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CONVENTIONS, PREVENTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

Australasian cinema since the 1970s

Jonathan Rayner

Introduction: the case of/for national cinema

The cinemas of both Australia and New Zealand warrant discrete consideration for their specific responses and solutions to key issues of representation, characterisation and thematic differentiation, and the industrial, contextual factors of production, distribution and exhibition historically affecting all national cinemas. Yet they also reward a connective and comparative analysis as parallel cultural phenomena reflecting and articulating similar experiences for filmmakers and audiences at home, and for worldwide critical consumption in a trans- or post-national cinematic era. This chapter explores the development of the cinemas of Australia and New Zealand, considering their enduring national and international, cultural and commercial importance. The histories and critical interpretations of the products of these film industries have been marked by the impact of external and internal, institutional and artistic factors. Textually Australasian films have been made and read as purveyors of highly specific national imagery, ideals and orthodoxies, and as commercial competitors and aesthetic assertions against media imperialism (in the form of British influence before the term was even coined, and American dominance since the end of the Second World War). Contextually, Australasian film production has reflected and reacted to altering patterns of financing and state patronage, which has (depending on perspective) either supported or thwarted the aspirations for sustained, specific, authentic and profitable indigenous cinemas. Historically, Australasian films and filmmakers have assumed responsibilities of cultural representation, and they maintain their distinctiveness, relevance and influential profiles in contemporary international cinema. Both film industries underwent rejuvenations in the 1970s and 1980s, with the proportionally massive increase in feature production heralding and expressing an increased sense of national pride and representation at home and abroad. These revivals or almost unprecedented initiations of national cinematic activity were often facilitated and, at the same time, handicapped by the specific circumstances pertaining to their instigations. Aesthetic ambitions, cultural agendas, local and international audience environments, and ideological as much as industrial contexts, defined these comparatively recent, nascent national cinemas from birth:

What is typical of the revival period is the intimate interplay of discourses belonging to such varied fields and agencies as policy, production, text, and criticism [...] which became the steady background radiation to the actual products, the films of the revival period.

(Kuna and Strohmaier 1999: 139)

Prehistories

The vibrant filmmaking of the silent period in Australia and New Zealand epitomises the distinctiveness, and the distinct challenges, faced by both film cultures. The earliest actualities, either imported from Europe and America or shot by home-grown pioneers, reflected the novelty of the moving image and the connection to local audiences, who may have appeared in the films they watched. Australasian filmmakers were at the forefront of formal developments, in lodging competing claims for the first ever feature-length presentations and productions with *Soldiers of the Cross* (1900, Australia, Herbert Booth) and *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906, Australia, Charles Tait) (Pike and Cooper 1980: 5–6; Reade 1983: 88). Subject matter was often closely tied to geography, history and culture, as in narratives making use of unique national landscapes and in the indigenous Australian “bush-ranger” that resembled but departed from the Hollywood Western in its specific moral bias. However, local innovations were ultimately stymied by external, industrial factors beyond the control of individual producers and directors. The First World War was an international cinematic watershed, after which the fortunes of virtually all film industries, apart from that of the United States, went into decline. Consequently, the connection of Commonwealth films with Britain’s protectionist quota systems in the late 1920s, restrictive industrial practices driven by foreign ownership of Australian distribution networks, and increasing production costs with the coming of sound, all had long-lasting, deleterious effects that compounded the difficulties of competing with Hollywood production values (Pike and Cooper 1980: 116; Gaunson, 2015). The careers of a handful of individuals, in some cases stretching from the start of the twentieth century to the 1960s, constituted the highlights of indigenous production. In Australia, Ken G. Hall’s and Charles Chauvel’s work between the wars and through the 1940s and 1950s attempted to bring commercial and artistic consistency to feature production, and present familiar stories, locations and actors to local audiences (O’Regan 2002: 119). Some international perspectives had been introduced during the Second World War via the production of propaganda films (such as Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen*, 1940, Australia, *The Rats of Tobruk*, 1944, Australia, and Harry Watt’s *The Overlanders*, 1946, Australia, produced by Ealing in the mould of British documentary features), and after the war through British/American co-productions such as *The Sundowners* (Fred Zinnemann, 1960). In New Zealand, Rudall Hayward’s output of a few features spread across the 1920s and 1930s, and John O’Shea’s handful of films made in the 1950s constituted the bulk of contemporarily recognised and retrospectively revered indigenous production (Roddick, 1985; Conrich and Davy, 1997: 1–2). In both Australia and New Zealand, the revival and renewal of feature film production during the 1970s, and their supporters and practitioners, sought to balance these honourable precedents with contemporary circumstances, demands and expectations of national cinemas, and square the circle of locally relevant and representative films with the need for a commercially viable film industry of international quality and appeal.

Australasian agendas

Calls for increased local production, control and representation in the mass media in Australia and New Zealand during the later 1960s chimed with overt nationalist sentiments, themselves responding to the contemporary political climate calling for separation and distinction from the United States and United Kingdom. These distant, dominant neighbours or cultural exporters were seen as either increasingly irrelevant to, or unduly influential upon, Australasian identities after the disappearance of the British Empire and the debacle of the Vietnam War. In any case, there was an undisputable need for a culturally relevant and representative film and media culture (Weir 1985; Lawson 1985). At the same time, prejudicial circumstances pertained for distribution and exhibition of local films, because of the control of these sectors of the Australian industry by American and British concerns (Thornhill 1985). Government intervention was demanded, and eventually delivered, to provide the funding necessary to nurture local production. The Australian Film Development Corporation, established in 1970 with a A\$1 million budget, acted as a new source of direct funding for film and television production, albeit under strict definitions of content, personnel and finance (Dermody and Jacka 1987: 54–55). The lobbying landscape in Australia was complex, reflecting different emphases and interests across television as well as film, the institutional factors of funding and overseas involvement in Australasian media industries, and the concerns of the critical and practitioner communities for a renewed film culture with both commercial sustainability and aesthetic integrity (Dermody and Jacka 1987: 48–50). Such perspectives also epitomised the traditionally different centres of gravity for Australian film (Sydney for the popular entertainment industry, Melbourne for the film festival circuit and more elitist art cinema). Although market-driven decision making gained precedence as direct government funding was reduced during the 1980s, the strategic polarities pertaining to the initial reinstatement of film activity, the “commercial-industrial (mainly initiated by the private sector) and the cultural-interventionist (mainly initiated by the public sector)” (Collins and Davis 2004: 24) continued to abide as the over-arching doctrinal positions for filmmakers and funders.

As suggested by the history of lobbying in Australia, what might be termed the real subject of the Australasian cinemas—national representation—remains a contentious issue even when comparatively large-scale filmmaking is (re)established. Attempts at defining and crafting a national image on screen, as an implicit or explicit agenda linked to cultural capital, prestige and nationhood as much as commercial success and international profile and tied to conditions and criteria of state funding, must negotiate intractable and enduring arguments over who or what is represented, whose culture, image or history has been shown, omitted or purloined (Barclay 2003), and how local and international audiences respond, or are assumed to respond, to such representations (O’Regan, 1996: 304–307). For small film cultures speaking in the immediate to comparatively tiny national audiences that are themselves subdivided along ethnic and/or cultural lines, such problems are acute:

Obviously, the struggle to find local audiences for local film is not peculiar to New Zealand, especially where there is not a long tradition of film-making or where film-making is regarded as an integral part of state cultural policy. The opportunity to see locally-made films is a fairly recent phenomenon for New Zealanders (even though the novelty has now worn of), and even though structures for government support for New Zealand film-makers remain (primarily through the New Zealand Film Commission), they are also under renewed scrutiny.

(Leland 2010: 257)

For such small-scale national industries, the problem of “finding” an audience for “local” films can be fatally compounded by even that potentially economically inadequate imagined community being recognised as several distinctive and incompatible audiences. By comparison, after barely two decades of revived feature film production, both the strategies of “selling out” to Hollywood mimicry with homogenised genre filmmaking and the art cinema option of elitist cultural representation were seen to have failed, prompting a fundamental reappraisal of how Australian films should look as much as how they should be financed (McFarlane and Mayer 1992: 238–242). National imagery and narrative (often retrospective and conservative in both cases) in the Australian films of the 1970s and 1980s were succeeded by more contemporary and eclectic representations in the 1990s. However, national and international critical and commercial successes since 2000, such as *The Dish* (2000, Australia, Rob Sitch,) ironic but celebratory depiction of Australian involvement in the 1969 moon landing and Baz Luhrmann’s extravagant self-reflexive spectacle *Moulin Rouge!* (2001, Australia/US), have either revived the conservative, male-oriented comedy emphasis of previous decades or capitalised on specific, recognisable Australian sub-cultures for their popularity:

In the case of *Moulin Rouge*, Australianness [sic] is effaced only to return as a hybrid, postmodern (distinctively Sydney) sensibility, one that seems entirely at odds with *The Dish*’s tongue-in-cheek style of populist nostalgia for a benignly bucolic Australia. However, both films have been produced as antipodal engagements with New Hollywood in both economic and textual senses.

(Collins and Davis 2004: 28–29)

These films’ coherent and deliberate engagement with expected Australian “textual” functions (in terms of the representation of national identity and the expression of authorial signature as advantageous commercial characteristics) may appear as assertiveness within or capitulation to the “economic” circumstances of millennial, international cinema. National identities, as recognisable and marketable entities, remain at the top of the agendas despite the gathering momentum of globalisation since the film revivals in Australia and New Zealand.

Principals, pioneers and provocateurs

The provision of funding for renewed film production was received by a community of filmmakers composed of individuals whose creative activity either pre-existed (and therefore anticipated) the mainstream revival or whose first ventures, particularly into the expensive business of feature production, were enabled by it. Bruce Beresford, after training at Sydney’s Cinesound and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and working in Nigeria and at the BFI in the UK, returned to Australia to direct some of the revival’s most commercially successful (and in some cases controversial) films (Crowdus and Gupta 1983: 20). Beresford’s output epitomised several phases or motifs of Australian production: the ribald and brash Ocker comedies such as *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (1972, Australia), adaptations from classic Australian novels such as *The Getting of Wisdom* by Henry Handel Richardson (1977), and sociologically and politically observant dramas such as *Don’s Party* (1976, Australia) and *Breaker Morant* (1980, Australia). Other notable directors of this period such as Peter Weir and Fred Schepisi, who had grown up watching American, British and European cinema, began directing features films after apprenticeships in television production, film distribution and advertising (Mathews 1984: 23–30, 76–108). Other key contributors (Philip Noyce, George Miller) were “film buffs” and amateur filmmakers “addicted” to the cinema, who began directing without thought of an industry or a career (Mathews 1984: 231–232).

The works of these directors were in large measure responsible for the establishment of certain narrative types and native Australian genres such as the Ocker comedy, the period film, the Gothic horror film and the male ensemble drama (Dermody and Jacka 1988: 29–74). Other directors such as John Duigan, Paul Cox, Geoffrey Wright, Rolf de Heer and Baz Luhrmann, contemporaries and successors of these initial national figureheads, would extend, affirm and problematise the representativeness and institutionalisation of these narrative formats within the national cinema. Although there were exceptions and challenges to this male-dominated filmmaking community, in the form of producers such as Jan Chapman and internationally acclaimed female directors such as Gillian Armstrong and Jane Campion (Chapman 2002), there were few initial opportunities for indigenous filmmakers despite a growth of Aboriginal media representation and production in the 1980s (Michaels 1984; Langton 1993).

In New Zealand, the emerging generation of filmmakers spanned a very wide aesthetic, generic, ethnic and ideological spectrum. Black and vulgar humour, stunts, action and spectacle on small budgets characterised the early films of Geoff Murphy and Roger Donaldson. These films were innovative in their brash and improvisational feel, their indigenisation of mainstream entertainment genres such as the action thriller (Donaldson's *Sleeping Dogs*, 1977, New Zealand), road movie (Murphy's box office hit *Goodbye Porkpie*, 1981, New Zealand) and the Western (in Murphy's *Utu*, 1983, New Zealand), and the foregrounding and narrativisation of particular aspects of Kiwi masculinity. Where Murphy and Donaldson converged sympathetically in the themes and styles of their films, Peter Jackson and Vincent Ward diverged equally drastically. Jackson explored and exploited the boundaries of taste as much as genre in early examples of horror and science fiction such as *Bad Taste* (1987, New Zealand) and *Braindead* (1992, New Zealand), whereas Ward courted comparisons with European art cinema in pensive portrayals of landscape, history and identity in *Vigil* (1984, New Zealand), *The Navigator: A Medieval Odyssey* (1988, New Zealand/Australia) and *Map of the Human Heart* (1993, Australia/Canada/France/UK) (Grant 1999; Rains 2007).

These successes, and moreover the treatment of Maori characters, narratives and histories in films by white (Pakeha) directors such as Murphy's *Utu* and Ward's *River Queen* (2005, New Zealand/UK) should not detract or distract from a vibrant, highly relevant culture of Maori filmmaking. Barry Barclay's contemplative, realist narrative *Ngati* (1987, New Zealand) represents the first feature film made by a director from an indigenous population. Barclay's career as a director was inseparable from his endeavours as an activist and theorist of indigenous filmmaking (Murray 2007). *Patu!* (1983, New Zealand), a documentary directed by pioneering female Maori filmmaker Merata Mita, delivered an uncompromising portrayal of New Zealand's internal ethnic tensions stirred and reflected by the controversy of a tour by the apartheid-era South African Springboks rugby team. She would later direct *Mauri* (1988, New Zealand), the first feature film made by an indigenous woman (Peters 2007). However, Maori representation both in front and behind the camera was not without controversy. Jane Campion's Palme D'Or winning feature *The Piano* (1993, New Zealand/Australia/France) was greeted with international acclaim for its combination of elements from the Gothic, landscape cinema, art film and feminist filmmaking, but was condemned in equal measure for its patronising, stereotyped representation of indigenous people (Margolis 2000: 2). The impact of *Once Were Warriors* (1994, New Zealand, Lee Tamahori) and its representation of gang culture, socio-economic inequality and domestic violence within an urban Maori community, was praised for its realism and timeliness and criticised for its reinforcement of racial stereotypes (Murray 2011). What such examples underline was that the challenge to use cinematic conventions in innovative, subversive or adaptive ways to suit local conditions also entailed a challenge to wider social conventions.

De-coupling the automatic ways of seeing (politically, ethnically and historically) from the conventionalised ways of showing (culturally, aesthetically and cinematically) would occupy the filmmakers and their critics, audiences and potential funders in both film cultures.

Funding, “types” and genres

Balancing the need for a sustainable industry with the desire for a national cinema has been seen to underpin, and bias, film production and policies for its funding since the 1970s onwards (Formica 2011). At the same time, and arguably as a consequence of the funding policies sequentially introduced by successive governments, Australasian filmmaking has been characterised by and analysed through the emergence of consistent, conventionalised narrative forms. These genres or “types” (Gillard 2007) have formed the basis of critical-historical accounts, interpreting the national cinemas via the regularity of their representations (Ryan 2012). The first commercial successes of the revival, the Ocker films, were:

greeted with critical hostility, being decried for their sexism and lack of seriousness. However, it was precisely this kind of film which was able to tap audience desire at the time, to overcome diffidence and resistance to Australian cinema.

(Dermody and Jacka 1987: 170)

This “tapping” or even creation of a national audience, a factor obscured or disregarded in controversies over nationally representative or culturally appropriate content, can be seen as the genuine achievement of the first revival successes. Under the Whitlam Labour government, the AFDC was succeeded by the Australian Film Commission (AFC), an organisation with a bigger budget, a wider remit for the organisation and manifestation of national film culture and policy, and the support of regional state film boards such as the South Australia Film Corporation (Dermody and Jacka 1987: 59–63). One of the repercussions of this change was a shift from the brash, low-brow Ocker comedies of the early 1970s to the perceived aesthetic refinement and cinematic sophistication of the period film. The basis of many of these films, from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975, Australia, Peter Weir) onwards, in respectable literary adaptation supported by central and state government funding, led to this naturalised heritage cinema being labelled the “AFC genre” (Dermody and Jacka, 1987: 132). The period film can be seen to have cast a long shadow, while offering restricted cultural horizons. Its influence can be seen in conservative representations of Australia’s imperial past on film (*Gallipoli*, 1981, Australia, Peter Weir) and in television miniseries (*Anzacs*, 1985, Australia, Nine Network) over more than a decade, at a time when nationally inspired heritage cinema held a similar sway in Europe. Indeed, this international dimension and the perception and reception of Australian cinema overseas, may have been equally instrumental in the support and valuation of certain films:

The theme of film’s role in increasing Australia’s international prestige would become an important element in the discourse of politicians and film bureaucrats as the decade continued [...] The (success d’estime) films overseas were, amongst others: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *Newsfront*, *My Brilliant Career*, *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*. They were praised for their freshness, their innocence, their *distinctiveness*; so, perhaps not surprisingly, it was the *foreign* definition and appreciation of indigenosity that circulated back and created the political climate for further support to similar kinds of films.

(Dermody and Jacka 1987: 137)

While it created a visual identity for Australian cinema at home and abroad with pride in (markedly Anglo-Australian) history and culture for national and art cinema purposes, this also coalesced as a “brand name” (Turner 1989: 113–114) with commercial funding implications.

However, a consciousness that the art-versus-industry circle could not be squared led to reconsiderations of the sources and criteria for funding, which in turn precipitated substantial change in the origins, forms and audiences for Australian films. The establishment of supposedly conducive tax incentives (in both Australia and New Zealand), followed by the eventual establishment of a film bank (the Australian Film Finance Corporation, or FFC) and the encouragement of greater investment from private enterprise, sought to engender an environment of industry savviness, based on solid distribution deals and presales, but also facilitated commercial cynicism, and imitative and unimaginative productions:

Bureaucrats no longer worried about film as public good, but only as public cost. The 1979 report on *The AFC in the 1980s* firmly came down on the idea of putting the house in order commercially. The “policy of bold and adventurous risk taking” in the Film Commission’s investment was over, it declared. Now it was time for everybody to “become more business-like, more realistic, more positive” in their policies [...] recommendations like these led directly to the notorious 10BA tax concessions and to the miserable situation the film industry found itself in through most of the eighties.

(Kuna and Strohmaier 1999: 145)

Genre films made under this funding pattern, such as the road-movie thriller *Road Games* (1981, Australia, Richard Franklin) which imported its narrative and stars from America, reflected an environment in which the biggest Hollywood companies (MGM/UA, Twentieth Century-Fox, Columbia and Warner Bros) continued to receive as much as 78 per cent of the total Australian box office (Jacka 1986: 20).

Appearing alongside the period film, and perhaps more candid in its commercialism, was the strand of horror and science fiction cinema referred to in both countries as the Gothic. Ironically, a key feature of the Gothic and period films was an emphasis upon the unique antipodean landscape that was crucial to the look and interpretation of both. The Australian “landscape cinema”, as a subset of the conservative, nationalistic trend of film narrative, paralleled “the landscape-tradition which, for two hundred years, has been used by white Australians to promote a sense of the significance of European society in ‘the Antipodes’” (Gibson 1994: 45). Conversely, Oz and Kiwi Gothic, in examples such as *Long Weekend* (1979, Australia, Colin Eggleston) and *The Scarecrow* (1982, New Zealand, Sam Pillsbury) presented the unique environments of the Southern hemisphere as uncanny, inhospitable and laden with menace embodied by the natural fauna or the unnatural human inhabitants. It was the mobilisation of the natural environment as a cinematic asset and tourist draw (in particular the Kakadu National Park), allied to toned-down Ocker humour and a formulaic romantic adventure narrative, that created the most successful (American-backed) Australian genre film to date: *Crocodile Dundee* (1986, Australia/USA, Peter Faiman) (O’Regan 1989). The penetration of the mainstream American market—unachieved by Australian art cinema successes in Europe such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* or *Breaker Morant* (1980, Australia, Bruce Beresford) but anticipated by *Mad Max 2* (1981, Australia, George Miller,) and *The Man from Snowy River* (1982, Australia, George Miller)—was realised by writer and star Paul Hogan’s film and its sequel (McFarlane 1987: 29–30). A cinematic mobilisation of the New Zealand landscape, in an even more spectacular fashion and to even greater international success, was



Figure 20.1 Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003, New Zealand/USA/Germany) enterprise had long-term benefits for and perhaps disproportionate influence upon the New Zealand film industry. ©WingNut Films.

a central strategy within Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003, New Zealand/USA/Germany) enterprise (Figure 20.1), with long-term benefits for and perhaps disproportionate influence upon the New Zealand film industry (Bosanquet 2009: 46–47).

Australasian cinema in the 1990s and 2000s

Shifts in funding and representation during the 1990s were in themselves responses to the successes and failures of decision making since the revival. The creation of the Australian Film Finance Corporation altered public finance to a “film bank” footing that encouraged pre-sales and co-production to guarantee markets as much as funding, but that therefore implicitly discouraged the less commercial ventures of documentary, short and experimental filmmaking (Jacka 1993: 191–192). The Film Finance Corporation's *Newsletter* announced in 1993 that “a dozen FFC-backed films with a total budget of around \$50 million” were in production, celebrated the screening of five Australian films within the official selections at Cannes and trumpeted the success of Australian features in making a “dent in the once-impenetrable US theatrical market (Rich 1993: 1, 5). It also quoted Jan Chapman, producer of *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (1992, Australia, Gillian Armstrong) and *The Piano* (1993, New Zealand/Australia/France, Jane Campion) as evidence of the renewed commercial and cultural integrity of the national cinema: “We do seem to be able—and I imagine it is because of the way the FFC exists—to make films that are authentically Australian and aren't subjugating their idiosyncratic or national characteristics to a larger, American-controlled industry” (Rich 1993: 3).

At the same time as the persistence of art cinema and period film precedents were discernible in Chapman's, Armstrong's and Campion's films, a new filmic “brand” appeared to emerge in the form of the “quirky” Australian drama. The outstanding examples (*Strictly Ballroom*, 1992, Australia, Baz Luhrmann; *Muriel's Wedding*, 1994, Australia, P.J. Hogan; *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, 1994, Australia, Stephan Elliott,) evinced an instinctively ironic, compulsively eclectic approach to postmodern allusiveness, performance, popular genres, and sub-cultural identities. The utopianism of these films matched their contemporaneity in the acknowledgement of multicultural, urban social realities, but their

popularity was also attributable to their dynamic reuse and re-invocation of the commercialism, vulgarity and political incorrectness of the Ocker comedies of the 1970s “dresse[d] up for international consumption” (Barber 1996–1997). Although in some ways these films can be seen to have launched and defined the career of Luhrmann as a significant international filmmaker, their representativeness, of the nation or the industry, was debatable:

Priscilla, Muriel and the other films of that ilk are the ultimate gesture of revenge against [...] a self-image which, in Australian cultural history, had its origins in the sleepy, self-satisfied, consumerist suburban ethos of the 50s. The “suburban surreal” of *Priscilla* screams that things are happening, that the “tyranny of distance” is easily obliterated by three drag queens on a bus, and that people of every imaginable ethnic and sexual mix can look equally silly to each other.

(Martin 1995: 32)

Other notable successes of the 1990s, such as the melodramatic biopic *Shine* (Scott Hicks, 1996) were seen not so much as manipulating and exploiting an Australian difference for international recognition as achieving a “skilful merchandising of a familiar theme [. . .] placed in an unfamiliar context” (Lapointe 1997: 38). However, a significant and unprecedented increase in the representation of ethnic difference came to characterise Australian cinema over the next ten years. The expansion of Aboriginal representation both within films and within filmmaking itself produced a number of notable and challenging examples that coincided with the “history wars” permeating mainstream society as much as academic debate (Collins and Davis 2004: 133–149). Although, controversially, some of the most high-profile films of this group were directed by non-Aboriginal filmmakers (*Rabbit Proof Fence*, 2002, Australia, Phillip Noyce; *Ten Canoes*, 2006, Australia, Rolf de Heer), their impact reflected the fundamental changes experienced by Australian cinema and society as a whole in the wake of the Mabo land rights case (Collins and Davis 2004: 3–19). The milestone success of the remarkable Aboriginal realist drama *Samson and Delilah* (2009, Australia, Warwick Thornton) marked a substantial shift in the representational potential and aesthetic boundaries of the Australian cinema, as a thought-provoking contemporary medium.

Conclusion: life/support

Within the first decade of the revival, Jan Dawson likened the position of Australian cinema (and that of minor European film industries) in relation to the American cinema to that of “Aboriginals to the mainstream of Australian culture [. . .] an oppressed minority group” (Dawson 1977: 373). The interplay of funding demands, commercial realities, and national and international representational conventions that formed the “background radiation” to the revival still registers consistently in the milieu of production, distribution and consumption for Australasian films since 2000, suggesting that Australasian filmmakers may actually represent an oppressed minority within their own countries. For revival director Tim Burstall, the commercial vigour, authentic observation, and comic-satirical energy of the Ocker film justified its status as the true or truest Australian cinema, which had been stifled by establishment concerns for cultural respectability and representation, not representativeness (Burstall 1985). Reading the combination of low-brow humour and *Candide*-like characterisation that links the commercial hit of the Ocker era, *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, the outstanding mainstream success of American collaboration in the 1980s, *Crocodile Dundee*, and the new incarnation of the naive Australian abroad in the new millennium in *Kenny* (2006, Australia, Clayton Jacobson), Benito Cao interprets the recurrent male everyman as the genuine barometer of the Australian cinema:

There are signs that Australian films are repositioning Australia as part of the Global Village, suggesting that Australian national identity might be moving beyond the imperial metaphors of Little America and British Rules [...] The evolution of the relation between Australia and Anglo-Empire symbolized by these three characters suggests we might be entering a post-imperial articulation of Australian-ness.

(Cao 2012: 240)

An example of such rethinking of Australia's economic and political geography and a reflection of the increasing irrelevance of its previous cultural associations with America and Britain is the growth of international co-productions in Asia (Walsh 2012).

Conscious repositioning of the national project has also been undertaken in New Zealand, with reviews of funding, apportionment, representativeness and viability constituting the parameters under which the film industry continues to exist:

According to the New Zealand Film Commission Act (1978), for any production to qualify as "a New Zealand film" it needs to meet criteria of local subject material, locations, creative and acting talent, funding sources, and local ownership of equipment and technical facilities. In 2009, the National Government initiated a review of the NZFC, arguing that the requirements of the 1978 Act no longer reflected the screen-production realities of the twenty-first century. This intervention (not the first since the NZFC was set up) was motivated by continuing complaints that the Commission was failing in respect of the commercial potential of locally-made films, where the great majority of state-subsidized film-making never returns on its costs.

(Leland 2010: 258)

Within this context, the status of Peter Jackson's cinematic and industrial achievements and influence, in establishing the country as a post-production hub as much as an exotic location, are at once a boon and a burden. Gaylene Preston, one of the most respected local filmmakers whose career spans the period since the NZFC's inauguration, has been scathing of the divergence she sees as increasingly evident between the cultural responsibility and commercial expectation of the national filmmaking initiative:

We found out early on that the films that travel are culturally specific. The cultural difference will help the film in the overseas market. There's no use in us trying to make a cheaper version of Hollywood films. [However] The New Zealand Film Commission Act doesn't have the word "culture" in it. From the beginning, unlike in Australia, the NZ Government did not support the film industry in order to get NZ stories told. The overwhelming idea was to attract foreign exchange.

(Bosanquet, 2009: 49)

Despite the cynicism with which government support is frequently viewed, awareness of the inevitability of reliance upon it regulates and limits film production within the national context, and perhaps continues to inspire outstanding Australasian filmmakers to pursue international careers overseas. In interview in 1980 (shortly before his own departure for Hollywood), Peter Weir likened the Australian industry to a "bedridden" critical (or terminal) patient unable to "divorce" itself from government sustenance (Stratton 1980: 293). Director Dean O'Flaherty employed a similar metaphor to describe the film industry in the new millennium (Flanagan 2009). However, the achievements of Australasian cinema under

such inauspicious or frankly hostile conditions have been to persist, to represent and broadcast a multiplicity of relevant cultural histories, narratives and identities. Such representation has perhaps been the chief end in itself of film cultures emerging from national cultures in states of constant flux, contestation and introspection. In this regard, the representative national depiction, the international high-profile cinematic success, and the unsuccessful, individual national film, are intrinsic components of a crucial, small cinema responsibility:

[even] without governmental underwriting, the cinema would still become a vehicle for social problematization, as the social record provides a commercial incentive to follow from and tap public issues. The cinema routinely produces representations which are as much interventions into as they are reflections of social formations.

(O'Regan 1996: 263)

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