



Contemporary **New Zealand Cinema**

From New Wave to Blockbuster

Edited by Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray

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Contemporary New Zealand Cinema

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Edited by Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray

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Contemporary New Zealand Cinema

From New Wave to Blockbuster

Edited by Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

Published in 2008 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

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ISBN: 978 1 84511 837 2

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham,
from camera-ready copy edited and supplied by the author with the assistance of
Opusculé

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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank Jodie Robson and the contributors for their help with the completion of this collection, Lindsay Shelton, Kathleen Drumm, and the staff of the New Zealand Film Commission for their generosity in supplying many illustrations, as well as the staff at the New Zealand Film Archive. Philippa Brewster and Jayne Hill at I.B.Tauris were invaluable in their commitment to seeing this book through to publication. Lastly, we would like to thank The British Academy for its assistance with travel and research.

Foreword

Lindsay Shelton

It is exciting to experience how New Zealand's national cinema is changing New Zealanders' perceptions, by giving us new confidence in who we are, and encouraging our awareness and understanding of our different communities. At a 2005 preview screening of Taika Waititi's *Tama Tu*, a short film about young Maori soldiers in Italy during the Second World War, I realised that most of the audience were Maori war veterans who had fought in Italy. Members of a generation who have generally kept silent about the war, their response to the film was anything but silent and the atmosphere in the cinema was electric with recognition. A year later, I sat with a general audience at one of the first screenings of Chris Graham's *Sione's Wedding*, a comedy which tells its story of a group of young Samoan New Zealanders with warmth and good humour. In a different way, this film also offered the shared pleasure of recognition, and in doing so it earned substantial popular success with local audiences.

Gordon Mirams said that if there was any New Zealand culture, it was to a large extent the creation of Hollywood. The campaign which changed this, and which proclaimed the need for New Zealanders to see their own films, did not begin until 1970, and Gregory A. Waller's article in this collection describes how it took seven years to achieve its goal. Of course, Hollywood films never disappeared from New Zealand screens. However, for the last thirty years there has been a difference: we have been seeing our own films every year, as well.

There is another difference. Since the early 1980s, New Zealand movies have been sold for screening in more than sixty other countries. Local audiences had been Geoff Murphy's sole target when he made *Goodbye Pork Pie* in 1980. I remember his surprise and pleasure when we came back from New Zealand's first international film market with the news that his movie would be screening in twenty countries. And when Murphy's 1983 film *Utu* was praised by Pauline Kael in the *New Yorker* and Vincent Canby in the *New York Times*, this was a new level of international recognition not only for the director but also on a broader level for New Zealand. We were no longer only a beautiful country. Now our films were making us known as a creatively talented one as well.

It is amazing to realise the speed with which New Zealand cinema established itself. Mark Williams's article considers the achievements of

Peter Jackson, and tracks the establishment of his international reputation only six years after he made his first feature. With his four most recent New Zealand films, Jackson has dominated the world's box office. His popularity with audiences at home has been equally extraordinary. Only four features have grossed more than \$NZ12million in New Zealand. One was *Titanic*. The other three were *The Lord of the Rings*.

Less than ten years earlier, the box office record was \$6.7 million, set by *Once Were Warriors*. Seen by more than a million New Zealanders (in a population of less than four million), it grossed more than *Jurassic Park*. Such statistics—there are many of them—help to demonstrate the high achievements of New Zealand's small film industry. Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray put things into perspective when they count a total of only 260 New Zealand features since 1977. The United States or Japan or India have each produced many more than that number in any one year. The comparison is clear. New Zealand films and filmmakers have earned successes quite disproportionate to the size of their industry.

The different narratives in this book all fit into what Nick Roddick calls the 'endlessly fascinating' history of cinema. New Zealand's cinema history is as fascinating as any, but its story has so far been told by very few. This book's perspectives and analysis are an important addition to the small collection of writing which explores how New Zealand has belatedly earned such a prominent place in the international cinema world.

Wellington, 2008

Lindsay Shelton was founding director of the Wellington Film Festival from 1972 to 1979, and the first Marketing Director of the New Zealand Film Commission from 1979 until 2001. He is the author of *The Selling of New Zealand Movies* (Awa Press, 2005).

Introduction

Ian Conrich and Stuart Murray

As a contemporary national cinema competing within the new global film markets, New Zealand's rise to a level of international recognition has been swift. Since the early 1990s, New Zealand has produced such critical and commercial successes as the cult-horror *Braindead* (1992), the social dramas *Once Were Warriors* (1994) and *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), the family feel-good movies *Whale Rider* (2002) and *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005), and the comedy *Sione's Wedding* (2006). New Zealand's film industry has been a key component in the production of the multi-award winning *The Piano* (1993), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–03), and *King Kong* (2005), and provided production facilities for *The Last Samurai* (2003), and *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005).

This is not to say, however, that the footsteps created by New Zealand's contemporary film production can only be traced back to the early 1990s. In fact, a period of contemporary New Zealand cinema would be best viewed as commencing in the mid 1970s when there was the first evidence of a film renaissance. In the decade that followed, various New Zealand films gained notable overseas recognition. These films include the true crime drama *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (1980), the anarchic road movie *Goodbye Pork Pie* (1980, the first New Zealand movie to receive nationwide release in the UK), the melodrama *Smash Palace* (1981), *Utu* (1983, New Zealand's own Western set during the nineteenth century Maori wars, which was widely praised by US critics), and *Vigil* (1984, the first New Zealand production selected to be screened in competition at the prestigious Cannes film festival). Moreover, New Zealand's contemporary cinema consists of more than the odd art house film, occasional genre successes, and a series of blockbusters and epic productions (predominantly financed from overseas). Since 1977, New Zealand has produced approximately 260 films, and many of these have had to seek exposure outside the overseas theatrical circuits and general widespread distribution, quite often appearing instead on foreign cable channels or as video rental releases. Despite the success of a series of films since the mid 1970s (particularly those made since the early 1990s), which have repeatedly focused attention on this nation, the full extent of New Zealand's film industry remains perhaps one of the best-kept secrets in world cinema.

1977

This collection takes as its starting point the year 1977 in its definition of a contemporary New Zealand cinema. The year was significant for the establishment of an Interim Film Commission, which in 1978 became the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC), a government constituted and funded body with the responsibility for assisting the development of a local film industry. 1977 is also significant as marking the release of two films—*Wild Man* and *Sleeping Dogs*—which drew particular emphasis to the need for Government support for film production in New Zealand. The comedy *Wild Man* was directed by Geoff Murphy, and *Sleeping Dogs* (based on C.K. Stead's 1971 political novel *Smith's Dream*) was directed by Roger Donaldson; in the respective lead roles, the iconic Bruno Lawrence was the eponymous Wild Man, and Sam Neill played Smith. These movies were the feature film debuts for Murphy, Donaldson, Lawrence and Neill, four filmmakers who in their own ways continued to act as primary figures in the development of a contemporary New Zealand cinema.

Placing this period in context, only four years earlier New Zealand had been forced into a position where as a nation it needed to seek stronger cultural independence. New Zealand's cultural and political economy had been woven into an identity that was markedly British, but in 1973 after a decade of political negotiation the UK joined the European Union (then the European Economic Community—the EEC). Amongst the conditions that were set by the EEC on the UK's membership, the favoured trade terms between this mother nation and its former colony had to cease. This became a significant part of what James Belich has described as a 'gradual disconnection from Britain', in the post-war years.¹ It is no accident that a cultural renaissance followed in New Zealand, with Colin James viewing the 1980s as a period of 'adolescent independence'.²

In fact, a New Zealand Film Commission was being discussed in 1970, when the New Zealand Arts Council sponsored a symposium on 'The Role of Film and Television in Establishing a Nation's Identity'. That same year, the Australian Film Development Corporation (later the Australian Film Commission) was established and this was instrumental in creating a new wave of local film production. By the late 1960s, the film industry in Australia had reached a point of enervation, though Australian cinema, in comparison to that in New Zealand, has always had a much stronger movie heritage. For instance, before 1970, New Zealand had made just five feature films in the previous thirty years, with what existed of a commercial feature film industry consisting of resourceful independent filmmakers, namely John O'Shea and Rudall Hayward. Working with the model of the new Australian film industry, in the mid 1970s Jim Booth from New Zealand's department of Internal Affairs, wrote the document *Proposal to Establish a New Zealand Film Production Commission*, which became part of the foundations of the NZFC.

When New Zealand's film renaissance began in the mid 1970s an industry coalesced from four key areas of cultural production: the

National Film Unit (NFU), Pacific Films, The Acme Sausage Company/Blerta group of artists, performers, and practitioners, and the Alternative Cinema group of filmmakers. The producer Aardvark Films should be added as a fifth element, though its contribution to feature film making is not as significant. The NFU, which produced documentaries, newsreels and Government promotional films, was established in 1941 following a recommendation from documentary filmmaker John Grierson, during his visit in 1940. Pacific Films, established in 1948 by Roger Mirams and Alun Falconer, became only New Zealand's second film production house (following the NFU). Compared to the NFU its output was more artistic, and it was associated with a diversity of productions, from the commercial features of John O'Shea—*Broken Barrier* (1952, co-directed with Mirams), *Runaway* (1964), and *Don't Let it Get You* (1966)—to documentaries, corporates or industry sponsored instructional films, sports items such as the coverage of rugby matches, cinemagazines or news compilation films with a local interest, television and cinema advertisements, and television programmes such as the seminal Barry Barclay directed six-part series *Tangata Whenua* (1974). Barclay made his feature debut in 1987 with *Ngati*, a production regarded as the first fiction feature by an indigenous filmmaker anywhere; two years earlier fellow Pacific Films director Gaylene Preston made her feature debut with *Mr Wrong*, one of New Zealand's earliest features directed solely by a woman. Alongside Paul Maunder (*Landfall*, 1975), John Laing (*Beyond Reasonable Doubt*, 1980), and Sam Pillsbury (*The Scarecrow*, 1982), who had worked predominantly at the NFU, these filmmakers became part of the core of directors who made their feature film debuts in the 1970s and 1980s.

The NFU and Pacific Films were based in Wellington. In contrast, the filmmakers cooperative Alternative Cinema which was established in 1972, was located in Auckland. It was led by Geoff Steven who directed the landmark experimental feature *Test Pictures: Eleven Vignettes From A Relationship* (1975). The more commercial small-town satire *Skin Deep* (1978) was Steven's second feature, and its origins were in his three-screen art gallery video presentation, 'Aspects of a Small Town'. The work of the Alternative Cinema collective, whose members included later feature filmmakers David Blyth and Gregor Nicholas was, in one way, closely connected to the display areas of city art galleries and community exhibition spaces, with artists exploring the visual and aural properties of film and video. One such artist was Leon Narbey, who had become known during the 1960s and 1970s for his small art films and experimental shorts, which often focused on the interactions between light and sound. Narbey, who later became one of New Zealand's most celebrated cinematographers, made his feature debut as director of photography on *Skin Deep*. Steven's film career in this period provides an interesting example of how the nature of the local film industry changed. In the brief three-year period between Steven's first and second features, the New Zealand government established a system of support for film production. This meant that whilst

Test Pictures: Eleven Vignettes From A Relationship revealed the director's resourcefulness in stretching a NZ\$14,000 budget (NZ\$7000 funded by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council), *Skin Deep* was the first production to have assistance from the Interim Film Commission and had a budget of NZ\$180,000.

Also based in Auckland was Aardvark Films, who achieved prominence with *Sleeping Dogs* following work producing commercials, television programmes, and documentaries in the 1970s. Often in combination with Mune Productions (operated by Ian Mune, who had a lead role in *Sleeping Dogs* as well as co-writing the screenplay), Aardvark Films made important programmes such as the television series *Winners and Losers* (1975–76). Mune's work connected with Murphy's The Acme Sausage Company and Lawrence's Blerta (The Bruno Lawrence Electric Revelation and Travelling Apparition), film producers whose activities were entwined. Murphy and Lawrence had emerged from the Waimarama commune that Murphy had established in 1971 with Alun Bollinger and Martyn Sanderson, two figures who have been ever-present in the contemporary New Zealand film industry in their respective primary roles as director of photography and character actor.

Blerta was also loosely the name of a psychedelic bus, which transported the Lawrence troupe of performers (which included Murphy) and their families around New Zealand, and later Australia, between 1971 and 1975. The group presented a mixed media package of family entertainment, musical performance, anarchy, and absurdist and surreal comedy, with distinct counter-cultural statements. Like Aardvark Films/Mune Productions, The Acme Sausage Company and Blerta were commissioned to make the occasional television programme such as the Murphy directed children's comedy series of five six-minute episodes of *Percy the Policeman* (1974), and the series of six thirty-minute *Blerta* programmes (1976), from which the *Wild Man* episode was expanded into a feature film. But opportunities were limited. New Zealand television, which had first begun transmission in 1960, favoured cheaper overseas product, and a second channel, TV2, was not added until 1975. New Zealand television was also very conservative and the skits, zany sketches, and sudden musical performances in the *Blerta* series challenged traditional programming expectations. Moreover, the Keystoneque *Percy the Policeman* was considered to be so anarchic and subversive in its portrayal of the police that it was never actually broadcast. Such rebelliousness, however, found greater expression in film and became a notable theme in many of the movies of the New Zealand new wave.

The New Wave and After

Whilst the movies of Murphy or Lawrence dominate New Zealand's new wave (they worked respectively on seven and sixteen separate productions, including four films together between 1977 and 1986), the largely male local film industry seemed to share their general interest in male-centric, testosterone-fuelled action-dramas, of law-breaking, stunts and car chases.

The impact made by *Wild Man* and *Sleeping Dogs* cannot be ignored, neither can the influence of the Waimarama commune and the Blerta troupe, who were also associated with *Goodbye Pork Pie*, a movie which finally seemed to demonstrate that New Zealand films could have a local voice and still be successful.

Mainstream film audiences in New Zealand had been familiar, and seemingly content, with foreign films (mainly American and British) which depicted distant stories and accents. For John O'Shea, the post 1977 explosion in New Zealand filmmaking was not just a quest for local cultural expression but for a new local audience that was interested in experiencing its own stories on film. As he argues,

[t]he 'explosion' of New Zealand films was more of an implosion—a bursting out within New Zealand of films searching for audiences at home, hoping to find a common awareness, a new consciousness of identity, a search to familiarise ourselves with our own image. Or as the Minister setting up the Film Commission said: 'We need to find our own heroes'.³

Goodbye Pork Pie with its defiant underdogs John (Tony Barry) and Gerry (Kelly Johnson) in their yellow Mini car challenging law and authority, gave New Zealand arguably its first recognisable local screen heroes, though it should be noted at the same time that the film has been criticised for its misogyny and sexist attitudes. It was supposedly the first New Zealand film 'to recover its costs from the domestic market alone', which would suggest it offered cultural value for a significant percentage of the New Zealand population.⁴ The film certainly captured the imagination of New Zealanders as John and Gerry raced their Mini from Northland at the very top of New Zealand to Invercargill in the deep south, taking in a variety of cities, towns, communities and stretches of regional landscape en route. New Zealand's then Prime Minister Robert Muldoon attended the film's premiere and was even photographed wearing a promotional tie-in baseball cap. Yet the mistreatment of women and the total exclusion of the Maori raises questions about the film's celebration of local identity, as it presented culturally specific heroes that surely can only ever be a part of what O'Shea perceives as 'our own image'. *Goodbye Pork Pie's* views on masculinity were far from being unique and in 1989 Roger Horrocks wrote that 'from a feminist point of view it is depressing to see that the New Zealand films most popular in their own country have been conspicuously old-fashioned in their treatment of women . . . [these] films seem to offer an escape from the social problems of today into a rural dream when men were men'.⁵

New Zealand films during this renaissance were not only concerned with attracting a significant local audience, but also overseas exposure. This drive to the international mainstream can be observed in many developing national film industries and in New Zealand the action-dramas which were produced were an attempt to create commercial movies that spoke

the language of the genre-driven high-energy narratives of the foreign markets. This led to less than successful films such as the *Mad Max*-inspired *Battletruck* (1982), the Western-styled *Wild Horses* (1983), and the slasher-style teenage horror-thriller *Bridge to Nowhere* (1986). New Zealand Government tax breaks (as in Australia) fuelled the new wave of film production by attracting foreign investment. A boom in filmmaking in New Zealand followed with many productions—such as the NZ\$13 million *Raiders of the Lost Ark*-inspired pirate film *Savage Islands* (1983), starring Tommy Lee Jones—filmed and (co-)produced locally and receiving extensive overseas exposure. But these films, too, were largely action-focused and were criticised for creating an Americanised product that stifled local creativity and which appeared to be producers' projects built upon financial incentives. For instance, producers such as Antony I. Ginnane, John Barnett and David Hemmings, with the companies Hemdale and Endeavour, drew on available funding and made a number of Australian-New Zealand co-productions. This resulted in films such as *Race for the Yankee Zephyr* (1981), *Strange Behaviour* (1982), and *Mesmerized* (1984), transnational productions focused on maximising overseas commercial appeal through the importation of known American actors (such as George Peppard and Jodie Foster), and the application of genre conventions.

The producers of such features were exploiting a loophole in the system of tax breaks. As a consequence, the loophole was closed in 1982, though a decision was made to allow films that were already at a particular stage of production or planning to benefit under the old system if they managed to complete before September 1984. Subsequently, there was a rush of films and the release of twenty-five features in 1984–85. If the new wave or film renaissance began in 1977, then it effectively ended in 1986, with the release of the last of these tax break films.

Towards the end of this period the dominance of the male Pakeha (European) filmmaker was partly fragmenting and being decentred, with an increasing presence of women filmmakers (such as the directors Yvonne Mackay, Melanie Read, Preston, and the producers Bridget Ikin, Robin Laing and Robin Scholes) and Maori filmmakers (Barclay and Merata Mita) within the New Zealand film industry. But ultimately, this national cinema found it difficult to recover from the experience of the mid 1980s and with a lack of opportunities certain key directors left for careers in the American market. Donaldson left in the mid 1980s, and since his arrival in Hollywood he has directed films such as *No Way Out* (1987), *Cocktail* (1988), *Species* (1995) and *Dante's Peak* (1997). Murphy followed a few years later, with Hollywood keen to employ his skills at handling action narratives. His films in the US include *Young Guns II* (1990), *Freejack* (1992) and *Under Siege 2* (1995), but with his employment in Hollywood now more as a second unit director he returned to New Zealand in 2004 to direct the political thriller *Spooked*. Other New Zealand directors who relocated to America include Pillsbury (after directing *Starlight Hotel* in 1988), and

Vincent Ward (after directing *Map of the Human Heart* in 1993). Ward has since returned to New Zealand and Pillsbury and Donaldson were briefly part of the New Zealand film industry again when they made, respectively, *Crooked Earth* (2001) and *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005), by which time a new group of filmmakers had taken their place.

If New Zealand's new wave of filmmaking was 1977 to 1986, then it could be argued that this national cinema experienced a second, albeit smaller, renaissance between 1992 and 1995, when not only Peter Jackson (*Braindead* and *Heavenly Creatures*), Lee Tamahori (*Once Were Warriors*) and Jane Campion (*The Piano*) firmly established their international reputations, but directors such as Alison Maclean (*Crush*, 1992), and Peter Wells and Stewart Main (*Desperate Remedies*, 1993) emerged into the feature film industry with their striking psychological dramas, after having spent the 1980s making provocative short fiction films.

A possible third new wave can be detected amongst the films that have been emerging in the years post 2005, which have been marked by the impressive and stylish first and second time features of directors such as Glenn Standring (*Perfect Creature*, 2006), Chris Graham (*Sione's Wedding*), Toa Fraser (*No. 2*, 2006), Jonathan King (*Black Sheep*, 2006), Robert Sarkies (*Out of the Blue*, 2006), Taika Waititi (*Eagle Versus Shark*, 2007) and Peter Burger (*The Tattooist*, 2007). There is here a wave within a wave, with this cultural surge partly powered by the confidence on-screen of a young generation of Pacific island voices. The biggest producer of fiction films within Polynesia is New Zealand, though its output marks this as a small national cinema. However, New Zealand's cultural diversity and the fact that the country has several of the largest diasporas of Pacific island people has been reflected in a growing number of films—features and shorts—that are focused on Pacific cultures. In particular, the films *Sione's Wedding* and *No. 2*, the former by the highly successful Naked Samoans comedy group, the team behind the television series *bro'Town* (2004–), have brought to a post-Middle Earth New Zealand transnational films of Pacific culture which add refreshing stories of humour, warmth, life and community. This works against the view of New Zealand as a space of dark fantasy or the Gothic that has dominated screen production—as can be observed with the films *Perfect Creature*, *Black Sheep*, and *Out of the Blue*—and which suggests a cinema of unsettlement.

In 2005, Vincent Ward directed *River Queen*, his first New Zealand feature film in seventeen years, an epic drama set during the period of the nineteenth-century New Zealand wars, when the Europeans were faced with a conflict that challenged their settlement claims. Having seemingly returned to the New Zealand film industry, Ward has followed *River Queen* with the personal documentary *Rain of the Children* (2007), which revisits his earlier documentary *In Spring One Plants Alone* (1980). In comparison, amongst the filmmakers who emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, Jackson has stood out for his decision to remain throughout his career in New Zealand, insisting that Hollywood instead comes to him. For instance, of

the second wave of filmmakers Maclean, like Tamahori, left for America soon after the release of a first feature, a path also followed by Christine Jeffs who, after her much celebrated feature debut *Rain* (2001), has made the American film *Sylvia* (2003). Tamahori, meanwhile, has made high impact action-dramas, perhaps most significantly the James Bond movie *Die Another Day* (2002).

Lindsay Shelton, the former Marketing Director of the NZFC, has said that 'a New Zealand filmmaker working in another country is not lost to the New Zealand industry because he or she will always be identified as the New Zealand film maker'.⁶ This is perhaps true considering the manner in which New Zealanders embrace their cultural identity, and seemingly celebrate anything which denotes international achievement or recognition. Interestingly, one of the most commercially successful of New Zealand's overseas directors is Andrew Adamson, who has not made a New Zealand produced film. He left for Hollywood in his mid-twenties, where he later directed *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004), as well as returning to New Zealand for Disney to direct *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. But could Shelton's statement be extended to New Zealand actors, such as Cliff Curtis, Temuera Morrison, Rena Owen and Karl Urban, who have been performing with varying degrees of success in Hollywood films? For instance, since the mid 1990s and following their appearance in *Once Were Warriors*, actors Curtis and Morrison have featured in a range of Hollywood blockbusters and high exposure films, but frequently as figures representing ethnic minorities and foreign cultures other than their own identity as Maori. Such roles include a Mexican, Iraqi, Puerto Rican, a Lebanese, Pakistani and Colombian in respectively *Speed 2* (1997), *Three Kings* (1999), *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999), *The Insider* (1999), *Vertical Limit* (2000), *Blow* (2001) and *Collateral Damage* (2002). The submersion of a Maori or New Zealand identity beneath the cultural makeup of another nationality could question issues of 'recognition', but it also points to the ways in which issues become complicated in the definition of a contemporary national cinema.

New Zealand Cinema

Like many other contemporary film industries (and especially those with a global presence) New Zealand's cinema is transnational, extending outside its geographical boundaries. New Zealand's national cinema is not simply the local industry, but as with its films in foreign markets it includes the presence of New Zealand actors, directors and film practitioners overseas. It also includes the presence of foreign actors and genres in New Zealand made movies, with additional consideration to be given to those foreign films employing New Zealand's film industry and production facilities. Furthermore, for a full understanding of New Zealand cinema there is a need to go beyond the fiction feature film and recognise other forms of screen culture, such as the short film, the documentary and experimental films, in which New Zealand has a strong heritage. In fact there is a

need to move beyond the production industry altogether in considering the diversity of cinema forms in the country. For New Zealand's cinema industry, as with all others, clearly consists of the processes of film publicity, exhibition, film classification and regulation. New Zealand's cinema is also its cinema culture, its film societies, film festivals, fans, or forms of film appreciation, film journalism, the print media and film merchandise. Here, New Zealand's cinema is surely therefore more than just New Zealand films, but the cultural choices, the range of movies and movie related products—irrelevant of the country of origin—that are available to rent, buy and view in New Zealand.

For example, there have been relatively few New Zealand produced film journals and magazines. Two such publications were *Cinema, Stage and TV* and *Sequence*. The latter was produced as a membership benefit in support of the Wellington Film Society, and predominantly contained reviews and short articles on foreign art house films or classics of world cinema. In contrast, the former was a commercial film monthly begun in 1956 and which included small ads for film fans and pen pals, interviews with the stars of the day and adverts for the current releases. Both publications were produced solely for the New Zealand market with the content reflecting local interests, but this also reveals that cinema culture in New Zealand for mainstream theatrical releases and film society screenings was very much foreign. This is not to say that this culture was alien to New Zealand. On the contrary, New Zealand cinema is marked by an overseas culture whether it is American, English, French or Italian, with the covers of *Cinema, Stage and TV* over its first few years of production featuring film stars such as James Dean, Tab Hunter, Anne Heywood, Diana Dors and Sophia Loren.

The study of New Zealand cinema has focused almost solely on film made in New Zealand and then it has tended to lean towards the early period of the pioneers, and repeatedly from a historical perspective. New Zealand as a contemporary cinema, or a cinema post 1977, has attracted quite a number of studies but these have been mainly interested in certain high profile films or filmmakers since the early 1990s, with the work of Jane Campion (in particular *The Piano*), Peter Jackson (in particular *The Lord of the Rings*) and the movie *Once Were Warriors* attracting most critical attention. Within the same period, there are films such as *Scarifies* (1999) and *In My Father's Den* (2004), which performed impressively at the New Zealand box office, and *The Irrefutable Truth About Demons* (2000), *Snakeskin* (2001), *The Locals* (2003) and *Perfect Strangers* (2003), which have registered notable retail and rental sales of videos and DVDs in overseas markets. These productions demonstrate that in studying New Zealand cinema the value of an industry's mass consumption and critical significance cannot be defined just by patterns of international theatrical exhibition.

This collection works within these parameters and explores a range of issues, and a diversity of films that assist in defining New Zealand's

contemporary cinema. The first section of the book, 'Industry and Commerce', opens with Gregory Waller's article on the NZFC which addresses questions of a national cinema through cultural policy and considers the emergence and sustainment of a government assisted feature film industry beginning with the initial discussions in the early 1970s. Working within the broad terms of a film culture Waller explores both the policies of the New Zealand government and the NZFC in establishing a local film industry, which can also compete internationally, and where national identity is closely connected yet is far from being a simple concept. The tax loophole of the early 1980s is a crucial part of this history. It is the focus of Nick Roddick's article which continues Waller's discussion by exploring the effects of a period of tax-driven film production from the perspective of the film industry. Roddick sees the closure of the tax loophole as a highly damaging act that, whilst seemingly unavoidable, altered forever the careers of many of New Zealand's key filmmakers.

As the last of the tax break films were being completed and the production of feature films was entering a period of enervation, New Zealand's short film industry was beginning to show significant growth with the NZFC establishing both the Short Film Fund and, in collaboration with Creative New Zealand, the Screen Innovation Production Fund in 1985. The short film has become a central element of film production within New Zealand with many filmmakers such as Maclean, Caro, Grant Lahood, Jeffs, Sarkies, Brad McGann and Standring first establishing their reputations on the festival circuits with highly innovative short fictions. Yet this aspect of the film industry is repeatedly neglected by critical studies of New Zealand's national cinema. Alex Cole-Baker's article on the short film here is like Roddick's contribution written from a position of inside knowledge of the industry. Baker has produced four short films and worked on many others and the issues that interest her the most are funding and distribution, which are both constant challenges to the maker of short films.

Similarly, Suzette Major has had experience working with the local cinema industry. Her article on the marketing of the New Zealand feature film connects back to Waller's with the recognition of a New Zealand film industry that has since the mid 1980s become increasingly driven by business thinking and concepts. This has created a tension between a creative industry and film as an art form and the commercial or economic factors that take control of a film's market value. Again, an overriding issue is the marketability of New Zealand movies internationally and therefore the extent to which the promotion of a film, and the image that it presents, is central to its success. Major moves through the different issues and stages in marketing a New Zealand film and the impact of such approaches on the industry concluding that the formula associated with the Hollywood marketing machine based on promoting a film's stars, awards or genre has been modified in New Zealand. Instead, many

New Zealand films are being marketed with a greater celebration of local cultural identity.

The final two articles in the first section move away from the NZFC and film production and focus on film-related institutions. A national office for a Film Censor in New Zealand began in 1916, and films screened locally have been subjected to particularly strict regulation. But as Chris Watson writes, whilst the regulation of the movies has shown signs of a more liberal approach since the 1980s, the growth of other media forms such as video and DVD have introduced new arenas for debate as to whether a film is deemed to be 'injurious to the public good'. And as Watson reveals in his study of the foreign films *Baise Moi* (2000) and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) the pressure exerted by a local group such as The Society for Promotion of Community Standards has meant that there has been a history of decisions made by the Censor's office which have been challenged as both too weak and too harsh. In comparison, the New Zealand Film Archive (NZFA), the subject of an article by Sarah Davy and Diane Pivac, has only been in operation since 1981. In that time, as Davy and Pivac establish, the NZFA has evolved into a major institution with a progressive approach that seeks to move away from the kind of authoritative mode of communication that has been conventionally employed by the heritage sector of museums, galleries and older archives, to one that is more socially inclusive and prepared to listen and involve the local community. The Archive has an important role as an entrusted guardian of the nation's heritage of film images and as part of its responsibilities for protecting and providing access to New Zealand's cinema history it works with community groups. This has involved, for instance, consultation and advice from the Maori community as to the best ways of storing and presenting film that is regarded as taonga (treasures) with immense historical, social and cultural value.

The second section of this book, 'Aesthetics and Form', focuses on issues specific to the style and nature of contemporary New Zealand film. Articles in this section remain concerned with the film industry and a national cinema, but move more towards the film text itself placing it within a cultural and social context. Ian Conrich's article considers a group of New Zealand films that focus on small town communities and it uses both social and cultural readings as well as studies of the American small town movie to develop an understanding of the themes and ideologies that the films contain. And whilst there are many similarities between the New Zealand and American forms, not least the community as a microcosm of the nation, the former shows its characters with a greater awareness for the reality of their situation, as opposed to the imaginary and ideal spaces of small town life depicted in the latter. One of the small town movies, *Magik and Rose* (1999), that forms a focus for Conrich's discussion is also a key text for Ann Hardy, in her article on a group of films that exhibit what she views as a neo-utopian sensibility. As with Conrich's study, Hardy is concerned with depictions of New Zealand society, and here she observes

that in the years surrounding the millennium a group of youthful features engaged with the fantastic and the supernatural. Incorporating also elements of realism these films depict environments in which everyday life is disturbed by psychic forces or spiritual acts. Hardy argues that this group of films that present a utopianism, and Edenic environments combined with magic realism, Maori exoticism and popular concepts of spirituality could be precisely the type of productions that can have a local impact whilst also packaging New Zealand as an idyllic alternative to the world and appealing to international audiences.

Some fifteen to twenty-five years before these movies, in the first decade of the NZFC's operation, the industry had a predilection for adapting local works of fiction. This was to such an extent that, as Brian McDonnell observes in his article, as much as one quarter of the films made in the first ten years of the Commission were adaptations. For McDonnell, there is a pragmatic reason for this pattern with few experienced scriptwriters in a newly emerging industry. There was therefore greater stability, from a position of investment, in a film proposal that was based on a known and published book or play. At a national level New Zealand literature had established an audience long before New Zealand made movies, and it therefore became an essential component for film production during the film new wave. Through three case studies, McDonnell explores the relationship between these two mediums and the properties—economic, industrial and aesthetic—that functioned in the making of film adaptations in New Zealand. Equally important as a prevalent form in New Zealand's post 1977 cinema is the documentary film. In contrast to the fiction adaptation, there was in the non-fiction film a local voice that frequently politicised the nation and revealed it to be a site of resistance and confrontation. Such social issues are addressed in the final article in this section, in which Annie Goldson and Jo Smith examine the emergence of alternative documentary forms and the work of filmmakers such as Barclay, Mita, Goldson, Wells, Preston and Alister Barry who made protest films, films engaging with Maoridom and racial and sexual difference, and representing union struggles and challenges to government policies. These oppositions to nationalism are explored in contrast and in relation to the government non-fiction films of the NFU, made over the three decades prior to New Zealand's new wave.

Issues of ideology, nation and identity are continued in the final section of the book. In the first article, Stuart Murray focuses on 1980s film production and the years in which the emerging New Zealand film industry strived to establish an identity. Murray sees in the narratives of many of the films made during this period a precariousness and anxiety in the depictions of community. Such challenges and crises are, as Murray argues, also found in the society, politics and culture of the time when New Zealand experienced a series of nation defining events. He concludes that the unease through which the national imaginary was interrogated was replaced by a group of films in the 1990s that were more irreverent

in their conceptions of the nation. These issues and films of the 1990s are picked up by Mark Williams in the article that follows, and he is especially drawn to the productions that appeared in the later part of the decade and in the years immediately after Sam Neill's and Judy Rymer's documentary on New Zealand film, *Cinema of Unease* (1995), which argued that post 1977 productions had been marked by a dark and psychological content. Williams sees within these films of the late 1990s a post-nationalism, which compared to its development in literature has been slow to emerge. These films have appeared during the Labour government of Helen Clark, which has been intent on promoting nationalism through the arts, yet Williams sees the new political imaginary of this era associated with a recirculation of images and a continuation of the nation through traditional myths of identity. For instance, New Zealand remains an apparent pastoral paradise in much of its cinema images. However, Williams, like Hardy, is encouraged by a group of youthful films produced either side of the millennium which have questioned the images of nationalism, have worked outside the defining myths, and are able to challenge its traditional images.

Murray and Williams see the incompleteness or fragility of New Zealand's nationalism, and the instability found in the film narratives, as a weakness in Pakeha identity. Politically, New Zealand is a bicultural nation—though there are increasing positions being made for the country's multiculturalism—and part of the Pakeha unease in this post-settler nation has been due to its unsettled relationship with the indigenous population. Michelle Keown's article in this section observes the change in film representations of the Maori from the objectification and stereotyping of the earlier years of New Zealand's film history to the 1970s and 1980s, when the cross-cultural love story was still a persistent screen fantasy. With the Maori renaissance that had begun in the early 1970s, however, images of the Maori underwent a transformation. In the 1970s many Maori voiced opposition to integrationist policies and protested at Maori inequality, with grievance directed towards land claims and ownership. Within these socio-political developments, film—both fiction and non-fiction—became an instrument for Maori filmmakers to control their own image and develop alternatives to the Pakeha produced dominant representations of Maori culture. Taking four films and three Maori filmmakers, Keown examines cultural identity and issues of nationalism, where self and community are preoccupations. But as she argues, whilst there have been other films made in New Zealand since 1977 that have been significant for their Maori involvement, Maori filmmakers in general have found a shortage of opportunities to make fiction features and have turned more to documentary, video and short film productions.

The Maori on screen have been marginalised by the dominant image of the Pakeha male which has become associated with the defining New Zealand films of the new wave. In Russell Campbell's article, Pakeha masculinity is addressed as a socio-historical construct of a post-settler nation, with New Zealand film displaying the Kiwi bloke and the contradictions

that exist in the stereotypes: the frontier or pioneering male, hardened and itinerant, versus the settled or domesticated male with respectability and a plot of family land. New Zealand film of the new wave traded on traditional images of the Pakeha male, whilst also redefining the form on screen as society and culture of the 1970s and 1980s altered. This has resulted in another Pakeha male archetype in the 1990s, that of the bloke under siege, stripped of authority. Covering almost twenty-five years of contemporary New Zealand film, Campbell's article shows that whilst representations of the Pakeha male have changed under pressure from society, masculinity remains for this national cinema an area of central significance. Masculinity has frequently been defined in opposition to difference and here the book concludes with Angela Marie Smith's article which considers specific images of marginalisation in New Zealand's cinema of disability. Concentrating on *The End of the Golden Weather* (1991) and *Crush*, she sees these films as significant representations of the ways in which New Zealand imagines itself. For Smith, disability in New Zealand film and literature has become a metaphor for the damage to the land, and for isolation, alienation and abandonment. As the articles by Murray, Williams and Campbell establish, there is a discernible cultural unease in contemporary New Zealand cinema and this reflects historical tensions and issues of nation and formation. In Smith's article the continued return to narratives depicting physical and mental dysfunctionality shows the extent to which disability and colonisation are interconnected. With New Zealand's cinema continuing to evolve and seeking to establish both its local and international voice there are complex and myriad factors—economic, political, historical, social, cultural and aesthetic—that combine to establish a specific film culture and films with a unique identity. As this collection demonstrates, contemporary New Zealand cinema requires in its study a multi-directional approach.

Notes

1. James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders. From the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Allen Lane, 2001), 439.
2. Colin James, *New Territory: The transformation of New Zealand 1984–92* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1992), 36.
3. John O'Shea, *Don't Let It Get You. Memories – Documents* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 1999), 28.
4. Helen Martin and Sam Edwards, *New Zealand Film, 1912–1996* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 76.
5. Roger Horrocks, 'Hollywood Strikes Back', in *Te Ao Marama/ Il mondo della luce – Il cinema della Nuova Zelanda*, ed. Jonathan Dennis and Sergio Toffeti (Torino: Le Nuove Muse, 1989), 112.
6. *Moving Pictures*, television documentary, UK broadcast, BBC2, 23 January 1993.