

Abstract

In seeing a link between his own struggle for human rights and the genocidal persecution against the Jews in Europe, William Cooper, a pioneering Aboriginal rights activist, was the first Australian to lodge a protest with the German Embassy against Kristallnacht.

Media products about William Cooper as a pioneer have previously been written but the family feels no connection to these artifacts since not being consulted.

Cooper's act of synthesising the struggles for human rights of two previously separate communities of people which has built a relationship between based on a shared experience of trauma and survival, this story of which remains the binding force.

For this narrative to be embraced in documentary form by William Cooper's family and Jewish community members there will need to be practices which encourage feelings of ownership and involvement so that a synergy of efforts is once again achieved and shared with broader Australian audiences.

Exegesis

Context of the project

In 2007 I wrote a paper entitled Tall Stories of History: The Impact of Mediatising Community narratives in which I examined how identity formation and negotiation are effected by the process of recording or 'writing' in a broad sense of the word of community narratives within a number of contexts including Australian Indigenous, Indian women and Hmong people living in the diaspora. It concluded that "Mediating community narratives where unity, diversity, participation and ownership are emphasised, steers a balance of negotiations within the construction of identity. The impact of recording community narrative is, therefore, is an active construction of local and individual identity that 'we tell of ourselves', as well as challenging and reframing the stories 'others tell of us'. Although I didn't rule out 'outsiders' being involved in the mediation of such narratives, it seemed a safe conclusion that such identity constructions are best performed by communities themselves. In a mere matter of months later, I am again being challenged out of my safe conclusion and through an invitation to produce a narrative about William Cooper am forced to grapple with how a feature producer undertakes such a project this ethically.

Synergy draws on participatory methodologies of non-fiction feature making with significant reference to the work of Florencia Enghel. Synergy critically reflects on the processes of power in orthodox documentary production and turns to alternative practices in an attempt to reduce the exploitative relationship between producer and subject towards a more collaborative and participant driven environment of narrative construction. This research also acknowledges that such an aim is inevitably doomed to fail on some level, with power, representation and reduction innate qualities of any production premised on truth. Furthermore, Enghel's reliance on Development theory shows an equally important area for critical consideration within participatory projects with respect to power and hegemony. However, it remains the contention of this research project that in adapting elements of Enghel's experience and theoretical framework Synergy can work not only to construct a narrative but also to "take into account the interests needs and capacities of all concerned" for use towards the "advancement of their (the participants) own social, cultural and political goals" (37). This research will

set a theoretical context for a participatory methodology as well as making use of reflective research practices to gain new understandings of how a consciousness of power in feature production can contribute to practice.

Using Enghel's work as a starting point, this research will make a feature for ABC's AWAYE program. Content will be decided upon in a participatory approach where possible. It will involve primary research through the use of qualitative interviews in the style of Oral History collection. It will also require secondary research where archival materials are necessary or desirable. It will also require professional industry research in order to meet the needs and requirements of the broadcasters, in this case, the ABC for length, quality and style.

Throughout this paper, most citations were intended by authors to relate to film documentary rather than radio documentary.

Why do we need a different approach?

Synergy involves a constructing a narrative based within both Australian Indigenous and Jewish community histories. As such, the production exists within a context and history of damaging ideological, stereotypical and hegemonic representations of Indigenous peoples in particular, contemporarily understood through frameworks such as the 'knowing' of the Other through a colonial gaze (Said) and Whiteness Studies.

"In recent years works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Paulin Hountonjo's *Sur La Philosophie*" *Africaine* (1977) have cast radical doubt on the procedures by which alien human groups can be represented without proposing systematic, sharply new methods or epistemologies. These studies suggest that while ethnographic writing cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract, ahistorical "others". It is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them; but no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance guarantee the truth of such images." (Clifford, 23, *The Predicament of Culture*)

"Dwyer and Crapanzano... where interlocutors actively negotiate a shared vision of reality... in the process, the ethnographer's authority as narrator and interpreter is altered. (43, Clifford)

Although these concerns have most seriously been raised by writers such as Marcia Langton with respect to representations of Indigenous peoples and culture through both the academic- anthropological and scientific documenting- and through the popular- media- the ethical concerns it raises are relevant to questions of representations of any group, whether that group is socially categorised based on religion, gender, ethnicity, class etc. In this way, many arguments put forward are equally relevant to working with Jewish communities, even through significant differences remain and where groups are always to be seen as heterogeneous, unique with continually evolving identities.

directly or indirectly refer to a long history of negative representation by the dominant culture, "Much of what has been written about Aboriginals by non-Aboriginals has been patronizing, misconstrued, preconceived and abused" (Huggins, as cited in Heiss, p 198). These sentiments are again reflected in Dodson's writing where he discusses the 'legacy' of white writers throughout Australia's history (2003, pp 22-45). While this historical connotations should not be dismissed, for a more contemporary illustration of the damaging effects of a well intentioned attempt to 'speak for' Indigenous communities, the glaring example is that of Dianne Bell in her co-authored report, 'Speaking About Rape is Everybody's Business' (as cited in Moreton-Robinson, 2003 pp 66- 77). While there is not the space in this essay to analyse this mediated event in its entirety, the point to be taken from this that the offence caused to Indigenous communities seems not so much in what Bell said but her assertion that she had the right to formulate and make public her opinion, with consideration to her position as a white woman from the dominant white culture. Bell had, in line with ethical protocols, sought permission from the community she wished to 'speak for' and had included a representative of that community in the production (ie. her co-author, Topsy Napurrula Nelson). The problems associated with Bell's writing, to a great extent, are in line with Edward Said's theory of the connection between power and representation of the 'other' (2003). Though Bell worked in academia rather than in the media, the risks of causing offence are equally relevant to Indigenous content producers in the different media industries.

The second major argument against non-Indigenous involvement in Indigenous content production is based on the idea that a non-Indigenous person could never have enough knowledge to be in a position to create a representation and that such an undertaking should be reserved for Indigenous people. Jackie Huggins expresses this argument as such:

"...I detest the imposition that anyone who is non-Indigenous can define my Aboriginality for me and my race. Neither do I accept any definition of Aboriginality by non-Aboriginals, as it insults my intelligence, spirit and soul and negates my heritage." (2003 p 60)

Here we can understand 'defining Aboriginality' as a process of representation. However, the problem with this position is that it essentialises the experience of Aboriginality, as argued by Paradies, who refers to a political attempt to create a 'relatively homogenous pan-Indigenous' identity and community, as a single identity existing between policed boundaries of what Indigenous identity should mean and should be represented as (2006, p356). This idea is more personalized through Dodson's reflections, '...I cannot stand here, even as an Aboriginal person, and say what Aboriginality is. To do so would be a violation of the right to self-determination and the right of people

to establish their own identity. It would also fall into the trap of allowing Aboriginality to be another fixed category.’ (2003 p 39). Marcia Langton says the belief that Aboriginal people will make ‘better’ representations simply because ‘being Aboriginal gives them ‘greater’ understanding’ is ‘naïve’ (2003 p 115). She says this belief is ‘based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated ‘other’” and adds that this is an assumption that all Aboriginal people are alike and equally understand each other and the preference to censor images to ‘true representation is based on fear’ (2003 p 115). This point may go part way to understanding the resistance of public broadcasters to surrender complete control of representation to the Indigenous community in question (as is key to Indigenous Intellectual Property rights) as it negates the role of a free-press environment to be free of censorship.

What surfaces here is a general need for all writers or producers, regardless of ethnicity and culture to realize once they become the creators of representation they are in a position of power and that this position of power is not just reserved for those in the white dominant culture.

What is the alternative approach?

Marica Langton shows in ‘Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...’ the need for community involvement in the construction of representations of narratives and identity. To achieve this she sees collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples possible within frameworks of critical theory.

Engel situates her work within Communication for Development paradigms in order to investigate participatory practice. She interrogates the meaning of communication, of development and of communication for development to set a context. Development in particular she finds is unexamined in terms of its ideological and theoretical implications. She quotes White, “Development policy proposed by western organizations involved ideological questions of power by representing dominant cultures’ intentions to help “solve” problems not their own (Jacobson & Servaes) and also Raymond Williams, “it is clear that, through these verbal tangles, an often generous idea of “aid to the developing countries” is confused with wholly ungenerous practices of the cancellation of the identities of others, by their definition as *underdeveloped* or *less developed* and of imposed processes of development for a world market controlled by others” (Jacobson & Servaes). However, Engel argues for working within this framework while informed a critically aware of its ideological limitations and for further investigation and democratization of real practices “in the context of debating which future we dare hope for humanity”. The Developmental framework is useful in that it is specifically driven by motivations outside of the producer and therefore lends itself towards projects which require methodologies which are participant/community advancement focussed. It is defined by Pieterse as “the organised intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement”. In stating that understanding development as a politics of difference, he argues for reflexive practice, a self-consciousness of political and cultural bias.

A weakness which runs throughout Enghel's work is the dependence on developmental theory to justify the 'good' of her productions. Participatory development should not only include communities in the process but should also enable self-determination. Therefore a production which is able to encapsulate both aspects would not be preoccupied with justify giving 'voice to the voiceless' or with definitions of documentary as 'not only an art form, it is a social service and a political act'. In using this framework for this project I realise I run the risk of subjugating both the Jewish community and the Koorie communities involved to an 'under-developed' status, which is not my belief nor my aim. Synergy is greatly advantaged by the fact that the community or Koora Cooper and Julian Silverman as representatives of their communities determined documentary as device for their employ towards political and social goals and approached the producer with the narrative for construction and this motivated use of a tool and a cultural form is the reason why developmental frameworks are fruitful. Also, the Communication for Development paradigm has much to offer in terms of methodology in managing relationships of power.

Communication for development is termed by Servaes as "the sharing of knowledge aimed at reaching consensus for action that takes into account the interests, needs and capacities of all concerned. Enghel also discusses the dominant preference of participatory view of communication, while also questioning how often these practices are followed through any more than lip-service.

So what is Participatory methodology and why is it so challenging.

To begin with, Enghel found in her investigation that participatory communication was a poorly defined term struggling to gain credence as a science for research. Huesca states that "despite its widespread use... the concept of participatory communication is subject to loose interpretation that appears at best to be a variable and contested and at worst misused and distorted." Participatory practices emerged out of a dissatisfaction with mass-media's "imposed the interests of the dominant classes on the majority of marginalised people, resulting in the reinforcement, reproduction and legitimation of social and material relations of production." This led to the abandonment of vertical structures towards horizontal structures which promote access, dialogue and participation (Beitran). Pieterse shows how participation remain paternalistic unless the idea of participation is radically turned around so that governments, international institutions or NGOs would be considered as participating in people's local development. Furthermore, Servaes shows how "authentic participation directly addresses power in its distribution in society". Again, in the context of Synergy, the self-determining aspect of Koora Cooper and Julian Silverman's desire to use documentary and to approach a producer to be involved is a sets a strong context of the producer participating in the community's own social and political goals.

Huesca shows how participatory practice relies on "the concepts of access (to communication resources) participation (in planning, decision making and production) and self-management (collective ownership and policy making). Participatory communication is envisioned as an action-research process and as such, the results must be shared and discussed between all participants involved. Sustained dialogue, discussion and collaboration are aimed at facilitating change. (enghel 22). Through retrospective analysis of her work, Enghel provides a model of participatory communication and production. Even though there are calls for participatory practices to be grounded in more concrete and accepted methodologies, Enghel herself acknowledges that "one of the most important issues that participatory communication tries to stress is the uniqueness of every specific situation." (Lie). Therefore, Enghel's

model will be a guide only and will be investigated for areas of intersection and diversion in the context of this research project.

How does this approach take form

Participatory Methodology Practices:

methodology under Communication for development paradigm.

Self-determination of content,

collaborating on content,

self-reflexive?

Pedagogic?

Dissemination/publicity.

Participation as attempt to counter some power inequities, Ego of film maker must disappear, seeing feature production more as 'A Creative tool in the service of a new signifying practice' (49). And the role of the producer as Amplification: Amplification necessitates some measure of strong narrative construction through editing so that a story will be disseminated and consumed, while retaining balance of integrity for the meaning conveyed by participant.

While I do not consider the narrative for this production to be ethnographic in genre, this field of enquiry has much to offer investigations into relationships between producer and participants in documentary making.

Enghel quotes Ruby: "The documentary is assumed to give voice to the voiceless,..." She also sees Robert Flaherty as a pioneer of participatory ethnographic documentary, a position which is quickly undermined with a closer investigation of his techniques of representation. (go to: Taxodemy and Romantic Ethnography, Fatimah)

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/13/orourke.html>