

# **Film, television and the urban experience:**

## **A case study of Brisbane**

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

August 2009

## Abstract

This investigation of Brisbane in film and television is a multidisciplinary research study that links anthropological and film/TV studies to the social consequences of imaging city life. It focuses particularly on how Brisbane is portrayed in post 1950s film and television programs. To date, much of the research into city growth and development has relied on the written sources and those of the built and natural environment. Similarly, research into film and television tends to focus on the narrative or *auteur* form, overlooking the significance of space and place and the contribution of the built environment. This study, however, demonstrates that a significant link exists between the city on one hand and film and television on the other. Therefore, excluding television and film in the history of the city ignores an integral part of Australian, and especially Brisbane, culture during the latter part of the twentieth century. Thinking about the city in terms of film and television, therefore, increases our understanding of the city, and conversely, thinking about film and television in terms of the city increases our understanding of screen culture and processes.

There are two parts to this study. Part I is a review of literature dealing with the development of the moving image and the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Contextual chapters on cultural aspects of the city and the development of the moving image in the urban frame form the theoretical foundation of this study. In Part II, a series of case studies present, critically, aspects of film and television as they relate to Brisbane. First, use of film to promote Brisbane's urban experience to prospective migrants by the Queensland Government in the 1960s and 1970s reveals the extent to which the moving

image can manipulate the perceived urban experience of a place. Next, is an analysis of the early years of Brisbane's television history: undertaken for its contribution to a 'sense of place' and which gave rise to a new industry during the 1960s and 1970s. Contrasting that, however, is the sense of placelessness apparent in films set in Brisbane since the 1970s. In the final case study, however, television drama series from the 1990s once again highlight the 'sense of place' in this media as opposed to film. Films and television programs, conventional historical sources, such as newspaper reports, industry publications, are examined as well as interviews taken of key players during that period. Thus, the research surveyed confirms that there exists a nexus of film and television on the one hand and the city on the other. Just as film and television informed and influenced the urban experience and the city, so too the city has positioned itself as the site of film and television industries and culture. Therefore, the general framework presented in Part I of this thesis informs and delineates each of the case studies in Part II.

How moving images impact on the developmental trends of the city is a problem that is particularly relevant to the industry partner, the Brisbane City Council. Council decision makers will be in a better position, because of this study, to understand how the city can benefit from television and film exposure and their concomitant industries. Council will be able to include this research in planning its promotional and cultural activities. To that end, the central theme in this study answers the question to what extent Brisbane has featured in moving images and whether this has, and will in the future, influence the type of development that has taken place in the city, and the degree to which this is still occurring.

## **Statement of originality**

This thesis is represents my own work. This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Elizabeth Anne Davies  
12 April, 2009

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are due to my supervisors, Albert Moran and Patrick Laughren, for their unwavering help and assistance during this research project. I am also most grateful to Sue Jarvis and John Davies for editing assistance in the final stages of the work. My thanks are also extended to Rick Sapsford and Greg Apel for their continued support and encouragement throughout the candidacy. My thanks and appreciation go, also, to the Australian Research Council for its financial support in the form of an APAI Scholarship and the industry partner, Brisbane City Council, for giving staff and financial support towards the research for this thesis. Completing a work of this nature cannot happen in isolation. On that account, I would like to thank, most sincerely, the staff at the School of Humanities and Graduate School, Griffith University, for the many kindnesses extended to me, as well as my fellow doctoral candidates who often lightened the load along the path with their good humour and encouragement. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the assistance of staff of Griffith University Library (especially Interlibrary Loans), the University of Queensland Fryer Library, John Oxley Library and The National Film and Sound Archive during the term of my candidature. No works were published in the course of the research for this thesis.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: A Nexus of Interests

### The issue

Cities changed considerably in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Where, once upon a time, most people lived on the land, these two centuries saw a massive migration to cities as populations searched for work, a livelihood, wages, housing, settlement, community, family life, diversion and amusement. The numbers of those living in the metropolis increased rapidly, and cities themselves underwent dramatic expansion and change as they coped with this massive population influx (Williams, 1985). Streets and buildings appeared where there had been nature; vehicles and people moved through this landscape where before there had been only wind and the elements. Urban life became a different experience for city dwellers. Printing, books and newspapers had preceded this kind of intense urban development. Soon other technologies of information and communication were on hand to help document and be part of this large-scale human development. Photography developed in the late 1830s; wire telegraphy appeared in the 1840s; wire telephony emerged in the 1880s; moving image photography and projection commenced in the 1890s; radio transmission started around the turn of the century; radio broadcasting got underway in the 1920s; and television broadcasting began in the 1930s. Therefore, given the impact of this, Brisbane, as much as

anywhere else in the Western world during this time, was affected by changes and technological innovation.

The emergence of moving images in the form of film and later television had a unique role to play in the economic and social history of industrialised nations in terms of increasing public self-consciousness and reflection regarding cities themselves. In fact, the interplay between urban life in the cities and moving images is dynamic: full of unfolding relationships and hidden depths. From the outset, the rise in the conceptual understanding of the city and the technology required to project the moving image on the large and later the small screen have gone hand in hand. Yet, despite the myriad points of intersection between these fields of study and the attraction of more than one discipline to one or the other, few attempts have been made by scholars to focus on a single city while engaging in extended reflection on these two developments. Specifically, research culminating in the case studies in Part II of this thesis has only rarely been attempted.

The number and diversity of the many points of contact available to illustrate the mutual dependence between moving images on the one hand and the city on the other are extensive. Three areas of research best illustrate the meaning of urban experience and its relationship to film and television. Foremost among these is the degree of spatiality upon which each is reliant: the moving image has its multifaceted portrayal of city life and influence in constructs of the past — the past and present city through spatial organization of infrastructure, culture and communication. The institutions of film and television have material spatial presences. For example, film production very often occurs on sound stages,

requires laboratories and editing facilities, turns up in cinemas and in DVD rental outlets, and is frequently watched in homes on consoles in lounge rooms. Another point of intersection rests in the dual capacity of the moving image to entertain on the large and small screen, while serving as a controlling or regulating agent of government bodies. Further, a significant part of the moving image–city nexus exists between film and television images of the city. The manner in which each medium has represented the city is closely linked to the role of the city in human society. Conversely, the city itself is a key participant in the representation of the urban experience found in both film and television. These particular points of intersection are sufficiently broad to encapsulate the complex relationship between the moving image and the city. They are a touchstone for this study under the aegis of current debate in this area and which follows in Chapters 2 and 3. In Part II of this thesis examples are elaborated on in a series of case studies which use Brisbane city as a backdrop.

Intersecting points between the moving image and the city will shift according to disciplinary interest, but even so, these generally have been limited to an analysis of either film or television, and their effect on the social life of the city. However, a systematic, multidisciplinary study of twentieth century Brisbane through industrial and social analysis on the one hand, and a study of extant moving images of feature films, government documentaries and the arrival of television and recent local television series on the other is capable of revealing a much greater depth and breadth to the urban experience at the local level. The relationship between the moving image and the city at this level of study is a mutually dependent one. City growth and development during the twentieth century were as

much organised by the film and television of the time, as the latter media were influential in shaping the physical and urban experience of the city through the promotion of community identity and cultural tourism. This study is an attempt to investigate the socio-historical life of Brisbane through examining the duality of place/space and society. By including the visual perspective of both film and television over the long term, the intention is to begin the task of stimulating a visual archaeology of Brisbane, the Queensland state capital.

Much of the research into city growth and development to date has relied on the written sources and those of the built and natural environment. Similarly, research into film and television tends to focus on the narrative or auteur form, overlooking the significance of space and place and the contribution of the built environment. Overall, few disciplines attempt to deal with the part played by film and television in the development of urban society and its environment. Yet there is evidence – as will be assessed in the case study on Brisbane film – that there is increasing awareness of the economic importance of film and television in to a city such as Brisbane as well as a means by which such a regional city can develop a profile with which to market itself to the wider world.

An undeniable link exists between the city on one hand and film and television on the other: films and television programs are often made in cities and cities are a common backdrop found in film and television programs. This lends itself to further research, and therefore a greater understanding of both urban history and sociology, and film and television studies. Until the inclusion of film and television in research on the city and urban life, and the role of the city in film and television, are given a higher profile, the

significant changes that have taken place in both areas over the last century will not be appreciated fully. Excluding television and film from the history of the city ignores an integral part of Australian, and especially Brisbane's, culture during the twentieth century. As a peripheral centre of Sydney, Brisbane was often seen as a branch office location and had little to recommend it to the wider world, yet its very inconspicuous nature gave it a usefulness to filmmakers that more iconic locations could not provide. As highlighted in the case study on film, Brisbane became, during the late 1990s and more recently, an ideal location as a representative of no place in particular. My primary research question, then, is this: How does thinking about the city in terms of film and television increase our understanding of the city, and conversely, how does thinking about film and television in terms of the city increase our understanding of film and television?

Further questions that arise from this are whether or not a relationship exists between the urban experience of Brisbane residents and those of the Brisbane's moving images? Has that had any social consequences for the city over the long term? Will a systematic investigation of film and television as it relates to Brisbane city life in the twentieth century provide a more concrete understanding of this city's urban experience, while at the same time raising the profile of film and television as an integral part of Brisbane's social, economic and built environment? This relationship is clearly drawn out in the case study on Brisbane's early television history, where it is noted that television had a marked influence on the people of Brisbane and the number of memories of place that

built up in a few short years. Ultimately, how does this, in turn, increase our understanding of Brisbane as a place?

The problem at the heart of my research is dealt with at different levels in various disciplines and from different perspectives. In film and television studies, discussion of the city is found mainly as an adjunct to an analysis of a particular film or television program. In urban studies, works dealing with the city make little or no reference to film and television as a source of information. In more indirectly related disciplines such as the geographical sciences, economics and philosophy, reference to the nexus of film, television and the city is patchy. To find a work that is used as a meeting point of disciplines is rare, though some material has begun to appear of late such as the edited volumes by Clarke — *The Cinematic City* (1997) — and Shiel and Fitzmaurice — *Cinema and the City* (2001). These will be discussed further in the literature review, specifically Chapter 3 and are used as a model for the case study structure of this thesis.

The remainder of this introductory chapter is devoted to three matters. The first has to do with the collaborative partner in the research project that has given rise to this work. This is followed by a broad description of the methodology employed in the research and its writing. Some of this anticipates the third and last part of the chapter, which has to do with a summary of the following chapters of the thesis.

## **Industry partner**

As part of the background of this work, it is necessary to draw attention to the Industry Partner involved in this investigation. Funds for the research project were obtained from the

Australian Research Council under its Linkage (Australian Postgraduate Award — Industry) grant scheme. The Brisbane City Council (BCC) was the collaborator identified in the successful application. This body was formed in 1927 with the amalgamation of Brisbane's several municipal councils into a single body. Serving the needs of 850,000 residents, the BCC is the biggest local government organisation in the country, larger in size than the state government of Tasmania and approaching that of South Australia. It has total assets of \$4.4 billion, with infrastructure valued at \$10 billion, and its last budget amounted to \$1.5 billion. Council's vision for the city is that 'Brisbane will be the most livable and progressive city in the Asia Pacific Region'.

The BCC provides general infrastructure and community services to the greater Brisbane area, ensuring that Brisbane's lifestyle is enhanced through innovations in community development and facilities. It is responsible for city planning, economic development, bus and ferry transport, water and sewerage, waste treatment and a range of community services. To meet its obligations, it employs some 7,000 workers, including a large management staff. Administratively, the BCC is divided into 11 divisions. Most of these, such as Transport, Water and Customer & Community Services, are organised around the provision of particular services to ratepayers, while others (such as City Governance and Human Resources & Strategic Management) are concerned with matters of administration. The Community and Economic Development Division (CED) is pivotal in this structure in terms of both representing the existing residential and business community and planning for its future development. Consequently, CED's five components — Health & Safety, Open Space Planning, Community Life, Information & Libraries, and Economic Development —

are all focused on cultural matters.

The BCC's Corporate Plan sets a strong community agenda, articulating Council's leadership role in fostering a city that, *inter alia*, has cohesive communities with a clear sense of their identity. Among the aims articulated in its mission statement are those of 'building vibrant communities' and 'supporting the sustainable development of the regional economy'. The proposed research will, it is hoped, make a valuable contribution to the BCC in terms of meeting these aims. The significance of data that it identifies, the quality of analysis that it develops and the human expertise that it builds will provide a framework and valuable contribution to the task of fostering the role of heritage in the development of city identity and community character. These resources are also of significant practical value to the BCC in terms of its role in the economic promotion of the city. Specifically, the BCC may be able to utilise research and materials produced as part of the project in its community cultural programs, including its Social History Exhibitions, Brisbane Stories website, Community History in Libraries Program, Heritage Trails, publications on Brisbane and tourism product development.

The ways in which moving images impact on the developmental trends of the city represent a problem that is particularly relevant to the council. The work is hopefully of practical value to this partner. BCC decision-makers may be in a better position to understand how the city can benefit from television and film exposure and its concomitant industries. Does adding value by a local government body influence economic and social outcomes? The council may be in position to include the research conducted in this project in formulating

future city plans and in its promotional and cultural activities. To that end, the central question in the project has been the extent to which the city generally, but especially Brisbane, has featured in moving images, and whether this might influence the type of development taking place in the city.

## **Methodology**

Two different research instruments are adopted in this work. The first is conceptualisation. It emphasises the background to the present study. While there are many points of intersection between the moving image and the city, nevertheless there is no full-blown tradition of inquiry into this relationship. However, it is still possible and necessary to conceptualise such a study in terms of its relevant antecedents. There are, then, two movements to the contextualisation of the subject of the work. The first has to do with the identification and delineation of a broad philosophical tradition regarding culture and the city. Many have inquired into the shape and texture of everyday life in the metropolis and these inquiries are discussed in detail. In turn, the second act of contextualisation has to do with another tradition of written reflection concerned with a particular and recent inflection of the culture and the city tradition. This latter relates to a set of inquiries that place film and television at the centre of studies of the city.

The second methodological decision concerns the means of concretising the overall topic through the device of the case study. This method is most useful when there are only a limited number of events or real-life situations on which to support ideas and what is already known through previous research. As such, there is no simple proposition or statement, for example that can do justice to the complex relationship between the moving image and the

metropolis. The adoption of a case study approach in this work bears witness to the necessity of developing a series of instances of connection between the screen and the city in order to aid in this larger, overall linkage. The case studies, however, do not exhaust the variety of possible linkages; but they do help imply its large number and variety. The further suggestion of having the case studies revolve around the city of Brisbane hints at the fact that, finally, the city–moving image linkage cannot be understood in the abstract but only in terms of specific cities. Brisbane is a particularly useful choice because, unlike other Australian capitals such as Sydney and Melbourne, it is not especially associated with audio-visual industry and culture. It is very much a second-level place of interest insofar as this nexus is concerned and its relative place in the world of film and television, and therefore all the more interesting as an example for investigation and reflection on how this has impacted on the city on the one hand and influenced the urban experience on the other. Indeed, it is because of its position in relation to other cities that it is most suited as an object of study for this thesis. It should be stressed that the focus for this work is not the city, Brisbane, per se, but the outcome of thinking of the city as a nexus of film and television on the one hand – and the city on the other. To do so in terms of a specific place, a place not known on the world stage for its iconography, gives the study of this problem a grounding that enhances the overall argument and hence the selection of case studies in Part II of this work.

Methods employed within each of the case studies in Part II change from case study to study according to relevance and availability of sources and based on the literature outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 in Part I of this work. Three of these chapters use film and television programs as primary material and subject these to qualitative textual analysis. The amount

of material discussed is restricted for two reasons, one having to do with the relative scarcity of examples and the other with reasons of research economy. Meanwhile, the case study on Brisbane television follows the method set out by Hay (2004), where he argues that the development of television is closely related to space and place through the emanating networks of communication that formed and the sites of interaction that developed. Oral interview and archival inquiry supported this particular investigation.

## **Summary of chapters**

As is clear from the Table of Contents, the work is divided into two parts. Part I is designed to accomplish two overall tasks. The first of these has already been outlined. It has to do with posing the question of how cities and the audio-visual have impacted on each other. How has the urban experience helped to shape film and television and how has image and sound moulded urban life? The following two chapters set the scene for helping to answer such questions. They not only provide valuable background that highlights the significance and ongoing preoccupation with such a matter but also form the theoretical backdrop to each of the case studies in Part II. Film and television are relatively new technologies in human experience; therefore, on the face of it, it would seem that it is the twentieth century which provides the backdrop to the general matter to be investigated in the thesis. In fact, however, this issue has had a much longer history, even if it has taken on a particular shape and guise since the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter 2 is concerned to set the issue of film, television and a city, such as Brisbane, in a larger context to do with human culture in the built environment. It therefore investigates an older matter out of which the more recent concern arises. This has to do with culture and the city. This inquiry might have begun with Greek and Roman writers. However, for the sake of brevity, I have begun this account in the

nineteenth century. I trace the development of the theoretical understanding of the relationship between space and place as it appeared in various texts throughout that century. This effort provides a solid foundation, not only for the following chapter on twentieth century spatial and city theories, but also as a point of discussion within each of the case studies.

In turn, this brings us to Chapter 3, which is concerned with a more specific recasting of the matter in the twentieth century in terms of film, television and the city. The discussion looks at culture and the city at a distinct point in time. It focuses on changing concepts of space and how this enhanced and exemplified the introduction of first film and then television. The changing means of communication brought about by the Industrial Revolution resulted in a technological imperative, a need to communicate differently through images and sounds. The chapter, then, is especially concerned with those media scholars who have focused their work on film and television.

Taken together, Chapter 2, Culture and the City and Chapter 3, Film, Television and Urban Places, form the theoretical foundation of my thesis. The research surveyed within each implies that there exists a nexus of film and television on the one hand and the city on the other and this is evident in Part II where specific cases, using Brisbane as a reference point, are selected to reinforce the connection to nineteenth and twentieth century theorists in film, television and the city. Just as film and television have informed and influence the urban experience and the city, so too the city has positioned itself as the site of film and television industries and culture. The general framework presented in Part I of this thesis informs and

delineates each of the case studies in Part II.

In Part II, four case studies concerning the Brisbane screen are presented. The chapters are broadly chronological, moving from the 1950s to the recent present. Chapter 4 examines the use of film by the government to promote and market the city over a 20-year period. Australia has a history of government-produced films made for promotional and educational use, though most were filmed in southern centres. However, three films have been chosen that were produced in the city: *Brisbane City in the Sun* (1954), *This is Australia: Brisbane* (1964) and *Viewpoint on Brisbane* (1975). These are reasonably representative of the government portrayal of the urban experience over the period. However, it is not until the voiceover of migrants recounting their experience of Brisbane in the final film that the viewer becomes aware that all was not quite as it seemed in the rosy picture painted by government. The next chapter discusses the introduction and the first five years of television in Brisbane. The new technology brought about a kind of geographical televisualisation of the city. Hence, for example, North Quay took on a new importance, being the place where children waited to be bussed up to Mt Coot-tha to form the live audience for children's television shows. Examining the phenomenon of television in this way enables a greater depth of analysis concerning the impact of television on the city community during a time of rapid economic and population growth.

The next two chapters move the story further forward in time. Chapter 6 focuses on feature films made in or about Brisbane. The number of feature films falling into these general categories is not extensive, and the 10 films selected for discussion cover the period from

the early 1970s up to the very recent present. Some might be said to be concerned with place, which features as foreground or as background. Others are involved in a general placelessness. They are set in Brisbane but might have been set anywhere. Still, there were reasons for choosing them, as the chapter is at pains to point out.

Meanwhile, Chapter 7 analyses the style and storytelling in two television drama series produced during the early to mid-1990s. These service dramas have been the only television fictional series made wholly in Brisbane. The two are, arguably, auteur series, produced by Tony Cavanaugh, a highly experienced television writer and producer who decided to relocate to Brisbane. In this respect, *Fire* and *Medivac* can be seen to represent one person's dramatic televisual experience of the city of Brisbane.

In the conclusion, I draw together the strands of argument within the work. The four case studies have attempted to concretise the general issues of the work and to allow examinations of different kinds of primary material, most especially that of film and television. However, as might be anticipated, much more work on this kind of topic needs to be done. After summarising the overall argument, the chapter goes on to suggest ways in which further investigation might be undertaken. First, new material and resources are continuing to appear in the shape of written works and also in audio-visual works. These will continue to furnish valuable resources for further investigation and reflection. Second, other researchers are also at work on projects that will undoubtedly help build the storehouse of information having to do with film, television and the urban experience of Brisbane. Two

of these are discussed in the conclusion as a means of helping to underscore the fact that more research needs to be done on film, television and the urban experience of Brisbane.

# **PART I**

## **GENERAL FRAMEWORK**



## Preface to Part I

As outlined in the introduction, Part I of this thesis deals with a theoretical framework from which to introduce the case studies in Part II. It is a method commonly found in interdisciplinary research, such that Part I draws together texts from a wide array of disciplines in order to indicate the complexity of the subject matter to be dealt as a series of case studies in Part II.

The intention in Part I of this thesis is to examine the scope of thinking on the city and the moving image. The theory discussed in Part I is then applied to the case studies in Part II. Interesting though it is as a subject, it is not the purpose of this thesis to deal with Brisbane in terms of its history, geography or economy. The aim of this thesis is to focus on the argument that there is a nexus of interests between film and television on the one hand, and the city on the other. Brisbane as a subject of study is incidental to this aim.

For this reason, the reader will not find in Part I of the thesis an overview of Brisbane's history or any other issue that might be of interest to the specialist. Reference is only made to Brisbane in order to substantiate the argument that a push pull relationship exists between the urban experience of the city and the moving image. Writing about Brisbane and its society in depth must, by necessity be left as a task for future researchers.



## Chapter 2

### Culture and the City

Every age is dominated by a privileged form, or genre, which seems by its structure the fittest to express (the) secret truths of that particular time or place (Jameson, 1991, p. 67).

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I was concerned with introducing the general question addressed in this work. That chapter traced in some detail the steps via which the issue arose and concerns about the nexus between the moving image and the urban environment. In addition, it also raised the matter of how to approach such a topic, most especially in the employment of strategies and methodologies in operationalising the research. In this chapter, the matter addressed is part of what usually forms a 'literature survey'. In this chapter, in particular, the aim is to pinpoint a tradition of inquiry that developed during the nineteenth century from which arose a direction of thought and reflection concerning the overlap between culture, communications and the city. While this kind of literature topic might, in other circumstances, be included in the introductory chapter, I have made it the subject of a separate chapter. The intention in according it this kind of status is to mark the general significance of a particular legacy that begins before the advent of the technologies of the moving image in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

The concern is with a tradition of thinking and debate concerning the relations between what might be called culture and society. Of course, while various authors, such as Raymond Williams, have addressed this subject in terms of a more particular literary heritage (Williams 1973), here culture and society are thought of in more particular and specific ways. Hence, culture is that part of human affairs that is not directly economic, political, legal or religious. It has to do not just with aesthetic experience but also with that which is social. It is concerned with the way people live their lives, with how they communicate with each other, with the kinds of knowledges they deem to be important, with the ways in which these knowledges are recorded, stored and reused. Similarly, society has to do with the experience of living in community, of belonging to a unit larger than the family or even a clan. Place is a particularly significant component of this experience, and I am especially interested in the growing recognition of the city as an increasingly important component of this sense of social space. This did not occur in a theoretical vacuum. At the time that the works of those scholars discussed below were attempting to see and write about the city in a different perspective, Brisbane was beginning its historical journey from settlement to regional city. Indeed, the selection of Brisbane as a convict colony in 1823 occurred at the same time that the study of the city of urban sociology as outlined in the section below on the works of von Thünen and others.

Therefore, although this survey of thinking concerning culture and the city might have started with philosophical reflection by authors such as Plato, Aristotle and the Greek city-states, I have chosen instead to start in the nineteenth century. This is because it was during this time that a tradition of inquiry began that is still with us in the early twenty-first century.

The object, then, is to examine the contribution of a range of authors concerning the cultural and sociological life of cities. For urban spaces have excited the curiosity and interest of sociologists, historians, geographers, literary authors, philosophers, cultural critics and others for a long time. Thus, by examining some of the key thinkers belonging to this school of thought, I will provide a background and context for the investigation of cinema, television and the urban experience that is to follow as well as show in the case studies in Part II how each is important to the research question stated in Chapter 1. The aim is to examine a number of cultural thinkers who have had different perceptions about cities and people and have come to formulate these in quite different ways. All the same, what they have in common is a grasp of the changing relationship between the urban experience and mutating modes of thought and feeling.

Fifteen different authors are surveyed here, some of them quite briefly. Those in question are Von Thünen, Tonnies, Weber, Simmel, Park, Benjamin, Barthes, Lefebvre, Williams, Foucault, Baudrillard, Soja, Jameson, Sassen and Landry. Their years of activity, in relation to the topic, run from the 1820s to 2001. Very often in their work, attention is fixed on a subject other than that of culture and the urban experience. However, at the very least they have something interesting to contribute towards this ongoing discourse; nor is this attention always passing and peripheral. In the case of others sketched here, there is a fuller engagement with the theme, so I pay rather more attention to them. With this caveat in mind, I examine their contributions in chronological order derived from their major works.

## **Von Thünen, Tonnies, Weber and Simmel: The birth of urban sociology**

As distaste for the modern city grew during the nineteenth century, and it became evident that unparalleled growth had brought with it many social problems, scholars turned to the study and analysis of this phenomenon. Early accounts were descriptive, but in the 1820s Johann Heinrich von Thünen (1783–1850), a German landowner, was the first to deal analytically, and in abstract form, with the spatial economic aspects of the city and its environs (*Der isolirte Staat*, 1826, trans. Wartenberg 1966). In this work, he developed a theory of zones to explain the relationship between land and rent. This was an important development, as it led to the core–periphery model and the concentric zone theory later developed by Park and others of the Chicago School in the 1920s. It continued to be a central theme in urban studies throughout the twentieth century (Briassoulis 2005) and has given scholars a deeper understanding of how cities such as Brisbane relate to larger centres (Wallerstein 1974).

As the century progressed, other thinkers began contributing to the nineteenth century analytical turn. Social aspects of the city, in particular, attracted a new wave of theorists who crystallised the change in ways of thinking about the city that then became the foundation for many twentieth century urban sociologists. This was most evident in the work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1855–1936), Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Max Weber (1864–1920). An examination of these theorists will now follow, as they are all important to this study in terms of their role as early exponents of twentieth century sociology and their influence on the Chicago School of Sociology, discussed further later in this chapter. The seminal works of Tonnies (1877), Simmel (1903) and Weber (1905) also coincided with the

development and appearance of film in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at a time of rapid city growth and a perceived breakdown of social order. The recognition that life within the city had changed irrevocably is central to a later understanding of the influence of film and television on the urban experience. It is also this sense of change that is highlighted in each of the case studies as the social fabric of Brisbane was altered irrevocably following each filmic or television event that used Brisbane as a locale and also as the film and television industry developed in the city - in the latter case, especially the advent of television in the late 1950s.

Ferdinand Tonnies received his doctorate in 1881 and wrote extensively on the nature of associations and the individual's relationship with associations. Where Tonnies' writing differed from that of others was in his analysis of the individual first in terms of the community (village) and then in terms of the city (Farganis 1993). He reasoned in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1877, trans. Community and Association, Loomis 1940) that in the city there appeared to be an increasing preference for a business social structure, or *gesellschaft*, as opposed to a small town communal social structure, or *gemeinschaft*. Identification of these societal structures by Tonnies was influential in twentieth century sociological studies, as the objective outlook of the alienated urban dweller in the *gesellschaft* appears to have led to an urban culture providing more visual texts as a means of guiding the new urban dweller through the increasingly unfamiliar environment. From close observations of urban social contact, Tonnies argues that urban social relations and interactions mark a fragility of existence in the city, where a person 'is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others' (Loomis 1940, p. 74).

A German professor of philosophy, Georg Simmel's contribution to sociology and urban studies in the twentieth century is regarded by many as both significant and influential (Farganis 1993). Simmel's work on the urban experience of the modern city dweller — a development of Tonnies' arguments regarding the fragility of life in the city — appears in his most notable work, *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903; in Miles, Hall and Borden 2004, pp. 12 - 20). In this, he argues that the modern city produces a 'metropolitan type [beset with an] intensification of nervous stimulation' that has no precedent. The city has become associated with freedom for the individual to engage with an 'objective spirit', one that negotiates with ease the 'rapid crowding of changing images and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions in deep contrast with small town and rural life' (1903 in Miles, Hall & Borden 2004, p. 13). Simmel's focus on the individual and his attempts to link individuals' social interactions with the newly emerging social structures of urban society mark a distinct change in understanding of the modern city which had implications in the way sociology came to be researched in the twentieth century. Moreover, since the publication of Tonnies' work in 1877, the urban dweller appears to have overcome the fragility of urban life by, Simmel argues, establishing an intellectual and emotional distance. However, in the case study on Brisbane's feature films in Part II of this thesis many characters are still seen to struggled against the 'tremendous agitation and excitement' of the city (1903 in Miles, Hall & Borden 2004, p. 17).

Max Weber's contribution to the debate on the cultural and sociological life of cities is quite different from those discussed previously and is concerned primarily with the study of the

city at a macro level. Born in Erfurt in 1864, he came from a family deeply involved in politics and economics, and embarked early on his career in the social sciences, holding professorial posts at several European universities. In *The City* (1905), Weber embarked on the first comprehensive history and analysis of the city. He concludes, following an examination of the essential features of the city, that entering a city is like going into a 'strange country', where 'personal reciprocal acquaintance of the inhabitants is lacking' (Weber, 1905, in Martindale and Neuwirth 1958, p. 65). Max Weber's later works are an attempt to come to terms with this 'strange country' as he begins to define sociology and sociological terms, and to construct a theory of urban social interaction. Weber's identification of the social group in urban society complemented Tonnies and Simmel's micro, or interaction, analysis of the modern city. In 1910, he became the cofounder, with Tonnies and Simmel, of the German Sociological Society.

## **Park and the Chicago School of sociology**

The aforementioned works became the foundation for sociological research on the city that was conducted by was later known as the Chicago School of Sociology in the first half of the twentieth century. Robert Park (1913–44) is the most notable sociologist of this group. Born in Pennsylvania to a prosperous family, Park studied at the University of Michigan under John Dewey. Following a varied career in newspapers, he studied at Harvard University and travelled overseas where, after listening to Georg Simmel's lectures in Berlin, he completed a PhD. Park accepted an appointment to the University of Chicago in 1914. He argued that a life of 'tramping about in cities in different parts of the world' gave him eminent qualifications for studying the city, 'not as a geographical phenomena but as a

kind of social organism' (Park 1950, p. viii). Park's arrival in Chicago in 1914 was fortuitous. In 1871, a devastating fire levelled the city, but in the process of rebuilding, developers introduced new building technologies, such as the load-bearing steel frame, which enabled the construction of the first 'skyscrapers'. Social and planning innovations followed that put Chicago ahead of many similar-sized cities, and it presented for Park, by 1914, an ideal laboratory in which to examine, in depth and at close quarters, the relationships between the social systems at work in the modern city (Croser 1977).

Park's influence on urban sociology during the interwar years was extensive. More than any other social scientist of the time, Park did a great deal to initiate programs of urban and social research. Up to the time of his early death at just 31 years of age, he raised a number of important issues that he felt needed further examination. Hence, when his previously published papers were republished as the *Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park* in the early to mid-1950s, these were organised around these major issues. The three volumes were *Race and Culture* (1950), *Human Communities* (1952) and *Society* (1955). Generally considered the founding father of the Chicago School of sociology, the *Collected Papers* were subsequently produced as a single collected volume to coincide with the university's 1958 Urban History Conference, a testament to Park's influence in the field.

Coinciding with the urban expansion and change taking place in Chicago in the years between the 1870s and the late 1930s/early 1940s, there had been at the university an enthusiastic attempt to record statistically the rapid changes taking place in society. Park considered these studies to be an ideal database for the further analysis of the relationships

over the long term between people, the urban environment in which they lived and the institutions constructed by them. Along with other American social thinkers such as Lewis Mumford, he also sought to understand the underlying trends in the apparent fragmentation and disintegration of urban society during the interwar years. Park considered that, while urban dislocation — particularly in the inner city — was a manifestation of this disintegration on the one hand, on the other the city presented itself as a laboratory or workshop in which to study this phenomenon. Just so is the role of Brisbane in this thesis as it, as with many Western cities during the interwar and postwar years, underwent disruption and dislocation as noted in the case study dealing with government film.

The focus of Park's collected papers is broad and far reaching. Taken together, they show that he was initially concerned with human behaviour and relations between ethnic groups. From here, he moved on to an examination of the environmental and institutional structures that people constructed around them. In *Race and Culture*, he raises questions about a multitude of topics on the current attitudes towards different racial and social groups, both at home and overseas, providing ideas for future research and advice on method. Having investigated disparate social groups, he then turns in *Human Communities* to the environment of choice for most groups in which those relations take place: the city. The latter becomes the mantle of those who live within it, shaping them in turn and itself being shaped further by the continued human interaction. Park draws upon ecological concepts to explain the structural processes of the city as an organism. Expanding this sociological vision in *Society*, Park examines the collective nature of individual actions and its effect on the development of the social structure within which the city and its inhabitants are couched.

The recognition that such a study was necessarily a multidisciplinary one was a feature of Park's work, and that of those who studied with him at the University of Chicago during the interwar years. The multidisiplinary approach of Park's work is attempted in this work also as theory and case studies present theory and data from film and television studies on the one hand and the city on the other in an attempt to understand, better, the relationship between the two and the concomitant impact on Brisbane society during the postwar years.

### **Benjamin's arcade *flaneur***

The developing academic discipline of sociology during the first half of the twentieth century was only one approach to thinking about cities. Other cities and other traditions have engaged the attention of a variety of authors. Born in Berlin in 1892, Walter Benjamin was an early twentieth century philosopher and literary critic of the Frankfurt School. Aside from his literary criticisms, his major unfinished work, *PassagenWerk*, focused on cities and the recurring theme of the 'street, the passage, the arcade and the role of the *flaneur*'. Benjamin described the *flaneur* as 'the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets' (Sontag, in Manion and Simon 1985, p. 9), though Levi noted that during the nineteenth century a certain literary interest developed in the *flaneur*, who became 'one of those *fin de siècle* dandies who ambled through the crowds of European cities in search of bustle, gossip, and beauty' (Levi 2004). However, Brisbane's role as a port city until the late twentieth century, led it to be a late developer as a *flaneur* place. Only after the realisation by the Brisbane City Council of the economic value of places useful for 'parading', places which notably appeared in the films and television programs selected for study in the case studies, was there an active development of places like Southbank and the Queen Street Mall, among others.

In *The Dialectics of Seeing*, Susan BuckMorss reconstructs *PassagenWerk* which, at Walter Benjamin's premature death by suicide in 1940 in the belief that he was in imminent danger of arrest when fleeing from the Nazis, remained a collection of data and observations on shopping arcades in Paris (BuckMorss 1989). Susan Sontag (in Manion and Simon 1985) indicates that Benjamin's method in this work stems from his early interest in the Baroque, where it is 'common practice' to develop and 'pile up fragments incessantly', provided there a strongly articulated structure or pattern is in place (1985, p. 16). In this regard, Benjamin's own life appears to have many parallels with the *PassagenWerk*: a brief passage through time during which a myriad of diverse experiences accumulates. Benjamin considers that these fragments facilitate a relationship between the past and the present, with political connotations in the present that are 'written in invisible ink' just as the removal of the industrial buildings on the south bank of the Brisbane River, across from the city's central business district, to be replaced by the development of the 1988 Expo site (and subsequently the Southbank precinct) was a statement by the Queensland Government of a change in direction for the use of place in the inner city. Reading an artefact in the context of contemporary understanding is the outcome of materialist history (BuckMorss 1989, p. 291).

The juxtaposition of style in these artefacts shown in Benjamin's collection of pictures and photos in *The Dialectics of Seeing* clearly demonstrates how the nineteenth century ornate casings in shopping arcades in Paris dissolve to reveal the functionality of the object as it appears in the twentieth century. Most indicative of this trend is Benjamin's comparison of

Charles Fourier's phalanstery, drawn in 1844 with the 'Domino' housing project designed by Le Corbusier in 1915 (BuckMorss 1989: 305). In the former, dissolution of existing institutional forms took place in favour of an economic unit of 1,620 persons — a phalanx — living and working together in a phalanstery. Benjamin considered that the regimentation of Fourier's social form in the mid-nineteenth century had faded by the early twentieth century. Le Corbusier's 1916 'Domino' housing project was an outcome of cubism and the German expressionist movement at the turn of the century, where 'forms were dismembered into their faceted components; angular forms, interpenetrated planes, transparencies, and diverse impressions were recorded as though seen simultaneously' ([www.archpedia.com/StylesModern2.html](http://www.archpedia.com/StylesModern2.html)).

Benjamin's awareness of the changing nature of the city throughout the interwar years appears in his examination of the *flâneur* and the relationship of the *flâneur* with crowds and public space. The *flâneur*'s penchant for loitering, having once been the stroller of the nineteenth century boulevard, was put to use in the 1930s as people were engaged to wear sandwich boards on which consumer products were advertised (BuckMorss 1989, p. 306). However, Benjamin foresaw the department store providing a safer venue for the stroller, as the automobile began to dominate public space in the city. Hence, the arcade would be the last haunt of the *flâneur*, 'increasingly corralled on islands of pavements and parks with restricted movement between them, under the control of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings' (1989, p. 344).

BuckMorss does not fully explain how Benjamin perceived the role of the *flaneur* and his connection with mass newspapers of the time. However, she does suggest that television provides a service to the watcher in the form of an ‘optical, nonperambulatory form’ of strolling taken to the extreme in Adorno’s ‘aural *flanerie*’: the station-surfing behaviour of the modern television viewer (1989, p. 354). Finally, in this brief examination of *PassagenWerk*, the growing ability of each generation of observer to deal with quickening scenes rests with the mimetic or imitative capacity of humans, Benjamin considers that the development of the camera facilitated this development, enabling a greater degree of insight into movement and space, and reversing the apparent fragmentation of city life — a form of seeing the modern city that had been underway in previous decades. The change in the ways of seeing as noted by Benjamin is a cornerstone of this thesis. As a result of seeing Brisbane in film or a television program, the nature of the way people living in Brisbane saw their city changed. This is brought out in each of the case studies. At the same time, and as a result of this, the city itself was developed to accommodate the needs of residents – another issue which is raised in the case studies in Part II of this thesis.

### **Barthes and the ‘new sensibility of vision’**

Thus, the early general interest and engagement with the overall social experience of the urban landscape that had begun by the time of World War II was transformed into a more particular focus on a more specific aspect of the overall experience. This certainly proved to be the case with Barthes. Roland Barthes (1915–80) was a French critical thinker writing in the mid-twentieth century. After an early critical defence and interpretation of the Nouveau Roman, he turned his interest towards a kind of structural anthropology of contemporary French life. His short essay, ‘The Eiffel Tower’, first appeared in *Mythologies* (1957). It was

one of many highly condensed essays favoured by Barthes in what was known as the 'Nouvelle Revue Française' writing style of the postwar era (Brown 1992).

Though Barthes focused on the critique of the text in much of his writing, he also commented on signs as an image that enabled a greater depth of cultural understanding. In *Eiffel Tower*, he highlights the paradoxical fact that the tower is observable from all places in Paris, and looking down from it one can view below the panorama of the city. Built in 1882, the construction of the Eiffel Tower heralded a technology that easily accommodates Barthes' investigation of its semiotics, for while the Tower is full of abstract symbolism, it has no use in a functional sense. Equally, the ever-present gaze of the Tower upon the city was difficult to escape — there was something about this a kind of benign watchfulness that was almost a comfort to the citizens below (Schirato and Webb 2004).

The Eiffel Tower was not only highly visible in the city of Paris. Through its structure and detail, it has come to represent the city, and as such was — and still is — instantly recognisable throughout the world. The Eiffel Tower, Barthes suggests, denotes Paris:

It is the universal symbol — it is everywhere on the globe where Paris is to be stated as an image; from the Midwest to Australia, there is no journey to France which isn't made, somehow in the Tower's name, no schoolbook, poster or film about France which fails to propose it as a the major sign of a people and of a place: it belongs to the universal language of travel. (Barthes 1997, p. 34)

Yet at the same time, from its top can be seen the city in all 'its structure'. Barthes traces this kind of geographical geometry back to Victor Hugo's 1831 *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and Jules Michelet's 1924 *Tableau Chronologique de l'Histoire Moderne*, in which the hypnotic nature of the panorama was first elucidated (Howard 1979). Barthes links the existence of the Eiffel Tower in its time with the historical popular attraction of the panorama, which were, he suggests, part of a 'new sensibility of vision' in which the traveller, having once experienced the environment as an immediate sensation, now had the means to observe from above – to 'see things in their structure' (p.8).

When the Tower was being constructed in the early 1880s, it was only the sun itself that fulfilled this omnivision of seeing and being seen. Hence, the Eiffel Tower became a kind of sun tower, the embodiment of a utopian desire to 'see' without being 'thrust into the midst of sensation' (Howard 1979, pp. 2-3). Barthes suggests that the Tower fulfils a function envisaged by early nineteenth century authors. It provides those who access it with the sensation of sitting in rarefied air 'as (socially) pure as in the mountains' (1979, p. 2). Paradoxically, however, few people elsewhere have the same opportunity as visitors to and citizens of Paris to visit the Eiffel Tower: it is beyond reach, beyond existence (p. 4).

At this point in my survey of authors who have written about the culture–city connection, we should mark a particular shift in the authorial commentaries. Benjamin and Barthes are particularly concerned with a new way of seeing, both literally and metaphorically. In part, what they are describing are particular anticipations and premonitions of the

institutional and technological arrangements that are given more precise and more permanent manifestation in the cultural form and apparatus of the moving picture on both the large and small screen. In just the same manner, viewing Brisbane on the large or small screen gave the people a manifestly different view of the familiar, which in time reshaped the very structure of the city itself – a topic dealt with in more depth in the case study on Brisbane’s early television history. Within a dozen or so years of the Eiffel Tower being completed, moving pictures had appeared in Paris, with filmmakers such as the Lumiere brothers filming on its streets and people paying to watch these movies in tents and elsewhere. Hence, it requires little imagination to see the relation between Benjamin’s Paris *flaneur* or consumer of sights, provided ‘with a whole polyphony of pleasures’ in a protected, artificial environment, and the situation of the viewer of moving pictures, watching either in a public although protected place or in the private space of the home. In late twentieth century Brisbane this manifested in shopping centre developments and such structures as the Southbank precinct, for example, all of which enabled and encouraged consumption of pleasure that could be writ large in film or television program. In his remarks about the Eiffel Tower, Barthes argues that viewing in the comfort of altitude without being soiled with the actuality of existence a thousand feet below is a new kind of spectator experience. His comments on panorama and the Tower are in sense in anticipation of moving pictures technology. Especially in television this constitutes a means of achieving a sun-like surveillance of places and events, even while remaining invisible. Moreover, of course, the Eiffel Tower itself serves as a forerunner of the television broadcast tower, both of them manifestations of these new technologies of vision.

## **Lefebvre: Production and space**

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) was a French intellectual and philosopher born in Landes, France. He graduated from the Sorbonne in 1920, spending the time until World War II teaching philosophy, translating and writing on Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche and dialectic materialism. Following his professorial appointment at a Parisian University in the 1960s, he became involved in the student communist group, Situationiste International. This group was critical of the mass media and its role in postwar consumer culture, and it was during this association, along with the influence of his work during the interwar years, that Lefebvre published *The Production of Space* (1974). He uses the term ‘production of space’ as a way of developing a meaning of what space is and what it signifies to people in the modern city in terms of the means of production. He begins by tracing the concept of space in philosophy, science and economics, concluding that space is critical to all facets of society. Given this, Lefebvre introduces the concept of social space that he had begun to elucidate in a previous work, *Critique of Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1948); he would go on to deal with it in more detail in two further works, *Writings on Cities* (1996) and *Critique of Everyday Life* (2002). Lefebvre work is most useful to this project since it outlines a social view of space that gives justification to the research questions. That is, whether thinking about Brisbane in terms of film and television increases our understanding, or vice versa, of the urban experience and to what extent is the city shaped, in turn, by such an understanding. It is an issue that is dealt with in each of the case studies in this thesis.

Space, Lefebvre contends, is a concept that goes beyond the spatial and temporal dialectic; it exists socio-politically on three levels — spatial practice, representations of

space and representational space. The first, spatial practice, is demonstrated and reinforced by people in society in the reality of day-to-day life through 'the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, "private" life and leisure'. Whereas spatial practice is organic and develops from daily life, the second level of space suggested by Lefebvre, representations of space, is imposed from above. These result from the ideas of planners and politicians, 'technocratic subdividers and social engineers', and are, Lefebvre argues, 'the dominant space of any society' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 261).

The third spatial type discussed by Lefebvre is representational space. It is this space that is actually lived in by the people of a place; denoted by associations and symbols, it determines 'the foci of a vicinity: the village church, the graveyard, hall and fields' (1991, p. 265). The lived space in the early years of television in Brisbane, for example, was quite different to the lived space of those living in the the 1990s as evidenced in the two case studies on television in Brisbane. Lefebvre describes these three levels of space as a triad of 'the perceived, the conceived and the lived'; each making its own contribution to the 'production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period' (1991, p. 265). Moreover, each continually vies for ascendancy and control and becomes manifested, for example, in local neighbourhood or consumers' movements. This provides an insight into 'prescient' urban geopolitical processes that Lefebvre is able to recognise as the conflicting interests inherent in representations of space and representational space within the urban space of a city (Brenner 2000, p. 374).

## **Williams: The city and country**

Raymond Williams (1921–88) was born in South Wales and educated at Cambridge University. Following a varied career as a teacher, novelist, critic and academic, he gained recognition as one of Britain's leading social commentators in the postwar period. Williams made a significant contribution to culture and history, and especially the linkage between film, television and culture, not the least of which was the introduction of the concept of 'flow' in television in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1972). Drummond notes the influence of his early life in Wales on *The Country and the City* (1985), in which he analyses the similarities and differences between country and city. His earlier work as a literary critic is evident as he uses English literature, and especially poetry, to develop insights about urban and rural regions in *The Country and the City*. His main argument is that the nature of urban and provincial life was radically altered from the early eighteenth century onwards. This was an outcome, he saw, of industrialisation and the rise of capitalism.

Williams develops a claim that the idea of loss is perpetuated in society through its literature by challenging the continuing reference to loss of tradition in the literature of the period. Longing for the past was, and still is, he suggests, a response mechanism by society in the face of industrialisation of the city and the concomitant urbanisation of the countryside. Perceptions of country and city are, he argues, 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977, pp. 120–22). Hence, retrospective tendencies in society are attributable to the speed and perceived negative effects of urbanisation. A new consciousness of the 'pleasing prospects' of an increasingly urbanised landscape offset the bleakness of the

nineteenth century city and the increasing sense of disconnectedness felt by inhabitants of the industrial city (1977, pp. 120–22).

Williams cites various literary texts from the seventeenth century onwards which demonstrate that the yearning for a lost tradition represents a distancing of self from the reality of the environment. In other words, he pinpoints a major shift in the manner in which society perceived environment. Queensland government films that represented Brisbane, to be discussed as a case study in Part II of this thesis, are a good example of the sense of longing for country and an example of how the experience of living in a city can be altered through film, as prospective migrants were to discover. Each film discussed in the case study in Part II, it will be shown, give a representation of Brisbane that is clearly different to the urban experience of its inhabitants, thus supporting Williams' argument below that perceptions of place can be altered through moving images (Williams 1985).

The pace of industrialisation and the fragmentary existence led by many, and alluded to time and again in literature, indicating that the experience of people living in the city had fundamentally altered by the turn of the twentieth century. Williams believes that this changed perception is closely linked to twentieth century forms of imagery in the small and large screen. In particular, he draws attention to the way motion pictures used montage techniques and observation of miscellaneous streets and people in crowds to back this suggestion of a fundamental shift in the 'structure of feelings' or the way people related to the lived experience of the urban landscape of the time. Images on the large and

small screen, according to Williams, precipitated a change in people's perceptions of the urban experience (Williams 1985).

Williams' review of literature, film and other material in support of his thesis is both extensive and impressive. However, it should be noted that he was writing in the early 1970s at a time of inner city decline and urban crisis. This influenced the textual evidence presented and the case that he puts. In addition, his argument is very ethnocentric. There is no discussion of the affects of industrialisation in places other than the West, nor of its impact on other cultural and ethnic groups. This might have provided greater balance to the thesis. More importantly for our purposes here, Williams does show that society is adept in using new forms of communication as a coping mechanism for change. This was initially evident in poetry, then in prose in the form of the novel, and generally in the language of the time. Hence, Williams considers film to be the latest in the development of a new societal consciousness. *The Country and the City* is therefore relevant to the project at hand. Williams shows that development in new ways of seeing did not occur exclusively in the more recent realms of photography and film, but belonged to a larger network of influences affecting change in society, which included city growth and development.

### **Foucault's *Discipline and Punish***

Michel Foucault (1926–84) was born in Poitiers, France and educated by the Jesuits at the College Saint Stanislaus. A philosopher and historian of thought, his work is an essential addition to this project, touching on most disciplines throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. It falls into several distinct but related areas: madness, medicine and

the medical profession, structuralism, discipline, and sexuality. The first of these areas of interest, madness, was an outcome of Foucault's early career in psychology at the University of Lille and it was here that he produced the *Maladie Mentale et Personnalite* (1987 [1954]). Following a series of publications that were the outcome of his doctoral thesis, he published his first major work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), in which he focused on the history of madness and the means by which control over the insane was asserted in accordance with the main belief system of the time.

In the second phase of his research, Foucault turned to the examination of medicine and the medical profession in recent history, producing his second great work, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). This text, with development of the concept of a medical regard or looking, was the first indication that Foucault was turning his interest to the objectification of the person in society by those in a position of power. Foucault entered the structuralist debate in the 1960s as his interest and involvement in communism grew.

Publication of *The Order of Things* (1966, trans. 1970) positioned Foucault as a key thinker and philosopher of his time and highly relevant to any extended consideration of the complex relationship between the urban experience and human culture. The concept of the clinical gaze became, in *Discipline and Punish*, a function of disciplinary punishment (1975, trans. 1977). In this text, Foucault differentiates between the monarchical system of brutal physical and public displays of punishment in place up to the late Middle Ages and the disciplinary methods of punishment in which surveillance is the chief means of control over the majority. Foucault argues here that the rise of

institutionalised disciplinary practices corresponds with the emergence of scientific thought and use of scientific method, producing a carceral continuum that is evident in every facet of modern society. Late in his career, Foucault's focus turned to the extent to which sexuality has been repressed in modern society, arguing that — quite unlike the attention given to it in early Western history and other cultures — this has caused it to become a core feature of the self. The topic resulted in the publication of *The History of Sexuality* (1976), a three-volume work, the last of which was published after Foucault's death from AIDS in 1984.

*Discipline and Punish* is the text that is most relevant to the current project, in particular Foucault's discussion of panopticism. Hitherto, he suggests, the few were observed by the many in religious and entertainment events. Panopticism, on the other hand, is the situation where the few watch the multitude. Foucault's investigation begins in a seventeenth century village affected by the plague. In an attempt to prevent this spreading further in the village, the local leaders decided to register and then isolate each individual in his or her own home. The implementation of these measures forces order on a scene of disorder. Foucault notes this event as the first where a panoptic schema imposed on a population whereby a few were in a position to observe the multitude. By the mid-eighteenth century, this response to a previously unknown and terrifying disease had manifested itself architecturally in the form of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. This device allowed for constant and continual surveillance of prisoners, who were segregated at the peripheral wall of a building that contained at its centre an observational tower.

Foucault's key argument is that the advent of the panoptic schema, developed from the seventeenth century onwards, was not restricted wholly to the architecture of prisons. It became, ultimately, a solution to demographic and economic problems and institutions for such agencies as the police, the judiciary, schools and hospitals. These and other bodies required a cost-effective means of social control and the idea of this was embodied in the panopticon. As Foucault shows, such systems had been in place in one way or another over a period of time. However, industrialisation and the pressing need to control an expanding and mobile population enabled a technological threshold to be crossed. What began as a physical solution to the plague ended with an idea of discipline and control that permeated the institutions of nineteenth and twentieth century society.

In his work, Foucault brings together a myriad of apparently unconnected elements to pinpoint a development in technologies of surveillance that permeate all aspects of society. We see further connection and extension of insights already touched upon by Benjamin, Barthes, Lefebvre and Williams. From the latter two writers, we derive the idea of power relations accruing around the acts of watching and being watched. Barthes, in his essay concerning the Eiffel Tower, links this with a particular technology and Foucault now proceeds to connect this with a specific apparatus. What is in question is the twin condition of watching and being watched. More is to be said on this in relation to Brisbane's television culture in the 1950s and 1990s in the respective case studies in Part II of this thesis. Clearly, although these authors would disagree about the particular historical timing, what they agree upon is the development of mass society on the one hand and a concern with visuality on the other. The latter might be said to represent the

general cultural condition that both anticipates and will find expression in the particular institutional conditions congruent with the appearance of film in the late nineteenth and television in the first third of the twentieth century.

## **Baudrillard and the new media culture**

Baudrillard was born in Rheims, France in 1929, studied at the Sorbonne, and taught in a *Lycee* until 1966. At that time, and under the tuition of Lefebvre, he submitted his doctoral thesis entitled, 'The System of Objects'. As a postmodern media theorist, he analysed the effect of the media on society in the latter part of the twentieth century. His importance in the field of social philosophy and thus the question of the urban experience of film and television, lies in the extent to which he pays attention to new forms of communication. In his earlier works, Baudrillard interpreted consumer culture at a level beyond that of the individual as an economic or productive being. By the 1970s, he had pushed the boundary of social theory by arguing that the media culture of the time had begun to develop codes for the objects that people consumed. This was done so successfully through the new electronic media that Baudrillard argued it was the code itself, and no longer the object, that had become the target of consumption. Thus, people no longer consumed objects for their own sake, but rather for what they signified. The suburban experience of television lie not in the consumption of television programs themselves but, as recounted by those interviewed, in what the television signified, what it said about the few who owned one in the early days of transmission.

*A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981) is important in the sequence of Baudrillard's publications because in it he demonstrates the process by which the sign

has evolved. He suggests that during the nineteenth century the focus of consumption shifted from production of the commodity to production of the sign signified by the commodity. That is, the use value of the good had been superseded by its exchange value, and through the new media the sign itself had become the commodity. For him, there is a totalitarianism attached to the sign in current media culture.

Like Guy de Bord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), and more recently Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000), Baudrillard's argument concerns the more recent state of culture - a process in which film and television are intimately implicated. Continuing a theme already found in Lefebvre, for example, concerning the ongoing manipulation and false consciousness of people, film and television are seen by Baudrillard to have a direct stake in bringing about this situation and the manner in which the use of the city changes once film and television become implicated in its growth and development. As in the case of Brisbane, the central business district and south bank usage changes from merchantile/industrial to retail/recreation – the world of Benjamin's *flaner*. A development that continues even til recently with removal of Kangaroo Point TAFE College (2009) and the transformation of the site into a viewing platform for consumption of the environment and spectacle of the growing number of firework displays put on by the Brisbane City Council.

However, just how the role of the moving image has influenced and promoted the exchange value of consumption patterns posited by Baudrillard and how these have impacted on the city does need to be examined further. An extension of the concept of use versus exchange value would be to consider the city itself as a commodity. The

question becomes one of how much the city has changed from that of use value to exchange value over time, and the extent to which the media have been involved in this transition. The four remaining writers to be considered below help further with this puzzle that is the transitional use of the city during the twentieth century.

## **Soja and the postmodern city**

Edward W. Soja (1941–) is a postmodern urban geographer and writer who has written and taught extensively in the fields of political economy and planning theory. Born and raised in the Bronx, Soja began his early work on spatial analysis in the mid-1960s at Syracuse University. It was from this time that he formed the conviction that a ‘geographer’s spatial perspective could contribute significantly to the rapidly expanding research in developing areas’ (Soja 1968, p. v). Following a period of teaching in the 1970s and 1980s, Soja began writing a trilogy that would confirm spatiality as a fundamental element of the postmodern city. *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) is the first part of a trilogy in which he deals with, and attempts to rectify, the extent of spatial awareness and analysis in modern geography and history. His second volume is *Thirdspace* (1996), while *PostMetropolis* (2000) completes the trilogy. *Thirdspace* deals particularly with the unreality of the postmodern city, while in *PostMetropolis* the author provides a more complete and extensive spatial history of the metropolis. In the trilogy, Soja laments the inability of language to deal effectively with the simultaneity of space. Los Angeles is used as an empirical model for his argument. He claims that inadequate attention has been given to the significance of space and its place in society and the built environment. Most ignored, Soja argues, has been the notion of power in the spatial divisions in twentieth century urban society, such as the movement of urban elites from

the Brisbane's city centre in the 1890s following the construction of public transport links (Lawson 1973). Likewise, the flow of residents to outer suburbs in the years following the first television transmissions and the concomitant change in the urban experience – the *Australian Dream* (1984) of suburban shopping complexes and Cineplex cinema. Soja shows that, during recent centuries, historians and social scientists have all but ignored space as a critical element of social study. The works of Marx, Lefebvre, Foucault, Harvey, Giddens and others are examined to demonstrate the extent to which spatial analysis had become subsumed by the temporal narrative until the closing decades of the twentieth century. Examining particularly Lefebvre, Foucault and Baudrillard, Soja develops his argument at different levels, ontologically, theoretically and epistemologically, to show that a reawakening has occurred in the spatial consciousness of society since the 1960s. This, he maintains, 'all comes together in Los Angeles'. Describing and then analysing this conurbation, Soja develops a panoptical interpretation of power relations between government, industry and society in a late twentieth century city.

### **Jameson and the postmodern condition**

The recognition of the transition from modernity to postmodernity has also been evident in the work of other theorists, such as Fredric Jameson. Jameson was born in Ohio in 1934 and studied at Haverford College before travelling and studying in Europe. He obtained his doctorate in 1961 at Yale, where he studied under Erich Auerbach. His work differs from the European positions of, for example, Baudrillard and Lefebvre, in that eclecticism evident in his work is in itself representative of the postmodern condition. In *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), he argues that the

postmodern phenomenon is characterised by fragmentation and depthlessness. This is especially evident in the films selected for study in Part II all of which display elements of fragmentation and dislocation in postwar Brisbane. The underlying cause of this, Jameson argues, is the separation of the referent from the sign, and a growing gap between the signified and the signifier. He concludes that postmodern forms, such as found in architecture, art, literature and film among others, are particularly useful for demonstrating changes from the modern to postmodern during the twentieth century.

In addition, the technologies and cultural forms of the moving image, whether on the small screen or the big screen are the contemporary cultural forms most sensitive to changes in the way we view our world. Television, for example, has developed into a highly refined postmodernist form that excludes cultural memory previously found in the (temporal) fractured modernist period. The effect of this condition is to keep society in the perpetual present. Jameson argues that it is too easy to miss ‘the point of television’: as its ‘critical role lies in its ability to produce the simulacrum of fictive time’. Although in writing this, Jameson applied this argument to the introduction of the video player, his remark that ‘every age is dominated by a privileged form, or genre, which seems by its structure the fittest to express [the] secret truths of that particular time or place’ nevertheless applies particularly well to television in the post war era (Jameson, 1991, p. 67). On the other hand he argues that film — an older medium with roots in the modern period — it lacks the flow evident in television and therefore structurally, more so than broadcasting, it is representative of the change between the modern and the postmodern. Jameson (1991) examines several films to support an argument that a significant cultural shift in society took place around the 1960s.

## **Sassen and the global city**

Saskia Sassen (1969– ) is currently Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago. In *The Global City* (2001), she identifies a number of elements manifested in cities that have become leaders of a region. These include a concentration of head office activity within the city, a locational preference for financial support industries, a preference by business for using the sites for innovative production, and a use of these sites as markets for innovations. The author notes that processes of globalisation that took place in the second half of the twentieth century arose from a combination of developments following the 1945 Bretton Woods Agreement. However, the rules set at Bretton Woods for global trade began breaking down in the 1970s. This, together with the Third World debt crisis of the 1980s, led to a global economy that was both spatially dispersed yet economically integrated. Sassen's examination of global cities such as New York, London and Tokyo highlights a number of points that set these cities aside from others, giving them a new and strategic role above and beyond that of their regional importance over the past two centuries.

One puzzle tackled by Sassen is how cities of such diverse histories have undergone similar transformations in such a short period. She identifies a number of aspects of cities that have contributed to this. The first is that spatial expansion, which might have expected to lead to disintegration of existing power structures, did not occur; rather, the reverse is so: the greater the degree of geographic economic control, the greater the agglomeration of power concentration in fewer and fewer centres. Sassen posits that a higher spatial density at the centre of these cities seems to indicate that an increased

dispersal of industry, due to an improved telecommunications service, has led to a greater need for higher density of central functions. One of the outcomes of this, she argues, has been greater spatial density at the geographic centre. Meanwhile, another outcome has been the impact on the economic order of this central growth; Sassen argues that global cities appear to be the most advanced in terms of specialised financial and accounting services and as such they have become centres of production for these services. The products are finance and business, with global cities assuming the role of market centres for these products, a process that has been developing since the 1980s. Sassen analyses this phenomena from the point of view of the production of the inputs of financial services, not the power corporate or supracorporate that controls them. A clear indication of this is evident in the case study on government film in Part II of this thesis. Film was selected as the best means to draw capital and migrant investment to Brisbane in direct competition with other regional centres throughout Australia. Similarly in the 1990s television was again used to present Brisbane and surrounds at a time of significant internal migration flows from the southern states.

Many cities developed a 'global control capacity' in finance and banking industries. Although the focus in this text is on the marketplace and production, rather than the larger corporations and banks, Sassen notes that this would limit attention to the more formal aspects of the firms under review, and as such the extent to which the global city impacts on the social order of the city — for example, the greater polarisation of labour (Sassen 2001, p. 45). At the same time, a final point of focus explored in the text is the impact on the above on the regional urban systems — for example, the relationship of the

global city to the nation state and how its global status affects the fortunes of regional cities in that country. As these regional cities, such as Chicago and Osaka, once played major roles in productivity and industry, a question arises as to whether these centres have lost ground when measured against the global city. This study is important in terms of my thesis since Brisbane, as a case study of moving images, is highly indicative of the relationship of regional versus global cities described by Sassen, and the role this plays in the development of the urban experience through film and television in post war Australia.

## **Landry and the contemporary city**

One of the most recent designations of the city to manifest itself is that of the creative city and a key exponent and authority on this theory is Charles Landry (1948–). Landry studied in Germany, Italy and Britain before forming the Comedia consultancy in 1978 to enable a group of urban experts to provide advice on city planning and cultural development. His work on creative cities has been developing since that time, but it was not until 1995 that its first appearance as a theory was set out in a working paper, *The Creative City* (1995). This later became the basis for Landry's seminal work on city culture, *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (2000), in which he argues that innovation and creativity are the machines that now drive the economy of the city, just as manufacturing, and later commerce, did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.. The city, through its cultural, social and recreational activities, encapsulates a sense of place that engenders a special meaning in the collective memory. The layers of meaning that exist for people in the public places found in cities provide opportunities for 'expanding one's horizons, of the unknown, of surprise, of experiment and of adventure'

(Landry 1995, p. 16). A key driver of the contemporary city, suggests Landry, is the cultural resource provided by representations of the city through, among other things, film and television. The cultural capital that is the product of such activity becomes an important investment in the city's internal and external development. Significantly at this time, and as will be argued in the case study on film in Part II of this thesis, the Brisbane City Council developed policies to promote Brisbane in film, which resulted in a number of overseas films being encouraged to Brisbane as a locale

Recognition of the depth and breadth of visual representations of the city by civic leaders enables any city to 'become a world centre for something if it was persistent and tried hard enough' (Landry 2000, p. 8). Visual portrayal of the city through film and/or television assists in affirming a community's identity and distinctiveness. It enables the creation of an urban literacy, a capacity of the community to read 'the dynamics, exchanges, flows, resources and networks' more comprehensively (2000, p. 250). Economically, it also becomes a means by which a city, through its selection of brand, can create a niche for itself on the national or international stage, thereby attracting investment and interest.

This chapter has traced a series of discourses on the general subject of cities and their culture. Collectively, the writings addressed add up to a philosophical tradition of what might be called urban studies and present both generalized theses and specific treatment of cities in the post war period. In the present context, these writings have been identified and discussed as a means of making the point concerning a rich historical tradition

running back to the European Enlightenment concerning the social life of cities. The more recent and specific concern with moving pictures and urban places can be seen as a later chapter of this particular story. In the era of so-called globalisation, there has been a heightened interest in cities and film and television, and it is to this that I turn in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Film, Television and Urban Places

The American city seems to have stepped right out of the movies...to grasp its secret you should not, then, begin with the city and move inwards towards the screen; you should begin with the screen and move outwards towards the city (Baudrillard 1988, p. 56).

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I surveyed those nineteenth and twentieth century writers and thinkers who have helped to develop a cultural understanding of the city. The multiplicity of authors demonstrates the depth of interest and vitality of engagement in this tradition of inquiry and philosophical reflection. However, what the survey fails to disclose is a particular inflection of that school of analysis – to be discussed in this chapter – that has become especially prominent in recent years. An engagement with matters concerning the interaction of the city, urban space and place and a particular stage of the culture industries, especially as they take the form of film and television, is a contemporary recasting of the overall concern with culture and the city. It is also a reconfiguration and a displacement of that older form of interest in the aesthetic dimensions of the metropolis. The changing structure and use of the city – and with it the city was experienced by its populace - towards the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century is a case in point. It is especially evident in Brisbane as late Victorian brick warehouses, offices and port buildings in the central business district and surrounds gave way to

residential and recreational structures, such as the Admiralty Towers development at Petrie Bight, redevelopment of the south bank and, most recently, the establishment of a ‘viewing’ platform/park at Kangaroo Point.

The issues raised in the previous chapter had to do with a particular stage in the formation of urban landscapes and concerned the pre-industrial and industrial city. It was a foundation to twentieth century thinkers in the disciplines of the moving image, sociology and urban studies. When French filmmaker Abel Gance made his classic forecast that the time of the image had come, he was in effect linking the advent of the moving image on the large screen of the cinema (later it would be joined by the small screen of television) with a further stage in the evolution of cities (cited by Walter Benjamin in Arandt and Zohn 1968, pp. 221–22). Labelled as the last Victorian technology of culture and communications and visibility, film has been one of the realities of the city in the twentieth century.\* This era spans two periods in the history of cities’ metropolitan spaces in both the later stages of industrialism and in the first throes of post-industrialism.

Undoubtedly, and by its very nature, the moving image in the form of film or television is set in, and therefore, tied to a place, whether in terms of setting, representation or formation. Nevertheless, it is also striking that, despite a good deal of research into the more obvious forms of this cultural geography, it has only been in the past fifteen years

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\* Film, naturally, has also been an important factor in the perception and understanding of regional and remote Australia as well; but it is not the task of this thesis to delve into this substantive area of research.

that researchers have begun to display more systematic engagement with the connection of the moving image to the urban experience.

This chapter, then, will focus on the relationship between film, television, urban places and experiences as discussed in more recent literature. Doing so strengthens the connection between Parts I and II of this thesis. The texts selected for the forthcoming discussion in this chapter have a stronger focus on film, television and the urban experience as it developed during the twentieth century and explores that common area lying between the fields of film and television on the one hand and the city on the other. The writers discussed below become a springboard for the case studies in Part II and as such are central to the research question posed in Chapter 1: in what manner, and to what extent, does thinking about the city in terms of film and television increase our understanding of the city (in this case, the city of Brisbane) and conversely, does thinking about a film and television in terms of the city change our understanding of this most modern media. From the scope of literature available on this topic, twelve authors are considered to be most relevant in terms of my thesis and have been selected for further discussion as an indication of the growing strength and variety of the new paradigm of the geography of urban visibility.

The discussion that follows seeks to complete the ‘background’ investigation initiated in the previous chapter by examining various writings that are in many ways still in progress. Various one-off essays have appeared — for example, essays on the role of place in a particular television program, or a film, or how place reconfigures various

aspects and elements of the institution of the moving image. Again, a network or set of connections, such as geography, culture and postmodernism to mention a few, that bind together film, television and the city is discussed - in the selected works herein - in a host of often unexpected but inevitably engaging ways. In turn, these essays have called forth other efforts in the field, including conferences, anthology collections, particular case studies, theoretical investigations, monographs and other initiatives that help multiply the growth that is occurring at the intersection of disciplines.

Like most fields of inquiry, this area of investigation is unwieldy and lumpy, so there is no very obvious way of ordering the authors and the material that follows. However, to help anticipate the engagement of subsequent chapters with matters to do with film, television and the city of Brisbane, I have decided to organise the survey that follows into a number of stages. The first has to do with the work of five major figures in the field: Douglas Gomery, James Hay, Nick Couldry, and Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice. This is followed by a second clustering where most of the material outlined is more occasional and one off, and includes the work of Peter Billingham, Giuliani Bruno, James Strate and James Lyons. Finally, in the third part, I look briefly at some Australian writings on the subject of screen place. Within this final group are included three essays: those by Rosaleen Smyth, Lennart Johnston and Albert Moran. These, coincidentally, are united in that each is concerned with the city of Sydney; but the method of each has much to offer a study of Brisbane images.

In the first stage of my discussion in this chapter, I deal in the first place with five major figures undertaking research in this field. The relevance and contribution of each is considered in turn. In closing, I turn to the one off papers that have some connection to the recent contributions in film, television and the urban experience.

## **Douglas Gomery**

Douglas Gomery is an economist by training, and a historian of film and television by profession. Previously working at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, he has since undertaken extended investigation of the coming of sound to the US motion picture industry. Since the early 1980s, his interest has focused on the history of picture-going in the United States and the result of this engagement has been a series of essays having to do with particular eras and regimes of film attendance that culminated in his work, *Shared Pleasures* (1992).

The publication of *Shared Pleasures* was the first indication that film and television studies were becoming something other than a study of form or auteur theory. The methodology of this text was strikingly different from anything produced previously as Gomery's major focus was the treatment of film and television as a business case study. Unlike previous texts, it also presented a strong spatial, economic and commercial focus on the relationship between the moving image and the city. Until this time, treatment of film and television remained much as a history of form, as with Bordwell's treatment of film as a history of form (Bordwell and Thomson 1979). In the early 1990s, he was also among the first to engage with film and television in connection with the spatial configuration of the city. For example, Gomery argued that the postwar period was one of

rapid suburbanisation of city peripheries as conversion of pent-up wartime savings into houses, furnishings and children took place. *Shared Pleasures* was a breakthrough in terms of the wider contextualisation of film and television, as he discussed in some depth the impact of film and television as business history — observing, for example, those choices made by postwar consumers that influenced the spatial development of the city (p.94). This theme is dealt with further in the case study on television in Part II of this thesis, where it is argued that the advent of television did more than just provide a new medium of entertainment, rather, it impacted on the structure of the city, of the houses within the city and, ultimately in the way people experienced their urban environment.

Given Gomery's focus on economic argument, it is not surprising that in *Shared Pleasures* he demonstrates that postwar population growth drove a concomitant rise in consumerism. Setting the role of film, television and the city in an economic perspective introduced hitherto unused concepts when it came to thinking about the relationship of film and television and the city. He notes that, in the early 1950s, new parents chose children as the preferred consumption, complemented with radio as the in-home entertainment. As radio switched to television in the early 1950s, the need of affluent young parents, living at the city periphery, for a low-cost and free babysitting service grew (Gomery 1992, pp. 88–100). This initially caused a decline in cinema going at the periphery, but by the 1960s and early 1970s, the rise in mall and shopping centre development at transport nodes on the outskirts of the city led to the installation of cinemas and later multiplexes. This meant that the business of 'going to the movies in many ways was reduced to the equivalent of standing in line at the Kmart to buy a tire or

lawn furniture' (Gomery 1992, pp. 93–95).

An important aspect of Gomery's work in terms of this study is his realisation that moviegoing takes on different patterns in different places. This being the case, his early research has subsequently developed into studies of other locations. For example, in *Film Theory* (1989), written with Robert Allen, Gomery uses a comparison of early patterns of moviegoing in two US cities, New York and Chicago, as part of a discussion of writing one particular kind of film history. In another study, he examines moviegoing in Washington and the particular aspects of this leisure activity in a national capital, which is then contrasted with an examination of this activity in small-town America in his work on moviegoing in the Shenandoah Valley in Kathy Fuller and George Potamianos' text, *Beyond the Bowery: The Cinema and Mass Entertainment in Small Town America* (2002). This pattern of producing additional material from the initial research is one that is common among the writers selected for discussion and is particularly apparent in the work of the next researcher.

## **James Hay**

Primarily a geographer, Hay's work in this discipline began with 'Geography and Television', a 1996 entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Television*, and the edited volume, *The Audience and its Landscape* (1996), in which he maps the landscape of television and the televisual in late twentieth century society. He asserts the need for clarity in definitions given to the terms 'television' and 'televisual' as well as additional effort in distinguishing between the two. While television presents clearly demarcated categories for study, it is equally important, he notes, to examine linkages between social space and

the televisual as the latter has been instrumental in shifting recent cultural perceptions of geographic place. In support of this argument, he details aspects of the visual and narrative form in which this has occurred, such as the homogenisation of place, as well as the manner in which aspects of culture have dispersed across different cultures through the televisual. The opening paragraphs of this entry serve as a background to Hay's main tenet that the history of the televisual is a history of how cultural use of space has been determined by the place of television in culture. In support of this argument, Hay traces the history of this relationship from the 1940s to show not only the impact this had on domestic space, but also the external, urban space. Popular series in the 1960s are examined in the light of the suburban growth — for example, the demonisation of the inner city, valorisation of ranch-style homes, or the run of series dealing with displacement or resettlement in one form or another. It is Hay's work that is pivotal in the case study on the early days of television in Brisbane and it is his arguments that are used to show the substantial changes in the way people related to, and experience place and city.

Currently a lecturer in communication studies at the University of Illinois, James Hay began, in the mid-1990s, to address in some depth the question of space and place as it relates to film, television and the city. Continuation of this process through more recent technology is also evident, and much of Hay's later works address the relationship of new technology and its spatial use by the youth of the day. Most recent technological advances have intensified this process, and Hay outlines specific ways in which the environment has been affected geographically, and which Hay sums up as the changing

flow of cultural capital resulting from the increasingly sophisticated communications technology (Hay 1996, p. 15). The downside becomes the uneven spread of this cultural and economic capital, commercial and political complexities, serving to exacerbate the lack of equitable access to this medium.

Hay's contribution to *The Cinematic City* (2001) continues his critique of twentieth century focus on historicism in cinema studies, and in particular the centennial celebration of film in the mid-1990s. Such events involving film, he considers, tend to restrict the study of film, reinforcing the compartmentalisation of cinema studies into related disciplines such as literature or sociology. Through a spatial examination of two interwar Italian films, *Sun* (1929) and *Mother Earth* (1931), Hay demonstrates how a cultural shift took place in society at that time through the urbanisation of the rural landscape around Italian, and by inference other, cities. Filmic mapping of population flows as demonstrated by Hay's treatment of this topic reflects one of the editors' aims that the concept of 'space' and 'spatiality' in film needs greater emphasis. He attends to this in a chapter in *Cinema and the City* (2001), entitled 'Shamrock: Houston's Green Promise', wherein he analyses the locational affect of the cinema and film on a specific city, Houston, Texas. By examining the parallel nuances in the 1956 film *Giant*, and the Shamrock Hotel built by oil millionaire Glenn McCarthy in 1949, Hay illustrates how the city can manufacture a role for itself in an industry. With representations of Hollywood's Wild West at every turn, 'Shamrock was to Houston what Hollywood was to the world' (Hay 2000, p. 79).

As the opening of the Shamrock Hotel testifies, Houston subjugated itself to the major industry of the time. Hollywood celebrities, and bit parts for the hotel in films such as *Giant* (1956), continually complemented the exuberance and abundance of the building and its interior. Equally as quickly, however, a city can reinvent itself. In the case of Houston, emerging technologies and space research can just as easily replace the ageing guise of the Wild West. This chapter aptly fulfils one of the goals of the editors by highlighting cultural repercussions of film and cinema in shaping the city through spectacle and the 'interpenetration of culture, society and economics'. Hay also fulfils another goal of the editors, in that he shows, with reference to a specific city, how film culture can shape a city, which in turn assists in the 'globalisation' of a culture (Hay 2000; Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2000, p. 4). Since Houston is, in many ways, similar to Brisbane in its developmental timeline and position as a regional centre, it is a useful study for Part II of this thesis.

Recent publications by James Hay indicate that he is developing an argument that study of and research into film and television can provide a deeper and richer understanding of the urban experience when taken in conjunction with the spatial configuration of the city. It was a methodology that first appeared in his 1996 edited volume *The Audience and Its Landscape*, and concerns the study of moving images as sites and networks of communication. This methodology, elaborated in more detail in the case studies of this thesis, is being applied to the city of Houston, Texas, and will form the basis of a forthcoming volume.

The work of James Hay is important to this thesis, especially in the area of television studies. His work is further summarized and discussed in the case studies in Part II of this work. However, it is useful to list his publications as a means of indicating the extent and direction of his research:

- 1996 *The Audience and its Landscape* (ed.) (New York: Westview).
- 1996 'Geography and Television' in *Encyclopaedia of Television*, edited by Horace Newcomb (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn).
- 1996 'From the Living Room to the Open Road (or Why Jack Kerouac was Television's Beat of Choice)', unpublished paper presented at the 53rd Mostra Internazionale D'Arte Cinema Tografica, Venice, 28 August–7 September 1996.
- 2000 'Unaided Virtues: The (Neo) Liberalization of the Domestic Sphere', *Television and the New Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 53–73.
- 2001 'Locating the Televisual', *Television and the New Media*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 205–34.
- 2001 'Piecing Together What Remains of the Cinematic City', in *The Cinematic City*, edited by David Clarke (London: Routledge), pp. 209–29.
- 2001 'Shamrock: Houston's Green Promise', in *Cinema and the City*, edited by Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 75–87.
- 2002 'Toward a Spatial Materialism of the "Moving Image": Locating Screen Media Within Changing Regimes of Transport', unpublished paper forwarded by author.

- 2004 'Crossing the Media(n): Automobility, the Transported Self and Technologies of Freedom', in *MediaSpace*, edited by Nicholas Couldry (New York: Routledge), pp. 209–32.
- 2005 'Overhaulin' TV and Government: Thoughts on the Political Campaign to Pimp Your Ride', *Flow*, vol. 1, no. 9, <<http://jot.communication.utexas.edu/flow>>, accessed 12 June 2004.

## **Nick Couldry**

A media and communications specialist, Nick Couldry initially graduated in Classics and Philosophy from Oxford University. His interest in media developed during a Masters degree, then a PhD program, at London University, after which he joined the London School of Economics in 2001. Although he has authored several papers and books (*Contesting Media Power and Media Rituals* in 2003, *MediaSpace* in 2004 and *Listening to the Echoes* in 2006) since then, it is his first text that is my focus here, as it investigates people's experience of the visual media.

*The Place of Media Power* (2000) deals with an area neglected in previous studies of the media: the meetings between 'ordinary people' and the media. His study explores what happens when people who normally consume the media witness medial processes in action, or even become the object of media attention themselves. Such encounters, he argues, tell us a great deal about our attitudes towards the media world, provoking a new way of thinking about the media's impact on contemporary social life, the basis of their social authority and the possibilities for challenging it. He covers perspectives of anthropology, discourse analysis, sociology and geography as well as media studies in

order to develop a wide-ranging theory that the media maintain a special status as storytellers and presenters of 'facts'. As the production of films and television programs set in Brisbane are a case in point. It appears from the research conducted for this thesis that people were far more critical of the media when they viewed filmic representations of Brisbane, especially the extent that the city was recognizable in the film or television program. This will be discussed further in the case studies in Part II that cover commercial film from the 1970s and television programs made in the 1990s.

Couldry goes on to explore the implications of this theory in two detailed case studies. The first is the set of a long-running TV soap set in Manchester, *Coronation Street* (1960-to present). Embedding his case study analysis of soap in spatial aspects of postmodern theory, he researches the reaction of visitors on the Granada Studios tour. In particular, he notes the willingness of visitors to treat the set as a live place through which each has experienced strong, usually positive, emotional connections.

The second case study in *The Place of Media Power* covers the impact of the negative media attention during two decades of protests against live animal exports at the port of Brightlingsea. Couldry describes the attention given to the people of Brightlingsea, irrespective of whether they were part of the protests or not as, 'the politics of the media frame' (p. 123). During the protests generally law-abiding residents of the small town were shocked to see themselves portrayed as negative stereotypes:

It felt so foreign, didn't it? To be walking down the street with a placard. I mean, prior to all this, when we saw any protest on television, we always thought or assumed, Oh, protesters are wrong, the police are right.' (Jim, interviewee, p. 127)

The relevance of these events and the impact on ordinary people for Couldry was the apparent recategorisation of individuals, who, up to this point had considered the media as only a means by which to find out what was going on in the world. (p.123). These two case studies, among the first of their type, offer fresh insights into people's urban experience of film or television and the impact these media can have on everyday lives (Couldry 2000).

In a more recent publication, *MediaSpace* (2005), Nick Couldry, with Anna McCarthy, brings together authors of diverse disciplines to add to the growing volume of literature that recognises the importance of space and place in culture. *MediaSpace* is in three parts. In the first, views are presented of how various media deal with and use space. Shaun Moore includes an argument that media facilitate the growth of space, seeking to understand the complexities of that development. Another chapter, 'Kinetic Screens: Epistemologies of Movement at the Interface', by Lisa Park, looks at the collapse of space in recent years in. In the second part of the book, Couldry and McCarthy deal with the lived experience of space as it is organised through media. They include in this section the impact of gentrification and marketability of space on previously settled places, such as an inner city neighbourhood, as well as the effect of the stratification of place in the lived relations of *MediaSpace* of previously unexplored places, such as how

images of the beautiful woman flow through a stratified space (2005, p. 11). At a macro level, Andrew Ross argues in his chapter that new media capitalism and speculative use of urban space have noticeably influenced the social stratification of inner city suburbs. At a micro level, John Caldwell turns the spotlight on spaces of media production as a taxonomy of social spaces with the production culture.

Finally, Couldry and McCarthy look beyond the connection of media and space, and concern themselves with the experience of media in different places and spaces, and the process by which technology is transforming place. The variety of chapters in this section gives voice to the many research interests that exist in an increasingly crowded discourse of media and space. These new spaces utilise new technologies of the web cam, the internet, smart homes, inflight entertainment and the ubiquitous mobile technologies of telephone, mini disc players, and the iPod, each shifting our sense of private space within the public sphere — as was evident with the introduction of cinema and television earlier in the twentieth century.

This brief discussion of the material produced so far in Nick Couldry's career indicates that he is among those whose work continues to deal with the intersection of film, television and the urban experience. Before turning to those researchers who have produced a single work of interest to this thesis, I shall deal with the work of Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice. It is they, I feel, who have been most instrumental in promoting the discourse of space, place and the relationship to film and television as it has been experienced by those living in the urban environment.

## **Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice**

Both Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice were lecturers in film studies at the time of publishing their first text, *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (2001) at Sheffield Hallam University and University College Dublin respectively. *Cinema and the City* forms part of the Studies in Urban and Social Change series, which aims to promote further research and debates in urban social studies. Unlike the other volumes in the series, this particular text resulted from a 1999 conference held at University College Dublin. Convened by Shiel and Fitzmaurice and entitled *City and Cinema*, it was described by them as a means to understand the crucial interconnectedness of cinema/culture and city/society over the past decade (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. xxi). Its contributors are published academics and professionals in the fields of communications theory, film and cultural studies, and social history. Following two background chapters, the editors divide the contents into four parts. They deal with the relationship between types of cities, their regions and the cinema culture that embodies them. In addition, a section focuses on current debates in the field.

This work has so far indicated and discussed the many works have been written on the cinema and/or the city, most of which have treated both topics as separate fields of interest. During the course of the last century, and particularly since the 1960s, a number of scholarly books dealing with one area or the other have been published as has been shown through these chapters in Part 1. On occasion, an author or editor can be found who has included analysis of the combined topics within a text, or a paper within an anthology. Given the fact that the city has often been a protagonist in film, and cities

have, in their turn, been shaped by film industrially, commercially and artistically, few texts have provided an exclusive focus on the effects of film on the city and society. In the *Cinema and the City*, however, Shiel and Fitzmaurice edit a series of chapters by authors at the forefront of thinking at the intersection of film, TV and the urban experience. In doing so, they provide contributions that link film and city on different levels: thematic, space, lifestyle and the human condition.

Mark Shiel provides a critical chapter that sets the tone and context for *City and the Cinema* through an examination of sociological and global influences. The cultural context of Shiel's chapter, 'Cinema and the City in History and Theory', centres on the theoretical background that relates film and cinema to the city. In this chapter, there is an invaluable survey of theory and issues pertaining to culture and society, space and spatiality, geographical description and uneven development, history, globalisation and genre, in a bid to pursue the means by which communication between the fields of film and sociology can take place. Accordingly, he outlines issues (culture vs society; operation of power; periodisation; industrialisation and spatialisation) shared by film studies and sociology (Shiel, in Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. 118). The relationship between sociology and film has been either negative or focused on mass indoctrination of consumers, which in either case has been deterministic and mechanical. Between film studies and sociology, the reflection of society in film has been seen either as a signifying system or as text. Roots of film analysis are in literary studies as text (visual language, dialogue, characters, narratives, storytelling) or as exegesis (psychoanalysis, Marxism, myth criticism, semantics, formalism). New to this is the subject of film and media

studies which, having its roots in sociology, tends towards the sociological approach and concepts.

The challenge, then, is to produce a text that considers the industrial/commercial sociology of the cinema (production, distribution, exhibition, consumption) with a focus on the role of cities (physical, social, cultural, economic, development). Shiel develops two propositions giving benefits to the interests of sociology (capital, economy, labour, demographics, focusing on the urban — culture, cinema, film — and the allegorical of social realities) and film studies interests and the synthesis of representation, subjectivity and text in production, distribution, exhibition and reception of the mediated production of urban identity and space in the cinema. ‘What will the new sociology of the cinema look like and what form will it take is the challenge?’ asks Shiel (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. 34).

Shiel sets the focus of *Cinema and the City* text to explain the relationship between the cinema and sociology, or film studies and sociology, in such a way as to avoid the previously mechanistic base/superstructure interpretation of society. Instead, he uses the Althusserian concept of structure, which allows contradictions to be modified by other contradictions. This produces an understanding of film studies and sociology that has a continual interplay in terms of their relationship with each other: an interdependency of culture described by Raymond Williams as ‘a whole and connected social material process’ (Williams 1990, p. 140) that focuses on culture as a ‘whole way of life’ (1990, p. 120).

On space and spatiality and its relationship to film, TV and the urban experience, Shiel notes that since the 1970s there has been a greater interest in the concept of spatiality, both as an organising tool and as a concept of analysis and description of modern and postmodern society and culture (Lefebvre 1974; Foucault 1977; Mandel 1975; Berman 1982; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1991; Soja 1989; Davis 1990). This has sprouted an understanding of the implications of the spatiality of social life and the concomitant power and discipline of politics and ideology, as well as the impact of spatiality on cultural text and product which enables a 'geopolitical aesthetic' of film (Shiel, in Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. 4). The increasing importance of space and spatiality in the modern world is reflected in cinema as space in film (shot, setting, sequence and environment) and film in space (film's influence on the spatial organisation of the urban environment through its industrial organisation). This consolidates Shiel's argument that cinema has greater cultural and sociological importance as a spatial rather than textual phenomenon, and in doing so enables a clearer interpretation of global capitalism.

In addition, Shiel argues a need for a 'cognitive mapping' of culture that exists both between and within cities in order to show the reality of twentieth century social and cultural life in an era of 'postmodern, global capitalism' of power relations that exist in the core periphery within/between cities and types of cinemas (Hollywood, European, Imax, documentary and low budget). This is manifested in cities and the film industry and their place in the global system. For example, Los Angeles exhibits First and Third World conditions, as well as Hollywood movies, while London and Paris — as fathers of

colonialism — still exert some influence in postcolonial countries. Both of these factors act as an ‘antidote’ to the free-market supporters and the defeatism of the homogenising effects of film in a postmodern era. Hence, Shiel argues that there is a need for a macrogeographic interpretation of spatiality that would be of interest to the disciplines of film studies and sociology alike (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. 68).

Recognition that an affinity exists between the moving image and the city is not new. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, filmmakers have been drawn to the city for its subject-matter, as the early films of Fritz Lang (*Metropolis*, 1926), Walter Ruttmann (*Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927) Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera*, (1929)) attest. The city, in its turn, was more than able to accommodate the new medium. The ebullience did not go unnoticed. Social commentators of the time were concerned with the effect of cinema on the morals of the working class. Yet others remarked on the richness and depth of the relationship between the city and the moving image, and the capacity of cinema to serve the new urban society. Historian Peter Fritzsche (1996) argues that the impact of rapid population growth at the turn of the century required a means for city dwellers to map their new urban environment and that the focus on the city in early films that fulfilled this need was much more effective than newspapers of the time (Donald 1999).

The synergistic impact of the city and film that brought about such popular enthusiasm in the early part of the twentieth century by filmmakers and audiences alike never appears to quite make its mark in academia. Mark Shiel puts this down to a mechanistic and deterministic turn in cultural and social studies, which was more or less in place until the

late 1960s (Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2001, p. 3). However, the critical relationship that exists between the city and film had not gone entirely unnoticed. Much of the cultural and philosophical discussions during the twentieth century have been dealt with in the previous chapter, but it is appropriate at this juncture to look at some aspects of late nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy. Current authors writing in this area have drawn upon this in order to support their current position, and a brief examination of this area will give a better understanding of why the current writers in film/TV and the city are dealing with this topic at this particular time. It is the purpose of this study to strengthen that connection between film and television on the one hand and the city on the other by presenting a series of case studies – arguably there are further avenues for research – that take a range of moving image media and connect it to the urban experience of the time.

### **One-off studies**

If these authors constitute some of the major reference points in the landscape of this kind of inquiry, it is by no means the case that they constitute its totality. Hence, by way of identifying some of the other features of this topography, I turn in this section to a series of other authors who have — albeit sometimes fleetingly — engaged with the overall subject. However, these authors have frequently been more concerned with more specific studies of particular places, representations, genres, and so on. Their studies are more applied investigations as will be shown in the discussions below. The one-off texts selected for inclusion in this literature survey often betray a good deal of methodological ingenuity and theoretical sophistication; thus, although they are treated as a secondary group here, they are certainly of equal stature to those in the first group.

### **Peter Billingham**

One of the few authors in this collection not associated with film, television or media studies, Peter Billingham is currently Reader in Performance Studies at the Bath Spa University, so in the context of his main research interests and other publications, *Sensing the City Through Television* (2000) is slightly aside. Nonetheless, although it surveys a range of television programs in terms of their settings, the underlying focus remains on television as drama rather than television as place. It provides an in-depth analysis of the political, sociological and cultural implications of popular programming through five case studies: *Queer as Folk* (1999), *Cops* (1989-),  *Holding On* (1997-), *Homicide* (1954-1977) and *Tales of the City*.(1993) Billingham argues that this selection represents a broad range of British and American cities and city subcultures. The discussion of place is evident in each case study in Part II of this thesis, but within an investigation of the intrinsic issues relating to the implications of popular and high drama and culture in television drama. Its inclusion in this thesis is justified on the basis that it represents the ever-widening body of literature from a number of related disciplines focusing on the intersection of film, television and the city.

### **David Clarke**

A further example of the interest taken in the role of the city and urban experience in film and television is *The Cinematic City* (1997), a multidisciplinary volume edited and published by David Clarke in the year following the centenary of film and the first to deal specifically with the relationship of space, place and film. It reflects Clarke's interests in human geography. He is currently lecturing and is an ESRC Research Fellow at the University of Leeds. Many of the contributors teach or research in geography or related

disciplines. Included, however, are chapters by writers in film, television and communication theory.

In a two-part introduction that puts the individual chapters in context, Clark is overtly philosophical in his focus on spatiality. In a bid to explore the screenscapes of the cinematic city, he examines the writings of Benjamin, Baudrillard and Harvey, among others, demonstrating that, by virtue of their use of space, both film and cities are implicitly and inextricably intertwined (1997, p. 2). Together, they represent and project the postmodern world of the city's social order (in Western society, at least) through dominant control over time and space. Clarke considers that more attention needs to be given to a combined writing of cinema and the city by specialists in their respective fields. He is critical of the fact that there appears to have been an active lack of will to treat the two subject areas as one. Citing Benjamin, he argues that, over the past century and a half, a change in our preferred sense has taken place, which has been at the same time consumed by and produced in the cinema. This occurs in the first place with an overview of modernity/postmodernity and the city, and in the second place by exploring the relationship between film, theory and space. This thesis has attempted to follow a similar method of presenting literature reviews at two levels before moving to a series of case studies that support and reinforce the literature.

For example, *The Cinematic City* presents a much deeper theoretical analysis of film noir in terms of space and place than has previously been the case. Rob Lapsley's chapter, 'Mainly in Cities and Mainly at Night', gives a psychoanalytic interpretation of the noir

city and the dark, somewhat forbidding atmosphere of these films, representing the Lacanian ‘Other’. Similarly, the chapter ‘Something More than Night’ by Frank Krutnik is a psychoanalytic interpretation of Hollywood films from the 1940s, identifying the degrees of noir in films, from the disordering darkness facing Millie and Paul in *When Strangers Marry* (1944) to the return of the city as protagonist from the iniquity of Portersville in *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946).

### **Giuliani Bruno**

A further example of the diversity of interests in the intersection of film/TV and the city is Bruno’s work on the films of Elvira Notari in *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural Theory and the City* (1993). An Associate Professor in Film and Environmental Studies at Harvard University, Bruno has published widely in film and cultural theory. What interests me is *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map*, especially the chapter that appeared in David Clarke’s *Cinematic City* (2001) entitled ‘City Views: The Voyage of Film Images’, that interests me.

In the latter chapter, Bruno argues that, for Italian migrants living in New York, films became a filmic channel of communication that helped them maintain cultural links to the homeland. In particular, films featuring Naples provided a ‘travelogue’, a diorama of a favoured place. Bruno uses the films of Elvira Notari, such as *Naples, Land of Love* (1928) and *Memories of Naples* (1931), to show that migrants who found it hard to deal with the separation of private and public places in New York reconnected through a cultural, filmic travelogue of their homeland in which public and private space was less defined (Bruno, in Clarke 2001). In time, migrant communities specifically requested

Notari to film specific places and people of the homeland. In the days before Super 8 cameras and videos, these short, commissioned films functioned as a panoramic personal archive of memories for a community.

Appearing in 1993, *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map* puts much less emphasis on this aspect of Elvira Notari's interwar film output. Bruno, who adheres to a feminist methodology in this text, canvasses a greater range of evidence to argue the Neapolitan connection; accordingly, there is extensive discussion on female geographies in architecture, paintings, photographs and literature as well as film (Clarke, 2001, p. x). The depth and breadth of Bruno's archaeological research into the cultural needs and urban experience of Italian migrants in New York is extensive with a focus on the erotic territory of the female gaze (2001, p. 6). So, as the main argument is somewhat off focus in terms of my thesis, its usefulness is that it contains more primary source detail than that of the aforementioned chapter. Quite the reverse, but in a similar vein, is the use of film by the government to represent Australia in the 1950s and 1960s – and in the case of this thesis, Brisbane in particular – as a land of milk and honey, which research indicates quite clearly that it was not.

### ***Lance Strate***

There is little doubt that many writers on the intersection of film/TV and the city are drawn from the media and communication disciplines. Lance Strate is Associate Professor and Chair of the Communication and Media Studies Department at Fordham University, and is well published in the area of communication and social interaction in

the environment.

Through an extensive study of the television drama series *The Sopranos*, Lance Strate argues that external locations act as a hook for local audiences, eagerly awaiting a familiar landmark or just simply open to the pleasure of recognition (Strate, in Lavery 2002). This was certainly found to be the case in the research for Part II of this thesis. However, he notes that any number of technical codes cannot shield the local viewer from the disappointment and sometimes the absurdity of familiar places out of place. It is this feature of Strate's work that I will discuss further in the case studies of this thesis.

### ***James Lyons***

A final example of one-off texts examining the city through either film or television is James Lyons' text, *Selling Seattle: Representing Contemporary Urban America* (2004). It is different from those texts hitherto discussed in this chapter in that the central theme is the corporatization of Seattle's coffee culture – through the rise of the Starbucks – and the transformation of the city from a racial and class divide. Lyons presents such television and filmic evidence, for example, as the television series, *Frasier* (1993-2004) and the film, *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992), to argue that Seattle experienced a period of media attention in the early 1990s that dramatically changed previous representations of the city of Seattle and its success in riding the wave of the coffee culture at this time was clearly evidenced in films and television series. Brisbane in the 1990s went through a period when films, such as *The Real Macaw*, *Go Go Gadget* and television programs, such as *Medivac* and *Fire*, were used overtly to promote Brisbane.

Indeed the practice has become so lucrative that for moving images, Brisbane City Council has a dedicated marketing department

## **Screening Sydney**

As mentioned above, there appears to be little yet written that is concerned with the matter of film, television and the Australian city. Hence, in this last section of the chapter, I address three essays that coincidentally have to do with the city founded at Port Jackson. These by no means exhaust the possible range of investigations that have occurred and are likely to occur concerning Australian cities. Graeme Davison (1978), for example, has written about representations of Melbourne, and has noted in passing how parts of the city have been represented on the screen, while Tom O'Regan and Susan Ward have analysed the film studio complex on the Gold Coast and some of the economic, industrial and aesthetic effects that have flowed from this placing (O'Regan and Ward 2006). However, the intention here is not to be exhaustive but rather indicative. With this in mind, I will now deal with three essayists who have emerged from my research and examine how film and television has impacted on the city and the extent to which the city has changed as a result of exposure on and through the medium of the moving image.

### ***Rosaleen Smyth***

Smyth's 'From the Empire's "Second Greatest White City" to Multicultural Metropolis: The Marketing of Sydney on Film in the 20th Century' is not only a useful portrayal of Sydney as portrayed on screen; but has much to offer in terms of the article's methodology. Smyth's output throughout the 1990s dealt mainly with grassroots activism

and the portrayal of indigenous populations through television, especially that of Australia Aborigines and Papua New Guineans. The appearance of this article in 1998 was something of a divergence from her usual research interests. In it, she argues that Sydney's hosting of the Olympic Games in 2000 was the climax of a century of propaganda during which the Australian and New South Wales governments systematically used film to promote Sydney in a bid to attract immigrants, tourists and trade, and to win national prestige (Smyth 1998, p. 237). Following a short historical background, the article then proceeds to examine and analyse, in some detail, a selection of key government films among them *This is Australia* (1932) and *Saga of a City* (1957). Each of these studies is incorporated with the history of government involvement and the role of such influential figures as H.C. Smart and Bert Ive. Given the method used by Smyth in the discussion on the use of film as government propaganda, this article will be examined in more depth in the case study on government film in Part II of this thesis. Smyth poses the question 'Is the reel Sydney the real Sydney?' and concludes that this applies equally to those postwar films produced by the Queensland Government that featured Brisbane — that is, whether and when the reel Brisbane becomes the real Brisbane?

### ***Lennart Johnson***

The Sydney Harbour Bridge has long held an iconic status in the Australian psyche. Yet so recent is the attention given to that intersection of film/TV and the city that scant attention has so far been given to the portrayal of the Bridge in moving images. At the eleventh Conference of the Film and History Society of Australia and New Zealand, held in Adelaide in 2003, Lennart Johnson, a PhD student from Monash University, presented

a paper entitled 'The Polysemous Coathanger: The Sydney Harbour Bridge in Feature Film, 1930–1982', in which he argued that researchers limited their analysis of the Bridge to paintings and still photos, ignoring or deeming irrelevant the frequency of its appearance in film and television. Following a detailed presentation of filmic evidence, Johnson concluded that narratives were capable of being drawn from Australia's first architectural icon..To some degree Brisbane's Story Bridge has suffered a similar fate until the making of *Medivac* highlighted – and presented to prospective migrants from the southern states – the iconic nature of this structure by repeated flyovers by state emergency service helicopters throughout the show.

### ***Albert Moran***

While one may lament the lack of material dealing with Sydney in terms of government and feature films, Sydney's connection with television and television's influence on Sydney has attracted even less attention. In a chapter titled 'Television at the Local Level: Sydney as a Case Study' (in Ferrero-Regis and Moran 2004), Moran rectifies this by examining the role of television in developing a sense of Sydney, of what it means to be in Sydney and to be a Sydneysider (2004, p. 73). As the concept and use of space changed from industrial and manufacturing to a commercial and services base, and geographical expansion of the city occurred, Moran notes that there was a concomitant growth and development in technology and broadcasting. Thus, as suburbs multiplied and technological advances impacted on media ownership and broadcasting needs, attention is drawn to the fact that, having undergone a long period of expansion, over recent years broadcasting requirements has generated a perceptible pattern of contraction of offices and technical services to Sydney's central business district. Evidence of this pattern of

expansion and contraction is apparent in two television series that Moran selects for in-depth analysis: *Water Rats* (1996-2001) and *Pizza* (2003-2004). In themselves, Moran argues, these series show a spatial transformation of Sydney's geography and mediascape, representing a geographic shift from the late twentieth century touristic shoreline of Sydney Harbour, the Opera House and Harbour Bridge in *Water Rats* to the gritty but hilarious realism of the western suburbs in *Pizza*. As with Rosaleen Smyth's publication, this particular work is discussed in more detail in the case study on television in the 1990s in Part II of this thesis. Taken as a whole, but outside the boundaries of this thesis, the papers of Smyth, Johnson and Moran are an indication of work on regional Australia still awaiting further research and completion.

## **Application of insights to the visualization of Brisbane in Part II**

The long-established tradition indicated in the works of writers discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis links social developments, cultural activity and aesthetic speculation with the metropolitan place has, in recent years, has been joined, in this chapter by a second complementary mode of inquiry. This new paradigm outline above sees the city in terms of the moving image and detects a series of points of contact, convergence and overlap between the two. Visuality in all its manifestations, whether of the cinema or television or both, has been for more than 100 years an increasingly inescapable fact of city life. The moving image has transformed the urban experience, even while it has been at work embedding itself at the very centre of this encounter. The last two chapters have traced the general and philosophical contours of this wedding in detail while remaining focused on the matter of general principle.

In order to have point and purpose, the ideas traced in this part of the dissertation must be grounded and must find specific form in more empirical and material circumstances. To that end, the next four chapters take up specific moving image case studies relating to the subject of Queensland's capital city and some of its varied relationships with the twin institutions of film and television. Four case studies are provided in support of the foregoing argument that the nature and perception of space and place are integrally linked with the representations of cities during the second half of the twentieth century and that the city, in turn, shapes itself to accommodate film and television influences. Chapter 4 deals with government film production while Chapter 5 outlines the early history of television in Brisbane. Chapter 6 examines feature films made in and about Brisbane, and Chapter 7 concentrates on two television series made in the city in the 1990s. The general subject of cinema, television and the city is now transformed into the more specific matter of Brisbane as a screen city.



## **Part II**

### **Four Brisbane Screen Studies**



## Preface to Part II

In the four case studies that follow, the inquiry traces a historical pathway in film and television during the half-century that began shortly after World War II and brings the reader to the recent present. How has the city life of the Queensland capital and its peoples been imagined on the big and the small screen? What do such representations disclose about the social life of a metropolis at a particular point in time? Once again, it is not the purpose of this thesis to delve into the history or political economy of Brisbane, rather it is that relationship between film and television on the one hand and the city on the other that is the focus here.

The chapters in Part I formed the backdrop to these four particular investigations, each having to do with Brisbane's moving images and sounds. The first chapter looks at the glimpses of the city contained in three short government films. These films were produced for information purposes, but it is certainly worth asking about the extent to which they are aimed at selling the city to its citizens and to others. Are they intended for purposes of urban marketing? To what extent do they attempt to be propagandistic?

The next chapter moves on in time to examine the years of early television in Brisbane. It is argued in this chapter that television brought people into more contact with their community, society and with the world at large. It was the modern technology and appliance *par excellence*. Accordingly, the chapter is concerned to ask just how television shaped the

city and how the city shaped television. Chapter 6 shuffles forward yet again in time and focuses on feature films released from the 1970s onwards. Brisbane's feature cinema is mostly 'an unknown cinema' that variously oscillates between place and placelessness. The analysis therefore traces this broken heritage to show how a feature film canon of sorts can be assembled.

Finally, the investigation moves closer in time to the present by focusing on two television drama series set in Brisbane in the 1990s. Concerned with modern social problems, the series were a pretext to produce modern action adventure drama set against a contemporary but anonymous city backdrop.

Each category of images chosen for inquiry in these chapters therefore reveals some facet of social life in Brisbane while offering representations of the city to the world at large. Analysis of each case study varies according to the availability of sources and materials. Only a handful of government documentary films are available for the period from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. The first days of Brisbane television live in newspaper records and in the memory of some of the early pioneers rather than existing on film or on video. There is a gap of almost 30 years before television drama series were produced in the city. Finally, a feature film canon of sorts does exist, although there is considerable doubt as to what might be included and excluded. However, some of this takes us ahead of the actual discussion. Instead, these issues will be picked up in Chapter 8 of this thesis.

## Chapter 4

### 'Brisbane' in Government Information Films: The Years of the 'Long Boom', the 1950s to the mid-1970s

In 1927, Walther Ruttmann, a painter and social documenter, released a work of such impact that it established itself in theatrical cinema as a new genre whose influences seemed to come together in *Berlin: Symphony of the City* (sic) (*Berlin: die Sinfonie der Grosstadt*, 1927). It was by no means the first film about a great city; predecessors had included Kaufman and Kopalin's *Moscow* and numerous short films, including *Manhattan* (1921) by the Americans Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, and an earlier venture by a Swedish visitor to New York, Julius Jaenzon, *New York 1911*. *Berlin*, however, started a wave of 'city symphonies', to which Ruttmann himself later contributed films on Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and Hamburg. (Barnouw 1974, p. 73).

#### Introduction

The relevance of Ruttmann's work and the context of the quote as an opening to this chapter these 'symphonies' became, over time, one means by which governments marketed their cities. This was especially the case for Australian governments as each state used film media to entice prospective migrants. This case study deals primarily with the government portrayal of Brisbane in such films during the post war years. .As already indicated, this part

of the analysis is concerned with four case studies of Brisbane's historic interconnection with screen cultures and industries.

In this chapter the focus is on three short documentary films made about Brisbane over a 20-year period starting in 1954 and ending in 1974. The years are notable in the city's history as these were, for most people, a time of affluence and prosperity. During these years, economic growth and population expansion spurred suburban and city development. While 1954 marked the beginning of the long boom, the world oil crisis in 1974 signalled the end of those years of postwar prosperity. The period also coincided with increased involvement by all levels of government in the production of documentary informational films. Three of these, *City in the Sun* (1954), *Life in Australia: Brisbane* (1964) and *Viewpoint on Brisbane* (1975), are chosen for discussion both due to their availability, and because they appear at the beginning, middle and end of this period respectively. As such, each film furnishes a succession of useful points of departure for documenting and exploring the life of the people and their city in the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s. Collectively, they tell us a lot about Brisbane in the years of the 'long boom'. Each is also somewhat reminiscent of the early symphony of the city films produced in the early part of the twentieth century. However, unlike the films of Vertov and Ruttman of that era in which the camera merely played the role of the observer, the government films made of Brisbane in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated a certain control of the message, scenes and dialogue were carefully scripted for the intended audience. This is quite unlike the element of chaos portrayed in films of the city in the first decades of the twentieth century. Simmel argues that the urban experience of the city dweller is one of fragility and 'beset with an intensification of nervous stimulation'

(1903 in Miles, Hall & Borden 2004, p. 12 – 20). By the later decades, government filmic portraits, and especially those made of Brisbane, are, Williams argues a good example of how the experience of living in the city can be altered through film, producing a sense of longing for a mythic other (Williams 1985).

There are many interesting themes and subjects that arise in the course of these particular films. However, I argue that one specific topic is especially important. This is the theme of perceived economic success as is illustrated in all of the films under discussion and which can be understood as part of an attempt to sell the city to prospective migrants. In the films, the use of outdoor and indoor scenes shows the Queensland state capital as a modern and attractive destination for newcomers. This is especially the case in the first film, *City in the Sun*. But in fact, as research can show, Brisbane in 1954 was a place of housing shortages and inadequate infrastructure and not, for many migrants, the sunny, bountiful place that this film portrays (Saunders 1999). The degree of mythmaking is less so in the second film, *Life in Australia: Brisbane* because there is greater attempt to represent the reality of life in Brisbane; but is still evident. For example As a representative city family goes about its business of work and recreation, the film suggests that the accoutrements of middle-class life are available to all: Australia, in general, and Brisbane in particular, are presumably places of bounty and plenty. By 1974, the hidden targets of such films, migrants, appear as on-screen subjects. In a film such as *Viewpoint on Brisbane*, these people speak for themselves. In their voices, the difficulties of life in the city are apparent. I discuss this further later in this chapter. In showcasing Brisbane to the world between 1954 and 1974 in these films, the way the government documentary film uses images and sounds changes. In

the 1954 film, there is an explicit, but generalised, representation of the city. By the time of the second film in 1964, the city's population can be exemplified by a kind of model family. By the time of the third film in 1974, Brisbane is an anonymous abstraction and the emphasis falls instead on the personalised, first-hand account of migrants' experiences in the city.

The period covered by these films is a particularly significant one in Brisbane's history. Though films were made at other times in the city's history, it is in the years following the second world war that the greatest expansion occurred. For most people, the time represented a period of growing affluence and prosperity. The year 1954 marked the beginning of the long postwar economic boom, which ended with the two global oil crises of the mid- and late 1970s. An influx of migrants and overseas capital created expansionary pressures in Brisbane that are not always evident in the filmic representations of the city. On the other hand, there was a high degree of political stability at all levels of government at this time, marking the period as one worthy of a case study. It is fortuitous that three films are available in which an exploration of the *mise en scène*, sound, cinematography and editing can reveal the type of urban experience that governments of the day considered appropriate to show to citizens and to the world. As such, these films can serve as a useful reflection of the aspirations of people living in Brisbane at the time of their production.

The chapter is presented in two parts and follows a method commonly used in this type of study (Smyth 1998; Moran 2004). In the first part, I provide background for the three films selected for analysis. This includes consideration of the general involvement of governments

at all levels in the production of information films, including the role of government in producing films during the period 1954–74. It notes how the government came to make the kind of films it did during this time, and the organisations through which the films were produced. In the second half of the chapter, the three films are analysed in the context of their time. The films are discussed in chronological order.

## **Government and documentary film**

Governments at federal, state and local levels have been active participants in film production throughout the twentieth century. Nowhere has this been more the case than with the federal government. Soon after Federation, the Australian government recognised the educational and marketing value of the moving image. The opening of the first parliament in 1901 was recorded by a commercial cinematographer employed for that purpose, and in 1911 the first government cameraman was appointed. From the 1930s onwards, a film production arm existed under various names and attached to different federal government departments.

Films were commissioned that focused on national issues, or the subject of Australia as a nation (Moran 1991). After World War II, government at all levels undertook more direct involvement in filmmaking, concentrating on commissioning films with specific educational, migratory or commercial topics (Smyth, 1998).

Many films had to do with the island continent as a whole, such as *Australia is Like This* (c1944), *From the Tropics to the Snow* (1964) and *For Every Walk of Life* (1973) (Moran 1991, pp. 88–93). In addition, a good deal of emphasis was also given to images that

promoted Australia's natural resources and in those films dealing with Australian cities, the attention generally fell on the southern capitals of New South Wales and, to a lesser extent, Victoria. Hence, for example, many films appeared dealing with the city of Sydney including *City in the Sun* (1947), *Souvenir of Sydney* (1954) and *Saga of a City* (1957). In fact, such an emphasis was hardly surprising. Not only was this city the largest urban centre in Australia, but it was also the headquarters of the federal government's film production arm (Moran, 1991, pp. 11–47).

Other state capital cities could not be ignored. From the mid-1950s, some government films began appearing that dealt exclusively with Brisbane. One of the first was *City in the Sun: Brisbane* (1954), which was part of the 'City in the Sun' series. The film production organisation was particularly fond of film series or cycles at this time, so that another film featuring Brisbane was *Life in Australia: Brisbane* (1964), which was part of the 'Life in Australia' film series. Meanwhile, there were also many one-off films dealing with the Queensland state capital, including *Heart of a City* (1959) and *Viewpoint on Brisbane* (1975). However, more specific features of individual cities also began appearing from the 1960s onwards. City industry was one such element, with one of its many Brisbane settings being highlighted in *Shipyard at Kangaroo Point* (1967).

Governments at the state and local levels have also had an interest in information films. Besides those films produced by the federal government film production arm, several Queensland government departments promoted Brisbane in film. Mention of *Shipyard at Kangaroo Point* helps highlight a filmic interest in the Brisbane River and its port. This

might be said to have been continued in several Queensland government documentary films including *Brisbane's New Building Dock* (1967), *River's End* (1979), *Living with the Port* (1980), and *From the Source to the Sea* (1986). The Queensland Port of Brisbane Authority has also been a major contributor of industrial films and has been responsible for *The Brisbane Line* (1988) and *Brisbane Portrait* (1990). In the 1970s and 1980s, the Queensland Department of Education made a significant contribution to films about Brisbane — although, as might be anticipated, these mostly focus on matters of schools and education. Finally, it is worth mentioning a small body of films produced by the Brisbane City Council. Works such as *Brisbane: City of Sun and Games* (1982) and *Brisbane's Beautiful Bay* (1989) signal a change in focus from Brisbane as an industrial port to Brisbane as a visitor destination.

## **The Commonwealth Film Unit**

The three documentary films to be discussed below all originated with the federal government's information film production arm. As prelude to their analysis, it is worth outlining the development of this production body. As already noted, a film cameraman had been appointed by the national government in 1912 to produce information films that promoted things Australian. By the early 1930s, this lone figure had grown into the Film and Photographic Branch, a body variously attached to different government departments but with the same task of documenting the place and the life of the Australian people. Particular government departments could commission the production of films that served to market Australia overseas. Some films, though, could outstrip this utilitarian purpose. Those such as *Sydney's Sunny Beaches* (1925), the series *Know Your Own Country* (1927–30) and *This is Australia* (1932) are a case in point. These, for example, did more than just advertise the

possibilities for trade and commerce available in Australia. Instead, they presented vivid images of life in Australia, including in its largest city (Smyth 1998).

In the postwar years, the Commonwealth government became even more directly involved both in producing films to serve the needs of different departments and in making films that were deemed to be in the national interest. Inspiration for this initiative had come from Britain. The documentary film movement, which had developed there since the late 1920s, was seen to offer a social service in dealing with problems and issues of national importance (Turner 1999, pp. 39–41). This form of filmmaking spread to Commonwealth countries, with successive visits to Canada, New Zealand and Australia by John Grierson in the late 1930s and early 1940s (Bertrand and Collins 1981). The latter was acknowledged as ‘the father of British documentary’. His task during these visits was to advise governments on the use of film for purposes of strengthening the bonds of Empire and the Commonwealth and to offset the domination of film by the United States (Moran 1991; Turner 1999). Under Grierson’s influence and leadership, the revamping and extension of film units occurred in Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

In 1945, the Australian government reorganised and enlarged its information film capacity as the production arm of the newly established Australian Film Board (Bertrand and Collins 1981). By the early to mid-1950s, this body was increasingly known as the Commonwealth Film Unit. Its overall task was to assist with postwar reconstruction and development (Moran 1991, p. 32; Smyth 1998). However, growth could imply not only the development of infrastructure but also the task of attracting newcomers to the Commonwealth, both as

labour and as citizens. Government films soon displayed a much sharper focus as they targeted trade and potential migrants to Australia. In this context, various information films concerning Australian cities emerged.

## **A changing city**

Manufacturing and trade fuelled the Australian economy during the period between the end of World War II and the Oil Crisis of the mid-1970s. This was a period of sustained affluence and growth known as the 'Long Boom'. Australian cities changed markedly in the period under the impact both of manufacturing and trade, and under the jolt of greatly increased migration. This change was especially marked in the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne, but also affected the smaller satellite state capital cities.

Brisbane saw a rapid increase in population, urban development and economic growth in the postwar years. Like many Western cities of the postwar period, Queensland's state capital's development was affected by the worldwide movement of displaced persons and international capital (Kenwood and Loughheed 1992). By the early 1970s, Brisbane had grown from being a small administrative centre for a sparsely populated and highly decentralised state to become a medium-sized city vying for importance and commercial independence from southern centres (Fitzgerald 2006; Evans 2006). Brisbane City Council records indicate that the city's population increased from 515,000 in 1954 to 705,000 in 1972, the largest single increase in any 20-year period during the city's history (ABS AUSTATS 1950-1980). Census data indicates that, Australia wide, 46 per cent of settlers in 1961-65 were from the United Kingdom and Ireland. By the early 1970s, this percentage had dropped marginally to 41 per cent. There was an increase in dwellings from 131,000 in

1954 to 210,000 in 1973, and rateable land values in this period rose from a total of AUD\$125 million to AUD\$900 million (BCC 1973). With these larger changes and developments in mind, I now turn to three films that offer portraits of the city and its people during this time.

### ***Brisbane: City in the Sun (1954)***

This film portrays Brisbane as a city of dignified, but not pretentious buildings, of sunshine and beauty. The film emphasises themes of commercial enterprise, employment and family cohesiveness. The connection between the city and the land is highlighted as in this period primary production is a major element in the success of the Queensland economy. Like others in the series, *Brisbane: City in the Sun* was a vehicle for promoting the Queensland capital to other parts of Australia and to the world as a place in which to live and do business.

Little archival information is available for this film. Prints are held in the National Screen and Sound Archive in both 16mm and 35mm forms. The film is one reel in length, a standard format for the Commonwealth Film Unit at the time. Its running time is nine minutes and 43 seconds. The film's title is similar to other films of the same era, such as *Coral: City in the Sun* (1959). The latter was produced by Henry Pollock, who described it as a travelogue depicting the Central Queensland coast and islands. On the 16mm copy of *Coral: City in the Sun*, the title frame contains a reference to the Sydney film *City in the Sun* (1947), which was made by the independent producer Alistair Loch and purchased by the Department of Information for its migration appeal. While this film bears little resemblance to the Brisbane film, the earlier film about Sydney contains many similarities to *Brisbane:*

*City in the Sun* (1954). In other words, it would seem that the Sydney film launched a formula that became the basis for film portraits of several of the Australian state capital cities..

The film is an Australian National Film Board (ANFB) production. Eric Thompson, who was an ANFB producer from 1948 to 1965, was in charge of its production. Hugh McInnes was director, while camera, sound and music were the responsibility of Edward Cranstone, Donald Kennedy and Don Andrew respectively. There is no scriptwriting credit, yet the sound commentary makes a substantial contribution to the film. In fact, its format reflects the structure of the ANFB at that time. Eric Thompson and Hugh McInnes had been trained in commercial newsreel production techniques. They approached their work with a modest professionalism that lacked any social commitment or a desire to influence its audience (Moran 1987, p. 137). Hence the film is workmanlike in approach — film prose rather than film poetry.

It adopts a form and style that locates it as classic documentary: the soundtrack is all-important; the voiceover commentary is directing the audience's attention; information on the topic is provided in a factual manner. The voice is male and speaks with an educated Australian accent which today sounds British. It also seems to display a mildly patronising tone towards its audience as it tells of the benefits of living in Brisbane. Visually, the film offers successive sequences of shots that are predominantly external — long, wide and panoramic. Following the classic documentary approach, the commentary appears to verify and corroborate its verbal propositions through various shots. Additionally, the voiceover

also serves to organise these together into a filmic whole.

*Brisbane: City in the Sun* is essentially a series of postcard shots of the city. It opens by locating the city on a map of the world, and this is followed by an aerial view of the river and city buildings. There follows medium-length shots taken from ground level and close-ups of bustling city crowds, busy work scenes on the city wharves, and vegetables, fruit, meat and fish arriving and being sold at the markets in Roma Street next to the rail-yards. Produce moves backwards and forwards, on and off trains, trucks and ships. The scenes suggest a big city and a large population. These early scenes are suggestive of the importance of agriculture in the life of the city and the state. Indeed, the film's commentary refers to 'a place that revels in the sun where pineapples, bananas, paw paws and custard apples are backyard fruits'. It also hints at future wealth as the city draws its place from 'the illimitable power and wealth of Queensland, a city that someday, perhaps, will be the richest in the Australian Commonwealth'.

Tighter close-ups of important buildings representing Brisbane as a cultivated and civilised place follow these first impressions. Buildings seen in this leisurely montage include City Hall, the Queensland Parliament building, St John's Cathedral and the University of Queensland. The commentary refers to historical events that affected the city in one way or another. Great happenings such as World Wars I and II helped place Brisbane in world affairs, thus suggesting that this is no mere colonial outpost. In what amounts to a second part of *Brisbane: City in the Sun*, there is a catalogue of the leisure delights to be found in the Queensland state capital. Attending a horseracing meeting is one of the several popular

highlights available. However, there is also a smarter, more dignified end to the town. Hence, the film ends with a white tie, silver service dinner. This is set against a backdrop of a mural of the blue waters and golden sands of Coolangatta and Tweed Heads. As the voiceover narration puts it, '[this playground] ... leaves a good taste in the mouth, a sense of wellbeing'. For some, at least, the city is a place of [soporific] contentment.

Like other government information films, then and now, *Brisbane: City in the Sun* has a more educative, rhetorical purpose – beyond imparting information and facts. Hence, the opening shot of the world map can be understood as explaining to prospective migrants just where the city was located. Even for newcomers from Britain, let alone those from Europe, Brisbane at this time must have seemed little more than a small, remote township that serviced outlying provinces in a sparsely populated state somewhere in Australia. Similarly, the gourmet banqueting scene that ends the film, indicating the idyllic life to be had in the city, might be understood in the same light. Its aim seems to have been to persuade residents of postwar Britain and other European countries to come to this city in the sun. In fact, of course, the reality of life in the state capital at the time was somewhat different to what is suggested in the film. For example, Saunders argues that the immediate postwar period was a time of serious housing shortages, although *Brisbane: City in the Sun* fails to mention this as a problem that would especially impact on newcomers.

### ***Life in Australia: Brisbane (1964)***

Ten years later, by the time this film made its appearance, the Commonwealth Film Unit was moving away from the classical style of documentary with its voice-of-God commentary and montage of postcard type shots of the city. The 1964 film is much less of a

direct advertisement designed to attract migrants, commerce and industry. Significantly, it opens not with an aerial view of the city, but rather a crowded beach scene. Where the 1954 film attempted to be comprehensive in its coverage of aspects of the city, the approach and emphasis in 1964 is generally different. In fact, *Life in Australia: Brisbane* might be seen as a transition film, opening in one way but soon settling into another approach.

The film's opening harks back to the classic documentary approach evident in the 1954 film, although this soon gives way to a rather different, displaced subject and a variation in form and style. However, it is worth outlining this opening to underline the point that — like its many predecessors — was intended to attract migrants to the city. In fact, it opens not with scenes of industrial activity, but an aerial view of the Coolangatta and Tweed Heads beaches. These shots not only anticipate the emphasis on leisure and recreation rather than labour and work in the film as a whole, but also demonstrate the degree to which Brisbane had recovered from postwar privation. The montage continues with a man welding a large water tank. Other initial impressions follow, including a barbecue, a glimpse of the University of Queensland, and a busy and varied city street.

Recalling *City in the Sun: Brisbane* in 1954, a map of the world appears with Australia placed strategically in the centre of the Southern Hemisphere. The title, *Life in Australia*, is superimposed on the map as the camera zooms to a close-up of the Southeast Queensland region as the title shot changes to the word 'Brisbane'. A wide-angled aerial shot of Brisbane suburbs appears on screen while an off-screen male voice imparts information about climate conditions and population statistics. The voice announces that this is a typical

mid-autumn afternoon in the life of the city. There are more aerial shots of the wharves around Petrie Bight and the commercial centre in town before the film cuts to a mid-shot of the Brisbane City Hall clock tower.

The bell is heard tolling the hour and is soon accompanied by a cacophony of workplace sounds and voices of people at work. The advent of on-screen sounds suggests that the director of the film is attempting to allow the sounds and their accompanying images a kind of space of their own, even if this means a partial displacing of the voice-over commentary. The montage of work is fast moving, suggesting that Brisbane is a place of gainful employment, of industry and commercial success. Women are invariably seated at machines. They do everything from tending to incoming calls to overseeing the progress of tins of pineapples. Men stride about, organising deals on the stock market, in the furniture factory, on the wharf, or on the machinery floor. Various workers' voices are heard. They portray Brisbane as a place of busy industry.

At this point, however, the film switches from this general portrayal of Brisbane to the introduction of an ordinary, representative Brisbane family. The whole is now typified by a specific example. The nuclear family was a favourite subject or example in information films at this time because following the way that its various members went about their daily activities over a period of time allowed filmmakers to combine representativeness with variety. In fact, the format of films used to attract migrants in the 1960s had changed significantly from those made earlier. The narrator's voice remains, but the background sound is more pronounced. The audience hears the voices of people as they engage in work

and leisure activities. Social variety abounds so why not allow the film camera to follow the members of a particular family through a typical weekend?

*Life in Australia: Brisbane*, then, proceeds to track a Brisbane family, the Quiltons. These are seen to be typical of place and people. The Quiltons move through the final day of the working week, through the weekend of various leisure activities, then back to work on Monday morning. The family is a nuclear one, a balance of two generations consisting of two adults and two offspring, two males and two females. However, these symmetries are deliberately varied so that the distribution is father Gil, his wife, an older daughter who is at university and a younger son in upper primary school.

The family portrayed in the film undergoes a somewhat idyllic end of the working week and a weekend of leisure. Gil is self-employed rather than a waged worker. He lives with his family in a newly constructed suburban house. That, and the fact that the daughter is at university, suggest that this family is upper middle class and enjoying the fruits of affluence during the period of the 'long boom'. Inside the Quiltons' house, a sequence of shots takes the viewer around the new technological marvels in the living room and kitchen. The viewer is provided with close-ups of such 1960s domestic essentials as the television, the telephone, the radio and the refrigerator. This household (and, by inference, many others in Brisbane) is benefiting from the white goods boom of the 1950s and 1960s. The rooms are clean and well presented. A prospective migrant would be left in no doubt that living in an Australian city such as Brisbane would be an experience well endowed with the latest technology.

The Quiltons are a representative nuclear family with members allocated to traditional roles. The home is tended by a full-time housekeeper — the wife, who remains nameless and voiceless. Mrs Quilton is constantly seen engaged in household tasks. A recurring musical motif accompanying these images suggests that this kind of household labour is pleasant and even enjoyable. Her tasks have to do with the home and the family. Only later does the audience see her enjoying her own leisure, taking part in rehearsals of a play put on by the Brisbane Repertory Company. Even then, she is playing a part that requires her character to take care of a young man, who is falling about the stage looking decidedly ill.

Gil Quilton is the head of the household, and the primary wage earner. The narrator informs the viewer that Gil has two children, a boy at school and a daughter at the university. In the house, the wife is helped by these two children with the preparation, serving and cleaning up after meals. Gil, on the other hand, is the master of the home's technology. He is variously seen operating various household appliances, so the viewer sees him using the telephone and the radio, while at the same time being waited upon by his wife and daughter. The father's position in the household is further reinforced as head of the household when the viewers see him driving the family car, and waiting patiently but bored while the son and daughter shop among the Saturday shopping crowds in the city for a Mother's day gift.

The urban experience for the average Brisbane family, as presented by this film, is one of patriarchal dominance of a nuclear family unit. The family is an ideal consuming group for the new electronic goods then making their first appearance in the marketplace and replacing older modes of family life and older domestic technologies. The focus is on

consumption at all levels. The wife's trip to the grocery store, for example, demonstrates the capacity of supply as the camera focuses on shelves loaded up with a good choice of fresh fruit and vegetables, an array of other grocery items and a selection of tinned food, bringing to mind the fact that frozen food was not yet an important part of the weekly shop or family diet.

The object of all of this was to demonstrate to intending migrants that goods were plentiful and easily purchased. The narrator is at pains to tell the audience that Gil Quinton and his family live in an average home in an average Brisbane suburb. The house is modern and complete with every convenience of the time, nestled in among other similar dwellings. Gil and the daughter's boyfriend own motor cars, and Gil's wife takes the car to go shopping at a modern shopping centre. On weeknights and at weekends, the family is sufficiently well off to be able to consume a diverse number of leisure activities, including tennis at the university, fishing in Moreton Bay and involvement in the local theatre. In fact, as Saunders has argued, the experience of living in Brisbane in the early 1960s was still difficult for many (Saunders 1998). A shortage of housing persisted and the Brisbane City Council was still playing catch-up with regard to the provision of infrastructure to the new suburbs on the outskirts of the urban area (Wanna and Caulfield 1995).

### ***Viewpoint on Brisbane (1975)***

Eleven years after *Life in Australia: Brisbane*, striking changes are evident in the way the Queensland state capital is presented filmically to the world at large. In *Viewpoint on Brisbane*, the end-product is still a documentary intended for the information and education of prospective migrants, but with one significant difference. In this film, the migrants

themselves provide the narration. In *City in the Sun*, the big picture was offered to the viewer through use of panoramic cinematography, aerial shots of the city, while the narrator provides statistical information to the audience. By the time of *This is Australia: Brisbane*, the focus had change to that of an individual family used to represent life in the city of the 1960s. Details of the urban experience are manifest in the babble of voices heard at the beginning of the film. Close-ups appear frequently, enabling the audience to gain an insider's view of the Quinton family's daily life, albeit still described by a narrator. It is not until the 1970s that the audience begins to hear the migrant voice. Thus *Viewpoint on Brisbane* is further evidence of the continuing shift away from the 'big picture' approach to a more personalised and representative account of life in the city. From this more intimate picture of selected migrants, recounting their experience in their own words, the audience infers the larger whole that is Brisbane. In this film, there is a much deeper sense of what it is to live and experience life in the Queensland state capital.

*Viewpoint on Brisbane* was part of a series of films on major capital cities sponsored by the Department of Labour and Immigration in 1975, and produced by the Commonwealth Film Unit under its new name of Film Australia. Other films in the series dealt with Adelaide, Perth and Sydney. The films were promoted as instructional films for the benefit of prospective or recently settled migrants. However, the emphasis now fell upon presenting such a viewpoint through the eyes of migrants. The film is held in the National Screen and Sound Archive and is available in 16mm and VHS format. Running time is a little over 22 minutes. The film's production team was an experienced and veteran lineup, including

Ross King as documentary cinematographer, Barry Williams as director and Don Murray as producer.

Throughout *Viewpoint on Brisbane*, the audience is introduced to the (mostly) working world of the city. The format is one consisting of commentary from several people, which is accompanied by scenes of Brisbane. For most of the film, these images are primarily scenes of the world of work. However, there are also echoes of earlier films. Late in *Viewpoint on Brisbane*, the viewer is presented with city street scenes and bustling crowds, reminiscent of *City in the Sun: Brisbane*. The leisure activity so vivid in *Life in Australia: Brisbane* in 1964 is briefly recalled in indoor images of people drinking and socialising in bars and cinemas.

Initially, the migrant subjects of the film are part of its working world. The film opens with scenes of horseracing stables with men looking after horses and occasional shots of horses being exercised around the track. There is no off-screen commentary or narration. Instead, the voices heard belong to the on-screen figures. These are not identified as individuals. Instead, the voices offer a running commentary on what it is like to live in Brisbane, the difficulties of starting over after arriving as a migrant, of not speaking English very well, and the degree of acceptance or otherwise from the community. Homespun advice is meted out on the best way to prepare for life in Australia: you have to learn English; it takes time to settle in; take what you get and what you can make of it yourself and don't expect too much. There is a sense of reservation in the tone of the speakers' voices, as though they have had to make the most of a bad choice that is settling in Brisbane: 'Oh I think you can live here alright as much as anywhere else, basically it's a bit slow here.' At times, the viewer is

reminded of the migrant's feelings of homesickness. There is a certain poignancy in a woman's voice, for example, when she speaks of her homeland: 'What you do miss sometimes are the things from your own country, and that for me would be the woods, beautiful woods and have a walk you know, it is something you know sometimes you miss it so much you could die for it.'

In the film, Brisbane is presented as a place in which migrants are welcomed into the local society. Each speaker agrees that, while it is not paradise, work is available. And so too is the Australian dream of owning your own home over a realistic timeframe of between five to ten years. Even though the migrants are given the opportunity to speak for themselves in *Viewpoint on Brisbane*, they are not identified, dramatised or personalised in any of the segments. Unlike the close focus on the Quinton family in the 1964 film, in which individual members are followed through a weekday and a weekend of activities, the migrants' narration in the 1975 film is merely a set of voiceovers to a range of workday and leisure scenes, some of which bear little relation to the commentary. As such, *Viewpoint on Brisbane* contains more similarities to 1954 film *City in the Sun*, which also maintains a running commentary against a plurality of images of the city's population. Curiously, the wheel has come full circle from diversity to representative uniqueness back to human diversity, from films to attract migrants to the experiences of attracted migrants, and from an all-encompassing voice to a sense of those who were encompassed.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented analysis of three government documentary films made between 1954 and 1975. These appeared at the beginning, middle and end of a 21-year

period, an era that was a relatively homogeneous one in the life of Australia as a whole and in the history of Brisbane. Economically, the time has been labelled the 'Long Boom', and it saw a good deal of affluence and economic good times. The years also witnessed political and social stability. Through the Commonwealth Film Unit, the federal government of the day showed a keen interest in displaying an idealised view of the experience of living in an Australian capital city — in this case, Brisbane. Some of the changes that took place over the period are reflected in these films.

The changes in the presentation of Brisbane in the films are also part of their story. The most notable difference in the films is the use of voiceover narration. In *City in the Sun*, this is achieved using an Anglo male voice while the camera provides images related to the topic being narrated. By 1964, the audience becomes privy to the daily affairs of the Quinton family, but the male voiceover has changed little as the camera moves through domestic, institutional and industrial urban space. This intimacy with the subject changes radically in *Viewpoint on Brisbane*. The subject is represented by voice only. The camera focuses on images that best portray Brisbane to prospective migrants while voices urge them to learn English before coming to Australia and to be prepare for assimilation into their new homeland. Multiculturalism, it seems, still had some way to go in the mid-1970s.

In fact, there was one major change in the city that none of the films addresses. This had to do with the coming of television. In the next chapter, I will look at the early years of the broadcasting institution and culture in Brisbane. This will focus on the pathways and sites of communication that developed as a result of television's arrival. Taken together, this chapter

and the next go a good distance towards suggesting some of the ways in which Brisbane was a screen city in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s.



## Chapter 5

### Early Television in Brisbane, 1959–65

The importance of a geographical understanding of television lies in recognising that television always has been produced for, has circulated across and has been engaged at particular sites. Consequently, what is understood as the ‘tevisual’ has never been a discrete object, but rather a set of practices and or attributes always attached to, situated within and dispersed across different environments (Hay 1996b, p. 1).

#### Introduction

The previous case study chapter offered an overview of Brisbane as it is glimpsed in documentary films produced in the years of the Long Boom, that is, the 1950s and 1960s. The films in question were government information films, which would have had a secure, if marginal, circulation in the context of education, migration information programs and elsewhere. In other words, Brisbanites would not, for the most part, actually have seen these films even if they were the subjects of them.

It needs to be reiterated, at this point, that while these case studies focus on Brisbane in relation to film and television, it is the urban experience that lies at the centre of the research question that was outlined in Chapter 1. The focus of attention in this chapter is still centred on the urban experience, but it varies, in that it is now the early years of television that fall under the spotlight. The emphasis herein has to do not so much with a detail account of the

programs, but rather the institution of this kind of broadcasting and its arrival in Brisbane in 1959 and immediately afterwards, the impact it had on Brisbane social and geographically. A new sense of awareness by the citizens about themselves, their neighbours and their city grew out of the commencement of television in Brisbane of television - embedding itself in the metropolis and subsuming the previously revered place of radio media. This chapter sets about dealing with these issues.

The first broadcast of television in Queensland occurred later than in southern states, but this did not dampen the eagerness with which people at that time awaited the new technology. Many had probably seen television on visits to Sydney and Melbourne over the previous three years, so they had already formed some idea of the home entertainment machine that was coming. Nevertheless, the initial years of the television industry on Mt Coot-tha — or ‘on the mountain’, as it became known — were infused with the enthusiasm and sense of adventure that comes with doing something for the first time. Brisbane’s early romance with television, for example, occurred at a critical time in the city’s development. As I have already suggested in the previous chapter, the 1950s and 1960s were a time of urban expansion and cultural change that invites an investigation in terms of the ‘sociospatial problematic’ that has been outlined by Hay (2001, p. 212).

## **Television’s research literature**

The critical element of space in academic disciplines such as social studies, media and communications and its influence of the urban experience has been addressed by only a few thinkers. In relation to television, Hay’s ongoing analysis of television and the geography of

the urban environment, which examines the complex intersection of communications and geography, is the most prominent. The intersection of communications and geography – and likewise the intersection of film, television and the urban experience – is a mode of analysis by which television can be regarded as an integral player in the life of a city and its urban population. In other words, the challenge posed by Hay is to investigate Australian television in terms of its social, spatial and cultural impact on a city such as Brisbane (Hay 2001). Soja (1996) argues further, that the spatial divisions of society and the built environment in the decades following the introduction of television were, in reality, a manifestation of the power relations between government, industry and society. Informing and entertaining through mass broadcasting, for example, dispensed with the need for close, geographical networks and active community spirit, which led throughout the 1960s and 1970s to more diffused urban settlements

To undertake such an approach to the study of is a new departure from the norm in academic research because it turns aside from the more discrete model of television that is found in previous approaches to the writing of Australian television history (Jacka 2004). Generally, as Elizabeth Jacka has shown, works on Australian television history have tended to fall into one of two categories. On the one hand, there are the theoretical works that place television in a cultural framework. These usually focus on the Sydney/Melbourne axis under the aegis of cultural or film studies, containing only an occasional reference to place or to peripheral cities, such as Brisbane or Adelaide (Turner and Cunningham 2000; Tulloch and Turner 1989; Cunningham and Miller 1994). On the other hand, an increasing number of popular texts have appeared that deal specifically with the history of television programs

and key personalities (Beilby 1981; Adams 1981; Moran 1993).

Within this category, the contributions to Brisbane's television history by Beck (1984), Cornish (1996) and Harrison (2001) are among the few that have to do with a particular place. A recent essay on Sydney as a 'television city' (Moran 2004) suggests an alternate means of producing television history. This latter approach is one that considers the 'social spatial problematic' (Hay 2001, p. 212) of a communications technology. More specifically, it might examine television as an apparatus through which the Brisbane community made sense of the postwar urban experience.

Embedding the history of television within the sociospatial sphere also recognises the role of the urban experience in the development of this medium. While it is true that the people of Brisbane waited longer for the broadcast of television, in some ways they benefited from the city's geographical distance from the southern capitals. Like that of other peripheral capital cities such as Perth, Brisbane television was able to develop in a relative isolation. Local TV channels, Nine, Seven, Ten and the ABC, were able to broadcast in-house productions to a local audience for a longer period, a practice that enabled close linkages to develop between the different TV channels and the city's public. This was to enhance the economic viability of Brisbane television as an industry and to foster a strong sense of community in the television culture, a feature that has repeatedly been commented on by former television personnel (cf. Cornish 2003; Jim Iliffe 2003).

## **Locating the televisual**

Coincidentally, television arrived at a time in Brisbane's history when it was to have most impact on the development of public and private space across the urban landscape. This shift makes the city an ideal candidate for what geographer and media scholar James Hay has described as the activity of 'locating the televisual' (Hay 2002, p. 202). Following his lead, this section attempts to reveal different interconnected sites of the television institution in all its variety and practice. The emphasis falls on exploring some of the communication networks, or linkages, that were formed in the first five years of television in Brisbane. They are considered in terms of the changing use of urban space associated with the new visual medium of television, and especially elements of the shift from a public to a private sphere during this period.

## **Background**

Brisbane in the late 1950s and early 1960s was as much affected by economic, social and political forces as many other Western cities in the postwar era. In turn, it was the particular combination of these elements that constituted the social environment in which television was to be introduced, developed and popularised at that time. The period between 1945 and around 1960 is sometimes called the postwar era, which tends to suggest that this time was fairly homogenous. In fact, although there had been financial difficulties in the immediate period after World War II and in the very early 1950s, in Australia the general economic climate was improving far beyond that of the later years of the Great Depression. At the time when Brisbane was receiving its first television broadcast, the federal government's expansionary economic policies were producing wage rises that generated increased

consumer spending. In addition, there was a marked expansion in international investment in Australia. Hence, for example, net capital inflow rose from \$204 million to \$656 million in the five-year period following the introduction of television in Brisbane in 1959 (Kirkwood 1991, p. 97). Although the economy was to continue to experience mild fluctuations that were felt in places such as the Queensland capital, Australia, along with much of the Western world, was about to enter a phase of a 'golden age of unparalleled prosperity' (Madison 1995, p. 73).

Brisbane's demographic profile was also changing rapidly. Troops who had returned from the war were now civilian workers, married and raising young families. An influx of migrants in the postwar years also increased the population substantially. Brisbane City Council statistical data reveal a sharp rise in net migration during the 1950s as well as a steady rise in natural increase in population from the 1940s onwards. This enlargement peaked initially in 1961 and then again in 1971 (BCC 1973, p. 61). Despite the city's suburban building boom in the interwar years of the 1920s and 1930s, a chronic shortage of housing was to result from the population pressures in the 1950s. As I have already mentioned in the previous chapter, many families lived in temporary accommodation, makeshift housing or as public housing tenants (Saunders 1999). By 1959, the shortage of housing was beginning to ease as a second, substantial, post World War II wave of newly constructed suburbs spread (Saunders 1999). Accompanying this residential building boom in the outlying parts of the city was the construction alongside of small and medium sized manufacturing industries. These had been relocated from Brisbane's city centre to the periphery. Brisbane's newest industrial suburbs sat close to the new residential suburbs and

both provided jobs for new suburban residents and were easy to access by adjoining roads. This overall large-scale development was in part created by postwar international investment (Davies 2000).

The stage was set for a television audience that was both captivated and captive. Government control of television for economic, social and political purposes was already well developed in the United States and United Kingdom. As an institution, it was being actively positioned to set up shop in countries like Australia. In particular, forces were coming together to aid the importation of the new television technology, along with the American way of life, to countries that were slow to innovate the new institution (Attallah 1986). Supporters could claim other reasons why television should be introduced, which even included the claim that the technological advance involved would help strengthen the military defensiveness of the country in the era of the Cold War (Attallah 1986).

The Australian federal government was aware that television was a useful instrument for nation building, and its implementation — first in Sydney and Melbourne in 1956, then in Brisbane in 1959 — coincided neatly with major events during that decade. Of the latter, perhaps the most important was the Olympic Games held in Melbourne in late 1956. With television already well developed as a popular form of national entertainment in the United States, United Kingdom, Western Europe and elsewhere, many events were filmed for rebroadcast elsewhere. Such filming for rebroadcast helped trigger the innovation of regular television broadcasting in both Melbourne and Sydney, and was to help sweep Australia into the television age.

The prewar view that television would have little social impact had now been replaced with an understanding of the social, economic and political benefits that might accrue. The Australian government was very much aware of the power of the new medium, and was anxious to avoid negative interpretations provided by those presenting evidence to various government inquiries during the 1950s (Moran 1993, p. 8). In particular, even as early as 1942, it showed itself anxious to avoid a repeat of the ad hoc introduction of radio during the interwar years. Instead, it set about the careful controlled rollout of television in the 1950s. In particular, the government adopted an engineering telecommunications plan that would see television spread across the land in the manner of a ripple in a pond. Sydney and Melbourne were to be the first cities of implementation, followed by Brisbane and Adelaide. The plan influenced the date that Brisbane and other regional cities were able to begin broadcasting.

It also affected the ownership rights to television broadcasting licences. The Royal Commission on Television (1954) recommended the licensing of one national station and two commercial licences for Sydney and Melbourne. The Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB) granted these in 1955 following a series of public hearings into the issuing of broadcasting licences. The question then became whether these commercial licensees were to have potential networking partners in the other smaller capital cities. Or were these only capable of sustaining one commercial operator? Brisbane was to be the first test case for this dilemma. In 1957, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board recommended that one commercial licence for Brisbane should be held by local interests. This was rejected by

the government in favour of two licences for the city. The Board was directed to reconsider the existing applications and recommend two potential licensees. Therefore, when Brisbane television stations QTQ9 and BTQ7 started regular broadcasts on 16 August and 1 November 1959 they were controlled by powerful newspaper interests with links to other press groups in the southern capital cities. This precedent arising in Brisbane set a pattern of future ownership and networking arrangements that was to dominate Australian commercial television for the next 50 years (AFTS 1981).

### **Sites of Brisbane's early television**

The availability of technology in the early phase of television in Brisbane — that is, between 1959 and 1964 — limited the scope of production as it was experienced later in the twentieth century. Many programs were imported from the United States and United Kingdom, representing a wholly different landscape insofar as urban and rural spaces were concerned from that of the Queensland capital in the 1950s. And, while some news broadcasts were filmed on location, most programs were studio-based productions. Describing the televisual landscape of this period, however, requires an extension of the commonly accepted analysis of television as a discrete form, from what is on the screen to an examination of sites as an organising feature of the city, the home and the urban experience (Hay 1997).

The earliest geographical site of television in Brisbane was the Tower Mill on Wickham Terrace. In 1935, Tom Elliott transmitted a picture of the Hollywood film star Janet Gaynor to a house in Ipswich via the radio station 4CM. This success was followed by a series of night-time transmissions of animated films between 6.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.

each Sunday night to enthusiastic amateurs who used a short-wave radio with a homemade TV attachment as a receiving set (anon, *Historical Society of Queensland Bulletin* 1956). These television broadcasts continued until 1939, when the government, at the beginning of the war, withdrew the test licences on which the experiments were based. Until this time, television was very much a local endeavour, and may have remained more so if Brisbane City Hall had been used as the preferred site for transmission. As a contemporary enthusiast with an engineering background put it:

Our experiments in 1934 showed that the best place for a transmitting station would be at the top of the City Hall, rather than on Mt Coot-tha, because it was found there would be several 'blind' spots in Brisbane from the latter, but none from the City Hall. (*Courier-Mail*, 3 December 1935, p. 2)

Given this early success in experimental transmission in Brisbane, and elsewhere in Australia according to the *Teleradio* (8 June 1935, p. 40), some frustration was evident in the local press that television was not introduced until the mid-1950s. Trials were considered to be as advanced as those in Great Britain and the United States. As one enthusiast put it in an unbridled burst of excessive idealism and optimism to the local paper:

Australia can have television here and now if the authorities are willing to cooperate. There is no reason to delay. An efficient system of low definition television could be put on the air almost immediately and Australia would, I feel

sure, be practically abreast of the world in the new science. (*Courier-Mail*, 10 April 1935, p. 14)

The experiments were not, however, to continue into the 1940s. From at least as early as 1942, the federal government began to consider the matter of television broadcasting in the future, and the days of the experimenter were coming to an end. In addition, the Postmaster General's Department was more circumspect about who in wartime should be conducting transmission experiments. Hence, the frustration for Brisbane television enthusiasts was even more evident when the announcement was made in 1955 that the ABCB had awarded the first commercial licences to Sydney and Melbourne: 'Canberra says we can't have it till it's tried in the south but ... Brisbane had TV 21 years ago ... and it worked' read the headlines in bold print (*Courier-Mail*, 3 December 1955).

At the Royal Commission on Television, even the chairman of the ABC, Robert Boyer, was confident that the ABC could transmit its first programs in Brisbane by 1 July 1957 using existing radio infrastructure if the organisation were appointed to provide the public service component of a broadcast service (*The Northern Miner*, 16 June 1954, p. 3). TV licences were not issued for the Brisbane area until 1958, with transmission to begin with Channel Nine on 16 August 1959, Channel Seven on 16 October 1959 and the ABC on 2 November 1959 following its earlier rollout in Sydney and Melbourne. This roll call of dates is an indication of the government's level of concern that television be introduced to Australians in a proper and orderly manner. It was also a testimony to the fear and even apprehension that it attached to the new medium (Attallah 1986).

There was a curious lack of excitement about this event in the local press at the time. Undoubtedly, Princess Alexandra's visit to Brisbane in 1959 played an important part in forcing the transmission deadline, but while most of the front page of the *Courier-Mail* contained enthusiastic reports on the visit, the introduction of television was relegated to a small insert at the bottom of page three, even though Channel Nine, operated by Queensland Television Proprietary, was partly owned by newspaper conglomerates with links to the Herald and Weekly Times group. Probably the explanation lies in two directions. First, many people in Brisbane might have had some contact with television in Sydney or Melbourne over the previous four years. In addition, test broadcasts had been on the air for several months so that the actual onset of regular television broadcasting simply meant that the system was in full swing.

As with the southern cities, the first corporate sites of importance after the licences had been granted were in the inner city. This followed the pattern of pre-existing radio stations, which were normally, in Brisbane as elsewhere, situated in the city centre. Indeed, at one stage in the Royal Commission of 1954, there had even been a firm suggestion that a television station might be located in West End in a renovated local cinema, the Rialto, both because its spaces could be converted into sound stages and because transmission signal could be sent from there to a transmitter at Mt Coot-tha for broadcast to the metropolitan region.

Instead, in 1959 the office of QTQ Channel Nine was located at 43 Queen Street, sandwiched between the Bank of New South Wales Building and the Queensland Ballet

Company. It was the task of Channel 9 to broadcast Brisbane's 'big event', the arrival of Princess Alexandra in Brisbane on 16 August 1959. With the strains of ballet music in the background, new equipment from overseas being delivered regularly, captions and graphics being prepared for the first broadcast, and people being interviewed daily for positions at the new television station, one worker described the time in the small city office as 'days of raw energy' (M. Ferguson 2003, interview, 17 October). Once the preoperational period drew to a close, however, the office relocated to the production and transmission centre on Mt Coot-tha.

The construction of television recording studios and broadcasting facilities offered Brisbane residents the clearest evidence that they were finally part of the television age. A high-profile example at the time was provided by Channel Seven when it erected a 'Seeing Eye' camera at the Royal Brisbane Show in August 1959. It operated daily throughout the Show and provided television monitors for the viewing public. Hoisted above the *Courier-Mail* Kiosk, a large sign on the miniature replica of the new Mt Coot-tha Channel Seven building proclaimed BTQ Channel Seven to be the 'Station to the Stars'.

Completion by QTQ Channel Nine of the television tower atop Mt Coot-tha in time for the start of regular broadcasts was a greater achievement, however. Even so, Channel Nine did only as much as it technically needed to do to get on the air on the 16 August. Jim Iliffe remembers: 'It was a sort of higgledy piggedly type of situation.' (Interview, 13 August 2003) While conditions on the ground were primitive, the towers would have been seen from a great distance in the suburbs around Mt Coot-tha, marking the start of a new era. For

the western suburbs, at least, it signalled the beginning of a new property boom. In the five-year period prior to 1959, the unimproved land value of Brisbane rose only 5 per cent, compared with a 50 per cent rise in the five-year period after 1959, but in the electoral ward of Toowong, which includes suburbs adjacent to Mt Coot-tha, the land value in the latter period doubled (BCC 1973, p. 97). In other words, television was beginning to influence the spatial development of a postwar regional city such as Brisbane (Hay 1997).

Clearly, the most influential site of the televisual was in the home. Scheiner (2003), for example, asserts that ‘during the postwar years, the primary site of entertainment transferred from the public space of theatres to the private space of the home’ (2003, p. 376), and this observation is supported by research in other fields (Davies and Moran 2006). A telling example of the impact of new technologies, especially television, on the Brisbane home is the number and type of advertisements that appeared in the local paper in the early years of local television broadcasting (*Courier-Mail* 1959, 1964). In the women’s magazines of the day, advice was given on the best way to lay out the living room for the new TV set. This included suggestions concerning the meals most suited to being eaten off a small foldout TV table while watching the evening programs. Flexibility in eating arrangements required a more adaptable living arrangement. After all, ‘what one does with TV is a matter of how one gets to and from TV’ (Hay 2001, p. 215).

As the new suburbs of Brisbane spread in the 1950s and early 1960s, the favoured house design followed the open-plan, ranch-style US model, which was ideally suited for the televisual home. Up until the mid-1940s, the separate roomed dwelling had been favoured

as a solution 'to the day to day problem of family house living' (Bunning 1945, p. 4). The new 1950s type design differed distinctly from the separate-roomed solution and was rapidly taken up. The importance of doors was downplayed in favour of open, unimpeded spatial flow. By 1960, in a 'Gracious living' article on housing design, the house of Mr and Mrs Bernard was described as the ideal home: 'a "flexible" home ... meant to merge'. Its open plan allowed for a clear view from the kitchen to the lounge room, ostensibly allowing dinner guests to converse with 'the housewife', but in fact enabling an uninterrupted view of the television set in the lounge while attending to kitchen chores (*Courier-Mail* 1960, 2 July, p. 120). Contributing to the popularity of the televisual home was a similar style offered in the 'Mater Art Union Sensation!' advertisements from the late 1950s. These were placed strategically below the TV program schedule in the *Courier-Mail* (1960, 30 August, p. 6), promising a 'Hollywood'-style bathroom and a kitchen straight out of the 'American Home Journal'.

Many other sites of the television institution or the televisual were apparent in Brisbane as it began a long-term expansionary phase in its development during the 1950s and 1960s. Businesses piggy-backed on the new technology as service industries developed around particular nodes and locations in order to maximise efficiencies. Some of these services were strategically located to allow access to prospective television participants. Hence, for example, the siting of the premises of Orbit Film and TV Productions, which regularly announced times for auditions and screen tests. This firm was located in Fortitude Valley, then a thriving Brisbane shopping centre easily accessed by city workers on their way to and from the suburbs (*Courier-Mail* 1960, 17 August, p. 17).

By 16 August 1959, retailers who were anxious to sell more television sets in anticipation of the beginning of a regular broadcasting service invited prospective customers to their display windows. By placing television sets in shop windows and leaving them on even after the store had closed, these retailers gave the public an opportunity to view evening shows and also advertised the television sets that were on sale within their premises (*Courier-Mail* 1959, 17 August, p. 3). Adding a new sense to the phrase ‘mass communications’, it became a common sight to see people sitting on boxes on the footpaths of busy streets, often just watching some test pattern. As one of the pioneer television broadcasters of the time recalled:

Retailers would put them [television sets] in their shop windows and transmit the sound outside so in September, when [test broadcasts of] television started the suburban footpaths were all alive with people in their little folding chairs wrapped up in blankets and their hot water bottles, watching television through shop windows ... it was just incredible ... and at five or six o'clock in the afternoon after the kids had tea they'd all go up to the shopping centre ... the local electrical shop was more than happy to let them watch. (Melody Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August)

Test broadcasts were aired by Channel Nine from 26 July 1959, with signals being received as far away as Toowoomba, Southport and Beechmont (*Courier-Mail* 1959, 26 June). It is frequently claimed that, during this time of test transmission before regular broadcasting

began, people were willing to watch just the test pattern, either in shop windows or on newly purchased television sets (Melody Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August). In fact, boredom could set in quickly with the new toy, and broadcasters were smart enough to provide something else. Some programs were broadcast during this time as part of the experimental process. The *Courier-Mail* appended a short item (1959, 14 August, p. 3) with details of the test program for that evening. Episodes of two filmed series were shown. At 7.30 p.m., 'Grey Ghost', a self-contained episode in a series dealing with the American Civil War and the figure of Colonel John Moseby, was scheduled. At 8.00 p.m., this was followed by *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1956-1965), a 30-minute suspense drama introduced and narrated by the film director Alfred Hitchcock.

### **Brisbane radio gets a face**

Yet another element of the televisual in these early years of Brisbane television had to do with the visual manifestation of what had hitherto been voices only. Favourite radio people shortly became well-known television personalities. Hence, for example, Hugh Cornish was an icon of the city but only an aural one, appearing regularly on radio station 4BH while Jim Iliffe was a regular sound presence at 4BC. The latter had hosted a children's program on radio since 1950 so it was obvious enough to Channel Nine that he would be a natural host for a children's afternoon program on television. The new television channels regularly recruited from radio, so several of Brisbane's sound icons and symbols such as Cornish and Iliffe now manifested a visual presence as well as a sonic one. On Jim Iliffe's children's program on Channel Nine, what could only be imagined with voices and sounds on his children's radio show on 4BC could now be seen as well as heard. Brisbane children had now entered the realm of the televisual.

Adding further to this sense of visualising what had hitherto only been heard, Melody Iliffe gave an instance of the kind of impact on the residents of the city that a voice over the airwaves could have at this time. After joining Channel Nine as a production assistant on a children's program, she found herself acting as station announcer one afternoon when the regular announcer was not available:

Then one day, they were only on air for half a day in those days and people would sit at home and watch the test pattern, waiting for lunchtime. And when they decided to go on air they always had an announcer, saying, 'Good afternoon, this is Channel 9 operating on so many what its, sound, and whatever', and whoever it was ... was late didn't turn up and someone in the studio, in the control room, said that I had done radio, and they said, 'Get in here and read this' and I sat there and read it. Well this was a new voice. People at home, as I said, were watching the test pattern and they started ringing up and saying, who was this new voice? And, you know, it was just amazing ... And so they decided they'd better give this new girl something to do. And so I started doing afternoons, just little five-minute things, and there was a very good reaction to that. (Melody Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August)

As a symbol or set of human sounds on the aural landscape of the city, Melody was soon catapulted into an on-air regular job as one of the station's two newsreaders. In other words, her path can be seen not only as part of her own career but also as symptomatic of how the televisual affected Brisbane in many ways, including helping to turn part of the city's radio soundscape into familiar television faces, bodies, gestures, movements, songs, dance

numbers, games, situations, stories and settings (Melody Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August)

## **Early televisual networks in Brisbane**

As televisual sites accumulated and redefined the urban experience for the people of Brisbane, other sites of entertainment and even information fared less well. The slump in the cinema and local theatres — especially in the suburbs following the introduction of television in the Queensland capital — still needs to be carefully and comprehensively investigated. One newspaper article lamented the demise of a local theatre destroyed by fire that ‘would have been rebuilt but for TV ... plans had been drawn up for a new theatre, but [the theatre manager] had found it was not a “safe investment”’ (*Courier-Mail* 1959, 14 August, p. 7).

Instead, the evolution of new forms of communication networks in Brisbane was inevitable as televisual sites began to proliferate. These networks became as much embedded in the urban experience of the postwar years of the state capital as the sites themselves. Raymond Williams thus described broadcasting as a ‘new and powerful form of social integration’ (2004, p. 16), which enabled ‘a new flexibility ... and a new mobility in time and space’ (2004, p. 52). Hay developed this idea further to include the reliance of this new social integration on the new technology that would provide ‘a more robust ... understanding of television’ (Hay 2001, p. 212). A changing mosaic of networks of communication resulting from the introduction of television was evident in many forms during the early years of the new technology and service.

Television called a mini-city into existence and helped to change part of the skyline of the Queensland capital. Although there were tentative plans in the early 1950s to locate television studios in such inner-city places as West End with ideas of transmitting a broadcast signal up to a giant broadcasting antennae for rebroadcast across the city, nevertheless — with the singular exception of the ABC, which did locate its production studio in Ferry Road, West End — no other studios were located in that vicinity. Instead, the two commercial channels were allocated land on which to build in the national park on Mt Coot-tha. Here, a veritable television city came into existence. Its buildings were the sound stages for television production, the offices and administration buildings, the adjacent warehouses that stocked equipment of all kinds, the surrounding fences, the security gates and the whole complex dominated by transmission towers. Inside it was, in the words of Hugh Cornish, ‘the closest thing that Brisbane had to Hollywood’. And overseeing it all was a veritable army of television workers who arrived each morning and left each evening. As Harrison has noted, this army was headed by its general, the general manager of the station. On the next rung down, there was a group of more specialist bosses — the manager of programming, the manager of production, the manager of sales, and so on. Going down another rung in the system of command there were the various section heads and finally under them the foot soldiers of the television systems, Brisbanites who a few years earlier were working in other jobs, some in radio but many in different trades and occupations. They had been recruited to become the living backbone of Brisbane’s television city. And, of course, enhancing the magical charm and ineffable mystery of being in television and working in television city was the physical fact of working on the mountain. Mt Coot-tha was remote from the everyday

world of Brisbane's city streets. To go there, one ascended, if not quite to heaven then at least some 290 metres towards the clouds. The geography of the industry seemed to be completely in keeping with what it offered and stood for (Harrison 2001, pp. 72–83).

Meanwhile, Brisbane's domestic spaces also readjusted around the new technology of information and entertainment. Social linkages flexed and shifted around the home. Those households that owned a television set found themselves attracting a good deal of neighbourhood attention: 'Such a house became a magnet ... [t]hey became popular overnight, with kids from surrounding areas dropping in after school as guest audiences' (Beck 1984, p. 34). Family members had friends they never knew:

People would say, "I just dropped in to say hello ... Oooh, you've got the television on!" and they would just sit down ... it was the great social lubricant of the time! Every man and his dog would come down and visit you it was just the most amazing time ... we were the closest thing to Hollywood and Hollywood stars that this city had ever seen! (Melody Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August)

As parents complained about the demands from children to be allowed to watch television after school, the broadcast channels worked unceasingly to involve children in the new medium. Channel Nine offered *The Channel Niners* (1959- late 1960s) and on Channel Seven, Nancy Knudsen compered *Cottes' Happy Hour* (1959-1961). The format was standard. Games and prizes were central. Club membership was offered and 'fans responded to the call to join the TV clubs, to take part in outings, and to be the proud wearers of

badges' (Beck 1984, p. 36). In Brisbane, a regular coach service operated from North Quay to take children who had been lucky enough to be chosen to be part of a studio audience at the studios at Mt Coot-tha. '50 to 60 children were bussed up every afternoon plus those driven up by their parents ... we had around 80 children every afternoon!' (Jim Iliffe 2003, Interview, 13 August)

US material also proved to be a popular source of entertainment — a treasure chest of games and awareness of new social mores. Christopher Hawke, who attended New Farm State School between 1959 and 1963, remembers: 'Many times when I came home from school, the evening was made up of watching: *Rin Tin Tin*, *Lassie*, *Tombstone Territory*, *Rawhide*, *The Lucy Show* and many more.' (New Farm State School 1999, p. 31)

Social networking in the postwar city provided a means to deal with the displacement caused by rapid population and urban expansion (Hay 1997). Brisbane was by no means alone in experiencing such a development. Nevertheless, for the rapidly expanding city, television became a means of staying in touch, of having a common outlook and agenda so far as everyday life was concerned. Yet another feature of the social networking provided by television was to, in effect, 'keep the troops happy' during a time of alienation and upheaval. As Williams puts it: 'Entertainment is said to be distraction, diversion: a bit of a laugh, or a bit of glamour, in a difficult world.' (Williams, cited in O'Connor 1989, p. 85). Such a sentiment is a good crystallisation of what is at work in early television schedules. The only exception, providing a change of rhythm, was the insertion of something of weighty importance to the government into the night's viewing. A favourite of sorts was the Budget

Reports.

In the first weeks of regular television broadcasting in Brisbane, Channel Nine's programming ran for only four and a half hours, operating between 6.00 p.m. and 10.30 p.m. Although quarter-hour programming was a feature of early television in Sydney and Melbourne, half-hour and one-hour programming had now become the norm. A typical weeknight was scheduled as follows:

- 6.00 *Channel Niners*, live children's session
- 6.30 *Sir Lancelot*, a program for younger viewers
- 7.00 *Steve Donovan*, *Western Marshal*, a cowboy series for both children and adults
- 7.30 *Burns & Allen*, a family comedy show
- 8.00 *Maverick*, a TV western
- 9.00 *Dragnet*, a police crime series
- 9.30 *Harbour Command*, an adventure series
- 10.00 *Cue for Music* (recorded in Sydney), an Australian musical program
- 10.30 *News and Weather*

(*Courier-Mail* 20 August 1959, p. 8).

A year later, in 1960, television had made even more inroads into the family life of Brisbane. Programming had extended from the evening back to the daytime. The television schedule now ran from 1.00 p.m. in the early afternoon to the end of the evening, just after 11.00 p.m. The programming schedule for 16 August 1960 is a useful indication of the

changing target audiences for an average day of viewing. Programming now revolved successively around the housewife, children, and then the family. Women's programs feature heavily in the first four hours, followed by children's television between 4.00 p.m. and 6.30 p.m., while the family then became the imagined audience up until the end of transmission for the day. American imported filmed-series programming continued to dominate the schedule, most especially after 6.00 p.m. On the other hand, Australian-made programs were beginning to appear here and there. In particular, variety shows were a favourite remembered by many (Beck 1984; Cornish 1996). Even closer to home, beginning to give a specific Queensland inflection to programming, was the occasional appearance of local shows — especially current community events such as the *Royal Queensland Show* reports which were carried by the Brisbane channel of the national broadcaster, the ABC.

By around 1965, the end of the period being analysed in this chapter, the programming schedule of Brisbane's television service was becoming considerably more refined. Broadcasting now occupied more than half the day, having extended even further backwards into the late morning. Programming now began at 11.00 a.m. and continued until 11.30 p.m. The institution of the midday movie had been put into place and this could anchor what went before and came after. Women's programs received most emphasis, and appeared after the midday movie. Children's programs finished earlier, making way for a regularly programmed 6.00 p.m. news broadcast, with the ABC avoiding direct competition with the commercial channels by scheduling its evening news at 7.00 p.m. Light evening entertainment concluded at 10.00 p.m., followed by a mixture of educational, sport and late evening news programs. Much of the night's viewing consisted of US films and serials, with

light entertainment provided by local channels (*Courier-Mail*, 16 August, p. 8). Women's and children's programs continued to receive a good deal of attention from the broadcasters. The latter were seen to be more socially malleable and the former were seen to be potential recipients of postwar social and economic information and commercials.

Within five years of television's introduction to Brisbane, families in both the older, inner-city and the newly built outer suburbs became adept at following a regimen of program schedules and organising their social and work lives around these. Without doubt, earlier programming practices associated with radio listening by the mass audience in the city had already prepared for this regime and set up the expectation of domestic practices that television would appropriate. Elsewhere, Raymond Williams has located this development in a wide social and historical context, seeing it as a 'response to a crisis within the system' of Western consumer capitalism associated with the lingering effects of the Great Depression and World War II. He argues that the solution was the creation of what was orchestrated through the manipulation of a new technology (Williams 2004, p. 14). The acute social dislocation of the immediate postwar decades in Brisbane, as elsewhere, required a communication network that would add structure to developing communities. This included regular patterns of activities in which the majority would be able to participate or appear to participate. It also required sites of common usage, such as production and transmission centres. These, of course, appeared in such guises as television studios, the home and other meeting places that enhanced the televisual experience. Use of these meeting centres, in turn, further compounded previously existing communication networks and even created new ones.

This chapter has investigated the footprint of television on Brisbane during the first five years of broadcasting. Television changed the city irrevocably. It gave its inhabitants a new sense of themselves and of the urban landscape. A giant transmission tower came to dominate Mt Coot-tha, even while viewing antennae appeared attached to the roofs of many households. Technological modernity had arrived in the capital city of Queensland. The advent of television in Queensland occurred later than in southern states, but this did not dampen the eagerness with which the people at that time awaited the new technology. If television changed Brisbane, then Brisbane changed television — or at least moulded it into something more familiar and everyday. Radio broadcasting had already paved the way for television, giving the city a series of familiar aural icons and symbols in the shape of favourite programs and personalities. The first phase of television has sometimes been called ‘radio with pictures’, and this was indeed the case with Brisbane. Television uncorked the genie’s bottle insofar as it conferred a visual appearance on voices and sounds that had hitherto only had a sound existence. These aural images were already icons of the city. Television magically transformed these giving them physical form and substance. The new medium redoubled the living presence of these embodiments of Brisbane. The initial years of the television industry on Mt Coot-tha, or ‘on the mountain’ as it became known, were infused with the adventure that comes with doing something for the first time. Through the excitement that springs from the beginning of an era, however, comes a tendency to attach little importance to records and clips for posterity. Such has been the case with television. The dearth of records from the early days should come as no surprise to the researcher. There is no doubt that the books already mentioned were designed as ‘coffee table’ texts,

drenched in memory and nostalgia. This does not detract from their historical value. They were written by people with first-hand experience in the early years of television in Brisbane, and consequently project a high degree of sincerity in their production.

The next media development that affected the city also began elsewhere. This was the Australian feature film revival that got going in the early 1970s. It was arguably a kind of delayed after-effect of the success of the Australian television service. While the Australian feature film industry that began around 1972 was mainly confined to Sydney and Melbourne, nevertheless features were produced that put Brisbane on the map. Accordingly, the next chapter takes three features produced in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s as a means of further analysing Brisbane's continuing engagement with the moving image which was indicative of the close relationship and interplay between film and television on the one hand and the city on the other.



## 6

# Place and Placelessness: Brisbane's Feature Film Archive Since the 1970s

I now want to consider what might constitute a local Australian look. It is time to consider Queensland on screen. But this is not the Queensland epically described by Charles Chauvel in *Sons of Matthew*. Nor is it the Queensland comically problematised by Jackie McKimmie in *Australian Dream* or lazily caricatured by Bob Ellis in *Goodbye Paradise*. Queensland is an unstable mobile that achieves a profound disunity under one name and time: *Mission Impossible*, Thursdays at 8.30 p.m., Channel 9, 1989. For it was here that we 'bought back the farm and then called it a skyscraper' (Miller, in Dawson and Molloy 1990, p.83).

### Introduction

This chapter continues the engagement with screen culture and industries and their intersection with the matter of the city of Brisbane. Although Brisbane has been the subject of numerous information films and has had a television culture for almost 50 years, nevertheless the fact is that Brisbane is not a screen capital. It boasts no continuing film and television industry of which to speak. No screen infrastructure is in place or likely to come about. Other parts of the state of Queensland where production frequently occurs, such as the Gold Coast and the Great Barrier Reef, are more likely to look to Sydney, Melbourne or even Los Angeles rather than to the Queensland state capital. Brisbane is, then, a city that lacks screen charisma and so is unlikely to become a screen capital.

This chapter is concerned with a group of feature films having to do with Brisbane,

produced from the very late 1970s to the recent present. The films in question are *27A* (1974), *Touch and Go* (1955), *Bootleg* (1985), *Australian Dream* (1987), *The Real Macaw* (1998), *Praise* (1998), *Inspector Gadget 2* (2003), *Swimming Upstream* (2003), *48 Shades of Brown* (2006) and *All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane* (2007). No doubt, there are other feature films that might be added to this list as they have been produced (in part at least) in Brisbane, or visually refer to Brisbane (whether overtly or implicitly). In the 1960s and 1970s, Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper assembled just such a miscellaneous group of feature films to constitute an Australian film archive (Pike and Cooper 1980). The list was highly opportunistic, necessary to the project of (re)founding a film culture, and included films that had been lost, may never have existed, and had been produced by visiting overseas film production units. The same is true in miniature of a possible Brisbane film archive. Such a canon will be unstable, incommensurate, opportunistic, dubious, prospective, threadbare, embarrassing, uninspiring and so on. Yet it also performs the important function of suggesting that there has been an ongoing tradition of feature filmmaking, either in part or in whole, in the state capital that might take its place alongside other craft traditions in such domains as music, painting and sculpture.

Taking its cue from Miller's comments cited above, the emphasis in the analysis falls on the constant filmic oscillation between Brisbane as place and a Brisbane placelessness at work in these films. Miller usefully calls attention to this phenomenon, labelling it an 'unstable mobile'. As we shall see in the discussion of the ten feature films designated, Brisbane is a filmically elastic space capable of being rendered as a specific place with known icons and landmarks or as an anonymous elsewhere that is recognisable but not familiar and

acknowledged. Like Baudrillard's *arcade* the placelessness of Brisbane lent itself admirably to the chameleon-like role of being whatever the film or television medium required of it (BuckMorss 1989). The films that are assembled here for discussion are by no means highlights of Australian film production output. They fall into several routine genres, and few are memorable in their own right. Several are what might be called 'mid-Pacific productions' and were probably intended for video or DVD release rather than appearing on theatre screens. One of the films cited is a genuinely underground film which, after 20 years, is difficult if not impossible to access and watch. That said, it is valuable to note this film output. Following the lead of Pike and Cooper, the discussion that follows is based on individual annotations concerning this body of feature films. They are discussed in chronological order.

## **27A (1974)**

The title of this film refers to a section of the *Queensland Health Act* (1937). Before its repeal in the late 1960s, this provision allowed that parties sentenced to prison in that state could, if they volunteered for psychiatric attention, be held in a different way. Irrespective of the length of their prison sentence, they could be held indefinitely in hospital until the hospital authorities declared them cured. This is the fate that befalls the central character in 27A. Bill Donald (Robert McDarra) is a middle-aged Queensland man who, after several family crises, has become an alcoholic and drug dependent. He volunteers for psychiatric help with his dependency, but instead finds himself incarcerated. Doctors, clerks and others passively connive in the hospital system which is overseen by the brutal male nurse Cornish (Bill Hunter). The regime is routine and rigid, and oppresses both Bill Donald and a series of other inmates, including those who Bill only hears in another room and those with whom he

sits next to the hospital yard under the watchful eye of Cornish. Bill escapes three times but each time is returned. Finally, miraculously, a journalist becomes aware of his situation and obtains his release. Bill is the epitome of that ‘metropolitan type’ that suffers from ‘intensification of nervous stimulation’ described by Georg Simmel in *Metropolis and Mental Life* but manages, eventually, to establish some emotional distance from the ‘agitation and excitement’ of the city (1903 in Miles, Hall and Borden 2004, p. 13).

As indicated above, *27A* was already historical when it was produced and released in 1973–74. The provisions of the Queensland *Health Act* had been repealed. Nevertheless, little had been known of this abuse of power so that there was novelty and social relevance in director Esben Storm and writer-producer Haydn Keenan’s dramatisation of interview notes of journalist Bob Sommerville who had witnessed the *27A* provisions himself. In any case, the film can also be seen in retrospect as in line with the anti-psychiatry and anti-institutional writings of figures such as R.D. Laing, David Cooper and Michel Foucault. Thus, *27A* is very much within the genre of Australian social realism, a cinema directed at exploring social issues, situations and problems with a view to their correction and improvement.

The form and style of the film supports such a claim. A voiceover narrator introduces Bill at the film’s beginning and, while we follow his plight, *27A* expands sufficiently to suggest that Bill is not alone. The recurring and institutional abuse extends not only to Donald’s companions but even to workers in the hospital and what they are forced to countenance. The film’s stance towards its subject is cool, distant and observational. *27A* deliberately

cultivates a documentary feeling such that we note the general abuse of power rather than just focusing on Bill's plight.

The film's fictional geography is deliberately obscure. By 1973–74, Joh Bjelke-Petersen was well into his two-decade reign as Premier of Queensland and, in other parts of Australia, various contingent abuses of power such as the 27A provisions could be regarded as symptomatic of a general reactionary politics in action. Fictionally, the film is set in Queensland. Each time he escapes from the hospital, Bill Donald is discovered by the film in a large city. The reasonable inference is that city may be Brisbane. In fact, though, none of the film was shot in Queensland. Although the two filmmakers responsible for 27A were from Melbourne originally, the film was shot in Sydney. Scenes involving the hospital were shot in a Christian Brothers psychiatry hospital in Sydney. The city scenes substituting for a fictional Brisbane were shot in various parts of Sydney. The scenes involving Bill at the time of his first escape necessitated filming in George Street outside Wynyard Station while the second escape has him in the Haymarket just off George Street. However, such scenes are brief. Bill is soon back in incarceration. The film is in no way caught up in any attempt to deliberately and explicitly suggest that the big city on screen is Brisbane. Yet, by implying that the operation of the hospital falls under the provisions of the *Health Act, 27A* is suggesting that the hospital is in the state of Queensland. A further suggestion, then, is that the city to which Bill absconds is the state capital. Once again, one is confronted by an implied city, Brisbane, that is represented by an actual city, Sydney. The 'cityness' of the latter can be rendered sufficiently indistinctive such that it can substitute for the former.

## ***Touch and Go* (1980)**

This production was the second of the two unmemorable feature films funded by the Queensland Film Corporation. Its aim was frankly commercial with a genre story that mostly traded on its placelessness. The film was directed and produced by Peter Maxwell and written by Peter Yeldham. These, together with cast and production crew, were based in Sydney and Melbourne, so that *Touch and Go* made little contribution to a nascent film industry in Brisbane and Queensland. While location filming occurred in Southeast Queensland, six weeks of shooting actually took place in Sydney. During its production, the film had the working title of *Friday the Thirteenth*. Clearly, such a title was chosen to indicate that all would not be smooth sailing with the film's central narrative feature, an intricate robbery on a resort island. However, the film's release title was changed to *Touch and Go* when it was learned that a new US horror film about to be released bore the same name. Ironically, this second title was also the name of a British social comedy feature film from the 1950s.

The 'Brisbane'-based *Touch and Go* is a light drama, verging on the comic, that features a trio of young women who act as a modern-day Robin Hood stealing from the corporate wealthy in order to help deserving causes. The trio are Eva, Fiona and Millicent, played by Wendy Hughes, Chantal Contouri and Carmen Duncan respectively. For good measure, for the heist that forms the main part of the film, they enlist the help of three more women played by Jeanie Drynan, Liddy Clarke and Christine Amor. Clearly, though, the idea for the central threesome and their caper is derived from the then very popular US TV series *Charlie's Angels* (1976–81). It is useful to be reminded of this predecessor in case the film

should be seen as in any way related to second-wave feminism. Rather, to emphasise its credentials as a crime/caper/comedy, it substitutes females for males in the central roles. Thus, the film can derive comedy from the female ingenuity and charm Eve uses on the amorous island resort manager Anatole (John Bluthal) as she is casing the joint for the upcoming robbery.

As is the case in this kind of light-hearted drama, the thieves are successful and get away with the proceeds of the safe at a leisure resort on a Whitsunday island. Although the manageress manages to hit an alarm button, the six make their escape by boat, evading both the resort staff and the police. However, as the genre demands, fate then decides to play a comic role in proceedings. An under-utilised Jon English as Frank, Fiona and George's gardener, finally comes into the narrative when he mistakenly discovers the proceedings of the robbery. His car is stolen at a garbage dump and the film ends on a comic note with the three women deciding to pull another robbery at Surfer's Paradise.

From the point of view of a Brisbane feature film archive, *Touch and Go* is, as Toby Miller (in Dawson and Molloy 1990) suggests, highly mobile and unstable. It is fictionally set in Brisbane, but this is a Brisbane that would be unrecognisable to its inhabitants. There are no city icons on display that would register any sense of place. Rather, the 'Brisbane' represented in *Touch and Go* is composed of anonymous streets with low-set brick and tile houses and bitumen roads.

However, if there are no city landmarks, nevertheless a fictional geography of sorts is

presented in relation to the film's 'Brisbane'. Fiona, married to the accountant George (Brian Blain), is the wealthiest of the trio and the two live in splendid surroundings. Parts of Noosa have been pressed into service here to add zest and a coastal connotation so this part of Brisbane 'overlooks' the Pacific Ocean. From the high balconies and terraces of this mansion can be seen the blue waters down below and the high hillside bank with bushland and the occasional house alongside. Nor is this geographical incongruity that situates the city on the coast a mistake. Instead, this reconfigured geography is insisted on later in the film. With scenes shot at Maroochydore, the film has Julia (Barbara Stephens), the headmistress of the school for disadvantaged children that the trio are helping, commandeer their kombi van. This is stuffed full of the proceeds of the robbery. But Julia uses it to take the schoolchildren to a nearby beach, thus initiating the chain of circumstances that leads to the money being lost. If only 'Brisbane' was not situated on the oceanfront — which, of course, it is not.

### ***Bootleg* (1986)**

Although a feature-length film, *Bootleg* is not mentioned or given an entry in Scott Murray's 1995 update of Pike and Cooper's (1980) chronological annotation of Australian feature film production. Instead, somewhat in keeping with its paranoid film noir working out of its crime melodrama plot, the film has only a kind of underground existence and copies are difficult to obtain. It was written and directed by the inexperienced John Prescott, then working at Griffith University. It is far from perfect or even accomplished, with often weak scripting, rickety integration of real footage with fictional scenes, obscure character motivation, inexpert direction and a poor soundtrack. What it does have, however, is a luminous performance by John Flaus as a Sydney private detective hero called to Brisbane

to investigate a disappearance and the political ambition of Prescott to say something about the police state of Queensland in the later years of the political reign of Bjelke-Peterson.

*Bootleg* tells the story of a private investigator from Sydney, Joe Hart, who accepts an engagement to go to Brisbane and find a young girl at the behest of a person he is led to believe is her father. John Flaus acquires himself as the film noir detective hero in a role that is reminiscent of his Larry Kent in Albie Thom's *Palm Beach*. While on the investigation in Brisbane, Joe is mistaken for Gromonski, the notorious car bomber. The plot weaves in and around Petrie Bight and Fortitude Valley, Brisbane's salubrious red light districts in the 1970s and 1980s. US military dissident David Hackworth turns up as himself in some documentary footage included in the drama. Fittingly, the plot is as difficult to understand for the audience as it is for private eye Joe Hart. Indeed, the film's title may refer to fictional cargo or to the circumstances of the film's own making. The story is replete with crooked police, Special Branch cops, nefarious underworld characters and prostitutes. Not surprisingly, the jaded private detective has a brief affair with one of these.

### ***Australian Dream (1986)***

By turns politically satirical and comically feminist, *Australian Dream* is set in the Brisbane suburbs, where it follows the aspirations of a wife and husband. Both Dorothy (Noni Hazelhurst) and Geoffrey Stubbs (Graham Blundell) are caught in a suburban trap of brick house, family and early middle age. She is the female eunuch of the suburbs, a housewife married to a suburban butcher, Geoffrey Stubbs. One typical Friday she joins her women friends for a sex aids and lingerie party where Todd (John Jarrett) undertakes a male striptease. This is followed by a visit to a class where the romance novel that she is writing

is put down by her tutor. Told to spice up her writing, she begins to imagine a sexual fantasy with Todd. The fantasy comes both in the form of imagined encounters as well as her own voiceover narration. On the Saturday, she and Geoffrey are running the monthly street barbecue and party whose theme is 'Come as Your Favourite Fantasy'. Geoffrey has political ambitions to be elected to the state government for the Progress Party and is determined to make a big impression on his mentor, Sir Bruce (Barry Barkla), on this occasion. However, in a fit of mild rebellion and dream-making, Dorothy invites Todd and his band to play. The party gets out of control and Dorothy escapes with Todd to fulfil her fantasy. The film ends on a beach at dawn in what may be a romantic dream. Todd makes love to Dorothy, who asks herself on the soundtrack 'Is that it?'

*Australian Dream* is an auteur work, with director Jackie McKinnie also being responsible for writing and producing the film. McKinnie had already directed the prize-winning short *Stations* with Noni Hazelhurst and the two were reunited for this attempt by the former to put a stake through the heart of Brisbane society and culture – and politics, since the film's Prosperity Party is a not-so-veiled reference to the Queensland National Party. By the mid-1980s, it seemed politically indomitable but which would shortly be swept from power. Similarly, Dorothy's sexual frustration bespeaks a feminist reading of life in suburban Brisbane. In fact, the film was produced as a kind of commando raid into the horrors of Australian dystopia. Life in the affluent suburbs of modern brick housing, neatly trimmed lawns and family swimming pools is anything but the Australian Dream of the film's title. Cast and crew jetted into Brisbane to put together this satire of life in the further reaches of a modern Australian city, and its sexual and political critique more than meets the approval of

its various cosmopolitan reviewers, including Garner (1987).

The film also supports the sense of a place that aspires to be placeless. There is only one explicit reference to the fact that the city is Brisbane. This comes in the claim by the politician, Sir Bruce, that the city might host the Olympic Games. This aspiration is in order because Brisbane had hosted the Commonwealth Games in 1982. Otherwise, there are no familiar landmarks, no visual icons that help secure identification between the setting and the Queensland state capital. The city is reduced to the anonymity of an upmarket suburban street that is without visual anchor or audience clue as to its location. Echoing the plight of its comic central characters, *Australian Dream* refuses to place its lawns, brick bungalows and streetscapes as being anywhere other than in the modern outer suburbs of an Australian city. The place may nominally be Brisbane but the general audience is silently ushered beyond such a registration or identification. The ghost of a relationship with place immediately gives way to the sense of an overwhelming and existential placelessness.

### ***The Real Macaw (1997)***

Brisbane has also been appropriated for children's films, and two recent examples are of interest. The first of the two, *The Real Macaw*, was an Australian production but staged in such a way as to be capable of international distribution. To the extent that it is explicitly placed at all, then its marketing suggests that it is initially located in Sydney. However, it is more internationally placeless. Much of its action takes place on a coral island and it begins and ends in the Amazon jungle. Its cast includes actor Jason Robards, which consolidates the sense of mid-Pacific placelessness that Miller addresses more generally at the beginning of this chapter. The plot of the film concerns a Macaw parrot that has been alive for almost

150 years. In 1847, a group of pirates raided a native temple on the Amazon River and stole treasure. Subsequently, their leader buried this on a coral island. The only witness to this was the parrot. Some 150 years later, the bird is discovered living with an old man in Sydney. Grandpa (Jason Robards) is grandparent to Sam, a young boy who is fiercely fond of his Grandpa and the bird. When Sam's father makes moves to put his father in a nursing home, Sam and the bird Mac set about raising money to pay off his bills. But a ring kept from the pirate treasure arouses the criminal interest of a museum director. Mac has revealed to Sam that he can talk, so the two set off to rediscover the treasure. They evade foul play from the museum director and recover it. Sam is reconciled with his father and the treasure is restored to its rightful owners, Grandpa and Mac, who will live with Sam and his parents.

Much of *The Real Macaw* is set elsewhere — beaches, jungle, tropical Brazilian villages. However, its opening segments are set in the city where, variously, Sam and his family, and Grandpa and Mac, live. The blurb on the DVD jacket suggests that the city in question is Sydney. In fact, the scene of this filming is Brisbane. Sam skateboards to a Brisbane primary school. He is seen in the indoor mall of an enclosed shopping centre. His parents' house turns out to be a tastefully renovated Queensland timber worker's cottage.

Other Brisbane geographical references are even easier to notice. The hotel on the coral island where the treasure is buried turns out to be the Old Customs Office with its combination of open planning, pillars and palms. Sam and Mac are seen against the glass office towers of Riverside Place. Columns in Anzac Square give way to the outside appearance of the Brisbane City Hall. But in the fiction of *The Real Macaw*, this venerable

frontage turns out to be a museum rather than the seat of urban municipal government. The City Hall's foyer is also used as the vestibule of the fictional museum where Sam meets the museum director, sells him a valuable ring, and alerts the director to the fact that he may know of the treasure's existence and location.

Sam, his father, mother and sister, Grandpa and others offer no verbal reference to where they are. This urban space is entirely blank so far as specific city location is concerned. As an Australian feature film, the city in question might be any one of half a dozen state capitals. Despite the blurb's claim that the metropolis where the present day action begins is Sydney, there is in fact no attempt to 'Sydney-fy' the place, just as there is no interest in 'Brisbanising' it. Instead, for audiences in other places, the urban designation is an anywhere, nowhere, take-your-pick placelessness, although for local audiences the place is Brisbane masquerading as a nameless, unidentifiable location.

### ***Praise (1998)***

Based on the 1992 Vogel prize-winning novel by Brisbane writer Andrew McGahan, this film belongs to the social realist genre which has been such a persistent feature of Australian filmmaking since at least the 1950s. As Moran and Vieth (2006) have argued, that genre took a particular twist from around the early 1980s, becoming concerned with the socially marginalised and focusing on issues to do with such areas as mental health, ethnicity and disability. *Praise* certainly belongs to this particular cycle in the Australian social realist genre. The film is fleetingly set in inner-city Brisbane and concerns a young man, Gordon, who leaves a meaningless job in a bottle shop at the beginning of the film. He is a chain smoker as well as being asthmatic, and struggles with ongoing depression. He meets a

young girl, Cynthia, who has a ‘thing about penises’. Her body is covered in bad eczema which she does little about. Cynthia begins a highly sexual relationship with Gordon, moves in with him and introduces him to heroin. However, she is edgy, often manic. Falling pregnant, she has an abortion. She also has to undergo treatment for genital warts picked up from a recent fleeting liaison. On the night that she is ready to resume their sexual relationship, Gordon calls their affair off. They lie together in a sad embrace and she leaves. Meanwhile, Gordon has an asthma attack and is warned about his smoking. He is unable to initiate a meaningful relationship with a childhood sweetheart and continues his solitary smoking.

Clearly, as this synopsis suggests, *Praise* is an interior rather than an exterior location film. A travelogue voiceover at the beginning notes that the suburbs of the city of Brisbane stretch out beyond the Story Bridge. Gordon, by contrast, lives in the inner city in a rundown boarding house in New Farm. Much of the story developments in the film happen there — in Gordon’s bedroom and in the general bathroom, doorways, verandahs, passageways and backyard of this frequently chaotic, sometimes violent flophouse of the alcoholic, aged and marginalised. Noise is a constant presence — voices engaged in broken, inexplicable communication, half-heard arguments and disputes, unidentified shouts and so on. Whatever its fictional location, there is no mistaking the dwelling as a large inner-city terrace house that has seen better days. Like its inhabitants, it is rundown, lacking in amenities and provisions. Lights and lampshades are stolen or missing. The lounge room television set does not work. Bass, a black neighbour of Gordon, conceives an unfounded dislike of another tenant and plans to harm him. The heat of a Brisbane summer only intensifies

feeling in this hothouse. Altogether, the setting is an apposite stage upon which the aimless romance of Gordon and Cynthia is played out.

### ***Inspector Gadget 2 (2003)***

The second of the two children's films is altogether more lavish in scope and universally Western in its ambition. *Inspector Gadget* is based on the animation character and is played by Rowan Atkinson of *Mr Bean* fame. The film was produced by Walt Disney Productions and is slick and bland in its amalgamation of dramatic performance and animation. Brisbane became its location principally because of the assistance provided by the Pacific Film and Television Commission and the Brisbane City Council, as well as the less expensive labour and related rates available in any Australian city compared with those in US cities.

However, despite the presence of Atkinson in the lead role and animation's overall effect of eliding detail, including that of place, *Inspector Gadget 2* continues to resonate for local audiences. An Australian specificity remains detectable on the film's edges. One such detail has to do with location, and this will be addressed shortly. Another example of the same familiarity resides in a number of Australian actors cast in major roles. Hence the film boasts Bruce Spence as Baxter, the rather hapless inventor of the robots, while Sigrid Thornton plays the Lady Mayoress whose charity drives are comically spoiled by Gadget. The plot of the film is simple and straightforward, as befits a feature intended for an even younger audience than that of *The Real Macaw*. Gadget is a first-generation human robot and capable of malfunctioning when called upon to act against law breakers. He is removed from duty by the police chief and the Lady Mayoress, and his place is taken by a second female robot, D2. When a master criminal, The Claw, escapes from jail and organises a big

jewel robbery, Gadget and his niece Penny come back into the action. D2, who is now romantically attracted to Gadget, reprograms him. He is able to overcome The Claw and have his old job returned so that he and D2 will now work together.

*Inspector Gadget 2* sets out to be geographically anonymous and placeless. Its fictional site is the unidentified US city of Riverton, a kind of generic name for a small city that might be anywhere in North America. To document such a background, the film finds sufficient urbanness in Brisbane to stand in for Riverton. In fact, the presence of the Queensland state capital is overwhelming, even if it remains unremarked. A catalogue of parts of the city glimpsed in the background includes: the city skyline; the river; lawn and trees at Kangaroo Point; buildings at the University of Queensland; the Brisbane City Hall; the Queensland Club; South Bank Parkland and streets; and especially, in the final confrontation between hero and villain, the William Jolly Bridge. Again, it is possible to echo the claim made at the end of the previous section of this chapter. *Inspector Gadget 2* is sufficiently urban in the shape of roads, buildings, skyline, river and river crossing to persuade audiences that Riverton is somewhere, even if they might have no idea where that somewhere might be. For Queenslanders, and especially Brisbanites, the fictional world of *Inspector Gadget* now includes the state capital.

### ***Swimming Upstream* (2004)**

A more recent film that might be seen to complete a Brisbane feature film archive is *Swimming Upstream* (2003). The film concerns the damaging psychological effects on children of an emotionally disturbed and disturbing parent. It is based on an autobiography of the same name written by a Brisbane swimming star of the late 1950s and early 1960s,

Tony Fingleton. In *Swimming Upstream*, the struggles of the central character are not public, but rather private and domestic. To succeed in his calling, he has to overcome the emotional effects of an abusive father for whom children are a means of somehow gaining the recognition that he feels was denied him when he was younger.

The film contains an interesting and accurate city iconography. None of this has to do with the public official Brisbane as embodied in such buildings and places as the City Hall, the Story Bridge, the Parliament and the University of Queensland. These are ignored in favour of more intimate and specific places and situations. Harold Fingleton works on the wharves, and there are several scenes showing the various activities associated with loading and unloading cargo from ships. Various other elements of space and setting come into play in representing life in inner-city Brisbane for the Fingleton family in these years. First, there are the various streetscapes of Spring Hill and Petrie Terrace, seen incidentally when adults and children spill out of doors and on to the streets of these suburbs. In keeping with the look of Brisbane at the time, the streetscape consists of Queenslander houses and workers' cottages. In the case of the Fingleton household, the typical wooden house is a modest one on wooden stumps. It has a short set of stairs at the back where it is possible, late in the day, to take a break from the house itself and its various emotional traumas.

Three other places and settings also figure in the film. The first and most obvious of these are the public swimming pools in Spring Hill and Fortitude Valley. It is to these that the young boys escape from both the heat of Brisbane and from the emotional heat and confusion of family life. Public swimming pools can seem very much like each other, and

this is certainly the case in *Swimming Upstream*. In any case, other swimming pools in other places such as Sydney and Perth are also featured so that it is clear that the distinctiveness of the two Brisbane pools is in no way important to the story being told in the film. Nevertheless, public swimming pools were an increasingly common feature of Brisbane from this time onwards so that they are important registers of social life in the Queensland capital at the time. Another leisure site glimpsed more briefly in the film is the pub where an older Tony finally resolves his differences with his older brother. The pub is seen from both the outside and the inside, indicating not only a warm climate that allows doors and windows to be kept open but also the manner in which the pub is integrated into a public social life of men.

A further element stitched into the Brisbane iconography of *Swimming Upstream* occurs late in the film. Tony and his mother, Dora, are found sitting on a beach near the abstract skeleton of a shipwreck. Tony talks of his desire to depart, possibly to swim to America. In suggesting that the beach and the icon are presumably within walking distance of the Brisbane home of the Fingleton family, the film cheats. The icon is, after all, situated at Bribie Island and is not within walking distance of the city. Nevertheless, because of its familiarity to citizens of Brisbane, the integration of the sand and icon seems like only a small-scale poetic licence.

However, a city can find its imagery not only in its physical attributes but also in its inhabitants. Tony Fingleton was, however briefly, a home-bred sporting hero in the city in which he grew up. While his fame and popularity may have soon been eclipsed by other

Brisbane swimmers, nevertheless his was a well known name in Brisbane and Queensland swimming circles in the early 1960s. He won Australian championships in the backstroke. He competed in the Commonwealth Games in 1962 in Perth and won a silver medal. He won a sporting scholarship to a prestigious American Ivy League university and might have competed in the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. Altogether, then, *Swimming Upstream* has excellent credentials to be considered part of a Brisbane feature film archive.

### ***48 Shades of Brown (2006)***

Based on the teenage novel by Brisbane writer Nick Earls, this is a teenpic or coming-of-age genre film. It is set in Brisbane and concerns a young boy, Dan, in his last year of high school. Dan's parents have gone to Geneva but he elects to stay in Brisbane and move in with his young aunt, Jacq, who is completing a university degree. The household is completed by Naomi, a young blonde woman who is also attending university. Dan is smitten by Naomi, but so too, in a less obtrusive way, is Jacq. Naomi is, however, indifferent to these would-be suitors because of her involvement with her own feckless boyfriend. Further complicating the household arrangements is the young owner of the house, Phil, who is smitten by Jacq without realising her gender inclination. Things come to a comic head when Jacq throws a university party where everyone becomes drunk. Phil does a striptease and declares his love for Jacq before retreating in comic confusion. Dan and his school friend, Chris, meet Naomi who, like them, claims to attend university. The next morning there is laughter and resolution of sorts. Dan confesses to Naomi that he is not the bird expert that he has pretended to be, Naomi will remain with her boyfriend, Jacq has a new girlfriend while Dan will probably contact Naomi.

*48 Shades of Brown* is avowedly Brisbane in its *mise en scène* even if geographical marking is incidental to the film's storytelling. The main visual icons are the Story Bridge, the Brisbane River and small city ferries. Apart from these, however, its locations are suburban. Dan and his friend are dressed in the school uniform of Brisbane Boys' College in Toowong and incidental scenes feature some of the school's grounds. A visit to the duck pond by Dan and Naomi makes it clear that the implicit reference is to the University of Queensland at St Lucia. Similarly, the house that Jacq rents with Naomi and Dan as tenants is the familiar repaired worker's wooden cottage somewhere in the inner city.

### ***All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane (2008)***

Finally, in 2008, appeared *All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane*, a fitting feature film on which to conclude this survey of a city's cinematic archive. In one way, it could be considered as a kind of sequel to *48 Shades of Brown* with its by now older protagonists. Additionally, the plot has parallels of sort with Tim Burstall's *2000 Weeks* produced 40 years earlier. That film featured a young would-be novelist who needed to wrench himself free of his home city in order to follow his muse to London and an artistic career. In *Leaving Brisbane*, the motivation for leaving what is described on the DVD's dustjacket as 'the biggest and best loved small town in Australia' is less aesthetically estimable. Instead, it is a rite of passage, a social custom where young professional singles in their twenties leave for London and other emotional and work opportunities. The romantic and comic plot tells the story of Anthea, who is bored and unattached and only realises that she and her male best friend Michael are in love as she is on her way to catch her plane. However, a single epilogue shot of the two in snow-bound London assures the audience of a happy ending.

The real interest of the film in the present context is its featuring of Brisbane as a place for singles to leave. Place is sufficiently itemised to make it clear that part at least of the film was actually shot in Brisbane. Again, this is the Brisbane of the anonymous but definitely inner-city suburbs. *All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane* features spectacular helicopter shots of the Story Bridge and the Brisbane River at night as well as business skyscrapers of the Stock Exchange and other buildings along the Riverside precinct. Michael shares a wooden Queenslander, although Anthea lives in a more anonymous brick apartment. Social drinking still happens at the Royal Exchange Hotel, a kind of link with university days. Meanwhile, the couple meet frequently for lunch on the lawns of the Old Botanic Gardens and it is here that they come together for the wedding of friends before Anthea leaves for the airport and London. *All My Friends are Leaving Brisbane* is by no means an outdoor drama. Much of it might have been set anywhere, in any place. Nevertheless, its matter of fact referencing of the city suggests not only a coming of age on the part of the characters but also a cinematic seasoning on the part of the place itself.

## **Conclusion**

Characterising the quite diverse output discussed in this chapter as a Brisbane film archive recalls another archiving effort occurring over 25 years ago. I refer to Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper's resuscitation of an Australian feature film archive, which finally appeared in publication form in 1980 (Pike and Cooper 1980). Many of the same strictures that apply to a Brisbane feature film archive also applied to the output identified and assembled by these pioneer film historians. Several of the films were no longer available or extremely difficult to retrieve. Others were produced by overseas production companies, so their inclusion in an Australian archive was quite debatable and problematic. Nevertheless, Andrew Pike and

Ross Cooper's assembling of that archive was a kind of polemic or manifesto in favour of future film production in Australia. The publication of the collection implied and asserted the industrial and artistic capacities of Australians to produce feature films in their own place. Place and placelessness were also woven into the films in that collection. Some were ostensibly set in Australia; others were incidentally situated there; still others might have been located anywhere on the planet.

The assembling here of a Brisbane film archive has the same intention. It asserts that Brisbane is enduringly worthy of being a feature film site both in terms of an industry and in terms of its imagery. The argument is one that concerns quantity rather than quality — the latter issue it leaves bracketed and in abeyance. Tracing a Brisbane feature film archive simply states the fact that the state capital has persistent claims to being considered as a film city in terms of both its cinematic infrastructure and its culture.

Two particular circumstances are worth noting in this regard. The first is the fact that the closer one comes to the present, the more frequent are films featuring Brisbane as foreground or background. The children's film, social realist drama, film noir and crime, the coming-of-age film, comedy and satire, romance — as this survey has indicated, Brisbane is quite capable of accommodating a range of different generic demands. The second detail is the fact that several of the most recent feature films discussed here are based on novels set in Brisbane and mostly written by Brisbane-based writers. The growing confidence of local novelists cannot but augment the emerging feature-film tradition.

## Chapter 7

### Brisbane in Crisis? Television Drama in the 1990s

... television, from its earliest years, has developed programs that focus on the workplace ... hour-long workplace dramas ... lifted dramatic focus ... to an ensemble of coworkers and to the workplace ... as a social service institution located in an urban industrial war zone with its own distinctive ethos and sense of place. Each also ... gave ... the workplace itself a 'look' and 'feel' that was utterly unique ... set in decaying inner cities ... centred on coworkers in the trenches, whose shared commitment to one another and to their work defines the ethos of the workplace and the sense of kinship it engendered. The workplace ... ultimately emerges as a character unto itself, and one that is both harrowing and oddly inspiring to those who work there. (Schatz 2004, p. 258)

#### Introduction

Chapter 5 dealt with the coming of television to Brisbane. However, as already indicated, it was doubtful in the late 1950s whether the city's advertising market could sustain two commercial television stations. The problem was resolved by allowing the state capital fledgling television service and industry to become a satellite of the larger, already established services in Sydney and Melbourne. Thereafter, Brisbane functioned as one of the BAPH services that comprised it: Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart. The Brisbane television industry provided a small amount of revenue towards the cost of television programming, which in turn enabled it to screen first-run content from Los Angeles and

London as well as from Sydney and Melbourne that attracted advertisers. So far as production was concerned, this meant that Brisbane television station sound stages functioned as an additional facility to those in Sydney and Melbourne. When studio space was unavailable in the southern cities, then production personnel looked to Brisbane as well as Adelaide, and even Perth. 'Spillover' production tended to occur in lower-cost program genres such as game shows and children's programs rather than in more prestigious and expensive forms such as drama and variety/tonight shows.

Such an arrangement is supported by the theory outlined in the literature in a number of important ways. In the first instance the action of southern capitals to treat Brisbane, among others, as satellite cities in a branch office arrangement for services follows the core periphery model of von Thünen (1926), which was later developed further into the concentric ring theory in the 1920s by Park and others in the Chicago School of Urban Studies (Park 1950). Secondly, Wallerstein has argued that cities throughout the Western world follow this pattern of urban development at a global level. Thus, Sydney is peripheral to London as Brisbane is peripheral to Sydney. Therefore, the use of Brisbane as a satellite city to major southern was merely to follow the laws of urban development as set out by the key thinkers discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

This situation helps explain the relative dearth of Brisbane television drama over the past half-century. There are one or two exceptions to this situation. In the early 1960s, the ABC produced a couple of plays in its Brisbane studios in Ferry Road in West End while in the mid-1970s, Reg Grundy Enterprises produced a daytime soap, *Until Tomorrow*, from the

studios of Channel Seven at Mt Coot-tha. Otherwise, there has been little or nothing.

However, in the 1990s, Brisbane became the backdrop for two new television series, *Fire* and *Medivac*. Both series received mixed reviews at the time and they have barely survived in the popular Australian imagination. Despite that, however, the two programs are useful sources of analysis and reflection for the present project, a systematic study of how moving images shape the urban experience of Brisbane and its residents. *Fire* and *Medivac* count as the first drama series made in Brisbane for Australian television audiences as a whole. As such, they are important in terms of what they say about the type of place Brisbane was in the 1990s, how it was being said, and who was doing this saying (Billingham 2000). Brisbane was being 'sensed' in and through television drama so that the point becomes one of developing an understanding of this imagining. Although it is apparent that neither *Fire* nor *Medivac* entered the televisual memory of the nation, the two drama series do serve a useful purpose in describing the cultural geography of Brisbane in the 1990s (McKee 2002).

There are important points of connection and continuity between the two series. Both deal with dramatic incidents and situations confronting different government emergency service departments in a putative large Australian city. They can be seen to follow in the wake of earlier successful departures from the genre, such as *All Saints* and *Police Rescue*. Both of the Brisbane series emphasised the service and the organisation rather than any particular fictional individuals. Work and the workplace were their continuing subjects. As will be seen in more detail below, *Fire* and *Medivac* were scripted and produced by the same production company, Liberty Films, on a back-to-back basis, making them sibling or drama

twins. Both subsequently were distributed by the transnational distributor, Beyond Productions, which has its headquarters in Sydney. Writer/producer Tony Cavanagh was the guiding spirit behind the two series. In Brisbane, they were shown consecutively in the same timeslot. Although they were screened by different networks, this still emphasised their continuity.

### **Brisbane workplace dramas**

Both series were eagerly welcomed by political and business elements of the city. They were supported by Queensland's Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) and the Brisbane City Council as a means of raising Brisbane's profile as a tourist destination (*Courier-Mail* 1994, 1 August). They were considered at the time to present to the wider world a representation of a new image for Brisbane. By 1994 the port warehouses earlier found throughout Brisbane's central business district, Petrie Bight, Kangaroo Point and the south bank of the river had been replaced with residential developments and recreational facilities. Brisbane City Council was now actively promoting the city as a cultural destination at the time when a key proponent of this thinking was publishing his seminal work, *The Creative City* (1995) which did much to persuade the city fathers that creativity and innovation were now the key drivers of the economy. The production and setting of *Fire* and *Medivac* at this time were an example of the eagerness of southern centres to relocate to Brisbane and to see it less as a peripheral settlement and more of a fresh urban backdrop capable of 'expanding one's horizons, of the unknown, of surprise, of experiment and of adventure' (Landry 1995, p. 16)

*Fire* was the first series to be shown, and each one-hour episode was aired in 1995 in the

prime time spot of Tuesday night at 9.30 p.m. on Channel Seven. The production was originally planned to take place in Melbourne, and this geographical location is reflected in the opening credits. *Medivac* followed in 1996. It aired until 1998 in the same timeslot, but on Channel Ten. The latter's opening credits are distinctly different in every respect to those of *Fire*. This seems to suggest that a significant change had taken place in the way Brisbane was portrayed by the series producers, Liberty Films. It also implied that Brisbane was beginning to represent itself in a different way to the world at large.

The opening sequences and many of the external shots of both *Fire* and *Medivac* suggest that Brisbane is a place of crisis. There is fast action drama, helicopters banking sharply among city buildings, pulsating music, city landmarks being burnt to the ground, helicopter rescues from [nearby] remote locations, hospitals inundated with patients suffering mysterious complaints, outbreaks of contagious diseases, and staff stressed through poor management decisions. This last aspect is particularly exaggerated by a nebulous off-screen board of management which gets in the way of workers attempting to carry out their duties. However, the differences between the two series are also striking in the manner by which they indicate how the perception of Brisbane had changed during the 1990s. It also demonstrates the extent to which a medium such as television can be instrumental in helping construct the reality of a place such as Brisbane (Couldry 2000).

### **Actual change and fictional crisis**

Electing to depict a city such as Brisbane as a place of crisis, or a place where critical incidents occur on a regular basis, may have been altogether different to how residents regarded the city. Caulfield and Wanna (1995) note that, in general, the residents of

Brisbane believed themselves, at that time, to be relaxed and easy going, living in a city more regarded as a large country town than a major regional city and state capital. However, plans were being laid in the early 1990s to regenerate the inner city areas through urban renewal projects that would dispel the Queensland state capital city's reputation as being a large country town. Private-interest groups encouraged the movement of industry and development to Brisbane while still proclaiming it Australia's most livable city. The broadcast of *Fire* and *Medivac* showing the urban location as a place of story, action, spectacle and drama would have tended to serve those interested more in a high-growth strategy for Brisbane than those happy with its hitherto relatively low-growth evolution, which had emphasised its pristine character, relaxed lifestyle and small population (Caulfield and Wanna 1995).

The two television series can also be interpreted within the context of 1990s societal angst: a metonymic response to national and global events evident in several television dramas of the same period (Jacobs 2003). Thomas Schatz' quote at the beginning of this chapter in highlights the growing number and impact of workplace drama series during this decade (2004). In *Body Trauma TV : The New Hospital Dramas* (2003) Jason Jacobs traces the development of this phenomenon throughout the 1990s of a willingness to portray, on the small screen, more and more explicit representations of the body in trauma.

However, at a local level — and a level with which my overall project is concerned — it can be argued that the opening sequences of *Fire* and *Medivac* are representative not of a Brisbane in crisis, but rather a Brisbane in transition. The city entered the national and, more

briefly, international limelight in the 1980s when it hosted two world-class events: the Commonwealth Games in 1982 and World Expo in 1988. These events in themselves might have been sufficient to raise Brisbane's profile from that of a sleepy, almost provincial town, an outpost of major southern centres, into a vibrant, independent city providing key services and a place of trade to an expanding southeast corner of the state that was attracting increasing numbers of migrants from southern states (Stimson 1998). Yet Guy West (1999) asserts that, even aside from these developments, the Queensland economy was already undergoing a significant structural economic shift. It was changing from a dependence on primary industries that was to have long-range implications for the state's economic policy.

Extensive study by Australia's Urban Research Institute reveals that Brisbane's rate of change was entering a period of dramatic growth in the 1990s. Filming in Brisbane and its surrounds in *Fire*, and more so in *Medivac*, presents to Australia and the rest of the world a city in the transition from an easy-going large country town to a dynamic regional centre. As a result, we might speculate that these television dramas can be counted as a factor contributing to the city's visibility. Thus, part of the context shaping the texts of *Fire* and *Medivac* includes increased migration to the state capital and to the Southeast Queensland region generally, the rise in industrial development with a concomitant fall in unemployment rates, and greater involvement by the public sector in managing this rate of growth (Stimson 1998). This background is relevant to any consideration of the two series.

### ***Fire***

*Fire* consisted of a total of 26 hour-long episodes, which were divided up into several shorter ongoing stories. The longest of these stories was the initial 13 episodes which

focused on the new woman recruit played by Georgie Parker and the hunt for an arsonist. There were also two four-episode stories — ‘Unity’ and ‘War of the Worlds’ — and a five-episode story entitled ‘Vendetta’. There were several recurring characters in both the fire brigade and in a special *Arson Investigation Squad*. The 26 episodes were split into Series 1 and 2 for broadcast and marketing purposes. Both were set in Brisbane, but in different fictional fire stations — Series 1 at the ‘South-East’ station and Series 2 at the ‘East End’ Fire Station.

As its name implies, *Fire* had to do with an important emergency service in the shape of the fire brigade and its work in battling fires. The series told the story of a platoon of firefighters stationed in Brisbane’s inner city. As Schatz (2004) has pointed out in his analysis of US workplace fictional drama of the 1980s and 1990s, each episode contains a continuing ‘framing’ story as well as a more compact story unique to that episode. Thus, the series had to be shown sequentially, in terms of the numbering of episodes rather than in an order dictated by the broadcaster. Tension in the first story series of *Fire* is maintained from episode to episode by the search for a deadly pyromaniac who, it turns out, is within the fire brigade squad itself. Additionally, this workplace is not organised along gender lines. Instead, as Schatz also points out, the workplace comprises both male and female co-workers. Georgie Parker is cast in the lead role as Morgan Cartwright, a new recruit to the force although both her father and brother worked in the service. Cartwright’s position as the first female firefighter in the Queensland Fire Service is compromised when she is press-ganged into service by the Arson Squad. The Squad’s lead investigator, Detective Sergeant, Jean Diamond, played by Liddy Clark, is convinced that one of the firefighters is actually

the arsonist responsible for a series of fires. Thus, Cartwright's ongoing attempt to uncover the arsonist among the firefighters provides a greater depth of conflict and crisis than might otherwise have been the case.

In its initial phases of planning and production, *Fire* was to have been a Melbourne-based drama. But the production of the series moved to Brisbane after a decision by the Seven Network to break what was perceived as the stranglehold of Melbourne and Sydney concerning Australian drama production. In addition, the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) in Queensland was eager to attract film and television production to the city and to the state. The PFTC was a new state film authority established by the Goss Labor government after 1988 and following the corruption associated with the Queensland Film Development Corporation that had led to the latter's demise. *Fire*, the PFTC thought, would be a significant feather in its cap, a good-looking drama series made in Brisbane that would help promote the city as a tropical paradise with easy, convenient access to external locations and city buildings. There is much evidence of this kind of thinking in local and state publications of the time. Brisbane City Council was particularly eager to capitalise on the success of the large-scale international events held during 1980s, and the making of the series *Fire* would fit nicely into this plan.

When the first series of 13 episodes of the program was in the process of being filmed, there was much anticipation and excitement in the city's news media. Writers asked just what *Fire* might mean for Brisbane. The drama was billed as a hot, new action show with a sizzling story of a mysterious arsonist setting local landmarks ablaze. After several decades

of midnight demolitions during the Bjelke-Petersen era (Melloy 1994), no doubt the narrative action of *Fire* might be imagined as a source of consternation for inhabitants of the Queensland state capital city.

### ***Locating Fire***

As might be expected from this kind of promotion, the opening credits begin in a literally explosive manner, with a fuse set alight within the confines of a derelict warehouse. The latter can be seen to be metonymic of the grubby, grungy Melbourne weather (Melloy 1994). As the theme music builds to a crescendo, the lit fuse traces a pattern of fire along the floor and up the wall of warehouse's vaulted room. The first external scene is shot in the training yard of the somewhat nondescript South East Fire Station, in a building that stood on what was for some time the IMAC Theatre in Grey Street at Southbank. Locationally, however, the series *Fire* gives little away. Local knowledge, or familiarity with Brisbane, would have been needed to identify the location as Brisbane. In fact, it is not until the final episodes of the program in Series 1 that external scenes are identifiably Brisbane. These include, for example, those shot from Nick (The Boss) O'Connor's Southbank apartment. Other than scenes such as this, much of the emphasis in external location shooting is on warehouse buildings. These were possibly planned for in the original production schedule but again usher in that sense of placelessness that has already been highlighted in the previous chapter.

The decision to relocate from Melbourne to Brisbane for the shooting of *Fire* had many positive aspects for the Queensland state capital. From a production perspective, the location

turned out to be a pleasant surprise. The director, Peter Fiske, considered the unspoiled and unexploited nature of the city to be a great bonus. As he put it:

I think after this you're going to see far more drama happening up here. You can walk on to locations in Sydney and Melbourne and just about see the tripod marks in the ground where the camera crews have been before you. But here, it's a fresh look. (*Courier-Mail* 1994, p. 7, 28 December, p. 14)

Given the response from key personnel of the production company, the extensive reporting in the local press at the time comes as no surprise. A further boost to Brisbane's new image as a destination of interstate film companies was the employment of local acting and production personnel, with a number of staff being drawn from the local area. The Brisbane City Council was very keen to get as much exposure as possible of Brisbane's best-known landmarks, so permission was given for *Fire's* producers to film, and jump from, the Story Bridge for one episode. In fact, the exercise of producing two television series reportedly boosted the city coffers by \$40 million (Tony Cavanagh (2003). Other figures are available that indicate Queensland's share of employment in the film and television industries rose from a zero base to 70 per cent in the first half of the 1990s. The producers of *Fire* themselves were said to be impressed with the local talent and they estimated that 90 per cent of the cast and crew of the drama series were Queenslanders (De Groot 1995).

However, *Fire* was not received so well in some quarters. Media reports indicate that the television series being filmed in the streets of Brisbane led to a number of inconveniences.

In one instance, two lanes of Lytton Road were closed when a disused bacon factory at Murarrie used for one of the episodes caught alight. Ironically, an actual fire unit had to come to the scene of the outbreak. A newspaper report continued:

smoke hampered fire officer's attempts to control [the] fire and the blaze caused havoc for peak-hour commuters because the Fire Service had to close both lanes of Lytton Road to get to water mains. (*Courier-Mail* 1995, 11 February, p. 13)

Queensland Fire Service firefighters assisted in training and provided consultancy services to the cast and crew. At the time of shooting, Brisbane and the Gold Coast were badly affected by bushfires so there was some resentment at having personnel and equipment diverted for filming (Metcalf 2003). Casting Georgie Parker in the lead role of the rookie firefighter also led to tension between the producers and Emergency Services, as firefighters at the time were generally a close-knit, male-oriented community in Queensland as well as in other states. Such a move was seen as overtly political by fire fighters in Emergency Services, who resisted any attempt at equity in employment in the early 1990s. To add to their chagrin, the main storyline in the first series involves a mysterious and elusive pyromaniac who actually turns out to be a (male) firefighter.

Despite this poor reception from Queensland firefighters, the continuing story of the mysterious arsonist was an effective narrative plot nonetheless. *Fire* was enjoyed by audiences across Australia, including Brisbane itself. However, with the show screening in the late evening adult time slot of 9.30 p.m. on a Tuesday night, its total audience was not

large. The series made no obvious or permanent dent in the realm of Australian television drama. Notwithstanding the enthusiasm for this series in the local press, *Fire* trailed fourth in the ratings for the timeslot. On the other hand, it sold well overseas and was especially well received in Germany (Metcalf 2003).

### ***Medivac***

*Medivac* screened between 1995 and 1998 and consisted of 48 hour-long episodes. It featured the same producer and several of the individual writers and directors employed on the earlier series. As its name implies, *Medivac* was a medical drama series, following happenings in Bethlehem West Hospital, a large fictitious Brisbane city hospital whose doctors also had to occasionally act as paramedics. It was known during early production as *Adrenalin Junkies* and was shown overseas under that title. Like its predecessor, this was a workplace drama that highlighted the professional and personal relationships of the unit. As in *Fire*, one of the team leaders was a woman doctor while some of the nurses were male. In other words, romance and sexual jealousy and tension immediately came into play, as well as personal jealousies and rivalries. But above all, like *Fire*, *Medivac* was a workplace drama series along the lines indicated above.

In fact, the star attraction of this medical series was a helicopter that enabled a medical team to arrive quickly at the place where service was needed. Various episodes featured extensive use of the helicopter, providing various adventures for the regular characters and allowing the series to feature a variety of different locations. *Medivac*'s opening credits, therefore, could present the viewer with panoramic views of Brisbane's city centre taken from the helicopter as it flies beneath the Story Bridge, then up among the city buildings near the

river, before taking in views of the nearby Glasshouse Mountains. Having been represented as a remote outpost during the Bjelke-Petersen era, Brisbane in the early 1990s, at the time *Medivac* was screened, was being viewed as a brilliant subtropical city with clear blue skies. In the words of the producer of the series,:

[Brisbane] enjoyed being filmed ... [it] welcomed filmmakers with an openhearted generosity of spirit, a sense of expansiveness that became written into the opening scenes of *Medivac*. (Cavanaugh, 2003)

The exploits of Bethlehem West's helicopter trauma team fill the episodes of the series. The series itself began with the dramatic rescue of a bushwalker in the [remote] Glasshouse Mountains, a dramatic incident that also provides a metaphor for the equally dramatic change in management that is taking place at the hospital. The rancour provoked among the staff will provide a source of conflict throughout much of the series. The major protagonist is the ageing Dr Harry Edwards, played by Graeme Blundell, and the young Dr Red Buchanan, a legend in the world of emergency medicine, played by Nicholas Eadie. Other conflicts between characters soon followed.

For local audiences, this drama and conflict provided one attraction, while spectacular locations and settings in and around the city constituted another. In fact, so impressive was what Brisbane had to offer that *Medivac* became an ode to the Queensland capital, showcasing the Brisbane River and various tourist spots around Southeast Queensland.

Unlike *Fire*, which had a single narrative thread through many episodes of the series, *Medivac* episodes were more or less self-contained, stand-alone dramas. The opening scenes suggested a fast-paced, action-filled workplace TV drama, which was set in and around the inner city of Brisbane during the mid-1990s. A typical episode in *Medivac* involved a helicopter rescue and internal conflict among the staff of the Emergency Department of the fictitious Bethlehem West Hospital. While most of the conflict was confined to a single episode, there were also threads of contention and friction between the staff that continued from episode to episode. The series was a typical adult workplace drama provided for a late-night timeslot (9.30 p.m. on Tuesday night). Unfortunately, this timeslot may have contributed to its poor performance in the ratings.

To the extent to which it is possible to speak of television program genres in decades, we might say that *Medivac* displays all the elements of a conventional 1990s workplace drama series. This form of television fiction had been developing in various guises in US, British and Australian television entertainment in the 1980s and 1990s, often centring on action and personal conflict perceived to be found in emergency public services such as police, hospital wards and the fire brigade. Schatz (2004) distinguishes between urban-based emergency workplace dramas like *ER* and *Chicago Hope* that used the setting as a backdrop to a formulaic plot, and others such as *Northern Exposure* where the setting provided an acute sense of place. In British television, *The Bill* deliberately abandoned its earlier short story-like form in favour of an ongoing encyclopedic storyline that focused on police station life at both a work level and a personal level. Meanwhile, in Australian television, *Police Rescue* adopted the new emphasis on the workplace as the site of adventure and personal

melodrama. On closer inspection, *Medivac* falls somewhere between the two poles represented by an *ER* on the one hand and a *Northern Exposure* on the other. On one side, there is the personal conflict between characters in a workplace setting, and on the other there is the dramatic, documentary realism of helicopter rescues and adventures carried out in remote areas that are inaccessible to ambulances, such as the Glasshouse Mountains and Moreton Island.

Given the excitement generated by remote area rescue on the fringes of Brisbane and professionals working in close proximity to each other in highly stressful, and somewhat unrealistic, personal and medical dramas, it is not difficult to imagine why the series did not do especially well in the ratings in its Brisbane season. Targeted at adults in its 9.30 p.m. timeslot, *Medivac's* springtime Channel 10 debut in 1996 would have offered Brisbane workers, settling in to relax after a day's work and the completion of family duties, the possibility of imagining weekend escapes, or at most the simple pleasure of attempting to identify a jumbled set of their city's landmarks on national TV.

The task of combining an *ER* or a *Chicago Hope* with the iconic ruggedness of a *Northern Exposure*, however, appears to have left the producers of *Medivac* with little of either. The later timeslot into which the program was placed suggests a target audience of supervisory, clerical, junior management or administrative workers. Nissan's sponsorship and advertisement for recreational vehicles prior to the airing of each episode would have appealed to this socioeconomic demographic of (Brisbane) workers. These might also have been watchful of the show's level of realism and attention to the portrayal of character and

location detail. Once again, a series located and shot in Brisbane did poorly in the ratings. On the other hand, it can be noticed in passing that, along with *Fire*, the *Medivac* series did rate well in the southern capitals and in various overseas markets.

### ***Brisbane iconography in Medivac***

However, even beyond the broadcast history of the series, *Medivac* provided continuing imagery that remains to be discussed. Unlike *Fire*, *Medivac* offers many more external shots of the city and its surroundings.

These, in turn, invest the series' different narratives with rich connotative meanings. Take, for example, a wide-angle, long aerial shot of Brisbane's CBD and the Story Bridge, which gives the opening and closing scenes of each episode a dramatic sense of place. Likewise, in the first episode, the same technique is used in the filming of the Glasshouse Mountains, in a shot screened immediately before the rescue of the bushwalker. In addition, the external shot of a rooftop garden is used on a number of occasions, and serves to inform local viewers that the series is set in Brisbane. In fact, this garden — which also doubled as the helipad in the series — is on top of the old Taxation Building on the corner of Creek and Adelaide Streets. All camera shots from this rooftop were wide angle. They were also mostly filmed in extra long shots that enabled the inclusion of the Brisbane Customs House, the facade of the Queensland Country Life building and the Brisbane River to feature in the background. Occasionally the camera pans around to show the northern end of Adelaide Street. However, if — as Lance Strate (2002) suggests — external locations act as a hook for local audiences, eagerly awaiting a familiar landmark or just simply open to the pleasure of recognition, any number of technical codes cannot shield the local viewer from the disappointment and

sometimes the absurdity of familiar places arranged into an impossible and non-existent geography. In fact, there are many instances of familiar Brisbane places being ‘out of place’. Hence, for example, the third episode features an emergency medivac trip from the Taxation Building in Ann Street to the Ekka Showgrounds via Trouts Road, a route that is physically impossible in a real Brisbane.

Compared to *Fire*, *Medivac* puts more emphasis on Brisbane as a place. As already noted, this is most evident in the opening credits, and in the many location shots included in the series. Yet, paradoxically, despite this featuring of the place, *Medivac*’s ratings in Brisbane, according to the producers, were lower than they were for *Fire*. This apparent contradiction has been attributed to the fact that the Brisbane audience had matured and developed a more sophisticated approach to watching itself on television. Reports in the local media support this proposition. For example, there was little of the earlier enthusiasm for reporting on all things occurring in the production of the series that could be found a few years earlier with news about *Fire*. Instead only a sense of hardcore fandom can be seen in these reports. In less than five years, it seems that Brisbane’s urban society had undergone significant change, and the way Brisbane was being portrayed to non-residents — virtually as a tourist commodity — was strikingly different from the way it was handled in the opening scenes of the earlier series. At this point, then, it is useful to examine the storylines of *Medivac*.

### ***Placing Medivac’s narrative***

The basic plot of the series is based in the emergency department of a fictitious hospital, Bethlehem West. Drama is intensified through helicopter rescues and the relational conflict and tension between the characters of the medivac team set against a backdrop of Brisbane

and its surrounds. While the individual episodes are centred on a particular drama or issue, some storylines are designed to carry over to future episodes. These include the tension between Harry and Red; the implication that Red worked overseas to avoid the consequences of medical negligence; frustrated, attempted or actual romantic liaisons between members of staff; and Marina's membership of a religious order. Along with the focus of each individual episode, the interrelationship between the characters creates the opportunity to explore issues of generational, relational and gender conflict.

However, aside from the conventional means of using characters to explore issues and create tension, it is also apparent from the analysis that place is also used to enhance tension in the narrative. In the opening credits, for example, the view of the Story Bridge from the helicopter is not a regular flyover, as flying regulations would dictate. Instead, the flight path takes the viewer under the bridge then climbs sharply to gain sufficient height in order to clear the high-rise buildings of the CBD. This gives the viewer an acute sense of realism. In the next shot, the helicopter is speeding its way among the office blocks. The velocity of the craft is sharply accentuated when shown in close proximity to the office windows.

Similarly, place is used to support the action taking place between characters in a scene. It helps to increase the apparent tension between Harry and Red, for example, and the way in which management change takes place in the emergency department of the hospital. Immediately prior to the scene in which Harry introduces the new Director of Emergency, Dr Red Buchanan, to the staff, there is an aerial view of the Captain Cook Bridge from a southerly aspect. The camera pans northwest following the South East Freeway as it crosses

the river at Gardens Point diagonally across the screen. In the next scene of Harry introducing Red to the staff, a large picture hanging on the wall behind the two men depicts a nineteenth century print of the Brisbane River and Gardens Point. This juxtaposition of the new and the old represents Harry's failure to maintain his position as Director of Emergency at Bethlehem West Hospital, while the external view of Captain Cook Bridge crossing diagonally from bottom right to top left of the screen connotes Red's energy and vitality for the role of Director of Emergency. There are events in Red's past, however, that are hinted at by Archie in a rooftop conversation with Red. As he suggests that there is something unsavoury in Red's career prior to his work with refugees, the crumbling facade of the Queensland Country Life building is filmed in the background. The camera provides long shots, also, of the northern end of Adelaide Street, towards Petrie Bight, an area of the city with a somewhat poor reputation in its day:

*XBreak:* Dr 'Red' Buchanan (Nicholas Eadie) talks with Archie (Grant Bowler — *Blue Heelers*) on the roof of old Taxation Building in Adelaide Street. Background shows rear view of the Queensland Country Life building's facade on Queen Street, Customs House and the Brisbane River. Foreground shows view of the Port Office Building. Camera swings around during the conversation to show views of the northern end of Adelaide Street.

The role of Brisbane and its surrounds as a place appears throughout the narrative. The external scenes have been placed into one of three categories. Category 1 contains scenes that are of iconic value. These scenes are easily recognisable by many Australians and a

good many locals as Brisbane and its surrounds. There are shots of the Story Bridge, the Brisbane CBD and the Glasshouse Mountains. At this level, iconic scenes might also be regarded as having marketing value for the tourism industry, showing as they do idyllic scenes from the southeast region of the state to viewers in other parts of the country. In addition, these iconic scenes are generally restricted to opening and closing credits, where they may be intended to act as hooks for the local audiences. Meanwhile, the second category of place includes scenes that are, to Queenslanders and Brisbane residents, recognisably Brisbane. This category contains by far the most number of entries. It includes shots of the CBD, Queenslander style housing, the Gabba lights and specific buildings such as the entrance to the old Taxation Building on the corner of Adelaide and Creek Streets and the AMP building. The third category contains scenes that might be of any city or any stretch of bush. In effect, these location shots imply that *Medivac* is operating in a gap between place and placelessness.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the two drama series discussed in this chapter are among the very small handful of Australian television drama series that have touched on the visual and dramatic subject of Brisbane. In 50 years of local Australian television output, there has been so little drama set in the city that these two series have warranted the attention devoted to them here. At many points throughout the two series, the Queensland state capital city is seen as backdrop and even agent in some of the dramatic actions taking place before the camera. Nevertheless, the fact is that the two series are most immediately read and understood in terms of the workplace drama cycle outlined at the head of this chapter.

The chapter has attempted to trace the way that the two series, *Fire* and *Medivac*, might have been looked at by local audiences interested not so much in the drama as in the city. Thus, Brisbane is on screen even if, in other instances, place dissolves into a general urban placelessness, a metropolitan anonymity. At such points, it is as though the script read simply ‘a city street’ or ‘a city bridge’ or ‘a city building’. Brisbane is merely an urban backdrop to these two workplace drama series that feature emergency service providers.

In turn, this quality of being unnamed and unknown is further compounded by the generic nature of these two television drama series, *Fire* and *Medivac*. Both have been influenced by the development of workplace drama in American television in the 1980s and 1990s, including *Hill Street Blues*, *ER* and *Boston Legal*. In this kind of drama, work and the workplace are the central and continuing focus of dramatic attention. The interest has to do with how the group works together as a team and how work leaves little time for family life. Indeed, the workplace becomes a quasi family home just as the workmates become a surrogate family. With such a narrative focus in operation, *Fire* and *Medivac* have little room for sampling the visual and aural variety of Brisbane or of making these the sustained subject of dramatic interest. Elements of the city become part of the visual backdrop, recognisable for citizens but anonymous and nowhere so far as viewers in other places are concerned. Crisis, danger, peril, emergency and so on involve professionals and victims and there is little room for surveying urban landscape or noticing city architecture. In other words, both *Fire* and *Medivac* put Brisbane in front of the camera even while it becomes an invisible presence, an unseen participant. After

waiting 35 years for a drama series set in the Queensland state capital, Brisbane becomes the vanishing point of *Fire* and *Medivac*.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion: Looking backwards and forwards

In a real sense, this study has done little more than open up the subject of cultural geography with particular reference to cities and screens. It has only scratched the surface so far as the relationship between Brisbane and the audio-visual is concerned. Nevertheless, the general significance of the topic should appear self-evident by now. Moving picture cameras have been at work on cityscapes for more than a century, and this in turn has created a real if scattered set of images and sounds that aid in the visual recreation of urban spaces. For too long, this rich historical and social record has been neglected, particularly in the case of Brisbane, and this work has attempted to place the matter in all its variety and detail back on the research agenda.

The thesis has, therefore, attempted to further its concerns on two interconnected fronts. In Part I of the thesis, I have concentrated on developing a general framework for understanding the relationship between the moving picture and the city. This matter is itself embedded in a larger even more philosophical tradition of inquiry concerning the relationship between culture and the city that I trace back to the eighteenth century. This prepared the ground for examining the much more recent inquiry into the more specific subject of film, television and the city. Meanwhile, in Part II, I turned to the more concrete matter of how Brisbane has been pictured by the moving image. Four particular case studies

have been investigated as a means of demonstrating some of the rich pickings that await discovery.

As always, much work remains to be undertaken. New works of theoretical and empirical investigation that not only enhances our conceptual understanding but also contribute to our further visual awareness of particular cities have already added to the literature on place and film and television discussed in Chapter 3. While there has been no attempt to update the overall coverage of the new literature in this thesis, two recent studies can serve to signify the vitality and imagination that currently animates scholars thinking about the cultural geography of cities. In 2004, Lyons' study of media representations of Seattle appeared. This full-length study investigates a series of popular representations of the city as it has appeared in film, television shows, novels, and documentaries over the past 15 years. The account is heavily culturalist and attempts to trace a wider discourse surrounding America's present and future as it registers in these popular forms. By contrast, the second study is far more focused on the political and cultural economy of place. Scott's (2005) study of Hollywood is concerned with the place as the site of industry and business, particularly that of the motion picture trade. His object is to show how Hollywood is an industrial centre that now includes a series of other creative industries that piggyback on the back of cinema, although the latter continues to be the wealthiest and most significant of Los Angeles' culture industries.

Closer to home, there is the obvious fact that the four different studies presented in the second part of the work have by no means exhausted the subject of Brisbane and the moving

image. Several other feature films, for instance, might have been analysed in the feature film archive, such as *He Died With a Falafel in His Hand* and *The Love of Lionel's Life*. Further analysis of adjacent subjects is also needed. Here, by way of amplifying this suggestion, we might point to two additional areas of study regarding the city and the audio-visual on which some investigative inquiry has already taken place.

The first has to do with cinemas and picture going in Brisbane, between the coming of synchronised sound films in the early 1930s and the point in the very early 1960s when the mass audience became entranced with the new medium of television and cinema attendance fell sharply. Helen Yates has undertaken a study of the cinemas themselves as part of her research towards a PhD in history on the subject. Her work has done much to help make available more knowledge about the location, ownership, architectural details and fittings of the city's different picture houses, both in the suburbs and in the city itself. In turn, research conducted in relation to picture going in Brisbane has helped amplify this work. The latter has given rise to an edited collection of writings and archive materials (Yates, in Davies and Moran 2006). It has also helped provide material and analysis towards a museum exhibition on the subject mounted by the Brisbane City Council in 2007.

A second area of investigation of Brisbane's audio-visual history is set even earlier. It has to do with pioneering work on television transmission. Russell Nunn (2008), formerly a studio engineer at Channel 7, is currently engaged on a study relating to early pioneering work undertaken in Brisbane between 1935 and 1939. Dr Valentine McDowell was a medical doctor who was interested in radiography as well as radio and television transmission.

Together with a younger enthusiast, Thomas Elliott, McDowell took out a radio station licence in 1925 and sent out transmission signals from the radio station he established in Proctor House in Queen Street. With the call signal of 4CM, this station was an early radio pioneering station in the city. Along with others elsewhere, the two soon became fascinated by the technical challenge of not only sending sounds through the air but also sending images. By 1935, McDowell and Elliott had rented premises at the Windmill Observatory Tower in Wickham Terrace, from which they transmitted television images as far as Ipswich. War interrupted this work. In turn, the federal government placed a ban on further experimental work in television while it considered just how a service might be established at some time in the future. In 1953, McDowell gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Television when it visited Brisbane. He indicated that he intended to apply for a television broadcasting licence once tenders were called. In the event, however, circumstances and age counted against such a bid. McDowell died in 1959, which happened to be the same year that a regular television service began in the city. Now, while some parts of this story are known, Nunn's research will add considerable detail to this history, which is part of the larger narrative of the encounter between the audio-visual and the city of Brisbane.

Even beyond these particular analyses of picture going in Brisbane and early television experimentation, there are many other Brisbane-related topics worthy of investigation. A short checklist of these in no particular order might include the following: the history of video and DVD sales and rental outlets in Brisbane from around 1980 onwards; the advent of film societies and film festivals, especially the trajectory of the Brisbane International Film Festival since the early 1990s; the long, complex relationship between state

government and film, including state government department film production and the history of particular film industry bodies, most especially the Queensland Film Development Corporation and the Pacific Film and Television Commission; a full study of the emergence and development of the Birch, Carroll and Coyle film exhibition chain; and a careful examination of film teaching in tertiary and the secondary sectors of education, most especially the pioneering role undertaken by Griffith University since the mid-1970s.

Such a listing is not exhaustive, but it is indicative. Put another way, much work remains to be done on the complex, tangled relationship between Brisbane and the audio-visual. Hence, the study contained in this dissertation represents one stage in this much longer, ongoing research project.



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