



The Art of Co-Creative Media: An Australian Survey

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ABSTRACT

This article describes how - in the processes of responding to participatory storytelling practices - community, public service, and to a lesser extent, commercial media institutions are themselves negotiated and changed. Although there are significant variations in the conditions, durability, extent, motivations and quality of these developments and their impacts, they nonetheless increase the possibilities and pathways of participatory media culture. This description first frames digital storytelling as a 'co-creative' media practice. It then discusses the role of community arts and cultural development (CACD) practitioners and networks as co-creative media intermediaries, and then considers their influence in Australian broadcast and Internet media. It looks at how participatory storytelling methods are evolving in the Australian context and explores some of the implications for cultural inclusion arising from a shared interest in 'co-creative' media methods and approaches.

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Introduction

Digital Storytelling provides a useful starting point for thinking about the making of participatory media culture. Community-based arts practitioners, cultural development agencies and community media producers have been key advocates of participatory media culture and have driven its development, diffusion and adoption through various means, including the development of co-creative media production methods such as digital storytelling. These practitioner networks are purposively embedded in an open-ended variety of communities. From this position they facilitate, create, curate and artfully communicate ‘insider’ perspectives, through storytelling, with a view to constituting and connecting with a variety of publics. They engage tactically with media to nurture and sustain social change and participation through creative expression and active listening. The innovations driven by these practitioner networks also inform developments in other media cultures.

These are some of the key findings of a large national research project involving researchers from three Australian universities and five industry partners of various sizes.² This research aimed to better understand community arts and media networks as infrastructures for community-based storytelling (as distinct from – but not discontinuous with – representative storytelling such as news and journalism, documentary, and national cinema). It was motivated by an interest in understanding how the interests of these participatory media networks might be converging. It aimed to consolidate and develop knowledge of the role of community arts and media networks as drivers and facilitators of population-wide social participation through creative expression, as well how these networks negotiate the barriers and obstacles that impede this momentum. This research seeks to contribute to a conversation about the ways in which digital media are being used by a range of community-based creative practitioners and media producers working in commercial, community, and public service broadcasting contexts, as well as independently of any formally recognised media sector. It is now normatively understood in governments, academies and media and communications industries alike, that the ‘gold’ of a digital economy resides in the ‘intellectual and creative ideas packaged and distributed in different forms over information networks’ (Venturelli 2005: 395-396). Moreover, the demand side of this new economy is not only the site of consumption and feedback for these outputs. It is also an important source of creative and intellectual inputs. This normative frame may indeed provide a helpful justification for research into the conditions of creative expression as a part of a human resource development strategy to be pursued for the benefit of a wider public or national interest. It is also, no doubt, an important strategic consideration in community arts and media practitioner networks.

² See <http://digitalstorytelling.ci.qut.edu.au/linkage>. University Partners are Queensland University of Technology, Swinburne University and Curtin University. Industry Partners are the Australia Council of the Arts, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Goolarri Media Enterprises, 31Digital and the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia.

However it is not pursued here. Instead, this paper relies upon a small number of specific examples drawn from the practitioner networks involved in this study to describe some of the social and political conditions of contemporary media participation. The intention has been to draw attention to what is intrinsically interesting about the diverse range of possibilities for participatory media cultures that are opened up by and through co-creative media practice, rather than to instrumentalise the case for co-creative media research and development. The intention is also to open up for discussion some of the key drivers and barriers to co-creative media activity. Co-creative media practice is described here as a participatory media 'art'. This is owing to its historical origins in the encounter of community arts, media and cultural development movements with digital media technology. This paper has outlined some of the ways that new media platforms are implicated in the expansion of co-creative media in Australia. Even though co-creative media is an academic invention it has been interesting, and surprising, to see how many arts and media practitioners are willing to identify what it is that they do in this way.

'Co-creative Media' and 'Digital Storytelling'

Our study of the characteristics and role of co-creative facilitation in building participatory media culture took digital storytelling as its starting point. Common-sense definitions of digital storytelling can be very expansive, and include all kinds of computer-mediated narratives, and so it was necessary to narrow the scope of the research to collaborative practices that are explicitly directed at facilitating media participation. Participatory media methods and techniques have developed to take advantage of the growth of consumer markets for digital media technologies. Practices such as Photovoice (Wang, Cash & Powers 2000), and the workshop-based method of digital storytelling that has been associated with the Centre for Digital Storytelling (CDS) in Berkley California since the mid-1990s (Meadows 2003), have been explicitly codified and extensively used in a variety of contexts. Large bodies of 'how to' and multi-disciplinary scholarly literature have built up around these methods, and helped to establish them as strategies for building community-wide capacity for conversation through the mediation of personal narratives and individual creative expression (Coudry 2008: 386-389). We took the CDS digital storytelling participatory media method as a starting point for a variety of reasons, including the existence of an international community media movement that has developed around this particular digital storytelling practice (Hartley & McWilliam 2009). The workshop-based CDS method builds group solidarity and capacity through knowledge-sharing and skill-building in storytelling. Participants create short, personal stories using a small selection of still images, a script written and recorded in the first person, with all elements put together in a movie-making application. Choices about the technologies used to create and communicate stories are aligned with the interests of participants and the cultural, community, and organisational contexts in which workshops take place. Although the CDS method has been extensively and often controversially adapted for other purposes (Lambert 2009: 82) it is also primarily concerned with fostering participatory media cultures, and for this reason is well-matched with the interests of this research.

We were also interested in other practices that share similarities with digital storytelling even though they may not conform to, or indeed be directly informed by, the CDS orthodoxy. For this reason, the CDS digital storytelling method is taken here to be emblematic of a wide

range of practices that rely upon a ‘co-creative’ orientation to media collaboration. Jenkins uses the term ‘co-creation’ (Jenkins 2008: 105-107) to account for the impact of end-user productivity on the complex collaborative practices required to produce new forms of transmedia storytelling, and the impact of end-user productivity on commercialisation of new media forms, enterprise and professional practice. Burgess and Banks deploy ‘co-creation’ to describe:

[t]he ways that users of consumers, within the constraints and affordances of platforms provided by others, collectively contribute to the social, cultural and economic value of the media products and experiences associations with those platforms; and likewise, it indicates the ways in which platform providers (however imperfectly) integrate user-participation into their own models of production (Burgess & Banks 2010: 298).

Our use of the term ‘co-creative media’ denotes a sub-group of collaborations where creative practitioners and media professionals facilitate self-representation in ways that critically engage with the social change potential of participatory media cultures. We found that such a critical collaborative (co-creative) orientation to media production activity is generally informed by:

- Critiques of mass media representation;
- Critical pedagogy;
- Curiosity about the possibilities for creative excellence in media self-representation, and
- Perceptions of the importance of personal storytelling to social change, knowledge, and humanistic endeavour.

The significance of storytelling to our project is discussed elsewhere (see Hartley 2011: 122ff; and Hartley in this issue), but in Australia, this kind of co-creative orientation to media production is widespread in community arts and cultural development networks. It is also found in community broadcasting and in hybrid community media arts networks (Shea 2011) that have flourished in the open source cultures of the internet. Our methods of data collection included interviews with leading organisations and practitioners in these networks, mapping these networks, and participant observation of exchanges between these networks (see Edmond in this issue). It also included case studies and a small number of co-creative media experiments, undertaken in collaboration with these practitioner networks. As our research progressed it became apparent that the significance of co-creative media activity lay in its incredible diversity – of applications, forms, participants, platforms, practices purposes and publics. We could identify the common, interconnecting, characteristics of co-creative media (listed above) but also found many points of disconnection across community-based media networks. The contours of this diversity, and associated constraints, are outlined in the following discussion of key ‘co-creative intermediaries’.

Co-creative intermediaries

Co-creative methods of digital storytelling have been taken up in a range of service sectors and professional communication contexts, including education (Robin 2006), public health

(Gubrium 2009) and public culture (Thumim 2009) and, a growing interest in corporate contexts and professional communication disciplines of marketing, public relations and advertising (Forman 2013). These developments open up exciting transformational opportunities in the design and delivery of services and are worthy of investigation in their own right. Our study was limited to the core drivers of co-creative media adoption and adaptation in Australia: the networks of independent media arts practitioners, community media producers, and community arts, media and cultural development organisations.

These networks of practitioners and organisations are very entrepreneurial in the way that they secure resources for co-creative media activity through commissions, private and public philanthropy, and project-based funding. Since 2006, a dozen or so extremely high achieving organisations that have ‘demonstrated outstanding leadership and success in community arts and cultural development’ (Australia Council n.d.), have also received program funding from the Community Partnerships section of the Australia Council for the Arts. Organisations that attract this support are identified by the Australia Council as ‘Key Producers’. The Australia Council helps to sustain the community partnerships of Key Producers for up to six years, and longer, if they are re-funded. The Community Partnerships section also supports shorter-term project activity, as well as coordination and strategic development of the Key Producer network and the wider community cultural development sector.

Another important co-creative media intermediary has been the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI). ACMI was an early adopter of digital storytelling in its public program activities, and had an important role in propagating the uptake of co-creative media in Australian arts and public culture agencies and networks, such as libraries and museums (Simondson 2009). It has hosted two international digital storytelling conferences (the most recent in association with the industry partners and universities in the research project reported here) and trained a generation of community media arts practitioners in co-creative methods. ACMI continues to facilitate a considerable amount of co-creative media outreach activity. It also includes digital stories in its screen culture collection. ACMI is also a leading innovator in co-creative media production methods and platforms. It has applied insights arising from early experiments in digital storytelling to new initiatives, including ‘15 Second Place’ and ‘Generator’.³ Other arts and public cultural networks continue to experiment with digital storytelling methods for a variety of purposes (Burgess, Klæbe & McWilliam 2010).

Media organisations and networks are now also emerging as important co-creative intermediaries. Interest in co-creative media methods and storytelling practices was found in every sector of Australian media to varying degrees. This is not to suggest that co-creative methods have been widely taken up, or that they are as well developed in media contexts as they are in community cultural development contexts. For example, a desire to engage with co-creative media theory and practice was quite often limited to individual producers, or specific programs or platforms in media networks, and was not necessarily evident in the cultural fabric of media organisations. This interest can nonetheless be understood as part of the negotiation that precipitates and accompanies the incorporation (or not) of co-creative approaches into media organisations and networks. These findings are illustrated in the following discussion of examples drawn from Key Producer organisations, community

³ ‘15 Second Place’ is available at <http://15secondplace.acmi.net.au/> and ‘Generator’ at <http://generator.acmi.net.au/>.

broadcasting, public service broadcasting, commercial broadcasting services, and an expanding array of new community media arts configurations.

Community Partnerships supported by the Australia Council for the Arts

Two recent examples of co-creative media, facilitated with Community Partnerships support, are considered here for the purpose of illustrating different points in a spectrum of contemporary co-creative media practice that have developed in the community cultural development rubric. Neither of these examples are instances of orthodox digital storytelling, but both used co-creative media methods to powerfully communicate ‘new’ stories. The facilitating organisations are recognised lead practitioners in co-creative media production methods.

The first example is *Reframing Culture*, a co-creative documentary project facilitated by Change Media for the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority. This 18 minute documentary was produced in four days, during a South Australian regional arts conference held on the traditional lands of the Ngarrindjeri people in late 2012. It was part of a larger capacity-building initiative intended to support Ngarrindjeri along the path of establishing a media hub (Change Media n.d.). Indigenous participants worked with the conventions of documentary film to assume positions of authority, behind and in front of the camera. Participants also made recurrent, stylised use of a picture frame, located in Ngarrindgeri traditional lands and hands, to powerfully challenge non-indigenous viewers to re-frame the way we think about the impact of colonisation on indigenous cultures. The participants in this project chose to work with documentary, a genre with which they were familiar and in which they wanted to build capacity. It was well-matched to the particular media cultures in which the *Reframing Culture* collaborators participate, and seek to participate. This choice also invites the question, ‘how might co-creative media facilitators collaborate with communities with affiliations to different media cultures and preferences, for example, for using new media platforms and non-linear narrative structures, such as those found in computer gameplay?’

One illustration of how this challenge has been met is provided in the collaboration between the remote West Australian indigenous community of Roebourne and arts and social change company, Big hART. *Neomad* is one of many outcomes from this collaboration. It is a beautifully animated interactive comic that has had a number of titles released as iPad applications. A teaser for the first title can be easily accessed online. Gameplay in the teaser takes place against a dystopic desert backdrop reminiscent of a *Mad Max* film set but which is, in fact, based upon the real-world playground of *Neomad*’s young co-creators. Game characters are the ‘Love Punks’, the fantastic alter-egos of the game creators who reveal themselves, and their highly energetic contemporary cultural vitality, through gameplay adventure. The *Neomad* series is just one of a suite of multi-platform storytelling initiatives facilitated by Big hART as part of the Yijala Yala project. This long term, arts-based collaboration caters to the media preferences and interests of the various sub-cultures that make up the Roebourne community (Myers 2012). It develops and uses digital media and content creation capacity in video, theatre, games and music, to communicate ‘the story of the community’s culture, history and future’ and to explore ‘the inter-connection between past, present and future, young people and older generations, ancient and modern culture’ (Yijala

Yala n.d.). The Yijala Yala project is in turn funded from a variety of sources including mining companies, which comprise the major industry of the region. To date, it seems to tentatively answer in the affirmative another question that motivates the project: 'Is it possible to work with mining companies to enhance a cultural resources boom with local indigenous communities to provide opportunities for future generations to cross between both cultures?' (Big hART n.d.).

Both *Framing Culture* and *Neomad* are co-creative collaborations based on extended partnerships with the participating communities. Both projects facilitate knowledge creation (through original stories), multi-directional knowledge transfer (between collaborators and to different publics), creative excellence, and storyteller ownership of story production and dissemination processes, in addition to intellectual property arrangements. Indeed, both initiatives were very mindful of the politics and risks of 'story theft' and 'story mining' – a critique that is levelled at certain kinds of collaborative storytelling practices and outcomes that are regarded as exploitative within Key Producer networks (Lyons-Reid and Cuddell n.d.).

Community broadcasting

Australian broadcasting services are provided by networks of public, commercial and community licensees. The numerically largest and most diverse of these sectors is the community broadcasting sector. There are over 300 licensed, community-owned and programmed services that are operated on a not-for profit basis by nearly 20,000 volunteers and 1000 paid staff (CBOnline n.d.; Australian Government 2010). The Australian community broadcasting movement is built upon a philosophical commitment to enabling media participation by groups and individuals who, historically, have not been well-served by commercial or public service media. Services have been developed by and for identity-based communities (for example, indigenous, ethnic, religious, vision impaired, music, education, gender and sexuality, and other communities of interest) as well as geographically proximate communities. Many special interest services have also established sub-sector coordination agencies to pursue their specific interests in content and service development, as well as public policy.

There are various accounts of the benefits of community broadcasting arising from the opportunities for self-representation that the sector affords (Meadows, Forde, Ewart & Foxwell 2005). Because most stations are based in non-metropolitan areas, community broadcasting has also been shown to provide important local news and information services tailored for specific communities that might otherwise not be available to them (Meadows 2013: 45-46; 52). The sector is also recognised as a major site of formal and informal broadcast training, and an important entry point for anyone with professional media ambitions (Rennie 2007). The sector has been an engine for broadcast media diversification and innovation (Rennie 2006: 99-131), and has made significant, far-reaching contributions in many areas including niche programming, program format development, work practices and spectrum efficiency.

Community broadcasting is philosophically aligned with community arts and cultural development (White 2012a). In many respects, the two movements can be understood as

parallel networks, with intersecting and overlapping histories, interests and personnel. They animate radical critiques of media cultures, including the politics and practices of representation, participation and production. The influence of pre-existing media cultures in shaping community broadcasting content – especially the tension between emulating and challenging professional values and practices – has been the subject of recurrent debate within the sector (Van Vuuren 2008). Arguably, actual production practices have not enjoyed the same level of sustained, critical consideration among program makers as has occurred in community arts and cultural development networks. There are numerous plausible explanations for this, including heavy reliance upon volunteers. Program makers are not as well-networked across the sector as their stations. There is also a tendency to conflate participation with co-creative media facilitation in storytelling, especially as it is understood in the digital storytelling movement. Indeed, we found very uneven comprehension of co-creative media methods amongst coalface community broadcasting producers. Some producers were very open to moving beyond the suite of established representational media practices and learning more about how to design for collaborative storytelling. Others saw themselves as little more than conduits for user-generated content, operating on the problematic, ‘build it and they will come’, presumption (Hearn, Tacchi, Foth & Lennie 2009: 160). This was not the case at the level of sector coordinating bodies, however, where there was an acute awareness of the complex politics of participation and a great deal of energy invested in developing sector-level services – including training, program exchange and supply, and community development. The demands of securing spectrum and maintaining broadcasting resources also place a considerable burden on stations, as do the challenges of integrating new platforms, including the internet and digital radio, into service development. These activities often consume the lion’s share of financial and technical capacity for most stations. The countervailing consequence, however, is that community broadcasting routinely conducts rudimentary, quantitative audience research and uses this evidence to justify the opportunity-costs of their claims on spectrum and related public support (CBOnline n.d). There is also, as yet, unrealised potential to ask more ‘interesting questions’ about audiences, and to engage with other digital community media practitioner networks (Letch 2010). Despite these limits, this research activity is an important reason why community broadcasters appear to be better equipped and able to transparently account for their public reach and impact than community arts and cultural development networks.

These comments can be contextualised by talking briefly about the way that digital storytelling has been incorporated into the programming and production practices of one community radio station. FBi is a very active and well-supported, music and youth-oriented, sub-metropolitan community radio station, based in the affluent eastern suburbs of Sydney. It’s reach and influence far exceeds its relatively small broadcast service area, partly due to its programming innovations, and also partly due to its effective use of all other available platforms. FBi puts its content into circulation through social media, web-based streaming and ‘on-demand’ services, and its participation in the community broadcasting sector’s distribution and sustaining service, the Community Radio Network. FBi is not alone in driving multiplatform development in community broadcasting, but two important innovations, relevant to this discussion, are singled out for consideration here. First is the storytelling program *All the Best* and second is the use of digital storytelling to experiment with, and popularise, digital radio.

All The Best (ATB) is a loose adaptation of the very successful US National Public Radio

program, *This American Life*. *ATB* is a weekly, one hour program dedicated to exploring radio as a storytelling medium and encouraging experimentation among a new generation of storytellers. The program was initiated at FBi by a team of volunteer producers and is presently co-produced with Melbourne community media organisation and community radio licensee, SYN. *ATB* producers work within community-based contexts to source new stories and have used a variety of co-creative methods in their various collaborations with different groups and organisations. Program producers have also collaborated with other sector coordinating agencies to achieve a range of outcomes for participants, that involve more than simply having their life stories ‘captured’ for inclusion in *ATB*. For example, *ATB* producers worked closely with one of the community broadcasting sector’s Registered Training Organisations, the Community Media Training Organisation, to facilitate a conversation with young migrants in the western suburbs of Sydney, who had recently arrived in Australia, about how they could benefit from being involved in the program. As a result, media production training was embedded in a mentorship program that was tailored to the specific needs and interests of participants. It also included training for existing FBi producers in mentoring participants. As General Manager of the Community Media Training Organisation explained, the intention was to meet, head-on, the paternalistic potential of digital storytelling:

Why should Indigenous and ethnic youth of Western Sydney come in to tell their stories? Why can't they make stories about you? You know, and how you exclude them all the time? (T)he only way that the 'other' is represented is to represent themselves, you know. It's either be represented by an anthropologist or you're only ever asked to talk about yourself. You're not asked for the commentary on the 'why' of the world (Joseph 2011).

Some of the most notable successes of *ATB* have been in developing the professional career pathways for its volunteer staff. The achievements of *ATB* and its producers have been recognised within and beyond the community broadcasting sector. In 2011, Gina McKeon received the Young Journalist of the Year Walkley Award for one of her contributions to *ATB*. One of the program’s first volunteer contributing producers, Jesse Cox, also transitioned into a professional media pathway and is presently producing and presenting a new storytelling program for ABC Radio National called *Long Story Short*.

Before leaving FBi to pursue a career with this national public service broadcaster, Cox contributed to another experiment that adapted digital storytelling for use as a digital radio format. The collaboration was driven by a small team of producers - drawn from FBi, community media arts, and the University of Technology, Sydney - who together created *Radio with Pictures* as part of the 2012 Graphic Festival. Metropolitan community radio services have been developing program formats for digital radio since 2010 (Spurgeon, Rennie & Fung 2011). Even though sub-metropolitan community radio services have been formally excluded from digital radio spectrum allocations for the time being, ‘Radio with Pictures’ FBi’s involvement challenged this setting in this experiment with the ancillary data capacity of digital radio to transmit still images and thereby extend the storytelling possibilities of the new platform (White 2012b). *ATB* facilitated collaborations between writers, comic, graphic and fine artists to co-create digital stories. The works were compiled in a live-broadcast event, staged at the Sydney Opera House. Tickets for the live event sold out, so a ‘listening party’ was organised, the likes of which probably haven’t been seen since the introduction of colour television, to cater for the overflow demand. *Radio with Pictures*

brought together intersecting creative communities of practice to co-create new media, and simultaneously constituted new publics for this work. In the process of working in, with and through practitioner networks, collaborating event co-creators also successfully straddled various community/arts/media policy silos that are intended to support these sectors, but also separate them.

Public Service Broadcasters

Australia boasts two public service broadcasters: the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) that deliver a multiplicity of radio, TV and online services. Both organisations have active interests in co-creative media. For example, the SBS relied upon community-based organisations to rapidly build capacity to establish multilingual radio and multicultural television services from the 1980s. SBS's continuing interest in self-representational media is reflected in its current tag, 'Seven billion stories and counting...'. Most recently, National Indigenous TV (NITV) has been brought under the SBS umbrella. NITV commissions and acquires most of its content from indigenous independent producers and media organisations, many of which are community-based. Like other public service broadcasters before it (notably BBC Wales – see Thumim 2013), the ABC has experimented with user-generated and social media for a number of years. *Heywire* is an online forum for non-metropolitan young people, and encourages contributors to complete for places in an annual Youth Summit (Mackay 2013). ABC Pool was a notable, research-driven initiative that explored the possibilities of online collaboration and co-creation with creative communities (Wilson, Hutchinson & Shea 2010).⁴ It was discontinued in 2013, in part due to the development of ABC Open, a new online service focused on applying participatory media approaches to diversify, and increase the relevance of services, available in regional areas. This discussion focuses on ABC Open.

ABC Open was established in 2009 as part of a longer term strategy to build digital media capacity in regional Australia in advance of a nation-wide rollout of broadband infrastructure (DBCDE 2009). The initiative contributed to developing the human capacity for the larger nation-building broadband project by seeking to turn regional ABC production centres into broadband hubs capable of supporting the ideals of universal access, localised cultural connection and public participation. It acknowledged the capacity of the ABC to develop and support a distributed network of creative, story-centred producers who could facilitate self-representation through content creation. Some 48 multimedia producers are now based in regional towns around Australia, and 'facilitate storytelling by regional Australians through a whole lot of different media' (Dwyer 2012). They train people and collaborate with individuals and communities to create and curate content. They experiment with different methods of using media to bring communities together, including co-creative media. Most of this content is published on the ABC Open website, but it is also distributed through other ABC radio, TV and social media channels.

ABC Online producers provide a responsive, community-based multimedia resource that can assist with devising novel solutions to highly localised problems. For example, a year after the

⁴ Information about ABC Pool is available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/pool/>

most devastating cyclone in Australia's modern history wreaked havoc on the Queensland coastal towns of Tully and Cardwell, a local community development worker seized a funding opportunity to use a participatory media method to renew social connectivity amongst school students and their wider communities. A very small amount of mental health funding was secured to assist these communities to learn about the resilience of their young people, through creative expression and community engagement. Students across the region were offered the opportunity to 'describe, explain and experience those moments, relationships, places of things which helped them feel safe, hopeful and positive during and post cyclone Yasi' (Dryden 2012). The intention was to create an exhibition of student photos and stories of coping with Yasi, using a very simple digital storytelling technique. However, neither the schools nor other agencies participating in the project had the necessary multimedia skills or the capacity to teach them. This changed with the discovery of the local ABC Open producer. His participation in this small, but very important, community project was crucial to its success. In addition to being locally exhibited, a very moving compilation of 'Little Voices, Big Stories' (ABC Open 2012) continues to be accessible through ABC Online.

The extension of public service broadcasting into online platforms has been contested by commercial media who regard them as competitors at a time when advertiser-funded business models are under considerable pressure (Franklin 2001; Murdoch 2009). However, the reality of media markets in many parts of regional Australia is that the economic incentives to supply local stories are, at best, negligible. Interest in the potential of user-generated content to address this under-supply of public informational goods is understandable and, arguably, this is the space that community broadcasting also occupies. Indeed, ABC Open's use of co-creative methods troubles the delineation between community and public broadcasting services (Dwyer 2012). However, ABC Open is nonetheless an important evolving experiment in online public service broadcasting. This is an important point of contrast with the community broadcasting sector which is quite mature in comparison. As 'Little Voices, Big Stories' also illustrates, building capacity for self-representation and media participation often requires expert facilitation. The will to generate content alone, is not always enough.

Commercial broadcasters

In the process of radically complicating and closing the gap between users and producers, new commercial media and entertainment operators, such as social media and massively multiplayer online games, have come to rely upon a variety of co-creation strategies (Burgess & Banks 2010). Many of these developments have been anticipated in the deep history of 'democratic-participatory innovation' that shapes contemporary media (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali 2013), and in which community media movements have been important participants in the post-WWII period (Rennie 2006), if not longer. These developments have also challenged the influence, if not the business models, of commercial broadcast media. Commercial broadcasters have always relied upon audiences to provide popular programming 'inputs', ranging from music requests, to quiz and talent show contestants, talkback contributors, funny home video, votes, and text message content for TV straplines. However, even in the era of 'mass conversation' (Spurgeon 2008) participation in commercial broadcast media does not usually extend to co-creative media practices or forms, such as those exemplified in digital storytelling. Co-creative media are usually constituted as an

oppositional, critical media practice. Outcomes such as digital stories are not usually popular, predictable or easily produced, and are usually intended for small, often uncertain, and limited publics. Nonetheless, commercial media do have co-creative media involvements. This discussion focuses on the relationship that one community cultural development organisation has succeeded in establishing with a pay TV channel to co-produce a program that aims to showcase talent and content developed in and through the use of co-creative media methods and community arts and cultural development networks.

ICE (Information + Cultural Exchange) is based in the Western suburbs of Sydney, which are ethnically very mixed, and include areas of considerable social and economic disadvantage. ICE has also been a beneficiary of Australia Council Key Producer funding, and digital storytelling is one of its foundational community cultural development practices. ICE facilitates storytelling through workshops and multi-platform exhibitions of work, including festivals, broadcast media and online. As part of its commitment to building the storytelling capacity of culturally and linguistically diverse populations it also facilitates access to professional media training and development opportunities. It has an enterprise centre that supports the incubation of small creative media start-ups and runs a number of programs that assist keen participants drawn from ICE's community-based activities along a pro-am trajectory into culture and media-based enterprises. As a result of these activities, ICE has built up important formal and informal networks of association with independent TV producers, many with national production credits and on-going relationships with public service and commercial broadcasters. Through these connections the opportunity opened up for ICE to co-produce a monthly community arts program, called *Chatterbox*, with FOXTEL's community channel, Aurora (ICE n.d.).

At the time of writing *Chatterbox* was in its third series, with a one hour program being produced and broadcast on Aurora on monthly basis. The format is a hosted magazine-style and is mainly comprised of reportage on community-based arts and artists. ICE describes 'Chatterbox,' as a storytelling 'showcase' for the community cultural development sector (Balachandran 2012). It brings to light 'less-heard community voices and happenings', often in delightfully engaging and original ways. For example, a regular segment produced by Jerome Pearce for the 2013 series, called 'Not Just Pixels', looked at the work of Instagram photographers. For one 'Not Just Pixels' segment, Jerome worked with Rania, a young female photographer whom Jerome had been following for 'a long time', and whose subjects are a parkour group called Team9lives(ICE 2013). Rania clearly negotiated the terms of her participation in the segment, including public revelation of her full identity. A Twitter exchange on a smart phone screen is cleverly used as a device to reveal her interactions with Jerome. We see Rania at work, but her face is never seen. Only her voice is heard. Subtle and empathetic editing reveals a personal story about movement photography practice that is as strong and compelling as Rania's images. Production values for the segment, and *Chatterbox* as a whole, are commensurate with a professionally produced arts magazine program. The presentation is energetic, youthful and polished.

In 2012 Aurora entered into a program-sharing agreement with the UK Community Channel. As a result of this agreement, 'Chatterbox' is now also available to British audiences (FOXTEL Insider 2012). In his analysis of British cultural politics since the 1960s, George McKay argues that the Community Channel illustrates three different ways in which the 'new economy' draws community development into partnership with government and capital

(McKay 2010: 50). Initially established with government funding in 2000, the Community Channel provides a platform for content emanating from ‘third sector’ voluntary, charity and non-profit organisations, including community-based media. Since 2004 a variety of national and transnational media organisations have pledged support to the Community Channel, including the BBC, ITV, Sky, Discovery, MTV, Disney and Joost. Consequently the Community Channel is now carried on free-to-air, satellite and cable platforms and services (Community Channel n.d.). The Community Channel seeks to offer a ‘critical alternative’ to its commercial and public service supporters, while simultaneously cooperating with them, and also integrating with them. McKay observes that the experience of the Community Channel shows that ‘the notion of “community”, as understood by activists for social engagement and change, can be surprisingly easily co-opted and de-constructed’, and suggests that activists, ‘must evaluate for themselves the extent to which such a pact is worth making, and what may be lost, in the chase for wider dissemination of community television programs’ (McKay 2010: 51).

It would appear that Aurora was initially conceived along the lines of the Community Channel, having first being proposed by FOXTEL as a part of a package of undertakings to mitigate the anti-competitive consequences of a program supply arrangement with other Australian pay TV operators (but subsequently rejected by the competition regulator, see ACCC n.d.). Even though Aurora remains the only community TV service in Australia with national reach, many community activists generally reject its claims to ‘community’, and regard it as a commercial channel because of its very close association with FOXTEL (Rennie, Berkeley & Murphet 2010: 19). ICE has taken a different view. It regards the Foxtel association as an important professional credit for participating *Chatterbox* co-creators. In the context of providing a pathway from amateur to professional recognition for the program’s (mostly) young participants, ICE has seized the opportunity to cooperate with Aurora. *Chatterbox* seeks to balance the benefits of national and international exposure with the compromises for community ownership and audience development that accompany such exposure. Importantly, ICE also pursues ‘grass roots’ co-creative media collaborations in a range of other projects and programs of activity.

Community Media

Not all practitioner networks considered so far would necessarily identify as ‘community media’ (Rennie 2006) but all could nonetheless be described as such. Indeed, Key Producer organisations such as Feral Arts and CuriousWorks highlight a distinct trend to mediatization of community arts and cultural development. Feral Arts uses co-creative media methods such as digital storytelling to build capacity in on and offline communities, and has developed a proprietary, web-based content management system and public interfaces to facilitate this activity.⁵ Conversely, CuriousWorks relies upon open source software and hacktivist culture to support the blending of new media arts and co-creative media methods in its formal and informal training engagements in school and community settings.⁶

⁵ See <http://www.feralarts.com.au/>.

⁶ See: <http://www.curiousworks.com.au/stories/blog/welcome/>

The term 'community media' also helps to describe another range of co-creative intermediaries that can also be differentiated from community arts and cultural development, community broadcasting, public service, and commercial media. This is a useful exercise for the purpose of illustrating the extraordinary diversity and growth of co-creative media that is occurring in Australia.

Beyond formal media and arts sectors there are a range of other co-creative media practitioner networks also engaged in building participatory media cultures. These are often cause-driven and often NGO-supported. For example, Indymedia was created at the height of the anti-globalisation movement at the turn of the Millennium as an 'open news' platform (Meikle 2002). It enabled real time citizen journalism and was a crucial antecedent to wikis, blogs and other 'web 2.0' building blocks. Creative Commons licensing is another invention of open source culture that has helped to focus community and co-creative media attention on questions of story ownership and rights, if not to provide practical solutions to these challenges in many instances. These developments have enabled international solidarity networks to proactively mediatise, and to incorporate participatory tactics and methods as core social change and justice strategies. One illustration of the capacity of these networks to constitute and connect with new publics is found in the example of human rights organisation, Witness, which has partnered with the social media news service Storyful and YouTube to curate YouTube's human rights channel.⁷

From its base in Australia, EngageMedia is also using social media and storytelling to build solidarity networks to help develop community media capacity and support human rights, social justice and environmental causes in South East Asia and the Pacific. EngageMedia curate online publication of digital stories, and also operate in the field to support training and capacity building in the communities they participate in. EngageMedia partner with other activist organisations, including Witness, in a range of activities, and have developed many novel methods to make co-creative media outputs accessible to supporters around the world.⁸ For example, 'Love Letter to the Soldier' was created in 2011 as part of EngageMedia's 'Papuan Voices' project, with translation and subtitling for this story subsequently crowd-sourced (EngageMedia 2012). 'Papuan Voices' aims to draw attention to human rights abuses occurring on Australia's doorstep in Indonesian West Papua (Irian Jaya). The post-colonial experience in West Papua has been far from happy or peaceful, but nor is it uncomplicated as this digital story shows. The storyteller is a Papuan woman, Samsul, who tells of the price she has paid for loving an Indonesian soldier who was based for a time in her village on the Papua New Guinea-Indonesian border. In her own language and words Samsul tells of her love for the soldier and their child that he has never met. Samsul speaks of the poverty and social ostracism that she endures as a single mother, and wants the soldier to return. However, Samsul does not know where the soldier is, or how to contact him. The open letter, communicated in the digital story form, is Samsul's best chance for reaching the soldier with news of her plight.

⁷ See <http://www.youtube.com/user/Humanrights>.

⁸ See <http://www.engagemedia.org/about-us>

Concluding comments

Funding agencies such as the Australia council for the Arts have made considerable investments in co-creative media and want to improve their knowledge of the extent and scope of co-creative media in order to better understand the impact of this investment, for example, how it might contribute to the development of participatory media cultures. Measuring this kind of social change is problematic (MacDowell 2012). It is nonetheless possible to map the contours of the impact of this investment in Australian media culture, and to comment upon how knowledge about co-creative media practice circulates, as well as the enabling role of digital media in the circulation of co-creative media.

Co-creative media methods circulate through all media sectors and systems. Dedicated media and communications infrastructure is important to this end (for example community broadcasting, and internet-based channels). However, the communicative intent underpinning co-creative media activity can also constrain circulation and commodification of co-creative media productions. For example, digital stories are quite often made for viewing by micro-publics in contexts outside the media systems considered here, such as festivals, and private screenings of stand-alone DVDs. Non-economic factors also shape the motivations of facilitating producers and community-based participants alike, and include creative expression, and social inclusion through self-representation. Personal and professional development figure more prominently as motivating factors in widespread experimentation with different media and communications platforms, including public service, commercial and social media (from iTunes, to commercial TV, to YouTube) to create and connect with new and existing publics, often constituted as communities of interest and identity.

Three distinct, but intersecting practitioner networks have been identified here as engines of participatory media culture: community cultural development, community broadcasting and community media. Expertise in co-creative media methods is shown to be important to all three networks, and to transfer from these networks into other public and commercial media cultures. Knowledge of co-creative media best practice is often tacitly embodied in practitioners, and most commonly developed 'on the job'. Knowledge transfer most commonly occurs through the movement of practitioners across networks, projects and along pro-am career pathways. Various co-ordinating agencies also attempt to codify this knowledge to facilitate more widespread adoption. For example, Feral Arts supports a number of communities of practice in its Place Stories platform (www.placestories.com), and the Community Media Training Organisation has established an Audio Lab of 'best practice' case studies.⁹ Formal awards also encourage practitioners to reflect upon best practice and to communicate achievements in the process of seeking recognition. These practitioner networks also exist in 'co-opetive' relations with each other, as well as other media networks (Hearn, Roodhouse & Blakey 2007: 432). This means that there is evidence of cooperation within and across these networks, but also of limits to cooperation arising from divergent interests in media participation and competition for resources. This is also reflected in the historical 'silos' of community cultural development and broadcasting policy. On the one hand this has ensured funding continuity for both community cultural development and community broadcasting, but it also appears to constrain information exchange across these networks and opportunities for mutually beneficial strategic engagements around co-creative media.

⁹ See <http://www.cmta.org.au/index.php/audiolab>.

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