

‘don’t use the **a-word**’
Arts by Stealth at the ABC—
A Latourean Analysis | LIZ JACKA

— ABSTRACT

The future of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the digital age receives an enormous amount of both media and academic attention. However, much of the analysis and debate is locked into some fairly stale and repetitious discourses polarised around oppositions such as state/market and popular/elite. In this article I describe a very minor episode in the long saga of public service broadcasting, namely recent changes to its coverage of the arts, using some insights drawn from the repertoire of actor network theory (ANT), and argue that it provides better resources for illuminating this episode than the more usual frameworks used to analyse such issues.

The ABC is strongly committed to fostering the arts in Australia. The ABC considers that it is uniquely placed to present Australian musical, dramatic, written and acoustic works, performance, representation of Australia’s cultural life and analysis of the arts to the Australian public.¹

We know that a lot of viewers don’t see themselves as people who are interested in the arts, so what we are trying to do is provide a range of programs which might get people to watch something that they wouldn’t if we ran it and called it the arts (Sandra Levy, Director ABC Television).²

We’re constantly tweaking things. In 2004 we’re trying to work out how we can have more fun on the network. We don’t want to be seen as worthy but dull, the station your grandfather listens to. (Gordon Taylor, Manager Radio National).³

We were told, ‘Don’t use the word “arts”’. (ABC radio arts presenter)

— INTRODUCTION

The future of public service broadcasting (PSB) in the digital age receives an enormous amount of both media and academic attention.⁴ However, much of the analysis and debate is locked into some fairly stale and repetitious discourses polarised around oppositions such as state/market and popular/elite. In the last ten years or so the development of a post-Foucauldian governmentality framework (e.g. Rose and Miller and Bennett among many others) has seemed to offer some new terms in which to talk about cultural institutions in a new and fruitful way, although with one or two notable exceptions (e.g. Hawkins) few of these theorists have applied the framework directly to PSB.⁵

Powerful though the governmentality framework is, I believe that it suffers from some serious limitations. In spite of its promise to deploy an ‘analytics of government’ which examine the specific and mundane mechanisms by which power is exercised at particular sites, its analysis remains at the level of the epochal and the general.⁶ This limitation has recently been identified and described by one of the foremost governmentality theorists, Tony Bennett, when he says:

[I]f the impetus of Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian scholarship has encouraged the development of an analytic gaze which looks closely at the ‘microphysics of power’ ... it has often proved less adept at undertaking such detailed, close-up inspection than other intellectual traditions which share a sense of the mundane particularities of technical arrangements and processes.⁷

The framework to which Bennett has begun to look for this extra dimension is that of so-called actor network theory (ANT), most closely associated with the name of Bruno Latour, a theorist who has made intermittent appearances in the work of both Australian and overseas cultural studies scholars.⁸ In this article I describe a very minor episode in the long saga of public service broadcasting, using some insights drawn from the repertoire of ANT, and argue that it provides better resources for illuminating this episode than the more usual frameworks used to analyse such issues.

I am a character in this particular drama. As someone who has published on the topic of PSB, I was called in to undertake a research project on arts programming on the ABC. The report I produced was put into circulation in the ongoing public debate about the ABC and came in time to be referred to as the ‘Jacka Report’, thus gaining the status of what Latour would call a ‘black box’.⁹ In the next section I describe the genesis of this report, and in subsequent sections I comment on the episode, using some ideas from ANT. For the most part, I have not used the actual names of any of the characters in the story, identifying ‘actants’ only by function or position.

— THE GENESIS OF THE 'JACKA REPORT'

One day at the beginning of December 2003 I received a call from an ABC radio features producer, inviting me to do a report into arts programming at the ABC. He told me that he was part of a group that were under threat of losing their jobs as a result of the cutting of the acoustic arts program, *The Listening Room*, and that the union covering ABC program-makers, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), would be the commissioner of my research. He said they wanted it done by Wednesday 17 December because that was the day the group had a meeting with the Director of Radio to discuss their situation. That meant I had ten days to do the research and write the report.

I sat on the end of the phone for a minute, contemplating the fact that this was not on my schedule, but more significantly, thinking about whether, being commissioned by the union, I could write an 'objective' and credible report. I thought, 'This is a terrible idea, I should say no', but I said 'yes'. For some time I had been working on a project broadly described as 'the past, present and future of public service broadcasting' and the invitation from the CPSU provided a good opportunity to get into the heart of the ABC and to get some good data. I was promised excellent access to radio program-makers and I saw this as a way of getting behind the surface of policy documents and public pronouncements.

Over the following week I interviewed scores of radio staff (who preferred to be anonymous in the final report), a number of prominent artists, composers, arts administrators and critics. I also attempted to interview ABC management, including the Chairman, the Director of Radio and the Head of National Music Networks. I made it clear to management that the union had commissioned me, but reassured them that I was an independent and very proper researcher. However, none of them would talk to me. I also talked more successfully with the Chair of the ABC's Arts Advisory Group and one of its other members, a prominent cultural commentator.

I engaged a research assistant who did some quick analysis of the levels of arts programming on ABC over a ten-year period, using ABC Annual Reports and program guides. I duly wrote my report over a weekend and reported to my radio staff Steering Group on the Monday morning. They challenged much of what was in the report and we negotiated the content to produce a product that both they and I could endorse.

It turned out that the original urgency was no longer a factor as the Director Radio had cancelled her meeting with the staff. It was decided that I should extend my research to television and online, so in the new year of 2004 I began the same process with those platforms. I interviewed program makers (anonymously), artists, arts administrators, critics; I was refused interviews by ABC senior and middle managers. I was also refused access to information which, by coincidence, the ABC had collected about arts programming for the

Cultural Ministers Conference. I had been alerted to this information by the Chair of the ABC's Arts Advisory Group (a past Chair of the Australia Council). She had directed me to the ABC Director of Development in Melbourne, who directed me to the head of Corporate Affairs in Sydney. After extended emails with a project officer in Corporate Affairs, it was decided not to give me the material (even though I knew it would have been gathered from publicly available information already published in Annual Reports).

I produced my final report at the beginning of February 2004. I went through the same negotiations with the Steering Group and we agreed on the final version. It was released under complicated circumstances on 4 April and received extensive and sympathetic media coverage in the following week. The ABC's public response was limited to Managing Director, Russell Balding's, comment that it was 'palpable nonsense'. I received supportive emails from various quarters and one letter from an 'ordinary' ABC listener from Willoughby NSW, who said how pleased she'd been to read about my excellent comments about the shortcomings of ABC arts coverage.

However, there was some evidence that the report did weigh on the ABC's mind. In an interview with the *Australian Financial Review* on Thursday 13 May 2004, the Head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment, was reported as follows: '... doesn't mind valid criticism about the ABC's coverage of the arts, but she's sure some of it is coming from people who aren't familiar with the national broadcaster's revamped schedule' (p. 73). The journalist went on to cite my report as the target of this comment. This ABC manager is one of the actors (in Latour's sense) in this situation and I will discuss her role further later in this paper. The report also cropped up in Senate Estimates hearings and in documents published by pro-ABC campaigners, such as the Friends of the ABC and Arts Hub.¹⁰

Under the usual conception of research, the sole product or outcome of the process described above is the report and the response or commentary on the report. In policy research the report might also be followed by a strategy paper or action. However, an ANT perspective allows you to see that the real story was the back-story, the bones of which I have given above. The report was just one of the actors in the story, no more or less significant than the other actors.

I also came to see that this tiny area of the ABC's activities, and my very modest project, tapped into all the issues that face public service broadcasting at the present time, and that the unfolding of the story outlined above was governed by a complicated process of negotiation, interpretation, adjustment of the sort that Bruno Latour and his colleagues describe as an actor-network.

As foreshadowed above, the accustomed ways of analysing the research/policy processes involved here are ideology theory (which analyses matters in terms of the discursive frameworks in which they are couched, e.g. state versus market) and governmentality theory.¹¹

Later I will say something briefly about how those approaches might speak about the matters I have laid out, but first I would like to develop an approach based on ANT to test whether its resources for bringing out the nuances of this episode are richer than those of the two competing approaches.

There are two particular moments in the story that I would like to analyse in more detail. They are (i) my interaction with one of the senior decision-makers, and (ii) the decisions I made about how to my report. Underlying this dissection of these two particular moments is the questions: how did it come to be the case that an organization like the ABC, whose editorial charter contains the obligation to foster the arts, arrive at a policy of 'arts by stealth' as exemplified in the quotation from Sandra Levy at the head of this paper? I'm suggesting that ANT provides a better framework for answering that question than alternative ones do.

— ACTORS, NETWORKS, TRANSLATION, PROGRAMS AND ANTI-PROGRAMS

For those who are not familiar with what has come to be called actor network theory (ANT), I want to sketch out a few of the key ideas so that when I move on to discuss my cases the ANT inflections can be perceived. A word of caution: ANT should not be treated as 'theory' if by that we mean a set of stable concepts and an algorithm for applying them to empirical material. As Latour himself says:

I will start by saying that there are four things which do not work with actor-network theory; the words 'actor', 'network' and 'theory'—without forgetting the hyphen.¹²

Rather, it is an approach or an attitude to investigation that emphasises mobility and transformation in both the objects of study and the means for studying them. ANT has developed considerably since its first appearance in the late seventies, and it quite difficult to give any general account of it.

However, for the purposes of this paper, I will borrow a formulation of ANT put forward by one of its foremost exponents, John Law. He describes ANT like this:

If we want to understand the mechanics of power and organisation it is important not to start out assuming what we want to explain. ... It is not a good idea to take it for granted that there is a macro-social system on the one hand, and bits and pieces of derivative micro-social detail on the other. ... We might start instead with interaction and ... ask how some kinds of interactions more or less succeed in stabilising and reproducing themselves; how do they overcome resistance and seem to become 'macro-social'; how do they generate effects such as power, fame, size, scope or organization?

The central idea is the metaphor of heterogeneous network; that is, society, organizations, agents (including non-human actors) and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials. ANT-influenced investigators then look to see how it is that networks can come to look like single point actors.¹³

A central notion in classical ANT is that of translation, and indeed ANT is often referred to as the ‘sociology of translation’. In a now a classic article about a scientific controversy about sea scallops, Michel Callon talks about four moments of translation he discerned as:

- (a) problematisation
- (b) interressement
- (c) enrolment
- (d) mobilisation.¹⁴

Problematisation is where ‘the researchers sought to become indispensable to other actors ... by defining the nature and the problems of the latter and then suggesting that these would be resolved if the actors negotiated the ‘obligatory passage point’ of the researchers’ program of investigation’.

Interessement is ‘a series of processes by which the researchers sought to lock the other actors into the roles that had been proposed for them in that program’.

Enrolment is ‘a set of strategies in which the researchers sought to define and interrelate the various roles they had allocated to others’.

Mobilisation is ‘a set of methods used by the researchers to ensure that supposed spokesmen for various relevant collectivities were properly able to represent those collectivities and not betrayed by the latter’.

Because this is a rare (for ANT) appearance of an apparent formula, these four stages of Callon’s have often been used by researchers trying to give an ANT analysis of their material. Perhaps I should not apply them directly to my corpus; in fact it may turn out they were only applicable to Callon’s scientists. However, as I hope to show, I have found them at least temporarily serviceable. There is a second ANT idea which I wish to introduce—the conception of program and anti-program.

In a brief but quite puzzling article in which he lays out some hints for how to do his sort of analysis (Latour, 1991), Latour gives an analysis of what he considers to be a very elegant letter written by Louis Pasteur to the French Minister of Education in 1864, asking for 2500 francs so he (i.e., Pasteur) can carry on his fermentation research. Pasteur reminds the Minister that wine is the glory of France, that it also earns lots of export income, but that because of the lack of knowledge about wine chemistry there is a lot of spoilage and he Louis Pasteur

is in a position to help with this problem if only he can travel to other wine-making countries and study certain microscopic vegetable matter etc, etc.

Latour comments:

Successive layers of actants—the Minister, chemistry, my research, my trip to the Arbois—get goals and borders attributed to them. Each of these layers is characterised by incompatible vocabulary: 2500 francs, the trade treaty with England, succinic acid, the cryptogamic plant. (Hence the word translation.) An anti-program gets attached to each of the programs of action: it would be nice to sell wine to England, but these wines are diseased; it would be nice to know the origin of these diseases, but wine chemistry is sixty years old; I would like to pursue my research but I lack money and assistants. On the one hand, the translation operation consists of defining successive layers of vocabulary, of attributing goals, and of defining impossibilities; on the other hand, it consists of displacing—hence the other meaning of translation—one program of action into another program of action. The overall movement of the translation is defined by a *detour* and a *return*. In the end, by giving Pasteur 2500F, the Minister is supposed to restore the balance of payments and thereby attain his goals. But the translation operation is always risky. Indeed, nothing guarantees that the detour will, in the end, be paid, rewarded by a return.¹⁵

Latour then goes on to elaborate an alternative scenario and another, which space prevents me from describing.

There are many other characteristic ANT formulae developed in the last twenty years—‘black boxes’, ‘immutable mobiles’, performativity, relational materiality—which it is not possible to detail here. ANT has some appealing aspects; some key advantages are that it evades the following dualisms:

event/context
inside/outside
agent/structure
micro/macro
subject/object
human/non-human
modern/postmodern

It also has some problems which various ANT-friendly critics have noted.¹⁶ I will examine these in more detail in my conclusion. However, without further ado, I will move on to a discussion of my story, the story about arts programming on the ABC, and I will attempt to do it informed by an ANT approach.

— ABC ARTS AS AN ACTOR-NETWORK

Below, in no order of priority, is a preliminary list of the ‘actors’ in the ABC episode under analysis. This might look like just a ‘cast of characters’ but I mean actor in the Latourean sense, viz., that an actor is ‘a product of set of alliances, of heterogeneous materials’ (both human and non-human).¹⁷ For the semiotically-minded, the concept of ‘actor’ also has a flavour of the concept of ‘actant’ which is used in narrative theory. The name, Greimas is often invoked by French Actor Network Theorists, and, in spite of Latour’s deep hostility to discourse theory, they use semiotics and sociolinguistic methods freely.¹⁸

The researcher (me)
The research assistant
Statistics
The union
The radio producers (Steering group) (not necessarily unified)
The TV producers
The on-line producers
Various other ABC staff
The ABC senior managers
The ABC commissioning editors
The ABC Board
ABC Corporate Relations
The Arts Advisory Board
The Australia Council
Saatchi and Saatchi (authors of report, Australian and the Arts)
The ‘arts community’
The ‘audience’
Friends of the ABC
The government (via the Department)
The Report
The media

Each of these actors is a network in the sense that, at least with respect to their place in my story of ABC arts programming, they are the (unstable and mutable) effect of their place in a series of translations, in Callon’s sense—that is they are involved in various programs of enrolment and mobilisation. Many of them in this context are also ‘black boxes’, in the sense that they are themselves extremely elaborate networks (e.g. The Australia Council, the union)

or 'fictions' in the sense that they cannot possibly be naming an actual entity but rather something that can be invoked in tactical situations (the arts community, the audience). I will take just a couple from the list and say how they function as a network.

ABC senior managers are involved in a series of negotiations with government, the ABC Board, their commercial competitors, the audience, the staff and so on. They are engaging in a series of problematisations—the ABC is losing audience especially in the younger age group; we need to increase audiences so the government won't say we should not receive public funds; there is evidence audiences are intimidated by the word 'arts'. Some interests include: we need to find ways of doing arts without seeming to, we need arts by stealth. Some successful enrolments: we hire new staff or convert existing staff to the vision; they begin to devise new kinds of programs which don't look like arts programs. An instance of mobilisation: we go out to the public and enrol journalists and publicists in speaking in favour of our new program.

Meanwhile the staff devise an anti-program. Their problematisations: the ABC is dumbing down, the ABC is abandoning its charter, it is losing its distinctiveness, it is in danger of having its funding cut by government because it is not different enough. Their interests: we have a solution—the ABC must have more arts, it must be more risk-taking. The staff successfully enrol members of the arts community; they join in the chorus of the need for more arts; they mobilise the media, who in turn are effects of in their networks. They also enrol the researcher (me); I am also a network-actor; I am linked to academic assemblages which include ARC pressures, relevance pressures, objectivity pressures, etc.

The 'arts by stealth' strategy was influenced by the 2000 Australia Council/Saatchi and Saatchi report, *Australians and the Arts*, which reported, among many other things, that '66% of people would feel more positive about the arts if arts and arts people were less elitist'. And 84% believed that 'the arts should be more accessible and available to average Australians' (p. 13 of the Overview). We remember that the present Chair of the ABC Arts Advisory Group was Chair of the Australia Council at the time the Saatchi and Saatchi Report was commissioned.

Now I will look briefly at a non-human actor in the drama—the statistics. I will say more about this when I look in more detail at the report, but a preliminary word is appropriate here. The statistics I am talking about are hours of programming of certain categories, for example programs by genre or by country of origin. I also include audience figures—ratings, reach figures and other report of results of quantitative audience research; and, most significantly, financial information. Such statistics are of course the result of purposive human action, but we know the complexity of the networks that gave rise to them. Think of the ethical, political, humanistic, cultural and economic negotiations that have informed the system of categorisation of television programs.¹⁹ Statistics have a life of their own; they

are networks but they are networks which have reached a temporary stability or punctualisation and so are 'black boxes' in Latour's sense. Once they have the status of 'black box', i.e. once all the negotiations about their creation have been effaced, they sit there are immutable and unarguable with. ABC managers tremble if the audience goes down or the budget goes up.

I would now like to analyse two particular moments in my ABC arts story using some more tools from the ANT toolbox.

— THE SENIOR DECISION-MAKER

I need at this point to relate a bit more of the story. In doing my research on arts programming on the ABC, I clearly wished to speak to the senior ABC managers who appeared to have a decision-making role in this area. I attempted to make appointments to interview the Chairman, the Director of Radio, the Head of Music Networks, the Director of Television, the Director of ABC Online and the Commissioning Editor TV Arts and Entertainment. The Chairman's PA turned me away with a frosty email: 'you may not be aware that the Chairman is no longer involved directly in arts administration'. Two senior radio managers originally agreed to interviews but then pulled out. The Director of ABC Online never replied.

There was one senior arts decision-maker however who was initially co-operative. I will call her Ms X. It happened that at the same time as the report was being produced, I was part of a group, concerned about arts coverage on the ABC, that was planning a Sunday seminar to discuss the issue. We naturally invited the same key member of the ABC management team, Ms X. She rang me and said she was very eager to participate in the seminar with one of her colleagues. She also said she had heard I was doing a report on ABC arts and would be more than happy to talk to me about it. Her door was always open, she was eager to share views of what the ABC should be doing etc, etc. Let's meet, she said.

Because of my bad experience with managers once they heard I'd been hired by the union, I felt I needed to double check Ms X knew that fact. When reminded of my tainted association, she said, 'I'd better just check with Y'. A day later she came back to me with the news that she wasn't allowed to talk. But as these things go, because we were already on the phone, she did start to talk. She said she was trying her best to open up the ABC to outside forces and had been appearing at forums where independent producers were present, inviting them to bring her ideas for new shows in the arts and entertainment area. She mentioned some particular appearances. She also made me aware of some programming trends that showed the ABC's performance was starting to improve.

I was disarmed by Ms X and my off-the-record discussions with her brought to the fore for me a worry I had all along in doing my report, but one I was refusing to face. That was: how damaging for the ABC was it for me to be attacking it publicly and to be providing

ammunition for those who want to undermine it? On the other hand, I was feeling pretty annoyed with ABC senior management. Their absolute refusal to talk to me or to give me any information had really frustrated me: I had become extremely indignant about their paranoia, their lack of transparency and accountability. They had fallen for the coalition government's culture of secrecy and spin, I raved at anyone who would listen.

Latour describes my relationship at that point with the managers well. I treat them like black boxes—fixed and immutable—‘we can follow the way in which actant B [me] attributes a fixed border to actant A [the managers], the way in which B assigns interests or goals to A ...’ I have a program; they have anti-program; but there is no successful translation; the detour is not rewarded by a return.²⁰

But at the moment that Ms X disarmed me, you might say ‘enrolled’ me, my program and hers begin to merge. I became worried about the question of whether I was actually damaging the ABC, and I went back to the draft of the report and began to put in qualifying material, especially in relation to Ms X's role and the question of whether Australian content was going up or down. I could feel myself wavering uneasily between the perspective of the ‘workers’ and the perspective of management.

Now, how do we understand the transactions that occurred in what I have just related? We could tell this story using a social psychological or even a ‘game theoretical’ repertoire, which would analyse it as an act of interpersonal communication, especially with regard to various techniques of persuasion, probably with a bit of gender solidarity thrown in, and I guess that *was* going on.²¹ But what else was in the picture?

We can use what Latour calls ‘the socio-logics of programs and anti-programs’.²² In that transaction between Ms X and me, many networks/black boxes are in play. She is the effect of a series of networks which includes the ABC and its history/position/philosophy, her place in the ABC's managerial hierarchy (and think of all the networks this lead to), the network of independent producers, some taste regimes to do with various programming styles and genres, the audience (a black box if ever there was one, represented by those recalcitrant audience statistics), the media, and so on. I am the effect of a series of networks/black boxes called ‘the university’, the ‘public interest’, communications policy, the media, various taste regimes (maybe the same as Ms X's, which is why I can relate to her) and so on.

She and I play the game of program and anti-program as we endeavour within our networks to bring some temporary resolution to the situation. I need information, she wants to give it to me, but she can't, and anyway, she only wants to give me certain kinds of information, and I want her to give me the sort of information which supports the way I've decided to play writing my report. And so it goes, as Bob Ellis would say.

We could also tell another story about the ABC which might account for the senior managers' defensiveness and which might temper my irritation with them. If I can depart

from ANT for a moment, this story would enable us to understand the current operations of the ABC as a public corporation within a set of wider changes in neo-liberal governance, viz., the growth of an audit explosion. This refers to the fact that, in the last ten years or so, mechanisms for reporting and oversight have increased exponentially. In an interesting collection of essays entitled *Audit Culture*, edited by Marilyn Strathern, she says (quoting other scholars):

Audit is an emerging principle of social organization [which] ... constitutes a major shift of power: from the public to the professional and from teachers, engineers and managers to overseers.

and

It has become a major institution of Western governance, on a par with other key organising concepts such as 'family' and 'society'.²³

Georgie Born has applied this insight very fruitfully in an analysis of the BBC. There isn't space here to go into this fully, but something she says about the BBC has resonance for me in relation to the ABC.

Audit amounted to a defensive bulwark against critics that charged the BBC with being inefficient, and poorly managed, unresponsive to audiences ... It operated publicly as a sign of corporate morality.²⁴

We can remind ourselves that under the current government the ABC has been subject to a truly frightening level of scrutiny and demands for constant internal audit, especially in relation to news and current affairs. This hangs over, I would suggest, every activity the ABC undertakes and perhaps accounts for what I encountered with the managers.

The report

Actors define one another in interaction—in the intermediaries they put into circulation ...
... like other texts, the scientific article [report] is a network whose description it creates.²⁵

Writing the report was a delicate operation. It had to satisfy a number of contradictory aims and/or please a number of incompatible constituencies. It had first of all to please the group who had commissioned it (the union, ostensibly, but really the small group of disgruntled radio producers who comprised the steering group). It had to show that things had got worse; it had to show standards had declined.

It also had to not annoy management too much, both because it needed to appeal to them as something partly 'written in their language', so they would not ignore it, but also, because I research the ABC and I don't want to be blackballed. It had to be academically credible;

I had to maintain my reputation as knowledgeable and disinterested. But it couldn't be written in an academic style, nor could it enter into any complex theoretical arguments. It had to pretend things were simpler than they are. It had to have hooks for the media, presenting them with easily comprehensible grabs of information.

Showing things had got worse and having something easy to throw to the media meant I had to have 'facts and figures'. This led me back to the statistics, those recalcitrant actors in the network. My problem was that I didn't really have any very extensive quantitative information. But I manufactured what I could from what I did have. I concocted indices which I could get somewhere near being able to measure; when I couldn't measure, I turned to vague circumlocution. In fact for radio, the statistics did not really confirm the conclusion I wished to reach, viz., that the total number of arts hours had gone down. I accounted for this by suggesting that many of the hours were repeat hours. This was consistent with my close examination of the program schedules, but I had no firm proof of it. However, neither apparently, did anyone else, so I was able to present this assertion as a plausible one.

And I had to approach the issue of value. Using the network that is constituted by dominant ideas about what counts as quality in broadcasting, I was able to suggest that some recent arts programs were wanting. I described a documentary about composer, Elena Kats-Chernin in scornful tones, accusing it of being 'arts programming meets *Big Brother*', knowing that that rhetorical flourish would be enough to discredit it and to provide a quotable quote, suppressing, for the moment, another network, which is the extensive academic debate about high and low culture.

The report itself, the text, once produced, became a new intermediary. It linked various actors, including me, the researcher, the media, ABC management, the arts community, even that elusive thing 'the public'. It was picked up, much more enthusiastically than I expected, by the media. It fitted a well-worn media trope—'problems at the national broadcaster'—which hadn't had enough of a run since Jonathan Shier's departure. The ABC ignored it publicly, except for the afore-mentioned dismissal by Russell Balding. But internally it was noted, and perhaps even read. Certainly, as I mentioned earlier, it formed a temporary frame against which the ABC had to define its arts strategy.

It also formed a temporary rallying point for various sectors of the arts and broadcasting community. At the small seminar held at the time of the report's release, at which I spoke about my report, there was much passionate debate about the dire state of things, comparisons were made with recent events at SBS. (In fact, because of the release of my report, ABC TV brought forward by a week its announcement of the move of David Stratton and Margaret Pomeranz from SBS to the ABC). Connections were made more broadly to the failure of the present government to develop and implement a robust strategy for arts, culture and creativity, and so on.

It was mentioned in Senate Estimates hearings in May 2004. A Labour Senator (primed no doubt by a disgruntled ABC staffer or member of the arts community), asked the senior ABC managers to comment on my report and in particular, whether they were considering my recommendations.

Managing Director, Russell Balding, replied:

No, we are not considering the recommendations. We do not agree with most of Professor Jacka's conclusions in that paper. We believe that there is a great deal of subjective argument that was based on perception and hearsay, and we believe it is poorly supported by evidence.²⁶

He then went on to produce his intermediary, the statistics.

We commissioned Newspoll to do a survey of our arts listeners. I can report that 74% of arts followers are satisfied ... while only 7% are not satisfied.

So my report has not achieved what Callon calls irreversibility, viz., when it is 'impossible to go back to a point where that translation was only one among others'.²⁷ Rather, it has been subject to 'persistent and obstinate assaults by competing translations', notably sympathetic newspaper interviews with ABC management.

Two months on from Senate estimates, the report had mostly passed into history, although as late as March 2005, it was still being referred to as the 'Jacka report'; its temporary perturbing effect was soon displaced by some new ABC drama, one of which was the investigation of the Richard Alston bias complaints. I have told you the story of this otherwise supremely insignificant story in order to demonstrate the insight of ANT, viz., that history is made, not by tectonic shifts or major structural changes, but by the endless flows and realignments of the networks.

The usefulness of ANT

The networks are simultaneously real like nature, narrated like discourse and collective like society.²⁸

[T]he macro-structure of society is made up of the same stuff as the micro-structure ... If a version does indeed represent a progressive change of scale from micro to macro with the inclusion of greater and greater numbers of black boxes ... then we can also document, using the same tool, the progressive reopening, dispersion, and disbanding of actors passing form the macro level to the micro level.²⁹

I want to argue that ANT enables us to give a better account of what happened and why, or at least how, than attributing the episode to some overarching set of policy decisions, or some fixed framework of what counts as arts, or some governance decision, or some response to audience demand etc.

As outlined above, there are two dominant strategies for analysing the fate of public service broadcasting. One may be described as a discourse-theoretical or ideology position, the other is governmentality theory. The first is framed by the fundamental dichotomy between 'state' and 'market' (the locus classicus is Nicholas Garnham's work).³⁰ This has concomitant dualisms—citizen/consumer, high culture/popular culture, quality/dumbing down, public sphere/commerce etc. The vast majority of academic and public discussion about PSB is framed by this paradigm. One has the vision of two walled camps—one called public/state the other called commerce/popular—with the combatants endlessly lobbing the same missiles at one another, missiles that, curiously, continue to fail to find their target. Think about the endlessly repetitious and unresolvable exchanges between the right and left-wing press commentators on this subject—Robert Manne versus Paddy McGuinness, Richard Ackland versus Miranda Devine, Janet Albrechtson versus David Marr, and so on and so on.

The other framework, governmentality theory, is more sophisticated and powerful. While virtually none of the major governmentality theorists has explicitly applied the theory to PSB, it easy to see how positions developed, say, to account for the social function of museums or schools, could be adapted to the case of PSB.

However, as foreshadowed above, I believe that the approach has a number of shortcomings. The problem is that, in spite of insisting on detailed and minute analysis of the particular techniques of government at play in any particular field—the list is familiar—the complex of mundane programmes, calculations, techniques, apparatuses, documents and procedures through which authorities seek to embody and give effect to governmental ambitions³¹—governmentality theory often seems to yield analyses which smack of seeing the micro-social as an effect of, or a metonym of, the macro-social, usually characterised as neo-liberalism. Perhaps because many governmentality theorists are also political scientists, there is a tendency to focus on big labels for big entities. There is often a sense of a great leviathan, a great governmental machine grinding away and turning out new subjects like so many items on an assembly line. Of course this is not what is intended, but nevertheless, in the course of any particular analysis, there seems to be no room for the contingency or reversals that is a constant feature of a Latourean analysis.

The Latourean posture, however, is not free from criticism. I will discuss three aspects of ANT which raise difficulties. The first is the objection that ANT analyses are purely descriptive, that they never move away from the micro-level. As we know, Latour enjoins researchers to follow the networks. Two issues arise: the first, the point at which the description of the networks should cease; the second, the danger of taking on the viewpoint of the actors.³² I will deal briefly with the second one first. The answer to the objection is to remind ourselves that in all research based on interviews with, or observations of, participants, this is an issue. However, unlike most research, that based on ANT first of all, reveals and can

talk about the gaps and contradictions in informants' discourse and second, can talk explicitly, as I have done, about their own role as researchers, not just in a dutiful nod to 'self-reflexivity' but because of the researcher's place in the network. The answer to the first question of when to stop, is, as I indicate in the next paragraph, when you have produced an effective account which resonates for readers and listeners.

Second, Latour radically rejects all general explanatory categories and challenges the analyst to replace a false meta-reflexivity with style.³³ In all the particularity and contingency of the story, it is difficult to say what has been achieved analytically other than a good story, a story which acts on the reader by techniques of persuasion and even guile. There is no longer a macro-level which explains a series of phenomena on the micro-level or of a 'macro' being able to be deduced from a series of 'micros'. Latour recommends 'throw-away' explanations:

Every time we deal with a new topic, with a new field, with a new object, the explanation should be wholly different. Instead of explaining everything with the same cause and framework ... we will provide a one-off explanation, using a tailor-made cause.³⁴

The danger of never seeming to produce any analyses which have major implications or which make sense of macro-social patterns seems like a loss. Latour answers this by describing what Michel Callon achieved in his analysis of the scientific controversy surrounding scallop farming discussed previously:

Callon's account of the scallop's harsh life deep in St Brieuc Bay ... is completely unreflexive. ... [But] these objects are freed, active and anthropological projects, full of life and ready to take their place in a dramatic story.³⁵

In other words, the account should be written in such a way as to make the elements (actors) of the story 'speak for themselves' even when they are non-human. The reader should be able to trace all the connections among the elements (the networks) to see how and why, at a particular moment, certain events unfold, certain outcomes are achieved, even when this achievement is only temporary. What ANT does beyond what a good investigative journalist would do is to lay bare the minute forces which bring about certain translations at various nodes in the network. In my story such a moment is perhaps where I (as researcher) formed a temporary alliance with my informant, which changed the course of how my report was written.

A third, and related criticism is that Latour claims too much for his analyses. In article with a very telling title ('Give me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World') in which Latour summarises his well-known work on Louis Pasteur, he argues that Pasteur's scientific discoveries revolutionised, not just the biological sciences, but France itself. (His book is called

The Pasteurization of France (!)]³⁶ His critics have argued that this is an over-inflated claim for the significance of Pasteur's work and that Latour substitutes rhetoric for rigour. His style is 'entertaining and creative, but does not bear close scrutiny'.³⁷

Given that these criticisms of ANT have some point, let's see how my ABC/ANT story fares when judged alongside the ways in which the other two frameworks would tell the story.

If I were using the discourse analysis mode of analysing the adequacy of the coverage of the arts on the ABC, I would immediately become locked into the high culture/low culture opposition. To oversimplify considerably, the account would go like this. I would describe on the one hand how the traditional arts constituency abhors the 'dumbing down' of the ABC because it does not give sufficient weight to the more demanding arts forms, it does not telecast whole operas and ballets, it gives less place to original Australian radio drama, it gives too much air-time to 18th and 19th century Western classical music while ignoring early music, contemporary and non-Western music. On the other side I would point to the low ratings for such programs, describe how the ABC is trying to create new audiences for arts by packaging it in more familiar generic forms like reality TV and remind the opponents, using no doubt a bit of Bourdieu, that it is anti-democratic to tax the whole population to fund what are actually elite tastes. I would then no doubt have to take sides (as I mostly did in the 'Jacka Report') or do some inventive conceptual squirming to come down somewhere in the middle (as I did a little in my report). But we would think we had heard it all before.

If I situated myself within a governmentality framework, I would no doubt relate my account of the changes in the ABC to the replacement of the welfare state by neo-liberalism in the following way. Rose and Miller see neo-liberalism as constituting a sharp break with welfarism at the level of moralities, explanations and vocabularies. Against the assumption the ills of social and economic life are to be addressed by the activities of the state, it sees that the role of state should be severely limited and that markets will replace planning as regulators of economic activity.³⁸ Active entrepreneurship is to replace the passivity and dependency of 'responsible solidarity' as individuals are encouraged to strive to optimise their own quality of life. Neo-liberalism entails a reorganisation of programs for the government of personal life. Instead of security and guidance flowing from state provision, the entrepreneurial individual will provide for his/her own prosperity, health and happiness.

For neo-liberalism, the political subject is less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is active. This citizenship is to be manifested not in the receipt of public largesse, but in the energetic pursuit of personal fulfilment and the incessant calculations that enable this to be achieved.³⁹

In other words, the political subject is less a citizen, in the sense of *social* citizen, and more of an individual centre of calculation of the maximisation of welfare and happiness in a landscape of almost endless choice. In the activation of choices that will maximise individual benefit, the individual 'active citizen' is assisted by an explosion of 'life-style' experts, with advice about how to reconcile 'ethical incompleteness'. As in other spheres, in the sphere of culture, overt state or welfare provision falls away. The task of welding a population into a polity exhibiting solidarity and adherence to unified values of national identity or other governmental purposes becomes redundant, because the focus of the management of personal life has moved elsewhere—on to a new 'technology of the self', that of consumer choice and individual entrepreneurship. Instruction no longer goes on in the national news or in events of national importance. It goes on in fashion magazines, homemaker magazines, health programs, money management programs, and other places where directions for self-management can be found.

The governmentality framework would invite us to see that, in order to remain relevant against the background of this transformation in the new regime, PSB has had to transform itself to conform to the new requirements of person-formation that emphasise individual entrepreneurship. The problem would then be to articulate a sustainable public mission for the ABC rather than to see it as just one more consumer possibility in the almost infinite regime of choice. At this level of generality, the transformations in the broadcasting landscape are seen to be just one more instance of larger transformations in late capitalist modernity, to be deplored or not as one sees fit. But this story remains at the very high level of generality and, like the discourse-theory one, becomes stale and repetitious after much reiteration and restatement.

— CONCLUSION

Telling the story through the optic of ANT provides a richness which the other approaches I have discussed lack. The story I have told is a very small and unimportant episode in the annals of PSB in Australia. But it offers the possibility of admitting a great range of actors into the field and of not particularly privileging any particular domain or sector as the determining one. It penetrates under the skin of the particularly crafted texts and performances that emanate from policy processes, public relations machines, publicity campaigns, government interventions and media reports. It shows how all these interact and are actors in a network, and how in turn they link to others, which might be almost mute in my story but are able to be mobilised if events turn in a slightly different direction.

It makes sense to me that the best account we can give of social processes and their transformations is one in which there are millions of such stories and they form networks which link with each other to form new connections and overlaps and emergences or becomings.

Social life is a great tapestry of becomings, and our practice of generalising them into one big overall account is a product of temporary punctualisation or irreversibilism, as Latour and Callon would say, rather than of the existence of overarching social laws.⁴⁰

LIZ JACKA is Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Technology Sydney. She is currently researching the past, present and future of public service broadcasting. She has published recent articles on aspects of this topic in *Television and New Media* and *Southern Review*.
<liz.jacka@uts.edu.au>

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