusion has arisen around the notion of human well-being.

Persons have always cooked, eaten, talked, made love and slept in the same place as the screen. What Denzin, Lipsitz, Schor, Jhally and others enable us to appreciate is that in contemporary times, the screen has become a commercial domain representing a virtual place. Virilio’s ‘split’ enables us to appreciate, in a Heideggerian sense, that our televisual society does not ‘dwell’ upon the earth. To ‘save the earth,’ Homo sapiens sapiens have to do more than merely reside; drawing on Heidegger, Rigby argues that saving the earth requires ‘living on it in such a manner that it is allowed to unfold in its own way, released “into its own presencing”’ (2004a:6). Mantovani and Heidegger enable us to theorise the consequences of being flung into a culture where a commercial screen is set in place. To underestimate the influence of commercial television in encouraging the viewer to pursue material wealth is to make a mistake, claims Jhally, one that is detrimental to global sustainability and hence human well-being. Abram, Heidegger and Malpas help us to appreciate that thinking in-place can be understood only by observing the place in which the thinking is taking place.

To misunderstand the influence of the commercial television screen in terms of the language used to describe the more-than-human world is to misunderstand crucial elements of how our televisual culture understands itself.

This chapter suggests that my question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world requires an inquiry into place. The response I have as a researcher to the combined effects identified in this literature review — the pervasiveness of televisual culture, the role of technology and the exclusion of the more-than-human world — is to immerse myself as fully as possible in the cultures of these worlds. Clearly, there is a need for the researcher to be ‘in the places where the
thinking is taking place’, and not to stand outside them as a disembodied critic or observer. Because of my background and experience I am well-equipped to journey into the more-than-human world, the world of the television viewer and the world of producing commercial television, and then to make sense of those encounters in the light of the rich theorising of the screen that I have reviewed in this chapter. The task of the next chapter is to discuss how best to explore these disparate worlds.
CHAPTER THREE

A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROCEDURE

And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And to know the place for the first time

T.S. Eliot.

1. The Methodology Found Me

My hermeneutic phenomenological procedure draws on my particular circumstances; I live in a rural environment where remnant and regrowth native places are within a few minutes walk of my home. I teach television production and have made television programs, plus I have numerous contacts within commercial television, especially within NSW. These contacts consist of production colleagues, former students, and various television personnel whom I have met over the past fifteen or so years.

Over the course of three chapters, I apply my hermeneutic phenomenological reflection to three distinct aspects of my lifeworld:

(i) I reflect on the more-than-human world via the creeks and woodlands, valleys and mountains of the place where I live — I ask: What arises from being immersed in the more-than-human world?

(ii) I observe and reflect on videotaped recordings of an entire twenty-four hour schedule of a commercial, free-to-air television network. Through those reflections I further reflect on commercial television since its inception in Australia — I ask: What arises from viewing commercial television?

(iii) I reflect on my observations and interactions with commercial television personnel — I ask: What arises from being immersed in the world of producing commercial television?

My research process is primarily a first-person account, via a procedure that Seamon (2000:2) calls ‘concrete, urgent, and ambiguous.’ My phenomenological question is
always ‘what is this kind of experience like?’ ‘What is experiencing the creek, the woodland, the valley and the mountain like?’ ‘What is viewing commercial television like? ‘What is making commercial television like?’ Within the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, my reflections are able to incorporate the ‘real and imagined’ elements pertaining to the ‘what’ of the more-than-human and commercial television worlds.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a method of qualitative research inquiry derives from each term of its methodology: it is descriptive (phenomenological) because it is attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena (van Manen, 1997:180).

a. When you walk the path

Though I am miles from the nearest settlement, instructions from my first PhD residential accompany me as I walk along the soft winding bush path: ‘let your research methodology find you’. I recall a Buddhist quotation from Bruce Chatwin’s Songlines: ‘when you walk the path, you become the path.’ My mind turns to Martin Heidegger and his notion of ‘tarry’ — of the richness found in sojourn. The call of a bird sings my attention back to the bush and then the path; I walk on, snippets from the residential lecture return, they ‘look’ to be ricocheting between the trees and rocks either side of the path. The path I’m walking leads across a ridge dividing the valley where I live (smoking chimneys where habitation is mapped out by straight fences), and a valley I’ve not entered — one where no houses or fences appear to stand. Here, between the known and the unknown I feel a sense of wonder. It reminds me of the day I stood before a video editing console for the first time some twenty-five or thirty years ago. Then, I watched in amazement at how one could edit raw camera footage into a succinct story. I stop and think about ‘wonder’, about how wonder links this moment, standing before a valley of native re-growth and remnant woodland and memories of standing before a JVC U-matic editing suite sometime in the late 1970s. My ‘wonder about wonder’ takes me back to 1956; I have just walked into Geoffrey’s lounge, his mother has switched on the television receiver; this will be the first time in my life that I see a television program — everything in the room is flecked by the
shimmer of the television screen. As if at a circus, the television-ringmaster proclaims, ‘faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, look, up in the sky, it’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s Superman.’ Wonderful — I need look no further for my research methodology.

From a philosophical perspective, it is not at all surprising that wonder is the central methodological feature of phenomenological inquiry, since phenomenology is a philosophical project. Ancient philosophy has proposed that all philosophical thought begins in wonder, but we may also turn it around and say that philosophical reflection is the product of wonder. In other words, wonder is both the condition and the primary principle of phenomenological method (Verhoeven, cited in van Manen, 2002:5).

The question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world found me tarrying in woodland; subsequently I came to realize that hermeneutic phenomenology offers a philosophy and method that complements my worldview. Philosophically, I am drawn to Martin Heidegger’s articulation of being-in-the-world. As a teacher, I am drawn to the hermeneutic phenomenological described by Max van Manen — the research procedure developed for this research project is adapted from two of van Manen’s texts: Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (1997), and Writing in the Dark (2002).

2. My Approach to Hermeneutic Phenomenology

My question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world reflects on the real and imagined ‘subjectively felt’ wonder I have for both worlds. My approach aims to describe and interpret the research with what van Manen describes as a ‘certain degree of depth and richness ... a search for the fullness of living’ (1997:11-12). Such a search for the fullness of living is one that acknowledges my lifeworld — the unique circumstances that have generated the particular wonder I bring to this work. In this context, hermeneutic phenomenological research is concerned with ‘the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualise, categorize, or reflect on it (Husserl, cited in Van Manen 1997).
a. Six points for a methodical structure of human science research

I have walked the landscape of my procedure thanks to van Manen’s map of the hermeneutic phenomenological method. The topographical nature of van Manen’s map enables one to enter a field; however, as van Manen would argue, the map is not the field. There are always uncertain boundaries and changing circumstances. The flux between known and unknown horizons has to be accommodated; the dynamics of landscape, be it migration, growth, decline or something else, can never be transcribed onto a map:

Some people speak of method greedily, demandingly; what they want in work is method; to them it never seems rigorous enough, formal enough. Method becomes a Law. … the invariable fact is that a work which constantly proclaims its well-to-method is ultimately sterile: everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing; the researcher insists that his text will be methodological, but this text never comes: no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method (Barthes, cited in van Manen (1997:125).

In light of Barthes’ concerns, van Manen poses the question, ‘How can human science research be pursued?’ In answering his question, van Manen posits the six research procedures below. Reduced to its elemental methodical structure, hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic weaving in a process that incorporates the warp and weft of the following:

(i) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interest us and commits us to the world.
(ii) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
(iii) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon.
(iv) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
(v) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon.
(vi) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
These six flexible and dynamic statements are helpful hints when travelling along the research path; they are interlocking procedures that assist with questioning and reflecting within the hermeneutic phenomenological project. The methodology is more a ‘carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique’ (van Manen, 1997:131). Its ‘procedures’ have been recognized as a project of various kinds of questioning, ‘oriented to allow a rigorous interrogation of the phenomenon as identified at first and then cast in the reformulation of a question’ (op. cit.). The procedures are woven throughout Chapters Four, Five and Six. All six elements require a dialectical going back and forth among their various levels of questioning. They are a means by which the lived-experience of this project and the subsequent text is spun into the ‘meaning-making’ presented in Chapter Seven — ‘To be able to do justice to the fullness and ambiguity of the experience of the lifeworld, writing may turn into a complex process of rewriting, (re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing)’ (op. cit.). Chapters Four, Five and Six are just this; they are a result of ‘re-thinking, re-flecting, re-cognizing.’

b. Research design and procedure

Hermeneutic phenomenology gleans more from existential phenomenology than transcendental phenomenology, so the transcendental phenomenological procedure of ‘bracketing’ is not employed. Heidegger discusses his existential phenomenology in *Being and Time*, noting that we and our activities are always ‘in the world’, our being is being-in-the-world. Hence, existential phenomenology doesn’t bracket questions of being or ontology (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 1997; Woodruff Smith, 2003). Nor does my research procedure bracket the world; rather, ‘I’ interpret my activities and the subsequent meaning that things have for me. I write and reflect, reflect and write about my lived experience. In this respect, for Heidegger, phenomenology resolves into what he called ‘fundamental ontology’ (Woodruff Smith, 2003:7). His etymology of ‘phenomenology’ is interpreted as, ‘to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself’ (Heidegger, 1962:58).

The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. Or, more accurately, says van Manen:
The problem is that our ‘common sense’ pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question’ (1997:47).

In phenomenological reflection, we need not concern ourselves with whether the ‘thing’ exists; I experience the reflective process of the ‘thing’ whether or not such a ‘thing’ exists. To this end, Woodruff Smith (2003:2) says classical phenomenologists practice three distinguishable procedures:

(i) We describe a type of experience just as we find it in our own (past) experience. Thus, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty spoke of pure description of lived experience.

(ii) We interpret a type of experience by relating it to relevant features of context. In this vein, Heidegger and his followers spoke of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation in context, especially social and linguistic context.

(iii) We analyse the form of a type of experience, factoring out notable features for further elaboration.

3. The Encounters

a. Chapter four: the more-than-human world

In this chapter I walk the country that shapes the place where I live. I walk along the two creeks beds that form a junction before my home. Then I walk the compacted and eroded sheep paddocks that partially flank my home; from there I walk nearby tracks forged by gold miners a century ago. Having walked these forged, eroded colonial tracks, I meet up once more with the creeks as they wind through regenerating and remnant bush land; there, in the woodlands that stand atop the valley in which I live, tracks give way to ancient paths.

Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses any phenomenon as a possible research experience in which the reflective descriptions ‘have a universal (intersubjective) character’ (van Manen, 1997:58). I aim at bringing this intersubjective character to the
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surface when reflecting on the experience of my walking beside the creeks, across the
farmland paddocks and weaving through native woodland. Chapter Four reflects on
the pre-reflective nature of ‘being’ in my local environment, the design of Chapter
Four incorporates Heidegger’s notion of sojourn, of immersion, of being open to what
presents itself. Four literary texts resonate within this chapter; firstly, David Abram’s
_The Spell of The Sensuous: perception and language in a more-than-human world_,
Bruce Chatwin’s _Songlines_ and Bill McKibben’s _The Age of Missing Information_ set
me on my way. Abram and McKibben were discussed in some depth in the previous
chapter. Abram’s chapter on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty plus his discussion of ‘time’
brought phenomenology to my attention and drew me to the existential questioning of
Martin Heidegger. McKibben brings into focus the more-than-human world in
relation to television. The somewhat controversial Chatwin opened my thinking
towards ‘walking in country’, towards path-making and path-finding — an
appreciation that was later enhanced by Jutta Malnic and David Mowaljarlai’s _Yorro
Yorro: Everything Standing Up Alive - Spirit of the Kimberley_.

Chapter Four is designed so that I can question the more-than-human and
subsequently reflect upon my unreflective immersion in that world. I approached this
process by sitting on rocks and watching the creek pass, by walking for hours through
native woodland regularly over a number of years. In tarrying by the creeks and in the
bush and then sitting down and writing about these lived experiences, I came to
appreciate that my question concerning commercial television was being asked from
the perspective of my ongoing more-than-human world experience.

b. Chapter five: viewing commercial television

This chapter has two interlinked components. One aspect finds me reflecting on
commercial television within the context of the natural rhythm of twenty-four hours.
Persons live within the continuous cycle of twenty-four hours; in recent times,
however, ‘the demarcation between the news/game show slot and the drama/comedy
period—has almost certainly become the most significant line of the evening,
replacing the evening star or the sun sinking beneath the horizon’ (McKibben, 1992:
142). In this context, I wanted to immerse myself in the daily cycle of commercial
television. Now, like the cycle of life, commercial television never stops — while we
sleep, work and play, make love, give birth and die, the production-line of commercial television churns away unabated from sunrise to sunrise.

The second aspect of this chapter is designed to reflect on commercial television since its inception in Australia in 1956. I draw on my memories of viewing television dating back to this period where, at the age of five, commercial television began broadcasting in Melbourne, Victoria. Here I reflect on my memories of unreflective viewing of television. Combined, these two aspects create the desired dynamic; the chapter enables me to reflect on commercial television as both a non-reflective viewer and as a reflective viewer, while enabling me to reflect on the cultural patterns welling out of fifty years of Australian commercial television. I am able to acquire a sense of both the daily and yearly cycle of television – the ‘nature’ of commercial television. This hermeneutic phenomenological experience of commercial television is one in which I have confronted something that is already an interpretation. Van Manen (1997:26) draws on Gadamer to explain this type of situation, one where the researcher is interpreting the meaning of something; as such I am interpreting an interpretation: ‘The essence of an experience has been adequately described in language if the description reawakens or shows us the lived quality and significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner’ (op. cit., p. 10).

The actual day of the year chosen to record the twenty-four hours was determined by the technicians at the university where I work having access to both time and equipment. For symbolic reasons, I wanted a recording of Network Nine — Channel Nine in Melbourne was the first broadcast signal that I ever saw. Network Nine was the first commercial network in Australia and, at the time of recording, the most successful. I ended up with three eight-hour videotapes of Network Nine, covering a twenty-four hour period from midnight to midnight.

I don’t claim that my way of interpreting television is the only way. Clearly there are other ways of reflecting on the viewing of commercial television that would provide other ways of presenting and understanding ‘television-meaning.’ As Seamon (2000:18) points out, ‘there are many ways to interpret the text, thus interpretation is never complete but always underway.’ By videotaping twenty-four hours of commercial television, I am able to return to the text as new understandings emerge:
‘If the researcher uses an artifactual text to examine the phenomenon, then she must be willing to return to its parts again and again’ (op. cit., p.13). I immerse myself in the phenomenon of watching television and the memory of television — my hermeneutic phenomenology of commercial television is, not to translate (reduce) the primordial relation of viewing commercial television into clearly defined concepts so as to dispel its mystery, but rather, to bring the mystery more fully into presence.

c. Chapter six: commercial television production

The human science researcher tries to enter the lifeworld of the persons whose experiences are relevant study material. The best way to enter a person’s lifeworld is to participate in it. Close observation involves an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations (van Manen, 1997:67).

Chapter Six has two design elements: the first incorporates my visiting and closely observing the production of commercial television; the second involves conversations that came about due to my presence within a commercial television production environment. Over the past fifteen years or more I have been in contact with the commercial television industry in one form or another: official visits on behalf of my School, accompanying students on excursions, plus catching up with friends and graduates who work in the industry — my daughter, before moving into film production, was a commercial television producer. As a result, I am familiar with news, drama and advertising production environments.

The production of commercial television has many facets, yet, as viewers, we are always before a moment (a now) where the combined result of innumerable complex and diverse processes merge on the screen as one ‘thing’. In terms of van Manen’s approach to hermeneutic phenomenological research, Chapter Six presented certain challenges that were not encountered in Chapters Four or Five; in those chapters the lived-experience is one of being immersed in a stable place — walking along creek beds etc, or sitting before my television receiver at home. The production of
commercial television comes about through disjointed and disconnected processes. A brief example will help explain.

One afternoon, while observing the production of a popular soap opera, I asked the director if I could have a copy of the day’s filming — to use as a teaching aid. The director asked his assistant to arrange for a copy. To which the assistant replied, ‘Where are we being recorded?’ The director stopped in his tracks; he didn’t know either! It turned out that no person in the control room or on the studio floor knew where the program they were making was being recorded. They didn’t know ‘where’ in the Network complex the program they were immersed in was being recorded onto videotape, and hence, where a copy of the day’s filming could be sourced. The ‘contracted’ camera operators didn’t know where the picture travelling down their camera cable ended. The actors didn’t know where their performance was being recorded. Eventually, the only permanent Network employee within this wing of the complex, a passing security officer, instructed a floor-runner where to find ‘Tapes’ — the department where the Network VCR’s and hard drives are housed. There, multiple images coming into the Network both from within the Network building and from without are recorded — images from all the States of Australia, plus satellite images from around the world dance upon the multiple screens situated in Tapes. The screens of Tapes are always ‘all-the-time’ awash with images: news; sport; promotions; raw footage to make programs; ready made programs forged from raw footage compiled in other Tapes departments, either in Australia or elsewhere. Tapes is a place where dis-stance is compiled; it facilitates the illusory presentation of the all-day, everydayness of television viewing as a seamless unified ‘thing’.

I closely observed the production of Australian commercial news, soap opera and advertisements. I did this by being present in the studios during the production of these genres, in combination with milling around networks, eating in production canteens, observing pre- and post-production procedures. I stood within the production process because I wanted to observe the persons who make commercial television content. I didn’t pursue a journey into the world of network management for, as Paddy Scannell (1995) points out, while network management has a desire for a program to be successful, it is the ‘production’ of the program that brings or doesn’t bring that ‘intention’ to fruition. Of interest here is the production of the types of
programs I discuss in Chapter Five, and, within that, the persons that are physically present in the making of those productions.

During this period I had a number of conversations with a range of commercial television production personnel: production executives, producers, directors, presenters and scriptwriters — their names have been changed. Within the design of my hermeneutic phenomenological research the conversations serve as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material and as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon of commercial television production. I also use them as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation ‘about the meaning of an experience’ (van Manen, 1997:66). Sometimes this ‘talk’ took place between moments in production, other times I was able to talk over coffee, other times we talked while driving, for example, between a guest lecture at my university and the airport.

When undertaking my television production research, I jotted down elements of conversations into my diary or onto my laptop. Sometimes conversation required a more formal interview-type structure shaped by a designated appointment and set duration; then I recorded conversations onto cassette tape:

If the interview format seems the best way to gather an account of the phenomenon, then the researcher must be open to respondents and adapt her questions, tone, and interest to both respondents’ commentaries and to her own shifting understanding as she learns more about the phenomenon’ (Seamon, 2000:12).

The conversations I draw on are rendered via a number of processes, some planned, others impromptu. For instance, I videotaped a director directing, and in doing so, captured production conversations between various crew members; later, as a houseguest of the director in question, I had coffee with his wife; we spoke about the life of a director from her perspective. The point of conversation in terms of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to borrow other persons’ experiences and their reflections in order to better come to an understanding of the deep meanings or significance of the human experience.
The conversational interactions undertaken in Chapter Six came out of my observation of commercial television production, as well as my personal experience in producing film, video and television. I reflected on my observations and conversations with the intention of bringing to the text a sense of the lived experience of commercial television production. When juxtaposed with Chapter Five, my immersion in the world of television production reveals thematic elements within the question concerning commercial television.

4. Applying The Procedures

Having identified the contexts within which I carried out my research, I am now in a position to return to the six elements of van Manen’s procedure to describe how it is that I employed the procedure.

a. Turning to the nature of lived experience

For a person undertaking hermeneutic phenomenological research, turning to the nature of lived experience is a turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests the researcher and commits the researcher to the world. This research approach revolves around the dynamic interplay between my serious interest in global ecological degradation, including the immediate degradation of the country where I live, and the position commercial television occupies in my culture — I am a person who teaches other persons how to make television content.

The procedure for hermeneutic phenomenological research requires that the researcher become oriented to a phenomena, it also requires that the researcher have a ‘a particular interest, station or vantage point in life’ (van Manen, 1997:40). My research draws on my vantage point of living in a secluded rural place, while at the same time, working in a teaching and learning institution where I am professionally associated with commercial television. My lifeworld is therefore well situated for an enquiry concerning the more-than-human world and commercial television. By drawing on my lifeworld I am able to formulate a phenomenological question and hence undertake a procedure in which I can be present: one in which I can be
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‘addressed by the question of what something is ‘really’ like’ (op. cit., p. 42); for van Manen, this is true hermeneutic phenomenological research.

b. Going back again and again to the things themselves

Chapters Four, Five and Six reveal both similarities and differences in my employment of the procedure. Common to these chapters is the hermeneutic phenomenological procedure of opening up, and keeping open, possibilities. To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the centre of our being. Within this procedure, van Manen says, the researcher becomes the question by living the question. Having drawn on one’s lifeworld to formulate the question the researcher moves beyond unreflective living by ‘going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put to question begins to reveal something of its essential nature’ (1997:43).

The procedure undertaken in Chapter Four ‘goes back again and again to the things themselves’ via the procedure of immersing myself in the more-than-human world time and time again. ‘As it reveals itself to me’, I develop a dialogue with the more-than-human world — over time, it reveals ‘something of its essential nature’. The viewing of commercial television in Chapter Five requires the ‘going back again and again to the things themselves’ via a different path. Because the viewing of commercial television takes place in the ‘purely-human world’ (McKibben, 1992) of ‘modern technology’ (Heidegger, 1977), the returning ‘again and again to the things themselves’ incorporates an ongoing immersion before the screening of commercial television. This procedure takes another turn, for as I reflect on viewing contemporary commercial television, memories emerge from my unreflective viewing of commercial television — ‘reflective consciousness is continually fed by this non-reflective dimension of life, which it thematizes’ (van Manen, 1997:38).

In Chapter Six, ‘going back again and again to the things themselves’ requires another path. Here, I immerse myself in a range of areas in which commercial television production comes to be. In the course of this process I interact with a range of persons that contribute to the making of commercial television. Sometimes ‘going back’ incorporates the physical nature of returning to a Network department, other times the
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‘going back’ is a going back to conversations with commercial television persons, either in person, or via my videotapes, cassettes or diary.

c. Investigating experience as we live it

Within the procedure, when investigating experience as we live it, ‘nothing should be considered given or granted’ (van Manen, 1997:53). The meaning of the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world ‘needs to be found in’ investigating my experiences of commercial television and the more-than-human world. The approach of ‘taking nothing for granted’ means that the lived experience of the researcher is all that remains when ‘presuppositions are suspended.’ This requires the researcher to search everywhere in their lifeworld for lived experience, for material that, upon examination and reflection, ‘might yield something of its fundamental nature’ (op. cit.).

The procedure of ‘investigating experience as we live it’ employs personal description of each lived experience. Accordingly, these lifeworld experiences are described in experiential terms, ‘focusing on a particular situation or event’ (van Manen, 1997:55) — how did commercial television enter my life? How did the more-than-human enter my life? Hence, such a procedure reflects upon memory and thought, on moments that clearly stand out, such as when I viewed television for the first time; or when I realized, ‘crawling beneath a lintel, forged by a fallen tree, nose centimetres above the path’, that I had entered another way of knowing, that the ‘horizon’ of my lifeworld had shifted! The procedure of ‘investigating experience as we live it’, enables the researcher to reflect in such a way that he or she can recognize ‘a next time’ experience. In the research that follows, I observe the ‘next time’ experience immersed within seasonality (Chapter Four) compared with the experience in which ‘next time’ presents a never-ending commercial-time (Chapter Five).

As he or she becomes comfortable with the procedure, the researcher is able to ask ‘is the internal dialogue congruent with the external dialogue?’ (op. cit.), ‘how does my “new horizon” sit with how I previously perceived my lifeworld?’ Within the context of hermeneutic phenomenology, the procedure of ‘investigating experience as we live it’ enables lived-experience descriptions to be understood as data, or material on
which to work — to this end, I have used van Manen’s ‘Suggestions For Producing A Lived-Experience Description’ (op. cit., p. 64):

(i) you need to describe the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoid as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interactions;
(ii) describe the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc;
(iii) focus on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describe specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience;
(iv) try to focus on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time;
(v) attend to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc;
(vi) avoid trying to beautify your account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology.

Van Manen’s comment that ‘it is not of great concern whether a certain experience actually happened in exactly that way’ (op. cit., p. 65), is also relevant in this context. For example, in Chapter Five I recall my lived-experience with commercial television from the age of five. I make no pretence that my memory of program details is flawless. Within hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen says, ‘we are less concerned with the factual accuracy of an account than with the plausibility of an account—whether it is true to our living sense of it’ (op. cit.). When I researched the facts, rather than my memory of commercial television, I found that my memory of programs of fifty years ago placed some characters in the wrong program; also the title of some programs was not as I recalled. Similarly, I have been visiting and interacting with commercial television persons for around fifteen years, hence, I haven’t drawn a line between ‘a then’ and ‘a now’.

d. Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection

The purpose of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection and explication as mapped by van Manen (1997:78-79), ‘is to effect a more direct contact with the experience as lived’. The desired aim of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection is to grasp ‘the essential meaning of something’, in this instance the essential meaning of the question
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concerning commercial television and the more-than-human. Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection entails organising the data in such a manner that when the lived-experience is transcribed into the text, the subsequent narrative or prose makes meaningful contact with the reader. Such a procedure requires textual labour. The crafting that emanates from the desire to go back ‘time and again to seek its meaning’, and the desire to seek meaning employs thematic analysis: ‘recovering the themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work.’ This proved to be a substantial task; Chapter Four comes out of having produced large amounts of reflective writing spanning several years. Similarly, Chapter Five, in particular the sections that reflect on my pre-reflective viewing of commercial television, required substantial textual labour — I am reminded of the van Manen aside, ‘And after seven drafts this is all you have?’ (op. cit., p. 8). Chapter Six has come about as a result of informal and formal conversations, diary entries, cassette recordings and video footage combined with vivid memories.

Hermeneutic phenomenological reflection requires ‘a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure’ — grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning (van Manen, 1997:79). The process of seeing meaning across the scope of three worlds — the more-than-human world, the world of viewing commercial television and the world of producing commercial television — required going back to the text again and again, and then some more in order to ‘craft the text’. As I reflected on lived-experience I was mindful that ‘phenomenological themes may be understood as the structure of experience’, however ‘lived experience cannot be captured in conceptual abstractions’ (op. cit.). When developing themes through hermeneutic phenomenological reflection, I drew on van Manen’s question, ‘What Is a Theme?’ (op. cit., pp. 87-88):

(i) Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point. For example, as I read over my reflections of the more-than-human world, I asked, ‘What is the meaning imbedded here, what is the point? As I asked such questions, I simultaneously held on to the notion that within this research project I have the desire and deep need to better understand how to move into the world and articulate the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world — ‘theme is the needfulness or desire to make sense’.
Theme formulation is at best a simplification. As I reflectively-wrote and reflected on my writing about my lived-experience with commercial television and the more-than-human world, I discovered that I was producing ‘theme-like statements’. I observed that these statements emerge from my sense making, yet, at the same time I am all too aware of van Manen’s observation: ‘We come up with a theme formulation but immediately feel that it somehow falls short, that it is an inadequate summary of the notion.’ As a reader of a particular philosophy, living in particular circumstances, observing place and persons embroiled in complementary and opposing worldviews, I accept that theme is the sense I am able to make of something, from my particularity.

Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text. Through the process of contemplation, of re-engaging with the text, I have come to better appreciate van Manen’s statement that ‘a theme is not a thing’. In the Heideggerian sense, there is no ‘thingness’ to a theme, yet, on the other hand, there is almost a thingness to theme — if we can speak this way — for in ‘place’, a theme has an intransitive presence, some type of connection. Heidegger wrote of this when he found the theme of his philosophical endeavour to be always there awaiting his arrival whenever he returned to his cabin (die Hütte) in the mountains — the place where he hand-wrote most of this works. Heidegger claimed an intellectual and emotional intimacy with the building and its surroundings, and even suggested that the landscape expressed itself through him, almost without his agency (Sharr, 2006). Theme is the openness to something — I strive to open myself to lived-experience across the diverse worlds of the more-than-human and commercial television. By opening myself to the fullness of a lived experience, ‘the promise of the notion embedded in lived experience’ presents an opportunity ‘of fixing something with a theme’. When searching for themes, within phenomenological reflection, ‘we need not concern ourselves with whether the “thing” exists’, for I experience the reflective process of the thing whether or not the thing exists.

Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. In this respect, I came into this project trying to understand the question concerning ‘realism’ (Fiske and Hartley, 1983/2003) and ‘the real’ (Heidegger 1977), in terms of
communicating global ecological degradation in a televisual culture. Hence, my project looks at the horizon of perception within ‘everydayness’ (Heidegger 1962). I attempt to poetically capture a day, ‘any old day’ of the ‘everyday life’ (Scannell 1995), of commercial television. I reflect within my text on those hermeneutic moments when ‘theme describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience’ (van Manen, 1997:87). Access to theme via the hermeneutic phenomenology of lived experience is such that life itself, upon reflection, is awash with themes. Theme is not restricted to the more-than-human or the purely-human world, it is everywhere and nowhere, it emerges out of the process of ‘insightful invention, discovery and disclosure’ (op. cit., p.88).

e. Writing

Writing, within hermeneutic phenomenology, entails being ‘sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak’ (van Manen, 1997:111) so that ‘the textual quality or form of our writing cannot quite be separated from the content of the text’ (op. cit., p. 112). Within this process, hermeneutic phenomenological writing values ‘memory’ and ‘anecdote’ as means that enable the ‘speaking’ of the things themselves. An aspect of my writing in Chapter Five draws on my memories of commercial television; here I present anecdotes as a device aimed at both linking and universalising the language within the text. The use of anecdote within hermeneutic phenomenological writing enables access to the particular while addressing general or universal questions, which van Manen says is the place hermeneutic phenomenological human science operates in — ‘the tension between particularity and universality’ (op. cit., p. 119). In highlighting the significance of anecdotal narrative in hermeneutic phenomenological writing, van Manen sights Rosen (1986) who presents four attributes of anecdotal writing:

(i) To compel.
(ii) To lead us to reflect.
(iii) To involve us personally.
(iv) To transform.
Woven through Chapters Four, Five and Six are anecdotal reflections: a sojourn along a creek with my youngest son, my seeing television for the first time, anecdotes that highlight the machinations of network television production. The text has been worked upon and crafted with the aim of compelling the reader, the anecdotes are shaped to personally involve, with the intention of transformation via reflection. Within this hermeneutic phenomenological writing method, van Manen draws attention to the communicative value of varying the examples within the data. A ‘science of examples’, says van Manen, is one in which ‘varying examples’ serve to point at the ‘thing’ which we are attempting to describe (1997:122). This is particularly evident in Chapter Five, where I vary my line-of-sight when viewing the terrain of commercial television.

Drawing on the existential philosophy of Heidegger (1962), van Manen argues that the text succeeds when it lets us see that which shines through. Words are not the ‘thing’, says van Manen, yet paradoxically, it is to our words, ‘language’, that we must apply all our hermeneutic phenomenological skill and talents, because it is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible. I approach hermeneutic phenomenological writing with the appreciation that while text possesses literal content or lexical meaning, ‘there is also meaning in the form or rhetorical structure of a text’. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach towards language is one in which ‘attentiveness to form is also attentiveness to content’ so that ‘certain meaning is better expressed through how one writes than in what one writes’ (op. cit., pp. 130-131).

The procedure of ‘maintaining a strong and oriented relation’ with the lived experience, emphasizes the researcher’s wonder for the research — the ‘where’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ that underpins inquiry. Van Manen says such an approach draws on how the researcher ‘stands in the world’ (1997:137) — which I find particularly appealing. While some critics argue that phenomenology lacks a certain political thrust (Woodruff Smith, 2003), I read van Manen’s insistence that part of the procedure of undertaking hermeneutic phenomenology incorporates maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the work, as one where the procedural requirement of being one’s true self within the research, also means embedding one’s spiritual and social presence in the text — this is a powerful political statement. Having disrobed,
the researcher, as person, as animal, embraces lived experience in a loving, respectful and wonderful manner. Undertaking hermeneutic phenomenological research requires a caring, loving act:

… in doing research we question the world’s very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us … we want to know that which is most essential to being … To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one’s very nature (op. cit., p.5).

In respect to this work, the method of maintaining a strong and oriented relation wells out of my being a person with a deep concern for the integrity of the more-than-human world, from the moss on the rock to the complexity of a creek. I am reminded of a song I heard at a Deep Ecology retreat; the lyrics tell of an ancient tree that hears the approaching sounds of chainsaws and bulldozers; the tree bemoans the fate of the birds nesting in its branches. As a person with a grounded understanding of the cinematic/televisual screen, I am deeply interested in developing and articulating procedures that do — when filming the chain saw, bulldozer, ancient tree, creek and moss on the rock — create ecological resonance within the everydayness of the viewer. As I speak or write, I need to see that, as van Manen would argue, the textuality of my text is also a demonstration of the way I stand in life. Maintaining a strong and oriented relation with my research is a sign of my preoccupation with the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world — it is a demonstration of my commitment.
CHAPTER FOUR
PATHS WITHIN PATHS

The mighty rivers of the world, after all, are simply untold billions of raindrops and snowflakes, each of which fell separately to Earth. Who shall say which raindrops are more important than others?

Mary E. Clark

In this chapter I set out to move beyond my cinematic, televisual lifeworld. I undertake a hermeneutic-phenomenological endeavour in which I gradually immerse myself in the landscape surrounding where I live. I entered each experience into a journal — the following text is the result of numerous revisits to both the journal and the places I reflect upon.

1. A Cup Of Tea

Six o’clock on a frosty Spring morning. The kettle is boiling. I open the door of the wood-fired stove to redirect more heat into the room. In a moment I will sit sipping tea and gazing into the stove’s fiery furnace. Jean douses the tea-leaves. I place two mugs, one black and one green, beside the teapot. Huddled around the firebox we sit rubbing our hands waiting for the cold to retreat to the outer perimeters of our little fishing cottage. I ask our eight-year-old son, Manning, who has already been up for an hour, to turn off the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle television program he’s watching. Sighing, and casting a look he daren’t cast at anyone but a parent, Manning activates the remote. Our cottage is small by contemporary housing standards. We eat and rest in just a few square metres that were cobbled together forty years ago by Jack Newlings, as a retreat from city living — our home was built for one, yet somehow we cuddle three into it. The killing of the TV screen, in particular the deadening of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle soundtrack, creates space for subtle rural morning sounds to enter. The soft tweeting of finches and wrens combines with the warbling of magpies — their native voices being both harmonious and discordant with the heckling from the nearby chook yard. Now that the television is turned off, Manning exits the room; I realize we need more light, and step the three metres from firebox to
window and draw the curtain. I scarcely acknowledge the world beyond the
windowpane. Yet beyond the window is an intriguing place.

The dismissive manner in which I treat the view is an insight into my state-of-mind.
This is a typical Friday morning; my head is full of office: unwritten memos,
committee resolutions, lectures written and lectures to write. The morning finds me
blind to the world beyond the window, just as it finds me blind to the world of the
window, which is smeared in the body oil of bogong moths. The window’s surface is
etched in the story of the lives that were attracted to the glow of our cottage last night.
Imprinted on the smear of bogong moth oil are the shapes of frog legs and stomachs.
The window’s apparently opaque text clearly spells out the story of those moths that
fell short of their pilgrimage to the Australian Alps, and the frogs that have adapted to
an electric light glowing all night in this ancient valley.

Seventy metres beyond the window is the junction of two creeks: Wisemans Creek
and Stony Creek. The union of these two creeks forms the more substantial waterway
of Sewells Creek, itself a tributary of the Campbell River, the river that supplies
Bathurst’s Chifley Dam. The weathered scape of the Wisemans-Stony Creek junction
hints at the age of this place. The majority of river systems in Eastern Australia are
around twenty to thirty million years old; I suspect the age of the junction is of a
similar magnitude. The large slabs of rock that have broken away from the three-
storey cliff face and tumbled before and into the creek point to the age of this place.
Like giant ‘fiddle sticks’, they overlap each other, shaping how the surrounding flora
and fauna, both in and beside the water, shelter and grow. In times of drought, the
junction bed reveals a large white boulder that usually stands a metre or so beneath
the water’s surface. Gaily twirled with ribbons of pink and red, the boulder bears little
resemblance to the sober greys of the fiddle stick slabs. After substantial rain
upstream the water of the junction laps our boundary fence, which is just twenty
metres from the window. Once, after a torrential downpour, the water’s edge rose to
within ten metres — evoking both consternation and inspiration. When the water level
recedes to the point where the white boulder can be seen, some ninety metres
separates it from our cottage.
The junction signifies the end of individual journeys by two distinct bodies — Wisemans Creek flows from the northeast where it wells from the foothills of Oberon; Stony Creek carries infusions from the Southwest. Increasingly since 1813 the local creeks and rivers have edged through land cleared for grazing, cropping and exotic pine plantations. Wisemans and Stony Creek are fortunate in that they weave through native re-growth valleys in which isolated gorges enable small stands of remnant woodland to continue to infuse the creeks with a certain native essence. Unlike their ‘townie’ cousins, the creeks before my home haven’t been reduced to drains. While they carry the residue of progress (discarded artifacts, exotic fish, superphosphate and agricultural chemicals), they are still able to retain their creekness, as they flow over, under, and through places less affected by modern technology.

2. The Billabong

Ironically, between crippling drought and raging flood, the expanse of water beyond the junction appears as if it were a billabong. Several hundred metres beyond the intersection of the two creeks the landscape presents an illusion. To the uninformed eye, the north bank of the valley appears to form a dam wall. The illusion is further helped by a small archipelago clustered before a central island (Weir Island), that stands in the middle of the creek. Over time, Weir Island has trapped silt, seed and driftwood; the small, but expanding, island is a combination of native and exotic life; a profusion of blackberry vines weaving through kangaroo grass render its hinterland impenetrable. At the borders of this entanglement, between island and creek, acacia, willow and melaleuca are in a constant state of ‘holding-on’. At its lapping edge, reeds and cumbungi sieve and filter. The island’s dynamic weave traps and binds to form a mass capable of withstanding the force of a torrent.

Platypus, water-rat (Hydromys chrysogaster), duck, heron, kookaburra, and their smaller kingfisher cousins dine on European and Australian delicacies before and beyond the island. In the shallows surrounding the island, ibis forage, while migrating birds bathe alongside the local finches, magpies and chuffs. Between Weir Island and the junction, heron dive into deeper water in search of fish, and ducks paddle, safe from fox and wild dog. The illusion of the billabong is further supported by how the outflow of the junction snakes around the archipelago and Weir Island before

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slithering away. Consequently, for much of the year, unless you peer through binoculars, you don’t notice the trickling water, the licking of rocks into pebbles, the shaping of fallen branches into driftwood.

For most of the year, the rocks and boulders surrounding Weir Island serve as stepping-stones for the wallaby, kangaroo, wombat, fox, sheep, cat and rabbit that graze and hunt along the creek bed. In times of flood the stepping-stones are covered, and in times of drought they’re rendered redundant. At the edge of the creek the complexity of Weir Island is repeated. Reeds, cumbungi and melaleuca stabilize the banks; beyond them, acacias, blackberries and willows spread into land cleared for sheep and cattle production; there, a handful of native ‘parent’ trees stand tall and resilient — their offspring vulnerable to the forging of both exotic and native animals.

When in flood, the shallowest section of the junction would swamp a double-decker bus — then the illusion of billabong is replaced by that of the mighty Murrumbidgee. However, for much of most years, the junction appears as if it is in a state of perpetual pause. No matter which phase it’s going through, the junction is a place between the going of water and the coming of water, a philosophical place, a place where one can enter other places, other dimensions, a place where one can slip through and into a silent secret ever-present world of perpetual beginnings and endings.

3. A Few Seconds Earlier

Having not registered the world beyond the smeared windowpane, I move back to the firebox — I didn’t look to see if there was a the breeze rippling across the creek’s surface, or if the heron were diving for fish, nor if the fish were spearing out of their watery world to feast on spring insects. Yet, before I can sit comfortably and take my first sip of tea, Jean stands and fetches the binoculars: ‘I can’t see if it’s a duck or a water-rat.’ I walk back to the window and peer out; by now the angle of the early morning sun has transformed the surface of the junction into a living mirror — reflected upon its surface are cottonwool clouds and a flock of sheep. The sheep are actually grazing on the westerly hill overlooking the junction directly opposite us. I attempt to distinguish which elements on the surface of the creek are substance and which elements are reflections. I squint, I don’t feel awake, I haven’t sipped my tea. I
mumble incoherently, ‘I think it’s too small for a duck.’ As my eyes begin to adjust, I observe a small dark animal swimming from Weir Island through the reflection of sheep and clouds and up towards the head of the junction. In the meantime, the morning sun has continued to paint the creek’s surface. ‘It’s hard to make out what’s in the water and what’s a reflection,’ Jean says, handing me the binoculars. By now, several ‘widow-maker’ gum trees have been etched onto the creek’s canvas. I decline the binoculars, my eyes want to dwell on the surface, I want to swim in it, let it wash off the sticky office bits that are still attached to me. ‘My eyes can’t focus,’ I reply, placing the binoculars on the window ledge before adding, ‘We need better binoculars.’ ‘We need younger eyes,’ says Jean. It is then that I notice the dark object arch its back, before diving under the surface. ‘It’s a platypus,’ I announce. ‘Wonderful,’ replies Jean, refocusing the binoculars. ‘We certainly are coming along as naturalists … we now know the difference between a duck and a platypus.’ ‘They both have bills,’ replies Jean with a tone of self-deprecation. We laugh at our ignorance and aging eyesight.

We stare at the junction sipping tea and waiting for the platypus to resurface. I silently acknowledge the spell of the moment. I am aware that when this spell is broken, as it must be, the morning will whisk us up into ‘getting ready for work’. But just for now, just for this moment, the junction holds us — morning birdcalls and the water’s mirroring shimmer work their magic. Juxtaposed to this mesmerizing moment, Manning is playing *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in the garden, in his pyjamas and slippers — with the dogs! I do my best to ignore ‘hey dood’, ‘cool man’, ‘far out’. The corners of Jean’s lips lift, her ironic smile gives me cause to suspect that we are in a similar state of mind. Jean’s attention, like mine, appears to drift between ‘our’ son and ‘our’ junction.

In times of drought the platypus retreats to a large waterhole beyond Weir Island where the creek has never been known to go dry. So it is with joy that we observe it this morning. For a moment, I had thought the platypus might have been the water-rat that foraged at the junction before the drought. Perhaps the arrival of the platypus is a sign that the water-rat will soon be back foraging in this part of the creek. The platypus has resurfaced, by now it is completely still, as if it were a log drifting. I’m
transfixed by its floating, time appears as if to last for ages. Then without warning, the platypus arches its back, and in the blink of an eye it has darted back under the water’s surface. When the platypus resurfaces, I decide to measure how long it rests on the surface; I count, ‘one thousand and one, one thousand and two …’ when I reach one thousand and ten the platypus arches its back once more, and in a flash darts back under the water’s surface. When it resurfaces, I recommence counting; once more the platypus rests for ten seconds before diving back under the water.

The section of creek where the platypus is foraging is no more that a metre deep. I count, ‘one thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three …’. I imagine being the platypus, I trawl, nudge and scoop along the creek bed in search of a yabby. The longer I stay beneath the water the more I become aware of my body, I realize how much energy I’m using, my face turns red, my lungs feel like they’re about to burst — ‘one thousand and thirty-four, one thousand and thirty-five’, I can’t wait much longer. At last the platypus surfaces — I gulp the cool morning air.

Prior to the platypus re-surfacing, the creek’s surface resembled glass. For at least twenty of the thirty-five seconds that the platypus was beneath the surface, ‘nothing much appeared to be happening’, neither splash nor ripple signalled what was going on beneath the surface. I acknowledge my appreciation of the platypus, how ‘other’ the platypus is to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, sipping tea and office politics. Once more the platypus appears, and once more the subsequent ripples make their way to the creek’s banks. Perhaps the platypus is eating a yabby, or perhaps there wasn’t a yabby. The platypus darts back under, in ten or so seconds the ripples disappear, the creek returns to glass.

4. A Platypus In My Sink

At the precise instant when a person understands and accepts that it is aspects of his or her own viewpoint that have created, contributed to, and helped to sustain the world’s problems, then that person suddenly becomes a part of the solution.

Mary E. Clark.
Sunday morning. I’m washing the dishes, I peer through the steam rising from the sink and look out the kitchen window just as a platypus moves into its arching position. For several minutes I watch the platypus’ foraging cycle of float, arch, dive and resurface, before my attention returns to the hot sudsy washing water. Having returned to the dishes, I begin to perceive the water in the sink differently. Yesterday, I pumped the H₂O component of the sudsy dish wash from platypus world to our corrugated-iron water tank. Once more I look up from the dishes and back out in the direction of the platypus. As if mimicking an artist switching attention between canvas and subject, I repeat this looking down and looking out gesture again and again, in an attempt to compare the two. Eventually the vision of the platypus dims as the steam from the hot sudsy water fogs the kitchen window.

The technologies of sink, hot water, detergent and glass combine to blanket my view of the platypus. The curtain of steam alters my perception of the world. The objects in the kitchen become more apparent, the internal workings of the house become more immediate and obvious, the sounds of my domestic world appear to increase as my vision of the platypus diminishes. I feel that if I don’t wipe the fog from the kitchen window, the ‘out of sight platypus’ will become an ‘out of mind platypus’. How will the platypus compete with office, sipping tea, and the Dower Jones Index? I wipe the window and peer out towards the creek; it has returned to glass, and I hold my breath until I spot the shatter of the platypus’ resurfacing — I sigh with relief. Oblivious to my insanity, the platypus arches its back before spearing back into the sink!

The platypus is foraging in roughly the same area where Jean and I observed it on Friday morning. I scrub the dishes quickly in an attempt to get as much done as possible in the thirty-five seconds before the platypus re-emerges. At first this method works; however, my efforts at time-management eventually falter — I find myself staring out the window in anticipation, dish mop at my side, water dripping onto the floor. ‘At last,’ I hear myself sighing, as the platypus bursts through the junction’s membrane, and snuggles into the water’s surface — like a newborn child burrowing into its mother’s breast.

While sipping tea last Friday morning, the platypus appeared to be almost, but not quite, close enough to touch. Now it feels as if the platypus is light years away. On
Friday, through the binoculars, it felt as if I could almost touch its wet body, now, with hot sudsy water dripping from my fingers, the platypus appears to be in another world. I attempt to comprehend the twenty or thirty million-year-old place before me, I fumble for a way to express what I am feeling: ‘is this what wisdom looks like, are my hands dripping madness?’ I realize that I am more familiar with the detergent containers at my local supermarket than I am with the world before me. I realise that I am not a passive voyeur; the kitchen window isn’t a television screen, a camera isn’t directing my seeing, I can’t suspend my disbelief. I physically pump platypus water to my house tank. I take that platypus water and value-add my sudsy detergent. I do what I wish with the water. I undertake no consultation with the creek and its inhabitants. I realize that I know very little about my neighbours; I am blind to their dance, deaf to their song.

5. The Platypus

I decide to see if I can get closer to the platypus. Perhaps in some way, getting closer to it will help me to articulate my feelings. I decide to take my camera; maybe if I take some photos, maybe that will help me find what I’m looking for. A sense of urgency overcomes me; I rush down towards the creek oblivious to the cold. My nose and eyes water, my sandshoes leave impressions in the frost-encrusted grass. Some forty yards from the cottage I reach the boundary gate, by now the soundscape of the creek has replaced the hum of domesticity. I descend the path to the junction. At the water’s edge, swelling willow shoots have begun to paint the creek banks Spring-green.

My plan is to cross Wisemans Creek by negotiating several large flat water-worn rocks that almost form natural stepping-stones across the creek. From there, I will be able to step up to the ledge running at the base of the cliff face and manoeuvre myself to several sitting rock places overlooking the main body of the junction. For most of the year the stepping-stones at the base of the cliff sit above the flow of the creek. Today however, the creek is gently washing over the slabs. I stare at the water washing over the stepping-stones and then down at my sandshoes. I hadn’t figured on getting wet; this isn’t how I saw the world from the kitchen window. It is as if I’ve stepped out of a rocket ship and discovered that the moon is not made of cheese —
the creek is not a postcard, its reality is not easy to navigate. I spot several small ridges jutting up from the submerged stepping-stones. If I’m lucky, I will be able to straddle the creek via these ridges without getting my feet too wet.

While only partially keeping my feet dry, I manage to cross the creek and clamber up to a ridge running beneath Wallaby Rock — a wallaby-shaped sentinel standing atop the cliff, overlooking the junction. Having negotiated the ridge, I make my way up and over several fiddle stick slabs. As I approach a series of boulders, a duck swims out from behind the largest fiddle stick slab (Frog Rock), that sits midstream between Weir Island and the head of the junction. I feel as though our eyes meet. I try to slow my movement from one of blundering along to one of moving in harmony with place. Eventually, I stand as still as I can; the duck sees me as if I am a red rag blowing in the wind. Wasting no time, it takes to the air in search of some other non-human space. I apologize to the now absent duck.

A minute or two later I reach a smooth rock and sit. As I attempt to make myself comfortable, I become aware of a certain impatience; my head is still full of my getting here; I’m still walking through the mud left behind from the recent flash flood; I’m still straddling Wisemans Creek, watching my step, navigating the frost at the base of the cliff, draining the water from my right shoe. Somehow, I’m still coming; yet I am also already leaving. I am impatient. I have a list of things to do. The rock I’m sitting on may be smooth, but it’s uncomfortable; and the platypus, where’s the platypus? I don’t feel connected, my fingers are searching for something; it is as if they are phantom limbs seeking a phantom fast-forward button — I am not sure what to do. I realise that I am not yet here — I am perceiving my being here at the speed of ‘mechanical time’ (Bollnow, 1960). I smile, and ask myself, ‘Am I waiting for time to pass or for time to arrive?’

Eventually, I begin to relax, I’ve stopped staring; my eyes are now drifting with the current. I begin to notice faint birdcalls; at first they seem as if in the distance, then, in what seems like an instant, they are distinct, now I am surrounded by song as a chorus of crickets and other creek singers harmonise with the birds. The longer I sit the more I meld into the rock; the more I meld into the rock, the more the world around me reveals itself. I realize that the rock I’m sitting on is painted in the ways of this place:
white patches of bleached bird scats distinctly mark the area. Several fresh bird crop
sausages, consisting of small bones, cotoneaster seeds, beetle shells and other mashed
vegetation and gristle indicate that the rock is more like a dining table than a chair.
Ants scurry to and fro; an eastern water skink watches me from the sun-drenched
shelter of its rock patio. Perhaps it’s wondering why I’m sitting in the shadow of the
cliff, when, a few metres before me the world is warm and bright! I slide out of the
shadow and into the sun, ‘slow learner’ says the skink to its friends.

I catch sight of a willie wagtail frolicking in the sun, and decide to watch the world of
the willie wagtail, only to later discover that I am no longer watching the bird; I
realise this when I note how striking a stand of fluorescent green moss is, and how it
must be defiant of both flood and drought. I’m not sure when I stopped watching the
willie wagtail and began observing the moss. Later, I notice that I have been drawn
into the complex layers and interconnections within the creek. I discover that my eyes
are tracking the eddies, whirlpools and currents that shape this place. From the
kitchen window, the fluid before me looked like a single mass of water; however,
from here, the creek presents itself as a multiple, co-dependent, layered system. Here,
Wisemans Creek and Stony Creek become Sewells Creek — such a complex dance.

I notice that one body of water is actually returning against the flow, as it travels from
Weir Island back towards the head of the junction. In turn, I am drawn to yet another
body of water moving more diagonally across the junction. In following that flow, my
eye momentarily settles on a whirlpool drawing the nearby micro world into its
vortex. The vortex, in turn, brings to my attention other multiple layers within the
multiple layers that constitute the junction. I watch a flotilla of froth sail across the
junction’s epidermis against the pull of the vortex. I realize that this flotilla of froth is
sliding over a microscopic film, for beneath the froth, at a thickness barely
measurable, a separate current is travelling in the opposite direction. Beneath these
viscose worlds is another, a world of waterweed and rock, where at least three types
of yabby and shrimp dwell. I focus and then refocus; I am able to ‘channel hop’ from
one world to another, from tiny water spiders skimming across the upper film of the
junction to a yabby measuring its progress along the junction’s floor — each step, for
this and the other beings in this place, holds the possibility of having breakfast or
being breakfast.
The platypus re-emerges, instantly shifting my attention from the world beneath the water to the surface of the creek. I realise that I have lost all sense of time. The platypus has been ‘nowhere to be seen’ for what could have been ten, fifteen or twenty minutes. It must have heard my ‘bull in a china shop’ entrance into its world. I can only assume that as this place washed over me, the platypus sensed that the bull had moved on. Oblivious to the human sitting on the rock, the platypus relaxes. Now motionless, like a log on a billabong, this giant member of the junction’s flotilla is as much the creek as any other entity. I gaze in almost disbelief, I feel privileged to be sitting a few yards from it — this experience feels different from seeing one of the sheep, cows, rabbits, foxes or cats that share this place. The indigenous aura of the platypus stands out from the imported Europeanised surroundings, it revivifies the echoes of what I imagine this place to have been like in pre-colonial times. I acknowledge to myself that I don’t need to eat the platypus, nor do I need its pelt and, as such, this influences how I perceive this moment. In this sense, I acknowledge to myself that I am experiencing the moment in a particular way. Through the platypus, I imagine the spirits of this place: the casuarinas that once grew where willows now stand, the native fish swimming in water free of chemical residue, the goanna hunting between the fiddle stick slabs.

Once more the platypus arches, once more it spears beneath the surface, once more the surface of the creek ripples out from the point of insertion. I look towards the cumbungi growing before Weir Island, and beyond to where the creek bends northwards. I imagine a mob of Wiradjuri walking up through the casuarinas: they are singing and laughing. A child, ten-or-so years old, wades into the water and gathers a cumbungi shoot. Peeling back the outer green layers the child bites into the crisp flesh. The mob stop at the junction and look up towards Wallaby Rock — an old woman points at the sentinel and begins singing. The children look towards it, their eyes piece together how the shape of the rock, in combination with the rhythm of the song, makes meaning. The old woman slaps her thigh before laughing about something to do with the wallaby story, then, all the children laugh and immediately begin splashing about in the junction. The girl with the cumbungi is one of half-a-dozen children laughing and splashing in the sunny-day warm water of the junction. Several of the women have moved upstream to hunt yabby and shrimp.
I think about all the mothers, aunties and grandmothers who laughed and sang while collecting food at the junction. The Wiradjuri were fresh water people; ‘Wiradjuri’ means ‘people of the three rivers’, their rivers being the Macquarie (known as the Wambool), the Lachlan (known as the Galiyarr) and the Murrumbidgee. Small mobs would sojourn up the tributaries of the local rivers into places such as the junction, the Campbell River being just an hour or so walk downstream. Analysis of pollen and charcoal suggests that places such as this have rung with song and laughter from around 55 000 - 60 000 BC. The Wiradjuri women and children laughing and singing at the junction are related to the largest Aboriginal group in New South Wales, their country takes in the Blue Mountains in the east, Hay in the west, Nyngan to the north and Albury in the south.

A friend, as a young boy, camped and fished at the junction with his grandfather some thirty years ago. He said the junction had the reputation of being a good fishing hole. Fishermen, who’ve heard such stories, still come to the junction, though fewer as each year passes. In ten years, I have not known of a fisherman catching a single fish here. ‘The fish don’t bite anymore’, one elderly fisherman told me. From around 1938, the hardwood forests upstream from the junction were logged to make pit props for the Broken Hill mines, before then, from around 1820, the local land began to be cleared for sheep and cattle pasture, as well as pea and potato farming. Consequently, the fresh water habitat of the Wiradjuri people rapidly declined.

Just a few years back, one farmer upstream illegally cleared-felled a hillside overlooking Wisemans Creek; a subsequent week of steady rain washed the hill’s thin topsoil into the creek before the farmer was able to sow his crop. Last year, 186 years after this part of the Australia was colonized, a neighbour ploughed an established pasture paddock. Before the farmer could sow new pasture, the rains set in, for a week or two the side of the ploughed hill turned into ruts and gutters, washing away what little top soil there was into one of the few remaining waterholes below the junction. I pass that paddock each morning on the way to work; as the paddock was being ploughed, and later, as the topsoil visibly washed away, I found myself thinking about the last great Wiradjuri leader, Windradyne, who died in 1878, attempted to defend his peoples’ homeland from the invaders; for not only were the colonizers massacring the Wiradjuri, the colonizers were raping the land, killing creation, grinding country
into dust, making the slurry that chokes the waterholes — indeed, ‘the fish don’t bite anymore!’

My wandering mind snaps to attention as the platypus emerges once more. I slowly raise my camera and focus on the platypus. I press the button, but nothing happens. The shutter doesn’t engage. Meanwhile, the platypus has arched and speared. Thirty-five seconds later it resurfaces, and again the shutter on the camera refuses to operate. I contemplate in disbelief at my newish camera not working. I console myself: the morning is frosty, maybe the camera can’t handle the cold. Perhaps I should have taken it out of the camera bag and warmed it in the sun? It is then that I wonder just how a photograph of the platypus is going to help me better understand this place — how will a photograph enhance my understanding of the more-than-human world? I didn’t come to the junction in search of food. I don’t fish, I don’t spear; I haven’t waded through the junction in search of a yabby, or trapped a platypus. I sleep, eat and help raise our little duckbill in a cottage seventy yards away. Through the glass of my kitchen window I see this creek as if it were a painting, a movie, a television program. For even though my shoes and socks are wet from being by it, and my ears are full of its babbling, and though it was in the lens of my non-functioning camera, the creek and I are separate. I am closer to the machinations of the supermarket mall than I am to this place.

I am the alien, and though the people who once passed through here were shaped like me, skin darker, nose broader, different language — those people survived, lived and prospered in their ‘moving through here’ — just like the platypus moving to the junction to forage before moving somewhere else. But neither those people nor this platypus dwelt in the sudsy sink, TV, toothpaste and modem way that my culture is here. ‘Amdand u khandand u sokhtand u kushtand u burband u raftand’ — they came and they sapped and they burned and they slew and they trussed up their loot and were gone (Bruce Chatwin, 1987:221). I don’t want to be like that. I stand and walk away from the creek, and while I have no intention of hunting the platypus, I resolve to return, to dwell in this place, to become as much a part of it as I possibly can. In five or six minutes I will have moved from the chill of here to the warmth of the cottage, I will sit and sip tea with Jean, I will look out over the junction and appreciate
how fortunate I am, and I will wonder if this place is sacred, if perhaps there is a language here, one that I can learn.

6. A Big Walk

So far we haven’t developed the global consciousness that would foster cooperation and wisdom.

Jay Earley, 1997:6

Manning gathers his two toy swords forged from black plastic irrigation pipe: ‘Look Bruce, if you put the sword through the handle you can carry the bag over your shoulder just like Blinkie Bill’. The spring school holidays have arrived, Manning and I are going for a big-walk. We’ve packed two kindergarten carry bags with mixed nuts, several choc-chip biscuits, a good portion of jellybeans and two bottles of water. We haven’t been on a big-walk this spring. A big-walk takes us up Stony Creek and into another place — a life and love sustaining place.

Hey Bruce
Look Bruce
What ya reckon Bruce
Bruce, Bruce, Bruce
I’m hungry Bruce

About ten minutes into our walk, Manning feels the need to sit and eat; memories from the last big-walk have been rekindled, he purposefully sits on the same rock as last time. We sit and talk about how the recent flood has scoured the lower third of the creek bank, ripping out blackberry bushes and small willow trees, before dumping them ten foot or so above where we’re sitting, on the top of the bank, as well as throughout the branches of the larger deep-rooted trees growing in and beside the creek. Manning speaks about this place as ‘his’ place — even though we don’t own this land. He has played here regularly over the past four or five years, walking this way with his elder brother, Jean and/or me on weekends and school holidays. Manning acts ‘at home’, it is apparent in the way he speaks, that he knows this place; he talks about a tree that is ‘no longer here’ — it was swept away by the recent flood.
Manning recalls playing beside the missing tree, we talk about walking downstream to look for it.

Our journey continues, before long we have negotiated a particular bend in the creek, one that requires climbing a six-foot high seam of rock jutting out from the bank. On the far side of the creek, a stand of large gnarled willow trees lean over the water towards the morning sun behind us. The stand of trees momentarily disperses the flow of the creek into several small streams; one stream flows over a thick matt of dark green moss, while another cascades down a series of miniature waterfalls. This spot has a European storybook feel — its gnarled willow arches, towering poplars and moss-covered nooks are the places of fairytales. Manning’s older brother associates this landscape with his favourite author — when Ryun walks this way, we invariably talk about J.R.Tolkien.

As Manning and I manoeuvre through the willows and over the rocks, I am aware that this place resonates with Tolkien for one son, and the adventures of Blinkie Bill for the other, while at the same time presenting me with questions about the stories that places like this held for the Wiradjuri, in the days when casuarina grew instead of poplar and willow. Being here is being in the very stuff that makes story. Ryun, Manning and I planted stories in this landscape by doing everyday things such as sitting on a rock and eating; eating and reminiscing on the same rock as the last time we came this way and reminisced — the same rock where similar reminiscing took place the time before that. Memories of Ryun as a teenager are here, memories mix with the moment and in doing so lay the foundations for future memories, for new stories. I realise that Manning and I are experiencing a different relationship with ‘story’ than that experienced when sitting in our cottage, viewing a television program of Blinkie Bill walking along a creek bed.

It feels as if Manning and I have disappeared — my nostrils take in this place, its taste settles on my tongue, I see that Manning is glowing, I realize that I am glowing as well, I appreciate that he is with his dad on a big-walk, I appreciate that I am his dad. I imagine what it must have been like, being a traditional indigenous child walking with family through this place. Such imaginings take me back to the junction, I imagine
Manning as one of the aboriginal children laughing at the Wallaby Rock story, and splashing in the water.

‘What sort of poo is that?’ asks Manning, pointing to the ground. I snap back to the moment and study the black intestine-shaped scat. I don’t know what type of faeces it is — maybe fox, maybe cat? Before I can say anything, Manning announces, ‘Looks like rabbit guts.’ The moment passes. Later, we come across a giant wall of jetsam and flotsam that the last flood crunched into a bend in the creek. The sun-bleached mass of tree trunks and branches rises ten or twelve feet, and about three yards deep, it stretches length ways for at least twenty yards. We study the tangle of bush sinew and human paraphernalia. We find a plastic toilet seat, a motorcar wheel, part of a cast iron bed frame, as well as fence posts, fencing wire and an assortment of beer and soft drink cans and bottles. I find it disquieting to come cross everyday domestic objects meshed with the ‘natural’ jetsam and flotsam. The artifacts seem out of place, they have no utility here — they are pins sticking into my dreaming bubble.

Wild with flowers
Twigs and rock
That looks like
A good spot

Manning points to a rocky outcrop, we sit and open our Blinkie Bill dillybags. I lie on my back and watch insects pollinating willow blossom. Manning decides to lie down as well — ‘Manning, what will we call this place?’ In Songlines, the character Wendy, an ethnobotanist, says that we make our language by naming the ‘things’ in it: ‘we give our children guns and computer games, they (Aboriginals) gave their children the land’.

We decide to call our resting place Sleeping Rock. As we chat, I realize that Manning has his sights set on journeying into Prickle Gorge. We have only ventured into Prickle Gorge once before; then, last summer, the big drought was building and the creek had been reduced to a trickle. Then, we managed to walk around the forest of blackberries that block the entrance to Prickle Gorge, by wading through a section of the creek that is usually impenetrable, due the force created by a narrow rapid,
gushing out of a deep dreaming-serpent sized pool. Last year, after having explored
Prickle Gorge for the first time, we exited by climbing the north face of the gorge.
Manning climbed straight up, me behind him, always with one hand on his bum and
the other under his heel. For ten minutes the slumbering serpent watched two white
aliens claw their way up the rock face, cutting and pricking their soft flesh on
blackberries, thistles and flint. As Manning inched out of the underworld and onto the
paspalum and clover pasture paddock, his dog, Gaius, having bounded where we
crawled, greeted Manning with a lick on the face.

Today however, one year on from that journey, the intensity of the rip gushing out of
dreaming-serpent pool means a water-borne entrance is out of the question. Several
attempts at finding a dry path into the gorge fail, the impenetrable nature of the briar
and blackberry means the gorge is beyond reach. Finally we decided to follow a
sheep track leading up and out of the creek; within a step or two I find myself
jumping backwards — a tiger snake, coiled on a patch of sun bleached jetsam and
flotsam, rears its head as I am about to step beside it.

‘Let’s go home,’ asserts a startled Manning.
‘It’s ok,’ I reply, as I try to catch my breath and appear calm.
‘I got a bloody fright.’ Manning replies.
‘Me too.’
‘I’m not use to seeing snakes yet this year,’ replies Manning, reclaiming his bravado.

We usually stop and watch a snake when we see one. We talk about it and make sure
the dogs stay away. If we see a snake around the house, we walk it towards the
boundary fence like sheep dogs moving a flock. The snake stares at us; we stare at
the snake. We (snake and persons) catch our breath. Manning and I choose another
route. The snake watches us move on. Our focus moves from the snake to another
obstacle: a blackberry bush growing over an old crumbling log. My attention is now
centred on how to negotiate the blackberry canes while straddling the large decaying
tree trunk. In that ‘cane-centred’ instant, the snake disappears from view. It is as if it
knew when our thoughts moved from those of snake, to those concerned with
negotiating our way ahead. The moment passes into memory, where, like a snake, it
remains coiled, until the next time we walk this way.
7. The Water-Rat And The Waterfowl

The June school holidays find Manning and I once more unable to enter Prickle Gorge. We sit on a small outcrop of rocks by the creek. Though the sun is out, the temperature is icy; the miniature pools imbedded in the rocks are frozen solid. Manning takes great delight in scooping out the small ovals of ice and setting them adrift on the creek. Our game is to see which one of us can break the iceboats with a stone. As we play, I notice movement on the creek bank some twenty metres downstream; I draw Manning’s attention to a water-rat making its way upstream. We watch the animal negotiate rocks and protruding tree roots. At times, the water-rat slips into the water to swim from one miniature headland to another, at other times it negotiates the slight ridges weathered into the side of the bank. Sometimes the angle of the sun, combined with the water-rat’s dark wet fur, enables the water-rat to blend into the winter shadows of the bank. In these instances, the only means that allows us to track its progress is the white tip of its dark tail.

Eventually the water-rat enters a large clump of reeds directly opposite us. To our amazement, a great kerfuffle takes place, for no sooner has the water-rat entered the reeds, than a dark purplish-blue waterfowl flies out of the reeds directly towards us. Manning and I sway as the bird negotiates the reality of the water-rat at its tail and Manning and I eyeballing it. In a split second the bird veers and heads upstream. We are immediately drawn back to the reeds by the sound of a second kerfuffle. A second bird, attempting to fly out of harm’s way, has been thwarted by the water-rat. As a result of it jumping onto the bird’s back, both creatures tumble into the creek. The water-rat bites into the back of the bird’s neck, and several feathers come away in the water-rat’s mouth — this enables the waterfowl to flee from its attacker. The creek carries the waterfowl downstream, however, the bird makes the mistake of attempting to follow its partner upstream; in doing so, it presents the water-rat with a second opportunity. It lunges at the waterfowl, clasping the bird’s right leg in its jaws; they roll and thrash in the water, barely two metres in front of us.

I realize my body has taken sides, it wants the waterfowl to escape; I realize that I don’t want to watch the water-rat kill the bird. This water-rat, whose cousin I have watched for the past five years from my cottage window, is no longer held in the same
high regard; perhaps for no other reason than I don’t find it as aesthetically pleasing as the waterfowl — though I can’t help but admire the tenacity of the water-rat as it struggles to bring down a bird over twice its size.

Somehow, the waterfowl manages to prize its leg free, with space between it and the water-rat, the waterfowl alters its escape route and attempts to swim downstream. The water-rat clearly has the upper hand; it pounces once more onto the bird’s back, causing both the bird and itself to sink momentarily beneath the water, before they tumble onto a partly submerged rock causing the water-rat to loose its footing and slip back into the creek. For a spilt second the two are once again separated. ‘Fly, fly,’ my heart sings, but the bird cannot muster enough momentum — perhaps its dislodged feathers have impeded its ability to fly? Having found its way to the bank, the bird attempts to outrun the water-rat, but the water-rat is too fast for the bird. Once again the water-rat pounces onto the bird’s back and once again the two roll and tumble, before splashing back into the creek.

Something has to give; it is as if the universe, like Manning and myself, can only hold its breath for so long. I get the sense that the moment has arrived. All attention, the breeze, the trees, the very rocks themselves seem bound by this moment. The waterfowl has made numerous attempts to escape, each time the water-rat has been able to pull the bird back into its space; I sense there is no more time nor energy for partial escapes. Unable to prize its leg loose from the water-rats jaw, the bird appears to sigh and accept its fate, its body limply flops before the water-rat. I swallow, my eyes refocus, I ready myself for the last moments of the bird’s life. Sensing the bird’s submission, the water-rat makes the mistake of presuming victory and ever-so-lightly eases its clasp on the waterfowl’s leg. In an instant, the waterfowl’s acceptance of death becomes a twist-in-life. Miraculously, the waterfowl finds a second breath; in a instant it dislodges its leg from the water-rat’s jaw and skips across the surface of the creek, screeching an ear-piecing shriek. As if the shrieking itself is the means that drives it forward, allowing the bird to draw the last drops of adrenalin from its core, the waterfowl flaps its wings once, twice, three times.

The bird becomes airborne momentarily, it is able to place two or three metres between itself and the water-rat, before crashing into a stand of reeds in the middle of
the creek. Any thought of the universe moving on is once more thwarted. Not to be
outdone, the water-rat swims across to the tuft of rock and reed. If the water-rat
reaches the waterfowl, the bird is done for. On this day, fate falls the way of the bird,
for as the waterfowl veered one way, the water-rat weaved another, between them,
nothing more than a clump of kangaroo grass and a few moss covered rocks. On a
tuft, in the middle of the creek, the water-rat was closer than it thought, the bird less
free than it imagined. Manning and I exhale, neither of us are capable of moving, our
bodies are rigid from the experience. I notice my heart is pounding as my eyes trace
the waterfowl’s escape. Now twenty metres downstream, the creek is carrying the
injured bird beyond the water-rat’s jaws. Yet, two or three hundred yards further
down the creek, Manning and I had, this very time yesterday, watched this or another
water-rat gnawing at willow roots.

Big-walk country has changed; it is no longer just a big playground for a father and
son. Big-walk country has become a real place, where real life and real death takes
place. My eyes turn to the water-rat, it is still searching for the bird, though as each
moment passes its determination wanes. The water-rat’s body takes on a downcast
disposition as it accepts its fate; its eyes and snout form a sullen look as it drags its
body forward. My attention is now locked onto the water-rat — I don’t realize how
intensely I am observing it. The water-rat now appears desperate as it switches from
searching for the water-fowl to finding something else to eat. It looks hungry, it
appears to sniff frantically at the ground. I get the sense that it has found itself in an
urgent space, it looks stressed — it doesn’t have a bag of jellybeans to call on. For all
I know, it may have babies to feed.

‘I’ve never seen that before … in the real,’ says Manning. I realize that neither of us
has spoken for some time. I feel as though time stood still. It was only after the bird
had drifted out of sight, that Manning spoke, that I slipped back into my body.
Perhaps it was then that we both realized we weren’t sitting at home watching a
wildlife documentary; for as the bird disappeared, the world before us didn’t cut to
another place; there isn’t a strip of anaesthetizing glass between ‘in the real’ and us —
no editing, no commentary, no scripted explanation shaped our thinking. We are here
— there is no cutting to the next story.
8. The Forest

Australians have begun to search more deeply for symbols of their identity. Increasingly, they are looking towards ‘the bush’ to provide them. From a biological perspective this is a good thing, for hopefully it will build strong links based upon understanding between Australians and their environment.

Tim Flannery.

I’ve been having trouble with my left shoulder for the past six months; my masseur suggested that I need to walk more often. I suspect he’s right. I’ve been spending too much time at my desk. It seems that I always have a mountain of paperwork to get through. I tell myself that once I get on top of the paperwork I will start walking. I finally begin to take steps when I come across a passage cited in Bruce Chatwin’s *Songlines*:

> Above all, do not lose your desire to walk: every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness; I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it … but sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer once comes to feeling ill … Thus if one just keeps on walking, everything will be all right.

Søren Kierkegaard, letter to Jette (1847)

Ten minutes ago the first rays of morning danced across my bedroom floor. Now, I am walking along a winding one-lane dirt road bisecting native woodland. For the next five or so minutes I walk up a steady incline until I come to a small clearing; from here, I am able to look out over a valley. Below, I see Wisemans Creek snaking towards the junction. On the far side of the valley, a substantial stand of native forest spreads over hill and dale as far as the eye can see. If I didn’t know better, I could easily think the forest goes on forever.

Birdcalls, the whisper of the creek, and the panting of my two dogs fill my ears. I can’t see a house or hear another human action — no kettles whistling, telephones ringing or televisions blaring. I take in a deep breath, the eucalyptus air invigorates. In
a similar vein to being at the junction or going on a big-walk, this place seems like a world away from the usual hustle and bustle — yet I am only fifteen or twenty minutes walk from home. As I stand on the ridge, looking out over the valley, I am drawn to a paper-thin streak of pink and grey mist hovering directly above the creek. I watch as it slowly rises and falls, twists and straightens, compresses and elongates. I get the sense that the mist is mirroring the creek — that they are linked, somehow. I decide to sit and watch the mist dance with the creek. As I settle, I become aware of a chorus of birds and insects.

My dogs, in their tireless search for rabbits, have slipped from my side, and in doing so have startled a bush wallaby. I catch sight of the wallaby bounding through the bush; its powerful hind legs seem to operate like giant springs, for no sooner has the wallaby touched the ground (thud), than it springs forward. For a moment the wallaby appears to glide through the air, before its powerful hind legs compress and release once again — the sound of the wallaby thud is reminiscent of a tree branch falling onto a soft mat of forest litter. I call Forr and Gaius back, they obediently run to my side. By the time I have finished patting them, the thudding has stopped. Not unlike the tiger snake Manning and I came across, the wallaby seems to know when it is no longer the centre of attention. Now, like the code beneath the interface of a computer screen, the wallaby doesn’t appear to be there; it has converged with the forest, its coat melds with the tree trunks, its curves once more in harmony with the boulders strewn throughout the forest.

After walking for a further fifteen minutes or so, I turn and head back towards home. I am still twenty-five or thirty minutes from a bowl of muesli, tying Manning’s shoelaces, drying the dishes, collecting the eggs and packing my laptop. For the next ten minutes I will walk through native forest before emerging into land cleared for cattle and sheep grazing. As I walk, I acknowledge that my regular walking in this place has enabled me to become acquainted with certain entities; I have become familiar with rocky outcrops, nooks and a giant gum tree — the hollow of its trunk is big enough sleep in. I have a photo of Manning and me standing inside the tree.

One of my favourite places is a natural alcove located about twenty metres up a ridge overlooking a wide sweeping bend of Wisemans Creek. When sitting there, looking
out over the creek towards the woodland beyond, I sometimes wonder if Wiradjuri children played in the hide-and-seek alcove. An overgrown path, cut into the ridge, runs several metres below the alcove; perhaps the children of the Chinese miners who made the path played in the alcove — it’s hard not to imagine children playing here. Maybe it was a smoko place for the miners working at the Acadia gold mine, the mouth of which is about one hundred yards upstream. From the edge of the abandoned mine’s tailings dump, I can overlook the creek and up to the alcove. Over the past one hundred years or so, the comings and goings to the alcove have fallen silent; now blackberry, biddy bush, wattle trees and rock slides almost conceal it. To the east of the alcove, and higher up the ridge, stands the place where I looked out over the pink and grey mist dancing with the creek.

Several kilometres west of the alcove, stands the junction where I live. To the northeast, a kilometre or so further up the creek, stands a substantial overgrown bluestone walled path that was built by Chinese miners over one hundred years ago. Once capable of accommodating a horse and cart, the path leads deeper into the regenerating bush. A few hundred yards downstream from the alcove, on the opposite side of the creek, stands an old miners’ cart made from wooden planks and riveted iron framing. Several lengths of buckled, rust-brown, small-gauge rail track stand either side of the cart. Beyond the cart, numerous dark tunnels burrow into the side of the mountain. Several of the tunnels aren’t tall enough to walk along, not that I have attempted to enter them; I need only peer into their cold mouth for my body to cower. Nearby, several pieces of machinery, each the size of a small automobile, stand to the side of Acadia Mine. One piece is the remnant of a large water pump; embossed at one end of it are the words ‘CROSSLEY BROs LIMITED MANCHESTER’ — the company operated between 1881 and 1935. The piece of machinery looks closer in design to 1935 than 1881. The second piece of machinery looks a bit like a large cement mixing bowl, it is lined with what looks like oven brick cement — the iron bowl is embossed ‘MADE BY LANSING CO LANSING MICH USA M54’.

When standing amongst these industrial remnants, I feel a palpable sense of past accompanied by an eerie sense of future. Once, someone walked away from the hand-pushed rail cart for the last time. Once, the pump stopped pumping, and the gold smelting ceased. Surrounding these obvious pieces of machinery, native and exotic
plants grow in and over various mining artifacts strewn through the bush and along the creek bank. An eerie sense of future overwhelms the sense of past — though bloodied, the more-than-human world of the bush is returning, in doing so, it grows over, in, and through the industry of man.

9. Back At The Alcove

At first, when I came across Acadia Mine and the various surrounding industrial artifacts, it felt as if I’d discovered an ancient ruin; though in reality, the ancient ruins of this place are represented by the remnant trees dotted here and there amongst the re-growth forest. Subsequently, I came to recognize that the more weathered, gnarled and less inhabited a place is, the more appealing I find it, the more I am able to embrace a sense of the more-than-human world. Sitting in the alcove, overlooking the bush, I acknowledge that this place is insightful, that the industrial skeletons help me gain a perspective of past, present and future. Ironically, the industrial artifacts point to what no longer grows and forages here. I appreciate that this place was once more in balance than it appears to be today or than it was when Acadia was in full swing. From the alcove I can look across at what was once living vibrant Wiradjuri country. The babbling creek sweeping around a wide bend appears to be real, in a way that other more frequented creeks beds are not.

The surrounding rocks and grassland are liberally spotted with wombat, kangaroo and wallaby scats, the more recent droppings glisten in the sun; beside them native orchids and grasses soften the undergrowth. Now, hope accompanies my previous eerie sense of future. It has only been in recent times that I have come to experience the soft matting of bush litter, the ‘reading’ of glistening scats, the aroma of woodland and the songs of the bush. I realise that the basic elements of yorro yorro are here — when writing about rock art and stories from the Australian Kimberley, Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993:223) name the ongoing divine creation, in absolute or holistic terms, as yorro yorro, ‘everything standing up alive, brand new’. The more-than-humanness of this place fills me with a sense of happiness.

Again, I find myself thinking about the Wiradjuri people who came this way, for unlike the miners and their need for a bluestone road to transport supplies, the
Wiradjuri were consciously enmeshed within the more-than-human world — their walking was a hunting and gathering path. For as well as a water borne diet of yabby, fish, water-rat, platypus, cumbungi etc, the Wiradjuri diet included kangaroo, emu, fruit, nuts, yam daisies, wattle seeds and orchid tubers — none of which I have the skills to harvest. I imagine an aboriginal child running up to the alcove; she is happily eating something, as are the children calling out to her. Women are cooking by the creek — their singing echoes throughout the bush. If my partial immersion in this place makes me happy: how happy were the Wiradjuri?

Beyond my imagination, I am beginning to see the traces of their Being in the world. The Wiradjuri came through here on their way to feast and celebrate at the places we now call Oberon and Katoomba. The wood they burnt, the flesh they ate, the fruit, nuts and yams they gathered, the soil they trod, all were imbued with reverence to Wallanganda and Wunggud. (Wallanganda — the sovereign of our galaxy and the force that made everything on earth. Wunggud — Earth, the primeval substance from which everything in nature is formed). I can remember, as a child, scribbling on paper in a fruitless attempt to make meaning — some of that is with me now, but in another way; here, I am attempting to make meaning out of the remnants of bush text, the bits that haven’t been rubbed out by careless erasure.

10. Into The Magic

Before Cartesian thought had challenged the belief in Wallanganda and Wunggud, the waterholes were not clogged, exotic briar, plus the chemical to control it, did not exist; to borrow from David Abram, ‘it was a time when this was a truly dynamic landscape subject to its own moods and metamorphoses’ (1995:32). There are certain places, as I walk through the bush, where such solemn thoughts well up. When I originally began walking this country, I perceived the forest and creeks as one undifferentiated whole; later, in conjunction with some historical literature, I began to understand why certain places had a particular resonance:

There is a relationship between the landscape and the location of the roads, inns and changing stations. There is also likely to be a link to Aboriginal history with some of these early tracks following the paths of the Aboriginal tribes who
frequented the area. There would be common elements – the easiest path to move through the countryside, and the need for water, food and shelter. There was also a commercial optimism to the location of some of the inns. An inn located beside a creek or river was likely to attract considerable custom when the waterway was in flood, isolating teamsters and travellers (Nicholls, 2006).

If you walk up the Wisemans Creek fork of the junction before our home, you enter a stretch of country that Jean and I describe as magic, ‘magic’ being the first word we both uttered when we first walked into the place. Later, we discovered that the original road between Blacksprings and Bathurst crossed over Wisemans Creek at this magic place. On further investigation, we came across a moss-covered rock-walled campsite by the side of Wisemans Creek. One hundred yards from the campsite, both sides of the creek bank are ramped — this is where the Cobb and Co horse and carriages crossed. Directly opposite the crossing, on the village side of the creek, stand the remnants of the shanty village of Wisemans Creek. The home of our immediate neighbour incorporates the old post office — a wattle and daub lean-to. Nester, the woman who lived in the post office until she was eighty-six, was the last postmistress at Wisemans Creek — Nester’s grandmother being the first. Across the way, attached to a more recent building, stands the chimney of the former Wisemans Creek blacksmith. Between the two, countless beer bottles (literally) from the shanty hotel that once stood between the blacksmith’s and the post office, are submerged in the debris from a bygone time. My current feeling is that the Wiradjuri camped here, for as Nicholls suggests, the Settlers followed the paths of the indigenous people.

In 1813, ten kilometres from the crossing at Wisemans Creek, gold was discovered in the Central West. Then, the Wiradjuri still walked this country as they made their way to the annual Urri Arra ‘Burbong Festival’ (ceremonial gathering) in the Blue Mountains, there, they roasted the plentiful rich fat Bogong moths, before eating them whole.

11. Back On The Path

I am walking on the dirt road bisecting the forest. At this time of the year (mid to late summer), the outer-bark of the trees in this stretch of forest peels. As a result, a ring of white, pink, brown and dark red bark forms a circle at the base of each tree — as if
shredded by a large cheese-grater. The circles of shards surrounding each tree are beautiful — at first, I wondered if they could be eaten, later I pondered ways of using them to decorate my home. In the end, I come to appreciate them ‘in their place’; though I can’t help but wonder what the Wiradjuri thought about the shards — did they collect the bark shavings for the Urri Arra, Burbong? Were the Bogong moths smoked, using shards like these?

I am now ten minutes or so from home; I’m walking the final steps of the road bordered by forest, in a few paces the trees will noticeably thin out before the might of Barry and June’s sheep paddock. Most of the landscape I’m now walking through has been affected in one way or another by gold, silver, copper and bismuth mining, in conjunction with sheep and cattle grazing, not to mention the large rabbit population, and the presence of feral pigs. When the parents of the trees I’m walking through were felled, the exposed paper-thin soil was not able to weather the substantial impact of hard hooves and constant grazing. As the bedrock beneath the soil became increasingly exposed, the introduced pasture grasses found the going too hard. In a dry season, the remaining pockets of soil turned to dust, and when it rained, the soil turned to slurry. On the northern and eastern slopes much of the weeping found its way into Wisemans Creek, on the southern and western slopes the slurry wept towards Stony Creek. Once the land became depleted, the local farmers were unable to reap an economic benefit from applying superphosphate, sowing pasture seed and spraying herbicide. As a result, exotic blackberry, briar and tussock, in hand with native biddy bush, acacia and indigenous tussock, took hold — combined, they have come to define certain stretches of land as ‘useless country’. Such perception, ironically, enabled these places to be returned to the care of Wallanganda and Wunggud. Through cracks and crevices the dreamtime serpent snakes yorro yorro back from deep hibernation, rekindling the spirits of the land — or at least, that is what I find myself dreaming as I both physically and emotionally negotiate the erosion, the ring-barked trees and the dead wallaby, shot for eating grass sown for sheep.
12. Path Making

To put it another way, the land began to shape the people.

Tim Flannery

I regularly walk the boundary of the Wisemans Creek Common, situated opposite the old post office and the blacksmith’s chimney. The ten or so acres of the Common houses an abandoned community tennis court and a dysfunctional white-ant infested cattle yard. In times of drought, drovers rest their cattle on the Common. Occasionally, campers pitch a tent and try their luck at gold fossicking along the banks of Stony Creek as it snakes through some ‘useless country’. I have made a path along the eastern boundary of the Common. To an untrained eye my path is similar to that made by sheep. I remember when my path didn’t exist. I would avoid walking through the Common because of the profusion of Scotch Thistle and Paterson’s Curse. Then, I walked on the gravel and bitumen roads that form the north and eastern boundary of the Common. As a result of reading books such as *Songlines* and *Yorro Yorro* and pamphlets on the history of the Wiradjuri, I wondered if making a path through a piece of country would help with my reflection. So, rather than walking down the gravel and bitumen roads, I made a path along the far boundary of the Common. On the first day, I slowly and carefully stepped on, and bent the back of, each Scotch Thistle and Paterson’s Curse with my canvas Volleys. On the second day there appeared little difference, and so once again I carefully stepped onto and attempted to break the backs of the Scotch Thistle and Paterson’s Curse. Over the next few days I repeated this slow and sometimes prickly process.

Now, several years on, there is a purposeful walking path along the far boundary of the Common, linking the back of our property to Old Soldiers Hill Road — the road I walk when heading off to Acadia mine and beyond. I had no idea what I expected would result from making a path. It seems such a simple thing. We all make paths in one way or another, each person is a person of habit, we can walk around our home with our eyes closed. We walk the same paths for most of our lives, though we don’t usually recognize the path we are traversing as path-making. The sturdy nature of carpet, floorboards, cement and bitumen conceal from us the regularity and hence shape-making of our ongoing path-making.
There came a time when the Scotch Thistle and Paterson’s Curse no longer grew where I walked. My regular walking through this place (sometimes twice a day) has caused a particular shape to appear — the shape of the path. Yet not only has the shape of the path manifested, a sense of who I am has also appeared. Each time I come across the path, ‘I am already there waiting for me’. I recognize that I am entering a path, that I am making a path, that I am path-making — ‘here I am, doing this again’. If I stop walking this way, the path will become overrun with thistles, it will be re-pathed into the path-making of other entities. As I walk the path memories and reminders appear. The memory of discovering a stand of wild asparagus is never far away. At certain times of the year the nature of the asparagus shifts — in early spring when its spears appear, I find myself saying ‘Ah, the asparagus’. I realize that I had forgotten about the asparagus, then for a while, the ‘Ah the asparagus’ recedes, until I notice that the succulent stems have grow tall and wiry. For a short time the asparagus is once again at the forefront of my mind as I pass that point on the path. The asparagus then slips from my attention once more, that is, until the asparagus berries turn from green to bright red. By the time the birds have eaten the red berries, summer has passed into autumn and the frosts are back. Then, as if out of nowhere, hundreds, if not thousands of spider webs appear — all dressed up in their snow white shimmering. Before long, winter begins to lay permanent sheets of ice in the darker recesses of the path. The weight of persistent frost bends the tall dry grass and soddens the earth; as I walk my breath clouds, my ears filled by the sound of ice cracking beneath my feet. Then one morning the ice has gone, and on yet another I notice green, new season spears lancing the soil — ‘Ah, the asparagus’.

The story of the asparagus is but one example of a particular type of thinking that takes place on a path; it is as if a path is a ceremonial place. For me, the path through the Common has become a place of preparedness, a process of stepping into an appropriate rhythm for my walking reverently in Wiradjuri country. I experience the path as a medium that negotiates rhythm. The medium of the Common path edits the speed of 21st century anthropocentrism, it delivers me to the natural rhythm of yorro yorro.
13. Walking The Dogs

The dogs and I negotiate our way across the cattle grid that keeps Barry and June’s cattle and sheep from roaming onto the road. On the paddock side of the cattle grid, Old Soldiers Hill Road climbs steeply towards the native woodland. Having reached the top of the first hill, I stop beside the solitary tree left standing, a majestic yellow-box — from here I take in the sweeping view of the surrounding landscape. The still of the morning settles around me as I catch my breath. The drone from bees, deep in the tree’s trunk, catches my attention; their droning conjures an image of Buddhist monks chanting in a monastery. The entrance to their temple is a six-inch slit about two-foot from the tree’s base. In late spring and summer, when flowers and blossom are in plentiful supply, the bees will have already chanted their morning prayers by the time I reach the summit. I look north to Mt Eli standing on the far side of Wisemans Creek, her south face is scarred as a result of gold and silver mining. Though abandoned sixty or so years ago, a substantial wound the size of several football fields appears as if it is still festering, even biddy bush and blackberries find the sour tailings impossible to seed.

I turn and look northeast to the native woodland bisected by the dirt road I’m about to walk. I haven’t walked this way for several days. This morning, my plan is to take a brisk half-hour walk along the dirt road before returning home to write. As I walk down the east face of Old Soldiers Hill Road, the dogs catch sight of a rabbit and, chasing it, head into a gully that feeds Wisemans Creek. I haven’t walked along a gully before; my walking has been confined to the Common, creek beds and this dirt track, though I have wondered what the country is like in the direction that the dogs have bounded. I step off the dirt track and begin walking along the edge of the gully. It is a deep eroded place that divides the best of Barry and June’s pasture paddock from the foot of the woodland; though on the woodland side, where I am walking, there is a flux between what was once pasture and what is now re-growth ‘useless country’. By the time I’ve walked for a hundred yards or so, the negotiation between the pasture and woodland has gone the way of the woodland. At ground level, pasture grass has been replaced by lichen. It is colder and darker here than it was back on the dirt road. My breath clouds; like my breath, spindly white gums rise in wisps towards
the sun. Biddy bush and acacia gather in larger clumps — I sense that I am crossing the border between Barry and June’s paddock and regenerating bush.

For the next five or ten minutes I walk along the rim of the eroded gully. The further I walk into the woodland, the more the gully transforms from a place of erosion and dumped rural artifacts, to a richly textured landscape. Behind me, where the gully leads up from the dirt road, all manner of discarded domestic and farming objects have been dumped in the gully — presumably in some sort of effort to stop erosion, though at times it appears as if the gully is looked upon as a tip. Metal bed frames, the carcasses of old refrigerators (electric and kerosene), as well as old farm machinery and parts of commuter vehicles slowly sink beneath the ongoing transference of soil and rock from the ever-widening gully erosion.

As the gully climbs the side of the mountain, smooth platforms of bedrock form natural steps. Small pools, that appear to have a semblance of permanency, stand at the base of each step. A gentle seep weaves through a carpet of moss linking the pools; at their edges tree litter folds back into the forest. Here, acacias and candle-wax gum replace the rural artifacts, as wallaby and wombat droppings replace that of sheep and cattle. The miniature lakes, awash with mosquito larvae and other wrigglers, hint at the presence of a cascading waterfall in times of rain. Spreading out from the moss and up the sides of the rock face, daubs of lichen and moss render the face of each step in a patchwork of aqua and green.

The gully begins to narrow, the surrounding bush thickens, with each rock-step there is less lichen, the trunks of the trees bordering the gully stand straighter, the ground is dryer. I move from walking along the rim of the gully and step down into its inviting moist green pathway. As I walk further up the gully, I am aware of a change in my senses. Similar feelings to those felt at the alcove resonate, though there is a difference. One difference between the alcove and here is that here, there appears to be no hint of abandonment, at least not that my untrained eyes can detect. The previous eroded form of the gully has been replaced; here, the gully seamlessly interfaces with the surrounding bushland.
Having stepped up the gully for twenty minutes or so, I come to a junction. In times of rain, water must rush down the two converging slopes and form a significant watercourse. I decide to walk up the steps of the gully that branches to the north-east, leading to the tallest section of mountain; this will be the destination of my walk. I will climb to the tip, take in the view and then return home. To my surprise, when I reach what I expected to be the top of the mountain, I discover that I have reached a big step. It now appears that in another couple of hundred yards I will reach the true top of the mountain — I walk on. Eventually I reach the top of what I think is the final step; only to discover that there is yet another step to this mountain — ‘Of course’, I hear myself laughing. It takes a further ten minutes to reach the platform of the next step — a giant step. Here, the step represents the edge of a section of flatter land about the size of a sporting oval. From here I look west, I take in the country I have stepped up, I look down into the valley of Wisemans Creek to where I began my walk. I see farm animals and machinery dotted over the landscape; from here, they look like toys. I turn to the north and take in the sweep of a forested valley, I wonder if the Wiradjuri walked through that country. Perhaps they walked into places like that to collect ceremonial food as they headed to the Urri Arra, Burbong. Perhaps the fruit, nuts, yam daisies, wattle seeds and orchid tubers found around here were used during an initiation or at corroborees held at the granite tors of Crown Rock that stand between here and Urri Arra, ceremonial country.

I turn and face the east; I decide to walk up the slight incline that appears to lead to the true top of the mountain. Again, when I reach the next step, another step appears in the distance. Before long I am deep in the woodland. I have been walking for an hour or so, and as I walk I wonder if human presence is soluble, that is, perhaps there has been enough time since the last person walked this way for all trace of them to have dissolved back into the landscape. I enjoy the thought that humans rarely visit this place. Maybe only a thousand or a hundred people have walked along this ridge since Chinese prospectors walked through here in the late 1820’s. Maybe only fifty, twenty, ten or half a dozen people have walked along this ridge in recent times — you can’t get here by vehicle. Long-gone are the labourers who cut down the trees to service the local needs of Acadia and the voracious demands of Broken Hill. My thoughts are interrupted as I stumble across a rotting surveyor’s peg: ‘Of course’;
surveyors come through here from time to time, but not this year nor last, it could have been ten or twenty years, maybe more since the peg was driven into the ground.

I recognise that I feel exhilarated by the experience of discovering the new, or at least, what is new to me. That said, I am also aware that I feel less pressure or tension in my body than I do when at work, or indeed shopping in the supermarket. I wonder about the benefits of being released from the endless pressure of regular, constant human contact. The bush has a palpable presence; I don’t feel alone as such. I can’t necessarily define the influence the more-than-human world is having on me — such rational questioning seems out-of-place. Being here is more than being away from e-mails, sculpted gardens and ‘price check on register twelve’ — somehow, and in ways I find difficult to articulate, an aspect of me was already here — in order to connect, ‘it’ required my walking-body to tarry. Having acknowledged ‘it’ as part of me, I am able to free it from the deep recesses of my consciousness.

The steps I have been walking up deliver me to the top of the mountain. From here I can peer through the native trees and take in a 360-degree view. I am drawn to the eastern edge of the peak, and to where a number of rocks, sentinel-like, appear to watch over the valley beyond. Each of these sentinels resembles Wallaby Rock — the sentinel that stands atop the cliff face overlooking the junction and my home. I stand on one of the Wallaby Rocks and look out over the valley. Part of me wants to walk into the valley; however, my limited experience tells me that if I do, I am looking at an additional two or more hours before I get home. Even though I have decided not to walk into the valley, an inclination persists; that is, until the Christmas green tips of a *Pinus radiata* plantation beyond the far ridge of the valley become apparent. The exotic trees indicate that the valley beyond the valley before me has been stripped of the type of biodiversity I have just walked through — my enthusiasm subsides. The sobering sight of the *Pinus radiata* turns my attention inward; I contemplate the reality of being here, standing amongst a mob of Wallaby Rocks that uncannily appear as if related to the lone Wallaby Rock standing on the cliff before my home. Like Jean and I, the Wallaby Rock keeps watch over the junction. It strikes me that my walking to this place came about via walking along a raphe. Here, right now, I sense a union between the sole Wallaby Rock sentinel at the junction, and the mob of Wallaby Rocks I’m amongst. In contemplating such a connection, my rational sense-
making is challenged, I feel mystified, I recognise that I am thinking differently — in fact, it is more a ‘feeling’ than a ‘thinking’. I am awash with emotion, feelings of rapture emerge, I am surprised — it is as if I have fallen in love or been present at a birth. I feel as if I have walked from one sacred place to another — but how can this be? It is only in my imagination that the Wiradjuri woman and children stopped at the junction and observed the Wallaby Rock. It is only through my naming of that rock ‘Wallaby Rock’, that the picture I’m painting is coloured! Surely my imagination is the only place where the raphe between there and here dwells — I am both beguiled and bewildered as I default to intellectualising a feeling.

I feel as far away from civilization as I have ever felt — the Christmas-green tinge of *Pinus radiata* on the far horizon only serves to heighten this sense. The more-than-human landscape, the aroma of the bush and the singing of the birds are so different, so much another world to the billboards, odours and electronic hums of civilization. My body bathes in the more-than-human shapes, sounds and aromas. I realise that I once perceived places such as this as alien. Just beyond the mob of Wallaby Rocks, stands a three-foot diameter rock platform. The rock marks a place that is the most easterly point on the tallest mountain that stands some ninety minutes walk east from my home. To paraphrase Bruce Chatwin, here I must take a leap into faith, into regions I would not expect anyone to follow. I stand on the rock and start singing. I’ve been mulling over a song lately. I no longer write down my lyrics — I sing my songs until they’re forgotten. As I sing, my body begins swaying, as my swaying becomes more animated, I experience the sensation that the rock is moving with the rhythm of my song. I immediately recall my physical history; I have a cervical vertebra prone to slipping from time to time. When that happens, I become giddy and experience a sense of motion when I close my eyes. I immediately stop singing and open my eyes. Deducing that I was not in fact losing my balance, I begin to sing and in the process close my eyes. Once again I become rapturous, my body starts swaying; this time, I realize that the rock is in fact swaying, or rocking with the rhythm of my body. I open my eyes and I make my way down the eastern slope to beneath the rock. The platform I have been singing upon is a substantial triangular rock wedged by a ring of boulders; from tip to top it is about ten foot tall.
I walk back to the rock and continue singing; the song develops beyond the initial lines I composed some weeks ago. Here, on this swaying rock, I compose and sing my song, composing the lyrics in real time as I sing; and while I sing the rock sways beneath my feet. I sing upon a rock that stands at the most easterly point of the mountain ridge bordering the valley where I live, I sing, and while I sing the rock sways. Perhaps the sign over Carl Jung’s door was right: ‘Summoned or not, God will come’.

Upon reflection, in the cold light of day, there is nothing particularly remarkable about the swaying rock. In my rapturous state, I built up a rhythm, the rock I sang on, due to its triangular shape, plus the fact that it was resting between several boulders, enabled it to sway from side to side. The rational Voltaireian side of me is relieved there is a ‘scientific’ reason why the rock swayed — there was no God, no mumbo jumbo. There isn’t however, a conclusive answer as to why I ended up singing on a rock capable of swaying. Upon reflection, I stood on a rock in an altered state of consciousness. What altered my state of consciousness is beyond my comprehension. I acknowledge that walking up the gully had exhilarated me. But that doesn’t account for the fact that I ended up singing on a rock that swayed. When walking to that place, I had any number of opportunities to take a different path. At each gully junction I chose a direction, at each ledge of each subsequent gully, I chose to go one ledge further. Finally, I chose to stand on one rock among many. I could have gone in any number of directions at any number of points in time, yet, in one sense, I walked directly to the rock and started singing, and as I sang, the rhythm of my swaying was just enough to enable the base of the rock to sway from side to side. That is what happened — but what happened?

14. What Happened

Aboriginals could not believe the country existed until they could see and sing it — just as, in the Dreamtime, the country had not existed until the Ancestors sang it.

Bruce Chatwin.
I am Worrorra
I am Ngarinyin
I am Wunambal
Once I walked my country
But lost my place
Then I lost my dignity — spirit.

Once when I walked my country
I was lizard and kangaroo
I was turkey and emu
And the Wandjina walked with me.

Now I have lost my place
I am grog and despair
I am sickness and early death
And the Wandjina can’t walk in jails.

How did I leave my country
What brought me out of my land
Can I remember
Did I ever know?

I must remember, I must know
Might be an illusion
That holds me from my country.

For I am Worrorra
I am lizard and kangaroo
I am turkey and emu
And I am spirit — rock
And I am Wandjina.

Mowaljarlai (1993)
In the dialect of the Central Australian aboriginal, Tjurna djugurba means ‘the footprints of the Ancestor’ and ‘the Way of the Law’. It would seem there exists, at some deep level of the human psyche, a connection between ‘path-finder’ and ‘law’.

Bruce Chatwin.

I walk up the hill and past the yellow-box tree atop Old Soldiers Hill Road; the Buddhist bees are deep in chant. As the dogs and I walk down the forest side of the hill, we step out of the morning light illuminating the yellow-box and back into a predawn grey. The sun has yet to find its way into Singing Rock Gully. I keep the dogs close to my side, they are eager to run to a place beyond the gully where rabbits can be found. The dogs look to me for permission, I won’t give it, not until I’ve made sure there are no kangaroos or wallabies grazing in the gully. I can usually see if there are any by the time we reach the viaduct at the bottom of the road that crosses the gully, only then will I nod to the dogs — they will then yelp and run, laugh and fart, bark and scent their way toward the rabbit warren. If, on the other hand, I see a kangaroo or wallaby that I think might catch the attention of the dogs, I will hold the dogs to my side until we walk to where the road climbs beyond the gully. Once beyond the gully, the dogs are free to chase rabbits and hares to their hearts content. But this morning, before I can nod, or say ‘wait’, a fox-brown brush-tail wallaby darts up out of the gully and hop-crosses our path. In a flash, Forr and Gaius take after the wallaby. I immediately whistle and gesture at them to come back. Gaius makes eye contact — he has to make a decision, he looks back towards Forr chasing the wallaby. Having considered his options, Gaius drops his head and trots reluctantly back to me. I feel a deep sense of guilt about Forr chasing the wallaby. I have trained him not to chase sheep and cattle, but not wallabies. I vow to train him not to chase these beautiful beings.

I continue along the road, whistling Forr as I go, but he doesn’t return. I begin to worry that Forr will become so engrossed in the chase that he won’t come back for some time. I’m not worried that he will catch the wallaby (he’s a slow old thing), I am concerned however, that he won’t find his way back to Gaius and me, and instead, he will eventually head home by himself. He has done this once before; then, he took off after a hare and ended up somewhere deep in the bush. If Forr were to head home
alone, it would mean that he would pass the sheep grazing in the Old Soldiers Hill Road paddock. I trust Forr not to chase the sheep, but I wouldn’t like Barry or June to see one of my dogs running across their paddock, unattended.

I turn and head back in the direction that Forr took to the bush. This is roughly in the same direction as Singing Rock, though Forr didn’t head up the gully; rather, he headed into the forest. I had thought about walking up the gully to Singing Rock today, however, the morning was overcast. It has been raining on and off for the past twenty-four hours, and as a result, Singing Rock Mountain is covered in cloud. I begin searching for Forr. I crash through the undergrowth and zigzag between trees as I make my way up the footings of the mountain. I climb over a couple of fallen and decaying eucalyptus dinosaurs before coming to a halt on a ledge about one third of the way up to the first ridge. While catching my breath, I peer in all directions. No luck; I can’t see or hear Forr. As the echo of my bush bashing subsides, I begin to hear the chirping of unseen birds. I realise that the bush has gone quiet since Forr and Gaius bounded after the wallaby.

By now, the sun has climbed the far side of the mountain and begun casting its morning light into the forest — beams of light impregnate the mist, causing the gully below to glow. As countless dewdrops glisten throughout the woodland, the jewelled trees appear to sparkle as each leaf on each tree is draped in dewdrops, as are the hundreds upon thousands of spider webs spread throughout the forest. Some spider webs stretch for metres, their tops attached to branches high above my head while their bases are attached to rocks and forest debris. These large webs appear big enough to catch a kookaburra. Paradoxically, this section of bush also reminds me of a Japanese garden. Deep green moss spreads over and under ornate rocks and hollow logs. One patch of moss resembles a bonsai version of the forest itself. There, a miniature spider web swings above the forest of moss. A two-inch tall blade of grass serves as the anchor point where the spider has swung out and over a miniature valley before coming to rest on a bed of moss on an adjoining miniature mountain ridge. The blade of grass and the moss-covered rock stand only an inch or so apart.

I have been re-reading James Gleick's *Chaos*; I think of Mandelbrot fractals. I momentarily lose a sense of dimension, the dew-draped trees above me could be a
forest of moss; the matt of moss beneath me could be a dense rainforest. I remember the tiny thumbnail rock I found down by the creek a few days before, on close inspection it reminded me of the moon. Notions of large and small seem intertwined. It is then that I notice a silver-white pathway shimmering before me. The path is no more than thirty centimetres wide. It is distinct. It is defined by a matt of pressed forest litter that at most is five centimetres lower than the forest floor either side. Each leaf, twig or strand of bark that helps shape the path is rimmed with countless dewdrops. The defused morning light works to thread each dewdrop into a seamless carpet that appears to lead up into the mountain. The path glistens, as if it is a world unto itself. I realise that the cobwebs aren’t, in general, draped across the path. I turn and look back from whence I’ve come, I can see where I crashed through the undergrowth and in so doing, decimated countless spider webs — I wonder what else I have destroyed in my blundering? This feeling of needless destruction is accentuated when I realise that the silver path winds back to where I originally came from. I realise that I could have reached this point by following the path, and in so doing I wouldn’t have disturbed the forest.

At first, I consider the path to be man-made. Chinese gold miners would have come through here; the bluestone walled path is not all that far from here. Perhaps this path is a remnant of that time. No. I dismiss the thought; the forest would have erased such a path one hundred years ago. On closer inspection I realise the path is still in regular use. A little way ahead, on the path-side of a native pine, a two-foot high polished rubbing-patch is clearly visible. I realise that some type of animal is using the tree as a massage pole. I discount rabbits. Perhaps foxes? Beyond the rubbing tree, I notice that another tree has also been shaped by whatever it is that uses the path. The trunk of that tree is growing on the very edge of the path, about three foot or so up the trunk, on the path side of the tree, its branches have been worn away; it is as if the users of the path are preventing the branches below this height from protruding onto the path.

I am reminded of the trees growing in Australian pasture paddocks; most farmland trees are bobbed at the height that sheep or cattle can stretch their necks to feed on the trees’ leaves. The difference here is that the tree before me is pruned only where the path passes beneath it. The tree hasn’t been grazed ‘in the round’ like a farmland tree.
There is at least one other reason why this is not a sheep or cattle path. The constant presence of the cloven hard-hooves of sheep and cattle gouge the ground. In so doing, they create distinct paths. This is particularly noticeable when sheep and cattle paths converge near waterholes. It is in these places that one can more readily see how the shape of their hoof cleaves and slices, cuts and slashes, smites and hews the thin Australian topsoil. One doesn’t need a glistening dew-drenched morning to become aware of the presence of sheep and cattle paths. Indeed, from where I am standing, I can look out through the bushland and clearly see hard-hoofed tracks on the hills over on the far side of the valley. I realise that a soft-footed animal moves along this path. Unlike the hard-hoofed tracks and their endless erosion, this path is sustainable — there is no sign of erosion here, the topsoil is held in place by the warp and weft of forest litter woven beneath a canopy of tall trees.

I realise how little I know about this place. Up until now my walks have been along the creeks and along the gullies. I’d always followed ‘obvious’ geographical trails. Though now that my eyes are becoming adjusted to the path, it too seems obvious. I start walking along the path; within a few steps I notice fresh wallaby scats, a few steps further I note wallaby scats that are beginning to break down, a short time later more fresh wallaby dung. I stand back and take in the path: wallaby scats both fresh and old are liberally deposited at semi-regular intervals. ‘Ah’, the wallabies of Wisemans Creek own this path. I had always associated paths as being far more obvious entities. But this wallaby path is subtle. The wallaby’s interaction with the earth appears to be more akin to a creek smoothing a pebble than to a sheep or cow ploughing the soil, for there are only subtle differences in the landform either side of a wallaby path. As my sight attunes to the subtle form of the path, I have little trouble following it, though in places the path is so soft, it almost disappears; on those occasions I look for a scat, and sure enough, the shape of the path is revealed once more.

Just like the creeks and gullies that I have previously walked, the wallaby path comes to a junction; as with the Singing Rock Gully, I choose one fork over another, I repeat this process a number of times. I discover that the wallaby paths gently weave across and zig-zag up the side of the mountain, only occasionally do I come across an offshoot that cuts directly up the mountain — those paths appear to be used less than
the paths that opt for a gradual ascent and descent. Before I know it, I am deep in the
forest.

The pattern of semi-bobbed trees and shrubs growing at the edge of the path is
repeated time and time again. Before me is a substantial native pine tree, the semi-
bobbed nature of the tree has formed an archway. The tree must be around sixty or
eighty years old, perhaps more, it is hard to tell in this rocky country. It is then that I
realise the obvious: ‘this path is older than me’. I try to absorb the fact that like the
creek and the gully, this path is timeless. It is then that I become aware of the broad
tree stumps and decaying tree carcases on either side of the path and throughout the
forest. If the trees standing by the path are sixty or eighty year old, the stumps and
decaying carcases must have been standing here prior to 1813, before Blaxland,
Lawson and Wentworth found their way across the Blue Mountains and into the
Western Plains. Those trees might well have shaded the Daruk and Wiradjuri people
as they hunted and gathered before Cook recorded his landing at Botany Bay.

I realise that many, if not all, of these wallaby paths are old pathways … perhaps they
are ancient paths … perhaps some of them are more than wallaby paths … perhaps
some are Wiradjuri songlines. Having noticed the wallaby-shaping of the landscape, I
realise that the wallaby path can be ‘read’; one can read how recently a wallaby
passed by, how often wallabies pass by, equally, one can read who else uses this path
— that is, if one learns how to read the signs. I realise that my elemental reading
places me in a position where I can begin to read country. The deeper I walk into the
woodland the more I acquire a sense of elation. I notice that I am experiencing the
same types of brain waves and pleasant physical sensations as those I experienced at
Singing Rock — impossibly, I am trying to observe my sense of rapture.

As I walk, I reflect on how I came to be walking along a wallaby path deep in the
forest. Half an hour ago my dog, much to my chagrin, chased a wallaby into the
forest. As a result, I discovered and consequently followed a labyrinth of wallaby
paths that led me to this place, a place deep in the forest, a place where I feel elation. I
think about the Buddhist notion Bruce Chatwin develops in *Songlines*: ‘You cannot
travel on the path before you have become the Path itself … “Walk on!” — the
Buddha’s last words to his disciples’ (1987:200). All Australian indigenous people
believed in walking up country — the Creator formed the landscape by walking, travelling. Mowaljarlai is emphatic: ‘it is important to remember that they all walked’ (1993:137). Did the Wiradjuri feel rapture when they splashed and sang in the junction before my home, and when they walked along this wallaby path? Was their life of walking, a walking-up of rapture? Why am I thinking about the Wiradjuri more and more as I walk through this land, what is it about this place that causes me to think and reflect, to reflect and think about the traditional Wiradjuri people, who, in 1880 danced at their last recorded Burbong near Darlington Point.

I walk on following the wallaby path over and under fallen trees between rocky outcrops and under branches. Eventually, I decided to take the exact journey a wallaby would take. This means sometimes crawling under low branches and squeezing between rocks and trees. It seems as if each time I go through a place shaped by the wallabies, I feel a sense that I am journeying deeper into the consciousness of the bush. That is, I feel as though I am sensing what it is like being one of the processes that shape the Being of this place. I feel the sense of becoming the path I am walking.

I am beginning to feel tired. I realise I haven’t had breakfast and I am ninety minutes to two hours walking time from home; in the process, I have passed the tallest mountain in the valley. Part of me wants to push on. At the edges of that part of me cries a voice that doesn’t want to go back at all, that part of me wants to follow the path as far as the path goes. My rational self knows full well that while I don’t know exactly where in the forest my body is located, I know that somewhere before me is a tinge of Christmas green popping its Pinus radiata head into my Wiradjuri dreaming. Remarkably, it is at this point that Forr and I come face to face on the wallaby path. Panting, Forr wags his tail. We are relieved to see each other. I turn and head home. The wallaby path leads Forr, Gaius and myself all the way back to Wisemans Creek.

It is a most curious feeling to come across a path in the bush that one feels completely ‘at home’ walking along. I think of Manning and his sense of ownership of the place where we stop for our first rest when going for a Big-walk. I wonder how traditional people such as the Wiradjuri, ‘who belonged to a Wallaby Dreaming’, felt when walking along a wallaby path?
15. An Old Mineshaft

While walking through some ‘useless country’ downstream from Acadia, I come across an abandoned mineshaft situated about twenty yards in from the bank of Wisemans Creek. The mineshaft has recently been used as a dumping place. The top layer of rubbish consists of plastic soft drink bottles, empty food tins and several disposable nappies. Prospectors and fishing expeditions camp along this stretch at Christmas and Easter. My mind goes back to the image of the platypus swimming in my sink. I wondered if anybody has dumped toxic materials into the shaft. Like the platypus, I also depend upon the water from Wisemans Creek — I water my garden and wash my hair in the water that flows by the mineshaft.

On the far side of the shaft I spot a polystyrene shell, the type used in the packaging of computers and televisions. The shell prompts me to think about how digital beasts interact with the earth when their utility has come to an end. I am struck by the thought of these dumped bodies leaking poisons into the surrounding earth – chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), battery acids, halogenated fire retardants, mercury, cadmium, lithium, lead, strontium, yttrium, gallium and samarium – they all, in their own time, leach into the soil. Whatever is in this shaft shares the underworld with Wisemans Creek; in turn, the creek is connected to Chifley Dam, the water that supplies Bathurst.

When an animal or plant dies, it positively interacts with and enriches the earth. The animal’s dead body, both fresh and decomposing, supports scavenger and microorganism activity. Death supports life. As a result, the immediate and wider environment maintains diversity. What I don’t see, as I study the contents of the shaft, is a sense of enrichment and diversity. The disposable nappies haven’t, in the six months since Christmas, broken down in any appreciable manner; several Coca-Cola containers appear as if they were used yesterday. There will be no green flush of grass appearing as a result of the dumped polystyrene decomposing. Much of what is now in this shaft will take forever in its ‘returning to the soil.’ In the stagnant world of the abandoned mineshaft there don’t appear to be any micro-organisms rapidly multiplying and in turn becoming food for other things, becoming soil for seed germination.
As I walk the valley of Wisemans Creek, I increasingly associate the land ploughed by the hard hooves of the local sheep and cattle with the wider implications of technological overgrazing, with the type of stuff dumped down the abandoned mineshaft — at the same time, I have come to associate the wallaby paths with sustainability, with harmonious ways of being in the world. For example, as I move further into the bush the shards of quartz exposed by the sheep and cattle are covered by forest litter once again. I sense a connection between the eroded sheep and cattle tracks and the rubbish lying at the bottom of the abandoned mineshaft. I begin to wonder if the sense of elation I feel when walking through the native landscape is, in part, due to my removal from hard-hoofed technology. Has the regular experience of the more-than-human world enabled me to experience my mind in ways that hard-hoofed technologies limit, short-circuit and divert me from? My walking research indicates to me that the corporeal place/s we constantly occupy influence us.

Half an hour ago I passed a dozen or so lambs grazing on the side of Old Soldiers Hill Road. It was difficult to see these playful young animals as anything but innocent *Play School* characters. Their inquisitive faces and soft clean wool says nothing of the devastation a worldview promulgating hard-hoofed technology creates. In contemplating how ancient the pathways beyond the hard-hoofed world may be, I begin to sense the woodlands differently. I recognise that my sense of reality has shifted, a relationship has begun to develop between the more-than-human character of this place and myself. With each journey along a wallaby path or sojourn by the alcove, I sense that my relationship with this place develops, becomes richer, deeper, more committed. I sense the wallaby path and alcove as ‘real’; I sense it in a way that I don’t sense television as real. I am aware that my direct experience of this place is subjective. I appreciate that I perceive this moment in time relative to my current emotional and financial position. This is a hermeneutic-phenomenology of a white fella in a more-than-human place. My awareness relates to my particular desires, to my particular tastes, and my particular concerns.

In this, the first of three hermeneutic-phenomenology immersions, I have set out to move beyond my cinematic, televisual lifeworld. I began this journey, though I did not then know it, when I purchased two and a half acres of land thirty kilometres from Bathurst, and as a result, began sipping tea overlooking the junction of two creeks. In
turn, my tea-sipping led me to rock-sitting and then Big-walking — that in turn led me to path-making. In doing this, I found myself standing on Singing Rock, deep in the forest that inhabits the mountain ridges overlooking this valley. As a result of my journey into those woodlands, I literally stumbled across a wallaby path and subsequently walked its weave through the mountains and valleys. In the next chapter, I travel a pathway that on one hand, like the sheep and cattle paths, is obvious, while on the other, like the wallaby path, can easily lay unseen.
CHAPTER FIVE

AS SEEN ON TV

1. The Network

A frosty spring morning. At last the kettle boils; now I can open the firebox door and redirect the heat. Jean douses the tea-leaves. I ask Manning to switch from the television program he’s watching to the VCR, so that I can watch the Nine Network videotape I’m researching. Manning activates the remote. The switching from one screen image to another does little to change the atmosphere in the room. The replacing of one soundtrack with another still prevents the subtle voices of the rural morning from entering the cottage — the finches tweet and the magpies warble beyond the earshot of our technological soundscape. The glow from the TV fills the room; we don’t need extra light; I don’t draw the curtain; I won’t notice the smear of bogong moth oil or the imprints of frogs on the windowpane.

Several meters above the window is a television antenna; it signals a type of junction, a place where the flow from five free-to-air networks meet. The union of these five networks presents a substantial stream of information into our home. For example, the television signal that reaches our home from the Nine Network travels down a particular route from Mt Canobolas, about seventy-five kilometres west as the crow flies. At 1395 meters, Mt Canobolas is the highest point in Australia west of the Great Dividing Range and is located twenty kilometres west of the city of Orange. There, local news, sport, weather and advertisements produced in and around Orange are broadcast to the central west of New South Wales. If the flow of locally produced television were to cease, causing the Orange tributary to dry up, the level of the stream carrying television to my home would not waver. This is because the dominant television provider to this part of the world is WIN TV, the studios of which are located several hundred kilometres away in the coastal city of Wollongong. The WIN TV television station is itself a considerable
junction where a substantial torrent of news, sport, weather and advertisements flow
down from the Network Nine television studios in the Sydney suburb of Willoughby.
Network Nine’s Sydney base is itself a catchment for a wide flow of national and
international television news, sport, weather and advertisements — the dominant flow of
overseas television streaming into Network Nine wells from the United States of
America.

Like the creeks that form the junction before my home, television is always in a state of
flux. And while its inherent pattern is immediately recognisable, a total understanding of
television can’t be achieved through observing one bend in its stream — there cannot be
an exact reading of television. As one journeys through the landscape of television, one
cannot observe all the tributaries and paths shaped by all its landforms and inhabitants.
Consequently, this chapter doesn’t profess to observe and reflect upon all the paths that
weave through such an expansive landscape.

The following reflections on the pre-reflective nature of commercial television at both a
macro and micro level is undertaken in order to develop ‘meaning-making’ in relation to
the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world. In this
chapter I reflect on commercial television by viewing three, eight-hour, long-play VHS
videotapes that recorded twenty-four hours of continuous commercial television. In
addition, I reflect on Australian commercial television since its inception in 1956.

I observe twenty-four hours of Network Nine for symbolic and practical reasons. On July
13, 1956, TCN-9 began business as a commercial television station; on September 16 of
that year, TCN-9 began regular test transmissions and on October 27, 1956, TCN-9
became the first television station in Australia to commence official transmission. From
Sydney, television spread to Melbourne, where GTV-9 became one of the first two
commercial television stations in Melbourne. GTV-9 began test transmissions on
September 27, 1956. Later in 1956, GTV-9, while still in test transmission mode, was
able to telecast from the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, as did the commercial station
HSV-7 and the government funded ABV-2. Had I chosen to record Network Seven or
Network Ten, the differences involved in such a decision would, in my opinion, be far outweighed by the similarities. The broad sweep of Australia’s three commercial networks have a great deal in common. For example, as I write, Network Nine and Network Ten share the televising of the AFL (Australian Football League), from 2007, Network Ten and Network Seven will share AFL broadcasting. Corporations advertise their wares on all three Networks, as they do on the hybrid Federal Government-funded and advertising revenue-raising SBS (Special Broadcasting Service). The Networks are notorious for poaching personnel from each other, as well as replicating each others’ successful program formats: renovation programs; holiday programs; reality programs and more.

My decision to record the Nine Network was also influenced by my ongoing access to Nine Network personnel. I have visited TCN-9 on and off for the past fifteen years; consequently, I know past, present and indeed future staff; a number of my students find employment at the Nine Network (as we will see in Chapter Six). The mechanics of recording and the date recorded was left in the hands of media production staff at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst. My only specification was that I wanted to record a weekday twenty-four hour cycle, as opposed to a weekend cycle. To my way of thinking, any one of the Monday to Friday twenty-four hour cycles takes place during the regular everyday path-making of the majority of viewers; indeed that is how Monday to Friday television programming is structured.

My reflections on Australian commercial television since its inception in 1956 don’t concentrate on a specific television network, nor do they run in a linear progression. Unlike the seamless sequencing of network television, memories don’t run to a schedule. I make no pretence that my television memories are exact; indeed, as we saw in Chapter Three, hermeneutic-phenomenological inquiry does not require such unrealistic demands. True to the methodology, my memories are a genuine attempt to reflect on my pre-reflective television experience prior to my professional interest in television.
In the following pages there are a number of instances where I transcribe what the actors and narrators are saying. In those instances I use the font ‘American Typewriter’. I chose the font because a vast amount of the text in the following observation originated in the USA.

2. Primetime Thursday (5 a.m.)

Tuesday morning, Network Nine is broadcasting the content of a videotape recorded in the USA, for the ABC Network (American Broadcasting Company). The broadcasting of the video of *Primetime Thursday*, at 5 a.m. on a Tuesday, takes place neither during primetime nor on a Thursday – this is not the case in the USA; there, the broadcasting of the program is true to its name.

I see a horse and cart and hear the sound of horse hooves on cobblestones; violins play in the background. The silhouette of a man in a cape and top hat appears, a female voice has begun to read a series of captions superimposed over the images, ‘The mystery of Jack the Ripper / and his purser. Tonite we bring you brand new evidence / just discovered. / In a century old crime / is it finally solved? / The women who has spent her life studying serial killers / crime writer Patricia Cornwell / taking you on a forensic chase for the most dangerous one of all / Jack the Ripper. / And guess what? / She says she’s found him.’

I can see Patricia Cornwell studying documents in a forensic laboratory and looking at the type of knife used by Jack the Ripper. I then see the reporter interviewing Patricia Cornwell.

Reporter: So you think you know who did it?
Cornwell: Absolutely.
Reporter: With what degree of certainty?
Cornwell: One hundred percent.

Images of Cornwell investigating documents reappear as the reporter’s voiceover returns: ‘She spent six million dollars of her own money looking for finger prints / DNA traces / finally a shock.’ We cut back to Cornwell being interviewed: ‘I’m a hundred percent certain that this case is closed.’ Now I see scratched, old black
and white photos of Jack the Ripper’s victims; the reporter continues, ‘Five women murdered in impossible savage ways by a killer who vanished in the smoke and fog.’ I see the reporter standing in a foggy lane, she is talking directly to me, ‘You can barely see six inches in front of you and then creeping up from behind you a man with a knife’; my attention is drawn to a man holding a knife; the man walks towards me.

I haven’t watched the USA produced Primetime Thursday before. In an Australian context, it is a cross between Network Nine’s A Current Affair and Sixty Minutes. As is the case in this genre, the introduction previews the story. The opening sixty seconds of Primetime Thursday incorporates a series of tried and true production techniques aimed at enticing the viewer to stay tuned. Visual re-enactments, visits to the crime scene and images of the victims culminate in the reporter asking, ‘Has Patricia Cornwell done what no other detective could do in one hundred years?’

The opening scene of every commercial television program is designed to draw the audience into the program. Here, dramatic sound and image effects, such as the horse-drawn cart, the silhouette of a man in cape and top hat, the close-up of a knife and the cinematographic lighting of the fog wisping across the laneway are all dramatic constructs. I know the fog has been artificially generated from a fog-machine, I know that a cinematographer has carefully directed the production lights upon the cobblestones so that the viewer can see the cobblestone texture, and I know that the re-enactment is a dramatic construct designed to attract and subsequently maintain the audiences’ attention. I know that a good television program is one that successfully combines production and performance techniques. I know, because I have observed the production of television first-hand — as a director, scriptwriter, producer and on several occasions as an actor. In this sense, my stance before the television screen is a return to familiar territory — this presents a different set of challenges to those of the previous chapter, where the territory I was reflecting upon was new to my senses.
I make a pact with myself: I will endeavour to suspend my disbelief, in combination with acknowledging my production literacy — the reading of camera angles, layered sound effects, edit points, lighting design and crafted script. I will attempt to close at least one of my production-eyes and place myself, as well as I am able, upon the path television lays before the general viewer. I will attempt to allow myself to be drawn into the image of the man’s feet walking along the cold foggy laneways of old London town — perhaps they are the feet of Jack the Ripper?

As the man walks along the cobblestones towards me, the dramatic music instantly stops. The image before me distorts, it is instantly overlayed with the Primetime Thursday logo, before it too is replaced by an image of a hot blazing sun. Synthesised panpipe music combines with an authoritative male voice: ‘A deal with the devil.’ A man is standing before me, behind him, a landscape of tall Mexican cactus trails off: ‘This is hell on earth for those who are ill prepared.’

Primetime Thursday will cover two stories: the Jack the Ripper story and this one, a story about desperate Mexicans braving the hostilities of a desert-border-crossing in the hope of finding employment in the USA. ‘A treacherous stretch of desert / a young woman / lost.’ A man in a red shirt says, ‘Hopefully she is alive / hopefully we’ll be able to find her in good condition.’ I am now in the sky flying over a desert, an authoritative voice says, ‘Something you’ve never seen before / Our cameras take you on the deadliest migrant trail in North America.’ By the time the voice-over has finished this stanza, I am back on the desert floor following a group of Mexicans walking through a hot barren place, I come across a dead man, a patrol officer is covering the dead man’s face with a blanket, ‘One hundred thirty degrees in the shade. / Danger with every step.’ I see a thorn being pulled out of an arm, followed by a close-up of a rattlesnake ready to attack. Instantly, I’m in a four-wheel drive, following border patrol officers on four-wheel motorbikes, ‘And a desperate search / A young woman out of water / Out of hope / Will they find her in time?’ The image of a blazing full red-orange desert sun burns before me: ‘Tonight, Surviving the devils highway.’
The program’s introduction is over, now the concerned, authoritative voice of the reporter is replaced by an entertaining up-tempo male voiceover, accompanied by up-tempo music: ‘From ABC news, this is Primetime Thursday, with Dianne Toyer (Jack the Ripper reporter) and Charles Gibson’ (Devils Highway reporter). I see Dianne and Charles in a news studio preparing to go on-air. Instantly, the image before me changes; a 25-30 year-old woman is about to prepare a meal in her clean, well ordered, contemporary, practical kitchen. She leans towards me and says, ‘Making roast dinner tonight.’ She pauses so I can get a bit closer, ‘Impress the outlaws.’ I smile. I know that I am going to be told a joke. I like the woman. She is a bit stressed about having the outlaws around for dinner. She is friendly. I find her attractive, unassuming. She knows how to tell a joke. She leans away from me in order to speak to someone else: ‘Just doing the vegies, won’t be long.’ Now I see her in-laws (the outlaws), sitting in her living room with a child and her husband. I am drawn to the father in-law, a nice gentle man, he likes his daughter-in-law — he doesn’t want to cause any trouble, he is always willing to help. ‘I’ll help,’ he says. I am now back with the woman, she can’t speak to me for the moment; she has to respond to her father-in-law. ‘No you won’t,’ she replies in a tone that attempts to blend politeness with authority. I now understand why the woman doesn’t want her father-in-law to come and help; I see that the vegies are not as I had expected. I now see that the woman is opening a packet of ‘Birds Eye Oven Roast Mix Vegetables’. As the woman sprinkles rosemary onto the vegetables from a ‘Birdseye sachet’, I am drawn close to her — she shares her secret with me. I focus on the sachet as she says, ‘Bit of rosemary / garlic.’ She and I know that the vegetables, rosemary and garlic are out of a packet — but the outlaws don’t know ‘our’ secret. The father-in-law arrives. ‘But I insist,’ he says, attempting to enter the kitchen — desperately, though warmly, the woman quickly and politely repels her father-in-law before he can discover the packet of Birds Eye Oven Roast Mix Vegetables. As the father-in-law returns to the lounge room, the woman looks over his shoulder towards me; our eyes meet, ‘we’ share the secret. Now I see the cooked vegetables sizzling in their pre-packed aluminium tray. The woman samples a piece of baked pumpkin. I can tell that it tastes good, because as she looks towards me, she raises an approving eyebrow
and utters a sigh of satisfaction. I now see her presenting the vegetables to her father-in-law, as if displaying a trophy: ‘Wallah’ (Voilà), she exclaims to the outlaws. I see her husband in the background; he refers to the meal as ‘Beautiful.’ I am very close to the mother-in-law; she tastes a piece of potato. ‘Delightful,’ she says. I now see the woman and her husband; he is closest to me, he delivers the punch line — ‘And all out of a box.’ The woman is dumb-struck, I smile; an image of a packet of Birds Eye Oven Roast Mix Vegetable fills the screen. A friendly and informative voice tells me, ‘New Birds Eye Oven Roast, delicious vegies in just thirty minutes.’

Instantly, my screen is filled with the surreal images of multi-coloured rubber gloves gliding through a void towards me. The rubber gloves appear to be coming out of a white haze, perhaps from heaven. My curiosity is satisfied when a man says, ‘If you thought all rubber gloves were the same, then think again.’ The gloves glide out of sight as a sound similar to that of Luke Skywalker’s lightsaber heralds the arrival of the Ansell graphic and voice-over, ‘Ansell, Fresh ‘n’ Dry.’ I am now observing the workings of a high-tech laboratory; an important middle-aged woman, while inspecting an Ansell glove, quickly walks through the laboratory with an attractive woman in her mid-twenties. Addressing the younger woman, the middle-aged woman refers to an Ansell glove as, ‘An ingenious invention, its foam lining absorbs moisture up to four times better.’ As the middle-aged woman speaks, I see how the laboratory tests rubber gloves; a high-tech machine holds several gloves open as mist is sprayed inside each glove — one glove is an Ansell glove and the other a non-Ansell glove. The older woman asks the younger woman to ‘Try it’; the young woman places her hands inside the scientifically mounted gloves, ‘Comfortable,’ says the younger woman — referring to the hand that she placed inside the Ansell glove, as opposed to the hand she placed inside a competitor’s glove. The young woman is now pressing her un-gloved hands onto blotting paper — ‘And so much dryer,’ she says. She is amazed by how little moisture there is on the blotting paper where she pressed her Ansell gloved hand, compared to the amount of water on the blotting paper where she pressed her non-Ansell gloved hand. I see at close range where the women pressed her Ansell gloved hand. The young woman comments, ‘Impressive.’ Speaking in a warm, knowing manner, the
older woman hands the younger woman an industrial (perhaps scientific), metal case of Ansell gloves, ‘Now you’ll have to try them at home.’ I am now in the young woman’s home. She is about to clean the house. I can see that she is determined. She puts on her Ansell gloves and gets to work cleaning stains from a glass table. A reassuring male voice tells me, ‘Ansell fresh ‘n’ dry for superior dryness, even through the most time consuming jobs.’ The woman has finished cleaning the house; she turns and heads toward the front door. I follow. She quickly takes off her gloves and throws them out of sight. Momentarily, I ponder her attractive buttocks. She opens her front door and greets her lover with a kiss. The voice continues, ‘Whatever you do, Fresh ‘n’ dry from Ansell.’

It has been sixty seconds since I was with Charles Gibson on the Devils Highway. During the intervening minute, I have been engaged in a suburban soap opera about feeding the ‘outlaws’ roast vegetables, as well as being told about the scientific attributes of Ansell rubber gloves. But before I have time to reflect, dramatic music and a concerned voice place me in a new circumstance. I am at the scene of an accident. Two ambulance officers are placing a person onto a stretcher. A woman dressed in a business suit walks up to me and says, ‘HCF is different from other funds, because if you have an accident, not only are your ambulance costs covered. …’ Instantly, the young woman bursts through a hospital swinging-door to the sound of up-tempo music; she looks straight at me: ‘... you don’t pay any nightly hospital excess which could save you hundreds of dollars.’ I am now in a hospital ward; two nurses are attending the patient from the first scene. The patient’s head has been bandaged; it looks like he’s also broken a leg. The young female presenter twirls her hand around the bed-head above the injured man; I sense that being in hospital will be okay. I am now in the hospital hallway, and a doctor, a nurse and two nursing aids are wheeling a young female towards a hospital ward. I can see that the patient is being well cared for. There is a sense of order and control about the hospital. The female presenter enters from where the man with the broken legs is being attended to. The woman looks straight at me and says, ‘And with us, there is no excess to pay on day-surgery either.’ She stands closer to me. I focus on her head and shoulders. I like her face. She is attractive. She
looks interesting. She has a strong, trustworthy voice. She looks like a busy person. Our eyes meet; she smiles and then says to me, ‘HCF, cover you can count on in an accident.’

A man jogs in front of me — his body, and face become blurred before I can focus on him. I am now in an industrial place, it’s dark, floodlights illuminate the scene of an industrial mishap, I see a leaking industrial hose, an ‘ENZED’ ambulance arrives, I see several ENZED doctors attending to, and solving, a problem. While I watch the action, a deep (commercial radio-style voice) narrates the story, ‘Keep industry running / there are millions of hoses and fittings powering thousands of vital machines / When the heart beat stops, call the ENZED hose doctor.’ A red pulsating heartbeat-graph is superimposed over the action, its beat flattens into a straight line; I realise the patient is close to death — the heart of industry has stopped responding. The ENZED ambulance arrives; a man with a coil of industrial hose briskly walks into a darkened and dying factory. A diagnostic touch-control computer screen is activated. In a strong, purposeful manner, the hose-doctor shakes hands with a factory person. I see the hose-doctor, torch in hand, inspecting the industrial pipeline of the darkened factory. I am now beside two hose-doctors, they are wearing dark glasses — they look like private detectives. They are intently inspecting industrial pipes running below several pressure gauges, the dials on the gauges indicate there is zero pressure — the ‘detective hose-doctors’ have found the problem. One of the hose-doctors takes a piece of industrial hose from the back of the ENZED ambulance and joins it to another piece of industrial hose: ‘Fast response, twenty-four hours a day / ENZED / your hose and fitting specialist.’ The heart monitor springs to life: ‘Call ENZED, 13 13 62 / We keep industry running.’

An attractive female face fills my world. The woman, who looks to be in her mid twenties, is talking with conviction to an unseen person. I quickly realise that she is talking about her hair. The young woman is proud of her hair. She tosses her head, before running her fingers through her bright ginger-red, clean and bouncy mane: ‘The moisturiser in Dove shampoo has nourished my hair, it’s rebuilt my hair,
especially after having a child. The secret to Dove is the moisturising / my hair was bouncy manageable (before she became pregnant) / it’s smooth silky (after having given birth) / it does what I want it to do.’ An authoritative male voice begins to speak — he maybe the person she has been talking to, perhaps the father of her child. ‘New Dove shampoo and conditioner with one quarter moisturising cream replenishes your hair from within.’ The young woman has strikingly beautiful grey eyes, her hair is cinematically beautiful, she has strong jawbones, I can see that she is a no-nonsense mother: ‘Beautiful hair to me is healthy hair, and the moisturising in Dove Shampoo allows you to have that.’ The male voiceover finishes the story: ‘Feel the difference with Dove.’ A male sings, ‘It had to be you’, I momentarily associate the singing with the Dove Shampoo woman, before another male voice says, ‘Rod Stewart’s outstanding new album.’ By the time Rod Stewart has finished singing the next stanza — ‘It had to be you’, I have forgotten about the Dove woman. The man tells me, ‘This is Rod how you have never heard him before / featuring fourteen classic covers.’ Rod begins to sing, ‘Oh, how the ghost of you clings, these foolish things, remind me of you.’ Once more the man announces, ‘Rod Stewart, it had to be you.’ I see and hear Rod sing, ‘It had to be you.’ The male voiceover finishes the thirty-second story, ‘Now also available on DVD.’ The soundtrack of Primetime Thursday fills me. I am whisked away from the Rod Stewart story. I find myself zooming in on the hosts of Primetime Thursday. Before I know it, I’m immersed in the story of Jack the Ripper.

3. Myer Emporium 1956

I belong to a unique subset of Australians who witnessed the introduction of television into this country in 1956. I can remember a pre-television life; then, the wider world entered my family’s home via the radio. I don’t have memories of newspapers being read in my home, which seems somewhat strange; both by grandfather and uncle were blue-collar workers at The Age. Prior to 1956, my experience of the moving image came through the occasional outing to the local Drive-in Theatre — I don’t remember attending the cinema prior to viewing television. The family tragedy of my mother’s death in 1956
coincided with the euphoria of the Melbourne Olympic games, plus the introduction of television into Australia. My first memory of coming in contact with television comes from this period. A week or so after my mother’s funeral, I remember my brother running into our bedroom and announcing, ‘We’re off to see television tonight Nip’. Donald was eleven and I was five years old. Donald had heard about television at school; however, I didn’t have a clue what he was talking about. After a thirty-minute drive into the city of Melbourne, Dad, Donald and I joined a throng of people standing in a semicircle before one of the Myer Emporium shopfront windows. On the other side of the window, a television receiver flickered; however, that wasn’t what caught my attention — I was captivated by the experience of being in a crowd, at night, in the city of Melbourne. I remember my father picking me up and pointing towards a bluish light, which must have been the flickering television receiver. However, it wasn’t the flickering light that I registered as significant. From the vantage point of my father’s shoulder, I had the perfect opportunity to gaze at the spread of cakes and biscuits set out on several card-tables at either end of the semicircle where the owners sat sipping tea and watching television.

For the majority of Australians, the price of a television receiver was a substantial family investment. In 1956, as a result of the Melbourne Olympic Games being televised in and around Melbourne, five percent of Melbourne households purchased a television receiver as compared to one percent of Sydney households.

4. The White Shirts Of Early Morning News (6 a.m.)

Theme music heralds the Early Morning News headlines. A well-groomed young man sits before me. I instantly recognize him, though I don’t remember his name. He is wearing a well-cut black suit coat and what looks like a new white shirt. His red tie has a smattering of small yellow dots. His open face and concerned voice settles me; I am willing to listen to what he has to say. Before I know it, another man is before me; he too is wearing a black suit, tie and a white shirt. While this second man delivers a story about the possibility of terrorist activities in Australia, I find myself drawn to his appearance. In fact both men appear unnaturally well-groomed for 6 am. For some reason
their glistening white shirts catch my attention. Yet another man appears wearing a bright white shirt. All three men look as if they belong to a sect of some kind. Next, the British Prime Minister, his deputy, and the leader of the British Opposition appear in white shirts; each wraps their white shirt in a dark blue suit. The leader of the Opposition’s lime green tie appears less formal than the red tie worn by the Councillor of the Exchequer.

Several South Korean politicians are before me; the leader of South Korea adorns his white shirt with a dark blue coat and a two-tone blue striped tie. Standing with the leader of South Korea is the Prime Minister of Japan; he embellishes his white shirt with a grey silk coat and tie. Later, the newsreader tells me about a squabble over the leadership in the Australian Labor party. An ex-Labor leader dresses his white shirt with a black coat and a light-red and white striped tie, while the Labor politician with leadership aspirations wears a dark blue coat over his white shirt, which is similar to those worn in the English parliament; he enhances his white shirt with a red tie that looks similar to the red tie worn by the newsreader. Later, I see the President of the USA wearing a dark blue coat and red tie with his white shirt; the white shirts worn by both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders standing with the President are equally impressive. The Early Morning News sports-reader adorns his white shirt with a dark blue coat and grey patterned tie.

Having been drawn to the white-shirt nature of television presenters and politicians, I can’t help but notice, over the following twenty-two hours, how often this image is repeated: hosts, salesmen, and actors portraying detectives, politicians, business men, government officials, etc. While there are exceptions, in most instances, ‘powerful men’ are presented wearing a suit, tie and white shirt.

5. New Talk In The Playground

Prior to my family purchasing a television receiver, the highlight of my weekday afternoon and early evening was playing with my toys in the living room and listening to radio programs such as Tarzan and The Air Adventures Of Biggles. The storylines of
these and other radio serials drifted into my play and conversations. One episode of *Biggles*, ‘The Land Of The Living Dead’, has stayed with me all my life — I was terrified by the images, in my mind, of the Zombie people who inhabited the Land Of The Living Dead.

At some point in time I began to notice that some kids in the playground were banding together to talk about a world of which I had no understanding. These kids talked about toys, lollies, soft drinks and heroes that I hadn’t heard about. There came a time when the cosmology of schoolyard radio-inspired games and conversations began to fracture. I felt ill at ease as the alien television cosmology began to manifest; it was as if friends who once spoke the same language as me were now speaking a new language. Initially, the advantages of being able to speak this new language didn’t fully register. However, the older kids outside of the new order, such as my brother, longed to become part of the new-speak. One boy in particular stands out as central to this new world — a stocky pale-skinned fellow with curly dark hair, who had recently arrived in Australia from the USA — he was several years older than me, and hence, several years younger than my brother. The boy was often the centre of schoolyard adoration by younger and older children alike. He appeared to know all about television — in addition, he drank Coca Cola and shared exotic American lollies with friends. Initially, he didn’t wear a school uniform, his clothes, like his accent and food, were otherworldly — he even had a girlfriend!

‘I can spell television using only two letters,’ said the American boy.

‘How?’ replied my brother.

‘T, V,’ replied the boy.

6. **Today (7 a.m.)**

At 7 am, Network Nine runs a two-hour news and information chat show; *Today* begins in a similar vein to all standard news programs — heralding music and an announcer describing the images on the screen. *Today*’s lead story concerns leadership bickering within the Australian Labor Party. The same story had prominence during the preceding
Early Morning News program. A laptop rests on a desk between the male and female presenters hosting the program. The desk appears neat and efficient; between the laptop and the camera, a daily newspaper rests. Post-it-notes, a reference book and other documents are neatly placed on the desk. Two glasses of water and two coffee cups stand either side of the eminently respectable presenters. They greet me and then each other — without taking a breath, the man turns to me and begins talking about the lead story. Then the woman informs me about the other stories that will be covered by the program. The man informs me that it’s time to check the weather. An attractive young blonde weather-girl is standing beneath an umbrella on a beach in Cairns. I don’t seem to flinch at the notion that one moment I am engaged with two people talking to me from behind a desk in Sydney, and the next, I am viewing a woman on a beach in Cairns. The three presenters exchange pleasantries — I feel as though I am included in their friendly conversation.

Back in the studio, the woman tells me that it’s time for the news, I see a third person in the studio: the newsreader, an attractive young woman, greets me with a warm smile, ‘Good morning.’ Instantly, in a concerned voice, she tells me about today’s news. The news that she speaks about is exactly the same news that featured in the previous Early Morning News program. The same images and the same reporters tell the same stories — the newsreader is the only element that has changed. Following the news, the presenters of Today embellish the news stories; the man interviews a Labor Party official; the woman interviews a representative of the Australian women’s rugby team before the weather reporter returns; this time the weather-girl is attending a beach barbecue breakfast with several Cairns residents.

The Today program will carry thirty-four advertisements. They inform me about coffee; kitchen and bathroom tiles; how to lose weight; how to clean my home and possessions; the advantages of saving my money in a Credit Union; where to purchase quality manchester; the advantages of gambling; the benefits of a Honda automobile; how a lozenge will relieve blocked sinus, and how office printing equipment saves on staff. As well, I hear about a local theatre performance; where to buy domestic furniture and
rainwater tanks and what type of chainsaw I should use as well as whom to contact for home improvements. I am advised where to find alternative medicine and how to forward-charge on the telephone; how to keep warm in winter, and how to make a good hearty beef stew. In addition, I am informed about seven programs coming up on Network Nine: *State of Origin* football, *CSI Miami*, *Stingers*, *The Gilmore Girls*, as well as *ER* and the Saturday night film.

*Today* is a pleasant program in which the presenters chat about the news and events of the day. By program’s end, my body yearns for a little more of its distracting ways. *Today* seems a nice place to be, in comparison to the daily grind of heading off to work.

### 7. Watching Superman With Geoffrey

One day, my best friend Geoffrey invited me to his house to watch *Superman*. Geoffrey had arrived at school one morning transfixed by having witnessed the spectacle of Superman flying through the air. Geoffrey’s parents were the first in our street to purchase a television receiver. As he and I walked up the hill to his house, Geoffrey reiterated how Superman leapt tall buildings in a single bound, and had x-ray vision. I didn’t have any idea of what Geoffrey was talking about — but was excited nonetheless. We took off our shoes in the laundry, before Geoffrey’s mother led us into the living room. Geoffrey promptly sat on the carpet, back straight, just like we did for Mrs Pritchard, whenever she read us a story at school. Not needing to be prompted, I sat beside Geoffrey — back as straight as his. I don’t think I noticed the television console until Geoffrey’s mother opened the two cabinet doors; even then, I don’t think I associated the grey glass screen with what was about to follow. Geoffrey’s mother turned a bakelite dial before stepping back and standing behind us.

Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. Look! Up in the sky. It’s a bird. It’s a plane. It’s Superman!
8. Here’s Humphrey (9 a.m.)

Look over there.
It’s Humphrey Bear
He has best friends ev’rywhere
Children, trees,
Animals too,
He loves them all especially you.
If you feel glum then you’ll need your chum,
Good old Humphrey Bear.

Humphrey Humphrey Humphrey Bear,
You see him here and see him there,
You hear his name down ev’ry street,
He’s the very best friend you’ll ever meet.
Hooray for Humphrey, Good old Humphrey.
Hooray for Humphrey Bear!!

© Banksia Productions Pty Ltd 1999
Words & Music D. Cowperthwaite

I immediately recognise Humphrey as the music begins. Some part of me remembers having viewed Humphrey on television before, as well as having seen Humphrey Bear merchandise in various shopping malls. What is immediately noticeable about Humphrey is that Humphrey doesn’t speak, or indeed sing, though he does dance — a young woman and a young man interpret Humphrey’s actions and relay them to the audience. I experience a sense of disconnection towards Humphrey; this is not so much because I am an adult viewing a program aimed at pre-school children. I don’t experience the same sense of disconnection when viewing Sesame Street and Playschool (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), both programs that take in a similar demographic to Humphrey. In watching Humphrey Bear, I feel as if I am watching an old black and white movie, its time has past, Humphrey is filling in time:

Imagine if wishes and dreams could come true
Think of all the lovely things that we could do
We could go swimming in pools of honey
It would be so runny, now wouldn't that be funny?
Imagine if wishes and dreams could come true
Think of all the lovely things that we could do
We could eat lots of ice-cream and topping....
Sugary and yummy, and never ever stopping

Words by R. Blackwell and Music by O. Popov

*Here's Humphrey* has won Logies for Best Children's Series and the character of Humphrey has received a number of national awards and commendations, including a special 'Citizen of the Year' Award at the 1994 Australia Day celebrations. Critics of Humphrey point to his mute persona arguing that some children may be negatively affected by a role model that does not communicate properly.

9. **Stories About Stories**

As a result of our first- and second-hand experience with television, Donald and I entered into conversations during the evening meal that excluded our father and grandmother. This altered the power dynamics at the dinner table — my father and grandmother had next to no knowledge of what we were talking about. Without realising it, Donald and I had become the holders of exotic knowledge, and though such knowledge was at best partial, such was the mounting interest in television that our father and grandmother listened intently.

10. **Mornings With Kerri Anne (9:30 a.m.)**

As the credits for *Here's Humphrey* fade, the screen presents a five-second station identification graphic, before a happy, attractive, middle-aged woman warmly greets me. I hear flamenco guitars as she speaks, the camera pulls back to reveal three Spanish
dancers, two guitarists and a male and a female singer. In a similar vein to the *Today* show, the woman informs me about what will be coming up in the program. Already I feel welcome in this woman’s world; though I haven’t been introduced, I get the sense that it is assumed that ‘I’, the viewer, know the person I’m looking at. (The program’s introduction didn’t have either a voiceover or graphic informing me about what I was watching.)

By now I know that the program will present advice on how to keep hormones in check; a life-coach will tell me how to take control of my life, and the lead singer of the 1960s pop group, *Manfred Man*, will sing one of the band’s old hit; also, I will be shown how to make the perfect cup of tea, as well as meeting a man who is proud of being a cad.

The program has now been running for eight minutes — for most of this time the Flamenco group have been performing. By the time the first advertisement runs, our home is usually empty — Jean and I are off to work, Manning off to school. The first advertisement hints at the audience demographic:

> My hair colour does something yours doesn’t. Because it’s new, Garnier Nutrisse, the only hair colour that nourishes with grape seed oil. Rich radiant colour all because Nutrisse means nourish. Your hair takes colour better and holds it longer, roots to tips. And speaking of colour, Nutrisse care means better colour. And greys? Gone, guaranteed. Can your hair colour do all that? New Garnier Nutrisse nourishes hair. Better colour, Garnier, trust them, they’re experts.

Following a number of advertisements (many of which I’ve already viewed more than once), Kerri-Anne is in conversation with a naturopath, Janelle Purcell. The conversation centres on healthy and natural foods that help women to address menopause, PMT and postnatal depression. I find the conversation compelling, the mood of the conversation is helpful and there is a sense of reality. Janelle prepares and cooks fish balls, before making a scrumptious looking green salad; in the process, Janelle offers advice on what
herbs help with menopause, PMT and postnatal depression. Kerri-Anne helps prepare the salad while asking questions. I get the impression that the questions Kerri-Anne is asking are genuine; perhaps the issue of menopause is close to her heart. Indeed, this section comes across as heartfelt. My body is feeling satisfied. I realise that this is the first instance in my television research where I have felt genuinely engaged with the content.

After an advertising break, Kerri-Anne interviews an author about his new book on life after marriage, and the difficulties men have when seeking a new partner. The level of communication, while conversational, holds none of the intimacy found in the previous section with the naturopath. I sense that I am being entertained, encouraged to purchase the book. A news update follows, this time a women in her mid-twenties regurgitates the main points covered in the earlier Early Morning News and Today programs. Now, the gist of the news is told in thirty seconds — the up-date is in fact a promo for the 11 am Network News.

Following the next suite of advertisements, the Mornings With Kerri-Anne logo rolls across the screen, however, instead of Kerri-Anne, a young man is before me. At first I assume he is introducing me to the next Kerri-Anne segment. As he speaks, the camera pulls back to reveal an athletic man and woman in their mid-twenties, exercising on an AbSwing. As the camera pulls back further, I notice a second male presenter. The two men start talking about fitness. As they talk, superimposed over the screen is the text, Danoz Direct 1800 80-8 938 www.danoz.com.au. The men then introduce a woman located at Coogee Beach; the woman is with a group of men and women testing the AbSwing. No sooner at Coogee Beach, than I am back in the studio with the Danoz Direct presenters. Using the same techniques employed by news and current affairs journalists, one of the presenters introduces a story about a football player who uses the AbSwing. As if back watching The Early News or Today, I see the football player at a football oval using an AbSwing. As soon as the football player delivers his AbSwing testimonial, I am back with the Danoz Direct presenters. If I buy now, I will go into the draw for one of five holidays to Melbourne, Margaret River, Tasmania, Hayman Island or the Daintree Rainforest. As still images of each holiday destination drift across the
screen, accompanied by the Danoz Direct phone number, I hear the two men speaking casually in the background:

Where would you go?
Tassie.
Hey, I’ve never been to Tassie either, I reckon Hayman Island sounds good.
That would be beautiful.
Hey, start dreaming and get an AbSwing — 1800 808 943. If you have been put’n it off, now’s your chance to just knuckle down; get fit. What do ya reckon Dave?
There is no time like the present Jamie; you’ve got to do it one day.

The holiday destination photos are replaced by a spinning Lucky Prize Wheel, a male voice tells me, ‘More prizes to be won on today’s wheel.’ The man describes the prizes I can win, but doesn’t tell me how I can win them. I then remember that back at the beginning of the program, Kerri-Anne read out a series of phone numbers. Perhaps regular viewers understand the Lucky Prize Wheel format. Perhaps I needed to phone in at the beginning of the program in order to be eligible to win a prize? Before I can ponder any further about the Lucky Prize Wheel, a young woman sits before me; she looks a bit like the naturopath. This woman’s persona, plus the style of presentation, places me in the mind-set of a current affairs program, hence, as she begins to speak, I initially think that I am watching a news and information section: ‘Using a mobile phone without a hand-free kit is not only dangerous but it is illegal.’ It is only after she has completed her first sentence that I realise I am viewing an advertorial, ‘With us today is Janelle Munro to tell us about car-chat, a unique new product that transforms your mobile phone and your car stereo into hands-free.’

I now realise that I am viewing Mornings With Kerri-Anne through the wrong lens. Because the program is using chat show and news techniques to sell product, I feel affronted. I have a sudden insight into my emotional investment in types of production
techniques. For while I may at times disagree with the viewpoint and subject matter of programs such as *Primetime Thursday*, *The Early Morning News* and *Today*, the format that those programs use when telling their stories, is one that I intellectually and emotionally associate with television news and current affairs. I have always perceived those formats as belonging to a particular endeavour, one that presented non-commercial information. I feel cheated. I was impressed with the segment where Kerri-Anne interacted with the naturopath. Then, it felt as if I was viewing some meaningful television. Now I feel as though I have been set up.

Another advertising break finishes, now Kerri-Anne is back, this time with Mike d’Abo, the former lead singer of the 1960’s pop band, *Manfred Man*. For the next five or six minutes the pair chat and sing. I find myself cooling down. By the time the following advertising break returns me to *Mornings With Kerri-Anne*, I am not as affronted when a young woman introduces me to a man selling computers. Already, I am becoming desensitised, my body is beginning to feel less affronted as I pick up on the format of the program. At the completion of the advertorial, Kerri-Anne appears and spins the wheel, before announcing what will be on the program tomorrow. The final moments of the program serve to marry both the advertorial and entertainment components. Kerri-Anne bids me a warm goodbye, and in so doing, maintains the façade that I have been watching *Mornings With ‘Kerri-Anne’* as opposed to *Mornings With Kerri-Anne And The Advertorials*.

**11. Boston Blackie**

Mr and Mrs Cunningham became the proud owners of the second television receiver in our street. Subsequently, as my father drove Mr Cunningham to work each morning, Mr Cunningham talked about what he had watched on television the previous evening. Shortly after, a colleague of my father also purchased a television receiver; as a result, my father was hearing second-hand television stories on the way to work, at work, and during the evening meal. Around this time, a friend of my grandmother also purchased a television receiver. As a result, a strange dislocated conversation came to dominate our
evening meals. Donald and I would talk about the television programs we had watched at the homes of our friends, as well as the programs we had heard about in the schoolyard; in turn, my father and grandmother talked about programs their friends had watched. My grandmother was yet to watch a television program, while my father had only observed television through the window of the Myer Emporium. Invariably, during our television conversations my grandmother and father would recite various versions of, ‘I don’t know how they can afford it.’

The Cunninghams invited my family over to watch Mr Cunningham’s favourite Saturday night program, the USA detective drama, *Boston Blackie* (Australia, 1957-58; USA, 1951-53). As a result, my grandmother cooked a batch of drop scones, and Donald and I were showered and dressed in clean pyjamas. Mr and Mrs Cunningham proudly directed us into their living room, where we stood and admired the television receiver, which was not turned on, though the cabinet doors were open. Mrs Cunningham and my grandmother adjourned to the kitchen to prepare supper. A short time later, the six of us sat in a semi-circle before a coffee table partaking in a supper of fruitcake, Anzac biscuits, drop scones and tea. Had there not been a television receiver in the room, we would have most likely sat in a circle around the coffee table. Though it didn’t register at the time, the furniture in the Cunningham’s lounge room had been re-arranged to accommodate the television receiver. Our lounge room had a traditional, soon to be old-fashioned, circular arrangement — chairs and other furniture were arranged equidistant around the room. Though the radio was often the centre of our evening attention, there was no need for the furniture in the room to substantially take the radio into consideration — it sat on a shelf to the side of my father’s reading chair.

Once supper was over, Mr Cunningham said to my brother, ‘Well Donald me lad, what do you think, should we watch some *Boston Blackie*?’ Donald’s eyes lit up. Mr Cunningham stood and began making his way towards the television receiver, before turning to Donald and asking, ‘Could you help me turn on the television Donald?’ ‘I always let Pop do it,’ said Mrs Cunningham to my grandmother. Hearing his wife, Mr Cunningham added, ‘It’s the tubes you’ve got to be careful of’. Mr Cunningham then
AS SEEN ON TV

proceeded to instruct Donald in how to switch on the television receiver. My father and grandmother leaned forward, unlike Donald and myself, my father and grandmother were caught in a void of expectation where ‘nothing seemed to happen’; sensing their anti-climax, Mr Cunningham explained that the ‘tubes’ had to warm up. He then went on to explain the correct procedure for turning on and turning off the television – apparently, if you turned the television off before the tubes warmed up, the lifespan of the tubes would be shortened. (Mr Cunningham’s use of the term ‘tubes’, referred to both the cathode ray tube and the thermionic valves that enabled early analog television to display its image (see Australian Heritage Commission, 2003).

‘Well done lad,’ said Mr Cunningham as he and Donald sat back down.
‘Good on you mate,’ said Dad, or my grandmother.
‘You’ll be able to turn on your own television set one day,’ said Mrs Cunningham.
‘Not cheap Noel, they’re not cheap,’ said Mr Cunningham.

And so it came to pass that going to the Cunningham’s on a Saturday night developed into a semi-regular event. During this period we became closer to the Cunninghams. Donald and my grandmother watered the Cunningham’s garden when they went on a holiday. My father, an electrician by trade, undertook some electrical work for the Cunninghams — refusing all offers of payment.

12. Network News (11 a.m.)

The 11 AM News follows the standard news format. The headlines of the early bulletins are accompanied by a sprinkling of new stories, as older and less meaty stories fall off the menu. The ongoing story concerning eruptions in the Australian Labor Party doesn’t change, though the reporter telling the story does — but his uniform, a black coat, red tie and white shirt, means that one hardly notices the changing of the guard. An interview with the Australian Foreign Minister is added to the ongoing terrorism story. Some aspects of individual stories fall away as new elements are introduced. For example, in the case of the terrorism story, since the story first went to air at 5 am, network reporters
in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne have secured additional material that has subsequently replaced or added to the existing story. Sometimes additional material shifts the story’s emphasis, other times the additional material provides further weight to a particular editorial angle. However, the suite of advertisements running since 5 am haven’t fundamentally changed; I sense that the continuity and consistency of the advertisements, like the continuity and consistency of the news stories, create a sense of place; they are the warp and weft of the television path I am on.

13. A Cardboard Box

Donald and I arrived home from school to discover a very large cardboard box sitting against one wall of the living room. And although I couldn’t read the text on the side of the box, I only required one try, when it came to guessing what was inside. Unbeknown to Donald and myself, our father had taken the day off work, picked up and set up our very own television receiver. The box had been placed around the already functioning television in order to create a sense of celebration. That night, for the first time, we ate our evening meal in the living room — because that was where the television stood.

The following evening, the first adjustment to living with television presented itself. My grandmother was not happy about Donald and I eating in the living room. It was agreed that we would leave the television turned on during dinner, and that we would listen to it, just as if we were listening to the radio. This seemed like a reasonable compromise, that is, until we sat down and began eating. It was then that it became obvious that ‘hearing’ television was not the same as listening to the radio — television demanded to be watched. Due to the design of our house, the television receiver couldn’t be seen when we were seated at the dining room table. My father promptly solved the problem. The following evening he attached caster wheels to the base of the television. This saw the beginning of a custom that would last for many years — as my grandmother began serving dinner, my father would swivel the television and point it through the doorway towards the dining room table.
14. Fresh (11:30 a.m.)

Immediately following a suite of advertisements, a woman quickly demonstrates how to bake a flathead garnished with lime and ginger. As the woman demonstrates how to cook the fish, I find myself feeling distant, as if flicking through a glossy magazine at the dentist’s or listening to Muzak. Following the next advertisement break, a male presenter demonstrates how to make meatballs. He seems to be speaking at a hundred miles an hour. He tells me that the dish he is about to make is wonderful, and hopes that I write down the recipe. He then rapidly proceeds in both the making of the dish and in listing the ingredients. Then, at the end of procedure, he says, ‘I hope you wrote that down, because this is a great recipe.’ There is no way that I could have written down the recipe in the time allocated. I find his approach puzzling … until I discover that if I go to Shopfast.com.au, I can click on a link and order all the ingredients for the recipe and have them delivered to my door. I feel annoyed. This man is not having an honest dialogue with me. He tells me to write down the recipe, but he gives me no time to do it. Later in the program, I discover that Fresh is sponsored by The Australian Woman’s Weekly, I discover that the recipes can only be found in this month’s edition of the magazine — by the time the program finishes, I feel a sense of violation.

15. Goodbye Biggles

While Geoffrey and I continued to play together, especially on the weekends, when we rode our bikes for hours along the new cement pavements of our burgeoning neighbourhood — my television-motivated visits to Geoffrey’s stopped. Increasingly, I watched television by myself after school, as did Geoffrey. We would talk about the programs we watched the previous afternoon and evening as we walked to school each morning — on most occasions we watched the same programs. I can’t recall listening to radio serials such as Tarzan or Biggles ever again. While some aspects of my world changed, other facets remained similar. For example, though we stopped going to the Cunningham’s to watch Boston Blackie, family friends who didn’t own a television began
visiting on Saturday night to watch our television — I continued to wear clean pyjamas on Saturday nights, and my grandmother continued to make drop scones.

16. Midday

A thirty-second news update continues to tell the same story about Labor Party leadership problems. The bulletin concludes with images of Rugby League players, as the newsreader announcers, ‘Queensland promising a brutal State of Origin opener in Brisbane tomorrow night.’ A WIN Television Logo replaces the footballers. A male voice tells me, ‘More regional Australians get their news from WIN television than any other source.’ A photograph of a small child, accompanied by dramatic music dominates my senses; a sombre male voice tells me, ‘He’s just four years old; his parents want to give him / marijuana’ — now I see and hear a weeping Mother, ‘We don’t have a choice.’ I see the child’s distressed father, the sombre voice continues, ‘What would you do?’ The dramatic music fades, the sound of a gong reverberates over a still image of the host of A Current Affair, while at the bottom left of the screen, I read ‘TONIGHT’.

My emotions are topsy-turvy, one moment I’m annoyed at the Fresh program for telling me one thing and meaning another, yet, before I can gather my emotions, I am flung into a world where desperate parents seek desperate measures; yet, before I can contemplate their plight, the next instalment of the twenty-four hour cycle has begun, ‘This program proudly brought to you by Coles Supermarket and Scotch Bright the high performance cleaning cloth.’

A sign on a door reads ‘203. Conference RM. 2’, a man in a white coat walks past the door, and two women seated in a reception area. The women stand and walk towards the conference room door, one of the women looks at her wristwatch, ‘What is taking so long?’ The second woman looks towards the conference room, ‘I don’t know, I thought Craig would be in and out. Kerry, I can’t image what they’re asking him?’ Kerry replies, ‘I’m just glad they’re not calling me in.’ Three reporters arrive, one asks Kerry, ‘Miss Reed, has there been a result in the Mike Horton
case yet?’ Kerry replies, ‘I’ll issue a statement as soon as we hear anything.’ A second reporter asks, ‘You don’t mind if we stick around Miss Reed, we don’t want to miss any of the fireworks.’ Kerry responds, ‘I don’t know what you’re expecting but …’ The third reporter says, ‘Ally McIntyre called us, said there is going to be a bombshell dropped on somebody.’ The second reporter states, ‘The question is who?’ The story cuts to the conference room where a dozen people are seated at a large oval conference table. An African American man says, ‘Dr Horton did everything in his power to get rid of Miss McIntyre, isn’t that true Dr Wetly?’ The Chairman of the meeting says, ‘Answer the question Dr Wetly, did Dr Horton consciously and deliberately try to get rid of Miss McIntyre?’ I now see Dr Wetly, he is clearly in trouble; he answers the Chairman, ‘Yes.’ The African American man continues, ‘Sally McIntyre was qualified for the head position at Mercy, why didn’t she get it when it came up at the university. Because it wasn’t convenient or pleasant for Dr Horton to see her everyday after he ended their relationship. That’s why. The very fact that Dr Horton recommended Ally for this position at Mercy is proof that Dr Horton is indeed guilty of sexual harassment.’

I am deep in a melodrama of some kind; I suspect I am watching Days of Our Lives, though it might be The Young And The Restless, or indeed a Soap that I have forgotten about. No sooner has the camera zoomed in and paused on Dr Horton, in order to catch the melodramatic moment, than I am whisked away to the middle of another melodramatic situation. ‘Oh, well, would one of you mind telling me what’s going on,’ says an attractive thirty-something woman as she walks in front of two men in a hotel bedroom. A man in his sixties replies, ‘Nicholas has had some interesting ideas for Titan, Kate.’ Kate replies, ‘Oh does he really.’ The other man, Nicholas, who is about the same age as Kate, casts an apprehensive look in Kate’s direction, before saying, ‘I was able to get the finance that we spoke about.’ The older man adds, ‘We’ll be able to acquire that Internet Company you wanted.’ At first Kate doesn’t seem impressed, ‘Don’t you think you could have dropped in, or is there some reason I’m the last to know?’ The old man is concerned
about Kate’s response, ‘Kate, it’s not like you to lash out.’ Kate apologizes, ‘I’m sorry; I guess I’m just over reacting.’ I catch myself smirking; perhaps Kate is over-acting?) The old man appears concerned for Kate’s wellbeing: ‘It’s Sammy isn’t it?’ Kate replies, ‘Yes, yes, yes. It’s Sammy, damn her.’ The old man tries to console Kate, ‘Don’t let her get to you; you’ve got to avoid her.’ The camera zooms in on Kate as she says, ‘What the hell am I suppose to do with her living under my roof?’ Finally, a close-up of Nicolas; ‘Ah,’ I think, already, without meeting Sammy, I suspect that there is something going on between her and Nicolas.

I am now observing the happenings of another room: a man in a blue t-shirt hides behind a door, a woman in her early twenties is speaking on a telephone, the man watches and listens. ‘Rosa, Rosa, this is Kate Robbins (Kate is crinkling a sheet of paper beside the telephone mouth-piece), Rosa we have a bad connection, can you hear me all right?’ I now see an attractive woman in her thirties, dressed in black lace, talking on the other end of the telephone, ‘Yes, but your voice, are you sick?’ Kate coughs into the phone while continuing to crinkle the paper, ‘It’s just a summer cold, Rosa, the reason I’m calling, I received your letter, it’s very sweet of you to keep in touch.’ Rosa replies, ‘Mamma and I are very grateful for everything you have done for us.’ Reflecting on the loaded response, Kate continues, ‘So you’re all right, you have enough money?’ Rosa smirks, ‘More than enough, thanks to you Kate.’ The camera cuts to a close-up of Kate as she contemplates Rosa’s answer.

From the close-up of Kate, the screen cuts to a close-up of a door key. The camera pulls back, the key is being held by a twenty-five year-old man, who says, ‘If this thing could talk.’ The man is seated in a restaurant with a woman of the same age, as well as a slightly older man. The woman is now holding the key; the key has something to do with her mother’s whereabouts. She ponders the key before saying, ‘Somebody definitely doesn’t want us to know what happened to my mother.’ The older man replies, ‘Ha, don’t you worry, we’ll find the answer to those questions, right Erik.’ The young man replies, ‘That’s right.’ The camera has zoomed in on
Erik, melodramatic music wells in the background, the camera pauses on Erick; I suspect that Erik and the older man are up to no good.

I am now observing a disturbing place, perhaps an attic; a woman in her forties, wielding a battle-axe, calls out, ‘Urs, Urs, Where are you Urs. He’s never gone this long before. Have you abandoned me? You’re my servant.’ The door begins to open; the woman throws the battleaxe towards the door. The camera zooms in on the woman — she stares long and hard to where she has thrown the battleaxe.

I am now observing the happenings in yet another room. An overweight man in his sixties, dressed in a blue business suit, walks across the room followed by a thirty year-old woman wearing a pink dressing gown; the woman says, ‘It’s been a very confusing year for me Steffen. I’ve made some of the biggest mistakes of my life. I just hope that in time you will be able to forgive me?’ Steffen turns, annoyed with the woman: ‘If I ever find out that you have betrayed me again, your life as Princess Geno will come to an abrupt and painful end.’ The camera slowly zooms in, then pauses on Princess Geno, who has entered a deep contemplative thought. As Princess Geno weighs up her options, the theme music for the program heralds the end of today’s First Act, a sophisticated and well-worn male voice recites, ‘Like sand through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.’

An intense male voice says, ‘Australia’s sexiest drama just gets better.’ I am now watching a promotion for a network program and, as with the Days of Our Lives intro, I don’t know what program the announcer is referring to — I stare at the rapid procession of images. I see a rat in a cage, then a man in a white laboratory coat says to a woman, ‘You scared him. All his hair is standing up.’ I am now somewhere else; I see a dead body, the intense male voice returns, ‘Tonight, a grisly find, with a bizarre twist.’ A detective appears to be inspecting a dead body, ‘Why would you wear three-inch heels in a lake?’ The narrator continues, ‘Call it a love triangle or could it be more than that? In a case where loyalties will be tested.’ The detective yells at the woman who previously scared the rat, ‘You just compromised
our investigation.’ The woman replies, ‘He deserved to know the truth.’ The narrator continues, ‘And the clues are difficult to find.’ I see the back of a man slumped in a chair, an unseen male says, ‘Who do you think killed her, the husband or boyfriend?’ The narrator has the last word, ‘8.30 tonight. CSI on WIN.’

During the preceding six minutes, I have been introduced to the ongoing saga within each of the stories being played out in Days of Our Lives. What strikes me about the program is that each of the characters appears as if they come from the same world, even the mad woman with the battleaxe. All the characters are well groomed; they look like the sort of people who clean up their mess with Ansell Gloves before listening to Rod Stewart. The characters appear sculpted. Unlike the previous program, Fresh, there appears nothing rushed about Days of Our Lives.

17. The Life Of Our Days

While recording an album at a friend’s studio in Lithgow in 1982, I tried my hand as a door-to-door Vinyl Cladding salesman. One day I found myself in an estate built during WWII to provide accommodation for the Lithgow Small Arms Factory workers and their families. Having parked at the top of a street, my intention was to work my way down one side, and then back up the other to my car. As I walked up the three steps leading to the front door of the first house, I heard the introductory theme music to Days Of Our Lives through the thin fibro walls. I knocked on the door, I heard the occupant stand and walk towards me, on what sounded like a polished wooden floor. Within a metre of me, the person turned left, stepped a further metre or so into a vestibule, turned right, stepped forward, unlocked the front door, and within what seemed like a micro-second, said, ‘Thankyou, but no thankyou’ … walked briskly back across the room, sat down and resumed watching Days Of Our Lives. The floor plan of each house in the estate was identical. With the exception of those homes where the occupants were out, each house contained one woman sitting in the front room watching the same television program. Each time I knocked on the door, near enough to the exact same procedure took place.
As I walked down one side of the street and then back up the other, I, like each woman in each house, followed the same episode of *Days of Our Lives*.

### 18. So Are The Days Of Our Lives

I am pleased to reach the end of the program. To my sensibility, *Days of Our Lives* is barren; I liken it to walking through a Pinus radiata forest — life and light diminish the deeper one journeys into its monoculture. After sixty minutes, the woman who is buying the Internet company is still in the hotel room talking with the two men; Princess Geno has changed out of her dressing gown and is now dressed for the day; the meeting in Room 203 is still going on, while the phone conversation with Rosa has just finished.

According to the official *Days of Our Lives* home page, the opening stanza to the program, ‘Like sands through the hourglass, so are the Days of our Lives,’ has introduced the program since its inception in 1965. *Days of Our Lives* is Number One in the key demographic for USA women between 18 and 49. It is the powerhouse of NBC’s soap opera line-up.

### 19. From The Special To The Everyday

At some point in time the special quality that surrounded the watching of television melded with the all-day everyday character of domestic life. Once our extended family and friends had purchased their own television receivers, Saturday night supper went from drop scones and jam to an arrowroot biscuit. The space before television quickly moved from a site of special occasion to an unceremonious place, one where my father cut his toe nails and such like, while my grandmother ironed, darned and slept before going to bed; a site where Donald and I lingered after school and before bed. However, there was still a gap between the subtext of a typical USA program and the reality of my suburban lifestyle.
Some eighty-five percent of Australian commercial television content during this period consisted of programs produced in the United States of America (Bailey, 2003). Many of these programs were produced during the previous decade, when the USA was undergoing a radical ideological shift from prudent consumption towards over-consumerism and increased household debt (Lipsitz, 1990). I felt alienated from the world portrayed on television. Having longed to live in a house ‘with’ television, I now longed to live in the world of television. My favourite programs contained products and consumer concepts that were utterly exotic to my suburban lifeworld. For example, the ‘American’ pizza (apparently common to all Americans at the time), was a mystery to my family, as it was to many Australians during this period — not unlike the Australian characters in David Caesar’s 2001 film Dirty Deeds, we didn’t know what pizza was. We watched in envy as USA television characters ordered pizza and other takeaway food over the phone. As a result, I fantasised about living in the USA and consuming exotic American consumables.

20. The Young And The Restless (1 p.m.)

There appears little difference between Days of Our Lives and The Young And The Restless. It is not hard to imagine the storylines of either program meshing with the other. The same melodramatic production techniques run through both programs: each sequence begins and ends using the same structure; the same type of music; the same type of editing and camera technique; the same pace within the performances. In combination with a similar stream of advertisements and news headlines, the two programs seamlessly fill in two hours of television; my body feels as if it is in one world: the Days of Our Young and Restless. I don’t consume any of the products advertised during either program; clearly, I am not the target demographic.

21. Ricky Nelson Drinks Coca-Cola

The person I most wanted to be like was Ricky Nelson. Ricky was the youngest son of Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, a successful showbiz duo who had turned their stage
performances first into a radio series and later into a television series. Their two sons David and Ricky co-starred in the television series. I have a lingering memory of Ricky arriving home from school; he saunters through the back door of his parents’ lavish suburban kitchen — his apron-clad mother is making dinner. Ricky says ‘Hi mum’; Harriet replies ‘Hi Ricky.’ Ricky continues on towards the refrigerator and without seeking permission from his mother takes an individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola and flips the lid — using a bottle opener attached to the side of refrigerator. Helping himself to a Coca-Cola was merely part of Ricky’s everyday activities — his mother didn’t react. Yet for me, Ricky’s action was radical. In my family circumstances, Coca-Cola was a luxury item. Up until this point in time, the idea of having a fizzy drink after school had not entered my reckoning. My family’s refrigerator, like the ice-chest it had recently replaced, had never held a ‘spare’ (family-size) bottle of lemonade, let alone an individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola. Birthday parties and Christmas holidays had always been the only domain of fizzy drinks. On those rare occasions when we did purchase fizzy drinks, we always purchased the normal family sized-bottles — one always had a glass of lemonade.

22. That's Life (2 p.m.)

A network announcer informs me, ‘Coming up next, the series final of That’s Life.’ A news up-date follows the announcement, followed by a suite of familiar advertisements; they momentarily dull my senses, before the equally familiar electronic fanfare that accompanies the Network logo streaks across the screen delivering me to a burst of feel-good music and a procession of smiling faces. Instantly I find the nature of this program warm and inviting; That’s Life is considerably up-tempo compared to the format of Days of Our Lives and The Young and the Restless. I find That’s Life easier to watch. There appears a greater diversity in character development; I suspect this is because the program is casting a wider net. I suspect the program is a repeat, perhaps a series that is no longer in production, as the production values are too high (expensive) for daytime television — subsequent research reveals this to be the case.
The sixty-minute comedy is a light-hearted depiction of a law-abiding family. Lydia, the main character is a young single woman looking for love and a stable career. Her brother is a young policeman, her father owns a restaurant and her mother is a city councillor. *That’s Life* taps into the ethos of the ‘American Dream’ (Lipsitz, 1990) that I warmed to and strove for as a child — Ricky Nelson would not be out of place here, sipping a Coca-Cola or swiping his credit card. My body is comfortable — I am back before the world that I loved as a child. Here, all the characters live the American dream: food, drink, clothing, shelter, communication and transport are in plentiful supply. *That’s Life* is a feel-good world where the mise-en-scène replicates the suburban and urban ‘Australia Dream’ — I am drawn into and subsequently enjoy the superficial story.

23. Cowboys

Ricky Nelson represented the dream I wanted to live — unlimited fizzy drinks and a ‘normal’ family. While television influenced my aspirations, I was nonetheless living with the reality of my mother’s death. To this end, I found a certain degree of comfort in cowboy programs. It was not uncommon for the hero’s wife to have died; subsequently, the cowboy roamed the Wild West alone — doing good! There was at least one serial where the cowboy’s son and daughter had to cope without their mother. Programs such as these helped me imagine getting on with my life. They helped me to imagine that even without my mother, I could get through life — that I could beat the baddies and grow-up to be a good man! I applauded the ‘good’ cowboys shooting the ‘bad’ Red Indians and cattle rustlers.

In the early days of Australian television, a sizeable portion of the eighty-five percent of USA content broadcast on Australian commercial television were programs such as:

*The Lone Ranger* (1949 to 1957); *The Cisco Kid* (1950 to 1956); *Adventures of Wild Bill Hickock* (1951 to 1958); *Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* (1954-1957); *Cheyenne* (1955-1963); *Gun Smoke* (1955 to 1975); *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957 to 1963); *Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans* (1957); *Tombstone Territory* (1957-
When researching these programs, I came across numerous photos of the lead characters, most if not all of whom I had not come across in forty years. Revisiting these images brought about happy feelings, not unlike the sensation of coming across photos of long lost friends. The persona of my root’n toot’n, shoot’m-up cowboy heroes is the antithesis of what I strive for in life, and yet, I can’t deny my feelings of nostalgia.

24. Dr Phil (3 p.m.)

Another news up-date: this time I am greeted by a smiling woman wearing shades of pale pink. Until now, the attire of the network newsreaders has been more sombre. Coinciding with the new newsreader is a shift in the priority of the network news headline; now a story about a $700,000 Aids court settlement leads the newsbreak, followed by a story about speed cameras and the speeding parents of school children. The third story is about the possible discovery of Queen Nefertiti’s mummified body. The final portion of the thirty-second up-date informs me that the USA didn’t have any hard evidence concerning the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

Following the network logo and fanfare, I hear a strong male voice with a Texan accent: ‘Today on Dr Phil, millions of girls are starving themselves, and the chances are you know one of them.’ I’m introduced to a young woman in her early twenties suffering from anorexia and bulimia. Dr Phil’s camera crew have spent a week with the young woman and her family. I find the mini documentary insightful. I see how little the young woman eats, plus the trauma she and her family experience each time she purges her body. Back in the studio, I am introduced to the young woman’s mother, father, brother and fiancé; they are all distressed by the young woman’s ailment — the young woman and her mother constantly wipe tears from their eyes. I am drawn into the
program. I get the sense that I am observing a meaningful dialogue between the makers of the program, the young woman and me (the viewer).

By the time the second advertising break is over, I am beginning to suspect that Dr Phil is entertaining me rather than informing me. I begin to sense similar commercial constructs as those woven into Mornings With Kerrie-Anne, in combination with the melodramatic techniques employed in Days of Our Lives and The Young and the Restless. Once noticed, the mercantile rhythm of the program becomes obvious. Phil McGraw (Dr Phil) slips from anchorman delivering a story, to an evangelic, advertorial preacher — many of the ‘solutions’ to the viewers woes can be found in Dr Phil’s books. As host, the entertaining Dr Phil is always promising me more: ‘Coming right up after the break.’

25. A Day At The Races

Donald, Dad and I were watching the Marx Brothers’ A Day At The Races on television one Saturday night. There is a sequence in the film when a racehorse named Jeepers Creepers gallops through the backyards of several homes. In the process, amongst other comic devices, Jeepers Creepers crashes through washing hung out to dry. I found this sequence particularly amusing. The moment that stays with me is one in which I find myself bouncing up and down on a chair; I realise that I am laughing like I have not laughed since the death of my mother. I am in mid-bounce, I am unsure if my laughter is a form of desecration. I begin to feel guilty.

I am now in slow-motion, I have no idea of what to expect as I turn towards my father — to my everlasting relief, he is also laughing. Our eyes meet, my father, just like me, has discovered that he can laugh again. Donald must have been observing this surreal moment, for as my slow-motion world returns to normal, he too begins to laugh at the movie — together, the three of us laugh and laugh and laugh.
26. Y? (4 p.m.)

There has been another shift in the order of the network headlines; now an airport security story replaces the speed cameras story. The up-date concludes with a snippet about the latest haircut of a local tennis champion — the story has replaced the earlier Iraq ‘weapons of mass destruction’ story. It’s 4 pm, I have been expecting a children’s program, so I am not surprised when the intro for Y? (sic) commences. Subsequently, I read the re-prioritising of the news headlines, from weapons of mass destruction, to a tennis champion’s haircut, as indicating a shift in the audience demographic.

‘Hello guys and gals, welcome to another scintillating episode of Y,’ say an energetic young man and woman. The two hosts, both in their early twenties, begin the program by demonstrating how one can create the illusion of a ball rolling up-hill. I get the sense that this is a responsible program, one that is attempting to speak to the audience, rather than speak down to the audience. I like each of the host’s persona; they are presented as being both hip and intelligent.

The first advertising break begins with the Government-sponsored ‘Safe Water’ campaign, promoting beach safety. I feel a sense of community and wholesome communication directed towards school children. As a parent, I am pleased with the program. Next, the adventures of Paddle Pop Lion, a sixty-second animated cartoon about the adventures of Paddle Pop Lion; named after the Streets Ice Cream product, ‘Paddle Pop’. Though I don’t view the animated Paddle Pop Lion character consuming an ice cream, the last three seconds of the ‘story’ present images of the various Paddle Pop ice cream flavours. At first, I thought I was watching a Paddle Pop ice cream advertisement. Then I thought I was watching an animation featuring Paddle Pop Lion. Finally, I realised that I was watching a cartoon advertorial aimed at school children.

The sixty-second Paddle Pop segment is followed by an advertisement for the Perisher Blue snow resort. The advertisement presents the recreational activities children can enjoy while holidaying at Perisher Blue. Running at the beginning, middle and end of the
advertisement is the jingle, ‘That’s what I like about Perisher Blue.’ Throughout the advertisement I see happy, healthy children having fun, and an energetic male voiceover tells me there is a ‘Cool ski carpet that makes learning easy and fun.’ The jingle returns, ‘That’s what I like about Perisher Blue’, before the male voiceover says, ‘Take a magic winter holiday that gets the family cheering.’ The jingle returns, before the male voiceover says, ‘You’ll get to taste great snow and great family fun.’ The jingle returns for the final time; however, this time, as the jingle comes to an end, I hear the sounds of adults singing and laughing, at what sounds like a bar: ‘That’s what I like about Perisher Blue; you can do what you want to do at Perisher Blue ... all right.’

The following segment of Y? is a current affairs type piece about genetic engineering and bananas. The story praises the wonders of science, and how it can take a disease-free gene from a banana plant growing wild in a rainforest, and insert the gene into plantation bananas — ‘Science is amazing,’ says the female host. The irony of the segment can’t escape me. Almost the entire banana plantation in far North Queensland, which supplies approximately ninety percent of Australian grown bananas, was recently destroyed by a cyclone. ‘No amount of genetic engineering can rectify that,’ I catch myself telling the screen — having recently read that the devastation wreaked upon the plantations was, in all likelihood, related to human-induced global degradation.

Back in the Y? studio, the hosts are carrying out an experiment with a glass of water and a cork. When the glass is filled to its absolute maximum, the cork floats to the middle of the glass, as opposed to floating to the side, when the glass is only partially full. The experiment enables the hosts to explain surface tension, cohesive forces and adhesion. I am becoming a little cynical: why have I been shown this? There is no explanation of how this experiment impacts on my life, or indeed the life of a school child! I am beginning to suspect that the science before me is just pseudo educative tricky; a way to fill in the spaces between advertisements. This segment is immediately followed by what at first appears to be another instalment of the adventures of Paddle Pop Lion. This time however, Paddle Pop Lion is featured in a thirty-second advertisement for Paddle Pop ice
cream. The animated advertisement is set around the Egyptian Pyramids; etched onto the walls are images of Paddle Pop ice creams. Engraved above each ice cream image is a secret code resembling Egyptian hieroglyphics. The advertisement invites me to visit the Paddle Pop web site and scientifically ‘crack the code.’

The Paddle Pop advertisement is followed by an RSPCA advertisement. Popular singer, Casey Chambers, sings her hit *Am I Not Pretty Enough*, as images of young domestic animals — cats, dogs and a white cockatoo — are sensitively portrayed. While it’s tastefully presenting animals as deserving of human love and appropriate care, I am sceptical. I can’t help feeling that the network is cynically using the feel-good nature of the RSPCA community announcement to construct a mise-en-scène of responsibility.

Next, I see a mother cleaning a little boy’s face. The little boy says to me, ‘*My mum cares about all sorts of stupid stuff/* like hair and ears and stuff on your face. And get this, she even cares about cordial.’ The boy is now holding a cordial bottle, ‘*It’s got to be the one that’s forty percent fruit juice.*’ Next, the boy is wearing an Akubra hat, ‘*The one that’s owned by Aussie farmers / gotta be Golden Circle.*’ I see the mother briefly, the boy continues, ‘*Care! / She cares about everything.*’ Now I see the boy with a range of cordial flavours, ‘*Mm, now what flavour this week? Fruit cup, Pine Lime. Golden Crush.*’ The boy looks at me, ‘*Golden Circle, the cordial for mums who care.*’ The final shot of the advertisement frames the slim, happy and healthy mum kissing the little boy on the cheek. From the advertisement I understand that the slim, happy and healthy mum cares for her child; however, I don’t recall hearing if the content of the cordial cares for the child? I hear that forty percent of the cordial is fruit juice — there is no mention of what is contained in the remaining sixty percent?

Now I’m viewing a suburban home, I’m looking towards the front door; the doorbell rings, a pizza deliveryman arrives. Both he and the pizza box he is carrying are smothered in cheese. An ironic male voice announces, ‘*Pizza dipped in Cheese. Cheese spread “Snack Abouts”, now with pizza flavoured biscuits.*’ The advertisement concludes with a still image of three packets of Kraft Snack About Biscuits: the Pizza
Dipped in Cheese packet is flanked by a packet of Nachos Dipped in Cheese and BBQ Dipped in Cheese. What is the flavour of pizza, I ask myself? In the wake of having watched how bananas can be genetically engineered, I have nonsensical images of Kraft scientists genetically engineering the flavour of pizza. I wonder if the scientists discovered a traditional pizza in the wilds of a Calabrian wood-fired community oven? Or did the Kraft scientists pursue the American Dream, and extract a pizza sample from a traditional Hollywood, double-cheese, meat-lovers delight?

Back in the Y? studio, the female presenter introduces ‘sweet Karin’, a twenty-something reporter who interviews a thirty-something environmental scientist about exotic weeds encroaching on natural Australian habitat. I find myself enthused. The segment has the potential to be the most environmentally aware piece of television I’ve watched all day. As the segment draws to a close, I realise that my initial enthusiasm has waned. The segment hasn’t provided any practical advice or any follow-up information, such as web pages, contact numbers and participating organisations. I am getting the distinct impression that Y? presents itself as saying one thing (science, education, conservation, community interest), while saying another — increasingly Y? appears to be little more than a commercial trope designed to deliver the audience, in this case school children, to the advertiser. For while there is follow-up internet information for the Paddle Pop ice cream advertisement, there is no such follow-up about exotic weeds encroaching upon the indigenous Australian habitat.

I am drawn back into the program; this time the male host, holding an ox heart, tells me about the history of the Western understanding of the heart, from Aristotle’s theory of the heart as the centre of emotion to William Harvey’s description of the heart as a pump, and the centre piece for a system of blood vessels. There appears to be a substantial gulf between the current discussion and the former advertisement for biscuits described as ‘Pizza dipped in Cheese’. I feel bewildered; all my senses tell me that the hyper-octane quality of salty artificially flavoured biscuits belongs in a different world to Aristotle’s theory of the heart.
A tasteful and compassionate advertisement for the Seeing Eye Dog Association opens the next set of advertisements. The final ad of the set places two beautiful toddlers before me, each carrying a large bowl of what looks like biscuits. A crooner sings, ‘Oh when you’re smiling, hey when you’re smiling, the whole world, it smiles with you.’ The toddlers are each carrying a bowl of McCain’s ‘Potato Smiles’, a pre-cooked frozen snack-food that is re-heated when required. The screen is now full of happy children eating ‘Smiles’. Each child holds multiple Smiles in their hands; clearly, the advertisement is encouraging an excessive consumption of Smiles. To my sensibility, the message is straightforward — the more Smiles a child consumes, the happier the child will be. A satisfied male voice says, ‘Smiles, crisp on the outside, mash potato on the inside. Ah McCain’s, you’ve done it again.’

According to Choice Magazine, Smiles are 87% potato. Choice warns about the dangers of deep frying Smiles (as one of the instructions on the pack suggests), as they've already been cooked in canola oil. A 125g serve contains a third of the upper level of sodium intake that’s acceptable for an eight-year-old to have in a day. Choice recommends that parents serve Smiles with some grilled fish and a green salad, as a healthy fish and chips alternative. The advertisement presents Smiles as a stand-alone snack, to be consumed while playing with friends.

The next segment of Y? is titled ‘Endangered Australians’. My spirits rise, I watch enthusiastically as a young female reporter tells me about an endangered woody shrub (Sandplain Thomasia) found in six locations east of York in Western Australia. As the segment proceeds, I realise that the reporter is merely reading a script; there is no enthusiasm in her presentation. I feel as if I am being spoken at, rather than spoken to. At the end of the segment the young woman says, ‘Thanks to the Commonwealth Natural Heritage Trust for providing us with the footage for this endangered Australian.’ What the young reporter didn’t mention, was that her script was extracted from a lifeless pamphlet on endangered species, and accordingly delivered to the audience in a pamphlet-like manner. I feel frustrated; once again there is no follow-
up information at the end of this segment — no web address for the Trust or similar information.

In the last thirty minutes there were eleven advertisements; all of these advertisements appeared for the first and only time during the thirty-minute timeslot, 4 pm to 4.30 pm. The Perisher Blue advertisement ran twice. None of the products advertised during Y? appear at any other time during the network’s twenty-four hour cycle. (A different Perisher Blue advertisement aimed directly at adults appears later in the day.) Overwhelmingly more new advertisements appear in this thirty-minute timeslot than at any other time in the twenty-four hour cycle. Not a single advertisement that appeared between 5 am and 4 pm appeared in the Y? timeslot. This is the only timeslot in which this will happen.

The content of both the ‘Y?’ program and the advertisements woven through the program feel like they have conspired to lead me along a particular path — a path of community, education, science and ecology — while in actual fact, they have led me along the usual path to consumption; in this instance, predominantly junk food for children. The Safe Water community announcement, the RSPCA and the Guide Dog advertisements can, in one light, be seen as a cynical exercise by the network, a façade that presents the Y? timeslot as having a ‘community, educational, scientific and ecological’ structure. Yet in reality the Paddle Pop Lion sixty-second adventure is nothing more than a ploy to prepare the audience for the follow-up Paddle Pop advertisement. The ‘pizza dipped in cheese’ biscuits are junk food, as are the McCain’s Smiles. The sight of viewing beautiful healthy-looking children portrayed eating junk food strategically placed between segments on science, ecology, and feel-good community announcements saddens me.

The program began with the illusion of a bowling ball rolling up-hill — the illusion was achieved by placing the ball between two billiard cues and then slightly raising one end of one cue (closest to the camera), while slightly lowing the other. The gravitational pull of the lowered cue (furthest from the camera) caused the ball to roll down that cue, while causing the ball to momentarily roll up the raised cue (closest to the camera). The image
of the ball defying gravity is a trick, one that the hosts of Y? explain following the ‘experiment’ — there is no explanation, however, for the nonsensical display of a biscuit portrayed as having the flavour of pizza dipped in cheese. In the world of Y?, ‘cheese and pizza’ are dealt with using a different rubric to the program’s pseudo science and education. I am clearly annoyed that the program purports to be a scientific and educational program for children, while the ads that accompany it present ‘pizza’ and ‘cheese’ as having a generic flavour; no wonder exotic weeds and endangered species are paid lip-service. In the Y? world, important information centres around an internet address where children can ‘crack the code’ and discover the available flavours of Paddle Pop ice creams: ‘It’s little wonder Australian children are facing an obesity epidemic, with unhealthy food companies employing such persuasive tactics that could rival the big tobacco companies’ (The Cancer Council of NSW, cited in Burke 2006). Upon reflection, this is the saddest half-hour of television I have watched in a long time.

27. Coco Pops

Donald came home from school one afternoon in around 1959 with the exciting news that he knew how to make a chocolate milkshake out of Kellogg’s ‘Coco Pops’. Consequently, the following Friday during the family’s once-a-week trip to the Supermarket, our grandmother purchased a packet of Coco Pops. The following Saturday morning my grandmother and I sat at the kitchen table like scientists observing an experiment. Donald opened the Coco Pops packet and proceeded to sprinkle two heaped dessert spoons of Coco Pops into a half-filled glass of milk. The three of us gazed into the glass — nothing happened. Donald had expected some type of effervescent activity to instantly take place between the Coco Pops and the milk, but the Coco Pops merely floated listlessly on the surface of the milk. My grandmother suggested that perhaps Donald should stir the Coco Pops. Again nothing. Eventually, my grandmother took to the glass with an egg whisk, but the Coco Pops refused to transmogrify into a chocolate milkshake. My grandmother then suggested that perhaps the Coco Pops needed to be added to the glass before the milk. Desperate to save face, Donald quickly drank the glass of milk and Coco Pops, before announcing, ‘Tastes good but.’
One of Donald’s schoolmates had misinterpreted the advertisement for the new Kellogg’s breakfast cereal. It wasn’t long before we came across the advertisement; initially, we read the advertisement as saying that mixing Coco Pops with milk produced a chocolate milkshake. However, by the time we watched the advertisement a few more times, the mystery was solved. The tagline for the Kellogg’s Coco Pop advertising campaign in 1959 was, as it is in the 21st century – ‘Coco Pops, just like a chocolate milkshake, only crunchy.’

28. A Game Show (4.30 p.m.)

The program following Y? is a game show with adult contestants. I find a particular honesty in the game show that I felt was missing in the previous program. The contestants are here to win money and prizes. There is no pretence that this program is anything other than a game show. I pit myself against the contestants; the host wishes ‘me’ luck before the start of each round of questions. And while I haven’t watched a game show in years, I find myself enjoying it more than the previous program. I am surprised by my response, for while I consider the program to be inane, it doesn’t affront me. I acknowledge that my opinion of the show is more a statement of preference; I’d rather spend recreational time in the garden or walking along wallaby paths. I can’t imagine myself watching this game show again. That said, I am not saddened by it; the game show doesn’t pretend to be anything else, I don’t feel tricked, it is what it is.

29. Internationally Acclaimed

A jet airliner soars above an airstrip, a beautiful woman waves goodbye, powerful, handsome men shake hands. One moment these men are being ‘important’ in Australia, the next they are being important in London, then Paris and finally New York — their important business is always taking place in the company of beautiful women. The up-beat music, mixed with the sounds of a bustling exciting world, confirms what the strong male voice proclaims: ‘Internationally acclaimed, Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes, smoked all around the world.’ I enjoy this advertisement, the jet aeroplane soaring.
the exciting men travelling all over the world. My father smokes ‘Peter Stuyvesant’ cigarettes. I am proud that the cigarette my father smokes is internationally acclaimed.

30. Fresh Prince of Bel-Air (5 p.m.)

A situation comedy begins. I don’t recognise the program. My immediate sense is that the program is a repeat, just like That’s Life, this program’s production values are too expensive for 5 pm television. To my sensibility the storyline is thin — the laugh track renders the lame jokes barely palatable. I am watching an instalment of the one hundred and forty eight episodes of the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air — screened in the USA from September 10, 1990 to May 20, 1996. This program has a similar feel to the type of television I enjoyed in my youth — programs such as The Beverly Hillbillies (1962-1971). Both programs have a fish-out-of-water feel to them; here, a streetwise Philadelphia teenager has ended up living in California with rich relatives in Bel-Air.

I can imagine myself as a child, ‘killing time’ after school in front of Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and programs not dissimilar to Y? — I snack on ‘pizza dipped in cheese’ biscuits and drink Golden Circle cordial. I am blissfully unaware of what is in the sixty percent of the drink that isn’t fruit juice, or what chemical emulsifiers and artificial flavours impregnate the biscuits.

31. The Saint

One of my grandmother’s favourite programs was The Saint. The lead character Simon Templar (Roger Moore) played the role of a special investigator. Roger Moore, according to my grandmother, was a handsome ladies’ man — not only could The Saint fight and shoot, leap and bound, in order to catch villains, he could also be a ‘wicked lad’. The circumstances under which my grandmother made these comments were always similar. In the course of his investigations, The Saint would have to interview a suspect or a witness, usually an attractive woman. This often repeated scenario would find The Saint and the attractive woman in some secluded room. The woman would offer The Saint a
drink, usually ‘scotch on the rocks’ — it was some time before my teetotal grandmother, let alone I, realised that ‘the rocks’, was ice. With a scotch in hand, one of the characters would offer the other a cigarette. The Saint would light the woman’s cigarette before lighting his own. From time to time The Saint (like our next door neighbour), would place both cigarettes in his mouth, light them, then give one to the woman. Each would then inhale; this was usually a long and considered process — during which a deep understanding of each other would take place. By the time The Saint and the beautiful woman had exhaled their cigarette smoke, which was usually accompanied by intense romantic music, the two would kiss — to which my grandmother would say, ‘He’s a wicked lad.’

I came to notice versions of the ‘scotch on the rocks, cigarette, and kiss’ scenario in a number of films and weekly serials. I hadn’t experienced alcohol, cigarettes or a romantic kiss, I didn’t find these scenarios wicked, so much as the usual manner in which powerful men and beautiful women went about an exciting life.

**32. Entertainment Tonight (5:30 p.m.)**

A network promotion for the detective show *Stingers* begins. A deep drooling male voice says, ‘The new kid’ and I see a young policeman, followed by an image of an attractive policewoman, who is describing the young policeman to her boss: ‘Young, kind of spunky.’ I now see the young policeman in a fist-fight, ‘Gets straight into action,’ drools the narrator. By now the young policeman and an attractive woman are about to embrace; the drooling continues, ‘Nothing like a young man on the job.’ The attractive woman rips off the policeman’s shirt, before kissing him on the neck; she pants, ‘This might work out after all.’

The fanfare accompanying the WIN TV logo delivers me to the open sequence of *Entertainment Tonight*. The USA-based magazine program follows the many and varied activities of media celebrities. Fast-paced editing and upbeat music underscore a constant stream of stories and ‘latest’ images of film, television, sports and music personalities.
The production fundamentals of *Entertainment Tonight* have similarities with *Primetime Thursday* — in both instances, a man and woman in their mid-thirties present alternate stories. Both formats lean towards curiosity over substance. I see and hear about the love affairs, weddings, honeymoons, divorces, holiday destinations and latest projects being undertaken by the Who’s Who of the entertainment world. As during the previous program, *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, my body feels as if it is filling in time. *Entertainment Tonight* is the most popular and longest-running entertainment news program in the USA … its first broadcast commenced on September 14, 1981.

33. Smoke Rings And Coca-Cola

The majority of my childhood television heroes smoked cigarettes. I had my first ‘puff’ at nine years of age when Donald and I began walking our dog on Sunday afternoons. Our walks took us past the nearest Soda Fountain (Fish & Chip Shop) where Donald would buy me an individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola. I looked forward to our walks; drinking my own bottle of Coca-Cola; moving side-by-side through the world with Donald. We were like two Texas Rangers (*Tales of the Texas Rangers* 1955-1957) — motherless, but taking on the world nonetheless. Donald was fifteen, his Brylcreemed, Ricky Nelson-inspired hair glistened, he wore pointy black leather shoes, slacks, a polo shirt, and an American college-style cardigan — Donald idolised Col Joye, whose band, *Col Joye and the Joy Boys* regularly appeared on *Bandstand* (1957-1972). I loved Donald’s cardigan, it was just like the cardigans American kids like Ricky Nelson wore to Soda Fountains.

Donald knew how to do the ‘drawback’; I would proudly watch the three stages of this process. First, Donald drew the cigarette smoke deep into his body; this appeared as if it were an active, searching process. Having inhaled, Donald would enter the second stage; there, he appeared to embrace a moment of contemplation — this was the place where detectives solved mysteries, the place where decisions were made about kissing and killing. Having contemplated, Donald entered the third stage of smoking. I could tell when he had reached this stage, because a certain knowing look spread across his face — sometimes he nodded, other times ‘I just knew’ that he ‘knew’. Once this stage was
achieved, smoke began to escape between his lips, before gushing out his nostrils — just like my cowboy and detective heroes.

34. Local News, National News And A Current Affair (6 – 7:30 p.m.)

The *Local News* covers the micro and the macro, from small-town flower shows to the ongoing drought. Tonight’s lead story reports on damage caused by vandals to a public amenity in a town 120 kilometres away — it so happens that I will be travelling to that town next week. The second story is about a racial discrimination incident in the town 30 kilometres away — where Manning plays several cricket matches over summer. The third story is about the upcoming Eisteddfod in a town 300 kilometres away, the town where Manning will play football in a week or two and where my university is setting up a new campus. The fourth story is an ongoing story about the prolonged drought biting into Central Western NSW — I see the consequences of the drought each day of the week. I feel engaged with the *Local News*; it reports on the world I move through.

The *National Network News* immediately follows the *Local News*. I am initially drawn to this program. In production terms, the ‘look and feel’ of this program is far more sophisticated than that of the *Local News*. I perceive the program as carrying more weight than the *Local News*. The lead story is about a possible terrorist threat, the second story is about a woman who contracted HIV/AIDS from her husband, due to a medical bungle. All the stories that run over the duration of the *National Network News* have been covered in the *Early Morning News*, *Today*, the *Eleven O’clock News*, as well as the intervening thirty-second up-dates broadcast throughout the day. As the bulletin proceeds, I notice that my body is not as engaged as when watching the *Local News*, my interest is beginning to wane. The news story that draws the state of my body to my attention is a piece about the ‘possible’ discovery of Queen Nefertiti’s mummified body. The story has been sourced from the Discovery Channel and re-purposed (adapted) for the news bulletin (The Discovery Channel logo is embossed over the pictures). The Queen Nefertiti story is presented in the mode of magazine television; it’s closer in style to *Entertainment Tonight*, and *Primetime Thursday* than to my perception of daily
national news. I fail to see the significance of the Queen Nefertiti ‘item’ (as opposed to a news story). Unlike the report about the amenities block being vandalised, or a local policeman found guilty of racial discrimination or the drought gripping rural NSW, it seems irrelevant to my life, its tone closer to a curiosity piece than news. In terms of ‘the latest news’, the story about the possible discovery of Queen Nefertiti’s mummified body is not ‘new’.

As the National News fades out, the opening story of the following program, A Current Affair, begins. The sense of remove that I felt during the National News continues. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach as I perceive A Current Affair as being even further removed from me than the National News. As the program proceeds, I get the sense of being duped. This feeling is not dissimilar to the feeling I experienced when watching Y? earlier in the day. I perceive the reports before me as lacking credibility. This is brought home when sponsorship endorsements find their way into the reports being presented. A significant segment of the program purports to help a widower and his two young children, by seeking donations for items the deceased woman had wished for her family — a swimming pool and a Christian education. The report focuses on the ‘good-natured community spirit’ of A Current Affair. To my way of thinking, the grieving family at the centre of tonight’s report are being treated as pawns — their tragic circumstances cynically manipulated to create a feel-good story. The presenter signs off by presenting an advertorial-styled thankyou to the Christian School that awarded scholarships to the family, and the swimming pool manufacturer that donated the pool. As the host beats the community-spirited chest of A Current Affair, I feel my blood pressure rise — I find it hard watching such blatant, mercantile-driven manipulation and exploitation of fragile persons.

35. My First Sighting Of An Aboriginal Australian

My father and grandmother were viewing the ABC investigative journalism program Four Corners — initially, I wasn’t aware that the images of the forlorn people living in squalor were Australian Aboriginals. My confusion was partially generated by an often-
gazed-at glossy dustcover of a picture book commemorating Queen Elizabeth’s 1954 tour of Australia. One image in particular fascinated me — a naked Aboriginal man holding a spear. I didn’t understand why the man was allowed to stand naked amongst fully clothed people: members of the Australian Defence Force, a man shearing a sheep, men in suits, plus women adorned in flowing dresses, ornate hats and white gloves — the image of the Aboriginal man was also the only image of a naked person that I’d seen.

At first, I didn’t associate the glossy dustcover-image of the muscular naked brown man, with the black and white images on television. An aboriginal child, perhaps my age, looked into the camera — which I read as looking at me. The child had flies crawling in her or his eyes, mouth and nose. My father made a disparaging comment about Australian Aboriginals, my grandmother agreed, dad stood, walked to the television, and changed channels.

36. The Gilmore Girls (7.30 p.m.)

The opening scene of The Gilmore Girls begins with the program’s theme music and titles accompanying a product placement for a popular automobile — which segues into a scene endorsing MacDonald’s hamburgers. Happy, well-dressed persons are going about their day in a world where one regularly bumps into the neighbours at the local shopping centre. This is a community where persons have the time and commitment to enter a dance marathon, to raise money for charity. The Gilmore Girls, like the earlier That’s Life, taps into my warm fuzzy memories of viewing Ricky Nelson as a child. My body feels safe in this place. I warm to the main characters; I perceive them as decent people who care for each other and for their community. Set in the fictitious Stars Hollow, Connecticut, The Gilmore Girls is the type of place I projected much of my dreaming during my prepubescent years. It is eerily satisfying to be ‘back here’ again; no displaced indigenous people on the horizon, nor hint of ecological catastrophe. Intellectually, I lean away from this feel-good pap; emotionally, I yearn for more.
37. A Refreshing Change

I don’t remember what we watched after my father switched from the ABC’s *Four Corners* to a commercial channel. Whatever it was, in a microsecond my family had fled from the plight of indigenous persons to a program that was less confronting. My father’s dismissive attitude towards indigenous persons living in corrugated iron shanties, where semi-naked, dishevelled children struggled to survive, coloured my formative assumptions of indigenous Australians. Any rigorous contemplation of their plight had to compete with our acceptance of the American Way — in my case, the desire to dress like Col Joy and brylcreem my ‘Ricky Nelson’ hair. In the American Way of my solid brick suburban dreaming, one drank Coca-Cola and sucked on FAGS (cigarette-shaped and-coloured lollies), while speaking and walking like Boston Blackie, The Saint and The Men from U.N.C.L.E. — all of whom smoked internationally acclaimed cigarettes in a world where beautiful women longed to be kissed by gun-toting heroes.

38. CSI (8:30 p.m.)

A caption for the following program, *CSI*, flashes on the screen, a male voice announces, ‘Coming up; a bizarre twist with a grizzly find.’ The Who’s hit pop song ‘Who Are You’ fills the room — ‘Who are you, Who, Who, Who, Who ...?’ In the opening scene, two crime scene investigators play at being Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. A moment later, upon discovering a severed leg, one crime scene investigator says to the other, ‘Something is afoot.’ Tonight’s *CSI* will combine three thin storylines with a smattering of schoolyard puns, in order to tell a story that I find neither ‘bizarre’ nor ‘grizzly’. The opening stanza clearly informs my senses that I am not going to be confronted. My body relaxes in the knowledge that I am not going to be challenged — there will be no ‘grizzly’ images, such as a suicide bombing in Iraq, or ‘bizarre’ images of forlorn Aboriginal Australians displaced in their ancestral land.

I am watching a well-worn genre, one in which the ‘bizarre twist with a grizzly find’ is not too far from *Days of Our Lives, That’s Life* and the *Gilmore Girls.* *CSI*
AS SEEN ON TV

conjures up memories of watching *Boston Blackie* — any perceived advancement in storytelling is attributable to advancements in production techniques, rather than content. Where once I watched *Boston Blackie* in monochrome — ‘Action! Danger! Excitement! Boston Blackie. Friend to those who have no friends, enemy to those who make him an enemy’ — today’s *CSI* version of ‘Action! Danger! Excitement’ merely has a digitally enhanced ‘bizarre twist with a grizzly find.’ *CSI* is one of the most popular television programs currently screening in Australia and the USA. The 2004-5 season finale (directed by Quentin Tarantino), was watched by over 40 million USA viewers, making it one of the most watched shows in USA television history.

39. Curfew For Cowboys

After my first three years of primary school, it became obvious to my teachers that I had learning difficulties. It was felt that I started school too early (due to my mother’s death), and therefore I needed to repeat third grade. During this period, I had been watching television until at least 9.30 or 10.00 pm. The Saturday night detective program *Boston Blackie* didn’t begin until 11.00 pm (TV TIMES). My grandmother decided I needed to begin the new school year by going to bed at 8.30 pm. On that first night, I cried myself to sleep as the theme music of *Wagon Train* (1957-1965) rang throughout the house. I couldn’t comprehend why my grandmother couldn’t understand my affinity with the characters of the program — they were part of my life! What’s more, a new character had entered the series the previous week; he was a young knock-about character, and his clumsy manner and naïve approach to life held so much promise of adventure and ‘friendship’. To my seven or eight year-old sensibilities, it seemed unfair that I should have to go to bed at 8.30, and as a result, miss out on getting to know this new character, not to mention keeping abreast of what the other *Wagon Train* characters were doing. As a compromise, my grandmother tucked into bed beside me, my replica Smith & Western rifle, to which I added my *Gun Smoke* (1955-1975) six-shooter, and my new *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957-1963) long-barrel holster.
40. Stingers (9:30 p.m.)

Though there hasn’t been an absolute demarcation, over the past two hours or so there has been a slight shift in advertisement content. Several of the previous staple advertisements, such as the *Ponds Institute* and *Ansell Gloves*, have been replaced by automobile-related advertisements: car insurance, road safety and brands of motor vehicles.

Another law enforcement program begins. Though produced in Australia, the content of *Stingers* doesn’t appear overtly Australian, and as such, my body doesn’t register that it is experiencing an Australian law enforcement program anymore than *CSI* drew to my attention that I was watching a USA law enforcement program. However, I have become aware of a certain difference between this program and the previous; my body is reacting differently, there is something that isn’t ringing true.

The production values of the Australian produced *Stingers* can’t financially match those of the USA produced *CSI*. For example, at the beginning of each *CSI* episode, there is a five-second scene in which a helicopter explodes in mid-air. The production budget for this single five-second scene was in the order of one million dollars. By comparison, the weekly opening credits for *Stingers* sees the law enforcement officers running along a street; behind them a fireball explodes. However, the on-screen image of this action has been shrunk to around one third of the total dimension of the screen. Hence, the detail of the explosion, as well as other action sequences, has been reduced in the hope of creating the required visual effect without the audience noticing the difference between a big-budget, USA-style action sequence, and the substantially smaller budget available for Australian action sequences. I realise that my expectations of what the world of detective storytelling should look like has become conditioned by the big budget scape of USA productions.
41. Living In The Past

In the late 1950s, right through the 1960s, a number of family and friends didn’t own a television receiver. There came to pass the most curious of sensations when visiting these households. There was something familiar about these homes that was no longer familiar within my home! Whenever we visited a home that didn’t have a television, there was a sense of going back in time. It was a bit like the memory cues one can have when browsing a second-hand or knick-knack shop, when chancing upon an item that was once central to a domestic activity — the everyday ice-chest, instantly forgotten once the everyday refrigerator took its place, or the record player, now replaced by an everyday iPod. These ‘no-television homes’ held particular memories. The occupants still listened to the wireless (radio) programs that I no longer listened to. Their furniture hadn’t been rearranged to accommodate a television receiver. There was a different internal dynamic operating in these homes; uncle Norm and auntie Grace weren’t readying themselves around the timeslots of The Saint or Wagon Train — though the pros and cons of purchasing a television receiver was often discussed. Uncle Norm worked night shift, he didn’t see the need for a television — auntie Grace thought it might keep her company. Auntie Edie said she wouldn’t mind having a television, ‘now that Jim had passed away’; however, auntie Edie was on the pension and couldn’t see how she could afford it. The McDonalds thought they might get one, now that Betty was about to start school. ‘There are so many educational programs on television,’ recited Betty, eyes affixed to her father’s. I remember this moment, because it struck me at the time, that ‘we’ didn’t watch educational programs. I wondered which programs she was talking about?

42. The West Wing (10:30 p.m.)

Cinematic camera movement and lighting beckons me to pay attention to the actors performing within a sumptuous production set. As the program progresses, I can sense my body relaxing. The program’s lavish set renders its lush mise-en-scène as ‘normal’. I feel more at ease here than I do when viewing an Australian program like Stingers — The West Wing, like the Gilmore Girls and CSI render the lower budget mise-en-scène of
Australian programs as sparse. Australian directors have to shoot their stories using tighter frames — they often have to imply, rather than show, action. Not only are episodes such as Stingers pictorially constrained; they don’t have the budget to develop scripts; to hire celebrities or to lavishly promote the program. Each of the principal actors in The West Wing received approximately $75,000 (US) per episode; the lead actor received around $300,000 (US) per episode. The lead actor’s ‘per episode’ salary is around half the total production budget of an episode for an Australian drama. My body responds to the substantial budget: the wide-sweeping camera angles, the dramatic explosions, the presence of internationally acclaimed actors. I wrap the rich tapestry of the lavish USA budget around me, and nestle into the program.

43. Blurring The Vision

At around ten years of age I was becoming interested in Australian Rules football. I remember my father, brother and uncle sitting in our lounge room watching the delayed telecast of the 1961 VFL Grand Final between the Hawthorn and Footscray football clubs. My next clear television-place memory is situated in 1963; the President of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy, had been assassinated — I am playing with my toys in the lounge room while watching Channel Nine’s New Faces, when a newsflash announces the assassination, I run to the laundry and tell my grandmother.

My memory begins to blur by the time The Beatles toured Australia in 1964. I think I remember seeing them on TV at the time; but was I standing in the lounge room, where my grandmother and I practiced doing the ‘Twist’ to Chubby Checker in 1961, or was I sitting in the dining room? My memory of time and place is well and truly blurred by the time Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969. That is, I can’t say if I remember seeing the original television event, or if my memories of those images are in fact memories of a replay. As I try to remember television events beyond my tenth year, the distinction between the original televised event, as opposed to the replay of that event, has become increasingly difficult to determine. My memory of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon has, like so many televised events, become blurred as the experience of
viewing countless re-plays washes over that first-time instance. With the advent of sophisticated replay and instant archiving technology, my memory doesn’t appear to have the capacity to separate the experience of a replayed event from that of viewing the event for the first time; hence unlike my memory of the 1961 football match, I can remember the events I saw on television, but I can’t remember where I was, when I saw them.

44. WIN News and Late Show with David Letterman (11:30 p.m.)

The half-hour, 11.30 pm WIN News, is a repeat of the WIN 6 pm news. In part, the program’s function is to synchronise this and other regional stations with the program schedule of the national network grid — enabling regional stations to shift into automatic-pilot from midnight to dawn.

‘From New York, the greatest city in the world, it’s the Late Show with David Letterman.’ The man before me looks at ease as he strolls onto the stage. He greets me and begins his banter. I don’t fully appreciate the subtlety within Letterman’s banter as he is primarily addressing a New York-centric audience, though his antics, over the course of the program, incorporate a wider USA, and at times, global, dimension. The program runs to a standard chat-show format — all the guests are promoting something. Tonight, an actress chats about her latest movie, a musician sings a song from his latest album; a stand-up comedian performs material from his latest stage-show. Between these guest appearances, Letterman chats with his straight man: the conductor and piano player of the house band. In addition, the program has three or four ongoing comedy skit segments. The intervening comedy skits, and Letterman’s banter, have a certain in-house nature to them. I get the sense that the David Letterman show is helping pass time, filling in the hour between midnight and 1 pm.

David Letterman has been a front-man on USA television since 1982, he has presented around 4,500 episodes of late-night, chat-television. The advertisements that dominated the early morning television of Primetime Thursday and Today have returned. Once more Rod Stewart is singing like I’ve never heard him before, the ‘outlaws’ are back for
more roast vegetables, the Ponds Institute is caring about my skin, and Mylanta is relieving symptoms of ‘over’ indulgence.

45. From Viewer To Observer

As a result of the 1970s Moratorium Marches and the burgeoning Back-to-Earth Movement, I found myself living an alternative lifestyle. On a number of occasions I lived in rural places without electricity, and hence was unable to view television. To the best of my memory, there were periods during this time where I didn’t come across television for four, five or six months. What I do remember clearly, however, is that each time I came in contact with television, I noticed a significant difference between how I perceived the content on television compared with how the person or persons I was visiting reacted to that content. Though I was questioning mainstream society, I wasn’t questioning television at that stage of my life. Nevertheless, I did notice that I reacted differently to advertisements, program content and the adoration of television personalities than did my hosts. To my way of thinking, mainstream television seemed bland and at times pathetically sad. This shift in attitude came to my notice when visiting relatives — unbeknown to me, I was laughing at the advertisements as if they were skits from a comedy program. My actions only came to my attention when I noticed the curious look on the faces of my young niece and nephew — neither could understand why I was finding the hard-sell emphasis of the advertisements amusing.

On several occasions I noticed my hosts attempt to engage in conversation with the television receiver — as if the newsreader or the politician were able to hear them. In this context, I noticed that the audience (friends and family), both child and adult, were absorbed ‘in’ television’, as opposed to my observations ‘of’ television. While I didn’t have a theoretical or production-based understanding of the ‘what’ that I was observing, I did nonetheless perceive my observations as significant; I realised that television has a mesmerising quality.
46. Elvis Lives (1 a.m.)

This program is a mix of popular musicians singing renditions of Elvis Presley hits, and file footage of Elvis singing at various venues throughout his career. I have previously seen most, if not all of the file footage — though I have no memory of where or when I last saw it. It is hard to imagine anyone enmeshed in popular culture not to have some knowledge of Elvis. I enjoy the program; it is tasteful and appears to be well researched. A number of popular musicians talk about how Elvis influenced their careers. I assume the program is being repeated as the production values are too high for early morning television — it’s 1am, and only a few thousand viewers across the nation are viewing. Initially broadcast as a primetime special, Elvis Lives was a USA television special produced to promote the CD release, ‘ELV15: Thirty Number One Hits’. This replay of Elvis Lives is filling a network gap, and in doing so, keeping me company, while the world around me sleeps.

47. Observing Colin, Viewing TV

For several months, between living an alternative life, and moving back into mainstream society, Jean and I lived with relatives whose two children viewed many hours of television. In particular, their youngest son, Colin, noticeably found it difficult to move away from being in front of the television receiver. At ten or eleven years of age, Colin appeared to find the world of television considerably more engaging than the world beyond the screen. Colin’s face warmed to the characters and situations screened on television. Seated in front of the afternoon cartoons, he would laugh and laugh and laugh. A pale-skinned blonde-headed boy, Colin would at times sit so close to the television receiver that its blue light danced upon his face as if it were a screen. Whenever Colin was asked to do some minor task, such as setting the table or feeding the family dogs, his mother would have to repeatedly ask him — each time louder than the last. As Colin slowly rose and began to edge away from the television receiver, his body became increasingly contorted, for in Colin’s attempt to maintain eye contact with the screen, his head tilted further and further back; finally, it would appear as if his head and body would
have to separate — Colin would be still facing the television screen as the rest of his body made its way to do his mother’s bidding. When Colin’s head did eventually snap to the front, the focus of his attention appeared to turn inward, as if he were now recalling the world he had left behind.

48. Special Unit 2 (2 a.m.)

My body feels a sense of relief as the program’s end-credits roll. I found no aspect of the program engaging. Professionally, I find it surprising that a program with such an obviously thin storyline was able to find its way into production. Special Unit 2 is a poorly conceived science fiction program with a solid budget. I am not surprised when subsequent research reveals that Special Unit 2 was a short-lived American science-fiction/comedy series that lasted a season and a half from 2000-2001. The series focuses on the exploits of a top-secret Chicago police unit known as Special Unit 2. The unit is charged with the task of policing the city’s ‘Link’ population. ‘Links’ are the common monsters from folklore and mythology (except vampires). Special Unit 2, like Elvis Lives is obviously filling in network-time. I get the feeling that if you have to watch television at 2 am, then you will just about watch anything. And hence, the network fills in this time with its extensive backlog of programs, no matter whether they have been successful or otherwise.

49. From Viewing Colin To Caressing Ernie

For some time, I associated Colin’s relationship with the screen as somehow symptomatic of his age, something he would grow out of, yet when I visited my grandmother some time in 1979, I began to change my mind. As my grandmother switched on the television, she inquired, ‘Do you watch Ernie?’ My grandmother spoke warmly about the daytime television host Ernie Sigley; the tone of her voice suggested an intimacy between her and Ernie — as if Ernie was a friend. At one stage my grandmother positioned herself between the television receiver and Jean and myself, in order to better hear what Ernie was saying. Later, she turned to Jean and I and said, ‘Ernie can be such a lad sometimes.’
As she spoke, my grandmother’s hand all but stroked the television screen. On another occasion, during the same program, my grandmother leant forward to listen to a piece of gossip that Ernie was ‘sharing with her!’ My grandmother laughed at the punch-line, before turning to us, to make sure that we’d heard what Ernie had told her — she was completely comfortable with her physical interaction with the television receiver. My grandmother’s pseudo relationship with Ernie appeared to be a different interaction with the television host to that which she had toward The Saint, some eighteen years earlier. Back then, her comments about the actions of an actor in a drama appeared to be from afar — then, it was obvious to me that she was observing the antics on television. Back then, my grandmother and I sat side-by-side, each equidistant from the action, though not from the innuendo. Now, my grandmother’s voice suggested that she perceived there to be less distance between her world and the television character. My grandmother wasn’t demented; she was a fully independent person. Her apartment was spotless; she baked drop scones especially for my visit, and enjoyed our walk to the beach — so in that sense, my grandmother was still very much the person who raised me after my mother died.

50. Chains of Love (3 a.m.)

I felt embarrassed when viewing this program — an experience I have not felt at any other stage in my life when watching a television program. Without a shadow of a doubt, this is the most degrading piece of television ‘entertainment’ I have ever viewed. Somehow, Chains of Love slipped under my radar when it first appeared on television. The program consists of a male contestant chained to four female contestants. The contestants supposedly spend a number of days chained together. The concept of the program is ludicrous — I find it insulting. The male contestant is in charge of $10,000, and at certain times during the show a locksmith appears and demands that the male contestant release one of the females. The male dismisses the female that he likes the least. When releasing the female, the male decides upon the amount of money he will allocate to the female. Over the duration of several days, the process is repeated until one female is left. In the end, if the male wishes to pursue a relationship with the ‘successful’ female, he has to give her half of the remaining money. If the ‘winning’ female is
interested, she has the option of pursuing the relationship by meeting the male at a designated place, otherwise, she can take the money and run.

The program felt like the most contrived, ill-conceived piece of television I have ever watched. It was neither documentary nor fantasy. Not surprisingly, the series failed when initially released. Interestingly, when trawling the internet for information about this program, I could only find one reference to the Australian franchise of this Dutch concept. Of all the programs that appeared on the Nine Network over the twenty-four hour cycle, this is the only program that doesn’t appear to have any information. The one reference that did I find merely mentioned the name of the program’s hostess.

51. Death of Grace

I knocked on the back door and entered the kitchen. It was around 8 am. By now, Tony had usually milked the cows and was having breakfast. This morning however, the house appeared to be empty. As I turned to leave, I heard a faint weeping coming from the adjacent living room, followed by, ‘It’s alright Bruce.’ Tony’s mother-in-law stood, wiped her eyes, and walked towards me, ‘I was just having a little cry, Grace died last night.’ ‘Oh. … I’m sorry to hear that,’ I replied, I didn’t know what else to say, I didn’t know a Grace, or at least I didn’t think I did. Perhaps Grace was a local whom Tony’s mother-in-law assumed I knew. In a clumsy attempt to both console and make conversation, I asked, ‘How did Grace die?’ To which I got the reply, ‘She got blown-up by a bomb!’

The previous evening, Grace Sullivan was scripted out of The Sullivans — the script had Grace killed in a WWII London air raid.

52. The Sullivans [Double Episode] (4 a.m.)

My body immediately feels at ease. I find myself drawn into the story. The contrast between the previous program, Chains of Love, and The Sullivans is like chalk and
cheese. The previous program, though contemporary, seemed unreal, as if conceived by prepubescent boys, while the monochrome-rendered *The Sullivans* feels as if reasonably adjusted adults have been at play. The persona of each character is drawn from a world where the approach, attitude and understanding of life are recognisable portrayals of existence — as I understand existence in the context of living within suburban and urban Australia. The script is a well-crafted story that combines the ongoing through-lines necessary for a television serial (*The Sullivans* accumulated 1114 episodes), plus the need for each thirty-minute episode to contain a self-contained beginning, middle and resolution. These two episodes weave together a range of questions and observations concerned with the ethics surrounding theft, love, liberty and war.

In the course of this twenty-four hour cycle of commercial television, *The Sullivans* stands alongside the *Local News* and the naturopath segment in *Mornings With Kerri-Anne*, as moments when I felt a connection of sorts to the persons and circumstances represented on the television screen.

In this episode, a bit-of-a-rogue character openly talks about various items ‘falling off the back of a truck’ at the Melbourne dockyards. In particular, he tells a story about a piano that found its way into the home of one of his working-class mates, whose daughter is learning the piano. The lead male character, Dave Sullivan — a respectable model citizen (who won’t vote for the Australian Labor Party’s candidate, Ben Chifley, and who honours the British monarchy), laughs as he listens to the piano story. Dave doesn’t condemn the theft, though he does warn his friend about the dangers of doing such things.

In another sub-plot, Dave hopes to convince the army to accept his plans to modify an army rifle. Prior to his meeting with the army, Dave’s pacifist son confronts him; Dave is accused of developing a weapon that will enable soldiers to kill more people, faster.

Another theme woven through this double episode concerns innocence. The theme has three interlinked elements. Dave talks with his mates in the backyard about the exotic Egyptian women he encountered during WWI — during the course of the conversation,
Dave makes sure his youngest son can’t overhear the ‘man’s-talk’. This storyline is tastefully interwoven with a subplot in which Dave’s teenage daughter experiences her first romantic kiss, prior to her boyfriend leaving for boarding school. And finally, Dave’s second oldest son, ironically on duty in Egypt during WWII, is observing an old soldier friend of his father solicit a prostitute — the prostitute remembers another Australian soldier (during WWI) by the name of Dave Sullivan. The camera zooms in on Dave’s son, the program theme music wells — the melodramatic moment replicates all those melodramatic moments I have experienced, from *Days of Our Lives* through to *Chains of Love* — for a moment, it seems as if, in fact, I have not viewed 18 or 20 individual programs and some 700 advertisements, but rather, I have been watching a never-ending series of melodramatic moments.

53. **Primetime Thursday (Revisited)**

The mystery of Jack the Ripper / and his purser. / *Tonite* we bring you brand new evidence / just discovered ...

In the following chapter, I step through the screen, as it were, and journey along the paths travelled when making commercial television. The conversations I have, and the programs I observe being produced are a solid representation of the types of programs this chapter reflected upon — and in several cases are actually versions of the above programs.
CHAPTER SIX

COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION

1. Introduction

I turn off the receiver and place the kettle on the hotplate. For a moment the world of commercial television stays with me, though I don’t hold a particular memory of what I’ve been viewing — the residue of the television programs, like the smoke from the log fire and the aroma of freshly doused tea, permeates my surroundings. I am drawn to the roar of a high wind brushing the tips of the tallest trees in the valley. I draw the curtain. The junction grabs my attention. Swelled by two days of good rain, rapids crash over and between rocks — where only a few days ago still water found a drake courting his spring bride, now jetsam and flotsam sweep through the junction before disappearing around the bend.

In this chapter I ask, what is it like to be involved in the process of making commercial television? I venture beyond the electronic images flickering across my television screen, and the smear of bogong oil on my window, and venture ‘up-stream’ to a soak where some of the commercial television flow originates. My aim is to reflect and interpret the people and places in which commercial television is made. I do this by visiting a range of commercial television productions: news, advertising and drama. I also reflect on a number of conversations with a range of persons who work in commercial television.

This chapter has three main sections: The Industrial Estate; Ratings; Listening to the Professionals. The Industrial Estate reflects on the physical places where commercial television is produced. Ratings reflects on the central force governing each person and production. Listening To The Professionals reflects on the conversations I had with the persons who make the various production components of commercial television.
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION

In this chapter I observe actors and advertising agency owners, a corporate CEO and a menagerie of production people and production processes. I talk with commercial television executives, producers, scriptwriters, directors and presenters. Some of these conversations have been recorded onto cassette tape and transcribed, while other references are drawn from my diary, as well as my memory. It was not always appropriate, nor possible, to record all conversations. The aim of this data set is to walk across a good portion of the landscape of commercial television; to have recognisably stepped beyond the screen of my living room, to have become immersed in the diverse and complex world of commercial television — to have experienced this strange place that dwells beyond the glass of my cottage window and the glass of my television’s window on the world.

a. A cast of pseudonyms

Bob
Lifestyle Producer Bob has been working in commercial television since graduating from university. Bob began as a news reporter, before moving into documentary, prior to becoming a successful lifestyle and reality director and producer. His employment is based entirely on short-term contracts. Bob and I were fellow undergraduate students in the same university department.

Di.
Drama and soap opera director Di began her career as a Floor Manager. She has also worked in Film and Theatre. With the recent decline in Australia drama, Di has recently added scriptwriting to her repertoire; she is currently directing and scriptwriting for one of Australia’s leading commercial soap operas. Di and I were fellow undergraduate students in the same university department.
Jill.
Producer Jill was the presenter for a popular commercial television lifestyle program. Jill currently appears in commercials and advertorials. I met Jill at a conference.

Maxwell.
Soap, drama and lifestyle director Maxwell is one of the old-timers of Australian television and theatre. He has been a theatrical Shakespearian actor, having walked the boards in London, as well as a popular television actor for twenty years. Until recently, when not working, Maxwell lived nearby — he occasionally tutored in the university department where I work.

Mick.
Mick has an extensive background in directing corporate videos, music clips, commercial television, film and big budget television advertisements. Mick’s passion is film — his dream is to work in Hollywood. Shortly after this research, Mick directed his first feature film. Mick and his wife are old friends; I studied with both at university.

Noel.
News executive Noel is one of the leading executives in Australia commercial television news — he has also worked internationally. Noel has an extensive range of industry contacts; he deals with the top echelon of commercial television decision makers. I first met Noel fifteen or so years ago when supervising an excursion by university journalism students to television newsrooms.

Robert.
Production Manager Robert is both a manager and newsreader for an aggregated rural commercial network. Robert worked for Noel when he was a young reporter for a Sydney commercial network. I taught Robert at university — he was one of the students I was supervising when I first met Noel.

Yar.
Scriptwriter Yar has been a commercial television scriptwriter for over twenty years. He has held senior positions in scriptwriting departments, including being the script editor
for a number of successful Australian television series. Yar is highly respected in the industry — he has written children’s books, as well as books for adults, and scripts for stage and film. Yar and Di worked together on a popular Australian soap. In recent years, Yar has become a regular acquaintance.

2. The Industrial Estate

‘Hello, I’m Bruce Fell, I have an appointment with Noel Chef.’ From behind a thick glass partition two security officers scan my face and car. One of the officers diverts his gaze and inspects a clipboard — my name is there. A minute later I am handed a Visitors Pass — I clip it to my shirt pocket. One of the officers raises an arm and indicates towards the car-park; he tells me to park in the visitors section. I thank him. Neither he nor his workmate respond. I feel as though I am under surveillance. The boom gate rises. I drive forward. No sooner am I through than the boom descends behind me.

It’s very regimented. You’re a prisoner in certain ways. You work within your parameters and you do what you can within your parameters. You’re never going to make the show that you want to make.

(Di: Drama Director)

I park near the open doors of a production studio; the intense heat radiating from the car-park asphalt accentuates my sense of being in an alien place. I notice two young men constructing a TV Set. They momentarily look my way, before resuming their work. I sense their dismissive glance is due to the fact that I am not a television personality — just like the bird fossicking for scraps in the nearby rubbish bin, I am nothing more than a momentary distraction. Executives and stars, as well as laypersons, enter the network studio via the path I’m walking.

The main entrance to the Sydney studios of Network Nine is a glass atrium. The ten-metre square by three-story high atrium houses a number of gangly, broadleaf plants shaped by years of leaning against the glass walls. I feel as though I am entering an exotic world. Inside the atrium, a squadron of blowflies crash incessantly into the glass, the
corpses of their predecessors dot the thin aluminium shelving supporting the glass panelling — not unlike the dead flies, *Wagon Train*, Ricky Nelson, Graham Kennedy, Grace Sullivan and *Chains of Love* have all lived and died behind these walls. At the reception end of the atrium, a poster size photograph of the Network’s *A Current Affair* host greets me. The photograph captures the host leaning against a doorway; behind, a soft white curtain drifts in the breeze — softening the host’s hard smile. The photograph leaves me in no doubt that I am entering the world of television personalities.

It’s a world that’s full of big personalities, big egos, and passionate people.

(Di: Drama Director)

A reception desk stands five metres beyond the poster; the electronic breeze of an air conditioner dries my perspiration as I walk towards three manicured young women — a security officer looks on. Like the set builders, the receptionists have instantly noted that I am not a celebrity. I feel acutely ‘ordinary’. I get the sense that in this exotic world, being ‘ordinary’ is akin to one of two things — being invisible or being a security risk.

I don’t think any of them ever get over the thrill of being in television. I’ve been seduced by the same thing. It’s very hard not to be seduced by the idea that because you have such a high profile job, you are somebody special.

(Yar: Scriptwriter)

I inform the receptionist closest to me that I am here to see Noel Chef. She phones Noel, before inviting me to sit in the foyer, located between the reception desk and the atrium. Two large wide-screen monitors, one each side of the entrance, broadcast the network’s current program — a cricket match between Australia and India. The entire National Nine Network, from Brisbane to Perth, is owned by one of Australia’s richest families, the Packers, yet there are no references to the family — there are no statues or oil paintings of Sir Frank, Kerry or Jamie Packer. I think back to the library at my university where oil paintings of Vice Chancellors and other university dignitaries adorn the walls. In addition to the photograph of the *A Current Affairs* host are a dozen or more poster size photographs of the network’s current stable of stars. If the observations of newspaper
columnist, cartoonists and skit comedy writers are correct, many of these faces are better known than our nation’s leading scientists, religious dignitaries, and indeed Federal and State politicians. Following the death of Crocodile Hunter, Steve Irwin, the Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, said that in his travels to the USA, Steve Irwin was better known than the Australian Prime Minister (ABC National News 4.9.06).

The receptionist invites me to take the glass elevator to the second floor. As it climbs the atrium, I feel like a bird, I soar up beside and then above a number of the exotic palms and broadleaf plants — at the base of each windowpane, juxtaposing the green leaves and the glass is a thin bitumen-like highway formed by countless blowfly corpses. The elevator comes to a halt, the door behind me opens, I turn and step into a dark windowless place. Awaiting me is a poker-faced, pale-skinned man wearing a black pinstriped suit — I feel as if I have stepped onto an aluminium shelf.

There is no job security, ever. (Di: Drama Director)

Each time I enter the world of commercial television, I am aware of the high-octane mix of insecurity and adrenaline. It doesn’t seem to matter whether I am in a news, current affairs or drama department, people are walking quickly, eyes darting, ever vigilant of the new face. As I enter the newsroom, the network’s most senior journalist-celebrity peers across the floor at the stranger — having quickly summed me up, he assumes a Mick Jagger-like posture — pouted lips, protruding jaw and swaggering hips.

People have tantrums and tell each other to fuck off, because there is so much pressure; and the egos, everybody wants to be heard, everybody wants to succeed in whatever their avenue is. Tensions run high sometimes. There’s absolutely no political correctness in the industry, it’s better than it was. A lot of the touchy feely stuff has gone by the by – if it’s not, and it’s not reciprocated, then you have problems – but it’s a volatile world. It’s full of volatile passionate people, because the whole thing is, you are as good as your last job. That’s at the back of everybody’s minds. (Di: Drama Director)
I’m standing in the newsroom studio of Network Nine. The news presenter is about to sign off for the night. According to the ratings chart, approximately 800,000 Sydney viewers are watching either this bulletin or that of its main rival, Network Seven. (One station has 430,000 viewers and the other 370,000). Nationwide at 6 pm, approximately 2.8 million people are tuned into the Seven and Nine Networks. At the same time, a combined 1.5 million Australians are watching networks Ten, SBS and the ABC. (OzTAM Ratings 18.10.2004).

News and current affairs is totally blokey, totally cutthroat. The women that are involved in it are totally cutthroat. That part of the world doesn’t interest me at all. Creative people, I feel warm about them, they’re mad, but there’s a warmth about them, whereas journalists and all that, that’s totally about business, it’s totally about coming through people’s emotions and getting stories and getting the grittiest horrible stories so that you can get the ratings. I take my hat off to those who can do it, but I’m not that person. It’s not the world that I want to be part of.

(Di: Drama Director)

A wall-mounted TV monitor shows the presenter bidding his audience goodnight, before thirty seconds or so of footage tells the story of a ‘fluffy cat’ being rescued from a tree by the fire brigade. The final segment of the news is often referred to as the ‘fluffy cat’ story. I smile, here I am in the newsroom, and the fluffy cat story of the night is about a fluffy cat! Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction.

The mantra from the news is entertainment and information, and I’ve lived by that. If people can learn something and be entertained at the same time, then that’s great, you’re achieving something. And sometimes it’s just pure entertainment, and we need a bit of that too.

(Bob: Lifestyle Producer)

The network logo replaces the image of the rescued cat; by now the floor manager has stepped between the camera and the newsreader and begun praising the presenter’s news-
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION

reading prowess. A throng of activity erupts across the studio; some staff wish their workmates goodnight, while others begin a post-mortem of this and the concurrent Network Seven News — which has been screening silently on a monitor beside the one screening the Nine News. A debriefing session has begun.

Getting that feel right, getting that pace right, getting the rhythm right. All those things that will somehow connect you with that audience and make them want to watch and enjoy. … It’s the endless quest.

(Bob: Lifestyle Producer)

By now, in another department on another floor, a computer timeline has slotted the next sequence into the system. The viewers’ attention has been seamlessly refocused from the newsreader, to the fluffy cat, to a network promotion — ‘Tonite, a grisly find, with a bizarre twist’ — before the computer timeline slots a suite of advertisements into the system — ‘Making roast dinner tonight / ‘Impress the outlaws ...’.

The embroidering of news, network promotion and advertisements into the one cloth is due to the dexterity of men and women sitting in a cockpit-like cabin. Before them, stands a bank of television and computer monitors displaying multiple images and data sets. The central monitor (not unlike the window a pilot peers through) displays the network’s ‘On-Air’ content — the images viewers see when looking at the world through their television portholes. Unlike directors, personalities and production crew, the cockpit people are removed from the hands-on world of making television content — they have little or no physical contact with journalists, producers and network stars. Having walked from the newsroom to this place, it is as if I am in another world; it is conceivable that the physical lives of the cockpit people will never mesh with the actual makers of television content — yet cockpit people can spend their working lives within walking distance of the ‘big’ names.
One of the young actors on ### had a relationship. He filmed them having sex and released it over the Internet. She was working with people — guys out at Channel ### were dubbing it down and fuckin’ distributing it.

(Di: Drama Director)

The cockpit people sit in a softly lit capsule where the glow radiating from the banks of monitors reflects and dances across their cheeks and foreheads as they speak in a short, sharp, technical language — all the while, their eyes constantly scan the images and data sets before them. At this station, the cockpit people are located on a different floor to the production studio; in some complexes they are in another building, in other instances, another city, and in yet other instances, another country. The cockpit people navigate the network juggernaut through an interconnected-disconnected world of ‘backwards’, ‘cued-up’, and ‘what’s coming down the line’ time. For example, one of the cockpit clocks runs backwards, it helps the line-producer count in each new segment; as she counts, the person operating the control panel prepares to push a button — ‘ … and in five, four, three, two, … and switch’ — instantly, the image on the ‘Standby’ monitor (a reporter in Canberra) has jumped across to the ‘On-Air’ monitor. The previous On-Air image of the A Current Affairs host has jumped across to the Standby monitor. A make-up artist steps in front of the camera and powders the host’s forehead and nose. I find this more entertaining that what’s being screened via the On-Air monitor.

The multiple monitors before the panel operator and line-producer have both raw and edited footage — here, stories produced from Melbourne to New York are being downloaded or switched to air. The A Current Affairs host (on one monitor) practices introducing a reporter in Paris (on another monitor); unaware of the host rehearsing, the reporter in Paris fidgets in his seat. At the same time, on another monitor, a politician in Perth is adjusting his tie while waiting to be interviewed — he stares blankly in the direction of the cockpit people. On yet another monitor, a Hollywood celebrity is adjusting her microphone in readiness to be interviewed. The first of the advertisements (that will separate the interviews with the politician and the Hollywood celebrity) is cued
up on another monitor. On yet another monitor, the paused image from an international football match shimmers in readiness to screen the match-winning goal.

The people in this and other control room cockpits from Sydney to Paris make sure that each moment of each television experience has the correct audio levels, that the image is at the correct luminosity, that the cut to the reporter in Paris, or the cut to the soap opera star in Hollywood, or the footballer kicking the winning goal arrives in our homes ‘on time’, and that the advertisements on the timeline are cued and ready to go — only a catastrophic event, such as a passenger jet crashed into the Twin Towers, will interrupt the schedule.

When we were surrounded by bushfires, the first thing we did was turn on the television to see if it was on.

(Yar: Scriptwriter)

Back upstairs, I catch a glimpse of the newsreader being pampered by the executive producer’s secretary. I remember when the newsreader arrived at the studio this afternoon: the secretary straightened his tie and spent an inordinate amount of time discussing how well the tie complemented his shirt. I got the sense that this was all part of a daily ego massage.

A friend of mine once very eloquently put it, that the TV industry is full of lame dogs and spastics. It’s full of people who could not work anywhere else in the real world. There is a lot of ambition. There is a lot of passion.

(Di: Drama Director)

And while it’s tempting to be cynical, the newsreader is an important cog in the network’s revenue. The most famous newsreader at Network Nine (Sydney), Brian Henderson, is rumoured to have received a one million dollar per annum salary package. Henderson ‘appeared’ before the camera for approximately forty hours in any one year, introducing news stories, sports and weather segments, as well as saying, ‘That’s the way
it is on this day (date), I’m Brian Henderson, good night’. For the NSW region, Brian Henderson was the person at 6 pm (Monday to Friday) who attracted a large and loyal following. After Brian Henderson retired, the rival Seven Network took the mantle as the leading 6 pm news bulletin in Sydney. Unofficially, many at the Nine Network believe Brian Henderson had become a drawcard, his presence, being more important to the viewer than the content of the news itself.

a. An advertisement

I am in the backstreets of Artarmon at 7 am on a weekday morning. The last vestiges of a leafy suburban life stands on one side of the road, on the other, prefabricated buildings house mid-range computer dealers and office equipment suppliers. Not unlike the atrium at Network Nine, strips of aluminium appear to hold their glass walls in place — these sheer, arid, prefabricated buildings stand in stark contrast to the frangipanis and maidenhair ferns growing in the moist front yards of the established homes. Dark green wheelie bins, like fence posts, line each side of the street.

I walk down an unkempt industrial laneway and into a no-frills three-story production studio — no boom gates, security guards or glass atrium. Over the next three days a North Shore advertising agency will oversee the shooting of a television advertisement for a new series of automobiles. The advertisement will be shot using expensive 35 mm film. The raw footage will then be used to compile one thirty-second and one fifteen-second television advertisement.

The production crew have been signed up for three days. Each of the first two days are contracted for twelve hours, the third day has an option to run to fourteen — with no extra pay. I am told that the ‘12, 12, 14’ is a standard contract for this type of production. The production budget for the three days is around $200,000, though the exact figure is not revealed. The cinematographer will receive in the vicinity of $20,000 for his three days work, as will the director.
The setting up for the day’s shoot began at 5 am, though the director — an old friend, whom I’m staying with during the shoot — has just arrived. A friend of fifteen years, Mick has allowed me to occupy the inner sanctum of the production. I will sit, stand, eat and drink with the executive producer, the accounts manager, their assistants, the director, the director’s assistant, the floor manager and the cinematographer. Mick’s personal manager and business partner has been here since 6 am; he won’t stay for the production — his job is to make sure that Mick arrives and that the day begins on the right foot — Alan will spend most of the three days back in the office lining up the next contract. His assistant has been here since 5 am overseeing the arrival of the electricians, carpenters, film, audio and lighting production trucks, and most importantly, the catering staff. The caterer has prepared fresh coffee and a spread of Danish pastries, as well as fresh fruit (to eat-on-the-run) for the crew of fifty or so men and women working at breakneck speed — the first scene is scheduled for filming at midday.

Though there aren’t any pictures of network stars adorning the entrance to this studio, there is a star performer nonetheless — as Mick makes his entrance through the industrial roll-up doors, heads turn, Alan immediately walks towards him, followed by the floor manager and, shortly after, the caterer. Each of the persons here today and during the following two days will endeavour to strike up a conversation with Mick. The art of creating a conversation with Mick will require finding a time appropriate to their individual station. Persons in the inner production circle will have ongoing access to Mick; those outside of the circle will need to seize the moment when it arrives.

Alan informs Mick, ‘So far, so good,’ even though a portable water-wall feature is taking longer to assemble than anticipated. ‘We’ll play it by ear,’ says the floor manager. ‘It may come together in time,’ continues Alan. The water-wall sequence is an optional scene; it will be filmed, but it won’t make it into the final edit.

The floor manager is called away. Mick and Alan immediately begin discussing the latest developments in a possible contract with another agency. They have a close business relationship, each owns fifty percent of their production company. After a few minutes
of intense conversation, Alan turns to leave. ‘See ya mate,’ he says, already scrolling through his text messages. Alan’s work is done, he doesn’t intend returning until the afternoon of the final day to sign off on the production — making sure the advertising agency is happy and the business of paying people and the bumping-out of the studio is going according to plan. Seizing the opportunity, the caterer approaches: ‘Mick, would you like some bacon and eggs, muesli?’ Mick is a wheeler and dealer; the caterer got this gig as a result of providing ‘quality’, cut-price catering for a short film Mick recently shot — according to Mick, the next three days will more than compensate for the caterer’s tight margins on that film.

The production studio is awash with conversations about future projects as men and women diligently go about their work. Favours are offered in the hope that favours will be returned — the caterer pours Mick a freshly squeezed orange juice. No sooner has he taken a sip, than his assistant (The Assistant Director) calls him away. One of the sets hasn’t been painted, which means they are going to have to shoot to a different schedule. The caterer follows Mick and his assistant across the studio towards the unpainted set — juice in hand, she stands discreetly back from the conversation. When their eyes do eventually meet, Mick shakes his head: ‘I’m right thanks Maureen.’ In reality, Mick is too nervous to eat or drink; he was up at 5 am, vomiting — his career rides on the next three days. While he appears happy and jovial on the outside, nerves rack Mick.

Automobile advertisements are a big-ticket item in Australia television; if Mick directs this advertisement well, he will move from what he calls the ‘B’ league into the ‘A’ league. Last night, Mick’s wife talked confidently about Mick moving into the ‘A’ league — once there, they would be able to move out of their small rented flat in Kings Cross, buy a house, and begin a family.

Last night, today’s shoot was just about all we talked about; our voices drowned out the television receiver — that is, until the advertising breaks came on. Then, Mick studied each frame of each advertisement. When the advertising break was over, he would discuss and analyse one or more of the advertisements — this would include the directorial approach, the technology employed, as well as the agency and the advertising
history of each director and agency. Mick knew the name of the person who’d directed each advertisement, as well as the agency responsible for the production.

Mick and Alan have been planning today’s shoot for around six weeks, though the actual production dates weren’t locked in until three weeks ago. As a result, they’ve had to cancel filming a music clip with an up-and-coming pop band, which in itself has caused ruffles within that sector: ‘There’s no money in music clips, unless you’re in with ###’s ex-girlfriend, she controls it all. If you’re not in with her …,’ Mick said last night when justifying the decision. He acknowledges that cancelling the music video has set back his plans of moving deeper into the music video market — a market that doesn’t pay as lucratively as the advertising market.

The production of advertisements pays the bills for many aspiring Australian film directors, producers and production crew. The lucrative work is highly competitive; like many of the people at today’s shoot, Mick dreams of working in Hollywood. This is a hard-nosed world where opportunism rules. For example, today is the first time the cinematographer and Mick have worked together. The cinematographer is considered to be one of the best two or three cinematographers in Australia. He is in high demand and the dates for this shoot were scheduled around his availability — hence the cancelling of the music clip. In securing the services of the cinematographer, Mick chose not to honour a long-running relationship with a talented, but up-and-coming cinematographer; whose substantial creative flair — when filming productions with a low- to mid-range budget — contributed significantly to Mick being here today. I spent time with the young cinematographer several months ago, then Mick was directing a two-day $20,000 budget, in-house, corporate promotion. The young cinematographer’s dream, like Mick’s, is to work in Hollywood and, in part, he was pinning his hopes on Mick helping him up the ladder. The budget for this advertisement gave Mick financial access to the best equipment and crew available in Australia — Mick chose to place his career aspirations in the hands of an established cinematographer. To borrow from leading television producer Penny Chapman, to succeed in film and television, ‘You have to be bloody tough, and bloody brave, and bloody bloody-minded’ (Tuohy. 2004).
I learn later from Mick that the cinematographer had sat in his bath between 5 and 6 am, meticulously going through each scene of the advertisement, shot by shot. It’s a process I am told he goes through before the first day of every advertisement that he lights and films. ‘That’s why he’s so good,’ says Mick, ‘he never leaves anything to chance. He’s worked it all out before he gets here.’

The lighting-state for each scene is a significant aspect of both the director’s and the cinematographer’s ticket to the future. While in instances such as this advertisement, the director has the overall idea for the look and feel of the production, it is the cinematographer who colours the mise-en-scène using lights, reflector boards, and smoke machines. Over the next three days the cinematographer will make subtle suggestions to Mick about camera framing, angles and possible lighting variations. While Mick is the centre of attention for all those who want work on his next project, he is in awe of the cinematographer — over the next three days Mick will be given a master class in cinematography. It is vital for both men that the ‘look’ of this advertisement is the best that money can buy: ‘The pictures are so important mate. The lighting. He’s fantastic,’ Mick tells me.

b. Shot one, scene one

The viewer will first meet the car being advertised via a reflection in the car’s duco of a female’s long legs — a shot intended to associate ‘sexy legs’ with ‘sexy car’. The advertisement will use the reflection of the model’s legs twice. In total, there will be around four seconds of this image in the final edited advertisement. This is the first scene to be filmed on the first day; its filming time had originally been scheduled for midday, with lunch at 1 pm — it is now 2 pm, and the camera is about to roll for the first time. The scheduled five hour set-up time blew out to seven, due to a concern that the colour of the duco chosen for the sequence might not reflect the model’s legs as well as had been hoped. Another car was brought in, and after several rehearsals with the model and a great deal of discussion between the director, the cinematographer and the advertising agency chief executive, it was agreed that the original car’s duco best reflected the
model’s legs. A team of drivers from the automobile company are on standby throughout the shoot, should an extra car or car components be required. The duco of the car that will serve as the mirror has been polished and polished and polished. The attention paid to the duco of this and the other cars used throughout the production is almost impossible to convey in words. At all times the duco had to meet the cinematographer’s filmic expectations. To achieve this, a car detailer polished and repolished, flicked off dust and breathed onto the duco’s surface time and time again. Before each car scene, the detailer would caress the duco with a soft cloth, before once more breathing onto sections that weren’t buffed to his or the cinematographer’s liking — a process that continued right up to the moment before each shot. ‘Mate, you should see what they do to burgers on the Macca’s ads,’ said the gaffer (an electrician), on noticing my bemused observation of the car detailer.

Lunch at last. Today, lunch will feature fresh lobsters, prawns and oysters; the quantity and quality of the food will more than meet the appetite of the thirty or so people who have made it to the first lunch break. About fifteen or twenty people have finished their tasks and have already left the set. The caterer announces tomorrow’s menu to the main table, where Mick, the cinematographer and the advertising agency personnel are networking.

During the course of the next three days a whole range of networking takes place — the caterer is signed up for another advertisement, with a maybe for a short film. People run, rather than walk — to arrive half an hour early is perceived of as arriving on time. This is a world where if you let someone down, your chances of re-employment are almost nonexistent. I am told that there isn’t a person in the production that has been employed as a result of responding to an advertisement. Everyone (including myself) is here due to a network of friends and workmates. This is a word-of-mouth industry, a place of ‘mates rates’ and favours returned. For three days the background sound of the studio is one of what’s ‘coming up’ and what’s ‘going down’.
It’s very political, it’s extraordinary political. The whole networking thing is important to keep doing. And it’s also good to be working on your own stuff or putting something out there that people will want. It’s like being back at School, where everybody wants to be with the most popular person. If you’re down on your luck, nobody wants to have a part of you. So you always have to have this façade of [pause] — nobody’s doing nothing, everybody’s working on their own projects. Everybody’s doing commercials, everybody’s doing something. But the thing is that everybody knows that dialogue and the lines. You know that when you’re working on your own stuff, you are unemployed. It is really important to keep moving ahead and presenting yourself as somebody who they want.

(Di: Drama Director)

c. Another day at the office

Day two, and the second twelve-hours of production are in full swing. A set builder is putting the finishing touches to a ‘puddle’ that one of the cars will drive through – this will be the first shot of the day, scheduled for 9 am. With all the production equipment in place, today’s shooting regime is more intense than yesterday. The atmosphere is calm as each professional goes about his or her work. Mick has time for breakfast, his voice is louder than yesterday, his laughing and joking manner permeates the set. Over the course of the day various crewmembers praise Mick, both to his face and to each other — the feeling is that Mick is on the rise; many of the crew are hoping he’ll remember them when his next big advertisement goes into production. The day runs like clockwork, the crew are at ease as banter and in-jokes create a friendly atmosphere, and I feel as if I’ve known the persons around me for weeks, rather than hours — even the reserved Accounts Executive (representing the automobile manufacturer) hangs his Armani jacket on the back of his chair, before sipping his coffee and reading the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I spend most of the day videotaping the ordered process of filming an advertisement. By day’s end, there is an overall sense of achievement — Mick is optimistic about tomorrow; he’s thinking that we’ll finishing one if not two hours before schedule.
At lunch on the final day, Mick jokes with the owner of the advertising agency and the accounts executive. As the production’s three most powerful men laugh and slap each other on the back (literally and metaphorically), the crew dine on fresh Italian-style bread, olives, fetta, traditional charcoal baked chicken and garden salad. Though the production is a little behind the clock, due to a technical problem with the camera-crane when filming one of the cars coming out of the garage, everyone is confident that the production will finish on time. The advertising executive and Mick are talking about working with each other again — though I get the sense I’m listening to pillow talk. Lunch runs fifteen minutes longer than on the previous two days. People talk openly about the television industry.

I knew I always wanted to be in the Arts and I think I did have an interest early on. I remember making my mum take me to a Games Show. I remember her taking me to Sale Of The Century when they had the audience participation. I said to mum, ‘I got to go in there.’ I remember being totally swept up in the whole thing when I was there as a ten year-old, and the floor manager was making the thing, like ‘Kids, the one who claps the loudest will get a prize at the end.’ That was great for me — I worked very hard to get that, because I wanted to be part of that experience. Yeah, I think it’s had that certain sort of magic for me ever since.

(Bob: Lifestyle Producer)

d. The mistake

This will be the first and last time Mick works for the agency that has the account for the automobile being filmed. The advertisement will go to air. The automobile company will be satisfied with the advertisement and they will maintain their contract with the advertising agency, but not before a major hiccup. Mick has made a fundamental mistake that isn’t realised until the final scene of the day. The advertisement tells a story about a normal (desirable) woman and her normal (desirable) husband who live a normal (desirable) life — both characters are professional models. The viewer realises how wise this desirable couple are when, in the last scene, the attractive wife, sitting in their new
car, indicates to her handsome husband that they have made a ‘wise’ choice. The woman will point to her forehead ‘wisely’, while a strong male voiceover will announce the company’s signature call.

The female model was selected from a portfolio of attractive models, based on her ‘great legs’ — her legs being an important visual hook for the opening scene of the advertisement. However, the final three seconds of the advertisement require the model to act — to perform the seemingly simple gesture of pointing to her forehead. However, if her finger doesn’t move correctly, or if the look on her face is not the correct ‘look’, then the ‘wise’ gesture could be read as ‘unwise’. The mistake that Mick has made is that he didn’t audition an actress for the ‘wise’ scene. Mick has underestimated the degree of acting required in the final three-second shot — which is the only acting component within the advertisement. Mick mistakenly assumed the model had performance skills.

The model raises her finger and points to her forehead — there is a ripple effect across the studio. The account executive looks up from his spreadsheet, closes his laptop, stands, and walks to the monitor, where the rigid stances of the advertising agency owner and his assistant belie their attempt to appear unconcerned. The director is now acting; that is, Mick is now running a thousand options through his head at a thousand miles an hour, and all the while appearing cool, calm and collected — the model can’t act! Though she successfully performs on a catwalk — a stage upon which one makes large theatrical gestures — acting for the camera requires an internal process. For example, on stage, one raises one’s hand to accentuate a certain emotion; however, when acting for the camera, to achieve the same result, one raises one’s eyebrow.

A multi-million dollar television, radio and newspaper campaign, not to mention the livelihoods of the advertising agency staff, the account manager, and a whole string of promotions people is riding on the outcome of a three and a half second shot. The production shoot is currently ninety minutes behind time — this only allows for a half-hour buffer before the days fourteen hours are up. Today’s long lunch seeped into a meandering re-commencement of proceedings. Prior to the model raising her finger, the
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION

thirty-minute buffer appeared to be more than enough time; now it is nowhere long enough. Mick has to quickly find a way to make contact with the model and teach her the art of acting for the camera. I watch the advertising agency owner watching Mick and the model; he is both bemused and exasperated; he believes that he could instruct the model more competently than Mick. Prior to running an advertising agency, he was an Australian household icon; as an actor, he headed up a popular television program on the ABC.

One hour and an inordinate amount of expensive film stock later, Mick turns to the advertising agency owner, his assistant and the accounts executive, and says, ‘I think we have something in the can — we can mix and match.’ There is now no doubt that Mick and the advertising agency won’t work together again. Mick is embarrassed, and the advertising agency owner is ropeable — he nods disdainfully, before turning to the accounts executive, where he attempts to sell Mick’s story. The advertising agency owner is the meat in the sandwich — he runs the risk of losing a lucrative account.

Meanwhile, Mick’s business partner Alan has been occupied in fast and furious negotiations to extend the fourteen hours to sixteen. While there are grumbles in some corners, there are no bold-faced complaints about having to work an extra two hours without pay, on top of having already worked fourteen hours for twelve hours pay. Any open complaint could mean that the person in question may not be contacted for Mick’s next job. It is well known that the director is ambitions, and though he has made a mistake, the general consensus is that he will continue to ‘pull in the work’.

e. All’s well that ends well

A fortnight later and both the thirty and fifteen second versions of the automobile advertisement have been edited and await final approval from the automobile corporation’s Australian CEO. I’m sitting in a plush state-of-the-art production suite with Mick, the agency owner, his assistant, the accounts director and Alan. At a glance this room is not all that dissimilar to the place where the cockpit people work at Network
Nine; however, in addition to a wall lined with monitors, this cockpit has several lounge chairs, a coffee table and a bar fridge. All eyes are peering through the room’s smoky-grey glass door towards the reception bay — we have been waiting forty minutes or so for the CEO. The tension in the room is palpable — the CEO has cancelled on two previous occasions — today is a ‘must’ meeting. The CEO is meant to view a rough-cut (draft-edit) of each new advertisement before the final screening. However, this has not transpired on this occasion — evidently there have been hiccups in his corporate world. Nonetheless, he has to give his personal approval before the advertisement can launch his corporation’s multimillion-dollar media campaign.

The agency owner announces, ‘There he is,’ before stepping outside to greet the man who can ‘make or break’ his day. Following a brief round of introductions and pleasantries, the CEO sits by himself in the middle of a three-seater black leather couch directly opposite the central screen — he doesn’t want coffee, nor does he appear interested in the spread of chocolates and pastries resting on the table before him. I get the distinct impression that he has places to go and deals to do. The CEO becomes noticeably agitated when a technical fault is discovered in the central monitor — another monitor is procured from an adjacent studio. Awkward smiles circle the room as several technicians busily fix the problem. Meanwhile, the CEO has stepped outside to make a phone call. Ten or so minutes later and the new monitor is ready. Finally the moment arrives, a countdown illuminates the screen: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two — each second seems as if to last a minute.

The thirty-second version of the advertisement runs its course — the sculpted smiles and cheery eyes that initially scanned the CEO for approval have receded into trepidation as the CEO stares blankly at the plate of chocolates. A worrying silence, like the eye of a storm, hangs in the air. It turns out that the CEO is not happy with the last two and a half seconds of the advertisement; he doesn’t like the colour of the car in the last sequence. He thought they had agreed on a blue, rather than red, car. He asks for the advertisement to be replayed — at the completion of which the worrying silence returns. For the next ten minutes the CEO, the advertising executive, his assistant and the accounts manager
discuss the merits of the final two and a half seconds of red car. Mick is sidelined from this conversation and, like me, stands at the periphery watching — any concern about the model not being able to act has long since passed. Alan slides back and forth between Mick and the main cohort. Finally, the accounts manager breaks away from the discussion and asks Alan, who in turn asks Mick, for an estimate to digitally change the colour of the car from red to blue. The CEO leaves the room; through the smoke-grey glass door he can be seen talking earnestly on his mobile phone. Back in the viewing room the atmosphere is one of considerable concern. While the problem is technically the CEO’s — after all, it was the CEO who cancelled the appointment to view a draft of the advertisement, and had he not cancelled, the ‘red car/blue car’ problem could have been addressed — no one is countenancing drawing this technicality to the CEO’s attention. Ten or fifteen minutes pass before a quote comes back from Sydney’s leading digital production house: a ballpark figure for changing the colour of the car from red to blue will come in at around $40,000. The CEO returns; in terms of the automobile company, the money is not an issue, the CEO is seriously considering going for the digital option. However, the problem that emerges is in the rescheduling of the release date of the campaign. This is a nuisance for the CEO, but not something he won’t countenance; he has a bee in his bonnet, he is considering pushing back the release date so that the final two and a half second scene of the advertisement projects the image of a blue rather than red automobile.

Unbeknown to the CEO, media space has already been booked — pushing back the release date will cut into the advertising company’s profit, if not wipe it out altogether. The agency has unwisely booked television and print advertising time. Mick informs me that the commercial television networks and print media will want their money, advertisement or no advertisement. The advertising agency owner’s assistant, an attractive, full-busted, no-nonsense woman, takes a calculated gamble: ‘I like it, I like the red; it gives the whole thing a lift’. The CEO looks at his watch. It looks like he needs to be somewhere else — ‘Okay,’ he replies, before repeating himself a number of times, ‘Okay … Okay … Okay, okay, we’ll run with it.’ Now the CEO is acting as if he liked the red car option all the time. He asks for the advertisement to be played again — at the
end of which, he says, ‘Good.’ Everyone is suddenly best friends — praise of the advertisement, the automobile itself, and the advertising strategy bounce from one player to the next. As if to stamp his authority, the CEO ends proceedings by saying, ‘I still think the blue would have …’ ‘Yes,’ cuts in the advertising agency owner, as if he too had considered the blue car as a better option — on cue, like a partner in crime, the accounts executive puts the deal to bed, ‘I like the red, like Margaret said, it gives the whole thing a lift.’ Resigned to ‘their’ fault, though convinced ‘his’ option would have been better, the CEO nods his head, before quickly saying goodbye — in a flash he is out the door and beyond the foyer. The agency owner collapses onto the floor, literally, once the CEO is out of sight. Margaret yells, ‘Fuck’, the accounts director uncharacteristically exclaims, ‘Phew’, while Mick and Alan make derogatory comments about the CEO’s cancelling of the earlier appointment. By now the agency owner is back on his feet and laughing, he phones his favourite restaurant and books a table for six — champagne will flow well into the afternoon, but the topic of Mick and the agency working together again will not be raised.

To my eye, the advertisement Mick directed looks as slick as any automobile advertisement on television. The cockpit people will blend it seamlessly into the never-ending flow of commercial television — a pair of long elegant legs, reflected in the duco of an automobile, introduces a thirty-second story about a young happily married couple who have made a wise choice!

It is all about selling advertising. The people up the top … they want a show that’s going to sell advertising.

(Di: Drama Director)

f. Lathering the soap

Here, I observe the production of a commercial soap opera. A substantial difference between the production of both soap opera and situation comedy in Australia, compared to advertising and, in some instances, drama, is the budget, combined with a certain
degree of artistic licence. Around ninety percent of soap opera and situation comedy productions are recorded in production studios, drawing on regular production sets and crew. Advertisements and action drama usually require some, if not all, scenes to be recorded in one-off locations, requiring specialist crew — from set designers building puddles, to stuntmen diving out windows — these types of productions require a larger budget than studio-based productions. In 2006, there were only two or three commercial Australian dramas in production.

The big problem is that … [Australian content] is always being compared to American programs, which have enormous budgets, and Australian dramas don’t. That’s the big thing with Stingers, they want ER, but we’ve got … the budget that we get is about half of one of the ER actor’s budgets’.

(Di: Drama Director)

Not unlike the production location for the advertisement, this soap opera is recorded in a cold cement grey building — one amongst a complex of similar buildings standing in a square industrial block bordered by a freeway and three busy thoroughfares. As I drive past security cameras, discarded packing crates and industrial dumpsters, I get the sense of being in the loading bay of a supermarket — grease or oil has permanently stained the path ahead, food wrappers thatch the wire fence like tumble weed. I enter the building via a loading ramp; a well-known actor is sitting on the edge of the ramp taking in the sun, smoking a cigarette and chatting with a security guard and a tradesperson — we exchange pleasantries. Once past the loading bay, I am immediately before the soap opera production set. I am standing before a glamorous world, the mise-en-scène before me represents what millions of Australians, indeed millions of people worldwide, perceive as the place where familiar faces live out their lives. For many of the viewers enchanted by the world of soap, the scene I stand before is a glamorous one, but in reality, I am standing in a world of short-term contracts and rating-driven decision-making.

The grey cement floor is cold — if I turn one way, I see a forklift, plus sections of a set not in use, stacked against the building’s unpainted cement brick wall. If I turn another
way, I see the on-camera world of the soap opera. I don’t have the frame of my television screen to crop out the industrial nature of this world. The ceiling of the building is three storeys high. Above the set, steel lighting grids and other industrial piping weave a purely-human cosmos — the production area is draughty, my ankles are cold.

You have to be happy to work in confin es and to other people’s specifications. It can be shallow and it can be mediocre and all those things. A lot of the actors that you work with are incredibly talented creative people. Those older actors … they know that they’re fuckin’ lucky to have a gig.

(Di: Drama Director)

During my one-day visit to the soap opera set, an entire episode (about twenty-four minutes) is recorded — indeed has to be recorded. I will spend most of the day in the director’s booth, which is a bit like the cockpit at Network Nine, only smaller in dimension and with fewer monitors. The booth is located on a mezzanine floor above the production floor. The director sits facing four monitors. Three of the monitors display the image of the camera they are connected to. The fourth monitor screens the camera filming the current action — the image being recorded. For example, where two actors are talking to each other, camera-one might frame a close-up of the first actor, camera-two might frame a close-up of the second actor, while camera-three might frame both actors. Each camera is connected to a switch in the director’s booth/control room. The selected button sends the corresponding camera image off to the VCR or hard drive to be recorded.

In a small glass-encased console beside the director, a man sits before an audio console. Like an overblown balloon, the man looks as if he’s about to burst — bottles of soft drink and chocolate bars cover his workspace. Seated in isolation, he monitors the audio levels, just in case the pre-calibrated audio adjustments need to be altered — they usually don’t.

Seated beside the director, with clipboard in hand, a woman in her late twenties is taking notes. Melanie’s job is part director’s assistant and part accountant’s assistant. A
significant aspect of her job is to log ‘downtime’— this is non-productive time that might be due to a camera being out of focus, an actor not remembering their lines, or any other mishap that unnecessarily halts production. Each type of downtime has a specific code number; Melanie jots down the amount of time lost beside the appropriate code — at the end of the day the codes are calibrated. The director (Maxwell) informs me that if a person gets too many ‘bad marks’ they are dismissed, that is, unless the downtime they cause is outweighed by their contribution to the program. Maxwell complained that some of the bit-part actors (actuals) have been chosen for their roles because they are, in real life, the type of character being portrayed — ‘Hoods play hoods, bunnies play bunnies,’ sighs Maxwell, before telling the following story:

I complained about one of them once. We were losing so much production time because this kid just couldn’t remember his lines. I went up to the producer and said, ‘This is bloody ridiculous’. The producer pulled out a cardboard box full of fan mail and said to me, ‘Have you got any idea what some of these girls are offering to do for that boy? We get a box full every week’ — you learn to deal with it.

Maxwell calls ‘Cut.’ One of the actuals is having problems with the script. Maxwell stands and announces that he’s going down to the floor. He has turned red in the face — as he exits, the feeling in the cockpit is more ‘ho-hum’ than concern. I get the sense that Maxwell is being petulant — perhaps he wants to emphasise the story he’s just told me. It is rare for the director to go onto the set during recording sessions. During rehearsal, the director sits with or walks through the script with the actors; however on production day, the director usually remains in the booth and any face-to-face negotiations on the floor are usually carried out on the director’s behalf by the floor manager — who is in constant intercom communication with the director. With Maxwell having decided to go down to the production floor, the ‘conveyor belt nature’ of the drama-factory grinds to a halt. Maxwell’s assistant reaches for the clipboard and marks the appropriate column. Via the three studio cameras, the monitors in the booth capture three loosely connected fragments of the production floor. In addition to the three cameras, the studio microphones capture
the shuffles and conversations of cast and crew. The main camera captures two actors sitting at a table; the actors have slipped out of character and begun chatting. As if the camera were not on her, and the microphone were turned off, one of the women begins talking frankly about her new contract. As if sitting at the table with them, the production crew in the booth watch and listen to the conversation. There is a surreal domestic or staff-room feel about the moment, yet, if this conversation were recorded and put to air, thousands, if not millions of viewers would be eager to get ‘inside’ the world of this character. I can see Maxwell in the corner of another monitor; he is no longer red-faced, rather, he is smiling and befriending the actual — he instructs the actual in how to perform the scene in question. By now the actor in the main monitor has stopped talking about her new contract and has moved onto talking about how much she is enjoying a pot of flowering pansies on her veranda — the crew in the booth nod when the actor talks about how much she’s looking forward to the weekend. Maxwell rushes in and sits down; Melanie alerts the floor-manager of his return, who in turn announces to the floor, ‘Standby.’ Melanie begins counting, ‘And ten, nine, eight …’ I can hear the floor-manager, via the intercom speaker, harmonise with Melanie, ‘Seven, six, five …’ Having readied themselves, the two female actors slot straight into the script, the actual enters the scene and successfully delivers his line.

You can be as creative as you like in this industry, as long as you come in on time and in budget.

(Maxwell: Drama Director)

The image that I found encapsulates the difference between Noel’s world of directing news and current affairs, Mick’s world of directing advertisements, and Maxwell’s world of directing soap opera, can be found in the presentation and consumption of food. Unlike the catering that provided sumptuous treats during the production of the automobile advertisement, the crew working on Maxwell’s soap opera purchased meals via a food and drink van that made several deliveries a day to the industrial estate where the studio is located. Maxwell sipped instant coffee out of a styrofoam cup — there was no caterer standing by with a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. The only cooking
facility is a make-shift kitchen where the food required for on-camera presentation is prepared — in most instances this food is not eaten. Between scenes, actors and crew sit in the dispatch bay smoking cigarettes and sipping out of soft drink cans. On another occasion, when visiting the production of a situation comedy at one of the networks, the production crew and actors accessed the network canteen, just like Noel’s news and current affairs crew: receptionists, reporters, presenters, actors, directors, editors, etc., stood in line — equal before the steaming bain-marie.

Every show has got its pluses and every show has its minuses. And you have to focus on the pluses, because if you focus on the minuses you are just going to be miserable. And your work always suffers and if work suffers you don’t get employed.

(Di: Drama Director)

3. Ratings

I was initially drawn to the centrality of ratings on the very first occasion that I oversaw a class of university journalism students visiting a commercial television newsroom. The executive producer of news, Noel Chief, whom I didn’t know at the time, invited us to his office after the 6 pm bulletin had gone to air. After pleasantries and some inside stories from the world of television, Noel asked my students if they could tell him, ‘What is a good news story?’ The students responded by saying that a good news story should be balanced; that a reporter should be neutral; that a good news story must always get its facts and figures correct. Noel listened carefully, sympathetically nodding his head from time to time. When the students had exhausted their list of attributes for ‘a good news story’, Noel calmly announced, ‘A good news story is one that delivers the audience to the advertiser.’ He then implied that when the students understood this important element of commercial television journalism, then, and only then, would they be considered for a position within his newsroom.

Noel made that statement to my students approximately fifteen years ago. More recently, in late 2003, a news and current affairs commercial television executive producer
reinforced this longstanding mantra. It was 9.30 am; the previous evening a rival network had attracted 200,000 viewers from the executive producer’s average weekly audience. The executive producer was clearly annoyed as he hopped into my car. Before I had driven out of the Bathurst airport car park, he was waving a ratings printout in my direction. He had marked in yellow highlighter the shift in audience numbers from his program to the opposing network. ‘I can take it for a couple of weeks, but if it keeps up they’ll cop me fuckin’ head off.’ His comment links the intervening fifteen or so years, and in doing so, highlights the through-line ratings has in commercial television. Every commercial television person I spoke with emphasised the importance of ratings:

_The Resort_ was ditched after six episodes, they had others in the can but they didn’t go to air because ratings started to plummet.

(Jill: Television Presenter)

- It’s about ratings, it’s about money, it’s always about money …

(Di: Drama Director)

The ratings company OzTam e-mail their subscribers the television ratings of the previous night. The ratings e-mail contains three attachments. The first attachment contains a minute-by-minute breakdown of viewing habits over the previous twenty-four hour period. A producer can chart the flow of viewers from one network to another; for example, from the Nine Network to the Seven Network. The minute-by-minute audience flow can then be compared with a number of variables. For example, the data can be placed beside the particular storyline and/or personality appearing on camera at a particular time. Hence, television executives can observe specific trends. For instance, one network executive noticed that whenever a certain reporter appeared on screen, a significant proportion of viewers switched channels. As a result, that reporter no longer appears on camera.

The second attachment provides the overall viewer-rankings from the number one program (the most popular) through to the least popular for the previous twenty-four
hours. On any given weekday evening approximately fifteen programs nationwide each have an audience of over one million viewers. Around one million viewers is the minimum requirement for a primetime program — two million viewers is achieved on only a handful of occasions, and three million viewers, once or twice a year. The third attachment consists of three databases (A, B & C). The ‘A’ database is a fifteen-minute breakdown of audience trends. It charts how many of the sampled houses had their television/s turned on and what stations the television/s were tuned to. This database is further broken down into the demographics of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth households (Hobart is not included). An NRL Grand Final might rate Number One in Sydney, yet rate Five in Melbourne (the home of AFL). The ‘B’ database in this attachment fits numbers of people per State to the first database. The ‘C’ database is a progressive percentage read-out of viewers for the week across all channels and across Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

In total, around eighty A4 pages are scrutinised. The focus on ratings is the one constant across all facets of commercial television, be it at the level of management, executive, producer, director, scriptwriter, actor or presenter — all of these people are remunerated in relation to the numbers of viewers that tune into their network program. The ratings chart that the current affairs executive producer waved at me was the ‘A’ fifteen-minute intervals database:

‘They’d put on the fucking Wiggles if they thought it would rate better …’

(News and Current Affairs Executive Producer)

As we saw in Chapter Five, the bulk of the content screened on commercial television is produced in the USA. To this end, the producer’s Australian-based comment falls in line with USA and other international approaches to television programming — as can be seen at the 2004 annual MIPCOM International Audiovisual Trade Show. For example, one program on offer (an extreme version of *Chains of Love* discussed in Chapter Five) is a reality series based around the production of a pornographic film. Titled *Private Stars*, the series consists of five male contestants pitted with five female pornographic film
actors. The television component of the program stops short of showing explicit sexual acts: ‘if viewers want to see more, they need to buy the DVD or they can go to our Internet site where they can follow the action in real time’ (‘Porno Wannabes’, 2004).

They’re simply trying to find the newest most outrageous thing that they can find to push the ratings.

(Yar: Scriptwriter)

They don’t care. If they knew that two million people are going to watch a Nun undress, they would shoot it. Because it would get good coverage. They are actually fairly unscrupulous about what they do.

(Di: Drama Director)

The ‘they’ that Yar, Di and others talk about are an elusive group of people. Many of the people I interact with in this chapter hire and fire staff. At the same time, they are themselves at the mercy of a higher level of management. Most of the people I interact with here are employed to tweak a program so that it will rate. From the perspective of a viewer, the people I’m interacting with in this chapter are significant identities in commercial television; yet, within the context of their work environment, they are all vulnerable:

The only thing that’s important is to push for higher ratings.

(Yar: Scriptwriter)

The consequence of a program not rating well (having less than one million viewers during primetime) is that the production of future programs and series will be cancelled. As a result, large numbers of people across all production sectors, from carpenters building sets, to computer graphic artists creating program logos, won’t have their contracts renewed. Several days after the current affairs executive producer waved his
ratings sheets in my direction, a senior executive producer associated with that network’s news and current affairs department was sacked. The executive producer I spoke with was promoted — the proviso being that he would improve ratings. This state of flux, due to ratings, reverberates across the landscape of commercial television. While the current affairs executive is contracted ‘fulltime’ (or as long as the numbers are good), this is not the case for many of the people who are central to the production process of commercial television. These persons have no say in program content, yet ratings is none-the-less central to their employment.

There is no job security ever. You know, the longest you get employed is two or three months in one trot. So, it’s a bit of swings and roundabouts kind of situation. A big part of me longs to have a regular job and a regular wage with paid holidays. I haven’t had paid holidays since 1983.

(Di: Drama Director)

Ratings affects how television makers approach their work, the decisions they make, the emotional rewards they receive and the justifications they draw on in finding their ‘happy mix’.

Finding that happy mix where you’re satisfying the network’s demand for ratings and your own cravings to get things right, and making sure that somewhere along the line that you’re not making those lines blurred — if they have negative connotations. And that’s difficult sometimes, it’s easy to take the knife to something and turn it into something that represents a reality that wasn’t the case when you shot the thing. That’s always a challenge, to try and retain integrity within what you do.

(Bob: Lifestyle Producer)

Everybody in an ongoing show is kind of in the same dilemma. It is all about selling advertising. … In that way, you think, okay, I’ll tell the story — because you’re not about to shoot yourself in the foot. If you don’t tell the story you haven’t
done your job. So you have to, every now and then, put your own thoughts on the back burner and tell the story as you see fit. You can voice, you can say ‘this is stupid, this is ridiculous’, at the end of the day the ratings will agree or disagree with you.

(Di: Drama Director)

Drama director Di tells a story where the very mood and approach of television executives is shaped by ratings, and in this sense, we can get a further insight into how ratings affects content. Di had just completed an episode for a top rating Australian drama; this entailed reading the script, auditioning and choosing support characters, negotiating subtle changes in the script, as well as enhancing character development, scouting about and choosing locations for the outdoor scenes and generally infusing the script and mise-en-scène with as many engaging elements as she could devise. Having directed the filming, Di then directed the editing of the program, plus oversaw music especially written for the episode, as well as sourcing specific sound effects. This particular script had a Christmas theme and was to be screened in the period leading up to Christmas. As usual, having completed the production, Di and the drama series producer screened the program to network senior executives prior to the program going to air. Unbeknown to Di, the network ratings had been particularly bad the night before. As we shall see, though the bad ratings of the night before had nothing to do with Di, or the program she had directed, the senior executives brought to the screening an attitude influenced by the previous nights ratings:

The EP [Executive Producer] said, ‘Oh I hate fucking Christmas episodes,’ Great! Ratings weren’t good the night before, so they came into the screening, and they were in a really shitty mood. You know, I had little Christmassy things, thinking, they want Christmas! So I’ve just gone, ‘Oh man.’ So we had to pare back all the Christmas stuff out of there – that wasn’t pleasant. That’s when things are outside of your control. That is one of the great lessons of the industry, don’t take things personally, even when you feel at the time that they’re nothing but personal. You
just have to get that thick skin and water off a duck’s back. Because it’s all about
business. It’s about money.

(Di: Drama Director)

4. Listening To The Professionals

The names of some of the actors mentioned in the following section are pseudonyms. I
begin this section with Di talking to me about how much influence she has, as a
commercial television director:

That’s kind of where the powerlessness of your situation gets frustrating, because
you can say, yeah I make it, but I don’t particularly agree with this way of thinking.
You can turn it off, but I get paid. Sometimes you like the stories you’ve been given
and sometimes you don’t, you don’t have that choice, you don’t have that luxury
half the time.

By and large the persons I observed and mingled with acknowledged that television, in
particular commercial television, is influential — the following comments by Di capture
this sense:

You’ve got to acknowledge that it’s part of our life, and it’s extraordinarily
powerful. People get fixated on the world [of TV]. I mean, just the amount of fan
mail that comes in. People do see the people in their lounge room [on TV] as part of
their family. The thing that I think is a bit of a worry is the fact that the box in the
corner has become their society. The fact that what you do make gets shown in
people’s lounge rooms, it actually means it becomes part of their life.

Scriptwriter Yar casts further light on the influential nature of television — the script for
one of his regular series had a well-known character having an affair. Yar takes up the
story when the actor whose character is having the on-screen affair is with his actual
wife, shopping at their local shopping centre:
He and his wife were in the supermarket and one of their neighbours – a seemingly intelligent woman, came up and took the wife aside and said, ‘I’ve got to tell you, Ron is having an affair.’ Because she had seen Ron having an affair on TV!

There are many aspects of the relationship between television production and the viewer. While Yar’s story is different to Maxwell’s (infatuated fan mail), they both provide me with insight into how the viewer is reading the television screen. Di further fleshes out this complexity when recalling an event where she is socialising with the soap opera actor Lee Batch whose on-screen persona is a character named Amanda:

If you’re out in a social situation with an actor, they are like public property. People won’t come up to her [Lee Batch] and say g’day Lee, they say, g’day Amanda. They will have this real familiarity with her because she visits them every night. But they will not see that she is Lee Batch, they will see that she’s Amanda.

The three stories above can be read in terms of viewers being intrigued and/or infatuated by a television personality, rather than somehow misperceiving reality. However Di challenges this notion; in doing so she recalls an event where the television actor is victimised, because the character that the actor portrays is a slow ‘thick’ person:

When I worked on ###, there was an actor whose character was a real dag. Yet Ryan is a very smart, witty — like he’s hilarious. He’s on one of those skit shows now. The amount of times he came in for the show on Tuesday to start rehearsals that he’d been in a fight on the weekend — all because people were giving him a hard time about his character. He just got into fights all the time.

One could be forgiven for jumping to the conclusion that these types of stories are isolated instances involving a few misguided individuals. Yar also challenges this notion; he drew to my attention that large numbers of people acquire similar misunderstandings of and about television drama:
There was a survey done in Britain in 1993. Asked if they didn’t live where they lived now, where would they most want to live, and the winner was Summer Bay, the fictional town in *Home and Away*. They did a survey of Australian primary school children in 1996 and asked them, who was their most admired Australian, and the winner was Pipa, from *Home and Away*, the foster mother. That ability to [pause] even though they know something is fictional, to almost will it into reality, because they so much wish it to be reality, is a capacity which even educated and intelligent people have.

Yar’s ‘educated and intelligent people’ regularly view persons engaged in daily activities, such as driving automobiles to identifiable locations, or performing complex tasks, such as an operation in a hospital theatre. While the stories may be fictional, the technology embroiled within the action occupies the same all-day, everyday world in which the viewer lives — a conundrum that further complexifies the relationship between the viewer and that being viewed, as Di explains:

> They realise that you can’t do a brain operation in 45 minutes; everybody has that knowledge of the medium. But they still see the actors as the characters by and large. They see [pause] they think that Georgie Parker can really do emergency tracheotomy. I mean; they are surprisingly gullible. Surprisingly accepting. When the John Howard character on *All Saints* — his first episode — the line at the end of it was telling the Georgie Parker character, ‘Don’t fuck with me’. The amount of letters, mail, everything that came in — they had to take out a full-page advertisement on page three saying — ‘These people really like each other’, because people can’t differentiate.

The ‘people [who] can’t differentiate’, as Di observes, include children who go on to have careers in television; some end up occupying influential positions. One example is production manager and newsreader, Robert:
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION

You certainly often hear about television being described as the baby sitter. I think it’s fair to say that television plays a very big role in the development of young people’s views of the world, a very big role, everything from the way television programs are structured, the moral code of messages in programs from *Play School* [ABC] right through. In those formative years television plays an influential role. … Television was definitely my third parent. Absolutely, absolutely.

Robert’s and Di’s observations further flesh out the nature of television’s shaping power. They helped me to further consider how normal everyday readings of commercial television take place within everyday, usual, domestic circumstances. To this end, Yar provided me with two examples of how viewers invest emotionally in television:

I remember when I was on *A Country Practice* we had once said that ‘Cookie’ had spent WWII as a cook in the centre of Australia. Six or seven years later, a whole new generation of storywriters had Cookie saying, ‘When I was on the Kokoda Trail’. Now the stream of letters that we got from people who remembered from six or seven years ago, a casual aside by Cookie! So for people to remember at that level, is a level of the dedication that you can only have with your closest, intimate friends.

In the second example, Yar spoke about a television character (Sue) who was scripted as being pregnant with twins. While working on the script, Yar was given two kittens; he decided to name the kittens after the fictitious twins Sue would give birth to. A television magazine ran a story about Sue’s impending twins, combined with the story about Yar naming his kittens in honour of the fictitious babies:

When Sue was ‘pregnant’ with twins, I had named my two kittens at the time, after the twins [pause] that weren’t going to be born on television for another three or four months. I was inundated by people trying to find out the names of the kittens. They wanted to call their children the same as Sue’s children were going to be
called [pause], because that would actually establish a familiar link between them and the character on the show.

The interplay between television and viewers’ thinking — from *Summer Bay* being perceived of as a real place, to Maxwell’s story of actors being sexually desired or adored (Lee Batch), to actors being mocked (Ryan), to the identity of an actor/neighbour becoming blurred (Ron having an affair), to setting the record straight (Cookie), through to wanting to identify with Sue’s twins — is further complexified by the fact that television makers (Robert) are also viewers of real and fictional persons and places.

Though it is complex and ratings driven, Di, Noel, Robert and Yar believe that commercial television has the potential to bring about positive social change. Below, Yar offers three examples where commercial television has made a positive contribution to society:

One of the nicest accolades I got was from John Pilger, who, when he was interviewed in one of the Sunday papers, was asked ‘What do you watch’; he said, ‘I am addicted to *Home & Away*, I’ve got young children and I sat down to watch it with them and I thought hey, this is actually saying things, this is actually [pause] this is not drivel.

I am quite proud of the fact that the British Schizophrenia association used our episodes as training films … the Suicide Prevention also uses our stuff as training videos.

The nicest letter I ever got was from a woman thanking me for saving her son’s life. We had done an episode where one of our characters had testicular cancer. This boy was walking around with a lump in his gonads for some time and had been too macho to talk about it. The doctors said, a few weeks later and you’d be a goner.

While agreeing with Yar’s sentiments, Di warns:
There’s a place for TV, there’s a place for kicking back and relaxing. But when it becomes your whole world, which it does for a lot of people, that’s when society has problems.

a. Green TV

At the height of her career, commercial television presenter Jill approached her network with the idea of producing a positive, informative program centred on environmental issues. In Jill’s words, she wanted to ‘present a positive ecology-based program’, which she described as:

An alternative lifestyle show looking at the good stories — different ways of living. Not the negatives, I wanted to do the positives, not the pollution stories. It was when the show I was doing was at the height of its success, and we were getting 1.3 million viewers every week.

The programming executive responded bluntly to Jill’s pitch, calling the concept boring and ‘goody two-shoes’. In rejecting Jill’s idea, the programming executive drew her attention to one of the fundamental principles of commercial television programming — Jill recalls the conversation:

It’s the nice programs like the Car Show, these things that automatically cancel out half your audience before you have even started. We can’t do that, he said, because we need as big an audience as possible. So if you’re starting off pitching at a very small group, you’re shooting yourself in the foot.

Noel, who has spent over thirty years heading up a number of high-rating commercial television newsrooms, is doubtful if ecology-based programs could work on commercial television:
Could you really do a program that was just on that alone? I’ve always worked in television news. I’ve always worked on the principle of the sugarcoated pill. In a news bulletin you’ve got to cover some very serious subjects, but you can’t make it all about that, you’ve got to do serious stuff and light stuff and serious stuff and stuff that’s fun so that you trap them in many ways — that was very nice, but there was something heavy in there.

Robert is proud of the ecology-based stories that his broadcast news journalists have covered since his appointment. Robert describes himself as pro-sustainability; he feels that the Australian Federal Government should sign the Kyoto Protocol. Robert faces the reality of being socially responsible, while being economically viable:

It’s a Catch 22 isn’t it? Ultimately, if you don’t rate in commercial television, then the organization won’t invest in your program and you throw the baby out with the bathwater — the fundamentals of your message are lost. I certainly know that within regional television there are great demands on ratings because regional television, regional news is extremely expensive and probably doesn’t recoup the costs that the companies invest to have it on-air. So ratings are very important, people have to be watching. And so the argument becomes that if you become a crusader for certain issues and people decide not to watch — you shoot yourself in the foot, because you run the risk of not existing in the first place.

Noel, who oversaw Robert’s early years in the industry, is adamant that successful commercial television production is determined by a set of clear parameters:

What television can’t do, and is completely useless at, is to preach to people — because you are preaching to the converted. The sort of programs that we do, news programs and current affair programs, the only people who watch them are people who are interested anyway, and so it doesn’t really influence the way that people think. You reinforce people’s ideas … whether it’s left or right, good or bad.
While proud of the ecology-based stories his journalists have covered, Robert faces the daily reality of bottom-line, commercial-television, managerial decision-making:

The environment has to fit in there somewhere and so does commercial television. I guess some people would argue that the problem will always be with the environment — that no one buys or sells it as such. If no one buys it or sells it, in a capitalist environment, where does it have any value?

Robert’s comments drew my attention to the challenges facing those commercial television makers who want to story the ‘new paradigm of global ecological degradation and social upheaval’ (Coates 2004). Lifestyle and reality producer Bob spoke to me about the challenges of making an ecology-based commercial television program. Bob’s employment is based around lucrative short-term contracts — he describes his future as being dependent upon how the ratings went for his last episode of entertaining television. Bob talked about ecological issues in terms of the expectations of commercial television management. His observations are that whatever the content, including ecological degradation and social upheaval, entertainment comes first:

They [management] will say the environment is dry and boring. So if you can make it exciting. Find storylines to weave through it so that you are still getting a message out there. If you’re able to weave a storyline through it and then throw in a few bits here and there about why it’s important, then that’s the way to get the message out. But it’s got to be wrapped up in entertaining television.

Noel, who also oversaw Bob during the early stages of his career, feels that news and current affairs is not the place for an ecology-based theme:
The real work to be done is subliminally in programs that aren’t news and current affairs. Drama programs, lifestyle programs, people copy them; people pick up sayings — they become part of the ‘water-cooler conversation’.  

Jill agrees with Noel. Having hosted a commercial lifestyle program for several years, she says a lifestyle program has the potential to foster ecological awareness:

The magazine format allows you to get stories in that won’t have universal appeal because they are over fairly quickly, so you cover the broad spectrum — so you cover the environment. It’s a program that has beautiful food made from bush tucker, eco tourism, outdoor adventure activity, eco gardening — all in one format. The program has got to have a hook, it’s got to have a twist, it could be humour, it could be a dynamic between two people — which really works — some really engaging personality.

Programs that address the more-than-human world need to incorporate ratings-drawing personalities. Lifestyle producer Bob agrees with Jill:

We are talent-driven. I have no preference. So it’s all about the talent. You’ve got to personalise it first and foremost to make whatever story you’ve got, whatever point you’re trying to push. You’ve got to almost hide it within a personal story. It’s all about engagement and entertainment, to keep those viewers there, to keep them engaged … that’s what it’s all about.

Jill suggests that an ecologically rich mise-en-scène within commercial television must incorporate the look and feel of contemporary television. She says the program has to be

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1 The term ‘water-cooler conversation’ refers to the conversations viewers have when in the canteen, staffroom, playground and other everyday social situations. When viewers chat about a television program (Big Brother, Australian Idol, etc), the networks feel they are onto a winner — that the program and advertisements are making contact. Water cooler conversation also bleeds into the public arena, such as talkback and chat radio, as well as newspaper columns etc.
‘craftily and sexually shot — the current vogue.’ To this end, Bob’s livelihood revolves around ‘shooting in the current vogue’; he talks about how environmental issues can be incorporated into the mise-en-scène of a popular program — with help from the Australian Conservation Foundation, Bob is producing a segment for a lifestyle program where a ‘green’ makeover on an inner Sydney house is taking place. Bob explained how he has dramatised the ‘green makeover’ by creating a challenge for the renovators. ‘Will anybody want the greenhouse,’ Bob asks himself, throwing his hands in the air, indicating that that is not really the issue at hand. In the end, the green makeover is all about entertaining television, as Bob explains, ‘Whether it’s sold or not, I don’t think that’s that important. It’s the journey — the story.’ Bob goes on to explain that the production company he’s working for are happy with the ACF collaboration and that the network are happy with the concept: ‘We are packaging it as entertainment. It will probably be fifteen minutes of TV dealing with all the things you can do to your house to make it more environmentally sustainable.’

Lifestyle and reality genres are often the crossover between the approach to ratings taken by news and current affairs programs and the approach to ratings taken by soap and drama genres. Bob says that in order to attract and maintain a lifestyle and reality audience, the production has always to be, ‘personalising the equation, so that people learn through other people’s stories and results. People are looking towards some end, “can we make this work, or can’t we make this work?”’

Yar believes that personalities are the best way to present stories about ecological awareness; he argues that soap and drama personalities have a greater potential than journalistic personalities to deliver positive stories:

If you want to push a green issue, you have to set it up a long way in advance. You have to create a situation in a person’s life that is dramatic, and then logically make them become a person who pushes a green issue. Why that will work for you, is because the audience travel the same journey with them. And the audience themselves will be saying, ‘yes, that’s the reason we should be green’.
Yar went on to explain how stories are developed for popular programs such as *Home and Away*, *Neighbours*, and *A Country Practice* (now out of production). Yar gave me several examples of how a scriptwriter develops a story so that it has the maximum potential to be believed. Both examples presented here are ecology-based:

We started off with a rich man living on a hill who had the trees chopped down opposite him, so he could get a view. And the kids protested about that, but didn’t get anywhere. Three months later a heavy rainstorm has Elsa trapped. Elsa’s house had a landslide come down on top of it and she was trapped underneath the landslide. But we had to set it up three months before.

We did a very big anti-pesticide thing; there was this lonely farmer who was using pesticides quite a lot, and he was lonely because his grandson had died of cancer about five years ago. And it was a big, it was a big pesticide battle. And then it took about three months [actual time] through the story when the kids did a toxic reading of his dam that his grandson used to swim in. And so by back referencing, this fellow had suddenly realised that he had killed his grandson — the grandson’s cancer probably being caused by the pesticide in the dam. So that sort of message we can get across.

Programs such as *Home and Away* run for many years and have an established Australian audience of approximately one million viewers per episode; hence it is possible for the scripts of such programs to set up a storyline three or more months in advance. Yar recalls the protracted storyline where the cutting down of trees results in a landslide:

You’re creating a world. It’s not an isolated incident, it’s about the evil of cutting down the trees. We then do an incredibly dramatic episode about our character buried under a landslide. Which then has a double effect for me, it doesn’t gratuitously become, ‘Oh lets bury our character under a landslide,’ no, we set it up three months before by making it believable [cutting down the trees]. And I based
that on what had happened in Wollongong when the landslide came down off the
escarpment there, after the denuding etc, etc.

Yar enabled me to appreciate how light entertainment can develop cause and effect
scenarios; for him a good script creates a world in which there are no isolated incidents.
In a well-developed script there are links and relationships within the mise-en-scène, just
as there are links and relationships within the physical and emotional world of our day-to-
day activities. From the perspective of both a scriptwriter and program executive, Yar
acknowledges the influence of the mise-en-scène. For him, the subtext and location of a
well-crafted script can’t help but influence the audience: ‘You’ve got cause and effect.
You always have to have cause and effect. You have to filter it and take your audience
along a journey that leads them to a conclusion themselves, rather than push the
conclusion down their throat.’

Above, we saw how viewers address a character (Amanda) rather than the actor (Lee
Batch), and how fictional locations (Summer Bay) are confused with actual places. Such
complexity is wittingly and unwittingly imbedded in soap and drama scripts. Di drew to
my attention how the audience is influenced by innocuous elements of a storyline: ‘When
they got alpacas on McLeod’s Daughters, the sales of alpacas went through the roof. You
can’t underestimate it.’

From news executives such as Noel, through scriptwriters such as Yar, to drama directors
such as Di there is an awareness within the industry that actors, script and location
influence the viewer. Di’s observation of *McLeod’s Daughters* and the sale of alpacas
emphasises the ramifications surrounding ‘placement’ within the mise-en-scène. The very
elements that shape the mise-en-scène in which scripts are enacted can render the actor,
entity, storyline and/or fictitious place as desirable.

Di and Yar have enabled me to appreciate that from scripted conversations to incidental
and constructed props, the dialogue and actions of familiar characters influences the
viewer’s thinking. Product placement within the mise-en-scène takes advantage of this, it
includes incidental items and/or processes that a character might be purchasing, consuming, or endorsing — as Yar explains:

Subliminal advertising in soap is huge, ### was heavily sponsored by Coca-Cola. So every time someone went to the shop and went to the fridge they got out ‘Coca-Cola’. It was also heavily sponsored by Uncle Toby’s. So the main house would always have an open packet of Uncle Toby’s on the counter.

As a director who implements the scripts Yar writes and oversees, as well as others like it, Di feels that while product placement is integral to the economics of commercial television, it can support social justice issues in small ways:

You can make statements. For instance, if you’re working on a show like Home and Away and your Mrs Jones goes to the shop and buys things, you don’t have plastic bags, you can send those kinds of messages, which most people are pretty au fait with these days. You can do things in small ways.

According to Robert, the recent proliferation of lifestyle programs has increased the incidences of product placement:

Ads used to be in-between the show, and now it could certainly be argued that the program makers look at how the ads and the show can be seamless. It’s an hour of garden makeovers that are only possible if you buy the product that improves the garden — or makeover shows where you’ve actually got to go out and buy the clothes, spend the money on the hair and the make-up.

When it comes to news and current affair programs, Robert feels positive about commercial television’s mise-en-scène. In his capacity as news production executive, he has personally initiated a number of positive community based television oriented outcomes:
It’s fascinating when you talk about television breaking down barriers, because we have a young bunch of journalists here, and I think that we are doing things and using the medium in a way that has not be done by news editors before, ever. We have done candid and open stories of people [in rural Australia] who have HIV Aids; I don’t think anyone would have been game to touch that before. We’ve done stories on environmental groups, we’ve gone and spent time with groups up in the Brigalow Belt Bioregion, who are dressed as cockatoos and koalas, etcetera and given them a voice. We have spent time with people who have abused drugs and alcohol. We have sat them down and said, ‘tell us your story’. And we’ve also made a concerted effort when covering stories on indigenous Australians.

5. Heading Home

Robert glances at his watch; it’s time to start writing promos for the evening news. We stroll out of the cool air-conditioned boardroom and into the bustling hallway, where Robert’s assistant awaits — there are several production matters requiring urgent attention. With a ‘here we go again’ raise of his eyebrow, Roberts smiles and warmly bids me farewell, before turning and striding up the corridor. I squint as the metallic shimmer and sticky bitumen of the network car park greets me — walking past Robert’s glistening sports car (resting in a shady reserved corner), I recall sitting in the driver’s seat of James’ glistening, top-of-the-range Mercedes-Benz coupé. Buoyed by the CEO’s approval of the ‘red car’, and the long champagne lunch, James had reverted to his television persona of years gone by. As I drove James across the Sydney Harbour Bridge, I was struck by one of his stories, a story that seemed to poetically speak to my observations and conversations within the world of commercial television.

When James was on hard times — between being a television personality and his current life as owner of a successful advertising agency — he had been employed to perform as Humphrey Bear for the opening of a large shopping complex. At the end of the performance, James discovered that there wasn’t a place to change out of his Humphrey Bear costume, so he decided to walk home as Humphrey Bear. As he walked through the
shopping complex James was surrounded by inquisitive children — so he continued to perform as Humphrey Bear. What he hadn’t reckoned upon was that the children would follow him not only into the car park, but also along the footpath as James, à la Humphrey Bear, walked home. The longer James walked along the footpath, the less he performed as Humphrey Bear, and subsequently the more the children urged and demanded that James ‘perform’. (Having worked as a clown during my undergraduate days, I can appreciate the predicament James found himself in, for once inside the uniform of a clown you are perceived of as neither human nor animal). Children poked and pinched, kicked and punched Humphrey Bear as if the character before them felt no pain. Concerned that the haranguing was become violent (though not perceived that way by the children), James attempted to run away — which as any clown knows, is a big mistake. The children thought Humphrey Bear was playing with them, and hence ran after James, yelling and screaming with gusto. Eventually James found himself caught between a dead-end loading dock and thirty excited children, some of whom were becoming excessively demanding and physically aggressive. In desperation, James yanked off his Humphrey Bear head-mask and yelled at the kids to, ‘Fuck off’ — at this, some children burst into tears and, according to James, the eyes of others almost popped.

Though James’ account accentuated the humorous side of the story, nonetheless, it enabled me to appreciate the predicament of being someone like Lee Batch trapped inside the persona of Amanda, or Ryan trapped inside the persona of a dork. The children haranguing James (like the woman talking to Lee Batch, or the men that bashed Ryan) had become disoriented within the complex-realism of the televisual-umwelt.

I stare out the window; the junction is looking increasingly like a billabong as the big dry sets in. I sip tea and reflect. What am I to make of my observations of commercial television and the world in which it’s made? What does my immersion in the more-than-human world say about those complex environments? In the chapter that follows, I draw on my observations and reflections to make meaning of my question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world.
CHAPTER SEVEN

MEANING MAKING

1. Introduction: A Cup Of Tea

Six o’clock on a frosty spring morning; Jean douses the tea-leaves; Manning and I sit rubbing our hands around the firebox waiting for the cold to retreat. Each of the three preceding chapters begins at this place, a place from which I venture into the world and to which I return. In Chapter Four I ventured beyond the homely technological world of firebox, teapot, television receiver and windowpane, and into the surrounding more-than-human world of the creeks and wallaby paths. Not unlike a bogong moth drawn to the glow of my windowpane, in Chapter Five I was drawn to the radiance of the television screen; there I reflected upon the experience of viewing the ‘secretions’ (Fiske & Hartley, 2003) of commercial television. In Chapter Six I journeyed beyond the smear and imprint of commercial television’s window on the world; as in Chapter Four, I physically moved beyond my home, this time into the world of commercial television production.

What sense can I make of these hermeneutic phenomenological accounts of immersion in three different worlds? How can I bring theoretical understandings to bear on what it is like to inhabit these worlds, and be true to the methodology of researching lived experience? I have chosen to structure and pace this journey into meaning-making as if it were a walk through the three worlds, pausing to reflect on what I have seen and what it might mean. The process is more than thematising, though indeed several key themes such as different types of time and the difference between distance and dis-stance do emerge. My meaning-making is more an attempt to consciously traverse the border areas and disjunctions between the more-than-human world, viewing commercial television and the production of commercial television in the company of those who have provided some ideas on how to understand these areas and, ultimately, what might be learnt from the journey. It is a contemplative journey. As I walk these many steps I mainly ask how we might
understand what it is that we do in these three worlds, rather than what we should do. That said, I conclude with some possibilities for action.

2. Finding Time

When I stood before the life and death struggle between the water-rat and the waterfowl, I experienced time and space as unified; there wasn’t a strip of magic glass between Manning’s ‘in the real’ (Chapter Four, p. 111) and us standing before the water-rat and the waterfowl: no editing, cutting to the next story, commentary or scripted explanation informed our thinking. Big-walk country had become a real place of real life and real death, and I was able ‘to regain a full-bodied awareness of the present’ — as Abram reminds us, time and space are ‘never entirely distinguishable, for they are still informed, however distantly, by a participatory experience of place’ (1996:197). Abram’s articulation of how time and space shape the participatory experience of place draws on Heidegger’s substantial analysis of time (1962). In this chapter I refer to Abram and Heidegger’s naming of the participatory experience of space, time and place as ‘real-time’, a term that also complements Virilio’s (1986) theory of ‘Speed’. For the sake of fluidity the space-time divide created by modern technology will be referred to as ‘mechanical-time’ — a ‘time’ where, amongst other things, the viewer is exposed to the ‘all day everyday’ (Scannell, 1995) nature of television.

For a person who has spent years making and teaching television, where the manipulation of time is paramount to storytelling, my immersion in the more-than-human world enabled me to become acutely aware of the distinction between real-time and mechanical-time, and how each in its own way influences the stories we live by. For example, as discussed in Chapter Five, I was unable to remember where I physically viewed the television images of Neil Armstrong walking on the moon; similarly, I was unable to remember where I was when I initially viewed the television images of the Beatles waving to a crowd in Melbourne from the balcony of the South Cross Hotel. Though I have viewed these and similar images many times, the re-viewing of such images has not required me to be in the same viewing space and time place. To some extent we saw how this disjunction manifests, when we saw that within mechanical-time I was able to view Primetime Thursday on a Tuesday, out
of primetime. During Primetime Thursday, one moment I was observing Jack the Ripper in ‘Foggy Old London Town’, then, in an instant, I was viewing Mexican immigrants negotiating an inhospitable desert in an attempt to reach North America, until mechanical-time instantly delivered me to a kitchen where a story about ‘cooking roast vegetables for the outlaws’ played out in thirty seconds. Mechanical-time, for both the viewer and the maker, places particular demands on time, it influences what the viewer is able to see and what the maker of commercial television is able to show. By contrast, the real-time of Chapter Four is a time in which the world can be said to unfold the multi-layered currents of a creek; the presence of a wallaby path; the life and death struggle of the water-rat and the waterfowl. Real-time cannot be constructed; it can’t be recorded, replayed, held in pause, digitised or manipulated.

The ‘cockpit people’ in Chapter Six provided an insight into the production-line nature of mechanical-time. We saw how such time is compiled and distributed using devices such as backward running clocks and delayed broadcasts. Time is displaced; on occasions it appears frozen. For example, the time in which the football player kicked the winning goal was technologically shaped — the image of the football player was frozen in perpetual pause until the required mechanical-time. When required, a cockpit person pressed a button that instantly thawed the action, enabling the ‘kicking-of-the-winning-goal-time’ to appear in the present-time of the viewer.

The mechanical-time of commercial television is further complexified by realism. Scriptwriter Yar spoke of the confusion this causes within the viewer’s thinking — the fictional location of Summer Bay (Home and Away) was voted the most desirable place to live by those polled in a British survey. In Chapter Five I observed how the fictional death of Grace Sullivan was experienced as an actual real-time death — the cutting from one camera to another, accompanied by themed music and followed by a suite of advertisements, had not fully signalled to the viewer that the death of Grace was fictional.

Mechanical-time does not allow the viewer to dwell in their own time; rather, the viewer is forever being led into the curious-time of ‘whodunit’ and ‘don’t go away now, coming up right after the break …’. This is a very different thinking-time to that
witnessed in Chapter Four where circumstances were revealed in their own time. For example, in my tarrying at the junction the various layers of creek were revealed in creek-time. To experience such time requires one to take in the polymodal sensuous, natural dimension of real-time: the sounds, aromas, textures, flows, hues and feelings in which breathing and dying takes place. Real-time can’t be put on ‘pause’; it can’t be time-shifted. This non-technological, non-commercial, more-than-human-time is perpetually lived in the moment. As we saw with the water-rat and waterfowl, each moment holds the stuff of life and death. To tarry in such places enables one to become aware of ‘presence’ — of being present within the more-than-human world in all its non-sentimental, non-judgmental, non-human actuality — it represents the ‘sensuous presence of the world’ (Abram 1996); it enabled me to contemplate our modern technological world.

A useful way of approaching this meaning-making is to draw from Paul Virilio’s (1986) observations of real-time and mechanical-time. The sensuous make-up of a person can be thought of as consisting of three bodies grafted over each other: what Virilio names the animal body, the territorial body and the social body (see Chapter Two, p. 41). When the three grafted bodies are in unison, a person is able to experience the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time — the types of experience I reflected upon in Chapter Four — what Virilio names as ‘real’. Because the real is located beyond the domain of television, Virilio sees television as equivalent to virtual reality — due to the split between the viewers’ three grafted bodies.

Initially television was observed from within the polymodal nature of audience, such as the Myer Emporium experience I reflected upon in Chapter Five. Later, the viewing of television was incorporated into social interactions, such as my family visiting the Cunninghams, and subsequently the McIntyres visiting my family. The Lithgow Days Of Our Lives example demonstrates a transition whereby television had become part of the all day everyday nature of domestic life — each occupied home in the street housed a single person viewing the same program as each of the other viewers in the street.

Both Chapters Five and Six draw attention to the complex nature of the intersection between the viewers’ physical life and what they are watching and hearing on the
screen — viewers mourn, write love letters and even harass those actors who portray undesirable characters. Viewers want to live in the world where the stars live; indeed, viewers want to kiss, make love, dress and consume in the manner and place of their favourite personalities. Much of this resonates with Denzin’s (1995) observation of the pre-television cinematic society, in particular where he draws on Blumer’s 1930s research to demonstrate how patrons perceived stories of love, religion and success (Chapter Two, p. 31). What is different however, can been seen in the situation observed by Di and Yar, where viewers feel as though they personally know a television personality, even though they have never met. Such mis-understanding is complex, and can be understood, in part at least, through Virilio’s notion of a split having taking place between the viewers’ animal, territorial and social bodies — a disconnection with the real.

Television drama director Di spoke of the viewer being disoriented, when in a social situation the viewer can perceive an actor (Lee Batch) as being the persona of the fictitious character (Amanda) whom the actor portrays when appearing on television. In these situations, the viewer addresses the actor by referring to the name of the actor’s on-screen persona. Di tells us that the viewer expects the actor to present himself or herself as the persona portrayed on television.

From the vantage point of encountering the more-than-human world, it seems that a particular confusion dwells within the mechanical-time of virtual-reality. In Chapter Four, I offer an example of the gap that has developed between the mechanical-time of modern technology and the real-time of the more-than-human world. While washing the dishes, I observed a platypus swimming in the very place from where I had recently pumped water to my house tank; the powerful technologies of water-pump, pipe and stainless steel had contributed towards shaping my perception of water. It was only when I was able to witness ‘real-time water’ and ‘mechanical-time water’ side by side, that I was able to begin to approach the intersubjectivity between myself, water and the platypus. As Abram reminds us, ‘that tree bending in the wind, this cliff wall, the cloud drifting overhead: these are not merely subjective; they are intersubjective phenomena—phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects’ (1996:38). Having observed the platypus from my window, I journeyed towards the platypus’ world. I sat on a rock at the junction, positioning myself in a
place where I could experience real-time unhindered by mechanical-time. As my animal, territorial and social bodies meshed with the surrounding more-than-human community, as I synchronised with real-time, my body took on the rhythm of that place. In due course the platypus returned to its cycle, as did the birds. As I experienced real-time I was able to observe differently. For example, I began to see and experience the various elements that constitute a creek rather than observe the creek as a single body of water. I began to synchronise with the sensuous dimension of a more-than-human place. In this sense, I was able to acquire a perspective that was influenced by real-time, that challenged my mechanical-time understanding of existence — I began to perceive mechanical-time as containing elements of confusion. The phenomenological process of tarry — to ‘wonder’ in real-time — delivered me to another way of thinking, and I began to recognise the presence of distance within modern technology.

3. Walking In Real-Time

To break from the shackles of the prevailing metaphysical tradition requires what Heidegger names as a ‘leap’:

The leap is the transition from the first beginning to the other beginning. The leap away from the first beginning (metaphysics) initially takes the form of an ‘abground,’ or an abyss, as the solid ground of the first beginning disappears under one’s feet, prompting intense disorientation. The goal of the leap, however, is the other beginning, which is a grounding of the truth of being (cited in Crockett 2001:2).

‘On the far side of the leap, the world looks different’, yet ‘it simply returns us to “the soil on which we really stand”’ (Pattison 2000:116). When I journeyed to the junction, or along a wallaby path, I did so at the human speed of walking. The act of walking is important here; walking enables a person to move with the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time. The inquiry undertaken by Bruce Chatwin (1987), particularly the chapter ‘From the Notebooks’ (pp 183 – 229) reflects on the substantial correlation between ‘walking’ in place and maintaining contact with the more-than-human world. More specifically, Abram (1996) and Mowaljarlai and
Malnic (1993) write about how walking brings the land to life in the mind’s eye of the walker. The regular walking in and reflecting upon the more-than-human world undertaken in Chapter Four facilitated my awareness of the real-time reverberations of creek and woodland. My immersion in the more-than-human world ultimately led to questioning my previous ‘purely-human’ (McKibben, 1992) worldview. My attention, as a maker and teacher of television, was drawn to the ramifications of commercial television within the frame of ‘modern technology’s’ mechanical-time. Walking in the more-than-human world stimulated my thinking concerning dis-stance and distance.

Let us consider distance. If we think back to Saul (1993) and his example of rock art, we are offered the image of flora and fauna rendered on the walls of places in which these entities are themselves enmeshed. For example, if we think of a person located in such a place, looking at an image of a wallaby on a rock wall, in conjunction with seeing a wallaby grazing nearby, we are able to appreciate that this person occupies the ‘far, near and close’ of distance. The person’s animal, territorial and social bodies are grafted and enmeshed within both the image of the wallaby and the corporeality of the wallaby’s existence. In Chapter Four, I described walking early one morning along a dirt track bisecting native woodlands and hearing the thud of a large wallaby. The sound of the thud, the startled look of my dogs, the scent of morning woodland mist, in combination with the diffused morning light, located the wallaby, my dogs and me in the one place. Within this distant interaction with the wallaby I had a bodily awareness of the wallaby’s corporeal circumstances: the availability of grass and shelter; the horizon the wallaby headed towards; the rocks and bush it melded into; the circumstances of its existence and my presence within that existence.

In terms of commercial television and the emergence of the televisual, Saul’s image and my experience of the wallaby have much to offer. I could no more touch the wallaby that morning than I can touch the person reading the news on television. The modus operandi of modern technology’s dis-stance can display the wallaby in ways I could not embrace at a distance. A televised close-up view of the wallaby, courtesy of a telescopic lens, would enable me to observe the wallaby in particular ways: the expression on its face, the flexing of its substantial leg muscles, etc. In addition, a directional microphone can capture the specific sound of the wallaby’s paws thudding...
onto the ground disproportionately to the other sounds that occupy the surrounding place: my dogs panting, or the nearby warbling of magpies. Such mechanical-time rendering, utilising special technology, allows me to observe the wallaby in ways that can never be possible in the ‘far, near and close’ of distance. Indeed, as a secondary source, such modern technology is enlightening — however, as a primary source, devoid of presence, the real-time reality of the wallaby is lost.

Dis-stance occupies a virtual-place where mechanical-time sequences events. When I stood in the bush I observed the wallaby in place, and my thinking about the wallaby was influenced by the place we shared; we were both contained within the one horizon, we both occupied the same time. In contrast, dis-stance splits the animal, territorial and social bodies into disconnected components. The viewer is, as dis-stance implies, near and far at the same time. As I stand before the rising sun with the scent of the new morning filling my nostrils, the feel of the rough bush track beneath my feet, the taste of a low-sitting cloud on the tip of my tongue, I experience the wallaby in ways modern technology can not allow. Likewise, via dis-stance, modern technology allows me to experience the re-presentation of wallaby in ways that the presence of the wallaby in the distance cannot — hence the primary contact with the wallaby is important. While real-time experience holds the potential to enrich mechanical-time experience, my concern is that if the more-than-human world is experienced via mechanical-time (often operating within mercantile subjectivity), and not in conjunction with regular walking in more-than-human places, there is a risk that the viewer will misinterpret the technological re-presentation of a more-than-human world as reality. In terms of image technology, if elements are not rendered upon the screen, they do not exist. Dis-stance is not capable of enabling non-rendered entities to be contemplated — if ‘it’ is not seen or heard, it is not seen or heard. It is only when distance and dis-stance regularly complement and enrich each other that misunderstanding is less likely to occur — our memory of experience within real-time is able to fill in the holes created by mechanical-time.

The sensations I experienced in Chapter Four were shaped by a particular place; while my reflections are mine alone, the polymodal, sensuous, natural dimensions of this real-time place are no more mine than they are the wallaby’s. On the other hand, though the sensations I experienced in Chapter Five are mine alone — as are the
reflections — the sedentary, linear construction of the mechanical-time in which I think when viewing commercial television, is shared (however partially) with millions of other viewers.

In Chapter Five, I reflected on my body experiencing dis-stance, an experience that instantly begins at the commencement of the USA produced program *Primetime Thursday* — the videotape of this program was broadcast on a Tuesday morning from Sydney, Australia, to where I viewed it (on video via my television receiver) in rural NSW, Australia. As an unreflective viewer dis-stance does not concern my body; I did not experience any sense of there being anything unusual about the dislocation — *Primetime Thursday* was merely part of the regular all day everyday nature of commercial television. I didn’t have a sense of the program being either a replayed video originally recorded in another country, or a live broadcast emanating from an Australian television studio. As an unreflective viewer, I am not aware of such things, mechanical-time does not concern me; in fact one could say that it feels natural!

*Primetime Thursday* commenced with a typical introduction — the purpose of the introductory segment is to entice the viewer to stay tuned to the program in order to deliver the viewer to a suite of advertisements. The introduction can be conceived of as part of commercial television’s ongoing entertainment-lure — the ‘what’s coming up next’ trap. As Noel, Yar, Di and Robert draw to our attention in Chapter Six, delivering the audience to the advertiser is what commercial television is all about. Located before the screen, my body is sedentary, my senses depleted, as a viewer, I am untroubled by the sedentary, sense-depleted, fractured time — one moment *Foggy Old London Town*, the next *The Devil's Highway*. As Scannell (1995) demonstrates, the ‘art’ of not troubling the viewers’ body is one that has been technologically sought and achieved. Therefore, as a viewer, my body is untroubled by dis-stance; the implications of this, and the viewer being also, by association, untroubled by the mechanical-time of virtual reality, requires further discussion.
4. Thoughts In The Dis-stance

What are the thinking cues that the dis-stance of commercial television provides? As noted, Primetime Thursday commences with the viewer seeing Foggy Old London Town while listening to presenter Diane Sawyer spruik the story; at a predetermined technological-moment, the viewer is sped to The Devil’s Highway where the entertainment-lure is set to further entrap, before being sped to a suite of advertisements. Of interest here is the realism contained within each moment in time, a realism that speeds its all-pervasive secretions across the location of the viewers’ stance. The choice of words is interesting here. The terms ‘speed’ (Virilio 1986) and ‘secretions’ (Fiske and Hartley 1983/2003) may at first seem at odds, yet the research in Chapters Five and Six indicates how, when combined, ‘speed’ and ‘secretions’ help flesh out the sedentary nature of the viewers’ body. The speed by which commercial television traverses dis-stance is both instantaneous and continuous — one moment the viewers’ stance is before Foggy Old London Town, the next The Devil’s Highway, and the next Dinner With The Outlaws. Such relentless speed, twenty-four hours a day, can be said to have secreted into the lifeworld of the viewer. As we saw in Chapter Five the televised image of Ernie Sigley was perceived by my grandmother as an entity one caresses; not dissimilarly, the death of a familiar character, Grace Sullivan, is mourned many hours after the soap opera episode has ended. The everydayness in which such familiarity is perceived is one into which the ongoing speed of commercial television relentlessly secretes.

The viewer is sped from one location to another, all of which appear to be actual places, yet in most instances they are constructed theatrical sets. For example, the automobile advertisement I reflected upon in Chapter Six was filmed entirely indoors, yet one scene has the car coming out of a garage — the clouds in the sky, like the trees and home beside the garage are nothing more than paint and papier-mâché. Another scene has the car driving through a ‘puddle’ — water encased within a plastic-lined wooden frame. Ever since the 1890s, when Méliès transposed the theatrical notion of mise-en-scène to film, motion screen realism has been achieved via technological manipulation in combination with the construction of realistic sets. Many of the stories told within advertisements and light entertainment ‘appear’ to take place in multiple locations, when in fact they take place in a studio; as a result,
shorthand compromises have been developed. Much of what we see on television is constructed in the sense of how the camera is framed, but also in the sense that it is constructed to ‘appear’ as the world. The advertising suite that follows the *Primetime Thursday* introduction begins with an HCF medical insurance advertisement apparently located, initially, at the scene of an accident; yet on closer inspection the accident is clearly filmed in a studio. Within a few seconds the viewer is before a supposed operating theatre; again on closer inspection the scene resembles the set where the car accident occurred. Similarly, the Ansell Rubber Glove advertisement begins in a supposed high tech laboratory before taking the viewer to the supposed home of the central character. In these and other examples the viewer is presented with a supposed-place. The realism within dis-stance has become increasingly unrealistic as commercial art refines the pro-filmic. When the pro-filmic is the primary source of information, as opposed to a secondary source, such supposed representations of reality are a wedge further splitting the three grafted bodies.

Let us return to Chapter Four for a moment. At one point in time I stand on a ridge; in my-time, I look to the distant horizon where the native woodland I’m standing amongst comes face to face with an exotic pine forest — I choose my sight-line, and within the stance of my polymodal presence I reflect and think, think and reflect. At another moment I look down to the creek running through the valley below; again within the stance of my polymodal presence, I reflect and think, think and reflect; at yet another moment I watch a thin stretch of cloud rise and fall, twist and float before me, I reflect and think, think and reflect; later, I come across a wallaby path, a path I could have walked had I noticed its existence prior to my crashing through the bush, I turn and notice the path leads back from whence I came — I reflect and think, think and reflect.

Returning to Chapter Six, the Ansell Glove woman is before me. I find her both efficient and attractive; I see how easily and efficiently she wipes food and beverage stains from a glass coffee table, the next moment I find myself contemplating her attractive backside — I reflect and think, think and reflect. But it is a different kind of thinking. While taking into account the multiplicity of cognition (Fiske, 1992; Hall, 1980), as viewer, I am nonetheless before the screen, I am technologically led in my thinking. While another viewer may find the rear view of the woman unattractive or
the glass table unfashionable, these are the only elements we have available to contemplate. In the context of the screen, I have no peripheral view, I cannot look left or right. There are numerous examples in Chapter Five where I make comments about my feelings towards persons on the screen: I find the ‘HFC’ woman trustworthy; the ‘Dove Shampoo’ woman strong; the ‘Smiles’ children adorable; the ‘Cottee’s Cordial’ boy cheeky, etc. The point I am making is that within the frame of this mechanical-time, my options for contemplation are commercially defined. Before the screen of commercial television, my thinking cues are always influenced by commerce.

As we saw in the production of the automobile advertisement, Mick chose a model because she had ‘great legs’; I dare say the Smiles children were chosen because they possessed the physical features required for the telling of that story. Such reactions by the viewer toward actors in programs or actors in advertisements are technologically striven for, as Scannell (1995) demonstrates. As Di told us, ratings charts and sales figures will ultimately decide if the desired reactions have been achieved. For now though, what is worthy of consideration is the scope provided for thinking. A particular type of thinking is taking place before the commercial screen, a thinking that would seem to indicate just how substantial the secretions of commercial television have become.

In Chapter Five we saw my family falling ever deeper into the entertainment-lure of the American Way. My father aided this process by attaching wheels to our television receiver so that we could eat and view at the same time. My family were drawn into the world of television in complex ways; for example, when Donald inhaled the smoke from his internationally acclaimed Peter Stuyvesant cigarette, I recognised the world of television on his face. I was impressed by the fact that my brother smoked just like ‘they’ do on television — in America! Then, I fantasised about living in America — today, according to Yar, some British citizens fantasise about living at Summer Bay.

Perhaps we can say the thinking that takes place before the commercial screen is a thinking that is influenced by a mise-en-scène constructed to encourage consumption, whereas, the thinking that takes place in the more-than-human world is influenced by
the polymodal, sensuous, natural dimension of real-time — a diverse, peripherally rich, non-consumptive thinking-place.

5. A Splitting Accident

Is there a link between the contemporary viewing of *Days Of Our Lives*, the World Problematique, and how, forty-five years ago I drooled over Ricky Nelson’s unabated access to Coca-Cola, ‘exotic’ fast food, automobiles, credit cards and other products? In the powerful essay, ‘Advertising At The Edge Of The Apocalypse’, esteemed USA academic Sut Jhally (2006) argues that there is a direct link between commercial television — that is, from Donald and I drooling over Ricky Nelson through to the women in Lithgow viewing *Days Of Our Lives* and ecological degradation. From Jhally’s standpoint, each in its own way has impacted on global degradation such as climate change and species loss.

When Ricky Nelson sauntered to his family’s kitchen refrigerator for a ‘real-thing’ — a refreshing, ice-cold, star-endorsed Coca-Cola — was I really viewing an accident waiting to happen? It certainly didn’t seem like that at the time; sipping Coca-Cola, wearing American high school sweaters and talking to girls at the soda fountain seemed more like heaven than Virilio’s ‘accident’. What if we perceive that individual-sized product in Ricky’s hand not so much as ‘heaven’, but as emblematic of ‘the danger’? (Heidegger, 1977) — we can then discuss it, not so much in terms of holding a fizzy sugar drink, but rather, more akin to holding a hand grenade!

The split between the animal, territorial and social bodies appeared less pronounced during the initial stages of television viewing. Reflections upon my initial viewing of commercial television are recollections of being with friends, family and neighbours, of people coming together to view a popular program, sharing food and conversation. This initial stage of television viewing had a cinematic ‘going to the theatre’ quality about it. As a child, I participated in a television viewing ceremony, a socialising where dress, food and conversation were part of the act of viewing television — as we saw, the television receiver was turned on to watch a program, and then turned off so that the ‘audience’ (not viewer) could engage in a social interaction. It can be argued that such an observation sits outside of the all day, everyday modality of television.
that exists today. As Scannell (1995) demonstrates, during the period of my youth, television was in its formative stage — this was a time when the radio techniques of mass consumption were being adapted for television. The shift in the ceremony surrounding the viewing of television rapidly moved from the social to the domestic. For example, my Saturday evening supper shifted from drop scones and jam to an arrowroot biscuit — and with it, television content increasingly took the place of domestic conversation. The shift in television’s utility in the home from that of being a component of social activity to that of being a central domestic process has multiple connotations. The story of a viewer crying over the death of Grace Sullivan some twelve hours after the program had finished provides an insight into the domestic, familiar and indeed family role television has come to occupy in the home. And yet, in Chapter Six we came to understand that human emotions, such as the tears running down the cheek of the viewer, are institutionally constructed in order to deliver the viewer to an advertiser. So, in addition to the consequences of the viewer being well-adapted to making emotional investments in events happening in the dis-stance, we need to take on board that such emotional investments are constructed by a third party, solely for commercial gain.

In 1999 the last recognised capital city, Thimphu (Bhutan) received commercial television (Scott-Clark & Levy, 2003). Commercial television secretes across each city and most villages around the globe all day every day; thus, the one million strong Bhutanese nation is destined to be entrapped within the televisual. We saw the beginnings of this entrapment via Lipsitz (1990), when he tells of the late 1940s soap opera The Goldbergs; the lead actor Molly says, in the context of a post-depression, post-war worldview, ‘I know Papa and me never bought anything unless we had the money to pay for it.’ In a 1950s Australian context, this was the world as I knew it: my father and grandmother instilled in both Donald and myself the dictum that one never went into debt — with the exception of buying a home. As Lipsitz says, Molly’s concern captured the mood of a generation that had experienced both the Great Depression and WWII. As a five-year old I didn’t understand the ramifications of either the Great Depression or WWII; however, I had heard numerous immediate and extended family conversations about both. I understood that money was hard to come by and that spending money was a process that required attentive consideration. (Scott-Clark and Levy raise not dissimilar issues in relation to Bhutan). So when, in
Lipsitz’s story, Molly’s son replies, ‘Listen, Ma, almost everybody in this country lives above their means and everybody enjoys it’, I can now appreciate that this was not the case, either in the USA or Australia, and now Bhutan. Rather, the script being presented by Molly’s son was, as Lipsitz argues, the ‘hope’ of corporations and governments — a hope that domestic consumption would drive the economy. By the time the episode reached its finale, Molly has been converted, she is going to buy two cars so that she and her family can ‘live above our means — the American way’ (Lipsitz, 1990:43).

6. Not At Home In Viewerland

In a 1961 address in Meßkirch on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of its founding, Heidegger notes that, ‘coming home to Meßkirch today, the first thing one notices is the forest of television and radio aerials on every roof-top’. Heidegger sees the aerials as a persuasive symbol of what the future holds for Meßkirch and the wider world — ‘human beings are, strictly speaking, no longer ‘at home’’ (Pattison 2000:60). Using Virilio’s terminology, elements of the viewers’ three grafted bodies are elsewhere. We can consider the possibility that for some considerable time now the viewer has been located within the landscape of Viewerland. In this sense, it doesn’t matter if Days Of Our Lives is being viewed in Lithgow or Liverpool, or if Primetime Thursday is being viewed in Bathurst, Meßkirch or Bhutan. Neither the actual program content nor the actual physical place in which the viewer dwells is of substantial concern in the overall machinations of commercial television. Consequently, Viewerland is, in McKibben’s (1992) terminology, a ‘placeless place’. Subsequently, the citizen of Viewerland, ‘the viewer’ is more central to our discussion than the suburb, city or nation state in which they dwell, for as we have seen, Viewerland is a global domain.

Commercial television was introduced, indeed legislated, as a means of stimulating a post-war USA economy by promoting domestic household consumption. As a child, my stance before Ricky Nelson, my thinking about and dreaming of stepping into the lifeworld of Ricky, challenged the all day everyday circumstances within my community. Unbeknown to myself, my stance before Ricky was in the dis-stance; I was before a commercially constructed story, a story aimed not at instilling me with
traditional customs, but rather the opposite. As Lipsitz demonstrates, commercial television aimed at shifting the viewer from an attitude of cautious consumption to one of debt-driven mass consumption — The American Way. Lipsitz helps us appreciate the global dimension associated with the commercially scripted act of Ricky Nelson drinking an individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola, and my desire to emulate this and other commercially scripted acts. The imperative to stimulate a post-war economy required a shift in the domestic consumption habits of the Western world. For this to happen, ‘we’ needed to purchase large amounts of produce, and for this to happen, ‘we’ needed to be convinced that ‘we’ could go into financial debt, and for this to happen, ‘we’ needed to be told new stories — only then would ‘we’ consider living the American Way. In the 1950s, I was located at the edge of Viewerland; from there, when Ricky Nelson quenched his after-school thirst with an individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola, it hardly appeared as if we lived in the same world. My world was dappled by the fading shadows of the past. In that ‘old’ world, a glass of lemonade was a sign of a special occasion: birthday parties, Christmas celebrations etc. By the 1960s I had edged deeper into Viewerland, a fizzy drink at the end of an ordinary school day had become part of my everyday activity. Such a small act, yet, when undertaken by billions of viewers, that individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola takes on another dimension. Not that viewers like Donald and I had any way of knowing that our desire to possess a individual-sized bottle of Coca-Cola was simply one more drop in a rising tide.

To my way of thinking at the time, the commodities advertised on television seemed to be infused with a feeling of progress; Coco-Pops and Coca-Cola sat comfortably alongside the progress promised by images of rocket ships and Neil Armstrong walking on the moon — to my mind, such products, like science, were part of the evolution of human well-being.

The implications of the content observed in Chapter Five, in the context of sixty years of persistent all day everyday corporate storytelling — in a no longer ‘at home’ Viewerland — raise questions about the domestic nature of commercial television and how it contributes to the habitats and landscape of Viewerland. In tracing the origins of institutional broadcast language Scannell demonstrates how broadcast language has been designed to be consumed individually; it is not surprising therefore that the ratio
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of television receivers to viewers hovers around one to one. In speaking about the individual nature of the broadcast voice, Scannell points out that all day, every day, people everywhere watch television as part of the utterly familiar and normal routine of a normal day:

‘Anything on telly?’ ‘No, nothing.’ It is not, of course, that there is, literally nothing to watch. Rather that what there is is nothing out of the ordinary, merely the usual programs on the usual channels at the usual times’ (1995:1).

When viewing *Mornings With Kerry Anne*, as discussed in Chapter Five, I observed a good example of this. During the initial six or seven minutes, neither the name of the host nor the name of the program was revealed. As a new viewer, I was slightly disorientated at the beginning of the program, yet I recognized that the program had a certain familiar, almost family ‘all day everyday’ feeling about it. Indeed, the alienation I felt was due to the fact that I wasn’t a regular viewer — I felt like a stranger who had walked in on a family function. For me to be instantly at ease with the program would have required the all day everyday ‘well-known’ to be explained. For example, I didn’t understand the well-known procedure surrounding the Prize Wheel; yet, I know the procedure of programs that I regularly view — as a viewer I would become annoyed if the well-known were continually explained. At the hub of appreciating the influence of the all day everyday secretions of commercial television lies the observation that ‘broadcast output is largely uneventful’ (Dayan and Katz, cited in Scannell 1995). We can appreciate the magnitude of the uneventful, all day, everyday nature of commercial television by once more stepping beyond Viewerland and returning to Chapter Four, to where I reflect upon making a path across the Common.

The path across the Common came into being through my uneventful all day, everyday walking; in this sense, I later came to reflect upon the labyrinth of wallaby paths as coming about as a result of an ongoing uneventful all day, everyday process. Such extensive interconnecting systems come about through uneventful means — the coming to and fro from the junction and surrounding grasslands. In this sense, the smooth nature of the wallaby path can be thought of as being replicated across the bed of the junction. As I write, we are amidst a ‘one-in-1000-year drought’ (*The Age*,

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November 8, 2006); there is barely a trickle in Stony Creek, and Wisemans stopped flowing two or three weeks ago. In the middle of Stony Creek, just before the junction, a trickle makes its way via a small well-worn channel; here, weaving along a path in the bedrock the creek makes its way, not unlike a wallaby path weaving through the woodlands. The smooth shapes of both are maintained by uneventful all day everyday processes — the wallaby weaving, the creek winding, me walking across the Common. Drawing on the wallaby path, the creek and the Common we can return to a discussion of the uneventful, all day, everyday flow of commercial television.

We can now appreciate that since the late 1940s, the uneventful flow of commercial television has shaped that which it has uneventfully flowed over, all day, everyday. While the wallaby path, creek and Common create a different appearance to that of the smooth rub of commercial television, nonetheless, we can appreciate the shape-making quality of the all day everyday rubbing caused by sixty years of commercial television. No one part of commercial television, like no one part of the creek water shapes the place it flows over any more than another. Like the creek water, the ongoing nature of commercial television’s mercantile-flow is that which does the smoothing. The effortless viewing of commercial television is a form of rubbing, a polishing of Viewerland, a shape making. My father attached caster wheels to the base of our television receiver; now, television receivers can be found in multiple locations in the home; now, not only can we view television as we eat, we can view it in bed, in the bath, just about anywhere. Indeed, I have been recently informed of a trend to place television receivers in domestic toilets. To this end, news executive Noel has five television receivers in a household of three; he spoke enthusiastically about each member of his family viewing their favourite programs in separate rooms.

In Chapter Five I observed the rub of Australian commercial television in Victoria, from its first trickle in 1956, when a small group of people stood in semi-circle before the Myer Emporium in Melbourne’s Burke Street, to its unabated flow through ninety-nine percent of consumer society homes in the 21st century. We have seen how the constant unhindered flow of television output has been designed to fit with the constant throughput of daily domestic life. Secreted throughout the domestic habitat is an entertainment-lure: advertisements; network IDs; network promos; news updates
and commercial-infused light entertainment. Upon reflection, I see that the familiar nature of such secretions flows down a network of mercantile pathways, from *Boston Blackie* in 1956 through to *CSI* in 2007. The usual process of viewing commercial television did not deliver me to a place of ecological and sustainable awareness. Rather, at all stages of my history as a viewer, I have been led down a very specific pathway, a pathway exemplified by the twenty-four hour cycle where I was constantly encouraged to consume products. When I drooled over Ricky Nelson’s unrestrained access to Coca-Cola, I didn’t know that such produce was being placed before me for commercial reasons — Di, Yar and Robert demonstrate that product placement continues within popular contemporary commercial television.

During the twenty-four hour cycle of Australian commercial-television discussed in Chapter Five, there were some 129 advertising breaks; each break contained between 6 and 8 advertisements consisting of product advertisements, program advertisements and network identification advertisements. Combined, these three advertising genres appeared approximately 770 times within twenty-four hours. Over a twelve-month period, Network Nine screens some 281,000 commercial announcements. Such a consistent rub, all day, every day, can’t help but shape the pathways the viewer finds before them.

### 7. Advertising And The Apocalypse

Advertising and product placement are as old as commercial television; my boyhood reflections recall both products and programs as a unified whole, rather than a segmentation of program and advertisement. In most instances it was the memory of programs and characters such as *The Saint* and Ricky Nelson that stimulated my memory of ‘Scotch on the rocks’ and Coca-Cola. Memories of Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes and the act of smoking loom large in my memory of this time; they sit in the same world as going to the Cunninghams to watch *Boston Blackie* where a cigarette, more times than not, rested between the detective’s pouted lips.

What are we to think of advertising? For some, advertisements are the noise interrupting a favourite program, for others, advertisements are entertaining and
informative, and of course for others, such as Mick and the crew working for him (Chapter Six), advertisements provide a livelihood. Jhally (2005) argues:

Advertising is the most powerful and sustained system of propaganda in human history and its cumulative cultural effects, unless quickly checked, will be responsible for destroying the world as we know it (p.1).

Jhally’s forthright stance, when placed alongside the warning of Fenner et al. (2005) [Chapter One, p.1], offers a particular reading of the 770 commercial messages I observed in Chapter Five. Jhally demands that we discuss advertisements in a particular way, one that recognises the global ecological harm that advertising and mass consumption is imposing on the planet. We are not so much concerned here with the specific products advertised, for in the broader context in which Jhally speaks, 21st century advertisements for Dove Shampoo and Birds Eye Oven Roast Vegetables carry the same meta-message as those I recalled from the late 1950s and early 1960s; as did the advertisements and product placements of late 1940s USA — such as the American Way dialogue presented in The Goldbergs. The meta-message of consumption broadcast unabated for the past sixty years on commercial television is linked to the Bretton Woods Accord. The Accord equated economic growth with human well-being. In 1944, at the opening session, Henry Morgenthau, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury and president of the conference read a welcoming message from President Roosevelt, in which the purpose of the Accord was named as creating

… a dynamic world economy in which the peoples of every nation will be able to realize their potentialities in peace and enjoy increasingly the fruits of material progress on an earth infinitely blessed with natural resources. … the peoples of every nation will be able to realise their potentialities in peace and enjoy increasingly the fruits of material progress … prosperity has no fixed limits (Coward & Maguire, 2000:29).

Lipsitz (1990:44) demonstrates that such USA Government policies ‘during and after WWII shaped the basic contours of home television as an advertising medium’. This came about due to government sponsored television research and development during WWII, which ‘perfected the technology of home television while federal tax policies
solidified its economic base’. To live the American Way, was, in the late 1940s, equated with human economic well-being, yet the net result of post-WWII mass consumption, has, by the 21st century, contributed to global ecological degradation, arguably, the direct opposite of its original intention. The twenty-four hour cycle of commercial television I observed in Chapter Five didn’t speak of the dangers of over consumption, and yet for Jhally, ‘our survival as a species is dependent upon minimizing the threat from advertising and the commercial culture that has spawned it’ (2005:1).

a. All in the detail

Attention to detail is paramount during the production of an advertisement; as we saw in Chapter Six, the attention afforded the duco of the automobile, in order to cinematically reflect a model’s legs, almost defied description. Substantial attention was also given to the choosing of a model or, more specifically, her legs — legs that would look appealing when reflected in the car’s duco. To this end, the conflict that occurred between Mick and James came about due to Mick’s lack of attention to detail — Mick should have hired an actress as well as the model. Jhally (2005) argues:

More thought, effort, creativity, time, and attention to detail has gone into the selling of the immense collection of commodities than any other campaign in human history to change public consciousness (p. 2).

The automobile advertisement described in Chapter Six employed some of the most sought-after commercial image-makers in Sydney; over the duration of three days they filmed material for one ‘all day everyday’ thirty-second advertisement (as well as a cut-down fifteen-second version). By comparison, in three days three episodes of a program such as Mornings with Kerry Anne are recorded, as are three thirty-minute evening news bulletins. As a child, I was not aware of the detail given to the presentation of the commodities that I viewed. Then, for me, products such as Coca-Cola, Coco Pops and later, Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes were all aids to my well-being. The twenty-four hour cycle observed in Chapter Five contains a litany of
advertisements in which products are presented as aids to well-being — Jhally (2005) points out:

No wonder then that advertising is so attractive to us, so powerful, so seductive. What it offers us are images of the real sources of human happiness — family life, romance and love, sexuality and pleasure, friendship and sociability, leisure and relaxation, independence and control of life (p. 5).

b. Polite and ordinary

Commercial television is able to meet its objective because it has been developed to flow with the ordinary domestic machinations of Viewerland; it has a particular charisma, what Scannell (1995) describes as ‘polite’. The polite nature of commercial television enables it to speak to babies, children, teenagers and adults as they move and mingle within Viewerland. As we saw in Chapter Five, the same or similar advertisements were screened regularly over a twenty-four hour cycle: Rod Stewart’s crooning and the plethora of voices singing the virtues of products such as shampoo, lozenges and new automobiles each filled the airwaves with their polite rhetoric. We saw my disappointment as a boy, at being sent to bed and subsequently missing out on another polite, ordinary episode of Wagon Train. We saw how Colin found the polite, ordinary nature of television compelling; he noticeably found it difficult to move away from being in front of television and appeared to find the world of television considerably more engaging than the world beyond the screen: ‘… when Colin’s head did snap to the front, the focus of his attention appeared to turn inward; it was as if he were now recalling the world he had just left behind’ (Chapter Five, p.195).

Colin appeared to be more connected with the mise-en-scène of television than he was with the corporeal aspects of his life. Similarly, we saw how my grandmother had become attached to the polite, ordinary, everyday events of the Midday Show. She made affectionate gestures towards the screen while describing the antics of the host Ernie Sigley — a person she had not physically met, but nonetheless a person she had become emotionally disposed towards. Scannell argues that for broadcasting to have
the influence that it does, it must first allow us to ‘find our way about in it in a quite untroubled way’. We do so, according to Virilio, in a manner that is split and removed from the ‘real’. When these two ideas are combined we get a sense of the polite, ordinary nature of Viewerland. As mentioned above, as an unreflective viewer, I found the mechanical-time of television ‘natural’. Through the observations in Chapter Five of the seamless nature of commercial television, we can appreciate that the viewer doesn’t notice the process of production. Drawn in by polite entertaining personality-driven stories, where one sequence flows seamlessly into the next, one program into the next, one day into the next, indeed, as my reflections indicate, one year into the next, television takes the viewer on a journey — one that can be conceptualised as a never-ending journey from one polite ordinary moment to the next polite ordinary moment, 365 days a year.

The polite nature of commercial television enables the viewer to embody its meta-message. The overall flow of the network — programs, advertisements, links and trailers for what’s coming next or later — is ‘a regular, patterned kind of thing through the hours of each day and from one day to the next, and the next and the next’; a single program has no identity, ‘it is a transient thing that perishes in the moment of its transmission’ (Scannell, 1995:5). Over the duration of the twenty-four hours discussed in Chapter Five there were some 29 programs: iterations of 16 were screened again the following day, a further 5 were screened the following week. All the while the contributors to the day’s 770 commercial announcements repeated their way through the day. Such ‘difference-in-sameness’ is the hallmark of commercial television. Scannell draws on Giddens (1984) to argue that this type of routine is the basis of ontological security in daily life.

e. Just for me

In Chapter Five, I describe briefly a period in which I drifted away from Viewerland and, as a result, came to notice ‘the viewer’. My observations of how attached my family and friends had become to television support Scannell’s argument. My family and friends had not noticed television’s everyday rub. I was able to observe that the viewer had taken on a particular stance, one I now understand came about due to the individual being addressed as an individual, while being presented with a specific
view of the world. As Jhally (2005) comments when talking about television and advertising:

It talks about our individual needs and desires. It does not talk about those things we have to negotiate collectively, such as poverty, healthcare, housing and the homeless, the environment, etc (p.6).

Observations in Chapter Five support Jhally. We saw how the introduction of commercial television worked against the gathering of an audience as community. That is not to say that individuals don’t come together and talk about their individual experience of viewing television; as we saw in Chapter Six, ‘water-cooler conversation’ is seen as a marker indicating the success of a program. Such communication is nonetheless commercially constructed.

As described in Chapter Five, I allowed myself to be drawn into the Birds Eye Oven Roast Vegetable advertisement; subsequently I felt that the Birds Eye woman was talking to me. I felt that the Birds Eye woman was sharing a joke with me, letting me in on the secret about ‘feeding the outlaws’. There is a substantial history embroiled within the performed ‘look’ projected by the actress performing in the Birds Eye advertisement; Scannell traces the origin of this look back to the earliest days of news reading. Scannell’s research reveals how techniques such as the look are consciously sought for, technically achieved, and humanly accomplished; the look appears as if it is a real-world interaction between the actor/presenter and each and every viewer, thereby securing the effect for each and every viewer of ‘I am being told’. The Birds Eye advertisement is but one thirty-second example of:

… a complex phenomenological projection that is unobtrusively but pervasively embedded in program output. The for-anyone-as-someone structure is a necessary precondition of any cultural product that can be found as meaningfully available, without any difficulty, by anyone, while presenting itself in such a way that it appears to be ‘for me’ (Scannell 1995:7).

The all day, everyday ‘for me’ nature of television offers the potential for large numbers of people to sit in isolation while viewing the same program; hence, as time
passes ‘there will be a historically cumulative common knowledge and understanding of the nature of the occasion’ (Scannell 1995:9). As we have witnessed, there is a particular ‘American Way’ about this historically cumulative common knowledge spreading across the planet. For sixty years product placement, consumption-endorsed scripts and advertisements have addressed the viewer as ‘me’. The viewer has been entertainingly lured before a message where ‘I’ am encouraged to indulge ‘myself’. All regular viewers attached to a television program have, according to Scannell, acquired a biography of the events they regularly view — ‘it is this that enhances the knowledge-pleasure effect of TV soaps’ (op. cit., p. 9). Could this individual viewer biography be the rub of commercial television? Is this where the viewers’ collective mis-understanding of the more-than-human world dwells?

If we think of Viewerland in terms of a domain where a polymodal interaction with the more-than-human world — a tarrying, tactile engagement — does not take place, then we can question Viewerland in a particular manner: what are the thinking cues available to the viewer when thinking in Viewerland? The viewer is embroiled within a polite, ordinary domain; there, before an audiovisual modality, the sedentary viewer interacts via mechanical-time with a commercial, virtual world. The all day everyday manner of programs such as *Days Of Our Lives* that have been running for over thirty years can be conceptualised as being the manner of significant thinking cues. Such programs don’t require a formal introduction — as observed with *Mornings With Kerry Anne*. Hence, we can appreciate the ‘physical’ significance within Scannell’s ‘all day, everyday, “for me”’ observation, one in which the physical stance of the body is sedentary. Viewers don’t have to attend to their stance when a new program begins or a different personality addresses them. Such a stance is substantially different to that required to ‘sing up country’. As Mowaljarlai and Malnic remind us, ‘it is important to remember that they all walked’ (1993:137).

The sedentary stance of viewing is a far cry from the polymodal stance observed in Chapter Four: being in the presence of platypus, water-rat, waterfowl and wallaby path. We can discuss this polymodal experience in terms of how Scannell enables us to think about television content, that is, in terms of the way the viewer builds a biography of television content: the regular programs and television characters that the viewer comes to know. In this light, we can say that through a regular immersion
in the warp and weft of wallaby path and creek bed — where I came to recognize and know individual trees standing in the forest, rock formations and bends in the creek — my mind was able to create a biography of the immediate more-than-human world I regularly inhabit. As a result of such an ongoing immersion — an ongoing ‘getting to know’ — I perceived that there was an interaction between the more-than-human world and myself. I use the term ‘perceived’, for as we have seen, many viewers also perceive that an interaction has taken place between their stance before the screen and the world they are viewing. That said, the wallaby responded to my immediate presence in a manner that the screen cannot. The routine manner of returning to, and tarrying in, a more-than-human place time and time again influenced a particular way of thinking. As does the routine manner of returning to a program in Viewierland time and time again influence a particular way of thinking — as evidenced by my grandmother caressing the screen, viewers in England wanting to move to Summer Bay, etc. Keeping in mind that there are approximately 39,000 television stations across the planet, we can say that a significant number of persons’ understanding of the world is influenced by their stance before the mechanical-time of commercial television.

8. The Televisual

Walking with my brother to the local milkbar — Donald with his Brylcreem-slicked hair, me in anticipation of a Coca-Cola and a puff of a Peter Stuyvesant — I felt as if I was stepping ever closer to the American Way. Donald and I epitomised how viewers developed a direct connection between commercial television and mass consumption. The ‘televisual’ (Fry, 1993; Schor, 2003) names the circumstance in which the buying and the selling of commodities can be thought of as rituals for our spiritual and ego satisfaction. Donald’s and my journeys to and from the local milkbar can be seen as the means by which the televisual secreted into our lifeworld — home and consuming became tarred by the one brush. The star-endorsed products that Donald and I strove to acquire contained no hint of the ecological degradation that lay ahead. As Australians increasingly followed the advice of Molly and acquired products via hire purchase, the corner milkbar transmogrified, first into a shopping mall, and later into substantial shopping centres where a complex array of access points and depositories made available the products presented on commercial television.
a. Creating an umwelt

My reflections of Donald and I walking our dog — dressed like ‘stars’, smoking cigarettes and sipping Coca-Cola — is an insight into how each strand of the televisual came to be spun. The strands that Donald and I helped to spin became a complex entwining, so dense that at some point in time an analogy between it and spinning a spider’s web became redundant. Now, the old web of walking to the shops has transmogrified into a televisual cocoon, a world — an umwelt. It is useful to conceptualise the televisual in terms of the notion of an umwelt — an ‘environment’, ‘world around’ and ‘world about’ (Heidegger, 1962:93-95). The stories told in Chapter Six by Di, Maxwell and Yar demonstrate that the viewer has come to perceive of the televisual as their physical life-support system. The reflections in Chapter Five tell how Donald and I became willing helpers in weaving the televisual-umwelt. The subjective relationships and interpretations embroiled within the televisual are derived from within household, shopping mall, work, school and recreation (Fry, 1993; Jhally, 2006; Schor, 2003). Hence, we can say that the televisual creates and maintains meaning in the world of the viewer; the televisual-umwelt defines existence and well-being.

The notion of the televisual as an umwelt is useful for our meaning-making, for it enables us to more accurately position the mechanical-time of the viewer in context with the real-time of the more-than-human world. Commencing in the late 1940s, viewers of the polite, ordinary world of commercial television have been and continue to be delivered to the advertiser, be they at home, school, office, shopping mall or leisure centre. There is a particularity about the stories told in this umwelt, one that is summed up by executive Noel: ‘A good story is one that delivers the audience to the advertiser.’ The televisual is a complex umwelt in which the viewers’ consumption-based-worldview is reinforced by ‘good stories’. Each domestic, commuter, school, work and leisure domain within our televisual culture is a product-consuming domain.

b. Culture and the embodiment of the virtual

The observations in Chapters Five and Six enable us to conceptualise commercial television as the embodiment of consumer culture; as Jhally (2006) and Schor (2003)
argue, the viewer increasingly occupies a commercially themed world. While the mise-en-scène of this themed world is screened on television, the products displayed within the mise-en-scène can be physically accessed anywhere from the domestic refrigerator to the shelves of shopping malls. Drawing on Abram (1996) and McKibben (1992), we can appreciate that the televisual-umwelt is an anthropocentric place, one in which the sedentary stance of the viewer is occupied at dis-stance from the more-than-human world. In view of that, we can think of the televisual-umwelt in a particular way, one complementary to Virilio’s (1986) concept of television as virtual-reality. The products the viewer buys can be thought of as sense pads — just as computer sense pads can be attached to one’s body, in order to replicate physical sensation when interacting with virtual games and flight simulators — products render the sensation of living in the televisual-umwelt as ‘real’.

At first, there can appear to be a conflict in how I name the physical world of the televisual as ‘virtual’. Clearly, the shopping mall is rained upon, windswept and stands before the rising and the setting of the sun. The televisual-umwelt was not rendered inside a piece of modern technology in such a way that its existence can only be represented on a screen — as is the case when experiencing flight simulation. That said, the cement path Donald and I journeyed upon — first to the solitary milkbar and later the shopping complex that grew out of it — is, when compared with the paths walked in Chapter Four, a pathway leading deeper into mechanical-time and away from the real-time of the sensuous, natural dimension of the more-than-human world.

We can further the enquiry into the virtual nature of the televisual-umwelt by drawing on Giuseppe Mantovani’s (2000) psychological inquiry into culture. Not unlike Heidegger (discussed below), Mantovani draws to our attention the significance within the fact that people are born into an already existing culture that has a particular set of classifications: ‘it is not we who acquire culture but culture which acquires us and allows us to live inside its symbolic order’ (Mantovani, 2000:16, drawing on Bruner, 1993). We are born into culture; classifications exist prior to our birth. As we saw in the literature review, Mantovani draws on the Dyirbal people’s classification of birds as the spirits of dead women to argue that cultural belief has power over empirical experience. In this sense, we can appreciate why Donald and I ‘knew’ that we were walking in the ‘real-world’.
When classifications are experienced as ontic (birds are the spirits of dead women) they avoid challenge; in this sense, Mantovani’s argument can be read as complementing Heidegger’s notion of individuals being ‘flung into everydayness’. We can view the classification of ‘real’ — as it exists within the televisual-umwelt — in a particular way when we compare it with the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time that I embodied at the junction and walking the wallaby path. As Donald and I strode towards our subdivision’s solitary milkbar, the baker’s horse-drawn cart, like the dairy farm on the hill, was giving way to the televisual. The local creek had been encased in cement pipes, the surrounding earth covered by concrete and bitumen as the rolling hills became stepped by brick houses, replete with television aerials — not unlike the television aerials that Heidegger observed at Meßkirch in 1961 or those that Scott-Clark and Levy observed across Bhutan in 2003. Mantovani enables us to appreciate that a person’s experience is structured by a system of categories which has its roots in culture: the Dyirbal people do not put birds in the same category as other sentient beings — because, according to their traditional beliefs, birds are the spirits of dead women. What’s important here is that a Dyirbal child does not have a cognitive conflict between bird as sentient being, and bird as spirit — put simply, a bird ‘is’ the spirit of a dead woman:

Every society supplies its members with a set of beliefs which direct both the judgements and the prejudices of those same members. … We explore ‘our’ reality by relying on the maps, the categories that our culture has given us (Mantovani. 2000:10).

For Mantovani, it is tradition which states at the beginning of our journey, ‘what we must experience and how’ (p.11). As we have seen in Chapters Five and Six, viewers interpret commercial television via a repertoire of pre-existing categories: heroes tote guns, smoke cigarettes and kiss beautiful women (Chapter Five); sexy legs equal sexy car (Chapter Six). Mantovani argues, ‘such categories are not produced in the recesses of individual minds but are transmitted by the communities in which those individuals began their social lives’ (p.16): since 1946/7 communities have been increasingly infiltrated by commercial-realism. It is little wonder viewers want to make love to soap stars; caress the screen; cry over a character’s departure and move to Summer Bay — for as Mantovani explains:
If we ask ourselves how was it that we developed a certain version of the world, we can not answer unless we put forward as one of the causes the environment in which we grew up (2000:16).

To grow up in the televisual-umwelt is to, as it were, ‘perceive of birds as the spirits of dead women’. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this — in the case of the Dyrirbal, such a belief is culturally enriching — however, if a belief is maintaining an unsustainable umwelt, then the opposite must surely be the case.

Drawing on Mantovani, we can appreciate why the categories presented by commercial television and the televisual influence. The concept of the televisual enables us to discuss commercial television as having outstripped any simple notion of it being a home entertainment device — a mere box in the corner. What do we make of observations such as those of Di in Chapter Six, where viewers interact with actors in social situations by directing their attention to the actor’s persona, rather than to the person who just so happens to be an actor? If we think of the actor as a component of commercial television, a ‘product’ shaped by sixty years of production refinement — a ‘product’ enmeshed with the mise-en–scène with other televisual produce. We can appreciate that, for the viewer to make a clear distinction between person, persona, mise-en-scène and product, requires the viewer to be in a reflective stance within the complex modus operandi of the televisual-umwelt. Arguably, to question the categories presented on the screen would place the viewer at odds with the everydayness of today’s civilization; or as Mantovani would say, ‘to question the environment in which they grew up.’

Whenever a product such as Coco-Cola is consumed by a star such as Ricky Nelson at domains like Summer Bay, the product being consumed is the same as the product sitting on the shelf at the shopping mall, the office, the school canteen, indeed, standing in the household refrigerator — why then, for the viewer, would a person seen drinking Coca-Cola at Summer Bay, not be the same person purchasing the same Coca-Cola in an all day everyday supermarket? Within the everydayness of the televisual-umwelt, the actor does not stand separate and distinct from the mise-en-scène. As we have seen via Di, Yar and Maxwell’s stories, the viewer doesn’t make a distinction between television content and televisual content. From the emergence of
commercial television (Lipsitz, 1990) through to its transmogrification into the televisual (Fry, 1993; Schor, 2003), the process of selling product has worked against making such distinctions. In Chapter Six, Yar and Robert spoke about products being deliberately enmeshed within the mise-en-scène so that they are viewed as ordinary and normal elements of the all day everyday world. Exponentially since 1946, ‘ordinary and normal’ occasions such as a person (acting on television) consuming ‘ordinary and normal’ products, has meshed with the consumption of ‘ordinary and normal’ products by the viewer. The actor in an ordinary and normal social situation cannot be easily distinguished from the all day everyday mise-en-scène of commercial television (itself, an element of the televisual-umwelt) — an all day everyday mise-en-scène in which the viewer has, over time, built a ‘biography’ (Scannell, 1995).

Walking with my brother to the local milkbar to buy Coca-Cola and cigarettes is also emblematic of a larger journey, one that is partially rooted in what Saul (1993) and Berger (1972) saw was a conjunction between Italian Renaissance, perspectival art, commerce and the emergence of a powerful anthropocentric scientific discourse. In that sense, prior to our setting forth, the image of an organic cosmos with a living female earth had been re-imaged as dead and passive (Merchant, 1989). In an ‘American Way’, Donald and I embraced an imperialistic ‘form of vestigial thinking which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations even after the formal end of colonialism’ (Shohat and Stam, 1994:2) — Heidegger would not disagree, though he would cast his view further back, seeing Donald and I as walking along the contemporary cultural-path of Western metaphysics, the first cobbles of which were laid in ancient Greece.

9. All Day Everydayness

Arguably, the essence of such a cross-domain, cross-disciplinary question as the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world is central to the inquiry of Martin Heidegger, in particular the later Heidegger (Pattison 2000) where we can observe a turn away from the excessive anthropocentrism of his Being and Time (Rigby, 2004b) to a philosophy that resonates with the sensibility of the more-than-human world as discussed here. Heidegger’s notion of everydayness sheds light on the shift that has taken place since the inception of commercial television. He
enables us to think about ‘the real’ and ‘the viewer’, outside of and beyond the categories set down within the televisual-umwelt.

The modus operandi of modern technology, such as commercial television, is the issue at hand, rather than technology as such. For Heidegger, persons have no say or control over the existence they are ‘flung’ into. The ‘when, where, how and what’ Homo sapiens sapiens are born into amounts to the everydayness of a person’s existence. All things within that existence ‘are’, they are in place prior to the individual being flung into life or indeed into a new place. It is in this sense that I perceive Mantovani and Heidegger as complementary.

When television was first spoken of, it was often described as ‘radio with pictures’. Usually, when a new thing is introduced into a culture, it is not conceived of as having a self-contained reference; we call on existing things to both describe and understand the new thing. Both ‘radio’ and ‘motion pictures’ existed prior to television, and hence they could be called upon as reference points when describing television to a person that had yet to observe it. It would be nonsensical to describe television as ‘radio with pictures’ to a person who was born into a household where television pre-dates that person’s existence. Indeed, today it is conceivable that many television viewers don’t listen to radio or attend the movies. In the context of this discussion, the question needs to be asked, ‘What are the ecological ramifications associated with viewers who have always experienced commercial television as part of their existence?’ For many persons, commercial television has existed for their entire life, and therefore, the twenty-four hour cycle observed in Chapter Five, like the sunrise and sunset of Chapter Four, is part of their everydayness.

We also need to take into account that the moving picture itself has a substantial association with ecological degradation. As we saw through Barnouw (1993) and Shohat and Stam (2002), the portability of the moving picture, as perfected by Lumière in 1896, rapidly became a means of cinematically confirming in the minds of the patrons ‘back home’, the merits of imperialism. By and large the degradation of ‘other’ people and places was edited out. Therefore, the question concerning the everydayness in which commercial television dwells does not derive from a utopian concept of pre-commercial television, where radio, moving pictures and newspapers
better informed the masses about degradation. Rather, it is a question that draws on the history of progress (Wright, 2004), in conjunction with questions concerning technology (Heidegger, 1977).

Jhally (2006) argues that commercial television conditions the viewer to think in a particular direction, one in which all manner of life’s necessities: love, security, happiness, success etc, can be met via consumption. Heidegger (1962) demonstrates that we can say how things are but not necessarily why they are. Our very familiarity with particular practices (viewing television) and ways of interpreting ‘life’s necessities’ are for the most part disguised, because those practices and structures that define how we make sense of the world are usually made transparent by the familiarity of everydayness. Complementing Heidegger, Malpas (1999) reminds us that place is ontological, an observation that connects within this discussion with Fry’s (1993) argument that television is ontological. Commercial television entered my lifeworld, but now children are born into a world where commercial television, and its mercantile interpretation of love, security, happiness, success etc, pre-dates their birth: ‘ontology must begin with the pre-ontological understanding of being because this is the definitive characteristic of Dasein’ (Phillips, 2005:7). How should we speak about this in terms of a sensibility towards the more-than-human world?

a. The pre-ontological and the suspension of disbelief

A Heideggerian reading of contemporary commercial television draws attention to the pre-ontological stance that commercial television has in the 21st century. Hence, in terms of awareness of the more-than-human world, we need to acknowledge the ontic nature of commercial television. The types of messages that dwell within commercial television, as witnessed in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, are, for millions of persons, prior to the experience of reading them. Such persons are flung into an existence where such commercial messages are a constituent of everydayness. Heidegger provides a means of thinking about the messages on commercial television and how a person who perceives television as ‘radio with pictures’ reads such messages compared with a person who perceives ‘commercial television as television’.
In Chapter Two, I briefly touched on Eason’s (1999) research on the response of unborn children to the signature tunes of television programs viewed repeatedly by their mothers. Let us imagine Manning as one of those babies, for indeed he is of that generation. Let us imagine that since the day of conception, Manning has been regularly present before the voice of MacDonald Carey: ‘Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives’. Perhaps it is possible that Manning has also been receptive to the charisma of Mornings with Kerry Anne, Dr Phil, The Young And The Restless, and Fresh. Indeed, the heralding music of the news, plus countless commercial jingles could very well have soothed him in the womb. Thus, the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world can’t avoid a discussion about the place we are flung into.

Later, as a newborn child, Manning is placed in a bassinet; an electric light illuminates the room; television resonates in the corner; automobiles rumble in the distance; a meal is cooked; family members mill round; the dog wants to go outside — we can say that Manning exists in safe, secure and desirable circumstances. With Heidegger in mind, let us make a further step and imagine the subjective knowing of the child — what is Manning thinking? Drawing on Malpas, we can appreciate that ‘thinking’ comes out of place; for Malpas the grasp of oneself as a thinking creature is reliant on notions of place and space; they are ‘determinative of patterns of thinking and understanding’ (1999:11). Though articulated less philosophically, in terms of visual literacy, Bamford (2003) complements Malpas when she says, ‘thinking comes out of seeing’. We can begin to appreciate that to be born into a world where commercial television is pre-ontological, creates very different perceptions of the world from that of a person born into a world where commercial television is introduced as ‘radio with pictures’.

From the perspective of the newborn child, the temptation is to ask, ‘What is this that ‘I’ (Manning) have been flung into?’ For Heidegger, like Mantovani, such a question is too objective. The notion of ‘I’ cannot, at this stage of Manning’s existence, be separated from all that exists in the world that Manning has been flung into. For however briefly, the televisual-unwelt that Manning has been flung into ‘is’ — self (Manning) is the all encompassing ‘thing’: the electric light; the sounds of television;
the muffle of automobiles; the aroma of food and the presence of family members. As Heidegger argues:

Thrownness is neither a ‘fact that is finished’ nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein’s facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, and is sucked into the turbulence of the “they’s” inauthenticity (Heidegger, 1962: 223).

In this sense, it is useful to think of Manning’s ‘assertions’ when flung before the surrogate cortex of commercial television, in terms of ‘intentional comportment’:

Asserting is one of Dasein’s intentional comportments. In essence it is an asserting about something and thus is intrinsically referred to some being or beings. Even if that about which an assertion is made should turn out not to be, an empty illusion, this in no way gainsays the intentionality of the structure of assertion but only demonstrates it (Heidegger, 1988:207).

The viewer (Manning) comes into a room and sees television. Now, the television that the viewer sees is not in the first instance the object of detached empirical perception. It is simply the television the viewer has to walk past, or sit near, or switch off or on or adjust the volume, or change channels. In such ways the viewer lives out an intentional comportment toward the television long before the viewer ever isolates it as a distinct object of perception.

Within the televisual-umwelt, the manner in which the viewer encounters television doesn’t just involve what the viewer subsequently isolates as television; here, such intentional comportment embraces the whole complex of the televisual, which is everything that has to do with the viewer entering a particular room or place where the story told by the commercial surrogate cortex resonates: commuting, school, work, shopping and recreation — ‘as it is perceived, as it shows itself in concrete perception’ … ‘the way and manner of its being-perceived’, … the show of its being-perceived … the how of its being-intended’ (Pattison, 2000:89).
b. Does commercial television care?

Accepting that we are flung into the world, the discussion above draws attention to the reference points a person chances upon. Such reference points contain the shaping power of existence. We are flung into life, and subsequently make do; which is not to say we make sense of it, or make either good or bad of it. That said, Homo sapiens sapiens thrive; our thriving, be it in harmony or disharmony with the more-than-human world has resulted from what Heidegger names as ‘care’ (*Sorge*). Care is the Being of Dasein, it is that fundamental structure that underlies each and every particular human existence. Heidegger’s explanation of care, via an ancient fable, helps further this discussion:

Once when ‘Care’ was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. ‘Care’ asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this, and demanded that it be given his name instead. While ‘Care’ and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her name be conferred on the creature, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: ‘Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called ‘*homo*’, for it is made of *humus* (earth) (1962:242).

Returning to baby Manning in the bassinet, we can appreciate that care, as the Being of Dasein, entails the full gamut of possibility — care resides in both the manger and the nursery. In the sense of immediate nurture, Manning is cared for by his mother, the caring circumstances in which mothering takes place are determined by family and community; in turn, a community’s quality-of-care is predicated on mother earth. If any of the tiers of care fracture, the quality of care for the baby in the bassinet is diminished.
In the light of this conversation, the question needs to be asked concerning commercial television and care. The quality of the family-care that dwells in the household of each viewer is infinitely variable, however, as Mantovani helps us to appreciate, the interpretation of care is determined by culture. Manning is flung into the ontic care of culture, a pre-ontological ‘one-caring-thing’. For example, the caring-thing that new-born Manning curls his tongue around must surely be the caring-thing he swallows. In this sense, surely the caring-thing whispering in his ear, is the caring-thing kissing his cheek? Likewise, is not the caring-thing (bunny rug) snugly wrapped around Manning, like the soft, flickering blue light reflecting off the walls and ceiling, not the same caring-thing? What then of the familiar voice of MacDonald Carey’s ‘Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives’, and the music heralding that program, and Dr Phil? Surely Rod Stewart, ‘as Manning has never heard him before’, is the same caring-thing as the jingle that accompanies the Smiles fried and frozen potato snacks — as must be the voice telling him about pizza flavour biscuits dipped in cheese!

As time passes, the teasing out of these things comes about in place — a culture of consumption, a commercial televisual-umwelt. Hence, we can make the obvious yet important statement: until processes come about that differentiate, things are undifferentiated; that which is not differentiated remains undifferentiated. Care is, ‘ahead-of-itself/being-already-in-(the world)’ (Heidegger, 1962:237). As a result, ‘things’ are mistaken as a ‘thing’; hence we can say that produce (Coca-Cola) and the star/personality consuming it, unless differentiated, remain one thing. The world into which the viewer is flung is a place where culturally determined everydayness dwells. Thus, being flung into the place of the televisual-umwelt is central to the question concerning commercial television, care and the more-than-human world.

Let us step beyond commercial television and Manning in the bassinet, and return to the leap undertaken in Chapter Four. I initially looked upon the junction of the two creeks as one-thing. As I sat on a rock at the junction I came to recognise the multi-faceted existence of the junction — water from Stony Creek flowing one way, water from Wisemans Creek another. I came to recognise the epidermis of each creek as they mingled; there, water spiders walked upon the creek like I walk across the land; a flotilla of minute jetsam and flotsam circled a vortex: beneath, yabbies made their
way across the floor of the junction. At another dimension, I came to dream and imagine other persons from other times undergoing a care-filled tarrying at this very same place — persons flung into the pre-dis-stance of modern technology. While the multifaceted complexities of existence are initially conceptualised as one thing, existence is malleable. Though cognition of existence dwells in perceptions shaped by culture (as Mantovani (2000) demonstrates, the categories of culture influence how persons flung into culture think), place can shift preconceptions. Place can provide the space in which one can leap — upon landing, ‘the world looks different’ (Pattison 2000:116): ‘the inquiry into the mind or the self will be identical with the inquiry into place’ (Malpas, 1999:16).

Moving back to commercial television, it is relevant to hold Scannell’s notion of ‘politeness’ (Chapter Two, p. 51), and Jhally’s notion of ‘life’s necessities’ — ‘how to achieve happiness’ via ‘our individual needs and desires’ (Chapter Two, p. 46 & p. 63) — alongside Heidegger’s articulation of care. The polite nature of television, as reflected in Chapter Six, locates life’s necessities (love, security, happiness, success etc.) in program and advertising content. We can thus name the care that resides in the everydayness of commercial television as ‘polite-care’. Scannell helps us appreciate how polite-care resides in the ‘look’ of presenters; I observed polite-care filled commentary directed towards the viewer by newsreaders adorned in polite ‘white shirts and ties’; similar polite-care emanated from Kerry-Anne, Dr Phil and the presenters of Y? Some of the examples of polite-care portrayed in the advertisements described in Chapter Five saw HCF medical insurance care for my health, Dove Shampoo care by my hair, Smiles care for my kids, Birds Eye Roast Veggies care for the ‘outlaws’ and Ansell Gloves care for my home. As Jhally demonstrates, advertising campaigns link care to product messages — whereas, Abram (1995), Chatwin (1987), Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993) demonstrate how traditional indigenous peoples associate care with the more-than-human world — a ‘care’ I came to care-for as a result of my tarrying at the junction and walking the wallaby paths. I have come to conceptualise more-than-human care in terms of yorro yorro — ‘everything standing up new again’ (Mowaljarlai and Malnic, 1993), a concept that resonates with Saturn’s wisdom: ‘“homo”,… is made of humus (earth)’ (Heidegger, 1962:242). When the more-than-human world is able to be diverse and sustainable, it
manifests *yorro yorro* — a place where Homo sapiens sapiens are in the bosom of ‘real-care’.

c. Dis-belief

As we saw in Chapter Five, commercial television is a storytelling modality; even the advertisements are stories, the Birds Eye Roast Vegetables advertisement being a good case in point. It is generally accepted that when persons are readying themselves to be told a story, they ‘willingly suspend their disbelief’ (Engell & Jackson, 1985). By willingly suspending our disbelief we allow ourselves to become immersed in the story being told; in doing so, we allow ourselves to experience a gamut of sensations such as fear, anger, humour, love, etc, while knowing that we are in a ‘caring’ environment — one in which we are not going to be physically involved with the happenings before us. Up until the last sixty years or so, Homo sapiens sapiens haven’t found themselves in an existence where performance-based stories are a constituent component of the sedentary domestic everydayness they are flung into. As we saw in Chapter Five, formal community ceremonies surrounding the watching of commercial television ceased shortly after they began: visits to neighbours homes, preparation of special food and ceremonial dress soon gave way to domestic routine.

In terms of commercial television, when does Manning, as baby, teenager, or adult willingly suspend disbelief? How do the persons enmeshed in a televisual existence know that commercial television is telling a meta-story? What are the points of reference that allow the viewer to question the commercial screen, to tease out and differentiate the threads entwining product, advertising, story and star/personality? How does the viewer distinguish between mise-en-scène and reality, between the *Days Of Our Lives* and the living of our days? How does the viewer come to know that they are being led down a commercially-constructed story-laden path, a path with the sole purpose of leading the viewer to a suite of purchasing options — produce that is ready to hand within the reality of the televisual-*umwelt*.

As we saw in both Chapters Five and Six, the viewer hasn’t differentiated the storied happenings on television from the televisual world they inhabit. This is understandable, for as we have seen, the distinctions within commercial television and
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the televisual are both complex and blurred. Why should we assume that the viewer knows that some elements of commercial television are ‘real’ and that other elements are ‘not real’— if the viewer does consider some aspects as real, and other aspects as unreal, what is the viewer basing such ‘knowing’ upon? What are the reference points the viewer draws upon when making such a determination? For example, how does the viewer know that the mercantile need for advertisements prevents the telling of certain stories, and hence certain ways of thinking? If a ‘good’ story is one that delivers the audience to the advertiser, then we have a potential conflict between polite-care and real-care. If good stories are imbued with polite-care, how can ‘good’ stories speak of real-care — while delivering the viewer to the advertiser?

In Chapter Four I noted my reflections when washing the dishes, when the steam from the hot sudsy water began to draw a curtain between my vision of the platypus and me, the dishwasher. I became concerned about losing sight of the platypus. I rationalised at the time that should the line of sight between the platypus and me disappear, then the platypus would disappear from my worldview. My concern at the time, and indeed my current pondering is, ‘how many more-than-human worlds, such as platypus waterholes and wallaby paths, have been concealed in the sprint for progress?’

Globally, the degradation of more-than-human worlds is having an impact on my life. For example, Australia’s food bowl, the Murray Darling Basin has on average a flow of 11,000 megalitres per annum, though over the past ten years this has fallen to an average of 8,000 megalitres. As the platypus swims before my home in December 2006, the flow in the Murray-Darling River Basin is approximately 500 megalitres (Mackenzie, 2006; Wahlquist, 2007). Five hundred megalitres of river flow is not enough to maintain either the human or the more-than-human habitat that depend upon this thirty million year old watercourse. While my allowing the steam to curtain off my view of the platypus doesn’t at one level affect the platypus, at a general level, the failure to view the more-than-human world, even at a distance, has a detrimental effect.

Another way of pondering my dilemma at the sink is through the philosophical work of Malpas (1999) and the phenomenological reflections of journalist Bill McKibben
Malpas argues that thinking comes out of place, McKibben argues that what we watch everyday affects how we think. Upon reflection, it appears as though I demonstrated more sense in wiping the steam from the window than my initial response indicated, for while the platypus was initially observed the distance, I was subsequently able to initiate a closer understanding. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the disappearing of the more-than-human world as a reference point is a fundamental issue. We need to ask, ‘What has fogged up our window on the more-than-human world?’ Keeping Heidegger and Malpas in mind — in terms of ‘Place, Care and the Pre-ontological’ — we need to question ‘thinking’, when thinking takes place within the purely-human worldview of the commercial, televsional-umwelt.

Returning to Chapter Five, having drawn the curtain on the more-than-human world, my mind continues to think in place. My new window on the world takes me to Foggy Old London Town and the story of Jack the Ripper. Sometimes, rather than sitting transfixed to the screen, I turn on the tap and fill the kitchen sink; there, I turn to the screen and view segments such as The Devils Highway. As I wash the dishes, the TV takes me from one entertaining-lure to another. By the time I dry and place the dishes in the cupboard, I am listening to familiar stories, such as ‘feeding the outlaws’. I turn on the vacuum cleaner, the sound of which drowns out Rod Stewart, ‘as I’ve never heard him before’. As I vacuum, my purely-human thinking reflects on my immediate world, the floor, the dishes, the images dancing upon the television screen. In such circumstances my mind is turned to the machinations of living in the 21st century. Heidegger says of contemporary civilisation, ‘It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself’ (1977:26). What comes about if persons only contemplate the anthropocentric? For Heidegger, the concern is, as it is for Abram (1996) and McKibben (1992), one in which Homo sapiens sapiens run the risk of losing what it is to be sapient.

Has the shift from real-care to polite-care endangered existence? Can we argue that more-than-human reference points are associated with wisdom? Can we argue that the loss of more-than-human points of reference is a significant ‘thinking’ issue, one in which our civilisation is losing important thoughts. Such ponderings are a substantial issue for Abram, for each time an animal is driven to extinction or a landscape
destroyed, the more-than-human ‘voices’ (the language of sentient beings and places) are lost forever, and with it, the intelligence of knowing:

By denying that birds and other animals have their own styles of speech, by insisting that the river has no real voice and that the ground itself is mute, we stifle our direct experience. We cut ourselves off from the deep meanings in many of our words, severing our language from that which supports and sustains it. We then wonder why we are often unable to communicate even among ourselves (1996:263).

10. Place Is Ontological

As we have seen, the type of thinking that took place in Chapter Four is a different type of thinking to that which took place in Chapters Five and Six. The thinking-place in Chapter Five is a place that incorporates reflecting upon a storied, commercial, virtual-reality; there, sight and sound are the only means of informing the thinker. The sedentary state in which virtual-reality is experienced is one in which curiosity dominates — multiple, rapid scene changes in which sound, light and action are manipulated to keep the viewer transfixed while being delivered to the advertiser.

My observations of commercial television from Viewerland are further enhanced by the type of thinking that I encountered within commercial television production — a thinking in which an advertisement requires two or three twelve-hour days to film in order that the desired story is relayed; this does not take into account the equally time-consuming thinking processes of negotiating, budgeting and scripting in order to bring about the advertisement’s intention. To varying degrees, similar processes are undertaken when producing drama, soap opera, situation comedy, lifestyle, news and current affairs. The production values of the Jack the Ripper and Devil’s Highway stories discussed in Chapter Five are substantial. For example, the Jack the Ripper story incorporated expensive studio production techniques such as a close-up shot of a cart wheel travelling across cobble stones; such cinematography incorporates special lighting effects and devices such as a fog machine and camera dolly, and is a time consuming and labour intensive process — one in which the thinking, like all the genres mentioned, is directed towards delivering the viewer to the advertiser.
The point I am making here is that as a viewer located within my sedentary stance before the screen, my thinking is taking place within the highly refined secretions constructed by commercial television thinking. As we saw in Chapter Five, such secretions contain a cocktail of curiosity. I was reading the screen at curious-pace; rapid image sequences accompanied by sound effects, music and voice encouraged me to remain sedentary before the screen. In the context of Heidegger’s notion of ‘curiosity’, the sedentary viewer seeks the excitement of continual novelty and changing encounters, while remained affixed to the screen. Both Virilio’s ‘speed’ (1986) and Fiske and Hartley’s ‘secretions’ (2003) contribute to the viewers’ sedentary, curious stance:

Curiosity has nothing to do with observing entities and marvelling at them — To be amazed to the point of not understanding is something in which it has no interest. Rather it concerns itself with a kind of knowing but just in order to have known. … Curiosity is everywhere and nowhere …(it is) … constantly uprooting itself (Heidegger, cited in Malpas 2006:75-6).

The curiosity enmeshed within the rapid-fire storytelling of commercial television is dependent upon the output of highly refined technological processes. The meticulous work of many people over many hours is presented to the viewer as a seamless audiovisual package; a package that is here one moment and gone the next, only to be replaced by another equally intense package. The modus operandi of the curious within the secretions of commercial television brings about a particular stance, one that is articulated by Heidegger when he described the good people of Meßkirch as being ‘present’ in the home, while having lost their ‘presence’.

a. Present and presence

On returning to Meßkirch in 1961, Heidegger commented on the number of television and radio aerials on the roofs of the town; the residents of Meßkirch had become viewers, for Heidegger, they were never home. This is interesting, for as we have seen via Malpas (1999) and McKibben (1992) place is ontological, even when the place is the placeless place of commercial television. Commenting on Heidegger’s Meßkirch observation, Pattison points out, ‘I may be sitting in my living room, but
‘really’, thanks to television, I’m in the sports stadium or on Safari or being a bystander at a gunfight in the Old West’ (2000:60). My experience in Chapter Five, when one minute I am in Foggy Old London Town and the next The Devils Highway, provides a sense of the complex nature of commercial television, place and the more-than-human world. In Chapter Five I provide two further observations of place in relation to commercial television. I recalled noticing a certain physical difference between my home in the late 1950s — due to our recently acquired television receiver — and the homes of family and friends who didn’t own a television receiver. I made the comment that ‘those homes felt how my home once did’ — their furniture and layout had not been adapted for viewing. Later, I reflect on visiting family and friends after I had spent a considerable amount of time away from Viewerland, I was struck by how central television had become to the lives of family and friends. To this end, commercial television can be thought of as the most immediate, most visible ‘sign’ of the dominion of modern technology, as such it is ‘the solvent of everything meant by “home”’ (Pattison, 2000:60). Should we be concerned about television aerials dotted across the roofs of homes from Meßkirch to Bhutan? Is the message reverberating within such dis-stance one that disentangles human ‘Being’ from the more-than-human world, and endangers the care that cradles Dasein?

We can gain a sense of Heidegger’s Meßkirch observation of ‘present’ and ‘presence’ by comparing the five minutes of commercial television at the commencement of Prime Time Thursday, with the time when Manning and I observed the water-rat and the waterfowl. Over a similar duration of about five minutes, Manning’s and my attention to detail was not funnelled into a modern technology-determined point of view; rather, the duration of five minutes was alive with sight and sound, scent and taste, location and touch. Manning and I were located in a particular type of stance, one infused with the polymodal, sensuous natural dimensions of real-time — we became acutely drawn into the presence of the moment. This particular moment was devoid of dis-stance. In terms of commercial television, we were not technologically drawn to an entertaining construct; we were not being delivered to an advertiser. In a Heideggerian sense, Manning and I were engaged in that which creates ‘presence’ — the polymodal nature of ‘tarry’. Manning and I were much more at home in the distance of watching the water-rat and the waterfowl than when at a dis-stance watching a wildlife documentary ‘at home’.
b. Dis-stance, curious and tarry

The separation of persons from presence is a hallmark of modern technology; dis-
stance, as observed in Chapter Five, presents the stance in which virtual-thinking
takes place, a stance in which the ‘curious’, as opposed to ‘tarry’, informs thinking.
This is a stance in which a person’s body can be in one place while that which the
person is instantaneously reflecting and thinking upon is somewhere else: the
‘s supposedness’ of Foggy Old London Town; Dinner With The Outlaws, etc. By
contrast, in Chapter Four, as I sat on the rocks at the junction, the world of the
junction was revealed to me in real-time — the birds that I had initially disturbed
gradually returned to their activities; the platypus returned to its foraging routine. We
can contemplate thus that there is no ‘supposedness’ in the more-than-human world.

The rhythm of contemporary commercial television is one in which the sedentary
viewer reflects and thinks, thinks and reflects within the modality of the ‘curious’. In
the Heideggerian sense, to be curious doesn’t allow the viewer to tarry; for to be
curious doesn’t allow things to appear in their own terms; to speak in their own
unique manner; to reveal themselves in their own time, and hence make available the
opportunity for the observer to more acutely understand them and their particular
circumstance. Viewers tend to re-act rather than contemplate when immersed in the
virtual-reality of commercial television, for commercial television requires the viewer
to assimilate at speed, in un-real dis-stance. This is not how the more-than-human
world unfolds, for the more-than-human ‘is’ the pace and rhythm of the real; it can be
no other way; here, dis-stance is nonexistent; instead, the physical stance of near and
far (distance) interacts with the pace and rhythm of the more-than-human world.
Things dwelling in the more-than-human world are seen and not seen; accordingly,
you appear or remain unseen according to more-than-human circumstances, as
opposed to the decisions brought about by a commercial imperative. The more-than-
human world is neither ornament nor entertainment; it is not a place where an
encounter between a water-rat and a waterfowl is punctuated by advertisements.
Likewise, at the junction, when a flotilla of jetsam and flotsam circled the vortex, a
soundtrack did not engineer my hearing of the event — neither violin nor trumpet
influenced my emotions.
Juliet Schor (2003) continues our Heideggerian zu Hause discussion of ‘human beings no longer “at home” where, seen from outside, they “live”’ (Pattison, 2000:60). Schor points out how the familiar discourse of commercial television is voiced beyond the home. For Schor, the urban and suburban world has become a televisual place where there is a particular familiarity between what is presented on television and what is displayed between home and work, home and school, home and shopping and home and recreation. Through Schor we can appreciate how the nature of the televised-curious has entered the viewer’s domestic, work, school, shopping, recreation and commuting lifeworld — the televised-curious is not restricted to the viewers’ stance before the domestic screen, it pervades the broad sweep of everydayness. Drawing on Schor we can argue that the viewers’ thinking is taking place in dis-stance, be it as a commuter, worker, student, shopper, holidaymaker or domestic viewer. The opportunity to tarry, to contemplate, to allow things to reveal themselves in their own time, to be at home in the world and embody the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time (presence), requires a step beyond the categories of our culture.

c. Care filled water-cooler conversation

Noel spoke of ‘water-cooler conversation’ as a measure of success in terms of commercial television; for him, when viewers at school, work or a social situation talk about commercial television content, then that piece of television content is considered to be successful. Such domestic, workplace, schoolyard, commuting and recreational conversations are ratings infused; in effect, they deliver the viewer to the advertiser across all aspects of living. As we have seen, when the viewer ventures beyond the familiar world of household, a familiar ‘at homeness’ is already waiting at work, school, commuting, shopping and recreational places. Hence, when viewers venture beyond the polite-care of household they find polite-care based reference points already waiting in the familiar, overarching televisual-umwelt. (Harking back to the conversations with Di, Yar and Maxwell in Chapter Six, it is not surprising therefore that the viewer should expect a care-filled interaction with television personalities if and when they chance upon them).

The ramifications of polite-care framing the televisual-umwelt are that the domain of continuous consumption is perceived of as a ‘place of real-care’. In terms of
commercial television, it is therefore reasonable to suggest that the challenge that stands before our culture in terms of embracing the more-than-human world is how to create a ‘leap’; how to shift thinking within the televisual-\textit{umwelt}.

If, as McKibben (1992) suggests, television has become the viewers’ third parent, can we also read this to mean that the more-than-human world has been relegated to the status of a distant relative. Does the viewer no longer have a mother earth? Neither Chapters Five nor Six presented reference points that directed the viewer to contemplate the notion of the more-than-human world as the means of our very existence. Over the duration of the twenty-four hour cycle, only one five minute segment involving Kerry-Anne and a naturopath instilled in me any hint of non-commercial care; for a moment, I perceived a genuine dialogue taking place, one in which well-being appeared to be positioned above selling. Though I wanted to dwell with Kerry-Anne and the naturopath, the commercial imperative of the network meant that ultimately, even this brief insight into well-being delivered me to a suite of advertisements.

\section*{11. The Surrogate Cortex}

The reflections on contemporary commercial television offer an opportunity to think about the commercial screen in the context of the broader notion of the ‘surrogate cortex’ (Hodgson 2000). When considering commercial television as a surrogate cortex I am drawing together the musings of cognitive archaeology, in particular those of Hodgson, along with a historical study of Australian traditional indigenous art, in particular Morwood (2002), in conjunction with Mantovani’s study of categorization (2000); all of these I read from the position of my immersion in the more-than-human world, ‘one in which allows to earth, sky, and divinities a plurality of voices of their own’ (Rigby 2004b:434). I understand that, combined the surrogate cortex, art, culture and the more-than-human world are integral to Care, as the Being of Dasein.

The cognitive archaeology of Hodgson puts forward the theory that in order for Homo sapiens sapiens to prosper, we needed to develop a means of categorizing the world. Such a complex process required physical reference points. The screen evolved as a significant modality upon which data could be rendered. Understood in its broadest
possible context, initial concepts of screen take in both momentary and permanent inscriptions, from a stick making marks in the earth, to sculpture, to engraving and painting where blood and resin-like substances were rendered upon wood, fibre, hide, bone and rock. The resulting inscriptions can be understood as calendars, encyclopaedias and registers of social, political, religious and spiritual beliefs and processes.

Homo sapiens sapiens’ very existence is dependent upon technology — to care for and be cared for requires technology. Persons have to gather food, be it by digging stick or combined harvester, spear or gun, shopping trolley or garden — we have always had to skin, peel and cook. Our dwelling upon the earth means that persons need protection, whether nomad or settler, we need clothing and shelter just as we require the preservation and storage of food. This all requires complex knowledge and processes that can’t be remembered, retained and implemented in their entirety without some form of manual — resin on a stick, oil on canvas, code on a computer. Such data, be it contained in manuals, calendars, encyclopaedias or story cues have been instrumental in providing care for Homo sapiens sapiens. In this sense, technology and care cannot be separated; for Ihde (1990), like Heidegger (1977), technology and care are an aspect of Dasein.

a. The Commercial Surrogate Cortex

Chapters Five and Six facilitate a consideration of commercial television as an iteration of the surrogate cortex, of how the care of Dasein is currently rendered. Commercial television, as a surrogate cortex, can be observed as carrying out the functions of calendar, encyclopaedia as well as renderer of political and religious beliefs. Programs such as *Good Morning Australia* inform the viewer of the time, day and date while presenting a gamut of culturally specific encyclopaedic, political and entertainment based stories. Rendered upon the modern surrogate cortex of commercial television, the viewer sees Homo sapiens sapiens positioned in the foreground, while the more-than-human world is relegated to the background.

When approached through the work of Abram (1996), Chatwin (1987) and Mowaljarlai and Malnic (1993), my contemplation in Chapter Four, in which I
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imagined a mob of traditional indigenous people gathering at the junction, can be read as a search for a particular type of thinking. I am interested in the ‘thinking’ undertaken by the people that Hodgson (2000) and Morwood (2002) ponder; those persons who etched distance; the traditional persons who hadn’t fallen prey to distance. My questioning was especially directed towards contemplating their relationship with the more-than-human world. For example, Morwood demonstrates that rock art provided Aboriginal Australians with encyclopedic understanding of flora and fauna: foraging habits, reproduction processes, configuration and skeletal structure. Similarly, Mowaljarlai and Malnic demonstrate how the surrogate cortex of sculpture, rock and bark painting inform culture.

We can contemplate how the surrogate cortex of the commercial screen presents the viewer with a different awareness of Homo sapiens sapiens’ relationship to the world, a world where the earth is no longer ‘mother’. The actor and the viewer harvest their food from a supermarket — Birds Eye Roast Vegetables, like fish ‘fingers’, come from a freezer. McCains Smiles and Streets ‘Paddle Pops’ are each presented as edible game playing. We saw how the purchase of a Paddle Pop ice-cream offers the viewer the opportunity to participate in an Internet game. The Smiles advertisement screened toddlers carrying bowls of Smiles, as if the produce was central to happy play — Jhally would not be surprised. Categories such as season and growing conditions in which Smiles come into being were not entered into; to this end we can begin to grasp just what it is that is missing in what McKibben (1992) calls ‘our age of missing information’.

The lineage of the surrogate cortex incorporates ‘writing-over’; from resin on rock, through oil on canvas; from analogue images on videotape to digital images on iPods; the surface of the screen has been and continues to be ‘painted over’ — new renderings of similar or different stories replace renditions no longer considered essential. Within our broad definition of the screen, we can appreciate that the work beneath is rendered over by those in power. Drawing on the cross-disciplinary ponderings of the screen by Berger (1972), Hodgson (2000), McKibben (1992), Morwood (2002) and Saul (1993), we can appreciate that culture can render the surrogate cortex with ‘missing information’. Contemplating Morwood’s observations of traditional indigenous art, we can appreciate, as Saul appreciates, a shift has taken
place. The commercial surrogate cortex categorizes the more-than-human world as ‘standing-reserve’ (Heidegger 1977). More than mere ‘stock’, standing-reserve names the ‘modern’ technologically altered character of things, a situation in which the more-than-human world is conceived of as standing in reserve for our use — season, reproduction, habitat and the integrity of the more-than-human as a whole is, as we have witnessed in Chapter Five and Six, misunderstood as having no or little importance in the 21st century by those who render the commercial surrogate cortex. As Robert said, ‘The problem will always be with the environment — that no one buys or sells it as such. If no one buys it or sells it, in a capitalist environment, where does it have any value?’

The surrogate cortex is how those with influence render their view of the world; Morwood demonstrates this was the case with traditional indigenous art; Berger demonstrates this was the case with Italian Renaissance perspectival oil painting; Shohat and Stam (2002) demonstrate this was the case with film, and Lipsitz (1990) demonstrates this is the case with commercial television. And indeed, public domain Internet free movie sites such as YouTube are now being colonised by political, publicity and public relation content (‘White House Hopefuls’, 2007).

As we have seen, all newborn babies in all epochs are flung into an everydayness where pre-existing cultural categories define perceptions of existence. Having made the shift from MacDonald Carey’s voice vibrating through their mother’s body, the televisual baby is now a toddler able to walk between the Days Of Our Lives and Y? — in doing so, this little person ‘snacks’ from a bowl piled high with produce such as Smiles. As we have seen, the viewer has difficulty teasing out and distinguishing the various elements that make up the televisual mise-en-scène of the surrogate cortex. In terms of the televisual child, are not the Smiles as central to existence as the wallaby cooking on a campfire was to a child of a different epoch? Just as the wallaby cooking on the fire, the wallaby grazing in the distance and the wallaby etched on the cave wall came from the same place, are not the Smiles in the bowl at home, the Smiles rendered on the television screen and the Smiles in the supermarket freezer conceived of as occupying one world? In terms of a child flung before the surrogate cortex of the 21st century, the perception exists that the televisual is real. It is a ‘real’ that no longer incorporates the three grafted bodies observed in Chapter Four, in
which the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time informs thinking. Now, the culturally determined perceptions of ‘real’ that inform the televisual child are, argues Virilio, ‘virtual’. According to the commercial surrogate cortex, Smiles appear to not require the four seasons in order to come into existence; rather, as standing-reserve, Smiles are always in stock. With this in mind, we can better appreciate why, in Chapter Six, a soap opera star in a supermarket is perceived as occupying the same world as produce; for both ‘star’ and Smiles are standing-reserve, both dwell within the virtual reality of the televisual mise-en-scène — a domain of polite-care.

b. Smiles, Realism And Reality

The ‘realism’ (Fiske & Hartley, 1983/2003) imbedded in the modern technology of commercial television is difficult to negotiate. The stories of my grandmother in Chapter Five, like the story about the death of Grace Sullivan, demonstrate that viewers who had not been flung at birth into a televisual everydayness have difficulty separating realism from reality — stories in Chapter Six from scriptwriter Yar and director Di support my observation. How difficult must it be for the viewer who has had no other experience than that of the televisual, to recognise that the realism of mechanical-time is not the real of the sensuous, natural dimension of real-time? How difficult must it be to distinguish between realism and reality, when realism is a constituent component of the everydayness one is born into? For the viewer in question, in an age of ‘invisible technology’ (Ihde 1990), where reference to the ‘crank-handle’ (Chapter One, p.6) has been rendered over, we can argue that in the ‘real world of the televisual’ Smiles didn’t manifest from harvesting, or hunting, nor did they come into season. There is nothing of winter, spring, summer or autumn to be associated with this product; the viewer isn’t immersed within seasonal or climatic circumstances in which Smiles can or cannot be — Smiles ‘are’ (they have always been so!): ‘Whatever stands by in the sense of standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object’ (Heidegger 1977:12).

Thinking back to Chapter Four and my immersion in the path across the Common, commercial television does not offer the experience of ‘Ah, the asparagus!’ In this sense, what type of reality do the Smiles occupy, what is the experience of coming across the Smiles? Can we assume that for the viewer the presentation of Smiles both
upon the surrogate cortex and within the supermarket is the total sum of the Smiles story — as the ‘care’ that bestows happiness? As witnessed in Chapter Five and confirmed in Chapter Six, the commercial surrogate cortex does not render either the procedure or consequences of mass consumption; as Robert commented, ‘there is no money in the environment’; this, combined with Noel’s comment, ‘a good story is one that delivers the audience to the advertiser’, allows us to see that the missing information upon the contemporary commercial screen is rendered intentionally by those in power. As mentioned above, ‘intentional rendering’ has always held sway with the surrogate cortex.

c. Alêtheia

In the context of this conversation, the question being asked concerns a surrogate cortex upon which the story of how things come to be is not entered into. The viewer is located in dis-stance; the story of the more-than-human world that exists beyond the televisual-umwelt has been rendered over; replaced by images of what our culture deems as having a higher priority. Commercial television, from the filming of a model’s legs mirrored in the highly polished duco of a car, to the images of a child eating a bowl of Smiles, renders the world in a particular manner. The daily work of the cockpit people observed in Chapter Five is emblematic of the procedures by which dis-stance and mechanical-time inform. The non-stop rendering overseen by the cockpit people screens a plethora of diverse images, both constantly and instantaneously all day everyday throughout the televisual-umwelt. If we think of such a complex production and delivery process not so much as screening the world, but rather as concealing the world, we can think about commercial television differently.

A Heideggerian reading of commercial television is one in which ‘truth’ is challenged. For Heidegger (1977) truth is that which is revealed (alêtheia) — ‘it is this disclosedness that Heidegger presents as the primordial phenomenon of truth’ (Malpas, 2006:186). As we have seen, commercial television conceals the processes and consequences of consumption while delivering the viewer to the advertiser, be that via news, sport, soap opera, game shows, after-school programs or drama. Hence, the storytelling process of reflecting a model’s legs upon a car’s duco, like the
storytelling process of presenting happy children eating junk food, can be thought of as concealment, rather than ‘revealing’ the truth.

12. The Reality Of Our Inauthenticity

Flung into the ‘ordinary and normal’ existence of the all day everyday televisual epoch, the viewer is enmeshed in a commercial mise-en-scène that ‘constitutes the reality of our inauthenticity’; as Heidegger suggested of the good people of Meßkirch, commercial television has become ‘part of the naturalised artificial world in which we are formed and find ourselves’ (Fry, 1993:12). How can commercial television relate or re-present the type of world reflected upon in Chapter Four — the care-filled world that ultimately provides human well-being.

To prosper in commercial television, program makers require one million people to be viewing their program; the viability of all commercial television is predicated on ratings, which in terms of the story of the surrogate cortex is significant — the North, East, West and South of telling is shaped by commercial imperatives. A good-news story has similar connotations, no matter the genre.

Arguably, it is only within this ratings context that it becomes possible for commercial television to ‘story’ the more-than-human world. The observations, conversations and reflections described in Chapter Six, suggest that television scriptwriters, and in particular television personalities, have the potential to bring about a turning; to render the more-than-human world onto the surrogate cortex of Viewerland, while operating within commercial television’s insatiable appetite for ratings. As Yar demonstrated, scriptwriters can weave subtle variations and nuances into a story in order to aid the viewer in making certain connections between events. However, there is a caveat; as we have seen, since the birth of commercial television in post-war USA, storylines have been manipulated to meet government and corporate agendas — it was not only Molly living the American Way, so was Ricky Nelson, as were (and still are) many a detective and secret agent solving the evening’s mystery. They all act within a mise-en-scène of product placement. As Yar demonstrated, to introduce ecologically aware dialogue and circumstances, the scriptwriter must work within the constraints of a corporate infused mise-en-scène.
While scriptwriters are not the masters of the world they write their characters into, it is possible for them, in certain instances, to infuse into programs other ways of seeing. Scriptwriters can weave well-being scenarios into the endless melodrama of daily and weekly serials. It is not unusual for scriptwriters to have several months in which the individual episodes of a serial can be subtly infused with, and hence, flesh out a cause and effect scenario. Yar demonstrated this with both his pesticide story (where events concerning a farmer and the death of his grandson were revealed over several months), and his story about Cookie (where viewers complained when Cookie was scripted as having been on the Kokoda trail, when several years previously he had been scripted as having spent his war years in Central Australia). As Yar said, ‘For people to remember at that level, is a level of the dedication that you can only have with your closest, intimate friends.’

Scannell would not be surprised by the biography of Cookie held by some viewers. As we saw throughout Chapters Five and Six, the commercial mise-en-scène is complex. As Yar indicates, ‘our closest, intimate friends’ (indeed enemies) include the actors and presenter-personalities broadcast into our household. Such close and intimate friends (and enemies) are the ones that attract a one million plus ratings demographic — star-personalities can most readily deliver the viewer to the advertiser. Though the glow of a television star is finite, at their peak stars have considerable radiance — as Di says, ‘the star pulls a lot of weight’. Di observed that when a star is passionate about an issue, they have the weight to influence network executives. Commercial television stars are able to negotiate over script, storyline and location because they are inextricably linked to ratings. They have the weight to incorporate ‘other views’ into the mise-en-scène that their character inhabits. Ironically, the television professional often attributed with having production weight, the director, is in fact powerless; as Di said, ‘Your situation gets frustrating, because you can say, yeah, I make it, but, I don’t particularly agree with this way of thinking!’

Particular types of stars and particular genres have greater fluidity; some programs have more potential for presenting the more-than-human world than others. The layperson tends to think that news and current affairs are the genres that influence the most, yet those working in the industry disagree. As news executive Noel said, ‘The real work to be done is subliminal, in programs that aren’t news and current affairs:'
drama programs, lifestyle programs. People copy them. People pick up sayings — they become part of the ‘water-cooler conversation.’

As the ‘sayings’ become part of water-cooler conversation, there is a greater likelihood that the program or product will be consumed. For Noel, storytelling within soap, drama and lifestyle programs is more effective in creating water-cooler conversation than news and current affairs. Scriptwriter Yar agrees, and explains it thus:

I show them that the world is shit, but there is a way out of it. I take them by the hand and lead them through it. And occasionally, for dramatic purposes, I leave somebody in it. But I always give my audience the potential that you can find a way out.

Star-based commercial television storytelling has the potential to find ‘a way out’, to present the more-than-human world to the viewer. The viewer perceives the surrogate cortex of commercial television as familiar; the viewer remembers and copies the familiar repetitive scenarios screened on commercial television. Hence, the star and to a lesser extent the scriptwriter have a particular charisma within the household. At this time in Western history, to educate the star personalities and scriptwriters of contemporary commercial television ecologically, is to take part in a significant dialogue in terms of the question concerning commercial television and the more-than-human world.

Just how many personalities and scriptwriters feel the desire to take the viewer by the hand and lead them towards a more sustainable world is an open question leading beyond the scope of this work. The school in which I teach is regarded within the Sydney commercial television industry as the leading communication school in NSW. Graduates become producers, directors, production assistants, editors, scriptwriters, presenters and actors contributing to national commercial television programs; indeed, some programs are screened internationally. I have run a Deep Ecology workshop with Ruth Rosenhek within my documentary production subject; I also teach with a documentary maker friend who produces ‘green’ programs. In addition, I have introduced current professional directors and scriptwriters into my video production
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subject — industry friends whom I know have a bent towards social justice, if not green issues. Academically, I have published and presented papers at Journalism Education Association conferences, an international television conference and an Arts and Activism Conference, as well as producing social justice videos and films. When I began this research I had to convince my audience of Global Warming; as the thesis draws to a close, Climate Change is a household term. In this sense, we can say that the ‘voice’ of the more-than-human world is beginning to be heard, hopefully, her dirge will make both my students and the industry increasingly receptive to my argument.

The history of social change, from the Suffragettes to the anti-Vietnam War marches tells us that the path walked by activists can reach a clearing. Any defiant placard waving or subtle intervention by stars and scriptwriters to present a more ‘green mise-en-scène’ has, initially at least, to poetise within a mercantile song. As we have seen, the production of commercial television takes place within an industrial workplace, one in which the viewer must be delivered to the advertiser, where producers will have their ‘fuckin’ head chopped off’ if ratings fall below one million Australian viewers per episode.

My research reveals a somewhat surprising observation; perhaps some ecological hope dwells with the people who want to live at Summer Bay — because that is where the stars and personalities live! There, Dr Phil will solve the viewers’ ills, while the special investigators from CSI will solve entertaining mysteries. Hopefully, one day, Summer Bay residents will lead an ecologically sustainable lifestyle — perhaps a star will fall in love with a person installing a solar hot water service; maybe they’ll kiss by the rainwater tank and make love in an organic veggie patch. While the conversations in Chapter Six point to a potential means of developing ecologically progressive conversations and habits within the household, it would be naïve to suggest that the occasional ecological scenario in the occasional commercial television program will encourage the viewer to make a leap from living the days of their lives (the American Way) to living in harmony with the more-than-human world. As we saw via Norman Denzin, since the 1930s when filmic sound, colour and editing created cinematic realism, the cinema audience has wanted to consume, dress, speak, kiss, and make love ‘just like the stars on the screen’. When the moving picture
screen entered the home and subsequently became available all day everyday, the surrogate cortex came to occupy a dimension unprecedented in the evolution of Homo sapiens sapiens. Flung into the 21st century, the viewer enters an everydayness in which thousands of Ricky Nelson-type scenarios are enacted. For example, the lead male in the CSI episode that I viewed (in Chapter Five) eats a hamburger and drinks coffee — the hamburger sits on a polystyrene tray; his coffee in a polystyrene cup. While I am reminded of the polystyrene I observed in the abandoned mine shaft, we can reasonably assume that the viewer observes the CSI actor as participating in an all day everyday activity — eating a hamburger. If the CSI star were to use recycled containers, then ‘recycled containers’ enter the ‘all day everyday’. A hero eating a veggie burger from a recycled container can be every bit as much a hero as the star who eats feedlot beef from a polystyrene plate — as Yar has demonstrated, the viewer wants to live at Summer Bay and do what the Summer Bay people do.

13. The Saving Power

As we have seen, the contemporary viewer is drawn to the same dream that Donald and I were walking towards in the late 1950s and early 1960s — can a turning come about? Can the viewer be encouraged to leap onto a sustainable path? Heidegger’s turn to art, in particular the poetry of Hölderlin, suggests that hope does dwell at Summer Bay:

But where danger is, grows
The saving power also.

Heidegger’s journey into the poetic allows us to approach the ratings-driven, ecologically destructive consequences of commercial television from a unique perspective. In his drawing on the poetic, Heidegger allows us to consider the paradox that — within the ‘danger’ of commercial-television-ratings, grows the saving power also. Perhaps the power to stimulate the viewer to venture beyond the polite-care-thinking of the commercial surrogate cortex and step towards the sensuous natural dimension of real-care thinking, lies in a particular type of acting and scriptwriting, one that we can usefully name as poetic.
Heidegger’s turn to the poetic draws on a moment in Western history prior to the onset of modern technology. He draws on the ancient classical Greek notion of technē to speak of a time when ‘art’ was not a separate function within society, but rather a unifying force that brought together religious life, political life and social life:

There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name technē. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendour of radiant appearing also was called technē. Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called technē. And the poiēsis of the fine arts also was called technē (1977:33).

Drawing on Hölderlin, Heidegger says, ‘Poetically dwells man upon this earth’ (1977:33). This sits well with our earlier discussion of art and the surrogate cortex, from Arnhem Land (Morwood, 2002), to Lascaux (Saul, 1993). It would appear that a certain lack of the poetic upon the commercial surrogate cortex is endangering civilization:

The poetical brings the true into the splendour of what Plato in the Phaedrus calls to ekphanestaton, that which shines forth most purely. The poetical thoroughly pervades every art, every revealing of coming to presence into the beautiful (Heidegger, 1977:33).

The art of ancient Greek culture, according to Heidegger, expressed humanity’s sense of connectedness with all Being — poiēsis is associated with ‘care’; as discussed above, ‘care’ is the Being of Dasein. The art of a caring poetic inscribing of the world holds within it a saving power, the poetic-artist takes the world as it is, the poetic-artist is interested in the world’s ‘true’ form, alêtheia. As we have witnessed, the ‘art’ within commercial television is utilised within a mercantile frame, the lineage of which, argues Berger (1972), can be traced back to the Enlightenment. Today the commercialised-artist is commissioned to inscribe the surrogate cortex with polite-care thinking and knowing cues — stories that deliver the viewer to advertisers.

There is a significant difference between the poetic-artist contemplating Being, and the commercialised artist contemplating polite-care. The art of the commercial-artist
is the rendering that determines what, for the viewer, is to count as ‘truth’. While the modus operandi of commercial television restricts the poetic understanding of the world from being rendered upon the surrogate cortex, as we have seen, space and time, albeit limited, does exist for the poetic rendering of existence within commercial television. There are occasional clearings in which the granting of poiēsis can endure — Robert, Yar and Di spoke of uplifting informative scenarios within commercial television. When such brief renderings-over of commercial-art does take place, the opportunity exists, however fleeting, for the viewer to reflect and think beyond the televisual. Hence, the potential exists for the viewer to question the danger of ‘Enframing’ (the process whereby modern technology has transformed both people and the more-than-human into standing-reserve).

Commercial television influences the viewers’ orientation towards the natural world as a result of constructing a mercantile mise-en-scène, a manipulation that operates within dis-stance — further alienating the viewer from real-care. As we saw in Chapter Five, the process in which the more-than-human is placed within commercial-categories, from the endangered WA wildflower *Sandplain Thomasia*, to potatoes within junk food (Smiles), presents a particular way of seeing — commercial television frames the more-than-human within the Western metaphysical Enframing of the world. We observed Enframing and its ‘danger’ in the way commercial television frames the televisual-umwelt as real and presents the unsustainable mass consumption of standing-reserve as ‘well-being’. Heidegger advances the possibility that the danger within Enframing can be reclaimed from its current destructive modus operandi — he does not say that it will be, only that the possibility exists for it to be reclaimed. We cannot ‘curse it as the work of the devil’ (1977:25):

The threat to humanity does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatuses of technology. The actual threat has already afflicted humanity in its essence. The rule of Enframing threatens humanity with the possibility that it could be denied to humanity to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth. (op. cit., p.27). [I have adopted Zuern’s (1998) translation: ‘man’ has been changed to ‘humanity’].
The commercial-art of the American Way revealed to Donald and myself a world inhabited by products (standing-reserve). We drew on products as equipment to locate ourselves within our culture and we felt positive towards the emerging culture of the American Way — the consequences of the new consumption-categories were not revealed in the daily grind of living in the televisual-umwelt. Heidegger offers the potential for the viewer to observe the saving power located within Enframing — for the post-war consumption-categories to be modified. The poetic offers a way to break the ecologically destructive grip Enframing has on modern technology. As we have seen through Di and Robert’s stories, as well as the Kerry-Anne example in Chapter Five, the art of the actor, personality and scriptwriter does from time to time embrace the poetic. The task of the poet is twofold; for as well as uplifting, the poetic has to disclose ‘the unhealable, the unholy as such’ (Rigby 2004b:431). This can be done, as Yar recounted: ‘I show them that the world is shit, but there is a way out of it.’

Commercial television can bring about positive reactions; the poetic within the ‘art’ of commercial television can come to the fore. In this context the poetic ‘is not a means of transcending or spiritualising experience, but a mode of unconcealment, or letting beings appear in their being … it is inherently and intimately connected with truth … it is … also inherently and intimately connected with the life of the people, the Volk’ (Pattison 2000:161).

In terms of commercial television, the facilitating process required for an ecocentric turn in viewer culture has to be a win-win situation. Stories that hold the saving power have to be personality driven; they have to entertain one million or more viewers per telling. The narrative of the saving power needs to coexist with the most ratings-infused stories on the planet — a scene in which the CSI detective is eating and drinking out of recycled utensils, rather than using polystyrene utensils, is an achievable adjustment. The commercial surrogate cortex needs to tell small as well as large ecologically sustainable stories. A sustainable future will require the commercial surrogate cortex to imbue its mise-en-scène with images and actions that are ecologically sustainable. Since persons replicate the renderings upon the surrogate cortex, a real-care mise-en-scène is central to Homo sapiens sapiens well-being. The Summer Bay actors will have to perform desirable real-care scenarios, Summer Bay...
has to become an ecologically sustainable domain, one that the viewers want to replicate.

As Di told us, if the ratings are good, then the actor is able to negotiate with management, because management are hesitant to argue with ratings. If ratings are the lifeblood of commercial television, could ratings be the viewers’ life raft — could ratings contain a saving power? As Heidegger and Mantovani allow us to appreciate, there is no other way the viewer can access the saving power other than through the culture of their existence. For billions of Homo sapiens sapiens the world over, existence is televisual, an *umwelt* in which stars, personalities and scriptwriters set the scene. As a starting point, activists, culture jammers, educators and lobbyists could actively encourage stars, personalities and scriptwriters to implement sustainable and entertaining more-than-human storylines into the ordinary and normal *Summer Bay* days.

I have progressively shown in this chapter how any attempt to alter the ecologically destructive path storied by commercial television must take into account the naturalised artificial world in which the televisual is formed and the viewers find themselves. Dis-located within the continuum of Western metaphysics, viewers are enmeshed within modern technology’s mechanical-time; the viewer is constantly before a surrogate cortex upon which the real-care of the more-than-human world is rendered as standing-reserve. The placeless place of commercial television has from around 1947 increasingly situated the viewer within a commercial domain. The surrogate cortex, though mercantile, dis-stancing and less than careful, remains a constituent of Dasein.

As significant as it is, commercial television is subject to the ebbs and flows of the World Problematique; there is no single approach to the ecologically destructive commercial stories broadcast by the world’s 39,000 television stations. Yet there is hope. Just as post-war legislation enabled corporations to use commercial television to implement a culture of debt-based mass consumption, perhaps it is not beyond the realms of possibility, in the wake of climate change, for governments to someday legislate the implementation of a green-mise-en-scène. In the meantime, it is up to
individuals and NGO’s to influence, where possible, the scripts and actions of stars and personalities.

My privileged position of being able to immerse myself in the more-than-human world of creek and woodland, combined with my professional experience as a teacher, producer, director and scriptwriter has enabled me to uniquely experience and reflect upon some of the differences between the mechanical-time of the televisual-\textit{umwelt} and the real-time of the more-than-human world. The act of returning again and again to my walking along creek beds and wallaby paths enabled me to become deeply aware of the rhythm of real-time. Having become bodily aware that the more-than-human world ‘is’ more-than-human, I reflected on the purely-human world of commercial television. In this world the real-time experiences of Chapter Four were replaced by the virtual reality of dis-stance, my three grafted bodies were split — what my eyes saw no longer connected with what my body was experiencing. Before the all day everyday nature of commercial storytelling I experienced the polite-care of the commercially constructed mise-en-scène. Armed with the experiences of Chapter Four and Five, I ventured into the hardnosed production world of commercial television. By reflecting on the practical day-to-day machinations of one of the world’s most influential polite-voices, I forged a conversation between the theory and philosophy surrounding the more-than-human world, Viewerland and modern technology at a time of global ecological degradation. As a result of observing the impact and pressure of ratings on each person in the production line of fire of commercial television, and how that pressure gives and takes power, I came to appreciate the influence stars, personalities and scriptwriters have within commercial television and the televisual.

My reading of Heidegger suggests that commercial television contains a saving power. The potential exists to make a path through the televisual, to re-render the commercial surrogate cortex and place the more-than-human world in the picture. It remains to be seen if and how more-than-human renderings will be etched into the commercial surrogate cortex. Standing between that future possibility and now is the question, ‘how will advertisers respond to a pervasive green mise-en-scène?’ The recent SBS program \textit{Eco Challenge} (2007) was able to attract only one corporation to advertise one ‘green’ product. Throughout the series, Australia’s largest hardware
chain, Bunnings, advertised an energy saving light bulb. All the other advertisements were standard fare, including advertisements for a six-cylinder internal combustion automobile. The hybrid government-funded and advertising revenue-raising SBS is not a fully-fledged commercial network. When and if future versions of *Eco Challenge* make their way to commercial television, we will begin to get a clearer view of the path ahead — clearly, there is a long way to go. How climate change will impact on viewers and manufacturers only time will tell. In the meantime, the ‘poetising’ of a commercial surrogate cortex that depends on ever-increasing consumption, will inevitably be a constrained process. The actors, personalities and scriptwriters as a group are key. How amenable large numbers of them are towards actively encouraging stories encompassing the more-than-human world into their roles and scripts is an important and open question.

I remain hopeful. The commercial television industry is a copycat industry. The success of *CSI* on one network brings about *NCIS* on another; *Strictly Ballroom* here is copied by *Dancing With The Stars* there. It may only take one superstar to successfully convert one high rating program into a green mise-en-scène for a leap to take place. Meanwhile, the *CSI* detective continues to eat from a polystyrene plate — ‘But where danger is, grows the saving power also.’ Should a turn happen, actors and scriptwriters may actively seek their own wallaby paths. In my role as an educator, I am already encouraging them to do that. Then, rather than endlessly commuting along the American Way, viewers may well leap sideways and tarry on the ancient paths of the more-than-human world. We can take hope from Heidegger’s philosophy of technology, for while it takes us to a brink from which we can view the consequences of Enframing and modern technology, the view also reveals a saving path, one that we may be able to leap onto:

Whether art may be granted this highest possibility of its essence in the midst of the extreme danger, no one can tell.

Yet the more questioningly we ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes.
The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought (Heidegger 1977:35).
The other day I was walking through a regenerating nook; head down looking for newly germinated native plants. Ahead, around the corner and up over the other side of a dip, a wallaby had its head down eating kangaroo grass. As I came up the rise we almost bumped into each other. For different reasons, we were both transfixed within the same world. The first impulse of the wallaby was to turn and bound, even though the world beyond the nook is windswept and barren, due to the big dry. My first impulse was to say sorry, the way one does when one unexpectedly causes a minor discomfort to another person. To my surprise the wallaby halted, turned, stood and stared at me. I walked on. After about one hundred yards I turned and looked towards the wallaby; it was standing upright watching me go. Understandably, it wasn’t taking any chances.

The wallaby travelled to this sheltered cove via paths that may well be older than time as I can experience it. If this little nook in the world becomes uninhabitable for the wallaby, will it have become uninhabitable for me? We have so much in common: we need the same air, water and earth to care for our young. If the wallaby and its young can’t survive here amongst the remnants of yorro yorro, surely the soda fountains at Summer Bay will have long since run dry.

The following day I had an eye out for the wallaby. This time the wallaby didn’t turn to move but, rather, readied itself to bound. I bowed my head and kept walking. From the corner of my eye I could see the wallaby standing tall, watching me pass. We were both taking care.

If the cosmology rendered on the popular surrogate cortex can once again incorporate a reciprocity between human and more-than-human, surely there is hope. If our popular Summer Bay actors can love and laugh at the junction where people and the more-than-human world mingle as one; if such ecologically sustainable myths and legends can be storied all day every day on the popular screen, then perhaps wisdom will prevent us from bounding towards a barren, windswept precipice.
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