In my final year at school, the honour of being one of a triumvirate was bestowed upon me. What this meant was that I was part of a team of three girls, the head and two others—the key idea behind this structure being the team—‘the triumvirate’. We were responsible for being responsible, for being role models, mentors and champions of the school ethos. The idea of a triumvirate came from ancient Rome and referred to a board of three ruling men. I liked the play on this given that I attended a school for girls. I was offered a freethinking and feminist education (for which I will be eternally grateful). I can still remember a teacher telling us not to compete with each other, to work together and support each other. I’ve been a team player; committed to team approaches, and interested in them ever since.

Film-making is a process that necessarily involves a team working together; it is by nature collaborative, but it is also generally hierarchical. This chapter considers a way of working which is genuinely collaborative and non-hierarchical. It explores the idea that when people form collaborative partnerships over a body of work, the work is influenced by this process. It investigates creative partnerships, the ‘team approach’, and takes up some of the issues for this way of working with particular focus (following the introduction) on the team from Gecko Films: Sue Brooks, Sue Maslin and Alison Tilson.
INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

At the 1999 AFI Awards Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin jointly won the Byron Kennedy Award for their work as a creative team; they acknowledged the other members of their film family—people with whom they had consistently worked. Byron Kennedy after whom the award was named, was himself part of a legendary team (Byron Kennedy with George Miller). Overseas teams provide strong models for the team approach; English director Anad Tucker (Hilary and Jackie, 1998) has claimed that ‘if there is a strength in the English film industry it is that there are these teams—producing, directing, writing teams that believe in each other and stay together and that’s how you produce films which have a distinctive voice’. An English example of a strong team is the one that made Trainspotting (1995) and in 1994, Shallow Grave: producer Andrew MacDonald, writer John Hodge and director Danny Boyle. Successful teams in Australia include Working Dog Inc., who produced the features The Castle (1997), The Dish (2000) and many other creative outputs. Working Dog appear to exemplify ‘true collaboration’ with the team working across all projects in a variety of ways. Jane Kennedy has said that ‘there is something about a group dynamic that is really healthy … there is no hierarchy within the company. If someone is passionate about an idea, the rest of the group will be supportive’. The way in which they work is that ‘on all the major projects two people write and the other two edit. Directing duties are shared’. Kennedy also points to a key problem for collaboration, that of finding and maintaining collaborative partnerships, saying that: ‘In the entertainment world, not too many partnerships last 15 years’.

Finding the right balance in a team is notoriously difficult. Producer Sue Milliken characterised industry relationships at the 1999 WIFT Conference saying that, ‘a large percentage of producer/director relationships “don’t work” and this is more of a problem, or happens more frequently, with larger, fully funded features’. Choosing the right collaborators is important, but difficult, and it is not always smooth sailing. While film-making involves collaboration, there is a difference between collaborating and working collaboratively in the ‘true’ sense that this chapter seeks to discuss.

Writer and director Jackie McKimmie has described the difficulties of the collaborative process with the example of her first film experience on a film she wrote called Madness of Two (1981). She worked collaboratively on the script with the director (Hugh Keays-Byrne), and his partner (who became the production manager). She recalled that they ‘opened my eyes to what real film-making was about. Passion and commitment … They’re real collectivists … Hugh involved me in everything … we’d have all night sessions sitting up rewriting it’. McKimmie described it as a ‘a truly wonderful process. But when we got into production it all changed’. She was left disillusioned because the film was not made the way she thought it should have been and she vowed to have more control with her next film experience, a path which lead her to directing. She had assumed that the vision she had was shared, and the articulation of that vision would be a careful one. However, despite the wonderful initial collaboration, this did not happen. It is an illustration of the way in which film-making is generally hierarchical and of the way in which writers are sometimes not offered full courtesy
once production starts. A process that begins with the triumvirate of the writer, director and producer sometimes moves from the time the production starts to the director, producer and editor.

**COLLABORATIONS AND FUNDING IN THE AUSTRALIAN FILM INDUSTRY**

Currently in Australia the government film funding agencies have focused significantly on the idea of teams. Ros Walker wrote when manager of Film Victoria, that the projects that get up ‘tend to have a strong team attached’. In her travel report following her attendance at the 1999 Australian Screen Directors’ Association (ASDA) Conference, she stated that one of the points the conference reiterated was that ‘the three positions of writer, producer and director are all pivotal to making a good film’. That ‘great films require great creative teams and all three roles [should] be involved in developing projects’. In response to this perspective on film-making, Film Victoria built into their 2000 funding arrangements for script development, that producers’ and directors’ fees can be included if they are working on the draft in question. Similar processes are in place in other states, such as Queensland for example, where the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) will fund teams, offering feature script development via an application from a writer, director or producer or, with emerging projects, assist to bring teams together where none are in place.

On a national level, the emphasis on teams has been more emphatic and prescriptive than it has been for the states. The Australian Film Commission’s (AFC) 2002 guidelines for feature development which have categories (Strand C and D) that are ‘available only to Writer/Producer or Writer/Director/Producer teams’. Current AFC production investment does, in general, favour team approaches and the guidelines express a preference for funding writers or directors on ‘projects with a producer attached’. The support of teams might lead to the development of a more ‘truly collaborative’ film-making culture, a model exemplified in the rest of this chapter by the Gecko team.
THE GECKO TEAM: SUE BROOKS, SUE MASLIN & ALISON TILSON

INTRODUCTION

Film-makers Sue Brooks, Sue Maslin and Alison Tilson\(^\text{14}\) formed the production company, Gecko, in 1992.\(^\text{15}\) Gecko are however much more than a production company, they are a creative team. As the following pages illustrate, their team is characterized by equality and a collective ideal. They have a determination to make ‘films that matter’\(^\text{16}\) to them and which share what might be described as like-mindedness. Although they do not always work together, they have collaborated (and continue to collaborate) on several films and the formalizing of a company was the result of their desire to work together as a team. In 1987 Alison Tilson said that she had ‘discovered that it’s important to work with people I like and trust and who share some basic political and aesthetic views’\(^\text{17}\). Tilson still works this way, as do Brooks and Maslin. When they work together, they do it as a creative team. Working collaboratively can be difficult but can also offer advantages. What follows here is an exploration of collaborative, creative partnerships—the ‘team approach’ as seen through the eyes of the Gecko team.

One of the features of Gecko is that they are all female. They say that this is something they don’t really think about. Gender is only one thing among fifty things but it inevitably comes up and they concede that one of the ways they are regarded is as a female team. They acknowledge that in some circumstances being an all-female team can be a problem. For example, they believe there is a real prejudice about giving women money; Tilson says, ‘I still think that a lot of men would feel more comfortable giving the money to another man’.

Brooks, Maslin and Tilson collaborated on the award winning\(^\text{18}\) film *Road to Nhill* (1997)\(^\text{19}\) and they are currently developing several projects together, including several features.\(^\text{20}\) Brooks and Tilson have worked collaboratively on a string of short and documentary works.\(^\text{21}\) As a team of ‘true collaborators’ Gecko have developed a working method where the projects themselves are collectively developed and realised. This is not to infer that they do not have discrete roles because this is necessary to get a film made, but rather, that the process and the relationships work in a way developed over a number of projects: a non-hierarchical working method where the films themselves are collectively developed and realised.

WORKING AS A ‘TEAM’

Tilson recalls that people say to her that ‘you are so lucky to have Gecko’ but from her perspective, ‘there is nothing “lucky” about it at all. It was a decision I made 20 years ago, that the way to make films was like this. The truth is that you’re trying to make productions together, which is harder than doing it on your own … I quite often think there are a lot of people out in the industry who struggle to find [successful] relationships. I don’t think it’s lucky, you do actually need to make really strategic decisions, you have to know where you are going—how to get there, and make that plan’. Maslin is less offended at the suggestion
that she is lucky to have found her collaborators. She says that she has had the same comment made to her as well but she interpreted ‘lucky’ as being fortunate.

All agree that they chose to do it this way because of an ideological decision to keep the balance of producer, director and writer equal. A strong reason they see for working collaboratively is that ‘the basic power triangle in films is the writer, the director and the producer. You have all those people on the “same tram” from the start’ (as opposed to the other model when a director for example, is brought in later in the project as more of a ‘hired gun’). And then, as Tilson explains, ‘each one of you have a job in getting everybody else in that film on the same tram’.

This is not unusual in terms of the film-making process. As English producer Tim Bevan has said, the ‘most important thing the producer has to do is to ensure that everyone who is collaborating on the movie is making the same picture’, saying that while this might sound strange, there are many films where ‘everybody is working on a different movie and they have a completely different idea of what that film should be’. In Gecko’s case, the key creative people (the producer, writer and director) already have this problem solved and work together to share the vision with the other people they bring on to the project.

Gecko describe the boundaries as being less rigid than most film-making situations. Everyone on the Gecko team contributes ideas but also, everyone has their own part to play. That is, ‘the buck’ stops with each person in the sense that they each have a role that is ultimately the individual’s responsibility. They say that this approach all started for them in the heady days of collective film-making when they were interested in what they were making, rather than because it is a good job or career path, they just did it because they wanted to and still are doing so. Maslin explains that she realised very quickly that she is not a project-driven producer, that ‘people—working as a team is the most important thing to me … having a way of working that is about being with the people whose values you respect, whose ideas you respect, who you know you find stimulating, challenging and you’re going to push each other to do the best you can do and that you are not doing it alone’.
Brooks, Maslin and Tilson are involved in all stages from the inception through to post-production and marketing. Tilson, whose chief role is as a writer, also has a role in post-production and is every bit as involved as Brooks, the director and Maslin, the producer. While it is unusual to have a writer present at, for example, the sound mix, Tilson explains it this way: ‘I don’t think I am there as a writer particularly anyway. I am there as part of Gecko [the team] and happen to have a creative role in trying to make the film good’. As a creative team, their approaches are more holistic, Tilson says, ‘There is a lot a writer can do but you are also doing it as a person. Normally creative producers would do this. If you are the writer you actually understand the rhythms of the script and you therefore probably are useful in terms of working out rhythms of the film at the end if things aren’t working—not so much in hanging on to what the script was’.

While Gecko’s productions are attributed in the credits to Brooks as the director, Maslin as the producer and Tilson as the writer, Gecko regard themselves as film-makers and their work as the product of collaborations across these boundaries. Brooks says that ‘we are involved in all of those stages’. Everyone is at every step of the process as the film-makers, as Gecko, and not so much as the writer, producer, and director. When they are ‘in strife’, they are all trying to work out strategies. Brooks says that, ‘From our point of view, we just work as a team … occasionally we scream at each other and say “get out of the room this is my bit.” But by and large we are all three film-makers making the one project’. Brooks says, ‘We are all Gecko … I need to know from Sue and Alison whether it is working and I rely on that sort of involvement’.

Tilson recalls that: ‘We had a lot of trouble fitting ourselves into the industry because when we first said we are a creative group they said well who does what?’ For her, the decision to go with writer, producer, director ‘is beginning to feel like a bad decision because of the way the industry perceives that and because it does not at all reflect how we work’. They all agree that perhaps one title ‘film-makers’ would be more apt because, as a team, it is clear to Gecko that it is their collective work but they also feel that realistically, credits listing them all as writer, director and producer would be a marketing problem. Brooks feels that ‘one of the tensions that happens for us is that we have to constantly deal with how we actually do our work, compared to how we are seen to do our work. For example, when you have finished something, it’s the director’s film. I get out there as the director and own the film in a way that I know is ludicrous, and I have to. It doesn’t matter how often I make references to the three of us doing it, it doesn’t cut through’.

As an illustration of how she does not work just as a director, Brooks explains that every day they all get up and go to work. She estimates that she would probably actually direct actors or direct performances and cut something together only about ten per cent of the working year. ‘I think my work engulfs a whole lot of producing, writing, directing or whatever it is’. Tilson adds that, ‘We make up ideas; we discuss those usually, pretty much sooner or later, either in twos or in threes, or three at the start. We apply for money, and that nearly always involves the three of us. We read work and throw it past each other. It always involves something you have to do with budgets and that usually involves the three
of us. Nobody goes off and does something and doesn’t pass it past the others ... We try to cram some money in for each of us and then go off ... spend time on [our] own, [then] we jointly work out the strategy for where it is going to go in the market’.

Tilson believes that ‘one of the pitfalls is that it’s not always easy’ developing ideas and making decisions in a group. ‘Sometimes when you’re in a group like this, like any relationship really, you think it would be easier if you could just do it by yourself because you don’t have to get the other two people’s approval or understanding. You could mono focus and [then you have the] realisation that is really stupid because you know that you can’t. We constantly have to learn to negotiate. We have to learn that over and over again in this group. We probably learnt some short cuts over the years, but we still have to do it’. The fundamental characteristics which they see as important in working together are a commitment to a team way of working, similar politics (which they believe is really important), and shared values. For example Maslin says ‘we don’t have to argue about feminism, homophobia, or sexism’.

Working collaboratively does not mean that consensus is immediate. Tilson says that creative difference is productive: ‘I think we have good battles ... no one gives in without a good reason. We stand our ground on what things mean and why they’re there, and we are not always there at exactly the same time’. Tilson acknowledges that the ‘best times are when we all have an idea and we are all incredibly excited by it’. Maslin explains that they [the projects] just don’t go away if one of us doesn’t get it, they come back’. Tilson recalled that there was a project that in the beginning Sue [Maslin] said she wasn’t interested in doing but that it kept ‘haunting’ Tilson, who says, ‘I just kept fiddling away with it. I had a choice ... to take it to someone else or try and get the two Sue’s in it ... and then I thought I’ll do a draft and it will be better. So I show it one more time. The three of us sit down and talk about it and Sue [Maslin] says what bothers her, and what she doesn’t get, and then we talk about everything—the way we work and whether or not we should take it on. Sue [Brooks] gets up in the middle of the night and writes five pages, then we have another meeting, and then I go off and do another draft’.

*Road to Nhill* is a product of Gecko’s team approach. *Nhill* is about a community. It is the story of a generally uneventful small country town where chaos occurs when a car load of lady bowlers turns over on the Nhill road and thus ‘ensues a rambling, constantly interrupted yarn in which everyone goes in every direction as we find out what happened’. Gecko describe the process of developing *Road to Nhill* as beginning from pooling the ideas they had individually or collectively and picking the one that they felt ‘most passionate about—all three of us’. The original idea came from Brooks who was born in the country town of Pyramid Hill (where the film is set) but all three of the Gecko team are from country towns. Tilson, who had visited Pyramid Hill with Brooks says that ‘we enjoyed listening to Sue’s dad’s yarns. He has that particular style of storytelling that draws you in and plays with you ... that became the basis of the film—the concept of small country town and telling yarns’.24
The ultimate goal for Gecko was to protect the ‘vision’ of the film that they all had in their heads. The shoot of Road to Nhill was fraught with tensions created by circumstances that cost them time, such as terrible weather and story imperatives such as the upside down elderly women. This meant that compromises had to be made but this was always achieved by coming to a decision collectively. For example, one of the difficulties for Gecko was the problem that arose in a key scene of the film—the upside down women (the women in the story who are involved in a car crash and become stuck in the car, upside down). They were shot with a stopwatch for every take because the maximum period the actors could be upside down was about two minutes. This meant that there was only around 45 seconds when they were in close up, upside down, and able to perform. The rest of the time was taken up getting into the harness and out again. After each take, the actors had to lie down to correct their blood pressure. The whole set then stopped and Gecko then found they were increasingly behind schedule and had to think on their feet to collectively come up with strategies. In order to get extra time they had to reduce the amount of time filming other scenes and collapsing shot lists into a fewer shots. Tilson says that it ‘was an extraordinarily difficult decision to make because we decided to put more time into that at a point when we were behind schedule because we realised that was the strength of the film’. They also decided to put in $13,000 dollars of their own money to buy that extra time.

All of the team have invested a lot of time and resources into Gecko. The dedication to achieve their own films has meant that there is perhaps more risk. Brooks is philosophical about it: ‘So far, we haven’t been able to be financially secure, but we still have a strong faith that it will work’. Tilson says ‘I totally subsidise Gecko, we all do now’. Maslin offers this as ‘definitely both a strength and a weakness, because we end up exploiting ourselves and each other’ (for example, putting in money to shoot the upside down women). But Brooks says ‘We do it with a trust that it will turn around. I look at a lot of organizations, such as Working Dog, and I know that they went through that for years’.

**GECKO FILMS IN THE AUSTRALIAN FILM MARKET PLACE**

The exhibition market in Australia is highly competitive, despite the mechanics of multiplex exhibition encouraging a growth in both screens and box office. The American studios have moved into art-house production, a place where Australian films have traditionally done well internationally, and American production continues to dominate the market (as it does globally). The AFC and FFC reported in 1999 that Australian films make up only 4
per cent of the total box office in Australia, compared to the dominating American studios which claim 87 per cent of it. Australia and other indigenous industries globally have to be strategic in protecting their market share and have implemented diverse strategies, for example, expanding the resource base (as has been achieved with English lottery money being diverted to local film production), content regulation and audience development. As Mary Reid outlines in her AFC report on current market trends, strategies might include a stronger focus on marketing and better interaction between distribution and exhibition sectors, researching audiences, finding a niche for Australian product by emphasising difference rather than similarities to Hollywood, careful timing of the release of Australian films, star development and the use of local stars in marketing, and promoting an understanding of ‘success’ itself in the sense that it is incongruent to compare Australian and American films given the dramatic difference in the industries.

Gecko stress the importance of being strategic. They have collectively worked out a business plan, and the marketing and exhibition of any of their projects involves developing strategies amongst the three of them in conjunction with the distributor. As three filmmakers, they are constantly assessing the changes in what is happening in the marketplace and adapting their projects accordingly.

Gecko explain that they have had to respond quite pragmatically because the whole market, and the industry, has shifted considerably over the last few years. Where in the mid 1990s there might have been an assumption that budgets would increase, this has changed due to the advent of low budget/no budget feature films which Maslin says were not really around until the 1990s. To be competitive Gecko say they have to consider the changes in technology that mean that quality productions can now be made more cheaply.

It is true that a large number of films currently made in Australia, in terms of the percentage of total production, are low budget/no budget films. For example, La Spagnola (The Spanish Woman) written and co-produced by Anna Maria Monticelli and directed by Steve Jacobs was the last of five ‘Million Dollar Movies’ made in the late 1990s. The AFC and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC) have reported that ‘overall, Australian feature film budgets have remained static. The average budget of features made in the 1990s was [A]$3.5 million, much the same as the average for the 1980s’. And they predict that these production levels will remain static, in contrast to production and marketing budgets of the American studio features which have risen significantly: ‘The average budget for a studio feature was US$52.7 million in 1998, and almost half as much again was spent on marketing’.

Gecko say that one of the things that film-makers have to look at in Australia, in order to make films that have large budgets, is that they have to appeal to the American market. Maslin says that is a given now; ‘the star cast will have to appeal to the American market, otherwise forget about doing something on a bigger budget’. Tilson says that the sort of material they are interested in ‘has a good, strong audience but it is not immediately big dollar. It is not going to star Brad Pitt, so we have to look very carefully about where we fit into the market’. For example, in 1999 Tilson wrote a low budget feature and while they
feel it is a great one, it was done as a very pragmatic response to the market and the environment they are operating in.

Gecko attributes their success with Road to Nhill to working very hard on their strategy and thinking laterally about how they would best ‘fit’. Currently exhibitors might release anything from 1–200 prints. If they don’t perform, the number of screenings may be reduced. Gecko’s plan for Nhill was based on a view that generally the way in which Australian films work best is the old model, where word of mouth gets out after a film has played for a while. They felt this was likely to be particularly true for Nhill. They did something quite unusual as part of their strategy for the film’s release. They began the campaign and released the film first in the country, coming later to city cinemas. They had fewer prints and they toured them because they didn’t ever believe that launching hundreds of prints was the best strategy for their film. Even if a budget for such a launch had been available, they would also have needed a commensurate advertising budget to compete with budgets of the imported films, which spend a huge amount on advertising in all media. They knew that it was not a film that was going to attract a lot of hype and that they needed ‘a slow burn’. Some of the marketing was direct mail or direct action such as getting out to community groups, having special screenings, doing trivia quiz nights, and capitalising on ‘photo opportunities’ such as dressing up as three lady bowlers for the AFI Awards. They spent months writing letters to bowling organisations and elderly citizens groups. They couldn’t actually physically be at all of the openings given that there were ten in seven days, so they did some together, individually, and got their ‘stars’ involved as well.

A SHARED VISION

It is my contention that Gecko share a ‘vision’ and what follows below uses the example of their feature Road to Nhill to offer some illustrations of this (although it is not the intention to comprehensively cover this particular film in this chapter).

A characteristic of Maslin, Brooks and Tilson’s work to date in both drama and documentary is an enthusiasm for telling Australian stories. Road to Nhill is Australian from its language (‘she’ll be right’) through to the sprawling vistas and characterisations. The vast landscape is hot, a place where the elements challenge people and where people become laconic because they don’t want to waste energy. This is emphasised by characterisation, and also by the visual style, where the audience watch (as opposed to tracking in to characters) from above as cars travel across roads in vast expanses—inevitably in the wrong direction! In addition, the humour of the film has been described as ‘quintessential Aussie humour’.

The Gecko team share an ideological perspective and this forms part of the world-view their vision offers. Sue Maslin has said that:

If you're black, or if you're gay, or if you're from a non-English speaking background or whatever distances you from the dominant ideology, it offers you perspective ... I feel, yes, women are interested
in different things, can offer different stories, and then by being feminist, that’s another distance again that gives you another perspective of looking at your film ideas.\textsuperscript{35}

In terms of story, \textit{Road to Nhill} could be interpreted as the kind of ‘different story’ to which Maslin has referred. \textit{Nhill} offers a focus on detail, human relationships (particularly those between women) and a story that ends without finite closure, leaving the audience with questions and a feeling that the world of Nhill goes on after the story.

\textit{Road to Nhill} has a focus on those ‘othered’ by those dominant in our community and illustrates an interest in power relations. \textit{Nhill} centres on female characters (common in their work) and the audience are privy to a female viewpoint. This is achieved especially well through the way in which some women gently step around men. For example, much of the humour is based in meaningful looks between women in the face of male ineptitude. Gecko’s passion for telling stories that give an ‘outsiders’ view is evident in the characterisations in \textit{Nhill}; be it non-stereotypical characters such as the townsfolk who are ‘different to the caricatures of country people that often emanate from city bound scriptwriters and producers’\textsuperscript{36}, the lesbian couple, Margot (Lynette Curran) and Alice (Kerry Walker), or in representing subjects who are infrequently the subject of cinematic stories (in this case older people, particularly older women).

Tilson has said that she is not interested in writing about things such as murdered women, heroic men, punch-ups, shoot-outs or men fucking and shooting each other.\textsuperscript{37} What she,
and Gecko generally are interested in here is a character-driven, rather than action-driven story. From this perspective, *Nhill* offers a story (and stylistically, a film) that is different from the mainstream where largely male-dominated action films occupy a large section of the market. Action films are frequently hero-driven but *Road to Nhill* itself could be read as a critique of heroism. For example, the character of the policeman, Brett (Matthew Dyktinski) is ‘a young man with just about everything—a gun, power, and a fast car with siren. In fact, the only thing he’s lacking is a bit of common sense’. Heroism is also critiqued when the rescue attempt by the men concludes by offering the feminist view that the women are the most competent to get themselves out and don’t need to be rescued. From the perspective of discussing their ‘vision’, it illustrates a more pragmatic rather than romanticised view of the world.

A point made by Gecko is that shared political values are important. In addition to the numerous women in leading roles, and a story told from a female perspective, *Road to Nhill* is a film where almost all the key creative production positions are held by women; a circumstance that is unusual on a feature film in Australia. The exceptions are generally films produced and directed by women, Shirley Barrett’s films for example. In addition to the Gecko team holding the positions of writer, director and producer; they also hired numerous other women: the director of photography (Nicolette Freeman), the composer (Elizabeth Drake) and the production designer (Georgina Campbell); the only key creative role not filled by a woman was the editor (Tony Stevens). While Gecko obviously felt these women to be the best people for the jobs, it illustrates a world view that women are equal and gender does not exclude women from being the ‘best’.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it has not been the intention of this chapter to juxtapose team and non-team (or hierarchical models) or to argue for one against the other. There is no magic answer or indisputable best practice in terms of whether to work in a team or not. It is just one of many possible ways of working, provided you can find the right collaborators.

The Gecko model illustrates the importance of shared values and trust, something that takes time to develop over a number of collaborations. Working as a team can be difficult, given that the other members of any group have to be won over, and sometimes this might delay a given project (or perhaps stop it). In Gecko’s case, they all subsidise their team with
other work, at times pouring this money into Gecko projects, and while this is a financial drain, it is one which they see as worth it given their faith in the collaboration. Working as a team offers advantages such as a supportive environment, where each member has a commitment to supporting each other. In addition the projects benefit from a range of views from the inception.

Gecko expressed a sense of reward derived from the actual collaborative process (which includes a balance of power that is shared, and working towards a shared vision). The Gecko situation is one where the members of the team have the collaboration in place; they are regarded as ‘lucky’ because they don’t have to constantly set up working relationships. The greatest advantage of the team approach is that it can potentially develop a body of work that has a distinctive voice through the shared values, intellectual and aesthetic commonalities in approach—a shared vision!

Endnotes

2 Working Dog Inc. are a team of cross media producers (Jane Kennedy, Tom Gleisner, Santo Cilauro and Rob Sitch). They began with a top-rating radio program (D-Generation) and have had a prolific output in television (for example, Frontline 1994, 1995 & 1997; Funky Squad 1995, A River Somewhere 1996; and The Panel 1998). They have made two features and also have some publishing activities.
5 ibid.
6 ibid.
7 The session was ‘Director, Producer, Writer Relationships’ and the conference was ‘Our Brilliant Careers’, St Kilda Town Hall, October 23, 1999.
8 Jackie McKimmie quoted in Julie James Bailey, Reel Women: Working In Film And Television, AFTRS, Nth Ryde, NSW, Australia, 1999, pp. 220-221.
9 Film Victoria is a state government funded organisation in Victoria that encourages and assists the development, production, exhibition and knowledge of film, television and new media.
12 Australian Film Commission, Film Development and Marketing Branch, Funding Program Guidelines, July 2000, p. 7.
13 ibid. p. 5.
14 Alison Tilson graduated from the AFTRS screenwriting strand in 1983. She has written both documentary and drama scripts. Sue Brooks trained in camera and directing at the AFTRS, graduating in 1984 and has directed shorts, television and a feature. Sue Maslin has produced numerous documentary films and
Their second feature together is *Road to Nhill* (1997), a collaboration with Sue Brooks and Alison Tilson. Maslin ceased to be a director of Gecko (the company) in 2001 but still works with Brooks and Tilson in largely the same collaborative way as had occurred when she was a director.

All of the material which follow is, unless otherwise indicated, from an interview with Sue Brooks, Sue Maslin and Alison Tilson conducted with Lisa French in December 1999. Quotations have not been indented as they are numerous.


*Road to Nhill* won ‘The Golden Alexander Award for Best Feature Film’ at the 1997 Thessaloniki International Film Festival and the ‘Best Feature Film Script’ at 1997 Turin International Film Festival. It was also nominated for three other awards: ‘Best Original Screenplay’ and ‘Best Music Score’ at 1997 Australian Film Institute Awards and was nominated for Best Original Feature Film Script at 1997 AWGIE Awards (Australian Writers Guild).

For further detail on *Road To Nhill*, see: French, L. & Tudball, L., ‘*Road to Nhill*’, Metro Education, No. 15, 1998, pp.30-42.


The ‘Million Dollar Movies’ accord was developed in 1995/96 as a joint initiative of the AFC and SBS Independent, with Beyond Films as sales agent. Other partners were brought in later with the Premium Movie Partnership in Australia and Channel Four in the UK. Five films with budgets of A$1 million each were funded over a three-year period. The funding for *La Spagnola* (The Spanish Woman) was the last to be announced (November 1999). The others were *Fresh Air* (Neil Mansfield, 1998), *Mailboy* (Vincent Giarrusso, 1999), *A Wreck, A Tangle* (Scott Patterson, 1999) and *City Loop* (Belinda Chayko, 1999).

The strategy to launch the film in the country was because they felt that it was a film that would benefit from word of mouth and also, it is a film about community and the country.

AFC is Australian Film Institute

Other Catastrophes (Emma-Kate Croghan, 1996) or Redball (Jon Hewitt, 1998).

Tim Bevan quoted in *British Cinema Today*, op. cit.


Mary Anne Reid, with Diana Berman & Rosemary Curtis, Distributing Australian Films - A survey of current market conditions and distributors’ perceptions, AFC, Sydney, 1999.

For example: *Love and Other Catastrophes* (Emma-Kate Croghan, 1996) or Redball (Jon Hewitt, 1998).

The strategy to launch the film in the country was because they felt that it was a film that would benefit from word of mouth and also, it is a film about community and the country.


See Blonski et. al., op. cit. p. 224.

I am not arguing that all action films are directed by or star men, as obviously women action directors exist and increasingly, warrior women have appeared in films—although it could be argued that these characters, while women, act in the same way as male action stars.