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**Review of Dunleavy, Trisha (2005) *Ourselves in Primetime: a history of New Zealand television drama*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.**

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340 pages with notes and index.

It is remarkable that it has taken until 2005 for the story of local television drama to be told properly. The names alone conjure up a host of memories: Country GP, Close to Home, Gliding on, Gloss, Marching Girls, Peppermint Twist, Street Legal, Mercy Peak and Marlin Bay. The list conjures up characters and places and stories many of us once made weekly appointments with on prime-time television. Remember a time when The Governor and Erebus explored difficult local stories and rated as well as the All Blacks? Television programmes constituted important national events. Then there are family Sunday evening memories of Hunter's Gold, which was sold to over 70 countries, and

other equally popular children's dramas in the seventies. And finally there are evocative images from lost anthologies of one-off dramas. These one off dramas were the spaces where valuable cultural research and development occurred.

Trish Dunleavy has done an excellent job of reminding us of this rich drama heritage. She argues, convincingly, that it is important to see ourselves and tell our stories on television by describing how local drama series have become interwoven into our everyday habits and pleasures over the last forty years. The story arc stretches from the 1960s dramas dripping with nostalgia for rural New Zealand, through the greed and camp of 1980s Gloss, the 1990s gritty urban feel of Street Legal to the Pacifica humour of Bro'Town. They record our changing national fortunes and bi-cultural and multi-cultural relationships, as well as our sense of place and sense of humour. She suggests that 'Cultural Cringe', which had hung damply over us for our first 80 years of broadcasting, finally disappeared with the cheap and cheerful weekday success of Shortland Street.

There are many heroes. Indeed there are far too many to do justice to. There are early stirrers like Ian Mune and Roger Donaldson. Michael Noonan, Tony Isaacs, John McRae, Catherine de Nave made things happen within broadcasting institutions. Independent production succeeded with the likes of Dave Gibson. Don Selwyn, Selwyn Muru, Ray Wuru and others who wove Maori culture into local story-telling. Bettina Hollings, as programmer with TV2, took a punt and conspired with NZ On Air to bring Shortland Street to air. These and many others have shown how local drama could build audience loyalty.

But Dunleavy also tells a timely cautionary tale about a creative industry beset by cycles of glut and famine. This has taken a toll on those working in it. Many key craftspeople continue to leave New Zealand during famine, never to return. It is hard to succeed in tiny New Zealand where it will always be cheaper and safer for programmers to import hits from overseas, and where politicians (and broadcasting commissioners) can't stop fiddling with broadcasting funding and structures.

She reminds us that in 1991 drama production resources were so run-down in the wake of deregulation that we had to go offshore to Australia for production and writing skills to make the NZ On Air brokered Shortland Street. Her position on local broadcasting politics is clear. She looks wistfully across the ditch at Australia's drama industry. She argues that quotas have enabled it to build capacity and continuity and asks 'what if the same had happened here?' Others would take issue, pointing out the formulaic nature of much quota driven Australian drama series compared to the innovative concepts brokered by producers, broadcasters and NZ On Air this side of the Tasman (Outrageous Fortune, Bro' Town).

It is salutary to note that in late 2005 Shortland Street was the only local drama on television. Critically acclaimed series like Duggan, Jackson's Wharf, Street Legal, Marlin Bay and Mercy Peak have been sent prematurely to the archive vault. This was not because they were failures. Some rated well, but with the less desirable 'older demograph'. Commissioners have been drawn to shows like reality television that attract younger audiences.

The good news is that the pendulum is swinging back. Matakau and Bro'Town (both appealing to younger viewers) and Outrageous Fortune have new series and there are several new charter-driven dramas in production. But those in the local industry remain vulnerable to the peaks and troughs that have characterised its funding. It continues to be a story of minor production miracles in the face of economic challenges and vulnerable to political fiddling.

The book makes a strong case that television drama has played a critical part in our social history. It reminds us of many forgotten treasures. It is incredible to learn that The Governor has only been shown once. It is time to see it again. Alas, that is not possible until the production industry resolves historic replay rights issues. It has been mooted that the industry should broker a fund to provide necessary pay-outs from future replays to those involved. This book is a valuable resource because it describes the content and making of our drama programmes, which is half the story. We readers will want to see the drama treasures

she talks about. I hope this publication will provide an incentive to make this happen.