

University of Wollongong

## Research Online

---

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -  
Papers (Archive)

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

---

2000

### Australia on the small screen 1970-1995: The complete guide to tele-features and mini-series (book review)

Margaret Nixon  
*University of Wollongong*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

---

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

---

## Australia on the small screen 1970-1995: The complete guide to tele-features and mini-series (book review)

### Abstract

Book review of: Australia on the Small Screen 1970-1995: The Complete Guide to Tele-Features and Mini-Series by Scott Murray. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp.248; index. £14.99 (paperback). ISBN 0 195 53949 4

### Keywords

small, australia, screen, book, review, tele, mini, complete, 1995, 1970, features, guide, series

### Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

### Publication Details

Nixon, M. 2000, 'Australia on the small screen 1970-1995: The complete guide to tele-features and mini-series (book review)', Australian Studies, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 221-222.

impossible not to see this as a means of making familiar relations strange, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, of drawing attention to the variety of social roles in existence, and of declaring the body's intercorporeal role. Searle's analysis, however, is located almost entirely in the contemporary, gaining immediacy from this but losing a degree of contextualisation.

Nevertheless, Searle uses the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's broadcasting of such programs as *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* and *Portrait of a Marriage* to good effect to identify the contradictions raised by broadcasting policies which locate 'quality' drama in high production values and literariness derived from British Broadcasting Corporation paradigms. In doing so, these effectively shut down the significance of lesbianism in the two productions. The reactions of mainstream critics to the two programs, she notes, largely exemplify the problems of recognition this creates.

In her discussion of community television and pay TV, Searle extends such arguments about the political institutionalisation of screen art to the discussion of the role Australian community television could play, given adequate funding, in realising a television audience for queer independent and experimental film and video makers. She concludes that it is not an analysis of queer sexualities in screen texts which might prove most productive in realising queer political aspirations but, rather, more concerted attention to the practices of exhibition, distribution and criticism. If this is the case, and Searle's book goes some substantial way toward proving that it is, *Queering the Screen* represents a strong argument for reconsidering the ways in which mainstream cultural criticism dampens the political and economic character of screen aesthetics in preference for a 'more acceptable' textual condition.

GRAEME HARPER

*University of Wales, Bangor*

**Australia on the Small Screen 1970–1995: The Complete Guide to Tele-Features and Mini-Series** by Scott Murray. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp.248; index. £14.99 (paperback). ISBN 0 195 53949 4

Scott Murray's book provides production details of tele-features, unreleased theatrical features and mini-series produced in Australia from 1970 to 1995. In attempting 'to record a film's (or mini-series') major technical and cast credits' (p.v), this work is a companion book to Murray's *Australian Film 1978–1994: A Survey of Theatrical Features* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press in association with The Australian Film Commission and Cinema Papers, 1995).

The work begins with a description of Murray's methodology, outlining some of the decision-making behind the compilation of the guide. He defines his terms and explains why he has included some documentaries with substantial 'drama content' and excluded others. But the big issue is how one decides a production is Australian. How (and why) one determines the nationality of any cultural production is problematic enough, and the difficulties (and necessities) of doing so in the globalised mobile economy of world media illustrate how slippery the category of nationality can be. For Murray, nationality can be determined by a range of considerations including the location of principal photography, sources of finance, the director's nationality, and where the copyright is held. Murray refuses to settle on which determinations are used in this guide so one is left to assume that some or all of these factors were considered. That the selection criteria are not explicitly stated is only mildly frustrating until the

appearance of the entry for *Fiddler's Green*, a Home Box Office production, directed by US actor/director Ken Olin, and starring Don Johnson and Rod Steiger. Given that elsewhere Murray comments directly on features of particular entries, the silence on this inclusion is puzzling.

Production information is taken 'directly from the film or video copy' (p. v). However, some productions have not survived in any form, and others do not contain production details. Where details are scant or missing, Murray has, where possible, used supplementary sources, including press materials and production surveys to fill in the gaps. Often it appears that Murray is describing the features of an archaeological find as he meticulously records the details of a finished production as it exists before it is broadcast and before it is cut by networks to be squeezed into programming schedules. Recorded dates are of the production's completion, not the broadcast or release date, and running times are actual lengths not broadcast times. This attention to the credits as they appear means that they are often reproduced as flawed documents, with Murray helpfully pointing to inconsistencies and inaccuracies, marking characters and actors wrongly credited and misspelled. Some entries include brief descriptions of the visual style of the titles, although why this level of detail would be important for some productions but not all is not clear.

There are other curious decisions made by Murray. Having established that the crew roles of "Production designer" and "Art director" have been used interchangeably on Australian productions, Murray decides: "'Production designer' is used for the principal person, regardless of how the film credits that role" (p. xiii). This seems unnecessary given that he appears to be working towards accurately recording the main credits as they appear.

Not all entries have (or could have) been checked and Murray indicates which 200 of the 570 entries were cited. While it is understandable, and regrettable, that some productions now exist only as production notes, there are no specific references to supplementary sources, making it unclear as to how unchecked entries have been compiled. It is also unclear as to why unchecked entries are so. Are we to assume that all unchecked entries are no longer in existence? Murray also does not explicitly state why his research begins in 1970 and it is unclear as to why some small screen productions are missing from the collection. *Women of the Sun* (1982), a mini-series of four self-contained but connected episodes portraying Aboriginal histories, is one notable omission.

Despite my frustrations, this is an interesting archive, a combination of meticulously checked research, guesses, and predictions about productions that might or might not exist, that were never broadcast, some that were broadcast and never kept, and those that never made it to the big screen they were intended for. While I found the level of detail and explanation inconsistent, I am grateful for the project. Murray lists a minimum of 20 credits per entry (where more than 20 exists) and thus begins to document previously unaccredited screen workers and their productions, some of which existed only briefly, incomplete and unreleased. For that reason, Murray's book is valuable as a partial record of Australian screen workers and their productions over some 25 years. It is precious because it records work never seen and work we will never see again, and it is a sad reminder of what we have failed to preserve. With an appendix of brief entries, a select bibliography and index of directors, this is a book that demands more detailed future editions. Finally, it is worth stating that it is time this type of research existed in a more accessible and revisable format: I hope the next edition is available at least as a CD-ROM.

MARGARET NIXON  
University of Wollongong