



Co-creative Media in Remote Indigenous Communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines co-creative video outputs that have originated from, or relate to, remote Indigenous communities in Australia. Scholarly work on remote media has mostly operated at the interface of media studies and anthropology, seeking to identify how cultural systems shape the production, distribution and reception of media in Aboriginal communities. This paper looks instead at content themes, funding sources and institutions during the 2010-2013 period, and examines the factors that may be determining the quantity of co-creative outputs, as well as the types of stories that get produced. I argue that the focus on culture has obscured important shifts in remote media policy and funding, including a trend towards content designed to address social disadvantage.

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Introduction

Media projects are a prominent feature in a significant number of Australia's Indigenous communities. At the basic level of visible goings on, in places where much of daily life is hidden from outsiders, these can appear as optimistic endeavours of enterprise and industry. Some media projects are permanent, housed amongst the rundown dwellings and minimal service infrastructure typical of most settlements (clinic, office, school). Others are set up temporarily and transported by creative workers between communities, towns and cities. Increasingly, media outputs are initiated by organisations that do not necessarily consider media to be their core business.

In this paper I examine the low cost, co-creative video content produced in remote communities and provide an account of the groups involved, funding sources and content genres. The content, typically short form and of local concern, has been created with the participation of the community. As I discuss below, such content was once the domain of a limited number of Indigenous broadcasting groups, justified for the purposes of cultural maintenance. The sample analysed here, taken between 2010-2013, shows an expanded field, including video that was produced and distributed by content makers from the arts sphere, as well as endeavours such as youth engagement aimed at overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

At a time when remote Indigenous media organisations have fewer resources to create community video content of their own determination, projects intended to produce social outcomes abound. I suggest that this trend reflects changes in the nation's relationship with remote Australia, from self-determination to social need. In the second half of the paper I address the implications for Indigenous media research, and suggest that our intellectual preoccupation with cultural difference has obscured these developments.

Defining Co-creative Media

In broadest terms, participative media signifies direct representation in the media (by individuals or groups) through content creation, enabling those who would otherwise be consumers of media to be part of the production and distribution process. Co-creative media is a subset of participative media that involves collaboration between professionals and non-professionals and is thus distinct from more 'spontaneous' forms of user-generated content. Such media projects are often conducted in workshop settings, and involve specific narrative devices such as digital storytelling (Hartley and McWilliam, 2009) and digital media skills training. The general aim is to enable participants to produce succinct content outputs, often planned around a specific theme or event. The end point may or may not involve public distribution; in some cases the process of making media is an end in itself, intended as a

therapeutic exercise or as skills development.

Co-creative media is a domain that interacts with remote Australia whilst overlapping with other projects and values. These endeavours circulate with and through a people and their place, and find legitimacy as a response to the conditions of remote communities. By defining co-creative media in such a way – as a social technology rather than as an expressive form – I do not wish to undermine Indigenous peoples' agency when they participate in these developments. My focus, however, is not on the motives of remote community residents or their perception of the utility of media and cultural exchange more broadly (for an analysis of these questions see Deger 2006). Instead, I wish to look at how an idea of Indigenous 'culture' is constructed through these projects, granted restorative powers and recruited into the work of the various industries that function off the plight, as well as the intrigue, of remote Australia.

Although co-creative content is generally considered a relatively new phenomenon of digital media, the projects discussed here need to be seen within a larger history of technological encounters, brought into remote communities through deliberate mechanisms. In particular, video projects have been carried out in remote communities since the mid-1980s. These were a response to the unstructured flow of videocassettes into communities and the perceived threat of the introduction of satellite television. Media content creation thus arrived into remote communities in a co-creative fashion before such a term existed in media studies (instead it was treated as community television content). I choose to use the term co-creative, in part because it overcomes connotations of authenticity that accompanied earlier intellectual work, as discussed below.

Method

The sample I have chosen (shown in table 1) represents a substantial portion of the organisations involved in co-creative media in remote Indigenous communities, but it is unlikely to be the complete field. The organisations and their projects were included because they were grant recipients, because their media outputs were shared on sites like IndigiTube, or they were identified as part of wider research into co-creative media production in Australia (ARC LP110100127²). All were active between 2010 and 2013. The majority of organisations work primarily (often exclusively) with Indigenous communities, but some routinely work with a variety of other Australian communities. For some organisations media production is the main focus, for others media production is only one aspect of a broader arts development or heritage project (that is, where media workshops exist alongside other arts, craft and storytelling workshops).

The sample illustrates clear patterns, demonstrating where this kind of media is being made, how it is being distributed, who is funding it, and who is facilitating it. However, as the data was sourced through publicly available information there is still much that is not known about the projects themselves. Some information was provided in grant reports, annual reports, on organisation websites, or in the content itself (where it was available for viewing online). A great deal of information is not reported or publicised, and not all media outputs are available

² <http://digitalstorytelling.ci.qut.edu.au/linkage>

for viewing by the general public. Furthermore, organisations that did not receive funding, or received funding from somewhere other than the known funding sources, could not be captured through this research method. I have excluded projects that were made for historical purposes, such as oral histories gathered by land councils for native title purposes. A small number of these projects would qualify as co-creative content but it is not necessarily clear from their project descriptions.

Some groups, including Indigenous broadcasters, generate additional content outside of project funding. I have attempted to account for these in the description of the content produced, but have not counted the separate productions of broadcasters in this first level analysis. Maura Edmond, who assisted with data collection, has coded facilitating organisations as being Indigenous or non-Indigenous (based on self-descriptions). Finally, we coded each entry by the type of organisation facilitating the workshop (such as community cultural development organisations, Indigenous corporations and state cultural institutions).

Overview of co-creative content in remote Australia, 2010-2013

What is the extent of co-creative media output by or about remote Australia and what does it look like? An initial observation is that remote Indigenous media forms a significant proportion of all co-creative Indigenous media content. From a cursory scan of all funded projects involving Indigenous communities (100 in total, not captured in the list of organisations in table 1), those conducted in remote and very remote areas make up around 60%. The second thing to note is that, in terms of the organisations producing remote content, a roughly equal proportion defined themselves as Indigenous organisations to those that did not (3 were not known).

The remote content was produced by a total of 35 organisations, the largest group being community and cultural development (CACD) organisations (12 in total), followed by remote Indigenous broadcasting organisations (6), Indigenous arts and heritage groups (5), community services (3), Indigenous corporations (3), educational institutions (2), government cultural institutions (2), as well as one screen resource centre, and one Indigenous philanthropic organisation. Although this list is not exhaustive it demonstrates the kinds of organisations most likely to be accessing funding for remote co-creative content.

Funding

The funding sources and their recipients demonstrate that co-creative media is a more distributed system than the Indigenous visual arts domain, which is largely centrally coordinated. Funding sources included 4 commonwealth media, arts, heritage and youth grants³, as well as state level screen and arts funding. Of known funding sources for projects

³ The specific grant bodies are the Indigenous Heritage Program in the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities; the Indigenous Cultural Support Program in the former Department of Regional Australia; Local Government, Arts and Sport, the Australia Council's Community Partnership's Board; the Youth Development and Support Program in the Department of

(42 in total), the majority of projects were accessing government arts funding (21), government other (including community media funding, 10), screen funding via broadcasters (such as National Indigenous Television (NITV) and the Special Broadcasting service (SBS), 6), and philanthropy and royalties (4). Only one project was identified as having accessed screen agency funding. Some programs received funding via the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), including funding from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (mining royalties) which is administered by FaHCSIA.

Funding via the Indigenous Broadcasting Program (IBP), currently administered by the department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, provides core funding for remote Indigenous broadcasting organisations. However, since 2007 this funding has been for radio only, with the expectation that NITV would fund remote video content. As a result, funding from the IBP was not a significant source of funding for co-creative video projects during this period, but it did contribute to general staffing and infrastructure costs for Remote Indigenous Media Organisations (RIMOs, see below). The time period examined in this paper thus represents a particularly difficult moment for the remote media sector, compounded by the fact that ICTV was not fully operational for some of this period (see Rennie 2013). The Community Broadcasting Foundation administers a small amount of funds for community television productions (\$300,000 per annum since 2011). The commonwealth-derived funding supports a limited level of content production, accessible to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups for content that is screened on a community television platform.

Remote Indigenous Broadcasters

The remote Indigenous broadcasting sector consists of small local broadcasting units in remote communities (Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services or RIBS) and RIMOs, which have responsibility for the RIBS in their region. These services have continued to produce video content despite their video funding being redirected to radio and the termination of terrestrial television in all remote communities (by the end of 2013). The remote media sector uses web and satellite technology to distribute its content (including Indigitube and ICTV). Remote media organisations are accessing outside sources of funding for some co-creative video content. For instance, Indigenous broadcasters including the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri Media (PAW Media, formerly the Warlpiri Media Association) and Goolarri Media Enterprises⁴ all received funding via FaHCSIA for media, training and media-related events during this period.

Remote Indigenous video production first commenced in the 1980s, established as experiments by educators and researchers in the central Australian communities of Ernabella and Yuendumu. In both instances, the intention was to create structures for Indigenous people to make media on their own terms. The history of remote video and television is too intricate

Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; and the Community Broadcasting Foundation's TV Content grants.

⁴ Goolarri Media Enterprises is an Indigenous media organization based in Broome that runs both a community radio station and an open narrowcasting television station. It is considered a 'town station' rather than a RIMO, but works closely with PAKAM.

to recount here, although there is further discussion of the research related to this sector below (see also Meadows 1992; Molnar and Meadows 2001; Rennie and Featherstone 2008). During the period in question there were eight RIMOs and 147 RIBS. Four RIMOs are based in large towns or cities: the Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasters Association (TEABBA) in Darwin, CAAMA in Alice Springs, Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media (PAKAM) in Broome and Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media (QRAM) in Cairns. The Torres Strait Islander Media Association (TSIMA) is based in the township of Thursday Island, a small town of approximately 2600 people. PAW, Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (PY) Media and Ngaanyatjarra (NG) Media are all located in smaller remote Indigenous communities.

Over the decades, RIMOs have accumulated a large archive of videos involving traditional song, stories and dance. A recent project of this kind was PAKAM's Kapululangu Dreaming Track Trip, where a film crew was sent to accompany traditional custodians to record sites and their associated stories, songs and dance on the Seven Sisters Dreaming track in the Great Sandy Desert, south of Balgo. The project received over \$30,000 in funding from the Indigenous Heritage Program, administered by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. PAKAM also received funding through the Community Broadcasting Foundation,⁵ which supported the production of RIBS programmers' own content ideas. In 2013 PAKAM received NITV funding for five short pieces (\$7000 each, see final section of the paper). Other projects developed by the remote media sector between 2010-2013 demonstrate a willingness to experiment with media forms beyond the heritage genre. For instance, PAW Media has recently been producing a series of claymation videos with funding from various sources, including Indigenous Cultural Support grant (ICS, administered as arts funding). PAW Media employs an animator to train and work with local people in the creation of traditional and contemporary animation stories. The animation skills were also shared with other Indigenous remote media producers during workshops at the 2012 and 2013 Remote Media Festivals (an annual forum of the Indigenous Remote Communications Association). During the period of 2010-2013 PAW media also undertook a range of media training and diversionary activities for young people, some in conjunction with Mount Theo (a youth program established to overcome petrol sniffing), and the Warlpiri Education Training Trust (WETT) with funding derived from the Granites gold mine⁶. For many of the RIMOs, funding provided through government jobs programs has helped to maintain institutional capacity, which has indirectly enabled video production to continue in the absence of IBP video funding. Music clips are now a significant feature of remote Indigenous video collections; ICTV reported that music videos were the most popular of all genres on Indigitube in the 2011-2012 financial year (ICTV 2012).

Other groups, including community cultural development organisations

A third of all facilitating groups are community and cultural development organisations (CACD, 12, twice as many as Indigenous broadcasting organisations working in this space). The CACD content spans a number of themes, including environmental protection, arts,

⁵ The author is a Director of the Community Broadcasting Foundation. The views represented in this paper are the author's own and do not reflect the Foundations' views.

⁶ In return for the grant being on Aboriginal land. Local Indigenous organisations compete for the funding.

media literacy, language, cultural heritage, water and land management, inter-generational relationships, youth, substance abuse and juvenile justice. None of the CACD organisations define themselves as Indigenous organisations.

Two well-known CACD projects are Ngapartji Ngapartji and the Canning Stock Route. Ngapartji Ngapartji by Big hART ended in 2010, having run a large program of theatre and media projects aimed at instigating social change through arts-based practice. The program was also intended for language revitalisation, including educational content for an online language course developed by local speakers, as well as a series of short videos. Big hART's current work includes the innovative Yijala Yala project, which combines video, games and interactive comics. The Canning Stock Route project involved canvas paintings, photographs and artefacts, alongside interactive media and video. The project was developed to provide an Aboriginal perspective and alternative history of the world's longest running cattle route. The entire collection was acquired by the National Gallery of Australia and was one of the institution's most popular exhibitions. Jennifer Biddle, in a review for *Art Monthly Australia* (2012), describes the project as revealing of Aboriginal experience and culture:

Actualities of lived life, continuities with traditional precedence and ancestral frameworks are what haunt and return in this exhibition; the inordinate complexities and commitment to counter, family, aesthetics, ways of doing and being that aren't chronologically driven or bound to this history or to any colonial past or mapping (p. 34).

She mentions the accompanying video material in which the voices of artists, 'whitefella project members' and the community are 'literalised by frequent direct quotation and sounds of laughter, song and language (from the films) animate the exhibition space' (p. 34).

Other projects not from the Indigenous broadcasting sector include a hip-hop song and video clip by 16-year-old Kylie Sambo, singing against the proposed nuclear waste dump at Muckaty Station. The video was produced by Armidale-based CACD organization Beyond Empathy, working in Tennant Creek with the Youth Development Unit and Barkley Arts. Carlew Youth Arts, based in Adelaide, worked with 500 young people in Pitjantjatjara communities to record inma (ceremony), resulting in a DVD and book, funded from remote service delivery funding and Indigenous language support programs. The Mulka Project is an Indigenous arts and heritage program based in Yirrkala, Arnhem Land that also produces co-creative media content. The Mulka Project operates in a similar fashion to a RIBS, creating local content, repurposing ethnographic film, and broadcasting to the local community on its own terrestrial television channel.

Of all funding types, the funding source most accessed by this group was arts funding, followed by philanthropy and royalties (when treated as one category) and other government departments. Very few projects (3) accessed broadcast and screen funding. Youth (including youth development, youth arts and youth crime prevention and diversion) was a major theme in the CACD category (17 projects), followed by language and cultural heritage (12) and media training (10).

Three things emerge from the research that have implications for how we understand the field of remote Indigenous media. Firstly, the sample shows that remote Indigenous media is no longer the isolated domain of dedicated Indigenous media groups. Secondly, Indigenous media is not wholly concerned with cultural maintenance, but also with what we might call the ‘caring industries’ – services that seek to improve conditions for communities and individuals. As media production becomes a less specialised field, the utilisation of video by various non-media agencies (directly or through funding mechanisms) has consequences for what is represented and how. Thirdly, remote media is very much a co-creative space, involving the collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous media professionals with Indigenous professionals, amateurs or trainees.

Reconsidering self-determination and remote Indigenous video

Remote Indigenous video organisations have, since their inception, produced video according to local needs and interests. In this respect they can be considered a product of the self-determination era as the institutions were deliberately established under the control of Aboriginal boards, in the expectation that they would carry out the community’s priority activities. The community broadcasting category was used as a regulatory device that enabled such local ownership and control to occur. Although remote media organisations continue to operate in this way, the removal of funding for video has curtailed capacity in respect to self-determined video production by these organisations.

This is not to say that the self-determination framework necessarily produced a more authentic version of Indigenous media. The concept of self-determination is useful for describing organisations that operate under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander boards and that are directly tied to the community they are intended to serve. However, the term also obscures certain aspects of operation, including what could be described as a co-creative method of production, whereby professionals and amateurs work together in the creation of content. The distinction is important in terms of this research, as it is the institutional capacities of the Indigenous media sector to produce video that is being examined, rather than Indigenous culture.

In the accounts of the origins of Indigenous video, the role of non-Indigenous media-makers and managers has been treated as a minor concern, typically as a transitional arrangement in the project of Indigenous cultural and political empowerment through media technologies. However, three decades since remote media began, non-Indigenous media professionals continue to fill management and training roles in many RIMOs, particularly in the very remote regions⁷. One explanation for this is that remote media organisations reflect the bureaucratic accord between the state and the Indigenous population that was formed during an era of self-determination, which imposed state determined structures while granting Indigenous governance (Batty 2003). The continued involvement of non-Indigenous workers is partly a matter of convenience that enables those in more traditional communities to continue ‘their way’ while at the same time benefiting from organisations that conform to the expectations of mainstream Australia (for an interesting description of this in relation to Mount Theo, see Stojanovski, 2010).

⁷ This is not the case in town-based stations such as Goolarri and CAAMA.

The early scholarly accounts, which emphasised cultural maintenance and Indigenous autonomy, were also influenced by disciplinary priorities. For anthropologists, whose concern was with understanding Indigenous culture, Indigenous ownership was a convenient construction that allowed researchers to focus on difference and aesthetic form over the external constraints and capacities of making media in remote communities. For media studies researchers, self-determination as it manifested in the emerging Indigenous media system represented a different kind of television in an era before community television or co-creative digital media forms existed (O'Regan 1990 offers interesting insights on this). The cross-disciplinary nature of much of the work – each borrowing from the other – reinforced the idea of remote Indigenous media as an autonomous domain.

For instance, rather than simply study the effects of Western television on the population of Yuendumu in the early 1980s, Eric Michaels gave video cameras to his research participants in Yuendumu, effectively establishing Warlpiri Media (now PAW Media) with the consent and collaboration of Warlpiri individuals, in particular Francis Kelly. The notion of Indigenous authorship was central to his research findings on the style of the videos, their subject matter and the organisation of production elements. In describing the media created at Yuendumu, Michaels made analogy to art-house film, asserting that the Warlpiri are the most doctrinaire practitioners of the 'direct cinema' approach (cinema verite), which performs everything in its true and proper manner (1994, p. 29). As Tim Rowse has pointed out, Michaels, in his quest to establish an Indigenous media sector, assumed the community's 'propensity for "properness" in the application of Warlpiri rules', and evoked Yuendumu as a 'an imagined community of culture uncompromised' (1990, p. 177).

The approach of giving cameras to research participants was both a community media experiment, as well as part of a broader turn within anthropology, which had begun to question the appropriateness of studying culture 'under a bell jar' (Michaels 1994, p. 130). Visual anthropology's previous forays into film – the ethnographer's own documentation of ceremonies as a means to preserve and study the most traditional aspects of Indigenous life – was critiqued by those within as a form of appropriation, a colonization of a culture via the camera. Such films were also considered insufficient for knowing Indigenous culture, in that it was impossible to determine 'how much of what is represented to us as them is really just us' (Moore 1994, p. 16). Anthropologists thus set out to understand Indigenous media 'on its own terms' (Ginsburg 1995, p. 122). If cameras were in the hands of Indigenous people, then the anthropologist would be alleviated of the invasiveness of ethnographic film, and able to access something of the real Indigenous experience, including the experience of cultural change that the videos themselves were a part of, without the burden of representation. As Faye Ginsburg wrote in 1995:

With the development of indigenous media (as well as work from other communities), the possible positions of authorship in ethnographic film and video expand, and we are more able to 'see' the multiple ways cultural realities are understood and experienced' (Ginsburg 1995, p. 73)

As the quote suggests, the media was a vehicle for anthropologists to understand Indigenous culture and sociality, something Indigenous filmmakers themselves hardly needed to discover. In an interesting critique of visual anthropology, British film scholar Rachel Moore queries whether Indigenous media serves the purposes of anthropology more than Indigenous people,

by lightening ‘the moral load of representation’ (1992, p. 17). The image of the Indigenous person holding the camera restores confidence for those that study culture through film; confidence in the authenticity of the Indigenous group as well as in the authority of film itself.

Accepting the co-creative nature of much remote media is therefore important for overcoming research biases; an exercise that should strengthen rather than undermine the case for Indigenous media as it resolves problematic notions of authenticity. This does not have to mean that remote media is the same as other media, even when facilitated by outsiders. From my own observations (when visiting remote media organisations), obligations to family and traditional roles continue to influence the manner in which people engage in media production in the more traditional communities, including kinship obligations (a core feature of Michaels’ work). Aboriginal lore changes the practice of media and determines what gets produced in remote Indigenous media organisations. The same everyday rhythms and socialities of remote communities dictate various domains of everyday life, including work and education, and defeat efforts to impose Western structures at almost every turn. The creative process is influenced by that same sociality of place, including practices and priorities that demonstrate a commitment to the ongoing maintenance of traditional cultural ways. It is also impinged upon by hardship and, in some instances, social dysfunction.

As both Hinkson (1999) and Deger (2006) have shown, Aboriginal media makers willingly engage in the project of production, finding utility, if not self-expression, in the use of media for the purposes of cultural leadership amongst their kin. Sometimes this will involve a conscious intention to communicate with national and international audiences. However, there remains a clear differentiation between what people engage with through the media and what they engage with in their own domain (Hinkson 1999). Traditional obligations and Indigenous socialities are negotiated in tandem with non-Indigenous institutional structures and workers, relationships that are sometimes productive, sometimes challenging on both sides.

Rather than seeing co-creative media purely as a form of cultural maintenance, it is perhaps best understood within the trajectories of life in remote communities, where traditional ways persevere alongside the daily negotiation of governmental structures and non-Indigenous culture. What we think of as ‘culture’ is shaped by these forces and in turn shapes them (Austin-Broos 2011). Whether this means that ancestral knowledge can persevere through video, and organised through the institutional frameworks of the settler colonial state, is another question altogether. One, I would argue, which has conflated the priorities of anthropology with those of media institutions, generating expectations that Indigenous media may not always conform to in practice.

The new co-creative

That tall man (Scott), Alex and Trevor have worked together with us. We all came together – including the person who invited me into the project, my daughter Inawinytji (Beth). And we’ve made wonderful work together, from what that tall man, Alex and Trevor and all of them began. We were very excited to join with the group – Amanyi (Dora) Haggie, Ngapartji Ngapartji performer and project advisor (in Kelly 2010).

The sample collected here shows that the ‘imagined community of culture uncompromised’ evoked in the cause of Indigenous media no longer holds at the level of production and facilitation, or in the content, if it ever did. The institutions that carry out this work are just as likely to be non-Indigenous, working with local people to create stories in genres and forms borrowed from Western culture.

As the data shows, co-creative content is often concerned with contemporary problems, attempting to educate remote viewers and participants alike on issues such as clean water, healthy eating and substance abuse. Some funding is sourced from government departments for whom culture is not a primary concern, and a significant proportion of projects see social change as their primary goal. Such projects are a clear example of the negotiation between culture and non-traditional, or Western, demands that characterise life in remote communities.

Although it is less apparent, the more traditional content themes – stories, singing and dancing – can also be products of this negotiation, both through the intercultural institutions that enable them and in the optimistic expectation that the power of culture can transform a community. In their explications of why cultural heritage work is necessary, arts organisations commonly express a desire to see Indigenous cultural capital usefully employed, expressed and circulated as a means of restoring social cohesion. Such ambitions position culture not just as communication but also as a saving mechanism.

The Indigenous policy field has been divided in recent years between those that seek to maintain cultural rights through policies of self-determination, and those that see self-determination as having contributed to social hardship by avoiding more direct intervention (see Sutton 2009). Efforts to sustain, even promote, the decision to stay living in remote areas, far from government services and economic opportunity, can be seen as condemning people to poverty and suffering. However, the research presented in this paper shows that the consequences of abandoning the self-determination model in the media production sphere is that organisations are directed instead into a paradigm that positions culture as a cure. When the only funding available is that administered through grants, some of which are provided to address specific health or social problems, certain types of organisations will succeed over others. By disabling the self-determination approach, government policy is (perhaps unintentionally) turning cultural institutions into what Rothwell has critically described as an industry that has evolved off a people’s misfortune (Rothwell 2013, see also Ottosson 2006. Altman 2007 offers an alternative view).

Remote media organisations, which seek to serve a community, are not necessarily immune from this trend. What appears to have suffered in the 2010-2013 period is the freely determined, responsive media of the kind that evolved over two decades within the remote media sector (with the exception of some content made with small amounts administered through CBF and NITV grants, or at an organisation’s own expense). Decisions such as establishing corporate video arms (PY media during this period) that operate off social marketing money, or competing with other players for the converged portfolio of ‘closing the gap’ money, corner remote media organisations into certain themes and genres. A further implication is that the platforms that distribute remote media are left with little else to broadcast. How audiences respond to these outputs is beyond the scope of this paper, but one that is worthy of further investigation.

The Abbott government's decision to move the Indigenous broadcasting and communication programs from the communications department and into a mega-Indigenous portfolio under Prime Minister and Cabinet is perhaps a signal that this trend is likely to continue. Although the move may reduce red tape for the sector when accessing FaHCSIA and other Indigenous grants, there is the possibility that Indigenous media will be overlooked as a cultural and creative output that requires support as an institutional infrastructure.

One problem with the social good justification for Indigenous media is that the outcomes are notoriously difficult to measure, leaving it open to criticism in terms of appropriate use of public resources. Even where outcomes are visible, it is often impossible to separate the cultural contribution from other variables that may be creating positive change. However, the success of some co-creative media endeavours suggests that social solutions can be found in peculiar places and where standard government approaches have failed (see Rennie & Potts 2012). New approaches to social financing, including social impact bonds, may provide a way through such concerns, but are still very much in the experimental phase.

Further Industry Considerations

Although the sample presented in this paper reveals the mechanisms that enable co-creative content (funding, facilitators), it does not show what co-creative projects are excluded from. Both the inter-cultural nature of co-creative media, as well as its community-level production aesthetic (including the short length of most videos), dictates where such content is distributed as well as available funding sources. The sample demonstrates diverse aspirations, functions and funding portfolios. However, the range of funds and justifications are possibly attributable to the fact that a substantial portion of the co-creative media produced is unlikely to qualify for major Indigenous screen and broadcasting funds. Two reasons underpinning this are the nature of screen funding, which favours professional, high-end content, as well as questions of race and eligibility.

On the second of these, Indigenous screen funding generally requires that individuals of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent fill key roles, such as director or writer. Screen Australia's Indigenous program guidelines state that 'funding is not intended for projects by non-Indigenous filmmakers with Indigenous content'⁸. Applications to the Australia Council for Indigenous programs require a letter confirming the applicants' Indigenous status from an Indigenous organisation such as a Land Council. As Michaels (1994), Batty (2003) and Langton (1993) have argued, these requirements turn Aboriginal identity into something that is verifiable by authorities. For Michaels, the category of 'aboriginal content' is ultimately racist, requiring identification, or ascription of Aboriginality as written in one's blood (1994, p. 42). He instead argued that culture is exosomatic and inscribed in the communication process itself. With his interest in community television, Michaels foretold that media 'constructed from lived events in nonfictive modes' would become a prominent feature of the Indigenous media landscape. Indigenous content requirements, he argued, would need to adapt, taking into account practitioners, subjects and viewers, and considering the conditions of making, transmitting and viewing (1994, p. 23).

⁸ <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding/indigenous/Overview.aspx>

One interesting development that possibly achieves this is the recent redirection of NITV programming funds to low cost remote content. Prior to its integration into the SBS, NITV had largely excluded remote co-creative content, including that produced by RIMOs, from its production funding. Although the controversy surrounding that decision is too convoluted to recount here (see Rennie & Featherstone 2008), both the quality of the content produced as well as the role of non-Indigenous workers were raised during disputes (for instance Pearson 2007). In April 2013, four months after moving to the SBS platform, NITV announced its *Regional, Remote and Emerging Initiative*, which would provide ‘15 minutes of new Indigenous content, six days a week for 20 weeks, on our screen’ (email correspondence). Producers that provide rushes for a story could apply for a commission of \$3000, to be edited by NITV. For those willing and able to take on the editing themselves, the commission was \$7000⁹. The NITV programming guidelines state that NITV prefers content from Indigenous companies and producers, but it will consider content involving non-Indigenous media-makers when ‘there aren’t enough Indigenous producers or program makers’ and when ‘a non-Indigenous producer is working with Indigenous people who have a big say in the project’¹⁰. At the 2013 remote media festival, the project’s coordinator, Pauline Clague, stated that content administered in partnership with RIMOs had been amongst the most consistent to date, a reflection on the institutional value of these organisations in nurturing remote media production.

Conclusion

Co-creative media raises further issues for the Indigenous media industries that I do not have space to deal with here. The proliferation of organisations working in remote co-creative media is possibly due to the inability of RIMOs to service all communities, a historical consequence of broadcasting policy. The removal of video funding for RIMOs in 2007 is a significant issue, particularly in the context of what the sector considers to be grossly inadequate funding available through the IBP. All of these factors determine what gets made and the organisations that develop or fail.

This paper has thus only scratched the surface of how policy and funding influence remote media. I have argued that an imperative for research is to understand the implications of grants-based funding, compared to initiatives that determine their own priorities and solutions. My approach has been to examine what kinds of content get produced under what circumstances, where media production requires some form of support to occur at all. The data shows that a more prescriptive version of remote Indigenous media is emerging – one that describes itself according to social priorities rather than local or cultural interests.

The sample of projects discussed here also demonstrates the diversity of the co-creative field, which includes the more traditional remote media sector, as well as a range of CACD organisations, Indigenous services, and heritage and arts organisations. Co-creative media assumes that Indigenous cultural capital and sociality can be productively directed into creative engagement with restorative powers. A substantial proportion of the co-creative

⁹ Some remote media organisations have argued that this funding is too low to support production, unless video coordinator roles are reinstated through other funding.

¹⁰ <http://www.nitv.org.au/about-nitv/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=79>

content discussed in this paper is concerned with both social change and cultural heritage. Such content presents an optimistic view that culture can be a remedy for what non-Indigenous authorities see as the maladaptive patterns of Australia's remote Indigenous population, including problems such as substance abuse and youth disengagement. By its very nature, co-creative content attempts to add new tools and structures to what remote communities already possess; cultures and connections which on their own have arguably proven insufficient to the task. The expectation is that if the communities can find a vehicle for expression, a distribution platform and skills by which to reinvigorate connection to country and traditional stories, then a healthier lifestyle will ensue.

I have not attempted to evaluate these projects or their success in achieving such aims. Rather, I have looked at co-creative content in the context of current debates on the role of culture, as well as the intellectual history that has accompanied remote media. Although I have only dipped into the Indigenous screen industry here—at the shallow-end of co-creative remote content - the sample demonstrates the complexity of the field. Co-creative media is often invisible or hard to find, wildly ambitious, and perennially tangled in the politics and problems of remote Australia.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Maura Edmond for assistance with data collection and Megan Kelleher and Daniel Featherstone for providing useful comments on an early draft.

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Supplement: Organisations Facilitating Co-Creative Media Production in Remote Indigenous Communities, 2010-2013

Facilitating Organisation	Indigenous Organisation ?	Type	Funding for Remote Indigenous Co-Creative Programs	Operational and Core Funding for Org in General	Themes
Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc	Yes	CS	Broadcast;	<i>no details known</i>	<i>not specified</i>
Australian Centre for the Moving Image	No	GCI	Govt - Arts;	State Govt - Arts; State Govt - Other;	health and wellbeing;
Ananguku Arts and Cultural Aboriginal Corporation	Yes	IA/HO	Govt - Arts;	Govt - Arts;	art / arts centres;
Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation	Yes	IC	Govt - Other;	<i>no details known</i>	language and cultural heritage; media training;
Barkly Regional Arts Inc	Yes	IA/HO	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts;	media training; youth development;
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)	No	EDU	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage; health and wellbeing;
Beyond Empathy	No	CACD	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Arts;	art / arts centres; PD for artists/filmmakers; youth development - arts; environment;
Big hART	No	CACD	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Other;	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Other; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other; Govt - Other; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other; Govt - Other;	art / arts centres; language and cultural heritage; media training; youth development; youth development - crime and drugs; education;
Buku-Larrnggay Mulka Centre	Yes	IA/HO	Govt - Arts;	Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Arts;	language and cultural heritage; youth development; employment & economic development; education;
Canning Street Route Project (Form Contemporary Craft & Design Inc)	No	CACD	Govt - Arts;	Govt-Other; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt-Arts; Govt-Other; Govt-Other; Govt-Arts;	art / arts centres; language and cultural heritage; media training; PD for artists/filmmakers; employment & economic development;
Carclew Youth Arts	No	CACD	Govt-Arts; Govt-Arts; Govt - Other;	Govt - Arts; Govt - Other; Govt - Other; Govt - Other; Govt - Arts;	language and cultural heritage; media training; youth development;

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Change Media / Tallstoreez Productionz Pty Ltd	No	CACD	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts;	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Other; Philanthropy and Royalties;	youth development - crime and drugs; youth development;
Community Prophets	Unclear	CACD	<i>no details known</i>	<i>no details known</i>	youth development; education;
Curious Works	No	CACD	<i>no details known</i>	Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other; Govt - Arts;	youth development;
Desert Pea Media	Unclear	CACD	<i>no details known</i>		<i>not specified</i>
Film and Television Institute WA	No	screen resource centre	Screen;	Screen; Broadcast; Philanthropy and Royalties; Screen; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other;	art / arts centres; language and cultural heritage; PD for artists/filmmakers;
Goolarri Media Enterprises	Yes	IB	Govt - Other; Broadcast;	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage; health and wellbeing;
InCite Youth Arts Inc	No	CACD	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties; Philanthropy and Royalties;	youth development - arts; education;
Injalak Arts and Crafts Associ. Inc	Yes	IA/HO	Govt - Arts; Govt - Other; Govt - Arts;	<i>no details known</i>	language and cultural heritage; media training;
Jimmy Little Foundation	Yes	Indigenous philanthropy	Philanthropy and Royalties	<i>no details known</i>	youth development; indigenous health and wellbeing;
Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation	Yes	IC	Govt - Arts;	<i>no details known</i>	language and cultural heritage;
Kickstart Arts	No	CACD	Govt - Arts;	Govt - Arts;	youth development - arts;
Library Board of Queensland	No	GCI	Govt - Arts;		language and cultural heritage;
Macdonnell Shire Youth Development	No	CS	<i>no details known</i>	<i>no details known</i>	<i>not specified</i>
Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women's Resource Centre	Unclear	CS	Govt - Arts;	<i>no details known</i>	art / arts centres; media training;
Ngaanyatjarra Media (NG Media)	Yes	IB	Broadcast; Govt - Other;	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage; indigenous health and wellbeing;
Outback Arts Incorporated	No	CACD	Govt - Arts;	Govt - Arts; Govt - Arts; Govt - Other; Govt - Other; Govt - Arts;	youth development;
Pintubi Anmatjere Warlpiri	Yes	IB	Govt - Arts; Philanthropy and	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage;

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Media (PAW Media and Communications, trading as Warlpiri Media Association Inc)			Royalties; Broadcast; Broadcast;		media training; youth development; employment & economic development;
Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media (PAKAM)	Yes	IB	Broadcast; Govt - Other;	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage; media training; indigenous health and wellbeing;
Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Assoc. Aboriginal Corporation (PY Media)	Yes	IB	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage;
Sandover Group Schools	No	EDU	Govt - Arts;	<i>no details known</i>	media training; education;
Sharing Stories	No	CACD	Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Arts; Govt - Other;	<i>no details known</i>	media training; youth development;
South Australian Country Arts Trust; Yaitya Makkitura Inc	Yes	IA/HO	Govt - Arts;	<i>no details known</i>	language and cultural heritage;
Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasters Association (TEABBA)	Yes	IB	<i>no details known</i>	Govt - Other;	language and cultural heritage;
Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC)	Yes	IC	Philanthropy and Royalties; Govt - Other; Govt - Other;	<i>no details known</i>	language and cultural heritage; media training; youth development;

Key:

IA/HO: Indigenous Arts and/or Heritage organisation

IB – Indigenous broadcasting organisation

IC – Indigenous corporation

CACD – Community and cultural development organisation

CS – Community service

EDU – educational institution

GCI – Government cultural organisation