

**Phillip ADAMS**

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**This is George Lewkowicz for the Don Dunstan Foundation's Don Dunstan Oral History Project interviewing Phillip Adams on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008 at Phillip Adams's residence. The topic of interest is the film industry, Phillip's advice to Don Dunstan on the setting up of the film industry in South Australia and Don and the arts more generally.**

**Phillip, thanks very much for being willing to do this interview. Can you, just for the record, talk briefly about yourself and how you became interested in the film industry? (clock chimes)**

Well, by the time I got the phone call from Don I'd spent some years persuading, cajoling, bullying, flattering a rapid succession of prime ministers into doing things. My interest in the film industry was simply as a member of an audience for most of my life and it seemed no-one ever considered it remotely possible that Australia make films. We were an audience *for* films – leaving aside our extraordinary history of film production, which went back to the dawn of time, which none of us knew about; we didn't know, for example, we'd made 500 films during the Silent Era alone – so, anyway, nothing was happening. The only film productions in Australia were a couple of very boring industrial docs.

But once 1956 arrived with television we had to start doing a few things of our own, and long before I started getting fundamental changes in policy and support mechanisms a law was passed. (telephone rings, break in recording) This is something that people don't know about, and it's really quite important: a law was passed, by whom I've never been able to establish, making it illegal to show foreign television commercials in Australia, and that was really the trigger. It meant that Coca-Cola and the mighty corporations couldn't dump their commercials on the air – they can now, but they couldn't then – and so you had to have little production companies to make television commercials; and out of that, in due course, would come many of the great names still extant in our film industry half a century later. So you had little companies making commercials and that was pretty much it: and I was making commercials as a young advertising bloke along with people like Fred Schepisi and Peter Carey and others from the middle '50s.

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Then some of us started to fantasise that we could make films ourselves: underground filmmakers started to pop up in Melbourne and Sydney, there were clusterings around film cooperatives and some of us made our little infantile efforts at feature films without any help from anybody. We didn't know what we were doing, we just made it up as we went along. And I could spend a week telling you about that. But, in any case, I made a feature film myself, I made it with a clockwork camera, and it won the Grand Prix at the Adelaide–Auckland Film Festival, the first Australian ever to win the Grand Prix at *any* film festival, let alone a modest international one. Now, as I'd made that film – and I did *everything*, my friend and I were the entire crew – I thought, 'Well, if we can do it, anyone can do it'.

**What was the title of that?**

It was called *Jack and Jill: the postscript*. It was also the first feature film to win the AFI<sup>1</sup> Awards. The AFI Awards had been in existence for a long time but they'd never had a feature film to give a prize to. So Adelaide, in a strange way, (laughs) had an influence on my life, because of giving me this nice little statue.

So then I decided that it was time to get something happening formally. Barry Jones and I managed to get very close personal access to John Gorton, we got John interested, John sent Barry and I around the world looking at ideas for a film industry; I didn't need to make the trip because I'd already worked out the entire plan, but I'd never been overseas and got a nice free trip. I came back and I wrote a one-page report, one sheet of paper, to Gorton and said, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident'. That was a little bit of an in-joke. 'It is time to hear our own voices, see our own landscapes and dream our own dreams'. And I set up a three-sequence argument: an experimental film fund, where we would just give money, scatter bread upon the waters for very young filmmakers to try anything; out of that we would take the talented and we'd put them in a hypothetical film school; in that film school they would form working relationships, and when they graduated you would

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<sup>1</sup> AFI – Australian Film Institute.

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fund them through a film bank. One, two, three. Gorton accepted it, but was only around long enough to implement stage one, which was the experimental film fund. Then we had rapidly a couple of other prime ministers but I kept on the case and – bingo! – those three things were put into place.

Then, *then* I get a call from South Australia, from Peter Ward, the Svengali, Don's Svengali –

**Yes.**

– asking me to go to South Australia because Don wanted to have a chat to me, and I was well aware of Dunstan, who even then I was describing as the Pierre Trudeau of Australia, and I was fascinated to meet him. So Peter picks me up at the airport, I'm going to Don's office, and the first thing that happened was and I tell the story how he sort of walked towards me across this vast expanse of carpet holding out his hand with this huge ring, the turquoise ring, and I wasn't sure whether I was meant to shake the hand or kiss the ring. (laughter) I think I did both. And we sat in a conversation pit underneath the obligatory Australian landscape – I think it might have been an Arthur Boyd. But he did a very odd thing: he went over and turned on a very large radio which was sitting on the other side of his office, very loudly. And I said, 'Why have you done that, Mr Premier?' He said, 'Because the Permanent Head is listening'. He was the permanent head of his own department, who was Sir Tommy Playford – – –.

**Yes; John White I think it was.**

On the other side of the wall, with a glass to the wall.

**Really?**

So he could listen in on what Dunstan was saying. So clearly the radio was a technique that Dunstan used frequently so he could have something approaching private conversations. Given that we had to shout at each other (laughter) I'm not sure how efficacious it was. So what happened then was very quick. Don said, 'I want to get into the film industry. I know what you're doing federally. How can I get into it?' And he said, before I could make a suggestion, 'I've got a very good

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idea'. He said, 'This is what I want to do: I want to open a film laboratory here. I've talked to Fuji in Japan and they're willing to set up a film lab so that all the film work that's starting to happen in Melbourne and Sydney, Adelaide can be a part of it'. I said, or shouted, 'It won't work, Don. They're known as "rushes" and they need to be *rushed*. By the time we send stuff over to South Australia on aeroplanes it's just not going to work. It's not the way to go, it's bullshit'. And then – I mean I didn't know why I was there, I had no idea – I said, 'But on the other hand we could set up a local industry. Forget processing, there's something else we can do'. And I asked him, I said, 'Can you find out how much filmmaking is going on in South Australia now within the Government?' Because I guessed there'd be a bit. And so he checked, and what we discovered was every other government department had a film crew and they were making dreadful documentaries on public roads or road safety and they were all over the place.

So Don and I came up with a conspiracy, and this is what it was. He didn't want to be seen publicly to be pushing for a film industry because he thought he might be seen as slightly mad. And so I said, 'This is what we're going to do: we're going to put all this film activity together in one body. All those cameramen, all the Moviolas, the Arriflexes, all this scattered activity, we'll put together into a sort of Film Australia model' – it was the Commonwealth Film Unit model – 'and that will be a front for what our *real* plan is, which is to make feature films'. So this is what we argued. We'd bring all the stuff together, get rid of – most of it was hopeless, most of them were useless, untalented, timeserving dills making really, really bad films – so 'We'll get rid of that, but this will give us an initial way of funding a bit of film, and you just do it covertly rather than overtly'. I was surprised that he was so reticent about doing it up-front, but he was, he just had this attitude. I said, 'Then we'll give it a name like the "South Australian Film Corporation" [SAFC]'.

I'd just been to the National Film Board in Canada, which I worshipped as a child. I thought it was the best government film production outfit in the world. And the day I arrived there everyone in the cafeteria was in tears. I couldn't work out why are all these people crying. They were crying because they had all got the sack. They'd all got the sack because it had occurred to the Canadian Government that

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most of them were useless, they were boring, timeserving farts and they had tenure. And, as a very prominent Canadian filmmaker told me, he said, 'Artists shouldn't have tenure. Filmmakers shouldn't have tenure. Novelists don't have tenure, painters don't have tenure. This is wrong. You've got to free it up and your tenure here is based on your talent, not on the fact that you're a public servant'. Now, this was initially deeply shocking to me because I came out of the old Labor Party tradition; but, flying back, I realised that it was right. So I said to Dunstan – and there was a procedure that went through this – I got him to hire a friend of mine who was a researcher, a very good social and political researcher in Melbourne.

**Who was that?**

I'm crook, it'll come back to me. Lovely guy. And he rushed around, did the research about the filmmaking going on and so we could see what it was in the aggregate. But I said to Dunstan, 'Let's have a new model for a film outfit. Let's have a place that really doesn't have staff. Let's have a director who is on a very short-term contract and let's bring in all the best filmmakers from around Australia to make films in South Australia as the first step'. I said, 'Perhaps we can get Peter Weir or we can get Schepisi' or whoever were the directors of the moment, 'but it will never be allowed to ossify into a bureaucracy. Even the top bureaucrat will be short-term'. And Dunstan sort of thought that was an engaging idea, so we decided we'd interview for the top job.

Oh, incidentally, what little industry there was in South Australia behaved in a completely predictable way: they hated the idea. They didn't want this to happen because it would upset their own – tiny as it was – it would upset the little world they had going for them. The same thing happened nationally. In Melbourne and Sydney that rotting little film industry that I described was totally opposed to having a proper film industry. The ABC<sup>2</sup> fought me tenaciously because they were a vertically-integrated, public-service method of making television programs and they didn't want outsiders coming in. Packer, Sir Frank, was much more amenable than

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<sup>2</sup> ABC – Australian Broadcasting Commission, later Corporation.

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the ABC was. And the same thing happened in South Australia. So everything was being done by stealth.

So we started interviewing people for the top job because we said, 'That's where it will start'. And I'd always had in mind that Gil Brealey would do the job, but between the time that I had come to the view that the interview process would almost certainly lead to Gil Brealey I'd had a major falling-out with Brealey or, rather – Brealey didn't know this to any great extent – I'd come to the view that he would be a disaster. Why? Because I'd watched him fail in a couple of federal jobs by sheer lack of tenacity. I'd watched him crumble under pressure and I'd decided that he was a flake. So for me the Gil Brealey interview – and it was my researcher, myself and I think Peter Ward were probably the interview panel, but certainly myself and the Melbourne guy whose name will come back to me later – sat in a room in Adelaide, in that building opposite the Hilton, and in the door came various wannabe people, none of whom were conceivable for the job, and in walked Gil. And in a piece of dazzling brilliance Brealey sat down, looked at me and said, 'I think, Phillip, you doubt my tenacity'. He'd got a whisper from somewhere. 'I think you doubt that I've got the bottle for this', you know, (growls). So he tackled it right up front, did a stunning interview and won the others over. I was still reluctant and reticent. He won the others over and so Gil gets the job. And Gil, however, did accept the principle, the principle being that we will have a bit of funding available, that the SAFC while pretending to exist for other purposes would really get into this business big-time. And Gil had been a senior person at the Commonwealth Film Unit, so he was used to dealing with government filmmaking, documentaries for government departments, and he had a toehold in the new industry which was burgeoning particularly in Melbourne and Sydney. So the argument was that filmmakers would be drawn to South Australia, helped in South Australia, and that the South Australians by osmosis would learn how to do it. And that's what happened.

You got *Sunday too far away* was the first film, and that was the theory, so along comes Jack and along comes – god help us, I can't even remember who made the damn thing now – but, you know, you had filmmakers from over there coming over,

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making a film here, and the idea was that they would hire a lot of crew from around and everyone would learn how to do it together. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, for god's sake, set in Victoria, became a South Australian Film Corporation project.

**Yes. *Storm boy* was another.**

*Storm boy*. Well, *Storm boy* was much more authentically a South Australian venture. So that's really how it got going. Don and I understood that we were doing the thing by stealth because he didn't want to provoke a major funding argument.

Now, what happened, though, within nanoseconds of Dunstan announcing that he was going to have one, everyone had to have one and it became 'the' model. So Victoria had one, New South Wales. It was always with variations. Tasmania had a film corporation. The only holdouts for a while were Perth, which never did, WA never really did it; and Queensland also came into line. All of them failed in one way or another, Queensland because of corruption in the Bjelke-Petersen Government, Tasmania because they didn't have critical mass down there – there just wasn't enough of *anything* happening in Tasmania to make it viable – and it boiled down to a war between Sydney and Melbourne. Sydney's failed finally because they didn't need it because there was so much film activity happening anyway, because Wran – that's Neville –

**Yes, Neville Wran.**

– was very good at getting federal initiatives based in Sydney. I was a Victorian, I wanted to have the Film School in Victoria, I wanted to build it or graft it onto Swinburne; but Wran lured it to Sydney. So you had in Sydney the head offices for the publishers – you had Fairfax, Packer, ABC, NIDA,<sup>3</sup> Film School – you know, every federal body was based in New South Wales, so it didn't really need a New South Wales Film Corporation. It had a Film Office, it's still got one, but once again there were problems with corruption in there. So South Australia for a while

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<sup>3</sup> NIDA – National Institute of Dramatic Art.

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grew strong, started to get a head of steam, was politically-advantageous to Don and I think he quite liked having it, and it's still probably historically the most successful.

What he wrote in [his book] for this is just absolute nonsense and I've never understood why he did it, so I wrote a very hurt and indignant letter to him saying, 'What are you saying?' He wrote a letter back, and after you contacted me I was trying to find the correspondence but all my correspondence is in boxes at the National Library and there's 500 of them, so finding anything is hard. He wrote back saying, 'I don't know what came over me, I'm sorry. Please forgive me, I'll fix it in the second edition', and it never happened. And it was always a thing of tension between Don and I right to the end of his life. You know, we made up and we did a lot of things together, Whitlam Lectures and so on – and, in fact, I was also embroiled in aspects of his sexual activities. I remember him ringing me up to say that he'd got Judith Pugh pregnant.

**Really!**

And he said, 'What shall I do about it?' And I said, 'Take out a full-page ad in *The Advertiser*'. She doesn't quite mention it in her book, which is just out now. There's a photograph of her and Don in the nude together, but she doesn't talk about the child. It miscarried, so it ceased to be an issue. So I had a lot of contact with Don over the years.

But the film thing was a very simple, mad little story; it was just a series of grabbing opportunities – – –. Everything I did with politicians was opportunistic. With Gorton you could flatter him into doing something; with McMahon you yelled at him; with Whitlam, I had correspondence with Gough where I'd write to 'Dear Medici Prince', you know, and he'd write, 'Dear Falstaff', you know. So it depended on who you were dealing with. Wran, you talked tough with Neville because that was his culture. In Victoria, they were quite nice people in Victoria, you could always sort of have a nice chat to them. So it was dependent on the personality of the person in place how you did things. But even Don wasn't



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sufficiently confident at that stage of his premiership to go out and hang a – his idea was a film laboratory. That was it.

**So you didn't get any sense of him knowing a hell of a lot about film itself.**

No, no, no. Well, mate, *none* of us did! We were all making it up, for chrissake. But what he *did* have, of course, was this panoramic view of the importance of culture. He was, if you like, an early version of Richard Florida – you know, the Florida arguments about a critical mass of gay men being absolutely crucial to a modern city. So Don was smart as a whip and he was charismatic, and he was also in many ways painfully awkward, though. There were things about him which surprised me when I met him, and a lot of his ostentatious sort of theatricality didn't come that naturally to him. It was almost role play, he was role-playing being the progressive premier, and very often I think he was very tentative about it. But fascinating, I still think. In fact, I was talking to *your* Rann a few months ago –

**Mike, yes.**

– and we were swapping stories about Don, and he told me stories about Don which are outside the parameters of this which absolutely floored me. *Amazing* stories. And I said, 'You've got to write the biography'.

**Really?**

But I fell in love with Adelaide, I thought Adelaide was a remarkable place during the Dunstan Era and I was thrilled to have that tiny little connection with it through this. Later, other people took over from Gil. John Morrison I think did a better job. He did a good job at the Corp, I think, and for a while Adelaide really was fighting well above its weight because interesting things were happening there. I don't know that the theory ever worked, finally, I don't think Adelaide ever got through this allegedly osmotic process a great sense of cinematic self-confidence, but at least it remained a player when the other states fell away.

**Do you remember Eric Williams at all? He used to run the Adelaide Film Festival in the '70s.**

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Oh, no, of course I remember Eric. Eric set up the Adelaide–Auckland Film Festival. He was a mate. I'd forgotten him. Yes, I liked him, and I would have talked to him about this at the time. Isn't it funny, I haven't actually heard the name for a long time. But it seemed to me that the place had infrastructure; within a hoot and a holler of the city there were every imaginable landscape, location; it had the Florida thing kicking over – you know, there's a lot of very smart people in South Australia. But of course they were still leaving at a rate of knots, my missus amongst them. I used to be amazed how often I'd be interviewing someone and they'd come from South Australia, they were born in Adelaide, but they weren't living there. So at least during the Dunstan Era the brain drain stopped –

**Most definitely, yes.**

– and the opposite seemed to happen.

**What was your missus's name?**

Patrice Newell, who writes lots of books.

**And did you know Len Amadio at the time?**

Yes. Well, Len, I met Len at that time and I liked him a lot. See, Len was another person, another reason for thinking that South Australia could do it, could do all sorts of things. But I think with the passing of Don it lost that sense of cultural confidence and started apologising again, and the thing that shits me about South Australia is that it's always apologising. Brisbane doesn't apologise, they're arrogant pricks up there; but South Australia is always – – –. And I walk around the place and I see the most beautiful homes in the country. To me it's just a great place and I've always wanted to shake it up –

**Yes, stir it up.**

– you know, 'You're fantastic, stop saying you're sorry for yourselves'.

So Don was fascinating, but quirky and in many areas tentative. I don't think people quite understand that he always felt beleaguered. Well, why wouldn't he if

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the head of the public service is eavesdropping on his meetings with a glass on the wall?

**He was of a certain old school type.**

But they all regarded Don as an upstart and hoped that he'd be a short-term phenomenon. The Playford Era was well and truly in the past.

**Just the film industry, why I asked about Len Amadio was whether there was any strategic sense – – –.**

I didn't talk to Len about it much at all. There was a series of meetings which would be Dunstan and myself or me and Peter Ward, and I'll have to ring you about the guy's name – he's an old friend and he's still around, but I'm simply just blanking out on his name today. That's it: Irving Saulwick. And Saulwick was, at the time, the great pollster. He worked out of *The Age*, the Saulwick Polls appeared in *The Age* in Melbourne. But he was a very good pollster and he was of left-wing personal proclivities, which I think always distorted his research, but that's another story. But we both thought Don was terrific and so South Australia did it, did it first and, as I said, because everyone was watching Dunstan, all the other premiers were terribly intrigued by him. If Don did something you had to have a look at it.

**Better watch, yes.**

So if *he* had one of these film things, *I'd* better have one. But film at the time, it was shooting fish in a barrel, because the thing took off so fast. People forget: my arguments that we'd have a film or industry in five, ten years – we had one in *two* years, because there was so much pent-up desire to make films that as soon as you hung a shingle up, Bing! We were a major force in the film industry, at least at the international film festival level, in minutes.

**So where did the finance come from? Were there tax concessions at the time?**

No. What happened was the argument when we set up the Australian Film Development Corporation, which later morphed into the AFC, was that it would put seed money into a project and then you'd rush around and you'd try and get a bit of dough from the private sector. And the first film off the assembly line was *Barry*

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*McKenzie*, which I did with Humphries and Beresford. Now, you have to understand that feature films then cost nothing. None of us got paid anything, we all basically worked for zilch, so you could make a feature film for a couple of hundred thousand. I'd made *Jack and Jill: a postscript* for six thousand, which won that prize. So for a quarter of a million dollars you could make a major feature film. And so the government reluctantly put some money into Barry McKenzie – this is the AFDC. They thought it was a pretty horrendous sort of project because it was dirty and filthy and unpleasant.

**Irreverent.**

Irreverent. But the private funding fell over just as we were about to fly off to London so they had to finance the whole thing, reluctantly. It was run by Tom Stacey, who came to the airport and instructed us not to put any of those vulgar colloquialisms into it, so we promised him we wouldn't. (laughter) And, see, that then was a remarkable success. It caused great embarrassment to half of Australia; the other half rejoiced in it, and it made possible the films that followed. You wouldn't have had a *Picnic* if you hadn't had a *Bazza*, but all the early films – *Barry McKenzie*, *Alvin Purple*, an absolute contemporary of *Barry McKenzie* was the David Williamson film that Tim Burstall directed with that incredibly tall actor.

**Stork?**

*Storkk*, not *Storm boy*.

**Bruce Somebody.**

Bruce, yes. So *Stalk* and *Barry McKenzie* were absolutely contemporary. Now, all these films were really aimed at the western suburbs and they all did quite well, and then it was only after we proved it possible to find an audience for an Australian film that you could contemplate going upmarket and do a *Picnic*. But even *Sunday too far away* had that earthy sort of western-suburbs appeal.

And the other thing they all had in common – and it would hold the Australian industry back for years – was that all of them were films about failure. Have you heard this argument?

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**No, I haven't, no.**

Well, it's a very powerful one. Almost all early Australian films in the renaissance had a central character who failed in his ambition. In *Sunday too far away* he wanted to be gun shearer. He failed. Jack then went on and made another film in Melbourne in which the central character wanted to be a big success at university. He fails and becomes a television repair man. Barry McKenzie fails to lose his virginity. Alvin Purple runs away from sexual encounters. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* the cast disappeared. *Burke and Wills* they all die (increasing laughter) in the desert. *Gallipoli* –

***Gallipoli, yes.***

– bit of a flop, really, militarily. *Phar Lap*, they killed the horse. It was amazing, all the films – *Cars that ate Paris*, central character. Fail, fail, fail, fail, fail. And I remember at the time Whitlam was trying to get a new national anthem and I pointed out to him that Australia only rhymed with 'failure' and (laughs) so it was going to be a pretty dud anthem. But there was something in the Australian character: we're the only nation which mythologises, builds its national identity on a defeat, and all our stories end in disaster, and it's because the country is fire, flood, and this is the country we live in. And it wasn't till the penny dropped and we started making films where there was a hero or heroine that actually *won* – the *Mad Maxes* and all the rest of it –

***Crocodile Dundee, yes.***

– and *Croc*, later – that we finally cracked the American market. Americans just can't put up with it.

I can remember being in Cannes, and I still led the contingent there because by then I was running the AFC, and I can remember there was a *huge* crowd to see *Burke and Wills*, and they're all there in their pretty frocks and all their dinner jackets on and they're all sitting there on the edge of their seat and about halfway through they realised, 'It's going to end in total fucking misery', and they started to walk out, saying, '*Merde!*' (laughter) Everyone wanted a happy ending, and

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Australians invented *calamity*. And it's a really, really strange trait. Now we make films about kids getting lost in the desert and central characters eaten by crocodiles. (laughs) And I thought it was terrific, I loved it.

These days, of course, now we just make genre films and down the road they do prequels to *Star Wars*, so we've become the very thing I never wanted us to be, which is a back lot for American film production.

**US, yes. I've got a problem with Australian scripts these days. I just think they're so ---.**

Yes, they're not great; but 99 per cent of the films that come in are shit, anyway. (laughter) We're pretty tough on ourselves. And even when we make a good one people stay away in droves. But there were deep cultural problems in attracting an audience to Australian films, and there still are. That was always a huge issue from day one.

So Dunstan picked up, basically, it boils down to Dunstan seeing something happening federally, wanting to get involved, having an idea which he conceded after 15 minutes of explanation wasn't the best idea he'd ever had, and creating this little thing through deviance. And as he got more confident, of course, he would never have done that two or three years later, you know, he would have been very much more up-front; but he felt that necessary.

**The Corporation, that was set up under legislation. Was that ever discussed with you or was that somebody else's idea?**

No. I just said you needed one.

**Yes, right.**

And I suggested, as I said, this open structure where you wouldn't have an awful lot of staff. By then I'd fallen in love with this new idea and, long before Channel 4, I persuaded Labor in opposition during the run-up to the Hawke Government that we needed something called The Electric Gallery, and it came out of my bitterness with the ABC. We were making films at a rate of knots and the ABC would not show any of them.

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**Really?**

And I gave a National Press Club talk and I said, 'The ABC is like the National Gallery: only hanging staff artists'. I said, 'Imagine a national gallery where all the artists that are displayed clock on at nine o'clock and leave at five, and that anyone who's painting in a garage over there, "Don't bring your paintings to us, fuck off!"' That was the ABC. I said, 'They just give me the shits. So what we do is we have a thing called The Electric Gallery, no staff, just a national network, and anyone who makes a documentary, they can come and hang their "picture" on The Electric Gallery and get paid for it'. And this was Labor Party policy – until we got into office and then it worked out to be too expensive; but a couple of years later pretty much that notion, the Channel 4 original model, came on-stream.

This is one of the reasons I think Don would have been careful because, from day one, film was seen as a bit of an indulgence of Gorton's and perhaps of Gough's, but of course in Gough's scale of indulgences it hardly mattered. People forget that when we set the Australia Council up film was one of the seven constituent boards, because I could always get Gough to write a cheque for anything. He rang me up one day and said, 'You've bought a cinema. Comrade, you've bought a cinema in Hobart, I hear'. And I said, 'Yes, I have, Gough'. He said, 'Why have you done that?' I said, 'Cause the fuckin' cinema chains won't show Australian films so we're going to set up our own chain of cinemas'. He said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'Well, I've got one there, because it was going to be wrecked. I bought that. I've got one here and one up there'. He said, 'You can't do this, comrade. You can't do this'. I said, 'I'm sorry, Gough, I've *done* it'. And then he said, 'Oh, well, okay'. But that was the spirit then. You could do anything.

**Just get into it, yes.**

But Gough, of course, was imperious and arrogant where really Dunstan wasn't. Dunstan realised how tenuous his grip on power was, where I think Gough thought he was there forever. Silly Gough.

**Yes, that's right. He went for it too hard.**

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But Irving Saulwick's still around. He'll have a slightly different spin on how it happened. But Peter Ward was the Svengali, the go-between, in these days and I used to find it fascinating to sit in a meeting with someone wearing dark glasses.

**Really? Oh, dear.**

Peter always looked like the lead in a New Wave movie of his own.

**French New Wave, yes.**

So on some levels it was comical, the whole thing was funny. Permanent head eavesdropping, radios blasting, huge rings being proffered for kissing. (laughter)

**No cassocks, though. Just one last area I wanted to ask you about: Don as a media performer, I'm just wondering whether you had any observations on that.**

Only the things one saw from the wrong side of Australia, him standing in front of the tsunami; the famous clothing stuff. Don was pretty good at all that, but he wasn't alone. It was a time, as I said, when you'd got ---. I think to some extent he did model himself on the Canadian.

**Pierre, yes.**

Trudeau set a style, a panache. It was very common. In the late '60s, early '70s, it was an era when anything could be done, you had that optimism that the world was there to change and that you could actually do it. So Don plugged into that and became Australia's prime example.

**What about Neville Wran? You mentioned him as being a bit of a tough guy.**

I've got to tell you a story about New South Wales. New South Wales came as a great shock to me when I moved up. I bought a farm, not far from Packers, who I knew very well, and it was a complete coincidence, I didn't quite know where Kerry's farm was, I'd always declined to go there. Anyway, so we buy this farm, pretty big place, throb, throb, throb, helicopter lands on the lawn, out gets Kerry, comes up, sits on the stairs and says, 'Now, son, you're going to need a manager'. I said, 'Ooh, I suppose I am'. He said, 'You can have my manager's brother'. 'Oh,' I said, 'thank you'. I said, 'Well, I'll talk to him'. He was okay, so we hired Kerry's



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manager's brother. And he said, 'But you're going to need a cattle dog'. I said, 'I probably *will* need a cattle dog'. He said, 'Do you know how you pick one?' I said, 'No, Kerry'. He said, 'Well, what you do is you get the litter of puppies and you throw an empty kero tin at them and they all run away yelping'. He said, 'The first one that comes back to sniff the kero tin, that's the dog you train'. I said, 'Kerry, that's the management principles at Park Street, that's the way you treat *humans*', because I'd seen him do it: terrified everyone, and the one that came back and sniffed the tin was the one he'd hire.

Now, that's the culture in Sydney and everyone got it from the Packers. Neville Wran told me. I sat in his office and he'd talk all about all the people he'd threatened to defenestrate. 'I said, "Look, you cunt, I'm going to toss you out the fuckin' window"', and he seemed to say that to everyone that came into his office. So all these Sydney hoons that ran the place all had the kero tin bully-thug principle of initial terror and then you dealt with the ones that showed some courage. So you had this culture that permeated everywhere in New South Wales, and I never saw it in Victoria until Kennett arrived. It was much more Sydney. And of course you *never* saw it in South Australia.

I've got so many South Australian stories. (laughs) I remember a couple of years ago Brown –

**Dean Brown, yes.**

– Dean Brown – I'm in Brown's office. He called me over for some other reason, I can't remember what it was, and so I'm sitting there with the Premier and the phone rings. (picks up telephone receiver) 'Hello? Er, no, no, this is not his office. You've got the wrong number. Ah, yeah. No. But, look, hang on, I'll see if I can get you transferred'. So he's the Premier, he spends about five minutes handling a wrong number. If it had been anyone – if it had been Neville he would have ripped the phone out and threatened to defenestrate the switch girl; but here was South Australia, being *nice*, decent. And I thought, 'Isn't this wonderful?' Nowhere else would you get a Premier that dealt with something as charmingly as Brown did, and

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I finished the meeting being delighted with Brown. Oh, it was water policy because he was passionate about the Murray.

**Murray–Darling, yes.**

That didn't come up with Don, I don't remember that water was ever discussed except how awful the tap-water tasted. Yes, so Wran – I mean, *your* Rann is absolutely, quintessentially South Australian. He does come out of the Dunstan culture and as far as I can see over my dealings with him he's lovely and nice and friendly. He ran around 20/20 working the room.

**Yes, so he told us, yes.**

But being very – – –. But, see, he buddies up with Carr, who could have been South Australian because Bob's cultural proclivities were very like Dunstan's. But there was a quality of civility and creativity. We ignore the dark side of South Australia.

**Still coming out, yes.**

The problem was always there: that poor, gay lecturer's being tossed into the Torrens and weird murders and stories compelling and often at least semi-persuasive stories about paedophile cults and so on. But to someone like me it was the best of all possible world: it was physically beautiful, had great old buildings – very important to the early film industry, incidentally, because you needed places where you could actually – most of our early films were 19<sup>th</sup> century stuff, it was good to have them. And a really bright, well-educated population. Rotten newspaper. But good place. And I seriously thought about moving there.

That was something, I'd forgotten that. I'd forgotten that. Important. When Ward rang, Ward's first contact me, and I'd never met him, he said, 'Look, Don Dunstan wants to talk to you'. I said, 'What about?' And he says, 'Well, he wants you to come and live in South Australia'. *That* was the first contact.

**Really? Amazing.**

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I said, 'Well, I'm a bit busy. I've got businesses, you know. I don't think I can live there. But I can visit, I could come over for a chat'. That's how it started, I'd forgotten.

**Incredible.**

So off I went. And I still come back whenever there's an opportunity. The Festival of Ideas has been great fun. See, only South Australia can actually do these things brilliantly. You've got a trained community – that's not a putdown, it's absolutely true. You try and do it in Sydney, it's too cynical. But in South Australia people will come out, sit in a draughty hall and listen to someone talk to them. I took it to Brisbane, it sort of works; but I've always said that South Australia is the place where these things just work, because the place is deeply encultured in a way that the other states aren't.

**Yes. Plus it's more of a sort of city, if you like – Sydney seems to be you're a 'Paddo person' or a Balmain or a Cabramatta or whatever; you don't bother to come into the centre that much.**

Yes. Well, Sydney's almost a cultural version of ethnic cleansing. There is a great sense of community, however apologetic the place is there is also a quiet pride in the place which is wholly appropriate.

I remember my argument to Dean Brown at the time when he was really worried. I said, 'Look, everyone laughs about Queensland but it's got its boom going', because it became the waiting room for heaven, whatever the term was, up there, and there was a huge movement of people from Melbourne up to Queensland for their twilight years. I said, 'But I live in Melbourne and I *hate* the fuckin' Gold Coast, I hate the heat. I belong to a group that would come and live in Adelaide if you actually position yourself as an alternative to the Gold Coast for people who don't like that sort of junky place', And I said, 'We'll all come over and spend fortunes buying your houses'. (laughter) And he thought that was a pretty good idea. Yes. So, mate, that's how it happened.

**All right, great. Well, thanks very much, Phillip. That's been most interesting.**

END OF INTERVIEW.