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❖ **Craig Collie — *The Business of TV Production***

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Since its release a decade ago, Martha Mollison's (2003) excellent 'Producing Videos' (now in its second edition), has been the last word on the technical side of video production in Australia. At the more conceptual and business end of production however, specifically television production, there has until now, been nothing comparable. This book addresses that gap in the market.

It is written for the Australian market (with a slight bias towards NSW) and while the practical information would be of primary interest to those working in Australia, much of the data and analytical material it contains would be equally useful to any researcher studying Australian television. The Australian industry as Collie notes, like television everywhere, is 'an industry of paradoxes', one where programs are destined for broadcasters who are, by and large:

...extraordinarily risk averse, when their own interest is best served by taking risk, and whose commissioning executives often seem to make decisions based on anything but the quality of the program proposal. (xii)

Fortunately television also seems to be an industry characterised by extreme optimism so that observation is unlikely to deter any among the book's audience.

As its title suggests, *The Business of TV Production* dwells mostly on the practicalities of making broadcast material. However it begins with a detour. Anyone who teaches will know that today's media students generally know (or care) little about the histories of the media in which they profess to want to work. Perhaps this is less important than their teachers often believe it to be. Still, students can only benefit from a little contextual material which illustrates how we got the television we have. To this end, Collie begins with a short history of the medium, with one chapter on global developments and another on the development of the medium in Australia plus a guide to digital television. He then moves on to television genres with the 'how to' sections taking up most of the volume. It is for these sections that most readers will have picked up the book in the first place.

The sweep of the information covered here is extremely wide. It follows the chronological path of a production from the initial concept through development to execution, detailing the considerations, large and small, with which production staff must deal from procedures for hiring crew and cast, arranging locations, travel and food, the shoot and post production work. Workplace safety is well covered. The information is clear and uniformly practical and sometimes a little tongue in cheek, such as the caution to the producers of studio-based programs that 'providing alcoholic refreshment to guests while they wait in the green room is not a good idea.' (320) Too true!

There is plenty on some of the more sensitive aspects of production including dealing with unfamiliar cultures and the special issues raised by working with children. The section on legal issues is well focused on the particular requirements of production staff, given that there are other excellent books on media law more broadly. There is also a section on business structure.

Determining just how detailed a level of information to provide in a work such as this is always problematic.

On the one hand, readers will want as much precision as possible since the book is designed to assist with production planning. On the other hand, specific data on industry policies and practices runs the risk of becoming dated. In general this volume has steered neatly between the need for detail and the provision of information that will remain up to date over the life of the volume.

The 'Australianness' of this book is conveyed in ways other than just in the industry regulations and data it covers. There is also discussion of some of the home-grown characteristics of production in Australia, some good and some less so. On the positive side it is noted that Australian film and television production crews are generally seen as less hierarchical than many counterparts overseas, and that everyone chips in and is expected to express ideas. This is a practice that has grown out of the need for cost efficiency and speed in the Australian production environment. But that same environment has also contributed to a style of storytelling of which Collier, among others, is a critic:

Too frequently Australian writers move straight on to writing the script once characters and setting are decided, rather than outlining the plot through scene breakdown...This is not a practice recommended by experienced writers. It can consolidate character traits and setting details in a way that constrains the drama of later episodes. It tends to produce scripts that rely too much on dialogue rather than action. (118).

It is to be hoped that this book will not only inform its readers, but also effect some change in areas where there are current deficiencies.

For a book that begins with a history of the medium I was disappointed that the author did not also consider any obligations to the history of the producers of contemporary broadcast material. There is no recommendation that producers consider the long-term conservation of their material and perhaps arrange a deposit with the National Film and Sound Archive. It's a small point, but not unimportant. Today's producers often draw on the ideas and sometimes the actual material of the past, to say nothing of the needs of media historians. A gentle reminder never goes astray.

Reference

Mollison, M, (2003), 'Producing Videos', Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

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