

BLAK SCREENS AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

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Research into how the “media worlds” of Indigenous feature filmmaking came into being in Australia is part of the broader project of the burgeoning work in the ethnography of media, which turns the analytic lens of anthropology on the production, circulation and consumption of media in a variety of locales, in this case asking what role these media play in the discursive evolution of new ways of conceptualizing diversity, contributing to the expanding (if contested) understandings of Australia as a culturally diverse nation, something that activist filmmakers have long understood. Their films contribute to that process not only by offering alternative accountings that undermine the fictions presented by unified national narratives as they play on screen; their work (in both senses of the word) also demonstrates that a textual analysis is not sufficient if it does not also take into account the “off screen” cultural and political labor of Aboriginal activists whose interventions have made this possible. More broadly, I underscore the importance of media and those who make it as critical to understanding how contemporary states and their citizens negotiate diversity. [Key words: Indigenous media, Australia, feature film, cultural policy, cultural activism]

A vibrant Indigenous film industry is vital if we are to properly reflect on our screens what it means to be Australian. And while much has been achieved in the past decade, it is time to look to the future, to ensure that we have the materials and the skills to build on the good foundations of the past. [Remarks of former Minister For Communications, Information Technology and The Arts, The Hon Daryl Williams Am Qc Mp, at the Announcement of Indigenous Film and Television Training Strategy, Sydney, November 2003]

INTRODUCTION

These modest, seemingly mundane, comments that open this article, made by a former Australian governmental minister in 2003, are a nonetheless remarkable intervention for early 21st century Australia, suggesting hopeful fissures in the otherwise grim cultural landscape of a nation in its then seventh year under a right-wing regime that is known more for its White Australia policy than for its support for Indigenous cultures in any form. The quote calls attention to the significance of Indigenous filmmaking to contemporary understandings of “what it means to be Australian”; Williams then links this to the need for ongoing

support of this work, something that will inevitably implicate government budget lines. At the same time, his words naturalize the years of Indigenous cultural activism and creativity through which an “Indigenous film industry” has come into being. His words set the framework for this essay in a number of ways that go beyond its local interest, research into how the “media worlds” (Ginsburg et al. 2002) of Indigenous feature filmmaking came into being in Australia is part of the broader project of the burgeoning work in the ethnography of media, which turns the analytic lens of anthropology on the production, circulation and consumption of media in a variety of locales, in this case asking what role these media play in the discursive evolution of new ways of conceptualizing diversity, contributing to the expanding (if contested) understandings of Australia as a culturally diverse nation, something that activist filmmakers have long understood. Their films contribute to that process not only by offering alternative accountings that undermine the fictions presented by unified national narratives as they play on screen; their work (in both senses of the word) also demonstrates that a textual analysis is not sufficient if it does not also take into account the “off screen” cultural and political labor of Aboriginal activists whose interventions have made this possible. More broadly,

I underscore the importance of media, and those who make it as critical to understanding how contemporary states, and their citizens negotiate diversity. This is a problematic central to current discussions of cultural citizenship, a topic that has gained considerable currency over the last decade in anthropology and other fields, but, which gives only occasional attention to media, despite the foundational work of Benedict Anderson (1991) in clarifying the role of print media in the formation of modern nations.¹ As an exception to that tendency, Australian media theorist John Hartley has argued in his work on this topic that,

the evolution of new forms of citizenship is matched by post-broadcast forms of television, in which audiences can be seen as organized around choice, affinity, and the production as well as consumption of media. These developments have powerful implications for the way nations are narrated in broadcast television...Indigeneity points the way to new notions of nation and television. [2004:7]

Let me elaborate on this point and the directions suggested in the quote that frames this article. First, the epigraph points to the critical importance that Aboriginal media have played in Australia over the last two decades in the creation of an “Indigenous public sphere” (Hartley and Mckee 2000). The use of Habermas’ language by academics to capture how media made by and about Indigenous people has created a new space of representation for their concerns has a colloquial counterpart for the term Blak Screens, used in the title of this article, drawing on its use in Blak Screens/Blak Sounds, the name given to the inaugural 2001 Message Sticks Festival of Indigenous film and music held at the Sydney Opera House, and discussed below. The use of the Aboriginal English “Blak,” takes up a term of pride and assertion of cultural identity, marked by its orthographic change from Black to Blak, that emerged along with the Aboriginal activism of the 1970s—a period in which symbolic politics borrowed

heavily from the language, strategies and tactics deployed by the United States Black Power movement. To associate “Blak” with the term “screens” in this context inverts the usual association of the idea of the “black screen” in film or television as blank (and in this case devoid of indigenously authored stories and images), and rather claims it as “Blak,” or proudly Aboriginal, now that Indigenous directors are creating their own work. The development of Indigenous filmmaking in Australia, which is the central concern of this essay, has been a two-decade long effort on the part of Indigenous media activists to reverse that erasure of Aboriginal subjects in public life (what we might call the blank screen) through their cultural labor, by making representations about Blak lives visible and audible on the film and television screens of Australia and beyond.

A second point raised in Williams’ quote suggests that Indigenous media in the country’s national film and television industries are key sites for the ongoing process of “narrative accrual” (Atwood 1996) through which an Australian “national imaginary” is produced, contested, and transformed. This argument about the place of national cinema in the imagined community of Australia has been central to the work of Australian media scholars and public intellectuals over the last two decades. It first appeared in the work of Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka in their 1988 classic, *Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*,² and was later elaborated in a globalizing context by Tom O’Regan in his equally significant *Australian National Cinema* (1996). Most recently, it was re-framed in 2004 by Felicity Collins and Therese Davis in *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (2004). They argue that the 1992 Mabo decision, which supported Indigenous claims to land and recognition by overturning Australia’s founding doctrine of *terra nullius* (which asserted that the continent was empty land when the British settlers arrived in the 18th century, despite the presence of Aboriginal people) irreversibly destabilized the way that Australians relate not only to the land but to their colonial heritage. This paradigm

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shift, they conclude, shaped the antipodean films of the decade following that judicial landmark which finally recognized, in legal terms, that Indigenous Australians were entitled to recognition, land rights, and possible compensation. Using the central image of “backtracking,” Collins and Davis (2004) suggest that in the narrative drive of a range of films made during the last decade—including a number of works examining Indigenous/settler relations by Euro-Australian directors such as *Tracker* (2002) and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002), as well as by Aboriginal directors such as *Radiance* (1998), *One Night the Moon* (2001), and *Beneath Clouds* (2001)—there is a renewed and more complex exploration of Australia’s past. These works “backtrack” through the nation’s history not in triumphalist terms, but in ways that address the legacies of grief and violence wrought by settler colonialism, a significant transformation in the country’s sense of its own legacies, and a recognition that it matters whose stories are told and by whom.³



Figure 1. Ivan Sen (*Gamiloroi*), Director of “*Beneath Clouds*”. Photo: Charmaine Jackson-John.

Books such as *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (Collins and Davis 2004) offer an occasion to think about Australia’s film industry, a privileged arena of national visual culture within a context of the country’s cultural politics. Is a term such as “the post-Mabo era” merely symptomatic of a changed sensibility in the kinds of stories told or, as in the Mabo case, does it index a transformed recognition of who is authorized to tell these stories? What does that periodization mean

in the crucial “off-screen” world on which a complex form of cultural production such as filmmaking in particular depends? Clearly, we cannot fully understand the change in the zeitgeist shaping film narratives without looking more broadly at the cultural and institutional conditions that helped bring at least some of this work into being. Collins and Davis (2004) provide important discussions of shifts in cultural policy and the critical role played by certain key producers; however, their study neglects the crucial role played by Aboriginal cultural activists and their fellow travelers who pushed to get support for the programs and resources necessary to create the kind of films that can expand if not transform a national cinema. Indigenous filmmakers who hope to develop their own capacities—their voices and visions—as well as the social and financial capital needed to enter into feature filmmaking face a far more complex and costly field of cultural production than the infrastructure needed by those who started the outback experiments in small scale video that began in the 1980s. The histories of initiatives to develop Indigenous feature film, launched in a systematic way a decade ago, are instructive. These efforts underscore the need for rethinking the problematic dimensions of multicultural arts policies, and the impact of culturally bounded categories of support for this form of Indigenous cultural production. Are new arenas emerging that provide a commensurate cultural location in which cross-cultural recognition can take place beyond the screenings of the films themselves? Furthermore, it is important to think about other “off-screen” dimensions of this work, and ask whether the post-Mabo framing is the most significant way to understand what is shaping these works as, increasingly, they circulate beyond Australia, implicating such work in the nation’s broader trade relations, political economies in which “culture” is increasingly caught up.

Beyond the national, debates about Australia’s cinema industry and its value have been key in considering Australia’s place in a global economy, particularly as questions have been raised about the consequences of the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement (signed February 8, 2004) for what the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade calls “the audiovisual sector.” The Department clearly anticipated industry-wide anxieties that this agreement will facilitate the displacing of Australian media by American products.⁴ These newly established global relations crucially reframe

national debates about what counts as Australian content, and resituate the place of Indigenous Australians not only in the national narrative, but also as icons of Australia on the world stage. Indeed, I would argue that the cultural capital available to Australia's Indigenous filmmakers through the international circulation of their media work, from Cannes, to Sundance, to Toronto, has given added value to their claims to cultural citizenship—as they increasingly become representatives not only of both their own communities but also (somewhat ironically) of Australia.

THE EMERGENCE OF INDIGENOUS FEATURES⁵

In 1998, the feature film *Radiance*, directed by Australian Aboriginal filmmaker and cultural activist Rachel Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon), was released to considerable acclaim in Australia, and circulated successfully at film festivals from Cannes to Toronto, garnering nine major awards, and securing recognition for Perkins as a player to be reckoned with in the evolution of Australian national cinema, as an independent director, and as an Indigenous cultural activist. The critical success of her first feature film—one that focused on the lives of three Indigenous Australian sisters—and others that followed by Perkins (*One Night the Moon*, 2001) as well as the first feature by the emerging Indigenous director Ivan Sen (*Beneath Clouds*, 2002), marked an irreversible change in the recognition and place of Indigenous media in Australia and beyond. The work of these filmmakers had not been expected to move from remote communities in the outback to the world stage in so short a time, an unexpected transformation captured in the title, *From Sand to Celluloid*, given to the first series of short fiction films by Indigenous directors that came out in 1996, through a training program organized by the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission.

If the first incarnation of Indigenous media in remote Australia had suggested utopian possibilities for a radical alternative to western practices, as supporters of the work claimed at the time (Michaels 1987), these more recent forms of cultural production have offered a different kind of intervention, creating new sites for the recognition of the cultural citizenship of a range of Indigenous Australians, from remote settlements to urban neighborhoods. Unlike the inaugural and ongoing small-scale media experiments with traditional Central

Desert (and eventually other) Aboriginal communities, that have focused on land rights, ritual, oral histories, language maintenance, and local sports events, these newer films speak to other, multiple legacies of settler colonialism that have shaped Aboriginal lives, but that are less clearly marked in public discourse. These works reject an easy division between remote, traditional people and deracinated urban Aboriginals. They offer alternative and complex accountings of histories and subjectivities, a site for a counter-public articulation of a broader range of Indigenous experience than the depleted repertoire of longstanding stereotypes of “the Aboriginal” allowed. This is particularly true for a sector whose experience has been rendered largely invisible in the Australian imaginary: mixed race, urban and rural Indigenous subjects, historically removed from contact with their traditional forebears, those for whom history—until quite recently—and the reflective screens of public media have been, so to speak, black. These new film works were in part a result of cultural activism that erupted in the late 1980s, demanding greater participation for urban Aboriginal people in Australia's mediascape, eventually leading to efforts, beginning in the early 1990s, to support the development of Indigenous fiction and feature filmmaking, which I discuss in greater detail below.

There is some irony in the fact that the first works coming out of these projects entered into public circulation in 1996, the year in which John Howard's election as Prime Minister definitively marked the increasingly rightward drift of significant sectors of Australian society. Given this context, it is particularly relevant to ask whether these films have achieved a level of recognition one might expect from both black and white audiences in Australia and beyond, or whether they remain a kind of promissory note toward fuller development of such work, in part due to the difficulty of placing Indigenous filmmaking in the recognized categories of what has come to be known as “world cinema”.⁶ Such recognition, of course, is crucially important in a national film industry that depends heavily on governmentally supported programs: prestigious prizes and critical acclaim are powerful forms of cultural capital that feed back into systems of public sector support that are fundamental to the development of Australia's media industries, and without which the scale of production required in feature filmmaking cannot be accomplished.

This is clearly a different approach than the “bums in seats” bottom line of more commercially driven systems such as Hollywood, which depend on an extravagant scale of production that is accepted as routine. The scale of commerce and spectacle assumed here contrast starkly to what some call “a medium-sized English language national cinema” (O’Regan 1996), a term used to describe the respected and state-subsidized film industries of nations such as Australia, Holland, and Canada. These formations are, of course, unstable signifiers at best, and constantly framed in relation to the hegemony of Hollywood, as the scholar of Australian cinema Tom O’Regan astutely points out.

National cinemas also partake of a broader “conversation” with Hollywood and other national cinemas. They carve a space locally and internationally for themselves in the face of the dominant international cinema, Hollywood. National filmmakers indigenize genres, artistic movements and influences... Like all national cinemas, Australian cinema is a collection of films and production strategies. It is a critical category to be explored. It is an industrial reality and a film production milieu for which governments develop policy. It is a marketing category to be exploited. It is an appreciation and consumption category for domestic and international audiences. Australian cinema is a container into which different film and cultural projects, energies, investments and institutions are assembled. [1996:1]

In contrast to anything we might imagine in the United States, the Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission had a budget from the government of approximately \$1.5 million for 2005. This money is spread across a number of initiatives, and is not enough to fund even a single feature film. Nonetheless, the judicious use of these funds to expand the training and opportunity structure for Indigenous filmmakers has been remarkably effective in creating a space in Australian cinema—including feature filmmaking—for work being produced by Indigenous directors. As a sign of their acceptance and value to this particular arena of national cultural production, since the mid 1990s, these filmmakers and their works are regularly sent to the world’s most prestigious film festivals as representative of Australia’s current talent. However,

lest we naturalize such achievements, it is important to recognize the off-screen cultural labor of Aboriginal activists in Australia and elsewhere that helped to routinize these new forms of cultural production and circulation. Such labor has been crucial in creating cultural, creative and bureaucratic space for the work of fiction and feature filmmakers that would have been unimaginable as recently as the early 1990s.

FROM SAND TO CELLULOID: THE SPACE OF COLLABORATION

In the past our grandmothers and grandfathers told us stories in the sand, and the winds came and buried these stories. Now, we are telling our stories again, but this time in celluloid; never again will the winds of time take that away from us. [From the dust jacket of the first *Sand to Celluloid* series, 1996]

Twenty years ago, the inauguration of outback “Aboriginal television” marked the introduction of media as a dimension of Indigenous cultural expression in remote communities, where it was simultaneously celebrated and kept at a relatively safe distance from the center of cultural power for mainstream Australian media. It was not until 1988, during Australia’s Bicentenary, that Aboriginal activists—whose protests were organized around what they aptly renamed Invasion Day—insisted that there be a regular Indigenous presence on national television, as one of a number of demands they presented in a range of areas. In response to these protests, Indigenous Units were established in 1988 at Australia’s two public sector broadcasters headquartered in the nation’s cultural capital of Sydney: The Indigenous Programs Unit was created at the ABC while the multicultural alternative station, SBS (Special Broadcast Service) set up its own Aboriginal Television Unit. They became important first sites within mainstream national television for the training and development of urban Indigenous producers who had the opportunity to create and produce a range of programs—documentary, current affairs, talk shows, music TV—but still within the paradigm of public sector television (Ginsburg 1993).

Four years after the inauguration of these Indigenous television units, a report commissioned by the Australian Film Commission (AFC), *Promoting Indig-*

enous Involvement, in the Film and Television Industry (1992), urged that the AFC establish an Aboriginal Program, “to develop strategies to proactively engage Indigenous Australians in the film and television industry.”⁷ In response to that recommendation, in 1993, Wal Saunders (Gunditj-Marra)—who had worked for a number of years in media production and the Indigenous film archive at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Studies (AIATSIS)—was brought on as founding Director of what became known as the Indigenous Branch of the AFC. A longtime Aboriginal activist and media producer, Saunders saw his mandate as twofold: (1) to promote Australia’s Indigenous media work internationally as part of the nation’s cultural export; and (2) to take an active role in creating new kinds of Indigenous media, filmmaking that could be considered part of Australian cinema, arguably the nation’s most prestigious arena of both creative media arts and culture industries. At that time, the range of Indigenous media was just beginning to expand beyond video production in remote areas. Saunders hoped to broaden the focus of Australia’s innovative, if sometimes uneven experiments with Indigenous media in remote communities by creating structures that would help support the development of new cohorts of Aboriginal media makers, emerging from the Indigenous television units established at ABC-TV and the SBS in Sydney; as well as the work being made by, and media makers being trained at, the exemplary Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in Alice Springs. These units trained a small core of Indigenous cultural activists who, since 1988 or earlier, had been working in various aspects of television production and by 1993, had sufficient background in producing documentary, and other cultural programming in order to further develop storytelling capacities in different genres. Anticipating correctly that he could build on that human capital, Saunders worked with a number of people, but most notably the Indigenous director and producer Rachel Perkins, to develop a program that would expand the remit of the Indigenous Branch of the AFC by creating a series of programs—collectively known as the Indigenous Drama Initiative (IDI)—to train Aboriginal filmmakers in fiction and feature film genres. To accomplish this, Saunders and Perkins established innovative training programs whose remarkable success established an enduring model into the present,

by drawing in some of the country’s top professionals in the field—directors, scriptwriters, and editors—to work with fledgling Indigenous directors as they refined their skills, initially through short projects. Experienced producers and directors such as Graeme Isaac,⁸ with longstanding experience in filmmaking and with Aboriginal cultural projects, were brought on to “fast track Indigenous directors into drama” but in a way that respected the particularity of their vision, rather than attempting to unify the way things looked (Isaac personal communication, 2005). The speed of project development was regarded as a key element in helping the Aboriginal directors refine their sensibilities, rather than mold themselves to a stylistic template.

Much of this collaborative method for training Indigenous filmmakers was built with the support of two key state-supported institutions. The first was the national Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), located just outside of Sydney, not far from the AFC. In 1994, the School established an Indigenous Program Initiative (IPI) designed to cultivate the creative and technical skills of Indigenous Australians already working in the film, broadcasting and new media industries. Additionally, the Special Broadcast Services’ film production wing, SBS Independent (SBSi), came on board to help support these projects, while also providing a highly visible venue for screening the work once it was produced. Drawing on these collaborations, which provided professional mentors, equipment, and other resources, Saunders was able to launch a pilot drama initiative, the aforementioned series *From Sand to Celluloid* (1996), a project that resulted in 6 short (10–15-minute) fiction films by Indigenous directors.⁹

That first set of works was remarkably successful. In Australia, in 1996, they had televisual showcasing on Australia’s ABC-TV and on SBS-TV, and also circulated throughout the country at 24 locations, from Cooper Pedy in South Australia to Broome in Western Australia; they were viewed theatrically by over seven thousand people in this first national tour of the work. All of the films from this first series eventually screened at international film festivals—from the Cannes Film Festival in France to Telluride and Sundance in the United States—and a number of them went on to win important awards including the Best Short Film at the Australian Film Critics Circle Awards and Best Short Dramatic Film at the 41st Asia-Pacific Film Festival, for Darlene Johnson’s *Two-Bob Mermaid* (1996).

Overall, the critical reception was very positive. Discussing the series, the reviewer for the influential *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, remarked on the films' originality: "not just their visual style, which is often stunningly concise and poetic, but in terms of content, these stories leave most filmic debuts looking gimmicky and shallow" (Hessey 1996:28).

A second initiative, based on the success of the first, entitled *Shifting Sands: From Sand to Celluloid Continued*, was completed in 1998.¹⁰ Together, these short film projects have provided a first step on the scaffolding for the further development of Indigenous filmmakers, almost all of whom have gone on to make longer, award-winning works, and four of whom are currently in development on feature films. Thus, these relatively modest projects have succeeded in precisely the way that Saunders had hoped they would; they continue to support the development of new filmmakers as well as the (now) more experienced ones.

Key to the success of these programs has been the commitment to intensive mentoring and workshops that Saunders established from the outset in order to "give Indigenous filmmakers access to the wealth and power to tell their stories and therefore, give others the opportunity to see their view of the world" (quoted in *Australian Film Commission News* 1998:1).¹¹ Each filmmaker is attached to a well-established professional mentor (usually a director or screenwriter) for a seven to ten day period. During that time, they work on their scripts with their mentors in the morning, then workshop the results with actors in the afternoon, rewriting the next day in response to what worked, until the scripts are ready to be shot. Other workshops may focus on visual storytelling, scriptwriting, or cinematography by working with experienced Directors of Photography, for example.¹²

Saunders' goal had been to develop broad support to cultivate Indigenous filmmaking talent with the kinds of resources that had been made available to other Australian filmmakers. As one of Australia's more recognized forms of cultural export, the nation's film industry had established, by the 1980s, a distinctive profile ranging from the quirky and irreverent on the one hand, to works drawing on the long tradition of the eerily beautiful outback landscape as a site for the Australian uncanny. By the time Saunders left the Australian Film Commission in 1999, he seems to have achieved much of what he had hoped. The AFC described his legacy as the creation of,

a body of work that has won acclaim both locally and internationally and...resulted in the development of a pool of Indigenous filmmakers who have benefited from ongoing production and development investment as well as professional development support. [1998]

But clearly, it was more than simply training "new talent" in the interests of diversifying professional fields in a multicultural society. It was about changing the script, so to speak, regarding who is able to make feature films, and who is entitled to tell the stories of Aboriginal Australian lives.

In 2000, Indigenous theater director and filmmaker Sally Riley (Wiradjuri) took over as Manager of the Indigenous Branch, bringing her rich background in theater and filmmaking to this position. A strong supporter of the methods established by Saunders for developing Indigenous talent, Riley was also aware of the potential hazards of ghettoization that might come to haunt programs set up to support Indigenous work, on the one hand, but whose funding structures might not be sufficient to subsidize work at the scale that feature filmmaking requires, on the other. Such structures for Indigenous media funding—what counterparts in Canada have dubbed "media reservations" can, ironically, make it difficult for Aboriginal filmmakers to get the support they need for the bigger projects imagined when the Indigenous Branch was first put in place in the mid 1990s. Fortunately, the Australian media industry has responded positively, increasing its support for and access to low-budget production funds for what is clearly one of the more original and exciting dimensions of new Australian filmmaking.

Since her arrival, Riley has inaugurated key programs to help bring this work to the next level of development. In 2003, a project entitled *Fifty/Fifty* supported two 50-minute films by more experienced directors: *Cold Turkey*, and *Queen of Hearts*. A 2005 initiative, *Long Black*, has helped to develop four feature-length projects by seasoned Indigenous filmmakers through an intensive Writing Workshop, where they worked through first drafts of their scripts under the critical direction of Riley, and senior Indigenous directors such as Merata Mita (Maori) and Nils Gaup (Sami). At the same time, in order to continue nurturing new talent, a series of five short films entitled *Dramatically Black* completed production in 2005 (in association with SBS).

While Indigenous directors are supportive of their stories being told well and sympathetically in any venue, there is still frustration that development support for feature films is far easier to mobilize for Euro-Australian directors than Indigenous ones. Their concerns are fundamentally about the dilemmas of Indigenous cultural citizenship, not just in the telling of Aboriginal stories to Australian publics, but in claiming the right and demanding the support to tell those stories, much like the motivations that catalyzed Saunders five years earlier when he wrote about how to increase screen representations made by and about Indigenous lives. Clearly, putting an embargo on the telling of stories involving Indigenous Australians is impossible; Saunders argued that respectful collaboration is the solution:

There are only two ways to go: either stop non-Indigenous film-makers from using government money to make films about Indigenous people, or to allow only collaborative projects which ensure that Indigenous people have the right to creative and artistic control. In light of the fine works that have come from such collaboration, I opt for the latter. [Saunders 1994:7]

The concerns Saunders raised are germane to questions of cultural citizenship and the contradictions that emerge when group rights bump up against notions of free expression. What are the implications of this cultural compartmentalization of support? Whose cultural practices and stories could legitimately be considered part of the Australian nation in the prestigious and powerful arena of film, so potent a signifier of Australian national identity? And in the post-Mabo era in which, if we accept the position of Collins and Davis (2004), there is a new openness to Australia's Indigenous history, who is entitled to tell that story?

These concerns have been central to the Indigenous cultural activists who have mobilized the political and cultural capacity to develop new initiatives for self-determined representations of Aboriginal lives. Indeed, writing a decade ago, the Aboriginal anthropologist and activist Marcia Langton commented on the potential impact of policing the boundaries of cultural production in her important 1993 publication on Indigenous representation that, "to demand complete control of all representation, as some Aboriginal people

naively do, is to demand censorship, to deny the communication which none of us can prevent" (1993:10).

Rather than operating in an exclusively Indigenous space—as if such a thing existed—the work of Indigenous filmmakers is characterized by forms of collaboration with a range of players from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds, but in which their stories are the dominant focus along with creative and artistic control, as Saunders argued. The prominent scholar of Australian cinema, Tom O'Regan, writing about the early stages of this work in 1996 argued that,

collaboration means here a more central bargaining position for Aboriginal and Islanders in the shaping of film meaning. It is the middle position between complete control and no controls. In a sense it is also necessary, because structurally an Indigenous cinema is limited by its relatively small population base of 1.5 per cent [sic]¹³ of the Australian population and a chronically disadvantaged and dependent condition.

As in feminism, the logic develops for both mainstreaming and a separate filmmaking space. [1996:278]

In order to ensure that filmmakers working with Indigenous communities and stories respect the distinctive cultural protocols that shape their lives, the Indigenous Branch of the AFC has drafted a protocol that is currently out for wide review around the country. The document offers a detailed checklist and case studies addressing everything from moral rights to cultural property issues, along with contacts for communities throughout the country.¹⁴ As Sally Riley, who is coordinating this initiative with Indigenous lawyer Terry Janke, explained to me:

We can't stop non-Indigenous people from telling our stories but we want them to be told as well as possible and, in any case, it's a shared history. This protocol document, when it is completed and made available in 2006, will go a long way in facilitating things. This way, Indigenous communities will know their rights, and outsiders, whether Indigenous or not, will know how to proceed appropriately. This is not censorship, but guidelines for consultation. You can't make blanket rules on projects. Negotiations about protocol have to be made on a case-by-case basis, and this is a start-

ing point. [Sally Riley, personal communication, October 25, 2005]

Collaborative practice is especially evident in the filmmaking initiatives that began in the mid-1990s. Since then, they have become an important base for a small and talented group of young, mostly urban, Aboriginal cultural activists to forge a cohort and gain the professional experience and entree that is placing them and their work onto national and international stages. The approximately 100 Indigenous filmmakers identified with this movement—and the films they have made, from shorts to features—represent a wide range of backgrounds, from those living in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne to Indigenous inhabitants of rural and remote Australia.¹⁵ Collectively, they recognize the potential their work has to change the way that Aboriginal realities are understood for the wider Australian public and even international audiences. But to do so through the social practice of filmmaking requires ongoing access to the resources and professional opportunities that fuel Australia's film culture; increasingly, as some of these players move to feature film work, one of the questions they face is whether they need to move outside the "Indigenous box."

BLACK TO BLAK

In November 2003, a new Indigenous Film and Television Strategy was launched jointly by the AFC and AFTRS. At the reception announcing its opening, Daryl Williams, the then Minister For Communications, Information Technology and the Arts offered a triumphalist spin to the last decade of Indigenous media work, capping his remarks with reference to the recent successes of Indigenous filmmakers, Rachel Perkins and Ivan Sen:

Tonight we celebrate a decade of remarkable achievement by Australia's Indigenous filmmakers. It is ten years since the first Indigenous student graduated from the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and ten years since the Australian Film Commission established a dedicated Indigenous Unit. Indigenous Australians are now working in front of and behind the camera in every niche of the industry and sharing fully in critical and box-office success. This decade of develop-

ment and consolidation culminated last year in a stunning run of achievements for Indigenous filmmakers. Ivan Sen's *Beneath Clouds* (2000) won the Best First Feature Award at the Berlin Film Festival, while one of the stars of the film, Danielle Hall, won Best New Talent. Ivan went on to win Best Direction at the Australian Film Industry (AFI) Awards, while cinematographer Allan Collins won both the *Inside Film* magazine Award and the AFI Award for his work on the film. Also at the AFI Awards, director Rachel Perkins won special recognition for her tireless service to the development of Indigenous filmmaking, and [the long-standing Aboriginal actor] David Gulpilil won the Best Actor Award for *The Tracker*.

But tonight is an opportunity to look to the future, as well as to reflect on the successes of the past... It is a chance to ensure that we continue to give voice to Indigenous culture and Indigenous concerns, and that we continue to draw from the deep well of creative talent that exists in the Indigenous community. While Australia's mainstream film industry began to blossom in the 1970s, it was not until the late 1980s that Indigenous Australians began to pick up the cameras and point them at themselves... The Australian Film Commission (AFC) and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) have played a valuable role in the development of an Indigenous film industry... Its graduates have not only gone on to award-winning careers and world-wide exposure at festivals like Cannes and Berlin, they have become role models for new generations of aspiring Indigenous film-makers. [Williams 2003]

If anyone has served as a role model for those filmmakers, it is probably Rachel Perkins, not only as a talented producer and director, but also as a tireless advocate for expanding the development of Indigenous media, and who has been especially effective in bridging the interests of remote and urban Aboriginal people. As testimony to the widespread respect she commands, she has taken on prominent roles in Australia's leading mainstream film organizations: she was appointed a Commissioner in 2004 to the board of the Australian Film Commission, serves on the Governing Council of AFTRS, and is a member of ScreenSound Australia, the National Screen and Sound Archive's Interim Advisory



Figure 2. Rachel Perkins (Arrernte/Kalkadoon), Director, *Radiance* (1998), *One Night the Moon* (2001). Photo: Australian Film Commission.

Committee. Equally active in setting up and helping to run Indigenous organizations, she is former Chair of Film and Television of the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (now the National Indigenous Communications Association of Australia), and founding Chair of Indigenous Screen Australia.¹⁶

Perkins also exemplifies those most active in the Indigenous media scene today, a generation of cultural activists who grew up with new political possibilities in place, when the struggle for Aboriginal civil rights was already a social fact, but who also recognized that the world of representations and the cultural spaces available for them were not so easily changed. O'Regan cites Jakobowicz's observation that the "mass audience is 'significantly racist' and this is evidenced by the fact [that] 'substantial minorities' in Australia are unable to 'exert very little real effect on the [on screen] outcomes'" (O'Regan 1996:331). The mainstream still holds "conventional monocultural views of nation and national identity" (1996:331) which stand in the way of the multicultural ideal.

A clear objective that shaped the work of the first generation of Indigenous filmmakers whose work emerged in the 1990s was to change black screens to Blak Screens (as discussed earlier), a shift from cultural absence to the creation of a self-determined sense of cultural identification and storytelling in Australian media. Rachel Perkins' career parallels the development of Indigenous media in Australia during that time as it moved beyond the outback experiments to the world of feature filmmaking. Her success, and that of

many of those who have followed a similar path and who now collaborate regularly, is also testimony to the potential value of these programs in helping develop not just Indigenous media makers but what we might consider a "cohort effect"—the creation of a group whose synergy and influence have the capacity to reshape their institutions and cultural worlds, generating the talent, skills, resources, and collaborations to transform Australia's screens, providing forms of mediation in which Aboriginal people are active cultural players in the making of representations about their lives on the nation's film and television.

In 1988, Perkins (at age 18) left Canberra for Alice Springs, where she trained with the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, one of the foundational Indigenous media associations serving remote Australian communities from four language groups, including the Arrernte, her father's people. Three years later, Rachel moved to Sydney to take up the position of Executive Producer for the three-year-old Indigenous Programs Unit at SBS-TV. While there, she developed a number of initiatives including the award-winning *Blood Brothers* (1993). The latter is a series of four documentaries, each featuring a prominent Aboriginal man. It includes *Freedom Ride* (1992) which she directed. The film is a history of the freedom rides that helped launch the Aboriginal civil rights movement told through the story of one of its key leaders, her father Charlie Perkins. (The film went on to win a 1994 Tudawali Award for Excellence).

In 1993, she formed her own production company, Blackfella Films, and through that, worked with Wal Saunders to help create the AFC's enduringly successful Indigenous Drama Initiative described earlier. In order to develop her own skills in that direction, she became the first Indigenous participant in the AFTRS Producing Program and served as a producer for Warwick Thornton's *Payback* (1996), one of the six films in the first series of short films, *From Sand to Celluloid*. From 1996–98, Rachel worked as Executive Producer of the ABC's Indigenous Programs Unit, where she commissioned 15 documentaries and created an Indigenous music series, *Songlines*.

Thus, by the time she left that position to direct her first feature film, *Radiance* (1998), she had over ten years of experience producing and directing different genres, thanks to the off-screen opportunities for Indigenous media created in response to activist de-



Figure 3. The actress Rachael Maza, as Cressy in *Radiance* (1998).

mands and actions, including those of Perkins. She also successfully developed a wide range of collaborations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous media makers. While at CAAMA, Rachel had worked with her Indigenous Director of Photography, Warwick Thornton, where he got his start. Her co-producer on *Radiance* (as well as other works) was Ned Lander, whose films *Dirt Cheap* (1975) and *Wrong Side of the Road* (1981), had earned him a well-deserved reputation as a talented and original filmmaker as well as lively collaborator with Aboriginal activists and artists. The film, adapted from the play *Radiance* by Euro-Australian playwright Louis Nowra who reworked it for the film, focuses on an incendiary reunion of three Aboriginal sisters who have had very different life trajectories and who come together for the first time in years after the death of their mother. The drama unfolds as unspoken complex secrets are revealed about the relationships among them and the burdens of their mother's history that shaped

them. Perkins was attracted to it as a drama "that captured these women as fully dimensional characters."¹⁷

In Australia, *Radiance*¹⁸ was a clear success on the festival circuit. It won Best Debut Feature from the Australian Film Critics Circle and Best Film (Audience Prize) at the Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra International Film Festivals and was nominated for six awards from the Australian Film Institute. One of the three stars, Deborah Mailman, won the AFI Best Actress Award for her performance. Overseas, the film won Best Film awards at the Créteil Festival des Femmes (France) and the Turin Festival (Italy).

Right on the heels of *Radiance*, Perkins began working on the musical drama *One Night The Moon*,¹⁹ inspired by the documentary, *Black Tracker* (1997), about the famous Aboriginal Tracker Riley whose extraordinary tracking skills and services to the Australian Police had earned him a King's Medal. The documentary made about him was directed by the

Indigenous filmmaker, the late Michael Riley, who was Tracker Riley's grandson. *One Night the Moon* is set in the Australian outback of the 1930s; a family of white settlers—against the advice of the local police—rejects the tracker's services to help locate their missing daughter because of their racism, an act that proves fatal to the child. Much later, the mother eventually goes to the tracker who is able to find the child's body despite the effacement of evidence by white posses, and the passage of time. Under Perkins' direction, the film enacts both the senseless tragedies of racism, as well as the possibilities of collaboration and reconciliation, while re-telling a classic Australian narrative from an Indigenous point of view. As she explained:

The lost child has been an important image in Australian film and literature for many, many years... I looked at *Picnic At Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir 1975) and other similar works when I was thinking about *One Night the Moon*. It is a very Australian image and there's the whole thing about the bush being a scary place, a place you have to "tame". So I was interested in exploring these ideas and, in particular, the Aboriginal perspective. [Millard 2001]

The unusual approach of the film—there is almost no spoken dialogue, and the original musical score and lyrics are used to signify the characters' inner thoughts—was catalyzed by a singular funding initiative, mdTV (Music Drama Television)—meant to bring Australian performing arts to the screen through innovative "music dramas." The exquisite cinematography by Kim Batterham, effectively evokes the sensibility of the 1930s Australian bush; the film was shot in Australia's Flinders Ranges and processed using a bleach bypassing process that takes out some of the color, especially pink but emphasizes contrast, thus heightening the mythic style, removing it from a sense of the everyday. The allegorical sensibility of the film is enhanced by the spare landscape, gestural acting, and folk operatic score, composed and performed by some of Australia's most gifted and well-known musicians and actors. Perkins saw the film as an opportunity to "talk about a loss that didn't need to be, so it's a small story, but one that has meaning for us all"—a statement she made when introducing the film at its debut screening in 2001 at the opening night of

the Blak Screen/ Blak Sounds, part of the inaugural Message Sticks Festival, three days of music and films representing a broad sweep of Indigenous life in Australia. The event was held at the Sydney Opera House's (SOH) Playhouse, the first time that elite venue had ever hosted films by Aboriginal directors. The Festival has now become an annual event.²⁰

The film had been made for television with no planned theatrical release; despite that, and its unusual genre and length, the film went on from Blak Screens to be part of the official selection for some of the world's most prestigious film festivals.²¹ Since then, Perkins has been working on a number of projects—she was co-artistic director of the Yeperenye Festival held in September 2001 when 20 thousand Australians converged in Alice Springs for the largest Indigenous Centenary of Federation ever held, and in 2002, was the convener of the first National Indigenous Film & Television Conference. She has been working with Indigenous producer Darren Dale to create an eight-part documentary series of one-hour episodes for Australian television (SBS I) modeled on the American classic, *Eyes on the Prize* (1987) series documenting and dramatizing the American Civil Rights movement. This project, entitled *First Australian Nations*, focuses on the history of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander experience from an Indigenous perspective; the time frame expands from prehistory to the present.

In January 2005, Perkins was at the Sundance Film Festival, where she served as a mentor in screenwriting labs for emerging indigenous filmmakers from all over the world, part of the Native Forum that Sundance has supported for a number of years. She also took the opportunity to meet and connect with other indigenous directors, such as Merata Mita (Maori), and Randy Redroad (Cherokee), and to make professional links for the series she is currently producing. The Native Forum, which originally focused on nurturing Native American filmmaking when it began in the 1980s, has expanded to include indigenous filmmakers from around the world, making the Sundance Festival a unique venue as the only international film festival that regularly embraces these directors and their works, and that has created labs for the development of work, an initiative currently spearheaded by N. Bird Runningwater. Perkins' presence there came out of the lobbying by indigenous directors for a broader framework. Due to the concerns raised "off-screen" by indigenous

directors, since 2004 their work is no longer contained in a separate stream from the Festival's general competition, but is part of World Cinema (although a Native Forum endures). This marks a kind of coming of age of indigenous cinema from Australia and elsewhere, as it finds a place for itself outside the national frameworks that have contained it to date, as this work takes its place, on its own terms, on the world stage.

While the value of such developments cannot be underestimated, the crucial forms of support for this work are still fundamentally national. It is reasonable to ask about the fate of continued funding for Indigenous media makers in Australia under an ongoing conservative government that gives a different spin to the idea of a post-Mabo era, as it enacts a kind of backlash against what some Australians see as the gains that Mabo, and subsequent events, signified. In May 2004, the government took findings of corrupt Aboriginal leadership as an opportunity to abolish ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders Commission), the Indigenously run bureaucracy through which most funds were distributed to Aboriginal communities and projects over the last ten years. When I asked whether this put the future support of Indigenous media at risk, Sara Hourez, Manager of Indigenous Programs at AFTRS, was cautiously optimistic that it was not, at least in her institution, attributing that ballast in part to the support of the School's Director, Malcolm Long. However, she then suggested there were concerns of even greater significance, having to do with the impact of globalization on the nation's culture industries. Australian filmmaking itself may be overwhelmed by the recent Free Trade Agreement with the United States discussed earlier, a relation that many fear will compromise Australia's cultural identity. As Hourez put it:

The Australian film industry is a cottage industry, and the Indigenous Film & TV Industry is a fraction of that size. In real terms it is amazing that [Australia's] voice is still being heard worldwide... As long as local industry is protected to some extent by ensuring that, for instance, local TV networks are required to provide so many hours of local content (drama particularly) then this requirement will ensure people are trained, have employment, actors can survive and the audience hears and sees Australian stories. The fear is that the United States Free Trade Agreement representatives will demand

that we get rid of the local content rule... Slowly, the industry dies with the skills going unused and undeveloped and money going to buying lots of cheap United States programs. [Indigenous films] and more broadly the commercial success of Australian productions are always being judged against the mega powerful United States film industry which incidentally owns most of the distribution companies as well as the cinema chains here. It is truly difficult promoting Australian films with our tiny marketing budgets against the incredible marketing budgets of the big United States films. [Sara Hourez, personal communication, 2005]

Ironically, then, the possibilities opened for Australia's Aboriginal filmmakers through the international networks of Indigenous cultural activists established via film festivals and other forms of off screen culture-making (Myers 2002), at home and abroad, may be threatened by the encroachments of other circuits of global trade in which such forms of localized cultural production find themselves increasingly at risk. Still, there is reason to be more than cautiously optimistic. Over the last decade, the richness of the Indigenous films that characterize what Collins and Davis (2004) call the post-Mabo era has been recognized by key funding structures such as the Australian Film Commission which has not only increased its support for the Indigenous Branch, but is working to get more Indigenous staff in place across the organization (Sally Riley, personal communication, 2005). The last few years of success by Indigenous directors, cinematographers, scriptwriters, and others means there are now people to take up such positions, testimony to the resilience of the off-screen structures supporting the cultural and social development of such work built from the efforts of Indigenous activists and their supporters. All of this has contributed to the strength of the cohort of Aboriginal filmmakers that has grown over the last decade, along with the density of the broad web of collaborations within and beyond Australia, and—perhaps most crucially—the vitality of the social networks established throughout the world as Indigenous filmmakers start to identify themselves as part of an emerging world cinema that bends the boundaries of the national. And most recently, in September 2005, the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, announced \$51.8 million in funds

to develop Indigenous television and to restore aging radio infrastructure in remote Indigenous communities, an initiative that has been a longstanding dream of Indigenous activists, although what the service will look like is still in negotiation.²² Together, these developments offer a robust, if modest, counter-weight to the once monolithic view of “what it means to be Australian,” irreversibly changing black screens to Blak.

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NOTES

¹ The term “cultural citizenship” has several etymologies; while discussions tend toward global abstractions, I would argue that each thread reflects particular national debates. Consistently, the intellectual genealogies include: (1) the early and well-respected work of the British sociologist T.H. Marshall who, over fifty years ago, divided citizenship rights into three categories: civil, political, and social in his now classic text, *Citizenship and Social Class* (1950); (2) Iris Young’s notion of “differentiated citizenship” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990);

and (3) the more recent work of Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka who argues in his 1995 book, *Multicultural Citizenship*, that citizenship is not just a legal status, defined by a set of rights and responsibilities, but also an identity, an expression of one’s membership in a political community that must be accommodated within liberal democracies.

In anthropology, the work of Renato Rosaldo (1994) and the Latino Cultural Studies Working group has focused on agency and traditions of struggle for recognition by marginalized groups, linking demands for cultural citizenship with social justice. Aihwa Ong (1999) takes a more Foucauldian approach, seeing citizenship as a project of subject formation enforced through schemes of state surveillance, discipline, control and administration, in which governmentality is central to the state’s project of moral regulation of its citizen.

In Australia, key works include Alastair Davidson’s, *From Subject to Citizen: Australian Citizenship in the 20th Century* (1997), which argues that the 1992 Mabo decision amounted to a “paradigm shift” in citizenship theory, posing new possibilities for what citizenship could be for Indigenous people. Nicholas Peterson and Will Sanders in their collection, *Citizenship and Indigenous Australians: Changing Conceptions and Possibilities* (1998), draw on Kymlicka, arguing that the “recognition of indigenous rights thus becomes the pursuit of equal rights at a more sophisticated level.” Similarly, Paul Havemann in his edited collection, *Indigenous People’s Rights in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (1999), argues that new notions of citizenship, stressing collective rights to self-determination and the need for states to recognize cultural diversity and pluralism, are displacing earlier notions of citizenship based on notions of equal rights that assume homogeneous identity. *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* (1997), by historian/lawyer John Chesterman and political scientist Brian Galligan, argues that Indigenous rights should have a special status outside claims of citizenship as the claims of Indigenous people to land and nationhood distinguish their positions in ways that cannot adequately be accommodated by liberal notions of citizenship. Most recently, Povinelli (2002) critiques Australian liberal multiculturalism as a form of governmentality that idealizes certain

- “customary” ways of being an Indigenous subject, casting doubt over the identities of Aboriginal subjects who appear non-traditional.
- ² Dermody and Jacka use the phrase “social imaginary” first coined by Thomas Elsaesser to underscore the key role that film plays in reflecting Australian society back to its own subjects.
 - ³ Addressing this sensibility, Collins and Davis wrote:

This era demands that frontier history be remembered and worked through, that settler Australia do the work of mourning entailed in giving up a form of emotional insularity which turns a blind eye to our place on the map and to the myth of *terra nullius*...the post-Mabo “opening of the heart” to grief...the revival of the desert landscape tradition in a series of films and the abiding issue of white-settler misrecognition of Indigenous land rights based on *terra nullius*. This connection has become more overt in Australian films of the post-Mabo era and need not be mistaken for a return to earlier forms of national insularity. [2004:172]
 - ⁴ On their website, one of their FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) is: *Will the FTA damage the Australian TV and Film Industry?* <http://www.dfat.gov.au/trade/negotiations/us.html>.
 - ⁵ Two other features by indigenous directors preceded these: *Jindalee Lady* (1992) by Brian Syron, which never was picked up by a distributor and the experimental work *Bedevil* (1993) by Tracey Moffat, an artist whose experimental photography has launched her well-deserved international reputation. Inspired by ghost stories she heard as a child from both her extended Aboriginal and Irish Australian families, the film is a trilogy in which characters are haunted by the past and bewitched by memories. All three stories are set in Moffat’s highly stylized, hyper-real, hyper-imaginary Australian landscape.
 - ⁶ This has started to take place in a few venues such as the Sundance Film Festival since 2004 and most recently at the two-week showcase, First Nations/First Features, held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC, an event which I co-curated. For more information, please go to www.firstnationsfirstfeatures.org.
 - ⁷ For more information on this report, see <http://www.afc.gov.au/funding/indigenous/default.aspx>.
 - ⁸ Graeme Isaac’s reputation in film work with Indigenous subjects was secured with the success of the offbeat 1981 road movie about an Aboriginal band, entitled *Wrong Side of the Road*. Since then, he has gone on to work on a number of successful projects including, most recently, as producer of the 2004 documentary, *Dhakiyarr vs. the King*, which premiered to an enthusiastic audience at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival.
 - ⁹ Of course, now, less than a decade later, “celluloid” already seems dated given the rapidity with which terms such as “the digital age” have transformed the way we imagine the materiality and distribution of media forms. For further discussion of this point, see Faye Ginsburg (2005).
 - ¹⁰ Individually *No Way to Forget* (1996) was included in the Official Selection in Un Certain Regard at the 1996 Cannes International Film Festival and the Cinéma des Antipodes in France and, in Australia, it was awarded Best New Director at the St. Kilda Film Festival and Best Non-Feature Fiction Film and Best Sound in a Non-Feature Fiction Film at the 1996 Australian Film Institute Awards. *Round Up* (1996), was selected for the Film Critics Circle Award of Australia, for the Cinéma des Antipodes in France. *Fly Peewee Fly* (1995), was nominated for the Australian Writers Guild, AWGIE Award, 1996 and an Australian Teachers of Media Award, 1997. In 1996 it was selected for the ANZAC Film Festival in the Netherlands, Cinéma des Antipodes Festival in France and the International Short Film/Video Festival in Turkey. *Two Bob Mermaid* (1996) won Best Short Film at the Australian Film Critics Circle Awards and Best Short Dramatic Film at the 41st Asia-Pacific Film Festival in 1996. It was included in the Official Selection for Window on Images at the Venice International Film Festival, the 1997 Clermont Ferrand International Film Festival and Cinéma des Antipodes in France and the Film Critics Circle Award of Australia. Warwick Thornton’s *Payback* went to the Telluride Film Festival, United States, and Cinéma des Antipodes in France in 1996 and was screened at the Clermont Ferrand International Film Festival in France in 1997.
 - ¹¹ Over the last decade since these projects were initiated, 18 Indigenous Australians have graduated from the School’s full-time film and television program, 32 have graduated from the intensive full-time production courses and 48 individuals have been supported to attend advanced short courses in

their area of specialization. Graduates and scholars now provide effective high-profile role models in a dynamic, tough, creative and demanding industry. They include: Priscilla Collins, Erica Glynn, Steve McGregor, Beck Cole, Warwick Thornton, Allan Collins, Sam Conway, Romaine Moreton, Catriona McKenzie, John South, Rachel Perkins, Darlene Johnson, Louise Glover, Kelrick Martin, Adrian Wills, Ivan Sen, Dena Curtis, and Murray Lui.

- ¹² Later series supported longer (26 minute) formats. In 2002 the series *Dreaming in Motion* supported five short films for new filmmakers.
- ¹³ The more common figure statistic for numbers of Indigenous Australians is 2% and more recently 2.5% as, over the last decade, more and more people have discovered and come to identify with their Indigenous heritage.
- ¹⁴ For background on the report, please see <http://www.afc.gov.au/funding/indigenous/icip/default.aspx>, accessed October 28, 2005.
- ¹⁵ I estimate that this group is about 100 people, based on those I have been in touch with during the course of my research over the last decade, and other indicators. The forthcoming edition of *The Black Book* lists 34 Indigenous filmmakers with credits as producers, 56 as directors, and 26 as scriptwriters (many of these overlap). Only four cinematographers, three sound operators, and one production designer and script editor are listed. The indigenous graduates of Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) provides another helpful measure. In 2003, AFTRS published a booklet entitled *Indigenous Voice: Celebrating the Journeys of Australian Film, Television and Radio School Graduates*, edited by the current director of the Indigenous Program Initiative (IPI), Sara Hourez. There are 20 entries in the booklet out of a total of 43 graduates, which includes many of the most active names in indigenous media making outside of more traditional remote communities. Marking its (almost) first decade, the publication offers the following description of the IPI: AFTRS Indigenous Program Initiatives (IPI) was established in 1994 with the objective "through education and training, AFTRS seeks to provide an avenue for talented Indigenous Australians to express themselves, in their own way, through control from behind the camera" (2).
- ¹⁶ Indigenous Screen Australia was established in early 1999 as an organization run by Indigenous film and video practitioners in order to promote their work nationally and internationally, focusing on sales, screen culture, production development, and employment and training. The group also created The Tudawali Film and Video Awards, a national event to celebrate the achievements of Indigenous people working in the film, video and television industry, which are staged bi-annually and held on Survival Day, January 26th. The name honors Robert Tudawali, Australia's first Aboriginal film star (in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*, 1955), who died prematurely at the age of 37.
- ¹⁷ Nowra originally wrote the play, his 28th, for actresses Lydia Miller, Rachael Maza and Rhoda Roberts who played Cressy, Mae and Nona in the original production performed by the Belvoir Street Theatre in September 1993.
- ¹⁸ *Radiance* was produced and developed in association with the AFC, the NSW Film and TV Office, the Premium Movie Partnership for Showtime Australia, and Andyinc Pty Ltd, Joanna Baevski and Michael Myer.
- ¹⁹ Perkins joined the project in early 1999 as director and shifted the script's focus somewhat from that of Tracker Riley's story to the mother's story and the loss of a child. Perkins also cast singer Paul Kelly in the role of the father (Millard 2001).
- ²⁰ The screening was followed with a performance by the film's team of popular musical artists, the Aboriginal singer Kev Carmody ("the black Bob Dylan"), and singer/songwriter Paul Kelly (also one of the film's stars) and Mairead Hannan, who scored the work. The ebullient party that followed featured Aboriginal rap artists DJ Goldfinger and Ebony Williams, and an assemblage that included filmmakers, musicians, actors, writers, media producers, and cultural luminaries from all walks of Australian life, Indigenous and otherwise.
- ²¹ These festivals included Sundance, Toronto, Berlin, Moscow and Hawaii. It won the New York International Independent Film & Video Festival Genre Award for Best Feature Film-Musical, an AWGIE Award for Television, an Australian Writers Guild Major Award, and Film Critics Circle of Australia Special Achievement Award.
- ²² For a full text of the announcement, see http://www.minister.dcita.gov.au/media/media_releases/telstra_sale_to_benefit_indigenous_broadcasting, accessed October 28, 2005.

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