The Kennedy Miller Method: A Half-Century of Australian Screen Production

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Candidate Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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I also certify that elements of Chapter 2 have previously been published as:

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Abstract

Kennedy Miller is the most notable of Australian film and television production companies since the industry’s ‘revival’ in the 1970s, and arguably even across the entire century or more of the Australian film industry. Despite this, the company (now known as Kennedy Miller Mitchell) has been largely under-researched and incompletely understood. What scholarship there is tends to focus strictly on its co-founder, internationally lauded filmmaker George Miller, or its most famous franchise, the Mad Max films, or else dates only to a short phase of its unusually long-lasting operations.

Drawing on extensive primary sources, including oral histories, company documentation, and new qualitative interviews with past Kennedy Miller creative personnel, this production history of Kennedy Miller gives an account of the company across its four main periods of operation: from its founding and first works in the 1970s, to its time of continuous production in the 1980s, its reshaping in the 1990s, and its ambitious expansion in the 2000s and 2010s. Particular attention is given to the concept of the Kennedy Miller ‘method’, a label once applied to the collaborative principles that were said to characterise the company’s operations. The ‘method’ is redefined here as describing the firm’s corporate culture, collaborative production practices, and house style. I argue that by understanding the Kennedy Miller method we can better observe the conditions underlying the firm’s sustainability, as well as its corporate authorship over production, and its place in the Australian national industry.

This thesis not only fills a significant gap in Australian screen scholarship, and in our understanding of recent Australian screen history, but also builds a conceptual foundation for future scholarly research on this globally influential company, its creative principals, and its productions.
Introduction

Overview

Kennedy Miller is a screen production firm established in Australia in the 1970s by co-founders Byron Kennedy and George Miller. The firm (renamed Kennedy Miller Mitchell in 2008) is known best for its connection with Miller, an internationally recognised filmmaker who has directed the majority of the company’s features, including the four Mad Max films. Kennedy acted as the company’s chief producer, in addition to other creative and technical functions, until his death in 1983. The enterprise they founded is, by any number of metrics—whether commercial profits, cultural influence, industry awards, or simply sheer longevity—arguably the most successful Australian production outfit since the local industry’s revival in the 1970s, and even across the century-plus history of the Australian film industry. Despite its obvious prominence, there is no extant comprehensive study of the company, and no serious attempt has been made since the mid-1980s to provide one. In what follows, I work to rectify this significant gap in Australian screen scholarship.

In broad terms, this thesis offers a production history of the company, from Miller and Kennedy’s very first short works up to their firm’s latest release, Mad Max: Fury Road (2015). The firm itself is obviously historically significant, not only in its production output, but also in its persistence through epochal changes in Australia’s screen industries. But equally interesting is the firm’s way of doing things; its ‘ensemble’ approach to production, which sometimes saw it marked as an outlier in the Australia industry. My thesis looks inside the company, at its particular internal culture, production practices and organisational strategies—or what I will call its method of production. As well as offering an original production history of Kennedy Miller—and, by doing so, broadening our understanding of the last fifty years of Australian screen production—the thesis also deploys my account of the company to advance scholarly discussions in film and media studies: about conditions of
authorship; about national identity in the Australian industry; and about how sustainability and success can be achieved.

In this Introduction, I will outline the background to my study. This background comes in three parts: first, I give a brief overview of the company’s activities since its founding; second, I discuss the firm’s place in the screen industry ecosystem; third, I give an account of the historical conditions for screen production firms in Australia. Following this background, I introduce the three disciplinary interventions I will make in the course of my history of Kennedy Miller, in studies of authorship, nationality, and sustainability. Lastly, I outline the design of my study: its structure, its disciplinary lineages in production research and film history, and my research methods.

Background to the Study

Kennedy Miller is undeniably a successful company. Its feature films have a cumulative (unadjusted) worldwide box office gross of around US$1.4 billion. Its works have been critically acclaimed, and have won multiple accolades in Australia and the US, including six Academy awards for *Fury Road*; a Best Animated Feature Academy award for *Happy Feet* (2006); AFI awards for Best Film for *The Year My Voice Broke* (1987) and *Flirting* (1990). It has had a significant cultural impact—evidence for the robust interest around the *Mad Max* franchise can be found in accounts of a June 2019 celebration held in Central Victoria to mark the first film’s fortieth anniversary, featuring fans dressed up in the films’ distinctive leather outfits, and recreations of Max Rockatansky’s iconic Ford Falcon V8 Interceptor.¹

The firm’s success is of central interest in my study. Although the idea of success refers to various things—profitability, fame, awards, influence—in this thesis I primarily treat success in a narrow sense as sustainability; or longevity and stability

over time. Kennedy Miller is now forty-eight years old, as measured from the year of Miller and Kennedy's first short film together. This duration itself is unusual, but we can also see that it encompasses major shifts in Australia's screen industry paradigms, particularly in the nature of government intervention, all of which Kennedy Miller strategically adapted to and persisted beyond. The company's duration also includes the rare achievement in the Australian industry of a period of continuous production, in the 1980s. And it includes a focused diversity in output—between film and television—and in business strategy—between Australian and US markets—which few other producers have managed to uphold. In the following sections, I provide a brief historical overview of the company, then a discussion of its identity as an independent production company, and I then discuss the broader historical conditions for production firms in Australia, in order to situate Kennedy Miller’s uncommon accomplishments.

Overview of Kennedy Miller

The company's history begins in early 1971, when Miller and Kennedy met at a film workshop in Melbourne. In the first decade of their partnership they conceived and made three shorts works together—Violence in the Cinema, Part 1 (1971); Frieze: An Underground Film (1973); and the television special The Devil in Evening Dress (1974)2—before producing the long-in-gestation Mad Max (1979, directed by Miller). This was one of the few Australian features of the time to be exclusively privately funded and not government-subsidised. On its release it garnered some controversy for its violent content and ‘Americanised’ style, but became a global success, ultimately grossing US$99 million.3

In 1981, with the financial windfall gained from these profits, Miller and Kennedy acquired the old Metro Theatre in Kings Cross, Sydney, as a base of operations. This former cinema became both office space and studio facility for an ambitious slate of

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2 The latter two of which are now out of circulation.
continuous production that followed. *Mad Max 2* (1981, directed by Miller, released as *The Road Warrior* in the US), was co-written by former journalist Terry Hayes, who would be a key creative principal and in-house screenwriter and producer at the company for the remainder of the decade. It was financed through the Australian Government’s then relatively new 10BA tax concession: a generous mechanism for the inducement of private investment, which underwrote much of the company’s output for the next decade.

*The Dismissal* (1983), a television miniseries dramatising the end of the Whitlam Labor Government, inaugurated a sequence of high-rating miniseries on Australian national themes, all aired by the broadcaster Network Ten: *Bodyline* (1983); *The Cowra Breakout* (1984); *Vietnam* (1987); *The Dirtwater Dynasty* (1988); and *Bangkok Hilton* (1989). So much did the company’s name dominate this ‘golden age’ of the Australian miniseries that television professionals are said to look back on it as the ‘Kennedy Miller era’.4 In 1987, the company also produced a cluster of telemovies, one of which was released as a feature: John Duigan’s *The Year My Voice Broke*. The remaining three—*Fragments of War: The Story of Damien Parer*, *The Clean Machine*; and *The Riddle of the Stinson*—aired in 1988. An eight-episode sports documentary series, *Sportz Crazy*, was also produced. Under the eaves of the Metro, and with a continuous stream of production work, Kennedy Miller in this period was reasonably described by scholars Susan Dermody and Liz Jacka as the “closest thing Australia has to an old-fashioned Hollywood studio”.5 It housed a recurring cohort of collaborators: a creative ensemble that included directors and writers Phillip Noyce, Chris Noonan, Carl Schultz, George Ogilvie, and Duigan; actors Nicole Kidman and Hugo Weaving; as well as many below-the-line crew members. Interspersed with its television work, the company continued in features, making *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985, co-directed by Miller and Ogilvie) and *Dead Calm* (1988, directed by Noyce). Miller also made forays into Hollywood

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In the 1990s, miniseries production across the industry cooled after the winding back of 10BA, and when a new lucrative deal to produce drama for Australian broadcaster The Nine Network fell apart, Kennedy Miller turned away from television work and entered a period of retrenchment. Hayes left after producing *Flirting* (1991), Duigan’s follow-up to *The Year My Voice Broke*. Miller’s next feature as a director, *Lorenzo’s Oil*, was released in 1993. Though the company’s films had always been commercially positioned for crossover into US and international markets, a distinct shift toward large-scale, big-budget, transnational, ‘blockbuster’ production began to become apparent after *Babe* (1995, directed by Noonan) became a hit, leading to the ambitious and commercially ill-fated *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998, directed by Miller). Two curios appeared in between: *Video Fool for Love* (1996), an autobiographical documentary feature directed by editor Robert Gibson; and *40,000 Years of Dreaming*, a documentary overview of Australian cinema history, made by Miller in 1997.

The focused turn toward high-stakes production continued into the next two decades, combined with a pronounced interest in emerging digital production techniques. *Happy Feet* (directed by Miller, Judy Morris, and Warren Coleman), the company first animated film, was released in 2006. It was produced in partnership with Sydney-based animation and digital effects studio Animal Logic, but for the sequel Miller and Mitchell established a new digital firm, Dr. D Studios. This ambitious contribution to Australia’s production infrastructure proved short-lived, producing only one feature, *Happy Feet Two* (2011, directed by Miller, David Peers, and Gary Eck), as well as facilitating the company’s brief flirtation with video game production. Renamed Kennedy Miller Mitchell in 2008 in recognition of producer Doug Mitchell’s role as the ‘silent power’ behind its operations, the company released its latest feature *Mad Max: Fury Road* (directed by Miller) in 2015. The

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6 George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
project had been in planning since the late 1990s but suffered repeated delays, eventually becoming the only one of the *Mad Max* films—Australia’s most significant and recognisable blockbuster franchise export—to shoot overseas (in Namibia) and to star multiple international leads. The prospect of further entries in the series—publicly floated upon *Fury Road*’s significant critical acclaim, US$370 worldwide gross, and six Academy Awards—became troubled when the company entered into litigation against the studio Warner Bros., a long-standing international partner in distribution and financing. The conflict, over an unpaid bonus Kennedy Miller Mitchell asserts it is owed, is unresolved as of writing.

**Locating Kennedy Miller in the Screen Production Landscape**

What basic characteristics define Kennedy Miller? It is a small company, consisting of only its two founders in its early years, and later growing to a size of twelve to fifteen employees in the 1980s and 1990s. It has had a core team of executives/creative principals—primarily Miller, and Kennedy, Hayes, Mitchell and others—which has typically been surrounded by a staff of administrative employees. But it can appear large, because it contracts a network of creatives and technicians—writers, directors, actors, editors—some on a recurring basis.

It is a production company in the film industry. Such organisations at their simplest level are business entities established as vehicles for the output of one or more filmmakers—typically a central producer, or a director or writer who takes on producing responsibilities. A production company manages the filmmaking process: inventing or acquiring a concept or piece of intellectual property; overseeing the development of a screenplay; selecting and assembling talent; securing or finalising financing; and guiding the project forward to pre-production, production, and post-production. Screen production today is a ‘project enterprise’ undertaken on a case-by-case basis, rather than with the continuous ‘Fordist’ production line of the

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classical studio system. Many production companies are therefore project-specific: temporary constructs registered to manage the work of newly gathered-together artists on a particular film. But others are years-long or decades-long enterprises, representing the ongoing activities of their principals. Such companies can be devoted to a single creator, as with Bazmark, the small firm of director Baz Luhrmann and his wife and designer Catherine Martin, which only makes Luhrmann’s films. Or its principals can oversee the work of other creators, as with Steven Spielberg’s Amblin. Or the company can be devoted to a collective, as with Australia’s Working Dog, which oversees the diverse film and television projects of a four-strong creative core. Kennedy Miller displays all three tendencies: it is most closely linked with George Miller’s work as writer and director, but has also produced the work of others, like John Duigan, and in its organisational culture has strong tendencies toward collectivism.

Like many screen production firms, Kennedy Miller has a diversified, multimedia output. Its core product is feature films, but it had a decade-long immersion in television production in the 1980s (and subsequent project development in that area in the 1990s and 2000s), as well as a late 2000s venture into video game production (through its divisions KMM Games and KMM Interactive). Its films are mostly derived from original subjects, with a minority adapted from pre-published or real-life source material—although, because it has also developed three franchises, fully six of its fourteen features are sequels or series entries. Its television programmes are mostly original dramas—it did not import or export programme formats.

Kennedy Miller is an Australian company, founded in Melbourne and operating for most of its existence in Sydney. Its creative principals are largely Australian (although Mitchell was born in Colombia and grew up in Scotland, and Hayes was born in England). The majority of its productions have been made in Australia, with predominantly Australian crews. Yet the firm must also be described in relation to the

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It is an independent company. Such firms can be distinguished from other production organisations by their not owning, or being owned by, a distribution company, and relying on contracts and alliances to move their output to market. Non-independent firms—clearly delineated, semi-autonomous production operations situated within larger studio organisations—are more commonly called production units. Many independent firms do not own their means of production, but must hire a physical plant or studio and other technical facilities to effect the filming and post-production of their work. Yet there are exceptions to these conditions, as with the case of independent studios like Britain’s Hammer and Ealing, which contracted for distribution but owned plant facilities. So it is with Kennedy Miller which, although sometimes contracting to hire plant facilities (as at Fox Studios in Sydney), has also made use of a modest studio set-up at its Metro headquarters; and which, while relying on external partnerships with distributors, has also undertaken to self-distribute one of its own productions, the documentary Video Fool for Love. Kennedy Miller has had recurring distribution arrangements on both sides of the Pacific: in Australia, with Village Roadshow and with the broadcaster Network Ten; and in the US, with Warner Bros. and Universal. The firm is independent but not ‘indie’—its products are directed at the mass market, and its partners are major distributors.

But independence has risks. Because filmmaking is a project enterprise, many production firms experience long hiatuses between completed projects—time usually spent in project development. Others achieve the uncommon state of continuous production, as Kennedy Miller did for a time in the 1980s. Continuity has obvious financial benefits; hiatuses can be challenging. In Australia, income for independent firms is often garnered from fees charged to the production for management services, and not necessarily from profits achieved after commercial exploitation.

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The business model is therefore precarious, because few works enter production compared to the number developed.\textsuperscript{11} Some independents seek financial stability from powerful backers, taking deficit financing from banks to cover overheads,\textsuperscript{12} or entering into ‘pacts’ with studios/distributors which guarantee these partners certain rights over the projects developed and completed\textsuperscript{13} (Bazmark has operated under such a pact, with the US studio Twentieth Century Fox). Independents can also self-finance part of their operations, as Kennedy Miller appears to have done using its profits from \textit{Mad Max} and others. Though Kennedy Miller typically works through stable relationships with larger screen companies, it is not obvious that the company has ever operated under a pact arrangement.

For the purpose of this study, I am also defining Kennedy Miller as several companies in one. ‘Kennedy Miller’ is seemingly a multitude: at least twenty associated businesses have been registered with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, including Kennedy Miller Features, Kennedy Miller Communications, Kennedy Miller Mitchell Projects, and Kennedy Miller Mitchell Locations. Kennedy Miller, as treated in this study, is not one company, then, but the continuance and uniting purpose of multiple different businesses, which have existed to conduct the production work of Miller and his partners. I have also applied this logic to Dr. D Studios, a separate company co-founded by Miller and Mitchell with Graeme and Christopher Mapp, of Omnilab Media. Treating Dr. D as part of Kennedy Miller’s operations allows us to see it as an example of a particular pathway available to production companies. Independents can be led by their executives through significant evolutions, becoming complex, sprawling, and difficult to disentangle from connected businesses. This situation can be observed with Lucasfilm which, until its 2009 acquisition by Disney, was an entity overseeing a particular production company, Lucasfilm Productions, as well as filmmaker George Lucas’s other interests in the screen industry, such as special effects house Industrial Light and

\textsuperscript{12} Sean Maher, \textit{The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s} (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 21.
Magic. Similarly, in New Zealand, filmmaker Peter Jackson and his partner Fran Walsh have the production firm WingNut Films, as well as post-production facilities and two special effects businesses. Kennedy Miller is likewise ambitious and entrepreneurial.

**Understanding Historical Conditions for Production Firms in Australia**

Having located Kennedy Miller as a production company in the screen industry landscape, we can now better pinpoint the firm’s achievements. Exact equivalents are hard to identify, for the simple reason that in the economically precarious conditions of the Australian film industry enterprises like Kennedy Miller (and even individual producers) have only rarely been able to achieve continuity over time—even over spans as short as a single decade. Although a complete survey of Australian production firms is beyond the scope of this research, it is still possible to gesture at points of comparison, as a way of establishing the historical conditions within which the company arose, and contextualising its accomplishments.

Precarious conditions for producers are present in the earliest periods of Australian film. The country is recognised as making significant global contributions to early screen history, as with the production of *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, by the Tait brothers in 1906—sometimes described as the ‘first’ feature film in the world.\(^\text{14}\) By 1911, a robust field of production organisations were at work, including the Australian Photo-Play Company, Spencer’s Pictures, Australian Life Biograph, Lincoln-Cass Films, Amalgamated Pictures (formed with the Tait brothers), and West’s Pictures.\(^\text{15}\) But production firms were mostly short-lived, or soon absorbed into the duopoly of distributor/exhibitors that came to dominate the field and stifle local production. This duopoly consisted of the ‘combine’\(^\text{16}\)—exhibitor Union Theatres and production-

distribution outfit Australasian Films, consolidated in 1913—and the rival exhibitor chain Hoyts Theatres. From the 1910s onwards, independent producers increasingly struggled to get their films into Australian theatres, which took block bookings of product from Hollywood studios.  

The American studio system, by contrast, represented a high standard in sustainability. In the classical Hollywood period (1917-1960), the major, vertically integrated film studios developed and maintained a factory system for the mass production and mass distribution of film that gave them an oligopoly over the American film market. Elements of this system have lasted even until today, at least in the names of major Hollywood studios like Warner Bros., Universal, Twentieth Century Fox. Australian theatres were, in effect, satellite outposts of the US studio system, owing to the local distribution duopoly’s close relationship with Hollywood suppliers.

The conditions that enabled the dominance of the classical Hollywood studio system never existed locally. But two major production enterprises did emerge in Australia in the 1930s attempting to replicate elements of this system. First was Efftee Studios, founded in 1930 by F. W. Thring, who established a production facility in St Kilda, Melbourne. Efftee later moved to Sydney, where Thring hoped the NSW Government would legislate a more favourable market quota for exhibition, but ceased operating in 1936, after Thring’s death. Though Efftee was short-lived, Thring is recognised as the first sound film producer in Australia to sustain a company in continuous production, despite the highly unfavourable conditions for such work.  

The second sustained film production enterprise was Cinesound Productions, a

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19 With British productions also making up a significant minority of films imported.  
20 Shirley and Adams, Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years, 112.  
21 Ina Bertrand. "Australian Film Studies: Efftee Productions." (Media Centre Papers 7, Centre for the Study of Educational Communications and Media, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 1977), 13-14.
subsidiary of the Australasian Films combine established in 1932, led by filmmaker Ken G. Hall, which operated a production facility at Bondi Junction, Sydney. Housing a permanent creative and technical staff, Cinesound made seventeen feature films across an eight-year period, until World War II and a change in corporate leadership caused its owners to shutter all but its ongoing newsreel and documentary production. Hall has described Cinesound as being, from the mid-to-late-1930s, a studio in continuous production.

Thring/Efftee and Hall/Cinesound provide the most obvious pre-WWII antecedents to Kennedy Miller: each was a relatively stable production enterprise, possessing a studio-plant facility, with recurring technical and creative corps under the oversight of a key creative executive who took on a producer–director role. Both achieved continuous production, at least for a time, along with stable distribution partnerships—though, in Cinesound’s case, this was through vertical integration. In total lifespan, Kennedy Miller has well outlived both Efftee and Cinesound as a feature film production firm; but comparing only the respective time spent in continuous production—for Kennedy Miller, this was roughly seven years from 1983 to 1989—the company broadly matches Efftee and Cinesound. A third historical antecedent is the independent filmmaker Charles Chauvel, who made nine features and one television series between 1926 and 1959. Chauvel did not operate a studio, but worked through a succession of production companies, almost one for every feature. Though he was a historically significant filmmaker, Chauvel stands as an example of a producing career compromised by the absence of consistent organisational housing: Chauvel sought to achieve continuous production, but could not. Together, these three cases offer some historical context for our understanding of Kennedy Miller’s unusual sustainability: where Australian film producers have achieved continuity—as with Cinesound and Efftee—longevity has escaped their

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24 Or, at a stretch, to *Flirting*, two years later in 1991.
grasp; and where longevity is observed—as with Chauvel—continuity is lacking.
Quite uncommonly, Kennedy Miller has had both: it achieved a finite period of continuous production, and then extended forward into longevity.

After World War II, Australia’s film industry entered a period of hibernation when little feature production was undertaken, with some interesting exceptions: Britain’s Ealing made films in Australia;\(^{26}\) and Australian actor Chips Rafferty co-founded the short-lived Southern International firm with Lee Robinson.\(^{27}\) Some long-lived production firms did emerge in this period, but these mostly serviced television, where conditions for independent producers were more stable. Significant operations here include Crawford Productions (founded in 1945), Reg Grundy Enterprises (founded in 1959): both ventured only occasionally into film; both achieved thirty to forty years of independent production before being sold (Crawfords to WIN in 1989, and Grundy’s to Pearson in 1995); each is no longer active. Another significant firm is Endemol Shine (established in 1972; formerly Southern Star), a large production output working predominantly in television (including animation, game shows, reality television, and drama), which was acquired by Dutch-British firm Shine in 2015. These examples indicate that television production is conducive to longevity, which is reflected in Kennedy Miller’s history, too. And yet Kennedy Miller only produced television for a discrete, minority period of its overall lifespan, and has not yet given up its independence.

The classical Hollywood studio system declined through the 1950s and 1960s, after the 1948 Paramount decree obliged studios to divest themselves of theatre ownership, among other structural changes. The emerging ‘post-Fordist’ industry encouraged the rise of independent production firms, who took on more of the supply of film product, with studios acting as financiers, distributors, and providers of plant facilities. But the beneficial conditions for US independents were not mirrored in


\(^{27}\) Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years*, 201.
Australia. The ‘revived’ Australian cinema of the 1970s assumed the character of a ‘cottage industry’, within which individual filmmakers had project-specific backing from a government funding agency, and executed their productions with the aid of a team that would by necessity disband on completion. New Cinesounds or Efftees did not appear; it was largely an industry of Chauvels. Few filmmakers of Miller’s and Kennedy’s generation attempted to found ongoing firms; major names like Peter Weir, Gillian Armstrong, and Bruce Beresford, who have achieved parity with Miller in career length, have mostly worked on a for-hire basis. The introduction of the 10BA tax concessions enabled new firms to arise, many of which attempted production continuity. These were likewise short-lived, mostly not persisting past the 10BA era. The 1990s saw the emergence of a large number of production companies, but of only minimal profitability.

Many of the significant firms of Kennedy Miller’s era did not last long: Roadshow Coote and Carroll produced for about ten years, while Tim Burstall’s Hexagon Productions produced for about seven years; both, significantly, were not truly independent, but were co-ventures with powerful Australian distributor Roadshow. Village Roadshow Pictures, a US-based production imprint of the Australian distributor established in 1986, has lasted a significant span of time, but operates largely as a co-producer to American studio Warner Bros. Major producers—including Hal and Jim McElroy, and Matt Carroll—worked for hire or moved between firms. If other major directors possessed notable production companies, they usually

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28 The term revival is tendentious and inexact. In general, this period is recognised as constituting an overall downturn in the fortunes of the feature film industry and in frequency of production, although scholars recognise that some significant Australian filmmaking was taking place, e.g. Giorgio Mangiamele’s Clay (1965). See: Shirley and Adams, Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years, 227-228.

29 It is possible that the structure of the revived industry inhibited the emergence of stable production enterprises, with film funding agencies assuming too many of the responsibilities that would otherwise be taken up by production firms, including oversight of development, and assessment of commercial potential (one state agency, the South Australian Film Corporation, the first to be founded, actually possessed the authority of a production company, as well as its own studio plant facility).

30 Dermody and Jacka, The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Volume 1, 206.

oversaw exclusive operations that produced only their own work—as with Luhrmann’s Bazmark, or Alex Proyas’s Mystery Clock. Other significant non-directing producers with long-lasting firms include Antony Ginnane, whose company F G Film Productions was established in 1983, and who also operates the US-based distribution firm IFM World Releasing, established in 1996, and David Hannay, an independent who produced over fifty productions between 1972 and 2012. Both Ginnane and Hannay are associated with low budget genre production and the ‘ozploitation’ film market.

Kennedy Miller is not the only notable Australian production firm of its generation, but it does possess a roster of achievements that have largely escaped others, including: significant longevity; achievement of studio-style organisation; achievement of continuous production; balance of feature film and television production; maintenance of independence; remaining based in Australia while building effective international partnerships; facility with high-budget production; and commitment to original intellectual property. To appreciate Kennedy Miller’s accomplishments, we must also observe that the firm has persisted through several major paradigm shifts of the Australian industry through. The firm has been an alert, active participant in every major development in modern Australia cinema. It has been at the vanguard of changes in screen funding paradigms, including the 10BA tax concession and the later Producer Offset, as well as changes to the Australian production environment, such as the orientation toward the servicing of offshore production in the 1990s to 2000s, and the increasing economic significance of digital production services. Kennedy Miller stands as a powerful case of stability and longevity in Australian production. What made that sustainability possible?

Key Arguments of the Thesis

Having provided the historical, industrial, and contextual background to this topic, I will now outline the three disciplinary interventions of my thesis. Despite its obvious

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32 One Kennedy Miller production, Babe, is based on a pre-existing book—The Sheep-Pig by Dick King-Smith. Some other works are based on true stories.
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prominence and improbable persistence, Kennedy Miller has only rarely been the object of sustained scholarly inquiry, and then only to limited effect. The richness of Kennedy Miller as an object of study paradoxically makes it challenging to decide what form that study should take. Perhaps this is one reason why existing research is relatively scarce: slice into Kennedy Miller from any angle and some pressing topic appears.

In grappling with this richness, I have oriented my production history of the company toward three disciplinary debates within film and media studies. These interventions will not be dealt with separately and consecutively. My response instead is intertwined in the form of a narrative history of Kennedy Miller, from its origins in the early 1970s up to 2019. The three areas I have selected as my focus are: the achievement of sustainability in Australian production firms; corporate authorship over screen production; and the categorisation of national identity in Australian production firms. I will now introduce each in turn.

Examining Conditions of Sustainability in Australian Production Firms

Sustainability—in terms of longevity and stability—is a clear issue of interest for screen practitioners and policy makers. By recent statistics there are over 2000 film and video production businesses in Australia, generating almost $1 billion in revenue. But many of these firms are ephemeral, created for the purpose of one production only, or associated with a sole freelancer. Sustainable production companies can make an important contribution to an industry’s experience, technical and creative knowledge, and economic foundations. Sustainability is also relevant to film and media scholars more generally; through understanding how producers operate and maintain their practices, we come to learn more about how media and film texts are made.

Previous scholars have treated the idea of sustainability in production—though they do not necessarily phrase it as such—in a variety of ways. Some seek to identify the business and economic strategies producers deploy in attempting to navigate the vicissitudes of the screen industries. So Albert Moran’s study of Australian television mogul Reg Grundy—founder of Grundy’s—locates the basis of this producer’s longevity in his adept development, adoption and import/export of TV programme formats, and in his ability to expand his business into international markets. Stuart Cunningham, analysing Chauvel’s thirty-year career, locates the filmmaker’s “industrial fortitude” in his nationalist spirit: a commitment to ‘featuring’ Australia on screen. Such strategic negotiations of Australian identity within market demands have been important to Kennedy Miller’s fortunes, too. These strategies will be discussed, but my analysis in this study is not limited to the firm’s manoeuvring for commercial advantage. In analysing Kennedy Miller as a case of a sustainability in Australian production firms, I am interested in achieving a holistic view of the conditions within the firm that enabled its longevity.

I am interested primarily in the view of sustainability proffered by US scholars Janet Staiger, David Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson, in their analyses of the classical Hollywood studio system. Staiger, Bordwell and Thompson link the cinema of the classical Hollywood studios with a particular mode of production: an industrialised way of making films, which involved certain divisions of labour, organisational hierarchies, material means, and systems of financing. Staiger locates the underlying logic of this mode in the economic imperatives of US capitalism: the ‘factory-style’ studio system was a means toward mass production and standardisation that helped the studios capture their market and achieve profits. Other contemporary and alternative analyses of modes of production likewise associate mode with

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sustainability—for example, Petr Szczepanik’s analysis of the ‘state-socialist mode of production’ of Central Eastern European industries links script development procedures with the communist party oversight that was necessary for project viability.37

As I have indicated, the classical Hollywood mode of production never really obtained in Australia. And yet Kennedy Miller still possessed that certain quality that prompted Dermody and Jacka to describe it as the closest thing Australia had to an old-fashioned Hollywood studio. What was that quality, and does the firm still have it? Kennedy Miller is not exactly organised like a studio: creative and technical production roles are filled by temporary contractors, rather than by salaried employees. But it has gone far in attempting a studio-style level of organisation and continuity; in the 1980s it possessed its own plant facility in the Metro, its own body of recurring personnel, and its own distinctive production practices. In this sense, it appears to be the first independent firm in Australia since the days of Cinesound and Efftee to achieve studio-style continuous production, even for a limited time.

I will contend throughout this thesis that Kennedy Miller’s organisation of production—as emblematised, at its height, by its arrangements in the 1980s—is the underlying condition of its sustainability as a production firm. I will not describe a Kennedy Miller ‘mode’ of production, because this term—as outlined by Staiger, and other film historians including Allen and Gomery38—is typically applied to a broad section of an industry (hence classical studio procedures together constitute a ‘mode’). I will instead be describing a Kennedy Miller ‘method’ of production. Though I see these terms as possessing substantially the same content, I have substituted ‘method’ in applying this frame to a particular production firm. In this study, ‘mode’ of production refers to external industrial conditions that work upon sectors of

production organisations, while ‘method’ refers to the internal strategies autonomously adopted by a particular organisation.

Prior organisational studies of production firms have similarly focused on internal production arrangements. Albert Moran’s study of the Commonwealth Film Unit categorises its history into successive periods of organisation, beginning with the ‘Generalist System’, then the ‘Producer System’, then the ‘Cell System’ (Moran associates changes in the organisation of production with bureaucratic administration by the Unit’s government overseers). Kennedy Miller’s method, as we will see, also evolves over time, although I will show that its fundamental tenets remain largely constant. Kennedy Miller’s method is treated here as the foundation of its longevity and stability, but it is not a fixed state.

My selection of the term ‘method’ is not arbitrary, but informed by the literature on the company. ‘Kennedy Miller Method’ was used by Canadian writer Barbara Samuels in 1984 to describe an “ensemble approach” to filmmaking practised by the company in the 1980s. A semi-formalised idea of the firm’s ensemble or collaborative practices was a recurring part of the literature on Kennedy Miller in this decade. Three prior scholars in particular have contributed substantial content to my understanding of Kennedy Miller’s method: Stuart Cunningham, Keryn Curtis, and Scott Murray. I will discuss these works in more detail in Chapter 1.

Samuels herself does not define the method in depth, and in her interview with Miller he shies away from seeing it as a true ‘method’, as opposed to a useful set of procedures. But in a 1984 investment prospectus, circulated to raise funding for the miniseries Bodyline, Miller himself offers a succinct appraisal of his company’s method of production, and its part in their good fortune. “When asked to nominate the reason for our success,” Miller wrote, “I list four in this order:

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(i) Concept—choosing the right story and finding the correct way to celebrate it with the audience
(ii) Personnel—careful selection of the production and creative teams. Fortunately, with our track record, we attract the best in the country.
(iii) Workshopping—we have deployed a unique and intensely collaborative approach to filmmaking
(iv) Excessive Preparation—making movies is like fighting a war. We undertake unusually long and meticulous preparation. Our preproduction and rehearsal phases extend two or three times longer than the industry norm.\textsuperscript{41}

In analysing Kennedy Miller’s method of production I am primarily interested in observing these elements that Miller flags—its selection and management of personnel; its workshopping and preparatory activities; its collaborative approach to production—while also tracking the other components found in an industrial mode: divisions of labour, hierarchies, material means, and financing.

Just as Staiger, Bordwell, and Thompson associate the studio mode of production with the formal norms of the classical Hollywood style (or what they term a mode of film practice), so I will argue that Kennedy Miller’s method is associated with a ‘house style’—or, more particularly, recurring approaches to narrative form that reflect its ideas about what the ‘right story’ is and the ‘correct’ way to celebrate it with the audience. Analysis of the reception of Kennedy Miller’s productions is outside the scope of this thesis. However I proceed on the understanding that the company itself had certain implicit expectations about viewership, which are apparent in its ‘audience-oriented’ outlook—or what Tom O'Regan has described, in reference to \textit{Mad Max}'s affective power, as the company’s invitation of “collusion”, as opposed to distance, from its audience.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Bodyline} Prospectus, 1984, \textit{Bodyline} Documentation, 482515, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{42} Tom O'Regan, "The Enchantment with Cinema: Film in the 1980s," in \textit{The Australian Screen}, ed. Tom O'Regan and Albert Moran (Ringwood: Penguin, 1989), 128.
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A mode of production, as the concept is used by Staiger et al. and Szczepanik, is not intentionally chosen by a producer, as though selecting a strategy for success. The link between mode and sustainability is founded in basic social structures: whether the mode facilitates capitalist or socialist production. I take the Kennedy Miller method to possess a capitalist element; its ‘audience-facing’ style courts popular mass-market success. But I also take the method, inasmuch as the company autonomously adopted it, to possess some strategic dimensions. In positing this, I follow on from prior European research on small production firms, specifically the Success in the Film and Television Industries (SiFTI) project undertaken by researchers in Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and the Netherlands in 2013–2016. These researchers highlight some ways in which organisational culture can contribute to the success of production firms. In Chapter 6, drawing on their work, I posit some specific ways in which Kennedy Miller’s method relates to its sustainability and success.

Although I describe the Kennedy Miller method as ‘autonomously’ adopted by the firm, I will also show that it is shaped by the surrounding industrial context. This tension between autonomy and structural influence requires a careful disclaimer: while the firm’s particular way of doing things is associated with its iconoclastic reputation, I refrain from judgement about whether and to what extent the Kennedy Miller method is unique within its surrounding national or international modes of production, or whether its production practices are close to or distant from surrounding industry norms. My goal here is to account for how Kennedy Miller did things, rather than engage in ceaseless comparison with how other firms did things, too.

The Kennedy Miller method, as I define it, encompasses three aspects: a strategically advantageous company culture, which regulates its collaborative organisation of production, which yield stylistic commonalities in output (that is, a

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house style). The central thread of my production history is to show how Kennedy Miller’s method of production has underlaid its sustainability. However I also make two further disciplinary contributions. These will now be discussed in turn.

**Understanding Corporate Authorship Over Screen Production**

The second disciplinary intervention I make is in our understanding of authorship in Kennedy Miller specifically and production firms generally. Cunningham has described the ‘discourse’ around Kennedy Miller—the circulation of ideas of its collaborative practices in the media, circa the 1980s—as embodying an ‘anti-auteurist’ stance and advancing a notion of “corporate authorship”. The tension between individual and collective creative authority, and its consequences for our understanding of authorship over production, is a recurring area of debate in screen studies, and is particularly vivid in the case of Kennedy Miller. Is the creative authority at Kennedy Miller vested in just one man—George Miller, its public face—or should it be attributed to a collective? Is it a mere ‘shingle’ for Miller—as US trade publication Variety calls small-sized, creator-run production businesses—or the near-studio that Dermody and Jacka describe it as? My account of Kennedy Miller’s method of production—and its collaborative procedures—will show that the two are inseparable. A multi-hyphenate director-writer-producer, Miller is often perceived as the mastermind behind the company’s works; but he has always worked collaboratively, within a team environment. Miller directed only a single episode of the firm’s television work, on *The Dismissal*, and though the majority of its films are his, some are directed by others. Some of these, like Duigan’s *The Year My Voice Broke*, were developed independently, but others, like Noonan’s *Babe* (1995), were developed internally under Miller’s oversight. Even those films which are ‘his’ are not his alone; on fully three of Miller’s nine feature films, he is credited alongside co-directors. To resolve these tensions I describe the firm as operating on a model of corporate authorship, using a formulation of this concept that acknowledges Miller’s

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creative centrality while also emphasising the significance of the firm’s collaborative practices.

The concept of corporate authorship is typically applied—just as Cunningham uses it—to the ‘discourse’ around a producing firm, and often in the sense of a self-definition of authorship promulgated by a firm for strategic purposes. For instance, Brookey and Westerfelhaus, in a 2005 article, argue that Pixar Animation strategically advanced an idea of itself as corporate author and recognisable brand at a time when its future relationship with its distributor Disney appeared in doubt. As the authors describe, Pixar created a corporate authorship persona by circulating an idea that its films were produced through a collaborative creative effort in a ‘family’ environment, an image it constructed through DVD extras. The Kennedy Miller discourse of corporate authorship, similarly, is associated particularly with the 1980s, when its brand identity was at its height through the screenings of its miniseries. Leora Hadas, in a 2017 chapter, explores the notion of corporate authorship in production firms with central brand-name auteurs, like J.J. Abrams’ Bad Robot; she describes Abrams as a figurehead auteur whose marketable brand makes viable the work of the network of creators gathered under his banner. Miller’s personal fame, similarly, brings cachet to his firm, but his is not solely a delegative authority; as often as not, he is intimately involved in the collaborative creative processes, as writer and director.

Advancing on Cunningham’s characterisation, I treat Kennedy Miller’s corporate authorship as not reducible to ideas of publicity discourse or branding strategies, but as a quality that inheres in its method of production, and which is substantiated by primary-source accounts of its working practices. The distinction is a crucial one. Contemporary authorship studies often focus on the extra-textual media that shape

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public understanding of creative authority, or on how institutions strategically position authorial figures for attention.  Kennedy Miller is a self-positioned author in this sense, with its use of the designator ‘A Kennedy Miller Film’, and the repackaging of its miniseries for home video under ‘Kennedy Miller presents’. But my account of Kennedy Miller’s corporate authorship here is focused on the procedures that lie behind the production of its texts, rather than paratextual materials of reception.

In a 2012 article, Avi Santo uses the concept of corporate authorship in the context of legal ownership of intellectual property. Santo describes how the company LRI (or The Lone Ranger, Incorporated) advanced a notion of corporate authorship in order to maintain control over the brand and character The Lone Ranger. The legal recognition of this claim invokes an idea of authorship in which ownership is vested in the ‘originator’ of the intellectual property, rather than in whoever imprinted the work with authorial personality, and in which the ‘motivating force’ of the corporate manager/employer supersedes the labour of the employee. Although I do not focus on IP here, I will show that similar logics of authority and primacy are visible in Kennedy Miller’s practices.

I argue that Kennedy Miller’s corporate authorship inheres in its role as originator, motivating force, and manager of its projects, and its valuing of collective creativity over individual. In general, Kennedy Miller and its principals originate story material, and hand over the work of developing and realising that material to temporary contractors working under the principals’ oversight. The work of these labourers is passed through collaborative practices such that individual contributions become part of the group effort. The Kennedy Miller corporate authorship, as I define it, is vested in these particular management–labour relations, in which individual creative contributions are subordinate to group processes and organisational authority.

49 As Santo describes it, LRI invoked the idea of management as authorial imprimatur in order to strategically suppress the creative labour involved in developing The Lone Ranger,
Introduction

My treatment of Kennedy Miller’s corporate authorship also contributes to existing discourses of authorship in media producing organisations. At a broad level, studies of media producing organisations are concerned with identifying what Graham Murdock and James Halloran call the “contexts of creativity”, or the suite of factors that influence the shaping of texts. It is a recurring concern of screen studies in general to understand how ‘external’ forces shape and work upon the internal nature of audio-visual works: their formal qualities or style; the organisation of their narrative elements; their ‘ideology’. Analyses of these influences range from the political economy approach, which treats the screen text as a commodity which instantiates the capitalist-industrial conditions of its creation, to an approach oriented on individual agency, which critically reads the text as an art object imbued with interior meaning by a single or primary author figure. Organisational studies occupy a middle range, focusing on the forces of influence that emanate from the institutions that have authority in the creation of media—Thomas Schatz has called this the “micro-industrial” level. Organisational studies can take on different focal points within the screen industries, from vertically integrated studios, as Schatz did in *Genius of the System*, to distribution concerns, as Tino Balio has done in *United Artists*, or Alisa Perren in her study of Miramax *Indie, Inc.*, to the single production and thereby maintain the illusion that the character had a mythic, rather than scripted, existence. Although this strategic suppression is not necessarily practiced by Kennedy Miller, it is notable that the firm’s principals have often emphasised the mythic underpinnings of its narratives, a stance that would naturally involve a de-emphasis of individual authorship in favour of collective inspiration.

unit, as with Hugh Fordin in his study of the Arthur Freed musical unit at MGM, or Albert Moran, in his study of the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit (now Film Australia).

It is the latter form—studies of production units, or equivalent independent firms—that is central to my study of Kennedy Miller. Key prior research in this vein stems from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, and the Centre for Mass Communications Research at Leicester University, particularly the 1970s work of John Ellis, Charles Barr, David Pirie, and Vincent Porter on the small British studios Ealing and Hammer. This tradition has taken in American subjects, too, as with Jane Feuer and Paul Kerr’s work on MTM Enterprises, the independent production company behind American sitcoms including *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. These works do not necessarily foreground debates over authorship, but rather address this issue covertly by describing the institutional conditions behind production work, the divisions of labour, and the possibility of collaboration and individual expression among creative principals.

Description of an organisation’s production practices typically also must address the operations of management: thus, the ‘family atmosphere’ found at Ealing, with regular round-table discussions between personnel, was made possible by the paternalism of its manager Sir Michael Balcon; and the creative freedom available to MTM staff stemmed from the beneficence of its founder Grant Tinker. Existing

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57 Moran, *Projecting Australia: Government Film Since 1945.*
treatments of managerial authority can be grouped along a spectrum, with the singular author figure at one end and the anonymous collective at the other. In the Australian context we have Pam Cook’s study of filmmaker Baz Luhrmann and his production company Bazmark, which frames Luhrmann as a singular artist whose authorship is unquestioned, but who nevertheless oversees a collaborative environment of employees—not least including his partner, designer and company co-founder Catherine Martin. On the other end we have, in Moran’s study of the Commonwealth Film Unit, a description of production occurring under a ‘Generalist System’, where fully dispersed responsibility was shared among the team of filmmakers.

My analysis of Kennedy Miller unifies both approaches. I show that Miller is managerially and creatively central, but that the company’s method of production also entails a spirit of generalism—known at Kennedy Miller as ‘comprehensivism’, an ideal which describes a collaborative approach to creative work in which normative divisions of production labour break down. I therefore thread through my account of Kennedy Miller’s practices a discussion of the regulating operations of management, even and especially non-bureaucratic creative management of the sort practiced by Miller. The interplay between the two is the heart of the firm’s corporate authorship.

This approach follows the example of scholars such as Schatz, who identified in the Hollywood studio mode of a production a “genius of the system”, in which institutional authority over creation outweighed the capacities of any single writer, director, or producer, but was nevertheless personified in particular managers. Taking as an example MGM under producer Irving Thalberg, Schatz shows that though the studio was a factory system, it was not necessarily an assembly-line operation, but involved interaction and collaboration among the principal creative personnel, overseen by Thalberg and his subordinates—this collaboration under

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management in turn reinforced the state of corporate rather than individual authorship. Although as central creative—director, producer, and writer—Miller is often more involved in creative work than Thalberg ever was, I argue for a similar view of Kennedy Miller as achieving corporate authorship by institutionalising non-hierarchical collaborative practices, in which the power of individual creative ‘voices’ is routinely de-emphasised in favour of the group, but in which the central creative authority and motivating force of the firm is always apparent.

**Negotiating National Identity in the Categorisation of Australian Production Firms**

The third disciplinary intervention I make is in discourses of national identity with respect to Australian screen producers. I have located Kennedy Miller as an Australian production firm, albeit one implicated in the US system. But how does it wear that identity? Cunningham, as I have said, identified in Chauvel a nationalist drive toward ‘featuring Australia’ in his films. Cinesound’s creative principal Ken G. Hall has said his studio was consciously determined to show off the Australian landscape, in a spirit of nationalism. Organisational studies of Ealing, likewise, have noted that it was concerned with projecting an idea of the “British character”.

Production firms, when described within a national context and within a national cinema, can be said to ‘project’ concepts of nationalism: not simply in the sense of physical landscape but in more abstract terms of social identity. What, then, is Kennedy Miller ‘featuring’ or ‘projecting’, if anything?

The question is vexed by the company’s habit of vacillating between the Australian and Hollywood contexts. It made, on the one hand, an overtly nationalist sequence of television miniseries, from *The Dismissal* to *Bangkok Hilton*, which are preoccupied with re-documenting and defining Australian colonial history. But on the other hand, it produced obviously ‘transnational’ films, particularly later mega-budget works such as *Babe: Pig in the City*, the setting and narrative of which do not

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65 Schatz, 46.
66 Hall, *Australian Film: The Inside Story*, 53.
correspond to any particular country or culture. Though obviously oriented toward the US market, Kennedy Miller has deliberately stayed located in Australia. Though its texts partake of a Hollywood aesthetic, they are threaded through with the local: either allusively—in the ‘car culture’ of the Mad Max films—or explicitly, in the history-telling project of its miniseries. Taking finance from Hollywood studios, it operates in Australia, self-consciously attempting to build up and maintain local industrial capacity. Turning up its nose at Australian screen agency funding, it produced one of the country’s most famous cinematic exports; and then forty years later relied on tax concessions in order to produce a third sequel, shot overseas in Namibia.

Complex negotiations over the categorisation of national identity are a recurring thread in discourses on Australian screen industries. These concerns are frequently visible in the literature on Kennedy Miller, as will be discussed in the next chapter. In the 1980s, Dermody and Jacka proposed a significant rubric for the categorisation of the national identity of Australian productions and producers in 1987. They posited a division between Industry-1—encompassing modestly budgeted, socially concerned, left-labour, Australian-identified productions—and Industry-2—encompassing big-budget, pure entertainment, non-Australian-identified productions. Neither category effectively describes Kennedy Miller, given that its output includes low, medium, and mega-budgeted works, of both socially conscious and pure action orientation, from private and public Australian funding sources, private American and international sources, and mixtures of each.

Deb Verhoeven later proposed a third category in the 2000s: ‘Industry-3’, which encompasses filmmakers “happily embedded in both the global and local”, and drawing international finance to local production; Verhoeven cites Happy Feet as an example.

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68 It is interesting to observe that while some Kennedy Miller productions, particularly the television works, do present and highlight Australia’s natural features, these tend to not be the ones directed by Miller. In 1985 Miller told French publication Positif that the Australian bush is “too confusing” to fit into the lens of a camera and too large to be filmed from the ground. See: Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec George Miller," Positif, December 1985.

example.\(^{70}\) I take this Industry-3 concept as representing a hybrid approach to understanding nationality in Australian production. Similar approaches can also be seen in O'Regan and Venkatasawmy's categorisation of *Pig in the City* as an instance of “Hollywood Downunder”,\(^{71}\) or in Ben Goldsmith’s identification of *Happy Feet* as an instance of “outward-looking” Australian cinema.\(^{72}\) These concepts arise from particular contemporary conditions: the 1990s–2000s globalisation of screen production which made the Australian-American entanglement more than ever a material fact of the industry.\(^{73}\)

But they are also simpatico with a broader contemporary development in Australian film studies, which seeks to ameliorate the limitations of strict national cinema discourses by acknowledging a more diverse understanding of ‘Australian’ film and addressing the interrelations, both current and historical, of a local “national production system with a global audiovisual sector”.\(^{74}\) Other examples of this movement include Pam Cook’s treatment of Luhrmann’s transnational production career;\(^{75}\) Jane Mills’ *Loving and Hating Hollywood*,\(^{76}\) the ‘Ozploitation’ discourse prompted by Mark Hartley’s documentary *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild Untold Story of Ozploitation!* (2008); Adrian Martin’s riposte to same;\(^{77}\) Mark David Ryan’s ongoing research into Australian genre cinema,\(^{78}\) Adrian Danks and Constantine

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\(^{70}\) Deb Verhoeven, "Film and Video," in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, ed. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 163.

\(^{71}\) Tom O'Regan and Rama Venkatasawmy, "A Tale of Two Cities: *Dark City* and *Babe: Pig in the City*," in *Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Films*, ed. Deb Verhoeven (St Kilda: Australian Catalogue Company, 1999), 187.


\(^{73}\) Ben Goldsmith, Susan Ward, and Tom O'Regan, *Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2010).


\(^{75}\) Cook, *Baz Luhrmann*.


Verevis’ article “Australian International Pictures”;\(^\text{79}\) and the recent collections
\textit{Australian Screen in the 2000s}, edited by Ryan and Ben Goldsmith,\(^\text{80}\) \textit{American–Australian Cinema: Transnational Connection}, edited by Adrian Danks, Stephen Gaunson, and Peter C. Kunze,\(^\text{81}\) and \textit{A Companion to Australian Cinema}, edited by Felicity Collins, Jane Landman, and Susan Bye.\(^\text{82}\)

I treat Kennedy Miller as an important and under acknowledged example of this Australian–American interrelatedness. It has not only been an active participant in these contemporary developments in offshore production, but additionally its enmeshment in the US market stretches back even to the first \textit{Mad Max}. The company has often been flagged in passing within this scholarly literature—most substantively in Tess Dwyer’s chapter in \textit{American–Australian Cinema} on \textit{Mad Max}'s US release; and in Constantine Verevis’ analysis of \textit{Fury Road} in \textit{A Companion to Australian Cinema}—but a comprehensive treatment has yet to be attempted. In this thesis, I offer an account of Kennedy Miller’s history within the parameters of a hybrid understanding of Australian–American identity. I do not seek to define Kennedy Miller as a producer of ‘Australian’, international, or transnational texts; instead I show how the company operated as a strategic actor whose base is within the Australian national industry, but which possesses conscious, active ties to Hollywood.


\(^{80}\) Mark David Ryan and Ben Goldsmith, eds., \textit{Australian Screen in the 2000s} (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).


\(^{82}\) Felicity Collins, Jane Landman, and Susan Bye, ed., \textit{A Companion to Australian Cinema} (Newark: John Wiley & Sons, 2019).
In positing this, I also draw on O'Regan's seminal study *Australian National Cinema*. Referring to a quote from Miller, in which the filmmaker argues that ‘Australianness’ is a quality and perspective that simply comes through films without being consciously determined by filmmakers, O'Regan argues that the ‘choice’ between Australian and international screen culture is ultimately a false one; instead, the ‘Australian’ voice is fundamentally relational, or “a way of being hybrid”. To the extent that Kennedy Miller as a production house can be claimed to ‘project’ anything, it projects this Australian hybridisation, through a production strategy that flexibly adopts both Australian and international markers. O'Regan writes that accounts of ‘nationality’ in cinema will describe filmmakers’ “multiple personae”: “as one who creates with materials and technologies, who asks politically, who manipulates funding bodies, who lobbies, who needs to know the market, financing and the local and international works of the cinema”.

My own treatment of Kennedy Miller’s hybridity therefore comes through an account of its strategic actions in securing funding, using technology, lobbying, playing politics, and in its work of creation—the elements of its method.

**Design of the Study**

Having identified three particular disciplinary interventions to be made by my thesis, let me emphasise again the overall historical significance of Kennedy Miller as a successful Australian production firm. A review of the literature on Kennedy Miller and its productions will be undertaken in Chapter 1, but I note here that there is a general dearth of serious, scholarly attempts to understand and document this important company. Most often the spotlight falls on Miller, and the organisation surrounding him slips out of focus—hardly satisfactory, given its production practices. That literature which does focus on its collaborative method—as in the work of Curtis, Cunningham, and Murray—is now out of date. What is needed is an

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84 O'Regan, 3.
up-to-date study of Kennedy Miller as a production firm in its total historical sweep: a study which picks up on the work done by Curtis, Cunningham, and Murray, but which continues beyond the 1980s and across the subsequent years of the company’s activities. At its broadest level, my goal here is to provide a holistic and comprehensive account of the firm, which can serve as a general reference tool for future scholars. But in the interests of clarity, concision and depth, my account is oriented toward the three inventions described.

The central research question this thesis asks is as follows:

*How has Kennedy Miller continued as a successful independent production company across a near half-century of operations?*

The answer to this question is given as a history of the company focusing on its method of production, which I treat as underlying its longevity in the same way in which the classical Hollywood mode of production is a condition of that system’s persistence and market success. Through analysing Kennedy Miller’s method of production, and its evolutions across the firm’s history, I will offer a view of Kennedy Miller’s sustainability, corporate authorship, and hybrid national identity. My account of the method comes as a four-part production history of the company—the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s-2010s—which outlines the development, evolution, and persistence of its method of production across the firm’s existence. These chapters braid together an account of the inner workings of the company—based on statements made by those who worked there—with a view of the external conditions that shaped its operations. A final chapter then analyses Kennedy Miller as a case study of a successful firm, taking up the evidence of its method as revealed in the preceding history to make comparisons with other producers, and to argue that Kennedy Miller’s particular way of doing things possesses specific strategic advantages that bear upon its success.

**Production House Research in Media Industry Studies**
Introduction

In determining the form of this study I have taken my first impetus from the prior scholarship on Kennedy Miller—the studies by Curtis and Cunningham, which I cite as my immediate antecedents. These authors position their work within the production-house case-study form, which Cunningham describes as a “venerable if intermittent” tradition.\(^8^5\) Key representative works of that tradition within screen studies have already been mentioned, including Jane Feuer and Paul Kerr’s work on MTM; John Ellis, Charles Barr, David Pirie, and Vincent Porter on Ealing and Hammer; and Hugh Fordin on the Freed Unit. Representative Australian examples include Albert Moran on the Commonwealth Film Unit, as well as Cunningham, again, with Elizabeth Jacka, in a succession of brief production-firm case studies in their book *Australian Television and International Mediascapes*.\(^8^6\) Production ‘houses’ like Kennedy Miller make for a narrow focal point, and so the relevant tradition of research should also include research on individual producers, as with Cunningham’s work on Charles Chauvel or Moran’s on Reg Grundy; work on studio organisations, as with Schatz’s *Genius of the System*; or work on particular productions, as with Tulloch and Alvarado on the production of *Doctor Who* at the BBC,\(^8^7\) Elana Levine on US television soap *General Hospital*,\(^8^8\) or Moran on *Bellamy*.\(^8^9\)

Across this tradition of production enquiry, researchers are concerned with the contextual operations behind the production of media and their effects on texts. This vein of investigation stretches back to early anthropological work on Hollywood, such as Hortense Powdarker’s 1950 study, *Hollywood: The Dream Factory*, which proposed to demonstrate how “the social system in which [movies] are made

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\(^8^5\) Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - ‘House Style' in Australian Television," 178.


significantly influences their content and meaning”. Research of such systems today is grouped under the contemporary rubric of production studies, and its umbrella field media industry studies. Considerable recent scholarship has gone into establishing this rubric and field and defining its aims, as in Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell’s collection Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries, Jennifer Holt and Alexandra Perren’s Media Industries: History, Theory and Method, Matthew Freeman’s Industrial Approach to Media: A Methodological Gateway to Industry Studies, a folio in issue 52 of Cinema Journal edited by Paul McDonald, and Havens, Lotz, and Tinic’s “Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach” in Communication, Culture and Critique.

One prominent feature of this contemporary incarnation of production research is an expanded conception of what or who a media ‘producer’ is; hence we have Mayer’s Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy, and Caldwell’s Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television, which each treat below-the-line personnel as relevant production workers. Although this attention to below-the-line labour has been vital in expanding our understanding of the nature of media production, for reasons of scope my study does not partake of this revisionist conception of creative personnel, and I largely restrict my focus to the traditional above-the-line director, writer, and producer credited positions; where below-the-line workers are discussed, they are treated as

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participants in the production activity initiated by the firm, rather than of independent interest.

My study here differs from the dominant strand of contemporary production studies in another key respect. Because I am interested in the longevity of Kennedy Miller across nearly half a century, my study has a prominent historical dimension. Historical research is not a dominant strain in production studies, which tends to focus on contemporary production cultures, although a ‘turn’ toward historical production studies has recently been described. Because of its age, Kennedy Miller is both a contemporary and a historical producer, and both aspects are given significant weight here. Because of this I also take some impetus from the field of film history, as outlined by Bordwell and Thompson in their *Film History: An Introduction* and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (with Staiger), Allen and Gomery in *Film History: Theory and Practice* and Chapman, Glancy, and Harper’s *The New Film History: Sources, Methods, Approaches*. It is from this field that I borrow the term mode of production, adapted here as method of production.

In fact the two fields of media industry studies and film history are more or less complementary in their aims, and crossover works are not uncommon—as with Schatz’s *Genius of the System*, which Mayer, Banks and Caldwell have described as a production history. It is feasible for either field to claim kinship with works from the other—film history, the elder of the two, established the set of research concerns and vocabulary adopted by the newer practice. However, two particular differences are negotiated here. Production studies seeks to uncover the operations of the

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101 Allen and Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*.
media as it is constituted at a particular historical moment, typically the contemporary one. Film history research, which seeks to uncover the generative mechanisms behind a historical event, is more concerned with change over time. I take both approaches here: in analysing Kennedy Miller’s longevity, I am preoccupied with its change and persistence over time; but in treating its lifespan in four stages, I am also concerned with its constitution at successive historical moments. Further, film history is principally occupied with an impersonal view of the structural conditions that generate states of filmmaking (or ‘modes’), whereas production research is liable to attribute greater autonomy to individual agents—and organisations can be agents—in their manipulation of production. While I note the structuring conditions of economy and industry here, I also take for granted a certain degree of autonomy in Kennedy Miller’s actions.

Production scholarship evinces no definite agreement on its specific object of study, although a range of options have been described. Moran’s Bellamy study identifies three possible approaches: studies of the division of responsibility (as among personnel); studies of production groups or companies; and process studies (of the making of particular productions). Graham Murdock and James Halloran identify four: production studies (of texts); organisational studies (of units/companies); context studies (of the interrelationship between media organisations and cultural, political, and economic environments); and occupational studies (of production personnel). Media scholar David Hesmondhalgh, in a survey of the field, identifies six: studies of the production of texts; studies of the production of genre; studies of occupational groups; studies of production organisations; studies of entire industries (as in a national cinema); and studies of sets of entertainment industries (as in the ‘culture industries’). Amanda Lotz and Horace Newcomb posit a different six,
representing possible levels of analysis: national and international political economy and policy; specific industrial contexts and practices; particular organisations; individual productions; individual agents; and amateur prosumers. These similar ways of chopping up the field into distinct foci indicate the spectrum of possibilities available to the production researcher, and in practice it appears that individual studies can encompass more than one approach or level. In keeping with the ‘production house’ tradition, I identify my research on Kennedy Miller as an organisational study first and foremost. However, I incorporate multiple levels of analysis, including of the occupational groups and personnel within the organisation, the national and international industrial contexts outside it, and the productions or texts that are its output. As Lotz and Newcomb have observed, effective production research maintains awareness of multiple levels of analysis and an interdependency of influences.

Media industry studies has been referred to as part of an “industry turn” that decentres the text in film research. This drive towards empiricism is also represented in the contemporary New Cinema History movement practised by Richard Maltby and others, which examines the operations of film consumption, exhibition, and distribution. My research is similarly empirical in aim; however for reasons of scope it largely excludes the exhibition, distribution, and reception of Kennedy Miller texts in favour of a consistent focus on issues of production. The impetus behind the ‘industry turn’ is also visible in other areas of Australian scholarship. In their 2014 study “The Australian Screen Producer in Transition”, Ryan, Goldsmith, Cunningham, and Verhoeven argue that the field of ‘producer studies’ is in need of “more systematic empirical grounding across all subfields of screen production”. I share these authors’ concern in developing an empirical

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110 Lotz and Newcomb, 72.
111 McDonald, "Introduction: In Focus - Media Industries Studies," 146.
understanding of producers, but my approach here is considerably different; where they conducted a quantitative survey of producers, I offer qualitative research into a single production house.

I will clarify here my stance in relation to the Kennedy Miller texts, as multiple positions are available. Moran has argued, reflecting on his Commonwealth Film Unit study, that the historical development of a producing organisation is relevant “only in so far as it affects [...] the production of films”. In this sense, the texts are his primary focus, knowledge of which is gained in the course of the organisational study. I share this focus only to a certain degree. Although this study will develop knowledge about Kennedy Miller’s output—as will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review—the primary object of interest here is the firm and its method of production, not the productions themselves. Further, while Allen and Gomery have argued that the use of films as evidence “tell[s] us next to nothing about modes of production, organisation structures, market situations, management decision making, or labor relations”, I will nevertheless make some limited use of Kennedy Miller’s texts as indirect evidence of its method, in respect of their expression of the firm’s house style.

**Research Methods**

Kennedy Miller was approached for cooperation at the beginning and end of my research, but its principals Miller and Mitchell were unable or unwilling to participate within the timeline set for my project. This absence is significant, but fortunately there were many other sources of information on Kennedy Miller available, including substantive tranches of archival sources such as oral histories, unpublished company documents, and newspapers clippings, many of which had not previously been utilised in scholarly research. I supplemented these sources with eleven original interviews, including six with former writers and/or directors at Kennedy Miller. At a broad level, my research is concerned with understanding both the

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internal conditions at the company—its method of production, as experienced by the individuals who were there—and the external conditions within which it operated, or the industrial and cultural contexts of the Australian and global screen industries. My use of research sources is governed by these two objectives. I will now outline my research sources and methods in detail.

The early stages of my archival research were focused on the AFI Research Collection at RMIT University, which houses a trove of clippings files, including folders on Kennedy Miller, its creative principals, and its individual productions. These collections of trade paper reports, newspaper and magazine articles, and assorted press clippings provided a crucial tool in constructing my history of the company, making possible a detailed chronological overview of its activities, including information sometimes elided in previously published summary accounts.

The clippings files are not exhaustive, and I have augmented these resources with additional historical and contemporaneous press material collected from the National Library of Australia’s Trove database, and the Thomson Reuters Westlaw Australian news database, with a specific focus on major Australian newspapers: *The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian, Herald Sun, The Courier Mail, The Sun-Herald, Daily Telegraph,* and *Australian Financial Review.* The AFI Research Collection also provided access to editions of the now-defunct Australian film publication *Cinema Papers,* which closely covered Kennedy Miller productions during its lifetime and featured several significant interviews with its creative principals and personnel, as well as the similarly discontinued *Filmnews.* Access to these physical copies through the AFIRC was augmented with online archives, such as the University of Wollongong’s digital collection of *Cinema Papers.* Other relevant primary source texts in this vein include self-authored reflections by the company’s creative principals, including Miller’s “The Apocalypse and the Pig, or the Hazards of Storytelling”, collected in the book *Second Take;* Chris Noonan’s “Makin’ Bacon: *Babe*” in the same volume; George Ogilvie’s autobiography *Simple Gifts,* and published interviews with Miller in *Myth and Meaning* and *35mm Dreams.* Though these are published press documents, these interviews provided an opportunity to
begin to gauge how publicity and media discourse about the company and its method reflected the views, remarks, and testimony of those who experienced work there.

My most significant tranche of material came from the National Film and Sound Archive’s oral history collection, which contains numerous recordings of interviews with former Kennedy Miller creatives. I have used twenty-eight: including six with George Miller; two with Byron Kennedy; two with director George Ogilvie; two with writer–director Chris Noonan; two with director Phillip Noyce; and others including writer-producer Terry Hayes, directors John Duigan and Carl Schultz, writers Brian Hannant, Francine Finnane, and Nico Lathouris, actors Sam Neill and Alan David Lee, editors Richard Francis-Bruce and Henry Dangar, production designer Owen Williams, and assistant director Phillip Hearnshaw. This extensive collection of interviews provided insight into the internal operations of Kennedy Miller, and first-hand experience of its method. Most of these oral histories date from the 1980s; the Hearnshaw interview, recorded in 2010, is the most recent. Not all of these oral histories were created by the NFSA. Many are recorded interviews made for use in prior publications: most originate from Curtis’s honours thesis research; others are from Stratton’s research for *The Avocado Plantation*; others are from writers at Cinema Papers and Filmnews, or for use on ABC radio, or for the internal use of Film Australia. With the exception of the Duigan interview, which arrived in transcript, I accessed these interviews as audio recordings, making notes and partial transcripts as I listened. Although most of these recordings have been used in prior research or publications, no prior researcher has yet taken the opportunity to collect these materials together and treat them as evidence of the Kennedy Miller’s evolving practices across its history. These recordings offered an opportunity to access complete and unedited remarks of the firm’s principals and workers as they described their experiences at the firm.

Although Kennedy Miller did not open its personal archives to me, I was also able to access old company correspondence, internal memos, financial information (in the form of investment prospectuses), scripts, storyboards, and other documents
through the NFSA, none of which has previously been utilised by researchers on the company. These offered unique insight into the operations of the company, and helped to substantiate and refine the understanding of its method I had developed through the oral histories.

The NFSA additionally also made available copies of Kennedy Miller’s now out-of-circulation productions, including some enormously significant early short works from Miller and Kennedy, and some of its telemovies—which, unlike the miniseries, have never received home video release. I have also accessed primary source materials from the National Archives of Australia, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, and the National Library of Australia—which granted access to the private papers of George Ogilvie, with his permission. Correspondence between Ogilvie and performers on Kennedy Miller productions offered insight into his substantial influence in introducing collaborative procedures to the firm.

To augment this archival material I also conducted eleven new qualitative interviews with former Kennedy Miller creatives and witnesses to key stages of its development. These were done for two purposes. Firstly, they shed light on aspects of the company’s history not adequately represented in other sources. For this, Peter Kamen, Nigel Buesst, and Robin Love, provided valuable information on the earliest days of Miller and Kennedy’s partnership. The second and more important purpose was to generate a supplement to the NFSA oral histories, to better understand how Kennedy Miller personnel’s experience of the organisation and its method stretched back to the 1970s, and forward to the 1990s and 2000s. For this, I focused on former writers and directors—James McCausland, Sally Gibson, Denny Lawrence, Lex Marinos, Mark Lamprell, Judy Morris, and Warren Coleman—treating these individuals as exclusive informants who could shed light on the inner workings of production at the firm. Interviews were conducted over the phone or by Skype, at a nominated time convenient to the participant—except for an interview with optical

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effects technician Roger Cowland, which took place by email. I used a semi-
structured interview format. I had a short pre-prepared questionnaire on hand, but
was largely guided by the participant's recollections as we discussed their
experience with the company, typically from initiation to final production. Pre-
prepared questions probed into their job title and duties, basis of employment,
duration of work, process of recruitment, experience of organisational hierarchy,
satisfaction with remuneration, and overall satisfaction with their experience at the
firm. Some interviewees requested an opportunity to examine my use of their
information in my thesis, and these additional exchanges were made during the
finalising of my manuscript.

I attempted to contact twenty-one other former Kennedy Miller personnel, including
both above and below-the-line crew members from across the firm’s lifespan. Eight
of these individuals explicitly declined to participate during subsequent
correspondence. Some of the reasons given for declining participation include
ongoing contracts with the firm, the firm’s lack of explicit approval for my research,
and concerns over the firm’s known litigiousness.

In developing my understanding of the external contexts of Australian screen history
and industry, I relied largely on secondary sources such as established film and
media scholarship on these subjects, including but by no means limited to Graham
Shirley and Brian Adams’ Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years; Ina Bertrand
and Diane Collins’ Government and Film in Australia; Susan Dermody and Elizabeth
Jacka’s The Screening of Australia and its follow-up The Imaginary Industry; Tom
O’Regan and Albert Moran’s The Australian Screen; O’Regan’s Australian National
Cinema; Brian McFarlane’s Australian Cinema: 1970–1985; Scott Murray’s two
reference collections on Australian features and television productions; Ben
Goldsmith, Susan Ward, and Tom O’Regan’s Local Hollywood; Nick Herd’s Chasing
the Runaways; and Lisa French and Mark Poole’s history of the AFI, Shine a Light.117

117 Refer to my concluding bibliography for a more complete overview of sources.
Despite the array of sources, there are still clear limitations on the information I have been able to gather. Some key facts about the company that are significant to my study are inaccessible, or must be arrived at or inferred through other means. I note, for example, its financial arrangements. Because Kennedy Miller typically disdained direct subsidy from screen agencies, it is impossible to collect detailed financial information from the relevant agency records. Without confirmation from Kennedy Miller it is impossible to say exactly what mix of funding sources and partnerships lay behind each individual production. In some cases, prior reporting and interviews—as on the private funding of *Mad Max*—make reliable accounts of this information available. In other cases, general trends of screen funding in Australia allow us to make educated guesses. In others, archived prospectuses for the company’s productions offer some budget details as well as confirmation that private investment was at least solicited. However, Australian tax legislation law requires film agencies to decline to disclose whether particular projects were ever submitted for tax concession eligibility, making definite conclusions on this front hard to draw.

Of course, sources such as those mentioned above have well-known limitations. Authors of written sources—journalists, academics, biographers—sometimes get basic facts wrong, even with good intentions. Interviewees—in oral histories, press profiles, or qualitative interviews—are capable of misremembering or misrepresenting series of events, or their own psychological states and those of others at the time in question. Wherever I have found inconsistencies or contradictions, I have either attempted to make the divergent views clear in my analysis, or to carefully assess the merits of each source and then arrive at a view based on the balance of information available.

In keeping with the dual disciplinary lineage of my thesis, I have used analytical methods from both film history and media industry studies in interpreting my data. Both traditions favour similar sets of research materials—internal documentation, interviews/oral histories, publicity and press publications—but place each within a different analytical frame, with the former seeking to account for structural conditions behind the development of film industries, and the latter seeking to describe the
operations of media production with an emphasis on the cultures of its labourers. I have attempted to balance elements of both here. The core of my thesis is a four-part production history of the company presented in a narrative form. In developing this account I have adopted the realist approach to historical research proposed by Allen and Gomery in *Film History: Theory and Practice*, which acknowledges the researcher’s intellectual activity in compiling and arranging available evidence in order to develop a complex account of the generative mechanisms behind a historical ‘event’. Thus, my production history represents my own account of the various mechanisms that lie behind the production of each Kennedy Miller text, as well as behind the overall longevity of the company itself.

My exploration of these mechanisms also stresses the industrial contexts prevailing through the Australian and international screen industries, and this approach reflects the political economy concerns that form part of the procedural mix of media industry studies. Contemporary production studies attempts to grapple with the “lived realities” of production workers, and this is reflected in my emphasis on oral histories, published testimony, and qualitative interviews. My particular construction of the Kennedy Miller method— which draws on the words of the firm’s principals and workers in seeking to go beyond mere ‘discourses’ of collectivism and collaboration at Kennedy Miller—reflects my analytical weighing of what Caldwell calls the “deep texts” of the industry, or the self-disclosures of screen workers as made in interviews, publications, and other forms of communication. Both film history and media industry studies tend to centre on informative description rather than explicit theorisation—though this practice has been sharply criticised. I have adopted this approach here: my goal in this thesis is not to produce a general theory of Kennedy Miller’s success, but rather to develop a richly informative account and explanation of it.

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118 Allen and Gomery, 16.
Summary

Kennedy Miller is arguably the most successful and significant production firm to emerge in Australia since the revival of the national film industry in the 1970s. Looking even farther back, its historical equals are few. The company displays a distinctive mix of achievements: consistently profitable output across film and television, a studio-style period of organisation, continuous production, technological exploration, effective management of relations with Hollywood, ambitious expansion, and sheer longevity. How did it accomplish all this? The question is not just of interest to the layperson curious about Kennedy Miller’s famous productions, but also to film and media scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers seeking to understand the operations behind the industrial production of screen media texts in Australia.

Drawing on a wide array of materials—including primary sources not previously deployed in prior research on the company—my study undertakes a production history of the company from the earliest activities of its founders up to its latest work. In showing how Kennedy Miller continued as a successful Australian production company across a near half-century of operations, I show how an understanding of the firm’s method of production can contribute to key scholarly discussions on authorship, nationality, and sustainability. I treat the latter concept of sustainability—the firm’s longevity and overall stability—as the core element of its success. But in the final part of my study we will look again at a broader commercial conception of success. What relationship does the firm’s method of production have to the popularity of its texts? As I will argue, the two are closely associated.

Structure

Chapter 1, “Literature Review”, provides a review of literature on the company in five parts, organised by theme. This review provides an overview of existing knowledge on the company, and establishes the gaps and deficiencies which will be addressed
by my history. In this Introduction I have already discussed relevant disciplinary literature in the course of establishing the aims of this study and its interventions. The literature review that follows is therefore limited solely to texts on the company, rather than to the more general methodological debates which have been covered in the previous pages. First, it explores discourses of iconoclasm, which reflect an idea of the firm as doing things differently. Second, it surveys prior accounts of its method of production. Third, it examines existing discourses of authorship in relation to the firm. Fourth, it compiles prior analyses of the firm’s house style. Fifth, it considers prior discussions of Kennedy Miller’s style in relation to its national identity. Each of these sets of literature, we will see, possesses clear limitations, and offers up gaps in knowledge and understanding that can be ameliorated by my study.

Chapters 2 to 5 are the core of the study: a four-part narrative production history of the company. Chapter 2, “1970s—Developing the Kennedy Miller Method”, outlines the early stages of the company and the impetus behind its method of production, covering Miller and Kennedy’s first short films, separately and together, and the production of their first feature Mad Max. Chapter 3, “1980s—The Method Enters Maturity”, outlines the formalisation of the company’s method during its period of continuous production, and its burgeoning status as a quasi-studio operation at the Metro. Chapter 4, “1990s—Redefining the Method”, outlines how the firm’s method of production evolved through the significant organisational changes that accompanied the cessation of continuous production, and how it embraced new technologies of production in the course of its strategic shift toward a big-budget, transnational category of filmmaking. Chapter 5, “2000s–2010s—New Means, Old Methods”, outlines the persistence of the company’s method of production through the significant changes in production technology it had adopted since the prior decade, and the firm’s further strategic adaptations to the changing global screen industry.

These chapters together answer the ‘how’ of my research question by describing the basis of the company’s continuance. Because of my focus on the firm’s method of production, these four chapters incorporate some ‘making of’ accounts of Kennedy
Miller’s texts. Productions are described as exemplifying some salient aspects of the firm’s method—for instance, collaborative production practices, or commercial strategies. Though ‘making of’ accounts of some of these works, especially the Mad Max films, have been written before and may be familiar, their presentation in this thesis is distinguished by their being shaped to substantiate the evolution over time of the company’s method of production. These historical chapters are broadly structured chronologically but, in the interest of compression and coherency, non-successive productions are sometimes grouped together according to the themes of my discussion. These chapters also integrate accounts of the industrial contexts that adhered throughout these periods, which are provided as context for the firm’s strategic actions. Together, these historical chapters answer the ‘how’ of Kennedy Miller’s half-century sustainability by providing a detailed account of the firm’s conduct across that period and the means by which it undertook its work.

Chapter 6, “Analysing Kennedy Miller as a Success Case”, takes a greater interest in the issue of ‘success’ by arguing that the company exhibits the characteristics of successful production firms, and thereby highlighting those facets of its method that will be of interest to scholars, policy makers, and practitioners. Although, as I have said, the cornerstone of my notion of the company’s success is its longevity, I also deal here with broader uses of the term ‘success’. My analysis in this chapter in split into three parts, reflecting three aspects of the firm’s method: its internal company culture, its organisation of production, and the house style that emerges from both. These three aspects each have particular relations to the company’s success.

The brief “Conclusion” then summarises my research and its findings and outlines some implications for future research.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

The overall field of literature on Kennedy Miller is wide but not deep. Because the company is long-lived and prominent, it is possible to find in Australian scholarship a wide variety of references to its work, displaying a range of engagement from modest analysis to passing interest. There is a small handful of substantive texts, including Adrian Martin’s monograph *The Mad Max Movies*, Luke Buckmaster’s recent non-scholarly biography *Miller and Max*, and the aforementioned work of Curtis, Cunningham, and Murray—but fewer sources than one might expect for a company of Kennedy Miller’s significance given the volume of writing on Australian cinema more generally. More significantly, these varied works mostly do not appear to be in dialogue with each other, nor do they build on each other’s findings. A comprehensive understanding of the company is absent from the extant publications. My production history of Kennedy Miller is in this sense partly an attempt to bring some coherence to this field, in addition to building upon its current knowledge and filling gaps within it. Due to the lack of serious commentary on the company, I have included relevant popular press publications in my survey as well. This decision also reflects the porous border between popular and academic discourse on the media industries and popular culture.

Despite the overall paucity of literature available, my literature review still excludes much from its survey. Because this study is focused on Kennedy Miller as a producing organisation, and largely excludes the reception of its texts, I have chosen to avoid discussing in detail textual analyses of Kennedy Miller’s output, as these do not generally consider the production dynamics which are of key concern in this thesis. In keeping with the success and popularity of its texts, there is a modest array of literature addressing itself to Kennedy Miller’s productions, which displays a spectrum of thematic interests. So to mention only a few that address the *Mad Max*
films, we have Meaghan Morris on “Mad Max and the Sublime”, of treatments of heroism from Dennis Barbour, Jan Newman, and Christopher Sharrett, of post-apocalyptic storytelling and Australian landscape from Paul Williams, Mick Broderick, Ross Gibson, and Dan Hassler-Forest, and of masculinity from Rebecca Johinke, as well as feminist analyses of Fury Road from Alexis de Coning and Michele Yates, and analysis of the franchise as a reflection of contemporary trends in remakes, franchising, and sequelisation, from Constantine Verevis. Scholarly literature on the company’s features and franchises other than Mad Max is less common, but the miniseries and television work proved a frequent object of interest. Ina Bertrand has written an extended analysis of The Dirtwater Dynasty for The Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television, as well as a review of Bangkok Hilton for Cinema Papers, which—as a frequent chronicler of Kennedy Miller’s

work—has also published essays on *The Dismissal* and *Bodyline*.¹³⁰ Prior analysis of Kennedy Miller’s texts is discussed here selectively, in reference to what it can reveal about existing understandings of the firm’s house style.

Because the literature on the company is so atomised, I have chosen to organise my discussion by theme. The following literature review is split into five parts, each relating to a broad discursive current in the literature, and each salient to the focus and disciplinary interventions of my study. First, I examine the discourses of iconoclasm that have surrounded the company. The literature has often reflected ideas about Kennedy Miller ‘doing things differently’. This strain of thought must be dealt with in order to accurately position my account of the firm’s method. Second, I look at prior accounts of the firm’s method of production, as I see it. These will provide an informational foundation on which the following history will build, offering an initial view of the firm’s collaborative procedures and underlying philosophies. Third, I look at discourses of authorship in relation to the company. As we will see, these most prominently reflect an idea of Miller as singular author, a stance which a deeper understanding of the firm’s method ought to qualify. Fourth, I look at prior discussions of the firm’s house style. These, as we will see, are partial and incomplete, lacking a unified approach to the firm’s television and film output. Fifth, I discuss how understandings of the firm’s style have been related to analysis of its national identity. The absence of consensus on the question of its identity, I contend, recommends a treatment of the firm in terms of its Australian-International hybridity.

**Iconoclastic Reputation**

Much of the discourse on Kennedy Miller, especially as found in press clippings and newspaper reports, reflects an idea of the company’s exceptional or outlier status: a sense that it is somehow different or apart. As we will shortly see, Stuart Cunningham positions his discussion of Kennedy Miller’s house style exclusively in

terms of its iconoclasm. The tendency to frame Kennedy Miller as an exception to prevailing norms stretches back to the unlikely and unanticipated success of Mad Max, which was viewed as unusual because of its fully private funding. Later press reports continued to frame the company, and Miller, specifically, as a “big outsider”—not just in Australia but also in Hollywood.

The firm’s iconoclastic image arises in the literature from several different aspects. There are, for instance, perceptions of its funding practices. In 1985 the Sunday Telegraph described it as “one of the few movie companies that does not put its hand in the pocket of the tax payer”—a characterisation that is not entirely accurate, but still typical of ideas about the firm’s financial independence and savvy. There is a sense of the firm’s uncommon political or legal ability. In 1984, the reporting on the company’s successful legal contest against the Sydney City Council—over the sanitariness of the Beyond Thunderdome production’s use of a herd of pigs—showed a company capable of exercising power at a level not available to most producers. There is also a sense that Kennedy Miller consciously holds itself apart from the Australian industry and from the industrial organisations that structure its norms. One 1988 Sun-Herald article notes Hayes’ absence from that year’s AFI awards ceremony—“There’s a limit to the amount of excitement I can handle in one day”, he is quoted as saying. As David Stratton notes in The Avocado Plantation, the company was not a member of the Screen Producers Association of Australia, even though Miller had joined US guilds.

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131 Stuart Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - ‘House Style’ in Australian Television," in The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the Late ’80s, ed. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, 177-201 (North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1988).

132 ‘Nick Brash, "They’re All Mad About Max," Daily Telegraph, July 2, 1979; Brian McFarlane, and Geoff Mayer, New Australian Cinema: Sources and Parallels in American and British Film (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 151.


137 David Stratton, The Avocado Plantation: Boom and Bust in the Australian Film Industry (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Publishers Australia, 1990), 349.
In fact, more than a few newspaper reports focus on the company’s vexed relationship with industry guilds. In 1985, a story in *The Age* describes an attempt from the Australian Union of Screen Composers to halt the company’s importing of composer Maurice Jarre to work on the music for *Thunderdome*.\(^{138}\) Later, in 1994, the composer’s guild again spoke out in criticism, when the company appeared to be soliciting international composers to work on *Babe*,\(^{139}\) though the work was eventually done by Australian Nigel Westlake. This protectionism is a recurring stance of Australian screen industry unions, and the fact that Kennedy Miller was recurrently an object of complaint in this area reveals just how the company was viewed as an outsider. The company’s iconoclastic reputation is most often associated with its purportedly unusual labour procedures. This is particularly evident in press accounts that refer critically to the company’s treatment of its employees, mainly its writers. The most hyperbolic expression of this is found in a July 1988 *Sydney Morning Herald* article, where it is reported that one dissatisfied writer described their experience at Kennedy Miller to the Writers’ Guild as akin to being “raped by the 90-tonne gorilla”.\(^{140}\)

In general, where the company is described as doing things differently, that difference is traceable back to the company’s method of production, as defined earlier. Financing, political dealings, labour relations: these are aspects of Kennedy Miller’s particular production practices, company culture, and industrial strategy—its method. We can see the strong link between the company’s iconoclastic reputation and its method of production in Barbara Samuels’ 1984 article “The Movies, Mate: Inside Kennedy Miller”.\(^{141}\) A six-page profile written for the trade journal *Cinema Canada*, Samuels’ article provides a journalistic look at the company’s operations at the time of the production of *The Cowra Breakout*, as well as a succinct early description of its production procedures. The article also provides the first locatable use of the concept of the “Kennedy Miller Method”; Samuels uses the term in relation

to an ensemble approach to filmmaking in which projects are ‘workshopped’ by
writers/directors and actors, and then produced ‘collectively’. The article
concludes with a scene in which cast and crew of the then-in-production *Cowra Breakout* gather
on the lobby stairs of the Metro to watch rushes of footage they had previously been
shooting on a stage inside the theatre: a collegial moment that illustrates the
company’s collaborative culture, or at least its surface manifestations. In an
associated interview with Miller, published in an earlier issue, Samuels also gets at
the thinking that lies behind the firm’s collaborative style. “Film is very much an
organic process,” Miller tells her, “and the more of a ‘specialist’ anyone becomes, the
more they’re doomed to failure.”

Samuels’ account of Kennedy Miller’s operations highlights the company’s
difference: the “message emanating from the somewhat dilapidated Metro is very
clear: this isn't Hollywood,” she writes. Her article is one segment of a three-part
industrial report on the revived Australian industry, directed at Canadian industry
practitioners; she uses the firm as an example of the way things are done in
Australia. But as we can see from those press reports cited above, some Australians
did not feel the firm was representative of Australian practices. The tension between
these differing accounts of the company’s difference, in a sense, reify a conception
of the company’s hybrid nationality: Kennedy Miller’s method is too Hollywood to be
truly Australian, and too Australian to be truly Hollywood.

However I note these examples of Kennedy Miller’s iconoclastic reputation only in
order to illustrate that reputation’s centrality to a common understanding of the firm,
and how the examples gesture toward the subject of the firm’s method. As I indicated
in the Introduction, my research is focused less on discourse on, about, or by
Kennedy Miller than on its actual practices—the former offers only indirect evidence
of the latter. My account of the firm’s method therefore attempts to dissociate itself
from simply discussing the firm’s reputation, and instead looks toward direct

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142 Barbara Samuels, "Dr. George Miller—Mephisto in a polka-dot tie," *Cinema Canada*,
evidence of its practices. As a corollary to this, I also stake no position on whether the firm’s iconoclastic reputation was truly warranted – that is, whether it truthfully did do things differently. In seeking to develop an empirical understanding of Kennedy Miller in this study, the primary goal is not to understand whether the way Kennedy Miller did things was different, but simply how Kennedy Miller did things.

Accounts of Method of Production

To truly understand the firm’s method of production, we must turn not to literature on its reputation, but to serious literature that approaches the firm directly and seeks to describe its operations. Samuels’ article represents a halfway step in this process, and as I have previously mentioned, her line of approach was later taken up more substantively in three key works of research on the company: those by Curtis, Cunningham, and Murray. These authors’ works on Kennedy Miller offer an invaluable account of the company’s method of production as it was in the 1980s. In this section, I will summarise and discuss the salient details of Curtis’s and Murray’s work—withholding Cunningham for a discussion of house style—and then highlight their limitations. While core aspects of the Kennedy Miller method have remained constant through its existence, I argue that we need a clearer picture of how the method developed and evolved from the 1970s through to the 2010s.

Curtis’s *Australian Film and Television: A Case Study of Kennedy Miller*, a regrettably unpublished honours thesis submitted to Griffith University in 1985, is to date the most thorough work of scholarship on Kennedy Miller, and the most detailed description of its method of production.\(^{144}\) The work is divided into four parts: the firm’s origins and history; company structure and organisation of production; company philosophy and house style; and a case study of the making of *Bodyline*. Curtis’s account is descriptive in nature but admirably wide-ranging. She describes the size of Kennedy Miller’s staff: twelve full-time in 1985—Miller, Hayes, Mitchell; two secretaries; three women in accounts; a runner; a receptionist; one writer-

\(^{144}\) Keryn Michelle Curtis, "Australian Television and Film: A Case Study of Kennedy Miller" (honours diss., Griffith University, 1985).
researcher; and two researchers. She describes the freelance employment conditions of its crew. She discusses finances, and notes that though the company’s habitual privacy makes it “impossible to assess the degree to which they utilise private external finance in relation to their own investment”, the company’s relative independence and freedom stems from its ability to mobilise its own monetary reserves. This early account of the company’s ability and willingness to self-finance, while speculative, is corroborated by later anecdotal sources. She describes the hierarchy of its decision-making: Miller, Hayes and Mitchell, as ‘the bosses’, have the final word on large financial and executive decisions, but administrative and business staff and researchers are empowered to make other decisions. She focuses on production practices in particular, describing the company’s extensive periods of pre-writing research, communal story conferences, regular group meetings for discussion and script revisions, and pre-production workshops and rehearsals (what Miller refers to in the *Bodyline* prospectus as “excessive preparation”).

Curtis uses the term “Kennedy Miller Method” to refer specifically to the company’s pre-production workshops, which were first implemented on *The Dismissal*. These were scheduled, structured events wherein the firm’s collaborative atmosphere was most explicitly implemented. But throughout this thesis I will be using the Kennedy Miller method in a broader sense: to encompass the related practices in development, writing, pre-production, managerial style, and collaborative atmosphere identified in Curtis’s work, and broader company structures and strategies. The major theme to emerge from her research, as with Samuels’, is Kennedy Miller’s emphasis on collaborative procedures across its productions. “A highly collaborative atmosphere”, Curtis writes, “is an overt, conscious, if unwritten policy of the company.” As she describes it, this atmosphere serves to create a unification of purpose among participants: “It is vital to both the practical operations and the aesthetic/philosophical interests of the project that both crew and cast are

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145 Curtis, 30.
146 Curtis, 53.
unified in their conception of the main goals.” Key terms used to describe the firm’s procedures are ‘collective’, ‘collaborative’, ‘democratic’, ‘team’, ‘encouraging’, ‘positive’, ‘open’. However, these conditions are not treated as a spontaneous emergence but, in the true sense of a company policy, as something expected and required on all projects.

The attitude is that a project will reach its peak potential only if there is a high degree of compatibility and support amongst all of the people involved in the various stages in various roles and that this can be achieved only when a strong sense of contribution, responsibility and a shared goal is generated. The meetings go a long way toward creating this atmosphere. People are encouraged to make suggestions, comment on other suggestions or decisions and to understand and respect each other’s needs regarding both their own roles and the project as a whole. In this way, it is argued, a happier and therefore more productive atmosphere will be generated where everyone will have a keen sense of their own significance and contribution toward a collectively established and shared goal.

Miller and Hayes are central to this atmosphere, in Curtis’s account. The prominent role they take during production “places them in the inimitable position of being able to involve themselves in and oversee and regulate the working experience and to make and utilise observations.” The unstratified, collaborative environment fosters a collective identity, but this environment is still regulated from above; and though Miller and Hayes are ‘the bosses’, they are also embedded within the process.

The Kennedy Miller division of labour is a point of interest also taken up in the work of Scott Murray. A filmmaker, publication editor, and writer, Murray oversaw extensive coverage of the company—in the form of production reports and interviews—during

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147 Curtis, 61.
148 Curtis, 53.
149 Curtis, 55-56.
150 Curtis, 56.
his tenure as editor at *Cinema Papers*. Though Murray’s work on Kennedy Miller is not delivered in the form of research papers, I take it as a major part of the central corpus of literature on the company and its method of production. Murray’s most significant single contribution on the company is *Back of Beyond*, the 1988 exhibition catalogue he edited, which includes two lengthy interviews by Murray with Miller and Hayes, in addition to an essay on the company by Debi Enker, “Crossover and Collaboration”.  

The interviews focus on the collaborative processes Curtis and Cunningham had already described as central to Kennedy Miller’s method of production. As Miller describes it to Murray, the firm’s philosophy of collaboration stems from his and Kennedy’s view of the filmmaking process as “organic and comprehensive”.  

It is comprehensive, for Miller, because he and Kennedy wanted to explore all aspects of filmmaking, and because they felt that film workers in a small industry ought not to specialise—as they believed workers did in the stratified Hollywood industry. And it is organic because they proceed intuitively, in a spirit of inquiry and because this outlook naturally yields collaborative behaviour. The comprehensivist outlook blurs the traditional industrial division of labour in production. Miller told Murray:

> I find this confusion some writers and directors have over sovereignty quite bizarre. That is a non-issue as far as I am concerned. At Kennedy Miller, we are filmmakers, whether we are writers, directors, or producers. You can’t differentiate. If people ask if the contribution of a writer or director is more valuable, they don’t understand the process. There is a continuum between the various facets, and it all comes under the heading, ‘filmmaking’.  

‘Storytellers’, ‘filmmakers’, ‘comprehensivists’—these are the umbrella rubrics for personnel in the Kennedy Miller ensemble, rather than specialised labour roles. Another variation on these terms can be found in a 1988 *Cinema Papers* interview

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152 George Miller, interview by Scott Murray, in *Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television*, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1988), 35.

153 Miller, interview by Scott Murray, 37.
by Tom Ryan, where Miller mentioned that the company housed “multi-disciplined filmmakers”, a quality which, he saw, distinguished the Australian style of production from Hollywood studio filmmaking. The ideal of comprehensivist storytellers, and what it reveals about the firm’s treatment of divisions of labour, is a key component of the Kennedy Miller method.

Hayes’ interview in *Back of Beyond* largely concurs with Miller on the centrality of collaborative practices to the company; significantly, he associates the collaborative ideal with Miller and Kennedy’s particular personal tendencies and preferences. He also embraces the perception of iconoclasm, saying that they like to see themselves as renegades: “As creative people, you’re at your most potent when you are not part of an establishment”—to which he equates the Screen Producers’ Association, and the Film Finance Corporation. He also acknowledges the dark side of the ostensibly utopian collaborative ideal. Hayes admits that Kennedy Miller has had difficult relationships with its writers who, being solitary by trade, he says are not accustomed to group critique, which is a key stage of the company’s development processes. Hayes says the company has had its most successful relationships with writer–directors, who see themselves as storytellers, and do not view filmmaking “in a segmented fashion”. But he also acknowledges that this ostensibly democratic collaboration is undergirded with definite power structures, and does not proceed through sheer positivity. It “requires a catalyst to work properly”—someone who is not afraid to be unpleasant.

Viewed together, the works of Curtis and Murray define the contours of Kennedy Miller’s collaborative creative procedures. Its components are the ideal of

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155 Terry Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, in *Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television*, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1988), 47. Hayes, in an earlier interview given to Keryn Curtis for her thesis, associates his distance from the Screen Producers’ Association with a sense of competitiveness, and describes SPA meetings as akin to group therapy sessions. Terry Hayes, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 270587, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
156 Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, 47.
157 Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, 49.
comprehensivism (or multidisciplinarity); an atmosphere of collaboration fostering a
sense of collectivism; an erasure of (some) normative divisions of labour; and an
unstratified, participatory ‘ensemble’ approach—but one which is regulated by a
central managerial presence. And it is implemented through concrete practices of
project development in research and development, writing, and pre-production
workshops. The limitations of Curtis’s and Murray’s work present opportunities for my
study. In general, when describing the firm’s practices, the authors’ accounts are
largely focused on Kennedy Miller’s television work. Is the method present in its
films, too? Miller tells Murray, in their interview, that he sees the films as less
collaborative than the miniseries.\footnote{158}{Miller, interview by Scott Murray, 42.}
But I will show in the following history that the firm’s essential comprehensivist philosophy is visible across all parts of its output.

Curtis and Murray’s contributions also focus largely on the company as it was
constituted in the 1980s, when they were writing. In general, these authors do not
look toward its prior history in seeking to understand its method, although Hayes tells
Murray that the firm’s collaborative practices are intimately linked to Miller’s and
Kennedy’s personalities. In the following history, I will show how Miller’s and
Kennedy’s personal tendencies and experiences in the 1970s, and the filmmaking
environment of that decade, shaped the method of production that they formalised in
the 1980s. Finally, the works of Curtis and Murray does not go beyond the mid-to-
late 1980s—when they completed them—and subsequent scholars did not take up
their program of inquiry. This is not surprising, since the 1980s was the period of the
company’s most intensive production, during which its sequence of miniseries
established Kennedy Miller as an identifiable brand. But as I have described in the
Introduction, the company has undergone significant evolutions since this core
literature was published. It is necessary now to understand how Kennedy Miller’s
method of production persisted and evolved through subsequent decades. As we will
see, the method was not a temporary construct used only during the firm’s temporary
studio-like period of organisation in the 1980s, but is a consistent set of tendencies,
practices, and strategies which underlie the company’s sustainability over its near
half-century of operations.
Discourses of Authorship

Curtis and Murray’s work on the firm’s collaborative procedures helped establish the ‘anti-auteurist’ discourse of ‘corporate authorship’ that Cunningham observed to surround the company in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{159} But this collective identity is not always acknowledged in literature on its personnel, particularly after the 1980s had ended. During that decade, Terry Hayes is often visible in the literature in the role of company spokesperson, and due to his willingness to make himself available to the press he usually appears as the public face of the company’s television work, as we see in Murray’s \textit{Back of Beyond} interview, a later \textit{Cinema Papers} interview, and other press clippings.\textsuperscript{160} Other members of the company’s creative ‘ensemble’, including Chris Noonan,\textsuperscript{161} John Duigan,\textsuperscript{162} Phil Noyce,\textsuperscript{163} and George Ogilvie,\textsuperscript{164} also received some press attention in connection with their tenure at the company, particularly from \textit{Cinema Papers}. Earlier, in the 1970s, some texts also highlight Kennedy’s contribution to the company’s work—as lead producer, he often acted as spokesperson and point of contact for media reports. If such texts do not treat Kennedy as the singular force behind the company’s work, at least they place him on equal footing with Miller—for example, both are given equal space in the \textit{Cinema Papers} production report on \textit{Mad Max}.\textsuperscript{165}

However the majority of press reports takes Miller as the key point of interest at the company. Miller is frequently profiled throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, in

\textsuperscript{159} Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - 'House Style' in Australian Television," 179.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

*Cinema Papers, Filmnews,* and various newspapers, as well as French publication *Positif,* in connection not only with his own films as director but also with those works made under him as producer; he is a visible part of the publicity campaign for Noyce’s *Dead Calm,* and Noonan’s *Babe.* With Hayes’ departure in 1991, the focus on Miller more and more becomes the singular avenue of approach to the company’s work, and his status as central creative force is assumed (Mitchell almost never makes a public comment). Miller, in this way, becomes represented as the default creative authority not just of his own films as director, but also of the Kennedy Miller corpus overall, a position of dominant authorship that was not consistently represented when Kennedy and Hayes were at the company.

Yet more substantive texts also struggle to reconcile the filmmaker’s obvious and freely admitted preference for collaboration with his status as the company’s public face and apparent mastermind. Adrian Martin’s 2003 scholarly monograph *The Mad Max Movies* is typical of such works in oversubscribing to an idea of Miller as singular author. In discussing the *Mad Max* franchise, Martin describes Kennedy, the formative collaborator in Miller’s development, only belatedly and offhandedly as the co-author of the outline for the film. Kennedy’s influence on the soundtrack, which I will show to be significant, and which Martin identifies as key to the effect of the montage sequences, goes unremarked upon, though he is credited accurately as a sound mixer on *Mad Max 2.* Martin also quotes Kennedy’s views on continuity in

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167 Miller and Noonan, interview by Scott Murray, *Cinema Papers,* no. 107; Tom Ryan, "Relieving an Obsession."


stunt editing, but does not connect this with a larger sense of how Kennedy influenced Miller’s style and sensibility as a filmmaker.

In general, Martin leaves Miller’s propensity for collaboration noted but mostly unexplored, describing him as a collaborative producer in his television work, but treating him as the singular author of his film work—a distinction that can hardly account for Miller’s crediting as co-director on three of his features, though two of these, the *Happy Feet* films, were released after Martin’s publication. The contribution of George Ogilvie, co-director of *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, is mentioned in Martin’s chapter on that film, but is discussed largely in terms of providing an opportunity for Miller to explore further developments in his style, with Ogilvie’s presence supposedly liberating Miller to explore the possibilities of mise-en-scène in addition to montage. In fact, Ogilvie’s impact on the method of production employed by Kennedy Miller, instituted when he joined the company in the years just prior to *Thunderdome*’s production, is very significant. For Martin, Miller’s individual development as a filmmaker is contingent on his place in a collaborative production environment—a view that is essential, but, as he posits it, partial and incomplete.

This dynamic is also at work in Luke Buckmaster’s 2017 popular press biography *Miller and Max: George Miller and the Making of a Film Legend*. This is an anecdotal account of the making of the four *Mad Max* films, and is likewise torn between a portrait of Miller as a singular creative genius and an acknowledgement of his place within a network of creative contributors. As Martin’s monograph is the sole book-length study of Kennedy Miller productions, so is Buckmaster’s the sole book-length treatment of one of the company’s principals. In Buckmaster’s conception of Miller’s global reach and relevance, the filmmaker is “the most influential Australian artist in history”, but also someone who, by nature, works in a collegial style, dependent on others. Buckmaster does pay special attention to the early contribution of Kennedy to the company’s work, identifying them as complementary personalities:

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Kennedy as the hard-driving, pragmatic producer, and Miller the daydreaming creative. And, drawing on extensive interviews with crew members, he exposes the diverse creative contributions that formed the *Mad Max* films. He also neatly analogises the collaborative writing of *Mad Max 2* by Miller, Hayes, and Brian Hannant to the ‘writers’ room’ model of US television—a description that accords with the collaborative procedures Curtis had earlier outlined. But some key points of creative partnership get overlooked—like Martin, Buckmaster gives little focus to the decision to bring Ogilvie on as co-director of *Beyond Thunderdome*, describing him simply as a “friend and colleague” of Miller’s whose focus on actors allowed Miller to work on the action sequences. Because of *Miller and Max*’s focus on the *Mad Max* franchise, Buckmaster also generally elides other key steps in Miller’s development: his responsibilities as producer in addition to director, especially on the miniseries work; his business entrepreneurship; and the expansion of his company toward quasi-studio status. These are fundamental to Miller’s identity as a filmmaker.

The narrow perspective on Miller is justified to an extent by his long-standing and actual authority over Kennedy Miller’s operations as its founder and executive. And it also reflects the lingering importance of the auteur theory as an analytical model in film studies. The auteurist position is not necessarily founded on an understanding of actual conditions of production, but on critical readings of textual and paratextual material – the categorisation of a filmmaker as an auteur can be institutionally assigned, as companies push the public’s focus to a particular creative participant. But attention to Kennedy Miller’s own representation of authorship reveals that the company itself did not excessively foreground Miller, or any single participant, and frequently sought to emphasise a blurring of creative responsibility on its productions. This is sometimes evident even in the distribution of credits on its output: writers and directors share story credits on the miniseries; Ogilvie shares director credit on *Beyond Thunderdome*; while *The Witches of Eastwick* is identified as ‘A Kennedy Miller Film’. Contemporary auteurist analysis is also capable of

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172 Buckmaster, *Miller and Max*, 105-106.
acknowledging the singular author as operating within a collaborative network, however a systematic representation of this position cannot be found in prior literature on Miller. Additionally, Miller’s rhetoric of comprehensivism, multidisciplinarity, and collaboration had arguably been circulated in the press to a sufficient extent by the late 1980s to caution writers against overlooking the collectivist aspect of his firm.

This study attempts to redress the imbalance created by the previous critical focus on Miller by giving an expanded treatment of the company’s corporate authorship, continuing the approach posited separately by Cunningham, Curtis, and Murray, and carrying it forward into the 1990s and 2000s and 2010s. This approach acknowledges the significance of Miller to the company’s operations, as founder, executive, director, and creative principal. As Curtis and Murray had already indicated, collaboration requires managerial regulation, and Miller typically provides that central regulating force. This becomes especially clear in the 1990s and 2000s, when the most visible personnel in the firm’s above-the-line ensemble drift away from the company, and Miller’s creative centrality becomes entrenched. But the corporate authorship model also better permits us to make sense of those periods of company operations when Miller was more recessive or absent, as in the majority of the television work.

House Style

Kennedy Miller’s collaborative method and corporate authorship are only infrequently mentioned in literature that proffers an analysis or critical evaluation of the company’s texts. But still, some reviews from the 1980s evince an understanding of its collective identity, through reference to a consistent company style. David Stratton’s 1989 review of Dead Calm, which he describes as having been directed in the Kennedy-Miller “house style”, is one such example. In a 1988 column for the


\[\text{\footnotesize 176 David Stratton, "Ocean Adds to Sense of Unease," Sydney Morning Herald, May 25, 1989.} \]
Sydney Morning Herald, journalist Peter Luck makes mention of the “familiar Kennedy Miller devices” observed in the telemovie Fragments of War, including its “once-upon-a-time”-style narration. These remarks show that a loose comprehension of the company’s collective identity was available to commentators in that period. However, an overall sense of the company’s house style appears undefined; it is not clear whether each writer’s respective perception of the company’s style is reconcilable with the others’.

Curtis’s thesis includes a brief discussion of house style, but in general her work is more concerned with the contexts of production rather than the textual characteristics they yield. Curtis positions her thesis within the then-contemporary lineage of production research stemming from Birmingham and Leicester universities, and, by extension, with a longer tradition of cultural studies stemming back to the Frankfurt School, although she argues that her own research goal was not to uncover the workings of ideology in the company’s production processes but simply to understand the factors which contribute to its dramatic productions. Nevertheless, her disciplinary allegiance leads her to reflect on Kennedy Miller’s ideological valence, speculating that the firm’s ‘democratic’ outlook might also entail a “specifically left-wing political ideology” at work within its texts.

By far the most substantive treatment of Kennedy Miller’s house style is found in the work of Stuart Cunningham on the company. This work, it is necessary to note, does not present as a cohesive organisational study of Kennedy Miller, like Curtis’s, but is actually a loosely linked sequence of articles and reviews. I treat them together, here, by means of acknowledging that Cunningham is one of the few scholars, in Australia or internationally, to have made the company a recurring object of inquiry. With the exception of a review of Dead Calm for Filmnews, Cunningham’s work focuses on the firm’s television output, and includes an analysis of The Dismissal in

178 Curtis, 63.
a 1983 issues of the *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, a discussion of *Vietnam* and the miniseries format for *Filmnews*, the article “Style, Form and History in Australian Mini-series”, and, most significantly, the article “Kennedy Miller: ‘House Style’ in Australian Television” in Dermody and Jacka’s *The Imaginary Industry*. In one respect, Cunningham briefly follows on from Curtis’s cautious left-wing analysis, claiming in 1987’s “Jewel in the Crown” that the collaborative, ensemble method of production yields a humanist dramaturgical style. But in general Cunningham’s approach to the firm’s house style does not focus on its possible ideological content.

His 1988 production-house case study, “Kennedy Miller: ‘House Style’ in Australian Television”, draws on much of the extant research on the company up to that point to give a holistic and wide-ranging description of its organisational characteristics. Alongside Curtis’s thesis (the research for which he draws on), Cunningham’s work in this article represents the most substantive and cohesive treatment of the firm prior to my study. Cunningham begins his discussion of Kennedy Miller with an account of its iconoclastic qualities, asserting that the identification of its house style requires the identification of its points of difference from the prevailing industry norms. For this, he notes the company’s unusual longevity (which at this point was little more than a decade!), its ensemble, collaborative, workshop procedures and corporate authorship, its posture of separation from industry guilds and funding bodies, its stable partnership with Network Ten, and its conspicuous overall success. Following his account of the firm’s industrial points of difference, Cunningham’s analysis of its house style focuses on what he regards as the experimental qualities of the TV miniseries, from *The Dismissal* up to *The Dirtwater Dynasty*. He identifies different procedures of experimentation in each one, but emphasises overall their

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183 Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - 'House Style' in Australian Television."
184 Cunningham, "Jewel in the Crown."
“cinematising” tendencies, or their establishment of “recombinant” televisual and cinematic forms.\(^\text{185}\)

Cunningham’s house-style analysis is incomplete by his own admission, since a full treatment of the firm’s style would also have to encompass its film output. But it is difficult to anticipate how a possible analysis of the films would meld with the analysis Cunningham posits of the miniseries, since it would be redundant to describe the films as exhibiting cinematising tendencies, and implausible to claim that they incorporate recombinant aspects of televisual form. An alternative way to describe the films’ procedures as experimental would have to be found. One possible avenue to such a claim of experimentation can be seen in *The Mad Max Movies*, where Martin describes *Beyond Thunderdome* as akin to an “art film”, in that it is structured around moments wherein its hero falls into unconsciousness, and the story displaces Max “from one strange environment to another”.\(^\text{186}\) It is certainly possible to consistently locate ‘experimental’ narrative or formal tendencies in Kennedy Miller’s features; and throughout the following history we will see that the firm often deployed experimental, unorthodox, or novel production procedures, particularly in its use of technology.

However, the account of Kennedy Miller’s house style posited across this thesis follows a different approach. I see it as unnecessarily restrictive to only look for the firm’s house style in its points of difference. House style can have a close relationship with prevailing norms when it is a curated suite of tendencies selected by the house out of the normative options available to it. My account of Kennedy Miller’s house style describes it as a part of the firm’s method of production but, as I have already indicated, I stake no position on the actual ‘difference’ of that method of production. I argue that it is preferable to see the Kennedy Miller house style as something emerging internally from sensibilities we can identify as integral to the firm. Cunningham’s house-style account already makes some key interpretive links in this regard. He associates the firm’s erasure of divisions of labour—its

\(^{185}\) Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - 'House Style' in Australian Television," 185.

\(^{186}\) Martin, *The Mad Max Movies*, 69.
comprehensivism, as described by Murray—with its principals’ self-identification as ‘storytellers’, which is itself associated with the firm’s attachment to the theories of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell, and the notion that narrative taps mythic structures held in the collective unconscious.\textsuperscript{187} In his monograph Martin also flags the importance of Joseph Campbell to Miller’s practice. Campbell’s description of the stages of the ‘hero’s journey’, the mythic structure he argues underpins universal mythic narrative, provided a “template” for Miller’s evolving understanding of storytelling.\textsuperscript{188} Putting these observations together, we can begin to anticipate a unified account of the firm’s cross-medium style which would address how its narrative conventions reflect an attachment to Campbell’s precepts.

Martin cautions against analysing the Mad Max films solely in mythic terms, arguing that “an account of the narrative forms in the Mad Max movies cannot stop at a simple mapping onto them of Campbell’s schematic grid”.\textsuperscript{189} So in positing a house style it is necessary to recognise that Kennedy Miller makes its own selections in regard to narrative construction, rather than following an assumed template. Cunningham offers further useful concepts in this direction. Adopting concepts posited by Fiske and Hartley,\textsuperscript{190} he associates the mythologising tendency of the company with the ‘bardic’ or ‘social ritual’ function of the miniseries, which he identifies as particularly apparent in Kennedy Miller’s moments of direct-address voiceover narration, as in the opening narration of The Dismissal.\textsuperscript{191} In the following history, we will see how the firm’s attachment to direct-address narration was present in its productions even before Miller developed an interest in Campbell’s ideas. We will also see how ideas about the ‘social ritual’ function of the firm’s works are borne out by Miller’s own stated ideas about the function of screen storytelling. My account of Kennedy Miller’s house style ultimately links the firm’s style with the commercial strategy that is part of its method of production. The firm is fundamentally commercially oriented—or, as we will see, ‘audience-oriented’—and this basic

\textsuperscript{187} Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - ‘House Style’ in Australian Television,” 183.
\textsuperscript{188} Martin, The Mad Max Movies, 39.
\textsuperscript{189} Martin, 40.
\textsuperscript{190} John Fiske and John Hartley, Reading Television (Oxon: Routledge, 2004).
\textsuperscript{191} Cunningham, "Kennedy-Miller - ‘House Style’ in Australian Television,” 186.
imperative drives its development of narrative norms. Its commercial instincts are expressed in a drive toward affective screen product, and the pursuit of affect governs its stylistic choices, including its adoption of Campbell’s theories and its procedures of direct-address narration.

**Style and National Identity**

In Australian screen studies and criticism, discussions of form and style frequently impinge on discussion of national identity, and particular textual qualities are taken to express an ‘Australian’ register of production or one of international influences. In the absence of a comprehensive extant conception of Kennedy Miller’s house style there has also been a concomitant lack of consensus on how to characterise its national identity—or whether the firm, and its stylistic tendencies, belong to the Australian register or to a foreign one.

Martin writes that the firm possesses a two-sided guiding policy:

on the one hand, bearing witness to Australian culture was the impulse behind the television series produced by the company; on the other hand, those universal, immortal stories to which Miller aspired to emulate naturally belonged to Hollywood, to him the most ‘mythological culture’ destined to service the globe.\(^{192}\)

In the ‘two-sided’ view, Kennedy Miller’s miniseries are plainly nationalist, local, and wholly engaged in Australian issues, while its films are global, universalist, Hollywood, and even “imperialist”.\(^{193}\)

The firm’s split national identity was a recurring subject of concern for writers through the 1970s and 1980s. In general, these decades generated a film discourse that was organised along oppositions of Australian/international, culture/industry, and

\(^{192}\) Martin, 45.  
\(^{193}\) Martin, 4.
This binary discourse has a kind of moral tinge. When Kennedy Miller is framed as only contestably Australian—that is, existing outside the ideological, aesthetic, and bureaucratic limits of ‘Australian’ film—the firm is also in a sense marginalised as an object of interest. It is perhaps for this reason that the field of literature on the company is insufficiently substantive overall. The Australian/international opposition—whether stated incidentally or at length—is observable across literature on Kennedy Miller’s output in these decades, and it highlights the rhetorical difficulties writers have encountered in attempting to categorise the company’s national identity.

The lack of consensus on the weighing of the firm’s national identity is particularly visible in the divide between discourse on the firm’s films and on its television programmes. In ‘Enchantment with the Cinema: Film in the 1980s’, O'Regan demonstrates the split: in the same chapter, the author treats *Vietnam*, on the one hand, as a clear instance of the commercial imperative toward ‘Australiana’ dictated by the 10BA tax concession funding environment, and *Mad Max*, on the other hand, as the inaugurator of a local mode of genre cinema that eschewed markers of Australian culture. The features are widely described as non-Australian. Neil Rattigan writes, for instance, that *Mad Max* is “cultureless” and denuded of identifiably Australian features. Brian McFarlane and Geoff Mayer discuss this as a film received as ‘tainted’ and impurely Australian by its adoption of classical Hollywood conventions. John McConchie writes in *Filmnews* that *Dead Calm* “barely qualifies” as Australian.

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And yet in some respects there is a distinct lack of consensus on the non-Australian identity of the firm’s features, or in how this tendency plays out across its filmography. Cunningham, for instance, somewhat contrarily lauds the Mad Max films for what he describes as a successful local appropriation of American genre forms, and then critically labels Dead Calm the company’s first “trans-Pacific” feature, for being not Australian enough. Cunningham, “Becalmed”. This trans-Pacific, or sometimes ‘mid-Atlantic’, label was applied to other Hollywood-facing filmmakers of Miller’s generation, such as Richard Franklin. See: Adrian Martin, "No Flowers for the Cinéphile: The Fates of Cultural Populism 1960-1988," in Island in the Stream: Myths of Place in Australian Culture, ed. Paul Foss (Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1988), 131.

Martin, The Mad Max Movies, 4.

Martin even sees the firm’s two-sided policy playing out simultaneously in the Mad Max films, in which, he writes, a foreign formal and narrative style is liable to rub up against evidence of “larrkin cheekiness” or some other eruption of the local. Martin, The Mad Max Movies, 4. I suggest this absence of consensus illustrates the fundamental conceptual difficulties of attempting to categorise Kennedy Miller’s work within strict Australia/international oppositions.

Some recognition that the firm does not fit neatly into nationalist discourse can be seen in Dermody and Jacka’s Screening of Australia. In diagramming the aesthetic tendencies of the national cinema, the authors posit the “AFC-genre”, a prevalent film aesthetic incentivised by the Australian Film Commission’s qualifying conditions for significant Australian content, as exemplified by Picnic at Hanging Rock and My Brilliant Career. This is the ‘cultural’, ‘artistic’, and ‘Australian’ side of the opposition. The authors claim Mad Max intentionally frustrates the conventions of this form, but they do not place it in the opposing category, which they term the “aesthetic of commercialism”, but rather in a third category of “eccentrics” that is designed to group the otherwise uncategorisable—a grouping where they also later place The Year My Voice Broke. Dermody and Jacka associate the miniseries form with the AFC-genre, but assert that Kennedy Miller’s works in that form, including The


200 Martin, The Mad Max Movies, 4.


Dismissal, Vietnam, and The Dirtwater Dynasty, display aesthetic innovation within it.\footnote{Elizabeth Jacka, "The Aesthetic Force Field I: The AFC-Genre and the Social Realist Film in the ‘80s," in The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the Late ‘80s, ed. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1988), 89.} The subsequent two Mad Max films are seen as making a kind of 'play' with Australian allusions, additionally arguing that the franchise takes inspiration from an Australian ‘gothic’ tradition; but they see Beyond Thunderdome as less Australian, even on this intangible level, than Mad Max 2.\footnote{Elizabeth Jacka, "Critical Positions," in The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the Late ‘80s, ed. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, 67-81 (North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School, 1988), 77-78.} In these negotiations with the textual characteristics of Kennedy Miller’s output, we can see a series of attempts to redefine or escape the Australian–foreign division.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, as I noted in the Introduction, alternative paradigms of national cinema discourse emerged, some of which sought to emphasise the ‘hybrid’ nature of Australian film, and which prioritised the acknowledgement of local traditions of ‘commercial’ filmmaking, such as the ‘ocker’ comedies, and action and horror films which emerged concurrently with the AFC-genre. One of the most significant texts in this shift is Mark Hartley’s documentary Not Quite Hollywood, which has become, as Ryan notes, the de facto “conceptual framework for understanding Australian genre movies”.\footnote{Mark David Ryan, "Toward an Understanding of Australian Genre Cinema and Entertainment: Beyond the Limits of ‘Ozploitation’ Discourse," Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies 24, no. 4 (2010): 2.} Mad Max is the only Kennedy Miller feature treated in this documentary, where it is placed among a set of films (such as Ian Barry’s 1980 film The Chain Reaction, for which Miller is credited with some second unit work) with similar action scenarios and stunt-driven aesthetics. Although Hartley deals in depth with the later wave of 1980s productions oriented to international markets, Mad Max 2 and Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome are notably absent—as is, as Ryan points out, Dead Calm—most likely because they do not meet the same standard of disreputability as the other films Hartley focuses on.\footnote{Adrian Martin, in a response to this film, has discussed the limitations of ‘Ozploitation’ discourse, and argued for further ‘parallel histories’ of Australian cinema outside of the AFC/genre dichotomy, though he does not identify which alternate schemas Kennedy Miller might be located in. See: Adrian Martin, "Ozploitation Compared to What? A Challenge to
Thus, even when restrictive conceptual frameworks of Australianness are renovated or enlarged, Kennedy Miller’s output still does not quite fit.

Judging by the reported utterances of Miller and Kennedy, the company itself often appeared indifferent to the issue of its national identity. An obituary of Kennedy quotes him describing the film industry as “indigenous to planet earth, not necessarily to Australia.” Kennedy Miller’s ‘un-Australianness’, in turn, became part of its global reputation—another means to identify the company as an iconoclastic outlier. In 1982 The New York Times described Miller’s films as “more openly commercial and purposefully abrasive than most Australian films released in this country”. Another 1982 profile, in The Salt Lake Tribune, described Miller as “not the typical filmmaker from Australia”.

Miller claimed, on the one hand, to be “not in the mainstream of Australian film”, but on the other disdained the idea of Mad Max being an ‘American’ film, because he felt its subject matter sprang from explicitly Australian concerns. It is this aspect of Miller’s thinking, the idea that ‘Australianness’ arises through the sensibilities or concerns of filmmakers, that O’Regan associates with the hybrid voice or relationality of the Australian national cinema, as described in my Introduction. Concepts of hybridity, rather than binary Australian–international oppositions, are the most effective tools for understanding Kennedy Miller’s national identity—hence the usefulness of terms such as ‘Industry-3’, ‘Hollywood Downunder’, and ‘outward-looking’ in thinking through the firm’s industrial position. Martin describes the Australian and Hollywood impulses as the two sides of the firm’s guiding policy, but it is still, crucially, a single and intertwined policy, and it will be treated as such throughout the following history.


210 Ryan, "George Miller Is Not Typical Filmmaker from Australia."
211 George Miller, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, Cinema Papers, no. 21 (May/June 1979): 366.
Summary

The five themes in the literature discussed here each clearly point toward areas of understanding that can be extended by my thesis. An empirical study of Kennedy Miller, one which gives a clear account of its method of production, will offer a strong basis for any future comprehension of its true iconoclasm, or actual difference from prevailing norms. A history of the company from its founding up to 2019 will better show how that method of production developed out of its earliest experiences, and then continued through later organisational changes in the 1990s and 2000s–2010s. A comprehensive account of its method of production, and most particularly its collaborative procedures, will show how the firm’s productions are vested with a quality of corporate authorship, qualifying any future views of Miller as a singular author. A holistic treatment of the company’s method will better expose the unified foundations of its house style. And this holistic treatment will also show its unified Australian–international production policy, thereby demonstrating its hybrid identity.

In general, and most importantly, the literature has shown that our understanding of Kennedy Miller’s constitution and identity as an organisation—and, in particular, of its characteristic collaborative procedures—is not up to date. The key sources in this area date back to the mid-1980s, and no subsequent studies were forthcoming to elaborate on the company’s situation in the 1990s, 2000s, or 2010s. The following production history resolves the problem by showing how the firm continued as a successful independent production company across its half-century of operations. In the course of this history we will see, for instance, that Miller’s and Kennedy’s collaborative and comprehensivist tendencies arose out of a particular industry context in the 1970s, and that even though the studio aspects of the company fell off after the 1980s, these tendencies—expressed as particular divisions of labour, development and preparatory practices, workshopping techniques—persisted and arose in different forms in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. We will see also that an ethos of collaboration remained at the heart of the company even as Miller assumed more prominence as its key creative principal. I will contend that Miller’s collaborative
habits are extensive and consistent, deeply linked to his personality and present at
every stage of his career. They are evident in his very earliest shorts, and are
present all the way through to his latest films. We will see that the company’s
production output and sensibility developed through a series of complex negotiations
with the reigning paradigms of the Australian industry, particularly its funding
contexts. These negotiations are visible in the company’s earliest shorts in the
1970s, and carry forward to the financing and organisation of later blockbuster
productions including *Fury Road*. Though “philosophically opposed” to government
funding in the early 1980s, the company has been deeply engaged with screen
agencies as both a recipient of funds and a policy lobbyist, and it has been a
conscious, strategic agent within the national industry. We will see that the Kennedy
Miller ‘house style’ can be expressed as a set of normative assumptions about
textual construction, linked closely to its production methods. The heart of this style
is the company’s ‘audience-oriented’ posture, a pursuit of affect and emotional
collusion that expresses itself both in recurring narrative techniques—such as the
use of voiceover narration—and in developing assumptions about the social function
of cinema. This posture unifies even aesthetically diverse works, from the
“pornography of death” of *Mad Max* to the family-musical style of *Happy Feet*.213

212 Robert Milliken, "Return of Mad Max," *National Times*, July 12, 1981.
213 David Stratton, *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival* (Sydney: Angus and
Chapter 2: 1970s—Developing the Kennedy Miller Method

Introduction

The origin of Kennedy Miller is difficult to pin down to a single event, or date. ‘Kennedy Miller Entertainment’ was first registered as an Australian company in 1974, but this does not reflect the beginnings of the partnership of its central two creative principals. *The Devil in Evening Dress*, a now largely forgotten television special, was the first screen work produced under the aegis of this company, but commentators are more likely to gesture to the release of *Mad Max*, five years later in 1979, as the key inflection point. Yet even this predates the acquisition of the Metro Theatre in 1981, and the solidification of the company into a quasi-studio operation. It is more useful to recognise that the enterprise emerged in stages, beginning with the first meeting of Miller and Kennedy at a 1971 film workshop at the University of Melbourne, during which they fell into partnership. Kennedy Miller in the 1970s was not yet a fully-fledged production firm, but rather a rudimentary partnership, formed between two still-emerging filmmakers.

In this chapter, I outline the preliminary stages of the firm’s development: the early lives of Miller and Kennedy, and some of their first filmic works, *Dragsters* (c. 1966) and *St Vincent's Revue Film* (c. 1970); the beginnings of their partnership and first projects together, including *Violence in the Cinema, Part 1* (1971), *Frieze: An Underground Film* (c. 1973), and *The Devil in Evening Dress* (1974); and finally the production of their first feature, *Mad Max* (1979). As I will show, these productions each exemplify aspects of the nascent sensibility and procedures of creative conduct that would become the Kennedy Miller method. I will show that a collaborative way of working was integral to Miller’s and Kennedy’s creative practices from their beginnings as filmmakers; that key aesthetic and narrative tendencies are present even in their first works; and that the production of *Mad Max* presented certain
organisational problems that spurred on the later formalisation of Kennedy Miller’s philosophy of comprehensivism. I will also note the beginnings of the firm’s relationship with the Australian media company Village Roadshow, which would be a key backer of Kennedy Miller throughout its existence. And I will argue that the firm was unavoidably shaped by the Australian film industry of the 1970s and its leading funding paradigm of direct subsidy. Although Mad Max, in a sense, inaugurated the ‘International’ side of the firm’s two-sided production policy, and its fully private financing indicated that the firm could do without government support, we should see Kennedy Miller as an organisation emerging from conditions created by government intervention, even as its founders shaped their firm in opposition to them.

**Miller and Kennedy Before Kennedy Miller—Dragsters and St Vincent’s Revue Film**

George Miller was born on 3 March 1945, alongside a twin named John. His parents were migrants—his father Dmitri (Jim), from the Greek island of Kythera, had changed the family name from Miliotis on arriving in Australia in 1921. His mother Envangalia (Angela) emigrated from Asia Minor, via Lesbos, in 1925. Jim and Angela raised four sons—George and John, Chris, and Bill—in the rural Queensland town of Chinchilla, where they operated a combined general store and cafe. Miller has described a childhood of long hours spent in wild and free play in the bush, as well as an early infatuation with the cinema; Chinchilla kids had a habit of sneaking beneath the floorboards of the local theatre to listen to films from under the feet of the audience. Miller’s parents expected high vocational advancement for their children, and Miller first pursued a career in medicine, an impulse he later tracked to the moment when, as a sick child, he was attended by a “magical doctor” who cured his fever and calmed his family. This formative experience, as Miller has described it, hints at a shared psychological impulse across his dual careers as doctor and filmmaker. In both, a practitioner (doctor or director) is concerned with achieving a

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215 Hawley, "The Hero's Journey."
therapeutic effect in a subject (patient or audience); later in his career, Miller began to describe cinema in terms of a social ritual that helped viewers process unconscious concerns.

Miller attended Sydney Boys High, and then the University of New South Wales, alongside his twin. But he was discontented, feeling as though he “didn’t think in the way doctors were meant to think”. He credited a lecture by visiting US polymath guru Buckminster Fuller with helping him find focus. Miller decided that his ‘right brain’ tendency to “create maps of understanding, meaning, interconnectedness” were really the cognitive patterns of a creative personality. He immersed himself in artistic pursuits: taking up painting, going to the theatre, and developing the mental habits of what Fuller called a “comprehensivist”. This experience seems to be an origin of the comprehensivist mentality that undergirds the Kennedy Miller method. Although the method also developed as a strategic response to conditions of production, as I will discuss shortly, we can additionally see that it is intimately linked to Miller’s own personality, and is a function of his central managerial position within the firm.

No copies of Miller’s ‘first’ film are extant, but he has described it in interviews. In 1970, Miller’s younger brother Chris (also enrolled at UNSW) learned about a competition in which participants would be given one hour to create a one-minute silent film, and where first prize was entry into a one-month film workshop organised by Aquarius, the cultural arm of the Australian Union of Students. Miller helped Chris brainstorm a plan for the short, which he described in a 1979 interview:

That was a film where you had one minute of silent black and white film, that had to be cut in the camera and one room to make it in. Everyone else in the competition was trying to make films that should have been shot for four million dollars. In my film the camera tracked towards a guy standing at the far wall and it got closer and closer. He’s got long hair, a long coat and a big hat,

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216 Hawley, "The Hero's Journey."
and his back is towards the camera. Then at about the 53rd second of the film he turns around toward the camera and a cartoon caption comes out of his mouth saying ‘The thing that really screws me up about films is that they’re not real.’ Then he turns around again to the wall and at the very last second of the film when everyone is wondering what the hell the film is about his head blows up and the movie ends.\textsuperscript{218}

Its conditions of production are indicative of the tendencies that would later govern Kennedy Miller—we can see the importance of fraternal or family-style relationships to Miller’s work habits, as well as the centrality of ‘brainstorming’ and discussion to his creative labour, and a loose conception of creative ‘ownership’ that encompasses collaborative divisions of labour or even labour performed by others. Though Miller refers to it as “my film”, it was his brother who went into the room and executed the concept.\textsuperscript{219}

The brothers’ short won first place, but Chris, being not overly interested in cinema, chose not to attend the workshop. Miller, with his classes concluded, had a summer to fill before undertaking a residency at St Vincent’s Hospital, and was working part-time as a brickie’s labourer, when a near-fatal incident—in which a brick fell from the top of his building site and narrowly missed the lunching workers below—precipitated a revaluation of his priorities. Setting his mind on the Aquarius workshop, he rode his motorcycle—a small Honda 90—from Sydney to Melbourne, intent on talking his way into the class.\textsuperscript{220} Though applications had closed, the workshop convenor Robin Love was impressed that this desperate-seeming medical student had actually travelled down the east coast to walk into her office, instead of simply calling or writing, as she felt would have been feasible; so she enrolled him.\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{218} John Nicoll and Peter Herbert, “Mad Max's Maker - George Miller,” \textit{New Farrago}, August 9, 1979, 42-43.
\textsuperscript{219} George Miller, interview by Kari Hanet, September 13, 1990, Oral History Collection, 380591, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{220} Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
\textsuperscript{221} Robin Love, interview by author, May 2017.
Byron Eric Kennedy was born in Melbourne’s inner west on 18 August 1949, growing up in Yarraville, and attending Footscray High. When he was eleven years old, his parents gifted him an 8mm camera, and he began to develop ambitions as a filmmaker in addition to his other hobbies such as building rockets. Kennedy enlisted his family in making shorts, including a war film, *Battle Cry*, made with his father Eric. As a teenager, Kennedy became friends with another young man from the neighbourhood, Peter Kamen, who likewise had an 8mm camera and interests in science, and they began to make films together.

Around Christmas 1966, they enlisted local kids from their Yarraville neighbourhood to act in a ten-minute short, *Dragsters*, the first extant work of Kennedy’s available in the archives. Centring on the story of a go-kart racing competition—Kennedy and his father had once acquired and restored an old go-kart—the film is notable for its strong prefiguration of a sensibility and style later evident in *Mad Max*. In the short, some children learn of a cash prize for a ‘dragdown’ competition, and set about making go-karts. Their activities are expressed in a brisk montage of sawing, hammering, and drafting. A villain emerges in the figure of a tough-looking kid styled as a ‘greaser’. The culminating race, filmed at a local park, makes adept use of cross-cutting in developing the drama of the competition, and the climax comes when the greaser kid activates a rocket strapped to the back of his vehicle and accelerates off a cliff toward a fiery death—an early hint of Kennedy’s, and his later company’s, interest in special effects. In its swift pace and formal commitment to montage, it feels tangibly like a practice run for the later chase scenes in the *Mad Max* franchise. The short is credited to ‘Ronter Productions’, a portmanteau of Byron and Peter—Kennedy’s first collaborative production enterprise.

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224 Credits and brief plot summaries for each Kennedy Miller production referenced in this thesis can be found in the concluding appendix.

225 Peter Kamen, interview by author, August 2018.
Dragsters was entered into a film competition at the local Moomba festival, but failed to place in the final ten. Undeterred, Kennedy re-entered the competition in 1969 (absent Kamen), with the documentary short Hobson’s Bay, featuring voiceover by a local radio personality. This won a prize, the Kodak Trophy, affording Kennedy a trip overseas to learn from film professionals. Returning home, Kennedy established himself as a young film worker, and later made his way into the Aquarius workshop. Kamen described Kennedy as being very interested in making money and seeing movies as a way to do it: a pragmatic, business-first attitude without much interest in art. He also had a wide streak of self-confidence. As early as 1968, when the Australian film industry had not yet emerged from its post-WWII slump, Kennedy wanted make a living from movies—a deeply optimistic ambition. Yet conditions were making it possible.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a sequence of developments in federal arts policy which laid down a framework for a revived Australian film industry. In 1968, when Kennedy’s ambitions were blooming, the Federal Government established the Film and Television Committee of the Australia Council for the Arts, which provided the “blueprint” for national film production industry in the 1970s. The Australian Film Development Corporation was established in 1970 to fund production, later to be supplanted by the Australian Film Commission in 1975, and the Australian Film and Television School followed in 1973. These institutions made film production practicable while, on a cultural level, a national appetite for Australian films was whetted by the booming television drama industry, which was itself the beneficiary of

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226 Footscray Mail, May 16, 1979
227 Buckmaster, Miller and Max, 19.
228 Kamen, interview by author.
230 The Australian Council was established by PM Harold Holt, in one of the final policy initiatives before his death, but the Film and Television Committee did not begin meaningful activity until new PM John Gorton pledged aid in 1969—an event self-reflexively dramatised by Kennedy Miller almost two decades later in Vietnam.
232 The AFC was later supplanted, in the labyrinthine history of Australian film agencies, by first the Film Finance Corporation, and then the present Screen Australia.
local content quotas for Australian broadcasters.\textsuperscript{233} One of the most visible of the new television producers was Melbourne production company Crawfords, whose long running police procedural \textit{Homicide} debuted in 1964.\textsuperscript{234} The success of Crawfords, and other such firms, had three roll-on effects. The popularity of \textit{Homicide} reintroduced local viewers to the pleasure of seeing themselves represented on screen—producer Matt Carroll later recalled that before \textit{Homicide} “people thought that Australians on screen looked terrible”.\textsuperscript{235} Crawfords also established for would-be professionals like Kennedy a sense of what might be possible. Kamen recalled that he and Kennedy had gone to watch \textit{Homicide} shoot on location, and discussed making something in a similar action genre.\textsuperscript{236} The television labour pool was also poised to make up part of the workforce for new feature production.\textsuperscript{237} The national screen infrastructure was not yet grown to the point where it would support a revived commercial industry. Only six film studios with sound stages were operating in this period, spread across Sydney and Melbourne, and only a dozen film laboratories, for a total workforce of 1,000.\textsuperscript{238} Newly created state film agencies, beginning with the South Australian Film Corporation in 1972, would establish their own industrial facilities,\textsuperscript{239} but Crawfords and other television production companies such as Grundy’s had their own studios and, consequently, a stable of experienced professionals adept in the work of screen production. These would be enlisted on new features—including, eventually, \textit{Mad Max}.

Another segment of the emerging film workforce was a cohort of film-enthusiast amateurs and semi-professionals. Though film production had fallen off, local film

\textsuperscript{234} Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, \textit{Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years} (Sydney: Currency Press, 1983), 233.
\textsuperscript{236} Kamen, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{238} Shirley and Adams, \textit{Australian Cinema}, 222.
‘culture’ had continued on, and a robust film-society movement yielded many cineastes eager to try their hand at filmmaking. This was partly a generational phenomenon. By 1967, of a total population of around eleven million, two and a half million Australians—Miller’s and Kennedy’s generation—were aged between fifteen and twenty-nine. So, this emerging underground filmmaking movement was characterised by youthful protest against conservative elders and conventions. They worked on cheap 8mm and 16mm film, often making films in an experimental style, and exploring new possibilities in self-distribution. In Sydney, the Ubu Films movement took its lead from the European avant-garde, and facilitated the beginning of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-Operative, a small-scale distribution unit which operated unlicensed screening facilities. In Melbourne, the loosely characterised ‘Carlton Ripple’, nested among the Melbourne University Film Society and the Melbourne Filmmakers’ Co-Operative, took its own lead from the French New Wave. Many participants in these circles would shortly become prominent figures in the new national industry.

Though filmmakers in both cities were working in an alternative and independent mode, later observers describe a difference in sensibility between the two scenes. Sydney—the past and future locus of the industry—was professionalised and industry-oriented; Melbourne, the locus of film culture activity, was art-oriented. Sydney filmmakers benefited economically from the goodwill of the local laboratory at Supreme Films, which processed negatives and often deferred credit until a film was distributed. Shirley and Adams describe this as support from “the vestiges of the earlier Australian film industry”, writing that it substituted for government subsidy within the Sydney scene. Melbourne, by contrast, was closer to the epicentre of the early government funding, such as the Experimental Film and Television Fund,

240 Lisa French and Mark Poole. *Shine a Light: 50 Years of the Australian Film Institute*, The Moving Image 9 (St Kilda West: ATOM, 2009), 5.
244 Shirley and Adams, 225.
which was administered by the local Australian Film Institute until the AFC took it over in 1977. Founded in 1958, the AFI was an offshoot of the Melbourne International Film Festival, itself an offshoot of the city’s film-society movement. The AFI, MIFF, and the related Federation of Victorian Film Societies—another local funding organ, along with the State Film Centre of Victoria—had respective boards that were populated by mostly the same few dozen individuals, leading to perceptions of an establishment club or closed-shop mentality in Melbourne.

The Aquarius film summer school was held in January 1971 on the grounds of the University of Melbourne. Nigel Buesst, a local filmmaker and member of the ‘Carlton Ripple’, taught the workshop; one of the tutors was Phillip Noyce, then an emerging Sydney filmmaker and participant in the Ubu film collective. The forty participants were divided into groups, and Miller and Kennedy became the creative drivers of their team, with Miller assuming the role of director, and Kennedy cinematographer. In formal aptitude, Miller was, in Noyce’s view, “the equivalent of a child who could already speak Latin, in terms of his film fluidity and vocabulary”. One of the first group activities was to shoot a work that contained a meeting, a chase, and a confrontation. Noyce described what Miller and Kennedy returned with:

a 2 minutes 40 seconds movie that only needed the camera stops cut out. As is characteristic of George’s work, the camera was placed in the almost perfect position, and it featured a dynamic meeting between two people, a kinetic chase through the Melbourne markets and a thrilling confrontation in an alley. And it was a movie. A primer of film grammar.

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245 French and Poole, *Shine a Light*, 5.
247 Love, interview by author.
248 Turner, “Curious George”.
Kennedy and Miller worked on several shorts at this workshop, and when the month was over Miller stayed on in Melbourne for some weeks to continue editing and to soak up the film culture scene around Carlton and the university. Later, after having lived in Melbourne for a time, he described some ambivalence about the ‘salon’-style Melbourne film scene. He felt it was energised by intense discourse and conversation, but that this talk was also a “masturbation”—effort wasted on involvement in film bureaucracies and organisations, rather than in creation. After the workshop, Miller returned to Sydney to carry out his eighteen-month residency, but carried on with film production work, taking weekends off to join as an extra, sound recordist, or editor on projects set up by Sydney filmmakers. The Aquarius course was Miller’s only formal education in film, and he developed a diffidence for formal instruction, later reflecting that the most productive participants in the Aquarius course were those who, like him, were really non-students who conned their way into it. Kennedy seems to have shared this perception. Buesst recalled that Kennedy compared film schools to courses in basket weaving—for those who wish to “dabble”. To the extent that Miller and Kennedy saw themselves as apart from their peers, their attitudes reveal an early element of the independent sensibility that generated perceptions of Kennedy Miller’s iconoclasm.

With Miller in Sydney, Kennedy likewise carried on with his own involvement in film production. He worked with Buesst on *Come Out Fighting* in 1973, where he is credited as cinematographer, though Buesst recalled him as having taken on more of a production manager role. One of Kennedy’s central virtues, as Buesst described it, was that he would turn up and work hard—which was unusual in a filmmaking scene where participants might drop in and out. One anecdote Buesst recalled reveals something about Kennedy’s practical drive: on a Sunday when the *Fighting* crew

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250 The workshop films are now lost, or concealed within a labyrinth of Aquarius archival material.
251 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
252 French and Poole, *Shine a Light*, 48-49.
253 George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
254 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
255 Nigel Buesst, interview by author, June 2017.
were rehearsing at a boxing gym near the Victoria Market, there was a rock band playing loudly next door. Kennedy went in and politely explained that the filmmakers planned to be back next Sunday, between two and four o’clock, for their shoot, saying “I beg you, don’t be here, because not only will it ruin our sound track, but I’ll come and kick your drums”.

Kennedy also continued a connection with Noyce, working as production manager and negative cutter on Good Afternoon (1971), a record of an Aquarius festival held in Canberra.

While a hospital resident, Miller was involved in a short titled St Vincent’s Revue Film, his first extant work available in the archives (1971). He is credited with ‘Production’, alongside John Mackay, and ‘Camera’, alongside Peter Marjason and Phillip Noyce, and editing is attributed to David Huggett. Of the listed crew of six, Miller is the only individual to receive two credits. Seemingly shot in and around St Vincent’s, and just under five minutes in length, Revue Film is a silent work—with music but no dialogue—in a sketch comedy style. The lead role is taken by actor Nico Lathouris, who later appeared in Mad Max and went on to work as a writer/dramaturg at Kennedy Miller on Fury Road. Lathouris performs in mime: barefoot, in white makeup and a top hat, he wanders around Sydney, humorously aggravating a group of nuns (most of whom are played by men), who chase him down and beat him. He then wakes up in hospital, where he receives treatment. The sketch comedy style has no obvious successor in Miller’s output (though his features often embrace a madcap sense of the grotesque), but a fixation on montage is already evident; shot-reverse-shot constructions dominate the film form. Particularly notable is a late sequence in which Lathouris flees on a bicycle, chased by nuns on motorbikes. One nun at the back of the pack (played by a man) pulls tricks, first lying prone on his seat, and then standing atop it with one foot raised in the air. These stunts prefigure the basic action material of the Mad Max franchise. Lathouris later described the filming as quite dangerous—he had been asked to cycle downhill into

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256 Buesst, interview by author.
257 David Huggett appears to have been a professional editor, going on to work with Noyce on Backroads and Ken Armstrong on Monkey Grip. No details on Marjason have been found. John Mackay appears to have been a career colorectal surgeon at St Vincent’s.
traffic with no breaks; Miller apparently rued that he “nearly killed Nick in my first stunt”.258

This earliest part of Kennedy Miller’s history—the introduction of its founders to filmmaking and each other—displays several elements of overall importance to my account of the firm. On a level of style, Miller and Kennedy’s very first films include tendencies that would prove recurrent in their company’s features: vehicles, stunts, special effects, and a formal aesthetic dominated by principles of montage. Their preference for a certain kind of dramatic material—the ‘right story’—is already evident: chases, competitions, confrontations, fights—‘action’ scenarios. The preference reflects the founders’ own tastes as moviegoers. Miller described feeling out of step in university cineaste circles: “Everyone was really into heavy art cinema, then, and if I admitted that I liked James Bond movies I was laughed out of the room.”259

This sensibility was part of the partnership’s burgeoning independent attitude: identifiable not just as personal taste, but also as a sense of difference or apartness from their peers. This would shortly expand into a posture of opposition to the leading paradigm of national production. And yet Miller and Kennedy still worked with, for, and among those peers, and the discursive, exploratory, semi-professional atmosphere of the times would come to exert an influence on their company’s collaborative method. Miller, while possessed of an early formal aptitude per Noyce’s account, was someone who habitually operated in tandem with others. Kennedy, the more technically experienced and knowledgeable of the two at the time, and equally accustomed to working in collaboration, was to be his most significant partner. Kennedy Miller’s collaborative method is in this sense not a unique invention, but can be associated with a type of production conduct common in amateur, cooperative circles in Australia at the time. Miller and Kennedy came to see this as a particularly Australian way of making films, different from and superior to the codified and

258 Nico Lathouris, interview by Margaret Leask, August 18, 2010, Oral History Collection, 811228, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
259 Nicoll and Herbert, “Mad Max’s Maker - George Miller,” 43.
hierarchical style of Hollywood production, and this influenced the firm’s decision to remain an Australian operation.

We can also see that the founding of the firm was to a large extent conditional on an environment for film production made possible by government intervention. This is necessary for an effectively shaded understanding of the firm as a part of the Australian national industry. As will be discussed shortly, the company’s early attitude toward government intervention was ambivalent veering toward hostile. That intervention undergirded the ground of its existence, and yet Kennedy Miller can also be described in opposition to it.

**Emerging sensibility in *Violence in the Cinema, Part 1, Frieze: An Underground Film, and The Devil in Evening Dress***

The key aspect of government intervention against which Kennedy Miller can be defined is the paradigm of 1970s filmmaking engendered by direct subsidy. The conditions attached to film subsidies in the 1970s shaped an industry of a particular character. The shaping was not part of a top-down system of intention and instruction—Dermody and Jacka in fact describe a “policy of no policy”—but a mechanism of incentivisation, as funding administrators selected the “particular strains” of filmmaking that best fit their vision for the industry. The holders of the government purse-strings, at this time, were Melbourne-associated, or else aligned with its values of film culture, art, and personal expression. Two funding bodies are of particular note. The Experimental Film and Television Fund, administered through the Melbourne-based, ‘closed-shop’ AFI, was broadly put toward upskilling filmmakers and toward projects which were ‘original’ in approach, technique, or subject matter, or which were technical experiments. The Australian Film Commission’s funding, while oriented toward the hoped-for eventual economic

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261 Shirley and Adams, 236.
viability of the industry, also following a logic of cultural policy that prioritised the inclusion of “significant Australian content”. This led to the aesthetic described by Dermody and Jacka as the ‘AFC-genre’: ‘literary’, nostalgic, period-set dramas, emblematised by works such as Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975) and My Brilliant Career (Gillian Armstrong, 1979). This aesthetic has been traced to the personal sensibilities of particular individuals at the AFC, which was seen, like the AFI, as another kind of ‘closed shop’.

Although the revived Australian film industry was essentially a creation of government policy, the nature of the intervention did not extend beyond production to distribution and exhibition. A 1972–73 Tariff Board inquiry into the Australian film industry proposed that the new AFC have a role in not merely funding films but also distributing them, but this recommendation was ignored. Likewise, the Experimental Film and Television Fund rarely took responsibility for distribution for its work, instead giving the finished films over to the AFI, which consigned them to a lending library (over the resentment of the much more distribution-focused Sydney Filmmakers Co-Op). In these ways, a kind of cleavage between filmmakers (production) and audiences (exhibition) was inscribed into government intervention in the reviving industry, and the notion of film as a commercial, market-based proposition came to be understood as opposed to government-supported film. Miller and Kennedy, already in possession of ‘commercial’ tastes and aspirations, saw themselves as outside of these closed shops; they were disinclined to follow such incentivised aesthetics.

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262 Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Volume 1*, 137.
266 Shirley and Adams, 252.
267 Shirley and Adams, 253.
Violence in the Cinema, Part 1 (1971), the first extant film of Miller and Kennedy's association, is in a sense a response to these conditions. Miller conceived the film while undertaking a psychiatric term as a junior resident at St Vincent's. Controversy around ‘ultraviolent’ films like A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) had been circulating in the media, and Miller began to consider the gulf between how intellectuals interpret screen violence and how the aggressive ‘reptilian’ part of our brains responds to it. He conceived of a film about a man lecturing on violence, while the very acts he is talking about are illustrated for the audience’s visceral pleasure. Kennedy, whom Miller had contacted with the idea, believed they would never be able to secure grant money for the kind of film Miller was proposing, so they self-financed it to the amount of $1500. Miller contributed $1300 and Kennedy $200. The film was shot on the 1971 Easter weekend, around St Vincent's Hospital. Arthur Dignam stars as the professor ‘Dr. Fyne’, who delivers a lecture on the intrinsic but immoral relationship between violence and cinema, adapted from a speech by the prominent Melbourne film-culture figure Phillip Adams, who was one of the architects of early government screen policy. Fyne delivers the lecture straight to camera, continuing on even after sustaining a shotgun blast to the face. The lecture proceeds through a series of gruesome acts as Fyne alternately inflicts or receives various tortures, until at last he is thrown out of a window, run over by a car, and set on fire.

Credits on the short suggest that the division of labour between Miller and Kennedy was not yet formalised, though Kennedy took the lead on technical matters. Each share attribution for editing and writing; Miller takes sole credit for “production” and “direction”, and Kennedy is listed as associate producer and lighting cameraman. They were assisted by a small crew, including Miller’s brother Bill as unit manager, and Jenny Day acting as production assistant and continuity overseer. The victims and associates of Fyne’s rampage are mostly uncredited; Kennedy is visible as the gunman who shoots off Fyne’s face, and Miller as a hanged man whose belly is slit

268 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
269 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
270 Keryn Michelle Curtis, "Australian Television and Film: A Case Study of Kennedy Miller" (honours diss., Griffith University, 1985), 8.
open. The violence is constructed primarily through montage, along the lines of the sliced eyeball in *Un Chien Andalou* (Luis Buñuel & Salvador Dalí, 1929).

No formal partnership between Miller and Kennedy yet existed; the film is credited to Warlock Films, a production label used by Kennedy on his childhood shorts. Miller and Kennedy’s self-investment yielded a respectable return. After the film screened at the Sydney Film Festival it secured commercial distribution, offered by Greater Union through MGM/BEF—early proof that the firm’s alignment with a commercial, market-based vision of filmmaking was viable. The film screened in cinemas and received at least a small publicity push in Sydney and Melbourne. Adams wrote, in contradistinction to his later remarks on *Mad Max*, that *Violence* was “an important film” and “ingenious and splendidly made”.²⁷¹ Its financial return is unknown but, per Miller’s recollection, it proved to him and Kennedy that no short film could earn serious money, and that they would need to produce a feature.²⁷²

Miller described *Violence* as an attempt to draw attention to the difference between cerebral and visceral responses to violence. Fyne represents the cerebral side, offering up a shallow moral analytic of screen violence, while also demonstrating its visceral pleasure for the viewer in the brutality inflicted on his body.²⁷³ The violence in the film can be understood as an early stage in the development of the Kennedy Miller sensibility, which is concerned with creating a strong affective response in the audience, in keeping with its commercial orientation. Violence was the first, most primitive technique toward this end, representing an initial sense of what kind of content commands an audience’s attention and enjoyment. Miller later felt he had overplayed his hand. Though the short was only given an M rating, there was pushback from audiences: Kennedy said that viewers vomited in response to the film.²⁷⁴ Miller later reflected that the film taught him the difference between “how

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²⁷¹ *Violence in the Cinema* Publicity Material, 779179, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
²⁷² Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
²⁷³ George Miller, interview by Paul Byrne, January 12, 2011, Oral History Collection, 818098, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
²⁷⁴ Byron Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 329006, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
people respond to violence, and how people respond to violence on the screen—

a crucial distinction, which would guide Kennedy Miller’s deployment of violence in Mad Max.

Sometime after Violence, Kennedy acquired a $438 grant from the Experimental Film and Television Fund, and made Frieze: An Underground Film (1973), which he summoned Miller to help complete. This short is credited as “A Film by Byron Kennedy with Assistance from George Miller.” Just over ten minutes long, Frieze is an assemblage of home-movie clips intermixed with original footage of Miller, who appears on screen dressed in a three-piece suit and lounging on a bed, cradling in his lap a microphone and tape recorder into which he dictates a running critique of the film in progress.

Frieze is the only Kennedy Miller-associated work that can be established as majority-funded by direct subsidy, but the firm’s complex relationship to government intervention is evident in its content. As an ‘experimental’ film it is wholly facetious; Miller described Kennedy’s proposal as a grant film that satirises grant films. The logic of the assemblage is self-consciously nonsensical, consisting of random footage: the Luna Park roller-coaster; a young boy putting on a football jumper; suburban backyards; living rooms; snowfields. When Miller appears, he viciously critiques the unseen filmmaker behind this work: “You just have no idea what films are about. If you want to express yourself go out and enamel a few pots or weave a few baskets.” Kennedy arrives in voiceover, explaining that the film is in fact an intensely personal meditation on feelings of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, but Miller continues his irritated tirade. A tinny recording of “Also Sprach Zarathustra” (from Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey) makes plain the short’s parodic ‘art film’ ambitions. There is no available record of Frieze being distributed, though it played at SFF in 1973.

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275 George Miller, interview by unknown (possibly Peter Page and Tina Kaufman), date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 0432564 – 001, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
276 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
277 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet.
Chapter 2: 1970s

_Frieze_ displays overt cynicism about the kind of films incentivised by the EFTF. Miller’s commentary makes an explicit link between experimental/art cinema’s inward-looking mode of expression and its formal deficiencies. “Everything you put in the frame you should think about incredibly carefully, in meticulous detail,” Miller says, “and you [the unseen ‘art’ filmmaker] sort of wave this camera about, expect things to happen spontaneously.” This suggests a relationship of compatibility between Kennedy Miller’s emerging formal rigour—at least, in the area of montage—and its commercial outlook. Forceful style, shaped to create a definite affect, would be another plank of the firm’s sensibility.

Additional indications of Kennedy’s frustration with funding paradigms are evident in an unfulfilled request he put to the EFTF in late 1972. In this application, Kennedy requested $5500 (with a proposed applicant’s contribution of $2000) for a work titled _A Night of Bloody Good Entertainment or Riffraff, Offal and Other Such Swill_. This never-made project is described as a “fast-moving casserole of humorous situations and satire”, suggesting something along the lines of a sketch movie or filmed revue. It is difficult to imagine how the project would have fitted within the remit of the fund—a dilemma Kennedy surely understood. He withdrew the application in February 1973. Kennedy Miller’s opposition to direct subsidy can be understood as an opposition to the aesthetic strains made possible or impossible under existing funding regimes. The modest viability of _Violence in the Cinema_ had already proved that the firm would be capable of operating outside these regimes.

After Miller completed his residency, he moved to Melbourne, and the Kennedy Miller partnership began in earnest. Buesst recalled that the two appeared one day with a Mazda Bongo van, which they planned to fill with their equipment and have ‘Kennedy Miller Entertainment’ painted on the side.279 A company under this name was registered in March 1974.280 The first project mounted under the formal aegis of this

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278 Isaac Gerson to Byron Kennedy, October 27, 1972, Box 8, NAA: C116, Kennedy, Byron, National Archives of Australia.
279 Buesst, interview by author.
280 ASIC Database extract, "Kennedy Miller Entertainment Pty. Ltd.," extracted October 10, 2019, in the author's possession.
shared enterprise was *The Devil in Evening Dress* (1974), an hour-long docudrama about a ghost that supposedly haunts Melbourne’s Princess Theatre—the spectre of an opera singer, Frederick ‘Federici’ Baker, who died during an 1888 performance of *Faust*. This film was made with Melbourne producer John Lamond (a former marketer at Roadshow Distribution), whose John Lamond Motion Picture Enterprises is credited as co-production company—281—the first external partnership undertaken by the firm. The budget was $5000, pooled by Miller, Kennedy, and Lamond. Miller recalled that they made their money back by selling the work to East German television,282 and it was also acquired by Channel Nine.283 The project was Kennedy’s initiative—he is credited as writer and producer and photographer, and Miller as director, while the two shared editing.

*Dress* represents a substantial production effort, and an obvious mid-point between a short like *Violence* and a full feature. The film attempts to evoke a gaslight period Melbourne and largely succeeds, thanks to judicious use of location shooting; Miller and Kennedy’s operation was evidently not yet at the point where they could marshal resources for sophisticated art direction beyond basic costuming (and it would not be until the second *Mad Max*). Locations include the Old Quad building at Melbourne University, the steps of Parliament House in Melbourne’s CBD, and inside the Princess Theatre itself. A rapid-fire montage of archival photos begins the film, then economically staged gothic re-enactments of Federici’s last day structure its first half, yielding in the second to a series of talking-head interviews outlining some of the sightings of the ghost. Australian actor Frank Thring Jr hosts the special, delivering narration straight to the camera. Beside the involvement of Lamond and the modestly ambitious mise-en-scène, evidence of Miller and Kennedy’s professional development is suggested by the cooperation of Thring, who had been a noted character actor, appearing in Hollywood epics including *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959) and *El Cid* (Anthony Mann, 1961), and would work with Kennedy Miller again on *Bodyline* and *Beyond Thunderdome*. Thring’s hammy confidence is essential to

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281 Lamond was the future writer–director–producer of sexploitation works like *Australia After Dark* (1975) and *Felicity* (1979).
283 Buckmaster, 20.
the short’s charm. Kennedy’s script is unsophisticated, but his instinct as a showman is appreciable in its delivery of old-fashioned, audience-baiting ghost-story tropes.

*The Devil in Evening Dress* highlights an emerging component of the firm’s house style: the use of direct-address narration. This is first evident in a satirical mode in *Violence in the Cinema, Part 1*, in which Dr Fyne delivers his lecture straight to the camera. But it is felt again in *Frieze*, where Miller—though not facing the audience directly—delivers his narration while he is a visible, on-screen presence. These experimentations begin to mature in *Devil*, where Thring directly coaxes the viewer into engagement with the text—“You will join me, won’t you?” he purrs, “I can promise you a devilish good time”—and appears throughout, framing the film, in effect, as a work of oral storytelling. Direct-address narration can be understood as another primitive commercial strategy, a means to solicit the attention of the viewer. As Tom Gunning has argued, direct-address strategies permeated the early ‘cinema of attractions’, which prioritised the vaudevillian display of spectacle over the maintenance of a unified narrative world (*Violence in the Cinema, Part 1* is, really, a non-narrative presentation of violent ‘attractions’, a logic still latently present in the stunt effects of the *Mad Max* franchise). The strategy, in this sense, reflects Kennedy’s showman-like concern for audience engagement. Kennedy’s selection of content—the decision to dramatise an Australian historical episode—also anticipates the focus on national stories that would later mark the firm’s television production.

An emergent sensibility is clearly traceable through the burgeoning firm’s initial string of shorts—a style complementary to (or exacerbated by) Kennedy Miller’s ambivalence toward government intervention in the film industry. Their almost total rejection of direct subsidy, the primary economic basis for the re-emerging Australian

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284 Another stylistic element, of less significance to this study, is also established here. Miller populates the margins of the film with a series of grotesques—an old crone whose laughter echoes through the theatre; a hunchbacked man who emerges to wait on Thring. The use of eccentrically styled supporting characters is prevalent throughout the *Mad Max* films.

industry, soon culminated in the unusual private financing of *Mad Max*. The sequence of shorts leading up to *Mad Max* describes Kennedy and Miller’s learning curve: *Violence in the Cinema, Part 1* proves the potency of violent content; and *The Devil in Evening Dress* displays their experimentation with different populist styles and different ‘sellable’ content. *Frieze*, meanwhile, suggests that they defined their sense of what ‘works’ in opposition to other filmmakers. That film’s strong critique of Miller and Kennedy’s peers—“you just have no idea what films are about”—encapsulates the firm’s independent attitude. But a purely reactive account of their sensibility can only go so far. Miller, asked in 1979 whether *Mad Max* was a response to the AFC-genre, stated that in his view a project must have “its own positive direction” in order to be worth mounting.286 If he steered away from the AFC-style, he argued, it might have been because there were simply too many period films in the market, and they were expensive to make.

Though Miller and Kennedy appear united in the broad strokes of their company’s commercial sensibility, it is possible to see different psychological shading in each man who contributed to it. As Kamen described, Kennedy’s attitude was mercantile, interested in filmmaking as a means of producing a commodifiable product.287 Buesst recalled that Kennedy used to say his aim was to get the money out of the audience’s pocket and into his,288 an attitude that surely set him somewhat apart from the art-oriented attitudes of the local Melbourne scene. His small role as an actor in Tom Cowan’s *The Office Picnic* (1972) is suggestive in this respect. The film is a black-and-white Antonioni riff, which recreates the dissolute conclusion of *L’Eclisse* (1962) as the aftermath of a boozy office party in a Melbourne park. Kennedy plays a beer-swilling partygoer who talks about how the park’s forestry has given him the inspiration to make a *Tarzan* movie. In a monologue he outlines the idea’s commercial potential: “I reckon if someone was game enough to get a bit of money from somewhere, take a crew to Africa and shoot something, this’d be a box-office smash.” Whether scripted by Cowan or not, Kennedy’s speech has a vivid

286 Miller, interview by unknown.
287 Kamen, interview by author.
288 Miller, interview by unknown.
irony, spruiking for Hollywood-style commerciality while standing in the middle of an imitation of the artiest of European dramas.

If Kennedy expressed his instincts in the language of the market, Miller expressed his own in terms of holding up an unwritten contract with his customers. He believed that a filmmaker’s final responsibility is to their viewers. “The most immoral thing you can do in the cinema is to bore an audience”,289 he told one interviewer. Films, for Miller, should be “audience-oriented”;290 the viewer should be “continually sucked down a tunnel of emotion” and never “wafting in and out of the movie”.291 In this formulation, a proper film is one that successfully exerts control over the viewer’s attention. This attitude has obvious formal implications, as seen in Frieze’s injunction toward ‘meticulous’ formal control. In one early interview, Miller claimed a preference for tracking over zooming, citing the track’s “emotional content”.292 This suggests an integrated understanding of how specific formal choices assist in the creation of affect. In this pursuit, Miller’s chief tool was montage, the element of classical Hollywood film style that had spurred on his interest in cinema. But the level of affective control Miller desired over his audience also required, in its formal complexity, a level of technical control over production, and this would prove difficult to achieve.

**Moving toward a method—Mad Max**

**Development and Pre-Production**

*Mad Max* represents a natural inflection point in the history of the company, as the project on which its founders finally fully graduated from amateur to professional. In its production, we can see some of the major tendencies of the company’s method begin to come into focus. The project was long in gestation: it entered development

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290 Miller, interview by unknown.
291 Nicoll and Herbert, "Mad Max’s Maker - George Miller," 43.
292 George Miller, interview by Tom Ryan, date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 325201, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
in September 1975,\textsuperscript{293} was filmed in late 1977, and then saw release in May 1979. This attenuated development was not yet a function of the company’s preference for ‘excessive preparation’ but, Miller said, was a consequence of his not actually knowing anything about writing a feature script, and having to figure it out as he went along.\textsuperscript{294} In the middle of this development work, Kennedy took another trip overseas, funded by an AFTRS grant,\textsuperscript{295} to the Milan and Cannes film markets, and to Hollywood, where he educated himself on film contracts and legalities.\textsuperscript{296}

When, on its release, the film garnered some critical suspicion for its ‘American’ car movie aesthetic, Miller and Kennedy would sometimes point defensively at the Australian elements of its conception. The central premise for the film emerged from a mix of local influences. Kennedy and Miller felt that ‘car culture’ had come to occupy a place in the Australian psyche equivalent to America’s gun culture.\textsuperscript{297} One weekend, Kennedy recalled, the Victorian road toll had risen to twenty-three; it occurred to him that car casualties had become a “socially acceptable form of death”, and, with his showman’s sense of commercial possibilities, Kennedy decided there was probably a good idea for a film in it.\textsuperscript{298} They also had some personal exposure to these casualties. While raising money for preproduction funds—which eventually amounted to around $8000\textsuperscript{299}—Miller worked as a locum doctor on rounds among the western suburbs of Melbourne, with Kennedy as his driver. They were both struck by the reverence with which families treated survivors of accidents, who seemed to be “warriors in this nihilistic war between them and the road”.\textsuperscript{300}

Miller had been a listener of a radio program called Newsbeat, which aired in Melbourne on 3UZ, in which reporter Neil Thompson would travel on night rounds with the police and interview car-crash victims; one night, Thompson encountered

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{293}Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
\item \textsuperscript{294}Miller, interview by Kari Hanet; Miller, interview by unknown.
\item \textsuperscript{295}Byron Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, Cinema Papers, no. 21 (May/June 1979): 365-68.
\item \textsuperscript{296}Buckmaster, 21.
\item \textsuperscript{297}Miller, interview by unknown.
\item \textsuperscript{298}Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, Oral History Collection.
\item \textsuperscript{300}Noel King and Richard Guilliat, "The Max Factor," \textit{Age}, December 18, 1999.
\end{itemize}
his own son, fatally injured in a crash in Clarinda, but insisted the show go to air as usual. Miller, hearing of this, began to conceive of a hardened professional insensible to violence, who would be awakened when violence struck his family—from this emerged the character of Max Rockatansky. Miller’s 1985 interview with Positif reveals a substantially different earlier conception of the film, in which Max would be aged around fifteen. This version would have been even more directly geared toward the teenaged, car-action-movie audience Miller and Kennedy saw as their target. Even at the firm’s early stage, the conception of Mad Max highlights its hybrid national identity; Kennedy Miller looked outward to the international, but arose from the local.

Additionally, although we can see the firm’s sensibility as emerging in opposition to the dominant, direct-subsidised filmmaking paradigm, there was also an existing local tradition of genre filmmaking within which its work can be located, as has been described in Not Quite Hollywood. Filmmakers like Brian Trenchard-Smith, with The Man From Hong Kong (1975) and Richard Franklin, with Patrick (1978), were already beginning to make genre works in action and horror, and proving their local commercial viability; these provide additional industrial and aesthetic context to Kennedy Miller’s ambitions. Kennedy, Buckmaster writes, even considered replacing Miller with Trenchard-Smith when Mad Max’s shoot began poorly; while Franklin, Kennedy has said, turned him and Miller on to the music of Brian May, whom they recruited to provide the film’s score.

Habits that would mark the writing process of the company’s method began on Mad Max. Miller knew little about writing a script, but he had read Pauline Kael’s essay ‘Raising Kane’, and concluded that most major American scriptwriters, like Herman Mankiewicz and Ben Hecht, were former journalists. So he hired one: James

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301 Ciment, "Entretien avec George Miller."
302 Buckmaster, 69.
303 Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
304 Kael’s book attempts to bust the idea of Kane’s director Orson Welles as its singular author, by emphasising the creative contributions of his collaborators—possibly a contributing source for Miller’s notion of comprehensivism. See: Pauline Kael, “Raising Kane,” in The Citizen Kane Book, 1-85 (London: Methuen, 1988).
McCausland, the Melbourne finance editor of The Australian, with whom Miller had previously bonded at a party as a fellow film buff. McCausland was paid roughly $3500 for about a year’s worth of writing. He understood that Miller and Kennedy’s clear intention was to make a ‘successful’ film: one that would have an immediate impact on its audience. Kennedy later claimed to have given the matter significant scrutiny; he discarded other feature concepts in development because they lacked international sales potential.

The basic concept for the film was already established when McCausland was brought on to the project. He worked from a one-page outline prepared by Miller, writing each evening from about 7pm to midnight. Miller would then arrive at 6am the next day to confer on the pages. Miller later described the writing as having proceeded by “intuition”—a word which emphasises the unbounded, exploratory spirit Miller saw as part of his process. McCausland had never written a script before, and did no formal or informal study in preparation, other than going repeatedly to the cinema with Miller, and discussing the dramatic structure of westerns, road movies, and action films. McCausland described taking the lead in writing the dialogue; while Miller was concerned with giving his thoughts on the narrative context of each part, and with thinking through the visual beats of how things would unfold on screen.

The ornate and hyper-verbal speech of Mad Max’s villains, like the manic Nightrider in the opening sequence, which would recur through the subsequent films in the franchise, in this sense stems from McCausland’s work, albeit under Miller’s instruction—and this model of collaborative contribution under leadership is essential to the operations of the firm’s method. Direct-address narration, established as a trope in the firm’s earlier shorts, is latent in Mad Max, although arguably perceptible in the Nightrider’s opening tirade.

Financing

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305 James McCausland, interview by author, March 2019.
308 McCausland, interview by author.
The financing of *Mad Max* displays several elements of significance to the firm’s broader history. In September 1976, a new company was registered, Kennedy Miller Pty Ltd (later renamed as Mad Max Pty. Limited in 1977), replacing the earlier Kennedy Miller Entertainment. \(^{309}\) This new legal construct was a means for Miller and Kennedy to begin to effectively court investment in the film; Kennedy said that a transparent description of company structure, accounts, and auditing was part of his presentation to investors. \(^{310}\) The firm had already concluded that no government body would consent to fund a film of *Mad Max*’s “aggressively commercial” nature; \(^{311}\) they never seriously considered approaching the AFC. \(^{312}\) The solution had to be private investment, an ambitious prospect.

This money was raised through a syndicate of private investors, overseen by Melbourne stockbroker Noel Harman. \(^{313}\) Details of the structure of the syndicate are scarce, but it was composed of a group of twenty to thirty individual investors. \(^{314}\) Investment came in lots of $2500, and the biggest single contribution was $15,000 from Kamen, Kennedy’s childhood friend and *Dragsters* partner, who was by then a medical doctor. \(^{315}\) Most contributions came in at around $10,000. \(^{316}\) Miller has described soliciting investment through friends and family, \(^{317}\) which makes the process sound rather ad hoc and charitable. But Kennedy has also described a solid investment prospectus, sufficient to make a persuasive financial case. The forty-page document identified the investment as high risk, and the specifics focused far more on the financial side—and on reassuring backers that their money would be put to use—than on the film itself, which was described over about one page as a simple

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\(^{309}\) Australian Securities and Investments Commission, Current & Historical Company Extract: Mad Max Pty. Limited, June 25, 2018, in the author’s possession.

\(^{310}\) Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.

\(^{311}\) Miller, interview by unknown.


\(^{313}\) King and Guilliat, “The Max Factor.”

\(^{314}\) Curtis, 13.

\(^{315}\) Kamen, interview by author.

\(^{316}\) Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.

\(^{317}\) Miller, interview by Paul Byrne; Nick Brash, "They're All Mad About Max," *Daily Telegraph*, July 2, 1979.
Chapter 2: 1970s

road action movie.\textsuperscript{318} Kennedy’s friend Kamen circulated the offer around his Melbourne medical professional circles, as he believed Miller did in Sydney. As would be standard practice for the company, Miller and Kennedy were reticent to disclose \textit{Mad Max}’s budget, especially in the years around its release.\textsuperscript{319} Precise financial details are consequently hard to come by, but the most frequently quoted numbers record the film’s cost as around $350,000. The budget appears modest in respect of later Kennedy Miller productions, but the achievement is substantial—Kennedy would later boast there was “probably more private finance tied up in this film than in any other in the history of the Australian film industry”\textsuperscript{320} The financing of the film demonstrates the entrepreneurial drive that would guide the firm through its later transformations.

Although Kennedy Miller saw no prospects with the AFC, the firm did put forward a funding application to the Victorian Film Corporation. But when the money was offered, the filmmakers declined. The exact figure is unclear. Miller, in a 1979 article in \textit{The Age}, says they were offered $150,000\textsuperscript{321}—and, in that same article, says they later accepted $20,000 from the State Government to promote the film overseas. But the VFC’s annual report for 1976–1977 notes an investment of only $50,000 (the refusal of the money came too late for the investment to be removed from the books for that year). The filmmakers’ reasons for turning down the money are unclear. Kennedy and Miller have both said that the application was submitted as a fall-back option, and that by the time the investment was available they were oversubscribed on private funds.\textsuperscript{322} Film agency historian Thomas Vincent O’Donnell writes that the investment fell apart when Kennedy Miller was unable to provide scripts and budget to the satisfaction of the VFC board.\textsuperscript{323} This appears plausible, if Kennedy’s prospectus at this stage was focused primarily on the business case, rather than the film.

\textsuperscript{318} Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
\textsuperscript{319} Nicoll and Herbert, “Mad Max’s Maker - George Miller,” 42.
\textsuperscript{320} Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
\textsuperscript{321} Childs, “Doctor George Ladles out Horror.”
\textsuperscript{322} Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray; Miller, interview by unknown.

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Although Kennedy and Miller were obviously entrepreneurial in organising the syndicate of private investors, they also operated with the support of the Australian company Village Roadshow, which had pledged $25,000 and a distribution commitment to the project. The significance of Roadshow’s support of Kennedy Miller as a powerful industry partner cannot be overstated. The company has now been a recurring associate through Kennedy Miller’s history, up to *Fury Road.* Founded in 1954, by the 1970s Village Roadshow operated one of Australia’s major exhibition chains, Village Theatres, as well as a distribution arm, Roadshow Distributors (since 1971), and had recently moved into film production, partnering with Melbourne filmmaker Tim Burstall in Hexagon Productions. This combination of activities made the company the closest thing to a vertically integrated studio operation in Australia—which, in addition to its close relationship with US studio Warner Bros., for which it handled local distribution, made it a significant force in the industry. Roadshow’s willingness to invest in Australian productions like *Mad Max* is another indirect consequence of government intervention, traceable to the 1972–73 Tariff Board Inquiry into Films and Television, which alarmed Australian distributors by proposing a restructure of the exhibition market, then dominated by Village, Hoyts, and Greater Union. Roadshow’s chief executive Graham Burke himself recalled that the Inquiry created an atmosphere in which distributors and exhibitors would work together with producers to ‘build’ films. Roadshow’s commitment to Kennedy Miller was closely associated with Burke’s personal support of its founders, in whom he had taken interest; he offered them office space, as well as feedback on the script and final cut. Burke, who was also a board member of

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324 Sean Maher, *The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 21.
325 The company continues these activities today, in addition to managing a studio and theme park, and is now one of the largest global distributors outside the US.
327 Shirley and Adams, 253.
the Victorian Film Corporation at the time,\textsuperscript{329} and later a commissioner at the AFC,\textsuperscript{330} is described by Dermody and Jacka as a “market based” operator.\textsuperscript{331} Miller and Kennedy’s commercial sensibilities aligned with his own.

**Production**

*Mad Max* was filmed in two parts in late 1977 and early 1978, for a total of twelve week of shooting around Melbourne and Victoria.\textsuperscript{332} Locations included the industrial suburbs Werribee and Laverton North in western Melbourne; Clunes, a town northwest of Melbourne; and Lorne, a coastal town on the Great Ocean Road.\textsuperscript{333} The finished film has about 1300 shots, from 1200 set-ups\textsuperscript{334}—a level of logistical complexity that would become a tendency within the franchise. Miller and Kennedy believed they had the film very tightly pre-produced and scheduled. But when lead actress Rosie Barley broke her leg the day before she was to start filming, their organisation was thrown into disarray. Miller has described running the shoot like a “punch-drunk fighter”, often staying up late to figure out what could be shot the following day.\textsuperscript{335}

Already looking toward the film’s possible international performance, Kennedy Miller considered casting an American actor for Max, and Miller spent time in LA scouting a lead. But he concluded that an international star would cost too much of the planned budget. Kennedy also believed an international cast would not offer a significant advantage in selling the film.\textsuperscript{336} Lead actors Mel Gibson and Steve Bisley were


\textsuperscript{330} Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Volume 1*, 87.

\textsuperscript{331} Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Volume 1*, 123.

\textsuperscript{332} Curtis, 14.

\textsuperscript{333} Neil Mitchell, “*Mad Max*, Cherry Lane, Laverton North, Altona, VIC, 3018,” in *World Film Locations: Melbourne*, ed. Neil Mitchel (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012); Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.

\textsuperscript{334} Miller, interview by unknown.

\textsuperscript{335} Miller, interview by unknown.

\textsuperscript{336} Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
sourced instead from a pool of NIDA graduates. Hugh Keays-Byrne, who had previously appeared as a biker in the 1974 feature *Stone*, played lead villain ‘The Toecutter’, head of the gang that ultimately attacks Rockatansky’s wife. In lieu of formal rehearsal time, the production shipped the motorcycles for Toecutter’s gang to Sydney, and Keays-Byrne and his castmates rode them back in a convoy,\(^337\) bonding along the way.\(^338\) Still, Miller later reflected that the shoot taught him that it is impossible to over-rehearse actors.\(^339\) One of the difficulties he had with the final film was with the quality of performances he elicited. Prior to its release he would describe *Mad Max* as not a “performance-oriented” film, and profess a desire to be “freer” with performance in the future.\(^340\)

The filmmakers felt the problems with the actors’ work acutely enough for Kennedy to say later that some of the work done to post-synch the dialogue was focused on adjusting the quality of the performances.\(^341\) Kennedy’s insufficiently acknowledged creative contribution to the film is particularly apparent across its audio elements: he was interested in the possibilities of cinematic sound, and took a strong hand in designing the soundtrack, working with sound recordist Ned Dawson (with Miller’s help), and cutting it himself (again, with Miller’s assistance).\(^342\) Roger Savage did the final mix, for $6000, at Armstrong Studios in Melbourne: an unconventional choice, since the studio was not built for film production, but Kennedy wanted to keep the work in Melbourne, and also make sure the car sounds had sufficient “body and oomph”.\(^343\) Savage used an unusual method: a twenty-four-track machine was cued to time codes, rather than sprockets. But this process was also not without its troubles: at the eleventh hour the filmmakers realised the dialogue was mixed so as to be nearly inaudible, necessitating a complete remix just before release.\(^344\)

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\(^{338}\) Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.


\(^{340}\) Miller, interview by unknown.

\(^{341}\) Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.

\(^{342}\) Miller, interview by Tom Ryan.

\(^{343}\) Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.

Kennedy described acquiring, through this process, a further feel for mixing and a sense for wringing affect out of sound.345

Miller was also unsatisfied with his efforts managing the crew, which was “essentially inexperienced” on the whole, populated by a mix of television workers from Crawfords and Grundy along with some amateurs and first-timers, most of whom had never made a feature.346 The mix of skills caused some inefficiencies, though Kennedy felt that the crew’s overall advantage—especially for the amateur cohort—lay in their enthusiasm.347 Miller, however, felt that some experienced crew members were unwilling or unable to deliver what he wanted;348 they became nervous, disoriented, and lost confidence in the film, seeking only to finish it perfunctorily.349 In his view, some believed they were “just going to make a Crawfords’ cop show”, and could not execute certain parts of his vision.350 The bad version of the film, he felt, would be an anamorphic version of Crawfords’ Homicide, a possibility he felt he had to struggle against throughout the shoot.351

The difficulties were also associated with Miller’s formal commitment to montage; he felt keenly that the shoot required him to sacrifice the more elaborate montage design he had planned out in his head.352 Films that are dependent on cutting, he later described, require the most fidelity in production to a carefully pre-planned and pre-cut template.353 Around the time of its release, Miller described Mad Max as a “montage film”, as opposed to a “mise-en-scène film” in which the camera records incident without editorialising. He argued that a montage film permits greater control over performance, which is especially useful when dealing with inexperienced

345 Byron Kennedy and David Watts, interview by Judy Adamson, November 11, 1981, Oral History Collection, 1122332, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
346 Miller, interview by unknown.
347 Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
348 George Miller, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 329006, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
349 Ciment, “Entretien avec George Miller,” 34.
350 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
351 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
352 Miller, interview by Kari Hanet
353 Miller, interview by unknown.
The comment reveals a dissatisfaction with the actors on Max, or his ability to direct them. But the assessment is also misleading, because montage was surely never just an expedient stylistic choice for a first-time feature director; it was at the core of Miller’s attraction to cinema. Miller had initially been interested in painting and drawing, and it was only when he was introduced to editing—and to what he later called the “pure plasticity of film”—that his taste for filmmaking grew. He fixated on how “you could put little bits of film together and make a whole sentence”—a feel for a kinetic, editing-intensive film style.

Two editors worked to assemble the cut: Tony Paterson (who had worked for Crawfords) and Cliff Hayes. But Miller completed the final pass. The problems of the shoot continued to make themselves evident in the cutting. Miller described feeling that his first editor did not understand the way he had filmed, because he had shot in fragments, working “in camera”. By this, he seems to mean capturing scenes and sequences in bits and pieces, according to his mental plan for how they would be cut together, rather than according to traditional master shots. Miller’s facility or preference for working ‘in camera’ is also observable in his description of his first ever short made with Chris, and by Noyce’s recollection of Miller’s Aquarius short—it was an emerging tenet of his process, and would later cause difficulties on Mad Max 2. So a montage-oriented aesthetic, seen also in the prior shorts, was now an established part of the Kennedy Miller style. But it was associated with certain logistical problems—or even inextricable from them—and the firm’s method evolved in response.

The central difficulties of the Mad Max shoot—actors’ performances and crew conduct—must have been bruising enough for Miller that significant elements of the

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354 Miller, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, Cinema Papers, no. 21: 370
355 Miller, interview by unknown.
357 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
358 Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
359 Ciment, "Entretien avec George Miller," 34.
company’s method of production, which would formalise quite quickly across the few productions following this film, took shape in response. Miller and Kennedy would henceforth be more careful in their selection of personnel, seeking out those who were compatible with their comprehensivist spirit, and instituting a corporate culture that would more effectively bind even professionalised crews to their preferred production procedures. Workshopping and rehearsal, of the kind prefigured by Keays-Byrne and the bikers, offered one useful model that could also be applied to the development of actors’ performances. Furthermore, the upheaval caused by Barley’s accident only reinforced the need for ‘excessive preparation’ that would, with some exceptions, mark the company’s work going forward.

“The kind of filmmakers we are” — Mad Max’s aftermath

Although dispirited by the final product, Miller sought to stay with the film after delivery, hanging around Roadshow trying to learn what he could about distribution. It seemed to him that the distributor had an uphill battle selling the film; the poor performance of the similarly action-themed Money Movers (Bruce Beresford, 1979) heralded an unprofitable release. But in the event Mad Max was a significant success, earning $5.3 million in Australia. US rights were sold to Samuel Arkoff’s AIP for $1.7 million, but when the company was bought by Filmways in 1979 the new owners were leery of the film, and the US/Canada release, in dubbed audio, was mishandled, ultimately collecting US$8.7 million. Roadshow’s US agent Marshall Shacker negotiated a $1.8 million deal with Warner Bros. for the film’s worldwide release. The international box office proved the biggest windfall for the film, collecting around US$80–90 million, for an ultimate worldwide total of

360 Miller, interview by unknown.
361 Nicoll and Herbert, “Mad Max's Maker - George Miller,” 42; George Miller, interview by unknown.
US$99 million. The biggest market for the film was Japan, and it also had significant receptions in Mexico, Germany, and Spain.\textsuperscript{365}

Details on the return to investors are scarce. One 1979 report in the *Daily Telegraph* describes a part-time typist who is “$40,000 richer” thanks to her contribution to the film; this was her return from the sale to Warner Bros.; returns on the Australian circuit were yet to come.\textsuperscript{366} The story states that even by August, four months after its Australian release, investors had already received a return of four times their initial investment. A much later 2007 story describes Roadshow’s initial investment as yielding a 1,500 per cent return.\textsuperscript{367} The crucial benefit to the firm lay in the equity allocated to Miller and Kennedy. Under a government grant, Kennedy said, a producer’s equity might be a maximum of 20 to 30 per cent; but the *Mad Max* deal was structured in the producers’ favour.\textsuperscript{368} So when the film became highly profitable, Miller and Kennedy were in a position to reap the benefits.

Alongside its commercial success, much discussion of the film in the press focused on its violent content. Phillip Adams attacked its “dangerous pornography of death”.\textsuperscript{369} In *Variety* the film was described as “sickeningly gratuitous and fascistic”.\textsuperscript{370} And it was banned in New Zealand, over concerns that it would inflame gang violence among Maori youth.\textsuperscript{371} Because of this reception, press coverage from around the film’s release frequently shows Miller and Kennedy in the position of having to defend their use of violence, which they describe as being generally implicit, and as a more or less natural commodity of commercial cinema.\textsuperscript{372} In some

\textsuperscript{365} Byron Kennedy and David Watts, interview by Judy Adamson.
\textsuperscript{366} Nick Brash, "They're All Mad About Max."
\textsuperscript{367} Turner, “Curious George.”
\textsuperscript{368} Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
\textsuperscript{369} Stratton, *The Last New Wave*, 242.
\textsuperscript{370} “Australia's Mad Max Prized at Avoriaz, Then X'd out of France," *Variety*, February 6, 1980.
\textsuperscript{371} “NZ Bans Mad Max," *Canberra Times*, July 5, 1980.
\textsuperscript{372} Terry Jennings, "The Man Behind Mad Max," *AVD*, August 16, 1979; Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
interviews, Miller is tangibly frustrated by the discussion, seeing it as part of an emotional response to the film that cannot be intellectualised.  

Miller and Kennedy’s responses to the controversy suggest that they saw cinematic violence primarily as a means toward an affective, attention-capturing response. The release of Violence in the Cinema had already modulated Miller’s understanding of the effects of violence; after audience pushback, Miller and Kennedy had constructed the violence in Mad Max to be less directly visceral. Significantly, after Mad Max’s reception, a new rubric for commercial viability began to undergird the firm’s texts, as Miller adopted the work of comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell and his universal conception of mythic story structure as a means to explain the film’s cross-cultural success. Exploitation-style violence, in the firm’s output, began to be de-emphasised in favour of new approaches to soliciting affect.

In the aftermath of Mad Max’s release, Miller and Kennedy took definite steps to formalise their partnership as a production firm. In 1979 Kennedy said they had received an investment grant to develop six new screenplays, with plans for Miller to direct and Kennedy produce; the writing was to be commissioned out. Sources mention several unmade or prospective works from around this period, including a Creature From the Black Lagoon-type movie, and a comedy film in collaboration with writer Patrick Edgeworth. After Mad Max’s success, Miller started to express his reluctance to talk about prospective projects; this close-mouthed posture would become a key characteristic of the company.

Whether the investment grant was public or private is unspecified, but around this time Kennedy’s attitude toward government intervention hardened further. Midway through post-production on Mad Max, he had gone to work as a producer on

373 Miller, interview by Tom Ryan; Miller, interview by unknown.
374 Miller, interview by unknown.
375 Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
376 Miller, interview by Tom Ryan
377 Miller, interview by unknown; Childs, "Doctor George Ladles out Horror."
378 Miller, interview by unknown
Hexagon’s *Last of the Knucklemen* (1979), on which he was tasked with controlling the finances. The experience gave him another firsthand view of the strictures that govern direct subsidy, and though he claimed to find the stringency and frequency of reporting to be ultimately beneficial, he also felt that grant requirements overly restrict the financial freedom of a production, and that a film could even be made more cheaply without government funds.\(^{379}\) For Kennedy, private funding meant complete financial control: a “flexibility” to make decisions without having to answer to a board.\(^{380}\) He would shortly be describing himself as "philosophically opposed" to any government involvement in the film industry whatsoever.\(^{381}\)

Miller was ambivalent on the issue. “Obviously there would be no Australian industry without the government,” he said in an interview in late 1979:

> It’s been a magnificent effort, but there are also negative sides to government funding. A lot of mistakes have been made. Making movies is a highly intuitive process which if institutionalized or bureaucratized cannot work as successfully.\(^{382}\)

Intuitive, exploratory, discursive development processes, already anticipated in Miller’s work with McCausland on *Mad Max*, would become a feature of the firm’s method, associated with its unstratified or non-‘institutionalised’ set-up—here we can see that Miller associated these practices with success. Bureaucratisation joins the list of features of direct-subsidy production Kennedy Miller opposed, in addition to a non-commercial, art-film aesthetic.

A commercial outlook—already endemic to Kennedy’s showman-like, mercantile attitude—was now an entrenched part of the company’s identity. Despite the ‘intuitive’ process of development, commercial success was an ideal consciously held, and rigorously pursued. In a 1979 interview, Miller described the “three main

\(^{379}\) Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.

\(^{380}\) Byron Kennedy and David Watts, interview by Judy Adamson.

\(^{381}\) Robert Miliken, "Return of Mad Max," *National Times*, July 12, 1981.

\(^{382}\) Nicoll and Herbert, "Mad Max's Maker - George Miller," 42.
elements” of a film as concept, shooting, and selling. Kennedy said that he and Miller scrutinised commercial potential in every potential project: “that’s the kind of filmmakers we are”. To the extent that their commercial insights proved correct, it was a combination of gut instinct, progressive iteration and experience. *Mad Max* was tested in rough cut before its release, and the difficult year-long post-production Miller has described reveals the extent of labour involved in fine-tuning the film for an audience. Despite being a first-time feature producer, Kennedy was confident that the film’s stunt spectacles would result in an effectively commercial product. McCausland’s account of watching and discussing classical Hollywood cinema during the writing process makes it clear that Miller, as well as Kennedy, pursued and held well-considered theories about which specific elements of a film product were commercial, marketable, and suitable for their aims.

However, Kennedy Miller’s attachment to unstratified, loosely structured production practices was already subject to external pressures. The problems with the crew on *Mad Max*, as Miller and Kennedy described them, came not from the amateurs—who contributed great enthusiasm—but from the professionally experienced members taken from the Crawfords and television workforce. This suggests that the firm would be drawn to collaborators who were unencumbered by normative conceptions of production processes. And yet the 1975 to 1980 period in Australian film, as the revival matured into an ongoing industry, also saw significant professionalisation and specialisation in production, and the successful unionisation of much of the workforce. Dermody and Jacka describe how this occurred without the “rigid and stifling “divisions of labour in the Hollywood and British industries,” and the unstratified aspects of the Kennedy Miller method would often be seen as part of Australia’s looser production style. But the firm would still have to work within a local industry undergoing increasing stratification, contrary to its internal philosophy of comprehensivism. Negotiating this conflict would provide much of the impetus for the formalisation of the method in the following years.

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383 Miller, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
384 Kennedy, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray.
Chapter 3: 1980s—The Method Enters Maturity

Introduction

In the 1980s, the nature of government intervention in the Australian film industry was drastically restructured. In place of direct subsidy through project grants came indirect subsidy induced by tax concessions for private investment. Already flush with the proceeds of Mad Max, and with proven experience in handling private investment and exporting to foreign markets, Kennedy Miller took advantage of these changed circumstances to accomplish a rare feat for an Australian producer: continuous production. The 1983 investment prospectus for the miniseries Bodyline emphasises the firm’s sunny prospects: “Kennedy Miller Pty Ltd is the largest production company in Australia with an ongoing production acquisition and development programme.”

The document highlights the “team of administrative and creative executives” assembled by the company, as well as its national and international corporate relationships with Ten, Roadshow, Village Theatres, and Warner Bros, claiming that Miller and Kennedy “were among the first to see the potential for ongoing film and television production involving both Australia and the USA”. The company moved from the closed-shop, art-oriented environment of Melbourne to the heart of industry-centric Sydney: establishing long-lasting headquarters at the old Metro cinema in Kings Cross; bringing on a new core workforce of administrative staff and researchers; and becoming home to a recurring ensemble of creative contributors. As a consequence of all this activity, the Kennedy Miller method of production, still nascent in the 1970s, underwent significant formalisation and refinement; as the firm’s corporate structure evolved, so emerged its internal culture, and with it the possibility of corporate authorship.

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386 Bodyline Prospectus, 1984, Bodyline Documentation, 482515, National Film and Sound Archive.
In this chapter, I will outline the beginnings of the firm’s attachment to 10BA production, with the making of Mad Max 2 (1981); the crucial stages in the solidification of its collaborative production procedures, with the miniseries The Dismissal (1983), Bodyline (1984) and The Cowra Breakout (1985); the firm’s deepening ties to the US with Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985), The Witches of Eastwick (1987), and Dead Calm (1988); and its run of continuous production with Vietnam (1987), The Year My Voice Broke (1987), The Clean Machine (1988), The Riddle of the Stinson (1988), Fragments of War: The Story of Damien Parer (1988) Sportz Crazy (1988), The Dirtwater Dynasty (1988), and Bangkok Hilton (1989). I will show how the firm’s philosophy of comprehensivism offered a way to simultaneously creatively empower and regulate the burgeoning ensemble of workers who contributed to the firm’s productions. I will outline the maturation of its two-sided production policy, as its outward-looking feature slate was complemented by a nationalist TV strategy. I will note the development of Kennedy Miller’s key partnerships with Village Roadshow and new backers Network Ten and US studio Warner Bros. I will describe the shifting terms of the firm’s relationship with government intervention, as it came to make use of the new funding possibilities offered by indirect subsidy. And I will argue that this period of intensive activity—the most significant in the firm’s history—created the conditions for the establishment of a method of production that would continue through the subsequent decades.

Conditions for Growth—Mad Max 2 and Twilight Zone: The Movie

After Mad Max’s release, Miller and Kennedy moved for a brief time to Los Angeles, taking with them Terry Hayes, a radio producer and former wunderkind newspaper journalist, whom they had hired to write the novelisation of the film (published under the pseudonym Terry Kaye).\(^{387}\) Hayes’s recruitment suggests an extension of Miller’s

\(^{387}\) The fact that the firm even prepared a tie-in novelisation is indicative of its commercial sensibility. The Mad Max book represents the first step toward a logic of merchandising that would become much more apparent on later works like Happy Feet.
conviction that journalists make good screenwriters, which had earlier led him to McCausland. In Los Angeles, the now-three-member core of the Kennedy Miller operation undertook an informal ‘inquiry’ into the film industry. Kennedy again examined distribution, Miller took acting classes, and he and Hayes worked on scripts, fixating on understanding the nature of drama. Around this time, Miller went to a talk by Joseph Campbell, whose work became a major touchstone for the Kennedy Miller narrative style. Campbell’s writing made sense of the international success of Mad Max for Miller, who now understood the Max character to embody a universal heroic archetype, and lent a new conceptual architecture to Miller’s previously ‘intuitive’ approach to writing. After Campbell, Miller has said, he “forgot about cinema altogether and basically became a storyteller”.

Miller and Hayes worked on an unproduced horror-musical Roxanne, described as a “kind of Bette Davis-Joan Crawford melodrama between two teenaged girls” and Miller considered offers to direct American films, including First Blood (which would be made by Ted Kotcheff in 1982), and Cat People (made by Paul Schrader in 1982). Though yet to have first-hand experience on an American production, Miller already had a feeling about Hollywood’s inefficiencies. “The machine here is so big,” he told a reporter for The New York Times in 1982. “So many things get in the way of making a film—the deal, the package, the career—that it’s a wonder fine films are made at all.” The looser style of the Australian industry—both at a broad structural level and in specific production hierarchies—continued to appeal to Miller and Kennedy. Miller and Hayes also began to discuss the problems of the first Mad Max,

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388 Terry Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, in Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1988), 46.
390 George Miller, interview by Paul Byrne, January 12, 2011, Oral History Collection, 818098, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
392 Dale Pollock, "Hot Wheels: His Road to Success," Los Angeles Times, March 24, 1982; George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
393 Pollock, "Hot Wheels: His Road to Success."
and these conversations led to the idea of a sequel. Though there were obvious commercial incentives for continuing the franchise, Miller was hesitant, still troubled by the difficulties of the first film. But with Hayes’ and Kennedy’s encouragement, he became energised by the prospect of a Mad Max 2—a chance to put theory into practice, and to fix his errors.

The mechanism that guaranteed Kennedy Miller the financial stability and creative autonomy it desired in Australia was 10BA, a revised set of tax regulations introduced by the government on October 11, 1980, which enabled investors to claim a 150 per cent tax concession on money invested into eligible film and television productions, and under which only 50 per cent of income gained from the investment to be taxed. The resulting influx of money sent the Australian industry through a sudden and gruelling growth spurt. The yearly number of productions financed under 10BA climbed precipitously through the early 1980s to a height of 170 productions in 1984/1985, with a total combined budget of $185 million. Enthusiasm waned from 1984, when the available tax deduction and concession was adjusted down to 133 per cent and 33 per cent, and again in 1985 when it was adjusted further to 120 per cent and 20 per cent. Though 10BA persisted as an available finding mechanism until 2009 (when it was replaced by the Producer Offset), its heyday is commonly agreed to have ended in 1988/1989 when the deduction was phased downward again to 100 per cent, thereby eliminating much of the appeal to investors.

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394 Terry Hayes, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 270587, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
395 Michael Specter, “Myths Shape Movie from Australia.”
398 Sean Maher, The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 28.
Kennedy was quick to grasp the benefits of the mechanism, calling 10BA “the greatest gift any government has ever given to any industry.” Mad Max was probably a direct influence on this significant policy shift. O'Regan has described the film as an “important reference point” for the policy report by Peat Marwick Mitchell (now KPMG) that redefined the terms of the AFC’s industry role. This report was released in late 1979, after Mad Max, and though the film is not mentioned specifically, it and Kennedy Miller appear to implicitly fit the model of production and producer the report is oriented to support. It is possible Kennedy played a lobbying role—in October 1979, he spoke at a special parliamentary screening of Mad Max at the National Library in Canberra, organised by the AFC, where he discussed the work of an independent producer. Dermody and Jacka describe how the PMM report initiated a fundamental reorientation of the AFC’s industry role: from a public organisation whose clients were filmmakers, to a servicing agency for private investors. The description shows just how conditions had shifted to Kennedy Miller’s advantage; the firm had neither wanted nor needed the AFC’s help when it was servicing filmmakers, but as a new conduit to private finance it was now of significant aid. In order to qualify for concessions, productions were still required to demonstrate significant Australian content, but this condition now appeared to pose no difficulty for the firm. Though Miller and Kennedy had doubted that the AFC would ever subsidise Mad Max, there are no indications that Mad Max 2 ever struggled to receive certification.

During the core eight-year 10BA period, 896 projects were financed (of which 227 were feature films), at a value of $959 million. But the primary beneficiaries of this

401 Peat, Marwick, Mitchell Services, Towards a More Effective Commission: The AFC in the '80s (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1979).
influx of money were not always the screen workers themselves. Production budgets increased, and fees were raised, but much of the windfall went to those who had arrived to manage the industry's refurbished financial and legal infrastructure. Costs associated with brokerage, insurance, lawyers, and accountants rose, and merchant bankers, stockbrokers, and other specialist financial entities came to assume a role as de facto executive producers. In this shift in balance, power moved from the hand of filmmakers and producers into those whose central interest was not in the film itself, but in the financial package and its investors. Dermody and Jacka write that this resulted in a new aesthetic sensibility that prioritised bigger budgets, international appeal, and 'commercial' style. Kennedy Miller was, in a sense, already adept in this style, but the new conditions were not always to its advantage. 10BA intensified trends in the professionalisation and specialisation of labour, offsetting the firm's developing attachment to multi-disciplined employees.

The production of Mad Max 2 displays several elements of importance to our understanding of Kennedy Miller's history and method of production. Per the unusual requirement affecting early 10BA projects, the film had to be completed by the end of the financial year, and so production proceeded in a rush. Even the financing, which on the first film had taken Miller and Kennedy months of preparation and persuasion, was achieved quickly—in one account, only two phone calls were required to secure the $3.9 million budget, the most expensive yet for an Australian feature. By Christmas 1980, months after 10BA was introduced, Kennedy Miller was back in Australia, intending to complete the film in time to debut the following Christmas in Japan, which had been one of the largest markets for the first Mad Max.

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408 Enker, "Cross-over and Collaboration."
409 Village/Roadshow: The Making of Mad Max II, 'Stuntmen,' in Mad Max II: Stunt Scenes and Other Segments, 53711, video, National Film and Sound Archive.
Filmmaker Brian Hannant, whose partner Jenny Day had worked on the first *Mad Max*, and on *Violence in the Cinema, Part 1*, was recruited to work on the script. Miller and Hayes had already developed a twenty-four-page document that incompletely synopsised the narrative, along with some rudimentary storyboards; work began, with Hannant on board, to flesh this out into a screenplay. In Hannant’s description of the writing process, the three developed the story in conversation; he and Miller paid particular attention to the visualisation of the stunt and action sequences, while Hayes took the lead in cleaning up the dialogue and in getting the work down on the page—a similar method to the division of labour that had governed the Miller–McCausland collaboration.\(^4\)\(^{10}\) Buckmaster describes this as akin to a writers’ room in contemporary television production.\(^4\)\(^{11}\) The system prefigures the norm that would later govern writing work on Miller’s features, and on the firm’s television work. As on the first *Mad Max*, Miller’s writing was concurrent with the working out of visual sequences and stunts—Hannant recalled spending two days plotting out the order of events in the scene where the young ‘Feral Kid’ throws his boomerang. The looming deadline curtailed the writing period, and the film entered principal photography with the script in an unfinished state, but because the shoot was scheduled largely in chronological sequence,\(^4\)\(^{12}\) Miller, Hayes, and Kennedy were able to make decisions during the filming that led to the final shape of the story.\(^4\)\(^{13}\)

Hannant moved from co-writer to First Assistant Director, and encountered problems in this capacity, which he later described in an interview with David Stratton. Production snafus emerged from Miller’s complex montage design and consequently fractured shooting style. Though Miller assiduously storyboarded throughout the shoot,\(^4\)\(^{14}\) Hannant recalled that the crew could have trouble interpreting these drawings. Miller had drawn them in ‘cut’ form, as a full montage sequence, but the

\(^{410}\) Brian Hannant, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 368185, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\(^{412}\) Miller, interview by David Stratton.
\(^{413}\) Hannant, interview by David Stratton.
\(^{414}\) Miller, interview by David Stratton.
logic of how scenes could be efficiently filmed—which moments incorporated into a master shot, or sub-master shot—was not clear. Hannant clashed with Miller over his preference for filming sequences in short slices: Miller felt that master shots belonged to television (which further explains his earlier difficulty with the Crawfords cohort). In the pursuit of visual precision, Miller preferred to use only one or two cameras to film stunts, feeling that there was a discipline to knowing exactly what would be photographed. After a month, Hannant moved over to head up a newly created second unit, having discovered that he lacked the authority to oversee Miller’s work.

The problems Hannant describes appear related to the issues Miller encountered on the first Mad Max. They suggest, again, that the firm needed to find a way to effectively induct a crew into its particular style of production. However, despite these issues, Miller himself felt that the finished sequel was much closer to the vision in his head than he had been able to achieve on the first. He and Hayes had learned to accept that filmmaking was an “organic process” and a project evolved throughout its making. Additionally, they had carefully selected an appropriate crew; new cinematographer Dean Semler, in particular, represented the “give everything and anything a go” enthusiasm Miller required. Stylistically, Mad Max 2 is notable as a clear refinement of the formal montage style present in Mad Max. But it also demonstrates the re-emergence of direct-address narration—Hayes, in particular, was very attached to this device, which is also seen in his later writing work. The film begins and ends with a ruminative voiceover, laying out the post-apocalyptic setting, and establishing the legend of the ‘road warrior’ Max. The character of Rockatansky, previously a family-man cop in the first film, is now explicitly re-conceived as a mythic hero, in line with the firm’s new attachment to Campbell’s ideas.

416 Hannant, interview by David Stratton.
417 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
418 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
419 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
Kennedy again took the lead in developing the soundtrack, taking the added step of paying for the film to be mixed in Dolby stereo, despite only being contractually obliged to provide a mono track. In this respect, he was attempting to stay at the technological cutting edge of distribution; Dolby stereo was still an emerging technique, and though it was thought to increase box-office potential, the majority of prints would still circulate in mono. For reasons of cost and geographical proximity, Kennedy did not mix the film in the US, but at a newly established Film Australia Dolby studio. A November 1981 recording of a conversation between Kennedy and managers at the facility reveals Kennedy's significant creative investment in the audio aspects of Kennedy Miller’s production work: sound, Kennedy believed, was a key ingredient in ensuring that a movie was an emotional experience.420

The recording also highlights his ill feelings toward the kind of production processes engendered by government funding:

[M]y, sort of, personal philosophies are basically opposed to government involvement in the film business in any way, shape, or form. That’s my personal philosophy. My expedient philosophy in a country like Australia shows that it’s absolutely necessary. Film Australia is a government facility, and there is a nine to five filmmaker mentality, which is the first time I’ve struck that, because I’ve always—I eat drink and sleep it. I wake up at two o’clock in the morning and think about something, or will get up and go out of bed and make a couple of cuts in the editing room, or something, and go in there and find the other guys that I work with are doing the same thing. And this nine to five mentality is its biggest drawback. And then the overtime situation. I would have thought that a facility like this, it would be in your interest to have it going twenty-four hours a day, if possible, and encourage me to work through till two in the morning … I don’t really quibble the overtime. I mean, it’s not extortionate. It’s just a philosophical thing that I’ve never ever struck before that I have to come to terms with. And the nine to five

420 Byron Kennedy and David Watts, interview by Judy Adamson, November 11, 1981, Oral History Collection, 1122332, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
filmmaking mentality here isn’t so pervasive that it stifles you or anything. It’s just on the periphery and it might turn some people off.\footnote{Kennedy and Watts, interview by Judy Adamson.}

Despite his discomfort with Film Australia’s “nine-to-five” atmosphere, Kennedy also praises the quality and efficiency of its Dolby studio technicians (including their willingness to fudge their time sheets), comparing them favourably to the passionless, clock-punching mentality of union technicians in the US. His anti ‘nine to five’ mentality reflects another aspect of the company’s comprehensivist method: work at Kennedy Miller was not only multidisciplinary, but it could also require a level of dedication, energy, and commitment that exceeded what was asked of workers in other organisations. Both founders were obsessive about their work, in their way, and required their collaborators to share this attitude.

Though *Mad Max 2* was scheduled for the Japanese market, more significant to the company’s trajectory is the fact that the film broke through in the United States, where it was released as *The Road Warrior* and, unlike its predecessor, was not dubbed. It earned US$24 million.\footnote{Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior box office figures, The-Numbers, accessed October 7, 2019, https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Mad-Max-2-The-Road-Warrior#tab=box-office.} While Warner Bros. had only picked up *Mad Max* for international distribution after completion, the studio partnered on *Mad Max 2* from the beginning, paying an acquisition fee that exceeded the cost of the budget.\footnote{Keryn Michelle Curtis, "Australian Television and Film: A Case Study of Kennedy Miller" (honours diss., Griffith University, 1985), 18.} As a result of his new cachet in Hollywood, Miller was invited to direct a segment of 1983’s *Twilight Zone: The Movie*, an anthology film overseen by Steven Spielberg, who directed another segment—the remainder were handled by John Landis and Joe Dante—and whose Amblin production company was involved in its development. Miller later described Spielberg’s Amblin as an analogous operation to his own Kennedy Miller: “a bunch of filmmakers making films together, with very little interference from the studio”.\footnote{Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.} Relations between Miller and the *Zone* team appear
to have continued amicably after shooting finished. Spielberg shipped to Sydney a copy of an arcade game called *Centipede* that Miller had enjoyed playing between takes on the *Zone* set; Miller installed it at the Metro. The 1984 *Bodyline* prospectus says that Miller “has an arrangement for more joint film-making ventures with Spielberg in the future” (exactly what those were, or might have been, is unclear). The relationship with Spielberg, then almost at the height of his Hollywood power, is emblematic not only of Kennedy Miller’s ability to establish international partnerships and connections, but also of the aesthetic terrain that the firm’s features would mostly tread—big-budget, mass audience, ‘blockbuster’ production.

The *Twilight Zone* shoot, for Miller, was enjoyable enough to give him a false impression of Hollywood work practices. He had attended the filming of Dante’s segment, to identify crew members he might want to select, and his group was young and enthusiastic and fresh off Spielberg’s *E.T.* Spielberg’s rarefied status also, lent the project a certain freedom from oversight. He described his experience as like “making a student film in the studio system.” Miller’s time on *The Twilight Zone*, he would come to feel, meant he was later complacent in preparing for the troubled *Witches of Eastwick* shoot, where he found himself at the mercy of erratic producers, overseeing a crew that was not to his preference. Miller generally perceived the Hollywood system to be stiflingly formalised in comparison to the looser Australian industry; a version of the professional vs. amateur crew dynamic he grappled with locally, writ large on the international stage.

### New Procedures of Collaboration

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425 *Twilight Zone: The Movie*: Letter to George Miller with Instructions, January 21 (year unknown), 1365813, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
427 *Bodyline* Prospectus.
429 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
In 1981, Miller and Kennedy acquired the Metro Theatre, an art deco former cinema (and then food hall) near Kings Cross, and the company finalised its relocation from Melbourne to Sydney. Miller has said that Sydney was a more attractive base for the firm because of its proximity to suitable Mad Max 2 locations (the film eventually shot in Broken Hill), and the benefits of its established professional production base, including film laboratories. But it is possible to sense also that the film culture-oriented Melbourne scene was tangibly no longer the right fit for the company’s ambitions. The firm’s shift to Sydney coincided with an extended period of professionalisation and formalisation.

An indication of Kennedy Miller’s original ambitions for the Metro can be found in a home movie shot by Peter Kamen, in which Kennedy is filmed outside the building and gives a broad sketch of his plans:

> We’ve bought the Metro last week, and what we propose to do is convert it into a totally self-contained environment for making movies, and also living in there, plus enough space to convert into commercial office rooms for other people, to hire out to other people, doctors, lawyers, or other film productions. On the opening section just here, that used to be small shops, we’re gonna convert that to a coffee lounge, so primarily we can come down and sit in there as a meeting place ourselves and discuss things, and it’ll also be open to the public … we can build sets there and go up vertically. And then there’s the floor above it, see, which can be office space as well.

There are no sources to indicate that the company ever used the Metro as living quarters, and the building was never converted to the full extent of Kennedy’s vision. An oral history with writer-research Francine Finnane indicates the building

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430 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
432 In fact, the next section of that home movie shows Kennedy outside a grand Elizabeth Bay mansion, which he is considering purchasing (though seemingly never did, since the heritage-listed flagpole could not allow for the approach of his helicopter).
was still largely unrenovated five years after Kennedy acquired it. But the Metro did house Kennedy Miller’s own central offices, and storage, and was a major shooting site. The old cinema seats were stripped out to provide room to build sets, and almost every corner of the building served as a location for one production or another. Scripts for miniseries would be rewritten if the production could not place enough scenes inside the Metro. It is clear that the acquisition of the Metro was essential to the company’s viability through the 1980s, in costs saved and stature gained. Not having to rent commercial studio space undoubtedly yielded substantial savings, and meant that it was possible to achieve ambitious productions economically. But also the simple fact of having physical headquarters surely enabled the company’s developing collaborative practices to flourish. Noyce has described the firm as having a “campus atmosphere”; the Metro was that campus.

The Metro was technologically limited, not soundproofed, and not equipped as a formal studio floor, but nevertheless it was this set-up that meant the company could, for a time, be reasonably referred to as “the closest thing Australia has to an old-fashioned Hollywood Studio”, enabling a production system that reflected the classical Hollywood mode—though not in every aspect. Now that continuous production was made possible by 10BA and its own production facility, Kennedy Miller was entering its period of greatest activity and prominence as a producer—these conditions set the table for the formal establishment of new procedures of creative conduct and collaboration.

**Innovation — The Dismissal**

The production of *The Dismissal* marked two new beginnings for Kennedy Miller. It was the first move into television, which would dominate the firm’s production slate

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433 Francine Finnane, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 270521, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.

434 Phillip Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara, February and May 2010, Oral History Collection, 803657, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.


for the remainder of the decade. And it marked the first time Miller’s and Kennedy’s preferences for organising production coalesced into something like a formalised set of collaborative procedures that could be fed forward into future work. 10BA’s reshaping of Australia’s film industry also extended to television, as its regulations provided for the financing of miniseries. Kennedy Miller was hardly alone in moving into this area—other film producers and writers including David Williamson, the McElroy brothers, and Roadshow Coote and Carroll, were also moving into miniseries. 437 But it was Kennedy Miller’s work that would come to dominate this era.

The firm’s move into television was made possible through the inauguration of another crucial external corporate partnership: with Network Ten, which would broadcast all the company’s television work. Partnership with Ten was facilitated by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who had taken over the station and, in 1981, brought on Greg Coote to be its managing director. Miller later recalled that Murdoch cemented their arrangement by offering them a free hand to make “bold television”. 438 The company had no complex contract with Ten: simply a basic agreement, and a promise that they could work without executive interference. 439 In this arrangement, we again see that the company’s corporate partnerships were closely associated with personal connections—Coote, formerly an employee of Roadshow, had met Miller and Kennedy while working on Mad Max. 440

Following a logic earlier established on The Devil in Evening Dress, which saw the firm treating television production as the appropriate avenue for locally-minded storytelling, Kennedy Miller considered several Australia-focused concepts for its next production, including a project on Australian Broadcasting Corporation reporter Tony Joyce, who had been killed in Zimbabwe, and a project on NSW Labor premier

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438 Lawrie Zion, "Tuned to the Local Heartbeat," The Australian, July 4, 2005.
Jack ‘The Big Fella’ Lang.\textsuperscript{441} Hayes, now ensconced in the firm’s creative core and carrying with him the sensibilities of a journalist, encouraged that the dismissal of the Whitlam government be pursued as a concept.\textsuperscript{442}

The most significant step in the formalisation of the Kennedy Miller method came with the recruitment of George Ogilvie, a theatre director Miller hired to help rehearse the actors assembled for the miniseries, and who also took on directing duties. The production of \textit{Mad Max} had made it clear that the firm needed to increase its facility with screen performance, as well as its ability to manage crews. Ogilvie’s rehearsal and workshopping techniques offered a toolkit to harmonise an ensemble of actors, which could also be applied to an entire production staff. Ogilvie was asked to head up a workshop process for \textit{The Dismissal}, a task he agreed to on the basis that it presented interesting theoretical and pedagogical challenges for thinking through the differences in performance across media; he became engaged by the question of “how to get good actors up to the screen”.\textsuperscript{443} Ogilvie understood that the firm wanted to improve the quality of television by giving actors more time and space to develop character.\textsuperscript{444} His overall involvement with Kennedy Miller was relatively short—only two to three years. But the processes he introduced to the company had a long-lasting effect, as a means of regulating its collaborative atmosphere.

Ogilvie joined an evolving ensemble of talent. Credits on \textit{The Dismissal} describe a core of creative talent who would return again on later Kennedy Miller productions. Direction is attributed to Miller (his sole miniseries as director; he would after only produce), Phillip Noyce (then a tutor at the Aquarius workshop, now an established feature filmmaker), John Power (playwright of the original \textit{Last of the Knucklemen}), and Carl Schultz. Dean Semler took up cinematography again, continuing what would become a long association. One of the editors was Richard Francis-Bruce,

\textsuperscript{441} Cullen, “Mad Max Loner Who Turned Our Movie Industry on Its Ear.”
\textsuperscript{442} Miller, interview by David Stratton.
\textsuperscript{443} George Ogilvie, interview by Kari Hanet, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 381146, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{444} George Ogilvie, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 368544, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
soon to be a recurring contractor. The credited producers are Miller and Kennedy (as executive producers), Hayes, and Su Armstrong, who had taken up a kind of production executive role at the company. Sally Gibson, a journalist from Melbourne, was hired to work on the proposal that led to a green light from Ten, and then invited to join the company in Sydney to research the project. The task of writing the scripts had been given to playwright Ron Blair.

The event that intensified Kennedy Miller’s commitment to workshopping occurred during Ogilvie’s rehearsal period for *The Dismissal*. The company hired a manor house in Elizabeth Bay and held a three-week workshop, during which the actors learnt about the historical circumstances behind the Whitlam dismissal together, and spoke with visiting politicians and other key participants. As the actors engaged in rehearsal and took possession of their characters they developed a mistrust of the scripted material prepared by Blair. Phillip Noyce recalled this as a “spontaneous revolt” on the part of the cast. As Miller later recalled, although Blair had entered the production as an authority on the material, the group authority, fired up by Ogilvie’s workshopping, began to eclipse his own. Blair became defensive when he ought to have instead joined the process, and as a consequence he was fired. Miller recalled this workshopping as a “collegial way of putting things together”, and credits it with establishing a “house style” for the company. Although, as Gibson described it, Blair’s exit was also precipitated by his taking liberties with the factual research material; a style of dramatisation at odds with her and Hayes’ background as journalists, and with the responsibility of accurately telling a politically momentous story.

After Blair’s departure, writing continued under the intense pressure of the 10BA deadline; the tax concession requirements stipulated that the project be completed

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445 Sally Gibson, interview by author, August 2017.
446 Miller, interview by David Stratton; Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
448 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
449 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
450 Gibson, interview by author.
within the financial year.\textsuperscript{451} Hayes wrote, working closely with research material (including scene breakdowns) prepared by Gibson.\textsuperscript{452} Whatever the precise division of labour, descriptions of the scripting reveal an emerging template for the work of writer at Kennedy Miller: credited scriptwriters marshalled, organised and laid down into scripts a volume of narrative material discovered in research and/or developed into story through group discussion. Archival papers from the production, held at the NFSA, attest to the level of research undertaken. They include extensive notes of relevant film and video clips (organised by film historian Graham Shirley), long biographical character profiles on the key figures, and detailed, scene-by-scene breakdowns of the historical events, supported by extensive sourcing from contemporaneous newspaper accounts and books.\textsuperscript{453} As would become standard practice on the later miniseries, the directors of \textit{The Dismissal} attended story meetings, helped to develop the material, absorbed the research—Schultz recalled being present at an interview with Paul Keating\textsuperscript{454}—and offered collegial support to each other; Ogilvie, directing for the screen for the first time, has described benefiting in particular from the guidance of others on the team.\textsuperscript{455}

The factual, documentationist, politically engaged aesthetic of \textit{The Dismissal} represents a break with the \textit{Mad Max} films, and can be viewed as offering a way for the firm to recalibrate its public reputation for exploitation-style productions. But this aesthetic does have roots deeper in the firm’s work, particularly in \textit{The Devil in Evening Dress}. Whereas the earlier work was semi-documentary, with extensive re-enactments, \textit{The Dismissal} makes the leap into full dramatisation. We can also see the continuance of direct-address narration—Ogilvie recalled that ex-journalist Hayes saw TV scripting as “headline writing”.\textsuperscript{456} \textit{The Dismissal}’s national history-telling aspect is likewise continued from \textit{Devil}—in a sense, both are workings-through of

\textsuperscript{451} Filming was even briefly paused to give Hayes time to write. Francine Finnane, interview by Keryn Curtis.
\textsuperscript{452} Gibson, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{453} \textit{The Dismissal}: Papers Relating to the Production, 0727903, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{454} Carl Schultz, interview by Pam Willis Burden, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 807488, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{455} Ogilvie, interview by Kari Hanet; Ogilvie, interview by David Stratton.
\textsuperscript{456} George Ogilvie, \textit{Simple Gifts} (Strawberry Hills: Currency House, 2006), 279.
Australian traumas, one lingering as a ghost, the other as unexpunged resentment. *The Dismissal* is, in its way, just as much a play for audience arousal as *Mad Max* – Gibson recalled that her time on the project (and later on *The Cowra Breakout*) was animated by a keen sense that their work was educating the Australian populace about key events in the nation’s history.\(^{457}\) Teacher’s guides were circulated for the show, emphasising its potential as a pedagogical tool. Network Ten was sufficiently aware of its potential impact to delay airing it until after the 1983 election, when the Liberal Fraser government, which had ousted Whitlam, was defeated.\(^{458}\) So Kennedy Miller’s shift into prestige, Australianist, AFC-genre-adjacent production was in this sense not a contradictory move. Its policy appeared ‘two-sided’, but it was internally consistent. It continues the firm’s overtly commercial approach—if it could attain funding with ‘Australian’ content, on its own terms, then it would—but also its fundamental sensibility.

**Repetition — *Bodyline***

On its next project the firm sought to expand on Ogilvie’s workshopping rehearsal process, bringing an ensemble attitude not just to the cast, but to the crew as well. Workshops for *Bodyline* were a two-week affair, with writers, directors and producers participating alongside the actors.\(^{459}\) The company cast a wide net for these, seeing workshops not only a way to prepare for particular productions, but as a way of scouting talent and feeling out the lay of the land in the industry. The techniques Ogilvie implemented were mainly team-building exercises, geared to cohere a cast of actors—or crew—into a single-minded ensemble, and to explore scenarios in which conflict or drama can develop.

In an appendix to his 2006 memoir, *Simple Gifts*, Ogilvie describes some of his activities.\(^{460}\) In ‘The Circle’ participants walk together in a circle while doing breathing exercises, and are coaxed to subconsciously respond to group intention, speeding

\(^{457}\) Gibson, interview by author.
\(^{458}\) Zion, “Tuned to the Local Heartbeat.”
\(^{459}\) Ogilvie, interview by David Stratton.
\(^{460}\) Ogilvie, *Simple Gifts*, 329.
up, slowing down, and turning *en masse*. Actor Alan David Lee described this as an exercise to inspire a feeling of collectiveness.\(^{461}\) In ‘Follow the Leader’, participants mimic the actions of an appointed leader, and experience the different dynamics that come with being subservient to different personalities, while also learning that ‘power’ in a scene or dramatic situation is a quality bestowed, not taken. In ‘The Book Lift’, participants develop a scene by undertaking to move a pile of books from one table to another, establishing a harmonious rhythm as they work; drama arises—and its dynamics made explicit—when disharmony is introduced into the work (as by the addition of a new participant).

As Ogilvie describes them, these activities do not just benefit the actors, but writers and directors, too, who are invited to see how drama can be created without words, and how scripts can too easily introduce extraneous material.\(^{462}\) The ultimate outcome of the workshopping process, Ogilvie said, is the creation of a “world” for the production, a common ground from which all creative decisions can stem, and in which the individual impulses of each creative participant are authorised by the shared understanding of all.\(^{463}\) Chris Noonan articulated the benefits in similar terms: once a world has been established, every decision “is then all working to the one purpose”.\(^{464}\)

Ogilvie again took director duties on one episode of *Bodyline*, but his overall influence on the production cast can be felt in a letter written to him by actor Jim Holt after production of the miniseries concluded:

> Someday George there’ll be a circle and you’ll give everyone the plague and we all know the plague is total. They all know it, no matter how they react. *Bodyline* proves it! The direction is one thing, you all share it, but the

\(^{461}\) Alan David Lee, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 270375, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.

\(^{462}\) Ogilvie, *Simple Gifts*, 331.


\(^{464}\) Chris Noonan, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 271754, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
performances, George, are yours and ‘ours’. It was ‘our’ circle and every
performer knows that, even though they may never admit it, even to
themselves.

Holt goes on to make mention of a death scene that was only performable by the
actors thanks to Ogilvie’s guidance: “How on earth could Hugo [Weaving,
presumably] have done that gross death scene without the strength of the circle.
That was testing the circle to its limit and it only just passed the test.”465 This thank-
you note, preserved in Ogilvie’s personal correspondences, makes visible not only
the practical usefulness of the workshopping style—which enabled the actors to fully
reconcile themselves with the scripts—but also shows how Ogilvie himself was
integral to this process. Script pages for Bodyline archived at the NFSA bear
evidence of revisions made after actors’ workshops had been held. These
amendments are not obviously substantial, having more to do with the sequencing of
dialogue and matters of staging than any change in meaning466—but they verify that
the production procedures of these miniseries afforded the actors a level of
responsibility for shaping the material.

Much of the creative team gathered together for Bodyline, as would be a recurring
recruitment procedure for Kennedy Miller, had existing personal or professional
connections to others already at the company. At this time, Kennedy Miller was not
necessarily recruiting for a particular project or looking for people with a particular
sort of experience, but rather seeking out promising and compatible individuals with
whom its principals might like to work. Some, like Sally Gibson, were given the
choice of which of the two shows they preferred to work on.467 Both Ogilvie and Schultz carried over from The
Dismissal to Bodyline, joined by writer–directors Denny Lawrence and Lex Marinos.
Lawrence had written the 1983 feature Goodbye Paradise (with Bob Ellis), which

465 Jim Holt to George Ogilvie, undated, Box 11, Papers of George Ogilvie, Acc11.101,
National Library of Australia.
466 Bodyline Ep. 06: Script: Draft, 691446, October 7, 1983, in Bodyline Scripts, Drafts,
Shooting, Storyboards etc., 0005360, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
467 Gibson, interview by author.
Schultz had directed (and in which Marinos acted, and Richard Francis-Bruce edited). Offered the choice of projects, Lawrence selected *Cowra Breakout*, and began work on that with Chris Noonan and Phillip Noyce; but when Kennedy Miller fired an early *Bodyline* writer, Ranald Allen, Lawrence was asked to shift projects.\(^{468}\) Marinos—who alone among the writing-directing team had extensive cricket knowledge—had connected with Miller through Miller’s then-partner Sandy Gore, with whom Marinos was working at a small theatre group, The King O’Malley Company. This troupe had organised a season of nine short plays in 1982, and Miller had been invited to direct one. Marinos had initially been invited to work on *The Dismissal*, but was committed as an actor to the sitcom *Kingswood Country*; he was later offered *Bodyline* when work on that series began.

Though the production had already amassed a great deal of historical information—collected by researcher Francine Finnane—Lawrence, Marinos, and another writer, Robert Caswell, worked on outlining the story and broke the material into episodes. They had regular meetings with Miller and Kennedy, as well as story conferences with the other directors. Then the firm fired Caswell, as it had done Blair and Allen. Lawrence speculated to me that Caswell’s first episode draft had been insufficiently filmic and overly talky. The final scripting credits are divided across Lawrence and Marinos, Hayes, and Hayes with Francine Finnane. Both Lawrence and Marinos’ recollections of the scripting process, as described in interviews with me, acknowledge the collaborative nature of work on *Bodyline*, but also share a feeling that the final allocation of story and scripting credits murkyly reflects the actual division and duration of writing labour on the series. Sally Gibson felt similarly about *The Cowra Breakout*.\(^{469}\)

We can see here some of the tensions associated with the firm’s ideals of comprehensivism and collaboration—in enforcing a posture of corporate authorship, the weight of individual contributions could easily be improperly acknowledged.

\(^{468}\) Denny Lawrence, interview by author, September 2017; Lex Marinos, interview by author, August 2017.

\(^{469}\) Gibson, interview by author.
Lawrence particularly emphasised his contribution to the story construction, in identifying English cricketer Douglas Jardine as the series protagonist, and developing the character of his fiancée Edith, who became the series’ narrator.\textsuperscript{470} Though Schultz and Ogilvie had been with the project from the beginning (as was now standard practice at the company) and received story credits, their work was probably mainly in the nature of feedback. According to Lawrence, Hayes came late as a writer to the series, taking on some of the departed Caswell’s scripts.\textsuperscript{471} In these accounts—as in Hannant’s on \textit{Mad Max 2}—a picture emerges of Hayes as often a rewriter and script editor, rather than conceptual lead. Lawrence recalled that Hayes was particularly enthusiastic about voiceover narration, embracing the idea that Edith narrate the series as a kind of elegy for the British Empire.

This production also reveals other aspects of the firm’s method. Notwithstanding the characteristic rushed schedule typical of 10BA production, the firm’s habits of preparation are evident in Miller’s request that directors storyboard their work in advance, with one of their in-house storyboard artists, Ty Bosco—archival material shows clearly that storyboards were prepared for nearly the entirety of the series. Some real-life participants were again consulted, where possible—actor Gary Sweet met with Don Bradman\textsuperscript{472}—though to a lesser degree than on \textit{The Dismissal}. Collaboration was achieved not just at the level of writing and performance, but also to some extent across the direction. Although the firm did not necessarily lay down stylistic edicts, Lawrence, Marinos, Schulz, and Ogilvie were in contact with each other, and their work was then mediated through returning cinematographer Dean Semler (and second unit cinematographer Andrew Lesnie). Scheduling facilitated additional cross-pollination of directorial influence; for the shooting of parts of the cricket matches, filming was organised by location, and so different episodes by different directors were shot in succession over portions of the same day. Schultz, recalling this process in a later oral history, said that he would normally prefer an uninterrupted rapport between a director and their performers, but that a piecemeal

\textsuperscript{470} In writing Edith, Lawrence had been responding to Kennedy’s desire to find a hook for the “midwestern housewife” in the audience. Lawrence, interview by author.

\textsuperscript{471} Lawrence, interview by author; Marinos, interview by author.

\textsuperscript{472} Curtis, 70
schedule was okay in this instance\textsuperscript{473}—evidence, I take it, that the company’s ensemble approach was operating smoothly. Schultz also described the collaboration among writers and directors as refreshing and exciting, and a contrast to the typical isolation of filmmaking.\textsuperscript{474}

The prospectus issued for \textit{Bodyline}—which I have already discussed—suggests that the project was largely funded through 10BA, continuing the run of indirectly subsidised production that defined the firm’s decade. However, media reports from just prior to \textit{Bodyline}’s production state that it had also received some direct subsidy from the AFC, out of a special $5 million fund administered by its chairman Phillip Adams.\textsuperscript{475} This exposes, again, the complexity of the company’s overall relationship with government intervention in the industry—whatever Miller or Kennedy’s feelings about that intervention, it still defined the ground on which their firm operated.

On July 17, 1983, during the pre-productions of \textit{Bodyline} and \textit{Cowra} (and with a third \textit{Mad Max} in planning), Kennedy lost control of his Bell JetRanger helicopter while on a joyride with a young neighbour, and crashed into Lake Burragorang in the Blue Mountains.\textsuperscript{476} Conditions were cold and foggy, and rescue crews were unable to sight the pair until the following morning. Kennedy died in the night.\textsuperscript{477} At the funeral in Melbourne, Graham Burke eulogised him as “Australia’s first truly international film maker”.\textsuperscript{478} Kennedy was the cofounder of the firm, and Miller’s longtime closest collaborator, so his death opened the possibility of a drastic upheaval in the internal organisation of the company. But the transition to a post-Kennedy period seems to have been orderly. Miller later recalled throwing himself into activity in response.\textsuperscript{479}

By early August, the US trade paper \textit{Variety} was already reporting reassurances that

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\textsuperscript{473} Schultz, interview by Pam Willis Burden.
\textsuperscript{474} Carl Schultz and Geoff Burton, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 368688, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{475} Costa Bosi, “Film Tax Plan Still the Most Generous in the World,” \textit{Australian}, October 11, 1983.
\textsuperscript{478} “Many Mourn Top Film Producer,” \textit{Herald}, July 26, 1983.
\textsuperscript{479} Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
\end{flushleft}
Kennedy Miller was still “an operational banner”, and that Miller and Hayes would fill Kennedy’s absence.\textsuperscript{480} Hayes had been credited as producer as well as writer on \textit{The Dismissal}, and he continued to fill one or both of these roles on every other Kennedy Miller production for the remainder of the decade. Also assuming greater responsibility was company accountant Douglas Mitchell, who had been hired by Kennedy, spent two years as his protégé, and been given an executive producer credit on \textit{Bodyline}. Mitchell now assumed oversight of the financial matters that had been Kennedy’s responsibility.\textsuperscript{481}

\textbf{Stability — The Cowra Breakout}

Production of Kennedy Miller’s third miniseries, \textit{The Cowra Breakout}, also displays the tendencies that define its method, now well-established at the firm. Chris Noonan joined as a writer–director on this project, alongside the returning Phillip Noyce; they had both been among the inaugural AFTRS directing graduates in 1973. Noonan’s recruitment came through an invitation from Miller, who had seen his graduating film, to participate in an actor–director workshop at the Metro.\textsuperscript{482} For Noonan, \textit{Cowra} involved a year of preparatory work; it began first as a speculative endeavour, and then, once greenlit, involved successive periods of research, story development, script breakdowns, and writing. Noonan and others, including returning researcher and now writer Sally Gibson, took a fact-finding trip to Japan, where they interviewed former Cowra POWs. Noonan described the development process on this series as being a group activity of exploring the historical subject and discussing how to organise it into dramatic form. Writers were not assigned particular episodes until late in the process, to prevent them from developing preferences and pet ideas. Creative decisions were reached through consensus. As Noonan saw it, being involved as writer–director meant that “problems of interpretation” in the material had already been encountered and solved by the time of filming, thereby minimising

\textsuperscript{480} “Kennedy-Miller Still an Operational Banner,” \textit{Variety}, August 10, 1983.
\textsuperscript{481} Miller, interview by David Stratton.
\textsuperscript{482} Chris Noonan, interview by Kari Hanet, September 6, 1990, Oral History Collection, 381140, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
creative conflicts. Only a few issues were ever settled unilaterally by Miller or Hayes—Miller, at this time, was largely hands-off, and preoccupied with the oncoming Beyond Thunderdome.

Rehearsal workshops were staged, as was now habitually a part of the company’s preparatory activities. An archived schedule for The Cowra Breakout workshop, held in a Darlinghurst studio in 1984, gives an overview of the kinds of activities that took place. The schedule includes film screenings of The Overlanders (Harry Watt, 1946) and The Rats of Tobruk (Charles Chauvel, 1944), as well as World War II documentary and propaganda works including Damien Parer and Ken G. Hall’s Kokoda Front Line! (1942), the Cinesound short How Japs Treated 8th Division Prisoners—Changi Prison (1945), and Ken Hall’s 100,000 Cobbbers (1942). Group acting exercises were planned, as well as weapons training, daily drill training, and lectures by former soldiers and POW guards. Performers also split off in groups to consult with directors Noyce or Noonan, or to receive other instruction—a few attended a special officer training session. Ogilvie’s workshopping methods continued to yield observable results on the production. Lead actor Alan David Lee later recalled having an on-set argument with Noyce over how his character would project authority within the context of a scene in which he prevents the beating of Japanese prisoners—this sounds like an outcome of Ogilvie’s ‘follow the leader’ exercises on power.

The structure of production permitted relative autonomy for creative principals and below-the-line crew. Noonan described having substantial authority within the hierarchy of the project, being involved not just in the writing and story development,

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483 Noonan, interview by Keryn Curtis.
484 Hall, who had been a mentor to Phillip Noyce on Newsfront, consulted on the project. Script drafts with Hall’s handwritten notes, dated March 1984, are archived at the NFSA. Hall’s comments mostly concern terms of expression used by the Australian soldier characters, and the sequencing of a love scene between the two leads. See: The Cowra Breakout Ep. 8: Script, with minor annotations, 357366, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
485 The Cowra Breakout Script, Actor’s Workshop, May 16, 1984, 731311, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
486 Lee, interview by Keryn Curtis.
but also in casting, scheduling, crew selection, and location selection.\textsuperscript{487} Editor Henry Dangar recalled that Kennedy Miller was unusually close-mouthed about budgets in comparison with other producers;\textsuperscript{488} he never knew his budget on \textit{Cowra}, but simply tried to proceed responsibly, and work until told to stop. Despite this ambiguity, Dangar describes the production as well planned, and recalls that unexpected expenses were minor.\textsuperscript{489} Production designer Owen Williams, in similar terms, said that the firm evinced careful thought and planning in its productions, and understood its budgets well.\textsuperscript{490}

As Gibson described it, her experience of the firm at this time was one of intense political and creative drive, defined by the youthful ambition of its personnel and an iconoclastic stance enabled by the financial cushion of \textit{Mad Max}.\textsuperscript{491} But it is also evident that by the time of \textit{Cowra} there were certain regularities of production in place at Kennedy Miller, including relatively stable procedures in writing and development. These regularities were also associated with a culture of collaboration and collectivism. Just as Kennedy Miller actors and crew were encouraged to egolessly see their parts within the ‘world’ of the project, so writers and directors at the company were expected to share and work toward an overall vision, rather than engaging in territorial behaviour. Hayes told Murray that from his first days with the company he was never permitted to be possessive over any elements in the scripts he was writing: “Ideas were things to be put up and assessed. Who they came from didn’t matter.”\textsuperscript{492}

\textsuperscript{487} Noonan, interview by Keryn Curtis.
\textsuperscript{488} Editor Richard Francis-Bruce, similarly, described Kennedy Miller as keeping financial matters close to its chest. Richard Francis-Bruce and Owen Williams, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 267679, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{489} Henry Dangar, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 267188, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{490} Richard Francis-Bruce and Owen Williams, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 267679, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{491} Gibson, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{492} Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, 46-47.
This valuation of the ‘world’ of the project over the egos of its creators—of the group over the individual—reflects Miller’s belief in collaborative filmmaking. The culture of collectivism stems from Miller and Kennedy, who as founders of the company set the terms of its conduct. But it was not expressed as top-down control. Although participating closely as a director on The Dismissal, Miller operated only as a producer on Bodyline and Cowra, and all miniseries from then on. Some evidence of his managerial style can be seen in a handful of archived memos from Bodyline. In one, Miller offers casual and broad guidance on achieving the correct period look for the series, noting that a muted palette would also assist in achieving certain special effects in post-production.\(^493\) In another, Miller makes proposals for ways in which budgetary resources might be distributed across the length of Bodyline so that lavishly mounted scenes early on establish a sense of high production value, while later scenes can be produced more economically.\(^494\) A third memo, sent to teams on both Bodyline and The Cowra Breakout, advises them to view John Ford’s How Green Was My Valley and observe its economy of camera set-ups, dialogue, and sets: “If anyone needs any inspiration about how to do things right, please refer to this fantastic film…There is not one wasted gesture.”\(^495\) Though not obviously of decisive importance, these memos show Miller’s managerial style as permissive and informal—in keeping with his collaborative ideals.

Production designer Owen Williams said that Miller’s style was of “one who plants a seed”\(^496\)—his requests as a producer were mediated through group discussion, and usually proved valuable. Assistant director Phillip Hearnshaw described how Miller generated an atmosphere of inclusiveness around him. Those inside the circle were

\(^{493}\) Memo from George Miller re. Costumes of Main Cast and Extras, undated, in Bodyline Scripts, Drafts, Shooting, Storyboards etc., 0005360, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
\(^{494}\) Memo from George Miller re. Tight Budget and the 'Val Leuton' (sic) Technique, August 29, 1983, in Bodyline Scripts, Drafts, Shooting, Storyboards etc., 0005360, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
\(^{495}\) Memo from George Miller re. 'How Green Was My Valley', September 7, 1983, in Bodyline Scripts, Drafts, Shooting, Storyboards etc., 0005360, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
\(^{496}\) Owen Williams, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 461718, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
listened to, irrespective of their titled role or formal position in any one production. Editor Richard Francis-Bruce remarked that Kennedy Miller would listen to the contribution of a cleaner, if it were good.\footnote{Richard Francis-Bruce, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 0267680-0003, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.} Noonan similarly described Miller as a benevolent but distant overseer on the television work, contributing thoughts to the scripting process, but being hands-off during the actual production—"no despot", but a paternal figure, with Kennedy Miller as his family.\footnote{Noonan, interview by Keryn Curtis.} These accounts are consistent with Miller’s interview with Murray in \textit{Back of Beyond}, where he says that the company does not practise ‘autocratic’ leadership, that conflicts are typically forestalled by developing a unity of vision from the start of a project—Ogilvie’s ‘world’—and that disagreements are typically yielded amicably to whoever has the stronger conviction.\footnote{Miller, interview by Scott Murray, 39-40.} Williams, comparing his experience at Kennedy Miller to his time with other producers, said that Kennedy Miller are “real filmmakers” who “understand the structure of filmmaking”, and are experienced, knowledgeable and engaged in the process at all departmental levels.\footnote{Williams, interview by Keryn Curtis.} Phillip Hearnshaw, an assistant director who crewed on the television production in this time, recalled that ‘typical’ crew issues did not occur on Kennedy Miller projects. Whereas other work environments felt disjointed, at Kennedy Miller everybody was “pointed in the same direction”; support, time and space for introspection was available; anyone could contribute to discussion; and the atmosphere was one of vibrancy, commitment, and high standards—“if we failed it was our own fault”.\footnote{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.}

Still, it is also clear that the ideal of comprehensivist individuals working in unison had to be enforced and regulated by the company. Though the company could appear egalitarian and unstratified, there was a clear power centre. Interviewed by Murray in \textit{Back of Beyond}, Hayes acknowledges that the company was sometimes aggressive in its supersession of individual authority, and that effective collaboration requires a catalyst; but he claimed also that the environment is exciting and
supportive to those with the right attitude.\textsuperscript{502} So there was a kind of trade-off involvement in the attainment of comprehensivism and collectivism. Recollections of workers at Kennedy Miller in the 1980s, and later, show a keen sense of shared purpose and energy, but also reveal demanding conditions. Gibson, in her interview with me, described her experience at the company as being infused with a great deal of youthful energy, where very demanding workloads were balanced against good pay, a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian atmosphere, and her own sense of idealistic purpose.\textsuperscript{503} Editor Richard Francis-Bruce recalled that Kennedy Miller projects “demand an awful lot of you”, but that the company demonstrates fidelity to those workers who “give it their all”.\textsuperscript{504} Editor Henry Dangar said that Kennedy Miller “doesn’t suffer fools”, but is “loyal to people who are loyal to them”.\textsuperscript{505} Compatibility with its method was obviously of central importance to Kennedy Miller in its selection of personnel; Noonan was recruited after his participation in a company workshop. When individuals proved subsequently to be a poor fit—as with writers Blair, Caswell, and Allen—the firm showed no scruples in sacking them. The Kennedy Miller method is in this sense complex in its power dynamics, combining an unstratified collectivism with strong central authority, in which individuals were granted significant creative autonomy only by suborning themselves to the group.

**Closer Ties with Hollywood—*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, *The Witches of Eastwick*, and *Dead Calm***

The miniseries work, now firmly established at Kennedy Miller, represents only part of its output in the 1980s. The firm’s feature film production slate also continued, even picking up added momentum from the writers and directors introduced on the television work. The company’s now-established method of production, on its face, lends itself most effectively to miniseries production: ambitious, multi-part projects, requiring the coordination of multiple writers and directors. Miller even told Murray

\textsuperscript{502} Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, 47.
\textsuperscript{503} Gibson, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{504} Francis-Bruce, interview by Keryn Curtis.
\textsuperscript{505} Dangar, interview by Keryn Curtis.
that the firm’s feature films “tend to be less collaborative and much more the work of the directors.” 506 But the difference was a matter of degree. We have already seen that the impetus for the method emerged from the production of Mad Max, and its core tendencies continued to be visible on Kennedy Miller feature work throughout the 1980s.

The two-sided production policy also proceeded apace. While the miniseries remained focused on Australian national themes, the feature work continued its outward-looking sensibility, now evincing even closer ties to the Hollywood industry. In this respect, the company was displaying an important strategic flexibility. In the latter part of the 1980s, the industry growth spurt propelled by 10BA eased off, as the government began to successively reduce the value of the available tax concession. Though it had benefited from these new conditions, Kennedy Miller looked back ambivalently on the effects of indirect subsidy. Miller saw it as “debilitating” for the industry at large: the influx of financial operatives brought along a subtle corruption; bad films were financed by indifferent producers, and staffed by well-remunerated crews who had no affinity for the project; and the overall surge in bad product cruelled the reputation of the industry. 507 Hayes, commenting on the 1986 reduction of the concession to 120 per cent, said approvingly that he expected the change to sort a lot of people out of the industry. 508 Other significant production firms, including Roadshow Coote and Carroll and McElroy and McElroy, were learning to bypass local funding and deal with overseas distributors 509—a trend that would become more prominent in the next decade. Kennedy Miller’s ties with Hollywood, and the international finance available there, kept it apart from some of the damaging pressures of the 10BA system, and positioned it for a time when the concessions might no longer be available.

506 George Miller, interview by Scott Murray, in Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1988), 42.
507 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome demonstrates these aspects of Kennedy Miller’s identity. The film advances even further than the prior two Mad Max films into an internationalist, Hollywood, ‘blockbuster’ aesthetic. The firm recruited an American star, Tina Turner, to anchor the film opposite Mel Gibson. An established musician rather than experienced actor, Turner represented a marketable element for international audiences, and released a tie-in single, “We Don’t Need Another Hero (Thunderdome).” Rather than using 10BA, as it had on Mad Max 2, Kennedy Miller collected the film’s substantial budget (probably around $13 million, the largest in Australia up to that time) largely from US studio Warner Bros., with some contribution from Kennedy Miller itself.510

Warner Bros, like Ten, was a cooperative partner. Miller had final cut, and recalled receiving ample studio support.511 As Mark Lamprell, who directed making-of documentaries on Bodyline and Cowra for Network Ten, described in an interview, Kennedy Miller existed in a rarefied environment of support and possibility. The attitude at Ten, Lamprell recalled, was to hold the company “in awe” and simply let it do its thing. Lamprell also directed a Thunderdome documentary produced in-house by Kennedy Miller. When circumstances required its schedule for completion to be suddenly accelerated, Hayes had the idea of recruiting Turner to provide voiceover narration; Lamprell was therefore immediately sent on a whistle-stop trip to Los Angeles to record her there, and Hayes drafted the narration while he was on the plane. Work at the company did not proceed on a logic of economic rationalism: as Lamprell saw it, the company’s core commitment was to get the best creative outcome, whatever that required. “I think it was a self-creating thing as well,” Lamprell said. “Because they had that attitude, they made better products. Because they made better products, they had better resources to have that attitude.”512

Core tendencies of the company’s method, having been formalised on the TV work, were carried over to Thunderdome—most obviously when Miller brought Ogilvie on

510 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
511 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
512 Mark Lamprell, interview by author, March 2018.
to the project in the position of co-director. The script is credited to Hayes and Miller alone; Miller had the story concept, and then fleshed it out with Hayes.\(^{513}\) Rehearsals with actors helped determine the final composition of the script. Ogilvie held extensive workshopping sessions with the large contingent of child actors; Miller and Hayes attended, and adopted dialogue based on the kids’ improvisations.\(^{514}\)

Accounts differ about the division of labour between the directors. Speaking to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Miller said:

> It wasn’t that I did the action scenes, and George, who has a theatre background, worked with the actors, or anything like that. We worked almost exclusively together. In the action scenes, it was very efficient to have two directors. During the chase, for example, he’d be off working with the train, or with the aircraft, and I’d be with the cars. It was particularly helpful when we were working with a multiple camera set-up. It really was a very efficient way to work.\(^{515}\)

This idea of an equal partnership is contradicted somewhat in an interview Ogilvie gave to David Stratton, where he indicates that he saw himself as subordinate to Miller—working on actor’s workshops and the script, but counting that Miller would take over on set, except for the few occasions when they split into separate units.\(^{516}\) In *Simple Gifts*, Ogilvie describes taking the lead in directing the narrative strand involving the tribe of lost children, while Miller worked on the action sequences and car chases—though Ogilvie does recall being invited to direct a portion of the final chase sequence.\(^{517}\) Ogilvie’s comments enable some understanding of the difference of degree in collaboration between the film and television work. On the miniseries, multiple directors could work together with parity, albeit across separate

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513 Miller, interview by Paul Byrne.
516 Ogilvie, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 368544, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
episodes. But as co-director on his features, Miller would be first among equals. Ogilvie later wrote that he worked in awe of Miller, who appeared able to keep the entire complex production in his head. Ogilvie concluded that he wasn’t suited to big films, and *Thunderdome* marks his last credit with Kennedy Miller.\(^{518}\)

After *Thunderdome*, the firm’s ties to Hollywood continued to deepen, as Miller went to the US to make his subsequent feature film, *The Witches of Eastwick*. Whether the film can be identified as a ‘Kennedy Miller’ project is ambiguous. It did not go through the typical Kennedy Miller pre-production process: Miller was brought on as a director-for-hire by the producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters, and the script, by playwright Michael Cristofer, had already been developed by the studio, Warner Bros., before Miller arrived. Miller used at least one recurring collaborator in editor Richard Francis-Bruce, but his desire to hire Dean Semler as cinematographer was stymied by a union dispute, and Vilmos Zsigmond shot the film.\(^{519}\) Reflecting Miller’s feeling that the final product was not really a ‘George Miller film’, and that he was simply loaned from his own production company, the possessive credit on *Eastwick* reads “A Kennedy Miller Film”.\(^{520}\)

Miller’s later descriptions of his unhappy experience on this production show how deeply entrenched the Kennedy Miller method was in his filmmaking practice. He said that the process on *Eastwick* was

the antithesis of Kennedy Miller. If you were collaborative it opened a floodgate; if you were polite it was misconstrued as weakness. So that you couldn’t get anything done unless you became a tyrant, and I became tyrannical. I learnt that Hollywood rewards you for bad behaviour, so the more you spit the dummy, the more attention you get. It’s true. And then you enjoy being like a child again.\(^{521}\)

\(^{518}\) Ogilvie, interview by Kari Hanet.  
\(^{519}\) Miller, interview by David Stratton.  
\(^{520}\) Miller, interview by David Stratton.  
\(^{521}\) Lynden Barber, "George Miller's Big Mystique," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 23, 1993
He characterised his experience with male lead Jack Nicholson as the best he has had with an actor, but had problems dealing with Cher, whom he saw as unwilling to work in an ensemble mode—a style he by now expected of his personnel. Having enjoyed working with his Zone crew, Miller left staffing decisions to others while he worked on the script, and later had regrets about the calibre of his collaborators. He later said that he made a mistake by not populating the crew with people he knew, and by not being a producer and thereby having control over the production finances. He left the project with an intensified commitment to protecting his contractual rights, especially final cut, and to examining closely all the personnel—“from the cameraman to the coffeemaker”—he brought on to his projects. Having now made four features and one episode of television within a ten-year span, Miller decided to take a hiatus from directing. He was concerned, he said, that his films would grow repetitive unless he took an opportunity to step back and survey the media landscape.

Kennedy Miller’s final feature production in the 1980s was Dead Calm. The literature review has already discussed some of the critical responses to this film’s internationalist, ‘trans-Pacific’ aesthetic. The firm itself was hardly shy of announcing its intentions in this area; Hayes described it explicitly in the press as a film “for the international market”. Calm was directed by Noyce—in his sole Kennedy Miller feature, after which he moved on to Hollywood work—who initiated the project, having been given a copy of Charles Williams’ 1963 book Dead Calm by an

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522 Cher, reflecting on this relationship in a different light, has told a story about being called up by Miller around her 40th birthday, and being told that she was too old and not sexy enough to be in the film. Evan Real, "Cher Recalls the Time Jack Nicholson Called Her 'Too Old, Not Sexy'," Hollywood Reporter, September 20, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/cher-jack-nicholson-he-called-me-old-not-sexy-1135992.

523 Miller, interview by David Stratton.


526 Miller, interview by David Stratton.

527 Noyce and Hayes also worked for a time on a planned feature follow-up to Dead Calm, an adventure romance set at the end of WWII. See: Neil Jillett, "A Vision of Contentment," Age, May 20, 1989.
American producer friend. Rights were secured from the estate of Orson Welles, who had mounted a never-completed adaptation called *The Deep*. Welles’ partner Oja Kodar was persuaded to sign over the rights on the basis that Kennedy Miller was a “maverick” non-Hollywood entity and would produce a non-Hollywood version of the story—ironic, given the film’s style, but not entirely inaccurate, given the firm’s ambiguous national identity. According to the film’s May 1986 prospectus, the project was budgeted at $10.4 million, $9.9 million of which was raised through 10BA—the other $500,000 being non-eligible expenditure underwritten by Kennedy Miller—with an agreement that on completion Warner Bros. would immediately pay US$3.5 million to BT Australia (issuer of Kennedy Miller investment prospectuses), which would then pay AU$5 million to the investors. Kennedy Miller would then receive 80 per cent of the film’s gross proceeds, after the WB advance.

Interviewed by Scott Murray, Miller describes *Dead Calm* as not really a collaborative project in the way of the firm’s miniseries. And yet the corporate hand of the company is perceptible in the implementation of its method on the production. The production team undertook a characteristic period of research, development, and workshopping/rehearsal, as shown in memoranda archived at the NFSA. A rowing and naval induction program was developed for star Sam Neill, whose character John Ingram was a former Navy man, including casual and formal lunches with serving naval officers. A complete chronological history of the character’s naval career was also developed. When Nicole Kidman was cast as John’s wife Rae, she received poise and diction training to ameliorate the significant age disparity between her and Neill, enabling her to act older, and a conversation was scheduled for her

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529 Phillip Noyce, interview by Margaret Pomeranz, 1989, Oral History Collection, 368549, National Film and Sound Archive.
530 *Dead Calm* Prospectus, May 12, 1986, 482054, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
531 Miller, interview by Scott Murray, 42.
532 Memo from Gabrielle Dunn re. Sam Neill’s Proposed Naval Program, April 29, 1987, *Dead Calm* Manuscript, 354696, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
with a real younger wife of a naval officer. A Kennedy Miller employee also had a consultation with a neuropsychologist at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, to discuss the mental health of the unstable antagonist, Hughie Warriner (played by Billy Zane), and these notes, including a full character biography, were also circulated in the production.

Hayes wrote the script, incorporating feedback from the other members of the production. Of the archived memoranda for this production, particularly notable is a letter from Zane to Hayes, where the actor gives a dense reading of the mythological subtext of the film, and a sensitive discussion of the scene in which his character rapes Rae Ingram. Evidence of the collaborative allowances the company offered to its actors is found in Zane’s sign-off: “I may have taken the invitation to ‘a work in progress’ a little too seriously, but I’ve never had the opportunity to have been stirred by as many talented minds on a project before.” Later descriptions of the filming reveal that Zane was encouraged to continue working in a collaborative style—moored on a boat some distance from the rest of the production, Zane and his co-stars were given a camcorder and permitted to improvise ancillary scenes to the sequence that outlines Hughie’s backstory.

The *Dead Calm* prospectus gives a plot description that hews fairly closely to the events in the completed product, except that the two additional characters from Williams’ book are included, whereas the final film prunes the cast of characters down from five to three. This shows that writing was still ongoing as the film entered into production, as had frequently been the case on the firm’s 1980s projects. A May 1987 memo from Noyce to Hayes and Mitchell also testifies to this: Noyce requests that a completed script—even one without finished dialogue—be made available for

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534 Notes on discussion with Kerry Harris, *April 15, 1987, Dead Calm Manuscript*, 354696, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
535 Assorted files, *Dead Calm Manuscript*, 354696, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
536 Letter to Terry Hayes from Billy Zane, *April 25, 1987, Dead Calm Manuscript*, 354696, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
his final two weeks of preparation and a coming workshop.\textsuperscript{538} Scripting, casting, and storyboarding all took place simultaneously.\textsuperscript{539} This documentary evidence suggests that even when carrying out its habits of ‘excessive preparation’, the firm did not necessarily settle all key creative decisions prior to production – it was not uncommon, especially during the 10BA era, for projects to begin filming with key elements still in flux.

Optical effects technician Roger Cowland recalled that for \textit{Dead Calm} effects meetings took place at the Metro (not at the Colourfilm laboratory where he worked, as was typical of other productions), and included editor Francis-Bruce, post-production supervisors Marcus D’Arcy and Claire O’Brien, as well as Noyce, Miller and Mitchell.\textsuperscript{540} This suggests not only the ongoing utility of the Metro to the firm’s operations, but also the participatory group culture in play among workers on the production.

Noyce is given the sole directing credit, and yet—as on the firm’s other productions—the firm’s corporate authorship can be said to supersede any individual authority. Noyce described a “cross-fertilization of ideas” between production staff on the film.\textsuperscript{541} A 1986 \textit{Variety} article states that Miller could be co-directing the film, with an unnamed partner.\textsuperscript{542} In the event, Miller returned from \textit{Eastwick} in time to shoot second unit. He later claimed, in press interviews, to have had enormous fun tailoring his work to Noyce’s: “You won’t find any so-called George Miller shots there, because I was trying to fit everything into director Phil Noyce’s vision.”\textsuperscript{543} But other sources describe an entire action sequence—in which Neill is menaced by a shark—that was shot by Miller and then cut for being too tonally unlike the rest of the film.\textsuperscript{544}

\textsuperscript{538} Memo from Phillip Noyce, May 2, 1987, \textit{Dead Calm} Manuscript, 354696, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
\textsuperscript{539} Noyce, interview by Brian McFarlane.
\textsuperscript{540} Roger Cowland, interview by author, September 2017.
\textsuperscript{541} Noyce, interview by Brian McFarlane.
\textsuperscript{543} Tom Ryan, "Relieving an Obsession," \textit{Herald}, May 23, 1989
\textsuperscript{544} Sam Neill, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465208, recording, National Film and Sound Archive; Ingo Petzke, \textit{Phillip Noyce}, 166-67.
The completed film also includes an epilogue not shot by Noyce, added at the request of Warner Bros., which wanted a more cathartic substitution for Noyce’s original, ambiguous ending. This sequence, in which Hughie is definitively dispatched with a flare-gun shot to the head, was developed by Miller and Hayes, and storyboarded by Miller. It is unclear who actually acted as director on production for this sequence, but in his biography, Noyce notes that this epilogue reflects a “different directorial sensibility.”

Continuous Production—*Vietnam*, *The Festival of Australian Films*, *Sportz Crazy*, *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, and *Bangkok Hilton*

By 1985, conditions were firmly in place for Kennedy Miller to be producing on a continuous basis. The company had its own (modest) plant facility; a network of relationships with corporate partners; and a rosy reputation both locally and internationally—financing production, even across two different media, was reportedly a matter of making a few phone calls. The firm’s method of production was now less a factor of the personal attitudes of its principals, and more of a formalised system with established procedures and operations, transferrable and implementable from project to project. 1985 to 1989 would be the busiest single period of the firm’s history: in addition to *Eastwick* and *Dead Calm*, it made three miniseries, four telemovies, and a documentary series.

Kennedy Miller’s next miniseries production was *Vietnam*: broadcast in 1987 but in development since at least 1985, the year when Keryn Curtis, researching her honours thesis, had attended a story conference. She describes a team-based process characteristic of the company’s method, similar to the writer’s room approach of American television writing. Storylines for the show were plotted out and ‘broken’ collectively at scripting conferences, drawing closely on the research

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545 Ryan, "Relieving an Obsession."
547 Ryan, "Relieving an Obsession"; Enker, "Cross-over and Collaboration."
collected for the project. Once the overarching narrative had been planned, structured, and segmented, individual episode drafts were then assigned to particular writers, who would begin by producing a scene-by-scene breakdown of each episode, which would then be evaluated and adjusted in conference with the others. Dialogue would typically be written last, and the final drafts were scrutinised and adjusted again by a script editor, a role usually fulfilled by Hayes.

Noonan returned as writer–director on Vietnam alongside John Duigan, an established feature filmmaker who had once been associated with the Carlton Ripple—Duigan had known Miller and Kennedy around Melbourne, and then been recommended to the firm by Noyce. Writing is credited to Noonan, Duigan, and Hayes, with additional story credits for Noyce and Francine Finnane. As Finnane described it in an oral history, the “bare bones” of Vietnam were worked out within the firm before Noonan and Duigan were recruited; the assembled team then broke the story and divided the episodes through script conference discussions. In a later oral history, Duigan recalled his time at Kennedy Miller as his “happiest period professionally”, because it was such a secure place to work. Financial matters were well worked out, and generous funds were available, thanks to Mitchell’s support. Though Miller was often distant—in this period he was working on Eastwick and Dead Calm—he took an “avuncular” view of what was going on, and offered observations and advice when he was available. Warren Coleman, who later worked on the two Happy Feet films, appeared in Vietnam in a minor role; in an interview with me Coleman described a typical-sounding Kennedy Miller workshop for the production, which included screenings of documentaries about the Vietnam war and era, and packets of historical material from researchers.

Duigan became a fixture at the company for the next six years. He followed his work on the miniseries with the 1987 feature The Year My Voice Broke. This film represents something of an exception to the prevailing norms at the company. It was

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549 Finnane, interview by Keryn Curtis.
550 John Duigan, interview by Geoff Gardner, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 1114337, transcript, National Film and Sound Archive.
not developed in-house, under the aegis of the company’s method; Duigan had written it as a spec script titled *Reflections* and brought it to the firm, which exercised only minor creative oversight on the production. A modest coming-of-age drama, set in a small Australian town, it also represents a break the firm’s ‘two-sided’ policy of production, sharing none of the outward-looking aspects of its film work. This is explained by the film’s actual origin as a telemovie: one of four planned by the company, which together solicited funding under 10BA as a ‘Festival of Australian Films’,\(^{552}\) to be broadcast in time for the Australian Bicentennial in 1988. Duigan submitted *Reflections* on the understanding that if it were good enough it would be released as a theatrical film—a condition Miller and Mitchell then negotiated with Ten.\(^{553}\) Though the film was an aberrance within the firm’s overall strategy of production, as a strategic gamble the production can be viewed as a success. It achieved modest returns at the Australian box office, and won several AFI awards, including Best Film for producers Miller, Mitchell and Hayes, and Best Director and Original Screenplay for Duigan.

One particular aspect of its production is noteworthy: the film was shot not at the Metro or around Sydney, but on location in Braidwood, NSW. Keryn Curtis, who had by then completed her honours thesis on the company, visited the production and wrote an article on it for the *Canberra Times*. She reports that the project injected $400,000 into the Braidwood economy\(^{554}\)—a financial coup for a small town. Earlier Kennedy Miller location shoots, as for *Mad Max 2* in Broken Hill, must also have had salutary effects on the local economies, but the figure for Braidwood indicates the growing financial impact the company could have on external organisations and communities;\(^{555}\) this economic power would be a tool wielded by the company in future negotiations, becoming more and more potent as its productions became larger and larger.

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\(^{552}\) Kennedy Miller: A Package of Four Telemovies: Prospectus, June 3, 1986, Kennedy Miller Documentation, 467747, National Film and Sound Archive.

\(^{553}\) Duigan, interview by Geoff Gardner.


\(^{555}\) While the production was on, the town shop sold out of its store of Drizabone.
The three other telemovies produced as part of the “Festival of Australian Films” are *The Clean Machine*, a fictionalised narrative inspired by police corruption scandals in NSW, directed by Ken Cameron and written by Cameron, Terry Hayes, and Richard Mortlock; *The Riddle of the Stinson*, adapted from the real-life story of the rescue of survivors of a light plane crash in Queensland in 1937, directed by Noonan, and written by Tony Morphett; and *Fragments of War: The Story of Damien Parer*, written and directed by John Duigan. Duigan was offered this project after quickly finishing his work on both *Vietnam* and *The Year My Voice Broke*. Kennedy Miller already had a script on Damien Parer from another writer with whom they hadn’t been satisfied, and Duigan did a total rewrite, highlighting Parer’s Catholic values.

The narrative framing device for *Fragments of War* has Parer’s widow attending a retrospective of his newsreel work screening at the Metro Theatre. This is an intriguingly self-referential gesture from the company, and part of a modest thread that ran through its television work—as in a scene in *Vietnam* which dramatises the beginnings of government support for the film industry—in which Kennedy Miller self-consciously engages with Australian film history, while placing itself within that history.

At this time the company also made the eight-episode documentary series *Sportz Crazy*, initiated by Hayes, and hosted and narrated by Jack Thompson, who had just starred in *Riddle of the Stinson*. Credits for this programme are not available, but Mark Lamprell described working as a director, alongside Marcus D’Arcy—a jack of all trades at the company—and Kieran Finnane, the sister of Kennedy Miller writer and researcher Francine Finnane. As Lamprell described it, he, D’Arcy, and Finnane worked with a small research team for roughly six months in 1986, with some funding from Network Ten, then filmed around Australia through 1987, editing simultaneously, for roughly a year. Episodes were delivered in early 1988 and screened by Ten. No copies of *Sportz Crazy* appear to be extant, but documentation

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556 Of these telemovies, only *The Riddle of the Stinson* received a home video release, but copies of *Clean Machine* and *Fragments* are held at the NFSA.
557 Duigan, interview by Geoff Gardner.
558 Lamprell, interview by author.
preserved at the NFSA shows that the series focused on eccentric and unusual Australian sports, such as nude racing, the Blackrock stakes, the Longreach endurance ride, and “dwarf throwing”. The scripted narration is in an Australianist mode, consistent with the national themes of the miniseries, but rather more exaggerated. From the opening of Episode Six:

Most Australians are bushmen at heart—or at least some like to think they are. The funny thing is, you'll hear them say g’day in dozens of different accents. Italian, Russian, Indonesian, Lebanese, Chinese, and Greek. Australia is one of the most cosmopolitan nations on earth. And here there is one great equaliser—sport. Whether you’re short, tall, thin, fat, black or white: when you’re good at sport, you're Australian. You’re that bronzed Aussie in a battered Akubra hat, leaning against a gumtree. It is this legendary Australian with his dry sense of humour and healthy disregard for authority who challenges anything conventional—Especially when it comes to that national obsession—sport—and the more noble or traditional the sport, the more likely it will fall prey to his mischief.559

Also airing in 1988 was the ten-part miniseries *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, financed through 10BA—or at least a prospectus was issued—and directed by Michael Jenkins and John Power, who are also credited as writers alongside Morphett, Duigan, Alan Seymour, John Misto, and Hayes. Budgeted at $7.3 million, *The Dirtwater Dynasty* shot for 94 days in early 1987, including on location around Broken Hill.560 Morphett had sat on the committee of the Australian Writers’ Guild, which by the late 1980s regularly cautioned members about the conditions for writers at Kennedy Miller, and he provided additional insight about the company’s method in a 1988 *Sydney Morning Herald* interview. He Analysed the writing process to

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559 Sportz Crazy Publicity Material, undated, 0781472, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
560 The Dirtwater Dynasty Prospectus, date unknown, The Dirtwater Dynasty Documentation, 482068, National Film and Sound Archive; The Dirtwater Dynasty: Script, Shooting Schedules, Synopsis, Cast and Crew Lists, 0730382, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
newspaper reporters working on a breaking story: “Everyone is writing bits. Everyone’s on the phone getting hits and the subs are pulling it all together. It’s a total collaboration … We wrote and re-wrote and tore each other’s work apart and put it back together again … a genuine collaborative exercise.” Morphett, who shared with Hayes a background in reporting, found this familiar, but recognised that solitary-minded writers would find it discomforting.

In a 1990 article in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, Ina Bertrand later described *The Dirtwater Dynasty* as a “major shift” for the company: from history to fiction. The documentationist fidelity to history evident in *The Dismissal* had been present, though never to the same degree, in later works including *Bodyline* and *The Cowra Breakout*, which presented dramatised embellishments of carefully researched real events. Later the firm pursued a more obviously fictionalised narrative mode, in which projects were ‘inspired by’ real elements of Australian history, but their characters and events were fully invented. But Bertrand’s description of a major shift is inapt. *Riddle of the Stinson* and *Fragments of War* had both continued the ‘based on a true story’ style, and the supposed shift from history to fiction had really occurred earlier, in *Vietnam* and *The Clean Machine*. The *Dirtwater Dynasty* represents a development in style mostly because it embraces a register of high melodrama that had been absent in the more strictly realist earlier works. In all essential respects, the style of Kennedy Miller’s television work—nationalist Australian history-telling—remained intact across the 1980s.

The firm’s final miniseries was 1989’s *Bangkok Hilton*, a three-part work that reimagines the real-life Barlow–Chambers case, in which two Australian men were tried and executed in Malaysia for heroin trafficking, as a family melodrama in which a white Australian woman is framed and thrown into a Thai prison. Ken Cameron directed, returning after *The Clean Machine*, and Terry Hayes conceived the story and scripted, with some additional story work credited to Tony Morphett. Scripts were

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finalised in January and February 1989, and shooting took place over seven weeks, from late February to late May. An archived version of the script (with the working title *Tales of the South China Seas*) includes a voiceover from an unnamed sailor on a tramp-steamer, who recounts the story as it was told to him by one of its key players—an unused bookend structure that clearly displays Hayes’ and the company’s strong preference for direct-address voiceover as a narrative device.\(^{563}\)

Like *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, *Bangkok Hilton* has minimal basis in historical fact but is still wholly Australianist in nature. As the capstone work on the firm’s television run, *Bangkok Hilton* exemplifies the two components of Kennedy Miller’s nationalist project of representing Australian to itself. There is a depiction of the legacy of colonial English settlement, which provided the central threads of *The Dismissal*, *Bodyline*, and *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, as well as a depiction of the country’s geographical and cultural enmeshment in Asia, as seen in *Cowra* and *Vietnam*. It is really *Bangkok*, more than *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, that displays something of a development in the company’s television style; though centred on Australian characters and history, it takes place mostly internationally, in Thailand, and prominently features a recognisable international actor, Englishman Denholm Elliott, in a lead role. In this sense, the project reflects the internationalist approach of the firm’s feature work; and it was sold for broadcasting to Turner Broadcasting Services in the US. Though earlier miniseries has been sold to international markets—*The Dirtwater Dynasty* to RTL in Germany, and *Vietnam* to PBS in the US—the firm was supposed to have previously declined to modify its Australian television work to make it internationally palatable.\(^{564}\) The development in *Bangkok* reflects the declining efficacy of 10BA as a funding mechanism. Through the late 1980s, and onward into the 1990s, international pre-sales became increasingly central to the viability of Australian production. O’Regan cites *Bangkok* in particular as an example of a miniseries affected by the logic of international pre-sales in its choice of story


and location. More than any of the other television work, Bangkok shows how the ‘two sides’ of the company’s production policy were in fact unified at their core.

By this stage of the company’s history, it is possible to see the ensemble aspect of Kennedy Miller’s method in its full scope. The firm’s capacity to undertake continuous production appears contingent on its network of sustained relationships with recurring collaborators, most of whom were not employees at the company, but short-term contractors returning on a project-by-project basis. The tendency is particularly visible in its above-the-line credits, as in the turnover of Schultz and Ogilvie from The Dismissal to Bodyline, Noonan from Cowra to Vietnam to Stinson, and Duigan from Vietnam to Year My Voice Broke to Fragments of War. It is visible also in its recurring use of certain actors—Hugo Weaving returned after Bodyline for Dirtwater and Bangkok; and Nicole Kidman went from Vietnam to Dead Calm to Bangkok; both later returned as voice performers in Happy Feet. It is in this aspect, as a ‘house’ for prominent creatives, that the firm appears most like a studio operation. Hayes, in fact, explicitly conceived the starring role in Bangkok as a vehicle for Kidman, wanting to employ her services once more before her expected transition to a Hollywood career. In a press kit for this project, Kidman describes her relationship with the firm explicitly in terms of a studio–star association—“if it were the 1930s I’d be signed to them”.

However, equally significant was the recurring cohort of below-the-line crew members and technical personnel. Cinematographer Dean Semler went from Mad Max 2 to The Dismissal to Bodyline to Beyond Thunderdome to The Clean Machine to Dead Calm. Editor Richard Francis-Bruce went from The Dismissal to Bodyline to The Cowra Breakout to Beyond Thunderdome to The Witches of Eastwick to Dead Calm. Production designer Owen Williams went from The Dismissal to Bodyline to Vietnam to The Dirtwater Dynasty to Bangkok Hilton. Other significant recurring personnel, across various roles, include Graham ‘Grace’ Walker, Geoff Burton, Henry

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565 O’Regan, Australian National Cinema, 180.
566 Bangkok Hilton Press Information Kit, undated, in The Bangkok Hilton: Documentation, 410050, National Film and Sound Archive.
Dangar, Neil Thumpston, Robert Gibson, Roger Ford, Frans Vandenberg, Norma Moriceau, and Daphne Paris, among others. Marcus D’Arcy, a director on Sportz Crazy, has credits on Kennedy Miller productions that include editor, sound editor, producer, and post-production supervisor. Roger Savage, sound editor on Mad Max, worked on its two sequels, as well as Bodyline, Vietnam, The Clean Machine, and Dead Calm. Roger Cowland, an optical effects supervisor at the Colorfilm laboratory, worked on every Kennedy Miller feature from Mad Max through to Pig in the City, except only Mad Max 2. So there was, overall, a great consistency in the Kennedy Miller workforce from production to production. Although the more overt studio aspects of the company began to fade in the 1990s as the firm reduced production, and as projects fell more tightly under Miller’s control and the visible ‘ensemble’ personnel moved on, an equally significant degree of collectivity was still poised to continue, vested in the firm’s below-the-line networks.

Historically, the state of continuous production has been something of an economic imperative for firms such as Cinesound, because of the rolling cost of maintaining a studio plant with full-time staff. Kennedy Miller did not possess overheads to quite the same degree; in addition to Miller, Hayes, and Mitchell, its staff consisted of a small administrative core, numbering around twelve. It had no obligation to provide continuous employment to its technical and creative workers, who were largely hired on a contract basis. Continuous production at a firm like Ealing also helped management to economise on costs, offering lower salaries to employees in return for stability of work. It is not obvious that Kennedy Miller ever relied on such a trade-off, though the contract system also has its own obvious economies. Given this, continuous production was more of an optimal state for the firm, rather than a necessity. Though the end of continuous production after Bangkok Hilton was contingent on circumstances to be discussed in the next chapter, in this sense it was not evidently deleterious to the company’s fortunes or to its effectiveness as a producer.

The achievement of continuous production, even if only temporarily, was surely of overall benefit to the firm’s sustainability. Analyses of classical Hollywood cinema
often associate the value of its output with its enormous capacity as a production plant: quantity eventually yields systematised quality. In Australia, Ken Hall has written of the improvements in Cinesound’s ability to make films across its 1930s, as its creative and technical staff became more adept through practice. In this sense, the 1980s represent a long and intensive period of upskilling for Kennedy Miller. This also had benefits for the wider industry; many individuals who worked with the firm went on to high-profile or consistent careers in Australia and Hollywood. Although 10BA had adverse effects on the culture and quality of output of the Australian film industry, it has also been noted that the concessions stimulated a great deal of investment in the supply side of the industry, facilitating the development of Australia as a ‘backlot’ for offshore Hollywood productions—circumstances which will be discussed in the following chapter—and generally increasing its overall productive capacity.\(^{567}\) 10BA’s effect on Kennedy Miller’s operations is visible in similar terms. The upskilling underwritten by 10BA had long-term significance to the company’s fortunes, contributing to its ability to mount more logistically complex projects, and control higher budgets, in the blockbuster production that would dominate its output in the 1990s and 2000s.

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\(^{567}\) Alex Burns and Ben Eltham, "Boom and Bust in Australian Screen Policy: 10BA, the Film Finance Corporation and Hollywood's 'Race to the Bottom'," *Media International Australia*, no. 136 (2010): 103-18.
Chapter 4: 1990s—Redefining the Method

Introduction

The 1980s had been a productive and high-profile decade for Kennedy Miller, thanks primarily to 10BA's reshaping of Australia's screen funding paradigm, and to the company's adept management of its relations with external partners including Ten and Warner Bros. But though 10BA had created a production boom that had enhanced the industry's experience, skills, and productive capacity, its overall effects were not always beneficial. Miller saw that the financialisation of the industry was engendering a subtle corruption in film workers, while the glut of product represented a victory of quantity over quality.\(^{568}\) Meanwhile, as the professionalisation of the industry continued, the screen culture wing and its film societies and festivals went through difficult years; the Melbourne Film Festival entered into receivership in 1984. French and Poole write that the new commercialised industry no longer needed to feed off the energy of the film culture movement, which therefore shrank in response.\(^ {569}\) In Miller's view, this had social consequences—the nation's knowledge about its own screen heritage was being diminished.

The 1990s would come to represent a kind of turn in the firm's behaviour as an agent within the Australian industry. The end of 10BA had in a sense eliminated the financial incentives toward the 'Australian' production that had shaped its two-sided production policy. But though Australian content began to be diminished in the firm's output, it also began an intensified engagement with the Australian industry, which took the form of a posture of custodianship for local film culture and infrastructure.

\(^{568}\) George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\(^{569}\) Lisa French and Mark Poole, *Shine a Light: 50 Years of the Australian Film Institute*, The Moving Image 9 (St Kilda West: ATOM, 2009), 63.
Though the studio-style ensemble aspect that had marked the firm in the 1980s, enabled by its continuous television production, no longer held in this decade, Kennedy Miller was still an active production ‘house’, offering a base of operations to holdovers from the previous decade including Duigan and Noonan. It still possessed its network of recurring personnel, and even offered new opportunities to repeat employees such as editor Robert Gibson. All in all, even though its output was diminishing, its collective identity remained largely intact. But the exit of Hayes, along with broader shifts in the structure of the international film industries, also meant that the company’s production operations, over the course of the decade, swung back under Miller’s direct control.

In this chapter, I will outline the beginnings of the end of the firm’s studio-style period of organisation and its swing back to Miller, with *Flirting* (1990) and *Lorenzo’s Oil* (1992); the intensification of its commitment to transnational, big budget production, with *Babe* (1995); the emerging posture of responsibility for Australian film culture and industry, with *Video Fool for Love* (1996) and *40,000 Years of Dreaming* (1997), and the final leap into blockbuster production, with *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998). I will show how many core tendencies of the firm’s method of production persisted and evolved in this decade, even under altered organisational conditions, and that although some of the more visible members of the firm’s creative ensemble were cut loose, its below-the-line core remained in place. I will describe the firm’s move toward new production technologies, which would influence its expansion in the following decade. And I will contend that the firm’s developing interest in the structural health of the Australian industry was associated with a new understanding of how it could wield its weight in the industry. With a decade of success behind it, Kennedy Miller had now accumulated substantial political and economic capital. Its new focus on high-budget production would require it to exercise that power.

**End of an Era—*Flirting* and *Lorenzo’s Oil***
The 1980s in Australian television were later described as the Kennedy Miller ‘era’, thanks to the company’s extensive output in the miniseries format; toward the end of the decade, the firm had been awarded a special Logie Award for ‘Sustained Excellence’. This had been a period of expansion, professionalisation, and formalisation for the company—underwritten, to a significant degree, by the new funding paradigm of indirect subsidy. But the conditions which enabled this run of continuous production did not adhere beyond the turn of the decade, as the 10BA concessions were reduced and their value to investors more or less eliminated. Miniseries production across the industry fell off precipitously, from an average of nine per year in the 1980s down to an average of four.

However, the cessation of Kennedy Miller’s television production after 1989’s *Bangkok Hilton* does not appear to be a strategic retreat in reaction to these changed circumstances. Miniseries production was still ongoing in the industry, though it was now increasingly reliant on foreign pre-sales—which can hardly have been a concern to an organisation with Kennedy Miller’s level of experience with external partners, as the style and US pre-sale of *Bangkok Hilton* indicates. In fact, in 1990 Kennedy Miller was reportedly still contracted with Ten for a never-made miniseries called *Mandalay Bay*.

But the company’s relations with this network were souring. Rupert Murdoch left in 1987 and the broadcaster entered a sustained period of poor ratings and management upheaval; its parent company would go into receivership in late 1990. In press reports, Miller was dismissive of his firm’s former partner: he said the

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571 *Bangkok Hilton* Press Information Kit.
network had become “losers” in Murdoch’s absence, and though they had once
given Kennedy Miller licence to make bold television, now “[t]he last thing Ten can
afford to be is bold even if they knew how to be.” Despite the shifts of the financial
landscape, Kennedy Miller was still a prominent brand in television production. Ten’s
misfortune was an opportunity for its competitor Channel Nine, which Bond Media
had bought from the Packer family in the same year Murdoch left Ten, and whose
managing director Sam Chisholm was eager to improve the network’s faltering
drama slate. In May 1990, after Ten had publicly poached a slew of Nine’s
executives and newsreaders, Chisholm and Nine announced a ‘coup’ of their own: a
deal for Kennedy Miller to take control of Nine’s drama programming for a period of
six years, with a reported value to Kennedy Miller of $20 million each year.\footnote{576}

Reports on the structure of this deal are vague. Miller declared in the press that Nine
had offered a continuation of Murdoch’s licence to make “bold” television and said
that the network would provide wide economic and creative parameters for Kennedy
Miller’s work.\footnote{577} Nine’s then-director of drama, Alan Bateman, was reported in May to
be expected to retain his position, but in a June interview Hayes had his own
expectations: that Bateman would be required to work under him, or leave.\footnote{578} This
June Sydney Morning Herald report describes Kennedy Miller as poised at the cusp
of a very new kind of business structure. The company is reported to have spent
several weeks carefully contracting its new association with Nine so that it would
retain a separate corporate structure, along with the right to pursue its separate
international feature film projects. But its prospective authority over Nine’s drama
production is described as wide-ranging: the Herald reported that Hayes and Miller
were engaged in studying the network’s current drama production slate begun under
Bateman, reading scripts and evaluating the work\footnote{579} —which suggests a great deal
of creative authority on their part. Hayes said he expected Kennedy Miller to enter

\footnote{576} Oliver, "Nine out of Ten"; Boylen, "Nine Lures Ten's Top Producer."
\footnote{577} Tony Squires, "Kennedy Miller Moves Its Dramas to Nine," Sydney Morning Herald, May
30, 1990.
\footnote{578} Oliver, "Nine out of Ten."
\footnote{579} Oliver, "Nine out of Ten."
Nine like a “commando unit”, and that the new production slate would include miniseries, along with series, serials and sitcoms yet to be decided on. A later report describes key members of Nine’s drama unit moving from Nine’s premises into Kennedy Miller’s Metro offices.\textsuperscript{580}

But the deal was soon dissolved. Kerry Packer regained control of the network from Alan Bond in June 1990, and by September, Chisholm had moved on to Murdoch’s Sky network, and it appeared that his arrangement with Kennedy Miller was evaporating. Miller later claimed that Packer had disliked the autonomous terms of his network’s new partnership with the firm, and demanded too much creative control over their work.\textsuperscript{581} Kennedy Miller terminated the contract and began legal action against Nine, accusing the network of not complying with its obligations under their agreement. The matter was settled in Kennedy Miller’s favour by December 1991, though it took until September 1993 for the company to secure a claimed $8.1 million in damages through arbitration, and then until June 1994 for this sum to be upheld on appeal by the NSW Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{582} Further details on the deal emerged in reports on this legal conflict: Kennedy Miller was contracted for 24 hours of miniseries drama, with the power to determine the number and length of the miniseries, and was to receive an $850,000 licence fee from Nine per hour.\textsuperscript{583}

The dissolution of this deal also precipitated the end of Hayes’ time with Kennedy Miller. This time in the early 1990s also saw an overall “collapse” in Australian TV drama,\textsuperscript{584} so despite the firm’s strong prospects it is possible that Hayes saw diminished opportunity in the Australian industry. By early 1991, newspaper reports describe Hayes as having more or less “disappeared from sight” in Sydney to take on feature film work in the US.\textsuperscript{585} His final producer credit at Kennedy Miller is on

\textsuperscript{582} Ben Potter, "Nine Shares Soar on 28% Profit Lift," \textit{Age}, September 8, 1993.
Flirting, John Duigan’s follow-up to The Year My Voice Broke. Though this film was released in 1991, it is a tangible holdover from the company’s 1980s work. As with The Year My Voice Broke, Flirting did not go through the typical Kennedy Miller collaborative writing and development process—Duigan had actually written the script before that of the earlier film, which he conceived as a prequel. Duigan’s two features should therefore be seen an exception to the collaborative practices that mark the firm’s method of production, although they also reflect Kennedy Miller’s willingness to grant significant, if ultimately limited, creative latitude to personnel working under its umbrella. Flirting is also Duigan’s final credit with the company, although he continued to develop some never-made projects. Kennedy Miller later funded Duigan to write a script about a group of African refugees living in Marseille, but he and Miller could not agree on a finished draft. Like The Year My Voice Broke, Flirting is something of an anomaly within the overall scope of the firm’s film production strategy—although it is notable that after the modest success of the first film, Kennedy Miller secured the partnership of Warner Bros. on the sequel. The film is slightly more outward-looking in appearance; whereas Year was set in a recognisably Australian small town, the boarding-school setting of Flirting is more English in flavour, and has the added element of stardom in Nicole Kidman, who plays the film’s third lead role.

Media coverage from the time of Kennedy Miller’s contract with Nine reports that the company was still intending to produce films, but that most of its deals in place were for overseas productions. Barring two curios from later in the decade, Kennedy Miller’s film work for the remainder of its history would be strongly international in outlook. The first of these new works was Miller’s 1993 biographical drama Lorenzo’s Oil, his first feature as director after Eastwick. The film dramatises the true story of Michaela and Augusto Odone, who defied medical convention in their obsessive

586 Duigan also had a half-written plan for a third film, which would have seen Noah Taylor’s Danny in Paris in 1968. But Taylor aged out of the role, and the opportunity passed. John Duigan, interview by Geoff Gardner, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 1114337, transcript, National Film and Sound Archive.
587 Duigan, interview by Geoff Gardner.
research for a treatment for their son Lorenzo, who suffered from the unusual disorder adrenoleukodystrophy. As a fact-based, family crisis melodrama, *Lorenzo’s Oil* might appear to be something of a break with the action and suspense-focused *Dead Calm* and *Mad Max* films, which were previously the major tendency in the firm’s internationalist feature work. But it does have clear continuities with the fact-based drama of its miniseries, which had also developed a focus on family melodrama through *Vietnam*, *The Dirtwater Dynasty* and *Bangkok Hilton*. More elemental aspects of the firm’s narrative sensibility also remained intact. Miller had explicitly conceived the drama in mythological terms, and said as much when he was outlining his vision of the film to the Odones; Michaela later recalled that in her very first conversation with Miller he said, “I see your child as a mythological figure in the Joseph Campbell tradition.”

Unlike on *Eastwick*, it appears that on *Oil* Miller was able to keep much of the production work in-house, with his preferred collaborators. He co-scripted the film with Australian playwright Nick Enright, and produced the film with Mitchell. Daphne Paris, a long-time script supervisor and writer at the firm, is credited as an associate producer. Cinematography was by the Australian John Seale (who had shot Schultz’s *Goodbye Paradise*), with editing by frequent Kennedy Miller hands Richard Francis-Bruce and Marcus D’Arcy. Press reports describe Miller’s typically long and detailed pre-production and development phase, which focused on mastering the factual and scientific detail the story required. So although some aspects of the company’s structure and production capacity were going through significant changes in these years, the company retained its signature method of production, and its collective identity was still apparent in its retention of below-the-line personnel. However one significant change had occurred on this project, not in method but in means: *Lorenzo’s Oil* was backed not by Warner Bros, but by a new external partner, the US studio Universal, which provided the US$25 million budget. This new

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arrangement was conducted on similarly favourable terms to the old one; Miller secured a contractual right to the final cut.  

The end of the television work signalled the end of the production conditions that had most obviously incubated and sustained the Kennedy Miller method. But though these conditions no longer obtained, the company continued its internal operations in the same vein, and the underlying impulses and production philosophies still held firm. “[W]e’re not structured, we’re very organic in our approach,” Miller told the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1993. “Nobody knows where the directing and the producing and the writing stops and begins.” However, he also said, “that’s not to say there’s not some person in authority.”  

Creative authority in Kennedy Miller in the 1980s had appeared decentralised, spread first across Miller and Hayes, and then across the wide band of writers, directors, producers, and below-the-line crew and cast on its television work. But now, following the death of Kennedy and the departure of Hayes, singular authority came to rest more visibly in Miller’s hands; he became the central power on which the collaboration ultimately relied.  

Continuous production had now ceased, and the elapsed time between successive releases now grew, but the company was still continuously active in its ongoing development work. Much of this writing took place under Miller’s oversight, and his preference for ‘excessive preparation’ still held firm. Though many of the company’s 1980s productions had entered photography with writing still ongoing, Miller now proclaimed his stringent expectations about the steadiness of this scripts: “If it’s not on the page, it’s not going to be on the screen.”  

Many of the projects in development at Kennedy Miller in the 1990s—including Duigan’s proposed Marseille project—never reached production, though not always for reasons within the company’s control. Just as enforced collaboration had led to the deterioration of the film’s relationship with some writers, the ‘excessive preparation’ of the company’s method was also a double-edged sword, which some experienced as stimulating and

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591 Barber, “George Miller’s Big Mystique.”  
592 Barber, “George Miller's Big Mystique.”  
593 Colbert, “Miller’s Way,” 5.
others as exhausting. In 1995, Miller conceded that he is known for “wearing people out”. 594

Despite the dissolution of the Nine deal, the firm had not wholly abandoned its interest in television, and around 1993 some time was spent developing a project titled *The Astronaut’s Atlas*, a documentary series which would examine issues such as water supply in a holistic, global framework, as though from the perspective of an astronaut looking down on earth. (The firm intended to film host segments with an astronaut character.) Mark Lamprell was involved as a writer, with a team of researchers, and the company spent about six months developing a show bible. Lamprell recalled that the emerging capabilities of the global internet seemed about to make the informational purpose of the show redundant, which is one reason why the project never proceeded further. 595

Around this time, Miller also began to focus on preparing an adaptation of the Carl Sagan novel *Contact* (later filmed by Robert Zemeckis), about an earth scientist who intercepts a message from an extra-terrestrial civilisation. The project was initiated by US producer Lynda Obst, who in her memoir *Hello, He Lied*, described an extensive effort required to woo Miller over. Miller had no agent and was difficult to contact, by Hollywood standards—which offers further evidence of his company’s iconoclastic style. Following Lamprell’s experience on *Atlas* of writing from a global perspective, Miller invited him to join *Contact* as a writer alongside Hollywood screenwriter Menno Meyjes. A characteristically in-depth and exploratory development process began, with long story and concept conferences between Miller, Lamprell, Obst, Sagan, and his wife Ann Druyan. As Lamprell described, Miller liked to distil a narrative’s purpose to a single “diamond idea”, which would govern the inclusion of all subsequent narrative material. Work began with this big idea, and then, through workshopping, participants would iterate the script into further detail. Once the team had shaped an overarching plot, Meyjes and Lamprell wrote together,

595 Mark Lamprell, interview by author, March 2018.
with Meyjes focusing on dialogue and story, and Lamprell detailing action sequences—though all members of the team were “hands on”, as per Kennedy Miller’s inclusive process.\textsuperscript{596} The film was greenlit and moving toward production but, reportedly amid budget conflicts, Miller felt that he needed more time to work on the script, and when the studio declined, he left, later describing this event as a sacking.\textsuperscript{597}

Other unmade projects from this decade included \textit{So Shoot Me}, a proposed experimental biopic of Australian author and disability activist Genni Batterham, developed as a kind of feature anthology of shorts prepared, as Lamprell recalled, by he, Judy Morris, and Daphne Paris. The film may have had difficulty getting financed because of its unconventional structure, though Lamprell also recalled that \textit{Babe: Pig in the City} took over the company’s energies around this time.\textsuperscript{598} From this account, and that of Duigan’s unmade Marseilles project, it is clear that the firm was developing small film and television projects in-house, including some with an Australian focus. This suggests that the two sides of the company’s policy were still in play—even if, increasingly, it would only be the large, international blockbuster projects that would move toward production and take the firm’s focus.

A New Direction—\textit{Babe}

Kennedy Miller’s 1995 feature \textit{Babe} stands as a significant tipping point in its historical progression. Though its outward-looking films of the 1980s—\textit{Dead Calm}, \textit{Thunderdome}, and even \textit{Eastwick}—had already given the firm significant experience in working with US studios, controlling high budgets, and in bringing international production to Australia, \textit{Babe} represents a kind of advancement on these existing tendencies: an intermediate step in the ultimate shift toward the transnational blockbusters of the 2000s. Though made at the relatively modest budget of $33.3

\textsuperscript{596} Lamprell, interview by author.
\textsuperscript{597} Rob Lowing, "Hamming It up Again," \textit{The Sunday Age}, October 27, 1996.
\textsuperscript{598} Lamprell, interview by author.
million (US$25 million), the film can be understood as a middle point between a well-financed project like *Thunderdome*, and later work like *Pig in the City* and subsequent films, which all stretched into the $100 million-plus range. *Babe* also stands out as the first Kennedy Miller feature to display a ‘family-friendly’ sensibility, entering a demographic territory later further explored with the *Happy Feet* franchise.

The production of *Babe* is also notable as an application of the company’s method of production, particularly in light of a later falling out between Miller and the film’s director and co-writer Chris Noonan. This break between the collaborators, which centred on the public attribution of credit for the film’s success, shows how the company’s collective identity and collaborative procedures, while genuine, were always contingent on the centralised power of its founders and principals—that is, on Miller himself. I have argued that Miller and Kennedy developed the method in part as a way to exercise more effective managerial control over production. Collaboration at Kennedy Miller meant collaboration on the firm’s own terms, under its own direction, not the handing over of independent creative licence. The tensions inherent in this dynamic were noted earlier in accounts of the firm’s dismissal of writers including Ron Blair, and are again on display in *Babe*.

The project had originated with Miller, who first encountered the source material, Dick King-Smith’s children’s book *The Sheep-Pig*, while on a flight to London in the late 1980s. One report states an early version of the screenplay had been written with cinematographer Dean Semler, with the expectation that Semler direct, but the technology to achieve talking animals was not yet practical or cost-effective. Miller may have also intended to take on the project himself, but the technological deadlock and the timing of *Lorenzo’s Oil* eventually made that impractical. Noonan joined the project in 1988, and ultimately worked on it for seven years, taking a break to film the ABC telemovie *Police State* in 1989, which was written with former writer Angela Wellington, “Australia’s Talking Pig Collects at US Box Office,” *Canberra Times*, October 31, 1995.

600 Wellington, “Australia’s Talking Pig Collects at US Box Office.”
601 Philip Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara, February and May 2010, Oral History Collection, 803657, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
Kennedy Miller researcher and writer Francine Finnane. In a public address made after the film’s release, and later collected in the book *Second Take*, Noonan discussed his writing process with Miller, which appears to be characteristic of the collaborative procedures that were part of the firm’s method. In the first phase, Noonan and Miller spent two and a half months talking over the source material and story, meeting every day for half a day, until they had narrowed in on a rough scene-by-scene understanding of the story. In the second phase, Noonan wrote a first draft over six weeks, which Miller then deconstructed and critiqued. Roughly six drafts were written over about a year, each undergoing this deconstruction-reconstruction process.

In developing the project, Noonan worked in concert with a small team, including Mitchell, Miller’s brother Bill Miller—who was now installed as a producer at the company— and Phillip Hearnshaw, who had been first assistant director on some of the 1980s productions, and here is also credited as associate producer. Hearnshaw later discussed his experience on the film in an NFSA oral history. Hearnshaw’s account describes the production as a highly oppositional process with significant technical and logistical hurdles -- few others believed that Kennedy Miller could make the film as envisioned. The small team worked concertedly for about eighteen months before the project actually secured outside financing. Financing was again achieved through Universal—though even then the firm encountered difficulties, and the production ultimately had significant trouble securing a completion guarantor.

The central technical challenge was to find a way to persuasively depict talking farm animals—the idea of incorporating real animals, rather than rendering the story in

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602 He had previously worked on *Violence in the Cinema* and *Mad Max*, but had not been credited since, and would become a prominently credited recurring producer for the remainder of the firm’s history.


animation, was part of the vision for the project from the beginning.\footnote{Wellington, "Australia’s Talking Pig Collects at US Box Office."} Achieving this effect in production required a significant amount of research and exploration—a new stage in the company’s tendency toward ‘excessive preparation’ that focused not on research and writing, but on technical development. It emerged that existing effects technology was not sufficient to their needs; Kennedy Miller needed to work with partners to develop an advanced mixed-effects approach, but found that many potential participants were unwilling to embark on such an exploratory effort; Hearnshaw felt that few shared the company’s obsessive, committed attitude.\footnote{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.} Kennedy Miller was already a technically adept company—at least in planning and executing stunts, and logistically complex productions—but this new interest and investment in visual effect technology, begun on Babe, would come to dominate its later work.

The production team ultimately decided to achieve the effect through a mixture of three approaches: live trained animals, animatronics, and CGI effects. Noonan sought to apply a variety of techniques to each scene and character, so there would be no predictable visual approach to clue viewers in to where each technique was being used and when. The animal training program was led by the American Karl Miller, who taught the animals to perform particular actions in response to sound cues. Hearnshaw had to identify and contract a pig breeder who could supply the project’s unusual needs: six identical female piglets, of an appropriate look, every three weeks, for a period of eleven weeks.\footnote{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.} An early test batch of pigs was housed in the Metro\footnote{Noonan, "Makin’ Bacon: Babe," 229.}—further evidence of the varied economies offered by the firm’s possession of that building.

Live animals were substituted in some shots for animatronic copies, supplied by Jim Henson’s Creature Workshop in the UK, and John Cox’s Creature Workshop, a Queensland-based company that worked with the Australian company Robotechnology. Cox had previously supplied animatronic sharks for the unused

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\footnotetext[605]{Wellington, "Australia’s Talking Pig Collects at US Box Office."} \footnotetext[606]{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.} \footnotetext[607]{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.} \footnotetext[608]{Noonan, "Makin’ Bacon: Babe," 229.}
sequence in *Dead Calm*. His sheep animatronics were said to be each as mechanically complicated as a Mercedes-Benz car.\textsuperscript{609} Animatronics were used as much as possible: although expensive to make, they were cheaper to use than the third technological approach, CGI effects, which were supplied through the Californian company Rhythm and Hues. These effects were used mostly to animate parts of the animals’ heads, so they would appear to talk and their eyes to follow movement.\textsuperscript{610} This process was costly—a seven-second shot of an animal talking cost between US$20,000 and US$50,000, and required eight weeks’ work. This was an ambitious CGI requirement for a relatively modest film, at a time when this branch of effects technology was still in its infancy—watershed CGI effects in films like *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991, dir. James Cameron) and *Jurassic Park* (1993, dir. Steven Spielberg) had appeared only a few years earlier. The technology evidently impressed Miller as a “new dawn” for cinema, and altered the trajectory of Kennedy Miller’s creative practice. These industry-wide technological developments spoke to Miller’s formative interested in the malleability of edited celluloid. Now, he saw, the “film image itself” had become plastic, through digital manipulation.\textsuperscript{611}

Established production practices were maintained on *Babe*, including preparatory workshops for voice actors, in which Noonan and the team played around with different vocal approaches for each animal character.\textsuperscript{612} Noonan also fully storyboarded the entire film, working with artist Peter Pound. Noonan and Miller were in agreement on creating a high style ‘storybook’ look for the film, and this style reflects the distinctly international characteristics of the film. At one point Universal urged the firm to Americanise the story and relocate the project to Utah, which the filmmakers resisted, citing the storybook look they had already settled on.\textsuperscript{613} But the finished product is still firmly internationalised in nature: locations have the bucolic appearance of the English countryside, while characters speak in mid-Atlantic


\textsuperscript{611} Jim Schembri, "Pig Appeal," *Age*, December 1, 1995.

\textsuperscript{612} Noonan, "Makin’ Bacon: *Babe*,” 246.

\textsuperscript{613} Noonan, "Makin’ Bacon: *Babe*,” 235.
accents (which were actually further Americanised in post-production), and the cars are left-hand drive.\footnote{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.}

*Babe* ultimately shot in the small village of Robertson, in the Southern Highlands of NSW, after extensive scouting across eastern Australia and New Zealand to find an appropriate locale. Miller personally approved the site, even down to the placement of the Hoggett’s homestead on the local farmland hired out to the production.\footnote{Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.} Hearnshaw scouted specifically for places that did not look Australian in their natural features, and was able to locate almost the entire production in the areas around Robertson—sets for interior scenes were built in local potato sheds and farm buildings.\footnote{Noonan, "Makin' Bacon: *Babe,*" 231.} As *The Year My Voice Broke* did for Braidwood, the *Babe* shoot brought a significant economic benefit to Robertson. The project employed a crew of up to 150, across a 96-day shoot—the manager of the local Bowral Hotel told Noonan it was worth $20,000 a week to have the production around.\footnote{Noonan, "Makin' Bacon: *Babe,*" 230.}

Other recurring members of the firm’s below-the-line ensemble worked on the filming and post-production, including Paris, who is credited as associate producer and led a second unit, and D’Arcy, who is credited as post-production supervisor and co-editor (with Jay Friedkin). Andrew Lesnie, who had filmed second unit on *Bodyline*, was cinematographer. Hearnshaw’s description of the logistical complexity of the shoot mirrors, in certain aspects, earlier accounts of the production of the first two *Mad Max* films. The filming was scheduled by shots (as *Dead Calm*’s had been); Noonan had storyboarded 1400. The main unit shot, on average, eight and a half set-ups a day, eventually necessitating the shunting of a few hundred shots to the second unit led by Paris, which mostly dealt with material not involving human actors. Roughly fifty-four hours of footage were shot for what would ultimately be a ninety-minute film. As with the practical stunts of the *Mad Max* films, the animal stunts were carefully pre-planned. Noonan was determined that the picture stay on “safe grounds”—any
shot that might not work had to be eliminated. The logistical commonalities between *Babe* and the *Max* films, despite their superficial stylistic differences, shows that Miller’s montage-intensive approach to filmmaking—which had been central to his own practice from the beginning—had filtered in to the firm’s overall formal toolkit.

The shoot, overall, was said to be calm. Mitchell was on set every day and managed the relationship with Universal, which largely did not intrude on the work. Miller was not often on set, though tensions between him and Noonan were present during filming. Actor James Cromwell later recalled feeling obliged to go and stand in solidarity beside Noonan one day during a dispute between the director and Miller. In this 2012 interview, Cromwell described Miller as a bully who sought to take control of the project back from Noonan when it became evident the footage was going well. Relations between Noonan and Miller later deteriorated further when the film was being edited. Specifics of their falling out are hard to access; Noonan later called them “spirited disagreements”, and Miller referred to them as “the usual creative differences.” Hearnshaw’s NFSA oral history is circumspect on the subject, though he is sympathetic in assessing Miller’s behaviour: “A movie that just had so much to love about it, I’d be very disappointed if I’d carried it all that way and then couldn’t have contributed.”

The break between Miller and Noonan became a public matter in the wake of the film’s conspicuous critical and commercial success; the film earned $36.8 million in Australia, $60 million in the US, and $240 million worldwide. The disagreement centred on who deserved public recognition for the film. Noonan sought to qualify

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618 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
619 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
622 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
624 Holgate, "True Love: A Journey in Film."
the perceived conflict between he and Miller in a letter to The Australian, writing: “If the media concentrated its attentions on him rather than me in the early stages of the film’s release, surely that was because he was the promotable ‘household name’ in the lineup.” In a Sydney Morning Herald article a week later, Miller attributed their conflict to the problem of ‘excellence’:

   It’s how hard people are prepared to push to lift the level of something. To take each percentage point of excellence requires a redoubling of effort … I think Australia, unfortunately, is a country where we tend to do it like 75 per cent is good enough. It’s very, very hard to get those next percentage points … and it takes its toll.

This suggests again that the firm’s method, rather than creating a utopian environment, actually had a restrictive element, enabling creativity by tightly regulating it. Some years later, in a 2007 profile, Miller assumed a much stronger posture of ownership over the film, saying that while The Year My Voice Broke had been Duigan’s vision, and Dead Calm Noyce’s, the vision for Babe was “handed to Chris on a plate”. In these comments, Miller, in effect, prioritises the firm corporate authorship over individual creative contribution.

In retrospect, the conflict appears to reflect the complexities that shadow Kennedy Miller’s collaborative procedures. At his AFTRS talk, Noonan described collaboration—widely understood then as part of the firm’s process—as something that, by its nature, is “amorphous” and always shifting:

   In the writing of the script I basically did most of the pen-to-paper work, but George made a huge impact into the story structure and with individual ideas. So even on the point of the actual act of writing being just one ingredient in the process, it seems appropriate to acknowledge the script as a piece of co-

625 Chris Noonan, letter to the editor.
626 Holgate, “True Love: A Journey in Film.”
627 Turner, “Curious George.”
writing … It wasn’t just George and me, either; there were other people involved, an increasing number as time went by. I am a great believer in the collaborative process as a way of solving problems and creating something that involves every participant in the process. The relationship between George and me, in some ways, was like a marriage—this was a seven-year project and plenty of marriages do not last seven years. We went through a process where we challenged each other constantly, where we were at each other’s throats a fair bit of the time, where we were fighting rear-guard actions against each other’s opinions and still, at the end of it, we came out with a film that doesn’t speak of conflict. It speaks with one voice.628

Miller has consistently proclaimed an interest in erasing distinctions between codified production roles, and as the creative producer and motivating force behind the project saw himself as entitled to a position of ownership over the film. Noonan, however, did perform the on-the-ground labour of writer and director—even if within a close-knit team—and in any production model other than Kennedy Miller’s comprehensivism his creative ownership would surely have gone unquestioned. The dispute reveals, as the firm’s earlier conflicts with writers previously had, that the collaborative practices at Kennedy Miller occurred within a definite power structure, even if they were enacted with egalitarian intentions. Though the firm’s procedures could appear unstratified, Miller was still the most powerful individual within his own business.

Two decades into his filmmaking career, Miller was also now a substantially powerful individual within the wider Australian industry. From Babe onward it is possible to see greater evidence of Miller, and the firm, exercising that power. Though Babe would become Kennedy Miller’s second major feature franchise, events after the film’s release show that the company aggressively protected the ‘Babe’ brand in the face of its popular success. When the town of Robertson proposed erecting a sign welcoming tourists to ‘Babe country’, Kennedy Miller issued legal advice saying it wished to protect the rights to that name. Residents were unable to cash in on the

town’s temporary fame. The president of the Robertson Environmental Protection Society said, “Robertson has been particularly kind to the film company. They were here for a number of months. It’s not much to ask that the village should be able to acknowledge its part in the film.” A spokesperson for Kennedy Miller said they “take the same line with everybody” seeking to use ‘Babe’ in advertising. Other film franchise locations have been monetised for tourists—a tendency for which the Lord of the Rings series and New Zealand is the paradigmatic example. But even after returning to Robertson for the sequel, Kennedy Miller saw the Babe brand as something to be tightly controlled.

Kennedy Miller also went to court seeking an injunction to stop the screening on Channel 7 of the TV special Babe—You’re a Star, hosted by Szubanski, about the film’s success. The company had cooperated on the project until days before it aired, but withdrew its support when Mitchell was screened a rough cut and decided the product had become what he saw as a “low quality attempt at a ‘Making of Babe’”. Mitchell felt a making-of would spoil the audience’s enjoyment. This attitude reflects company’s dedication to making the effects work seamless and persuasive; it had even asked John Cox not to publicise his work on the animatronics, to maintain the illusion around the effects. A certain degree of circumspection and secretiveness had long been established as part of the company’s method, extending to many aspects of its operations. Its ability to enforce this secretiveness among its contractors, employees, and collaborators was now evident, too.

Developing National Responsibilities—Video Fool for Love and 40,000 Years of Dreaming

Kennedy Miller’s ongoing commitment to internationalist, ‘Americanised’ feature production—which had been part of its production policy from its beginning—had

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631 Rachel Browne and Rob Lowing, "Hands Off Babe!"
been made more visible by the absence of its nationalist television work. The question of the company’s relationship to the national industry, to ‘Australian’ film, now began to loom larger. Though *Lorenzo’s Oil* was financed and shot in the US, Miller claimed that the full participation of his production company on the film meant that it could be allocated an ‘Australian’ identity, because, he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “the production company is entirely Australian”. In the 1970s, Miller had professed to not see filmmaking as a “geographical process”. But now, with the television work gone and the company’s energies almost wholly focused on international features, Miller began to reconceive his responsibilities to Australian culture and industry. These expressed themselves, on the one hand, in the argument that whatever local content a film lacked, its circumstances of production could align it with Australia—a view consistent with screen funding guidelines stretching back to the AFC. On the other, Miller’s local responsibilities also expressed themselves in a newfound posture of engagement with the industry and with Australian cultural heritage, which Miller now saw as being depreciated and in need of support.

This turn coincides with a personal period of disillusionment with Australian culture for Miller, who had been splitting his time between Australia and overseas, and now described his country as a “cultural wasteland”. This is visible also in his comments on the problem of ‘excellence’ on *Babe*. Miller saw Australia as a country in which 75 per cent effort is deemed good enough. Australia, he said, does not “have a lot to say”. In the late 1980s he told David Stratton that his projects were mostly out of the country: two Australian stories, one Hispanic, two American, and three European. Having dealt with Australian culture through the 1980s television work, Miller felt that there was little else to contribute. He appeared particularly disillusioned with the state of Australian cinema, despite—or because of—the explosion in quantity of production that had occurred that decade. His concerns in this area persisted into the next decade. In a 2003 *Daily Telegraph* article, Miller

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633 Barber, “George Miller's Big Mystique.”.
634 George Miller, interview by Tom Ryan, date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 325201, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
635 Barber, “George Miller's Big Mystique.”.
636 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
described his concerns that Australian culture was losing its national identity: “My big worry is my kids and their friends know much more about American culture than Australian culture.”

Miller’s stance on this issue has some retrospective irony. The 10BA industry, as described by Dermody and Jacka, was one which marginalised questions of national culturalism in favour of economic rationalism—in 1987 they wrote that “there is a professional discourse to talk about the economics of films and the popular one to promote them; but ways of discussing our cinema in its aesthetic and political aspects are severely undeveloped.” Kennedy Miller had, in a sense, been a prominent test case for the logic of economic rationalism in Australian film, and the post-Mad Max Peat Marwick Mitchell report had reshaped the industry accordingly. But now Miller was dissatisfied with the consequences. The position could appear ironic, but it was still internally consistent. Kennedy Miller’s two-sided policy had always seen the firm dedicate attention to cultural works, when commercial possibilities made it favourable.

In 1990, Miller headlined an abortive project to found a national cinémathèque next to the Museum of Contemporary Art, on Sydney’s Circular Quay. The argument Miller mounted to the public, one that he repeated in other forms throughout the decade, was that Australia’s history as a nation is deeply intertwined with the cinema—“Film is one of the few art forms as young as Australia’s colonisation”—but that its screen legacy has been mishandled. Miller felt that Australian cinema had “lost its focus”, in part because it lacked a systematic film history and archival program. Later in the decade, at the request of Denny Lawrence, Miller became a patron of the AFI, feeling strongly that he should support the “locus” of the Australian industry, and a site of vital film discourse. Though in the 1970s his firm had professed

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640 French and Poole. Shine a Light, 73.
ambivalence about government intervention in the film industry, Miller now saw it as essential for protecting Australian culture and industry: “If we lose our cultural institutions like the Australian Film Institute, the Australian Film Commission and other funding bodies, this country will slowly lose its advantage.”641 Though dismissive about Australian culture in general, Miller felt that he had committed Kennedy Miller’s energies to the country. He described being in a position, post- Eastwick, to fully pursue an American career, but making the “moral choice” to stay local: “it was a choice between Hollywood or Australia, and I made the choice to do it here”.642

In his interview with Stratton, Miller speculated that Australian filmmaking might benefit from the stimulus of an avant-garde movement—an intriguing claim,643 one which might shed some light on some of Kennedy Miller’s directions in the 1990s.644 Even though his work on Frieze with Kennedy indicates that Miller shared some contempt for ‘experimental’ filmmaking as a style and tradition, his own practice does have some experimental aspects: in his discursive, exploratory development work, and increasingly, the technologically innovative nature of the company’s activities. Technological innovation was a pillar of the Babe production—which began development around the time Miller spoke to Stratton.

Another work that arguably belongs under this rubric is Kennedy Miller editor Robert Gibson’s documentary Video Fool for Love. Gibson had spent ten years filming his life and love affairs with a video camera, and with Miller’s guidance assembled an 87-minute docudrama out of 100 hours of footage, focusing on his relationship with a woman named Gianna Maria Gabriella Santone. Directed, edited, and ‘videographed’ by Gibson, and produced by Miller and Mitchell, the film opened in March 1996. Unusually and for the only time, Kennedy Miller acted as its own

643 And a contestable one, given the avant-garde style and process of much film production activity in the 1970s, including Ubu Films, in Sydney.
644 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
Chapter 4: 1990s

distributor. For Miller, Gibson’s guerrilla-style process represented new possibilities of working outside the “lumbering machinery” of orthodox filmmaking. He had earlier predicted, in conversation with Stratton, that individual filmmakers would increasingly take on more of the production workload themselves, forecasting enhanced abilities to manipulate images and complete production processes with minimal cost and resources. Similarly, around the release of Babe, Miller predicted that fully automated “computer people” would soon replace human stuntmen. Having developed a philosophy of comprehensivism to help him manage and control the complex forces of production, Miller may have seen in the rise of digital video and computer effects new ways for a single filmmaker to control their films, and reduce human error and happenstance on their work.

Though Video Fool for Love looks like an anomaly within the broader context of the company’s production policy, Gibson’s comment to a journalist that his making a feature film with a home movie camera was a kind of “hero’s journey” indicates that the established Kennedy Miller conceptual storytelling terminology was in play during the editing process. Because of its use of home movie footage, the film also evinces some formal echoes with the Frieze: An Underground Film. As in the earlier short, Miller appears onscreen; here in a brief conversational exchange that similarly establishes him as in dialogue with the (as yet unseen) director.

By the mid-1990s, Miller’s sense of the mythological essence of ‘storytelling’ and film narrative had also developed into a sense of cinema’s social purpose. He now referred to the movie theatre as a kind of religious sanctum where the audience goes to process their unconscious concerns. He recalled that as a young doctor in an emergency ward he had intuitively imitated movie doctors when attempting to

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645 Video Fool for Love press kit, 435470, documentation, National Film and Sound Archive.
646 Holgate, “True Love: A Journey in Film.”
647 Miller, interview by David Stratton.
comfort the relative of a deceased patient—“I resorted to all those behaviours I had learned from the movies. I shook my head in that same slow, sad way, and muttered all the clichés.” Miller’s sense of the affective power of cinema—present since *Violence in the Cinema*—now included strong feelings about its social consequences. Cinema’s social purpose formed for him the basis of a kind of narrative ethic, which perceived ‘mindless’ stories as toxic: “anybody who … contributes to the mosaic of our mythology or our culture should be aware of their responsibility”.

The fullest expression of this attitude came in the sixty-seven-minute documentary *40,000 Years of Dreaming* (also known as *White Fellas Dreaming*), produced in 1997 in partnership with the British Film Institute, for its Century of Cinema series. Miller directs the film and also acts as on-screen presenter. Miller and Mitchell are credited as producers; Graham Shirley acted as researcher, historical consultant, and associate producer. In this film, Miller posits cinema as a space of “public dreaming”, analogous to the songlines of Indigenous Australians, and makes an extended argument about the importance of Australia’s national cinema to its developing identity as a nation. The film moves through several headings—convicts, bushrangers, bushmen, ‘sheilas’, ‘gays’, and ‘blackfellas’—illustrating each social category with selections from relevant films, ranging from *The Story of the Kelly Gang* to *They’re a Weird Mob* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, with a particular emphasis on pioneering Australian filmmakers including Charles Chauvel and Ken G Hall. Miller had maintained an association with Hall, who had consulted on *The Cowra Breakout*, and whom he admired for his nationalistic commitment to life as an Australian filmmaker. In 1994, when Hall died, Kennedy Miller was reported to be working on a three-hour documentary on his life—presumably never completed. Though part of Miller’s admiration for Hall had been

651 Miller, “The Apocalypse and the Pig,” 36.
653 Martin Scorsese’s *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* was another documentary produced in this series.
that the earlier director’s works had ‘defined the country’, Kennedy Miller’s work after *Dreaming* would no longer represent much in the way of ‘Australian’ subjects, coinciding with Miller’s public disillusionment with local culture, the depreciated state of which he felt necessitated his involvement in heritage-building projects like the cinémathèque—*Dreaming* is really an abbreviated cinémathèque in the shape of a documentary.

Kennedy Miller instead began to primarily conceive its responsibility to Australian culture in terms of upskilling and capacity building. The end of the miniseries era had been bemoaned even in government quarters because it marked the loss of an important training ground for Australian screen practitioners. In a 1993 *Sydney Morning Herald* article Miller looked back with pride on his company’s function as a “launching pad” for local and international screen careers, and suggested also that Kennedy Miller’s particular collaborative processes had often forced people to do their best work. Miller was also asked about his support for the ‘new’, post-new wave generation of filmmakers, and he pointed to Noonan’s work on the then-upcoming *Babe*, as well an in-development project with theatre director Gale Edwards, whom Miller was said to have brought on for a semi-apprenticeship during the making of *Lorenzo’s Oil*. Kennedy Miller’s activities as cultural custodian are largely limited to the 1990s, but the role it conceived for itself in contributing to the structural health of the national screen industry would continue to emerge—and in some ways become even more prominent in the following decades, as its increasingly complex productions required more and greater resources, technicians, and training—and to demand advanced forms of state cooperation and subsidy.

**Commitment to International and Offshore Production—*Babe: Pig in the City***

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656 Barber, “George Miller's Big Mystique.”
The 1998 sequel *Babe: Pig in the City* represents a capstone on the changes Kennedy Miller had been undergoing through the decade. It also exemplifies some of the overall shifts in film production that were sweeping the Australian, and global, industry at the time: shifts to which Kennedy Miller was ideally positioned to adapt. After 10BA was wound back, government intervention in the film industry at the national level once again returned to a direct subsidy model, but with some significant changes. The AFC was supplanted by the Film Finance Corporation, a funding agency first introduced in 1988 to offer an alternative to tax concessions. In the 1990s, this agency became the “principal single investor” in Australian films.\(^{657}\) However, the national purse strings were now considerably tighter: whereas the 10BA concessions had an estimated annual cost of $150 million, the FFC had an initial budget of only $70 million. Additionally, FFC funding was often required to be supplemented by some private backing, which usually had to be located from international sources in the form of a pre-sale, or a minimum guarantee for domestic and international market.\(^{658}\) Pre-sales had been part of the 10BA market, but now the impact of international finance on Australian filmmaking was becoming more and more evident, as the national industry became increasingly interconnected with foreign production entities.\(^{659}\)

The 1990s saw escalating developments in the globalisation of the screen industry. At the blockbuster level, film (and television) production became unbound by national borders, in both its country of origin and intended market. Foreign interest and investment in Australia took multiple forms beyond the financing or co-financing of production. International distributors such as Miramax opened local offices, as local successes like *Strictly Ballroom* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* gave the industry new international cachet. And US studios became partners in local infrastructure: in 1991 Warner Bros. joined with Village Roadshow on a theme park


\(^{659}\) Sean Maher, *The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 7-8.
and studio complex on Queensland’s Gold Coast; Twentieth Century Fox then followed with a studio complex in Sydney in 1998. Plant facilities such as these have been described as ‘local Hollywoods’ servicing the hypermobile, internationalised, production system of ‘global Hollywood’.  

Australian government policy, aided by the devalued local dollar, directed itself toward attracting international production to the country; this yielded high-profile results in ‘offshore’ Hollywood projects including The Matrix, Mission Impossible 2, and George Lucas’s revived Star Wars franchise. Prominent local filmmakers such as Baz Luhrmann with Moulin Rouge, and Jane Campion with Holy Smoke, were also seen as important conduits for attracting international finance, and so was Miller—this was the development of ‘Industry-3’, as described by Verhoeven. Though the work of these filmmakers was often international in flavour and financing, for the purposes of government policy it was agreed to be ‘Australian’ because local filmmakers originated and creatively controlled the projects. O’Regan and Venkatasawmy explain that this period showed an overall expansion in understandings of what might constitute an ‘Australian’ film, which now encompassed intersecting notions of Australian ‘content’, Australian ‘involvement’, and Australian ‘approach’.  

Kennedy Miller had been at the vanguard of these developments, having already demonstrated—in productions like Beyond Thunderdome and Dead Calm—a facility in attracting international finance to Australia and orienting Australian product for an international mass market. But even though the broader industry was restructuring

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662 Deb Verhoeven, "Film and Video," in The Media and Communications in Australia, ed. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 163.

663 Tom O’Regan and Rama Venkatasawmy, "A Tale of Two Cities: Dark City and Babe: Pig in the City," in Twin Peeks: Australian and New Zealand Films, ed. Deb Verhoeven (St Kilda: Australian Catalogue Company, 1999), 188.
itself to follow suit, the firm’s production strategy still had further adaptations to make. Although it was now theoretically easier to attract international production to Australia, the nature of those international productions was changing. In mid-1990s Hollywood, it was becoming clear that ‘mid-range’ or ‘mid-budget’ features would be phased out: one survey found that in 1995 half the films costing between US$25 million and US$60 million were commercial failures, and Babe’s US$25 million budget was likely the maximum sum Universal was willing to invest in an untested property. This created a prevailing landscape of polarised budgets; Hollywood films would be either relatively cheap, or hugely expensive. This tendency became evident in Australia, too: though the average budget of local films in the 1990s was $3.5 million (consistent with the average of the 1980s), there was an increase in films budgeted under $1 million, and a rise in big-budget internationally financed productions.

In this polarised landscape, Kennedy Miller surely felt the pressure to go in one direction or the other—although, in another sense, its trajectory was already clear, given its history. The firm’s film output had long shared some of the central tendencies of high-concept and ‘blockbuster’ Hollywood production. It had a well-established franchise in Mad Max, which it had long seen as amenable to commodification (stretching back to the first film’s tie-in novelisation). It had utilised star performers, such as Gibson, Kidman, and Turner on Beyond Thunderdome. It had developed some merchandising and ancillary commodities, as with Turner’s “We Don’t Need Another Hero”, or Hayes original novelisation of Mad Max. It had oriented its work to globalised markets, targeting Japan with Mad Max 2. But it had also in some aspects resisted the commercial exploitation of its output, as seen with Babe. And its budgets had mostly been ‘big’ in relative terms, or big for Australia.

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Chapter 4: 1990s

_Thunderdome_ and _Dead Calm_ had cost around $13 million and $10 million, which meant they fell into a production category that now practically no longer existed: these films were not quite low-budget enough to belong in new ‘indie’ speciality divisions like Miramax for Sony Picture Classics, but were not high-budget enough to match the firm’s populist aspirations. With _Babe: Pig in the City_ Kennedy Miller made the leap over the mid-budget gulf, and has not since returned. At a reported final cost of U$100 million (having crept up from an early estimate of $74 million), the budget for _Pig in the City_ was by far the highest yet handled by the firm. It is tempting to wonder what Miller himself thought about the cost; in late 1996, recalling the high budget on his proposed _Contact_, Miller told a reporter that “[t]here’s something obscene about spending $100 million on a film.”

The production of the film again shows the firm’s method in operation. Except Noonan, much of the creative team from _Babe_ returned in similar roles, along with other recurring Kennedy Miller personnel. Miller now took on the role of director, as well as producer and co-screenwriter. Bill Miller and Mitchell produced; Lesnie returned as cinematographer; Jay Friedkin returned as editor, joined by Margaret Sixel, who had married Miller; and Marcus D’Arcy was post-production supervisor. Long-time production manager/associate producer Barbara Gibbs is credited as executive producer. Daphne Paris again helmed an additional unit. Colin Gibson, PJ Voeten, Catherine Barber, and Guy Norris, who had variously taken on earlier roles on the firm’s productions as financial controller, stunt coordinator, stand-by props, and assistant director, are all credited as associate producers. Hearnshaw returned also, as scheduling first assistant director.

Though there was obvious pressure from Universal to consider a sequel, Miller proclaimed a resistance to treating the film as a “quickie cash-in”, a line consistent with the firm’s careful protection of the _Babe_ brand after the release of the first film. Miller has said that he does not think of production in terms of franchises, but only in

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668 Rob Lowing, "Hamming It up Again," _The Sunday Age_, October 27, 1996.
669 Rob Lowing, "Going the Whole Hog," _Sun Herald_, October 13, 1996.
terms of stories that interest him—a statement that should be qualified against the fact that many of the firm’s feature films are sequels or franchise entries. Although the firm’s production strategy is plainly driven by commercial considerations, it is clear that Kennedy Miller’s sense of what constitutes the ‘right story’ is driven by some belief in its intrinsic merits. The script for *Pig in the City* is co-credited to Miller, Lamprell, and Judy Morris. The latter two were long-time members of the firm’s network; Lamprell as documentary maker and co-writer, and Morris as actor on *The Dirtwater Dynasty* and *Bangkok Hilton*, and as writer/director on some unmade projects through the 1990s.

They both described elements of the writing process in interview with me, in terms consistent with Miller’s established compositional approach from *Mad Max* onwards. As with McCausland’s experience on the first *Mad Max*, Morris and Lamprell were brought on after a narrative core had already been established; early work on the script was primarily about honing in on an appropriate structure, hammering out the mechanisms of the plot, and sounding out what Lamprell called the ‘diamond idea’—the central concept with which all elements of the story must be reconciled. For *Pig in the City*, this was the phrase “a kind and steady heart can mend a sorry world”—which was later made the refrain of a tie-in single performed by Peter Gabriel. Lamprell recalled that Miller had a tendency to circle back to ideas that Lamprell was confident had already been eliminated, and would inevitably find some useful new elements. Morris likewise remarked on Miller’s attention to detail, which she recalled encouraged inventive and imaginative script amendments. Lamprell said Miller’s “commitment to brilliance, to the best idea, was remarkable and relentless and stoic”. Although on other projects Miller apparently left the physical writing process to his collaborators, on *Pig in the City* the three writers sat together at a computer, taking turns to type. There was no division of labour in which individual

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670 George Miller, interview by Paul Byrne, January 12, 2011, Oral History Collection, 818098, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
671 These sequels nevertheless tend to be constructed as stand-alone stories, rather than serials.
672 Judy Morris, interview by author, April 2018.
673 Lamprell, interview by author.
writers were accorded certain specialities, and Miller fully encouraged each writer to contribute any new ideas or edits. As on previous productions, Miller planned out the visual structure of the action sequences during this process, working with a storyboard artist.

The production again filmed in the NSW town of Robertson. This time, residents were reportedly obliged to sign a secrecy agreement, as were all cast and crew involved in the film. Robertson again hoped to exploit the franchise as a lure for tourism, and locals were reportedly annoyed when Kennedy Miller disassembled all sets after the film had finished shooting. The company was intent on keeping the *Babe* brand firmly under control; reports noted its unusual restraint in the face of the Hollywood industry’s tendency to merchandise its properties. A Kennedy Miller spokesperson explained to the media: “George just wants to protect the character he created … With the first film, the people came and discovered us, not the other way around. George wants to stay true to that with this film as well.”

Though secrecy provisions are not unusual in film production, the image of an entire town suborned to secrecy and prevented from associating themselves with the final film is indicative of the power now exercised by the firm.

That power is also revealed by the production’s work in Sydney. The majority of filming took place at the Sydney Showgrounds at Fox Studios, which was then under construction. This studio complex, which included six sound stages, was a shared venture between US studio Twentieth Century Fox (then owned by Rupert Murdoch’s NewsCorp) and local developer Lend Lease, assisted by payroll tax concessions and other benefits valued around $109 million from the NSW Government, which sought to maintain Sydney’s economic dominance as the ‘capital city’ of Australian film against popular or developing production sites in Queensland (such as the WB–

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In its use of Fox Studios we can see the firm again on the vanguard of major developments in Australian production, as it had been with 10BA and private financing. Miller actually attended a sod-turning ceremony at the site the day after then-NSW Premier Bob Carr had first broken ground. Carr touts "Pig in the City", which was anticipated to generate employment for about 500 people in the state, as proof that the government's projections for filmmaking possibilities at the site were accurate: “It confirms that there will be serious and substantial filmmaking here at the Showground." Kennedy Miller had advocated vigorously for permission to use the Showgrounds. According to a description of a development proposal lodged by Kennedy Miller, the firm claimed: “It is vital to the NSW and Australian film industry that Babe 2 is filmed at the Showground.” The large budget was deployed as a cudgel, threatening the loss of benefits to another suitable ‘local Hollywood’. “If Kennedy Miller cannot use the Showground for Babe 2,” the proposal says, “it will be filmed overseas.” The firm had already begun to claim a potential responsibility to Australia’s film culture and industry; here we can see its willingness to use the exercising of that responsibility, or not, as a negotiating strategy in securing for itself favourable industrial conditions.

In logistical terms, Pig in the City was likewise an advancement on the firm’s prior work. Mad Max 2 and Beyond Thunderdome had both required substantial set building—Kennedy had boasted that the oil refinery in Mad Max 2 was the largest Australian set yet built—but Pig in the City’s time at the Showgrounds required “restoration, construction, and demolition on a grand scale”. Production executive Rod Allan said “There’s nothing like this in Australia.” Kennedy Miller’s productions had now become very big enterprises, both in terms of resources marshalled and time spent: Babe was in the works for seven years, and Pig in the City for five. During filming, between two and five units were operating simultaneously, and work

679 Amanda Meade, "Son of Babe Trots on to Fox Film Set," Australian, April 30, 1997.
was scheduled twenty-four hours a day, with twenty weeks of night shoots. The crew was up to 600 strong, and wrangled 799 individual animals.

Press reports indicate the film had a troubled production and completion: stories emerged that Miller’s perfectionism and “pursuit of absolute excellence” was causing significant delays and cost increases. Further delays occurred in post-production. After undesirable responses from a test screening, Universal requested changes to the edit; effects companies struggled to deliver work on schedule. As with Mad Max, the firm discovered soundtrack problems almost at the last minute; the soundtrack—described as “shrill and strident”—had to be remixed shortly before completed prints were to be delivered. Miller was said to be sleeping on a cot at Fox Studios as the finishing touches were completed, and technicians worked thirty-hour shifts to overcome last-minute problems. Universal funded the film but, according to one report, the studio only retained 60 per cent ownership after the breakeven point, giving Kennedy Miller a large share of potential proceeds. The film was viewed as a commercial disappointment on its release; it was perceived to be less family-friendly and more ‘dark’ than its predecessor, although some critics responded effusively, and the film has since developed a cult reputation. Phillip Hearnshaw recalled that its reception led to a depression within Kennedy Miller.

_Pig in the City_ not only exemplifies key tendencies in globalised blockbuster production in Australia; it also forecasts a crucial technological change which would

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683 Hames Sterngold, "Pig at a Snail's Pace," _At the Movies_, November 20, 1998.
685 Sterngold, "Pig at a Snail's Pace."
686 Stevenson and Te Koha, "Oh Babe! George Miller's Difficult Delivery."
687 Lowing and Sutton, "Sty Wars."
688 Maddox, "This Little Director Queues Up."
689 Stevenson and Te Koha, "Oh Babe! George Miller's Difficult Delivery."
690 Lowing and Sutton, "Sty Wars."
692 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
dominate Kennedy Miller’s operations for the next two decades—the shift toward Australian digital effects production. On *Babe*, the company had contracted with US-based Rhythm and Hues; for *Pig in the City*, Kennedy Miller also used the effects companies Mill Film, in Sydney and London, and Animal Logic in Sydney (which had previously worked on the opening titles for *Video Fool for Love* and *Babe*). The link with Fox Studios is also timely in this respect; the site houses several post-production services, in addition to digital cable links to the US, which enabled it to close the technology gap that inhibited Australia from participating in special effects-driven production.\(^693\) As one of several locally made films from within a short span of years to evince a reliance on digital production techniques—including *Dark City* and *The Matrix*, both of which were shot at Fox Studios—*Pig in the City* has been described as “epitomising the graduation of the Australian post-production sector” to feature-film formats.\(^694\) Though Kennedy Miller did not necessarily drive this industry shift, it had visibly been at its forefront, and its role as conduit and supporter of Australian effects work—also evident in the locally made animatronics on *Babe*—would only intensify in the following decades.

Jacka, in 1997, argued that the first *Babe* indicated the “possible future of the film industry in Australia”:

> international as well as national, imbricated with other audiovisual industries and with new media technologies and with a narrative style and theme that is different from a Hollywood blockbuster but sits comfortably alongside it.\(^695\)

These conditions were intensified on its sequel. Kennedy Miller’s international outlook, once framed critically in discourse on its productions had now, in a sense, been legitimised by evolutions in the nation’s feature production paradigm. *Pig in the City*’s ‘transnational’ identity is particularly evident in the narrative setting, which sees

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\(^693\) O'Regan and Venkatasawmy, "A Tale of Two Cities: *Dark City* and *Babe*: *Pig in the City*," 193-94.

\(^694\) Sean Maher, *The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s*, 9.

\(^695\) Jacka, "Film," 88.
Babe leaving the bucolic safety of the Hoggett’s farm for a trip to a large urban metropolis, which is designed and visualised as an impossible combination of landmarks and features from cities worldwide. It is literally a ‘transnational’ space—“everywhere and nowhere in particular”—and it is this kind of space where Kennedy Miller now firmly located itself; *Pig in the City*’s ‘Metropolis’ even features a cinema modelled on The Metro.\(^{697}\)

\(^{696}\) O'Regan and Venkatasawmy, "A Tale of Two Cities: *Dark City* and *Babe: Pig in the City*," 189.

Chapter 5: 2000s to 2010s—New Means, Old Methods

Introduction

Although the 1990s had seen Kennedy Miller undertake production on a scale larger than it ever had before, the firm itself had in some aspects grown smaller. Notwithstanding the continuities in its recurring workforce, the end of its television production line had seen many of the most prominent members of the Kennedy Miller ‘ensemble’ drift away, and with them any sense of the firm as a studio-like operation. The actual size of its staff remained consistent and compact, running on a between-productions core of 12 to 15—not significantly different from what Keryn Curtis had described in the 1980s—but an Australian Financial Review article in 2007 describes the Metro as mostly empty. Miller said that a small staff meant the company could avoid mounting productions simply for the sake of it—“if you run too big a machine, you’ve just got to keep the machine fed”. Kept at modest dimensions, Kennedy Miller would not be “forced to do anything”.

And yet in playing out its commitment to big-budget, logistically complex, ‘blockbuster’ production, the firm also came to require greater production resources, including crew, technicians, and—with a new turn toward digital production—animators and effects artists. To the extent that Miller’s early interest in digital production technologies was founded in a desire for a single filmmaker to control more of the means of production, it is ironic that truly digital production now proved to demand the marshalling of huge quantities of new technicians. The firm’s response to this need, and to its posture of responsibility for local screen infrastructure, was to partner with the production services business Omnilab on a new digital animation and effects outfit: Dr. D Studios. In the 1980s, the firm had run

a continuous production machine at the Metro, thanks to a felicitous funding environment and its relationship with short-term contractors. The new studio was preparing to operate on a continuous basis again; in press comments, Miller stated that in order to stave off talent drain overseas he knew he needed to have projects lined up for a five-to-ten-year period to entice professionals to stay. The choice to found Dr. D is conspicuously ambitious, in light of Miller’s stated desire to keep his operation lean. As Cinesound’s Ken Hall once wrote, “The man who raises up a film studio puts a millstone around his neck.”

In this chapter, I will outline the new terms of the firm’s engagement with digital animations techniques, with *Happy Feet* (2006); its intensified lobbying for tax concessions and government support for production, with the unproduced *Justice League Mortal*; its ambitious expansion with Dr. D Studio and *Happy Feet Two* (2011), and the associated move into video game production; and return to its first franchise, in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). I will outline how conditions within the international screen industry shaped the firm’s commitment to both blockbuster output and to Australia’s new role within globalised film production. I will describe the firm’s economic and political power in its appeals for state and federal support, and the sometimes unsuccessful lobbying efforts that lay bare the complex nature of its relationship with government intervention. I will show how its expansion with Dr. D again displays the persistence of the firm’s philosophy of comprehensivism. And I will argue that its method of production persisted through to the making of *Fury Road*. Although much about screen production had changed since its founding, both within and without the firm, Kennedy Miller’s particular way of doing things had remained essentially the same.

**The Studio Game—*Happy Feet***

The eight-year gap between *Babe: Pig in the City* and Kennedy Miller’s next feature, *Happy Feet*, appears long, if in keeping with the now considerable lapsed times

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between its productions. But in fact the company was, as usual, occupied with project development in the interim: most significantly, the long-gestating fourth Mad Max film, *Fury Road*, which had begun development as early as 1999. A decade past the imbroglio with Channel Nine, the firm also began to venture back into television work. The era of ‘prestige television’ had begun, inaugurated by the airing of *The Sopranos* on HBO; and the company prepared to partner with pay-TV network Showtime—whose CEO, Peter Rose, had worked at Ten when Kennedy Miller’s miniseries were airing there—on a new Australia-focused miniseries. Named *Mango River*, the show was to be an account of the 2002 Bali bombings, directed by Michael Jenkins (who had directed parts of *The Dirtwater Dynasty*), and starring Hugo Weaving. The subject matter alone indicates a return to the national history-telling aspect of the 1980s television work; the series focused on the joint investigation into the bombers by Australian and Indonesian police forces. The project advanced to the point where a team had decamped to Indonesia and begun production work, when a second bombing occurred in October 2005, and the Indonesian authorities subsequently withdrew their cooperation. Reports also state that by this time Kennedy Miller, after overseeing the scripting, had limited involvement with the project, having chosen to devote its energies once again to a large feature production.

The new focus of the firm’s attentions was *Happy Feet*, its first animated feature—a significant change in technique to occur so deep into the company’s history, but one consistent with its history of technical exploration. Kennedy Miller had been a relatively early adopter of digital effects on *Babe*, and *Pig in the City* had coincided with the opening up of Australia as a potential post-production effects hub. In the

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704 Nico Lathouris, interview by Margaret Leask, August 18, 2010, Oral History Collection, 811228, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
years since, the possibilities of digital animation had been steadily influencing the trajectory of Hollywood production. *Happy Feet*’s development was stimulated when cinematographer Andrew Lesnie—who had shot both *Babe* films, and second unit on *Bodyline*—demonstrated for Miller the motion capture technology Peter Jackson was developing for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which Lesnie was shooting in New Zealand.  

Motion capture—which also came to interest American filmmakers of Miller’s generation and disposition, including Robert Zemeckis, on *The Polar Express* (2004), George Lucas, on the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy (1999–2005), and Steven Spielberg, with Jackson, on *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011)—was a further step in the technological advancements Miller had enthused about at the turn of the 1990s: a new way for a filmmaker to exert total control over their work. These new production techniques, in which the movements of an actor are processed, treated, and completed by animators, offered a new way to compensate for the vagaries of performance—an X-factor Miller had been grappling with since *Mad Max*. Miller also confessed to getting “addicted to trying new tools”—a tendency embedded in the company since its beginning. The links between Kennedy Miller and Jackson’s WingNut Film are many: separated by the Tasman Sea, both make Hollywood-style product outside Hollywood, manage fraught relationships with their national industries, and oversee unusually complex production enterprises. Jackson had even hired Lesnie on to the *Rings* trilogy after seeing his work on *Babe*; Miller, in turn, hired *Rings* actor Elijah Wood as the voice actor for *Happy Feet*’s central character, Mumble. And Lesnie then returned to the firm by serving as cinematographer for *Happy Feet*’s live action unit.  

*Happy Feet* is also the first project since *Beyond Thunderdome* on which Miller is credited alongside co-directors, here Judy Morris and Warren Coleman. Miller’s sole directing credit on *Pig in the City* had appeared, in some lights, like a reassertion of his authority in the wake of the public disagreement with Noonan. Now, the collective

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character of production at the firm was once again evident. Co-directing credits are common on animated films. They are frequently seen on Pixar productions, where media strategies around a film’s release identify one director as the chief author figure: this was Pete Docter on *Inside Out* (2015), co-directed with Ronnie del Carmen, or Andrew Stanton on *Finding Nemo* (2003), co-directed with Lee Unkrich. Hence, the fact that Miller co-directed his two animated features can be seen in the context of standard animation production practice. However, evidence of *Happy Feet*’s production shows practices of collaboration and collectivism consistent with the company’s established method.

Morris’s and Coleman’s recollections of the writing process on the film reveal that the established Kennedy Miller method of rewriting, tearing apart, and redoing existing story material into new scripted forms continued on *Happy Feet*. As Morris and Lamprell had been on *Pig in the City*, both Morris and Coleman were brought on to the project after the firm had already established the fundamentals of the story; significant early work had been done by Miller and John Collee. Coleman was recruited around 2000; Miller was satisfied with the shape of the story, but wanted to flesh out certain aspects, including character. Coleman and another writer rebuilt the script, trying out new versions of established material, and veering off into new directions, with Miller’s oversight, until the project went quiet for a time.\(^{708}\)

When development started up again some years later, Morris was brought on in a co-director role, which also entailed working on the script materials.\(^{709}\) This had been more or less standard practice at the company since the miniseries. Coleman was then invited back on to the project around 2002: first to take part in a ‘radio play’ recording of the script, and then again as a writer. When both were on the project, Morris and Coleman would often write together, frequently using an old ticket booth room in the Metro. They had regular meetings with Miller, during which they would read the work out loud to him—Miller liked to take advantage of having writers who were also experienced performers. Coleman described Miller’s screenwriting

\(^{708}\) Warren Coleman, interview by author, May 2018.

\(^{709}\) Judy Morris, interview by author, April 2018.
methods as unconventional, and his script formatting as unique, being principally concerned with communicating the story in a highly readable and visual fashion. As with other Kennedy Miller projects, the writing of *Happy Feet* involved many writers or writing teams working under centralised oversight across different periods of time. There does not appear to have been any special division of labour between the participants—though Coleman felt that each had complementary strengths, and speculated that Miller could have recruited them with these in mind.

Coleman’s account of the writing and development is consistent with Mark Lamprell’s and Morris’s recollections from *Pig in the City*. Script revisions with Miller were inevitably a long process: “Whenever you think it is done you’re about a third of the way through.” Miller had to satisfy himself that he had looked at a story from all possible angles. If money and time were available—as they usually were at Kennedy Miller—then it was preferable to leave no stone unturned. Yet Miller could still change his mind completely when a better idea arrived: what Coleman calls an “extraordinary combination of preparedness and flexibility”. As Coleman understood it, much of the company’s development work was self-financed, and Kennedy Miller retained ownership of the ideas its writers developed, allowing it to control and polish a project, and then offer it to a financing partner on its own terms. Kennedy Miller writers are often employed ‘as required’, on a rolling week-by-week or month-by-month basis, rather than being offered a specific fee for a specific task such as a script pass. Such a system requires ongoing spending on weekly fees, but would also have allowed the company to economise on project costs, as it could control the rate of development and the resources devoted to it. But it also is obviously advantageous in respects of Kennedy Miller’s organising philosophy; writers are given substantial freedom to pursue ideas, but develop no sense of ownership over their work—they are workers tinkering with discrete parts of a larger, more complex production, which is ultimately in the control of Miller, Mitchell, and the firm.

A clear structure or division of labour on the directing work is, as on *Beyond Thunderdome*, difficult to delineate. Morris defined her responsibilities as co-director

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710 Coleman, interview by author.
as working closely with Miller throughout production. Coleman described his as accumulating up over time, a consequence of the firm continually giving him additional work to do on the project, from working on the motion capture filming, to editing audio, to doing a first pass edit on filmed material, to progressive bouts of re-writing. Judging from their accounts, the essential comprehensivism of the Kennedy Miller method was still present in this period. The company had an inclusive, can-do atmosphere, where “everybody kind of mucked in on everything”.\(^711\) Miller seemed to pride himself on his ability to familiarise himself with his employees, appearing to know the names of everybody who worked in his building. The firm still devoted resources to its ‘excessive preparation’, consulting with scientists on penguin behaviour. Coleman initially had expected to work only three months or so on the project, but his involvement stretched forward nearly four years; he was never sure for how long his services would be required, and he also recalled being pleasantly surprised with his final allocation of credit on the film. This suggests that the ongoing efficiencies of the firm’s use of contractors on its productions afforded it the benefits of collaboration while minimising the authority or creative ownership of any individual personnel other than the firm’s principals.

Production practices appear consistent with the firm’s established procedures, albeit adapted for digital animated filmmaking. Voice performers were recorded progressively, in batches, stretching over the long years of the production. But Coleman also described Miller’s preference, where possible, for filming actors in groups, with all their microphones simultaneously live, under the principle that “acting is a contact sport”.\(^712\) Character movement and behaviour was created through motion capture performance—an experienced team of dancers and choreographers were recruited to devise and perform the penguins’ dances, including Australian Kelley Abbey, who ran a workshop-style ‘penguin school’ for performers, and acted as the principal motion capture performer for multiple characters.\(^713\) These

\(^{711}\) Coleman, interview by author.
\(^{712}\) Coleman, interview by author.
procedures suggest a variation of the Kennedy Miller workshopping/rehearsal process, which extracted benefits from performers preparing and working in tandem.

Hearnshaw is credited as associate producer, and first assistant director on the motion capture unit; he felt his role on the film was ill-defined, which indicates that the company’s multidisciplinary practices were continuing. As with *Babe*, Hearnshaw described *Happy Feet* as a “pioneer exercise” in technology, which required the team to develop new techniques in motion capture, digital rigs and sets, and other devices. Press reports claim the producers spent two and a half years developing a digital ‘pipeline’ which could combine computer animation, motion-capture photography and digital effects. Given that the technology used on the film was being developed throughout production, it surely made sense for the firm to hire trusted and liked workers like Hearnshaw and let the labour proceed organically as circumstances demanded. Hearnshaw saw Miller’s methods on this project as unique, collaborative, and unformulaic; he said that though some people would find the firm’s style to be unsettling or confronting, he personally embraced it, finding every day to be fresh.

*Happy Feet* exemplifies several core tendencies of the film production environment of the time, not just in Australia but also throughout ‘global Hollywood’. To make the film, Kennedy Miller partnered with the Sydney-based digital effects studio Animal Logic, which it had previously used on the two *Babe* films. The credits on the text suggest something close to an even partnership between firms, billing the film as “A Kennedy Miller production / in association with Animal Logic Film”. Animal Logic has been described by Goldsmith as an emblematic case of an ‘international Australian’ company participating in the globalised film production service market. Founded in 1991, the company had provided effects both to local productions such as *Moulin*

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714 Philip Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara, February and May 2010, Oral History Collection, 803657, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
716 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
Rouge and offshore productions including *The Matrix* and international works like Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* (2004). *Happy Feet* was Animal Logic’s first animated feature, but it possessed ambitions to be a new Pixar.\(^718\) The company ballooned in size during production, recruiting animators from over twenty different countries to supplement the available Australian workforce; at peak workload, the project required 4000 computers for rendering scenes, 500 desktops for artist and crew housed at Fox Studios, and enough generators to power a small hospital.\(^719\) The company has since become a semi-regular and prominent local producer of animated films, including *Legend of the Guardians* (Zack Snyder, 2010) and *The LEGO Movie* (Phil Lord & Christopher Miller, 2014), in addition to continuing to provide visual effects work to Hollywood productions, like the Marvel films. The partnership of the two firms again shows Kennedy Miller at the vanguard of significant developments in Australian production capacity.

The film was backed—at a reported budget of US$100 million—by Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow, now partners again with Kennedy Miller after the separation of the 1990s. In the interim, the US studio and Australian company—long-time associates in distribution—had made a formal coproduction pact in 1996. Village Roadshow had secured $250 million in credit to complete the deal, and additional credit extended the relationship to 2015, the year of *Fury Road*’s release.\(^720\) US scholar Tino Balio has described such production pacts: companies like Village Roadshow raise their own financing (as from a line of credit), and provide half or more of a film’s production budget upfront; studio majors, like Warner Bros, gain worldwide distribution rights, but charge lower fees for the service.\(^721\) Each partner in such arrangements would have equal oversight of all stages of production, and receive half the profits from revenue stream. *Happy Feet* was part of this ongoing pact between Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow—and Kennedy Miller was plainly well positioned to take advantage of their mutual arrangement, having longstanding


distribution and financing relationships with both. As Mark David Ryan has shown, Animal Logic, Warner Bros., and Roadshow are key corporate movers in a category of ‘Australian Blockbusters’ that emerged in the 2000s. Kennedy Miller’s close relationships with these companies not only shows how it operated in concert with industry trends, but also that the firm itself could be characterised as a key mover of these developments.

Balio describes the risk-sharing relationship of US majors with independent producers as a consequence of growing economic conservatism within the global film industry. An atmosphere of tightened purse strings was a key part of the so-called ‘Millennial Hollywood’ of the 2000s, which Schatz has argued was defined by forces of conglomeration, globalisation, and digitisation: waves of mergers and acquisitions placed the US media industries in the hands of an increasingly small number of multinational corporations; and the convergence of film, TV, and home entertainment industries, and the rise of digital technologies, yielded shifts in production and distribution strategies. Responding to the economic uncertainties of the restructured industry, Hollywood focused its energies on blockbuster franchise production, which is precision-gated for a global audience, and spread across the synergistic activities of a corporation’s interrelated entertainment divisions. Schatz defines the emblematic production house of this period as Pixar Animation Studios, with its close relationship to Disney, and its sense of a blockbuster franchise as a “consummate renewable resource”—it is indicative of Kennedy Miller’s commercial sensibility that it was now pursuing production in a Pixar mode.

Another structural consequence of Hollywood’s economic conservatism was an increase in the importance of talent agents, who had assumed new industrial power as dealmakers in the post-Paramount decree era; now again they became

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723 Balio, 37-38.
prominent, as studios became bearish about the high fees commanded by creative talent. Not coincidentally, in the wake of *Happy Feet*'s release Miller signed with US talent representation firm Creative Artists Agency, having been without representation around the development of *Contact*; he claimed to be seeking new assistance in navigating the vagaries of Hollywood power structures. In 2006, Miller described the “studio game” as “the roughest there is, aside from politics”:

> They’re booking theatres—18,000 around the world—and they have to slot into their dates almost a year ahead. You’ve got advertising, promotion departments, toy makers, publishers with all that lead time … people are seeing the movie in rough form and they’ve got to decide ‘how much do we put into the promotion of this film?’; do we believe George Miller when he says he can deliver a film that is going to work with the public?’ It’s an act of faith for a studio.

Having demonstrable experience with both small and medium-sized films, Kennedy Miller might have elected to pursue production outside the studio sphere in the field of independent film, which had undergone a popularisation across the 1990s. But the incentives offered by the blockbuster mode—whether in terms of finance or as a canvas for creativity—must have proved too tempting, however pressurised the atmosphere that accompanied this strategy. When Coleman was brought on to the developing *Happy Feet* he had the impression that the film was treated like a side project Kennedy Miller was working on while principally occupied with *Fury Road*—part of the company’s commitment to continuous development. But when *Fury Road*'s progress to production suddenly halted, the company’s attention swung around to *Happy Feet*, and its scope grew in response. In practice, for Kennedy Miller there were no little projects anymore.

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727 Turner, "Curious George."
728 Turner, "Curious George."
In 2008, the firm was re-named Kennedy Miller Mitchell, reflecting Doug Mitchell’s longstanding role at the company. Mitchell rarely makes a public comment, but evidence suggests that after Kennedy’s death, and Mitchell’s assumption of financial responsibilities at the firm, he came to assume an elevated position as Miller’s partner. Miller described him to Stratton as the “silent power” behind the firm, and a creative influence who shares his comprehensivist outlook. In Hearnshaw’s oral history, he recalls that producing work was done orderly and invisibly between Miller and Mitchell, with no obvious division of labour. Coleman described Mitchell as a very reliable administrative producer, but also someone who would get his “hands dirty” creatively by suggesting edits, or working up different editorial options to present to Miller.

“We have a talent drain” — *Justice League Mortal*

The never-made *Justice League Mortal* is the best-publicised of the firm’s unrealised projects. Although it came close to principal photography in 2008, production was ultimately suspended by US backer Warner Bros. The circumstances of the project and its dissolution are emblematic of the firm’s production strategy in the 2000s, and of its position within the evolving national industry. Miller’s disillusionment with Australian culture, which had become apparent through the 1990s, continued onward into the 2000s. In newspaper interviews from 2001, when he became an AFI patron, 2003, 2005, and 2007, Miller expressed concern for the “watered down” state of Australian culture: that the local was being eclipsed by the ‘mono-culture’ of America; that no new ideas or contributions were being offered; and that the nation as a whole was culturally disorganised, and its collective identity eroded, so no concerted cultural improvement programs were in effect. “I’m not talking about

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729 George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
730 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
731 Coleman, interview by author.
734 Michael Idato, “Miller’s Tale: Why Australian Drama Is in Such a State.”
the technical training, we’re very resourceful and very gifted technically,” he told the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2003, “I’m talking about creative training … There are no creative gymnasia in this country.”736

Though in the 1970s he had expressed some ambivalence about government intervention, Miller now identified the government as the entity responsible for overseeing the nation’s cultural health. “Those responsible for protecting our culture are letting it fall away,” he told the *Courier Mail* in 2001:

> We have a talent drain where our most gifted artists are winning international recognition, but things are stagnant here. The Australian film industry has been left to market forces – governments and their advisers and their consultants have taken an economic rationalist approach, which is the wrong direction.737

His firm had appeared largely positive about those ‘market forces’ in the 1970s and 1980s—or, at least, in its own ability to use them to its advantage. But by the 2000s and onwards, Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s production strategy was once again reliant on some form of government intervention, as it had been in the 1980s. This situation had been prefigured by *Babe: Pig in the City*, which, though privately financed through US studio Universal, also required the mobilisation of government cooperation in order to shoot on the developing Fox Studios site. This film had seen the firm leap beyond the mid-budget threshold: following works, like *Happy Feet*, all cost upwards of US$100 million, and drew on new Australian tax concessions to ameliorate their expense. This accorded with a general trend in the newly cost-conscious Hollywood industry, in which studios increasingly became reliant on ‘soft money’ subsidies and tax breaks—Australia’s viability as a local Hollywood was dependent on such concessions.738

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In the 1990s, Australia had not had a national program of tax incentives designed to attract international production. But this changed: in 2001, with the introduction of the Location Offset, a tax refund for eligible production expenditure within Australia, then in 2007, with the introduction of the PDV Offset, a rebate for post-production, digital, and visual effects production in Australia; and then again that same year with the Screen Producer Offset, a rebate (of up to 40 per cent) offered to producers of qualifying Australian productions. These three mechanisms of indirect subsidy together came to replace the long-since phased-down 10BA concessions, after the revised experiment in direct subsidy pursued by the FFC in the 1990s. Village Roadshow’s Graham Burke told the Weekend Australian Financial Review in March 2007 that Happy Feet would not have been made in Australia without the location offset. Miller, the same article reported, had been one of many urging the Federal Government to deliver a package of further incentives—indicating that the firm had undertaken certain lobbying activities.

The introduction of 10BA in the 1980s had a transformative effect on the firm’s operations, leading to a period of continuous production, the employment of a recurring creative ensemble, and allowing it to achieve the dimensions of a small studio. Skin in the Game, a 2017 report from Screen Australia, described the impacts of the Producer Offset scheme as enabling firms to take a bigger equity position in their projects, to achieve consistency of production, retain staff, and develop their own intellectual property, and to facilitate the raising of finance and the building of business relationships in Australia and internationally. In one way or another, Kennedy Miller Mitchell has already made achievements in these areas, and the introduction of the Offset does not therefore appear transformative in the company’s operations. However, the evidence above shows that the company desired and

739 Sean Maher, The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 25.
740 Nick Herd, Chasing the Runaways (Sydney: Currency House, 2004), 41.
relied upon tax concession schemes, and events show that the new Producer Offset became crucial the firm’s ability to mount production across the next decade.

Federal government film policy went through additional changes in 2008, when the Australian Film Commission, the Film Finance Corporation, and Film Australia were merged into the new agency Screen Australia, which oversaw the Offset. These changes induced a certain amount of industry skittishness as producers worked to wrap their heads around the implications of the Producer Offset conditions—including which projects would qualify as possessing significant Australian content (a decision that largely rests at the discretion of the funding agency), and which would only be eligible for the Location offset. Debate also emerged about the likelihood of international productions “retooling” themselves to become eligible.

Financed by Village Roadshow, made for US studio Warner Bros., and based on the American DC superhero comics, *Justice League Mortal* proved to be an early test of these new conditions. Reports in early 2008 described the project as a “cynical play” for the rebate, being not Australian in content, and having been originally under development as *Justice League of America* until Miller was announced as director in late 2007. Though Miller, an Australian, was presumed to have creative control over the project, the film was perceived as American in essence, and the cast itself was largely international. In press reports, the project was described as having ‘divided’ the screen industry between crews, contractors, and labourers who were eager to earn a wage, and filmmakers who wanted to see the rebate only nurture Australian stories and only represent a minimal burden on public funds. Given *Mortal’s* high budget, an article in the *Australian Financial Review* alleged, taxpayers

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744 Michael Bodey, "Shoot and We'll Cough Up," *Australian*, February 27, 2008.
745 Bodey, "Shoot and We'll Cough Up."
747 Though, unusually for him, he was reported to not be receiving a writer’s credit. See: Bodey, "Shoot and We'll Cough Up."
would “forfeit some $60 million to Miller’s company, Kennedy Miller Mitchell, upon completion of the film”. 748

Warner Bros. ultimately suspended the project in January 2008—very close to the beginning of photography, with casting complete and actors assembling in Sydney—after it became evident that it would be refused a provisional certificate to qualify for the Producer Offset rebate (and, reportedly, over concerns about the script). Through February and March that year, Miller appeared to be continuing his efforts to reverse or forestall a final decision on its eligibility, and as late as October he still claimed to hope to make it. 749 At the time, the film’s ineligibility was taken as evidence that Screen Australia, like the earlier AFC, would be predominantly applying ‘cultural’ criteria in assessing projects for government support. In this sense, the rejection of Mortal is consistent with Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s assumptions, stretching back to Mad Max, that its work was largely unsuitable for government subsidy, despite the alignment of firm and government interests that had occurred in the 10BA era. But this view was then muddied the following year, in 2009, when local filmmaker Alex Proyas’s feature Knowing—an American story made in Australia, was deemed eligible for the offset—with commentators concluding that for Screen Australia commercial, not cultural, imperatives ruled the offset’s governing considerations. 750

The firm’s subsequent productions have both secured the offset.

As it did when advocating for use of the Showgrounds for Pig in the City, the firm argued that the production would be relocated overseas to Canada or New Zealand, along with those of Happy Feet Two and Fury Road, if it was not afforded sufficient government concessions. “I’m dancing as fast as I can with the studio to have them hang on here,” Miller told the Australian Financial Review in February, “We’re going to appeal it because it’s not just ‘Justice League’, we have other films with Australian

748 Boland, "We Are Australian, Claims Filmmaker."
749 Bodey, "Shoot and We'll Cough Up"; Boland, "We Are Australian, Claims Filmmaker"; Garry Maddox, "Little Feet Bring Film Industry Back to Life," Sydney Morning Herald, October 10, 2008.
Here Miller appears to be referencing other unspecified and unforthcoming Kennedy Miller Mitchell projects, which he says would be adversely affected by a restricted application of the offset. Despite all this, Kennedy Miller Mitchell still felt the tax concessions were crucial to its production plans, as is indicated by brief reports of Miller’s and Mitchell’s ongoing lobbying activities. Later, in 2011, the *Australian Financial Review* reported that Miller and Mitchell had been working on a “concerted, behind the scenes campaign” to persuade the government to extend the Producer Offset. 

Reporter Brook Turner noted that Miller and Mitchell only lacked a “compliant government to rush through emergency legislation”, as had been available to Peter Jackson in New Zealand, when he confronted organised labour issues in the production of the *Hobbit* trilogy.

In comments to the press, Miller framed *Justice League* as an attempt to stave off the ‘talent drain’ he had earlier expressed concern about in 2001. “This film is being made for only one reason, and that’s because of me,” he told *The Australian*, “The main reason I wanted to do it here was to get the talent to stay here and (expand the visual effects) companies.” After *Happy Feet*, Miller had expressed concern about the dispersal of the film’s digital production staff upon its completion. “They’re in London now, working on the next *Harry Potter* movie,” he told *The Age*. “They’ve gone to India, to Canada, to big companies in America. A few have stayed and are working at Animal Logic. But there’s no continuity.”

Miller felt that Australia lacked the critical mass needed to maintain local talent, and that to develop it required concerted effort.

Since as far back as *Mad Max*, the firm had seen filmmaking as not a “geographical process”, but rather something “indigenous to planet earth”. That posture, the
internationalist aspect of its ‘two-sided’ policy, had remained more or less consistent ever since. Although commentators might disdain the ‘imperialist’ style of its films, Kennedy Miller Mitchell had never had significant reason to adjust its own policy, because the terms of private financing available to it through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were largely favourable. But now in the blockbuster era, the firm was obliged to engage with the terms of cultural policy in Australia, something it had consciously avoided in the AFC era of the 1970s. The firm’s policy engagement reflects concrete economic problems affecting its output, but it is also consistent with the firm’s posture of responsibility for Australian culture and industry first taken up in the 1990s. Miller, defending the international character of *Justice League*, had argued that “*The Lord of the Rings* is not a New Zealand story and yet it basically transformed the New Zealand industry economically.”\(^757\) He believed the film would have led to a series of big-budget productions in Australia, and that the country had lost a chance to become a film epicentre.\(^758\) Franchises, he argued, were needed in the industry to maintain and elevate production activity, upscale workers, and retain talent,\(^759\) even if they were not ‘Australian’ in character.\(^760\)

“The same game” — Dr. D Studios and *Happy Feet Two*

Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s expansion in the years around *Justice League Mortal* was in part an attempt to realise the firm’s ambitions for Australian screen infrastructure. In 2007, Miller and Mitchell announced that they would launch their own digital outfit, named Dr. D Studios, in partnership with Omnilab Media Group, an Australian production services company.\(^761\) Though Dr. D Studios was a separate entity, I am treating it here as something like an extension of the Kennedy Miller Mitchell production house, since its purpose and activities with respect to the firm’s output

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757 Bodey, “Shoot and We’ll Cough Up.”
759 Maddox, “Little Feet Bring Film Industry Back to Life.”
are so intertwined as to be indivisible. The now-defunct Dr. D Studios website describes the company as “multidisciplinary” and “collaborative”—terms that reveal a more or less direct offshoot of the firm’s identity and method. “We don’t consider ourselves an animation studio”, the website said. “We’re not stuck to one style, toolset or medium and if we were to define ourselves we would say we are … Storytellers.”

The Dr. D Studio facilities, which ultimately encompassed a 120-seat digital cinema, two railway carriages fitted out as meeting rooms, and a large motion-capture stage, were housed within Sydney’s Carriageworks arts hub, and were so extensive that they required their own generator. The space was secured from the NSW Government (then-premier, Nathan Rees, announced the lease) for what would ultimately be a four-year occupation, reportedly under very favourable terms of lease. Government concessions made the new enterprise viable: Dr. D was granted a tax assistance package from the NSW Government; then-Minister of State Development Ian MacDonald announced that the new initiative would put Sydney “once again front and centre of the national film industry”, and create hundreds of skilled jobs for young people leaving Australia’s screen and digital educational institutions.

This expansion was conceived in imitation of Peter Jackson’s extensive interests in Wellington, New Zealand: a suite of companies, owned by Jackson and his partners, encompassing all aspects of screen production. “I don’t think I would even have attempted this had I not seen what they did in Wellington,” Miller told the Daily Telegraph. “They have the best talent pool in the world. And Wellington [with a

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population of 400,000] is a tenth the size of Sydney." The intertwined motivations for the founding of Dr. D include the desire to secure high-level talent for Kennedy Miller’s productions, and to contribute to the overall stability of the digital production sector of the Australian screen industry by attracting foreign investment, ensuring long-term local job prospects and upskilling for new graduates, and staving off talent drain to overseas industries. This required a commitment to continuous production. “You’ve got to have enough films lined up to be able to entice people to come back for five to ten years," Miller said. “They need to know that they’re not going to come here for a short term then have to go again.” Dr. D was expected to handle Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s still-in-development Fury Road, and a possible third Babe, as well as future animated work (including a never-made bear movie called Fur Brigade) and an anticipated slate of other big-budget, international projects. The focus on animation projects explains why some future Max franchise entries were rumoured to be animated films.

In the end, the studio’s only completed feature production was Happy Feet Two. The production of this film again displays the ongoing persistence of the company’s method. On this film, Miller again takes primary director credit, but with two co-directors, Gary Eck and David Peers. The script is credited to Miller, Eck, Coleman, and Paul Livingstone (an Australian comedic performer who had earlier appeared in a bit part in Pig in the City). Peers is a visual-effects professional who had earlier been credited as camera director on Happy Feet (he is also credited on Fury Road as supervisor of the pre-visualisation department). Eck is a Sydney-based comedian, and the film is his only Kennedy Miller Mitchell credit to date. Margaret Sixel, Miller’s spouse and editor on the first Feet, is given prominent (and unusual) credit as ‘dramaturg’, and thanked in the end credits for ‘story structure’. In these divisions of credit, we can see that core elements of the team from the first Happy Feet carried over onto its sequel—the firm’s ensemble style in effect—but that the constitution of this team was also founded on a central constant: Miller himself.

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767 Roach, "It's Miller's Double Dip."
768 Maddox, "Little Feet Bring Film Industry Back to Life."
769 “Song and Dance over Return of Penguins,” Canberra Times.
Hearnshaw returned also, and is credited as executive producer. In his NFSA oral history, recorded during the film’s production, he said that *Happy Feet Two* was again blazing a trail technological development. Hearnshaw carried out work in the research and development department at Dr. D, which built software to animate the penguins. He described a push to develop new technological tools for animating the penguins’ feathers, and for new digital camera technologies and lensing tools—the company held ambitions to be at the forefront of the technological field.

Hearnshaw had gone to the computer graphics conference SIGGRAPH to recruit staff for the film, and described some difficulties in convincing promising candidates to move to Australia. He said that many employees were relatively inexperienced in the field, in part because experienced workers would be prohibitively expensive. These comments indicate some continuity with the firm’s habit, from the first *Mad Max*, to hire for enthusiasm and cultural compatibility, and to avoid ‘professionalised’ or non-comprehensivist mentalities. Hearnshaw, speaking from his several decades of experience on Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s productions, said that the firm had successfully expanded the way it could produce collaboratively by the time of *Happy Feet Two*, by developing writing and directing techniques that enabled the collaborative process to be as good as it could be. Hearnshaw described animated digital work as fundamentally more collaborative than anything in the live-action paradigm.

Dr. D Studios, and the production of *Happy Feet Two*, show an intensified commitment from the firm to the new digital production technologies that had been influencing the global screen industry since the 1990s. This is reflected also in Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s investment in video-game production around this time, another kind of company expansion closely associated with Dr. D. The firm’s interest in video games dates back at least to 1987, when a developer for a VHS-based video-game console named Nemo (which ultimately never reached stores) reached out to propose a *Mad Max* vehicular combat game, to be called *Autorama*. The developer, Ken Melville, wrote and storyboarded an intricate, interactive script of

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Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
material to be filmed, which Miller was enthusiastic to produce and direct in Australia with Gibson starring. But the project was cancelled when Nemo’s corporate owners, toy company Hasbro, learned that the Max franchise was not child-friendly.\footnote{Adam Redsell, “The Mad Max Game That Never Was,” IGN, August 3, 2013, http://au.ign.com/articles/2013/08/04/the-mel-gibson-mad-max-game-that-never-was.} Twenty years later, in 2007, Mitchell and Miller registered the company Kennedy Miller Mitchell Games (or KMM Games); reports say that they had poached noted game developer Cory Barlog, director of the popular God of War 2, from Sony Santa Monica to work on a Max game synchronised with the production of a new Mad Max feature, which was rumoured to be animated (possibly an iteration of Fury Road).\footnote{Bodey, “In with Lyn, Just Not For Long.”}

The firm’s interest in video games had three visible strategic aspects. The maturing video game industry was becoming hugely financially lucrative, capable of outgrossing major Hollywood movies at a fraction of the production cost; Mitchell saw it as a “$60 billion industry fast-tracking towards $90 billion”—a tempting outlet for production, given the circumscribed possibilities in the film industry. Games also presented a unique advancement in screen narrative art, Miller’s long-time obsession—he saw them as “four-dimensional storytelling”, possessing the potential of a novel in their ability to digress and explore an open world.\footnote{Turner, “Miller’s Crossing.”} And, most importantly, games acted as a synergistic partner to the film and television production. Miller felt these fields were converging, not only on the level of narrative style, but on the production side, too; divisions of labour between technicians in live action film, animation, and video games were increasingly collapsing.\footnote{Stephen Fenech, “Miller Is Game for Creative Challenge,” Daily Telegraph, April 23, 2007.} The firm’s stance on this issue was consistent with overall trends in production that Ryan, Goldsmith, Cunningham, and Verhoeven later highlighted in the findings of their Screen Producer Survey, which describes media convergence, and cross-media mobility in production, as facts of life for contemporary Australian producers.\footnote{Mark David Ryan, Ben Goldsmith, Stuart Cunningham, and Deb Verhoeven, “The Australian Screen Producer in Transition,” in Beyond the Bottom-Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies, ed. Andrew Spicer, Anthony McKenna, and Christopher Meir (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 139.}
KMM Games produced a game accompaniment to *Happy Feet Two* (published by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment),\(^{776}\) using many of the same production processes as the feature, including the same Carriageworks motion capture studio, and the same cast of dancers.\(^{777}\) But in 2011, the year of *Happy Feet Two*’s release, KMM Games was supplanted by Kennedy Miller Mitchell Interactive, a new venture created to house the firm’s existing games interests alongside incoming cohorts of workers from Krome and Team Bondi, two Australia-based game outfits which had entered into organisational difficulties. Team Bondi had just released the highly acclaimed and commercially successful *LA Noire*, which used advanced motion-capture technology for its character animation. But the game had taken seven years and (allegedly) significant internal distress to make, and Team Bondi entered liquidation not long after its release. Studio head Brendan McNamara sold Bondi’s intellectual property and assets to KMM Interactive, and decamped there with a corps of employees and development material for a follow-up to *Noire*, a Shanghai-set game to be called *Whore of the Orient*.\(^{778}\)

Derek Proud, a developer at KMM Games and KMM Interactive, later told the *Game Hugs* podcast the new venture was initiated by Mitchell, who saw an opportunity to pick up the pieces of a prestigious development studio and see if they could be put to work again, with the bill to be footed by Warner Bros.\(^{779}\) Proud referred to a “difficult integration” between the Bondi and Krome teams and those already at KMM Games.\(^{780}\) Bondi team members, on arriving, were put to work on *Happy Feet Two*, suggesting that the distinctions between Kennedy Miller Mitchell, as a production company, Dr. D, as its studio, and KMM Interactive, as its games division, were

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\(^{779}\) Proud, interview by Jason Imms.

highly porous. This looks like part of the company’s plan for these labour pools.

“People can move from a game to a movie and be completely at home,” Miller told The Australian Financial Review in 2011, “because it’s the same skills, process – the same game.”

But the causes behind Bondi and Krome’s difficulties, and the struggles facing the local video-game industry, were also endemic among the broader screen industries—most particularly a resurgent Australian dollar, which made local investment less attractive to international financiers. Beginning in late 2011, Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s ambitious new expansion and investments in digital production began to collapse. In November, shortly after Happy Feet Two’s commercially unpromising debut in the US, reports indicated that Dr. D Studios—absent a critical mass of continuous work, and with Miller and Mitchell described as distracted and enervated by further delays to Fury Road—would shortly be undergoing a shrinking and restructuring, and be renamed ‘Dr G’. The workforce had reportedly peaked at 670 in August, but by November the majority had been retrenched, and the fifty or so remaining long-term contractors were expected to shortly also be gone.

In November 2012, then-Federal Minister for the Arts Simon Crean announced a new $20 million games fund, to be dispensed over three years, after lobbying from the gaming sector to include video-game productions within the Producer Offset scheme. Miller and Mitchell had been among those lobbying Crean, whom Mitchell said had visited the company several times over a six-month period, even going out to Dr. D’s premises for a day to watch the work there. But the games fund was evidently too little too late, as the economic stresses affecting KMM Interactive and Dr. D came to a head throughout 2013—though the company’s habitual privacy

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781 Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
782 Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
783 "600 Not So Happy Workers," Daily Telegraph, November 26, 2011.
784 Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
785 I do not know whether KMM Interactive was able to make use of Crean’s new fund.
787 Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
makes it difficult to parse the timeline of events. In April 2013, reports said that the Bondi/Orient team had been shut down at KMM Interactive—though Mitchell claimed he was still looking for a partner for the game—and that a Max game said to be under development there had shifted to Swedish studio Avalanche, where Barlog had gone after his time at KMM Games. In June 2013, Dr. D Studios held a fire sale of its remaining assets; the remaining employees were said to number fewer than half a dozen. The Carriageworks premises were vacated in July; one report said that the NSW Government had gone so far as to lock the company out. Also in June, the NSW Government announced that it had given KMM Interactive a $200,000 grant from its Interactive Media Fund, for the development of Orient, but both the game and company ceased being active concerns around this time, and Orient never emerged into commercial release.

**Going Forward By Turning Back—Mad Max: Fury Road and after**

Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s final completed production to date is 2015’s Mad Max: Fury Road, the fourth entry in its original and longest-running franchise. It is also the longest-gestating of the company’s works. Miller conceived the idea for the film in the late 1990s, and the project entered formal development shortly afterwards. As early as 1997, press reports circulated that Mel Gibson was preparing to return for a fourth Mad Max film, commanding an enormous fee of $50 million; reports also said that Gibson would be killed off and the story continued by Max’s son, a character played

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789 The eventual Mad Max game in 2015, arriving after the release of Fury Road, had Avalanche as its developer and Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment as its publisher.


791 “Kennedy Miller Gets the Bird,” Australian Financial Review.

by then-rising Australian actor Heath Ledger, or that Ledger himself would play Max.\textsuperscript{793}

The rights to the \textit{Mad Max} franchise had been tied up in the firm’s partnership with Warner Bros., but as part of a negotiated agreement following Miller’s exit from \textit{Contact}, Kennedy Miller reacquired the rights, and the fourth film was for a time set up at the News Corp-owned studio Twentieth Century Fox, where Gibson had a deal.\textsuperscript{794} In January 2003, a version of the film, then titled \textit{Mad Max: Dirty Road}, appeared to be moving toward production, with Gibson starring and a reported budget of $104 million.\textsuperscript{795} The film at this time was scheduled to film in Namibia, but was then delayed by Fox, citing concerns over the impending Iraq war. Production was allegedly slated to resume in 2004, but an article in \textit{The Australian} states that Miller was attempting to find out whether the ‘delay’ was actually a de facto cancellation.\textsuperscript{796}

In October 2009, after the release of \textit{Happy Feet}, the film was again reported to be entering production, now filming entirely in Australia, not Namibia, and without Gibson, the franchise backed once again by Warner Brothers and Village Roadshow.\textsuperscript{797} The \textit{Daily Telegraph} reported that “much of the work” was due to be done at Carriageworks—presumably at Dr. D Studios—plus thirty weeks outside Broken Hill. Sam Worthington was rumoured to star, alongside Charlize Theron. As with other Kennedy Miller Mitchell ventures in this period, this production was enabled by focused lobbying efforts and mustering state cooperation. The press report state that then-NSW Premier Nathan Rees had “moved heaven and earth” to secure the film, which was expected to create more than 500 jobs, and inject “tens of millions” into the economy. Miller is reported as saying:


Big movies like *Fury Road* and *Happy Feet* are rare and competitively sought after in all the filming regions of the world. The production agreements have been a long time in the making and Premier Rees and his team have worked like Trojans to ensure this substantial investment comes into this country. Not only does it help fuel the local economy but it means many talented people get a chance to practise their craft and lift their skill.\textsuperscript{798}

But this version also was delayed, because an unexpected rainfall made the planned Broken Hill locations unsuitable to film as desert landscapes.\textsuperscript{799} However, given that this came after *Justice League Mortal* was refused Producer Offset certification, it is also possible that financial considerations rendered an Australian shoot unsuitable. Nevertheless, development on *Fury Road* continued through the production of *Happy Feet Two*; one press report described a secretive *Fury Road* meeting room at the Carriageworks Dr. D premises.\textsuperscript{800}

These several abortive beginnings meant that the film went through an unusually attenuated development process, beyond even the company’s habitual ‘excessive preparation’. Miller first wrote the film with British comic-book artist Brendan McCarthy, composing not a formal script but a set of full storyboards for the planned film. After McCarthy moved on, Miller continued to work on the ‘script’ material with John Collee, and then with dramaturg Nico Lathouris, from *St Vincent’s Revue Film*, who is credited as co-writer on the final film. Miller consciously prioritised visual storytelling over dialogue—as has been his tendency since the first *Mad Max*—wanting to make a movie that would not need subtitles.\textsuperscript{801} This decision also recognised the growing importance of foreign-language markets to the success of blockbuster franchises—in 2012, *The Age* reported that Doug Mitchell had attended a Screen Australia delegation to China, around the time a formal co-production

\textsuperscript{798} Joe Hildebrand, "*Mad Max* Millions-Fury Road Leads to NSW Film Recovery," *Daily Telegraph*, October 24, 2009.
\textsuperscript{799} Bodey, "Australia Would Have Been a Superhero of the Film World: Miller."
\textsuperscript{800} Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
\textsuperscript{801} Maddox, "The Celluloid Warrior."
agreement with that country was finalised. This suggests that Kennedy Miller was proactively exploring changes in the international film market.\textsuperscript{802} During the development process, Miller also began to work on two additional scripts: one titled \textit{Mad Max: The Wasteland}, and another titled \textit{The Praetorian}, which was an origin story for \textit{Fury Road}'s female lead, the character Imperator Furiosa, played by Charlize Theron. John Collee wrote an outline for this story, plotting out story beats provided by Miller.\textsuperscript{803} An anime-style animated project titled \textit{Praetorian} was set up with Warner Bros. as part of the overall contract for \textit{Fury Road}, but there is no evidence it ever entered production.\textsuperscript{804}

The dramaturg Lathouris had worked on the firm's \textit{Mango River} before that TV project was halted, as well as other never-made projects, and he described his writing process at Kennedy Miller in a NFSA oral history. Lathouris's account outlines some of the varied processes possible within the firm's edict for excessive preparation—he writing work, as described, was exploratory and highly conceptual. Unlike Coleman, Lamprell, and Morris, Lathouris mostly worked by himself, in consultation with Miller. He shared with Miller a sense of the “social function” of narrative, and saw dramaturgy as a way to cure ‘social cancers’.\textsuperscript{805} Lathouris identifies more as a ‘dramaturg’ than a writer, having worked in Australian television in positions interfacing between writers and actors. As dramaturg on \textit{Fury Road}, Lathouris spent about ten months translating the existing script into a 200-page document, which he called an “investigation of the action of [the] story”. He left the project when the Iraq war interrupted its 2003 production, but returned for its later iterations. Lathouris describes Miller as an artist who is not trying to “sort himself out” through his work with personal stories, but someone who gives a “universal idea a

\textsuperscript{802} Karl Quinn, "Sinking out Teeth into China," \textit{Age}, October 25, 2012. Although, in the event, \textit{Fury Road} did not actually open in China, which restricts the number of foreign films that play each year.


\textsuperscript{805} Lathouris, interview by Margaret Leask.
human form”—a view consistent with the firm’s established commitment to Campbellian mythic narratives.

Kennedy Miller Mitchell also funded Lathouris’s work on an untitled narrative about three women, which he wrote out and explored using a variety of narrative techniques, across about a year. A resume for Lathouris, hosted on the website of the Sydney High School Old Boys Union, also references work on other Kennedy Miller projects including Justice League Mortal, as well as Shifted—a “multi-platform, lateral application, live-action drama initiative using game design principles for storytelling via the Internet”—and a feature titled The Hidden, about which no further details are available. This suggests that the firm was still actively pursuing continuous project development in the periods between its features. As Lathouris describes it, the general structure of the writing process between him and Miller first involved long conversational meetings, which Lathouris would tape and then turn into a transcript, which he would return to Miller. After many sessions of talk, the two would narrow in on a desired story. Lathouris, on the unspecified project he discusses, took the unusual step of writing his ‘script’ in the third person as a narrative, focusing on the visual and “thinking filmically”, writing “what is happening, rather than what people are saying”—though dialogue was included. Though Miller was the “guiding light” of the project, Lathouris did the actual writing. This process appears consistent with other accounts of script development with Miller, albeit adapted for his particular relationship with Lathouris.

Production on Fury Road started up again, for the last time, in November 2011, at a reported budget of US$150 million—Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s largest yet. The film was reported to be moving back from Broken Hill to Namibia, with British actor Tom Hardy cast as Max. Filming was scheduled from June to December 2012. As was now characteristic for the company, the shoot was logistically complex, with crew numbers ranging from 1200 to 1700. Two units shot simultaneously, one with

807 Maddox, “The Celluloid Warrior.”
Miller and one with stunt coordinator Guy Norris. A clear sense of the firm’s production ensemble of the time is visible in the film’s below-the-line crew members: PJ Voeten, an assistant director on the Babe films, and on television productions stretching back to Vietnam, is credited as producer alongside Mitchell and Miller, and as first assistant director; John Seale, who had shot Lorenzo’s Oil, returned as cinematographer; Colin Gibson, art director on the Babe films, returned as production designer; Sixel returned as editor; and Peter Pound, a visual artist for the company stretching back to the Babe films, is credited as principal vehicle designer.

Warner Bros. reportedly contributed additional millions to shift the shoot overseas, including shipping over vehicles that had already been designed and built for the 2009 version. This expense, Mitchell told the press, meant that he and Miller had to cut back on the material they had planned to shoot, filming for only 100 days in Namibia (plus 20 days in a Cape Town studio), instead of a planned 150. The truncated shoot meant that only the central chase portion of the film was initially shot in Namibia; the bookend sequences set at the ‘Citadel’ of villain Immortan Joe (played by the returning Hugh Keays-Byrne) were filmed later at Fox Studios in Sydney in 2013, at an additional cost of $31 million. Despite filming largely overseas, with British and South African stars, Fury Road, did ultimately receive the Producer Offset tax concession. Screen Australia reportedly invoked the so-called ‘Gallipoli clause’ in order to allow a film shot on location overseas to still qualify as ‘Australian’.

Like the previous Mad Max and Babe films, Fury Road was logistically complex, having been shot across 135 days, using up to ten cameras at a time, recording up to 20 hours of footage per day, and yielding a total 480 hours of footage. It took three months for the editors to view the material, and cutting continued over a two-year period: Sixel has described working more or less continuously from March 2012 to

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808 Maddox, "The Celluloid Warrior."
809 Turner, "Miller's Crossing."
810 Maddox, "The Celluloid Warrior."
April 2015.\textsuperscript{811} \textit{Fury Road} was the first \textit{Mad Max} film to be cut digitally, on the Avid system, and its rate of cutting is far more rapid—it contains around 2750 shots, as opposed to \textit{Mad Max 2}'s 1200. The film is the most intensive example of the firm’s formal commitment to montage. Marketing around the film’s release, focusing on the crew’s achievement of practical vehicular stunts during the Namibia shoot, described \textit{Fury Road} as a return to ‘practical’ action filmmaking, and the film is in some sense a return to the style, milieu, and overt formal and narrative concerns of the first two \textit{Mad Maxes}. And yet the film was extensively digitally manipulated: not only in the creation of CGI effects to complement the practical material, but also in its editing techniques, and in its thorough colour grading. Both as production and as text, the film appears a complete synthesis of Kennedy Miller’s earliest tendencies with its later technological evolutions.

Although Kennedy Miller Mitchell had in the past enjoyed a good relationship with Warner Bros., press reports indicate the studio grew concerned during the shoot, sending out a representative to keep an eye on things after filming fell behind schedule and over budget.\textsuperscript{812} Tensions between the partners again became evident in the wake of the film’s release, when Kennedy Miller initiated legal action against the studios over an unpaid $7 million bonus it was alleged to be owed. Kennedy Miller Mitchell also alleged that Warner was contractually required to approach the firm as a co-financing partner if required, which the studio had violated in arranging for Ratpac-Dune Entertainment to provide extra financing without informing Kennedy Miller Mitchell.\textsuperscript{813} In legal submissions, Warner Bros. argued the firm was not eligible to receive the bonus, since in the studio’s accounting the film had gone over budget, from US$154.6 million (Kennedy Miller Mitchell’s figure) up to US$185.1 million. The


$31 million difference represented the budget for the shooting of the additional scenes in late 2013, after principal photography in Namibia had concluded; Kennedy Miller Mitchell shouldered some of the cost. Warner also claimed that Kennedy Miller Mitchell was required to bring the film in at 100 minutes, not the final 120, and that extra costs incurred by the firm caused the film to exceed its budget.

The dispute highlights some of the legal tangles that can emerge from an outward-looking production strategy. Kennedy Miller Mitchell argued that the case should be heard in Australia, in respect of the contract between its business entity Kennedy Miller Mitchell Films Pty Ltd and the Australian company Warner Bros. Feature Productions Pty Ltd. But a NSW Supreme Court ruling upholding the firm’s argument was eventually overturned in April 2018, obliging the company to enter into arbitration with the local WB’s parent company Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc., in the legal domain of California. The suit appeared to forestall the possibility of production on any of the rumoured *Fury Road* offshoots and sequels developed during its extended pre-production; Kennedy Miller Mitchell claimed that Warner Bros. had destroyed their relationship of trust.

In October 2017, Kennedy Miller Mitchell announced that it was putting the Metro Theatre up for sale, for an expected price of $20 million. Though the Metro had played an essential role for the company in the 1980s, most particularly as a shooting stage for the television work, it had less utility in the following decades, as the firm’s Sydney production sites, when not on location, came to be housed more often at the technologically sophisticated ‘local Hollywoods’ developed at Fox Studios and at Carriageworks. Press reports said that the company would be permanently moving its headquarters to the Fox Studios complex. After a lengthy listing on the market, during which local residents hoped the City of Sydney would purchase the property for public use, the Metro was reportedly sold in March 2019 to

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Abacus Property Group, for $19.8 million. In late 2018, trade reports emerged from the US that Kennedy Miller Mitchell was preparing its next feature, to be titled *Three Thousand Years of Longing*, described as a love story directed and written by Miller, and starring British actors Idris Elba and Tilda Swinton. The film appears to be financed through international sales organised by the US company FilmNation, a financier, distributor, and producer of independent film. Miller’s agency CAA is reported to be organising sales in North America and China. This suggests a turn away from the blockbuster, studio production model pursued by the firm through the late 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, and towards an independent film model; however the budget and scale of the project are yet to be reported as of writing.

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Chapter 6: Analysing Kennedy Miller as a Success Case

In the preceding four chapters I have provided a production history of Kennedy Miller, from the 1970s up to 2019. These chapters have together shown how the firm continued as a successful independent production company across its near half-century of operations. In the course of this narrative history, I have described some of the conditions underlying its sustainability as a production firm, such as its strategic adaptations to changing cultural and industrial contexts. Chiefly, I have shown that its method of production is the unifying element of the company’s operations: the combination of collaborative procedures, stylistic norms, divisions of labour, managerial and hierarchical structures, financing and partnership arrangements which I have shown evolved and persisted across the company’s history.

In this final chapter, I elaborate on the notion of Kennedy Miller as a successful production company, and reflect further on what the portrait of its operations given in the preceding history might offer to screen practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. Successful, sustainable production enterprises offer many benefits to their industries; in a 2005 editorial, former AFTRS director Malcolm Long attributed the systemic faults of the Australian screen industry to its prioritisation of “jungle-fighting individualist” filmmakers over stable “enterprise structures”, arguing that a greater number of sustainable enterprises would create a more sustainable industry overall. Analysis of Kennedy Miller offers one model for how success in enterprise structures can be achieved.

There are many possible ways to define ‘success’ in a production firm. In the preceding history, I have focused chiefly on the achievement of longevity and stability; or sustainability over time. A second approach would be to point at the

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Chapter 6: Analysing Kennedy Miller

commercial returns of a firm’s productions (a company is unlikely to become long-lived if its output does not yield a profit, after all). A third approach would be to examine critical acclaim, or lasting cultural impact; 'popularity' in less tangible terms. In this chapter I use elements of all three. My operative notion of success here is taken from the Success in Film and Television Industries (or SiFTI) study, which was undertaken by a group of media and production scholars from Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. These scholars employ a concise and minimal definition of success in production firms, which they judge as survival for over five years, plus popular or critically acclaimed output. Kennedy Miller is quite evidently a successful company under these terms.

My analysis of Kennedy Miller’s success comes in two parts. In the first, I describe Kennedy Miller as exhibiting the tendencies and characteristics of successful productions firms. In the preceding history, my focus has been on describing Kennedy Miller directly, rather than elaborating on points of comparison with other firms and filmmakers. And while I noted the firm’s iconoclastic reputation, many of the elements of the Kennedy Miller method I have described, such as collaborative practices, are used by other producers, too, and may even be the norm within certain sectors of the industry. In this chapter, I now widen the scope of my discussion to posit a series of comparisons between Kennedy Miller and other similar firms, using the portrait of the company developed in the preceding history.

I have structured this discussion with reference to the aforementioned SiFTI study, collected by Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer in their 2017 volume Building Successful and Sustainable Film and Television Businesses. These authors present a cross-case analysis of the European companies examined in their study, and arrive at a set of shared tendencies of successful production firms. This study offers a useful conceptual approach, grounded in understanding the strategic benefits of a certain kind of organisational culture found among successful firms, as well as an

appropriate pool of data, because the firms analysed by the SiFTI scholars occupy similar structural conditions to Kennedy Miller. These European firms are micro, small, or medium enterprises, located in moderately-sized national industries which are underwritten by government support while also being implicated in the globalised screen industries. But in describing Kennedy Miller as possessing characteristics of successful firms I also draw on alternative examples from Australia, the UK, and the US.

The second part of my analysis argues that Kennedy Miller's procedures of production, as described in the preceding history, have a beneficial effect on the success, or popular acclaim, of its output. I contend that its collaborative procedures have a regulating effect on its work, which becomes evident in the 'house style' of its output, and that this house style is congruent with the commercial aims of the company. My discussion of these matters is structured with reference to the concept of a mode of film practice, or the textual conventions associated with a particular mode of production.

Throughout my analysis in this chapter, I elaborate on my concept of the Kennedy Miller method, which I have defined as consisting of three parts: a strategically advantageous company culture, which regulates its organisation of production, which yield stylistic commonalities in output (or a house style). Through further discussions of these three aspects, I return again to my three core disciplinary interventions.

Organisational Culture in Successful Production Firms

Understanding How Organisational Culture Contributes to Success in Screen Production Firms

The concept of an organisational culture refers to the beliefs, values, and behavioural norms (or accumulated shared learning) of a firm, which govern its responses to problems of internal integration and external adaptation, and which are
taught to new members as they are socialised into the group.\textsuperscript{819} As outlined in the preceding history, the Kennedy Miller culture is encapsulated in the ideal of comprehensivism or multidisciplinarity. Under these guiding values, Kennedy Miller employees and collaborators have been encouraged not to see themselves as restricted in participation, or siloed in a particular labour role (such as writer or director), but to take on the attitude of team members engaged in a collective enterprise. The atmosphere, as described, is generally collaborative, egalitarian, permissive, empowering, and unstratified, but also organised in relation to central managerial figures including Miller, Kennedy, Hayes, and Mitchell. In Chapter 2, I argued that Kennedy and Miller’s early lives in the cooperative Sydney and Melbourne film scenes, and their interest in finding ways to govern crew conduct and to shape performance, played a significant role in forming these tendencies, which, as I described in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 were later intensified and formalised under the continuous production of the 1980s, and then persisted through the company’s retrenchment and refocus on large-scale blockbuster feature production, and found new expression in its adoption of digital production techniques.

How might an organisational culture like that observed in Kennedy Miller contribute to success in screen production firms? In this section, I will first briefly outline some of the general ways in which a cohesive organisational culture can be beneficial to screen production firms, and then secondly discuss how some particular facets of the Kennedy Miller culture, as described in the preceding history, compare with the characteristics of successful European production firms outlined in the SiFTI study.

The ‘post-Fordist’ structure of the contemporary screen industries, as described in my Introduction, is associated with precarious labour conditions, in Australia and internationally—screen production is now largely a project enterprise, and producers assemble teams that must necessarily disband on completion of the project. These conditions are linked to the transformations of media production represented in the phenomena of ‘global Hollywood’, which sees production capital opportunistically

\footnote{\textsuperscript{819} Edgar H. Schein and Peter Schein, \textit{Organizational Culture and Leadership} (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 6.}
relocating to whichever offshore locale can offer attractive financial incentives and sufficiently unrestricted terms of labour, and are symptomatic of broader circumstances in the global creative industries more generally. A recent body of scholarship has worked to analyse the effects of these conditions on the working lives of individual labourers, who must confront problems of sustaining careers within informal project networks rather than traditional corporate hierarchies.

As a small, independent production firm, Kennedy Miller confronts managerial problems associated with these structural conditions from two directions: it must present itself as sufficiently attractive to the itinerant forces of capital that back its activities, and it must oversee a workforce that it mostly does not employ on a continuous basis. Cohesive organisational culture can help with both. Peter Bloore has argued that organisational culture is especially important for independent production firms, which, because they generate income from creativity and intellectual property rather than physical assets, must stand behind their culture— as the constitutive element in past success and future prospects—in courting investment. As we have seen in the *Bodyline* prospectus, the firm has used an account of its culture (or the “reason[s] for our success”) in soliciting financial backing.

In the preceding history, I have shown that Kennedy Miller’s labour practices are basically typical of the post-Fordist, globalised industry structure: the company conducts recruitment through informal networks; prominent ensemble members—

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823 *Bodyline* Prospectus.
like Noyce, or Duigan—eventually move on; and even when operating in its ensemble mode, the company usually relies on the input of temporary contractors on a project-to-project basis. Its culture of comprehensivism can be viewed as a tool to help coordinate its individual labourers, to transform disparate workers into an ensemble of ‘filmmakers’. The normative shared assumptions of organisational culture, as communicated to new members, can govern the integration of individuals and help identify unsuitable workers, as seen in Kennedy Miller’s practice of using its workshopping process to select candidates for recruitment, described in Chapter 3.

Organisational culture can also help firms navigate changes. Chris Bilton has argued that periods of growth and expansion are particularly dangerous for independent production firms; stable group identity can help navigate strategic shifts, establishing long-term priorities ahead of short-term opportunism. \(^{824}\) As we have seen in Chapter 3, it was precisely during Kennedy Miller’s first major expansion in the early 1980s that the company worked hardest to formalise its method, through the production workshops it instituted with Ogilvie. And as seen in Chapter 5, when Dr. D was founded, the language of comprehensivism was again deployed in the studio’s description of itself as populated by ‘storytellers’.

**Kennedy Miller’s Organisational Culture: Family Resemblances with Other Successful Firms**

The examples above illustrate the general benefits of organisational culture. But what of the particular elements of the Kennedy Miller method? In lieu of attributing strategic advantages to each aspect of the method, as identified in the preceding history, I turn here to the work of the SiFTI scholars. Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer offer a cross-case analysis of successful European firms in terms of the shared tendencies of their organisational cultures, and how these enabled the firms to respond to problems of internal integration and external adaptation. Although Kennedy Miller is an Australian firm, not a European one, and, as these authors write, each firm’s

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culture is context-dependent and unique, it is nevertheless still possible to posit certain “family resemblances” among organisations. Kennedy Miller shares many family resemblances with these successful European firms. In observing these similarities, I will further pinpoint the strategic benefits of the firm’s organisational culture, and indicate some of that culture’s complexities.

Internal Integration

For Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, the cultures of their successful European films display shared tendencies in leadership, corporate vision, and relationships with employees, which they associate with the effective internal integration of the organisations. I will now apply these tendencies to the account of Kennedy Miller established in the preceding history.

Charismatic Leaders

The first tendency identified by Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer is charismatic leadership. The firms in the SiFTI study are led by CEOs who are also usually the company founder, owner or major shareholder, manager, and producer. These leaders have elevated positions of authority but also a strong personal relationship to the organisation. Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer observe that these leaders are motivated by a desire to work as screen producers, rather than to be company managers; the corresponding emotional attachment to their work enables them to communicate their passion to their subordinates.

These qualities are present in Kennedy Miller, too. Miller and Kennedy were the firm’s founders as well as primary filmmakers and producers. Neither founder, as outlined in Chapter 2, had much formal education in film (nor business), nor much

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experience working within other established production firms. Rather than an informed adoption of industry best practices, then, Kennedy Miller’s culture is moreso the idiosyncratic fruit of Miller and Kennedy’s personal attitudes and styles. Kennedy exhibited a strictly mercantile philosophy in his attitude to the film business—Kamen described his friend Kennedy as viewing filmmaking as a vehicle for making money—but this was still evidently motivated by some passion for filmmaking, which had been present since childhood. Miller’s self-declared identity is foremost as a filmmaker, or rather ‘storyteller’. His passion in sharing that mission with his employees is evidenced in editor Richard Francis-Bruce’s mid-1980s oral history, in which he said that Miller would listen to anybody who came up with an idea, even the company cleaner. An over-dependency is perceptible in Kennedy Miller, too. In the 1980s the company had a robust run of production under Hayes that was more or less out of Miller’s direct oversight; however from the mid-1990s onwards we have seen that productions tended to be directly under Miller’s control as producer, co-writer, and (co-)director. While other filmmakers developed projects for the firm, only Miller’s projects moved toward production. Several possibilities could account for this limitation: it may be that the firm was unable to secure sufficient capital for projects that did not have Miller’s personal imprimatur; or it may be that Miller would no longer permit the possibility of a second semi-autonomous production stream inside the company, or that the firm did not have the resources to fund one. Whether this dependency has been detrimental to the firm’s functioning is debatable—while Kennedy Miller has produced less output in this period, it has also produced some of its most notable works, such as Happy Feet and Fury Road.

827 Richard Francis-Bruce, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 0267680-0003, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
829 Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, “Conclusion,” 325.
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Complementary Competencies in Shared Leadership

A second tendency of successful production firms identified by Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer is a shared leadership structure: two founders, who engage in a complementary division of labour, with one primarily concerned with project development and the other concerned with financial management and business affairs. This system, Bakøy argues, helps to achieve efficiency in administration, eases the psychological burden of management, and bridges the potential contradictions between creativity and administration. But it also creates a barrier between leadership and employees, who are limited in their potential for advancement.

This same division was carried out by Miller and Kennedy: from the beginning, Kennedy took the lead in financial and business affairs, while Miller focused on creative tasks. Kennedy’s death, in a sense, formalised this split leadership model when the firm’s accountant Mitchell subsequently advanced to the position of partner. However, it is probable that as sole remaining company founder Miller possesses the greater portion of leadership authority—which is reflected in the company’s dependency on his productions. Accounts indicate that Kennedy was able to manage and supervise Miller—Buckmaster even writes that Kennedy considered firing Miller from Mad Max when the shoot began poorly. Stratton writes, in The Avocado Plantation, that Kennedy’s absence during the Beyond Thunderdome production meant that no one was really capable of overseeing Miller’s work. While evidence of Mitchell’s role at the company indicates that he has some creative influence, as Kennedy did (complementary competencies at

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830 Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 325.
833 David Stratton, The Avocado Plantation: Boom and Bust in the Australian Film Industry (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Publishers Australia, 1990), 86.
Kennedy Miller also must abide by the firm’s ideals of comprehensivism), there is no indication that he also possesses the power to overrule Miller.

The elevated position of Hayes in the 1980s complicates the neat picture of dual leadership at the company. It is possible that, having joined when Kennedy Miller was only beginning to expand and formalise its operations—and given also its founders’ egalitarian impulses—Hayes was able to establish an atypical position for himself within the firm (a position reinforced by Kennedy’s death). Though Hayes was the proximate authority over the company’s television work as its in-house writer and producer, his overall company authority never exceeded Miller’s. In an interview with Keryn Curtis, Hayes indicates that if he had an idea for story, he needed to convince Miller it was a good one. In hierarchical terms, it is appropriate to view him as a powerful unit producer within the company, rather than a third leader. As described in Chapter 4, Hayes’ departure from the company also coincided with the end of the Channel Nine deal, which had been an opportunity of potential advancement for him. The fact that no other prominent and autonomous producer has emerged at Kennedy Miller since Hayes left suggests that the dual leadership model is entrenched there.

A useful reference point here is the work of Wayne Baker and Robert Faulker, who provide a complementary view of how dual leadership can contribute to success. These authors argue that the ‘blockbuster’ period of US filmmaking entails particular combinatorial patterns in the organisation of labour. In their view, the blockbuster period coincides with the increasing prominence of specialised producers, who undertake the complex dealmaking aspects of film production, working alongside consolidated writer–directors. This is likewise the system followed by Kennedy Miller: Miller was (co-)writer–director on his films, and Kennedy or Mitchell was the business-focused producer. In this sense, the division of leadership at Kennedy Miller is not only characteristic of successful small production firms, but is also

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634 Terry Hayes, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 270587, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
adaptive to the demands of the transnational blockbuster production strategy the company has pursued with its Hollywood partners.

**Strong but flexible visions**

A third tendency of successful production firms identified by Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer is strong but flexible corporate visions. The SiFTI scholars argue that their firms share a clear, inspiring attitude about the nature of their production output, combined with a liberal attitude to the delegation of creative autonomy. In his chapter on the United Kingdom’s Aardman Animation, Andrew Spicer gives one example of flexibility and the delegation of autonomy. He observes that this firm operates on a “brains trust” system, in which a core creative team—founders Peter Lord and David Sproxton, and star animator Nick Park—offer strong direction and rigorous coaching of employees, but also foster the candid sharing of ideas and opinions, and empower creative teams to solve problems. As an instance of staff empowerment, Spicer describes the career progression of writer Mark Burton, a freelancer who was brought on to contribute additional dialogue to the film *Chicken Run* (2000), and was then offered additional writing commissions before being drafted as co-writer and co-director of *Shaun the Sheep: The Movie* (2015).

Kennedy Miller’s own strong corporate vision is evident in its labelling of production participants as ‘filmmakers’ and ‘storytellers’, while its liberal attitude toward creative contributions is apparent in its unstratified, collaborative practices, and in the internal belief that anyone is able to contribute an idea to a project, even the cleaner. In an oral history from the 1980s, production designer Owen Williams described Kennedy Miller as “real filmmakers” who understand the structure of filmmaking at all departmental levels, and are not simply out to make product. In a 1990 oral

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836 Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 326.
838 Owen Williams, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown (circa 1985), Oral History Collection, 461718, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
history, Phillip Noyce described Miller and Hayes as “jacks of all trades”, possessing a greater variety of expertise than typical producers.\textsuperscript{839} In his 2010 oral history, Hearnshaw states that Kennedy Miller wants to “make professional screen product with the highest regard for the audience”.\textsuperscript{840} Though made almost thirty years apart, these statements reflect a similar internal belief system at the firm, which prioritises shared values of skill and competency and has a clear understanding about the purpose of its work.

A comparable progression to Aardman’s Mark Burton is also visible at Kennedy Miller for Judy Morris, Warren Coleman, and others. However, the delegation of creative autonomy has clear limits at the firm, as is revealed by Noonan’s experience on \textit{Babe}. Kennedy Miller does not wholly share this sense of ‘flexibility’. The firm cannot really be described as operating on a ‘brains trust’ system, because with the plausible exception of its short-lived video game divisions, about which little is documented, it does not possess internal units that are empowered to act semi-autonomously. Flexibility of vision occurs more through the invitation of collaboration rather than through delegation; and as I have argued, this collaboration is regulated by management. Miller’s own writing practices, as outlined in the history, show that he can allow significant autonomy to his writers as they explore and refine narrative material. But this flexibility is ultimately conditional; whether or not Miller takes a heavy hand in exercising his power, he is the final authority as co-writer, producer, and (often) as director.

\textbf{Nurturing and Supportive}

A fourth tendency of successful production firms identified by Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer is their nurturing and supportive environments. The SiFTI firms are described as ‘lifestyle businesses’: they nurture talent, tolerate risk, and cultivate a family-style supportive working atmosphere in which the firm leaders act more like surrogate

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{839} Phillip Noyce, interview by Kari Hanet, June 12, 1990, Oral History Collection, 380597, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
\item \textsuperscript{840} Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
\end{itemize}
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parents than authoritarian bosses. Kennedy Miller shares some of these characteristics, but ambiguously. The company can be observed to support talent in that it has provided recurring opportunities to favoured workers, along with the prospect of advancement in responsibility. But this form of progression is not a graduation toward creative autonomy—with the arguable exception of Duigan on The Year My Voice Broke or Flirting—but to greater authority within the limit of the ensemble.

Nurturing of talent is arguably visible in the firm’s relationship with actor Nicole Kidman, for whom Hayes took a particular interest in developing challenging material (although her profile as a rising star also offered an obvious quid pro quo to the firm). In some cases, Kennedy Miller’s creative personnel appear to have benefited, in the form of external opportunities from the wider industry, from early career development at the company, with individuals such as Kidman, Mel Gibson, Richard Francis-Bruce, and Dean Semler going on to substantive careers in Australia and the US. In other cases the advancement appears largely internal; but this could be due to limited opportunity in the wider Australian industry. The firm’s construction of corporate authorship also sets an ultimate limit on the degree of empowerment available to its workers, and therefore on the amount of professional credit they can use in transferring to opportunities outside the firm.

Kennedy Miller has also been described in familial terms. In an oral history from the mid-1980s, Noonan described the company as like a family, with Miller as its paternal head. The company has also come to assume actual familial dimensions, with the incorporation, in the 1990s, of Miller’s brother Bill as a producer, and Miller’s relationship with Sixel, who had worked as an editor for the firm.

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841 Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 327.
842 Though Duigan was also already an established feature filmmaker by the time he joined the firm.
843 Chris Noonan, interview by Keryn Curtis, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 271754, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
844 In an interview with David Stratton, Miller also retrospectively identified Kennedy as a fraternal figure. See: George Miller, interview by David Stratton, date unknown (circa 1989), Oral History Collection, 465210, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
are a recurring feature of successful small-to-medium production firms in Australia, and elsewhere. Luhrmann’s Bazmark—co-founded with his wife—has been described along ‘family-style’ lines.\textsuperscript{845} Jackson and Walsh’s WingNut and associated Weta operations similarly display collaborative practices.\textsuperscript{846}

There is also a familial or social aspect in Kennedy Miller’s recruitment networks—a tendency to hire acquaintances or friends-of-friends—another similarity with the SiFTI firms, and consistent with the contemporary US industries generally.\textsuperscript{847} In the \textit{Bodyline} prospectus, Miller said the firm practises “careful selection of the production and creative teams” and attracts “the best in the country”,\textsuperscript{848} and Kennedy Miller’s ability to attract high-calibre collaborators is demonstrated, to a point, by its having brought established filmmakers like Noyce, Schultz, and Duigan in-house for a time. But in other instances, partnerships with established personalities—like a rumoured project with writer David Williamson\textsuperscript{849}—went nowhere. The critical factor in the suitability of a person to work at Kennedy Miller appears to be not simply individual merit, but their ability to work tightly to the company’s culture and in subordination to its principals.

Kennedy Miller does not necessarily appear familial in the sense of providing a warm, feel-good environment. Remarks on the challenging, perfectionist quality of the work at Kennedy Miller have appeared throughout its history. Hayes, as mentioned in Chapter 3, noted that work at the firm can “get a bit aggressive on occasions”.\textsuperscript{850} The firm’s “obsessiveness”, Miller admitted in the mid-1990s, has been known to wear people out.\textsuperscript{851} Hearnshaw, as cited in Chapter 5, said that some

\textsuperscript{845} Pam Cook, \textit{Baz Luhrmann} (London and Basingstoke: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 17.
\textsuperscript{846} Alfio Leotta, \textit{Peter Jackson} (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 30.
\textsuperscript{848} \textit{Bodyline} Prospectus.
\textsuperscript{849} Rob Lowing, "Going the Whole Hog," \textit{Sun Herald}, October 13, 1996.
\textsuperscript{850} Terry Hayes, interview by Scott Murray, in \textit{Back of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television}, ed. Scott Murray (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 1988), 47.
workers find the company’s way of doing things “unsettling” or “confronting”, but that he himself experienced it as pleasurable.\textsuperscript{852} It is clear that some have found the firm inhospitable, while others find conditions there creatively stimulating. Whether these confronting, exhausting, aggressive aspects of the firm’s culture have any relationship to its success can only be speculated—though Miller himself argued defensively, at the time of his break with Noonan, that achieving excellence in production “takes its toll”.\textsuperscript{853}

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Stuart Cunningham pointed out in his house style analysis that Kennedy Miller’s “creative ensemble” in the 1980s was predominantly male,\textsuperscript{854} and in considering whether the firm was nurturing and supportive of its staff, it is useful also to reflect on Kennedy Miller’s gender dynamics. In a 2015 report for its Gender Matters initiative, Screen Australia noted that between 1970 and 2014—roughly the span of Kennedy Miller’s existence—women made up only thirty per cent of producers of feature films, twenty-one per cent of writers, and sixteen per cent of directors.\textsuperscript{855} Four women are given screenplay and/or story credits on Kennedy Miller’s narrative television work—Sally Gibson, Daphne Paris, Francine Finnane, Margaret Kelly—compared with eighteen men,\textsuperscript{856} but there were no female directors. Judy Morris is the only woman allocated writer and director credits on a Kennedy Miller film, and for these she was co-credited. Some women are given prominent producer credits—such as Su Armstrong as executive in charge of production on the firm’s early television work; Barbara Gibbs as associate producer, production manager, and/or executive producer on many productions through the 1980s and 1990s; and Daphne Paris as associate producer on \textit{Lorenzo’s Oil} and \textit{Babe}—but the core producer team of Kennedy, Miller, Hayes, Mitchell, and Bill Miller remains consistently male. Recruitment through informal networks, of the sort practised by

\textsuperscript{852} Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
\textsuperscript{856} Credits for \textit{Sportz Crazy} are not available.
the firm, has also been linked to the systemic disadvantaging of female screen workers.\textsuperscript{857}

Although many of its productions feature strong female roles—particularly for Kidman in \textit{Vietnam, Dead Calm} and \textit{Bangkok Hilton}, and Tina Turner in \textit{Beyond Thunderdome}—there has been a general perception that the firm was primarily interested in ‘boy’s’ stories—in 1983, New Zealand film director Jane Campion graduated from AFTRS as a director; her entry in the school handbook for that year states, in part, “Her ambition is to work for Kennedy Miller—when they start making girl’s films.”\textsuperscript{858} A home movie shot by Kennedy’s friend Peter Kamen on the set of \textit{Mad Max 2}, and archived at the NFSA, indicates possible cultural problems on the firm’s productions. The footage includes a brief segment in which actor Mel Gibson slaps the buttocks of a female crew member who is bent over working on something on the ground.\textsuperscript{859} In an interview with me, Sally Gibson described as a young woman feeling flattered when she was given a standing ovation by male staff after submitting a script for \textit{The Cowra Breakout}, and then patronised when they said they thought she had gotten another (male) writer to write it for her.\textsuperscript{860}

Analysis of Kennedy Miller’s gender dynamics, both internally and within the context of broader industry norms, is a complex subject deserving of further consideration, particularly in light of policy initiatives like Gender Matters, which seek to amend the chronic underrepresentation of women in the screen industries. Through my own observation, it appears possible that the firm’s record in this area improved over time. Judy Morris’s credits as co-writer and co-director came about in the late 1990s and mid-2000s. Some recurring female employees achieved greater roles of responsibility over time, such as Paris, whose credits range from script supervisor, to

\textsuperscript{859} \textit{Mad Max II}: Home Movie, June, 1981, Behind the Scenes Shoot, 5356, film, National Film and Sound Archive. Although, it must be said, Mel Gibson’s personal conduct (which led to public disgrace later in his career) does not necessarily reflect the company’s culture.
\textsuperscript{860} Sally Gibson, interview by author, August 2017.
associate producer and additional unit director, or Catherine Barber, whose credits range from ‘additional accounting’ on *The Dismissal*, to financial controller on most subsequent productions, to associate producer on *Babe* and *Babe: Pig in the City*. It is clear that women played an important role in the Kennedy Miller ensemble, despite being under-credited in key creative positions in comparison with male workers. Though its credited writers, producers, and director are male, the firm’s most recent film, *Fury Road*, also became its first to garner an unambiguously feminist reception, thanks to its narrative centering of the female character Furiosa, played by Charlize Theron. Miller has claimed that the feminist elements of this film reflects his progression from a “male dominant” past into a present life surrounded by women.\(^{861}\)

**External Adaptation**

The SIFTI researchers write that successful firms share particular tendencies that shape their ability to adapt to external conditions. These are: an innovative approach to diversifying revenue streams and finding new markets; a reliance on negotiated dependencies with external partners; and a relationship with their national mechanisms of public support. Kennedy Miller, likewise, shares these tendencies, but once again with some differences.

**Innovation and Diversification**

Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer identify innovation as a tendency of successful production firms. However they describe the SiFTI firms as pursuing innovation through finding new business opportunities, rather than through forging technological advances.\(^{862}\)

Because the four national industries represented in the study (Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Great Britain) are each to a large degree underwritten by government support, which often undergoes shifts in policy and priority, these

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\(^{862}\) Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 328.
European firms must frequently adjust their production strategies by searching out international sources of finance. These firms also adapt to new technology—the authors cite in particular Aardman Animation’s founding of an internal apps, games, and interactive division.

These strategic innovations are also visible in Kennedy Miller’s history. As we have seen, Miller and Kennedy were quick to look for funding and exhibition opportunities outside Australia, particularly in the US. Operating with a clear preference for indirect subsidy, the company has assiduously navigated Australia’s funding paradigms by seeking out available tax concessions and even lobbying for new ones, and by courting international finance. Changes in funding paradigms precipitated changes in production strategy: the firm’s response to the return of direct subsidy in the 1990s, as described in Chapter 4, was to intensify its involvement in transnational production, while the later co-founding of Dr. D and the two video-game divisions, as described in Chapter 5, represent adaptive responses to globalising screen industries and technological convergence.

The company’s interest in technological adaptation has been continuous, from the adventurous sound mixing techniques applied on the *Mad Max* productions to Robert Gibson’s home video project *Video Fool for Love*, and *Babe’s* mix of live animals, animatronics, and CGI effects. Kennedy Miller’s technological mix is at all times broadly consistent with contemporaneous trends in screen production technology. Kennedy mixed *Mad Max 2* in Dolby just after Film Australia had installed this technology; *Babe* turned to CGI and animatronics just as this technique had been proven effective by *Jurassic Park*; and the firm turned to digital animation after Pixar had demonstrated the technological and commercial utility of this style of production. Hearnshaw has described some technological advancements developed on the *Babe* and *Happy Feet* films—which he referred to as pioneer exercises—but, in general, the company is best characterised as an early adopter of emerging standard techniques, which it invests in once their potential has already been proven, rather than a company that forges technical advances. This is consistent

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863 Hearnshaw, interview by Martha Ansara.
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with a commercial film production strategy; cinematic ‘spectacle’, and its commercial appeal, has long been associated with new technologies. The company was also a leading actor in technological adoption across the wider industry, and its work with Animal Logic, and the founding of Dr. D, are appreciable as attempts to open up and expand the emerging market for digital services in Australia.

The characteristic of technological vanguardism is not attributed to the firms in the SiFTI study, but it is a tendency recognisable in other successful small to medium production firms internationally. Comparative models for this tendency are George Lucas’s Lucasfilm operation and Peter Jackson’s WingNut, each of which became associated with closely linked digital and practical special effects businesses. In both cases, these producers and firms were motivated by a desire to undertake sophisticated, high-technology productions outside the reigning Hollywood system: Lucas, to preserve his independence by establishing his operations in the Bay Area; Jackson, to remain based in New Zealand. Although making forays into US production, Kennedy Miller likewise has been motivated to stay located outside of Hollywood, and to bring opportunity to its national industry. This strategy is also consistent with another leadership characteristic discussed by the SiFTI study: the importance of being entrepreneurial in response to environmental and technological change. However, the impulses associated with Dr. D yielded only qualified success, as the studio completed only one feature film before shutting down. Whether the collapse of this venture will have any long-term impact on the stability of Kennedy Miller Mitchell is yet to be apparent.

Negotiated dependencies with external partners

Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer use the concept of “negotiated dependencies” to describe the SiFTI firms’ relationships with external partners—negotiated because relationships between independent producers and distributors/financiers are

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865 Bakøy, "Leadership Practices in the Norwegian Film Industry," 49.
inherently asymmetrical. Independents, in general, cannot produce output without external backing, and their partners therefore hold considerable power over their operations. However, firms can also negotiate for degrees of creative autonomy.

Kennedy Miller’s history, as we have seen, is marked by at least five dependencies: with Roadshow, with Warner Bros. (the two often cooperating together), with Network Ten, with Universal, and with Omnilab on Dr. D. Roadshow and Warner Bros. are its longest partners: the relationship has lasted, with an interruption of about a decade, from Kennedy Miller’s first feature up to its latest. The partnership with Universal lasted for three features across the 1990s. The partnership with Network Ten lasted six miniseries, three telemovies, and a documentary series across the 1980s. The dissolution of the deal with Channel Nine, and the subsequent internal changes within Kennedy Miller, indicate some of the dangers that can arise when dependencies abruptly dissolve.

Within these relationships, Kennedy Miller has achieved a position of substantial autonomy. Though it accepts input from its partners, the company has maintained its posture of creative authority: Kennedy Miller had contractual final cut on Dead Calm, but still acceded to Warner Bros.’ requests to change the ending. Miller has said the relationship with Network Ten was initiated on the basis that the network would give the company licence to make bold television. This formed part of the Nine deal, too, and the retraction of this licence when the company reverted back to Kerry Packer precipitated the dissolution of the deal. On the whole, the consistency of partnership relations and the autonomous terms of its creative conduct show that Kennedy Miller has been adept in managing its negotiated dependencies.

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866 Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 328.
867 See also: Andrew Spicer and Steve Presence. “Autonomy and dependency in two successful UK film and television,” Film Studies 14 (Spring 2016): 5–31. Spicer and Presence provide an extended discussion of their term ‘negotiated dependencies’, and alternative applications of Schein’s concepts to small production firms in the UK.
The firm’s dependencies are strongly associated with personal connections. Graham Burke has been a consistently visible partner to the company through his role at Roadshow, while former Roadshow executive Greg Coote appeared pivotal in initiating the company’s association with Ten when he was managing director there. The significance of this kind of personal support from industry power players to enable successful production careers has also been established in the case of Charles Chauvel: Cunningham explains that Chauvel benefited considerably from a relationship with Herc McIntyre, an Australian representative of US studio Universal, which distributed three of Chauvel’s films.\footnote{Stuart Cunningham, *Featuring Australia: The Cinema of Charles Chauvel* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 31.} (McIntyre also eulogised Chauvel, as Burke reportedly did Kennedy.)

The SiFTI authors also highlight another aspect of negotiated dependencies: that independent firms are generally not concerned with communicating with the public at large, but with an inter-industry audience of media companies and corporations—their prospective partners. Communication here refers to practices of marketing and self-promotion; with the cited exceptions of Aardman and Lars von Trier’s firm Zentropa, the successful European firms discussed are not generally concerned with projecting an image of themselves for public consumption. Kennedy Miller’s own conduct in this area is ambiguous. Though it has taken some steps to project its identity as a production house—marketing the home-video release of its miniseries under “Kennedy Miller presents”, using a collective possessive title on its films—it cannot be described as a consistent self-promoter; the company does not even have a website. As discussed previously, its corporate authorship is more so a function of its production method than a self-projection of it.

The communicative aspect of negotiated dependencies also offers a way to make sense of the firm’s sometimes complex relationship with the press and with other industry organisations. Though it has cooperated with coverage about itself and its films, in other respects Kennedy Miller has been resistant to providing access either to journalists or to other industry figures. For example, in July 1985 Greg Bright, an
editor for film trade magazine *Encore*, told the *Canberra Times* that he thought it a “shame that the most successful producers in Australia are so secretive”, when by being more transparent about its operations the firm could help instruct other producers.\(^{870}\) Hayes brushed off Bright’s concerns, saying simply: “We’re a private company, that’s our private business affair. We decided long ago not to talk about budgets—that’s not film-making.”

This ‘secretiveness’, though perfectly in line with the behaviour of many privately held companies, has become an established aspect of Kennedy Miller’s reputation. In this encounter we can see that while the press represents a kind of dependency-partner for production companies during periods when publicity is needed, this relationship does not extend to unconditional disclosure. A similar view is available on Kennedy Miller’s relationships with Australian screen industry guilds, with which it has at times eschewed a dependency relationship, contrary to industry norms.

**Mechanisms of public support**

As the SiFTI authors describe it, their successful firms persist in tenuous environments of state support.\(^{871}\) Government intervention in the screen industries in each of the four European nations studied is, with the exception of Denmark, too patchy and piecemeal to decisively assist with the sustainability of production firms (hence the strategic necessity of international commercial partners) and also fails to confront problems of distribution or the dominance of multinational corporations. Likewise, in Australia, government intervention is largely oriented toward development and production support rather than distribution and exhibition, and policies incentivise the engagement of international investment, in the form of tax

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\(^{870}\) Anne Susskind, "Terry Talks About the Ballyhoo, but the Big Bucks Are Taboo," *Canberra Times*, July 21, 1984.

\(^{871}\) Bakøy, Puijk, and Spicer, "Conclusion," 329.
subsidies for offshore production. Government support also mostly takes place on a project-by-project basis.\footnote{Screen Australia does maintain a commitment to supporting viable screen businesses, and offers an Enterprise Business and Ideas funding program, but generally speaking the majority of funding is allocated toward particular projects.}

As we have seen, Kennedy Miller’s history is marked by the strategic necessity of adapting to changes in the industry environment created by government intervention. Very early on the firm established a posture of independence of state support, and even disdain for it, as in Kennedy’s “philosophical opposition” to government intervention in the film industry. But in critical respects Kennedy Miller is also in a state of negotiated dependency with Australian governments, at the federal level and in the state of NSW. As we have seen, the reigning paradigms of government support have shaped successive periods of company activity, both positively and negatively—as when the emergence of 10BA made the continuous production of the 1980s possible.

In the latter part of the company’s history, the negotiation of these dependencies has become more visible, as Kennedy Miller lobbied for government and tax support by promising to bring investment and employment to Australia—through the Justice League production, and through Dr. D. These negotiations with the state have not always been successful, as the case of Justice League Mortal shows. The increased visibility of these negotiations also coincided with an evolution in the company’s posture of engagement and concern with the national industry. As discussed in Chapter 5, Miller described the proposed Justice League Mortal, and the development of a digital production workforce at Dr. D Studios, as attempts to improve the employment stability of the Australian film industry by establishing a skilled workforce and a solid basis for future production. These claims unavoidably have an element of self-interest—Miller’s view of what is good for the Australian industry is also what is good for his own enterprise—but are not therefore insincere. Other attempts by Miller to exercise industry power, as with his support of a
proposed cinémathèque in Sydney, appear more clearly altruistic and animated by real hopes for the health of Australian screen industry and culture.

Complex relationships with government agencies are not exactly a characteristic of successful firms, although we can see that Kennedy Miller adeptly managed those relationships. It is possible that firms at a certain success level in small countries might inevitably find themselves testing the boundaries of government support. Kennedy Miller is by no means the only firm in its comparable range to exercise and confront political power. In New Zealand, the political power of Peter Jackson’s filmmaking operation was tested in a conflict with the local actors’ guild just prior to the production of the *Hobbit* trilogy, which led to warnings from Jackson that the projects might be moved internationally. The New Zealand Government then coordinated to pass special film production employment legislation in order to keep the films in the country.\(^{873}\) The difference between Jackson’s effective exercise of political negotiation on the *Hobbit* films and Kennedy Miller’s unsuccessful exercise of power on *Justice League Mortal*—both projects that had the backing of US studio Warner Bros.—highlights a distinction between their relative national statuses. Jackson part-owns much of the major filmmaking infrastructure in New Zealand, and is arguably the face of its screen industry; he is a big fish in a small pond, whereas Kennedy Miller is better described as a medium-sized fish in a moderate-sized pond.

The findings of the SiFTI study allow us to see that Kennedy Miller possesses the characteristics of a successful production firm, in its tendencies of leadership, vision, collaboration, innovation, diversification, negotiated dependencies, and relationships with government agencies. But we can also pinpoint how these facets of its culture contributed to the firm’s sustainability. Charismatic leadership meant that the firm could communicate a strong personal vision to employees and investors. Divided, complementary leadership meant that executive skills and energies were directed appropriately. The firm’s strong vision meant that it could attract talented personnel,

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but also manage personnel changeover in an industry defined by itinerant labour. Its penchant for innovation meant that it kept pace with emerging industry technologies and commercial strategies, and its negotiated dependencies show how the firm split its reliance on international financiers and distributors with national film funding agencies. These aspects of the firm’s corporate culture have been described as part of Kennedy Miller’s method of production. But the method can be shown to bear on success in other ways. In the following section, I argue that the firm’s collaborative production procedures are characteristic of other successful firms, and argue that collaborative procedures have some bearing on successful production and project viability.

**Collaborative Procedures and Successful Production Output**

**Collaborative Production in Successful Production Firms**

Collaborative production procedures of the kind used by Kennedy Miller, though sometimes associated with the firm’s iconoclastic reputation, are also identifiable as a recurring characteristic of other successful production firms. As mentioned above, many of the firms discussed in the SiFTI study operate on similarly collegial, non-hierarchical, collectivist terms—though the authors do not always state to what extent this culture is present on production work. In Australia, collaborative practices have been described at Bazmark, which has also used a workshopping method in developing material, and at Working Dog, where the team of creative principals offer feedback on each other’s work. Organisational studies of Britain’s Ealing and Hammer, both successful small studios in their time, also highlight similar collaborative tendencies. Charles Barr writes that Ealing Studios possessed a “family atmosphere”, in part due to the stability of employment it offered its creative and technical staff. Vincent Porter likewise describes it as “more like a family co-

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operative than an employer.” Ealing films underwent collaborative oversight: each project was discussed by seventeen-odd staff members prior to shooting, at regular meetings around the studio’s round table.

Although Kennedy Miller tended to contrast the comprehensivism of its method against the rigid stratification of the Hollywood system, many Hollywood firms have been claimed to possess similar practices. Carl Schultz, who went to work for Lucasfilm after working on Bodyline, would later say that the process of working on that company’s television program The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles was similar to the collaborative method practised at Kennedy Miller, albeit less liberal, and with more top-down instruction—writers sat together and discussed their work. Lucas had formerly been associated with Francis Ford Coppola’s Zoetrope, an earlier attempt at an artists’ collective-style studio. Miller also described his experience at Steven Spielberg’s Amblin as being similar to the work practices at Kennedy Miller: “a bunch of filmmakers making films together.” Spielberg’s later studio DreamWorks has been described as operating under a non-bureaucratic style, where there were few job titles, and a “utopian environment prevailed”. And, further back in Hollywood history, such practices have been described during the classical era: for example, Schatz’s account of MGM focuses on the collectivism of writers, directors, and producers under Irving Thalberg’s management. Though the companies mentioned here offer only a partial sample of production firms in Australia, Britain and the US, these examples should illustrate that, at its broadest level, the tendencies that mark Kennedy Miller’s collaborative method have been observed, at least in part, in other successful companies of a similar structure and purpose. Kennedy Miller’s collaborative culture is not unique, but belongs to the family traits of successful production enterprises.

877 Carl Schultz, interview by Pam Willis Burden, date unknown, Oral History Collection, 807488, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
878 George Miller, interview by Paul Byrne, January 12, 2011, Oral History Collection, 818098, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
The Regulating Effects of Collaborative Procedures

Although I see them both as part of Kennedy Miller’s method of production, I have divided my analysis of the firm’s collaborative organisational culture, discussed above, from its collaborative production procedures, which I now discuss here, because this separation helps us to see an essential tension between producers (or production organisations) and the creative workers they employ. The separation between the two has been described in terms of the “hybrid characteristics” of the culture industries, which are constituted by, on the one hand, the bureaucratic organisation of capitalist media businesses, and, on the other, by the ‘craft’ mentality of short-term contractor artists who possess certain expectations of creative autonomy and self-expression in their work. Culture industries therefore display a complex intertwining of commerce and creativity; they are zones where the balance between the “standardised, controlled accumulation” of capitalist operations and the “unruly creativity, art and autonomy that makes creation of new commodities possible” must be carefully managed. Kennedy Miller’s collaborative culture is not only a means of empowering its staff; it is also a means of managing its labourers. Collaborative production procedures can be understood as a strategy for maintaining the balance between capitalism and creativity: a way to achieve certain standardised, controlled regularities of output in the process of disciplining the unruly creativity of the individuals who make that output.

The key structure of Kennedy Miller’s corporate authorship, as I have described it, is that its collectivist, collaborative procedures are regulated by central management. The prospect of creative collaboration appears liberating and utopian in the abstract, but the history of Kennedy Miller shows that it demands careful regulation. The truncated involvement of Ron Blair with *The Dismissal*, as described in Chapter 3,

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shows that the company is decisive in excluding creatives it feels are unwilling or unable to work on its own terms. Likewise Hayes’ acknowledgement to Murray that collaboration requires a catalyst to work properly—someone not afraid to be unpleasant—indicates that the procedure can be fraught. These examples reveal that the company’s collaborative philosophy has a disciplining effect. Collective engagement as filmmakers in the ‘world’ of the production is the state Kennedy Miller desires of its workers, but this collective state only takes shape under a definite power structure, with Miller (or Hayes, or Mitchell) at its centre.

However, although Kennedy Miller’s collaborative procedures can be described as a regulating strategy, it is important to emphasise that accounts from writers often describe work at the company as open, improvisatory, and exploratory. Lamprell’s, Coleman’s, and Morris’s descriptions of writing for the firm emphasise Miller’s stimulating interest in creative digressions, and his desire to exhaust the conceptual possibilities of story material before moving forward with it. Lathouris’s account also indicates that these digressions can be worked through in unconventional forms like script stories written out as third-person narratives, or by using other approaches. Miller has used the term ‘intuitive’ in describing his approach to filmmaking, as on the first Mad Max. While the firm’s method might be disciplining in effect, it is not necessarily experienced as such.

These collaborative procedures arguably have a disciplining effect not only over the firm’s workers but also over its output. As we have seen, collaborative procedures at the company typically involved successive stages of feedback and revision across project development, pre-production, production, and post. This is particularly visible in the writing procedures in place through the company’s history, which move through initial concept, story conferences, treatments, scene breakdowns, and script drafts, with different writing teams sometimes labouring on different stages, working under Miller’s direction—at least on his features—to re-express the central story concept.
The firm’s ‘excessive preparation’ during development and pre-production periods has been well attested, ranging from the years-long lead-up to *Mad Max* to the long writing process on *Happy Feet*. It is evident even from James McCausland’s recollections of writing *Mad Max* that it is Miller’s habit to begin projects with multiple and extended story discussions (and, later in his career, research conferences), and his lengthy drafting-editing-redrafting cycles are attested in the testimony of his writers up to the 2010s. Although the enforced deadlines attached to 10BA production sometimes curtailed writing schedules, as in the abbreviated scripting of *Mad Max 2*, *The Dismissal*, and *Bodyline*, sources and interviews also attest to Kennedy Miller’s commitment to extensive factual documentary research throughout the 1980s.

The company’s workshopping and rehearsal activities—particularly on the miniseries—also represent a disciplining stage of feedback and revision, in which performers and directors are able to take command of the material and even reshape aspects of it. The emphasis on revision through collaboration can be likened to a success strategy of iteration and refinement—a way to continuously fix the ‘bugs’ of a project before bringing it to market. The firm’s ‘excessive preparation’ affords opportunities to refine projects before they are brought to production.

**House Style and Success**

What relation does the method’s regulation of creative work have to the success of Kennedy Miller’s output? Kennedy Miller’s group culture—its unified identity as storytellers—and its collectivist practices of production can be seen to achieve a disciplining effect on its work, which in turn is associated with certain regularities of output. In the next pages I will argue that these regularities are expressed in the standardisation of the company’s texts—its ‘house style’.

**Understanding How House Style Contributes to Successful Production Output**
The establishment of a consistent house style implies a level of standardisation in production output conducive to a firm’s viability. Discussion of standardisation in media texts stems back to cultural-studies analysis of capitalist production, which the Frankfurt School tradition has critiqued for enforcing a homogenisation of expression in service of its social ideology.\textsuperscript{883} But in terms of production strategy, a certain level of homogenisation has obvious benefits for stability of workflow and for commercial exploitation—a point made in accounts of the classical Hollywood studio system, such as Schatz’s \textit{Genius of the System}, which tend to focus on the standardised production procedures through which films were created. It is in this sense that I take Kennedy Miller’s house style, to be defined shortly, as a contributing factor in its success. With a consistent and commercially proven sense of what the ‘right kind’ of story is, and how to tell it, the company could act with confidence about the viability of its projects.

The firm—and Miller specifically—appears to have devoted considerable intellectual energy to developing practical theories of market-oriented filmmaking. It is the talent of a successful ‘showman’, in the old-fashioned sense, to recognise what the public finds popular—what it wants—and to re-use and repackage these essential elements in the formulation of a new product. This has been a key logic in the film industry, from the formation of Hollywood popular genres like the Western through to the more recent dominance of franchise properties. Kennedy Miller has often displayed a determination to understand and, if possible, anticipate and capture the desires of a popular audience—in a 1979 interview Miller described it as the responsibility of the audience-oriented filmmaker to analyse and dissect failures and successes;\textsuperscript{884} this also speaks to the patterns of iteration and refinement that were discussed earlier.

The firm’s practices of iteration, refinement, and standardisation are obviously in accordance with market-based logics of popular film production. They also possess points of interest from a genre studies framework, which examine the effects of

\textsuperscript{883} Hesmondhalgh, “The Production of Media Entertainment,” 158.
\textsuperscript{884} George Miller, interview by unknown (possibly Peter Page and Tina Kaufman), date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 0432564 – 001, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
systems of commercial feedback between audience and filmmakers on the
emergence of standardised textual forms. Kennedy Miller would appear to be a
conscious participant in such feedback systems—Miller has even said that
audiences “determine” movies. It is apparent that the firm’s style has been
developed through a similarly active process of feedback and revision—as I have
described, Miller’s remarks around the release of Mad Max show that he and
Kennedy and carefully considered audience responses to Violence in the Cinema,
Part 1 when devising the film. The decrease in average shot length across the Mad
Max films similarly demonstrates an attentiveness to the evolving preferences of
contemporary audiences.

Thomas Schatz has argued that the commercial feedback system that generates film
genres affords a view of filmmaking as “cultural ritual” or “collective expression”,
which has a socialising influence. Miller’s views on the function of cinema likewise
embrace a ‘social ritual’ view of cinema, in which theatres are “covert cathedrals”
and film watching is a “public dreaming” wherein audiences process their
unconscious concerns. We can infer that Miller’s views on this subject show his
intellectual sympathy with core tenets of genre formation theory. These conceptual
alignments encourage a view of the firm as reflecting in its own particular practices
the logic of popular film production more generally.

**Kennedy Miller’s House Style: A Mode of Film Practice Oriented
Toward a Popular Audience**

Having described the general benefits of a house style to successful production, I will
now discuss some particular elements of Kennedy Miller’s style, as I see it. Although
I use the term ‘house style’ to emphasise the continuities of my research with

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885 George Miller, interview by Peter Beilby and Scott Murray, date unknown (circa 1979), Oral History Collection, 329006, recording, National Film and Sound Archive.
887 Janet Hawley, “The Hero’s Journey. “
Cunningham’s prior analysis, my analysis here is centred on the narrative
customs of Kennedy Miller’s output, rather than the elements of film form—mise-
en-scene, cinematography, or editing—more traditionally associated with the concept
of film style. My approach is informed by Staiger, Bordwell, and Thompson’s concept
of a mode of film practice, which describes the textual norms identifiable in films
made under a particular mode of production.889 Staiger identifies a film practice by its
definite historical existence, conventions of narrative, narration, and subject matter,
and implicit viewing procedures.890 My preceding history stands as an account of the
historical existence of Kennedy Miller’s practice; my focus now is on its narrative
conventions and implicit viewing procedures.

The preceding history offers some evidence for the existence of a Kennedy Miller
style in the traditional sense. I have referred to certain recurring stylistic tendencies,
such as Miller’s guiding interest in montage as the primary principle of film
construction and in the ‘plasticity’ of film form; an interest that I contend influenced
the firm’s commitment to digital effects. It would be plausible to posit an overall
analysis of Kennedy Miller’s house style in terms of plasticity and montage—and to
think through the implications of its recurring relationships with editors like Richard
Francis-Bruce and Margaret Sixel, or with cinematographers like Dean Semler.
However, my attention here is not on the traditional elements of film form but on the
conventions of narrative, narration, and subject matter I associate with the firm’s
screenwriting practices—since in the preceding history I have identified writing and
development as an important locus of the firm’s method—as well as the implicit
viewing procedures that can be extrapolated from the firm’s audience-oriented
outlook. These are, as Miller’s has described it, the firm’s ideas about “choosing the
right story and finding the correct way to celebrate it with the audience”.891

889 Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema, xiv; David Bordwell,
"The Art Cinema as Mode of Film Practice," in The European Cinema Reader, ed. Catherine
Fowler (New York: Routledge, 2002); Janet Staiger, "Film History, Film Practices," in Scandia
890 Staiger, "Film History, Film Practices," 15.
891 Bodyline Prospectus.
Chapter 6: Analysing Kennedy Miller

The Kennedy Miller Conventions of Narrative, Narration, and Subject Matter, and Implicit Viewing Procedures

What are the basic elements of Kennedy Miller’s conventions of textual construction—its notion of the ‘right story’ and the correct way to tell it? As I have shown in my Chapter 1 Literature Review, prior scholars have made some contributions in this area. As Martin states in *The Mad Max Movies*, the narrative theories of Joseph Campbell have been of central importance to Miller’s conception of his feature films. I have shown through the company’s history that Campbell significantly influenced Kennedy Miller’s approach to writing and story development after Miller saw him speak in Los Angeles shortly after *Mad Max*’s release. Campbell’s ideas were recurrently discussed in-house. Noonan has described being introduced to these concepts by Miller and Hayes. Robert Gibson described his work on *Video Fool for Love* in terms of the hero’s journey. Denny Lawrence, in my interview with him, recalled that the firm was “very into the hero’s journey” at the time of *Bodyline*. But these theories were not necessarily applied by rote or edict. As Morris told me, Campbell-style story principles did play a part during writing processes at the firm, but there was still always a “sense of freedom” to explore.

The firm’s adoption of Campbell’s ideas is one way to associate its narrative form with the success of its productions. Campbell’s description of the putatively universal monomyth known as the “hero’s journey” forms the basis of much screenwriting literature on optimal story structure. His division of the monomyth into discrete stages including the “call to adventure”, “road of trials” and “crossing the threshold”—and its adaptation by subsequent screenwriting gurus like Christopher Vogler—have been widely applied to screenwriting practice within contemporary and blockbuster film production in Hollywood, and this is very often the category of production practised by Kennedy Miller.

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894 Judy Morris, interview by author, April 2018.
895 Craig Batty, "The Physical and Emotional Threads of the Archetypal Hero’s Journey: Proposing Common Terminology and Re-Examining the Narrative Model," *Journal of*
Though concepts of the hero’s journey, and its associated story structure, are evidently a part of the firm’s approach to developing narrative, I take a view of the firm’s narrative form independent of Campbellian screenwriting theory. As Martin writes, our understanding of the firm’s narratives ought not to stop by mapping them on to Campbell’s schematic grid. Instead, I suggest that Campbell’s concepts define a field of options from which Kennedy Miller selected its particular conventions. I contend that Kennedy Miller’s film practice or house style is associated at the level of subject matter with the creation and reification of community; at the level of narrative with logics of myth and legend; and at the level of narration with strategies of direct address oral storytelling. I highlight these particular conventions as structural elements of the firm’s overall practice, however it is certainly possible to identify other narrative conventions which recur at a more superficial level – the prominent environmental concerns that form a thematic thread between the Mad Max and Happy Feet franchises, for instance. My selection here is intended as representative, not all-encompassing.

Creation and reification of community is at the core of the second, third, and fourth entries in the Mad Max franchise, which each conclude as Max more or less reluctantly facilitates a group exodus out of the desolate wasteland into a habitable spot on its periphery where stable civilised society can be reformed. The first Mad Max, made before the company’s style was formalised, is the only one to eschew this pattern; it ends with social bonds being decisively dissolved, as Max leaves behind his dead family and the ineffectual Main Force Patrol, and assumes the violent, amoral disposition of the biker gangs he combats.

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These environmental themes, alongside the interest in vegetarianism and animal rights in the Babe films, and the material on nuclear war and petrol or water shortages in the Mad Max films, demonstrate the social ritual aspect of the firm’s work – these films sort through social issues of contemporaneous relevance to their audience.

Fury Road complicates this centre/periphery division by locating the habitable spot—the Citadel of the Immortal Joe—in the desert, rather than on the coast as in the prior two films. But the basic principle remains.
The *Babe* films centre on the peaceful cohabitation and cooperation of animals and humans in the social microcosm of the Hoggett’s farm. The *Happy Feet* films likewise revolve on the constitution, practices and survival of the community of Arctic penguins. *The Witches of Eastwick* unfolds as a conflict between the three central women and the community values of their Rhode Island town, ending with the women establishing a semi-independent familial haven on the estate of their banished lover Daryl van Horne. *Lorenzo’s Oil*, similarly, shows a conflict between the Odones and the reigning medical establishment, as well as the quiescent community of family members of adrenoleukodystrophy patients, concluding when the Odone’s discovery of the oil treatment reorients those communities in their support.

Only Duigan’s two films display significant variation: though highly community-focused—on the small town of *The Year My Voice Broke* and the cloistered boarding school of *Flirting*—they are concerned with the struggle of the individual, Danny Embling, to negotiate the norms of those communities; and unlike *Babe* and *Happy Feet*, they do not conclude with the community reshaping itself to conform with the hero’s virtues. Danny remains an outsider.

The miniseries are likewise concerned with community, expressed as the social microcosm of the political parties in *The Dismissal*, the cricket teams in *Bodyline*, or opposing Japanese and Australian armed forces in *The Cowra Breakout*. This concern sometimes manifests at the level of individual families—the Goddards in *Vietnam*, the Eastwicks in *The Dirtwater Dynasty*, and the Stantons in *Bangkok Hilton*—who are essentially treated as representative of broader national segments. At a more abstract level, their nationalist, history-telling project works to reify the community that is their presumed audience, inscribing their viewers into an Australian polity, the parameters of which are implied by the texts.

Kennedy Miller narratives are consistently organised by reference to structuring concepts of myth and legend. Hence the action of *Mad Max 2* and *Beyond*
Thunderdome is recast, at the conclusion of these films, as the mythic tale of the contribution of “the road warrior” in establishing their communities. Likewise, the penguin Mumble’s actions in Happy Feet are communicated as a legendary story, and the storybook framing of Babe grants a ‘once upon a time’ flavour to the film. The trio of witches’ three newborn children at the end of Eastwick represent a movement toward social continuity associated with the regenerative function of mythic storytelling. And Lorenzo’s Oil’s concluding montage of patients treated with the Odones’ oil preparation offers testimony about the effects of their research. In the miniseries, mythic framing arises through their nationalist-historical aspect, in which the narratives present as the primal events that define Australian identity.

At the level of narration, Kennedy Miller texts often deploy devices of direct-address oral storytelling, although this presents to differing degrees across the company’s output. In The Dismissal, the story is relayed through an unseen narrator; in Bodyline, the narrator is Douglas Jardine’s fiancée Edith, who directly addresses the audience as well as participating in the narrative action; in Mad Max 2 and Beyond Thunderdome, the narrator is revealed as one of the supporting characters at the close of the story; in Happy Feet, the ‘narration’ achieves a diegetic aspect, as the penguin Lovelace shouts at Mumble—while really addressing the audience—“I’m gonna be telling your story, Happy Feet, long after you’re gone.” The voiceover narration has different tonal registers—ruminative in The Dismissal; nostalgic in Bodyline; naïve in The Cowra Breakout; ironic in the Babe films—but is consistently deployed throughout its output.

These particular conventions deployed by Kennedy Miller point toward an implicit viewing procedure, or set of expectations about audience experience, that prioritises the solicitation of emotional or visceral affect. In general, I understand Kennedy

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899 Staiger’s analysis of the classical Hollywood film practice identifies its pursuit of affect as the core of its implicit viewing procedures; the orientation toward emotional, rather than intellectual, engagement on the part of the audience. It appears obvious that Kennedy Miller’s practice corresponds in many particulars to the classical Hollywood practice and style, but I withhold from discussion of that issue here. See: Staiger, "Film History, Film Practices," 21.
Miller’s conventions as techniques for the solicitation of affective response: they invite the audience into a shared constituency with the texts’ characters, implicating them in communally held values, and drawing on a nostalgic effect in looking back or forward to community (re)formation. I have argued in Chapter 3 that Kennedy Miller’s early use of violence, which it deployed primarily for its affective possibilities, was later superseded by this more developed narrative style, which achieves affect through other means.

Cunningham also observes this affective strategy in his association of the ‘storyteller’ identity of the company with what he views as the bardic or social ritual function of the miniseries. The concept of a bardic function in television is described in Fisk and Hartley’s *Reading Television*, in which they posit the bardic voice as one that orally communicates to members of a culture a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves⁹⁰⁰—as we have seen, Miller shares a similar notion of the purpose of screen storytelling. Kennedy Miller’s narrative form—across both film and television—possesses just such a function: it employs oral narration to communicate a confirming, reinforcing vision of society to its viewers by shaping story as the primal drama of community formation and testing.

**Kennedy Miller’s Practice, Commercial Sensibility, and Hybrid Identity**

In the preceding history, I have described Kennedy Miller as possessing a commercial sensibility, and shown how the firm strategically adapted to shifting commercial contexts in the Australian and international screen industries. I take it that the identification of Kennedy Miller’s film practice as possessing a particular sort of affective dimension adds definition to our understanding of its commercial sensibility. Although the conventions of the firm’s mode of practice and style do not add up to a blueprint for success, together they indicate the firm’s commercial positioning of its output, and pursuit of a ‘popular’ audience.

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This sensibility is not only evident from its texts, it is also stated freely by the firm’s principals and employees—as seen in Hearnshaw’s comments about Kennedy Miller’s highest regard for the audience. Miller also indicates as much in the *Bodyline* prospectus, where attributes part of his firm’s success to its selection of “the right story and finding the correct way to celebrate it with the audience”. The close association between ‘right story’ and ‘audience’ in Miller’s statement speaks to the core of the company’s sensibility. A high regard for the audience has been a central element of the company’s identity since its origins. This is clearly expressed in *Frieze: An Underground Film*, which makes visible Kennedy’s and Miller’s disregard for avant-garde, solipsistic, inward-looking texts, which treat film as a mode of personal expression rather than a popular product. This outlook cannot be reduced to a baldly mercantile attitude, despite Kennedy’s overt interest in using film as a vehicle to make money. The company’s affective sensibility is also associated with a view of the screen arts as a medium possessing a capacity to reach out, hold and influence the audience. Miller has said that commercial film—the mode he had chosen—is “audience-oriented”.

Kennedy Miller’s determined pursuit of the popular audience is of a piece with its commercial strategies of production, and its deployment of genre, effects technology, star performers, and large budgets. The firm self-evidently tends towards the production of mass-market works. This is visible even with a cursory glance across the company’s output; despite being an ‘independent’, Kennedy Miller has never really practised ‘indie’ production: its clients are major studios and distributors; and its product is often high-cost, and geared for a global audience.

To identify Kennedy Miller as possessing a commercial sensibility also helps us place it within a lineage of production companies of similar aims. Cinesound’s Ken Hall, writing in the late 1970s, embraced the characterisation of his work with Cinesound as “frankly commercial”. Other international production firms have

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901 *Bodyline* Prospectus.
902 Miller, interview by unknown.
903 Hall, *Australian Film*, 102.
operated on similar commercial logics: the British firm Hammer worked on a philosophy of the marketplace.904 Norway’s Cinenord is described in the SiFTI study as possessing a commercial outlook—a belief in “reaching out” to audiences, “not in order to challenge their views, but in order to engage their emotions”.905

The maintenance of a commercial identity—in the sense described here—should not, in itself, be taken for granted in film producers, despite the prominent link between film as an industry and the market economy. Under the cultural policy of film subsidy, commercial considerations have sometimes been decentered in the face of an obligation for film and filmmakers to represent aspects of Australian identity, whereas Kennedy Miller appears to have consistently placed commercial considerations first, approaching nationalist production—as on the miniseries—only when it became viable through its preferred private funding structure.

Although the dichotomy between ‘Australian’ work and ‘commercial’ work is a false one, the presumed tension between the two does underlie much of the Australian-international binary discourse in Australian screen studies described in my Introduction and Chapter 2. As I have argued, Kennedy Miller fits neatly into neither category, but exhibits a hybridity in which elements of ‘the Australian’ and ‘the international’ are always intertwined. Kennedy Miller is dependent on the Australian national industry, even as it looks outward to international (primarily American) markets and financing, and its multiple personae as an actor within that national industry always balance these dual considerations. Although the company’s policy of production can be described as ‘two-sided’—between miniseries, and features; Australian and Hollywood—we can see how those strands are unified by the firm’s commercial sensibility, audience-oriented outlook, and consistency in mode of practice.

To sum up: in the preceding historical chapters, I showed how Kennedy Miller’s method of production undergirded its half-century sustainability; in this chapter, I

have analysed in further detail the elements of that method and their strategic advantages, and argued that these enable us to see Kennedy Miller as exhibiting key characteristics of successful production firms. My discussion has divided the method and treated it in three different aspects or guises: first as organisational culture, second as collaborative production procedures, and third as house style (or mode of practice). We have seen that Kennedy Miller’s organisational culture shares many family resemblances with the cultures of successful European production firms analysed in the SiFTI study: its egalitarian, unstratified, comprehensivist, but tightly controlled philosophy; its history and style of leadership; its practices of innovation and diversification; its negotiated dependencies with corporate and government partners. All of these facets of its culture helped the firm to achieve internal cohesion and external adaptation. We have seen how its collaborative production procedures possess a kind of disciplining function, enabling the firm to harness and manage the creativity of the individuals it employs to make its productions. And we have seen that this regulation of production is associated with a mode of practice: a standardised understanding of what constitutes the ‘right’ story and how to tell it, which aligns with the firm’s commercial, audience-oriented sensibility.

In the course of this discussion I have also returned to the three interventions outlined in the Introduction. Through the company’s habits of leadership, cultivation of personnel, and maintenance of external partnerships, we can see how its method of production shaped and guided the sustainability of the firm across its half-century lifespan. In its collaborative procedures we can apprehend the company’s corporate authorship of output—a regulated system of collaboration taking place under strong central authority. In its screen practice, we can see how the company’s hybrid national identity is founded in its strategic navigation of industry conditions.
Conclusion

Kennedy Miller is an Australian production company of distinctive merits, including the commercial and cultural success of many of its feature films and television miniseries, its achievement of continuous production, and its improbable, uncommon longevity of nearly half a century. If one were casting around for a single lens through which to view the history of Australian film and screen since the 1970s, then one might find no more suitable aperture than the story of Kennedy Miller, which, as I have shown, has been an active and engaged participant in the major shifts and movements of this industry since its ‘revival’ at the time of the company’s founding.

This thesis has shown how Kennedy Miller continued as a successful independent production company across a near half-century of operations by delivering a production history of the company focused on its method of production, which I have described as underlying its sustainability. The Kennedy Miller method, as I construct it, is not a fixed dogma – I have instead revealed how it developed, evolved, and persisted over time. This method encompasses a number of tendencies which I have identified as central to the firm’s operations, including its particular organisational culture, its collaborative production procedures, and its normative ideas of textual construction, or house style.

In describing the Kennedy Miller method, I have drawn on primary source material including oral history interviews with the company’s principals, key creatives, and below-the-line personnel, as well as press and media clippings, and company documentation such as investment prospectuses, scripts, memos, and private papers and personal correspondence. To fill some significant gaps in this archival material—particularly in the relative paucity of first-hand testimony about the company’s creative procedures in the 1970s, and 1990s and 2000s—I conducted eleven new qualitative interviews, including six with former writers and/or directors at Kennedy Miller. These interviews, with James McCausland, Sally Gibson, Denny Lawrence, Lex Marinos, Mark Lamprell, Judy Morris, and Warren Coleman offered a
supplementary view of development and production at Kennedy Miller at key stages of its existence, from *Mad Max* to the miniseries to *Babe* to *Happy Feet*. In gathering all this research material my focus has been on understanding the internal operations of the company in the words of those who worked there.

My treatment of the method took some impetus from four qualities that Miller, in the 1984 *Bodyline* prospectus, claimed had a bearing on his firm’s success: its sense of what the ‘right’ kind of story is, its selection of personnel, its use of workshopping, and its commitment to ‘excessive preparation’ in developing and pre-producing its projects. As I have shown, the firm does have stable narrative conventions, habitual recruitment practices focused on social networks and its sense of preferred employee conduct, consistent use of workshopping and related rehearsal techniques, and recurring development and writing practices focused on research, story conferences, and “exhaustive” periods of revision.

However, the method is characterised by additional elements, too. Kennedy Miller’s founders embedded in their firm’s culture an ideal of comprehensivism, or multidisciplinarity. The firm’s principals believe that creative labour should not be silo’d and stratified, but instead carried out in an atmosphere of collective purpose—a shared ‘world’ for each project—that is permissive of contribution from all participants. These ideals were informed by Miller and Kennedy’s early experiences as young filmmakers, and bolstered by the workshopping techniques introduced by George Ogilvie, and they generated the collaborative practices that mark the firm’s production procedures. Kennedy Miller’s preferred kind of personnel are multi-skilled, capable of offering a wide scope of creative insight and taking on multiple duties – seen prototypically in its preference for combined writer-directors. However, this atmosphere of collaboration, and avoidance of certain rigid divisions of labour, is also regulated by management, and the firm adopts an overall position of creative authority that supersedes the autonomy of individual contributors. The organisation is in this sense both unstratified and egalitarian, and also tightly controlled by its principals, chiefly Miller.
On a material level, the firm’s method includes a particular business structure: a small group of principals (Miller, Kennedy, Hayes, Mitchel) supported by a small administrative staff, and using a contract system to manages its temporary creative and technical employees. The firm has benefitted from achieving some ownership over its means of production, with the use of its Metro headquarters as studio, and its later founding of a digital studio in Dr D. It has consistently been an early and enthusiastic adopter of new technologies and tools, from Dolby sound mixing, to the early combinations of computer and practical effects in the *Babe* films, to the leap into digital filmmaking in *Happy Feet*.

On the level of business strategy, the firm has embraced private funding, international partnerships, and indirect government subsidy, and, with few exceptions, focused its energies on generating mass-market commercial products. It has had a complex relationship with government intervention in the film industry: oppositional in the 1970s time of direct subsidy; eager in the 1980s time of tax concession; oppositional again as it looked toward international funding through the 1990s; and engaged again, even to the point of active lobbying, in the return of tax assistance packages in the 2000s.

I have argued also that Kennedy Miller’s method is a strategic element that played a significant part in the company’s success, and the success of its productions. I contend that this occurs through three interlinked processes. First, through its achievement of standardisation in output via the regulating operations of collaborative production and corporate authorship. Second, through a house style or mode of practice that exhibits consistent conventions in subject matter, narrative, and narration, and established viewing procedures. And third, through its accompanying commercial sensibility and pursuit of the popular audience.

Finally, although Kennedy Miller has been seen, treated, and even understood itself to be an ‘outsider’ in the Australian industry, I have shown that many of the tendencies that mark its history are not unique to the company, but reflect the behaviours and strategies of other perspicuously successful production enterprises
both in Australia and internationally, and not just today but in the past.

**Implications**

In the course of this thesis, I have shown what an understanding of this significant company can offer to ongoing debates within film and media studies: on sustainability in production, on authorship in production firms, and on national identity.

Advancing on the prior difficulties scholars have encountered in adequately and comprehensively accounting for the national identity of the firm and its productions, I have argued that Kennedy Miller possesses a hybrid nationality, which is visible in the two sides of its production strategy—which without contradiction is oriented both toward the Australian and international markets—and in the outward-looking and commercial sensibility it maintains even while firmly based within the Australian industry. My treatment of the firm’s hybridity, which I have shown to be a fundamental part of its operation from its origins and throughout its history, offers a corrective to past debates about the ‘Australianness’ of its work, as well as a caution against any uncritical future attempts to deal with the firm within restrictive Australian/international oppositional discourses. My perspective on the company’s hybridity also serves as a contribution to contemporary Australian scholarly trends that seek to acknowledge the present and historical interrelatedness of the Australian and international screen industries. Kennedy Miller offers exceptional evidence of that interrelatedness.

I have argued that Kennedy Miller displays particular conditions of authorship: a ‘corporate authorship’ founded in managerial regulation of collaborative activity. My description of the firm’s corporate authorship demonstrates an application of this concept that is grounded not in press or publicity ‘discourses’ around a firm, but in accounts of its actual conditions of production, and develops a conceptual approach for future researchers investigating conditions of creative authorship and autonomy at production firms. Further, my discussion of the importance of Kennedy Miller’s
collaborative tendencies to Miller’s personal practice as a filmmaker must have bearing on any future scholarly or non-scholarly analyses of Miller’s career, and on any discussion of individual authorship and agency at the firm. Without denying his gifts as a filmmaker, I have shown that Miller’s creative practice must be understood within the context of systems of collaboration which are present across his output. This is visible not only in the crediting of co-directors on three of his films, but also in his general habits of creativity, the customs and practices through which he manages the development, writing, and production of his films, and, finally, in his ideal of comprehensivism and belief that creative production roles should not be divided off from one another. Any attempt to trace the ideas, ideologies, interior meanings, and styles found in Miller’s films back to him specifically, without also noting the mediating effects of his various collaborators, and of his company, can present only an incomplete account of his work.

I have also argued that the firm represents an instructive case of how sustainability and success might be achieved in production firms. Conditions for Australian producers are precarious and have been since the beginnings of the national cinema. Kennedy Miller stands as a powerful example of longevity and stability, thanks to the advantages offered by its method of production. An improved understanding of the causes and conditions behind its achievements will surely be of interest to screen policy makers and practitioners, as well as to scholars. This thesis has identified and described at length a number of such causes and conditions, specifically its advantageous organisational culture, collaborative production procedures, and house style (or mode of practice).

In the course of describing Kennedy Miller as a successful firm I have posited several comparisons between the firm’s organisation and conduct and that of the firms described in the SiFTI study, as well as other Australian and international firms like Bazmark, Working Dog, WingNut, Amblin, and Lucasfilm. I will conclude here by briefly discussing some broader implications of these comparisons. These comparisons have added to our understanding of Kennedy Miller as exhibiting the characteristics of successful firms, but they also point the way toward an empirically-
based theory of success in screen production. What are the characteristics of successful firms in the Australian screen industries? This question remains an opportunity for future work in our field. I would suggest that a cross-case comparison of Kennedy Miller, Bazmark, and Working Dog, using the analytical principles described in Chapter 6, might provide valuable answers. Or, given the correspondences between Kennedy Miller and the SiFTI firms, an Australian-European comparative investigation might be able to posit principles of success for independent firms in nations with equivalent small to medium-sized screen industries that are underwritten by government support.

If Kennedy Miller shares the characteristics of success with other firms, it might also share comparable methods of production; a possibility with rich theoretical consequences. The possible correspondence between Kennedy Miller’s method of production (as defined in this thesis) and a broader mode of production (and practice) encompassing its ‘family’ of likeminded firms is a complex issue deserving of further investigation, and raises a set of questions which return back to some of the core findings of my thesis. Although I have noted Kennedy Miller’s iconoclastic reputation, I have refrained from a substantive account of whether its method of production exactly corresponds to or is excepted from Australian screen industry norms. Therefore, a question remains unresolved: what is the relationship of Kennedy Miller’s method of production to Australian industry modes of production? Or, just how Australian is the company in its conduct as a producer?

As has been discussed, collaborative practices are not unique to Kennedy Miller, but are present in Australia at least in operations like Working Dog and, to a certain extent, Bazmark. It may be that Kennedy Miller has gone farther than other companies in formalising these practices into a sustainable and adaptable set of production procedures, by organising them under an organisational culture and philosophy of comprehensivism, and instituting regularities in writing, development, and project management that ensure their continuation. Internal conditions at the company—its ownership of the Metro; the residual financial cushion from *Mad Max* and later successes—also meant that Kennedy Miller had the luxury to devote time,
space, and money to these practices, which other production firms generally lack. The question is therefore not whether the Kennedy Miller method was unique—in its constituent parts it was not—but to what degree its combination of these parts differed from the prevailing industry around it.

Miller, at least, once believed—or saw fit to claim in the *Bodyline* prospectus—that Kennedy Miller’s preparatory practices went on at lengths “two or three times the industry norm”.\(^\text{906}\) It is difficult now to judge the accuracy of that claim, either for standard practices at other production enterprises in Australia in the 1980s, or for the decades since. However, it is sometimes claimed that development processes within the Australian screen industry are insufficiently robust, and that this high-risk phase of work suffers from underinvestment by government film agencies.\(^\text{907}\) Kennedy Miller’s writing and development habits—which Miller and Hayes perceived as different from those of other producers—could represent an exception to the prevailing Australian industry norm. Certainly, reports or rumours about its treatment of writers—as described in the Chapter 1 and throughout—show that the industry and press believed there is something unusual about the way the company does things.

The Australian modes of production have arguably been less intensively researched and described than the American, although media and industry studies have identified and analysed many of its characteristics, as in the work of Dermody and Jacka, O’Regan, Ryan, Goldsmith, Verhoeven, and others. Dermody and Jacka’s *The Screening of Australia* and *The Imaginary Industry* offer substantive notes toward the Australian mode of production of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly on the policy forces shaping organisation of the industry and its textual aesthetics, but do not extend to a discussion of production practices, hierarchies, and divisions of labour. My research contributes to this body of literature by describing in depth the practices of one major producer, with an emphasis on the firm’s management of

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\(^{906}\) *Bodyline* Prospectus, 1984, *Bodyline* Documentation, 482515, National Film and Sound Archive.

\(^{907}\) Sean Maher, *The Internationalisation of Australian Film and Television through the 1990s* (Sydney: Australian Film Commission, 2004), 27.
labour. The question as to whether its conduct is comparable with local norms is an opportunity for future research. Given that iconoclastic accounts of Kennedy Miller are most often directed at its labour practices, I find it likely that this will be where the true point of differentiation between the company’s method and the Australian mode will be locatable.

If Kennedy Miller’s method is actually representative of a broader industrial mode, a further step would be to locate that mode not within Australia (or not only within Australia) but in alternative national or transnational industrial contexts. Although Kennedy Miller distinguishes its comprehensivism from Hollywood stratification, my comparison with Lucasfilm and Amblin shows that it shares some family resemblance with certain American production firms. The difference between Kennedy Miller’s comprehensivism and Hollywood attitudes could be reducible to cultural differences in crew behaviour and the relative power of trade unions.

More provocatively, this line of investigation affords an opportunity to bypass altogether the problems of national industry discourse, which has so stimulated and vexed screen scholars. Even my description of Kennedy Miller as possessing a ‘hybrid’ identity has conceptual limitations, not so much escaping the local-international binarism of national discourse as fudging its borders. Programmes of research focused on methods and modes of production have the potential to elide the issue of national borders and speak directly to shared characteristics in production conduct. It is possible, for instance, to hypothesise a trans-Tasman ‘mode’ to which Kennedy Miller and WingNut belong, or even a Pacific Rim mode encompassing Kennedy Miller, WingNut, and Lucasfilm.

These firms have intriguing similarities in method: collaborative environments; expansion into effects businesses; oppositional/negotiated relationships with their local industries; quick uptake of new technologies; and strategic engagement with blockbuster, franchise productions. They also partake of a shared mode of practice, possessing comparable conventions of narrative form and viewing procedures. Staiger has argued that the analysis of modes of practice—and, by extension, of
production—has the ability to carry scholars beyond the limitations of national cinema discourse. Such research efforts, I believe, must be founded on fine-grained and focused analysis and documentation of the conduct, strategies, and procedures of particular producers—the individual cases from which broader modes can be extrapolated. My research on Kennedy Miller therefore opens up a pathway toward substantive, non-national studies of the global screen industries, which can, in turn, contribute to our understanding of Australian production.

There is also the question of the firm’s ongoing activities. The book is not closed on Kennedy Miller Mitchell, despite its improbable longevity, and future output, and future accounts of production, could reshape the findings I have reported in this thesis. The forthcoming Three Thousand Years of Longing, with its apparently-studio-less and independent financial structure, and as-yet-unknown narrative form, raises the possibility of further evolutions in method of production in the company’s future.

Given the flexibility that I have shown to be part of Kennedy Miller’s method, its willingness to adapt and evolve in response to different funding paradigms, technologies, and industrial conditions, and its complex negotiation of national and international boundaries, we could even say that an ability to move between modes is a distinguishing characteristic of the company. This very flexibility—its selective combination of practices in search of commercial advantage and thence sustainability—has been a constitutive factor in enabling the firm to survive and thrive across nearly half a century in a notoriously uncertain and unstable industry.

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Appendix: Kennedy Miller Productions

1960s-1970s∗

The Dragsters (short, Peter Kamen and Byron Kennedy, c. 1966)
Ronter Productions Presents
Locations: Yarraville, Melbourne
Filmed: presumed to be December 1966
Video: NFSA Access Copy
8mm (assumed). Around 10 minutes.
Filmed by Byron Kennedy and Peter Kamen
Synopsis: A group of young children build go-kart and compete in a race.

Untitled UNSW Short (short, Chris Miller and George Miller, c. 1970)
B&W. 1 minute

St Vincent’s Revue Film (short, George Miller and John Mackay et al., c. 1971)
Location: St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney
Around 4:52 minutes
Video: NFSA Access Copy
Camera: Peter Marjason, Phillip Noyce, George Miller. Editing: David Huggett.
Production: George Miller, John Mackay.
With the generous assistance of: Yoram and Sandra Gross, Opunka Film Group, Derek Jones, The Magnificent Nuns of St Vincent’s
Cast: Nick (sic) Lathouris, Billy Kay
Synopsis: A man aggravates a group of nuns, who he seems to see everywhere he goes. A chase ensues. The nuns beat the man; he wakes up in hospital.

∗ Information for Kennedy Miller productions has been excerpted from Scott Murray’s two reference surveys:
I have sometimes added information on shooting locations, where listed in the credits, as well as some crew listings not provided by Murray (such as for researchers, and post-production supervisors).
Production information for films released after 1994 has been largely collected from credits on available home media copies of these films, but are necessarily incomplete.
Production information for short films made by or associated with Kennedy Miller has been taken from available copies at the National Film and Sound Archive (though may be incomplete).
Credits for Violence in the Cinema, Part 1 are taken from:
Synopses are my own.
**Violence in the Cinema, Part 1** (short, George Miller, 1971)
Location: St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney
13 minutes.
Cast: Arthur Dignam (Dr. Fyne), Victoria Anoux (Woman), Mallory Petit (Kid), Karl Avis and Stewart McQueen (Henchmen).
Synopsis: Dr. Fyne delivers a lecture on screen violence, while alternately inflicting and suffering a series of violence tortures.

**Frieze, an Underground Film** (short, Byron Kennedy, c. 1973)
A Film by Byron Kennedy with Assistance from George Miller
Made with assistance from the Experimental Film and Television Fund of the Australian Council for the Arts
Budget: $438
Around 12 minutes
Video: NFSA Access Copy
Synopsis: An assembly of brief clips, ostensibly organised according to the filmmaker’s perceptions of ‘hot’ and ‘cold’. Miller appears on screen, critiquing the film as it plays out.

**The Devil in Evening Dress** (television special, George Miller, 1974)
Kennedy Miller Entertainment and John Lamond Motion Picture Enterprises
Budget: $5,000
52:32 minutes
Cast: Frank Thring Jr (Host)
Synopsis: A documentary on a ghost that supposedly haunts Melbourne’s Princes Theatre; the spectre of actor Frederick ‘Federici’ Baker, who died during an 1888 production of Faust. Features dramatised re-enactments of Baker’s final day.

**Mad Max** (feature, George Miller, 1979)
Kennedy Miller present (sic)
1979 Crossroads International Finance Co.
Budget: $380,000
Locations: Melbourne, Sunbury, Clunes (Victoria)
Filmed: November-December 1977
Australian Distributor: Roadshow
Opened: 12 April 1979
Video: Roadshow Home Video
Rating: R
35mm. Todd AO. 91 minutes.

Cast: Mel Gibson (Max Rockatansky), Joanne Samuel (Jessie Rockatansky), Roger Ward (Fifi Macafee), Steve Bisley (Jim Goose), Tim Burns (Johnny), Hugh Keays-Byrne (The Toecutter); Lisa Alpenhoven (Nurse), David Bracks (Mudguts), Bertrand Cadart (Clunk), David Cameron (Underground Mechanic), Robina Chaffey (Singer), Stephen Clarl (Sarse), Matthew Constantine (Toddler), Jerry Day (Ziggy), Reg Evans (Station Master), Howard Cynon (Disband), Max Fairchild (Benno), John Farndale (Grinner), Peter Flemington (Senior Doctor), Sheila Florence (May Sawaisy), Nic Gazzana (Starbuck), Hunter Gibb (Lair), Vince Gil (Nightrider).

Synopsis: An officer of the Main Force Patrol, Max Rockatansky, patrols the highways of a deteriorating society, guarding against vicious gangs of bikers. When one such gang, led by the Toe Cutter, attacks his friend Goose, and then his wife and child, Max enacts violent vengeance.

1980s

Mad Max 2 (feature, 1981)

Kennedy Miller presents

Alternative title: The Road Warrior (US)

Copyright 1981 Kennedy Miller Entertainment Pty. Ltd and Others

Budget: $4.5 million

Location: environs of Broken Hill (New South Wales)

Australian distributor: Roadshow

International distributor: Warner Bros

US distributor:

Opened: December 1981

Video: Warner Home Video

Rating: M

35mm. Panavision. 94 minutes.


Cast: Mel Gibson (Max), Bruce Spence (The Gyro Captain), Mike Preston (Pappagallo), Max Phipps (Toadie), Vernon Wells (Wez), Emil Minty (The Feral Kid), Kjell Nilsson (The Humungous), Virginia Hey (Warrior Woman), William Zappa (Zetta), Arkie Whiteley (The Captain’s Girl), Steve J. Spears (Mechanic), Syd Heylen (Curmudgeon), Moira Clauz (Big Rebecca), David Downer (Nathan), David Slingsby (Quiet Man), Kristoffer Greaves (Mechanic’s Assistant), Max Fairchild (Broken Victim), Tyler Coppin (Defiant Victim), Jimmy Brown (Golden Youth), Tony Dearay
(Grinning Mohawker), Kathleen McKay (Victim), Guy Morris (Barclay Mohawk); Annie Jones, James McCardell (Tent Lovers); Harold Beignet (Narrator).

Synopsis: In a now fully post-apocalyptic Australia, Max is a lone warrior, passing through the wastelands in his Ford V8 Interceptor. On the hunt for fuel, Max is embroiled in a conflict between the citizens of an oil refinery seeking to escape the desert, and the bloodthirsty forces of the warlord Humungous.

**The Dismissal** (television miniseries, 1983)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright 1982 Byron Kennedy and George Miller
Locations: Canberra; Sydney; The Metro Theatre Studio
Network: 10.
Aired: 6 March 1983 (first episode)
Video: Roadshow.
16mm. Television length: 3 x 2 hours. Actual length: 267 mins.
Executive producers: Byron Kennedy, George Miller. Scriptwriters: Ron Blair, George Miller, Phillip Noyce, Terry Hayes, Sally Gibson, Daphne Paris, Terry Hayes.
Cast: Max Phipps (Gough Whitlam), John Hargreaves (Dr Jim Cairns), Bill Hunter (Rex Connor), John Stanton (Malcolm Fraser), Stewart Faichney (Billy Sneddon), John Meillon (Sir John Kerr), Ed Devereaux (Phil Lynch), Peter Sumner (Bill Hayden), Neela Day (Junie Morosi), Harry Weiss (Tirath Khemlani), Carol Burns (Cairns’ Secretary), David Downer (Tony Staley), Nancy Hayes (Connor’s Secretary), Tony Barry (The Press Secretary), Robyn Nevin (Lady Kerr), Tom Oliver (Reg Whithers), Tim Elliott (Sir Frederick Wheeler), Arthur Dignam (Liberal MP), Alan Becher (Liberal MP), Sean Scully (Doug Anthony), John Allen (Prime Ministerial Aide), Les Foxcroft (The First Speaker), Dennis Miller (The Second Speaker), Ruth Cracknell (Margaret Whitlam), Stuart Littlemore (The TV Anchorman), Veronica Lang (The Reporter), Martin Vaughan (Albert ‘Pat’ Field), Malcolm Keith (Melbourne Reporter), George Ogilvie (Senator Jim McClellan); Peter Carroll (Narrator).
Synopsis: Depicts the political struggle leading up to Governor General John Kerr’s controversial dismissal of the Whitlam government, with a focus on the dramas afflicting Whitlam’s cabinet.

**Bodyline** (television miniseries, 1984)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright Kennedy Miller Pty Ltd
Location: Sydney; The Metro Theatre Studio
Network: 10.
Aired: 16 July 1984 (first parts)
16mm. Television length: 5 x 2 hours.

Cast: Hugo Weaving (Douglas Jardine), Gary Sweet (Don Bradman), Jim Holt (Harold Larwood), Rhys McConnachie (Pelham Warner), John Gregg (Percy George Fender), Heather Mitchell (Edith), Julie Nhll (Jessie), John Walton (Bill Woodfull); The Bradman Family: John Clayton (Mr Bradman), Colleen Fitzpatrick (Mrs Bradman), Mark Kounnas (Young Don); The Jardine Family: Arthur Dignam (Mr Jardine), Jane Harders (Mrs Jardine), Nicholas Gledhill (Young Douglas); The MCC Lords: George Whaley (Lord Hawke), Edward Howell (Lord Hailsham), Colin Croft (Sir Stanley Jackson); The Australian Cricket Board: Peter Whitford (Robertson), Bruce Myles (Jeans), Peter Gwynn (Oxland); The Australians: Paul Chubb (The Barracker), Norman May (The Commentator).

Synopsis: Dramatises the 1933 Ashes cricket test series. Desperate to bring the Ashes back to England, English Captain Douglas Jardine develops the controversial and dangerous ‘body line’ or ‘leg theory’ bowling tactic to combat the skill of Australian batsman Don Bradman; the Australian team, and nation, is outraged.

**The Cowra Breakout** (television miniseries, 1985)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright 1984 Kennedy Miller
Locations: Singleton Army Base (New South Wales); New Guinea; The Metro Theatre, Sydney.
Network: 10
Aired: 4 March 1985 (first episode)
16mm. Television length: 5 x 2 hours.

Cast: Alan David Lee (Stan Davidson), Dennis Miller (Mick Murphy), Tracy Mann
Appendix: Kennedy Miller Productions

(Sally Murphy), Andrew Lloyds (Lieut. MacDonald), Junichi Ishida (Junji Hayashi), Kazuhiro Muromiya (Komatsu), Munehisa Fujita (Minami), Peter Hehir (Padre), Carole Skinner (Mrs Davidson), Norman Kaye (Mr Davidson), Simon Chilvers (Maj. Holden), Lauri Moran (Corp. Doyle), Max Cullen (Priv. Hook), Rick Tanaka (Naka), George Shevtsov (Yuri Shevkov), Kerry Mack (Mary), Hide Hiram (Matsumoto), Fumikazu Morihashi (Okamura), Rebecca Smart (Shirley Murphy), Fumihiko Ikeda (Oishi).

Synopsis: Dramatises the August 1944 breakout of Japanese POWs at the Cowra prison camp in New South Wales. Returning from a traumatic tour of service to take up a post at the camp, Australian Stan Davidson finds that the Japanese soldier he thought he had fought to death in the jungles of New Guinea, Junichi Ishida, is now a prisoner under his oversight. A tentative friendship develops amid the increasingly volatile atmosphere at the camp.

**Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome** (feature, 1985)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright 1985 Kennedy Miller Productions Pty Ltd.
Locations: Coober Pedy (South Australia), Blue Mountains, Camperdown (New South Wales)
Australian distributor: Roadshow
US/International distributor: Warner Brothers
Opened: 8 August 1985
Video: Warner Home Video
Rating: M
35mm. Panavision. 106 mins.
Scriptwriters: Terry Hayes, George Miller. Director of photography: Dean Semler.
Cast: Mel Gibson (Max), Tina Turner (Aunty Entity), Helen Buday (Savannah Nix), Frank Thring (The Collector), Bruce Spence (Jedediah the Pilot), Robert Grubb (Pig Killer), Angelo Rossitto (The Master), Angry Anderson (Ironbar), George Spartels (Blackfinger), Edwin Hodgeman (Dr Dealgood), Mark Spain (Skyfish), Mark Kounnas (Gekko), Rod Zuanic (Scrooloose), Justine Clarke (Anna Goanna), Shane Tickner (Eddie), Tom Jennings (Slake), Adam Cockburn (Jedediah Jnr.), Bob Hornby (Waterseller), Andrew Oh (Ton Ton Tattoo), Toni Allaylis (Cusha…the Pregnant Girl), James Wingrove (Tubba Tintye), Adam Scougall (Finn McCoo), Adam Willits (Mr Scratch).
Synopsis: Still wandering the wastelands, Max is first embroiled in a power struggle between the rulers of the burgeoning community of Bartertown, and then cast as prophesied saviour to a tribe of lost children in the desert.
The Making of Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (documentary short, 1985)
Copyright 1985 Kennedy Miller Pty Limited
Network: 10
Aired: 26 July 1985
Television length: 1 x 1 hour.
Cast: Tina Turner (Narrator).

Vietnam (television miniseries, 1987)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright 1986 Kennedy Miller
Locations: Phuket (Thailand); Sydney; The Metro Theatre Studio
Filmed: April-May 1986 (Thailand); June-July 1986 (Sydney).
Network: 10.
Television length: 5 x 2 hours.
Cast: The Family: Barry Otto (Douglas Goddard), Veronica Land (Evelyn Goddard), Nicholas Eadie (Phil Goddard), Nicole Kidman (Megan Goddard); The Politicians: Noel Ferrier (Sir Robert Menzies), Henri Szeps (Harold Holt), Lucky Grills (Sen. Shane Paltridge), Don Reid (Paul Hasluck), Alan Cassel (John Gorton); The Soldiers: Mark Lee (Laurie Fellows), Brett Climo (Ritchie), Jim Holt (Lt. Smart), Tim Robertson (Pascoe), Leigh Biolos (Heylan), Tom Appleton (Peter), Marc Caleb (US Sergeant); The Friends: John Polson (Serge), Imogen Annesley (Annie Phelan), Warren Coleman (Rabbit), Alyssa Cook (Deb), Francesca Raft (Ros), Graeme Blunder (Miles), Celia de Burgh (Monica), Grace Parr (Le), Pauline Chan (Lien).
Synopsis: Follows the Goddard family through the social upheavals of 1970s.
Australia and the Vietnam war. Nicholas, the son, is conscripted and traumatised by his service. Evelyn, the daughter, drops out of school and joins the youth protest movement in Sydney. Veronica, their mother, seeks a divorce and strikes out on her own. Douglas, her husband, a conservative Canberran bureaucrat, slowly changes his position on the war.

The Witches of Eastwick (feature, 1987)
Warner Bros Presents / A Guber-Peters Company production / A Kennedy Miller Film
Copyright 1987 Warner Bros., Inc.
Location: Massachusetts
Filmed: 1986
Opened: June 1987 (US)
Rating: M
113 minutes


Cast: Jack Nicholson (Daryl Van Horne), Cher (Alexandra Medford), Susan Sarandon (Jane Spofford), Michelle Pfeiffer (Sukie Ridgemont), Veronica Cartwright (Felicia Alden), Richard Jenkins (Clyde Alden), Keith Joachim (Walter Neff), Carel Struycken (Fidel), Helen Lloyd Beed (Mrs. Biddle), Caroline Struzik (Carol Medford), Michele Sincavage, Nicol Sincavage, Heather Coleman, Carolyn Ditmars, Cynthia Ditmars, Christine Ditmars (Ridgemont Children), Craig Burket, Abraham Mishkind, Christopher Verrette (String Quartet), Becca Lish (Mrs. Neff), Ruth Maynard (Mrs. Biddle’s Friend).

Synopsis: Three lonely women, Alexandra, Sukie, and Jane, magically manifest the suitor of their dreams: the mysterious, and possibly demonic, Daryl van Horne.

The Year My Voice Broke (feature, 1987)
Odyssey Distributors Ltd presents / Kennedy Miller presents / A Kennedy Miller production.
Copyright 1987 Kennedy Miller Production Pty Limited
Location: Braidwood (New South Wales)
Australian distributor: Hoyts
US/International distributor: Odyssey Distributors Ltd
Opened: 17 October 1987
Video: First Release
Rating: M
35mm. 105 mins.


Cast: Noah Taylor (Danny), Leone Carmen (Freya), Ben Mendelsohn (Trevor), Graeme Blundell (Nils Olson), Lynette Curran (Anne Olson), Malcolm Robertson (Bruce Embling), Judi Farr (Sheila Embling), Tim Robertson (Bob Leishman), Bruce Spence (Jonah), Harold Hopkins (Tom Alcock), Anja Coleby (Gail Olson), Kylie Ostara (Alison), Kelly Dingwall (Barry), Dorothy St. Heaps (Mrs Beal), Colleen Clifford (Gran Olson), Vincent Ball (Headmaster), Kevin Manser (Mr Keith), Emma Lyle (Lis), Louise Birgan (Lyn), Mary Regan (Miss McColl).

Synopsis: Growing up in a small, insular NSW country town, Danny Embling is in love with his childhood friend Freya, who is more interested in local bad boy Trevor Leishman.

The Clean Machine (telemovie, 1988)
Kennedy Miller.
Location: Sydney
Network: 10.
Aired: 22 May 1988
Video: NFSA Access Copy
16mm. 90 mins. Tele-feature.
Cast: Steve Bisley (Eddie Riordan), Grigor Taylor (Det. Sgt. Warren Davis), Ed Devereaux (Commissioner Fred Riley), Regina Gaigalas (Veronica Riordan), Peter Kowitz (Stewart Byrne), Marshall Napier (Keith Reid), Sandy Gore (Marcia Irving), Mervyn Drake (Ron Maher), Frank Hitton (Premier John Morgan), Tim Robertson (Dr Michael Milius), Edwin Hodgeman (Max Newell), Tony Poli (Paolo Morello), Brian McDermott (asst. Commissioner), Robert Taylor (Const. Ron Healy), Ric Carter (Det. Sgt. Frank Truro), Garth Meade (Imad Hamoudi), Frederic Abbott (Premier Bruce Russell).
Synopsis: Inspector Eddie Riordan is the patsy chosen to lead a new anti-corruption squad in the state police, but after he assembles an ambitious team his investigation uncovers more than his superiors bargained for.

The Riddle of the Stinson (telemovie, 1988)
Kennedy Miller.
Network: 10.
16mm. 109 mins. Tele-feature.

Cast: Jack Thompson (Bernard O'Reilly), Helen O'Connor (Viona O'Reilly), Norman Kaye (Binstead), Richard Roxburgh (Proud), Huw Williams (Westray), Dennis Miller (Boyden), Mark Lee (Shepherd), Susan Lyons (Jean Batten), Len Kaserman (Fountain), Russell Newman (Graham), Peter Browne (Herb), Mary Haire (Rose O'Reilly), Kendall Monahan (Thelma), Frank Wilson (Robinson), Essen Storm (Meissner).

Synopsis: After a light aircraft crashes in Queensland’s McPherson Ranges, local man Bernard O'Reilly makes good on an improbable solo effort to locate survivors.

Fragments of War: The Story of Damien Parer (telemovie, 1987)
Kennedy Miller
Network: 10
Video: NFSA Access Copy
16mm. 101 mins. Tele-feature.
Cast: Nicholas Eadie (Damien Parer), Anne Tenny (Marie Parer), Huw Williams (Ron Maslyn Williams), Steve Jodrell (Chester Wilmot), Jeff Truman (Osmar White), Liz Stuart (Pru), Melanie Salomon (Amy), Maureen O'Shaughnessy (Rose), Mery Regan (Alice), Halina Abramowicz (Hana), Alan Zither (Maj. Albite), Mark Hebrew (Padre), Bob Haines (Ken G. Hall), Ross Sharpe (Alistair), Anna Hruby (Meg), Leone Carmen (Waitress).
Synopsis: Dramatises the wartime career of Cinesound newsreel cameraman Damien Parer.

The Dirtwater Dynasty (television miniseries, 1988)
Kennedy Miller.
Locations: Broken Hill, Sydney (New South Wales).
Network: 10.
Aired: 10 April 1988 (first episode).
16mm. Television length: 2 x 3 hours; 2 x 2 hours.
Directors: Michael Jenkins (1, 4, 5, 6, 9), John Power (2, 3, 7, 8.), Producers: Terry Hayes, Doug Mitchell, George Miller. Associate producer/line producer/production manager: Barbara Gibbs. Scriptwriters: Tony Morphett, Michael Jenkins, John Power, Terry Hayes, John Duigan, Alan Seymour, John Misto. Director of

Cast: Hugo Weaving (Richard Eastwick), Victoria Langley (Kate McBride; Nancy McBride), Steve Jacobs (Josh McCall), Judy Morris (Frances Eastwick), Bruce Spence (Lonely Logan), Dennis Miller (Hasky Tarbox), Harold Hopkins (Rev. McBride), Jenny Lee (Mrs McBride), Kristina Nehm (Esmerelda), Peter Phelps (David Eastwick I), Scott Burgess (Guy Westaway), Robert Menzies (Richie Eastwick), Ned Manning (David Eastwick II), Anne Louise Lambert (Emma Tarbox), Anna-Maria Winchester (Mrs Tarbox), Laverne McDonnell (Christine Eastwick), Ernie Dingo (Billy), Mary Acres (Bourke Postmistress), Noel Adams (Army Messenger), Geoff Aldridge (Real Estate Agent), Drew Anthony (Tapper), David Arnett (U.S. Army Sergeant), Queen Ashton (Old Patient), Bob Baines (Navy Official), Phillipa Baker (Landlady), Vincent Ball (Eastwick Banker).

Synopsis: A Dickensian rags-to-riches melodrama, in which a foundling from British coal country, Richard Eastwick, carves out an enormous cattle empire in Australia, all the while struggling to secure a suitable heir to his fortune.

Sportz Crazy (television docuseries, 1988)
Network: 10
Television length: 8 x 1 hours
Credits unavailable, but, according to Mark Lamprell, he, Marcus D'Arcy, and Keiran Finnane were series writers and/or directors.
Cast: Jack Thompson (Host)
Synopsis: A light-hearted look at eccentric or unusual Australian sporting events, including the Blackrock Stakes, Mud Football, Beercan Regatta, Canoe Marathon, ‘dwarf throwing’, and the ‘black Olympics’.

Dead Calm (feature, 1988)
Kennedy Miller presents
Copyright 1988 Kennedy Miller Productions.
Locations: Whitsunday Passage, Hamilton Island (Queensland); Sydney.
Australian distributor: Roadshow
US/International distributor: Warner Brothers
Video: Warner Home Video
Rating: M
35mm. Panavision. 95mins.

Cast: Nicole Kidman (Rae Ingram), Sam Neill (John Ingram), Billy Zane (Hughie Warriner), Rod Mullinar (Russell Bellows), Joshua Tilden (Danny), George Shevtsov (Doctor), Michael Long (Specialist Doctor); Lisa Collins, Sharon Cook, Paula Hudson-Brinkley, Malinda Rutter (‘Orpheus’ Cruise Girls).

Synopsis: On a yachting trip in the middle of the ocean while recovering from the death of their child, Rae and John Ingram rescue the unstable Hughie Warriner, who claims to be the lone survivor of a food poisoning outbreak on a nearby ship. When John goes to investigate, Hughie hijacks his yacht, taking Rae with him. The couple must struggle to reunite.

**Bangkok Hilton** (television miniseries, 1989)
Kennedy Miller Productions presents
Locations: Sydney; Bangkok; Goa; The Metro Theatre
Network: 10.
Aired: 5, 6, 7 November 1989.
16mm. Television length: 3 x 2 hours.
Director: Ken Cameron. Producers; Terry Hayes, Doug Mitchell, George Miller.
Cast: Nicole Kidman (Katrina (Kat) Stanton), Denholm Elliott (Hal Stanton), Hugo Weaving (Richard Carlisle), Jerome Ehlers (Arkie Regan), Joy Smithers (Mandy Engels), Judy Morris (Catherine), Noah Taylor (Billy Engels), Norman Kaye (George McNair), Gerda Nicolson (Lady Faulkner), Lewis Finder (James Stanton), Pauline Chan (Pretty Warder), Ric Carter (Detective King), Tan Chandraviroj (Major Sara); Wallas Eaton.

Synopsis: Naïve Australian Katrina Stanton is framed and imprisoned for smuggling heroin in Thailand. She enlists expatriate lawyer Richard Carlisle in her defence, who in turn involves his alcoholic mentor Hal Stanton. Unbeknownst to Hal and Kat, Hal is her long-lost father, who left Australia in disgrace.

**1990s**

**Flirting** (feature, 1990)
Warner Bros. Kennedy Miller presents.
Copyright 1990 Kennedy Miller Productions Pty Limited.
Locations: Sydney, Bathurst, Braidwood (New South Wales)
Australian distributor: Warner Bros
Opened: 21 March 1991
Video: Warner Home Video
Rating: PG
35mm. 99 mins.
Cast: Noah Taylor (Danny Embling), Thandie Newton (Thandiwe Adjewa), Nicole Kidman (Nicola Radcliffe), Bartholomew Rose (‘Gilby’ Fryer), Felix Nobis (Jock Blair), Josh Picker (‘Backa’ Bourke), Jeff Truman (Mr Morris Cutts), Marshall Napier (Mr Rupert Elliott), John Dicks (Rev. Const Nicholson), Kym Wilson (Melissa Miles), Naomi Watts (Janet Odgers), Lisa Spinadel (Barbara Howe), Francesca Raft (Fiona Spry), Malcolm Robertson (Bruce Embling), Freddie Pari (Solomon Adjewa), Femi Taylor (Letitia Adjewa), Gillian Hyde (Dr Alison Pierce), Harry Lawrence (Motel Manager), Kurt Frey (Jean-Paul Sartre).
Synopsis: Danny Embling struggles with the cloistered environment of his all-boys boarding school, and finds first love with Thandiwe, a Ugandan-Kenyan student from the girls’ school across the lake.

_Lorenzo’s Oil_ (feature, 1992)
Universal Pictures presents / A Kennedy Miller film.
Copyright 1992 Universal City Studios, Inc.
Location: Pittsburgh (US)
Filmed: 9 September-12 December 1991
Australian distributor: UIP
US/International distributor:
Opened: March 1993
Video: CIC
Rating: PG.
35mm. 135 mins.
Cast: Nick Nolte (Augusto Oden), Susan Sarandon (Michaela Oden), Peter Ustinov (Professor Nikolais), Kathleen Wilhoite (Dierdre Murphy), Gerry Bamman (Doctor Judson), Margo Martingale (Wendy Gimble), James Reborn (Allard Muscatine), Ann
Hearn (Loretta Muscatine), Maduka Steady (Omouri), Mary Wakio (Comorian Teacher), Don Suddaby (Don Suddaby), Colin Ward (Jack Gimble), La Tanya Richardson (Nurse Ruth), Jennifer Dunas (Nurse Nancy Jo), William Cameron (Kellerman), Becky Ann Baker (Kellerman’s Secretary), Mary Pat Gleason (The Librarian), David Shiner (Clown), Ann Dowd (Paediatrician), Peter MacKenzie (Immunosuppression Doctor), Paul Lazar (Professor Duncan); Noah Banks, Billy Amman, Michael Haider, E.G. Daily, Christin Woolworth, Zack O'Malley Greenberg (Lorenzo).

Synopsis: When their son Lorenzo is diagnosed with the complex and debilitating adrenoleukodystrophy disorder, Augusto and Michaela Odone go to obsessive lengths to research and discover a treatment, while fighting against the inertia and mistrust of the medical establishment.

Babe (feature, 1995)
Universal Pictures presents / A Kennedy Miller Film
Copyright 1995 Universal City Studios, Inc.
Location: Robertson (New South Wales, Australia)
Filmed: January-June 1994
Australian distributor: Universal
US/International distributor: Universal
Opened: December 1995
Video: Universal
Rating: G
88 minutes
Cast: Christine Cavanaugh (Babe), Miriam Margoyles (Fly), Danny Mann (Ferdinand), Hugo Weaving (Rex), Miriam Flynn (Maa), Russie Taylor (Cat), Evelyn Krape (Old Ewe), Michael Edward-Stevens (Horse), Charles Bartlett (Cow), Paul Livingstone (Rooster), James Cromwell (Farmer Hoggett), Magda Szubanski (Esme Hoggett), Zoe Burton (Daughter), Paul Goddard (Son-in-law), Wade Hayward (Grandson), Brittany Byrnes (Granddaughter), Mary Acres (Valda), Janet Foye, Pamela Hawken, Karen Gough (Country Women)
Synopsis: Young pig Babe must find his place on the Hoggett’s farm or risk being slaughtered. Improbably, his talent turns out to be herding sheep.

Video Fool for Love (feature, 1996)
Kennedy Miller presents / A RG Film & Video Production
Copyright 1995 Colgrove Pty Limited
Location: Sydney  
Filmed: c. 1991  
Australian distributor: Kennedy Miller  
US/International distributor: unknown  
Opened: May 1996  
Video: unknown  
Rating: MA  
87 minutes  
Synopsis: Editor Robert Gibson obsessively films his day-to-day life, including his turbulent relationship with Gianna Santone.  

**40,000 Years of Dreaming** (doco special, dir. Miller, 1997)  
The Australian Film Finance Corporation presents / in association with the British Film Institute / a Kennedy Miller Film  
Alternative title: *White Fellas Dreaming*  
Copyright 1996 Australia Film Finance Corporation and Kennedy Miller Movies Pty Ltd.  
67 minutes  
Appendix: Kennedy Miller Productions

Cast: George Miller (Host)
Synopsis: Miller outlines the history of Australian cinema, while arguing that movies are a space of public dreaming, and that films sing the nation into being.

*Babe: Pig in the City* (feature, dir. Miller, 1998)
Universal Pictures presents / A Kennedy Miller film
Copyright 1998 Universal City Studios, Inc.
Location: Robertson, NSW; Fox Studios, Sydney.
Filmed: 1997-1998
Australian distributor: Universal
US/International distributor: Universal
Opened: December 1998
Video: Universal Pictures (Australasia) Pty Ltd
Rating: G
92 minutes
Director: George Miller. Producers: George Miller, Doug Mitchell, Bill Miller.
Cast: Magda Szubanski (Esme Hoggett), James Cromwell (Farmer Hoggett), Mary Stein (The Landlady), Mickey Rooney (Fugly Floom), E.G. Daily (Babe), Danny Mann (Ferdinand), Glenn Headly (Zootie), Steven Wright (Bob), James Cosmo (Thelonius), Nathan Kress, Myles Jeffrey (Easy), Stanley Ralph Ross (The Pitbull, Doberman), Russi Taylor (The Pink Poodle), Adam Goldberg (Flealick), Eddie Barth (Nigel, Alan), Bill Capizzi (The Sniffer Dog), Miriam Margoyles (Fly), Hugo Weaving (Rex), Roscoe Lee Browne (Narrator), Paul Livingstone (Hot Headed Chef).
Synopsis: While travelling to a distant sheep-herding contest, Esme Hoggett and Babe are waylaid and separated in the hostile and chaotic city of Metropolis. Babe earns the admiration and friendship of the local animals as he struggles to set things right.

**2000s-2010s**

*Happy Feet* (feature, dirs. Miller, Morris and Coleman, 2006)
Warner Bros. Pictures presents / In association with Village Roadshow Pictures / A Kennedy Miller Production / In association with Animal Logic Film
Copyright 2006 Warner Roadshow Films (BVI) Limited
Location: Sydney, Antarctica
Australian distributor: Village Roadshow
Opened: December 2016
Video: Village Roadshow
Rating: G
104 minutes
Synopsis: In a community of singing Antarctic penguins, Mumble is born to dance. His gifts make him an outcast, but his bravery saves his community from the threat of overfishing.

Happy Feet Two (feature, dirs. Miller, Peers and Eck, 2011)
Warner Bros. Pictures Presents / In Association with Village Roadshow Pictures / A Kennedy Miller Mitchell Production / With Dr. D Studios
Copyright 2011 Village Roadshow Mumble 2 Production Pty Ltd
Location: Carriageworks, Sydney
Australian distributor: Warner Bros. Entertainment Australia Pty Ltd
Opened: December 2011 (Australia)
Video: Warner Home Video
Rating: G
95 minutes
Appendix: Kennedy Miller Productions

David Dulac. Supervising sound editor & designer: Wayne Pashley. Choreographers: Wade Robson, Dein Perry, Kate Wormald. Dancing and choreography of Mumble: Savion Glover. Co-producer: Martin Wood. Financial controller: Alistair Jenkins. Head of production: Brett Feeney. Dr D. Studios: Graeme Mapp, George Miller, Christopher Mapp, Doug Mitchell. Group financial controller: Lynda Collings. First assistant director (3D live action unit): P.J. Voeten. Production designer (3D live action unit): Colin Gibson. Stunt co-ordinator (3D live action unit): Guy Norris. Cast: Elijah Wood (Mumble), Alica Moore (Gloria), Ava Acres (Erik), Benjamin ‘Lil P-Nut’ Flores Jr (Atticus), Meibh Campbell (Bo), Common (Seymour), Magda Szubanski (Miss Viola), Hugo Weaving (Noah the Elder), Carlos Alazraqui (Nestor), Lombardo Boyar (Raul), Jeff Garcia (Rinaldo), Johnny Sanchez III (Lombardo), Sofia Vergara (Carmen), Robin Williams (Ramon, Lovelace), Brad Pitt (Will the Krill), Matt Damon (Bill the Krill), Hank Azaria (The Mighty Sven), Richard Carter (Bryan the Beachmaster), Lee Perry (Wayne the Challenger), Jai Sloper and Oscar Beard (Weaner Pups), Anthony LaPaglia (The Alpha Skua), Danny Mann and Lee Perry (Brokebeak & Francesco), Lee Perry (Eggbert & Leopard Seal).

Synopsis: Mumble’s son Erik has his turn in the spotlight when the Antarctic penguins face a new environmental threat.

**Mad Max: Fury Road** (feature, dir. Miller, 2015)

Warner Bros presents / in associate with Village Roadshow Pictures / a Kennedy Miller Mitchell Production

Copyright 2015 Warner Bros. Feature Productions Pty Limited

Location: Namibia, the Cape Town Film Studios, South Africa, Fox Studios, Sydney.

Filmed: June-December 2012, 2013

Australian distributor: Roadshow


Opened: May 2015 (Australia)

Video: Roadshow (Australia)

Rating: MA

Panavision, Arri, and Codex. 120 minutes

Director: George Miller. Producers: George Miller, Doug Mitchell, P.J. Voeten.


Cast: Tom Hardy (Max), Charlize Theron (Imperator Furiosa), Nicholas Hoult (Nux), Hugh Keays-Byrne (Immortal Joe), Josh Helman (Slit), Nathan Jones (Rictis Erectus), Zoë Kravitz (Toast the Knowing), Rosie Huntington-Whiteley (The Splendid
Angharad), Riley Keough (Capable), Abbey Lee (The Dag), Courtney Eaton (Cheedo the Fragile), John Howard (The People Eater), Richard Carter (The Bullet Farmer), iOTA (The Doof Warrior), Angus Sampson (The Organic Mechanic), Jennifer Hagan (Miss Giddy), Megan Gale (The Valkyrie), Melissa Jaffer (Keeper of the Seeds), Melita Jurisic, Gillian Jones, Joy Smithers, Antoinette Kellerman, Christina Koch (The Vuvalini),

Synopsis: Max makes an unlikely ally in Imperator Furiosa, as they flee from the forces of the wasteland dictator Immortan Joe, taking with them Joe’s treasured harem of wives.
Appendix: CHEAN Notices of Approval
Appendix: CHEAN Notice of Approval

Notice of Approval

Date: 24 January 2017

Project number: CHEAN A&B 20570.11/16

Project title: Kennedy Miller Mitchell: Industrial and Cultural Conditions - A Case Study

Risk classification: Low risk

Chief Investigator: Dr Adrian Danks

Status: Approved

Approval period: From 24 January 2017 To 30 June 2019

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

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The above application has been approved by the RMIT University CHEAN as it meets the requirements of the National statement on ethical conduct in human research (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:

1. Responsibilities of chief investigator
   It is the responsibility of the chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by CHEAN. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the CHEAN secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify the CHEAN immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of their research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.

5. Final report
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

6. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the CHEAN at any time.

7. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the Australian code for the responsible conduct of research (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

KCR and Research Office: Human Ethics, RMIT DSC 00000020570.11/16 - A0237863F ABB 20570.11/16 - Dr A Danks - Notice of Human Research Ethics Approval.doc
Appendix: CHEAN Notice of Approval

8. Special conditions of approval
NIL

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above:

Dr Marsha Berry
Chairperson, College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN B)
RMIT University

Dr Scott Mayson
Deputy Chairperson, College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN A)
RMIT University

cc: Dr David Blades (CHEAN secretary), Mr James Douglas, Dr Stephen Gaunton.
Notice of Approval

Date: 11 June 2019

Project number: CHEAN A&B 20570-11/16


Risk classification: Low Risk

Investigator(s): Associate Professor Adrian Danks, Mr James Douglas, Dr Stephen Gaunson, Dr Ramon Lobato

Approval period: From: 11 June 2019 To: 30 September 2019

I am pleased to advise that your extension request has been granted ethics approval by the Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (DSC CHEAN), as a sub-committee of the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Ethics approval is extended until 30 September 2019.

Terms of approval:

1. Responsibilities of investigator
   It is the responsibility of the above investigator/s to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by the CHEAN. Approval is only valid whilst the investigator/s holds a position at RMIT University.

2. Amendments
   Approval must be sought from the CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project including approved documents. To apply for an amendment please use the ‘Request for Amendment Form’ that is available on the RMIT website. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.

3. Adverse events
   You should notify HREC immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project.

4. Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (PISCF)
   The PISCF and any other material used to recruit and inform participants of the project must include the RMIT university logo. The PISCF must contain a complaints clause.

5. Annual reports
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. This form can be located online on the human research ethics web page on the RMIT website.

6. Final report
   A final report must be provided at the conclusion of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
7. Monitoring
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by HREC at any time.

8. Retention and storage of data
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data pertaining to a project
   for a minimum period of five years.

Please quote the project number and project title in any future correspondence.

On behalf of the DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network, I wish you well in your research.

Dr David Blades
DSC CHEAN Secretary
RMIT University
dscethics@rmit.edu.au