Imagined Geographies:
Women's Negotiation of Space in Contemporary Australian Cinema, 1988-98

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Murdoch University, Perth, 2000
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract
Abstract

Imagined Geographies: Women’s Negotiation of Space in Contemporary Australian Cinema is an exploration of the nexus between gender and locale in films from the last decade, 1988-98. This thesis examines the way meaning is made through the negotiation of diverse geographies by central female protagonists in a selection of recent Australian feature films. The films I analyse were predominantly produced by female writers and/or directors.

In the context of Australian Cinema, locale is an area much talked about but little theorised. It is an issue which remains in the background of much scholarship and is often tangential to many arguments but rarely constructed as a central concern. Where it is foregrounded, as in Ross Gibson’s work, it is reduced to the significance of landscape or ‘natural locations’ rather than examining the diversity of its manifestations.

Two notable but related spatial shifts have occurred in Australian cinema of the 1990s. The first is a change in industrial practice. Female artists are now creating spaces for themselves in mainstream feature filmmaking — spaces traditionally occupied by men. This trend is away from constructions of a distinctly feminist cinema or counter-cinema which was identifiable in the 1970s. Second, there is a shift in the character of on-screen space. The presence of growing numbers of women writers, directors and producers in the Australian film industry is shifting the cinema’s focus away from traditional ‘masculine’ topographies — the pub, the prison and the outback — thus allowing explorations of other spaces and visions to develop. I am arguing therefore that there is a feminization of space occurring in Australian cinema.

In this thesis I investigate representations of so-called traditional ‘feminine’ or domestic domains. The place of the gendered body and embodiment in films is a central concern and is theorised in the first chapter. As we move through the thesis chapters, sexed bodies enacting gender in a variety of ways and in different zones — the car, the house, the suburb and the country town — will be explored. Through these analyses I examine the methods some film directors employ to problematize space in such a way that their work overcomes the limitations of its previously dominant representations. This thesis is primarily an attempt to open up the field of criticism to acknowledge the diversity of locales which exist within the rich tapestry of Australian Cinema.
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Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Stephanie Donald, whose enthusiasm, theoretical rigour, humour and encouragement enabled me to finish this thesis. I also extend my appreciation to Tom O'Regan who supervised the initial stages of my candidature. His vast knowledge of Australian cinema and passion for the subject was inspirational.

Thanks also go to those Murdoch academics who have at different times played a part in this thesis: John Darling, John Richardson, and Peter Jeffery. My gratitude to Garry Gillard and Alec McHoul for the many hours spent proof-reading the manuscript. To the librarians at Murdoch University working under increasingly difficult conditions; my especial thanks goes to Helen Gibson and Doris McIntyre. Thanks also to the Murdoch support staff: Lyn Dale, Cheryl Miller, Elaine Tay, Jill Soderstrom, and Claire Wilson.

To the postgraduate students at Murdoch University, especially Rama Venkatasawmy, Tanja Visosevic, Chris Palazzolo, Alison Harding, Carol Laseur, Helen Olivieri and the chicks at SSIN.

I am extremely grateful to my family who provided their love, interest and support which has helped me along the way. Thanks goes especially to Marie and John for instilling in me the desire for knowledge and their care and encouragement in the last few bumpy months of this journey.

And finally to Bruce, who listened, questioned, inspired, and provided me with the love and laughs essential to keep going.
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Previous Publications


Part of an earlier version of Chapter Two was presented at the “National Cinema: Sites of Resistance Conference”; the bi-annual Australian and New Zealand Film and History conference in Brisbane, in December 1998.

A portion of Chapter Two was also published as “Notes on the Significance of Home and the Past in Radiance”, *Metro Magazine*, No. 119, 1999, 28-31.

An interview carried out with *Radiance*’s director, Rachel Perkins, was published in the same edition of *Metro*: “An Interview with Rachel Perkins – Director of Radiance”, *Metro*, No. 119, 1999, 32-34. It appears as Appendix One at the back of this thesis.

Introduction

Interrogating Filmic Space and Place

0.0 A Preface of Sorts

0.1 Locale and Place Identity

0.2 Developing a Language for Place

0.3 Theorising Place and Space in the Cinema

0.4 Women, Space, Cinema

0.5 Outline of Chapters
0.0 A Preface of Sorts

The pleasure of film lies partially in its ability to create its own cinematic geography, but so too does its power. (Hopkins 1994: 47)

Place implies memory, reverie ... and the imaginary ... Place also implies displacement, being elsewhere, being a stranger. Films are like imaginary journeys; the cinema is a magic means of transport to distant places. Places are functions of narrative (actions must take place somehow) yet the fascination of film is often with the places themselves. (Wollen 1980: 25)

This thesis began as an investigation into the significance of landscape in Australian cinema — rather than a theorisation of women's negotiation of space as it has since become.\(^1\) The impetus for my original topic emerged following the staging of the first Australian film festival in Istanbul in 1994.\(^2\) It occurred to me that nine out of the twelve films I had jointly selected for the festival — *Shame* (Steve Jodrell, 1987) *Exile* (Paul Cox, 1993), *Sweetie* (Jane Campion, 1989), *beDevil* (Tracey Moffatt, 1993), *No Worries* (David Ellick, 1992), *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (Gillian Armstrong, 1992), *Black River* (Kevin Lucas, 1993), *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1981) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994) — had vital elements of their plots located in the rural sphere, or that landscape and 'natural' locations were an integral part of them.\(^3\) While I was conscious of attempting to present a cross-section of exemplary, recent Australian works which disclosed the (then) current diversity of Australian cinema, 'locale' or 'setting' was not an aspect of diversity that came to mind during the selection process. In retrospect, I wonder if there had been an unconscious 'bush bias' in my selection criteria. Did I perceive that those films, based in more rural environments, were

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1 For an account of the significance of landscape in Australian cinema from a geographer's perspective, see Craig Faulkner's Master's thesis (1983) which exclusively focuses on period films made between 1971-79.

2 For an online discussion of this eventful festival see Simpson 1995 and for the festival brochure see Appendix Two.

3 The exceptions, with a distinctly urban focus, being *Romper Stomper* (Geoffrey Wright, 1992) *Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann, 1992) and the *Good Woman of Bangkok* (Dennis O'Rourke, 1992).
Introduction

somehow more ‘Australian’? And, as I was aware of certain Turkish perceptions of Australia, was I unconsciously reinforcing those perceptions?4 Or has the landscape, as Ross Gibson argues, come to represent something much more than just an environmental setting for local narratives? “In so many ways”, states Gibson, “the majority of Australian features have been about landscape” (Gibson 1992: 63).

While researching this topic — particularly through my engagement with theories of place in cultural and feminist geography, and viewing a range of contemporary Australian cinema — it became evident that a whole body of so-called ‘women’s cinema’ of the 1990s was revaluing those ‘interior’ spheres traditionally regarded as feminine: suburbia, the house and the body. And that those spaces not stereotypically regarded as feminine — the country town and the car — were being presented with a different emphases to their dominant representations in mainstream Australian feature filmmaking of the 1970s and 1980s. I do not doubt the significant role the landscape or ‘the bush’ have played throughout Australia’s film (as well as broader art, literature and cultural) history in attempting to form some kind of cohesive national identity or character. However, the importance of other, often more ordinary, quotidian locations, and their part in constituting, or helping to tell other stories within ‘the rich tapestry’ of Australian Cinema is that to which my thesis testifies.

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4 As in many other countries, Crocodile Dundee (Peter Faiman, 1986) left a lasting impression about Australians on Turkish people which was difficult to dispel. However, the popularity of Peter Weir’s Gallipoli (1981) and its historical significance within the Turkish context also must not be forgotten. This film was screened to packed audiences at the Australian Film Festival in Istanbul in 1994. (Simpson 1995).
0.1 Locale & Place Identity in Australia

The issue of identity formation and its relation to filmic place as well as notions of ‘belonging’ are central to this work. The same place can equally mean entrapment, freedom or just indifference for different people, or, ambiguous and vacillating feelings which are difficult to articulate. Whether returning to a childhood house in the middle of suburbia or driving through the desert, feelings towards locale are rarely stable. Revisiting certain places may induce joyful memories or may be the means of resolving a painful past. “As subjects, we vary widely depending on the actual place we came from and the subsequent places we occupy”. (Kirby 1996a: 1)

In recent times the significance of the spatial has crept into many spheres of the humanities and social sciences. In his Berlin lectures in 1967 Michel Foucault stated that: “The anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time.” (Massey 1993: 141) Kathleen Kirby introduces her text, which examines spatial concepts and human subjectivity, with the comment: “The language of space is everywhere in theory today.” (1996a: 1) And Luce Irigaray asserts: “The transition to a new age in turn necessitates a new perception and a new conception of space—time, the inhabiting of places, and containers, or envelopes of identity.” (Irigaray cited in Rose 1996: 56) In The Production of Space, Henri Lefèvre goes even further, and states that:

... any revolutionary ‘project’ today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the re-appropriation of the body, in association with the re-appropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda. (1991: 166-7, cited in Dirlik 1999: 152)

In the following introduction I will bring together relevant writings on space and place be they fictional, analytical, philosophical or phenomenological in order to develop a way to apprehend the significance of location in Australian
Cinema. Drawing from sociology, the first part of this introduction will look at the issue of locale and place identity. Moving back to specifics and the Australian context, I will then discuss the changing perceptions of place and the way in which a new language is developing in order to articulate meanings associated with place. Then, the way space and place have been theorised in the cinema generally will be examined. The issue of women and cinematic space will be addressed followed finally by the outline of the five thesis chapters.

In discussing issues of identity such as class, gender, and ethnicity, theorists often utilise spatial terminology. The connection between space, place and critical theory phrases is clearly evident in such terms as “subject positioning”, “historical location”, “political terrain” or even “mapping”. This terminology tends to ignore the role of traditional place designations or the function of ‘real’ places in identity formation. (Ching & Creed 1997: 6-7)⁵ While ‘real’ places as such are not the focus of my thesis, the issue of identity formation and its relation to the space defined on screen is central to my argument. The array of writings on Australian cinema which discuss the issue of identity generally reduce it to those three primary components — class, gender and ethnicity — and ignore the significance of place, except of course when place is conceived of in terms of landscape as in the work of Ross Gibson (1988, 1992, 1993, 1994), Stuart Aitken (1991a, 1991b 1992, 1993, 1994a), Leo Zonn (1984, with Aitken 1994) and Craig Faulkner (1983). My intention in

⁵ This idea is central to Ching and Creed’s text Knowing Your Place, where they argue that in many disciplines, particularly cultural studies and literary criticism, urban contexts are primarily focused on whilst rural culture is often ignored altogether. The urban, they assert, has become the assumed reference point when terms are articulated which could refer to both rural and urban subjects, and, in ignoring this rural/urban distinction, we are blinded to the power relations which shape the experience of people. (Ching & Creed 1997: 2-3) Because postmodern social theory’s stable reference point has been the city — it denies the extent to which a subject is constructed by its opposition to the rustic. (1997: 6) The notion of rusticity is taken up in Chapter Five, entitled: “Prosaic Rural Terrain: Reconceptualising Rusticity”.
this thesis is to foreground and analyse the issue of place identity and associated notions such as characters' attitudes to and interaction with place, within the context of specific films. As film theory has little to say about locale as such, I have borrowed from the social sciences to define the importance of place identity and the notion of locale:

... place identity can be defined as an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolise or situate identity. Like other forms of identity, place identity answers the question — Who am I? — by countering — Where am I? Or Where do I belong? ... Like people, things and activities, places are an integral part of the social world of everyday life; as such they become important mechanisms through which identity is defined and situated. (Cuba and Hummon 1993: 112)

While another of the primary aims of this work is to open up the field of criticism to acknowledge the rich diversity of locations in Australian cinema my work inevitably performs a unifying function, in terms of limiting my chapters only to those locales — the body, the home, the suburbscape, the country town and the roadscape — which I see as crucial locales in the experience and understanding of contemporary Australian society. My use of the term 'locale' in this thesis draws on Anthony Giddens' formulation whereby locale specifically refers to the spatial context of action. Giddens believes that “social interaction is in part constituted by its spatial setting — where things happen is part of the explanation of why and how they happen in the way they do.” (Giddens cited in Saunders and Williams 1988: 82) Saunders and Williams' sociological emphasis define crucial locales as settings “through which basic forms of social relations and social institutions are constituted and reproduced.” Representations of these crucial locales mentioned above are the subject of my analysis.

While researching this thesis I have been influenced by an extraordinarily diverse array of research and writings interrogating the notion of place and its influence in shaping identity. These span a vast array of disciplines and
approaches: cultural theory, sociology, cultural and feminist geography, architecture, philosophy, urban planning, psychoanalysis and phenomenology. I have also borrowed from Australian literature and criticism, which has had quite a lot to say about the notion of place. (Malouf 1985a, 1985b, 1987; Jolley 1986; Murnane 1982, 1987) However, very little has been written about the significance of locale, place or space within the context of feature film. It still remains an embryonic research area. Thus I emphasize here the interdisciplinary nature of this study; the very nature of space means it cannot be easily categorised nor packed neatly away as much as we may try. (See page 15) This I believe is the virtue and the downfall of this study — it is messy. But in the end I am hoping to contribute a capacity “to view the subject through the lens of space⁶ ... [because] space can be a site to bring together and understand the connections between the psychic and the social, the personal and the political.” (Kirby 1996a: ix)

0.2 Developing a Language for Place

One thing that virtually every scholar who has ever written about the concept of physical place agrees on is that our language is unable to adequately articulate the connections between subjectivity and locale or place. In 1974 Yi-Fu Tuan, a human geographer, perceived this inadequacy and coined the term “topophilia” which refers to the “affective bond (both positive and negative) between people and place or setting”. (Tuan 1974: 4) Frawley,⁷ while utilising the concept of topophilia in his discussion of Australian rainforests, points out that:

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⁶ I mean view here in its most literal sense rather than Kathleen Kirby’s figurative slant. See Kathleen Kirby’s Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts in Human Subjectivity (1996)

⁷ Frawley’s diachronic account, “An Ancient Assemblage: The Australian Rainforests in European Conceptions of Nature” discusses the shifts in landscape perception and valorisation based on “a marriage of scientific discovery (even revelation) and changing aesthetic sensibilities” (1990: 137)
Investigation of topophilia is beset by two main problems which need recognition ... The first is that rarely are responses to and feelings about environment one-dimensional and clearly identifiable. They are more likely to be ambiguous and ambivalent, sometimes contradictory and generally poorly articulated. Dichotomy between thought and action are characteristic. (Frawley 1990: 138)

Filmmaker and critical theorist Ross Gibson also discusses understanding place as “a process of knowing in your bones”, something, which he implies cannot yet be adequately articulated. In other work, Gibson has described a similar developing awareness as a “sense of subjective immersion in place”. (1992: 18) In his essay “Enchanted Country” he utilises Eric Rolls’ book about the Pillaga to re-examine his essay film Wild (1993).

The language we have inherited already encourages us to know a place in our bones or through a network of feelings and responses to stimuli in much the same way that one can know the overall cohesion (or soul?) of one’s own body precisely because one is immersed in it and neurologically mapped throughout it ... [M]any hunter-gatherer societies have an array of feelings organised around crucial sites of their country so that the people and the country are intricate with mutual sentence. Such people ail when their tracts are abused. This should not be surprising. The country has entered the bone and tissue, the mind and the soul. The country is a structure of feeling that is also a way of knowing ... The organisation of a colony happens through storytelling ... And it happens slowly ... organically ... Eventually particular locations are charged with particular stories which overlay or occasionally intermingle with whatever stories were in place in the indigenous landscape. ... [T]he stories arrange ideas, fears, aspirations, pleasures and pains spatially in geographical patterns and temporally in narrative rhythms that can be experienced and re-experienced by the people settling into (or being unsettled by) the country. (Gibson 1993: 41)

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8 This involves the ability to place oneself in systems of settlement not based on “the acquisitive processes of conquistadorial survey” which, he says, “might be reason for optimism as the third colonial century commences in the South Land” (Gibson 1992: 18).

9 In her autobiographical text Tracks, Robyn Davidson eloquently articulates her developing relationship to the land which she is travelling through on her camel journey. What she describes below seems very close to Gibson’s of process of knowing that is founded in “an immersion in the logic of the country”, a very organic way of adapting to place:

Throughout the trip I was gaining an awareness and an understanding of the earth as I learnt how to depend upon it. The openness and the emptiness which had at first threatened me were now a comfort which allowed my sense of freedom and joyful aimlessness to grow. This sense of space works deep in the Australian collective consciousness. It is frightening and most of the people huddle around the eastern seaboard where life is easy and space is a grasppable concept, but it produces a sense of potential and possibility nevertheless that may not exist now in any European country. It will
Gibson makes bold statements about the significance of landscape and its connections to the nation in his seminal essay "Formative Landscapes". His relevance to this research lies more in his references to developing a new way of seeing, a new way of understanding and articulating subjective interactions with the environment. In articulating his ideas he attempts to develop a new language; a new way of seeing and understanding place. While his analyses are restricted mainly to more 'natural' environments I think we can extend the way he talks about these places — a "subjective immersion in place" (Gibson 1992: 18) — to knowing everyday environments such as the house and the car.

In light of comments above (Tuan, Davidson, Gibson, Frawley) it seems clear that we are gradually acknowledging this lack, while endeavouring to counter it by developing a process of understanding, examining and articulating the notion of topophilia. Apart from Tuan however, what is common to all of

aimlessness to grow. This sense of space works deep in the Australian collective consciousness. It is frightening and most of the people huddle around the eastern seaboard where life is easy and space is a graspable concept, but it produces a sense of potential and possibility nevertheless that may not exist now in any European country. It will not be long however, before land is conquered and beaten into submission. But here, it was free, unspoilt and seemingly indestructible.

And as I walk through that country, I was becoming involved with it in a most intense and not fully conscious way. The motions and patterns and connections of things became apparent on a gut level. I didn't just see the animal tracks, I knew them. I didn't just see the bird, I knew it in relationship to its action and effects. My environment began to teach me about itself without my full awareness of the process. It became an animate being of which I was a part. The only way I can describe how the process occurred is to give an example: I would see a beetle's track in the sand. What once would have been a merely a pretty visual sign with a few associations attached, now became a sign which produced in me instantaneous associations --- the type of beetle, which direction it was going in and why, when it made the tracks, who its predators were ... When this way of thinking became ordinary for me, I too became lost in the net and boundaries of myself stretched out for ever. In the beginning I had known at some level that this could happen. It had frightened me then. I had seen it as a chaotic principle and I had fought it tooth and nail ... In different places survival requires different things, based on the environment. Capacity for survival may be the ability to be changed by environment (Davidson 1980: 194-196).
of knowing the land, a kind of knowing or feeling in your bones, a process which is not wholly conscious. In his account of the Queensland bungalow, David Malouf undertakes a topobiographical enterprise in seeking to explain: "not only facts, but a description of how the elements of a place and our inner lives cross and illuminate one another". (Malouf 1985a: 298) He asks:

... how do we interpret space and in doing so make our first maps of reality, how do we mythologise spaces and through that mythology (a great deal of it inherited) find our way into culture? (Malouf 1985a: 298)

Where investigations of place go wrong is where they attempt to unify places and their meanings for a whole nation — as Gibson has sometimes done. Tuan comments on the importance of the subjective (micro) world of places in contrast to the blinding power of nationalism when he says that: "topophilia rings false when it is claimed for a large territory — affection cannot be stretched over an empire." (Tuan 1977: 101) The impetus of my thesis extends to the national only inasmuch as the films I look at are all made in Australia by predominantly Australian creative talent. This thesis will not be an investigation into the notion of national cinemas, nor will it problematize the concept of what exactly constitutes an Australian film; an issue which is becoming increasingly complex in the age of co-productions, international financing and 'offshore' studio productions.10 I am taking that issue for granted. The next topic will examine the question: what happens when 'place' is only an imagined manifestation on celluloid?

0.2 Theorising Space & Place in the Cinema

At one level, the space created by film is simply the frame within which a subject is located, and twenty-four of these frames pass before our eyes every second. This space enables the subject of the film to unfold in a variety of ways that may be controlled by narrative convention. More than neutral space, however, these

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10 For a in-depth analysis of this issue, see Tom O'Regan's book; Australian National Cinema, (1996) and his essay, "Beyond 'Australian Film'? Australian Cinema in the 1990s". (O'Regan 1998)
At one level, the space created by film is simply the frame within which a subject is located, and twenty-four of these frames pass before our eyes every second. This space enables the subject of the film to unfold in a variety of ways that may be controlled by narrative convention. More than neutral space, however, these shots demand to be read as real places with their own sense of geography and history (Aitken & Zonn 1993: 195).

Contrary to the diverse and ever growing body of writing on space in sociology, cultural studies and of course cultural geography (see texts as diverse as: Smith & Katz 1993; Massey 1993; Kirby 1996a; Duncan 1996 or McDowell 1999), little has been theorised about the place of physical space in the cinema. When the issue is addressed, the dominant concerns about space in film theory seem to revolve around the concept of space as a function of narrative, as a site for action or in terms of spectatorial positioning. As Wollen has remarked: "It always seemed to me strange that, whereas 'space' has often been discussed as an aspect of the cinema, nothing much has been said about 'place'" (Wollen 1980: 25).

Bordwell and Thompson have made similar claims:

In the classical paradigm, the system for constructing space (the 'continuity style') has as its aim the subordination of spatial (and temporal) structures to the logic of the narrative, especially to the cause/effect chain. Negatively, the space is presented so as not to distract attention from the dominant actions; positively, the space is 'used up' by the presentation of the narratively important settings, character traits and ('psychology') or other causal agents. Space as space is rendered subordinate to space as a site for action (Bordwell and Thompson cited in Higson 1984: 7-8).

Moving back to specifics and discussions of Australian cinematic geographies, Ross Gibson speaks of 'place' in terms of the unstable positioning of the spectator. In discussing his essay film, *Wild*, he talks about the way films break down the 'space' or the separation between the spectator and the film:

Film is well suited to this kind of task, particularly in the way it folds a spectator into a scene through the all-encompassing environment of sound and editing sequences which lay out space over and around a viewer who is being 'shifted' constantly in vantage-point to a profusion of possible sites-of-being and sites-of-seeing.
occurs, the film sends the viewing subject away from him or herself and all over the place. The viewing subject ‘becomes’ an expansive changeable ‘place’... The represented space of the film has picked up ‘charges’ of meaning or potential meaning so that the spectator becomes an ‘occupant’ immersed in the semiotic universe of the film. Or described in another way, the place of the film enters the spectator’s mind and soul. (Gibson 1993: 43)

Three cultural geographers who have examined the issue of physical or grounded place in the cinema are Stuart Aitken, Leo Zonn and Jeff Hopkins. These geographers deem it a necessity to distinguish between the places in film and the space of film:

there is a particular significant tension between the places in film and the space of film. There is, however, a way in which this tension is transcended by the animation of landscape as part of the narration or description. Herein lies an important geography of film. Place becomes spectacle, a signifier of the film’s subject, a metaphor for the state of mind of the protagonist ... (my emphasis, Aitken & Zonn 1993: 195)

In reference to what Gibson has said above, it is when the spectator becomes “immersed in the semiotic universe of the film”, that the places in film become part of the space of film. Hopkins further elucidates this notion of the difference between the places in film, which he terms a geography in film, and the space of film he calls a geography of film. He implies thereby that a geography in film merely refers to geographical descriptions of the images on the screen, while a geography of film is bound up with the meanings produced from representation of space and the implications of this in culture:

... cinematic place is not, therefore, limited to the world represented on the screen (a geography in film), but the meanings constructed through the experience of film (a geography of film). The meanings constituted through film do not simply reflect or report on space, place and society, but actively participate in the production and consumption of larger cultural systems of which they are a part. (Hopkins 1994: 50)

So like real place, reel place is even more ‘constructed’, not only through the interpretations of the viewer but also through the process of its industrial production.

Approaching film as a semiotic landscape, as a socially constructed cultural image or sign system that represents and
structures an environment, provides a way of questioning the very representation and interpretation of cinematic place. (Hopkins 1994: 51)

So what happens when we introduce gender into the picture? The next section will briefly background women’s position in industrial practice before introducing the geography of women’s cinema in Australia.

0.5 Women, Space, Cinema

Despite the still unequal numbers of women involved behind and in front of the camera, driving the story and the large disparity between male and female performers, the Australasian cinema in the 1990s represents one of the ‘best scenarios’ for women in front of and behind the camera of any cinema in the world. (O’Regan 1998)

So how are women located in the contemporary Australian Cinema industry? The answer to this question is not as straightforward as it seems. On inspection, in industrial practice, two contradictory pictures of the Australian film milieu emerge. On the one hand, as O’Regan has indicated above, in comparison to many other national cinemas and Hollywood, the Australian film industry is far more progressive in its attempts to attain gender equality — it has sometimes been called ‘women friendly’. On the other hand, however:

women have always been shown in Australian cinema, yet they still do not participate to the same extent as men do in creative, technical and administrative positions. The opportunities for and wages of women actors and performers are nowhere near as great as for men. (O’Regan 1996: 288)\textsuperscript{11}

In industrial practice, women in the 1990s are increasingly occupying spaces which were once reserved for males.\textsuperscript{12} With the achievements of female

\textsuperscript{11} Just to elaborate on this point, the Australia Council’s survey on performers’ income showed male performers in 1992/3 earned a mean income of $14000 while females an income of $8300. (O’Regan 1996: 288)

\textsuperscript{12} The advent of significant numbers of females occupying these positions is not totally foreign to the Australian filmmaking milieu. As Creed (1994: 185) and Speed (1987: 25) have noted, women’s filmmaking in Australia has a history long before the revival and that:
In industrial practice, women in the 1990s are increasingly occupying spaces which were once reserved for males. With the achievements of female creative teams on feature films in the 1990s, it is now far more difficult to claim that: "[w]omen, white as well as black, have played a peripheral part in most Australian cinema", as Meaghan Morris did in 1989 (Morris 1989: 117). While women have been quite prolific in the areas of short and experimental filmmaking since the Revival, as Blonski, Creed and Freiberg's book, Don't Shoot Darling (1989) indicates, they made only minor contributions in the prominent creative positions on mainstream feature film production industry up until 1989. There were only, for instance, six mainstream feature films directed by women during this time. In this thesis I have focused predominantly on mainstream feature filmmaking. My rationale for not taking up experimental cinema to any great extent is encapsulated by Elizabeth Grosz's remarks concerning the unwanted side-effects of the creation of alternatives unrelated to mainstream cinema:

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12 The advent of significant numbers of females occupying these positions is not totally foreign to the Australian filmmaking milieu. As Creed (1994: 185) and Speed (1987: 25) have noted, women's filmmaking in Australia has a history long before the revival and that:

[I]t certainly did not commence with feminism in the late 60s. From 1921 and 1933 at least sixteen feature films were either directed or produced by Australian women filmmakers ... (Creed 1994: 185)

Approximately 100 productions were made over that period. (see Pike & Cooper 1980)

These producers and directors included Lottie Lyall, Yvonne Parvis, Louise Lovely and the McDonagh sisters, Isobela and Paulette (a director/producer team). Some of the more renown titles include Sunshine Sally (Lawson Harris, 1922), Jewelled Nights (Louise Lovely & Witton welch 1925), The Cheaters (Paulette McDonagh, 1929) and Far Paradise (Paulette McDonagh, 1928) (Creed 1994: 185).

13 As Blonski and Freiberg have noted:

One of the first impulses of women’s films was to create a repertoire of images, narratives and situations designed to counter hegemonic definitions and the second issue became the question of how things are said ... The idea of creating a counter cinema — issues such as abortion, women's health, women and labour, sexuality — were the subjects of feminist counter cinema, particularly documentaries throughout the 70s (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 191,196).

14 These were My Brilliant Career (Gillian Armstrong, 1979), Starstruck (Gillian Armstrong, 1982), Silver City (Sophia Turkiewicz, 1984), Fran (Glenda Hambly, 1985), Hightide (Gillian Armstrong, 1987), Sweetie (Jane Campion, 1989).
identifiable in the 1970s and 1980s. (French 1995: 42) Between 1991-1998 there were about 230 Australian features were produced.\textsuperscript{15} Of these, about 40 (or approximately 17\%) were directed by women.\textsuperscript{16} 96 or 42\% were produced or co-produced by women.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1989 Elizabeth Grosz argued that there needed to be more investigation of the distinctive contributions women are able to make, more specifically:

their particular skills, and their different ways of proceeding and creating. ... This does not mean that there is a common, single, 'female' way of proceeding, but rather that, given women's exclusion from equal participation in all spheres of social life, that at least some of their experiences are common and do not fit with prevailing frameworks. (Grosz 1989: 17)

Given the increase in production over the last decade, we now have a substantial body of women's cinema through which we can examine, compare and elicit trends. That women are bringing a new voice to Australian cinema in a way which has not been glimpsed before, and forging new spaces in which to represent their stories has been remarked upon by the filmmakers themselves. It has been often stated that:

women share and collectively bring an 'outsider's view'... a view which brings them to consider other ways of looking. About Only the Brave, director Ana Kokkinos and producer Fiona Eagger have said they both believe, 'women filmmakers can indeed create a different world to the one we have been accustomed to seeing at the movies'. Kokkinos has said that women also 'write different stories and therefore make different films' and also have a different sensibility in the 'way they direct, in the way they work with actors and in the way they tell a story'. Kokkinos points to the emphasis on inner-life rather than action ... (French 1997: 79)

\textsuperscript{15} These statistics have been taken from the Australian Film Commission's Australian Feature Films; A Checklist of Feature Film Production, May 1998.

\textsuperscript{16} I conducted my own survey and found that the percentage of female directors of feature films competing for the AFI awards from 1997-1999 are as follows: 1997: 29\%, 1998: 21\%, 1999: 28\%. (See Australian Film Festival Programme 1997, 1998, 1999) This roughly reflects the proportion of women, (29\%), cited as directors (film/stage/radio/TV) in the Australian Film Commissions' Get the Picture publication, 1998.

\textsuperscript{17} This figure looks a lot healthier than it is because often there are two or sometimes even three producers for the one film.
Actor Miranda Otto has also noticed the differences working with a totally female crew. She speaks about her experiences of working with the female crew on the film The Well (Samantha Lang, 1997):

"When women work together, you are inclined to tell more secrets. And I think there's a real woman's quality that they bring to a film: an eye for detail and for humanity, how people behave and why they do things. Some men have it too, but it's much more evident in women directors. It's a film that demands you expose a lot of yourself and do things that are quite confronting, sometimes it can be a lot easier with a lot of women there ..." (Williams 1997: 36)

Critic Richard Jinman has also remarked upon the importance of the writer/director in articulating her own unique vision:

The rise of the female writer/director [in Australia] has also been important. While a writer/director is hired to interpret someone else's script, the writer/director of a low budget film has an unparalleled opportunity to convey her vision. A glance at the work of Campion, Moorhouse and younger writer/directors such as Barrett and Pellizzari reveals this can often be a uniquely feminine perspective. Pellizzari — who made a 16-year-old Australian/Italian girl the central character in Fistful of Flies [1998]— says: "I think if women are allowed to they will make different films [to men]. They have a different view of the world and the writing is less linear, more mosaic." (Jinman 1996: 11)

If females are more aware of space because of social conditions and other environmental factors that Kathleen Kirby argues in Indifferent Boundaries then surely this is going to affect the way that space is represented by females on screen. Throughout this thesis I am primarily concerned with the methods some film female directors employ to represent space in such a way that it overcomes the limitations of dominant representations of space. I argue that up until recently some spaces were rarely seen on screen or if they were they

\[\text{\footnotesize 18} \text{ In his essay "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" Jameson objects to the phenomenological trend in cultural studies, the increasing interest in analyses of the lived experience of time and space" because this mode of existence reflects only imaginary functions. (Kirby 1996a: 62) Kirby observes that "we must wonder what power a politics excluding the everyday and the 'personal' would have for accounting for women's oppression." (Kirby 1996a: 62) Kirby also suggests that contrary to Jameson's ideas, "orientation" is not a generalisable project and that space can be negotiated on a number of different levels. For example because of the ever present threat of physical attack, a woman is always quite conscious of the position of exits, darkened stairwells, and blind corners. (Kirby 1996a: 62)\]
were rarely examined by critics as significant sites.\textsuperscript{19} I therefore investigate some of these representations of so-called traditional female or domestic spaces; the house and the suburb. It is in “discovering, reclaiming and revaluing ‘traditional’ women’s spaces that a further dimension has been added to the spatial disciplines”. (Johnson 1989: 42)\textsuperscript{20} The spatial division of everyday life into a so-called public arena and private sphere, the former associated with men and the latter with women, has been a central theme of feminist discussion for decades. (McDowell 1999: 36)\textsuperscript{21}

Grosz argues that feminists should use the cinema to self-reflexively examine their history. This, she suggests, may involve changing many of the processes of cinematic production, including:

foregrounding the colours, shapes or general visualness of cinema; or using cinematic techniques to appeal to senses other than the visual; or on the level of plot, character and content, creating non-stereotyped, ambiguous and irreducible terms, terms not amenable to or explicable by the norms of masculinity. ... [T]here are always other ways to represent, other modes of signification, other techniques to be developed and pleasures to be experienced than those which are dominant today... (Grosz 1989: 19)

\textsuperscript{19} Ian Craven has argued that shifts in the institutional organisation of film production in the late 1980s have produced on-screen spatial shifts. He suggests a proliferation of more suburban fictions have been a result of this. More specifically, Craven observes, the presence of growing numbers of women writers and directors have shifted the cinema’s focus from more masculine topographies and narrative preoccupations. (Craven 1995: 57)

\textsuperscript{20} As Louise Johnson has remarked: “Naming women's spaces is itself a radical exercise, an important part of the reformulation of the spatial disciplines with profound consequences both for the conceptualisation of disciplinary concerns and outcomes of subsequent policy and planning decisions.” (Johnson 1989: 40)

\textsuperscript{21} Geographer Doreen Massey has even suggested that space and time have different gendered associations:

There is a whole set of dualisms which whose terms are commonly aligned with time and space. With time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason and portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. (Massey 1994: 257)
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Grosz wrote this in 1989. Female directors are now employing exactly these kinds of strategies.\textsuperscript{22} Commonplace events become extraordinary in the work of particular female directors — particularly Jane Campion, Shirley Barrett and Sue Brooks.\textsuperscript{23} A certain clarity is brought to quotidian or prosaic situations and environments while everyday dialogue and events are portrayed as eccentric. It is these specificities, combined with the representation of filmic place, that has led me to theorise about the feminization of space in Australian cinema.

Several feminist writers (Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988) have broadly argued that women in commercial cinema have had little relevance beyond their representations as sexual objects for the (male) voyeur. Their function is to establish an ‘essential’ set of societal values and norms against which the (male) hero must rebel. The purpose of this thesis is not to critique the representation of women in mainstream Australian cinema. Nor is it to investigate industrial practice or policy and discover why there are not more women filmmakers. (Those established women filmmakers will keep producing films and with appropriate funding incentives, their numbers will gradually increase.)\textsuperscript{24} Rather, the purpose is to examine the contribution made by such filmmakers to the public aesthetic of Australian cinema.

\textsuperscript{22} "Within this cycle of women-centred narratives Lizzie Francke (1993: 18) finds an 'Australasian new female wave' in a 'new generation of women directors ...'. These directors — Ann Turner, Alison Maclean and Tracey Moffatt — are 'marked by a similarly skewed vision of the world, particularly when it comes to the traditional female preoccupations of family and friends.'" (O'Regan 1998)

\textsuperscript{23} O'Regan has remarked that: "Campion and later [mainly female] directors appropriated the repertoires of Australian ugliness and vitality and translated these across the gender divide. They opened out a terrain of representation for Australian women in which they can be energetic, daggy, ugly, freakish and simply unconventional." (O'Regan 1998)

\textsuperscript{24} I hope! The Australian Film Commission’s disbanding of its Women’s Programme, which has supported the development of films by, for and about women, will
0.6 Outline of Chapters

This thesis moves beyond generally accepted notions associated with locale, opening up the field of criticism to acknowledge the topographic diversity which exists Australian Cinema. Acknowledging this diversity has come from my focus, primarily, on domestic, or private spheres.25 In the main, but not exclusively, I have chosen to analyse films with female creative control. The films: Lilian's Story (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1995), Dance Me to My Song (Rolf de Heer, 1994) and Muriel's Wedding (P.J. Hogan, 1994) are the exceptions.26 These films exemplify the prevailing trend I identify. I have also specifically chosen films with central female protagonists, but have not looked exclusively at relationships between women. Each of the works considered in this thesis is concerned with the ways place inscribes and is inscribed by the subjects who inhabit it. The locales which form the basis of the following chapters are analysed with the following questions in mind: How are women literally located in these fictions? What is their interaction with space in these various locales? What is the nature of their interaction with other characters and how is that interaction governed by the space they are in? While my thesis focuses specifically on films from the last decade, I am also conscious of drawing from the archive of Australian Cinema. I attempt to be consistently aware of acknowledging my Australian, middle-class, female, inner-urban subject

however no doubt have a significant impact on the future contribution of women to the industry. (See Kaufman 2000: 5 and Mills 2000: 16)

25 While I argue that many of these films are revaluing the domestic domain, I am not maintaining an essentialist feminist position on this issue. However the social reality is that women do spend more time than men in domestic spheres, and these spheres are often relegated to the bottom-end of the spatial hierarchy. This has allowed the division of public and private, and the spatial hierarchy, to be maintained and perpetuated.

26 Interestingly while these films do not have female directors, they have significant female contribution in the writing and production process — Lilian’s Story is based on the novel by Kate Grenville and produced in part by Marian MacGowan, Dance Me to My Song was partly based on the script by Heather Rose, Muriel’s Wedding was produced by Lynda House and Jocelyn Moorhouse.
positioning in relation to these films and to the approach that I have adopted.\textsuperscript{27}

The method I have chosen to structure this thesis as a whole is to work through chapters dealing with specific locales rather than thematically. This approach produces two drawbacks. First, in attempting to define and analyse the significance of those \textit{crucial locales} which form the basis of each of my five chapters — the rural sphere, the roadscape, the suburban sphere, the body and the home — I am inevitably excluding other spaces which contribute to the topographic diversity of Australian cinema. Second, in reducing my thesis to these locales and forcing artificial divisions between chapters (and between spaces) I inevitably face other problems because most films do not involve one unitary locale but rather move fluidly across spatial boundaries.

The structure of this thesis moves from the inside out. In the first chapter I begin where all geography starts, and that is with the body. I then move to other interior spaces — Chapter Two examines the house, more specifically the notion of ‘returning home’. Chapter Three focuses on another domestic space — suburbia. The potentially mobile zone of the car constitutes the subject of the fourth chapter before driving into the country town, in the final one. Each individual chapter follows roughly the same structure. I commence with a theoretical overview of the space being examined within the Australian cultural context. This is then followed by a charting of Australian cinema’s representation of that space since the Revival\textsuperscript{28} before moving on to a

\textsuperscript{27} Ching and Creed have noted that authors should, when writing, not only consider their nationality, gender, class and ethnicity but also their \textit{spatial} positioning.

\textsuperscript{28} The ‘Revival’ loosely refers to the period in the early 1970s when there was an upsurge of Australian film production. This occurred after a long drought in the industry during the postwar period when most of the feature films made in Australia were products of American and British production companies. (McFarlane 1999: 410)
discussion of specific films within the context of theories previously discussed.

The foundations for this thesis are laid in Chapter One, which examines the significance of the body. This chapter is particularly important in the context of the whole work because it theorises the space of filmic embodiment. This necessarily precedes an exploration of the female body’s negotiation and interaction with other environments on screen, which I address in subsequent chapters. From a geographical perspective, the body is the site of the individual: "with more or less impermeable boundaries between one body and another." (McDowell 1999:34) Many critics have lamented Australian cinema’s obsession with dysfunctional sex(uality), which borders at times on somatophobia. In Chapter One I argue that a shift is occurring in the way female bodies are depicted in space on screen. The new model is being created by predominantly female creative teams. Films such as Aya (Solrun Hoass, 1990), Sweetie (Jane Campion, 1989), Oscar & Lucinda (Gillian Armstrong, 1998), Vacant Possession (Margot Nash, 1995), The Well, High Tide (Gillian Armstrong, 1987), Radiance (Rachel Perkins, 1998) and Love and Other Catastrophes (Emma-Kate Croghan, 1996) continue Australian Cinema’s long tradition of sex as a battleground between the genders. However, these films also construct complex kinds of female subjectivity which involve attempts by the characters themselves to articulate a sense of their own sexuality. Female sexuality will be a continuing tangential concern throughout the thesis as we venture into other spaces, especially in relation to suburbia and the car. My film analysis in this chapter is particularly informed by the growing body of theory in the field of human (and feminist) geography on the body such as studies by Linda McDowell, Elizabeth Grosz and Iris Marion Young. The final part of this chapter involves an analysis of two variants of female embodiment — the maternal body and the disabled body — in the films:
Waiting (Jackie McKimmie, 1991) and Dance Me To My Song (Rolf de Heer, 1998). I argue that these two films reconfigure the mind/body dichotomy and enact the concept of meaningful embodiment. The construction of mise-en-scène and filmic space in Waiting constitutes, I argue, a third gendered space — that of the pregnant woman.

The approach adopted in my second chapter on ‘the home’, is part phenomenological, part psychoanalytical and part postcolonial. A developing trend in Australian cinema depicts mature female and male characters, but particularly female ones, returning to their childhood homes and exploring unresolved familial issues within that time/space of the past. I analyse the significance of the sphere of the home and its haunting interiors for the central female protagonists in the following films — Vacant Possession, Lilian’s Story (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1995) and Radiance. My mapping of the oneiric qualities of the houses in these films has been informed particularly by the work of Gaston Bachelard in his Poetics of Space, and David Malouf in his fascinating topoanalysis of the Queensland bungalow (1987), which particularly influences my reading of Perkins’ Radiance. Freud’s theory of ‘the uncanny’ is also central to this chapter. With the help of Gelder and Jacobs’ discussion of the postcolonial uncanny along with my theorisation of the filmic uncanny I investigate the meanings invested in the sphere of the home for the characters who inhabit them. I argue that in both Vacant Possession and Radiance, the house becomes a metonym for the nation-state. The destruction of the houses at the end of both films symbolises the unsettling of the foundations of the nation-state and has profound implications for the issue of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Professional observers have often asserted that Australia is the most suburbanised culture on earth and census statistics tend to confirm this.
(Craven 1995: 45) In many ways the locale addressed in my third chapter, “Suburban Subversions” flows directly from Chapter Two on ‘the house’. Chapter Three however, takes its approach from contemporary Australian cultural theory and sociology. It is primarily concerned with investigating female protagonists’ negotiation of the houses and backyards of suburbia in contemporary Australian cinema. Taking five films with female centred narratives; Aya, Sweetie, Floating Life (Clara Law, 1995), Australian Dream (Jackie McKimmie, 1992) and Muriel’s Wedding (PJ Hogan, 1994) I examine the way the central female characters subvert the suburban paradigm, either by escaping from the physical space itself or by attempting to render subtle internal subversions within that space. I also examine how the suburbs have created an inbetween or interstitial space. They are neither city nor country, and have elements of both private and public spheres. Contrary to the negative attributes constantly associated with suburbia — that it is culturally and spiritually barren and sterile — I argue it is exactly this ‘inbetweenness’, this strange space between the city/county dichotomy which makes suburbia, and the characters which inhabit it, so fascinating. The construction of the abject is central to my discussion of Sweetie. This ‘strangeness’ is also clearly evidenced in films which represent migrants’ perspectives of suburbia and their subsequent transformation of Australian homes and backyards, as in Solrun Hoax’s Aya and Floating Life.

The interior cabin of the car is one sphere which has often been overlooked because it is, for most people in Australia (apart from autophiliacs and revheads) just an unexceptional, functional part of the scope (or scape) of everyday life — like houses, suburbs and country towns. 29 In Chapter Four,

29 To illustrate how pervasive cars are in Australian cinema, the 1997 AFI festival included fourteen feature films — six of which contained explicit road movie elements; True Love and Chaos, Doing Time for Patsy Cline, Heaven’s Burning, Kiss or Kill, The Well and Road to Null. For another three, The Castle, Blackrock and Idiot Box the
"Volatile Vehicles", I explore the significance of vehicular space and more specifically, characters' interaction within the cocooned interior of the car and with the mobile mise-en-scène around them. I argue that the controlled interior of the automobile structures a sphere for particular types of interaction between characters to occur.\textsuperscript{30} Given that the road is often deemed a masculine domain, in this chapter I focus on what happens when women take the wheel. In the films I analyse it becomes evident that alternative vehicular visions arise through the process of what I have termed 'domestic journeying'. Using the following films, The Last Days of Chez Nous (Gillian Armstrong, 1992), High Tide, Sweetie, Radiance, The Well and the short film Peel (Jane Campion, 1983), I show how the car in these films becomes an extension of or even an alternative domestic space to the house. The volatility of the car is as much to do with its potential mobility as with the way power relations become manifested in the interior cabin. Dysfunctional interaction between characters can become magnified leading to stasis, or alternatively the car can be seen as a utopian site in which to reconstitute familial relations.

Another pervasive locale in the context of Australian cinema is the country town.\textsuperscript{31} For the most part, the country town in Australian cinema has functioned as a transitory space for protagonists on their way to another destination (True Love and Chaos, Priscilla, Spider and Rose (Bill Bennett, 1994).

\textsuperscript{30} On the one hand it can be an arena of freedom where new versions of yourself can be tested against what Kerouac has called "the protective anonymity of the road" (Eyerman & Löfgren 1995: 64-5) while on the other it can be a site of death, destruction or even procreation.

\textsuperscript{31} Six of the nineteen films at the 1998 AFI festival contained explicit elements of plots located in country towns or the rural sphere — Hurrah (Frank Shields), In the Winter Dark (James Bogle), A Little Bit of Soul (Peter Duncan), Radiance (Rachel Perkins) and The Sound of One Hand Clapping (Richard Flanagan). In 1997, the proportion was even higher; seven out of a total of fourteen — Doing Time for Patsy Cline (Chris Kennedy), Blackrock (Steve Vidler), Heaven's Burning (Craig Lahiff), Kiss or Kill (Bill Bennett), Road
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Sometimes characters get trapped in them and they become “places of purgatory for heroes in transition” (Tulloch 1981: 357), where parochial and patriarchal values manifest in hostility and suspicion towards outsiders (Shame, High Tide, Doing Time For Patsy Cline, Priscilla, Welcome to Woop Woop (Stephan Elliot, 1998). Chapter Five, “Prosaic Rural Terrain”, focuses on the ways country towns have been depicted in films from the last decade. In general they are seen in opposition to a fixed, imagined urban normalcy. Contrary to their general depiction of being inimical to women, the country town spheres that I examine in the films, Love Serenade (Shirley Barrett), and Road to Nhill (Sue Brooks) subvert this notion. Both films depict complex interaction between the female characters and their environment. Using Stuart Aitken’s and Leo Zonn’s theory of transactional analysis I show that specific image-events in both films enable the viewer to glimpse the mundane in the extraordinary and vice versa. Although the country towns in these films are still conveyed as prosaic terrain, their surreal lensing, I argue, leads to the reconceptualising of rusticity. Road to Nhill especially achieves this through its disruption of the city/country binary.

It signals a significant achievement for women in the film industry that a study such as this one, focusing on mainstream Australian feature films produced by predominantly female creative teams, could not have been undertaken a decade ago. While each of the films analysed in this thesis has something individually to say about the issue of space (and other issues) in the cinema, when taken together I believe that a clear trend is developing which has led me to theorise that a feminisation of space is occurring in Australian cinema. Finally, this work has been inspired not only by the films themselves but it has also developed from the numerous ideas and concepts

to Nhill (Sue Brooks), True Love and Chaos (Stavros Efthymiou) and The Well (Samantha Lang).
of theorists spanning a variety of disciplines. With this thesis, I am primarily concerned with making a contribution to the fields of film/media studies, cultural geography, feminist theory and cultural theory within the Australian context.
Chapter One — The Body

Somatic Obsessions:
Female Geographies of Embodiment

1.0 Backgrounding the body

1.1 Bodily Dilemmas: From Gender to Meaningful Embodiment

1.2 Charting Australian cinema’s “obsessive concern with the pleasures of the body”

1.3 Waiting: Pregnant Embodiment in the Landscape

1.3.1 The Maternal Third Gender

1.4 Dance me to my Song: Erotic Embodiment but Contorted Corporeality

1.5 Conclusion: Autonomous & Meaningful Bodies
1.0 Backgrounding the body

Any exploration of space and place must start with the body. Our bodies are our initial access to the world and in part they shape our comprehension of it. Being in the world rests as much on comprehension through bodily experience as on cerebral activity. The question I address here is whether being on-screen in Australian cinema portrays the impossibility of the mind/body split. One of the over-riding aims of this chapter is to show the way in which some contemporary Australian cinema, like feminist theory, is posing a challenge to the mind/body dichotomy. My use of the term ‘embodiment’ posits a reconciliation of this dichotomy. I want to move beyond just thinking about bodies on screen to showing how characters feel and experience what it is to be a body.¹ That is, I will endeavour to show how filmmakers approach the way the filmic body is subjectively lived by characters on screen. This chapter provides a foundation for the thesis by theorising the space of filmic embodiment before exploring the body’s negotiation and interaction with other environments on screen in subsequent chapters.


¹ As Vivien Sobchack has noted, thinking about bodies means that they are “always posited in their objective mode, always seen from the vantage point of an other ... feeling what it is be my body (lived by me uniquely from my side of it, even as it is also simultaneously accessible to and lived by others on their side). In this regard, it is especially important that we redeem for critical thought an understanding of the body that includes our bodies — that is, bodies not merely as they are objectively seen, but also as they are subjectively and synoptically lived ...” (Sobchack 1999: 47).
1962, Sobchack 1999), imaginary bodies (Gatens 1996), along with the connections between sexuality and space (Cream 1995, Rose 1993, Bell & Valentine 1995). Synonymous with the other more traditional cinematic sites of action which will be encountered throughout the chapters of this thesis, the body, as Linda McDowell and many other feminist theorists have recognised, can be conceptualised as a 'place' too:

Although geographers might not readily think of the body as a place, it is one. The body is the place, the location or the site ... of the individual, with more or less impermeable boundaries between one body and another. While bodies are undoubtedly material, possessing a range of characteristics such as shape and size and so inevitably taking up space, the ways in which bodies are presented to and seen by others vary accordingly to the spaces and places in which they find themselves. (McDowell 1999: 34)

Within the context of Australian cinema, if we regard the body as a 'place' or cultural site, in much the same way McDowell does, interesting implications emerge. Films which focus on the body and sex are by no means a new phenomenon. The first films produced during the revival of the Australian film industry in the early 1970s were, to say the very least, bodily obsessed. Critics have noted and often lamented the body's (dysfunctional) centrality for decades:

There is a tradition of hysteria about the body in Australian Cinema; it runs from the 'chunderscapes' of Burstall's Stork (1971) to the sex and toilet jokes of Tom Jeffrey's The Odd Angry Shot ... (Morris 1980: 134)

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2 McDowell goes on to say that, "traditionally the discipline has focused on the public arena to the exclusion of the private, and the body, with its attributes and performances and its sexuality, has been firmly identified as exactly that: as fundamentally a private concern ... recent feminist work shows how the body itself is constructed through public discourses and practices that occur at a variety of spatial scales." (McDowell 1999: 35)

3 Scott Murray has also commented on the 'ocker' male's dysfunctional relationship with his body: "Australian males are shown as happiest when among themselves ... The sex act is often performed by them when drunk, a car bonnet (The FJ Holden, etc.) or scrap of scrubby land (Wake in Fright, et al.) just as good as a bed. The advantage for the male of being drunk is that he doesn't have to communicate with the female afterwards. For him, sex is a need that has to be got out of the way when nature calls; it is not a desired ideal, except by romantic school boys who know no better. This helps push Australian women to the sidelines of male society, unwanted for true companionship, their contribution to society, or for their intellectual and artistic gifts." (Murray 1994: 132-3)
Writing almost two decades after Meaghan Morris, Mary Colbert continues to lament the absence of 'genuine erotica' and the emphasis on dysfunctional sex in Australian cinema which is perhaps indicative of an inherent somatophobia existing in our cinema:

...picture the Australian Kamasutra: Alvin Purple's Rabelaisian romps, the tacky thrustings in *Idiot Box*, Bad Boy Bubby's incestuous grapples with his mum, the bumbling zipper scene in *Muriel's Wedding*, the Greek boy's serial rampage in *Head On*? (you lost count?) ... With the exception of some genuine erotica in Jane Campion's *The Piano*, the few depictions that break the drought in Australian film tend to be simplistic, rushed, chauvinistic, aggressive — dysfunctional sex. Foreplay, sensuality, passion, erotica — the areas in which French film excels — have largely been bypassed. (Colbert 1999: 6)

After viewing four recent Australian films, *Head On* (1998, Ana Kokkinos), *Praise* (1998, John Curran) *Dance Me to My Song* (1998, Rolf de Heer) and *Strange Fits of Passion* (1999, Elise McCredie) one could readily jump to the conclusion that Meaghan Morris's earlier claims concerning the 'hysteria about the body' are still apposite. Focusing solely on this aspect however would deny the existence of a number of recent films where the body, more specifically the female body and sexuality, are taking on new complexities. Section 1.2 of this chapter will briefly chart Australian cinema's more renowned somatic obsessions, from the ocker cycle of films to the lesser known feminist counter-cinema which has existed outside of the mainstream, to contemporary mainstream film making. In this section, I argue that a shift is occurring in the way female bodies are depicted in space on screen. This shift is being predominantly influenced by the work of many female creative teams.⁴

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⁴ While this chapter, and my thesis generally focuses more specifically on representations of female embodiment there is also a growing a body of films in which the significance of masculinity and space is being explored, more specifically in relation to gay experiences of corporeality in films such as *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliot, 1994), *The Sum of Us* (Kevin Dowling, 1994) and *Head On* (Ana Kokkinos, 1998). Elise McCredie's film, *Strange Fits of Passion* (1999), also involves an investigation of male sexuality as a corollary to the central female character's sexual (non)awakening.
Sections 1.3 and 1.4 of this chapter will focus on an analysis of two variants of female embodiment — the maternal body and the disabled body — and their representation in the films: Waiting (1991, Jackie McKimmie) and Dance Me To My Song (1998, Rolf de Heer). My analysis is informed by the growing body of theory in the field of human and especially feminist geography. I argue that these two films challenge the centrality of the mind/body split and attempt to present autonomous, embodied female subjects. By the closing sequences of both these films the central female protagonists have acknowledged their own meaningful embodiment.

1.1 Bodily Dilemmas: From Gender to Meaningful Embodiment

... the body and sexuality have a key dominance in contemporary cultures in industrial societies in ways previously unparalleled. These material changes are accompanied by the theoretical shifts that have occurred in the 'postmodern' period. ... The deconstruction of the centrality of the opposition between the mind and the body established in Enlightenment thought has been a key element of this work. (McDowell 1999: 38)

Before embarking on charting Australian cinema's "obsessive concern with the pleasures of the body", I want to clarify my use of the term embodiment within the context of contemporary theoretical discussion. As I mentioned at the outset, central also to my notion of 'embodiment', is its challenge to the mind/body split and the notion of becoming. I bring together several associated concepts from different intellectual trajectories in order to provide a framework for my theory of embodiment; they include Grosz's concept of the sexed 'body image', Butler's idea of gender taking on a performative role, McDowell's notion of the fluidity and malleability of bodies in space, together with Sobchack's phenomenological perspective of bodies as subjectively 'lived in'. It seems to me that although these theorists come from varying disciplines and use different terminology they are all attempting to articulate a similar concept. As I am primarily theorising female embodiment it is necessary to
return to three other concepts: gender, the body and sexuality and their relationship to sexual difference. These concepts are inextricably linked to embodiment so for the sake of clarity I will prise them apart and deal with them individually before showing how they work together to produce a theory of embodiment which will prove useful for this particular study.

The term ‘gender’ has been central to feminist theory since 1970s. The political imperative of using the term ‘gender’ (instead of ‘sex’) was originally to assert that sexual difference was socially constructed, rather than something which was innate. The term ‘sex’ on the other hand, pointed to the bodily or biological differences between men and women. At the time it was obvious why such terms were employed. As Grosz (1994: xiv) argues, “women have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body”, so that thinking about sexual difference in terms of the body and biology (ie. ‘sex’) “seemed a dangerous move for feminists” (Birke 1991: 448). Much earlier, Adrienne Rich remarked that “the body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit” (Rich 1979: 40). So employing the term ‘gender’ in one sense enabled feminists (theoretically at least) not to be defined solely by their bodies (to travel as ‘disembodied spirits’) and pursue equality on intellectual grounds in the public sphere. However some theorists soon began asking whether women should have to ‘shrug off their bodies’ in order to improve their position in society, gain promotions and attain equality. Surely women’s specific experience(s) of being in their bodies — the experiences of menstruation, and (potential capacity for) pregnancy, childbirth and lactation to name the obvious — gives them a unique perspective on the world and enables them to access a particular set of (bodily) knowledges? Is using the term ‘gender’ just an
extension of the binary way in which the (patriarchal) world is constructed: men are to culture as women are to nature?

More recently, use of the term 'gender' has come under increasing scrutiny. Moira Gatens (1996) has critiqued the sex/gender division by arguing that the distinction is an extension of dualistic conceptions of body and mind. The term 'gender' has often been employed to deny the importance of the materiality of the body, and Gatens argues that this leads to a neutralisation of sexual difference. If we argue that sexual difference and its associated corporeal aspects are unimportant, then surely this mitigates (against?) the reasons for women to have control over their own bodies and their representations. In order to overcome these problems along with the mind/body, gender/sex binaries, Gatens adopts the notion of a sexed 'body image' which takes account of the meaning of materiality of the body (Gatens 1996: xii).

Elizabeth Grosz also discusses the notion of the 'body image'. In her book, Volatile Bodies, she stresses the enigmatic status of the female body throughout history and asserts that theorists of the body image (be they neurophysiologists, psychoanalysts, philosophers) never overtly specify that male experience is taken as the norm for their theories on the 'human body', whilst women's experience is either ignored or taken as deviant. In Volatile Bodies, Grosz attests to the paramount importance of placing the body at the centre of studies on subjectivity and understanding sexual difference so that universalising (and neutralising) assumptions about the human body can no longer be taken for granted.5 As Grosz has made us aware, the instances of hypochondria, hysteria, the phantom limb phenomenon, along with issues of

5 Grosz claims that Foucault, for instance, did not address the specific sexed differences in the production of masculine and feminine bodies.
sexuality and pregnancy, often allude to the fluidity and pliability of the body which is often considered inert, fixed and passive. The biological body, she asserts, exists for the subject only through the mediation of an image or series of (social/cultural) images of the body and its capacity for movement and action (1994: 41). The 'body image' thus exists somewhere between the mind and the body. Grosz discusses sexual difference in terms of the body as marked:

by a range of voluntary practices, habits, lifestyles that distinguish female from male bodies: make-up, stilettos, bras, hairspray, clothing, underclothing mark women’s bodies in ways in which hairstyles, professional training, personal grooming, gait, posture, body-building, and sports may mark men’s (Grosz 1994: 142).

Judith Butler on the other hand looks at ‘gender’ in terms of it taking on a performative role. This is similar to Grosz’s remarks above concerning body image taking on ‘a range of voluntary practices’. Butler describes gender as: “the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 1990: 33).

To provide a concrete example within the context of Australian cinema, one way in which bodies can be regarded as gendered or sexed is the different meanings inferred through a character depicted vomiting. While designated as neither ‘feminine’ nor ‘masculine’ behaviour, vomiting, or ‘chundering’ in ocker-speak, signifies totally different implications depending on whether a female or male character is involved in the process. For males, chundering, a process which played a notable role in the ocker films, inevitably signifies an extreme state of inebriation. For female characters however, it is the most direct way for the filmmaker to signify a pregnancy (and thus imminent baby, abortion or miscarriage in the narrative) to the viewers.⁶

⁶ For examples of females vomiting(!) to signify pregnancy see The Last Days of Chez Nous, True Love and Chaos, Caddie, Radiance.
Another approach to embodiment is to look at bodies from a phenomenological perspective, or as subjectively ‘lived in’. In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz draws on the phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty’s work. He tries to challenge dualist structures of thought, and the mind/body dichotomy in particular. Merleau-Ponty locates experience midway between mind and body. He argues:

that experience is necessarily always embodied, corporeally constituted, located in the subject’s incarnation. Experience can only be understood between mind and body — or across them — in their lived conjunction. (Merleau-Ponty cited in Grosz 1994: 95)

As I noted in my introduction I want to move beyond thinking about bodies in their objective mode to showing how they are depicted on screen subjectively. Vivien Sobchack has argued that it is important that we redeem for critical thought an understanding of the body that “includes our bodies — that is, bodies not merely as they are objectively seen, but also as they are subjectively and synoptically and synesthetically lived.” (Sobchack 1999: 47) So although vision is a vital way in which we conceptualise our bodies, they are lived in ways far beyond the visual sense-making capacities. Merleau-Ponty writes that: “My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension’”. (1962: 235) Here we can see the way in which Sobchack and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the body as subjectively ‘lived in’ melds with Grosz use of the ‘body image’, which involves a mediation of an image of the body along with its capacity for action and movement.

The final aspect of embodiment which I wish to discuss here is sexuality. Michel Foucault stated that sexuality is concerned with ‘the body and its pleasures’. (1979) The ways in which female characters enact their sexuality in a variety of spaces on screen is a central focus of this work. Sexuality
Chapter One — The Body

ecapsulates a range of different meanings. In this thesis I will use the term to refer to sexual desire or drive, and the various identities and social practices which are affected by the beliefs and ideologies which sanction or regulate specific sexual activities. (McDowell 1999: 39) To extend this definition I draw here on Grosz’s explanation of sexuality. She specifies four different senses or uses of the term. The first use of the term is commonly associated with psychoanalysis and posits sexuality as a drive or impulse which directs a subject towards an object. Secondly, sexuality can be understood as an act, “a series of practices, and behaviours involving bodies, organs and pleasures, usually but not always involving orgasm.” (Grosz 1994: viii). Thirdly, sexuality can be related to identity and used to describe the binary opposition male/female, often connoted by the term ‘gender’. And finally sexuality refers to a set of orientations, positions and desires, which implies that there are particular ways in which the desires, differences and bodies of subjects can seek their pleasure”. (Grosz 1994: viii) Grosz’s fourth sense of ‘sexuality’ is an extension of Foucault’s argument that there is nothing ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ about bodily pleasures and sexual practices and that during different periods there was common agreement about what was accepted as ‘normal’ and what was accepted as ‘transgressive’. As Angela Carter remarked, even in the bedroom when we imagine we are engaging in the most ‘private’ and ‘natural’ of activities, we drag in with us ‘the baggage of our society’ which influences who puts what where.7 (Carter cited in McDowell 1999: 50)

To conclude this section I want to draw a distinction between the terms ‘the body’ and ‘embodiment’. ‘The body’ will refer to the biological body whereas ‘embodiment’, stresses the lived conjunction of both body and mind. The

7 In quoting this statement, I am reminded of the ridiculous scene in The Adventures of Barry McKenzie where in order to increase his chances of getting laid, the naive and virginal Barry puts chicken curry down his pants, misunderstanding the notion of Kamasutra, and demonstrating the variations on “who puts what where”.
material aspect of embodiment cannot be denied and the term tries to convey
that the body is neither inert nor passive, but subjectively ‘lived in’ and
continuously becoming. McDowell elaborates on this notion of embodiment:

... embodiment ... captures the sense of fluidity, of becoming and
of performance that is a key element in the recent theoretical
approaches that question the relationship between anatomy and
social identities ... the body is not taken for granted as a fixed
entity but is instead seen as having a plasticity or malleability
which means that it can take different forms and shapes at
different times, and also have a geography. (McDowell 1999: 39)

This notion of ‘malleability’ is particularly relevant in relation to the films I
discuss below concerning maternal embodiment and disabled corporeality.
For the character in Waiting, pregnant embodiment is a temporary experience
which attests to the plasticity of the body and its ability to ‘take different
forms and shapes at different times’. At moments in this film we also have
insight into how the pregnant woman’s body is subjectively ‘lived’. In relation
to Dance Me to My Song, the central character’s body is disabled but her mind
is not: hence it seems that different types of corporeality demand different
types of embodiment. The fact the character’s quest is to achieve recognition
of her sexuality within the confines of her disabled body attests to Dance Me to
My Song’s attempt to reconfigure the mind/body split. She enacts her
sexuality despite her disability. At the same time however the character
cannot disavow those elements of her body which are not ‘normal’ when it
comes to enacting her sexuality:

No part of the body is divested of all psychical interest without
severe psychical repercussions. Human subjects never simply

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8 Susan Wendell argues that we have to be wary of seeking to deconstruct this
mind/body dichotomy absolutely, for all bodies. She asserts that while feminists have
often sought to deconstruct this dichotomy because it inevitably leads to devaluing
the body and bodily experience, ‘suffering bodies’ often use the strategy of
dismemberment or transcendence from the body in order to deal with chronic pain
and/or illness. Robert Murphy, who became a quadriplegic after an illness, stated:
“My thoughts and sense of being alive have been driven back into my brain, where I
now reside ... my sense of self is otherwise shrunk to the confines of my head”.
(1990: 102, 193) At the same time however Wendell stresses the importance of
corporeal acceptance, as opposed to alienation, in the process of an illness or
disability: “For all the advantages that some degree of disembodying the self may
have in coping with illness or disability, the process of coming to identify with a sick
or disabled body can play a part in adjusting to it” (Wendell 1996: 177).
have a body; rather, the body is always necessarily the object of attitudes and judgements. It is psychically invested, never a matter of indifference. (Grosz 1994: 81)

The notion that the body has meaning, value and significance and is not merely a functional tool, encapsulates my definition of ‘meaningful embodiment’ which we shall return to in the final section of this chapter.

1.2 Charting Australian cinema’s “obsessive concern with the pleasures of the body”

Rather than reconfiguring the centrality of the mind/body split, the revival of the Australian film industry in the early to mid 1970s saw many films enact this split by focusing predominantly on one side of this binary — the corporeal — with an evident absence of anything remotely cerebral. Sex and bodily functions were a constant source of fascination to many mainstream (predominantly male) filmmakers (Tim Burstall, Bruce Beresford, Richard Franklin) as many critics have pointed out (Morris 1980; Colbert 1999; Enker 1994, O’Regan 1989; Dermody and Jacka 1988, Murray 1994). This so-called ‘ocker’ cycle of films resulted from a series of immense societal changes, including the rapidly liberating climate of the time. (Murray 1994: 73) Censorship had just been relaxed and Australia was emerging from being one of the most culturally repressive countries on earth to one of the most liberal. (Adams 1994: 67). But as well as liberating the body from the shackles of the past, the ocker cycle of films was a product of the wider artistic and institutional milieux in Australian television, theatre, literature and popular journalism at the time. (O’Regan 1989: 78) Tom O’Regan has described ocker’s obsession with the body:

If ocker represented the elevation of slang and bad manners, it did so in the context of an inventive anti-language for bodily functions, sex, drinking and women. Ocker implied a resolutely

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9 O’Regan 1989: 78

10 Adams continues: “From banning esoteric novels, we suddenly had full frontal nudity in television soaps.” (Adams 1994: 67)
hedonistic outlook. Out of this sprang its obsessive concern with the pleasures of the body. This led not only to the highlighting of drinking alcohol but also to the highlighting of sex — getting enough of it, not getting enough of it, talking about it ... A consequence of ocker's bodily emphases was that the mind could only be looked on as at best a repressed body, at worst with a suspicion that amounted to anti-intellectualism. (O'Regan 1989: 76)

However, to assert that this fascination with sex and somatic obsessions was limited primarily to the 'blokey escapades of Barry McKenzie' et al.\textsuperscript{11} as Colbert and others have done, would be to deny the existence of a large body of feminist counter-cinema many female filmmakers were producing during that time and subsequently. These films shared ocker's somatic fascination but revealed vastly different depictions of the female body which directly challenged those overtly misogynist and voyeuristic representations found in the ocker films. The problem of spectatorship and filming the woman's body became a central issue in many of these films (Creed 1989: 57) and many filmmakers employed novel strategies to deal with it such as presenting naked but active female bodies on screen or absenting the female body from the screen.

One of the first films to raise the issue of voyeurism and the whole problem of representing women's bodies on screen was a documentary called Size 10 (Sarah Gibson & Susan Lambert, 1978). (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 200) It consists of a series of interviews which are direct and confrontational in content and style. The film attempts to provoke through developing nonvoyeuristic representations of women's bodies where the women present themselves naked, in all their various forms and sizes, to their own and the viewer's gaze. (Gibson & Lambert 1987: 198)

\textsuperscript{11} The other ocker films include: Alvin Purple (Tim Burstall, 1973), Petersen (Tim Burstall, 1974), Melvin, Son of Alvin (John Eastway, 1984).
In exploring the issue of domestic violence, another film, by the same creative duo, *Behind Closed Doors* (1980), employs the opposite strategy — not showing women’s bodies at all. In this film, the anxiety about representing women’s bodies on screen and reproducing the voyeuristic pleasure which the cinema engenders in viewing women’s bodies is dealt with through the total effacement of the female body from the screen. (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 202) This denial of the female body is in direct contrast to the technique employed by Margot Nash in *We Aim to Please* (Robin Laurie & Margot Nash, 1977) which explicitly depicts women’s bodies but in a deliberately controversial and provocative manner. Addressed to an imagined male viewer, the film eschews notions of the ‘body beautiful’ and upturns the conventions through which women are conditioned to display their bodies for the pleasure of men. (Creed 1989: 57) As Creed has pointed out, the two female protagonists display their bodies in deliberately confrontational poses. (Creed 1989: 57)¹² Using a totally different strategy, *A Song of Ceylon* (Laleen Jayamanne, 1985) as Creed has argued, signifies a ‘return of the body’ through erotically charged images of deviant bodies. (1987a: 389) Through its exploration of the body in extremis, or caught within extreme states of being ranging from the narcissistic to the masochistic, *A Song of Ceylon* attempts to simultaneously deconstruct the notion of the gendered binary opposition and provide a direct critique of some feminists’ desire to recover the ‘essential’ female body. (Creed 1987a: 389)

In the mainstream filmmaking scene, a cycle of more conventional narrative filmmaking followed as a direct reaction to the somatic focus of the ochre films. The ‘period’ films or ‘AFC genre’ films of the late seventies and early

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¹² Creed continues, "Rather than represent a 'rape', and run the risk of appealing to voyeurism of viewers, the film suggests violence against women by showing a beer bottle smashing into the pink flesh of a watermelon." Also see Catriona Moore's excellent extensive discussion of *We Aim to Please* in Blonski, Creed & Freiberg's text. (1987: 358-370)
eighties displayed a more cerebral emphases.\(^\text{13}\) As Colbert has pointed out (1999: 6) a few significant films from these years were female-centred narratives and show women in complex situations where explorations of a more intellectual endeavour or political persuasion are pursued: films such as in *The Getting of Wisdom* (Bruce Beresford, 1977), *Caddie* (Donald Crombie, 1976), *My Brilliant Career* (Gillian Armstrong, 1979). These films also display Australian cinema’s noted and lamented tradition of heterosexual coupling as a battleground. This is a trend which has continued in contemporary times with a few notable exceptions (for example *Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann, 1992), *Paperback Hero* (Antony Bowman, 1999)). As Mary Colbert has noted, *Praise* continues this tradition which was central to much seventies and eighties cinema such as *Don’s Party* (Bruce Beresford, 1976), *FJ Holden* (Michael Thornhill, 1977), *Monkey Grip* (Ken Cameron, 1982), *Petersen, My Brilliant Career, Shame* (Steve Jodrell, 1987), *My First Wife* (Paul Cox, 1984), *Celia* (Anne Turner, 1989) (Colbert 1999: 6). Debi Enker articulated the despairing vision of sex and intimacy between men and women in *FJ Holden*:

> The young adults who are the focus of the film seem hollow, clearly unsatisfied yet oddly inert. They play out their ritualised mating games like passionless robots: men drunkenly initiate and women obediently comply. There is no visceral connection between the characters: they barely talk and, when they have sex, it is primitive and almost mechanical (Enker 1994: 211).

The films with predominantly female creative control discussed in this thesis do not generally present more optimistic depictions of relations (sexual or otherwise) between men and women. On inspection they seem to reinforce the bleak and despairing view of Enker and others, especially in the case of *Australian Dream, Aya, Muriel’s Wedding, Love Serenade, Waiting, Radiance, Sweetie, Dance Me to My Song,* and *Vacant Possession.* What is different about these films produced in the last ten years is that they have managed to

\(^{13}\) It must be noted that there was an outcry over the government funding of the ocker films so the Australian Film Commission began funding more appropriate nation-building films. This is outlined extensively by Dermody and Jacka (1988) and O’Regan (1989).
combine both the cerebral and visceral aspects of cinema while depicting female characters with both agency and autonomy. This amounts to a challenging of the mind/body split through creating alternative images of female sexuality and relationships between women. The ocker films’ emphasis was on corporeal viscerality. They simultaneously lacked any cerebral impact, and the representation of female autonomy/agency was generally absent; ie. it was female bodies rather than any notion of female embodiment which was represented on screen. The period films on the other hand were generally lacking in visceral aspects and focused on cerebral enterprise deemed ‘appropriate’ to nationbuilding. The feminist counter-cinema had an overtly political imperative. This was primarily to increase women’s control over images of their bodies, sexuality and reproduction. It was this counter cinema which inevitably paved the way for women to create spaces — both real and reel — for themselves in the contemporary mainstream milieu. Having witnessed the ocker cycle of films come and go by the mid-1970s and also the commencement of this counter-feminist cinema, Meaghan Morris in 1980 glimpsed the potential for the exploration of alternative depictions of female sexuality and subjectivity in the closing remarks of her essay, “Personal Relationships and Sexuality”:

Margot Nash’s We Aim to Please (1977), and Jeni Thornley’s Maidens (1976), were made explicitly to provide an alternative image of female sexuality and of women’s relationships to other women ... While these short films ... are still seen by comparatively few people, they do point to the possibilities which Australian films have rarely taken up so far ... (Morris 1980: 151)

I believe that Australian cinema is now realising the possibilities to which Meaghan Morris alluded back in 1980. This thesis attests to this imperative in its analysis of the issues surrounding space, sexuality and subjectivity in contemporary mainstream filmmaking. There has been a fundamental shift in the way female bodies are being represented in certain films which, I argue, is
directly related to the increase in female creative control.\textsuperscript{14} Female protagonists in these films are no longer at the whim of some ‘ocker’ wanting to do it in the back of a panel van with his mates looking on. And when it comes to the issue of sexual desire being satiated, in some cases women have climbed on top — \textit{Praise, Feeling Sexy} (Davida Allen, 1999). The films I discuss in this thesis — \textit{Radiance, The Well, High Tide, Floating Life, Muriel’s Wedding, Spider & Rose, Sweetie, Aya, Love Serenade} — “provide an alternative image of female sexuality and of women’s relation to other women”, which can’t simply be reduced to voyeuristic objectification.\textsuperscript{15}

Identity has become more problematically associated with corporeality — we see it too in contemporary contexts: black bodies, gay bodies, transsexual, transgender bodies, ill bodies and disabled bodies. Corporeal identity thus carries social and personal meaning in a world of uncertainty and flux. Classificatory systems have been used over time to demarcate bodies — determining who constitutes insiders and who constitutes outsiders (Meekosha 1999: 26).

The final section of this chapter undertakes an in-depth textual analysis of the films \textit{Waiting} and \textit{Dance Me to My Song}. My selection of these films is specifically related to the fact that they emphasise the importance of the body and its significance in the constitution of female subjectivity. Thus they lend themselves to an analysis of the geographies of female subjectivity and sexuality. What they assert is not only the importance of just any old body, but bodies with a difference. Both films take a phenomenological approach to their representation of filmic embodiment. By this I mean that the ‘daily, lived’

\textsuperscript{14} This is not limited to mainstream feature filmmaking either but the issue of female embodiment and sexuality also continues to be at the forefront of many short Australian films: such as Monica Pellizzari’s exceptional short, \textit{Just Desserts} (1993) which humorously juxtaposes an Italian-Australian girl’s first experiences of a period, masturbation and sex with her mother’s preparation and cooking of various Italian dishes. Other shorts include Tracey Moffat’s, \textit{Nice Coloured Girls} (1989) which concerns three young Aboriginal women: “cruising King’s Cross for a night of diversion at the expense of a boorish and predatory white man” (Jennings 1993: 69).

\textsuperscript{15} In the context of lesbian desire, Creed was able to claim as recently as 1993 that “[l]esbians do not exist in mainstream Australian cinema ...” (Creed 1993: 11) Since that time several feature films have been produced which depict desire between women, overtly or implicitly, on screen: \textit{Road to Nhill} (Sue Brooks, 1998), \textit{The Sum of Us} (Geoff Burton & Kevin Dowling, 1994), \textit{Dallas Doll} (Ann Turner, 1993), \textit{Strange Fits of
experience of how specific filmic bodies move through and occupy cinematic space is a central focus. The term 'embodiment' is most useful in the context of both these films. It captures the sense of fluidity and pertains to the body's malleability or notion of becoming. Therefore it is able to take on various forms at different times and also have a geography. (McDowell 1999: 39) Both films are radical in their depiction of bodies which are demarcated as different, as outsiders. *Dance* is subversive because it depicts a disabled woman erotically embodied — desiring intimacy and sex and to some degree fulfilling that desire. On the other hand *Waiting* is radical in that it depicts a pregnant woman (naked on occasions) gradually attaining a sense of embodied autonomy and not just allowing her body to become a vessel or 'site' of proceedings for other people. Interestingly the central characters in both films have their attempts to achieve meaningful embodiment thwarted to some extent through the actions of other females around them; the carer, in the case of *Dance* and the central character's friends in *Waiting*.

1.3 *Waiting*: Pregnant Embodiment in the Landscape

...speaking for the mother is only one way to surreptitiously control her. Another way is to speak on behalf of the infant. (Doane and Hodges 1992: 22)

*Waiting* seems to be working on a number of different levels. In the first place, it is radical in its representation of maternal embodiment. *Waiting* depicts a very pregnant woman, naked on our screens. The rarity and taboo surrounding this event is evidenced by the outcry caused by Annie Leibovitz's photograph of Demi Moore depicted naked and pregnant on the front cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine. (August 1991) *Waiting* enables the audience to approach a high level of mental subjectivity of the experience of pregnancy — from the

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16 Existential phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty have located consciousness and subjectivity in the body itself, which challenges dualistic metaphysics. (Young 1990: 161)
pregnant woman's perspective. With its idyllic rural setting and pregnant
woman, Waiting constructs a seemingly harmonious link between women and
nature and then satirises this notion through the chaos and comedy that
ensues. The film also goes some way in deconstructing the gendered binary
because all the characters to some extent deny the pregnant-woman-as-
subject. Often, she is physically depicted as occupying different spaces to the
other characters. In this way I argue that Waiting constructs a third gendered
space — that of the pregnant or maternal woman.

Waiting is a dialogue-driven, comedy of errors about twenty-four hours of
chaos in the life of an artist, Clare, and her three friends — along with their
respective dogs, children and partners — awaiting the birth of a child. Clare,
at the request of her infertile friend Sandra, has decided to become a surrogate
mother. The 'sperm donor' is Sandra's husband, Mike, thus ensuring that the
child is brought up by his/her biological father. Following the birth of the

17 Another, more recent film to present the experience of pregnancy from the woman's
perspective (and reveals an experience of reluctant motherhood rather than the 'joys
of motherhood') is the hilarious New Zealand film, Topless Women Talk About their
Lives. This film ends in the same way Waiting does — with the birth of a child.

18 In Australian women's fiction, As Brenda Walker has argued, contrary to the
mainstream discourses concerning the joys of motherhood, maternity has taken on a
rather equivocal status. Her exploration of the work of women authors lead her to the
conclusion that childbirth is often being associated with psychic incoherence and
death, while pregnancy often depicts radical estrangement from the body. (Walker;
74)

19 I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr Stephe Donald, for this insight.

20 The image created by the term 'expecting', argues Young, clearly reveals how much
the discourse on pregnancy leaves out the subjectivity of the woman. From others
perspective pregnancy is primarily a time of waiting and watching when nothing
happens. (Young 1990: 167)

21 In a humorous conversation which takes place between Clare and her (ex)boyfriend,
Steve, it is disclosed that Clare and Mike 'did it' with some difficulty:
Steve: Where did this planting ceremony happen?
Clare: My place
Steve: What did Sandra do while you were doing it? Go to the pictures?
Clare: Would've been better if she had. It was terrible. Sandi was in the next room
playing DJ. Every time Mike was about to come the music would stop. I was
terrified of making a noise in case she thought Mike was enjoying himself. It
took hours. I never want to listen to Brian Ferry again.
Steve: What if it looks like me?
baby and its adoption by Sandra and Mike, Clare's initial intentions are to head off to Paris to take up the prestigious Moet et Chandon art award. At the first sign that Clare is about to give birth, her friends converge on her rural retreat to assist in the home-birth. However as the film unfolds, it becomes evident that each of the women have their own personal agendas for the birth, some of which do not necessarily equate to Clare's changing relationship with the pregnancy. Like McKimmie's other films, the narrative of *Waiting* revolves around setting up a binary structure and stereotypical character-types and then deconstructing this binary through satire, to reveal its absurdities.  

In this case, the apparent contradiction of surrogate motherhood and 'natural' home birthing in a 'natural' environment amongst 'sisters' bears the brunt of the satire.

The opening titles of *Waiting* are set against a black screen with a cacophony of sub-tropical Australian bush sounds — frogs croaking, crickets chirping and the regular rhythm of gently lapping water.  

The viewer is then privy to a harmonious scene of almost palpable fecundity. A static wide-angle shot shows a dam surrounded by trees, then the sound of a woman gasping for breath precedes her swimming into frame. At first the viewer sees only her head and neck, with the rest of her body remaining hidden in the water and we wonder why she is gasping for air. Then, in the same shot, she laboriously ascends out of the water to reveal her full bosom and belly. In this long take, which lasts about a minute, a high level of mental subjectivity is achieved. The viewer readily gains insight into the character's awareness of the physicality of her own body because we see her gazing down and embracing her

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22 For further discussion of McKimmie's use of binary structures see my analysis of *Australian Dream* in Chapter 3 and the function of character types and 'suburbia' as a third space in the urban/rural dichotomy.

23 It almost reminds me of those relaxation tapes you can buy (and they have playing) in Australian Geographic shops. The sounds of the bush are digitised, packaged and ready to buy!
pregnant belly. She comes into the frame of the next shot fully clothed with her towel draped over her shoulder. The camera tracks back as she strolls towards then past it. It keeps her in frame but moves to a high-angle shot and we see an overview of the property. She walks off into the distance towards her rural studio retreat surrounded by an exquisite rainforest and lush green paddocks of grazing cows while a barking blue heeler is close on her heels. The non-diegetic Doris Day song, "Que sera sera, whatever will be will be" plays in the background. Without the benefit of being familiar with the whole narrative, the opening sequence of Waiting could easily be mistaken for embellishing 'the woman is to nature as man is to culture' discourse. Waiting deconstructs this binary because the female characters in the end are shown to be no closer to nature than men are. In spite of the women's attempts to perform the natural home birthing ceremony, which seems like a good idea in theory, in practice it falls on its head due to the women's experience of being products of their environment or living in late twentieth century Western society.

While Waiting is fundamentally about Clare's experience of pregnancy and struggling to achieve a sense of corporal autonomy against the will of her friends, it also explores other characters' corporeal obsessions and bodily insecurities. While much of the dialogue focuses on pregnancy and childbirth, it seems the other portion is primarily concerned with bodies and sex (or the absence of it!) It is often through these dialogue sequences that the film constructs a third maternal gender. As Burne has noted, the different paths these women have chosen are indicative of the choices now available to women. (Burne 1991: 60) In another way however their different experiences

24 Concerning pregnancy Young says: "... the most ordinary efforts of human existence, such as sitting, bending, and walking, which I formerly took for granted, become apparent as the projects they themselves are. Getting up, for example, increasingly becomes a task that requires my attention." (Young 1990: 166)
of embodied female subjectivity also impact and reflect their life decisions (and vice versa). For example Diane is editor of a fashion magazine and has been living in the US and the UK for many years. She is obsessed about keeping her body glamorously fit and toned. However Diane realises that she has sacrificed a lot for her career — including not having children. At one point she says to Clare in relation to her career: “that’s all I’ve got”. Terri on the other hand is a ‘hardened’ feminist and implies that through having her daughter and bringing her up as a single mother, her career in filmmaking has been sacrificed. Terri’s insecurity about her fleshly corpulence is conveyed through an exchange with Mike. When Mike hands Terri a book entitled: Fat is a Feminist Issue, she throws it to the ground and leaves the room in disgust/hurt while Sandra points out: “You know she’s sensitive about her size”. Mike bewilderedly responds, “I thought she was supposed to be a feminist!” At a later point, when they are swimming naked down at the dam, Mike says to Terri:

Mike: Why don’t you get your gear off?  
Terri: I don’t want to give Diane fuel for comment.  
Diane: And what’s that supposed to mean?  
Terri: I don’t send you articles from all over the world about how to dynamite your cellulite or make your tits defy gravity. Imagine if I was always saying to you, “They’ll be hitting your waistline soon if you don’t watch out!”

Diane: Are they sagging?  
Terri: Not enough of a sag!  
Diane: Oh very funny! I never said you were fat! Anyway you can carry it.  
Mike: Don’t listen to her. You’ve got a great body. Classical proportions. She’s just jealous.

Later on Diane says to Terri: “You’ve got the right idea choosing celibacy.”

And Terri remarks, “I didn’t choose it, it chose me!”

Many feminists have argued that patriarchal culture often “identifies women with the sphere of the body while preserving for men the privilege of disembodiment, a non-corporeal identity.” (Smith cited in McDowell 1999: 40) Waiting cleverly shows that the male characters are as firmly located within
the framework of the corporeal as the female ones. For example Mike has an
obsessive concern about the starving populations in the third world and the
cultural imperialism of multinationals like McDonald's which he registers
through starving himself.25 At the dinner table that night, the chubby doctor
enquires: "Aren't you eating Mike? Are you on a diet?" To which Sandra
replies: "He's on the 40 hour famine". And the doctor responds, "Isn't that a
bit dangerous for someone with your build, Mike? You're not exactly Arnold
Schwarzenegger." The doctor himself (Bill) is not free of corporeal weakness.
In fact on more than one occasion he bears the brunt of comedy through this
weakness. He suffers two physical beatings (along with plenty of verbal
abuse) over the course of the 24 hours.26 On his arrival at the farm late at night
he and his Mercedes get totally covered in mud. Bill is then beaten to the
ground by Terri who, in the dark, mistakes him for an intruder. Later on in the
night, after only a few puffs of a joint, Bill impersonates a 'randy dog'. In their
tent he tries to take advantage of the sleeping Diane barking, growling and
trying to mount her. Diane responds by rendering him unconscious (she
thinks she's killed him). As much as he might have wanted to be
'disembodied', or defined in terms of his mind rather than his body, it seems
he can neither escape his corporeality nor his sexuality. Thus the film alludes
to the fact that Bill, in his quest to attain cerebral satisfaction and status
through his occupation, has neglected his body in the process. To paraphrase
McDowell, disembodiment works for neither gender.

25 "Half the world is starving while the other half is eating McDonald's," says Mike to
his kids when they are hassling him to go McDonald's.
26 The following morning, Bill is depicted scoffing down a huge plateful of greasy
bacon, eggs and sausages alone while everyone else has their healthy milkshakes. This
shows his lack of concern for his body, despite his occupation.
An irrepressible and engaging film which will make you laugh, cry... a wonderful movie.
- IMAGES MAGAZINE.

"YOU'RE IN FOR A TREAT... fresh, funny... enormously amusing..." - SUN-HERALD.

Clare (Noni Hazlehurst), a talented artist and first-time mother-to-be, becomes the subject of a grand plan. In her isolated country farmhouse, she awaits what she hopes will be the perfect home birth, while her three closest girlfriends with their various men, children and animals converge from all directions to assist in the big event. But the chaos that results is a far cry from the re-union Clare had planned on.

The power goes out, the rain pours down, Clare's contractions cease, the kids are arrested, Bill is concussed, and the three girls start bickering over love affairs and lost opportunities.

It's a wacky, witty and warmhearted story that exceeds everyone's expectations. It really is a comedy that delivers!

Approximate Running Time: 97 minutes, plus trailers.

A comedy of errors and expectations

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Figure One
Clare’s preparation for childbirth extends to a highly rigorous physical regime, (sounds like one of Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’). Her emphasis on the purely corporeal aspects of her pregnancy have enabled her to maintain a mind/body split, without acknowledging her changing relationship to the pregnancy. She says to Terri at one point, “I’ve been living like a nun for nine months — no fags, no booze, no sex”. Her emphasis on ‘no sex’ seems to indicate she is trying to maintain a pure body. “Bloody impressive!”, responds Terri. “Bloody boring!” Clare replies. At another point in the film, Mike sympathetically and sincerely inquires about how Clare is feeling and she remarks, “I feel like I’m in training for the Olympics, swimming every day, walking ...” Waiting also explores the sexuality of the pregnant subject. At one point Clare’s ex-boyfriend Steve, (described by Diane as “good in bed, nothing in the head”) comes to visit. Without the knowledge of the other women, they escape together with Clare on the back of the motorbike for a few hours and we discover that she is not sure whether the baby’s biological father is actually Mike or Steve.37

Sandra maintains an aggressive relationship with her own body. She refuses to acknowledge her own body’s potential and doggedly insists on its reproductive role. Sandra is corporeally excluded from the process of procreation and her response to this is a total obsession with her incapacity to bear children. So she asks her friend to do the impossible. At the chaotic dinner table scene, Sandra responds to Bill’s skepticism about Clare’s surrogacy:

Sandra: Clare knows I love the baby as my own. I’ve even been taking hormones so I can breastfeed her.
Bill: You’re keen!
Mike: That’s the understatement of the year! I’d say obsessed more like it!

37 See footnote number 21 for this dialogue sequence.
Chapter One — The Body

At various points in the film, a few of the characters seem to be voicing Clare’s increasing doubts through their questioning of the wisdom of surrogacy from her perspective. During the dinner table discussion the doctor, Bill, when he hears about the arrangement, wonders: “What’s in it for the mother?” (He has just learnt there is no contract nor financial agreement between the surrogate and the adoptive parents.) At a later point Diane inquires: “What’s in it for you Clare? ... you’re the star of a film that probably will never be seen. Stretch marks, saggy boobs, broken heart.” And earlier, Diana is skeptical about the wisdom of what Clare’s undertaking: “I think you’re amazing doing what you’re doing. I need a Valium just to have my legs waxed.” “Just as well you’re not the maternal type,” responds Clare. “Well, just as well you’re not!” exclaims Diana. Even Mike seems to have reservations about the whole thing. Clare asks him: “What are you going to call it?” and Mike retorts: “What’s it going to call you?”

1.3.1 The Maternal Third Gender

E. Ann Kaplan argues that there has been quite a radical shift since the 1970s which has seen the foetus positioned at the centre of things in place of the mother, potentially leading to the mother’s alienation of her own pregnancy. This is indeed the case with Clare in Waiting, however it is primarily for other reasons. Kaplan asserts that:

New reproductive technologies ... have produced a situation where the mother is seen as merely a vessel for the foetus, now conceived as a being not only in its own right, but with its own rights: these are frequently represented as in conflict with the mother’s desire and, sometimes, rights. (Kaplan 1989: 32)

She goes on to say that: “the contemporary anxiety about the mother/mothering is only the historically appropriate manifestation of the ways in which culture has always (or at least in modern times) blocked the mother-as-subject (i.e. the mother-as-sexual, independent, autonomous).” (Kaplan 1989: 32) What is interesting is that the disavowal process, or blocking
of the mother-as-subject seems to manifest in a similar way because she is going to be a surrogate mother. It is through this blocking of the mother as subject by the other characters that the film posits the maternal gender in opposition to the others. After they arrive at her rural retreat, Clare seems to spend most of the film attempting to escape her (so-called) friends — or ‘the Mafia’ as Steve, her ex-boyfriend describes them — who believe they know what’s best for her. Diana, who is skeptical about the ‘natural’ home-birthing idea, brings a male gynaecologist to the farm unbeknown to the others. Sandra, the friend who has been obsessively preparing to take on the role of ‘mother’ once the baby is delivered, prevents Clare drinking wine and smoking. While Terri is determined that Clare doesn’t have a hospital birth because she wants Clare to avoid her own horrendous experience, and she’s also making a documentary. “Giving birth is like passing a camel through the eye of a needle,” says Terri. “Least you won’t have a horde of medical students shoving their arms up you to check if the head’s engaged.” Then in the same breath Terri reveals her own agenda in making the documentary, as well as her own hypocrisy in terms of her view of the (male) gynaecologists fitting in births around their golf schedules when she says: “You betta have it tonight, I’ve gotta work tomorrow!” By contrast, the only person who does not really have anything at stake, or is not attempting to “speak for the mother and surreptitiously control her” is Frank. (Doane & Hodges 1992: 22) “I still don’t know who the father is,” says Frank indifferently during the chaotic dinner-table discussion.

Failing the onset of labour by the next morning, the women further alienate Clare by arguing about what they should do given that they all have work responsibilities which they need to get back to. In its strategic division of

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28 “Maybe you’ll make a lot of money with this film for once, or at least become famous”, says Terri’s daughter.
space between the location of Clare in contrast to the rest of the women, the
following sequence conveys the way in which pregnancy could be
conceptualised as a third gender; or the maternal vs the non-maternal. The
following exchange occurs on the front verandah. Diana walks out to join the
characters Sandra and Terri who are already seated there:

Diana (in mcu): I think we should get a doctor in to take a look at
her. (A cut to Sandra and Terri in medium close-up with a look of
disgust on their faces — so she qualifies it):
    Just to make sure everything’s alright!
Sandra:    Well everything is alright, isn’t it Terri?
Terri:      It’s just taking a bit longer than we thought. I was
            in labour for 20 hours with Rosie.
Diana:     And you’ve told us a hundred times what a
            nightmare that was.
Terri:      This is different. Clare’s got us ...

Then a cut to a medium close-up shows Mike intruding on their discussion
and telling Terri there is a phone call for her. The camera tracks back to a
medium long shot and holds Mike in frame while he casually strolls away
from the women towards the camera, clad only in a towel round his waist. As
he walks around the corner of the verandah the camera tracks beside him. We
see him gaze into Clare’s bedroom and then keep walking but the camera
follows his gaze. The next shot is a close-up of Clare through a mosquito net,
lying in bed and listening to ‘the mafia’ talk about her ‘condition’ in her
absence. An expression of anxiety registers on her face which the viewer, but
none of the other characters, is privy to. In this way the film divides up the
space between Clare and the other characters. Oblivious to their hypocrisy,
they continue talking about her, rather than to her, thus treating her in exactly
the way in which they claim (male) doctors are infamous for. They also deny
Clare’s own agency in the whole process. This behaviour recalls Marion
Young’s passage:

Pregnancy does not belong to the woman herself. It is a state of the
developing fetus, for which the woman is a container; or it is an
objective, observable process coming under scientific scrutiny; or it
becomes objectified by the woman herself as a “condition” in
which she must “take care of herself”... [or it] as Kristeva puts it, is
"concerned with the subject, the mother, as the site of her proceedings" (Kristeva 1980: 237, Young 1990: 160).

This quotation, emphasising the omission of the mother's subjective relationship to her own pregnancy, is even more appropriate in response to Clare's intention to become a surrogate mother. Her sense of alienation of her own body through the pregnancy is even more emphasised in this case, because her body is even more of a 'container' or a vessel (for other people's agendas). The split is far more defined as the women all have their own reasons for Claire's childbirth and pregnancy. Even though they are not the quintessential male doctor, they believe that they can make a difference as women without perhaps realising that they have created a separate space for her. Unfortunately they have lost the combination of knowledge and experience which comes from being living in so-called 'traditional societies'. In spite of the different women's best intentions to deliver the baby together like they used to in traditional societies, and have a perfectly planned homebirth, captured for Terri's documentary, it is the Ray Barrett character, Frank, who eventually delivers the baby successfully, without a mid-wife nor the intervention of modern medicine, nor the 'help' of the Clare's friends. Frank's nervous fumblings through Clare's brief labour humorously recall his earlier boastful words of 'comfort' to Clare after her first contraction at the start of the film, "Don't go getting yourself into a state. I've had experience delivering babies: animal and human!" Without any specific or specialised medical knowledge, just the 'real' or functional knowledge which comes from experience, Frank performs the task of delivering the baby and in doing so deconstructs both the essentialist feminist rhetoric espoused by the women throughout the film and also the objective scientific discourse prevalent in conventional Western medicine. Even though Frank can never subjectively

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29 In the film, the documentary being made becomes 'a film within a film' and we see Clare on camera earlier in the pregnancy describing the process: "Traditionally a group of women would go into the house of the labouring woman, bringing food and
empathise with the experience, he is, finally, able to adequately assist with the birth. The assistance Frank provides is neither a masquerade of mid-wifery, nor of medical science in the vein of doctor’s invention, but rather a process of mutual co-operation between genders — the maternal and the non-maternal.

In one of the final scenes when Clare finally confronts Sandra about the fact that she’s going to keep her baby, Sandra’s emotions are amplified by the ominous grey skies and the drizzle which leaves them drenched. The matching of topography and emotion gives the viewer an insight into the character’s mental subjectivity. A reviewer noted: “The moment at which Sandy’s hopes crash is impressively shot by director of photography Steve Mason, as she stands alone on a hillside masked by grey skies.” (Burne 1991: 59) Clare finally seizes the opportunity to voice her feelings about the baby: “It’s not going to come ‘til we talk about it”. As soon as Clare has told Sandy of her decision to keep the baby and go to hospital to have it, her contractions start but she doesn’t get further than Frank’s caravan. Her decision to keep the baby destroys the mind/body split that she was attempting to maintain.

My discussion of Waiting has tried to show how the film constructs Clare’s pregnancy in relation to the embodiment of the other characters. In the context of this film the pregnant woman is depicted as another discrete gender. Even though the other central characters are female — and have been pregnant, in the case of Terri, or have the capacity but not the desire to give birth, as in Diane’s situation — they are, throughout the film often depicted in a separate space to Clare, lending credibility to the notion of the maternal woman as a

drink, the men were turned out of the house and the whole thing turned into a party and sometimes they’d even get drunk.”

Marion Young has argued that the control over knowledge about the pregnancy and birth process that the physician has through instruments, devalues the privileged relation she has to the fetus and her pregnant body. The doctor’s empathy is reduced by the fact that usually the obstetrician is a man.
discrete gender. In this way the film moves beyond the notion of pregnancy as transgressive embodiment.

1.4 *Dance me to my Song*: Contorted Corporeality but Erotic Embodiment

What do you do when you’re stuck in a fucking wheelchair and you can’t talk except using a voice machine and your carer doesn’t give a shit for anything except herself? Sit around a lot, I suppose, talking to yourself. What do you do when a man turns up and you fancy him except your carer does too the bitch and steals him from under your nose cause she’s not a fuckin’ spastic? You try to steal him back of course. A film for Heather Rose ... by Heather Rose ... with Heather Rose.31

The synopsis of *Dance Me to My Song*, above, which appeared in the AFI Award Screenings catalogue (1998), captures the provocative tone of this film. These thoughts propelled the production of *Dance*, based on the experiences of Heather Rose herself, a woman with cerebral palsy who depends on others to perform life’s basic functions and speaks through a voice synthesiser. (Urban 1998a: 20)

Nothing, however, is preparation for the first image of the film. An overhead, high-angle shot reveals the contorted body of Julia lying awake, shaking frustratedly on her bed. She struggles to breathe while impatiently awaiting the arrival of her carer so she can perform her daily morning rituals — getting out of bed, going to the toilet and showering; those things the ‘able-bodied’ take for granted. This image of Julia’s distorted body is juxtaposed against the figure of Madeleine, her ‘able-bodied’ carer, showering while narcissistically admiring her own naked body in the mirror, in preparation to arrive at Julia’s house for another day of ‘caring’. On one level the film’s confrontational nature lies in the way it juxtaposes these two female bodies and inverts the

31 The script was written by director Rolf de Heer from a treatment by Heather Rose and Frederick Stahl, born out of Rose’s real experiences of cerebral palsy. (Urban 1998a: 20)
viewer's expectations by the end of the film. On another level however, *Dance*

is simply about two women trying to 'get laid' and their competition for the

same man. By the end of the film the able-bodied character has been reduced
to the corporeal side of the mind/body divide while the disabled Julia is
depicted as gradually reconciling this split and attaining a sense of meaningful
embodiment through various techniques. The power of *Dance* lies in the way

that the character of Julia progresses from being depicted as body=victim to

achieving meaningful embodiment and finally erotic empowerment. The term

'embodiment' is most useful in the context of the film *Dance*, because it
captures the sense of bodily fluidity and malleability. It incorporates a notion

of becoming which enables the filmic body to take on various forms at
different times, but also have a geography (McDowell 1999: 39).32

At first, *Dance* explores the notion of the disabled female body as victim and
doubly imprisoned — in her own body and in her home through neglect and
actual mistreatment by her abusive carer. The film also makes reference to the
spatial dynamics of disability (Dear et al. 1997), the negative side of which is
exacerbated even further by the malevolent behaviour of Madeleine. One of
the main disadvantages that Julia faces is isolation when she moves from an
institution (Seawinds) into the wider community. While she has a sense of
independence living in her own house, Julia has minimal human interaction
with others, apart from her carer. This is one of the many facets of Julia’s life
maliciously controlled by her carer. Throughout the film Madeleine
repeatedly blackmails Julia:

32 As Grosz (1994) has made us aware, the instances of hypochondria, hysteria, the
phantom limb phenomena along with issues of sexuality and pregnancy often portend
to the fluidity and pliability of the body which is often considered inert, fixed and
passive. The biological body, she argues, ‘exists for the subject only through the
mediation of an image or series of (social/cultural) images of the body and its
capacity for movement and action’ (1994: 41). See McDowell’s discussion of
anthropological studies which challenge the notion of the fixed and bounded subject
If it wasn’t for people like me, people like you would be stuck, and still be back in that institution. See, all I have to do is resign and back you go. You couldn’t have your independence without me. Couldn’t live on your own. Want to go back to that place? ... Well you betta be a bit nicer to me and stop wetting yourself.

Chance meetings with people would be rare in the quiet suburban environment in which Julia resides. The only occasions in which Julia leaves her house is when her friend, Rix, takes her out and gets her drunk. Julia’s ingenuity in overcoming this lack of interaction with others is particularly emphasised on one occasion where Madeleine storms out on Julia\(^{33}\) and she is left to her own devices. Desperate for a drink of water (and access to her voice synthesiser which Madeleine has prohibited her from using)\(^{34}\) Julia purposely steers her wheelchair directly into the oncoming pathway of an attractive, young man in order to get his attention.\(^{35}\) This is Julia’s first meeting with Eddie, and so begins their relationship. This is also her first act of resistance against victimhood.

As the film progresses, the question of who exactly is more needy in this parasitic relationship of interdependence is raised. Other than the opening scene described above, another scene which cleverly illustrates the juxtaposition of the two central characters is when Julia’s quest for erotic intimacy with Eddie is to some extent achieved while Madeleine is being date—raped by Joe. At her request, Eddie dances Julia ‘to her song’. During this moving and emotional scene, which depicts Eddie gently embracing and swaying Julia to Berhard Huber and John Laidler’s “Kizungu”, Madeleine’s obsessive pursuit of sexual gratification is having devastating consequences.

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\(^{33}\) Her parting words are: “Right fuck off then. Fuckin’ take care of yourself then. See if I care, you bloody ungrateful spastic bitch!”

\(^{34}\) Madeleine’s rationale for prohibiting Julia’s use of the voice-machine is: “I don’t want that fucking thing beeping at me the whole time!”

\(^{35}\) The audience is privy to the fact that Julia can’t be desperate for just any kind of human interaction because just prior to Eddie’s appearance on the scene we see a middle-aged woman walk her dog past her house while Julia is sitting on the front verandah.
The tackiness of the date-rape scene is emphasized by its mise-en-scène. The stark lighting accentuates the harsh reds, greens and purples in which the characters are dressed. In contrast, Julia and Eddie, both dressed in white, embrace under soft lighting which sensually frames them as Eddie dances her around the lounge-room. This sequence of images cleverly traces Madeleine’s reduction to the the victim, whilst Julia manages to incorporate or reconcile her disability into an erotic act. The spatial separation between the characters here emphasizes their different experiences of embodiment in much the way that Clare is positioned in different spaces to the other women in Waiting. Following this scene, Madeleine, in desperation, drives to Julia’s house for support. The camera follows her as she lets herself in the front door then shows her in a medium close-up as she climbs into bed next to Julia. They two of them are framed in a medium-close-up as Madeleine cuddles up next to Julia in bed and weeps violently: “You’re the only person in the world who loves me, Julia.” The absurdity of the situation, given Madeleine’s treatment of Julia, is further emphasized by the fact that Julia, because of her disablement, cannot physically move away to escape Madeleine’s embrace. An ambivalent expression of bewilderment/horror registers on Julia’s face while simultaneously we are made, although only momentarily, to empathise with Madeleine’s desperate isolation.

Despite Madeleine’s overt display of vulnerability, the following morning she returns to her usual routine of psychological abuse. Preventing Julia from using her voice machine enables Madeleine to embark on one of her monologues. The following words capture the way Madeleine perceives and identifies both herself and Julia in purely corporeal terms:

Madeleine: Why can’t I get a decent man? I know I’m good-looking. I know I’m good in bed. Can’t understand it. Must be something else wrong with me. Least I’m betta off than you poor thing. Maybe I should find someone else to bring around here to
entertain you. What about your new friend? Would you like that? He’s quite good-looking. Looks like he might have some money too. Probably quite a good catch for someone like me. Don’t think it’d do you any good. He’d get sick of visiting you and you’d never hear from him again.

As Julia has a mouthful of porridge she cannot respond. Madeleine chats away maliciously and proceeds to force another spoonful of porridge into Julia’s mouth. Julia is depicted in a medium close-up, her arms flailing around in resistance, porridge all the way down her chin, and virtually at the point of choking. As Madeleine has prohibited Julia from using her voice synthesiser she cannot communicate, so her response, a physical one, is appropriate in the context of her frustration. She spits porridge at Madeleine and it sticks to her face and hair: “Fuck you’re gross. You hopeless little spastic bitch. I’ll give this to the fuckin’ cat. At least it doesn’t spray shit all over me ... Sit in your own mess for a while. Think what it’s like to be sprayed in someone else’s shit.” She leaves abruptly. In this scene Julia is constructed as abject — the site of Madeleine’s loathing and disgust. However for Julia, as we shall see a little later, the abject can also be constructed as a site of resistance.

Julia’s daily lived experience of disablement also means that bodily functions often become the central focus of the film. Dance does not shy away from presenting these aspects. Through Julia’s association with bodily functions her corporeality is that of an abject body, especially through Madeleine’s interaction with her. In her essay on abjection, The Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva discusses the way in which bodily waste is not simply a by-product of a biological system but as symbolically tied up with notions of the self. (Kristeva 1982: 68) She theorises the way in which urine, excrement, vomit disturb the concept of the ‘pure’ body. Elizabeth Grosz elaborates:

... urine, faeces, saliva, sperm, blood, vomit, hair, nails, skin — retain something of the cathexis and value of a body part even when they are separated from the body.\footnote{Schilder (cited in Grosz 1994: 81) argues that the voice and the breath are also still parts of the body image even when separated in space from the body.}
of the subject bound up with them — which is why they are objects of disgust, loathing and repulsion as well as envy and desire. They remain (peripheral, removable) parts of the body image ... these body products can only be negatively coded (with disgust or horror) because there is also the possibility (and the prior actuality) of a love of the body and its substances. (Grosz 1994:81)

Creed describes Kristeva’s notion of ‘abjection’ as that which does not respect borders, positions, rules and the place where ‘I’ am not. (Creed 1992: 8) Because the abject threatens life it must be ‘radically excluded’ from the body and deposited on the other side of the imaginary order which separates the self from that which threatens it. Although the subject must exclude the abject it must also be tolerated, for that which threatens life also helps to define it. (Creed 1992: 9) Throughout the film Madeleine continually constructs Julia in terms of abjection. We see Julia reprimanded by Madeleine for wetting herself, due to her late arrival. “I hope you haven’t wet yourself.” When feeding her, Madeleine says: “I wish you could eat like a normal person, instead of like a bloody animal.” When Madeleine seizes her voice machine, Julia’s only mode of communication remaining is through spitting porridge at her. Madeleine is able to construct Julia in infantile bodily terms because she is without a ‘voice’. Madeleine can be seen as an extension of the ‘cruel maternal’ and in a relationship with an adult infant whom she insists on returning to the pre-symbolic voiceless state to justify maternal cruelty and disgust.

On one of the many occasions she has been abandoned by Madeleine, Julia desperately needs to go to the toilet. Eddie has dropped in for a visit, not knowing quite what he is in for! Eddie is a reluctant carer, but his growing friendship and love for Julia engenders an ethic of care and acceptance of the abject as a fundamental part of her embodiment. This is in stark contrast to Madeleine.

Julia (mcu): I need to poo!
Another important element of Julia's abject embodiment and her daily lived experience of disablement is her difficulty in breathing. This is emphasized through the snorting and grunting sounds she makes. The technology used in the production of *Dance* — binaural sound which requires the use of two microphones instead of one — enables an important element of her embodiment to be captured and emphasised:

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37 One on Rose and one on the camera. This was pioneered by de Heer on *Bad Boy Bubby*. (Urban 1998a: 21)
A controversial new film from the Rector of Bad Boy Bible.

Eva is a woman with light. She lights up the morning and to go to bed at night. She lights to... she lights to breathe. Yet when her new career arrives, she discovers that the light is only just beginning...

Do you do what you can do in love, make love, and even without expecting anything, and your love doesn't grow and you can't have anything?

Who do you do when you turn up and a dance can stop you more than blossoms?

Contact the hotel from another city again the same time.

A new week and two books of course.

Included in the official selection at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.

A love triangle? Depends on your point of view, really...

"...one of the bravest and most compelling Australian films ever" - The Age

"A wonderfully uplifting story...a rapturous movie experience...a remarkable film" - The Hollywood Reporter

Recommended Audiences: 15 Y

Adult Themes, M-E

Figure Two
We used this because we get very close to her. We hear the intense breathing which is a critical part of her character. Heather doesn’t speak conventionally, but we still wanted to capture her personality and her breathing is very present about her ... the end result of the use of this technology is a dense, dynamic sound with deep perspective which lifts the dramatic effect. (de Heer cited in Urban 1998a: 21)

Part of the power of Dance is that by half way through the film, as de Heer has commented, we perceive Julia quite differently to how we perceive her at the beginning. In the opening of the film, for instance, the audience is painfully aware of Julia’s breathing, which in corporeal terms reduces her to a victim. By the end of the film, the viewer notices neither her breathing nor those other bodily aspects of disablement. “She’s just Julia, no longer the disabled character any more than Madeleine is the character with the brown hair or Eddie is the character with the muscular body.” (Urban 1998a: 20)

Like her difficulty in breathing, Julia’s voice-machine is also a fundamental part of the way her daily lived experience of disablement is constructed in the film. As Clear has noted, despite the demonstrated benefits for some disabled people of some of science’s technical achievements, they do not necessarily: “signify any ultimate liberation for disabled people from the normalising ideology of the body.” (Clear 1999: 8) This comment is particularly relevant to Julia’s situation. Advances in technology allow her to express herself through a voice synthesiser whereas before her ability to communicate would have been far more limited. However she is still not liberated from the “normalising ideology of the body”. The machine is a cumbersome way of communicating38 and can be seized from her at any time by Madeleine.

Applying McDowell’s use of the term ‘embodiment’ and Grosz’s notion of the ‘body image’ helps us to understand the psychic importance the voice

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38 Also a temporal element is introduced too because it takes much longer for Julia to have a conversation with someone. In this way it is a cumbersome way of communicating.
machine plays, or in other words the way it is constructed not merely as a functional 'tool'. Embodiment captures the sense of fluidity and portends to the body's malleability or notion of becoming which can enable it to incorporate outside things. Elizabeth Grosz has shown how inanimate objects can become part of the 'body image': "External objects, implements and instruments become, while they are being used, intimate, vital even libidinally cathected parts of the body image." (Grosz 1994: 81) In this way Julia's voice machine has become a part of Julia's 'body image', a vital part of her embodiment.39 The fact that she uses it to communicate with the world through language makes it that much more important. In another way Dance also demonstrates that when corporeally disabled people are allowed to have a voice, they may pose a threat to conventional society. Evidently Madeleine perceives the threat that the machine poses so she forbids Julia from using it. In Madeleine's case, however, the threat extends to Julia's infantile status in the relationship. Having a voice poses a challenge to the pre-symbolic 'voiceless' state in which Madeleine structures her relationship with Julia. On one of only two occasions in which Julia 'goes out', Eddie invites her out for an ice-cream. That Julia's ability to communicate on this occasion does not necessarily: "liberate her from the normalising ideology of the body" is evident from the shop assistant's attitudes illustrated in the scene below. However the scene also shows how the machine can be used as a tool of resistance.

An establishing shot shows Eddie and Julia behind the counter at the ice-cream shop as Eddie places his order. An mcu depicts Julia smiling.

Mcu of Shop Assistant and Eddie in frame shows her scooping out the ice-cream and glancing at Julia: Poor little thing. She'll enjoy this, won't she!
Eddie: I'm sure she will!

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39 It must be noted however that as the film progresses, the viewers learn to recognise and understand the meaning of Julia's expressions. It becomes obvious that, as Stratton remarked, Julia "communicates almost as much with her eyes as she does via the machinery she uses" (Stratton 1998).
Mcu of Julia reveals her expression has changed, she’s lost the smile on her face.
Mcu of Shop Assistant reveals her finishing off the ice-cream with Eddie in frame: That’ll be $6 please.
Cu of Julia gasping with shock and we see her quickly trying to type something into her voice machine. A quick cut to mcu of Shop assistant then a cut to an mcu of Eddie while Julia can be seen in the bottom left hand corner of the frame, still typing away. Cut back to shop assistant as she returns the money and then a quick cut to mcu of Julia as she says: Fuck me!
Cu of Shop Assistant who stops in her tracks: What did she say?
Mcu of Eddie grabbing ice cream with Julia in background: Fuck me! (Eddie tries to imitate the voice machine.)
Cut to shop assistant who says: Really! (in disgust)
Cut back to Eddie and Julia, Eddie: I think she finds the prices here a bit steep and I think I’d tend to agree with her!”
(There’s a sneaky smile on Julia’s face as she takes a bite of it then throws it on the ground. Eddie turns around to see what’s happened and laughs.)
Cut back to Shop Assistant hissing: I’ll just get her another one and then get her out of here please!
A shot from the shop assistant’s pov reveals Julia and Eddie exiting the shop and laughing with her voice machine repeating: Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me!

In this instance there is a sense that the shop assistant is not reacting to what Julia has said, but the fact it is being said by a disabled person. Simply because Julia has expressed herself, the sales assistant can now no longer stereotype her as a ‘poor little thing’ nor talk about Julia as if she were absent. In this way Julia has transgressed or subverted a corporeal boundary. Julia’s ‘vocal’ expression represents a threat to everyone who maintains fixed stereotypical ideas about people with disabilities. She also poses a threat to those who know her well, such as Madeleine, and wish to repress her expression of her personality for their own selfish reasons and their own insecurities. And she later expresses this to Eddie when she says: “Please don’t talk about me or to me like I’m an animal.” And Eddie enquires, “Like at the ice-cream shop?” “Yes”, says Julia, and Eddie sincerely reprimands himself: “I’ll have to stop that!” In this way the voice machine is crucial to Julia’s embodiment and is another form of resistance. Instead of it being just another way in which she is constricted by the ‘normalising ideology of the body’ she uses it as a tool of resistance and liberation.
Helen Meekosha has noted that "The differently bodied are presented as a constant sexual threat — in the movies as in life." (Meekosha 1999: 25) In conclusion I argue that the abject and sexuality are linked in the film and that Julia’s abject body becomes a site of personal resistance and a threat to others. Julia’s desire to explore her sexuality is emphasized in the scene when her lesbian friend Rix (and Rix’s lover) take her out and get her drunk. Julia’s yearning for human interaction and especially bodily contact is evidenced when she asks Rix for sex. While Julia does not represent a threat to Rix, she presents a threat to Madeleine because her body engenders abjection. There are constant references throughout the film to Madeleine’s perception of Julia’s body as disgusting, and animal-like — the manifestation of the abject. Julia’s body poses a threat to Madeleine’s pure body — her ‘able-bodied’, ‘normal’ sexuality. In the penultimate scene, a medium shot frames Eddie and

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40 This comment was made in relation to Alien 3 where the main character Ripley is ‘raped’ by the Alien. Rather than give birth to a hideous monster, she kills herself. (Meekosha 1999: 25) The comment is also relevant to Dance.

41 Dance is not the first Australian film to explore issues of sexuality within disabled embodiment. Bad Boy Bubby (Rolf de Heer, 1994) also depicts the development of a relationship between the boy-man, Bubby, and a disabled character (also played by Heather Rose). Bubby’s extraordinary experience of parental abuse enables him to develop a special ability to communicate with those who cannot speak. This gift allows him to communicate with Heather Rose (when no ‘normal’ person can) and he brings her a new lease of life and she subsequently falls in love with Bubby. Struck By Lightning (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1992) also in part revolves around society’s reaction to a relationship which develops between two adult down-syndrome characters within an institutional setting.

42 Julia: I love you Rix.
Rix: No you fuckin’ don’t.
Julia: Yes, Yes. I love you Rix...
Rix: Do you know what you’re saying?
Julia: Yes.
Rix: Do you love me or do you just want me to look after you?
Julia: Both.
Rix: Do you know what you mean by love?
Julia: Yes.
Rix: Do you mean mental?
Julia: No.
Rix: You mean physical?
Rix’s lover: She wants to root you Rix! You do, don’t you?
Rix: Not here and now?
Julia: Yes yes!
Rix: I don’t know Julia. I thought you preferred men.
Julia: Yes, yes!
Rix: You do prefer men but there’s none here so I’ll fuckin’ do. Thanks a lot!
Chapter One — The Body

Julia in bed together, naked and embracing. The sensuality and moving nature of this scene is cut short when Madeleine bursts through the door and finds them in bed together. In this instance her rage is not simply an expression of jealousy — after sleeping with Eddie, Madeleine thinks she has 'caught' him — but it is also an expression of abjection. Through Eddie's intimate connection with Julia, an abject body, there a sense in which his body too has become defiled. She screams at Eddie: "Jesus, you bastard! You low-life shit. You fuck cripples now do you? Shit, get out you twisted pervert. Get out before I call the fucking cops and have you arrested for rape." This is the last straw for Julia and she realises that even being back in Seawinds, the institution, might be healthier than suffering violent, physical abuse at the hands of Madeleine so she has Madeleine fired. Angry and distraught, Madeleine returns one evening to wreak her revenge on the physically defenseless Julia, possibly with the intention of killing her. "I can't believe I've been fired by a fuckin' spastic!" she says. In the context of the physical, verbal and psychological abuse wrought on her, it would be easy to construct Julia in terms of a victim. In spite of the injuries she has sustained, (a close-up shows her blood-spattered nose) she remains a threat to Madeleine, as long as she is perceived in purely abject corporeal terms. This threat is emphasized in her final comment to Madeleine: "I stole your boyfriend." While Madeleine and Julia were never competing for Eddie on equal corporeal grounds, through

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43 Perhaps part of the problem also has been what Herzlich and Pierret (1987: 69) point to when they claim that: "there is always something inexpressible about the body; there are cries and whispers which cannot be put into words." Whether they had in mind the bodies of people with disabilities when they said this, I don't know. Nevertheless this quotation seems to be particularly pertinent to Dance, especially in the scene where Eddie and Julia lie on the bed naked together. One critic claimed that: "When he dances with her and later during their naked embrace, it's like a handful of emotional hand grenades thrown into the cinema. In the end, it's a love triangle, but the struggle takes place on terra infirma; Julia's physical disability – its extreme nature – shifts the battle to shaky psychological ground." (Urban 1998b) and "We are inundated with emotional and intellectual responses that defy simple explanation." (Urban 1998a)
valuing her desire for erotic embodiment, Julia has managed to claim her
abjection as a site of resistance.  

1.5 Conclusion: Autonomous & Meaningful Bodies

"No person lives his or her own body merely as a functional
instrument or as a means to an end. Its value is never simply or
solely functional, for it has a libidinal value in itself. The subject is
capable of suicide, of anorexia (which may in some cases amount
to the same thing), because the body is meaningful, has
significance." (Grosz 1994: 32)

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that "the body is the place, the
location or the site ... of the individual" and that the body is not a fixed entity
but "can take different forms and shapes at different times and also have a
geography" (McDowell 1999: 89). That the filmic body is a 'locale' in both
Waiting and Dance me to my Song is intimated by their confronting opening
scenes. Instead of the customary establishing shots defining the film's setting,
in these two films bodies bursting forth onto the screen constitute the
establishing shots. The naked pregnant woman bursts into frame gasping for
breath in one, while in the other the disabled woman confronts the viewer
gasping for breath on her bed. Both films also deconstruct long-held ideas
about different types of embodiment and appropriate behaviour; for example
a wheel-chair-bound woman getting pissed with her lesbian friend is just as
unstereotypical as a 'nine-month' pregnant woman escaping her
overprotective friends on the back of her ex-boyfriend's motorcycle. The way
the filmic body is constructed on screen ensures the empowerment of both
subjects.

I also argued that there is shift occurring in the representation of female
bodies on screen in Australian cinema. While the ocker films focused on the

44 "I see disabled people's re-valuing of their own bodies and ways of living and the
forms of culture that are emerging from disability pride, as oppositional discourses
somatic side of the mind/body split, these two films reconcile the split and present autonomous, embodied female subjects. By the closing sequences of *Waiting* and *Dance* the central female protagonists have acknowledged that their bodies are neither solely a functional instrument in the case of *Waiting* nor totally limiting in the case of *Dance* but can be the site of meaningful resistance and agency.

In the following chapter I move from my focus here on the body, to exploring the ways in which female protagonists negotiate the sphere of the home. While in this chapter reconciliation of the mind/body split and the resulting empowerment of subjects has been central, in Chapter Two, I discuss a different type of reconciliation — that *between* characters and characters' reconciliation with homes of their youth.
Chapter Two — The House

Uncanny Houses: Returning Home and Destabilising the Domestic Realm

2.0 Introducing the Home

2.1 Mapping the Filmic Uncanny & the Postcolonial Uncanny

2.2 Lilian’s Story: Mad Return

2.3 Vacant Possession or House of Dream-memory

2.4 Radiance: Universal Exile?

2.5 Conclusion: Uncanny Returns
Chapter Two - The House

2.0 Introducing the Home

...we never really leave the places we’ve made home. They map our memories like blueprints, precise and violent blurs. And as we live in houses they live in us. (Johnson 1993: 40-41)

The passage of time is often spatialised or stabilised through the image of the house; the dwelling endures (even if only in memory) and creates a sense of continuity between past and present. (Ferrier 1987: 45)

A plethora of Australian features from the last decade depict adult siblings venturing back to the homes of their youth in search of meaning and familial resolution in their sometimes troubled lives — The Tale of Ruby Rose (Roger Scholes, 1988), Return Home (Ray Argall, 1990), Choo Choo Choo¹ (Tracey Moffatt, 1994), Hotel Sorrento (Richard Franklin, 1995), Lilian’s Story (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1995), Vacant Possession (Margot Nash, 1995), Radiance (Rachel Perkins, 1998) and most recently, Soft Fruit (Christina Andreef, 1999) and Erskineville Kings (Alan White, 1999). The frequency of ‘returning home’ films in Australia even led one critic to disparagingly comment that: “the family reunion theme has been done to death in Australian Cinema.” (Stratton 1999: 20)² Many critics in the mid 1980s expressed similar sentiments regarding the so-called ‘period film’ or ‘AFC genre’ which involved the depiction of symbolic landscapes in historical contexts. Comment often focused on the ideologies naturalised in these symbolic landscapes and what they revealed about Australian’s sense of place (or lack thereof) and cultural myths about

¹ The second story in the Bedevil (Tracey Moffatt, 1993) trilogy.

² David Stratton continues: “In Erskineville Kings, a couple of quarrelling brothers are reunited because of the death of their father. Generally, though, the focus in these films is on sisters. (Why is it always three sisters? Chekhov, you have a lot to answer for.) In Hotel Sorrento three sisters are reunited because of the death of their father; in Radiance, it’s because their mother is dead. And Soft Fruit involves three sisters yet again, plus a brother, though this time mum isn’t dead, just terminally ill.” (Stratton 1999: 20) In relation to the recurring theme of female characters returning home and reuniting with other siblings, Rachel Perkins also claimed: “I think we need to work out some new subject material.” (Simpson 1999c: 33)
the land. In this chapter I do not intend to argue that the notion of ‘returning home’ is a key feature in Australian cinema which reflects an essential Australian identity. Rather, with the help of Bachelard, Ferrier and Freud, and through the textual analysis of three films — Vacant Possession, Lilian’s Story and Radiance — I wish to explore the filmic construction of the topos of the house and its importance in personal and public reconciliations.

As part of an ordered human world, houses are used to demarcate space, to express feelings, ways of thinking, and social processes, and provide arenas for culturally defined activity as well as to provide physical shelter. (Rakoff 1977: 85)

The objective of this chapter is to investigate the meaning and significance women attach to particular homes of their youth and illustrate how these houses are filmically constructed as almost sensate beings. In mapping, or performing a topoanalysis of the interior spaces of these houses, I will take you on a journey through the verticality of the house, from the heights, the rational zone of studies then down into the underworld, into cellars and the anomalous zones, then finally, under the house — the area of illicit activity. The three films I analyse — Vacant Possession (Margot Nash, 1995), Lilian’s Story (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1996), and Radiance (Rachel Perkins, 1998) involve both a physical and psychological Return Home — not only to the childhood sphere (which has a geographically specific location) but also to the unresolved familial issues within that space/time of the past, leading to the subsequent destabilisation of that space. This may occur dramatically through the physical destruction of the house (Vacant Possession, Radiance) or selling off the house (Lilian’s Story and Hotel Sorrento) and its subsequent loss of meaning for the central character/s. Contrary to the ideals of home in providing shelter, protection and the illusion of stability for its inhabitants, or a safe

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3 Films such as Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975), Sunday Too Far Away (Ken Hannam, 1975) and My Brilliant Career (Gillian Armstrong, 1979). Perhaps in a few years time we may talk about the ‘return home genre’ of the 1990s Australian cinema.
place for the dreamer as Gaston Bachelard argues, the majority of the films analysed here depict homes which the central protagonists must escape or destroy in order to physically survive. Aboriginal meanings of home constructed on screen are also central to this study — specifically in relation to *Radiance* and *Vacant Possession*. I am also interested in the way a sense of the ‘uncanny’ or *unheimlich* is associated with them. For in returning home, to the familiar, these characters find themselves in place and ‘out of place’ simultaneously and subsequently dispossessed. Before embarking on my textual analysis of these films, first I want to briefly attend to the significance of the house in Australian culture as well as the gendering of houses.

In the group of films I noted in the outset of this chapter, with the exception of *Return Home* and *Erskineville Kings*, this act of ‘returning home’ seems to be primarily a female preoccupation. Interestingly, those exceptions — Ray Argall’s *Return Home* and the recent production of *Erskineville Kings* — emphasize coming home to a general *area* or *suburb* rather than specifically the microcosm of the *house itself* and its interiors. *Return Home* for instance, depicts the return of the metropolis-dwelling Noel to the space of his childhood; a suburban, working-class suburb of Adelaide where his brother’s family has a petrol station. In *Erskineville Kings*, the central character Barky’s father has died and his childhood house has been already been sold before

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4 "... if I were to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters the daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace ... it’s because our memories of former dwelling places of the past remain in us for all time." (Bachelard 1969: 6)

5 Thanks to Chris Palazzolo for introducing me to the notion of the uncanny in a very early version of this chapter.

6 In Lucas’s analysis of the film, she says: “the film explicitly links the world of the suburbs, in iconographic and class terms, with the private world of memory and childhood. Noel returns to Adelaide to re-establish a point of emotional solidarity after the break-up of his marriage and the stress of his work as a high-powered businessman in what the film codes as the mega-metropolis of Melbourne. In this sense ‘return’ takes on the nature of an embryonic retreat to a place where he is accepted without question and where sameness resonates with familiarity and reassurance ...” (Lucas 1994: 116)
Barky arrives on the scene. Instead of going back to explore the interior space of the house where he grew up, he checks out the car in the garage beside the old place.

While the gendering of houses is not an issue I particularly want to focus on in this discussion, I am taking for granted the general assertion that the house is mostly gendered feminine. In Hogan’s discussion of Helen Garner’s novels, she argues: “From a feminist perspective, the house is a particularly significant site, as it is conventionally associated with women, the familial and domesticity.” (Hogan 1995: 70) Stratford has also claimed: “Despite the efforts of many women and some men, the home is a symbol that remains gendered feminine.” (Stratford 1994: 19) The connection between the feminine and the domicile is unsurprising — in cinema it appears in genres as diverse as the western and the melodrama. (White 1992: 140) In her article, “Woman-House: Architecture, Gender and Hybridity in What’s Eating Gilbert Grape”, Blocker uses Louise Bourgeois’ print, Femme-Maison, as a starting point to explore the woman-as-house metaphor. She says:

So imbricated have woman and the home become in this print, so conflated the feminine and the domestic, that they are very nearly one and the same. The identity of the woman has been united with that of a building; she is literally a ‘house/wife’ known not for who she is but the space she occupies. (Blocker 1996: 127)

With one of the highest rates of home ownership in the world, it has been stated on numerous occasions that the house is a particular Australian obsession. (Boyd 1972, Ferrier 1987, Craik 1990) Considering the large real estate lift-outs in the weekend newspapers along with the popularity of magazines like House and Garden, and weekly TV programs like Home

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7 The print depicts a female hybrid whose legs and belly support a house where the head and shoulders ought to be. See Blocker’s article page 126 for a reproduction of this print.
Improvement and Burke's Backyard, it would be easy to gain the impression that many Australians “literally live for their house — saving for a home; building, renovating or restoring one; or just dreaming about owning one”. (Craik 1990: 188) Australia's most recent cinematic history has even seen one family, the Kerrigans, in The Castle (Rob Sitch, 1997) go all the way to the highest-court in Australia just to save from demolition their modest home on a small plot of lead-contaminated land, bordering an international airport.

In the Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard undertakes a phenomenological and psychoanalytical approach in reading the significance of houses and homes. He argues that in order to discover the significance of the house we must go beyond mere description to reveal “how we inhabit our vital space ... for our house is our corner of the world ... our first universe”. (Bachelard 1969: 4) Bachelard claims that: “the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, dreams and memories of mankind.” (Bachelard 1969: 6)

Central to this integration is the daydream, in holding childhood memories motionless. As Elizabeth Ferrier has remarked, although the 'home' as such is an abstract concept, it is conceived of in particular spatial and material terms and is associated metonymically with the house. (Ferrier 1987: 40) Ferrier elaborates on the multifaceted significance of the familial space of the house:

Different characters, objects and events of the past, present and future are brought together in and around its spatial framework. This spatial arrangement enables us to discern patterns in and relationships between the different elements, for example, configurations of a hierarchical, totalitarian or egalitarian nature within families, households or other social groups and institutions. It also enables us to see temporal patterns, for example, an institution's expansion or a family's disintegration. The passage of time is often stabilised through the image of the house; the dwelling endures (even if only in memory) and creates a sense of continuity between past and present. (Ferrier 1987: 45)

The building of houses and similar structures has been of significance in Australian fiction (David Malouf 1985b, 1985c, 1987, Peter Carey 1985,
Elizabeth Jolley 1984, and Patrick White 1961)\(^8\), which may signify an attempt to establish a relationship with the land, or an assertion of ownership over it, as Ferrier has argued. (Ferrier 1987: 43) Rather than depicting the construction of houses, however, the recent batch of ‘return home’ films in Australian cinema depict the sale of the house or its destruction. For instance the protagonists purposely burn down the house in Radiance, it self-destructs in a storm in Vacant Possession, and after inheriting it, the siblings sell it off in Lilian’s Story, Hotel Sorrento and Erskineville Kings.

2.1 Mapping the Filmic Uncanny & the Postcolonial Uncanny

In Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation, Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs introduced Freud’s notion of the uncanny to explore contemporary discourse on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. They also use it to examine constructions of postcolonial ghost story narratives in Australia. Their usage of the uncanny depends on an essay published in 1919, in which Freud investigates the importance of the unheimlich and its relation to psychoanalysis through a number of case studies and the literary Gothic. Gelder and Jacobs argue that Freud’s essay is also pertinent in discussing one’s “sense of place in a modern, changing environment, and it attends to anxieties which are symptomatic of the ongoing process of re-alignment in the post-war modern world.” (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 23) Freud attempts to define the meaning of ‘the uncanny’ through a linguistic examination of two German words, heimlich and unheimlich, whose meanings at first seem diametrically opposed. In general heimlich:

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\(^8\) Ferrier notes that when first settled by Europeans, the Australian continent was seen as a place devoid of culture. Meaghan Morris (quoted in Ferrier 1987: 42) argues that the ‘classic image of Australian space, as structured by a void or an absence which needs to be filled in’. (Morris 1982) Ferrier continues: ‘there was little understanding of Aboriginal cultures with their different practices of settlement. As white settlers built in Australia, they had a sense of starting from scratch, as if they were establishing the first signs of culture here. In Anglo-European cultures at least, the act of building signifies the assertion of culture. (Ferrier 1987: 42)
is not ambiguous but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight. The word unheimlich is only used customarily, we are told as the contrary of the first signifies and not of the second. (Freud 1919: 375)

Gelder and Jacobs paraphrase his lengthy linguistic discussion by noting:

"heimlich is associated with meanings of ‘home’, a familiar or accessible place and unheimlich as that which is unfamiliar, strange, inaccessible, unhomely."

They continue:

An ‘uncanny’ experience may occur when one’s home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and ‘out of place’ simultaneously. This simultaneity is important to stress since, in Freud’s terms, it is not simply the unfamiliar in itself which generates this anxiety of the uncanny; it is specifically the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar — the way in which one seems always to inhabit the other. (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 23)

Gelder and Jacobs also discuss the concept of the uncanny in relation to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and the way in which the concept refuses the binary structure. We often speak of Australia as a settler nation but the ‘uncanny’ can remind us that a condition of unsettledness is imbricated into this taken-for-granted occupation. Reconciliation, they argue, is not simply a matter of whether or not Australians will be reconciled with one another but rather the way these two possibilities co-exist and flow through each other in a productively unstable dynamic. (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 24)

They also observe another binary structure at play within the context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Australia. They argue that non-Aboriginal Australians:

... can be innocent — in the sense of not being implicated in earlier processes of colonisation, or guilty — in the sense that everyone (‘all of us’) is drawn into ‘the guilty industry’ whether we like it or not. Paradoxically the former position casts non—Aboriginal Australians as ‘out of place’, uninvolved in those formative colonial processes whereas the latter position would conceive of

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9 It is rather the way in which, and in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening. (Freud 1919: 370)
non-Aboriginal Australians as in fact, too involved, too embedded in place, in the sense that every one of them, even the most recent immigrant, automatically inherits the (mis)fortunes of Australia’s colonial past. In postcolonial Australia however it may well be that both of these positions are inhabited at the same time: one is innocent (‘out of place’) and one is guilty (‘in place’) simultaneously. And this is entirely consistent with postcoloniality as a contemporary moment, where one remains within the structures of colonialism even as one is somehow located beyond them or ‘after’ them. (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 24)

So these processes of being both innocent and guilty, of reconciliation and non-reconciliation and the way they are inextricably linked are what I shall loosely refer to as the ‘postcolonial uncanny’.

Let us now turn our attention to another type of uncanny, which is embedded more within the framework of psychoanalysis, and is not necessarily a condition of postcoloniality. In the third part of Freud’s essay, his general contention, which Gelder and Jacobs do not focus on in any great depth, is that: “the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed” and “... the better oriented in his [sic] environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it.” (Freud 1919: 401, 370) Freud ultimately identifies the notion of the uncanny or unheimlich with “the former heim [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt upon a time and in the beginning” — the mother’s womb. (Freud 1919: 399) In Gothic narratives, like in the films I examine here, it is the uncanny house that the heroine is forced to inhabit and to explore. (White 1992: 140) White makes the comment that: “in the threatening family mansions of the Gothic ... a door, a staircase, a mirror and a portrait are never simply what they appear to be”. (1992: 140) She goes on to argue that the title of the Fritz Lang’s film, Secret Beyond the Door sums up the enigma of many of these films in which a question about the husband’s motives becomes an investigation of the house (and the secret of the woman who previously inhabited it.) (White 1992: 140) While husbands
are absent in the films I discuss and their motives thus irrelevant, the secrets of
the women who previously inhabited these houses — the mothers — continue
to haunt the houses and are central to the narratives.

The way in which all three films, Radiance, Vacant Possession and Lilian’s Story,
explore the realm of the house has led me to theorise this notion of the ‘filmic
uncanny’, which evidently draws heavily on Freud’s psychoanalytic notion of
‘the uncanny’. The process of returning home — to what was once a familiar
realm and confronting the repressed — is central to this. We remember Gelder
and Jacobs interpretation of the uncanny here: “it is not simply the unfamiliar
in itself which generates this anxiety of the uncanny; it is specifically the
combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar — the way in which one seems
to inhabit the other”. (1998: 23) On the protagonists’ return however, the space
is constructed in such a way that it provokes the resurfacing of the repressed.10
This is evident through the protagonists’ memories — and perhaps those who
formerly inhabited the house — which haunt the interior spaces of the house.
Images and hallucinations of the past are rendered filmically through
flashbacks. Often these images are frightening and involve characters reliving
‘family secrets’ of being raped by a family member or being cast out of the
house by a domineering, abusive father. If we recall Freud’s description of the
other meaning of the German word heimlich, as “that which is concealed and
kept out of sight” we see the importance of secrets in the concept of the
uncanny. The character’s past experiences renders them in a sense ‘out of
place’. Instead of the house being a familiar, comforting realm it becomes a
frightening and alienating one, (thus emphasizing the notion of unheimlich or
‘the uncanny’). Much of this process involves the central protagonists
struggling with the topos of the home, which in some cases also involves a

10 “The uncanny’ proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed.”
(Freud 1919: 401)
struggle with the mother\footnote{This is especially in the case of \textit{Radiance} in relation to the characters Cressy and Mae, see further discussion of this in the textual analysis of these films.} or the father. The reliving of these experiences in effect renders the characters ‘out-of-place’ within the environment of the house. They realise that a home need not be house. They are then free to embrace this notion of ‘at homeness’ within themselves (in the case of \textit{Lilian’s Story}) or within their relationships (in the case of \textit{Radiance} and \textit{Vacant Possession}) then symbolically destroy the physical manifestation of their past life. This enables them to move forward.

Margot Nash, director of \textit{Vacant Possession}, argues the metaphor of ‘home’ being a safe place for children is of paramount importance:

\begin{quote}
I was always interested in the notion of the house, in the image of it as a metaphor or container, in the notions of ‘house and home’, a place that would or would not protect children. I had done a documentary with teenage girls who were in care, and I’d come out of that thinking that questions about housing and a safe place were really critical. (Nash, director of \textit{Vacant Possession}, quoted in Corbett 1995: 18)
\end{quote}

\textit{Lilian’s Story, Vacant Possession,} and \textit{Radiance} focus on the haunting and sometimes terrifying memories and dreams invoked upon return to a childhood home. In the first two films mentioned the houses are not the oft-quoted metaphors of shelter or protection but spheres from which the main characters, Lilian and Tessa respectively, were banished in late adolescence by domineering, abusive fathers. In the case of \textit{Radiance}, the eldest sister Cressy is a product of the ‘stolen generation’ and was (forcefully?) taken from her mother and put into foster care.\footnote{Cressy believes that her mother ‘just handed her over’ when the authorities arrived.} A physical return to the homes of their past for these characters also invokes a psychological return to the oneiric qualities embedded in the interiors. This physical and psychological revisiting is necessary to try and solve unanswered familial issues or come to a deeper understanding of themselves. For Lilian, Tessa and Cressy entering these
houses of 'dream-memory' in their later life means reliving the painful memories inlaid in the staircases, cellars, studies and in the case of Radiance, under-the-house. Just as their adolescent (romantic) dreams were abruptly and violently curtailed, these women become suspended in a dream-memory state where the past momentarily flows into the present.

2.2 Lilian's Story: Mad Return

Lilian's Story was adapted from Kate Grenville's novel of the same name, inspired by the peripatetic life of the eccentric Bea Miles, who roamed the streets of Sydney reciting Shakespeare in the 1980s. The film begins as Lilian, aged in her late fifties, is released from a mental institution and follows her subsequent displacement and homelessness on the streets of Sydney. We learn that Lilian's release is probably due to the efforts of her brother John, who works for the Salvation Army.

It is not until after the death of her father that Lilian is able to make a physical and psychological return to: "the gothic harbour home of her youth, the dark bastion of her madness" (Fitzgerald 1996: 65). Through a flashback, in the scene before Lilian is raped and abused by her father, we see her mother leave. During this time, her few happy memories of intimacy are connected to her teenage romance with F.J Stroud. That however, is abruptly finished by her father when he catches them on the beach together, innocently reciting Shakespeare.
Lilian's Story is delivered with the same compassion as HINE and is "a film we have been waiting for... a fine achievement."

The search for happiness can sometimes take a lifetime.

"An extraordinary film..."

Margaret Pinnace, HERALD SUN

Lilian's Story

Adapted from the novel by Kate Grenville

Figure Three

MA 15+ UNDER THE AGE
HIGH LEVEL VIOLENCE, ADULT THEMES

MA 15+ UNDER THE AGE
HIGH LEVEL VIOLENCE, ADULT THEMES

Forty years after LILIAN NGER had been locked up in a mental institute by her father, her new life begins. Equipped with a room of her own, an allowance, a strong sense of destiny and the words of Shakespeare, she sets out to live her new life on the streets, buses and taxis of Sydney.

Lilian is determined to earn her keep and give something back to the city; she recites poetry for a dollar and shares her wisdom with passers-by. Still not content, Lilian wants to understand her troubled life and finds that the key to her true happiness lies in confronting her past.

Lilian's Story is an extraordinary tale of one woman's struggle to be free from her past and reclaim the love that is denied her. For Lilian it is never too late to change and secure happiness. Life, for her, is an experience where everything matters. Starring Ruth Cracknell and Toni Collette in her AFI award-winning performance, this is a film at shouldn't be missed.
Lilian's childhood house becomes more of an extension of their domineering father, rather than the mother, as is the case with *Radiance* and *Vacant Possession*. Its vast exterior, castle-like, looms obsessively over the empty grounds and harbour beach in front of it. The significance of the house to which Lilian and John return, may be read satirically in terms of Bachelard's theory of the vertical construction of the oneiric house:

> the dreamer constructs and reconstructs the upper stories and the attic ... when we dream of the heights we are in the rational zone of intellectualised projects. (Bachelard 1969: 18)

It is in the upper story of the house where their father's study is aptly, or should I say ironically located; or in the 'rational zone'. The first journey Lilian and her brother John make upon entering their dead father's house is up the stairs and into his study; a sphere from which they were prohibited as children. This scene recalls the father's study from which the child, Nathaniel, is banished from entering in Hoffman's "The Sandman" (1961). Freud takes up Hoffman's fantastic tale in his discussion on "The Uncanny".\(^\text{13}\) Amongst many other uncanny facets of the tale, the father's study, far from being Bachelard's 'rational zone', is defined as an uncanny sphere. It is here where Nathaniel first recognises the the Sandman; a figure who continues to haunt him for the rest of his life and eventually causes his suicide.

Through the memories and daydreams sparked by Lilian's return to this house, and realised through flashbacks in the film, the filmic uncanny is established. The flashbacks are bathed in golden tones to distinguish them

\(^{13}\) On certain evenings, Nathaniel's mother would send him to bed early, warning that "the Sandman was coming" and he learns from his nurse that the Sandman is "a wicked man who comes when children won't go to bed and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so they jump out of their heads all bleeding." (Freud 1919: 379) Sure enough, Nathaniel would hear "the heavy tread of a visitor" upstairs in his father's study. Dreading what he might find, but determined to discover the secret of the Sandman, one evening Nathaniel hides in his father's study. He identifies Coppelius, the family's despised lawyer, as the dreaded Sandman. Nathaniel betrays himself when he cries out in horror at Coppelius's comment: "Here with your eyes". (Freud 1919: 380) Not long after, his father is killed by an explosion in his study, however the lawyer Coppelius mysteriously vanishes.
from real-time events. We begin to comprehend the reasons for Lilian's insanity and eccentricities along with the hate projected towards her father while he was still alive:

... thanks to the house a great many of our [childhood] memories are housed ... if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. (Bachelard 1969: 8)

As brother and sister enter the house they are shown in a medium long shot tracking backwards. Lilian enters apprehensively after John sparks her memory of the significant event which changed her life. A medium close-up reveals an expression of recognition and fear on her face. Then as she looks back a cut to a flashback reveals a long shot of her father rushing across the grounds in front of the family house furiously searching for her. Eventually he gives up and, in a tone of simmering rage, says: “I know you’re out there. I’ll deal with you on my return.” After her father leaves the young Lilian enters the house and goes into his study. A cut forward to real time shows Lilian and John in medium long shot outside their father’s study. Lilian grabs the key from the door and enters with John following behind. Upon entering the study John excitedly says to Lilian: “Remember father was always saying: ‘I carry a great weight of ideas around which must be set down’?” Lilian meanwhile slowly flicks through her father’s ‘book of facts’ as she did when a teenager. The scene swaps to flashback. Lilian’s old hands are replaced by her teenage ones. As like then, it is completely empty but for a photo of the teenage Lilian snugly nestled in its pages, like the photo of an absent or dead lover. A shot of young Lilian’s hand grabbing the photo is followed by a medium shot of old Lilian as she passes the book to John. Then John exclaims, gazing in disbelief at the empty pages: “Book of facts, by Albion Singer. It’s empty. There’s nothing ... Father ...” and Lilian completes his sentence “... was a fraud.” Lilian proceeds to recall the events of the fateful day:

Lilian: Then after father’s study I tried on mother’s clothes. Her room was too small so I went out to the landing.

John: That was the past Lil’, don’t you see?
In flashback the young Lilian tries on her mother's clothes, discovering her changing adolescent body in the mirror. This sequence is shown in slow motion accompanied by Cezary Skubiszewski's nostalgic sound track. Unbeknownst to Lilian her father suddenly appears at the top of the stairs and is gazing down on her.

Father: You entered my study! How dare you! You tight steamy little vixen. You're a disgrace to your sex.

Then Lilian's father proceeds to whip her with his belt. Close-ups of young Lilian's face are then interspersed with close-up shots of old Lilian's as she relives the pain of those events. He stops momentarily and leans down, as if to comfort her for his brutality. At this point she's shown in medium shot on the ground and relaxes somewhat, thinking the trauma is over. Then the expression on her face changes from one of sadness to one to one of absolute fear as he forces her onto the ground and she realises he's about to rape her. Meanwhile the young John covers his ears and runs down the stairs and out of the front door as Lilian's anguished cries for help reverberate throughout the house.

Lilian's act of entering her father's forbidden study, can be read as an act of symbolic castration. She disempowers her father because she now has knowledge of the 'secret' he was hiding; that he is a 'fraud' and his 'book of facts' is empty. We remember Freud's comment that an important part of the concept of unheimlich are secrets: "that which is concealed and kept out of sight". (Freud 1919: 375) Lilian's punishment however, of being physically raped, is a disproportionate response to discovering her father's secret and her symbolic enactment of her father's castration.

Unlike the films Hotel Sorrento, Vacant Possession and Radiance, sibling rivalry over ownership of childhood memories and possessions isn't at issue in Lilian's
Chapter Two - The House

Story. Lilian’s demand from her brother John is for mere recognition of their tyrannical father’s sexual and psychological abuse in her adolescent years which, it is implied, incited her madness. This journey back into the home of her youth uncovers the painful memories but also a leads her to demand why her brother never did anything to help her:

Lilian: John. John ... You knew what father was doing to me. Why didn’t you help me?
John: No. No. I didn’t.
Lilian: You came back and saw everything. I saw you
John: No. No. Father said you were running wild, you’d brought disgrace to the family.
Lilian: You told everyone I was mad.
John: Father had no choice. It was you ... you ... why did you do it? You were mad. I didn’t see it.
Lilian: You just stood by and let them lock me up for 40 years!

However in the next scene John eventually is moved to tears by guilt and regret and apologises to Lilian. It is this apology which leads to a recognition of the past and Lilian is subsequently able to bury the ghosts of her childhood, even though her father is already dead. This is symbolically enacted in the following scene when Lilian ventures to her father’s graveside and buries the photo of teenage Lilian which her father had kept in his ‘book of facts’. Now, once again Lilian is able to dream in peace.

In Lilian’s Story the house plays a vital role in the reconciliation between Lilian and her brother John. Through a return to the house and an exploration of the uncanny, Lilian is also able to reconcile the memory of her childhood-self and childhood hurts with her adult self. While Lilian’s Story deals mainly with personal reconciliations, Vacant Possession moves from the personal to issues of public reconciliation/s.
VACANT POSSESSION

Director: Margaret Nash
Producer: John Winter
Produced by Wintertime Films and As If Productions in association with the Australian Film Commission
1994, Australia, 95 mins, 35mm & VHS, Drama

Following her mother's death, Tessa returns to her childhood home, a house haunted by emotional secrets.

But how do you return home after years away? And what's home after all...a house...a place...a family?

VACANT POSSESSION is the story of two families - one white, one indigenous - both living in the shadow of the past. A past fragmented with events too long unresolved.

Weaving dream, memory, fantasy, present and past, VACANT POSSESSION is a story of conflict and the complexities of reconciliation.

Festivals & Awards: Special Jury Mention, Creteil International Films de Femmes, 1996; International Film Forum Arenals Lavinia, 1996; Cinema Tent Etan Geneva, 1996; Odense Film Festival, 1996; Adelaide Festival, 1996; Portland Film Festival, 1996; Strictly Oz. UCLA/Washington, 1996; Women in Film, Seattle Film Festival, 1996; Melbourne Film Festival, 1995; Sydney Film Festival, 1995; Jump Cut Film Festival, Perth, 1995; Brisbane Film Festival, 1995; Chicago Film Festival, 1995; Asia Pacific Film Festival, Indonesia, 1995; Hawaii Film Festival, 1995.

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Released exclusively in Australia & New Zealand by AF Distribution

AUSTRALIAN FILM INSTITUTE

4 AFI Award Nominations

"Best Director"
"Best Original Screenplay"
"Best Editing"
"Best Sound"

"...daring and mature...a landmark Australian film."
Anna Maria Dell'Oso, Sydney Morning Herald

"Excellent...dreamy, lyrical...an evocative, powerful experience..."
David Hunter, Hollywood Reporter

Figure Four
2.3 Vacant Possession or house of dream-memory?

... the real houses of memory, the houses which we return to in dreams, the houses that are rich in unalterable oneirism, do not readily lend themselves to description ... to describe them would be like showing them to visitors ... the first oneirically definitive house must contain shadows ... all we communicate to others is an orientation towards what is secret without ever being able to tell the secret objectively. (Bachelard 1969: 13)

For Tessa (Pamela Rabe), the central protagonist in Vacant Possession, a physical and psychological return to the sphere of her childhood home and its surrounds brings back painful memories. At sixteen, Tessa was banished from her home and family by her father because of her teenage romance and pregnancy to Mitch, a local Aboriginal boy. Now, as a mature woman in her early forties, she returns to confront the ghosts and memories of her recently deceased mother, her mad father, and Mitch.

From the outset, Vacant Possession problematises the notion of 'home' and 'belonging' as it is set in Botany Bay, 'birthplace of a nation'. The film opens with a montage of disparate, dream-like images drenched in blue and golden hues. Shots of the hauntingly beautiful mangrove swamps are juxtaposed against heavy industry wreaking destruction on Botany Bay's shore-line. In these shots, Tessa's voice-over introduces her own personal story, set against the more public history and myths which endow Botany Bay with national significance:

Some dreams you remember as if they were real. Others are like fragments that float away, never to be held. This dream returned to me again and again. I knew it was about home because it started here on a boat heading for Botany Bay, birthplace of a nation, my birthplace, my home. The heads lay in front of me like an entrance to a womb and the great land whispered behind it. All that I could think of was that my mother was dying and I wouldn’t reach her in time. In the dream I thought of her mother and her mother’s mother. I followed the links in the chain one by one back to the ancestors; prisoners sweating and hungry in the dark hulls. I thought of my father and his father’s father. Fear of the unknown gripped me like a cold chill. (Tessa in Vacant Possession)

Tessa is compelled to return to her childhood home after a repeated dream she has, foreshadowing her mother’s death. Her dream-memory of this home is
however a far cry from the old, dilapidated dwelling to which she eventually returns with her sister. Tessa has remained single and is now a professional gambler in financial difficulty. Her sister, Kate, has repeated the mistake of her mother and is living in an unhappy, stressful marriage and having financial difficulties. Like Hilary in *Hotel Sorrento*, Kate does not have the same sentimental attachment to the house. She has maintained a spatial and temporal continuum with its dilapidation and grown accustomed to its gradual decline. When Tessa returns from overseas and explains that her mother left the house to both of them in a new will, a dispute breaks out between the siblings over ownership of the house. Kate has taken care of her ailing, aging parents over the years so believes that she solely is entitled to the house. Tessa meanwhile, believes that selling the house will give her a

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14 In the depiction of what the viewer later realises to be a dream sequence, a close-up shot of Tessa’s hand shows her taking the latch off the gate. In the next shot the gate opens in the foreground with a weatherboard house surrounded with wide verandahs in the background. Tessa’s voice-over discloses: “There it was, the house I grew up in.” Then a close-up shot reveals her sandy bare-feet walking across white beach sand onto grass, towards the house: “And as I moved closer, I thought of the Aboriginal children down the road. The children we weren’t allowed to play with.”

15 Like *Radiance*, *Hotel Sorrento* revolves around the reunion of three sisters. Two of the sisters have been living overseas for many years and one, Hilary, has remained in her family home in the sleepy, beachside town of Sorrento and raised her son there. Hilary has taken responsibility for her aging father after her mother’s death and has been solely responsible for her son, after her husband’s suspicious death — possibly suicide — ten years before. For Meg and Pip, the two sisters returning to the space they actually grew up in (both the town, Sorrento and the house, ‘Hotel Sorrento’) seems to be just as important as attempting to fortify sibling relations established in that sphere.

Meg, the author of the best-selling book ‘Melancholy’ nominated for the Booker Prize, has been living in England for 10 years. While she obviously denigrates her experience of growing up in Sorrento and Australian culture in general it is these experiences which form the basis of her book. As Hilary has maintained a spacial and temporal continuum (or diachronic relationship) with ‘Hotel Sorrento’ well into her adult life she perceives the place in a far less self-conscious way than her returning, dislocated sisters. Her memories of more recent times such as the death of her father, are far closer to her. Meg and Pippa on the other hand have only distant, disjointed memories stimulated by different places within the town or rooms within the house; the verandah where their father used to drink with his mates, the kitchen where their mother used to cook, the pier where they fished. Both Meg and Pippa do not have the same diachronic relationship to the house so their memories and emotions become simplified and suspended; deadlocked in a time and place which no longer exists. They simultaneously idealise and denigrate their childhood town and home and Australia as their macro national home. They have to continuously psychologise their environment of return and attempt to justify to themselves (and others) why they left in the first place. Whereas Hilary’s experience of Sorrento has been developed on an uninterrupted continuum.
chance for a new start. So Tessa returns to live in the house and search for the new will. During her time there people ceaselessly pass through the house.\footnote{During her stay various uninvited guests descend on Irene: a real estate agent whom Tessa’s father has asked to ‘snoop around’; Milli (Mitch’s niece); Milli’s cat, Captain Cook; two vagrants who were friends of her mother’s; another relative of Mitch’s; a neighbour from up the road and the last, most disturbing visitor, her father.} She is also confronted by repressed memories, fantasies and ghosts from her childhood:

> Over and beyond our memories the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us, a group of organic habits ... we would push the door that creaks with the same gesture as we did when we were a few years old ... there exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory ... (Bachelard 1969: 14-15)

Evidently for Tess this is the oneric house of her childhood; her house of ‘dream-memory’. However in Tessa’s case, when the house of dream-memory is challenged with a return to the real childhood house, her fantasies do not correspond to the reality. So the house itself is then rendered unfamiliar and becomes ‘uncanny’. For example Tessa’s sensation of returning to the house in a dream in the opening sequence mentioned earlier is then juxtaposed with her return in ‘reality’ with her sister Kate. Like Lilian in Lilian’s Story, Tess’s memory of the house is a static or synchronic one trapped in the time and space of the past, after she was banished from it as a teenager by her brutal father. Tessa’s feeling of familiar, unfamiliarity — or the uncanny — is encapsulated in this parallel sequence. In the confrontation between fantasy and reality, fantasy wins out. The ‘real house’ is made unheimlich because it fails to live (down/up) to memory. Tessa enters through the gate like she did in the dream, however a look of shock registers on her face when she sees the dilapidated state of the dwelling. There is a striking juxtaposition in mise-en-scène between the fantasy and ‘real time’ sequences. The fantasy sequence...
describes Tess as an organic part of the environment. She is bare-foot, the wind blowing her tangled hair across her face; her clothing an earthy, light brown shade, and the light diffused. In contrast, the ‘real time’ sequence depicts her as well-coiffured, dressed in a brilliant red suit and donning sunglasses which shield her from the harsh, mid-day sun. Here she is positioned in stark contrast to the neglected dwelling and its surrounds.

On arrival at the old house, a teenage Aboriginal girl, Milli, runs around the back of the house and looks under the house. She then becomes aware of Kate and Tessa’s presence and is taken aback. Milli tells the women she’s looking for her cat called Cooky (short for Captain Cook, because “we didn’t invite him and he wouldn’t go away”). Meanwhile Kate whispers to Tessa, about the Aboriginal family who have been renting the house: “They think they own the bloody place”. A short while later this comment is repeated by Milli, but in relation to Cooky: “He thinks he owns the place.” So in another way the house and its surrounds are rendered unheimlich, the characters being both simultaneously ‘in place’ and ‘out of place’. Milli and her family used to rent the house so she feels ‘at home’ in the vicinity of the house until the two women arrive. They, on the other hand are ‘in place’ in white terms because they own the materiality of the house but at the same time they are located outside its spiritual connections with the land. It is this dimension which Tessa tries to recover and embrace when she moves in and lives at the house.

The filmic uncanny is also constructed through the way in which Vacant Possession transcends the conventions of linear temporal continuity and moves fluidly between dream, memory and fantasy, between past and present. At times Tessa’s mother (dead in real time) will stand beside her, both aged in their forties. At other moments the contemporary Tessa embraces the
psychologically wounded teenage Tessa, as she discovers she is pregnant. This technique is reminiscent of one used in Anne Pratten’s short film, *Terra Nullius* (1993) where Carol Laseur has noted that in an embrace: “the two main protagonists (the old and young Alice) unite in a symbolic image of wholeness — as mother and daughter — [and] the split in Alice’s identity is healed.” (Laseur 1998: 114) This symbolic image of wholeness is emphasised too through utilising a similar technique in *Vacant Possession*. As the film progresses we find out that Tessa has returned not only to reconcile past events with her parents but also to see what has happened to her teenage lover, Mitch. In one sequence Tessa speaks to a relative of Mitch’s who visits unexpectedly, thinking that his Aunty Beryl and her family are still renting the house. Through him, Tess discovers that Mitch died a few years ago. After he leaves, Tess is depicted in medium shot rocking on her bed like a little child, weeping uncontrollably. Then Tessa’s mother Joyce, aged in her forties walks into frame to comfort Tess. As she embraces Tess the camera tracks forward and holds them in medium close-up. The sequence is shot in darkness except for a blue hue which bathes both characters creating an atmosphere of maternal empathy and understanding.

*Vacant Possession* examines the complexity of the meaning of ‘home’ or ‘a house’ from a number of different perspectives. On one level the house, called ‘Irene’, is merely a physical possession, being bought, sold and disputed over simply for material gain. At another level it is a sensate being, endowed with familial memories, dreams and ghosts which the central character must reconcile if she is to: “look to the future and to the past ... without fear” (Tessa’s voice-over at the end of the film). Director Margot Nash has

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17 Carol Laseur in her analysis of *Terra Nullius* shows how Pratten along with Tracey Moffatt, in her film *Bedevil*, transform traditional notions of genre and seek to redefine the dominant paradigms of race, culture and social context. She calls for a more thorough investigation of reception fields and questions the limits of applying conventional realist viewing strategies to these films. (Laseur 1998: 30)
anthropomorphised Irene. The house is named, endowed with a kind of spirit, and invokes an ambience of both mystery and menace which lurks in every corner. Filmic techniques are used to evoke a sense of the uncanny. Often, for instance, the house is depicted as if trying to communicate with Tess. In one scene Tess is writing in her diary then an off-screen, presumably diegetic sound is heard, coming from inside the house (like a window or door being closed). A close-up of Tessa’s face reveals an expression of fear. She retrieves the hammer from under her bed for protection and gradually makes her way into the other rooms in the house, searching for the source of the noise. She hears the noise again as she makes her way through the different rooms. “Who’s there?”, she demands. Then as she walks into the kitchen she sees ice dropping from the freezer as the fridge defrosts. Frozen in amongst the ice is the altered will which reveals that her mother left the house to both sisters rather than just to Kate. In this way it is constructed as an ‘oneiric house’ of ‘dream-memory’ attempting to communicate to Tess.

To bring further complexity into the equation, the land on which Irene resides in Botany Bay is, of course, originally Aboriginal land. There are various references throughout the film of the land being poisoned through white settlement. The Aboriginal family living down the road is a constant reminder of their continuous presence on this land and of the various injustices levelled against them. The family also has distinct links to Tessa’s family. Pamela Rabe, the actor who plays Tessa, has stated that:

*Vacant Possession* is like a love letter to the land. It is a love letter that acknowledges the difficulty and ambivalence of the

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18 When Tessa first arrives in Botany Bay with her sister she notices a sickly smell and her sister explains that they are dredging the bay. On another occasion while Tessa is visiting Aunty Beryl she is sick and complains that there must be something in the water. Tessa’s father also mentions the land has been poisoned.

19 The logic of the film seems to imply that if Tess's racist, abusive father hadn’t treated the couple so brutally they would have been 'family' through the union of Tess and Mitch.
relationship between white Australia and the land, and between indigenous people and colonisers. It also hints at a different connection that Aboriginal Australians have with the land, a bond not confined to the dream of owning a house. (Pamela Rabe cited in Corbett 1995: 18)

Rabe’s comment concerning the “difficulty and ambivalence ... between indigenous people and colonisers” is reminiscent of the postcolonial uncanny that Gelder and Jacobs evince, and the notion that one can be simultaneously ‘in place’ and ‘out of place’.

Throughout the film various members of the family lay claim to Irene, but it seems that Irene has a mind of her own. Initially, like her sister Kate, Tessa believes that physical possession of the house, and its sale are simply ways to rectify financial hardship. Their father, Frank, lost possession of the house after his divorce with Joyce, their mother. In the settlement, Joyce was given possession of the house because she owned the land. In the scene set in the cellar, close to the end of the film, Frank tells us that Joyce won the land: “in a ballot after the war. One of those schemes they had for dividing up vacant crown land. You put your name and ten pounds in a hat”. Now, after Frank has received his superannuation, he wants to try and buy it back because, as he says to Tessa: “For God’s sake ... I built the bloody place. You put the sweat of your hands into something. It’s part of you.” But Tessa demands that they should give it to Mitch’s family in compensation for his death, for which Frank was indirectly responsible. But while father and daughter argue about the fate of Irene, the violent storm outside takes hold and Frank, Tessa and Milli (Mitch’s niece) are forced into the cellar:

the cellar is the dark entity of the house the one that partakes of subterranean forces. When we dream there we are in the harmony with the irrationality of the depths. (Bachelard 1969: 18)

In the scene that ensues it seems that both father and daughter have finally come to some recognition of each other’s lives and choices. Meanwhile decrepit, old Irene has made up her own mind that no one shall claim her and
she self-destructs under the weight of the weather and falls down around them. As Gelder and Jacobs saw it:

the house is blown away in the tempest, as if dispossession must be shared equally in order for Tessa to achieve a 'proper' homecoming. The cat, Captain Cook, dies during the storm and is later buried, signifying the successful transition to a postcolonial sensibility. (Gelder & Jacobs 1998: 36-37)

It is questionable whether the uncanny can self-destruct so easily, signifying, as Gelder and Jacobs have argued: “the successful transition to a postcolonial sensibility”. The uncanny and its inherent unsettledness, must be read as a part of a postcolonial sensibility. In commenting on the film, Adrian Martin hints towards the notion of the postcolonial uncanny in his use of the adjective 'uneasy' in the following quotation:

Nash’s film attempts to dramatise Aboriginal ownership of the nation — an issue recently in the news with the groundbreaking “Mabo” legislation, which established crucial land rights claims for Aborigines. The ‘vacant possession’ of the title refers to white Australia’s uneasy, even illegitimate, claim on this ‘home’ and the spiritual emptiness and emotional dysfunction which come with it. (Martin 1995: 30)

The familial relations dysfunctionally manifested in Irene also make it a metonym for the Australian nation and the growing rift between black and white Australians. The rigid structure which supports these relations — the house — collapses, therefore signifying the possibility for renewal and change. The conversation which takes place at the end of the film, between Tessa and Milli, illustrates the potential for an intersubjective dialogue and further understanding to develop between black and white Australians. Down in the cellar, after Milli (Mitch’s niece) has overheard the argument between Tessa and her father, Frank, over who will take possession of the house, she says to Tessa:

Milli: We don’t want your house. Why do you people always think you know what we want?

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20 One reviewer of the film said: “Wearing her liberal heart on her sleeve, Nash takes on more than she can chew — it’s an impossible task for Tessa to take on the whole burden of Australia’s white guilt. (Fitzgerald 1996: 65-66)
Tessa: [shocked] I ... I just thought ... I heard you people talking about a bank loan ...

Milli: We was only gamming. You know, joking. We was talking, but we was talking about a home, not a house. A home is a place. It's where you belong.

2.4 Radiance: Universal Story?

While Vacant Possession is overt in laying bare its social text, Radiance seems to be working in more subtle ways. This can be seen in the discourse surrounding the release of the film — in the way it was both marketed and received. Generally it was viewed within the parameters of a ‘universal story’, rather than as a film engaging with the contemporary issues of reconciliation and the stolen generation.21 This, I argue, ultimately results in a superficial response to the film’s ‘Aboriginality’.22 Radiance financier Andrew Myer for instance emphasises the universal appeal of the film and downplays its Aboriginal specificities:23

The script deals with issues and themes common to all human beings: trust, love, truth — and the secrets of the past. It’s an Aboriginal story, because Louis originally wrote the play for three Aboriginal actors, but they could be three Caucasian women. (Urban 1998c)24

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21 Like others, on my first viewing of Radiance, I initially envisaged the film could be set anywhere in the world and that is how I approached the interview with Rachel Perkins. (See Simpson 1999c or Appendix One.)

22 “Aboriginality arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who engage in any intercultural dialogue, whether in lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book.” (Langton 1993: 31)

23 While the notion that films about Indigenous Australians “are box-office poison” (O'Regan 1996: 59) in Australia is diminishing, it is possible that the marketers of the film played down its Aboriginal specificities for this reason.

Radiance is a captivating story of three young women who reunite, alter many years apart. For their mother's funeral, they grieve, reconcile and celebrate. Over the course of twenty-four hours, the skeletons in the family closet emerge, and we discover that coming home means different things to different people.

Love, madness, and ramshackle house on the remote Queensland coast conspire to create an irreverent tale of family intrigue. Three women, each with a different story, reunite almost as strangers and together they ignite the film.

"Deborah Mailman ... lights up the screen at every turn ... a star is born."
- Paul Fischer

Radiance

Voted Most Popular Film in Both
The Sydney Film Festival and Melbourne
International Film Festival

Recommended for Audiences 15 Years
Adult Themes, Medium Level Coarse Language

Figure Five
The last lines of Mark Juddery's review of *Radiance* dismisses its Aboriginal perspective as 'mostly immaterial' given its 'universal story':

... Incidentally, the sisters are Aborigines. This has some relevance, but is mostly immaterial. These are universal characters, in a universal story. (Juddery 1998)\(^{25}\)

This comment however, seems to disregard the socio-political implications of the fact that this is a story appropriated and directed by an Aboriginal woman about Aboriginal women — a highly significant event in itself. It seems difficult also to overlook the specific socio-historical realities central to the story — the 'stolen generation' along with the history of dispossession — which continue to resonate with painful urgency in Australian society today. Perhaps what Myer is suggesting is that *Radiance* can be fully appreciated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians alike without the white audience having to directly confront the past or being made to feel uncomfortable about their 'white guilt'.\(^{26}\) However, *Radiance* cannot be a story about three Caucasian women as Andrew Myer has suggested. If we make that mistake, then again we are looking at the film from within a colonial discourse and silencing its Aboriginal voice(s). Contrary to what many people have said about *Radiance* — "There are no socio-political undertones, just contemporary characters" (Urban 1998c) — I believe the film can be read as having strong socio-political undertones which I will attempt to underscore through a brief discussion of its style and its use of the house as a metonym for the nation. If we ignore this perspective of its agenda then we are denying its expression of Aboriginality and forcing an assimilationist perspective on the work. Central to my reading


\(^{26}\) Through the accessibility of *Radiance* — in its genre, style and humour — and its lack of a polemical tone, along with the way it has been cleverly marketed (as a 'universal' story which won't subvert the safety and comfort of white Australia) it has no doubt be viewed by a far broader audience than other films which didactically deal with Aboriginal issues.
of Radiance is also is the way the filmic uncanny and postcolonial uncanny become implicated in this work.

Radiance, like Hotel Sorrento, is based on a play and centres on the reunion of three ‘sisters’, who return to their mother’s house for her funeral. Like the films already discussed, the three central characters in Radiance — Nona, Mae and Cressy — have starkly differing relationships to the home of their youth; a bungalow on the remote Queensland coast. The youngest, Nona, ran away to Sydney in her early teens but now, having just discovered she is pregnant, wants to carry on the legacy of the family and have her baby in the house. Nona’s also obsessed with finding her father or any possession signifying his existence. Her fond childhood memories of the ‘Queenslander’ and playing under it are the absolute antithesis to Cressy’s experiences. Cressy (Rachael Maza), in contrast, has an absolute irreverence for the house; her horrifying memories are spatialised through its different spheres. Cressy, we discover, is a product of the ‘stolen generation’ but has since ‘made it’ and become a operatic diva travelling from metropolis to metropolis. Despite their apparent difference, both Nona and Cressy’s relationship with the house is a static or synchronic one, trapped in the time and space of the past. Mae (Trisha Morton), on the other hand, is the backbone of stability in the family and nursed their aging, ill mother until her death so her relationship with the home is diachronic. To Mae the house is more of a prison.

For Cressy, returning home produces uncanny feelings evocatively illustrated through the filmic techniques used on her initial arrival at the house. Nona and Mae are getting ready for their mother’s funeral and, in Cressy’s absence,

\footnote{As the film progresses we find out they are not actually all ‘sisters’, there is a mother/daughter, sister/aunty relationship as well as the sister/sister one.}
Nona puts on Cressy's Madama Butterfly music CD and reminisces about her beautiful and famous sister's voice. The "One Fine Day" aria creates an uneasy, almost melancholic atmosphere signifying Cressy's arrival. Her taxi pulls up and Cressy gets out and gingerly closes the car-door. A medium close up of her face shows her eyes moving furtively behind sunglasses. The next shot is taken from inside the verandah. In close-up we see her peering cautiously in through the lattice-work, her face partly obscured. Then, a long shot from behind shows Cressy approaching the steps. She pauses at the bottom then makes her way up tentatively. When she finally opens the front door neither Mae nor Nona notice her entrance because they are not expecting her. Their surprise at seeing her elicits the comment from Cressy: "I'm no ghost!"

The filmic uncanny is also established in the scene which precedes the one just described and opens the film. We see a close-up shot of Mae striking a match in the darkness and saying: "You are still there, aren't ya? Ghosts burn, d'you know that? ... You did the dirty on her, did the dirty on us both but he'll be too late and it'll all go up in flames." This is followed by eerie, non-diegetic music and shots of shadows being cast against the interior walls of the house across an old photograph of their mother and a painting of Jesus on the wall. But one of the most striking ways in which both the mother and the house are imbued with a sense of the uncanny is the scene where a group of boys throw rocks at the house:

Nona: It's eerie to think it's her isn't it? (to Cressy looking at the ashes of their dead mother. Just as Nona says this there is

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28 Mae is very similar to the characters, Kate in Vacant Possession, Hilary in Hotel Sorrento and the Marcia Langton character in Tracey Moffatt's short film, Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy (1989).

29 Interestingly, the story of Madama Butterfly like Radiance, is one of maternal loss. Madama Butterfly revolves around the story of a Japanese woman who has her child taken away when its father, an American sailor, reclaims the child a few years later with his new white wife. The sailor justifies taking the child on the grounds that it will have a 'better future' in America.
a diegetic sound of something falling on the roof and
male voices chanting: “witch, witch, witch!”

Nona: Hail stones!
Cressy: (alarmed) What is it? What’s happening?
Mae: They’re just some boys.
Cressy: What are they doing?
Mae: Don’t cause a fuss (she says casually)
Nona: They’re throwing stones at the house.
Mae: Only on the roof.
Cressy: (indignantly) Do they do this a lot?
Mae: They’re only boys.
Nona: Well they fucking well better not do it again.
Mae: Nona! (Nona goes running out onto the verandah to tell
the boys to “fuck off!”)
Cressy: Mae! What’s happening? Why are they doing this?
Mae: Well I guess they don’t know.
Cressy: Don’t know what?
Mae: That she’s dead!
Cressy: This is against mum. They’re calling her a witch.
Mae: But she was! She was a witch! She spat on people if I took
her out... Why d’you think no-one turned up today? No
one goes to the funeral service of a witch. (cut away to the
storm brewing outside. It’s as if the weather is turning on
them).

This disparity in feelings towards the house between the three women is
clearly evinced when Nona impulsively goes under-the-house in search of a
Radiance tin — which, Nona says: “still smelt of nougat” — in which she can
put her mother’s ashes. Cressy is desperate to stop Nona going under-the-
house because it provokes the resurfacing of feelings which she has long ago
repressed. In this instance Nona going under-the-house also produces feelings
of the uncanny, and her cry at the end of this scene of: “here comes the boogie
man” is rather prescient.

Mae: Where are you going?
Nona: Under the house.
Cressy: (urgently): No, don’t go under the house.
Nona: Anyone want to join me? (mischievously)
Cressy: (shouts desperately as Nona leaves) Nona! (Then
to Mae) — Did mum leave this to you in the will?
Mae: She didn’t leave a will.
Cressy: So what have you decided?
Mae: To burn it to the ground.
Cressy: What about Nona?
Mae: She lives out of suitcases.

Cut to under-the-house. Nona has been listening to their
conversation through the floorboards. “Whacko bitch!” she
says. She grabs a crab net and starts banging the floor and
making ghost noises “woooo!” Cressy gets up and starts
shouting alarmingly: “Nona! Nona! Nona! Nona! Nona come here this
minute.” Then a mcu of Nona gazing at her reflection in a mirror and whispering ‘Woooo! Here comes the boogie man!’ and Cressy starts shouting again: “Nona, stop being a silly idiot. Nona ... stop mucking around!”

Cressy’s seemingly irrational outburst in this sequence is a product of her determination not to let Nona discover her ‘secret’. The more obsessed Nona becomes with finding any possession which will provide her proof of her father’s existence, or ‘the black prince’ as she calls him, the more fearful Cressy becomes. Eventually Mae convinces her to tell “the truth” about how she was raped by her mother’s boyfriend at age twelve under-the-house and subsequently brought Nona into the world.\footnote{Cressy also claims that the only thing she was allowed to do was to name Nona — her own mother (Nona’s grandmother) denied her any maternal role.} So Nona’s ‘black prince’ is Cressy’s ‘boogie man’.

The fact that Nona goes under-the-house in this scene is also significant. In David Malouf’s work the dark space under the ‘Queenslander’ is endowed with both menacing and subliminal significance, and in Ferrié’s work it would be referred to as an anomalous zone\footnote{Anomalous zones are boundary areas, such as the beach (neither land nor sea) or twilight, (neither day nor night) and are in many cultures associated with transgression of conventions, with mystery and contradiction. Areas of this kind in fiction are rooftops, towers, attics, underground rooms, wells. (Ferrié 1987: 50)} or a boundary area. As David Malouf tells us:

While the family house is described as an ordered, familiar space dominated by convention and clear boundaries, the area under it is an unstructured void, associated on the one hand with sexuality, freedom and mystery and yet also with darkness, fear and death. It is the area of illicit activity, representing all that is repressed in conventional social life: ‘under-the-house was another and always present dimension ... For me... that underworld was full of threat’. (Malouf 1987: 84)

For Nona, under-the-house does not invoke this potential threat because at this point she is still naive to her violent origins. In Louis Nowra’s original play, Cressy’s description of the rape is graphically detailed. Director Rachel
Perkins said she felt inclined to edit a lot of this material out because: “we realised ... a mother would never tell her daughter that amount of detail because she'd never subject her to the pain she went through to create her” (Simpson 1999c: 34). This is an example of the appropriation and subsequent feminisation of the script.

At first the house in Radiance is symbolically entwined with the idea of the mother and the irreverence the women show for her is variously depicted in the film. The sisters have a pitifully small wake (no-one but the three women attend the funeral service). When Cressy proposes a toast to their dead mother, Mae responds: “You don’t toast the dead”. And Nona replies; “No, you incinerate them ...” The house too is eventually incinerated. As Radiance progresses we discover that the mother doesn’t legally own the house and the man who ‘gave’ it to her, a white bloke called Harry, (who, it is implied, kept their mother in the house as his mistress) wants to reclaim it now that she has died. When the two elder women discover this, their relationship to the house is fundamentally changed. Close to the end of the film we see Cressy and Mae enter an almost trance-like state and set fire to the house. On a personal level, burning down the house could be regarded as simply a cathartic process of destroying the place in which these memories are painfully manifested. Nona

32 The differing relationship towards their mother is also illustrated in the conversation that ensues between Cressy and Nona after she has suggested that they should properly scatter the ashes of their mother. Cressy says: We're strangers because of her ... She had us with no concern for our future.
Nona: She was kind to me. When officials came she would always hide me.
Cressy: You were special. When they came for Mae, she just handed her over, easy as pie. Same as she did with me. Then forgot us.
Nona: She didn’t. She was always talking about you.
Cressy: She knew where I was. Where Mae was. All she had to do was visit. Just once.
Nona: She tried to.
Cressy: All she had to do was ask the nuns.
Nona: She saw you. I was there. We took a train to Brisbane.

33 The irreverence the women show for their mother is also illustrated by the absurdly comic conversation which ensues after the women spill her ashes over the floor.

34 Arson, incidentally would have to be the most symbolically destructive act and resonates with a sense of emphatic finality.
however is distraught about this impending annihilation. She still harbours the illusion the house can provide her with a sense of continuity between her childhood and the present. But in the context of Radiance, this destructive act can also be viewed as an attempt to undermine the patriarchal, colonial hegemony manifested both symbolically and literally in the house, a house significantly owned by an old white guy.

When I interviewed Perkins about the house-burning scene she said that the sisters: "thought the house was home but actually home is in each other and the physical place has no meaning necessarily — a home needn't be a house" (Simpson 1999c: 34). Her comment is evidently an extension of the notion of a home as a set of relationships rather than a material/spatial phenomenon. Of course a home needn't be a house, but this house evidently still does have significance to these women for it to invoke such pain (in the case of Cressy) and joy (in the case of Nona) upon their return and for it to elicit such a violent response through its calculated destruction. Their act of arson symbolically overthrows the power relations invested in this home; and if we extend the home to a metaphor for the nation, then the film can be read as an attempt to undermine the hegemony within the nation-state. It can also be seen to be symbolising the necessity for a journey from a colonial to a postcolonial condition. Burning the house can be read as unsettling the (colonial) foundations.

Louis Nowra's original ending to his play saw the three women scatter in different directions and never see each other again which seems a nihilistic and negative prescriptive for the future of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians alike. 35 Perkins however transformed the ending of Nowra's play, partly because, she says:

35 It has been noted that the nature of theatre ensures this kind of unresolved ending.
it's indigenous and we wanted it to go out to the broadest audience possible. There's so much of a perception that Aboriginal film is inaccessible because it's Aboriginal and it's boring and it's too hard and [so] we deliberately approached it, to make it more ... accessible I suppose. (Perkins cited in Simpson 1999c: 33)

Optimistically, in the film we see the three women reunite again, emphasising the importance of family, and by extension perhaps the larger Aboriginal Australian family. The ending too sees the women forsake the notion of stability and opt for the mobility and flexibility of the road in the fabulous purple — at least for the moment. Through this scene Radiance also: "hints at a different connection that Aboriginal Australians have with the land, a bond not confined to the dream of owning a house." (Corbett 1995: 18)\(^{36}\)

Stylistically, unlike Vacant Possession, Lilian's Story and Choo, Choo, Choo where flashbacks are a fundamental way of creating the oneiric interior quality of these houses, Perkins chose not to use this technique, because she says: "it's not about then it's about now and what's happening between the sisters, so going back then would have taken the emphasis off what was in the present." (Simpson 1999c: 33) The implication of this comment and her approach to filming Radiance takes on additional significance if we view them within the context of her earlier statement about Aboriginal film being 'too hard', because inevitably, it often deals with the past. Perkins seems cognizant of the fact that in the current political climate if something is in the past then it is readily perceived as no longer relevant so we can seek to ignore it, which both denies our responsibility for it and the necessity to apologise. The importance Perkins places on the present is insightful if we see this comment within the wider socio-political context and the stalling of the reconciliation process through the inability of our politicians and wider community to deal with the

\(^{36}\) Pamela Rabe's comment made in relation to Vacant Possession seems appropriate in the context of Radiance. (Pamela Rabe cited in Corbett 1995: 18)
past. By locating the film in the present she is making the film relevant from within the current political framework, and therefore on these grounds it cannot be ignored. What Perkins has achieved in Radiance is both remarkable and radical — a film which, very quietly, drifts from the personal to the political and resonates with contemporary national significance.

2.5 Conclusion: Uncanny Returns

In all these films the house is vital in both personal and public (non)reconciliations. The act of returning home is one of reunion, redreaming and re-assessing. But the notion of reconciliation and non-reconciliation and the way that these processes exist and flow through each other in an unstable dynamic is significant. While some kind of personal reconciliation is reached between the central characters — in the case of Radiance and Lilian’s Story and partially in Vacant Possession — the ideal of fixity and stability is shown to be unattainable. The houses are destroyed, disintegrate by themselves or are sold off. Thus they are only retained in the imagination or through dreams, onirically.

We have colonised this country; we’re living in a post-colonial society, trying to understand what that means, and trying to find our place and our sense of belonging. That is, I think, something that a lot of white people in this country have enormous confusion about. (Margot Nash quoted in Corbett 1995: 19)

In her statement above, Margot Nash, director of Vacant Possession captures a sense of the postcolonial uncanny. What becomes obvious from all these films is that the house remains a contested zone — perhaps even after its destruction. All the central female protagonists in these films end up houseless, rather than homeless, perhaps calling for a reconfiguring of the meanings manifested in or spatialised through the (national) domestic domain. Therefore, to reiterate Gelder and Jacobs’ argument, these films show
the way in which in postcolonial Australia one can be both ‘in place’ and ‘out-of-place’ simultaneously. Postcoloniality demands that we remain within the structures of colonialism even as one is located somehow beyond them or ‘after’ them. These films refuse the binary structure with the characters remaining in a postcolonial unsettled state thus destabilising the domestic realm of contemporary Australian cinema.

In the next chapter we will venture both inside houses but also outside into the backyards of suburbia. The following chapter demonstrates the ways in which those characters who inhabit the suburban environment transform it to suit their needs, or, alternatively, escape it.
Chapter Three — Suburbia

Suburban Subversions:
Negotiating Suburban Space

3.0 Introduction: Defining Suburban Space

3.1 Spatial and Cultural Origins of Suburbia

3.2 Australian Nightmare? Australian Dream

3.3 The Backyard: Hills Hoists, Aboriphobia & the Abject: Australian Dream, Muriel's Wedding and Sweetie

3.4 The Backyard: Food & Cultural Maintenance in Aya

3.5 Dislocated Homes: Floating Life

3.6 Conclusion: Escape from or Transformation of the Suburban Sphere
3.0 Introduction: Defining Suburban Space

The single family house on a suburban block, with its implied gender relations for men, women and children, accounts for 78% of all Australian housing stock; its ownership a national ideal ... owning a house in the suburbs remains the dream for most Australians. (Rubbo 1992: 4)

In the Australian spatial imagination, suburbia runs in bands around an urban core. Like rings of Saturn, they are finely graded orbits of particles, surrounding an urban ball of hot air. Out beyond that lies empty space. The larger and richer and denser particles cluster close in the inner rings, and by finely graded degrees they become less rich and more sparse on the way out to nothingness. (Wark 1999: 155)

In the previous chapter, I was concerned with the filmic construction of the topos of the house, and the significance which female characters attach to the homes of their youth. This chapter will move from the microcosm of the house to the broader sphere of suburbia. The term ‘suburbia’ describes the sphere in which the majority of Australians live. It also functions as an imagined space “on to which a vast array of fears, desires, insecurities, obsessions and yearning have been projected and displaced.” (Healy 1994: xiii) I will primarily be concerned with investigating female representations of suburbia in contemporary Australian cinema. Focusing on five recent Australian films with female centred narratives; Aya (Solrun Hoass, 1991), Sweetie (Jane Campion, 1989), Floating Life (Clara Law, 1996), Australian Dream (Jackie McKimmie, 1992) and Muriel’s Wedding (PJ Hogan, 1993) I discuss the ways in which the central protagonists negotiate feelings of alienation in the suburban sphere, by rendering subtle transformations within it, or escaping from the physical space itself. For the recent migrants depicted in Aya and Floating Life, modifying the interior of the home and the backyard, along with the preparation of food, is paramount in maintaining cultural continuity and a sense of self. Before returning to an analysis of the films themselves, I want to briefly engage with the shifting position of suburbia within current cultural debate and in Australian Cinema more directly.
Films with inner-city locales have been prevalent in Australian cinema since our early urban melodramas\(^1\) — for example *The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford, 1919) and *The Cheaters* (Paulette McDonagh, 1930) — but films located in the interstitial sphere of suburbia have not been as common. Only a handful of films after the Australian cinema Revival, produced in the seventies and eighties, depict the Australian suburbs; *EJ Holden* (Michael Thornhill, 1977), *Mouth to Mouth* (John Duigan, 1978), *Winter of Our Dreams* (John Duigan, 1981), *Fran* (Glenda Hambly, 1985), *A Street to Die* (Bill Bennett, 1985). Generally these films, as Debi Enker remarks, represent suburbia as a "cultural and spiritual desert".\(^2\) (Enker 1994: 211) In the last decade, however, opposition to using suburbia as a setting or being the object of a film’s investigation seems to be weakening amongst film producers, writers and directors. No doubt this opposition will continue to diminish after the commercial success of *Muriel’s Wedding* (P.J. Hogan, 1993), the gently satirical film, *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1996), along with the critical success of David Caesar’s feature, *Idiot Box* (1996). The proliferation of more suburban fictions can be directly related to the increasing numbers of women in the industry who have shifted the cinema’s focus away from “more masculine topographies and narrative preoccupations” (Craven 1995: 61), or in other

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\(^1\) Despite Australia often being described as the most urbanised nation in the world, with over 60% of the Australian population living in cities, (Ward 1991: 11) this is often misleading because for most of our history the majority of Australians have actually been living in suburbs, rather than the inner-city. (Seddon 1993: 22) The inner-city areas of Australia, located around the CBDs of the various capital cities, are endowed with an urban ambience because, generally, they are the oldest suburbs and the closest approximation to the old cities of Europe. I want to make a distinction between those films with a particularly inner-city, gritty realist, (often Melbourne) urban setting such as *Romper Stomper* (Geoffrey Wright, 1992), *Proof* (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1992), *Angel Baby* (Michael Rymer, 1995), *Death in Brunswick* (John Ruane, 1991) and most recently *Two Hands* (Gregor Jordan, 1998) and *Redball* (John Hewitt, 1998) as opposed to those films located in the interstitial sphere of suburbia which I intend to focus on here.

\(^2\) Don Edgar, in his book, *Men, Mateship and Marriage* (1997) maintains that the suburbs rather than the inner-city sustain much more contact between parents and their adult children, siblings etc. The idea of the suburban wasteland in terms of contact both face-to-face and telephoning is better applied to inner city life which resembles less the “organic” supportive community than does the suburb. In this sense both *The Castle* and *Australian Dream* are possibly more accurate in their neighbourly representations than people might think. (Thanks to Tom O’Regan for this insight.)
words, the landscape narratives and traditions of (generally male) outback legends. Although the suburban sphere need not necessarily be regarded as a gendered one — as the most recent batch of suburban fictions reveal — evidently a wide range of symbolic associations have attached women to the suburbs versus men to the cities (or 'the bush' in the case of Australia). It has often been stated that the process of suburbanisation radically sharpened the sexual division of labour because it separated production from consumption and paid work from the home. (Cross 1997: 116-7) On average, women still spend far more time in suburbia and invest more labour in its upkeep — it is estimated that women still do 70 per cent of domestic labour (Bryson 1996: 40) — so perhaps it is not surprising that the domestic/suburban sphere is often represented (albeit with different emphases) in films with female creative control.

3.1 Spatial and Cultural Origins of Suburbia

It has often been argued that Australia is the most suburban culture on earth and perhaps was even the first suburban nation. (Rowse 1978: 4, Craven 1995: 45) In 1964 Donald Horne also observed this phenomenon:

*Australia may have been the first suburban nation: for several generations most of its men have been catching the 8.2, and.messing about with their houses and gardens at the weekends. Australians have been getting used to the conformities of living in suburban streets longer than most people: mass secular education arrived in Australia before most other countries; Australia was one of the first nations to find part of the meaning of life in the purchase of consumer goods; the whole business of large-scale organised distribution of human beings in a modern suburban society is not new to Australians. (Donald Horne cited in Rowse 1974: 4, emphasis in original)*

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3 FitzSimons & Ward (1995) make a strong case against the outback being an exclusively male domain citing the bush heroines evident in early Australian films; particularly those of the 1920s and early 1930s such as *The Squatter's Daughter* (Ken G Hall, 1932) and *A Girl of the Bush* (Franklyn Barrett, 1920). They give a fascinating account of the social conditions pertaining to that era which may have contributed their production.
Historians, geographers, sociologists and cultural critics have generated substantial literatures on the origins and effects of Australia's suburban dreaming. (Craven 1995: 45) As Craven argues, less considered have been the ways in which representations of suburbia have participated in these wider practices of assessment. (Craven 1995: 45) In the following I will briefly outline the spatial and linguistic origins of suburbia before discussing its construction as an interstitial sphere.

Connotations of the term 'suburbia' or 'suburban' often have as much to do with the ideology ascribed to 'a way of life' as well as a topographical description or definition of the space itself. In Roget's Thesaurus the adjectives given for "suburban" are "tedious" and "plebeian" (Kirkpatrick 1987: 1004). Admittedly, the space itself (signifier) and its meaning in discourse (signified) are inextricably linked, but by returning to the origin of the division of this space into public and private, it becomes evident how certain limitations are already pre-imposed. As Seddon has noted, behind the strict codifications in this division of land in Australia lies the attitudes of the territorial imperative of the suburban British (of the Victorian and early twentieth century). The 'drawbridge mentality' that defines the border between the public (or external) and private space — the no-man's-land represented by the modern day front garden — was, up until recently, often employed in Australian suburbia.4 (Seddon 1993: 5) Another major cultural force that underwrites

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4 The common (antiquated, and misogynist) saying "A man's home is his castle" or more precisely: "An Englishman's home is his castle" implies the creation of a defensive space between the house and the external world through the front yard or garden. (Seddon 1993: 6) In the traditional English castle it was customary for this "defensive space" to have a moat with a drawbridge around it, thus establishing a kind of no-man's-land between the castle itself and the external space. This strong consciousness of the individual boundary or the "drawbridge mentality" is not nearly so common in other cultures. Americans rarely fence off their yard, even at the sides. (Seddon 1993: 6) However this "drawbridge mentality" has evidently made its way to Australia. If you look at any suburb established before the 1980s, these boundaries, even to the extent of having a front fence (or English hedge) to separate the public space of the footpath, road and nature strip from the private space of the house, are prevalent. Newer suburbs however seem to be adopting the American suburban custom of not having the front fence to separate the public and the private space. And
suburbia and its gardens in Australia is the cadastral survey: a rectilinear grid
which was imposed at various scales on the entire continent by the British in
the nineteenth century, literally squaring off the irregular landscape to impose
an order convenient to the authoritarian colonial administration.5 (Seddon
1993: 6) Thus the logic of the central British administrative power, (which was
also common to other British colonies too; for example India and Ireland)
made it convenient for the movement of troops, performing a census, and
imposing taxes. However, as Seddon points out, the imposition of this
uniform grid on the landscape often had a heavy cost in Australia because it
ignored the natural diversity in landform, soil and vegetation and therefore
defined a space which was not diversified but monotonous. The artificial
subdivisions of the quarter-acre block limited the possibilities of what could
be achieved within this space. Thus those adjectives often associated with
suburbia — that it is banal, tedious, homogenous, conformist, complacent and
rigid — are inherently describing the space which has in turn developed into
what we have come to know as the suburban ethos.

Suburbia has often been characterised by intellectuals in Australia, America
and Britain as an interstitial space or a borderland place which reflects the
"contradictory aesthetic and moral value of residents torn between rural and
urban life." (Cross 1997: 109) It has been argued that suburban fictions can be
seen to inhibit narrative trajectories oriented towards the maintenance of
binary structures by abolishing the resistances of the natural environment and
dispersing the concentrated social organisation of the city. (Craven 1995: 59)
This inability to place suburbia within traditional boundaries of city or
country has evidently led critics for many years to castigate it and not deem it

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George Duby has noted that the idea of privacy first emerged in England, at the time
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a worthy subject for artistic/cultural attention. John Hartley illustrates the way in which suburbia has often been perceived:

In any case, even if suburbia had not the fatal flaws that it so obviously has in its social sterility, its aesthetic emptiness, its economic wastefulness, where is the point of sacrificing the invaluable dramatic contrast of the two old utilities [of town and country] for one simple neutrality. (Hartley 1997: 186)

Hartley goes on to add that the suburbs are: “an offence to binary logic, being neither city nor country ... They’re an in-between, both urban and not urban at once, a logical impossibility, being a third term in a two term universe.” (Hartley 1997: 186) But perhaps it is exactly this “in-betweenness”, this strange indefinable space between the inner-city and the country which makes suburbia, and the characters which inhabit it, so fascinating. In recent times it seems that rather than expressing suburbia’s worthlessness, sterility and hostility ad nauseam, there seems more urgency with representing a sense of its strangeness, which Jane Campion and Clara Law have evocatively captured in Sweetie and Floating Life respectively.⁶ The almost surreal suburban topography envisaged in these two films is at once both familiar and alien, or as the young boy, Chau, says in Floating Life, “sunny, flowers and trees ... like a movie”?⁷ Perhaps, as Craven has argued, the processes of gentrification and migration have transformed the character and pattern of suburban culture so

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⁵ This evidently did not have its origins with the British but was used by the Imperial Greeks and Romans. (Seddon 1995: 6)

⁶ The outer-suburban, gritty and decaying, semi-industrial terrain in which the two Greek-Australian girls in Only the Brave (Ana Kokkinos, 1991) inhabit, is very different to the sanitised, ordered cinematic suburban scapes of Floating Life, Muriel’s Wedding, Aya, Australian Dream or even Sweetie. In this film, the threat of violence and the undercurrent of malevolence is a reality. This dystopian suburban sphere limits the girls’ potential so one hatches a plan to escape to Sydney to find her mother. The other wants to go with her to avoid the incestual abuse of her father in their suburban home. They both manage to escape the environment; one however, tragically does so through burning herself alive.

⁷ This sense of surrealism can also be glimpsed in the cinema of another very suburbanised culture — the U.S. One distinct difference however is that the U.S. cinematic suburbia is often depicted through the horror genre: Nightmare On Elm Street (Wes Craven, 1984), Halloween (John Carpenter 1978). If not through horror, then often a malevolent, violent undercurrent seems to permeate the sphere of US cinematic suburbia in films such as Blue Velvet (David Lynch, 1986), American Beauty (Sam Mendes, 1999) and Lawn Dogs (John Duigan, 1997).
that it seems “less readily constructed as fixed and finished” than it once was.
(Craven 1995: 57) After watching Sweetie and Floating Life, along with Muriel’s Wedding, Australian Dream and Aya one is left with the impression that Australian suburbia is a bizarre, mysterious and even threatening place but far from aesthetically empty.

3.2 Australian Nightmare? Australian Dream

As the credits roll at the beginning of Australian Dream we hear Dorothy (Noni Hazeldurst) and Geoffrey Stubb’s (Graeme Blundell) voice-overs, catatonically reciting a rather clichéd narrative about suburbia:

Geoffrey: Got a boat, a TV.
Dorothy: One for the kids, one for me.
Geoffrey: Don’t read books, don’t think, I’m healthy.
Together: Australian Dream, Australian Dream, Australian Dream, Australian Dream.
Dorothy: Got a dishwasher, huge debts and two cars.
Geoffrey: One for the wife, one for me. A huge house, a wife, a double garage.
Together: Australian Dream, Australian Dream, Australian Dream, Australian Dream.

A crane shot then presents a middle-class street — Boomerang Crescent — in a middle-class suburb — Avon Heights. An endless row of Commodore Family wagons and sedans line the streets in front of the double-brick-and-tile houses which stretch into the distance. If writer/director Jackie McKimmie wants us to believe this film is a satire on suburban (read: social) conformity and consumerism then she is not leading us down the garden path, so to speak, but leads us right up to the front door. As the camera follows two women pulling into the curb in their family wagon to attend a “Tupperware party with a difference”, our gaze is immediately drawn to the one vehicle which stands out in the line of family wagons: a flashy red, 1960s American convertible. Evidently this car and its occupant — which we later find out to be ‘raunchy’ dancer, Todd — are symbols of sexual fantasy and escape for Dorothy. During the course of a weekend Dorothy goes from being bored,
suburban housewife performing menial domestic tasks — looking after two kids and her butcher husband — to having her wildest fantasies fulfilled; waking up to sunrise in a Sandman on a suburban beach on Sunday morning with Todd!

So little are the suburbs associated with sex ... despite the fact that homes in the suburbs are where couples set themselves up to produce families and where children first learn about sex and teenagers first experience it ... [the] suburbs — sexy they ain’t. (Hartley 1997: 208)

If the suburbs are so rarely associated with sex, as Hartley suggests above, then it is evident why the following scene in *Australian Dream* is so awkwardly hilarious. The latest battery-powered portable accessory being promoted to the women at the ‘tupperware party’ Dorothy attends are not buying the latest kitchen mod-con that is going to help mum prepare breakfast so the kids get to school on time. Long gone are the martyr-like model mums invoked in advertisements from the 1950s — this is the 1990s and the age of self-gratification. The road to gratifying female sexual desires no longer need be sought in the private realm of the bedroom, but can be achieved with the latest consumer item for busy suburban mums; that is if we believe the spiel of this modern-day equivalent of the 1950s Avon saleslady. We see the conflation of the consumer (sex) accessory — the vibrator — with the sex object — Todd:

Get an extra buzz out of life with Dick: strong and reliable with a choice of two speed controls. Dick is ideal for those situations when you have only half an hour to spare before the baby wakes up. Turn it on, to turn you on ... And now ladies the moment you’ve all been waiting for: Todd — trim, taut and terribly sexy...

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8 So little are the suburbs associated with sex that noticing it has the force of a literary innovation, says Hartley. (1997: 208) “In one scene of The Nightmakers, Sue Dobson, a cynical veteran of the urban counter culture, takes a friend to the family home, deep in the suburbs, as part of a tour of the city. ‘Take any normal street of average length and just consider all that fucking!’ she advises her companion. ‘Simply concentrate on a street of a suburb: that’s mind blowing!’” (Alan Wearne, *The Nightmakers*, cited in Gerster 1990: 573) This observation, says Gerster, neatly rebukes those who mechanically dismiss the suburbs as passionless and sterile. (Gerster 1990: 573)
Every month someone in Boomerang Crescent, Avon Heigins throws a party. This time it's Geoffrey and Dorothy Stubbs turn...

But somehow the great Australian barbie explodes into chaos as a noisy band of punk rockers appears from nowhere and conducts criminal activities between brackets. Someone dressed as the Virgin Mary has twins on the patio; marriages break up; affairs begin, Dorothy disgraces herself with an inflatable man and a suitcase full of sex aids; Geoffrey ends up with a garage of stolen videos.

RUNNING TIME:
86 MINUTES.
PLUS TRAILERS.
The vibrator, in this instance, is being sold with the same kind of rationale (i.e. as a labour saving device) as a Sunbeam electric beater or a Fisher & Paykel dishwasher. Given the giggling response of the majority of these women to both "Dick" and Todd, they are evidently not accustomed to having something presented to them which usually belongs in private sphere. Clarke, in her essay, "Tupperware: Suburbia, Sociality and Mass Consumption" argues that the role of postwar mass domestic consumption and material culture can be viewed as potentially active rather than passive, and that Tupperware quickly became an icon of this suburban retail and consumption. Tupperware parties not only provided an opportunity for females to socialise outside the home but the party plan embraced rather than jettisoned the nuances of everyday domestic economy and undermined the postwar image of the housebound, passive privatised consumer. (Clarke 1997: 156) With the rise of corporate power and manipulative advertising, the sanctity of the private diminished as commerce followed ‘women into their own kitchens and laundries’. (Clarke 1997: 140) The ‘Vibrator Party’ in *Australian Dream* embodies all the potential of the post-war Tupperware Parties but the sanctity of the private is diminished even further as commerce follows women right into their own bedrooms! Thus here we can see a female subversion in the blurring between the traditional boundaries of the public and the private domain with women, albeit on the whole tentatively, taking control over both their own consumer and sexual desires. But sexual desire in this instance becomes just another thing to be gratified in the shortest time possible. As Cross has remarked in relation to the suburban weekend: “with affluence, consumption has inevitably colonised time” (Cross 1997: 125), and in this instance, I might add, pleasure.

Contrary to Hartley’s claim above — “so little are the suburbs associated with sex ...” — four of the five films discussed in this chapter investigate female
sexuality in relation to the suburban sphere. Muriel’s escape from beachside suburban Queensland in *Muriel’s Wedding*, and her subsequent sexual awakening, comes in the form of taking a taxi out of the intolerant Porpoise Spit to reside in the more cosmopolitan melting-pot of Sydney. The supporting protagonist in *Sweetie*, Dawn, or “Sweetie” as she is affectionately called by her father, is represented as vulgar, uncivilised, rampantly oversexed and, I argue, becomes a signifier of Kristeva’s notion of “the abject” through her violent attempts to overturn the prevailing order and rigidity of suburbia. In comparison with the Mills and Boon romance devices utilised in *Australian Dream*, the sensuality of the central protagonists in *Aya* and *Sweetie* is more metaphorically expressed. After Aya meets her young Japanese lover in the restaurant where she works, they stroll along the beach and he sensually removes her sock and sandal — a scene charged with eroticism. In an analogous scene later in the film, Aya’s husband Frank attempts to perform the same gesture for Aya but she resists it, alluding to the breakdown of their relationship. The final scene of *Sweetie* has similarities with *Aya* in its metaphorical use of feet to emphasise sexuality but in this instance it also symbolises reconciliation between Kay and Louis after Sweetie’s death. A close-up of Lou and Kay’s socked feet, placed sole-to-sole, reveals them moving around as if in an intimate, sensual embrace, and we hear Kay ask: “Hey, d’you know what your feet do when you have sex?”

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9 Muriel’s mother however doesn’t have the youth or courage of her daughter to adapt to another social space (on earth!) and makes a more brutal and desperate exit out of suburbia through death. (Not that her depicted mental and physical state renders her much more than dead anyway.)

10 “Solrun HoaaS says she shares with Japanese novelist, Tanizaki, a fetish for feet”. (Blonski & Freiberg 1991: 7)
3.3 The Backyard: Hills Hoists\textsuperscript{11}, Aborphobia\textsuperscript{12} & the Abject

Flo: What a plain little backyard. No trees?
Louis: I did plant one once.
Flo: I can't imagine living without my trees. They give me hope ... \textit{(Sweetie, Jane Campion)}

Australian suburban ideology is inextricably bound up with specific notions of the backyard, so it is no surprise that backyards are often depicted in Australian films about suburbia. In both The Castle and Muriel's Wedding the backyard remains a male sphere of responsibility. Although the Kerrigans's backyard (which is part of Darryl’s 'castle’) does not conform to usual suburban stereotypes with its “bloody long driveway” it still enables Darryl to realise his two hobbies — planning extensions and maintaining his greyhounds. We also learn through Darryl’s son that: “there were only two places he did his thinking — in the pool room and out the back lookin’ up at the power lines.” Evidently the conventional suburban sphere represented in Australian Dream is a place which “separate[s] the sexes”, but perhaps it is exactly this rigidity and conformity evident in that sphere which inspires Dorothy and others to subvert it:

the suburbs function as an emotional straitjacket, strangling any spirit of independence. Non-conformity is tantamount to breaking the law and is certainly seen to contravene the unspoken customs of the community ... They are places which separate the sexes, actively stifle the spirit and exact a debilitating toll on those who challenge the prevailing order. (Enker 1994: 213)

\textsuperscript{11} The rotary hoist washing line, commonly known as the Hills Hoist, has been a symbol of the Australian backyard since the 1950s even though commercial production of it began in Melbourne in 1926. (Hucker 1993: 55) Now, however, it is a far less common sight, being replaced with retractable or removable hoists and electric dryers.

\textsuperscript{12} Please note the discrepancy in spelling. George Seddon uses aborphobia while Meaghan Morris uses aborphobia. For the sake of consistency, I have used the former except in quotes from Morris.
Sweetie portrays the unsteady relationship between two sisters, thin introverted, undersexed, sensible Kay, and fat extroverted, oversexed, deranged Dora (Sweetie). The two share a love-hate relationship in this bizarre, often hilarious film. In the tradition of David Lynch's 'Eraserhead' and 'Blue Velvet,' director Jane Campion (Angel at My Table) has created a world of insatiable appetites, misunderstood family ties, and the passionate need for black nail polish. Be sure you're not the last to see this original, audacious trag-comedy. It's . . .

"SPECTACULAR" — Vincent Canby
"A GREAT FILM" — New York Post
"REMARKABLE" — New York Times

Running time: 100 mins

Sweetie
A film by Jane Campion

Video Connection
— Melville —
330 4012

Recommended for mature audiences 15 years and over. Occasional coarse language and adult concepts.
In *Australian Dream* the backyard is significantly transformed when the Stubbs have their bizarre dress-up party, which seems on the whole to indicate that idiosyncratic characters are fostered in the suburbs as opposed to “strangling any spirit of independence”. But perhaps this party can be read as a temporary subversion from the constraints of living in a suburban environment rather than a more fundamental subversion; in a similar vein to Bakhtin’s notion of carnival\(^\text{13}\); as a temporary subversion of the hegemony. During the few hours of the monthly neighbours’ party, all the normal conventions of everyday suburban living are thrown off and the spirit of liberation is set free. At this “your favourite fantasy” party the crude, the vulgar and the debauched are enshrined. Grown men and women, dressed in the most ridiculous outfits, are depicted wife/husband swapping. [This film could be viewed as the 1990s version of *Don’s Party* (Bruce Beresford, 1976).]

At one stage a man dressed up as a baby attempts to seduce a very pregnant ‘Virgin Mary’ because, he says, “pregnant women really turn me on”. When ‘Mary’ goes into labour, the same man tries to exploit the situation further by going into foetal position and rebirthing. Finally the ambulance arrives and it is the ‘new-ager’, ‘Mary’, who needs the tranquilliser! During the confusion and chaos of this party, Dorothy escapes unseen with Todd, thus in keeping with the spirit of carnival and temporarily subverting the institutional, hegemonic nature of marriage. In the context of this film, it would be difficult to maintain that the: “suburbs function as an emotional straitjacket, strangling any spirit of independence” and that “non-conformity is tantamount to

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\(^{13}\) In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin points to the pre-Lenten Medieval Carnival — a period of festivities like our modern Mardi Gras that might last for weeks or even months when the spirit of liberation is set free. (Sobchack 1996: 179) “What is suspended [in carnival] first of all is hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it — that is everything resulting from sociohierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people.” (Bakhtin 1984: 122-23)
breaking the law and is ... seen to contravene the unspoken customs of the community”. (Enker 1994: 211)

In contrast to Dorothy, for Kay in Campion’s film, *Sweetie*, the backyard remains a threatening place where Kay’s pathological phobia of trees, or aboriphobia, takes on awesome significance for her (Seddon 1993: 30):

We had a tree in our yard with a palace in the branches. It was built for my sister and it had fairy lights that went on and off in a sequence. She was the princess. It was her tree. She wouldn’t let me up it. At night the darkness frightens me. Someone could be watching from behind ... who wishes you harm. I used to imagine the roots of that tree crawling, crawling right under the house, under the bed. Maybe that’s why trees scare me. It’s like they have hidden powers. (Kay’s voiceover, *Sweetie* Campion. *My emphasis.*

*Sweetie* primarily revolves around the character of Kay, who, from the outset, embodies a kind of suburban banality illustrated by the way she dresses, the fact she works in a bank and is a “serial monogamist”, as her bank colleagues emphatically state. However beneath this facade of normality, Kay is a megalomaniac, highly superstitious and harbours some bizarre phobias. One day, thirteen months after Kay and Louis meet, she returns home from her work at the bank to find Louis and his friend, Simba, violently ripping out the Hills Hoist in the middle of the backyard and replacing it with a baby Alder tree. This scene seems to be functioning on two levels. The Hills Hoist, of

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14 In Glen Tomasetti’s novel *Thoroughly Decent People*, the author outlines two symptoms of aboriphobic behaviour:

“An enemy on one boundary, inoffensive people on another and friends at a short distance was a pattern repeated in the suburbs. The larrikins fulfilled the requirements for enmity. Their garden was neglected. Their flowering gums planted on the fence, dropped leaves and nuts on Bert’s drive. Hanging low after the rain, they wet his head when he parked the Vauxhall beside the house.” And with this enmity of trees goes a mania for pruning “Arthur didn’t believe in pruning soft-fruit trees. Bert did. He loved pruning, cutting back and lopping. ... When the day came he started the job joyfully, cutting back to the last possible spot from which new growth might shoot. The sight of a tree, just after he’d pruned it, was as painful as the sight of her was to him, after she’d had a new permanent wave” ... Bert’s reaction to natural bushland reveals a pioneering mentality: “They were passing through bush and it depressed him. He could see no beauty in it at all. It represented back-breaking labour. He thought of fire because he’d really like to put a match to it and see it swept away, leaving the land for man’s use. That didn’t happen after a fire of course. The bush recovered. The grey-green leaves of the gum trees with their ragged bark and spindly wattles not yet in flower all filled him with dull melancholy; work, monotony, work. The bush had nothing to do with Bert’s understanding of the glories of nature (Tomasetti cited in Seddon 1993: 30-31)
course, remains a pre- eminent icon of the Australian suburban backyard. Extracting it could be interpreted as an attempt to dismantle the ‘Australian Dream’ of suburban culture — or the tamed or controlled nature represented by the Hills Hoist — and replace it with raw nature and thus the freedom, untamed sexuality and disorder that the tree represents. Even the young boy who lives next door, Clayton, seems fearful of the implications of this disruption and he rushes to greet Kay on her return from work and exclaims in shock: “They’re taking out the Hoisty, Him and another man!” The use of long shots and slightly canted framing in this particular scene also serve to distance the viewer and heighten the sense of discord. On another level for Kay, the baby Alder tree seems to be symbolic of Kay and Louis’s relationship and the fact that it is “yellow and sick”, as she says, is extremely disturbing to her. Bloustien has argued that on a subconscious level the baby Alder tree symbolises Kay’s “familial roots that can grow silently and disturb the outwardly firm foundations of normalcy, thus crumbling the facade that she has built around herself”. (Bloustien 1992: 37)

Like most houses in the suburbs, this one provides shelter not only from the external environment but also from Kay’s internal, pathological phobia of trees. But as the film progresses and Kay’s eccentric sister, Sweetie, re-enters her life, it seems as if the trees, representative of the backyard and the external environment, are encroaching on the built environment. It is not until later, however, that we realise Kay’s phobia of trees is inextricably linked to her relationship with her sister and all that she embodies. Sweetie, like the baby Alder tree, embodies untamed nature and the raw sexuality which has not been repressed by the conventional restraints of suburban middle class society. In the course of the film we see Sweetie pissing on the ground and licking and fondling Louis on the beach while Bob, her loser
boyfriend/producer, is not far away, buried in the sand. Just after Sweetie arrives, Kay hears her having sex with Bob in the next room. When their father, Gordon, arrives at the house after his wife Flo has left him, we see Sweetie fondling her father’s groin under the guise of searching for the soap. Kay gazes at them through the half open door with a mixture of horror and disbelief which then transforms into envy as we hear Gordon say: “You know you’re Dad’s best girl”. At a later point, after Sweetie has been left alone by the rest of the family when they go in search of Flo, they return a few days later to find Sweetie impersonating a dog, biting and growling at anyone who approaches her. Sweetie’s personality is the antithesis of Kay’s and embodies excess in every way — as illustrated by her insatiable appetite for food (signified by her large figure), and her insatiable appetite for sex. Sweetie in fact is the epitome of everything that suburbia is traditionally perceived as not being, whereas Kay represents suburbia, or nature tamed to the point where even the presence of a tree is too much of ‘raw nature’ or the ‘abject’ for her to cope with.

In *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed uses Julia Kristeva’s reading of abjection in her study of horror films and female monsters. Although *Sweetie* could not be classified within the conventional boundaries of the horror genre, the way Creed employs the notion of ‘the abject’ can be directly applied to the way Sweetie/Dawn is represented. She is seen mainly from Kay’s point-of-view. When Sweetie arrives on the scene she does not respect unspoken rules about civility and disrupts the ‘identity, system and order’ that Kristeva talks of below and subsequently the family spirals into chaos:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it — on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (Creed 1992: 8)
Creed then goes on to describe Kristeva’s notion of ‘abjection’ as that which ‘does not respect borders, positions, rules’ and ‘the place of the monstrous is the place where meaning collapses’ the place where ‘I’ am not. (Kristeva cited in Creed 1992: 8) Because the abject threatens life it must be ‘radically excluded’ from the body and deposited on the other side of an imaginary order which separates the self from that which threatens the self. “Although the subject must exclude the abject it must, nevertheless, be tolerated, for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life ...” (Creed 1992: 9)

Kay has manifestly defined herself in opposition to Sweetie and thus the abject. In one of the last scenes of the film we see Sweetie naked and painted brown indicative of shit, a primary abject substance. She shouts abuse at the neighbours from her tree-house, or the ‘palace in the branches’, as Kay calls it. This scene further emphasises the symbolic meaning of trees for Kay and Sweetie’s position of the abject in relation to the symbolic. The ‘palace in the branches’ in her parents’ backyard also represents the bond between Gordon and Sweetie of which Kay is intensely jealous. Thus, in order for Kay to cope with life, she must either learn to come to terms with and tolerate the ‘abject’, or alternatively exclude the abject from her life once again; the latter will ensure trees have “hidden power” over her. The destruction of the ‘palace in the branches’ along with the death of Sweetie, enables Kay to exclude the abject from her life once again. This also seems necessary for the reconciliation to occur between Louis and Kay at the end of the film. There is a sense however, that trees (and Sweetie) will continue to haunt Kay as her voice-over during Sweetie’s funeral reveals:

“Trees never seem to leave us alone. We couldn’t even get the coffin down for some tree root sticking out the side.” (Kay’s voice-over in Sweetie)

In Muriel’s Wedding, the backyard takes on significance after Muriel’s mother, Betty, burns the overgrown grass in it before committing suicide. This is her
last act of vengeance and aggression against her suburban lifestyle and her uncaring and uncommitted husband and children. Like the tree roots in *Sweetie*, the unkempt and uncared for backyard in Muriel’s *Wedding* becomes symbolic of dysfunctional familial relations. Instead of gardening in the backyard, and hence altering and improving the environment in which the family resides, a common suburban pre-occupation, Betty symbolically destroys it, and in so doing declares her rejection of the myth of the ‘Australian Dream’.

After hearing the news about her mother’s suicide\(^{15}\), Muriel returns from Sydney to Porpoise Spit to be with her family. She walks out onto the landing at the family’s suburban home and gazes incredulously down into the backyard. The Hills Hoist creates a stark contrast against the scorched earth that is still eerily smouldering:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Muriel:} & \quad \text{What happened?} \\
\text{Tony (her brother):} & \quad \text{Mum burnt it.} \\
\text{Muriel:} & \quad \text{Why?} \\
\text{Tony:} & \quad \text{Because she got sick and tired of waiting for Perry to mow it!}
\end{align*}
\]

The same backyard also functions as a sphere of fantasy-escape for Perry, Muriel’s younger, unemployed brother. In the Heslop family, traditional male/female roles apply. Being the eldest son, it is Perry’s responsibility to mow the lawn, and thus his fault Betty burnt it before her death.\(^{16}\) At an earlier point in the film, Perry — in parallel to Muriel’s daydreams and obsessions with marriage — is daydreaming about being a famous footballer. In this instance he kicks a milk carton around the overgrown backyard lawn

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\(^{15}\) We hear from Muriel’s sister that she found Betty, their mother, with an empty container of sleeping pills beside the bed. Their father Bill, however, tells everyone she died of a heart attack.

\(^{16}\) The failure of Muriel’s father also to care for the yard is in a sense representative of his failure to be a suburban father and care for his family. Betty’s burning of the backyard could be associated as much with her anger at his failure to conform to and be an integral part of suburban household labour. (A point made by Tom O’Regan in conversation.)
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SPECIAL THANKS TO: STEPHEN KORS, TONY MANSOUR, LOUISE & JOHN KADOWSKI

SOUND RESEARCH: MICHAEL, D. AGIL & TONY MANSOUR, PRODUCED BY LINDA HOESE & RACHEL MCCORMICK

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(instead of mowing it) while dodging the Hills Hoist and vociferously commentating on his ‘star’ (imaginary AFL) performance.\footnote{Both Muriel’s father and brother can also be seen as failing to live up to the outback myth which has been displaced onto the suburban Australian backyard. Mowing the lawn can be seen as the signifier of the present-day struggle against nature, through which masculinity is forged. As Lucas has noted: ‘...the suburb constitutes a latter-day frontier or site of struggle and proving, at an economic, cultural and geographical remove from the city — the city which justifies and supports the its cluster of surrounding suburbs but which provide a proving ground for battlers and economic underdogs such as Steve [in \textit{Return Home}]. The suburb may be seen as a residue of those privileged values as associated with rural Australia; the backyard, in which we see Steve [\textit{Return Home}] and Len McGuire [\textit{Newsfront}] constructing their futures and the future of a certain Anglo-Celtic version of Australianess, is the literal remainder of those high places of the Snowy, the Kakadu of Mick Dundee (Paul Hogan), or those ‘sulit plains extended’, and its ideological crucible in which a central male Australian identity might be cast.’ (Lucas 1994: 122)}

The neglected Queensland suburban backyard of the 1990s, depicted in \textit{Muriel’s Wedding}, is a far cry from the carefully tended vegetable garden that performs only one of the various functions of the productive backyard represented in \textit{Aya}. In \textit{Muriel’s Wedding}, hanging out the washing and daydreaming seem to be the backyard’s primary functions. The suburban Melbourne backyard of the late 1950s and early 1960s, depicted in Soltun Hoaas’s film \textit{Aya}, provides a space where the central protagonist can cultivate all the vegetables she needs for Japanese food, whilst simultaneously providing a space for entertaining family and guests. But, more significantly, the backyard provides a sphere for cultural maintenance.

At first, for Aya, the backyard is an unfamiliar environment which she fears. However, she gradually grows to embrace it after realising it can be utilised for her own ends. This transformation not only occurs on the level of what she introduces to it, in other words what is grown in it, but also in relation to the significance of the Hills Hoist, which at the time when this film was set would have been a prominent feature of the Australian backyard and has since become a suburban icon. In the beginning we see the Hills Hoist from Aya’s perspective as quite alienating. Not long after she arrives in Australia, Aya
ventures outside in the middle of the night to visit the outhouse. The moonlight reflects off the Hills Hoist creating a ghostly image and Aya's fear is further emphasised when a cat takes fright and launches itself out of the toilet. Aya ventures in timidly with a torch to find it filled with spiders and six-legged creepy-crawlies. She then returns to the house and takes solace from the familiar habit of eating Japanese pickled vegetables and gazes out the kitchen window at the Hills Hoist gently rotating in the wind. This image of the oscillating Hills Hoist forms a graphic match with the next image of a Japanese parasol resting on the ground next to shoes placed outside her house. The parasol also oscillates slightly. Although not clearly delineated as mental subjectivity, from Aya's perspective the similarity between the two objects and their movement, one alien and one familiar, lends them to comparison. This allows her to understand the Hills Hoist on another level which inspires her to modify its usual function. The next time we see the Hills Hoist in Aya is when it is being transformed into a koinaburi flag pole (A traditional Japanese flag-pole). The family entertain guests with a traditional Aussie barbecue in the backyard, and the Hills Hoist is decorated with Japanese lanterns and the flying fish, while they groove to the rhythms of the early 1960s. The sequence reveals that subtle subversions of the suburban environment can have quite significant consequences for the central protagonists. In this case, the transformation of the backyard space into a place where Aya can feel 'at home' is paramount; where the once alien and unfamiliar is transformed into something familiar which can be embraced/enjoyed.

3.4 The Backyard: Food & Cultural Maintenance in Aya

Food, as we know in Australia, is a more digestible way to accept the face of multiculturalism. (Gunew 1992: 30)
On another level the backyard is also a sphere in which cultural maintenance can be performed in food production — through cultivating Japanese vegetables and herbs. The difference between the two central male characters in the film, both of whom are war veterans — Frank, Aya’s husband and Mac, their mutual friend — is lucidly illustrated through their contrasting attitudes towards Japanese foods. On one occasion Aya is depicted gardening in this backyard and Mac, a Japanese speaking Australian, pops in unexpectedly and shows his appreciation of the cultural significance of this event for Aya by singing a traditional Japanese poem of blessing to the herbs:

“Among the first herbs of early Spring, we may not find so many kinds”

In contrast, when Frank loses his job he becomes more belligerent towards Aya’s increasing independence by attempting to deny her expression of her Japanese culture or simply by overt denigrations of it. Frank grabs her specially prepared pickles from the fridge, smells them, then disparagingly tosses them into the sink. Later Mac returns from one of his long overseas trips and visits Aya, Frank and their toddler son, Ken. When Mac speaks to Ken in Japanese, Frank responds: “He’s bloody Australian, not a bloody Japanese”. On another occasion, as Frank sinks deeper into despondency, we see him burn all the pictures he has drawn from the war. He buries the remaining ashes by carelessly digging up one of Aya’s herb bushes in the backyard, which is now really her space, and then pisses on it. This is a symbolic act perpetrated against Aya’s beloved and cultivated backyard which she has made her own.

“We have moved to Melbourne now. Soon I can grow all the vegetables I need for Japanese food — eggplant, pumpkin, turnips. We still have to order rice and it smells old.” (Aya’s voice-over)
Aya is a beautiful and exotic woman in a passionate and volatile relationship with Frank. When Frank comes home late one night, Aya is the victim of a violent attack. The incident upsets Frank, who becomes withdrawn and anxious. He attempts to resume their relationship, but Aya cannot forget the attack. She is forced to seek help for herself.
As *Aya* progresses, food, in its cultivation, preparation and consumption, becomes more significant not only as a metaphor for maintenance of cultural identity but also as a pivotal narrative device around which many events are based. Aya is depicted performing food-related activities on more than twenty-five occasions throughout the film: tending her vegie garden, preparing food, eating or waitressing in the Japanese restaurant. Like the French character, JP, in *The Last Days of Chez Nous* (Gillian Armstrong, 1992) who had been looking for Brie cheese “since two years”, consuming food from home also provides something familiar which Aya can seek solace in when feeling alienated. But just as in *The Last Days of Chez Nous* where the Brie cheese episode becomes symbolic of the central characters’ (Beth & JP’s) marriage breakdown, the Japanese pickles and sea urchin form a similar function in *Aya*. Early in the film we see Aya and another Japanese war bride improvising their own method of making pickles using beer.¹⁸

Growing and preparing ‘food from home’ is in cases the easiest way for females of migrant cultures to maintain cultural links and a sense of identity. Transforming the physical structure of the house would be a far more difficult task. However, there are other ways in which simple subversions of suburban space can be carried out and have significant meaning for the protagonists concerned. An earlier example in *Aya* was the modification in function and appearance of the Hills Hoist. There are also numerous ways in which Aya adapts the interior space of the house for her own needs and purposes. They are revealed through the repeated shots of shoes lined up at the front door, the wind chimes gracing the interior of the house along with Japanese calendars and other ornaments all of which not only symbolise Aya’s negotiation of space but also her acceptance and extension of self in this new environment.

¹⁸ This of course would have been considered a very subversive act for some sections of Australian society in the 1950s!
In direct contrast to Aya, the central character in _Floating Life_, Bing, does not deem her culturally specific rituals and customs as worthwhile in the process of negotiating space in her adopted homeland of Australia. The logic of the film implies that this denial of self eventually leads to a fracturing of her identity, and deep depression, which occurs close to the end of the film.

### 3.5 Dislocated Homes: _Floating Life_

The migration process entails leaving one place for another, and being inserted into a new language and a new symbolic order. In order to negotiate the new language the migrant must suppress the old language, so that both the mother-land and the mother-tongue are disavowed. This process and separation is marked by abjection. (Lozanovksa 1994: 193)

_Floating Life_ opens in a crowded Hong Kong cafe where the family is preparing to meet up with their daughter, Bing, in Australia. The cluttered but cosy interior of this café, bathed in golden brown hues, provokes a sense of intimacy which is in stark contrast to the subsequent scene in Australia, where immediately we are made aware of the preponderance of open space and the harshness of the sunlight in this wealthy modern suburbaka. The cut from the Hong Kong café to Australian suburbia mimics a jump-cut and produces an uncomfortable sensation of dislocation in the viewer. This highlights the family’s sense of displacement in their new environment. Chau (brother 3) and Yue (brother 2) reminisce about their first impressions on arrival in Australia and Chau perfectly captures the surrealness of the stark brick-and-tile — green, grey and blue — wealthy suburbaka before him:

- **Chau:** I can still remember that day ... cold, sunny, flowers and trees, like a movie ...
- **Yue:** What movie?
- **Chau:** Basic Instinct, Terminator, Jurassic...
- **Yue:** Alright. You mean a bloody horror movie!
Most of *Floating Life* is located ‘somewhere in suburban Sydney’, where the central character, Bing (or second sister) and her husband have been living for several years. The film also moves between a compact, high rise Hong Kong apartment where the family originated from, to a cosy inner-city German refurbished apartment, where the main character’s older sister, Yen, has migrated with her German husband. The three different locations lend themselves to direct comparison and Law has structured the film into eight separate sections which move back and forth through time and different locations. Judging the film by conventional narrative standards, this technique creates a disorienting effect in the viewer. However, the disjointed spatial and narrative structure, along with the fluid temporal nature of *Floating Life*, serves to further emphasise the dislocation which each of the family members feel at various stages.

Bing shares some of the same megalomaniacal characteristics that Kay does in *Sweetie*. Although not overtly suffering from any kind of phobias like Kay’s aboriphobia, she is depicted as being obsessive about cleanliness, about financial and physical security, about not being recognised as a noticeable outsider and conforming to what she believes as appropriate behaviour in Australia. Bing turns herself into a caricature of a ‘good migrant’:

> This is my second house. This is a 100% clean, tidy and secure house. I am saving up. I have 2 million Australian dollars so that even if the government goes bankrupt and has no pension for us Asian immigrants I’ll still have enough money. I won’t have to beg for help. There isn’t anyone to turn to for help.19

When her family first arrives she demands the utmost rigour from her teenage brothers because “the Chinese are the worst when they say boys are better than girls”. She demands with indomitable persistence that they speak English, tuck their shirts in, and wear sunburn cream at all times. The arrival

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19 Although made before the recent escalation of debate over migration and racism in the media and the advent of ‘Hansonism’, the character, Bing, in *Floating Life* captures
of the extended family to Bing's "100% clean, tidy and secure house" disrupts the order and rigidity she has been able to establish with almost fascistic temperance. It is evident that Bing has attempted to exclude all material/spiritual customs of her Hong Kong/Chinese migrant identity. She even forbids Ma and Pa to burn incense in the house on the day of the ancestors, for fear that "a little fire would burn it down." Bing attempts to exclude the abject completely from her life. There are no signifiers of her "migrant" identity within her house. She also does not allow her brothers to speak Cantonese, thus "disavowing their mother-tongue" (Lozanovksa 1994: 193) and she will not tolerate certain traditional Chinese foods. Ma says to Bing at one point: "Don't you control everything already? No oil with vegetables, no salt in omelettes, no chilli in curry". Even the thought of eating the skin on some chicken, which her mother has marinated for hours, is enough to provoke such feelings of revulsion in Bing that she throws a plateful of beautifully prepared chicken into the bin. In some sense Bing and Kay are similar figures. At one point in *Sweetie*, Kay rationally asks Louis where she will now hang out the washing after the Hills Hoist has been dismantled and so disguising her phobia of trees. So too, Bing rationalises not eating the skin on the chicken because it will cause her aging parents "to get heart disease and high cholesterol" and thus veiling the real vulnerability and confusion she is feeling about her familial roots. As Kristeva has said: "Although the subject must exclude the abject it must, nevertheless be tolerated for that which threatens life also helps to define it." (Kristeva cited in Creed 1992: 9) In contrast to Bing, Aya uses the process of preparing traditional foods to preserve her sense of self and her Japanese-ness. She embraces that which could be looked upon as abject by the host culture. By the end of *Floating Life* however there is a sense that through the persistence of

some of the insecurities some recent immigrants must be currently experiencing living in Australia.
her mother, Bing finally comes to tolerate the abject, but the process is a long and difficult journey.

In *Sweetie*, tree imagery symbolises familial roots, which grow silently and disturb the foundations of normalcy thus crumbling the facade that Kay has built around herself. (Bloustien 1992: 37) In *Floating Life*, the many different houses, established at different corners of the globe, symbolise the disjointed nature of this family's roots. Early on in the film we see Bing making veiled, indirect attempts to reach out to her family. On several occasions she refers to the flimsy construction of the house, which incidentally looks like a typical well-to-do, double-brick-and-tile, suburban Australian house. When Bing expresses how flimsy the walls are and that just a little fire will burn the house down it is evident here that she is talking about not the physical construction of the house. Rather, she refers to the vulnerable familial roots which for her have become symbolically manifested in the house. In striving for material security and independence Bing has forgotten about the emotional support that comes from cultural rituals, familiar customs and ancestral roots. When Bing does need physical, psychological and emotional support near to the end of the film, her family is close-by to help her.

In contrast to Bing, Yen, her elder sister, is living in Germany and is painfully aware of the tenuous nature of her familial and cultural roots. On one occasion she expresses it overtly. At an intimate moment in bed, after her daughter has disillusioned her by doubting the importance of her Cantonese language homework, Yen says to her husband:

I don't know if I should think of myself as Chinese. I was born in Hong Kong. I don't speak Mandarin and soon Hong Kong won't be Hong Kong. The colour of my skin is yellow not white. I speak German with an accent. I live in Germany but I'm not really German. Where is my home? I only know that my roots are with my parents. I finished college and came here 10 years ago. They never asked me for anything. Now they've grown old. The happier I am in Germany, the more it hurts.
By the end of the film we know that Ma is beginning to embrace her new environment when we see her able to make the little dog, which has periodically terrorised the family since their arrival, sit on demand. Pa, who for most of the film has denied himself the pleasure of drinking Chinese tea because he thought he should “Follow the customs of the new village”, finally succumbs to his age old habit. There is acceptance that the family will be able to “put down their burden and plant [their] roots in this soil” when we see Pa making plans to turn the suburban house into an ancestral one for his children. Like Aya’s ability to transform the space of the backyard into something which is culturally significant and has practical functions, so too does Pa see the potential of adapting and individualising the traditional big Aussie backyard for his own cultural and functional purposes:

We’ll make a pond here, to grow lotus. We can have lotus roots to eat in the summer. Your ancestral home has a lotus pond in the back garden. Acres and acres ... Over there we can build a greenhouse ... We need a greenhouse to grow quality tea leaves. When you three marry there’ll be no need to buy a house. You can build here. There’s enough room for three ...

As Mark Roxburgh has noted, this is the first moment in the film where the word ‘home’ is used. In previous sequences, “their domiciles past and present have all been referred to as houses.” (Roxburgh 1997: 6) Perhaps it is exactly this preponderance of suburban space which facilitates new Australians’ adaptation to the environment through cultural transformation, something incidentally which could only be achieved in a limited fashion in the inner-city urban sphere.

3.6 Conclusion: Escape or Transformation

...you don’t have to be a mindless conformist to choose suburban life. Most of the best poets and painters and inventors choose it too. It reconciles access to work and city with private, adaptable, self-expressive living space at home.” (Stretton 1970: 20-1)

All of these films show women subverting the traditional ideas associated with suburbia through transforming the physical sphere of the house or
alternatively, escaping from the environment altogether. Although *Australian Dream* and *Muriel's Wedding* do not present particularly complex, equivocal discourses on suburbia, they satirise every icon and every stereotype associated with it, often to the point of absurdity. In particular, along with a more recent suburban fiction, *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997), *Australian Dream*’s humour stems from the audience’s familiarity with suburban icons: the Mills and Boon romance genre stereotypically associated with the ‘suburban woman’, the suburban shopping malls, mowing the lawn on the weekend, the sexist male suburbanites. In *Muriel’s Wedding*, *Australian Dream* and *Sweetie*, contrary to Stretton’s claim above, the suburban sphere is depicted as limiting or alienating the aspirations of the central protagonists. Muriel makes her escape early on from beach-side suburban Queensland to the cosmopolitan melting pot of Sydney. Muriel’s mother unfortunately has neither the youth nor the courage of her daughter to adapt to another social space (on earth!) and makes a more brutal and desperate exit out of suburbia through death. Sweetie also makes a rather violent, final flight from the suburban sphere after wreaking chaos and destruction on the lives around her. On a lighter note, Dorothy makes a (temporary?) retreat with raunchy dancer Todd, but we never really know whether this is ‘real’ or just another of her rampant, romantic fantasies. The logic underlying both *Floating Life* and *Aya* seems to imply that for recent migrants, internal subversions upon the physical topography in which they reside, however subtle they may be, is necessary not only for cultural maintenance and by extension continuity of self, but also to weaken the physical and psychological dislocation that is often part of the migratory experience. In the context of these latter two films, suburbia enables its protagonists to achieve Stretton’s ideal of a ‘private, adaptable, self-expressive living space at home’.
In the following chapter we are going to venture into a sphere not traditionally regarded as a feminine one; the car. In “Volatile Vehicles: When Women Take the Wheel”, I examine what happens in cinema where, as my title suggests, women take the wheel. Focusing on a series of films which contain moments of ‘domestic journeying’, Chapter Four investigates the ways in which the car becomes an extension of domestic space, or indeed an alternative domestic space to the house. It also shows the ways in which the vehicle, sometimes even when stationary, can become a refuge or an escape from the familial. Because of the nature of vehicular space, the car is an extremely useful site in which to examine (familial) power relationships.
Chapter Four — The Car

Volatile Vehicles:
When Women Take the Wheel — Domestic Journeying & Vehicular Moments

4.0 Introduction: Finding the Road

4.1 Road Movies, Gender & the Familial

4.2 Dystopian Domestic Realms: Negotiating Familial Space on the Road

4.2.1 Peel

4.2.2 Sweetie

4.2.3 The Last Days of Chez Nous

4.3 Utopian Visions: Cars as Catalysts for Maternal Reconciliation

4.3.1 Hightide

4.3.2 Radiance

4.4 Car as Consumer-Fetish Object; Soft Fruit & Feeling Sexy

4.4.1 The Well

4.5 Conclusion: New Beginnings?
4.0 Introduction: Finding the Road

In a country with huge distances and isolated centres of sparse population, cars promise a rabid freedom, a manic subjectivity: they offer danger and safety, violence and protection, sociability and privacy, liberation and confinement, power and imprisonment, mobility and stasis. The way that any one of these oppositions can reverse and swing into new alignment with the others suggests the car's semantic potential for extreme volatility ... Dermody and Jacka put the problem more simply: our cars kill us, and without them we would die. (my emphasis, Morris 1989: 124)

Up until this chapter I have been primarily discussing spaces which are grounded or static — the house and suburbia — and characters’ interaction with(in) these spaces. This chapter will focus on mobile spaces, or rather the potentially mobile zone of the car. The cinematic genre which most readily deals with the car zone is the road movie. This genre necessitates that the car, or vehicle of some description with its obligatory roadscape iconography along with its quest/escape motifs, is blatantly set up to be the point of focus for the viewer. Research into the genre of the road movie, emphasises that automobiles have long been recognised not only as a means of getting from one locale to another.¹ Their narratives are structured such that the vehicle and the journey take on other semantic and symbolic functions. In his landmark essay, “Genre, Gender, and Hysteria: The Road Movie in Outer Space” (1991), Timothy Corrigan’s prescient final comment was that,

Once the buddy [road] movie has driven itself into outer space, other drivers might take the wheel ... the road might now explore other cultural and gendered geographies. (Corrigan 1991: 160)

In a way, Corrigan’s comment predicted the moment of Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991) in Hollywood cinema. In response to Corrigan, I provide a glimpse of what happens when other drivers take the wheel and explore “other cultural and gendered geographies”. I will convey alternative visions of journeying that are possible when women take the wheel in the Australian context. Perhaps this will subvert the common perception of cars and the road

¹ For a discussion of the car as icon see John Orr 1993: 127-54.
as an undisputed male terrain. To find out however, we have to move beyond
the generic constraints of the purist endeavours of the epic road movie to a
more inclusive type of domestic journeying where protagonists do not
necessarily engage in the epic transformations or the apocalyptic visions
synonymous with the (masculine) road movie.\(^2\)

This chapter explores in particular the importance of cars and those small,
seemingly inconsequential, micro-journeys between home and elsewhere
which depict interaction between the driver, passenger(s) and the car, in films
which would not generally be considered road movies. I have chosen a series
of Australian films from the last decade where the significance of the car
rarely gets a mention in their uptake by reviewers, critics and academics; *The
Well, Radiance, Sweetie, Last Days of Chez Nous, Hightide*, and the short film *Peel.*\(^3\)
The cars in these films are highly aestheticized images, creating memorable,
and sometimes erotic moments which make an impact on their drivers and the
audience. If we look at these films with the vehicle as our central point of
focus, sometimes unexpected readings emerge from the roadscape and the
interior cabin of the car; moments which bring drivers and protagonists
together in a space which, I argue, reveals “the car’s semantic potential for
extreme volatility” (Morris 1989: 124). Before moving on to a textual analysis
of these films, I make a brief foray into the gendered construction of cars and
their relationship to the familial within Australian culture and cinema, as well
as the wider cinematic milieu.

\(^2\) In the Australian context I am thinking of films such as *Mad Max* (George Miller,
has discussed the apocalyptic elimination of the wife and child in *Mad Max* in her
article “Fate and the Family Sedan” (Morris 1989: 117).

\(^3\) This, I would argue, is usually because of their genre — read ‘art film’ or ‘drama’ —
where the aesthetics of the cerebral and symbolic get prioritised over the visceral and
kinetic aspects of cinema.
In a purely logistical sense the car serves a very functional purpose in the cinema. The vehicle provides a convenient space for filmmakers to engineer seemingly spontaneous initial interaction between various characters. An automobile can also provide an immediate, inexpensive set which is easy to control in comparison to location shooting. Given the visual nature and organisation of the space — a windscreen with characters seated side-by-side — the car seems like it is made especially for the cinema. Shot/reverse shots can be readily set up without the expense of elaborate set design. Depending on which model and make the filmmaker/scriptwriter chooses, the car as icon can be read as having varying semiotic and semantic significance without much effort. For example, Charles Pickett illustrates the different meanings even the same make but different model Holden can produce:

Until Kingswoods appeared, Holden family sedans could be sexy ... the Kingswood represents a bloke-on-wheels, the antithesis of anything sophisticated, cosmopolitan or sensuous. In contrast, the FJ Holden, 20 years out of date, became more sexy as the 1970s progressed. (Pickett 1998c: 31)

Cars can also function as a method for creating those extremes of character-character interaction — emotions become magnified or intensified in that volatile capsule. Alternatively, it is not easy to disguise or escape if you are feeling uneasy or claustrophobic in the enclosed cabin of a vehicle.

4.1 Road Movies, Gender & the Familial

Much has been written concerning the connections between the road movie, frontier ethos and masculinity — albeit often a kind of hysteria or crisis associated with this masculinity and male subjectivity.4 In fact the road movie

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4 Some titles here dealing with masculinity and the road would include “Western Meets Eastwood” (Roberts 1997), “Mad Love, Mobile Homes & Dysfunctional Dicks”, (Leong, Sell and Thomas 1997), “My Own Private Idaho and the New Queer Road Movies” (Lang 1997) and “Disassociated Masculinities and Geographies of the Road” (Aitken and Lukinbeal 1997) in Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark’s The Road Movie Book. Cohan and Hark have claimed: “the road movie promotes a male escapist fantasy linking masculinity to technology and defining the road as a space that is at once resistant to while ultimately constrained by the responsibilities of domesticity: home life, marriage, employment.” (Cohan & Hark 1997: 3)
has been described as a "genre traditionally focused, almost exclusively, on men and the absence of women". (Corrigan 1991: 143) Apart from the critical works on Thelma and Louise, the so-called ‘feminist’ road movie, the significance of women and cars has been virtually absent from critical studies of the road movie.

In the context of Australian cinema there have been only a few sustained enquiries examining the significance of cars and/or the road movie. Susan Dermody characterised a type of road movie called the “urban road movie” or “street film”. It concerns films “of cars on the cruise, of alienation behind the dashboard and windscreen ... Ironically, despite all the driving, the stories are not driven by anything more sharply focused than anguish. No-one is solving anything, no-one is going anywhere.” (Dermody 1990: 134)

In the context of women and the road, Janet Wolff (1993: 229) has argued that the histories of travel make it clear that women have never had the same access to the road as men:

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5 In an essay on American fiction, Enloe notes the centrality of the image of motion connected with the American hero (authors she discusses include Faulkner, Dreiser and Updike). At work here is “a habit of association that connects females with stasis and death; males with movement and life” (1992: 17) Indeed, she notes how frequently in such fiction the females have to be killed to ensure the man’s escape.

6 More recently there have been critical pieces on the heterosexual outlaw couples on the road in films such as Bonnie & Clyde (Arthur Penn, 1967), Gun Crazy (Joseph Louis, 1950) and Natural Born Killers (Oliver Stone, 1994). Cohan and Hark claim that in the 1990s the outlaw couple film has reinvented itself through the lens of postmodernism in films such as Wild at Heart (David Lynch, 1990), Kalifornia (Dominic Sena, 1994), True Romance (Tony Scott, 1993) and Natural Born Killers. (Cohan & Hark 1997: 3) Recent Australian films such as Kiss or Kill (Bill Bennett, 1997) and Heaven’s Burning (Tony Mahood, 1997) would also neatly fit into this category of the heterosexual outlaw couple.

7 In the forthcoming paper: “From Sand to Bitumen, From Bushrangers to Bogans; Mapping the Australian Road Movie”(Venkatasamy, Simpson & Visosevic 2000), we trace the evolution of the Australian road movie from within the context of Australian cinema and culture. While influenced significantly by Hollywood, we argue that its origins are also firmly entrenched in the Australian bushranging and droving narratives and films from earlier this century. The Australian road movie’s original character comes from its generic hybridity, such as the mixing of the road movie with the comedy, or social realist genres for instance.
In many societies being feminine has been defined as sticking close to home. Masculinity, by contrast, has been a passport for travel. Feminist geographers and ethnographers have been amassing evidence revealing that a principal difference between women and men in countless societies has been a license to travel away from a place called ‘home’. (Enloe 1989: 21)

Mary Gordon has argued, quoted in Wolff, that men’s journeys should be constructed as a flight from women.

Moving back to the Australian context, Kimberley Webber observes that contrary to popular belief, since the beginning women have been keen about cars. Surveys done in Australia and overseas have found that women enjoy driving every bit as much as men do. (Webber 1998: 100) As early as the 1930s increasing numbers of women were getting behind the wheel. It is estimated that in 1935 there were over 100 000 women drivers in Australia’s major cities. (Webber 1998: 97) However Webber argues that a principal difference between men and women in countless societies has been the license to travel far away from home.

The experiences of men and women behind the wheel remain very different. On average men drive far more and over far greater distances... Men also spend more of their work and leisure time driving beyond the boundaries of their suburb and neighbourhood. In contrast, women, regardless of whether they are in paid employment, take shorter trips, principally in their neighbourhood and for shopping, ferrying children and taking care of family business. The US historian Martin Wachs argues that the car has therefore done little to overturn the separate spheres of men and women; rather, it has enabled women to expand their domestic sphere while remaining firmly entrenched within it. (Webber 1998: 99-100)

The importance of the car to the domestic sphere in Australian family life was noted back in 1928 when a trade journal stated that: “The home may be deserted, but family life is benefited by the car. It is a family machine which

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8 In 1971, 35% of women were drivers as opposed to 46% in 1994. (Webber 1998: 98)

9 This quote echoes Enloe’s argument above.

10 “In New South Wales in 1994, men drove 20 656 kilometres compared to women drivers’ 14 284 kilometres.” (Webber 1998: 98)
binds the family together although it takes [it] far from home." Even during the Depression the desire to own and drive a car did not wane, with registrations dropping only marginally. Webber suggests that the reason so many people were prepared to make such sacrifices to preserve their place behind the wheel was that: "together with the home, the motor car had become an essential part of family life".12 (Webber 1998: 97) The exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney "Cars and Culture: Our Driving Passions" illustrated Australians' century-long love-affair with the car. The editor of the collection of essays published to coincide with exhibition also notes the importance of cars for family life:

The ubiquity of cars, their symbolic value as possessions, their role as site and source of pleasure have made them part of Australia's emotional and cultural landscape. Cars figure in most people's ideas and memories of work and play, formality and informality, family and independence, matrimony and sexuality, danger and comfort. For decades cars have been 'part of the family' in snapshots, advertising and art. (Pickett 1998b: 8)

The familial nature of cars also comes to the fore in many Australian road movies. Out of all the Australian road movies, George Miller's Mad Max cycle (1979, 1981, 1985) have attracted by far the most critical attention. While I do not wish to focus on them in this chapter, comment surrounding the films often highlights their significance in relation to the domestic or familial sphere. For example in his discussion of the Mad Max films and the iconic nature of the car in Australian cinema, Jon Stratton argues that the car is often a repository of the domestic domain: "There is a tendency not merely to personalize cars but to do so as locations of the domestic domain. In Australia with its huge distances and isolated centres of population this tendency is more pronounced than in for example, America." (Stratton 1983: 55) It has also

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11 This was quoted from The Industrial Australian and Mining Standard, 12 January 1928, quoted in Webber 1998: 97.

12 There was also some concern at the time that too much of the household spending was going on cars and married couples were foregoing the pleasures of parenthood in order to afford a car (Webber 1998: 98)
been observed that: "The lovingly reconstituted car denies both the market economy and alienated labour; the mobile home offers a utopian space to escape or 'reconstitute' sexual and family relations." (Morris 1989: 124) In his remarks below, Adrian Martin implies that the Mad Max films signalled an important tension between domesticity and suburbia in Australian life:

... the Mad Max movies really do tap into something in Australian life and Australian culture, particularly to do with our car culture, and everything that cars mean to us — cars as escape, cars as destruction of someone else, destruction of yourself, ways of the relation between you and your car and you and your home, domesticity, the very fraught relations of domesticity and suburbia in Australian life.' All these things are played out in this highly expressionistic way in the Mad Max movies, without a single character having ever to sit down and say 'I have a problem with suburbia and domesticity. Now I'm going to get in my car and burn down the road.' But it's all there. (Martin 1998)\textsuperscript{13}

Another critic who has also explored the layered connections between the road, the car and familial space is Meaghan Morris. Her 1989 essay, "Fate and the Family Sedan", established alternative grounds upon which to investigate the significance of the car, domesticity, and sexuality in Australian cinema. The first part of her paper focuses primarily on the way the family has become represented as a 'social problem' in Australian cinema. Within this context she discusses the significance of the car as "an agent of action" along with:

\begin{quote}
cars as mobile, encapsulating vehicles of critical thinking about the family and familial space — articulating a conflict between a 'society' and an 'environment' which are nonetheless mutually, and historically, entailed. (Morris 1989: 116)
\end{quote}

While Morris's discussion focuses on 1970s and 1980s cinema, I will be pursuing some of the issues she explores within the context of recent cinema. As a corollary to the importance of familial space I will examine the way the space of the road and vehicle has been eroticised for a female audience/central characters. The eroticization, I argue, creates a type of autophilia. This also relates to Morris's observations concerning the car's

semantic potential for extreme volatility and their ability to convey dystopian or utopian visions. She argues that films such as Backroads and the FJ Holden engender dystopian visions because they construct political/social worlds in which humanity is stripped of agency. These films are the counterpoint to those such as Mad Max and Shame which have a kind of utopian force as they assert the propensity for action and generating change.

The films I discuss here concern micronarratives of journeying where the car often functions as domestic sphere, rather than outright generic pursuits which involve an epic (anti-)hero narrative structure like Mad Max and Shame. Where I want to take up Morris’s ideas is in relation to the car as a utopian space to escape or relocate the domestic sphere which in turn enables a reconstitution of family relations as in the films Radiance and Hightide. (1989: 127) Moving on to my first filmic analysis, the following examines how Jane Campion relies primarily on dystopian constructions of the domestic/familial interaction in her two films.

4.2 Dystopian Domestic Realms: Negotiating familial space on the road

In Peel, Sweetie and The Last Days of Chez Nous vehicular space has a metaphorical narrative function in defining familial power relationships. The tussle for power is played out through who is driving and who is sitting in the back seat or the front. These films illustrate that, unlike other forms of

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14 In Shame, the motorcycle which Asta rides provides the narrative logic for why she remains in the red-neck town of Ginborak in the first place. The bike becomes a focal point for the relations between her and the louts in the patriarchal town. She fixes the bike by herself, despite being patronised by the males around her. The bike forms Asta’s mode of communication between her and the boys. In one scene Asta literally takes one of them ‘for a ride’; she does a wheelie unexpectedly and he falls off the back of her bike with his friends looking on in amusement. In this context, the bike performs the function of the phallus and the boys recognise and respond to its power and in turn she earns a certain respect. But as soon as Asta is without the bike, it is as if she has been castrated, and she becomes the target of the young boys’ aggression, like the other women and girls living in the town.
transport, all the passengers in the car are forced together, to travel in the same direction at the same speed, at the will of the person behind the wheel. The car itself becomes a site of familial contention, more so than a house would be, because in a house people can always retreat to different spheres as they so desire — the backyard, the study, the bedroom or the toilet. For passengers in a car within the confined cabin of an automobile, there is no chance for retreat or even temporary escape. This is one aspect of the space which makes it so volatile.

4.2.1 Peel

"We are not going to leave here until you pick up every piece of that peel!" (Tim says to his son, Ben in Peel.)

One of the first significant films to investigate "cars as mobile, encapsulating vehicles of critical thinking about the family and familial space" made with predominantly female creative control, was Jane Campion's short film, Peel. Peel explores the power dynamics within a family in an aborted journey along a country road. It cleverly depicts "the very fraught relations of domesticity within Australian life" (Martin 1998), whilst also illustrating the car's semantic potential for extreme volatility. The film opens with a black screen and the sound of repetitive thumping. A few moments later a close-up shot discloses an orange being thrown against a car windscreen like a tennis ball, by a little boy. A diagrammatic intertitle then sets up the triangular relationship

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15 Even getting out of a car and trying to find other means of transport is often not an option in Australia. Perhaps this is one aspect of travelling which is particular to Australia because as soon as you get out of the main cities, the distance between towns and rural centres is often so great, that to get out of a car without thinking about it is only considered a last resort, given that your chance of getting public transport or hitching a lift is next to none.

16 Or where women take the wheel in terms of creative control as opposed, necessarily, to the characters in the film.

17 Made at the Australian Film Television and Radio School, (AFTRS) in 1982, Peel won the Golden Palm Award for Best Short Film at Cannes in 1986. Another short film made in the same year but did not receive the same critical acclaim as Campion's film, was Margaret Dodd's short, This Woman is Not a Car. This film raises questions about "motherhood, sexual and power relationships in Australian culture, male violence
connecting the three people in the car — the father/brother (Tim) to the sister/aunty (Katy) to the son/nephew (Ben). A second intertitle reveals that this is a 'real story' about a 'real family' as if the audience is being asked to explore the anthropological patterns of kinship in a scientific way (Bloustien 1992: 30). In Peel, even the spatial arrangement of the characters in the HR Holden is strategic rather than incidental. The positioning of the brother in the driver’s seat, the son/her nephew in the passenger seat and the sister/aunty relegated to the back seat, reflect the power relationships which the audience realises by the end of the film are probably firmly entrenched family behavioural patterns.

From the outset, tension is created within the vehicle from the three different characters having opposing desired trajectories. Given that the father/brother, Tim, is driving — he controls the trajectory of all three of them. Katy and Ben however attempt to thwart this control through their various, but often feeble, forms of resistance. The motivation for the journey is Tim’s desire to buy a block of land in the country. He has dragged his sister and son along partly for their opinions and support but, most of all, just for the ride. On their return the little boy, Ben, wants to relieve the utter boredom of sitting still for so long and escape the claustrophobic confines of the car.18 Katy wants her brother to make a hasty return home so she doesn’t miss Countdown.19 The journey home towards women and objectified desire through a strangely humorous yet horrid fantasy about men, their women and their cars” (Stott 1987: 17).

18 This scene is redolent of my own childhood journeys, especially one trip my family made from Perth to Melbourne (and back again) in a pale blue HJ Holden Kingswood station wagon in December 1977. I have very strong memories of being squashed between my two elder brothers in the back seat, both of whom were intent on doing that male ‘spread-legged’ thing all the way for 2000kms. As the drive shaft in that model of Holden runs down the middle of the chassis and puts a big hump in the middle of the floor pans, my knees often felt like they were pressed up around my chin. I remember feeling utterly relieved when the Kingswood overheated and blew its head gasket in the middle of the Nullabor Plain. I was finally able to get out, run around and relieve my absolute boredom.

19 “This will be the first time I miss Countdown in two years”, she moans.
progresses without incident until Ben starts throwing orange peel out of the window. In response, Tim suddenly pulls off the road, abruptly brings the car to a halt, and then demands Ben pick up the pieces of peel. "We are not going to leave here until you pick up every piece of that peel", he says. After Ben has jumped out of the car and escaped down the highway with Tim in close pursuit, Katy, in a small act of defiance peels an orange herself and nonchalantly drops the peel on the ground beside the old frost-green HR. So when Tim and his son Ben finally return to the car reunited, they both demand Katy pick up the peel. Evidently she is not going to cave in to the boys' demands and as far as she is concerned now that they have missed Countdown it doesn't really matter how long they remain stationary beside the road. Perhaps this stand-off metaphorically indicates the inability of this family's relationships to progress any further and move on. A final long shot from a passing car on the country road depicts Ben jumping on the roof of the stationary HR as darkness descends, paralleling the thumping noise of the orange against the windscreen which commenced the film. The sonic parallelism also emphasizes the circularity or inability to change already established familial relationships and dysfunctional patterns of interaction. From Katy's perspective, by the end of the film Tim and Ben have forged a pact against her. In the penultimate scene, Ben mimics Tim's behaviour: "Pick it up!", Tim at first demands when he discovers Katy has dropped the orange peel on the ground. "Pick it up!" mimics Ben obstreperously. "Well you were the one that was in a hurry", responds Tim. When they started the journey they were heading out of home looking for land and thus the car signified mobility and the propensity to change. By the time the film finishes the car

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20 Evidently Tim is projecting his annoyance (or hurt) about his sister, Katy's opinion ("If you don't want our opinions, don't ask for them. It was a really scrappy bit of land. That's my opinion. It was scrappy.") concerning the land he wants to buy, onto his son so that he responds to Ben's behaviour in a harsher way than he otherwise would have. When Tim stops the car, it suits Ben just fine and it enables him to get out of the car and 'stretch his legs'. Ben craftily obeys his father's earlier expressed wishes.

21 "That's the last time I do you any favours", she says angrily to her brother.
signifies stasis. The title of the film refers to the battle waged over picking up the orange peel which can be viewed, as Bloustien has argued, as a kind of defiance or attempt to have one's own needs recognised as well as the need to gain power and control in a situation where one feels impotent. (Bloustien 1992: 29)

4.2.2 *Sweetie*

"This is family business and it'll be handled by the family."
(Gordon, Kay & Sweetie's father in *Sweetie*)

In *Sweetie*, familial relationships are augmented through the pale blue HJ Holden, echoing similar themes and images in relation to those just discussed in *Peel*. In just a few brief scenes, *Sweetie* explores the often dysfunctional circularity of family relationships and the way patterns of behaviour and familial tension become magnified in the interior cabin of the car.22 There are three scenes in *Sweetie* where the car takes a central role in defining familial interaction. On the first occasion, Lou and Kay are journeying home from the meditation centre. Kay has noticed one of Lou’s Lecturers taking a more than just Platonic interest in him and bursts into tears of jealousy (or hurt). "What was that book you were looking at?", demands Kay. "Just a meditation book”, lies Lou, not wanting to disclose that he was looking at a Tantric sex book. Kay then begins to sob. ("What’s the matter?", he asks. "Nothing”, she responds.). This is the first time that something is depicted as amiss in their relationship. This scene has a rather surreal quality because the couple are depicted sitting in the front seat of their Holden sedan, Lou behind the wheel, but without his hands on the wheel. A sensation of moving is implied through the night-time shadows being cast across the car, as if from passing lights. We are led to assume that they are driving home, given the chronological placing

22 Twice family members are depicted breaking down in tears in the enclosed cabin of the car.
of this scene in the narrative. However whether they are actually driving home or not, in other words, the journey in itself, is not that important to the narrative. What matters is the establishment of Kay’s insecurities, which happens in the interior capsule of the car.

This scene is significant in the way it constructs the car as a liminal zone and signifies the imminent appearance of the abject through the figure of Sweetie. A low-angle shot at the beginning of this scene shows a canopy of Morton bay fig trees as if from the perspective of someone riding in a convertible looking up. Trees of course, as discussed in Chapter Three, “Suburban Subversions”, play a fundamental role in establishing Kay’s fear of the abject — manifested in aborophobia — which is always lurking just below the surface. The car zone is a liminal one because it is the boundary space and condition between being stationary and in motion. The car zone breaks down the overt boundary between these two states. And even when the vehicle is actually stationary — it constantly threatens to produce mobility:

The Australian road problematises identity and identification in the sense that it ubiquitously occupies that liminal space between the real and the imaginary, “home” and “not home”, town and country, between suburbia and the bush, between culture and nature, between America and Australia. (Venkatasawmy, Simpson & Visosevic 2000)

The abject can also be read as occupying and creating liminal space. Reiterating my argument in the preceding chapter on suburbia, the abject “disturbs identity, system, order”. It is that which “does not respect borders, positions, rules: the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 1982: 4) Liminal space functions in a similar fashion. It blurs borders, it is a threshold at which binary opposites undo themselves and where meaning becomes fluid and dynamic. The abject is that which announces danger to

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23 Kay’s fear of the abject and her sister Sweetie is intimately connected with her fear of trees. This is a fear of disruption of order.
both social and individual systems yet, ironically, the abject also makes these systems possible. (Brooks 1998: 89) Sweetie enters the narrative in the scene which follows this one, so in a way the construction of the car zone as a liminal one signals the impending arrival of the abject in Kay’s life.

On two other occasions Gordon’s HJ family station wagon is used as a vehicle of escape from the Sweetie/Dawn character (or escape from the abject). In the first instance, even when the car is stationary it seems to act as a symbol of mobility and escape. Kay, Lou and Gordon (Kay’s father), seated together in the car which is stationary, discuss ways to remove Sweetie and her producer/boyfriend, Bob, from Kay’s house. Kay suggests that if they manage to get Bob out then Sweetie will follow. (“Get rid of Bob first — then it’ll be easier. Take him to a restaurant or something then afterwards jump in a cab by yourself.”) The inability of Gordon to comprehend the domestic dysfunctionality of which he has unwittingly been, at least in part, the agent, is reflected when he exclaims to Kay and Lou in the same scene:

“I can’t understand what’s happening. The family’s coming apart like a wet paper bag. People like you two don’t appreciate this, but the show world is full of unusual types. What’s to say Sweetie is any more unusual?” (Gordon)

While Campion maintains the basic temporal continuity of the editing of the sequence in its shot/reverse shot structure, in spatial terms it is somewhat disorienting. In separate shots, Kay and Lou are placed in the extreme right hand corner of the frame and Gordon is positioned in the far left hand corner of the frame, emphasising the emotional distance between each of the characters, especially between father and daughter. During the discussion about Sweetie, a cut-away shot reveals a little toy-bear dangling from the rear vision mirror, pointing to the ubiquitous nature of Sweetie and the fact Kay can never seem to escape her.
The horizons and feel of Sweetie change dramatically when the family — minus Sweetie — heads ‘out west’ to aid Gordon’s reunion with his wife Flo, who has been cooking for some stockmen on a station. When they finally get on the road, after waiting hours for the opportunity to deceptively remove Sweetie from the car, the film takes on a distinct shift in pace and mood. In this mini road movie section of the narrative, the mobility, freedom and opportunity on the open road is matched with upbeat music, which starkly contrasts with the claustrophobic house they have just left, dominated by Sweetie’s ubiquitous and oppressive presence. However the car’s semantic potential for extreme volatility is emphasised during the return journey from ‘out west’. A telling moment reveals the extent of the family’s dysfunctionality. Flo and Gordon have reunited, which was the original purpose of the trip, and the family is singing happily altogether in the car: “Let me take you in my arms, you won’t be sorry dear, because I know you’re the one”. However the realisation of Sweetie’s absence and the fact the family is not altogether dawns on Gordon and he suddenly pulls off the road and starts sobbing: “I just want everyone to be together”, he cries, evidently attempting to reach out to the family, who are at this point physically close to him, given the interior nature of the space of the vehicle.

24 After Sweetie discovers the family is going away she tries to make sure she is not left behind by just sitting in the car, stationary. Gordon claims that she will have to get out of the car some time, even if it is just to go to the toilet. The next scene however reveals Sweetie pissing on the ground beside the car with the back door open. Eventually the family removes her from the car by saying that her boyfriend, Bob, is on the phone then they drive off without her.

25 Carol Laseur argues that this “bizarre outback dance scene peopled by shearers, dwarfs and other seeming misfits” takes on a surreal sensibility when “ordinary events are played out in a set of extraordinary circumstances.” (Laseur 1998: 102)

26 The fact that the interior cabin of the car can invoke such intensified emotions is illustrated by the fact that just in the films I discuss here, there are three separate occasions where the driver stops the car and pulls over because of some emotional disturbance. The first time it is in anger. In Peel Tim pulls over to make his son Ben pick up the peel. In the second instance, Gordon pulls over and starts sobbing at the realisation that Sweetie is not in the car and they do not know what they are going to do with her. And finally, in The Well, Hester pulls over and runs over behind some rocks to get a hold of herself after she is discovered that Kathy’s friend is coming to stay with them which could jeopardise their relationship. In pulling over and stopping
At this point precisely the car interior changes from signifying a comforting cocoon promising familial renewal to a claustrophobic cabin. Flo motions for Lou and Kay to get out of the car and we are lead to think that perhaps Flo wants to talk with Gordon alone. However her only response to his desperate plea is; “Ooh honey” before she hastily makes her own exit from the vehicle, joining Kay and Lou on the road and leaving Gordon to console himself, alone. Flo seems somewhat embarrassed at his outburst and does not know how to deal with it. Up until this point in the film, Flo is depicted as the sole character who seems most able to function in the ‘real world’.

The framing of this dialogue sequence is particularly significant. A high, wide-angle shot shows a medium close-up of Flo and Kay in the foreground standing in the middle of the road, while the sky-blue HJ in the background behind them creates a stark contrast to its immediate environment; an infinite vista of road and empty horizon stretching out beyond them. The incongruity of this image along with the discussion taking place (below) emphasises the process of disavowal set in place:

Kay: Sweetie?
Flo: Hmmm. One thing we’ve decided is she’s not going to live with us, we’re finding her something nice close by.
Kay: That’s good mum. That’s really great.
Flo: Well I don’t know. I don’t know if he can do it.
Kay: Well he must. It’s for the best!
Flo: He’s in a fix about her. He’s under her thumb. Look at him. He’s scared stiff.

As I will show further on, the interior cabin of the car can alternatively be a utopian space to relocate the domestic sphere and an opportunity to reconstitute family relations. The intimacy of the capsule can offer the opportunity for reconciliation and understanding, as in Hightide, when Lilli and her daughter Ally come to painful understanding of each other’s needs.

the journey and they are in another way perhaps subverting the normal passing of time. There is a sense here of fear of loss of control.
But for Kay and Flo seeing their father/husband a blithering mess is just too much for them to deal with, and a process of disavowal and denial is set in place.

4.2.3 The Last Days of Chez Nous

Throughout The Last Days of Chez Nous, the central character, Beth makes desperate attempts to communicate with the men who are most intimately associated with her by talking to them in environments outside the home; her sphere. She tries at first to salvage her marriage by making an ‘appointment’ with her husband, JP, in a café. She then invites her cantankerous, sardonic father (Bill Hunter) on a Leichhardtian-journey\(^\text{27}\) into the Australian interior, with the intention of developing a closer, more meaningful relationship with him before he dies.\(^\text{28}\) However, as we soon discover, as far as her husband is concerned at least, it is their relationship which needs salvaging. This is inferred from JP’s skepticism about the importance of the journey in the following quotation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{JP:} & \quad \text{Why are you going out there? There’s nothing there.} \\
\text{Beth:} & \quad \text{I might find something.} \\
\text{JP:} & \quad \text{You drag this poor old bastard out into the desert ...} \\
& \quad \text{(Father appears at the door.) (Garner 1992: 56)}
\end{align*}
\]

Like the family in Sweetie, who attempt to achieve some kind of familial resolution through a journey beyond the urban and suburban environs, Beth abandons her family and tries to salvage the relationship with her father, with an odyssey into the desert. However as Collins has noted, home remains a structuring absence throughout the journey and Beth never escapes its centripetal pull. (Collins 1999a: 59) This is emphasized through the parallel

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\(^{27}\) Leichhardt was an Australian explorer who attempted to cross the country from East to West. His journey is fictionalised as a poetic search for self-discovery in the Patrick White novel, Voss (1957).

\(^{28}\) In response to JP’s skepticism about the journey, Beth says to him: He’s old see. I’m scared stiff he’ll die bfore I can —

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{JP:} & \quad \text{Before what?} \\
\text{Beth:} & \quad \text{Before I can get things sorted out.}
\end{align*}
\]
editing which creates a series of contrasting couples in different spheres - Beth and her father on the road, Vicki and JP having their affair in Beth’s house, and Annie and Tim finding young love: “In the early stages of the journey rising tensions between father and daughter, trapped together in a moving car, is contrasted with the release of erotic energies at home.” (Collins 1999a: 59)

As they journey further away from ‘home’ in Sydney, the car is the vehicle through which their character traits are paralleled while also displaying the gulf which exists between them. Beth has evidently inherited her father’s stubbornness and his tendency towards megalomania. But what is most interesting is the way in which this mini ‘road movie’ section of the film contrasts with the cluttered, interior spaces of the house. Keogh briefly comments on the striking significance of these scenes and points to the possibilities for ‘new connections’, which essentially are never realised by characters on the road, Beth and her father. The new connection is rather between JP and Vicki, Tim and Annie.

Armstrong’s camera, at first, is styly unadventurous, picking up only the safe geometry of car interiors, dusty highways, and motels. Once the two travellers take risks and open new possibilities in their connection, Armstrong suddenly reveals grander, more inviting vistas spread over the bold terrain. A lesser filmmaker, most filmmakers, would have missed this matching topography of land and soul, exploiting photogenic opportunities in the outback for the sake of production values. (Keogh 1996)

While a dystopian vision of the family is predominant in Sweetie, especially in regards to Gordon’s incomprenhension of the family’s dysfunctionality and Flo and Sweetie’s disavowal of his emotions, the father in Last Days, is equally impotent in not being able to open up and make a connection with his own daughter, and thus to act. From the outset it is obvious that father and daughter are making the journey for different purposes. Their desired trajectories, or reasons for being in the car, are different. The father sees the opportunity to get out of the city and to travel, the experience itself matters
and is seen as a noble endeavour. As far as Beth is concerned, the journey is not an attempt to go anywhere in particular, it is just an excuse to get her father away on his own and into a different environment, without the other members of the family present, so she can "get things sorted out". From the beginning they are already on different trajectories, but at the same time on a collision course within the steel cabin.

The yellow Falcon in which they set out, owned by Beth's father, seems to act as an agent reifying the already dysfunctional relationship between father and daughter on their journey to the interior. Perhaps this is the problem, if they had headed out in something else, like for instance Lilli's ('old bomb') Valiant, then perhaps the journey would have offered more potential. The Falcon is very much the father's domain and ultimately becomes just another extension of the hierarchical nature of their relationship. It does not allow for any space for the relationship between them to develop. With a different type of vehicle, a more neutral space, which was not owned by either of them, perhaps they could have forged a new way of relating to each other.

By changing the environment, Beth believes they might be able to change the relationship with her father. However as the scenes where Beth and her father are depicted journeying into the interior, it soon becomes obvious that the cabin in this case can be a claustrophobic environment which inhibits the development of their relationship and rather emphasises their intolerances and insecurities towards each other. Those patterns of behaviour established in childhood and recited over and over again throughout adolescence cannot be easily broken. As Garner has stated in her screenplay, "any minor incident, a certain tone of voice, a momentary dinting of their vanity can trigger off ancient, unconscious, unresolved hostilities" (Garner 1992: 74).
Lisa Harrow plays Beth, a successful writer who runs her household and career with great energy and humour. Even though life gets a bit hectic with her French husband (Bruno Ganz), her carefree daughter and a new boor, there's no problem in her inner-city home - known as Chez Nous - that she can't handle.

That is, until the return of her sexy younger sister Vicki (Kerry Fox) which sparks a chain of events that turns the lives of everyone upside down... and could mean that these are the last days of Chez Nous!

Acclaimed director GILLIAN ARMSTRONG (My Brilliant Career) brings the charm, chaos and comedy of THE LAST DAYS OF CHEZ NOUS to life in a heartfelt story about lust, betrayal and other family values.
Like the battle played out over the peel in the Peel, the following sequence reveals each character’s need to have their own desires recognised as well as the need to gain power and control in a situation where one feels impotent:

Beth is driving. A cow appears, looking very small, on the verge of the road a hundred yards ahead of the car.

Father: Ease ‘er down.
No reaction from Beth.
Father (with more authority): Ease ‘er down!
Beth does not respond. He looks sharply at her.
Father: I said EASE ‘ER DOWN!!!

Beth offended, pulls over, stops the car, pulls on the hand-brake hard. They are still yards away from the animal: there was no danger of their hitting it.

Father: That’s no way to put on a hand-brake.
Beth: Dad. I have been driving now for over 20 years and in all that time I have never had an accident. I know how to put on a handbrake!
Father: You yanked it. Maybe in the bombs you drive that’s how you put a hand-brake on. (Garner 1992: 73-74)

When they venture outside of the enclosed cabin of the car, the father’s domain, it seems as if there is some propensity for new connections to develop between them. During Beth and her father’s discussion about God, which reveals his resolute commitment to atheism, it seems for a moment that finally Beth is crashing through the barriers he has built around himself. Then Beth asks him: “What about dying? Are you afraid of it?” and he responds, “Fair go!” thus limiting any possibility of further discussion and putting up the walls again. Thus the process of disavowal continues.

In this section on Sweetie, Peel and The Last Days of Chez Nous, I have attempted to show the way in which dysfunctional patterns of behaviour and familial tension can become magnified in the interior cabin of the car. As an extension of domestic space, characters jostling for positions of power in the vehicular microcosm are often thwarted. Far from being a utopian zone in which to
generate change and reconstitute familial relations, it becomes a dystopian sphere where unresolved hostilities come to the fore.

4.3 Utopian Visions: Cars as Catalysts for Maternal Reconciliation

The automobile can become a repository for dysfunctional domestic spheres, as I have described above in *Peel, Sweetie* and *Last Days*. It may also however be a utopian space for familial reconciliation. Two cars which do not appear to be that 'practical', but which come to signify a volatile paradox are Lilli's 1962 S-Series Chrysler Valiant\(^{29}\) in *Hightide* and Mae's violet Ford Falcon in *Radiance*. Before Lilli (Judy Davis) drives into the seaside 'resort' town of Eden, the Valiant symbolises a sense of freedom, independence and relative autonomy while enabling her to lead a life of transience. Mae's Falcon on the other hand, blazing angrily through the Queensland cane fields, is a signifier of her indigenous identity. It also initially functions as an extension of Mae's frustration and anger towards the world. By the end of both films, the Valiant and the Falcon respectively have become, quite literally, the vehicles for maternal reconciliation and mobility.

\(^{29}\) Beth's father would most definitely regard this car as a 'bomb'!
Lilli (JUDY DAVIS) is a back-up singer for an Elvis Presley imitator (FRANKIE J. HOLDEN); living an aimless life on the edge of show business. She is strong-minded and independent, she is also alone and lost, drifting to escape commitment.

When Lilli is kicked out of her act she finds herself stranded in a coastal town with a broken down car, no money, no job and nowhere to go.

Through a strange twist of fate, Lilli befriends a teenage surfer kid, Ally. Ally is the daughter she abandoned as an infant, who has been raised by her grandmother, a gutsy stern survivor (JAN ADELE).

"HIGH TIDE" is the rarest of gems... a well deserved Oscar nod for Davis' soulful, magnetic performance."

Steve Chagollan, HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"A powerful, emotional, beautifully made film which will touch the hearts of all..."

VARIETY

"You know from the moment 'High Tide' begins that it's going to be the best Australian Movie you'll see all year."

DOLLY

From the heart of Rock 'n' Roll comes a story that will touch your soul.

A Gillian Armstrong Film.
4.3.1 Hightide

Ally: I'm going with my mother.
Bet: Jesus-God! ... Where are you headed?
Ally: North, I think. (Hightide)

Hightide revolves around the story of Lilli, a back-up singer for a touring Elvis impersonation band. After being sacked by Lester, the band’s “Elvis”, Lilli’s means of escape breaks down and she gets trapped in Eden without any money. She discovers her daughter, Ally, whom she abandoned as a baby, living at the Mermaid Caravan Park with Lilli’s mother-in-law, Bet. She then meets Mick and has a brief affair with him. 30

In Hightide, the Valiant is initially set up as the differentiating factor between Lilli and the other band members. Her behaviour on the road in the opening sequence of the film immediately establishes the pre-existent structure of hierarchy in the band and signals her future sacking by the Elvis Impersonator, Lester (Frankie J Holden) a few scenes later. In this instance, the Valiant functions as a means through which Lilli can simultaneously express resentment towards Lester and challenge his authoritarian patriarchal behaviour by ‘playing chicken’ with him on the country road. In this scene, Lilli incites Lester’s rage by speeding ahead of him, then prevents him from overtaking by dangerously weaving all over the road. After she has pushed the power-games to the limit she eventually allows Lester to pass her. “I told you to follow me!”, Lester angrily shouts through the window as he roars past her in his testosterone-charged V8 and overtakes. Lilli sarcastically responds, “Yes Lester, I know Lester”. In an unequal power relationship, the Valiant is Lilli’s sole means of challenging Lester’s authority.

30 Crofts has noted that Hightide absents the male character through death and quite explicitly writes out its next major male character, that of Mick. (Crofts 1991/2: 18)
Chapter Four — The Car

The fact that Lilli is a drifter (in contemporary times) necessitates that a vehicle of some description be involved. The personality of drifters is often clarified by the vehicles they drive. (Crofts 1991/2: 18) In an interview with Gil Armstrong she mentioned that originally the Lilli character was intended to be a male but when they changed it to a female it was easy because: "for a modern woman who’s a drifter, a lot of her behaviour is like a man’s ... Society condones that sort of behaviour in a man, but it’s still not expected or condoned in a woman." (Armstrong & Grieve 1987: 30) Collins has also noted the importance which different types of vehicles play in defining the central characters and their various attributes:

In a film which is a kind of off-road movie, each of the main characters are defined in terms of a vehicle ... The ice-cream van and the Valiant afford Bet and Lilli limited forms of mobility ... Cars and sexuality are bound together in the film. Lester's struggle for control of his all-girl backing group is played out in the cat and mouse game with Lilli on the road. Mick uses his black V8 to court Lilli, dropping off the chook she'd won in the club raffle, escorting her to the club for her first gig as a stripper, and finally, taking off up the coast with Lilli on a short-lived trip ... Col uses his battered blue ute to ram Country Joe's bull-horned four-wheel drive, taking revenge for Bet's casual infidelity. (Collins 1999a: 48, 49)

As Crofts has pointed out, both the car and the road remain significant motifs throughout the film and structure the relationships between Lilli, Ally and Bet. The road enables the reunion between mother and daughter initially and subsequently tears Nan and Ally apart in the final sequence. Collins has observed that Hightide:

envisions new spatial relations between a mother, her abandoned daughter, and the daughter’s paternal grandmother. This spatial re-arrangement entails new relations between landscape, milieu and the maternal within the fictional world of Hightide ... This ... holds within it the possibility of reciprocal rather than a guilty, punitive or self-sacrificing maternal imaginary. (Collins 1999a: 46)

The Valiant too is a fundamental agent in reconfiguring this spatial arrangement. It achieves this in part through becoming an alternative domestic space. Following the disclosure of Lilli's identity to Ally, the two are
depicted side-by-side on the front bench-seat of the Valiant. The Valiant is parked on a grassy knoll above the grey-blue melancholic ocean, reflecting the emotions being played out inside the car. Lilli painfully tries to explain why she left her as a baby with her grandmother, after Ally’s father died: “After John died, I didn’t want anything.” “Do you love me?” Ally demands, “I love you!” “You don’t know me”, responds Lilli. The car in this instance is like a mobile home or haven and structures the relationship between the two characters. The close environment forges a painful but intimate connection between them. The car also provides a sphere in which they will not be disturbed by Ally’s grandmother, Bet. This scene reminds us that cars can be:

a form of social containment, a mobile suburban living room. While cars can be places of abandon, they can also be refuges from it, and from engagement with society and nature. Cars can also provide a mobile sanctuary in urban contexts … (Pickett 1998c: 31)

At the opening of the film, the road points to a geographical and emotional connection between Lilli and Ally when Lilli drives into Eden while later on in the film it is the road which associates Lilli with irresponsibility and finally separates both Ally and Lily from Bet when they leave Eden at the end of the film. (Crofts 1991/2: 19) The penultimate sequence reveals Bet’s absolute despair at losing her granddaughter — whom she has really brought up as daughter, given the absence of Ally’s parents. A close-up shot frames Nan (Bet) looking desperately out through the plastic curtains of the Two-fold Bay Fisherman’s Co-operative and then tracks back to a long shot and finally an extreme long shot. We realise what we are seeing is from Ali’s point-of-view looking out through the back window of the car. Gradually we lose sight of Nan as the car turns the corner, drives out of town and heads out onto the open road. “In this shot Bet’s face becomes a vanishing point — an emblem of maternal loss ...” (Collins 1999a: 46) And Crofts has noted:

While the film’s last shot of dotted lane markings ceding into the night could signal a decorous retreat for the spectator from the fictional lives of the film, it cannot help but evoke also the contexts
it reprises from earlier in the film, the transience of human relationships. (Crofts 1991/2: 19)

While Crofts emphasizes the transience of human relationships in the film’s last shot, reconciliation must be its flipside with the reunion between mother and daughter. Collins argues that through this reunion, the film envisions a post-Oedipal, intersubjective relation between mother and daughter. She believes that a reciprocal maternal space underscores: “the mutual recognition between two subjects” (1999a: 55) In this way the film moves to reconstitute family relations and the site for this intersubjective, or reciprocal maternal space is Lilli’s Valiant.

4.3.2 Radiance

    Nona: Where the fuck d’you two think you’re going?
    Cressy: Where d’ya wanna go?

We have already encountered Radiance in Chapter Two. In addition to the plot summary there, and pertinent to this discussion, is the figure of Mae’s Falcon which provides a means for three ‘sisters’ to reconcile and head off to a new life together. The significance of the Falcon in Radiance takes on a totally different meaning to that of the newish (practical and reliable ‘family sedan’) Falcon discussed earlier in Last Days. As Pickett has noted:

    Cars are functional objects, but they do have appeal primarily to reason and rationality. It is a cliché that cars can be sexy. Like sexuality, cars can give pleasure in a variety of ways, both visual and visceral. They are not mere metaphors for some other experience. But cars can be fetish objects, substitute articles of desire. (Pickett 1998c: 23)

Mae’s violet Falcon performs several functions in Radiance. The image of it blazing through the Queensland cane fields with Mae at the wheel, creates the a highly-charged and aestheticized vehicular image. The car also plays a part in the articulation of Mae’s indigenous identity. Roaring furiously through the environment seems to be the sole way Mae can directly express herself,
particularly her anger and frustration towards the world at having to look after her dying mother.\textsuperscript{31}

The first impression created by the vehicle, as the women make their way to their mother’s funeral service, is one which, colour-wise at least, is starkly contrasted to the environment. In another way however, the aesthetic and visceral impact of the Falcon seems to construct it as an integral part of the environment.\textsuperscript{32} The violet car journeys down a narrow dirt track while green cane lashes at its exterior shell. The non-diegetic music playing — a traditional South Sea Islander tune — seems to create a sense of coherency within the image, making the car seem almost autochthonous. Another facet of the Falcon also seems significant in this context. The particular model that Mae drives, a 1977 XC Falcon, is one of a series of models of Falcons often preferred by indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{33} These classic model Falcons are known in derogatory, racist Australian slang as ‘coon mobiles’ or a ‘Falcoons’. The appropriation of the Falcon by Mae, in addition to its colour\textsuperscript{34}, seems to emphasize the feminization and indigeneity of the vehicle, and can therefore be seen as an extension of her identity.

While erotic moments in \textit{The Well} are created through Katherine’s flirting with Hester, in \textit{Radiance} it is Mae and her machine. It is evident that Mae represses

\textsuperscript{31} Mae is also reminiscent of the daughter figure who looks after her dying (foster) mother in Tracey Moffatt’s short film, \textit{Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy} (1989).

\textsuperscript{32} This scene in \textit{Radiance} reminds me of the striking mauves, purples and greens which permeate the texture of Tracey Moffatt’s first two films, “Mr Chuck” and “Choo, Choo Choo” in the \textit{beDevil} trilogy.

\textsuperscript{33} In the documentary, \textit{Bush Mechanics} (Francis Kelly & David Batty, 1999) the Aboriginal men dump the broken-down Holden Commodore in favour of a Falcon! One of the men’s final remarks about the Holden is: “This heap of metal has been nothing but trouble!”

\textsuperscript{34} Purple, or violet, is of course the colour appropriated by feminist movements around the world.
her sexuality from the comments Nona makes throughout *Radiance*.³⁵ Mae's love-interest is absent in the film and so the Falcon becomes her fetish-object, her substitute article of desire. Thus Mae is given an avenue to express her sexuality — a sexuality which lies latent until she gets behind the wheel of that violet falcon. On a more functional level, the vehicle also enables reconciliation between the women on several occasions.

On one occasion, Nona purposely thwarts their journey to the airport which would see Cressy fly off back to the metropolis and leave them. During this journey Nona feigns the need to go the toilet, so they are forced to stop, and Cressy then misses her plane. They end up dropping her at the outback airstrip anyway, six hours before the next light aircraft is due to leave because, Cressy insists: "Well, at least I won't miss it!" As Nona and Mae drive off, Nona says to Mae: "Couldn't wait to get rid of her, eh? Just like you can't wait to get rid of me!" A few moments later we see Mae and Nona heading home and Mae says: "We are not going back!" In the next shot however, Mae pulls up beside Cressy who is patiently waiting on the abandoned airstrip. Nona opens the door for Cressy who appears to ignore them, so Mae sarcastically states: "What d'you want? A standing ovation!" Nona holds the car-door open for the diva who slides herself in. This second reunion between the 'sisters' paves the way for the maternal reconciliation between Nona and her newly discovered 'mother', Cressy, to occur after the women have destroyed the house.

Like the function of the road in *Hightide*, the road also functions as a motif in *Radiance* and alludes to the geographical, emotional and familial connection

³⁵ On one occasion, Nona, while sitting on the verandah chatting to Mae and Cressy, feigns an orgasm to provoke Mae's anger and highlight her celibate state. "Oh baby please! Oh God, Oh but you, you will never know, will you Mae", then Nona breaks into laughter.
between the three women; Nona, Cressy and Mae. It is not only Mae’s character that is defined by a vehicle. Both Cressy and Nona are initially characterised in opposition to each other through their means of transport to the old family house on the Queensland coast. Nona hitches a lift with a truckie, indicative of her wild, spontaneous and transient life. Cressy, in contrast, arrives respectably and orderedly via taxi from the local airstrip. While a vehicle would normally be a motif for transience, and the house an image of stability and connection with one’s roots, in Radiance, it is the opposite way around. The house in the end becomes the ‘transient’ object and the vehicle one of reconciliation and new beginnings.

In the final scene of Radiance, the Valiant enables the maternal reconciliation between Cressy and her daughter Nona to occur after the women have destroyed the house. When Nona discovers that Cressy is really her mother, not her sister as she had thought, she becomes very confused and escapes across to the near-by island. The next morning she returns to the mainland. Nona disembarks from the boat which brought her from the island and walks straight past Mae’s violet Falcon, conspicuously parked at the end of the wharf. Cressy and Mae appear in disguise (blonde wigs and sunglasses), crouched down in the front of the car. As Nona walks past the car, seemingly unaware, Mae whispers loudly:

  Mae:  Psst! Nona! (As Nona takes a sideways glance, Mae indicates that it really is them, they’re just in disguise!)
  Nona:  Where the fuck d’you two think you’re going?
  Cressy:  Where d’you wanna go?
  Mae:  C’mon! (She motions for Nona to get into the car.)
  Nona:  (Reluctantly jumps into the back seat) There’s no fuckin’ way I’m callin’ you “Mum”! (she says to Cressy).

Cressy and Mae laugh in sisterly conspiracy as they take off down the highway in their mobile home. In this instance, the intersubjective relation

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36 The respectability and orderliness of Cressy’s character is further emphasized by the colour of the taxi; it is lilac and matches perfectly with Cressy’s suit!
between mother and daughter is emphasized even more so than in *Hightide*, through Nona’s claim that she is not going to call her newly discovered mother, ‘mum’. Rather than a hierarchical maternal space, the film emphasizes: “the mutual recognition between two subjects”. In the beginning the function of Mae’s Falcon was to express her anger. In the end, it becomes the site for maternal and sisterly reconciliation. Although both *Radiance* and *Hightide* end with the characters heading out onto the open road, with the white lines leading off into the future, *Radiance* ends on a somewhat lighter note than *Hightide*. *Hightide* envisions maternal loss as well as its flip-side, reconciliation.

### 4.4 Car as Consumer-Fetish Object: *Feeling Sexy & Soft Fruit*

The fetish nature of cars and their ability to fuel *male* desire has been predominant in Australian culture. Marshall McLuhan was among the first to claim that 1950s and 1960s cars were ‘mechanical brides’, womb-like interiors offering control of exteriors styled as lovethe machines. (McLuhan cited in Pickett 1998c: 24) When pop psychologists and feminists began describing cars as phallic symbols, the fetish role of cars became part of popular discourse. Polishing a car took on new meanings. Julie Ewington asked:

> are Australian men more infatuated with their cars than with their girlfriends and wives? Do Australian women experience anything remotely like the lavish care bestowed on cars? Is the car the phallus, or rather the fetishized object of the phallus’s desiring? These are familiar speculations of Australian cultural life. (Ewington cited in Pickett 1998c: 34)

An Australian short film which was a product of the counter-feminist cinema of the 1980s, *This Woman is Not a Car* (Margaret Dodd, 1982) plays with this notion of the automobile as the “fetishized object of the phallus’s desiring”. The film draws on the conceit employed by A.D. Hope in his poem “The Brides” whereby the marriage industry is correlated with the motor industry; the bride with the new model car coming off the assembly line. (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 209) Dodd turns the conceit around so that it is the motor-
worshipping male who is the focus of the satire rather than the bride. Blonski and Freiberg state that the dream-like scenes in which men at the service station caress, fondle and fill the car with petrol are charged with an eroticism that displaces women and substitutes a car in her place. (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 209) Early in the film, the housewife’s breasts acquire headlamps instead of bras; at the end, she gives birth to a baby car in place of a human infant. (Blonski & Freiberg 1989: 209).

Before moving on to my analysis of the car as fetish-object in *The Well*, I will engage briefly with two recent Australian films, again made by female creative teams, which show the vehicle performing quite a different fetish function. In *Feeling Sexy* (Davida Allen, 1999) and *Soft Fruit* (Christina Andreef, 1999) the car has an intimate connection to satiating female as opposed to male sexual desire. In both these films the car provides an intimate space in which to escape chaotic domestic environments. More provocatively the films also show that cars can be:

sex aids rather than sex objects. Like the boys in the *FJ Holden*, they [the female protagonists] value their cars for the independence, privacy and mobility they confer. Their cars are statements of independence rather than man-substitutes ... (Pickett 1998c: 35)

In one hilarious scene in *Soft Fruit*, a vehicle, although stationary throughout the scene, provides Nadia (Sacha Horler), a practical means of escape from her toddler child and other domineering family members. She grabs a novel and a blanket and retires to the driver’s seat of her Datsun Sunny for a few moments of peace. She opens her book, places a blanket over her body from the waist down and, we are lead to assume, masturbates. Nadia’s small moment of auto-ecstasy, however, is abruptly curtailed by her self-righteous elder sister, Josie, who soon appears at the car window, unbeknownst to Nadia. In this scene the car is used as a travelling boudoir, or a room which is potentially mobile. This recalls Pickett’s comment that cars can “be places of abandon”,
and refuges "from engagement with society and nature. Cars can also provide a mobile sanctuary in urban contexts ..." (Pickett 1998c: 31)

In *Feeling Sexy*, the central character Vicky restores the sexual passion and excitement in her marriage through combining her art with fantasy sexual encounters. One of the film's final scenes uses a Volkswagon Beetle in a unique fashion to show the way in which Vicky has learnt to, once again, "feel sexy". Vicky is positioned behind the wheel, with her husband beside her and kids in the back seat, at a petrol station. As the station attendant — a rough-looking, moustachioed mechanic, dressed in a pair of dirty orange overalls — starts filling up the car with petrol, she fantasizes about a sexual liaison with him. In a hilarious sequence, we see her glance in the rear vision mirror as a look of desire sweeps over her face. In a series of shots — images from her imagination — the attendant seductively whips the petrol hose into the back of the car, then fills it up. The next shot shows Vicki, in a moment of passion, being thrown on the bonnet of the car and erotically kissed by the attendant. This scene is reminiscent of *This Woman is Not a Car* mentioned earlier. In *Feeling Sexy* however, both the attendant and the car are entwined in the central female character's fantasy. *This Woman is Not a Car* still depicts male desire, even if it is in a critical light, whereas the purpose of the scene from *Feeling Sexy* is very different. In this sequence there is no doubt that Vicki controls this fantasy.

These are just two short examples of the way in which films by female creative teams show female characters subverting the car and the road as predominantly male terrain. In the next film I am going to examine, the car takes on a more complex function in the auto-erotic fantasies of the two central characters, Katherine and Hester. In this film we are reminded that
cars are not merely metaphors for some other experience, they are also, especially in the case of *The Well*, a fetish-object, a substitute article of desire.

### 4.3.1 The Well

*The Well*, based on a novel of the same name by Elizabeth Jolly, revolves around the story of Hester, a middle-aged woman who lives with her father on their rural property. Hester decides to take on Katherine from a near-by girls’ home to help her with the domestic chores at the homestead. Hester’s father soon dies and her relationship with Katherine develops from being one of mutual companionship to one of unhealthy dependency, on Hester’s behalf at least. Her patriarchal father is hardly cold on his death-bed when Hester grabs the keys from around her dead father’s neck and places them around her own. Her moment of independence becomes embodied in this act. Now she has control over her father’s property.

When Katherine and Hester swap the clapped-out old 1970s Toyota Corona with a nice brand new Four Wheel Drive Toyota Hi Lux, just right for the country, the film changes pace. Suddenly the women’s consumer fantasies seem to be epitomised (momentarily at least) by the purchase of the new machine. For Kathy the new car symbolises the propensity for freedom, excitement and perhaps escape, while for Hester it provides another means of maintaining Kathy’s attention and affections. It is through this car that both Katherine and Hester realise the exhilaration and addiction of speed which results in death and tragedy.

The narrative function of the car in *Sweetie*, when the family are making their journey beyond the urban environs, is to signal a change in mood and pace. A similar technique is used in *The Well*. We are introduced to the Four Wheel Drive when Hester and Katherine are driving home from town in their new
purchase. A low, wide-angle travelling shot commences this sequence depicting the centre white lines of the country road disappearing into the distance. Non-diegetic grunge music “Get on the highway” heightens the viscerality of the scene. Next, a close-up of the bull-bars and spot-lights on the front of the moving Four Wheel Drive precedes a wide-angle shot through the wind-screen of Katherine, perched in the passenger seat, inciting Hester to pass the slow moving vehicle in front of them. They subsequently only just avert a head on with another Four Wheel Drive coming the other way. The desire for speed becomes erotically realised by Katherine in this sequence:

Katherine: Overtake.
Hester: No no no.
Katherine: Go on! Floor it!
Hester: No there’s no time! there’s no time!
Katherine: Floor it, go now!
   (Katherine leans over and beeps the horn and the two women scream as their Four Wheel Drive roars past the slow moving vehicle.)
Hester: That was risky.
   (She grins mischievously and beeps the horn a few times.)
Katherine: Ooh aah. That was just ... fabulous. (with erotic delight.)
Hester: Wooo. Woo Woo. (They both laugh.)
Katherine: I’m in love with these boots Miss Harper ... I wonder if I should have got the suede ones.

The way in which Katherine satiates her consumer desires in rapid succession — the purchase of the new machine, speeding, and purchase of the new boots — is interesting in the light of Pickett’s observations about the connections between cars and other commodities. Katherine and Hester use the car to change and project their own style. Pickett’s comment below emphasizes the way in which the Four Wheel Drive could be read to objectify “sensation and desire”:

37 In discussing the difference between American and Australian psyche and car cultures, Tom O’Regan has noted that “Americans dream of freeway pile-ups and their exploitation films have “crazies” driving spectacularly through crowded city streets pursued by slightly crazy policemen; Australians dream of cars coming over hills in the middle or on the other side on the wrong side of the road.” (O’Regan 1996: 208)
Based on the award-winning novel, THE WELL delivers a haunting tale of a devastating secret that two women share and the deception that tears them apart.

From the day she brings Katherine home to the isolated farm where she lives alone with her difficult father, Hester's life changes. Taken on as house-help, Katherine soon comes to mean something more to Hester.

As their relationship develops, something long-repressed in Hester is released as she discovers the giddy pleasures of friendship. When Hester's father dies, she takes control of the farm and family money and, for a brief time, their new relationship is poised in perfect balance as each gives to the other exactly what she needs.

This harmony is shattered in one night when Katherine accidently runs over a man on a deserted road near the cottage. The incident delivers a fatal blow to their fragile happiness and, in a whirlpool of anger and accusations, their relationship begins to unravel.
Cars combine mechanical impersonality with everyday intimacy. As with clothing and shoes, people can costume themselves with cars, using the vehicle’s appearance and style to change and project their own. Cars have sculpted appearances that objectify sensation and desire. And the elemental experience of speed puts cars into a different category from other commodities. Even non-driver Patrick White appreciated this:

“As for the occupants of the car, sheer intricate activity gave them a status and importance which made God unnecessary. Speed, after reducing your flesh, leaves you on equal terms with the natural forces which have replaced Him. It was exhilarating at least.” (White cited in Pickett 1998c: 23 my emphasis)

The “elemental experience of speed”, argues Pickett, puts cars in a different category to other consumer items. The way in which cars can become part of the ‘body image’ is also another way in which cars are different to other commodities. In Volatile Bodies, Elizabeth Grosz argues that the ‘body image’ is not fixed by nature or confined to the anatomical container or the skin. She discusses the way the body image is capable of accommodating and incorporating an extremely wide range of objects from external tools to jets, ships and cars. Part of the difficulty in learning how to use these implements and instruments is not simply technical but is associated with the libidinal problems of psychical investment. She takes the example of driving the motor car:

In driving, the car becomes part of the body image, a body shell for the subject; its perils and its breakdowns, chasing another car or trying to fit into a small parking spot, are all experienced in the body image of the driver (and sometimes, to their horror, in that of the passengers as well). (Grosz 1994: 80)\footnote{J.G. Ballard’s novel Crash and Cronenberg’s subsequent film of this book (1996), takes this notion of how the car can become part of a person’s ‘body image’ to its most literal extreme. In this narrative character’s bodies, maimed and deformed through car accidents, become the site of erotic fetishes and fantasies.}

Grosz’s remarks can be related to my earlier discussion of Radiance, particularly in relation to Mae’s relationship with her violet Falcon; we see Mae displaying her anger and frustration through doing burn-outs on the country roads, to the horror of her passengers, Cressy and Nona. Lilli’s Valiant initially lets her down in Hightide. On another occasion however it
provides her with a means of challenging Lester's patriarchal authority and the car becomes part of her 'body image' in the game of 'chicken' with Lester on the country road. The ways in which the car becomes psychically invested as part of the 'body image' is dramatically realised in the following sequence where Katherine kills the man on the country road in *The Well*.

In this sequence, part of which is repetition from the opening of the film, Katherine and Hester are about to return home from the Borden's party in town. Hester hobbles out from the party and takes the keys from around her neck. Meanwhile Katherine comes out behind her, still dancing. "I'll drive", says Katherine. "Uhh-uhh. No Kathy!" says Hester, "Not at night." We see Katherine, despite Hester's protestations, drive them both home. Katherine is swerving all over the road and singing. "Kathy, Kathy. It's the big bend. Slow down!" Katherine ignores Hester's cautions and keeps singing and speeding until Hester shouts: "Hey, hey ... look out there's someone on the road." Then we hear the thud of flesh on metal. The spookiness of this scene is emphasized by the blue hue which permeates the darkness and silhouettes the characters. Katherine and Hester momentarily sit in shocked silence before Hester finally gets out and walks around to the front of the vehicle. She holds up her hand and says: "It's not a roo. He's stuck in the bar." A medium close-up of Katherine in the driver's seat shows her holding her face as she begins wailing hysterically. Hester shouts: "Just stop that howling and let me think!" They then drive slowly back to their property and drop the dead man down the well. The shock of the experience of hitting the man becomes libidinally invested in Katherine's 'body image'. She squats by the well, hysterically moaning and shaking.
Following this sequence Katherine and Hester find that the money acquired from the sale of the house, which they had hidden in the kitchen, has gone missing. Following this discovery, Katherine seems to enter a state of psychosis, telling Hester that the man down the well is still alive and that she is having a relationship with him. The final image of the film however confirms Katherine psychosis as feigned. We see Katherine leave Hester’s house and head down the country road on foot. Before hitching a lift she opens her suitcase beside the road to reveal a wad of one hundred dollar bills.

Many of the homo-erotic moments of *The Well* actually occur within the interior cabin of the car. At times, like in the instance above, the characters interrelate with each other *within or through* the vehicle. Following Hester’s sale of the homestead and farm property to the Bordens — Hester is manipulated into selling it by Katherine — she becomes distressed in the car driving back to their new place located on the corner of the property. As we have seen previously, the nature of the small, confined interior cabin of the car is such that it is impossible to hide such tension and hostility. In a scene which could have ended in a fierce argument Katherine cleverly defuses the tension by flirting with Hester and deceitfully manipulating her insecurities and feelings of dependence:

Hester: How can you laugh and chatter away with a woman who’s driven me off my land. I have nothing.

Katherine: But you’re rich and you’ve got me. (flirtatiously)

Hester: (glances at the dress which Mrs. Borden has given her) Those clothes look cheap.

Katherine: Hey look it’s raining. It’s going to storm. (Katherine erotically reaches her hand and head out of the window into the wind.)

Hester: I s’pose you’d rather live with them.

Katherine: ‘Course not. No way. Here. (Katherine brings her cold hand in from outside and gently places it up against Hester’s cheek, then moves it to place it against her own cheek)
While the car, quite literally, is the vehicle which brings the two women together it is also the material manifestation of their deteriorating relationship. Hester becomes obsessive of the car, constantly sure the key is around her neck, always wary of Katherine’s inevitable escape from her. It is only through the agent of the car that Hester can exercise power over Katherine, controlling when she may and may not drive.

At one point, Kathy and Hester return from their weekly visit into town. While sitting outside the post office Kathy informs Hester that one of her friends — Joanna — has just got out of prison ‘on remand’ and is intending to visit them on the farm. Hester perceives Joanna’s visit as an impending threat to the unspoken but erotic rapport established between the two women. While driving home, Katherine discusses how she will need to learn to drive now that Joanna is visiting them. The thought of Katherine’s independence from her provokes a surfacing of Hester’s insecurities. She rationalises her decision against Katherine learning how to drive by saying: “No, there are too many accidents.” Then she suddenly pulls off the road. Under the guise of needing to go to the toilet Hester escapes from the vehicle and runs up behind a huge rock formation, away from Kathy’s view. She gasps for breath and suffers a panic attack.39 Meanwhile back at the car, Kathy gets into the driver’s seat fiddles around with the gears, turns on the ignition and begins reversing. Hester has returned, recovered, and appears behind the vehicle. She jumps into the passenger side and so begins Kathy’s first driving lesson.40 It seems

39 This scene is interesting in comparison to the others discussed above where drivers have to momentarily stop the vehicles. (See footnote number 26.) It is as if stopping the vehicle and the journey somehow stops the unpleasant event, and enables them to gain control of the situation.

40 This scene reminds me of one from another Australian film, The Cars that Ate Paris (Peter Weir, 1974), where the ability to drive means the ability to escape. In the country town of Paris, Arthur has been captive after a car accident engineered by the local inhabitants who live off the debris and carnage of car-wrecks. In the final moment of Cars, the car-phobic Arthur cries, as he sits behind the wheel, “I can drive!” Morris has commented that this is “a wickedly comic moment, as much an expression
that Hester cannot prevent Kathy’s inevitable escape: “Lesson number one”, says Hester, “Never reverse on a blind bend!”

Considering all the films discussed in this chapter, the most explicit illustration of “the car’s semantic potential for extreme volatility” and the notion that “our cars kill us but without them we would die” comes in my analysis of The Well, where both characters share in the elemental experience of speed resulting in the death of the man on the road. In this instance, this act is psychically inscribed into Katherine’s ‘body image’. At other times in The Well the tussle for power between the two women is either played out inside or through the vehicle.

4.5 Conclusion: New Horizons & New Beginnings?

Before making my concluding remarks about the films discussed in this chapter I want to comment on an Australian road movie, Spider and Rose (Bill Bennett, 1995), in which the primary cinematic moments are, not surprisingly, also situated around automobiles and their volatility. The film focuses on the journey and unlikely alliance between an ambulance driver and an elderly woman. The beginning and ending of this film associates cars with tragic endings and new beginnings and emphasizes Jacka and Dermody’s claim that “our cars kill us but without them we would die”. In the opening sequence the elderly Rose is depicted dazed and aimlessly walking around the roadside after being thrown from her rolling car. She then finds her husband lying lifeless beside the outback road.\footnote{This scene is remarkable in its emotive portrayal of Rose’s realisation of her husband’s tragic death. The scene is made more horrifying by the sound of a buzzing fly which permeates the silence and takes us towards the dead body. It then forms the link between Rose’s memory of this car accident to her current condition — showering in the hospital where she is convalescing after the accident. The bulk of the film revolves around Rose’s journey from hospital back to her country property in an of joy at the last minute, ludicrous redemption of a hopeless case as a hint of more carnage to come.” (Morris 1989: 124)} While in the closing sequence, despite
unending protestations from family members and others, Rose forsakes the inevitability of going into an old-age home to die a slow death and takes to the road instead. She masterminds her own escape by feigning a heart attack at a party her family holds for her. Spider, under the guise of taking her to hospital, places the 'comatose' Rose into the back of a car and drives out into the bush. He pulls over, gets out of the car and Rose hops in behind the wheel. We see her heading out on her own in search of new horizons and new beginnings.

I commenced this chapter with a remark from Timothy Corrigan, that once the buddy road movie has “driven itself into outer space, other drivers might take the wheel.” (1991: 160) I have attempted to provide a glimpse of what happens when women take the wheel and “explore other cultural and gendered geographies”. (1991: 160) Interestingly, it seems that when women do take the wheel, the way power relations are manifested in or through the vehicle are significant. With the exception of The Well, familial geographies are also central, echoing Webber’s comment that “the car has enabled women to expand their domestic sphere, while remaining firmly entrenched within it.” (Webber 1998: 37)

Peel, Last Days and Sweetie all contain journeys beyond the urban environs signalling mobility and a propensity for renewal. However these films end up showing the way in which dysfunctional patterns of behaviour and familial tension become magnified in the interior cabin of the car, emphasizing its potential for volatility. Far from being a utopian zone in which to reconstitute familial relations, the interior cabin of the car becomes a dystopian one representing stasis and the inability to act. The dystopian vision conveyed in

[ambulance. She grudgingly develops a relationship with the young ambulance driver, Spider, and he seems to restore her zest for life.]
these films is in direct contrast to that offered by *Hightide* and *Radiance*, where empowerment and reunion are emphasized.

*Hightide* and *Radiance* offer radical visions of the family and its relationship to the car and the home. On the one hand they transform the ideal of a conventional family, and on the other they define home as nowhere in particular. Both begin and end on the road, the broken white line ceding off onto the horizon, signalling new horizons, similar to *Spider and Rose*.

The central characters are heading somewhere, but not sure where: “North, I think”, says Ally to her grief-stricken grandmother. “Where d’you wanna go?” Mae asks Nona cheekily. Home is family in these films which is materially manifested in the vehicle, at least for the moment. In *Radiance* and *Hightide* the mobile home offers a utopian space to relocate the domestic sphere and to reconstitute familial relations.

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42 This final sequence of *Spider and Rose* in which we see Rose heading off also recalls the ending of *Lillian’s Story* in which we see the same actor, Ruth Cracknell, who played Rose being driven out into the bush by a taxi driver. As she sits in the back seat of the taxi, she tells him: “Everything matters!”
Chapter Five — The Country Town

Prosaic Rural Terrain: Reconceptualising Rusticity

5.1 Introduction: Driving into Town

5.2 Rusticity Examined: The City vs The Country

5.3 Australian Cinema’s Urban Outsiders

5.4 The country town as inimical to Women?

5.5 Filmic Topographies of Country Towns: A Transactional Analysis

5.5.1 Fish and Female Agency in the Ruralscape of Love Serenade

5.5.2 Escaping the Urban/Rural Dialectic, but not Fate, in Road to Nhill

5.7 Conclusion: A Celebration of the Prosaic
5.1 Introduction: Driving into Town

The country town, like the bush that surrounds it, provides both the physical and dramatic context for particular types of narratives. It is the social and cultural as much as the physical conditions of the country town and the surrounding 'natural' environment that supply the shape, structure, and specifics of the narratives ... With rare exceptions, country towns in Australian film are represented as irredeemably awful. This awfulness may be as 'harmless' as being unrelievably dull (The Settlement; Blue Fin, 1978), or at the other end of the spectrum, it may be undeniably destructive (The Cars that Ate Paris, 1974). (Rattigan 1999: 81)

My last chapter explored the significance of vehicular space and the car's function in reifying or reconfiguring relationships, particularly familial ones. Vehicles often play a significant part in films set in country towns. After all, there has to be a way of travelling to and from these towns and, in Australia, public transport (via train for instance) is rarely a viable option. Many of these films' opening sequences depict the central character(s) driving into town. For instance, in Shame, Asta limps into the red-neck town of Ginborak on her broken-down Japanese motorcycle. In Love Serenade we are introduced to the philandering DJ, Ken Sherry, as he lolls into Sunray in his daggy brown Mazda RX 7. The Cars that Ate Paris shows the central character and his brother on a country road about to enter Paris when both they and their vehicle become the victim of a xenophobic attack. Four 'lady bowlers' are depicted driving back from their Sunday match in Road to Nhill, when their Ford Falcon rolls after hitting a blind-spot on the road. And of course, as we just have seen in Hightide, Lilli and Lester are defined by their classic-model cars playing 'chicken' on the country road leading into the coastal town of Eden. In this chapter we are going to step out of the car and explore the sphere of rusticity and how it has come to be lensed in Australian cinema.

Country people are beginning to be regarded as almost another culture, a different kind of Australian, stuck in Akubra hats and the ways of the sixties. (Bowden 1994: 9)
Late in 1997, I attended the Perth opening of Doing Time for Patsy Cline, a country-and-western road movie cum prison film, at the Luna Cinema. The manager organised a group of bootskooters (or line-dancers) to do some skootin' in the aisles of the cinema prior to the screening. The response from the audience of predominantly young, inner-city 'sophisticates' was a mixture of awkwardness and silent disbelief. The bootskooters themselves, probably accustomed to enthusiastic clapping, looked equally uncomfortable. At the conclusion of their routine they were greeted with very restrained, polite applause. Even though these dancers were quite probably urban residents, bootskooting signifies 'the country' or 'the bush' and by extension all those ideas associated with it.

For me, this event represents the huge gulf which has developed between the cultures of 'the city' and 'the country' in Australia.¹ Numerous films since the Revival have focused upon the difference and division between the two spheres.² Up until recently, the country town has been depicted as a creature of the urban imagination; simultaneously othered but rarely idealised, or in Rattigan's words, portrayed as "irredeemably awful" (1999: 81). Unless there is (an) outsider/s — generally coded urban — passing through the town, (The Cars that Ate Paris, Wake in Fright, Shame, Hightide, Love Serenade, The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert) it is implied that the space is not worth presenting on screen.

¹ Asa Wahlquist has noted that although the bush may loom large as part of the national self-image, Australia is the second most urbanised country in the world. Census figures from 1996 show that 12.6 million Australians (70%) live in metropolitan areas, and many of these people have no links with the bush. (Wahlquist 1999: 191)

² As Neil Rattigan has noted, the country town "uneasily situated in the cultural mythos between the bush and the city, has had a magnetic attraction for post-1970 Australian filmmakers." (Rattigan 1999: 81)
In this chapter I want first to engage with the urban/rural dialectic in the Australian context and the part it plays in the construction of rusticity. Second I will examine the general discourses surrounding country towns and how they have been depicted in Australian cinema, taking a few examples from the last decade. The country town, often figured as a space inimical to women, is central to these discourses. The final section of this chapter will concern a transactional analysis of two recent Australian films — Shirley Barrett’s *Love Serenade* and Sue Brooks’ *Road to Nhill*. I argue that these films, in quite radical ways, subvert dominant representations of the country town. Rather than country towns being hostile to women they show a feminisation of the rural sphere occurring where the female characters are autonomous and independent. I will demonstrate how *Road to Nhill* even reconceptualises the predominant urban/rural dichotomy. These films also depict characters who are not alienated from their environment in any way; they are very much ‘at home’ in these country towns.

5.2 Rusticity Examined: The City vs The Country

Geographers Gerald Creed and Barbara Ching argue that in nearly every country and culture the rural/urban distinction underlies many of the power relations which shape people’s experience, but few scholars, particularly in cultural studies, have addressed the notion of rural identity. (Ching & Creed 1997: 2) Those who have focused upon the issue, usually from areas such as community or rural development studies, have often failed to connect it with

3 ‘Rusticity’ is a term connoted by Ching & Creed in their book *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*. They argue that while many have studied rural people and places, they have generally failed to recognise the systematic *devaluation* of the rustic as a source of identity. “While the disciplines of cultural studies and literary criticism have enthusiastically taken up the issue of cultural hierarchies and identity construction, they focus primarily on urban contexts, ignoring rural culture altogether. Bringing together these approaches, then, forces us to *recognise rusticity*” (Ching & Creed 1997: vii)
those larger theoretical debates — race, class and gender. Such blindness, Ching and Creed argue:

reflects other political and economic processes that have globally marked the rural end of the place spectrum. In many spheres the urban has come to be the assumed reference point when terms are used that could in theory refer to both rural and urban subjects. (1997: 3)

From an urban perspective, the urban/rural distinction is now less important in Australia given that only a fifth of the population are located in rural and regional areas as opposed to half a century ago when this proportion was close to a third of the total population. (Castles 1992: 149 quoted in O'Regan 1996: 266) Economically and politically the importance of the traditional agricultural sector has declined significantly over the last fifty years.4 In Australia's case the gap is widening between rural and urban identities as the urban is perceived as becoming more globalised while the rural more provincial or localised and rural communities continue to attempt to maintain a keen sense of difference from their urban counterparts. A glance at a two-week-long special report in The West Australian called "Country at the Crossroads" constructs the current Australian rural crisis in terms of the city-bush dialectic. The old, commonly held notion of the city as a corrupting influence and a parasite on the country is evident in the headlines here: "A Bush Gambler Beats Big City Ways" (Barrass 1999:1), "Forgotten Underdogs Battle Against the Odds" with a by-line: "Tony Barrass ... remembers how it used to be in the bush — and ponders why it has all gone wrong" (Barrass 1999: 6-7), and "Banks and Bulldust on Jack's Lot" (Barrass 1999: 6-7).5

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4 Politically all this changed with the Queensland election (June 1998). The Liberal/National coalition had, up until then, taken the vote of rural/regional constituents for granted. With the rise of the One Nation Party the electorate became radicalised and regional and rural issues became part of the mainstream political agenda.

5 An old Australian saying: "Australia rides on the sheep's back", referring to the wool booms both last century and this century, emphasises the importance of the rural sector to the Australian economy.
Raymond Williams, in his seminal text *The City and The Country*, examines the semantic associations of these words. He demonstrates how these binary constructions — the country/city, urban/rural or provincial/metropolitan dialectic — have been fundamental to our understanding of place since classical times:

‘City’ and ‘Country’ are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities ... On the actual settlements which in real history have been astonishingly varied, powerful feelings have gathered and have been generalised. On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, of innocence and of simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, and light. Powerful hostile associations have also developed: on the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation. A contrast between country and city, as a fundamental way of life, reaches back into classical times.

(Williams 1973: 1)

Examining these remarks within the Australian context, it becomes evident that the dichotomy Williams describes here between ‘city’ and ‘country’ ignores the subtleties of the differences between various locales which could be loosely termed ‘country’ or ‘the bush’. For example, the large regional centres serving vast rural areas have a very different feel to the small to medium-sized country towns existing for the purpose of mining or the small coastal communities (fishing and tourism) or the isolated stations dotted throughout the outback. The two films I explore in the latter part of this chapter are both set in small sized country towns serving pastoral communities.

Like the suburb, the country town can be viewed as an ambivalent or third space, because it is neither part of the two extremes; outback nor inner-city. This point is taken up in the following extract, where Bruce Bennett describes how, in the Australian context, a hierarchy of value on place has made its way
into our language. Bennett shows the differentiation between the outback and the rural, country town:

In literature and speech, ‘suburban’ often connotes narrowminded or conventional in outlook, while ‘suburbia’, the suburbs considered collectively, is thought to embody the middle range of community standards and values, for which ‘boring’ is the most common epithet. Further down this presumed scale of civilisation is ‘rural’ or ‘rustic’, which connotes simple, artless, unsophisticated or more scathingly, uncouth, rude or boorish: agraria, the world of farms and country towns is commonly thought to be inhabited by slow wits. By contrast, the urban dweller is a metropolitan figure, commonly associated with ‘urbanity’: i.e. he or she is sophisticated, civilised, and at least knows what elegance, refinement or courtesy in manners and expression are; while the bush or outback is held to breed its inhabitants tough, to endure hardship and to face ultimate tests of the human spirit. At each extreme, City and Bush cry out for capitalisation; agraria and suburbia are relegated to the lower case. (Bennett 1984: 41)

This devaluation of the country town to a lower sphere is not only limited to literature and speech. John Tulloch has remarked that unlike towns in the American Western, the country town in Australian cinema is depicted as neither a centre of power nor a source of community feeling. (1981: 357) Tulloch also observes that country towns are notably absent from Australia’s early ‘bush’ films. When they do occasionally appear, country towns figure as “places of purgatory for heroes in transition” from the city to a more ‘authentic’ country identity on an isolated station, as in The Man From Kangaroo or A Girl of the Bush, or places of temporary suffering which emphasise the country town’s ambivalence as a place between the country and the city:

Just occasionally, as in A Girl of the Bush, there is a hint of the monopoly rapacity of the country store-keeper. But it is never generalised and quickly forgotten. More often than not, the country town is suppressed altogether. (Tulloch 1981: 357)

This notable absence that Tulloch speaks of may not be surprising given the typical historical pattern of settlement in Australia which started in the city then moved to the more isolated rural areas and as a result, country towns
sprung up. As Max Neutze has noted, country towns grew up as collecting and distributing centres through which goods flowed between the capital cities (in each state) and the rural areas, rather than in the opposite direction synonymous with most older societies. (1985: 8-9) Neutze argues that the country town's concentration on 'agency' functions, rather than as centres of production or market centres, has inhibited the development of distinctive regional identities so "often these towns resemble remote suburbs of the metropolitan centres." (1985: 10) Geographer Michael Keniger, writing specifically about Queensland, has also noted country towns' homogeneity or lack of regional variation. He says that country towns:

are thought of with a form of cultural dread by sophisticated urbanites, perhaps because of the relative isolation of the towns or because of their lack of urban substance ... towns possess a uniformity that, to many, would seem dreary. Any journey out west, or up north, takes one through town after town, each ordered in a similar way and each marked by similar buildings made of similar material and garnished with similar advertisements. Regional variation is difficult to pick out and is often more related to the generating economy of the town than to any sense of locality ... The Australian country town is a remarkable demonstration of how a culture has struggled to establish a sense of urban order and place within an otherwise untamed and poorly understood environment. (Keniger 1989: 37)

Thus this lack of any regional identity would reinforce the perception of ambivalent nature of country towns. I take up this point in my discussion of Love Serenade. In the case of that film — the country town seems to evoke quite a strong regional identity.

5.3 Australian Cinema’s Urban Outsiders

The conflict that drives the narratives of country-town films is based on the incompatibility of the presence of a stranger (who may be an outsider or an estranged local) and the hidden secret, and is exacerbated by the rigid behavioural codes that the stranger does not accept or recognise ... (Rattigan 1999: 82)

In Australian cinema country towns are seen primarily in opposition to the city space or ideas associated with the city. They become part of the city/country, or provincial/metropolitan dialectic, rather than existing in their
own right. They come to be seen in relation to being not city because the urban is the assumed reference point. The country town is a place you pass through on the way to another city or the outback, a place you try not to get stuck in.

Tom O'Regan has noted that rural, white communities in feature filmmaking:

have come to represent all that is bad in the Australian settler culture and which a metropolitan sensitivity can take its distance from; racism, xenophobia, misogyny, violence, intolerance of difference, homophobia and aggressive masculinism in a filmmaking stretching from Wake in Fright through to Weekend of Shadows (Jeffrey, 1978) to the Adventures of Priscilla; Queen of the Desert. Even the so-called nostalgia films with their rural settings constructed the bush as something you needed to overcome in order to be who you could be (writing rescues Sybylla from rural idiocy in My Brilliant Career), it is what you grow out of and leave, as in The Year My Voice Broke. (O'Regan 1996: 266)

O'Regan has also noted that the conceptualisation of the country town's malevolence in Australian cinema is generally the antithesis of television series' 'soap operas' (Blue Heelers, A Country Practice, The Flying Doctors, Bellbird, and more recently Sea Change, Something in the Air) rosy depictions of pastoral, organic, stable, close-knit communities where problems are transient.

O'Regan states:

... the ordinary TV series exploits the opportunities for interrelatedness, closeness and caring in country town settings. It permits people of diverse backgrounds, occupations, ages and values to interconnect and collide. (O'Regan 1996: 267)

In 1990s filmmaking, Stephan Elliot's features, The Adventures of Priscilla; Queen of the Desert (Priscilla), and Welcome to Woop Woop (Stephan Elliot, 1998), along with Doing Time for Patsy Cline have perpetuated the simplistic provincial/metropolitan dialectic and have stereotyped country towns as bastions of conservatism, parochialism, rural idiocy, populated by freaks and eccentrics. In Priscilla, a musical comedy-road movie, three urban drag queens (Felicia, Mitzi and Bernadette) constitute a threat to the local men and women of the country towns they pass through on their way to their four-week cabaret engagement in Alice Springs. After Felicia gets beaten up by a group of drunken, homophobic miners, Bernadette highlights the tolerance of the
city in its insular and protective containment of difference and reinforces the desire to keep ‘them’, the country folk, out of it and in their correct place in the spatial hierarchy:

“It’s funny we all sit around mindlessly slagging off in that vile stink-hole of a city, but in some strange way it takes care of us. I don’t know if that ugly wall of suburbia has been put there to stop them getting in or us getting out”. (Priscilla quoted in Robertson 1997: 282)

This comment also underscores the hierarchy of value placed on spheres which Bruce Bennett alluded to earlier. In contrast, another 1990s film, *No Worries*, convincingly inverts the city/country dialectic. Instead of the outback or country town being the alien, unwelcoming space, these sentiments get placed onto the city when the central character and her family are forced off their farm into the city after a series of droughts and falling wool prices. As O'Regan has noted, the director, David Elfick, drew on the late 1980s and early 1990s social reality of rural crisis. The hardships and cultural confrontations experienced in the city became an “allegory for urban Australia’s marginalisation and lack of understanding of the culture of regional Australia”. (O'Regan 1996: 267-268) *No Worries* is told through the eyes of a 10 year old girl, Matilda, who performs a vital role on the family farm; she drives a tractor, helps with the shearing and when running late for school, she even drives herself to the bus-stop. Her devastation, after being forced off the farm and migrating to inner-city Sydney with her family, culminates in Matilda running away from her uncle’s house where the family is staying. Matilda’s absolute alienation in this environment is epitomised in the closing scenes of the film where Matilda is depicted aimlessly wandering through Chinatown — lost, disoriented and confused — eschewing those notions of the city as a site which embraces difference. Matilda eventually gets discovered by her newly-made Vietnamese-Australian school friend at Bondi Beach wading out into the ocean. The beach and ocean in this instance invoke the freedom and open-space of the endless paddocks on Matilda’s family
farm. The film seems to be implying that *difference* in multicultural Sydney is tolerated, provided that it is not *rural* difference.

*Doing Time for Patsy Cline* is a coming-of-age film which also narratively and spatially exploits the opposition between city and country through the clash of the two lead characters Ralph (read: rural) and Boyd (read: urban). The ingenuous Ralph, true to his rural-roots, is fascinated by Country & Western music and fantasises about going to Nashville, Tennessee to make it big. However, a short time after departing his isolated family farm for the big smoke he gets picked up in a stolen Jaguar by a speed-crazed, drug distributor and his ‘pussycat’ Patsy. Ralph ends up having a different kind of coming-of-age experience - in a country town jail! Just prior to leaving the family farm on his adventure, Ralph’s father imparts a few words of ‘advice’ about women. Despite the evident irony in the following sequence, it also taps into the current discourse and social reality about the decline and lack of services in rural areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dad:</th>
<th>Your ah your mother wanted me to have a word with you before you leave ... man to man</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ralph:</td>
<td>Oh yeah? What about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad:</td>
<td>About women. Don’t bring back any woman with thin hips to this part of the country boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph:</td>
<td>You’re joking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad:</td>
<td>No I’m being serious. City women like their thin hips, I know that. But they’ve got their big city hospitals, but we’re too far away for that kind of luxury.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph:</td>
<td>But Dad, if you like a girl ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad:</td>
<td>Now don’t get too choosy. They’re all the same when the lights are off. Any other questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ralph:</td>
<td>Naaaa!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad:</td>
<td>That’s it then. You make us proud of you boy!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Country Towns as inimical to Women? The Pub.

Many of the values and beliefs traditionally associated with the idea of mateship are held by the menfolk of country towns. Country men ... believe ... that women are inferior to men; and
that the company of mates is preferable to the company of women. (Dempsey 1982: 131)

Evidently it is not only Ralph’s Dad’s concern about the lack of ‘big city hospitals’ which make rural environments inimical to women. The social reality of this notion is evidenced by the (relatively few) gender studies of rural and country communities undertaken which have found endemic structured inequality. The culture of mateship and male-bonding through drinking seems to be one of the primary ways in which this inequality has been institutionalised and perpetuated, and of course one of the central spheres where this occurs is the pub.

Neil Rattigan has noted that country-town films foreground masculinity which is “ruthlessly and iconoclastically attacked in more than a few country-town films (Dimboola, 1979; Shame, 1988). Mateship and masculine behaviour generally are at the root of the aggression and the hostility that define the social relations of the country town in Wake in Fright and Weekend of Shadows.” (Rattigan 1999: 82) Two films with central female leads in the late 1980s, Hightide and Shame depict the country town as a misogynistic, dystopian

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6 See Dempsey 1982, Ryan 1989 and Poiner 1979. The back-cover blurb of Gretchen Poiner’s 1990 text, The Good Old Rule: Gender and Other Power Relationships in a Rural Community, remarks that “Studies of rural communities have been few in number. Moreover these studies have focused on male participation in such communities and on areas of traditional interest to men; women have remained mostly invisible.” And Ryan has noted: “Almost two and a half million Australian women live outside urban centres, yet they are largely absent from studies of rural issues, rural decision-making bodies and the popular image of agriculture. The preconception of rural life as a predominantly male domain is however a false one … currently one third of farmers are women.” (Ryan 1991: xi)


Curiously, three prominent films by female directors which have gained (Inter)national awards and critical acclaim: Love Serenade, Road to Nhill and Hightide don’t rate a mention. I would have thought that writing on the country town and not mentioning Love Serenade would be like writing about suburbia and not mentioning Sweetie!
sphere which holds little economic or other opportunities for women. The pub in both films is constructed as a sphere which excludes and intimidates women. Hightide and Shame also perpetuate the rural/urban dialectic through urban-coded outsiders, Lilli and Asta respectively, who pass through the country towns and upset their conservative but fragile equilibrium.

In Steve Jodrell's Shame, Asta, a disillusioned city barrister, finds herself stuck in the small, isolated country town of Ginborak after her motorcycle is damaged in a road accident. She quickly realises groups of young men are roaming the streets at night, harassing and attacking young women. However none of the victims or their families dare to speak out for fear of being beaten or ostracised. As Crofts has noted in his discussion of Shame: "Rape in Ginborak is socially licensed, connived at, perpetuated through a conspiracy of silence, and overall authorised by the oppressive male culture of a small outback town whose social life revolves around its pub." (Crofts 1993: 13)

Asta, as an outsider, is portrayed as the only person who has any power to speak out against the institutionalised pack-rape in this small (fictional) country town of Ginborak.

In one of the opening scenes Asta enters the country pub, looking for somewhere to fix up her bike and a single bed, despite the offers from the young men at the bar: "You can stay at my place, love." As Crofts has remarked, the Sargeant Wal Cuddy character recalls the sinister bonhomie of the Chips Rafferty cop in Wake in Fright (1993: 15). As he disparagingly directs

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8 Shame was made in the West Australian country town of Toodyay, about 100kms north-east of Perth. Toodyay is located in a valley surrounded by fertile pastoral/grazing plains.

9 An earlier Australian film by John Prescott, A Town Like This (1971) took up a similar themes. The film was based on the case of the Queensland sugar town of Ingham exposed in the National Times in 1977 for its institutionalised pack-rape. The Ingham case was more alarmingly systematic than that represented in either film. (Crofts 1993: 7)
Asta to the garage, his remarks are horrifyingly prescient as Asta herself is attacked the next day:

Sargeant Cuddy: You wouldn’t want to stay in a rough joint like this. No — it’s — uh no place for a — uh —
Asta: No place for a lady.

As the film progresses, it becomes evident that Sergeant Cuddy’s comments embody the extent to which overt, violent hostility towards women has become normalised in this environment. Hostility which he, as representative and upholder of the law, has helped institutionalise through turning a blind eye. So the discourse of country towns being inimical to women is not only narratively engendered in *Shame* but also spatially manifested within the public/private divisions of Ginborak. The feminine is radically excluded in those masculine spaces or:

the so-called ‘public’ spaces of pub and street, and the milk-bar too, spaces where women are verbally and physically threatened and abused ... Once out of the domestic domain and the supermarket, women’s personal space is shown to be continually curtailed and violated. (Crofts 1993: 15)

The discourse of country town sphere being inimical to women is blatantly exemplified in Joddrell’s *Shame* and this notion is perpetuated to a lesser extent in Gillian Armstrong’s *Hightide*, with Lilli’s lack of work prospects other than stripping in the coastal town of Eden. *Hightide* also pertains to a more complex aspect of the relationship between characters and environment. The opening moments of *Hightide* juxtapose the two central characters by placing them in contrasting places and thereby signifying their differing relationship to the environment; Lilli as an outsider on the one hand performing in the loud, rough pub environment is in direct contrast to Ali’s ‘at homeness’, wetsuit-clad and floating effortlessly in the ocean. The brooding, symbolic coastalscape of Eden is redolent of the Coorong coastal region in Henri Safran’s *Storm Boy* (1975). And Ali, like the young boy, Mike in *Storm
Boy is shown to be inextricably entwined in her physical environment; the ocean and the beach. Another scene from High Tide also shows Lilli alienated from her environment. A pan from Lilli in a public telephone box over the country town reveals some Mobil storage tanks set against a bleak, wintery harbour. This creates a melancholic atmosphere and emphasises Eden as a place of unfriendly prospects rather than community. It is only within the male sphere of the public bar, working as a stripper, that Lilli can earn enough to get her back on the road:

Manager: Well I tell you what. We’ve got a buck’s night coming up. I can book you for that and I could probably organise a smoko — that’d be two shots. But you’d have to strip.
Lilli: I’m not a stripper.
Manager: No well ... I mean ... I appreciate that ... but we pay well. Enough to get you back on the road ... After all it’s just show business.

In contrast to the films described above, one film which shows a reconfiguring of the male-dominated sphere of the country town’s public bar is Radiance. During the women’s return from their mother’s funeral, Nona suggests that they should have a wake: “Let’s get some beer”, she says to Mae and Cressy. “I don’t drink beer!” responds Cressy disparagingly. “Well, we’ll get some champagne.” Nona and Mae are depicted standing at the bar in the local pub and are shown to be very much at home and in control of this space, demonstrated through the humour in the following sequence:

An mcu of Mae and Nona standing at the bar.
Nona: Why didn’t any one else come?
Mae: I don’t know.
Nona: Didn’t you send out any RSPCA’s?
Mae: I said I don’t know, so lay off.
Nona: Could’ve done it better myself.
(A quick cut to a mls showing two men sitting at the bar, a little along from the women, chatting to the bar-tender, then cut back to Mae and Cressy. )

10 O’Regan has remarked that Armstrong and her cinematographer, Russell Boyd, have managed to turn “some of the most beautiful coastline in Australia into landscapes without promise — miming the bleak prospects of its central characters” (1996: 244).
Mae:  You should talk. Our mother’s funeral. You showing off your muffy and the priest with a hard-on.
Nona:  You had no black panties!
Cressy:  He was looking right up your dress. You must have known.
(A cut to the three men in mcu again who have now gone quiet. One of the men’s eyes are wide with disbelief at what he is hearing.)
Nona:  I was thinking about Mum! (She realises she is being stared at. The camera follows her gaze and cuts to an mcu of one of the men with eyes gaping wide then a cut back to Nona)
Nona:  (snaps) What are you staring at bug-eyes?
Bartender:  (comes over to them and tries to defuse the situation)
   The usual?
Nona:  (to bartender) Give us a slab of beer, another bottle of champagne, a packet of chips ...
Mae:  (finishes off the order) a carton of cigarettes, and ... a bottle of vodka.
(A shot of the bartender in singlet and blue jeans as he turns to get their orders from the refrigerator. A cut back to Mae and Cressy shows Mae’s eyes drawn to the bartender’s tight Levi-clad arse.)

This scene is so unusual in Australian cinema that it is worth comment in itself. Not only does Nona put one of the men in his place for listening in to a private conversation but the sexually repressed Mae challenges the usual direction of the gaze in the male-dominated sphere of the country-town public bar through her own objectification of the bartender.

5.5 Filmic topographies of Country Towns: A Transactional Analysis
The pub does not make an appearance in the final two films I discuss. The town topographies evocatively lensed in Love Serenade and Road to Nhill provide locales for complex interaction between both the central female characters and their environment. In order to explore the importance of the country town topography in these films, I draw on an embryonic research area in geography. Human geographers Stuart Aitken and Leo Zonn have applied a geographical model called ‘transactionalism’ to their study of film. (See Aitken 1991a, 1991b, 1992, Aitken & Zonn 1993, 1994, Zonn & Aitken 1994, Zonn 1984.) The transactional model is primarily concerned with the connection or transaction between the individual and their perceived
environment. (Zonn 1984: 145) Film provides a perfect medium in which to explore the nexus between the people and their environment as Kennedy outlines below:

If we assume that the primary elements in movies are people and their environments, then they clearly offer a unique opportunity for the study of person-environment relations. Much of what we know of the world and specific places ... come not from first hand knowledge but what we are taught through secondary information. (Kennedy 1994: 163)

While Aitken and Zonn's approach is quite a scientific one, the terms they use to explore transformations between people and their environments are useful in my analysis here. They investigate the way 'image-events' cut across narratives and how they can be used to enhance the portrayal of person-environment relations. On first inspection, use of the term 'image-event' could often be replaced with the more commonly used 'scene' or 'sequence'. However Aitken and Zonn seem to be referring to something more than just a scene; a scene with a very specific purpose if you like:

Image-events are defined as a sequence of shots that violate or enhance the rhythm of a film and provide a level of communication between filmmaker and viewer. (Aitken 1991a: 106)

and Aitken adds:

The impact of an image-event is based upon violating everyday expectations and thereby heightening the involvement of the audience with the film. As such, the portrayal of usual imbalances and unique transformations between people and environments constitutes an important component of good cinema. (Aitken 1991a: 105)

While I am not particularly interested in employing subjective judgements about what constitutes 'good cinema', the violation of viewer expectation is fundamental in his definition of the 'image-event' and constitutes its difference from an ordinary scene. Aitken also stresses the importance of an event creating transformation and imbalance. He notes that "... it is important not to fragment a person-in-environment whole artificially by
studying behaviours or environments separately.” (1991a: 107) In his analysis of the Scottish director, Bill Forsyth’s films, Aitken demonstrates how a transactional interpretation can highlight ordinariness through juxtaposing contrasting themes and images. Particular image-events serve to underscore the incongruity of the extraordinary in the mundane and vice versa. (1991a: 109)

Both *Love Serenade* and *Road to Nhill* subtly subvert the notion of country towns being spaces which are inimical to women; or where women lack primary agency in a male-dominated domain. They also disrupt popularly held notions about mateship in country towns — the issue is absent in both of them. Both films are made by directors who have a close (subjective) association with the country towns where the films are shot. The townscapes of these films are infused with subtle textures and nuances which invoke a strong sense of their regional/rural place. Sunray, the Victorian wheat-belt town in *Love Serenade* enables the sisters Vicki-Ann and Dimity to realise their bizarre (country town) fantasies.11 While Pyramid Hill is more than just a simple backdrop for the fatalistic *Road to Nhill* and is literally ‘close to home’ for the creative team on this film.12 This film, I argue, fundamentally disrupts the city/country binary. Humour in both *Love Serenade* and *Road to Nhill* is generated from the presentation of commonplace customs, experiences and ordinary environments and characters’ subtle interaction or transaction with

11 Sunray, explains director Shirley Barrett, “is a town called Robinvale, in north-west Victoria, where my husband grew up. I’ve spent a lot of time there in the past 14 years. Robinvale has a kind of bleakness about it. It defies you feeling any sentiment towards it. There are no beautiful old buildings. It’s not a charming pastoral ideal, but is flat and scrubby, with prickles everywhere ... Early on I found Robinvale quite hostile, because it wasn’t what a city girl imagines the country to be like, but after a while it really grew on me. We spent a lot of summers with nothing to do except climb the silos and look out over the landscape.” (Shirley Barrett cited in Urban 1996: 13-14)

12 Director Sue Brooks grew up in Pyramid Hill, and writer Alison Tilson spent a great deal of time there during the researching and writing of the film while the producer, Sue Maslin grew up nearby in the Riverina. (AFC Media Release 1995)
them. This enables these directors to bring, to borrow a phrase from Aitken, a “shrewd clarity to prosaic situations and environments” and enables us to glimpse the mundane in the extraordinary. (1991: 109)

5.5.1 Fish and Female Agency in the Ruralscape Love Serenade

“I really wanted to write something that was set in a town like [Sunray], where the town’s atmosphere would have an effect on the girls. I wanted people to understand why the girls are so yearning for something else...” (Director Shirley Barrett, in Urban 1996: 14)

Love Serenade’s narrative of two sisters’ bizarre, romantic fantasy has been described by critic Nick Place as a film where “Riverina virgins ... obsessed with fish and husbands, collide with a snaky, ageing DJ who has a penchant for Barry White love songs”. (Place cited in French 1997: 78) However contrary to what Place seems to be suggesting, it is the DJ, Ken Sherry, who suffers most from this collision rather than these Riverina virgins, Vicki and Dimity, who neatly dispose of Ken by the end of the film. Ken Sherry is ultimately the pawn, the odd (urban) one out in this love triangle, which revolves primarily around the relationship between the two eccentric sisters. Once they’ve done away with Ken, order is restored and the two can carry on with their lives; dreaming about fish and husbands.

We are introduced to Sunray through the eyes of DJ extraordinaire Ken Sherry as he drives into town in his rather dusty, dated Mazda RX7 listening to the Barry White song “My Baby, keepin’ on going, my baby, you’ve gotta get there”. If cars are an extension of their driver’s personalities, which is often the case in road movies, then this RX7 definitely gives us a few clues about Ken Sherry’s personal attributes (or lack of them). This caramel brown Mazda RX7 is the epitome of sliminess (it was the ultimate philanderer’s car) and dagginess (it is now dated and who would ever buy one that colour?) As we reach the outskirts of this “rural paradise”, as it is described ironically by Ken
during one of his radio soliloquies, and glimpse the wheat silos and the train track, this dated car seems almost autochthonous. It is not until we see Ken look at his road map that it is revealed he himself is an alien in this environment. Ken finally reaches his destination — a double brick and tile house on a very suburban looking street.

*Love Serenade* has done to the sphere of the country town what *Sweetie* did to suburbia — revalued the space aesthetically through its surreal lensing of the banal and symbolic. Whereas trees constitute a complex, recurring motif in *Sweetie*, fish perform a similar function in *Love Serenade* and add a surreal element to the narrative. In *Love Serenade* the fish motif is introduced in the rather prescient teaser right at the beginning of the film over the introductory credits. A close-up of a fish (in a tank or in the Murray?) circles a baited hook serval times before grabbing it — hook, line and sinker. Immediately a cut to the open road reveals Ken Sherry driving into Sunray. Is Ken the fish, the audience is led to wonder, as Ken’s fate eventually becomes synonymous with that of the fish. Or is this fish simply the Murray cod which Dimity and Vicki Ann have caught that day? As Ken crosses the Murray River and drives into Sunray, a deep focus shot enables us to glimpse Dimity and Vicki-Ann in the background fishing. And later that day Vicki Ann offers the Murray cod to Ken and he responds in slowly measured tones: “Thank you Vicki Ann, but I don’t eat fish”. Like Kay’s irrational phobia of trees in *Sweetie*, Dimity is equally inanely preoccupied with fish. Lisa French has elaborated on the film’s rather ambiguous fish motif with the following remarks:
TEN SECONDS TO OPEN

Love Serenade

TAKE IT OFF, BABY TAKE IT ALL OFF.

"Highly entertaining and extremely funny"
- Peter Thompson, Sunday

★★★★
- Peter Castaldi,
ABC Review

A black comedy with a steamy soundtrack of 70's classics and "One of the best Australian films of the year" - The Australian

From the producer of The Plunge, Love Serenade was awarded the prestigious Camera D'Or at the 1996 Cannes Film Festival.

SYNOPSIS

In a small country town, two bored sisters Dimity (Miranda Otto) and Vicki-Ann (Rebecca Frith) develop a fierce and competitive crush on their new neighbour - a moody and self-centred radio personality with a predilection for moulting 70's soul and a taste for the younger ladies.

Abandoning all sibling loyalty, the sisters launch into a stormy battle for the affections of this mid 40's, twice divorced, ex-DJ from Down Under radio.

"I'd like to pay tribute to the generous hospitality of the town girls. Especially in regard to the easing of a man's testosterone."

AFTER THE SCREENING

Red carpet, interviews, wardrobe changes, champagne, drugs, and sex. And that's just the first day.

The film explores themes of love, lust, and the tragedy of the human condition.
The fish motif may be a red herring, but we can easily see the emotionally dead Ken as a ‘cold fish’, Dimity as a ‘fish out of water’ (in that she does not appear to be in her element) and we are reminded about the joke about the Murray cod, the fish that ‘got away’. Dimity says that Vicki Ann shouldn’t marry Ken, telling her sister she has reason to believe Ken is a fish. Dimity also comments that some fish mate for life (underlining the different views Ken, Dimity and Vicki-Ann have in relation to what love is). Ken inveigles Dimity into his living room with the line, ‘Would you like to have a look at my fish?’ and later expresses the view that being committed to another person is like being a marlin in a fish tank (French 1997: 78).

I disagree with French that Dimity seems like a fish-out-of-water in Sunray — to the contrary, she seems totally at home in this environment. If anyone is an outsider in this environment, then it is definitely Ken. One particular montage of townscape images, set against the music, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love”, invokes a physical sense of the small town of Sunray and seems to define the girls’ place within it. Passing shots show recognisable icons which constitute Australian country towns. In some cases they reveal physical decay, like the old, dis-used drive-in, while other shots show familiar, quintessential country town places — the Chinese restaurant, the hairdressers where Vicki works, the town mall, the wheat silos and the old railway track. These icons make up the physical places which have meaning for the sisters and constitute the primary elements of their existence in Sunray and emphasise the sisters’ ‘at homeness’ in the environment.\(^\text{13}\)

The prosaic nature of Sunray seems to have etched its way into Dimity’s unconscious, because even her dreams are banal, but presented as comically absurd. She says to Vicki-Ann one morning at the breakfast table:

Dimity: I had that dream again last night.
Vicki-Ann: What dream?
Dimity: The one where there’s a marshmallow inside my head and it keeps getting bigger and bigger.
Vicki-Ann: Oh that dream!

Through Ken’s rambling soliloquies on radio we quickly learn about his philosophy on life, greatly influenced by the music of Barry White. The 1970s music diegetically integrated into the film as part of Ken’s play-list at Radio Sunray (particularly the Barry White songs) seem to perfectly complement the languorous pace of Sunray. Ken’s introductory monologue particularly gives us insight into Sunray, a view which could perhaps be extended to country towns in general:

“... kind of appropriate really to play ‘The Hustle’. ... because I never play anything which is pertinent to anything. Let me get that straight from the outset. I’ve just come to Sunray to escape from the hustle and bustle of life in the big city and I see that not only have I escaped the hustle and bustle but I escaped anything resembling 90s technology. I don’t say that Brisbane is the centre of the world but at least we’ve heard of a CD there. You know often I lie in bed at night thinking for quite some time owing to certain things manifesting themselves. I don’t want to bore you with details ... heck I hardly even know you ... suffice to say that I don’t sleep like a baby anymore. Heck I hardly sleep at all so I have all those hours pre-dawn to reflect on my life, my life’s journey and I have to confess it’s taken many twists and turns and deviations over the years and now to my surprise I find my journey has taken me to this little rural paradise on the banks of the Murray River. Ever heard of the expression, “Stop the world, I wanna get off”? Well my name’s Ken Sherry and I got off in Sunray.”

Throughout Love Serenade we are continually made aware of the isolation of living in a country town. When Ken Sherry first arrives in Sunray the two sisters Vicki Ann and Dimity appear extraordinarily privileged to have a DJ of Ken’s calibre — formerly the radio drive-time king of Brisbane — in their hometown, “living right next door to us”, as Vicki Ann says. Evidently, Vicki Ann immediately sees the potential (marriage) possibilities of another man in town and Dimity doesn’t take long to find out the other fishy possibilities Ken offers either. This is evidently the most exciting event since Dimity’s ‘accident’
with the chain saw which saw the end to Vicki Ann’s last betrothed. It is as if Vicki’s apologising for the lack of action in Sunray when she says to Ken Sherry just after he arrives; “Hope you don’t find this too dull and boring after Brisbane.”

Nick Place has observed that Shirley Barrett has managed to capture “the somnolence, isolation and tedium, representative of just about every small town in rural Australia.” (Place 1996: 7) A series of parallel scenes which constitute an image-event also occur throughout the film which initially function to set up the prevailing banality and predictability of daily life in Sunray. Then however, they are effectively used to signify disruption to this routine. Reliably, every day both Vicki-Ann and Dimity meet for lunch in a tired-looking Rotary Park to consume their round of white bread sandwiches together at an archetypal picnic table beside the obligatory railway line. In the first depiction, we see the girls in harmony, cheerfully chatting away. In the second however, Dimity is wearing Ken Sherry’s shirt and she discloses she has slept with him. Conflict in the girls’ relationship surfaces and dramatically erupts as Vicki chokes violently on her sandwich. “I wash my hands of you”, Vicki says bitterly to Dimity. The disruption occurs in the third parallel scene when Vicki Ann doesn’t even bother to turn up for lunch and she is cheekily replaced by a pink and grey galah which perches itself at the end of the table while Dimity eats alone. In the fourth sequence Vicki Ann has slept with Ken and is planning her wedding while Dimity tries to explain that Ken is a fish.

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14 As Waddell has noted: “Vicki-Ann is a brisk, motor-mouthed, over-groomed beautician, a fervent devotee of the cult of the feminine as prescribed in women’s magazines several decades ago: perms, pastels and stand by your man. If only she had one.” (Waddell 1996: 42)

15 Evidently this is a physiological reaction to shock which has happened since childhood and Dimity knows to whack Vicki-Ann on the back so she will start breathing again.
Many of the criticisms of suburbia - that it is insular, parochial, alienating for women — can also be applied to depictions of country towns. Particularly in *Love Serenade* these stereotypes associated with country towns are necessary in order to understand much of the humour associated with them. Max Neutze has observed:

... country towns are like remote suburbs of the metropolitan centre. The simile emphasises their lack of independence, the fact that they serve a local rural community and have mainly agency functions, and their place within an inter-related urban system in which control is highly centralised ... Their only justification is that they facilitate the use of rural resources; take that away and the country town disappears ... Most of them are both suburban and rural. (1985: 11)

There is something very suburban too about Sunray; the double brick and tile houses, the big backyards. In fact the backyards become a sphere where ‘neighbourly’ interaction is attempted but hampered by the height of the back fence. Another series of parallel scenes reveals this neighbourly interaction.

At first we see Ken Sherry out in the backyard doing Tai Chi with Dimity peering over the fence curiously. The next time we see him doing this is after Dimity and Ken have slept together and Ken invites Dimity in to do some more “loneliness easing” — his term for sex. “I’d like to pay tribute to Sunray girls, especially in the easing of a man’s loneliness ... Sorry I’m late!” Ken smugly announces on his radio programme.

One image-event which exemplifies the mundane in the extraordinary is Dimity’s strip tease in Ken’s lounge-room. Knowing Dimity’s penchant for fishing, Ken invites Dimity back to his house to have a look at his big Marlin. Ken is depicted medium shot sitting in his brown leather couch in the far right

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16 Enker has noted that: “In purely geographic terms, the small towns and settlements of the outback seem far removed from these suburban centres. Yet there are striking similarities in the film-makers perceptions of how these remote and isolated communities function. The social conventions and the implicit values travel from city to country with ease. Ted Kotcheff’s *Wake in Fright* (1971) and Ken Hannam’s *Sunday Too Far Away* (1975) present comparable accounts of aggressive, masculine societies.” (Enker 1994: 213)
hand corner of the frame while Dimity is looking at the fish on his wall.

Dimity asks Ken about the soul of the fish and then in a shot/reverse shot
sequence:

Dimity: Do you ever feel loneliness?
Ken: Loneliness? Of course I feel loneliness.
Dimity: Me too. Sometimes. Not all the time ... Would you like me
to ease it for you?
Ken: Ease what?
Dimity: Your loneliness.
Ken: My loneliness?
Dimity: I could ease it for you maybe?

At this point the camera cuts back into medium long shot, distancing the
viewer as Dimity takes off her skirt. The non-diegetic Barry White music track
starts: “Feels so good, you lying here next to me.” A reverse shot of Ken in mls
staring at Dimity, who seems to goofily sways to the music, is followed with a
cut to Vicki Ann, gazing angrily out of the window. This scene completely
subverts the usual voyeuristic nature of a strip tease. At one point Dimity
cannot even seem to get her stockings off!

As I noted above, the power of Love Serenade is generated from the way the
characters' behaviour subtly transacts with ordinary environments creating
heightened tension and/or humour. This is particularly underscored in the
scene after Vicki has slept with Ken and now presumes that they must be
destined for the altar. She takes out her wedding dress, neatly packed away
awaiting the big day, and puts it on, then knocks on Ken's door to give him a
“sneak preview”. Ken's surprise is registered when he casually asks: “Who's
the lucky man?” “You are of course”, Vicki Ann responds. “I don’t think so,
Vicki Ann.” Vicki, in horror, then races down the road in her dress, veil
trailing through the dust behind her and then makes her way to the wheat
silos. The juxtaposition of Vicki in her white wedding dress against the road
with surrounding fruit orchards creates an incongruous image. She is placed
in contrast to the surrounding environment and the disorder provocatively conveys her sense of desperation. This is further heightened when she reaches the top of the silos and the viewer is left to wonder whether she is going to jump. At this point Dimity convinces Ken that he should come with her to the silo to persuade Vicki to come down. In this sequence Dimity’s familiarity with the environment is contrasted with Ken’s unfamiliarity — she scampers up the ladder then smugly watches Ken tentatively follow. Despite Ken’s (ill-founded) confidence in other matters, his vertigo is made apparent through his furtive glances below as he cautiously takes one ladder-rung at a time. When they finally reach the top of the silos, Ken gives his wise old bent on freedom and non-commitment:

Ken: I don’t know if I’ve ever shared my thoughts with you about love, Vicki Ann, because I want you to know I believe in love. But to me love is not some abstract concept of philosophers and songwriters. No. To me love is like those birds, see them circling overhead? What’s beautiful and special about them is their freedom. Wouldn’t you hate to see such magnificent creatures trapped in a gilded cage?
Vicki Ann: I s’pose.
Ken: Well that’s how I feel about love. In order to love somebody, first you must set them free. Now I’ve set you free Vicki Ann, just as I set Dimity free. Now all I ask is that you set me free.
(At this point, Dimity unexpectedly pushes Ken over the side of the silo to his death.)

The conclusion of this scene violates the viewer’s expectation and upsets the equilibrium, which we assume will be restored in the final sequence. In the next scene we see Vicki and Dimity returning Ken’s corpse to the water. This corpse, continuing the fish motif and the absurd comic tone of the film, swims off with a balloon Dimity has given Ken attached, saying “I wuv you”. Vicki’s enthusiastic readiness with which she “washed her hands” of her sister is again reflected when they dump Ken in the river: “Well that’s that then!”
ROAD TO NHILL proves it's not the story you tell, but how you tell it. It is about a small country town where nothing much happens... until the day a car-load of ladies bowlers - Margot (Lynette Curran), Carmel (Lois Ramsey), Nell (Monica Maughan) and Joan (Patriota Kennedy) - flips over on the road home from Quambatook.

From here confusion escalates as word spreads around town. No-one knows for certain who is in the car, how bad the accident is, or even where it is. On the old Nullah Road, or on the road that actually goes to Nullah. The ambulance goes out one road, the fire truck goes out another and Bret, the policeman (Matthew Dyktynski), who is otherwise preoccupied misses the accident altogether.

Husbands of bowling ladies go in all directions in search of their wives. Helpful passers-by take the women involved in the accident in other directions. And of course after the event everyone has a different version of what actually happened.

TONY BARRY • VIKKI BLANCHE • PAUL CHUBB
LYNETTE CURRAN • MATTHEW DYKTYNSKI
BILL HUNTER • PATRICIA KENNEDY • ALWYN KURTS
MONICA MAUGHAN • TERRY NORRIS • LOIS RAMSEY
DENISE ROBERTS • KERRY WALKER • BILL YOUNG

AN ACCIDENTAL COMEDY.

PARENTAL GUIDANCE FOR PERSONS UNDER
ADULT THEMES
5.6 Escaping the Urban/Rural Dialectic, but not fate, in *Road to Nhill*

"This is a story about fate and it tells an Australian story yet to be told on film. Country people are often portrayed either as hicks or wise old sages. These people are neither." (Sue Brooks cited in AFC Media Release 1995)

*Road to Nhill* concerns the attempts of a small country town community to attend to and subsequently come to terms with the effects of a non-fatal car accident which has left four ‘lady bowlers’ stranded in their upturned Falcon just outside the town. What makes this film so important within the context of other country-town films is the fact that it does not in any way rely on reinforcing stereotypes to realise its narrative. The drama does not originate from the interactions between outsiders and those characters that reside in the town but from within; from characters coming together who already know each other. The main ‘event’ of the film, the car accident, takes place within the bounds of the community structure and no fundamental, all-encompassing changes come about as a result of it. Nevertheless its effects slowly ripple throughout this small close-knit community.

*Road to Nhill* creates an important contrast in the discourse on country towns because there is no mention of the country town in relation to/opposition to the city in this film. There is no slick Ken Sherry escaping from the city or urban-lawyer come to show the women how to stand up for their rights (*Shame*). In *Road to Nhill* the country town is depicted in its own right. The opening sequence of the film emphasises this through a shot of the rotating earth from outer-space, presented from “God’s” perspective. The voice of God, literally, establishes that “the one incontrovertible fact of every life ... is death. Death is the one certainty, the one inevitability, the one eventuality“. After establishing God’s relative position from the outer universe, an aerial shot zooms in over the earth to somewhere in Australia and gets closer and closer until we glimpse a settlement. This technique seems to be implying that
if we pick any spot in the universe there is not only going to be death, but also
a story to be told. This egalitarian technique also serves to depict this country
town, Pyramid Hill, in relation to the wider universe rather than to the city or
a metropolis and establishes the overall space within which the action takes
place. The opening voice-over complements this universal aspect of the story
by alluding to the more existential questions about life — and death — than
just the city/country distinction:

Lives are lived, sandwiches are packed
Work shirts are washed, tomatoes are grown
Children are had, buildings are raised
Dreams are dreamt ... and the best endeavours of women and men
go to eluding death do not succeed. (The Voice of God in Road to
Nhill.)

The voice of 'God' in Road to Nhill is, ironically, the voice of Phillip Adams —
probably Australia's pre-eminent public atheist — who sardonically reminds
us that in our day-to-day existence the facts of life are sometimes easy to
overlook. There is only one certainty that awaits us all at the end of the road to
Nhill. This shadow of mortality hanging over the townsfolk of Pyramid Hill
makes one realise that, contrary to the mix-up which occurs between the
ambulance, the police and the fire engine as they go off in different directions
in search of the upturned Falcon, it does not matter whether it is the Nhill
Road or the Road to Nhill, because both eventually lead to death.

The following sequence in Road to Nhill is redolent of the opening of Strictly
Ballroom where Scott's mother emotionally relates the tale of how Scott came
to "dance his own steps". In Road to Nhill Bob (Bill Hunter), in a direct-address
to camera, matter-of-factly recounts the events leading up and subsequent to
the non-fatal car accident involving four 'lady bowlers' while his wife looks
on disdainfully. We learn they were on their way back from their bowling
competition at the neighbouring town of Quambatook. The seriousness of his
tone implies that this is the most exciting and controversial incident that's
happened in Pyramid Hill for quite some time. "Things were going on pretty much as usual at that stage", says Bill. A montage of images then reveals what "going on as usual" means in the context of this country town and emphasises the slow and quotidian nature of life here. For example, a shot of a woman sweeping an empty footpath in the main street is followed by a woman cutting roses in her garden, a local cop tentatively pulling in to a drive-way, an elderly man on a bowling green, another sitting on a bench looking at his shoe, another trying to turn on the radio and yet another man looking out across a dry, empty paddock and scratching his chest. This montage of rather prosaic images is then broken up by a shot of a bright blue Falcon coursing along a country road and we hear the rather banal conversation taking place inside the car about eating emu. There is a cut back to the man in his kitchen finally turning on the radio then a cut forward to the car on the road, but this time from the driver's perspective. As the car approaches a bend the sun streams in through the windscreen. A medium close-up of the driver shows her being blinded by the sun and trying to pull down her visor, by which time she has lost control of the car. A shot from the POV of the passengers reveals the car veering off the road into the scrub beside it. The driver temporarily maintains the vehicle's vertical position as it careens erratically through the bush, collides with something and subsequently flies through the air and flips 180°. As soon as the car loses control, a cut to the interior cabin reveals one of its occupant's perspectives as her bowling hat flies out the window before the car comes to rest with a thump, upside-down.

The resulting drama of the car crash is temporarily suspended through a cut back to what is going on in the country town. A parallel sequence of the same

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17 Bob says of Brett, the local cop: "That bloody Brett. He should have been there quicker. But we know where he was. Winny and I have always prided ourselves on keeping ourselves to ourselves and he'll probably end up getting carpeted for not being there when he should have. You know the essential services and that sort of thing ..."
characters continuing their routine activities from moments before heightens the ridiculous nature of this image-event — the man in his kitchen now looks at his watch and walks over to the kettle, the other one at the bowling green is now bowling with his dog looking on, the man pulling at his shoe is now looking at his watch, the woman cutting roses is now smelling them. Then a cut back to interior cabin of the car reveals the women all conscious and unhurt, ridiculously suspended upside-down in their seat-belts. In this hilarious sequence we see the women’s different reaction to the shock of the accident and the men who try to rescue them.

The car accident itself — usually posited as the site of dramatic and violent spectacle — subverts everyday expectations because no-one dies nor gets seriously injured. It also subverts viewer expectation in another important way too. The function of the car crash in most Hollywood movies is to create dramatic visceral impact through violence, destruction and maybe death. Most often the crash is one of spectacle and is shot from an objective perspective. While the shooting and editing of this scene in *Road to Nhill* creates a cinematic spectacle, what is unique is that immediately the car becomes airborne we are given a subjective point of view of the occupants in the car. The crash is seen from the point of view of the characters inside the car. In relation to my previous chapter, *Road to Nhill* could perhaps be regarded as an anti-road movie. Like the films discussed in Chapter Four, which look at cars’ domestic journeys, in *Road to Nhill* there is no quest or escape motif, no one is going anywhere, except back into town, and even that is quite a feat!

Nothing closely resembling mateship is shown to prevail in Pyramid Hill which is a reversal of some of the stereotypes associated with country towns.
The women’s agency in this town is emphasised on several occasions. Indeed the centrality of the four women to the life of the town is stressed. The accident upsets the town’s routine and everyone seems to be affected by it. The four women, after more or less taking care of their own rescue, have to hold things together as the men go to pieces. The women end up taking care of the men. Laurie, the pig farmer, is the first on the scene. Despite his words of ‘comfort’ while the women are still trapped in the vehicle: “Hold on. Hold on girls. I’ve got ya!” he deserts the scene of the accident and races back to his ute to get a spade! The women manage to get out of the car by themselves while Laurie is still looking for his tools amongst the pigs in his ute. Their respective partners have varying reactions to the event. The husbands are shown as totally dependent on their wives. Nell’s husband, Frank, follows the ambulance around in circles trying to find the accident. The country police officer, Brett, misses the whole event because of his affair. The SES (State Emergency Service) guys who have turned up do not seem to know what to do. They are depicted arguing about whether Ted’s wife should go back in the truck, because it is not the regulations, or whether they should wait for the ambulance, which has gone the wrong way. Brian Broadbent tries to use the accident to make a move on one of the bowlers. His move on the lesbian Margot is not however reciprocated.\footnote{Another subversion of stereotypes concerns the lesbian couple in the town. In \textit{Priscilla}, the rural country towns are both heterosexual and homophobic, while the urban is shown to be tolerant and diverse. In \textit{Road to Nhill} this portrayal is far more subtle. Margot and Alice appear to live happily together in the town.} Later on in the evening, after taking Margot and Nell back into town, he trips over his vegetables and cuts himself. The women are understated and calm by comparison. What is interesting here is despite the myth of mateship prevailing in country towns, this film completely undermines that myth through humour. The men are not seen to exist in separate spaces to the women, but fundamentally rely on them in the ensuing chaos.
Another reversal of stereotypes associated with country towns is to do with the constabulary. In Australian country-town films the police are often shown to have totalitarian power which often goes beyond the constraints of urban civil society (*Shame, Wake in Fright, Doing Time for Patsy Cline*). In country towns there are no checks on the power of the police and normal human rights are suspended. In *Road to Nhill* the whole town seems to get by without the local cop, who incidentally, is having an affair with one of the single lonely women in the town. In fact it seems that they would probably do quite well without him. When he does not respond to his wife’s emergency radio calls about the accident she suspects he is having an affair. In the penultimate scene, we see her packing up the kids in the family Holden Kingswood stationwagon and leaving him. Brett, meanwhile, revealing the extent of his inefficacy, chases her down the road in his Commodore police pursuit vehicle, siren wailing! This also emphasises the women’s agency in the film which the men can do little to control.

Unlike other films such as *Shame* and *Welcome to Woop Woop, Hightide* and even *Love Serenade*, the film’s logic in this instance does not set up the premise that things need changing in the town. The town exists as it is, and the film takes place within the confines of a community where relationships are already established. It is not even suggested that the hazardous section of road where the four lady bowlers had their accident should be fixed. Brett says to Alice, about the accident: “… just looking at the accident scene, looking into it, I’d say it was purely weather conditions and the conditions of the road in this case” And Alice responds: “Weather conditions? What does that mean?” “Well if you’d nodded off that’d be careless driving, but you don’t need to worry about that. I’ll just put weather conditions here and there’ll be no further police action.”
In Pyramid Hill there is also an acceptance of the land and its idiosyncrasies. There is no one here struggling against the environment or battling against the alien land. By the same token, there is no awe or romanticization of the landscape either. This is just the way things are. There is no central narrative which is pushing for change, there is nothing to be resolved. Everything is put down to 'weather conditions' or should we say fate, which both Brian Broadbent and Brett, the police officer, are quick to point out. There is no talk of doing something about the blind spot where everyone almost has an accident. (The last shot of the film is of a yellow Falcon clipping along around the bend, being struck by the afternoon sunlight, and then swerving off the road into the bush. A fatal accident is averted as the driver quickly regains control of the vehicle and swerves back onto the bitumen road.) There is no sense of man overcoming the natural environment in order to forge the male character — which pervades many Australian films. And when Margot tries to take responsibility for what has happened she is quickly dismissed by Brett, who is more concerned with his wife packing up the kids and leaving him. Alice suggests she might have seen a rabbit and Brett responds, with a look of incredulity on his face: “No one in their right mind would swerve for a rabbit. The more you hit the better!”

And just prior to the tumultuous final events in the film — Brett’s wife leaving him and Nell dropping down dead in her loungeroom — God says, perhaps revealing his lack of omniscience or emphasising his ironical bent:

    And so calm and order is restored, Disaster is averted,
    Death is denied and the forces of chaos & uncertainty and
    the unexpected are tamed.
    And life goes on ...
5.7 Conclusion: A Celebration of the Prosaic

Nearly all country-town films stress the environmental isolation of the town being portrayed. This is done through images that place the town within a mise-en-scène that consistently emphasises the extent to which they are small, lonely places of human origin in an otherwise barely inhabited and barely hospitable landscape. This varies from the sweeping grasslands and scrub that imprison the town in *The Year My Voice Broke*, to the encompassing green of the sugar cane in *All Men Are Liars* (1995), to the remote, iconographic red desert of *Razorback* (1984). The effect is the same: the Australian landscape surrounds, isolates, and threatens the community uneasily inserted into it (Rattigan 1999: 81).

The bizarre and surreal imaginings of the two ‘Riverina virgins’ in *Love Serenade* seem to be a product of their environmental isolation. The aerial shots in *Road to Nhill* show the town surrounded by flat, dry grasslands and scrub. Whilst a sense of the community’s isolation is initially provoked through these aerial shots, by the time we are introduced to the characters there is no sense that they actually feel isolated. They are not alienated by the landscape; they respect it, yes, but are threatened, no. This is merely a projection of the (sub)urban imagination onto this environment and a non-rural dweller would actually feel in that environment.

Despite the way in which both these films subvert the dominant contention that country towns are inimical to women, they certainly don’t challenge the notion of the country towns as boring — places where nothing much happens. After all, one contains the most undramatic car crash in Australian film history. The other presents us with possibly the most unerotic strip tease on celluloid.

The country town, as defined in opposition to the city space in *Love Serenade*, carries on a very long and well documented tradition of the function of the country town in Australian cinema. There is no doubt that for your regular city slicker, Pyramid Hill may be conceived as “irrelievably dull” but nonetheless it succeeds in presenting us with a vision of the country town
which does not rely on the city/country divisions. *Road to Nhill* transcends the urban/rural split. By not relying on the city as a reference point, it makes a more universal comment on life and death within a humanist tradition.
Conclusion

*Imagined Places: Happy Endings, Reconciliations & Beginnings*
A happy ending which "imagines change" (Morris, "Fate" 118), or even a second chance in a new space, is a rarity in Australian cinema. (Collins 1999a: 91)

With the exception of Road to Nhill and The Well, the films which have been the focus of this thesis conform to Collins's notion of a "happy ending" inasmuch as they "imagine change" and new beginnings in different spaces for the central protagonists. In her analysis of Radiance, Floating Life and Vacant Possession, Collins remarks upon these films' final images of reconciliation:

The open road, the little girl and the campfire are diverse 'last images'. They are familiar yet foreign to a national cinema uneasy with history, wary of women and others and unused to happy endings. The carload of Aboriginal 'sisters' speeding down the road, the little Chinese girl describing her transnational family tree and the gathering of stray, Anglo-Celtic women around the campfire are images of reconciliation. These endings refuse the dead-end of 'white masculine' landscape tradition and rewrite the family romance around the figure of the daughter ... The longing to bring the ancestors home belongs not only to the daughters: yet it is their films which are the opening up of the space of the ghosts of history to re-animate the landscape of Australian cinema. (Collins 1999b: 115)

Similarly diverse 'last images' of reconciliation emerge in the other films examined in this thesis. Reunion between couples who can look forward to a new life together occur in Dance Me to My Song, Sweetie, Muriel's Wedding and the sisters in Love Serenade. While the open road provides a space for new beginnings for the mother/daughter relationship in High Tide, it also provides a fulfilled close to a difficult life for Lilian in Lilian's Story. Opportunities are created in new or familiar environments for the women who go it alone: for Aya working as an interpreter in a portside-town in Aya, for the author Beth, strolling down the road lined with cypress trees in Last Days of Chez Nous and for the artist, Clare, with her new-born baby in Waiting. The recent release of two features Me, Myself, I (Pip Karmel, 2000) and Looking for Alibrandi (Kate Woods, 2000), continue to reflect the already established trends - themes of reconciliation and new beginnings maintain their significance to these female creative teams.
Conclusion

The overarching aim of this thesis, *Imagined Geographies: Women’s Negotiation of Space in Contemporary Australian Cinema*, has been to show the ways in which traditional interior, domestic domains are being re-valued through their construction and presentation on screen. I have argued that a developing *feminization of space* in Australian cinema can be elicited from contemporary films such as those I have examined. Felicity Collins also hints at a developing feminization of space when she observes:

> When Australian cinema is appropriated by the ‘women and Others’ it has routinely erased, different endings are proposed. These endings have something to do with space and vision, and something to do with time and memory. (Collins 1999b: 112)

Although this thesis has investigated the representation of space by predominantly female directors and creative teams, it has not done so exclusively. I believe that some male directors are representing place in a different ways which fits with the prevailing trend I articulate.

In addition to this, my aim throughout the chapters of the thesis has been to show the ways in which interaction between characters is in part constituted by their spatial setting or, to rephrase Giddens, *where* things happen is part of the explanation of how and why they happen in the way they do. This I believe is related to Ross Gibson’s contention that there is a “sense of subjective immersion in place” developing in Australian cinema. Thus, the ways in which the issues of reconciliation and power relations manifest within specific *places*, along with the subversion or transformation of particular *spaces* has been central to this work.

In Chapter One on ‘The Body’ I discussed Australian cinema’s somatic focus. More specifically, I argued that some filmmakers are currently challenging the mind/body split and showed the importance of feminist theory in constructing reconciled filmic embodiment. Chapter Two, “Uncanny Houses”,

demonstrated the importance of 'returning home' for reconciliation between characters, and characters with places. These films work on the premise that even though understanding the past can create an unsettled condition, it is paramount to the present and creating a better future in a (post)colonial nation such as Australia. In Chapter Three I examined another domestic space which is increasingly being taken up by Australian filmmakers: suburbia. I argued that the Australian cinematic suburbia is being figured in a multiplicity of ways. While suburbia is not for everyone, it can be transformed by those female protagonists who choose it. Chapter Four demonstrated the ways in which (familial) power relations can become manifested or inscribed within vehicular space. I argued that this vehicular space can be an extension of other interior domestic spaces or, alternatively, may be an escape from them (and the characters who inhabit them). And finally, in Chapter Five on the Country Town I demonstrated the way another binary is being reconfigured; the city/country divide, and how country towns can be places in which a sense of "subjective immersion in place" is developing.

The spaces and places of past and contemporary Australian cinema which we have been accustomed to seeing, may change quite fundamentally with the emergence of new cinematic technologies. The construction and representation of on-screen geographies in Australian cinema is becoming increasingly more complicated. While the majority of Australian feature films are still shot on location, better opportunities are now available (for some filmmakers) to shoot extensively in controlled environments and to shoot and post-produce with digital equipment. (O'Regan & Venkatasawmy 1999b: 198) O'Regan and Venkatasawmy argue that Dark City and Babe: Pig in the City's combination of studio comic book or story book worlds, and special effects, is bound to transform not only the look and the locations of subsequent filmmaking, but the very practices of that filmmaking as well. (1999b: 198) Pertinent to future
discussions of cinematic space in the age of new technologies, are the questions that these critics pose:

What would as complete and as self-sufficient a remaking of other spatial locales and their attendant stories produce? What might Australian location setting staples such as sun, sand, bush, and suburbia become? (O’Regan & Venkatasawmy 1999b: 198)

This emerging trend in Australian cinema also elicits other important questions. These relate not only to the kinds of stories and spaces in which they are told in Australian cinema, but also to the implications for women’s access to these studios and this new technologies. Perhaps director Gillian Armstrong is a case in point. Her film Oscar and Lucinda (1998), (distributed by Searchlight, Fox’s arthouse distributor) used extensive digital and studio work. (O’Regan and Venkatasawmy 1999a: 24) However Gillian Armstrong, together with Jane Campion, are Australia’s most high-profile female directors. Will less lionised (female) directors have access to these studios and new technologies I wonder? With the disbanding of the Australian Film Commission’s Women’s Programme, and the emerging marginalisation of a feminist perspective in arts and new media technologies policy in Australia, it is easy to be cynical about their impact on women’s access to these new technologies. Concerning this prevailing trend, a sense of urgency exists in policy adviser, Patricia Palmer Gillard’s emphatic remarks, which call for women to be involved in every stage of the political/policy process:

Women are not going to be admitted easily as leaders, experts or advocates in the new communications age. The conventional relations of ruling will be scripted all over again in new fields if we do not intervene ... Women must gather their resources and shape this communications future themselves. (Gillard 1998: 91)

Thus women’s contributions to filmmaking are not only important for social equity reasons, in ameliorating their position in society, but also simply from the aspect of diversity. The diversity of perspectives and spaces represented is what makes the Australian cinema milieu such a dynamic one. The
contribution of women's perspectives to maintain and extend this diversity is vital.

As I mentioned in my introduction, this study could not have been undertaken ten years ago. It is very much a product of the late 1990s film milieu in Australia. The fact that I was able to undertake such a study of films attests to the prevailing success of women in those domains of creative influence; spaces which were not very long ago, virtually closed to them. This is something which must be recognised and celebrated. However, there is a sense that, at this point in time, we are at the crossroads of a new millennium, unsure of the road ahead. Government funding promoting women's filmmaking is under threat. The opening of Fox Studios in Sydney is changing the kinds of stories that are being told in Australia, and the spaces in which they are told. Women will have to fight to have their voices heard and fight for their legitimate access to these new technologies. I hope we will not look back at the 1990s like we now do at the 1920s and 1930s, with fondness, as a golden anomaly in Australia's filmmaking history where women were making significant creative contributions to the industry.¹ I hope this is just the beginning, again. At the conclusion of the Brilliant Careers' seminar in Melbourne in 1999, which examined women in the film industry, in response to the imminent closure of the Australian Film Commission's Women's Programme, Julie James Bailey remarked that: "there is still so much to be done". (Kaufman 2000: 5)

¹ Sally Speed argues that due to funding difficulties (there was no government funding of the industry during this period), fickle markets, and competing with Hollywood, this phase of filmmaking was certainly not a golden era. (Speed 1987: 3)
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Maidens (1978) (documentary) Director: Jeni Thornley.


Appendix One — Interview
This Woman is Not a Car (1982) (short film) Director: Margaret Dodd.


Town Like This, A (1971) Director: John Prescott.


We Aim to Please (1977) (short film) Directors: Robin Laurie & Margot Nash.


Transcript of Interview with Rachel Perkins (Luna Cinema, Perth, 1/10/98), Director of Radiance, published in Metro Magazine Number 119, 1999, pages 32-34.

Radiance is Rachel Perkins’ debut feature film. Rachel’s successful and diverse career in television, as both a director and executive producer has included work on series such as Songlines, documentaries like Crim TV, From the Bush and the 4-part documentary series Blood Brothers along with a children’s programme, Manyu Wanna in the Warlpiri Language with English subtitles.

C: Did you see Louis Nowra’s play of Radiance and were then inspired to make the film? How did the idea originate?

R: I’d heard it was good but I was somewhere else when it was on. Trisha Morton who’s a very good friend - we lived together for years and also grew up in Alice Springs together - asked me to come to down to the Eora Centre in Redfern for her end of year performance. Trisha did the monologue on the mud flats [from Radiance] straight to the audience with no props. I was so taken with the piece that I rang Louis the next day and asked if I could adapt it as a half hour piece and he said, “No, I think you should do it as a feature and you should direct it” and I was like, “OK, we’ll do that” and it sort of started from there.

C: In what ways did you modify the script?

R: Well we wanted to keep the essence of the fact that the drama was contained in the dynamic of the 3 women and we were nervous about adapting a play but we looked at other things like Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Richard Brooks, 1958), Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf (Mike Nichols, 1966) and they’ve succeeded to do that. So we tried to look at what they had done successfully and then use that and what we realised was about keeping it enclosed. So although we did bring it out in terms of using landscape, we kept it small and contained in terms of the characters. But I suppose we tried to give it more of a point of view through Nona, making her the central protagonist and moving the story through her action. And we changed the ending. We gave it a more positive ending.

C: So what was Nowra’s original ending?
R: Nona went to the island and the two other girls were like “I hope she’ll be alright. Will she come back ....?” So they never come back together again in the play.

C: Where did you shoot the film and how long was it?

R: The shoot was 6 weeks. We had 3 weeks in studio and 3 weeks on location which was up at Seventeen Seventy, 150 kms north of Bundaberg and at Hervey Bay. We also used just a few little locations around the same place up there.

C: So all the interior scenes were shot in studio?

R: Yes. We constructed the front of the house, the verandah, in the studio. So all the close-ups on the verandah were done in studio and the wide-angle shots were done on location.

C: Was the play originally set in Queensland?

R: Yes it was. Louis had them all on the mud flats. The only thing we introduced was the pier because when I was travelling around Australia I went to Hervey Bay and inadvertently got stuck there. What I remember was going out across this extraordinary pier and I thought I’ve gotta put that pier in a film one day and it came around that we managed to do that which was great.

C: So you didn’t grow up in Queensland, did you?

R: No I grew up in Alice Springs, Canberra, Sydney and Adelaide, all around. We just followed where the work was for my father - so predominantly Canberra.

C: I guess the house was one aspect of the film that really fascinated me. The interior of the house particularly and of course the fact it was a ‘Queenslander’. Were you trying to inform some kind of regional identity through the house?
R: Having no prior knowledge of Queensland and coming from Alice Springs, you know, places have a kind of essence about them, a certain feel. Alice Springs certainly has a special feel to it and I don’t think many films have really captured that apart from films like *Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg, 1971) which really captures that country. So not being from Queensland and only ever having been there a few times we went up on a recce just to sort of be there and soak up the environment, get the feel of it and that’s exactly when we found the house. We were walking along this beach and saw this house on the hill [that appears in the film] and thought, “Shit that that looks like a perfect house”. So we went up and walked around it and thought it was great. Then we went to the petrol station and asked, “Who owns the house?” And they said, “That guy over there on the tractor”. So we walked up to him and asked what he was doing with his house and he said he was going to knock it down and we said, “Well, can we burn it down?” and he said, “Yeah that’ll be fine. Just give me a thousand dollars and a crate of Moet and its yours”. So we did! We tried to, I suppose, create a sense of place through the house and the weather.

C: You obviously didn’t grow up in one of those bungalows being from Alice originally.

R: No, but I’ve always fantasised about those houses. I’ve been having this fantasy about taking one to Sydney. You know how they uproot them and drive them to different places? Well apparently it costs about 30 grand but it would be too far to take it to Sydney. But I love those houses so we spent a lot of time thinking how we could give the house a feel and a certain quality. In the script we tried to create an atmosphere through the house especially as we didn’t want to show the mother because we thought it’s actually more potent to imagine something than when you see it sometimes. We made a conscious decision not to show the mother and so we had to create her identity and character through the house. With the production designer we talked a lot about the objects in the house and the style of the house and what that said about her. We put a lot of effort into the house and also tried to make it come alive through using lighting going through the house.

C: So was that why you didn’t use any flashbacks, because you would have had to show the mother?
R: We did talk about using small flashbacks, like the hem of her skirt and the
bottom of her leg and shadows but then we just thought it’s not about then it’s
about now and what’s happening between the sisters. So going back then
would have taken the emphasis off what was in the present. And I don’t really
like flashbacks. They’re often really hokey... They have to be done well to
work and I’ve done flashbacks before and failed miserably.

C: I presume Louis Nowra’s seen the film, has he?

R: Yes, many times.

C: And what does he think?

R: Well he thinks it’s a good film but Louis’s a pretty complex person and I
think he was really game to give me his play in the first place, given that it’s
his complete creation. I would have found it difficult to hand over work like
that, particularly to someone with inexperience. So I think he’s pleased with it.
I think he’s pleased with the performances. He was actually the Associate
Producer and he contractually had final say, final approval over the cast
which I was really happy to give him because as the writer he created those
characters and he should be deciding who plays those roles.

C: I thought those 3 women just worked brilliantly together. What has
Deborah Mailman (Nona) done before?

R: Deborah had done Radiance before in a QTC (Queensland Theatre
Company) production and she’d done 3 years at the Brisbane Performing Arts
College - so she’d had formal training but she’d only done theatre before. This
was her first film work. Rachael Maza [Cressy] had done some small film roles
as well as played the lead in an episode of Naked. She was the most
experienced out of the 3 whereas Trisha [Mae] had done nothing before, she’d
done one student production so this was a big leap for her.

C: Have you seen Margot Nash’s Vacant Possession (1995)? I could see a few
parallels in terms of plot and central themes between your film and hers; the
return of the female protagonists to the house of their youth or childhood...
R: Yeah, she said to me that when she was watching *Radiance* she was saying, "Oh my God, this is just like *Vacant Possession*. I didn’t see it until after I’d finished *Radiance*.

C: There’s been a few other films around that motif of returning home... *Hotel Sorrento* (Richard Franklin, 1995), *Lilian’s Story* (Jerzy Domaradzki, 1995)... 

R: And there’s *Soft Fruit*, a new film from Christina Andreef & Helen Bowden which is very similar - about 3 sisters who come back to the house when their mother’s dying. So I think we need to work out some new subject material!

C: So there was no real influence from any of those earlier films?

R: No, none at all. In fact we wanted to move right away from *Hotel Sorrento* and indeed Margot’s film as well because I think *Radiance* is a very different film. It’s much more accessible. There’s a lot more humour...I’m not saying that those films aren’t good. I’m just saying that this film’s a lot different from it... we wanted it to be enjoyed by people. I’m not into high-brow, art-house film-making. I’m into big budget, moving films where you weep and cry and go “Oh my god, I hope they get together in the end!”

C: Ahh. That explains your change to the ending then!

R: Yeah that’s right. Happy endings. I know it sounds tacky but I like those sorts of films. But I suppose particularly because it’s indigenous we wanted it to go out to the broadest audience possible. There’s so much of a perception that Aboriginal film is inaccessible because it’s Aboriginal and that it’s boring and it’s too hard. We deliberately approached it to make it, not so much commercial, but more accessible.

C: I guess after Tracey Moffatt’s debut feature (*Bedevil*, 1993) which some regard as quite inaccessible, high-brow, art-house kind of film-making...

R: Well I think Tracey’s fantastic and she’s got a great visual style but she’s into a different genre of film-making.

C: I guess one thing that’s really different about *Radiance* in comparison to these other films we were talking of before is the fact that in *Radiance* the
house gets purposely destroyed. It’s such an extraordinary and dramatically powerful scene...

R: Well one woman came out of a screening the other day and said, “Now I know exactly what I have to do. I have to burn my mother’s house down as therapy”. So I don’t know if she’s done it yet. But burning the house was that act of cleansing and rejuvenation and burning the past and moving forward ... although they had different perspectives on the house which meant so much to them because they thought, or my interpretation of it is they thought the house was home but actually home is in each other and the physical place has no meaning necessarily.

C: And the conflict between the three sisters... well the two sisters and their daughter/niece - as it unfolds - was interesting too. Just in terms of Nona wanting to have her baby in that house and carry on a legacy or her family roots...

R: Nona’s experience was that she had a great time in the house. She loved the house whereas Cressy just wanted to escape from it. She thought it was the biggest dump. For Mae it was really a prison. So Nona wanted to capture it and live out this fantasy of them all living there together being a happy family but the other two women did not want a part of it.... I think they had a more cynical approach to it. There’s a thing between younger sisters and older ones. Sometimes in families there’s a lot of shit that goes down and the older ones don’t tell it to the younger ones because they’re trying to protect them. But in a way Nona lived a good experience compared to them because she had a mother all the time and they were both gone and she was the last child and was embraced and didn’t go through any of the shit the older children went through because they were older. I think in sibling situations there’s certain patterns that happen depending on whether you’re the eldest, the middle or the youngest.

C: And the Harry character - he was interesting in terms of never being shown. I mean there was ambiguity about whether he was Aboriginal or white - was that intentional?

R: Well I sort of imagined he was white. Didn’t you get the feeling he was white?.... We decided not to show him but we thought we’d identify him
through his house. You probably didn’t get that through his house but we thought the house was just him because it was so anal and revolting and suburban and in the middle of all this cane but obviously he wasn’t a big landowner, but rather a suburban middle class, working class guy. I don’t know whether you feel that from his house but that’s what we were certainly thinking when we chose his house. I mean he’s definitely very straight.

C: The film seems to have an irreverence for the physical body of the mother then that’s followed up with the burning of her house, which as you said before symbolised her in a way. Was there a sense of destroying her too, or throwing away memories of her?

R: Well, I think it was more a throwing away of what happened in the house, particularly because it symbolised what they had been through, especially the elder sisters. It was like not redemption but more like burning the past, like an escape from what had happened under the house, getting over it and moving on...

C: You know what happened under the house, was that actually part of the play as well - it seems significant that those horrific events occurred under the house.

R: There’s a lot more description in the original play, like her biting into the post and him abusing her with a screwdriver and the smell of petrol and an oily rag in her mouth so she didn’t scream and all this stuff.... well we tried to make that bit work and thought why is this scene not working. She [Cressy] was saying, “and I was biting into the post with an oily rag in my mouth.....” Amazing lines but really graphic and we realised after rehearsing it once or twice that a mother would never tell her daughter that detail because she’d never subject her to the pain she went through to create her and so we edited it down. It was about 10 pages and we edited it down to 1. So that’s changed a lot in interpretation. Initially it was given with anger but we wanted to change it so it’s given with love. And then we told Louis .... we in fact edited a lot of stuff out, especially Nona’s stuff about having sex with her father which is then the motivation for Cressy to blurt out the stuff that was quite graphic... So Deb and I sat down and talked about this and I thought I’m going to be really uncomfortable when my dad comes into the cinema and sees this. She said, “So am I”. So we crossed all this stuff out. I think it’s better because it’s
not so confronting ...well it's still confronting but it's not unnecessarily so. But you know, brave writing, brave writing from Louis.

C: How has the film been received so far? I mean it hasn't been theatrically released yet has it?

R: No it's been in a lot of festivals so it's had a lot of exposure but it opens nationally on the 8th of October. It closed Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra Festivals and won the audience vote for most popular film at all those festivals. I think that's pretty unusual, I mean it's interesting that it's won all these things and I still feel like it's this big disaster.

C: Oh really? Why do you feel that?

R: I don't know.

C: Aren't you happy with it?

R: Well the first 10 minutes I don't like. The first 10 minutes I can't watch because I feel there's just agony and pain and it's really slow. A lot of other people feel that too. A lot of reviews we've had have been saying that you know the rest of the film's great, it's just the first 10 minutes.

R: If you had the chance would you re-edit that section or re-shoot it?

C: It's done, it's over. You can't rethink what you've done - it's too much. But it's just good to know what's wrong with it. In fact I could go on all night about what's wrong with it but that's the main thing. So even though it's had an amazing reception - that's never happened in this country before to win both Sydney and Melbourne. You know that's fantastic. A couple of critics, who don't like it because it's so basic in its accessibility and its style, have criticised it saying it wouldn't have won, it's only because of the PC audience in Sydney that it won so they try and take away from the fact people want to support it because it's Aboriginal and I think that's a good thing. They take away from that goodwill. They take away from that achievement. By saying that they are discounting it. Film critics aren't into it as much as normal people are. Well that's not true - a couple of them have given it really good reviews.
Appendix Two — Brochure
Yeni bir dünveyadan filmler
En değerli kâr ortaklarımızdan biri.

Nesli tehdit altında olan Sarı Çiğdem, ülkemizin korunması gereken doğal türlerin denginliklerinden biri. Garanti, gelirin bir bölümüyle, bitki türlerinin de korunması için alınan yaşamalar yapan Doğal Hayatı Koruma Derneği'nin projelerini destekliyor.
Düşleyin, döşeyin.


Düşlerinizi yaşamak için, Çanakkale Seramik döşeyin.

Çanakkale Seramik
"düşlerinizdeki gerçek"
Message from the Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Paul Keating.

"Films From a New World" marks a significant step forward in promoting the rich cultural diversity of Australia on world screens, as this is the first time a group of feature films has been shown in Turkey. It is therefore my great pleasure to congratulate the organisers of this festival, as well as the directors of the individual films and all associated with them. This Film Festival is supported by the Australian Government. It aims to show the strength of our contemporary film-making, to promote and strengthen cultural and trade links between Turkey and Australia, and also to develop the relationship between the two countries.

On 18 July 1994, I announced that a Global Cultural Diversity Conference will take place in Australia in April 1995. The Conference will provide a forum for government leaders, academics and prominent members of the international community to consider the social, economic and public policy issues surrounding cultural diversity and ways in which diversity can be viewed as a social and economic asset. The Conference will result in exchanges of ideas and experiences on ways of dealing with the increasing diversity of our lives, international movement of people, advances in communications and globalisation of international markets.

I believe this festival will, like the Global Cultural Diversity Conference, provide an opportunity for exploring ways of dealing with the increasingly varied nature of society in which we live.
My best wishes for a most successful Festival.

Avustralya Başbakanı Paul Keating’in mesaji

"Yeni Bir Dünyadan Filmler", Türkiye'de ilk kez gösterilen bir grup film olmasından ötürü, Avustralya'nın zengin kültürel çeşitliliğini dünyada perde lere yansıtmada önemli bir adım. Bu nedenle filmlerin yönetmenlerini, tüm katkısıda bulunuları olduğu kadar bu festivalde düzenlenenleri de kutlamak benim için büyük bir onurdur.

Bu Film Festivali Avustralya Hükümeti tarafından desteklenmektedir ve çağdaş film yapımımızı sergiletemeyi, Türkiye ile Avustralya arasındaki kültürel ve ticari bağları sağlamıştır, arttırmayı ve de iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri geliştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.


Konferans, sosyal, ekonomik ve ulusal politikaları görüşmek üzere hükümet liderleri, akademisyenler ve uluslararası komitelerin belirli başlı đứcelerinin katıldığı, kültürel çeşitliliği ve bu çeşitliliği, sosyal ve ekonomik bir kazanç olarak görebilme yolları çerçevesinde ulusal toplumsal ve ekonomik politikaların görüşüleceği bir forum yer alacak.

Konferans, yaşamımızda artan çeşitliliği ele alma yolları, ülkelerarası geç, iletişimdeki gelişmeler ve uluslararası pazarları birleştirilmesi üzerine deneyim ve fikir alışverişiinde bulunacaktır.

'Dünya Kültürel Çeşitlilik Konferansı' gibi, bu Festival'in de, yaşadığımız toplumun gideriçik çeşitlenen doğasını ele alma yollarını araştırma imkanı sağlayacağına inanıyorum.
Başarılı bir festival olmasını dilerim.
SINGAPUR HAVAYOLLARI İLE DÜNYAYI DOLAŞIN.

Her perşembe, her pazart BIG TOP 747'lerimizden biri sizi İstanbul'dan Singapur'a götürmeye hazırdır. Singapur'dan Asya'daki bütün önemli kentlere haftada 300'den fazla, Kuzey Amerika'ya ve Avustralya kızasına haftada 30'ardan fazla uçuşuz var. Avrupa'ya haftada 40, Ortaasia ve Afrika'ya 14 kere uçuyoruz. Bizimle her uçuşumuzda, dünyanın en genç, en modern Fukuralarını sunduğum konfor ve diğer havayollarının bile takdirini kazanmış konukseverliğini bir kere daha yaşayacağınız.

Reservasyon: İstanbul Tel: (212) 232 37 06 (4 hat) Faks: 248 86 20, Ankara Tel: (312) 468 46 70/71, İzmir Tel: (232) 41 69 24/25
TNT Express Worldwide

Cumhuriyet

Çanakkale Seramik

Tetris

Australian Film Commission

SINGAPORE AIRLINES
Note from the Festival Directors

The films presented in this program created the inspiration for the first Australian Film Festival in Turkey. The realization of this festival rests on the support of people, whose enthusiasm above all, has been the greatest contribution.

With the encouragement of Aylin Günbak (the Cultural Attaché at the Australian Embassy in Ankara) we approached the Australian Ambassador to Turkey, Mr. David Evans, with the concept of an Australian Film Festival in Turkey. He immediately realized the potential of such an event and pledged the crucial support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We are also indebted to the Australian Film Commission, in particular Conchita Pina and Shane McConnochie, whose financial assistance and moral support is a good measure of the vital role they play in sustaining and promoting a unique film culture in Australia.

While the geographical distance between Turkey and Australia is great, our major sponsor, TNT Express Worldwide, has proved true to their promise of “Anything, Anywhere, Anytime”. Their financial and logistical support has made this cultural exchange possible and we thank them for their valued involvement in this project.

We hope this festival, which promises to be a celebration of the unique friendship our countries share, will also be a part of greater cultural and economic exchanges between Australia and Turkey.

In respect of this friendship, there will be special midnight screenings of the film “Gallipoli” from the 7th to the 9th of October with the ticket sales going to the restoration project currently underway on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

The festival is also timed to coincide with the 26th anniversary of Turkish migration to Australia, that began with the first flight from Istanbul on the 13th of October, 1968. The children of these Turks are now part of a wider community that numbers over 80,000 Turkish Australians. The contributions of such communities to the rich multicultural fabric of Australian society have produced a unique artistic environment for film making. We present the following films with the wish that in sharing our cultures we may better understand each other.

Festival Organizatörlerinin Mesaji

Programda gösterilen filmler, Türkiye’de ilk kez yapılacak olan ‘Avustralya Film Festivali’ düşünmesinde bizlere eşin kaynağı oldu. Festivalin gerçekleyişi, çocuklarla heşeyin üstünde olan insanların katkılarında yatmaktadır ki bu bilirler için en büyük destekti.

Avustralya Büyükelçiliği Kültür Ateşleri Aylın Günbak’tan teşekkür ile Büyükelçi Mr. David Evans’a Türkiye’de bir Avustralya Film Şenliği gerçekleştirmeye düşünmesiyle başvurdu. Kendileri, böyle bir etkinliğin olanakları dahilinde olduğu görün Avustralya Dışişleri ve Ticaret Bakanlığı’nın kesin destek teminatını verdiler. Avustralya Film Komisyonu’nun, özellikle Avustralya’nın benzersiz film kültürünün tanımını ve güçlendirilmesinde türkçeleri yardımı tutanları şaşırdı, bize verdikleri madde ve manevi destekten ötürü Conchita Pina ve Shane McConnochie’ye minnettarız.

Avustralya ile Türkiye arasındaki coğrafı uzaklık böyle birボーイスロン TNT Express Worldwide “Nereye, Ne zaman, Ne isterseniz” sloganlarını doygunu bize kâdir. Olanların maddi ve lojistik destekleri bu kültür alışverişi olanak sağlamış. Değerli katkıkarlarından dolayı kendilerine teşekkür ediyoruz.

Ülkelerimiz arasındaki dostluğu ve bu kutlaması sonrası arzu ettigimiz festival umarım, Türkiye ve Avustralya arasında daha geniş çapta bir kültür ve ekonomik alışverişi parçası olur.

İzleyiciler, bu dostluk bazında, “Gelibolu” filminin 7-9 Ekim tarihleri arasındaki ‘Geceleri Gösterimi’ ne katılarak Gelibolu Yarımadası’nda devam etmekle olan yeniden ağaca alınarak projesine katkıda bulunma fırsatını elde edecekler.


Bruce Jeffreys
Catherine Simpson
"Strictly Ballroom" is a romantic comedy about the dreams of youth, rebellion and ultimate fulfillment. In a bold style that pays homage to the classic Hollywood dance films of the 1940's, it tells a story of love and conflict, of two young people fighting for artistic freedom against a repressive regime.

When 21-year old ballroom champion, Scott Hastings, commits the cardinal sin of dancing his own steps and not those laid down by the all-powerful Dance Federation, retribution is swift. He is dumped by his partner Liz and his hopes of winning the Pan Pacific Grand Prix are dashed. All seems lost when out of the shadows emerges Fran, a beginner and the ugly duckling of the dance studio run by Scott's parents. Through sheer persistence, the attractive teen convinces Scott to give her a chance and an unlikely partnership is born. Federation President, Barry Fife's pressure to break up this renegade partnership pushes Scott into the Spanish world of Fran's family, where he experiences the excitement of true Latin dancing.

Baz Luhrmann (Director)
Baz Luhrmann is unquestionably one of the most exciting talents to emerge in the Australian film industry in recent years. Born in 1962, Baz grew up in the Australian bush, but was introduced to the world of theatre and film as an actor, appearing opposite Judy Davis in John Duigan's feature film, "Winter of Our Dreams". In 1985, working with his regular creative team of designers Catherine Martin and Bill Manton, Baz directed a production of 'La Boheme' for the Australian Opera which was an astonishing success, both critically and commercially.

In 1986, while a student at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney, Baz devised the first stage version of 'Strictly Ballroom' with other students, and directed the first production. It was later invited to The World Youth Theatre Festival in Czechoslovakia where Baz gained the Festival's award for Best Director.

"Although it is a synthesis of old and new styles, 'Strictly Ballroom' is ultimately original that is its greatest strength. Making anything that is original is the most difficult of challenges, and one that cannot be faked alone. "Baz Luhrmann."
The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert / Priscilla Colleen Kralische

Three Sydney showgirls with problems—Felicia, Mitzi and Bernadette—are invited to play a four-week cabaret engagement at a resort hotel in Alice Springs, in the middle of Australia's red desert.

The prospectus seems easy enough at first. To travel across country in a bus, leaving all their troubles behind them. But getting there intact is another problem altogether. Our three drag beauties are not your usual strutters: Felicia and Mitzi are drag queens and Bernadette is a transsexual, and meeting a man in a dress in the outback is not a normal occurrence.

The bus is found, immediately christened “Priscilla” and eventually painted a lovely lavender. The girls’ set off on the two-week trip with music blasting from the stereo and the bus crammed with a gaudy assortment of rocks, stillets and the occasional padded bra. Their journey is more like a collision, as they are continually swerving from a string of comic, bizarre and sometimes dangerous situations. ‘The Adventures of Priscilla - Queen of the Desert’ is a musical comedy road movie with a difference. Only when the wierd get going does the going get mighty weird.

Stephan Elliot (Director)

Elliot is a huge talent, whose first film ‘Frauds’ was shown in ‘Competition’ at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993 and ‘Priscilla’, only his second film, was selected for a ‘Special Midnight Screening’ at Cannes in 1994. It was his work as assistant director that introduced him to Latent Image Productions, where he directed two shorts in three days: ‘Fast’ and ‘The Agreement’—as his calling card. Both of Elliot’s feature films were subsequently produced by Latent Image.

“Drag queens are like the last of the great Hollywood musicals. The style, the glitz, the glamour and the pain has gone. ‘Priscilla’ was a great way to bring back the musical” Stephan Elliot.
Black River / Kara Nehir

"Black River" is a sumptuous and compelling adaptation of one of Australia's boldest contemporary operatic works, featuring Aboriginal mezzo-soprano, Maroochy Barambah as Miriam. The production was originally mounted to unanimous acclaim by the Sydney Metropolitan Opera and the Bangarra Dance Theatre. This inherently cinematic rendering of that work won the Oscar of Operas—the 'Grande Prix Opera Screen Prize' (Paris) in 1993.

The film explores the memories, visions and fears that envelop the central characters; imprisoned as much by their prejudices and cultural ignorance as they are by the imposing storm and flood that forces them to take refuge in the local gaol, where Miriam's son had recently been found hanged.

The cascading fantastic images and sounds leave you both seduced and horrified by the intensity of their meaning.

"Black River is a vital collaboration between black and white Australians in search of an artistic and musical statement that crosses political, social and other boundaries. It makes a dramatic human statement about this country today......It is about an Australia that we have all inherited whether we like it or not." Kevin Lucas.

Kevin Lucas (Director)
Kevin Lucas commenced his creative career in Architecture before moving into theatre, music and film production. He has worked in all aspects of the film industry, lectured in film production techniques, worked as a professional performing artist and as artistic director for a theatre company. He has a special interest in music related projects and is an internationally awarded film director and screen writer.


Film müziği farklı ve sel yüzünden, kısa bir süre önce Miriam'ın ogluna ait olan bu hâlâ bir yapılmış olarak bulunduğu hapishaneyeHONE'nda kalan, onların, ve kültürel al-ŞAAMFİKLARINA ALABİLDİĞİNE HAPISHANESİ NAS‹A KARAKTERLERE ÂLB‹L‹G‹NE HAP‹S‹L‹S‹N‹S‹N‹S‹Z‹ HEDEŞ‹ İÇİNDE B‹RAKACA<_

'Kara Nehir' politik, sosyal ve diğer sınırlarla aşar sanatsal ve müzikal bir or- tak dil arayan siyahlı ve beyaz Avustralyalılar arasında yaşamalı bir işbirliği.

"Film bugün, bu ülke hakkında dramatik, insanı bir yor- yum getiriyor. Sevsek de sevmece de himpizin miras- aldığını bir Avustralya bu." diyor Kevin Lucas.

Kevin Lucas (Yönetmen)
Kevin Lucas yaratıcı kariyerine, tiyatro, müzik, film yapımında yönelimlerden once mimarlık alanlarında başladı. Film endüstrisinin tüm alanlarında çalışır; film yapım teknikleri konusunda ders verdi, bir tiyatro topluluğunda sanat yön- netmeni ve profesyonel oyuncu olarak çalıştı. Müzikle bağlantıtı projelerde Özel ilgi duyulan, uluslararası odallı film yönnetmeni ve senaryo yazandır.
20. YÜZYIL
FRANSIZ RESMİ SERGİSİ

EXPOSITION
DE PEINTURE
FRANÇAISE
DU 20ÈME SIECLE

Yapı Kredi, sanatseverlere, 50. yılı kültür ve sanat etkinlikleri çerçevesinde olağanüstü bir sanat olayı sunuyor. "20. Yüzyıl Fransız Resmi Sergisi."


Yapı Kredi, bu önemli sergiyi Türkiye'de gerçekleştirilmiş olmanın heyecanını ve gururunu yaşiyor.
Bedevil

tried in three parts. And never before has hell been so exhilarating. Drawing together a trio of very different stories, each turning on a mystery, Tracey Moffat’s much anticipated debut feature film is a stunning visual assault which enrota the ideas she initiated in her short film, ‘Night Cries.’

Each story is a potent evocation of a ghostly tale; set in the 60’s, ‘Mister Chuck’ plunges the depths of the secret about a missing US soldier; ‘Choo, Choo, Choo’ explores the reappearance of a young and ‘Lovin’ the Spin I’m In’ is a tragic tale of desire and murder.

Each chapter delves into essence, loss and love, and the characters are literally haunted by the past, and the present is bewitched by memories.

In an industry more used to employing social-realist conventions when it comes to any Aboriginal or Islander characters, Moffat’s distinctive quasi-surrealist approach redefines and advances cultural discourse on this process of imaging. Her Aboriginal characters are absolutely central and essential to the narrative, indeed they are the source of the stories, a rare position in such Australian drama.

Bedevil introduces a new era of dreaming and imagination into Australian filmmaking.

Tracey Moffat (Director)

Tracey Moffat was born in Brisbane in 1960. She is a graduate of Queensland College of the Arts where she studied film and video production. She moved to Sydney in 1983 and has since worked as an independent film-maker, photographer and exhibitions curator. She has produced her own films as well as commissions for Film Australia, SBS Television and various Aboriginal organisations. Moffat’s work has been invited to numerous international art and film festivals. Her short ‘Night Cries’ was accepted for official competition at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival. Her photography is represented in public and private collections throughout Australia. ‘Bedevil’ is not only written and directed by Tracey but she also features as the young Ruby in the second story ‘Choo Choo Choo’.

Director/Yonetmen: Tracey Moffat
Producers/Yapımkaralar: Anthony Buckley, Carol Hughes
Screenplay/Senaryo: Tracey Moffat
Cinematography/Görüntü Yönetmeni: Geoff Burton
Editing/Kurgu: Wayne Le Clos
Production Design/Yapım Yönetmeni: Stephen Curtis
Sound/Ses: David Lee
Music/Müzik: Carl Vine
Cast/Oyuncular: Diana Davidson, Jack Charles, Tracey Moffat, Auriel Andrews, Lex Marinos, Pauline McLeod
World Sales/Dünya Hakkı: Southern Star
1993/35mm/Col/90mins

Tracey Moffat (Yonetmen)


An intimate urban drama, 'The Last Days of Chez Nous' follows the events in a hectic inner-city Sydney household at the height of a balmy Australian summer.

Beth (Lisa Harrow) is a successful writer whose cross-cultural marriage to Frenchman JP (Bruno Ganz) is showing severe cracks. Dramatic and bossy like her father, she works hard at the games and routines that keep her eccentric household together, which include her teenage daughter Annie (Miranda Otto) and young lodger Tim who, absorbed in their own lives, are seemingly unaware of any impending drama.

Vicki (Kerry Fox) has always admired and depended on her older sister Beth; however, after returning home from a long trip overseas, her true spirit and independence have been unleashed.

While Beth travels into the outback to resolve her relationship with her father, the household at Chez Nous erupts from under her wing....

**Gillian Armstrong (Director)**

One of Australia's most celebrated directors, Gillian Armstrong has won some of the most coveted awards for her films since graduating from the Australian Film and Television school. She won the Greater Union Award for Best Fiction and the 1976 AFI (Australian Film Industry) Award for Best Short Film, for 'The Singer and the Dancer' which she both wrote and directed. Armstrong's first internationally awarded film was 'My Brilliant Career,' starring Judy Davis. The film not only became the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival, but won awards in 11 categories in the 1979 AFI Awards.

In 1984 she directed 'Mrs. Soffel,' a feature starring Mel Gibson and Diane Keaton and then in 1987 she made another feature with Judy Davis, 'High Tide' which again brought Armstrong an outstanding number of impressive awards. 'The Last Days of Chez Nous' marks Armstrong's return to the Australian film industry.

Duygusal bir kent drama olan 'Evimizin Son Günleri', bunaltıcı bir Avustralya yazında, kargaşanın içindeki Sydney'de bir evde yaşanan ilginç olayları anlatır.

Başarı bir yazar olan Beth'in (Lisa Harrow, tarihi bir kültürden gelen Fransız JP (Bruno Ganz) ile yaptığı evlilik tehlilini biçimde çatırdamaktadır.

Yeni yeni gelen bir ilişki içindeki gözleri kendilerinden başka bir şey görmeye genç pansiyonluları Tim ve gençlik çağındaki kızı Annie’den oluşan kesinlikte arası ve bu aracılık ile bir arada tutmak için çok çaba gratuites. Baba gibidir emretmeyi seven menşeli Beth, görüntüleme yakını zamanda yaşanan dramdan habersizdir.

Vicki (Kerry Fox) ablası Beth’le hayran ve çok bağlamaktır. Fakti uzun bir deniz sahasi seyahatine döndükten sonra gerçek kişiliği ve bağlamızı ortaya çıkar.

Beth babasından ilgilişi çözülemek için işsiz taşır ve yoldaşıyla birlikte ev halkı kanatlarını altından uçurur.
Romper Stomper / Rap Rap

'Romper Stomper' is the contemporary and uncompromising story of a gang of skinheads who believe in the superiority of the white race, out of the personal sense of inferiority and displacement. Undoubtedly and unemployable, they watch with growing resentment as their deteriorating neighbourhood is invaded by Asian immigrants. Hando, a man branded by hate, leads this gang of Neo-Nazi skins. He also keeps his distance from the others in the gang. Only Davy, his right-hand man, seems to know how to communicate with him. Hando kicks off the gang on rampages which turn the streets into an urban battlefield, brutally bashing Asians who wander onto the street. Into this malestrom of violence wanders the young girl, an emotionally wounded lost soul. She left her rich father's home long ago, after being repeatedly sexually abused by him and has fled for herself ever since. On the run from her abusive boyfriend, Gabe meets up with the gang and is drawn to their savage world.

Geoffrey Wright (Director)

Right graduated from the Swinburne Film and Television School (Melbourne) in 1979 with a Diploma in Film and Television. He subsequently was a film critic for Radio 3AW (Melbourne), The Melbourne Times and The Age (Melbourne). In 1989 Wright wrote and directed the short feature "Lovin Boy" which won awards for Best Australian Film at both the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals that year. Subsequently "Lovin Boy" was screened at the Venice Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, and the Toronto Film Festival. Wright received an Australian Film Institute Award for Best Direction in 1992 for 'Romper Stomper'.


Geoffrey Wright (Yönetmen)

Wright 1979 da Swinburne Film ve Televizyon Okulundan (Melbourne) lisans diploması alarak mezun oldu. Hemen ardından Radio 3AW (Melbourne), The Melbourne Times da ve The Age'de (Melbourne) film deşifre etme çalışmaları yapar. 1989 Melbourne ve Sydney Film Festival'deki 'En İyi Kisa Metraj' Avustralya Film'i ödülünü alan 'Lovin Boy'un senaryosunu yazdı ve yönetti, Film ahu arşivanı Yenedik, Hoff ve Toronto Film Festivalinde gösterildi. 1992'de 'Romper Stomper' (Rap Rap) ile Avustralya Film Enstitüsü'nün En İyi Yönetmen ödüllünü aldı.
The Good Woman of Bangkok

The filmmaker was forty-three and his marriage had ended. He was trying to understand how love could be so banal yet profound. He came to Bangkok, the mecca for western men with fantasies of exotic sex and love without pain. He wanted to meet a Thai prostitute and make a film about that.

The Goodwoman of Bangkok is the story of Aoi. She works as a prostitute, catering to the male tourists who crow the girlie bars of Pat Pong. In Thai, her name means 'sugar cane' or 'sweet' - not her real name but the one she used.

It was three in the morning when she finished dancing and sat with him. The pimp leaned over and said, "only 500 baht or 20 dollars... you keep her until the afternoon and do anything you like... O.K."

They stayed in a seedy hotel on the red light district and in the months that followed he fell in love with her. He paid and she was her customer, she became the subject of his film.

Starting from this worst possible position their relationship is recorded: its evolution from fake sexual intimacy to collusion in the process of making the film and, finally, to friendship and a kind of love.

The Goodwoman of Bangkok is an ironic parable about the impossibility of living a good life in an imperfect world. It is a film about prostitution as a metaphor for capitalism, here played out across the borders of racial and cultural identity; about prostitution as a metaphor for relationships between men and women.

Dennis O'Rourke (Director)
O'Rourke was born in Brisbane, Australia, in 1945. He spent several years in the late sixties travelling and working as a stevedore on cattle properties, an oil rig worker and a maritime seaman. He later became a stills photographer, and then a film maker for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. His most important films are: Ishken - Politics in Papua New Guinea (1978), Yap... How Did You Know We'd Like TV? (1980), The Starkeepers of Konta (1982), Couldn't Be Fairer (1984), Half Life: A Parable For the Nuclear Age (1985), and Cannibal Tours (1988).

Yogetmen: Dennis O'Rourke
Producer/Screenplay: Dennis O'Rourke
Screenplay/Editor: Tim Litchfield
Sound/Photography: Yaowalak Chonchanakun as Aoi

Director: Dennis O'Rourke
Producer: Dennis O'Rourke
Screenplay/Senyo: Tim Litchfield
Editing/Kurgu: Dennis O'Rourke
Featuring/Oyunçu: Yaowalak Chonchanakun as Aoi
World Sales/Dünya Hakları: Southern Star

1991/35mm/Col/92min
Kay is frightened of the future and of the present, of life and of death, of loneliness and of love, she's frightened of the trees that whither and die, frightened of shadow and light, frightened of giving herself up to her dreams and her memories. When a clairvoyant describes minutely the man of her life, Kay abruptly interrupts the constant stream of monogamous relationships, which had become her pattern, to set up home with Louis, the ex-boyfriend of her colleague. After a year of apparent happiness, her fears are rekindled; she turns away from Louis and withdraws inexorably into herself.

That's when her older sister, Sweetie, appears. Sweetie is impulsive and untidy; a fat adolescent who her father, Gordon, still stubbornly insists is the "artist" of the family. She loses no time in turning Kay's orders upside down with her capricious demands, her voracious sensuality, her enormous appetite and her terrifying rages. Kay struggles gamely with this whirlwind, but she can't escape Sweetie's overpowering influence, her thirst for love and her inexhaustible energy.

Jane Campion (Director)
Campion was born in New Zealand and studied painting and sculpture before attending the Australian Film and Television School, where she directed three short films. In 1984 she wrote and directed a 30 minute film, 'After Hours,' for the Women's Film Unit; it won the XL Elder Award at the International Festival. In 1986 Campion caused a sensation at the Cannes Film Festival with 'Passionless Moments', 'A Girl's Own Story' and '2 Friends' which were all programmed in the 'Un Certain Regard' section. 'Peel,' one of her student projects, won 'Palme D'Or' for the Best Short Film. In 1987 the Australian Film Institute gave '2 Friends' awards for Best Director, Best TV Film, and Best Screenplay. More recently Campion has been critically acclaimed worldwide for her film 'The Piano' which also won the 'Palme D'Or' for Best Feature Film at Cannes in 1993.

Jane Campion (Yönetmen)
Campion Yeni Zelanda da doğdu. Üç kısa film yönettiği Avustralya Film ve Televizyon Okulu'na devam etmeden önce resim ve heykel eğitiminde görüntüler. 1984'te kadın Yönetmenler Birimi için 30 dakikalık 'After Hours'u yazdı ve yönetti; film 'Uluslararası Festival'de XL Elder ödülü aldı. 1986 Cannes Film Festivali'nde programlanan 'Un Certain Regard' bölümünde gösterilen 'Passionless Moments', 'A Girl's Own Story' ve '2 Friends' ile büyük birakarak yaratıldı.

Öğrencilik projesi olan 'Peel' kısa metrajlı film dalında 'Altın Palmtı' ödülüne alındı. 1987'de Avustralya Film Enstitüsü'nde '2 Friends'e En İyi Yönetmen , En İyi TV Film ve En İyi Senaryo ödülüne verdi. Cannes 1993'te En İyi Uzun Metrajlı Film dalında 'Altın Palmtı' ödülüne alan 'Piano', dünya çapında beğenildi.
Paul Cox, in his stirring adaptation of E.L. Grant Wilson’s book, “Triest Island”, has confirmed his passion for the use of landscape as an ancient force, a character to be reckoned with.

“In the name of the law and your fellow men, I declare you, Peter Costello, to be outlaw, and decree that if you ever should return to the mainland, any man meeting you shall have power, and bold it to his duty, to work your death, seeing that your life is forfeit. Here on this island you shall stay....”

Late last century, this sentence was passed on a young man (Aden Young) whose only crime was to steal a few sheep, in order to secure the dowry for the girl he loved.

Left on an isolated island, haunted by Jean, his lost love, he fights the demons of his past and the ghosts of his present. Slowly Peter falls in tune with the elements, manages to build himself a hut and learns how to live off the land and the sea. Mary, a girl from the mainland, learns of Peter's isolated existence and compelled by loneliness and romantic dreams about ‘the outlaw’, decides to join him on the island. In secrecy she acquires a small boat, loads it with simple provisions and a goat, and crosses the treacherous waters to the island. Within their isolation an uncertain relationship grows, as much controlled by the elements as their own passion. With the birth of their child, Mary wants their relationship sanctioned by marriage and baptism, but Peter has other plans.

Bu mahkumiyet karan geniş yüzeyinin sonlarına, tek suçlu sevgili kızın başlı paraışı için bir kaç koyun cırtı olmak olan genç bir adam (Aden Young) verildi. Peter, işsiz bir ada terk edilmiş, yitirdiği aşık Jean’ın hangi ile döndü, gecimini iftisal edenlar, bugünkü hayaletleri ile savaşmaktadır.

Doğanın güçlerini yavaş yavaş kabul edip onlarla işsiz bir ada nasılsın yaşayacağını öngrenmek kendi başına yapmayı becerir. Anakara’daki kıyı olan Mary, Peter’in dışlanmış varğını öğrenir; mahkumun yalnızlığı ve O’nunla ilgili kurduğu romantik düşler, Mary’yi adaya girmeye ve ona katılmaya ısrar eder. Gizlice bir kayak temin edip içine erzak ve bir de keçi yükleyip hain suları arasında adaya yollanır. Yalnızca tutkularının değil dönenin da çekıp çevirdiği belirgin bir ilişki gelişir bu iki insanın dışlanmışlıklarında.

Bebeklerinin olması ile Mary ışıklarını evlilik ve valliz törenine takdis edilmesini ister ama Peter’in başka planları vardır.

Paul Cox (Yönetmen)
When her motorcycle is damaged in a road accident, Asta Caddell finds herself stuck in the small and isolated country town of Ginkarok while she is waiting for spare parts to fix her bike.

Asta gradually realizes that groups of young men are roaming the streets of Ginkarok at night, harrassing and attacking young women. She becomes aware of a conspiracy of silence in Ginkarok. The Curtis family, owners of the small garage where Asta repairs her motorcycle, have been affected. Their daughter Lizzie, sixteen, was raped the night before Asta's arrival. Everyone knows what the young men are doing at night but no-one dares to speak out or resist. Those who do are beaten or ostracized. Asta, it emerges, is a disillusioned barrister, burnt-out and cynical about the law. What she sees in Ginkarok only confirms her cynicism especially as the local police appear disinterested in what is going on in the town. But Asta has a strong sense of justice and is drawn into the conflict when she sees some townspeople's unsuccessful attempts to stand up for themselves. Eventually charges are laid against the boys but it ends in tragedy.

Steve Jodrell (Director)

Jodrell has been a professional director, producer and actor in theatre and films for over 20 years. Behind the camera he has produced, directed and written a wide range of dramatic, current films and television programs including 'The Buck's Party' a cinema short which won three national awards in 1979 and was featured in film festivals around the world. Jodrell was also director of the television series 'Kicking Around' and assistant director on the feature films 'Fran' and 'Windrider.' Since the early seventies he has been an active supporter of film and television endeavours within Western Australia's local film industry and has lectured in film and drama studies at Curtin University for over 10 years.
No Worries/İç İrt Dert Değil

courage and heroism of a rural Australian family is wittingly brought to the screen in 'No Worries,' a
surprising drama that has captured the world over.

and Ellen Bell and their 11
year-old daughter, Matilda, have had a
never-say-die spirit that has seen them through countless brushes
in misfortune in a country plagued
by drought. Their lineage has been
at the heart of Australia for
millennia; sheep farmers with a
lesson for the land.

Matilda Bell is a spirited country girl and plays an impor-
tant part on the farm. She drives a tractor, helps with the
shearing, and is popular among her friends at school. She
is not blind to the troubles besetting her family and others in the Bundooma dis-
tric.

Drought sweeps through the Australian outback with devastat-
ing consequences.

The recession of the 1990's, as the flames with bank
work. On farms becoming the rule,
other than the exception. Even Matilda's school
threatened with closure because of the falling
number of students.

As the price of wool tumbles and sheep die
in drought, Ben Bell rebounds with a
scheme to supplement their feed with
olives. The spectre of doom is
transformed into a merry adventure.

Then adversity strikes directly with the
fate. A ferocious dust storm
destroys most of the sheep and
alters the Bell home. Matilda
and Ben escape unharmed from
their overturned truck, but Ellen
is almost killed. This time there
will be no swift recovery.

But the Bell family have been
un-tested to survive. They
face their greatest challenge, and the
domestic situation transforms them forever. In a
world where life can be hard and nature can be
cruel, a close family can survive anything.

Avustralya’dan bir köylü ailesinin cesaret ve kahraman-
lığını barışla ile peşeye taşıyan, yürek ısıtan bir dram.

Ben, Ellen ve 11 yaşındaki kızkardeş Matilda Bell kuruluk-
tan kurtulan bir ülkede sayışı tahlisizliğe göğüs germe-
erini sağlayıp, umudunu asla yitirmeyen bir ruha sa-
hiptirler. Nesillerden topak aşık ise hay-
vanlık yapan dedeleri Avustralya’nın bel kemiği'dir.

Matilda Bell gurbuz bir köylü kızkardeş ve çiftlikte onemli rol oynamaktadır; kamyo-
uğu kullanan, yürek kırma işinde yarım
eder. Okulunda da başarılıdır. Ailesini ve
Bundooma bölgesinde yaşayan diğelerini
kuşatan sorunları da farkındadır. Kurück
bu iki bölgeyi mahveder. 1990 ekonomik
bunalımları, çiftliklerin bankalarca hâzını
alevlenirdi, durumda olan dış olmak-
tan çıkarıp stradan bir olay haline getirir.

Matilda’nın okulu dahi, öğrencisi sayısındaki
azalma nedeni ile kapanma tehdidi altunda

Yun fiyatlı düşüş koşulları kurulukların telefon
olunca Ben Bell, hayvan sahiplerine
molası yaratmak para kazanma
düşünsesi ile herseyi yer
rinden başlar. Kötü
kaderin gelmesi

ilemli olur. Matilda
ve Ben ters dönent
yordan yara almadan kur-
turlar ama Ellen neredey-

se ölmüştür. Bu kez
herseyi kabul eden yoluna girmeye

kadar. Simdi ise
yasağının en büyük savasını
vermektedirler ve bu savaş onları

edebiyyen degerlendirmektedir. Hayatın çok
zor, doğanın çok acımasız olduğu bir
dünyada omoz ommuz veren bir aile, her ne olursa olsun ayakta kalabilir.
While Maria Stroppi is discovering her body and her sexuality, her mother is in the kitchen. Maria’s first period is evoked through the crushing of grapes for wine, and the making of Venetian fritters parallels her first attempt at masturbation. Maria easily survives the chastising of her mother, and the episode on the surfboard with her savage sense of humour. Utilizing split-screen techniques and a witty episodic structure, Monica Pelliuzzi continues her exploration of the Italian-Australian teen experience, confident that Maria will repay her Just Desserts.

Alt yazılara okumaya ihtiyaç duymadan İngilizce filmleri orijinal olarak izlemek istемez misiniz?

Öyle ise...

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American School of Languages and Art wishes the Australian Film Festival all success.
The story of Alice, a young Aboriginal girl who absorbs the fear and shame of her adoptive whitematch parent. The film links the denial of Aboriginality to an invasive sense of incest which occurs throughout the film. A look at how untreated fear and shame get passed down from one generation to another.

Note: In 1788, Australia was chosen as a penal settlement and the inmates of the overflowing British prisons were sent halfway around the world to start a new colony. The British law of the time considered that Australia was “terra nullius” - an empty land - and so the invasion of Australia began. The indigenous local Aboriginal population, with one of the oldest cultures in the world, was dispossessed and almost wiped out. From late last century until 1970, children were taken from their parents to be institutionalised or raised in white families. The authorities hoped that, with this denial of their existence, the Aboriginal population would gradually become either assimilated or vanishing. This outcry of “terra nullius” was only reversed by the Australian High Court in 1992.

İN FOCUS Projeksiyon Sistemleriyle

İnema keyfinizi evinizin rahatı ve size özel ortamıyla birleştirebilirsiniz.

- Her tür bilgisayar, videoya (PAL-SECAM-NTSC), video kameraya ve televizyona bağlanır
- Projektör veya panel
- 16.7 milyon renk
- 4 ekstra girişyle multimedya uyumlu
  (Aynı anda 4 ürün birden bağlanabilir, birbirine anında geçiş yapar)
- 4 Stereo Ses
- Mikrofon girişi
- Kolay taşınır
- Disket sürücülü (Bilgisayar taşima külfetinden kurtarır)
- Küçültme, büyültme özelliği
- Uzaktan kumandayla mouse işlemleri yapabilme özelliği
- 3.6 m uzaklıkta, 3.05 m diagonal görüntü büyüklüğü
  (Uzaklık arttıkça görüntü daha da büyür)

İster alım ister kiralamış, ama bu zevki mutlaka tadın.

"üstün üründe profesyonel destek"
Gallipoli is probably the most well known Australian film, as it dramatically captures the nature of post-federation Australia and the tragedy of the Gallipoli campaign. Peter Weir’s film begins with the image of young Archy (Mark Lee), practising his spining in the West Australian dawn of May 1915. It is as much his story as the story of a generation of the young men lost on both sides of the battlefield. When Archy meets up with the cynical Frank Dunne (Mel Gibson) a friendship is formed that takes them across a vast, dry lake-bed to the city of Perth, where they “join-up” and, after separation, are reunited in Egypt before going on to the rocky shores of the Dardanelles.

Gallipoli remains one of the most important films in Australian cinema because it deals with elements associated with the national character. The film unequivocally celebrates the bond of mateship without recourse to either sentimentality or tiresome buddy-ism. It is not a strongly anti-war film but it is certainly not pro-war and it doesn’t approve of Australia’s participation in World War I. Its focus concerns the way people react to the idea of war and how they behave in war.

It is the importance of this story to Australia’s sense of identity, in particular its unsympathetic representation of the British, that defines it as an important event in Australian cinema.

Peter Weir (Director)

Weir began his film career with three prize winning short films before directing The cars that ate Paris in 1974, an off-beat comedy/horror picture. His next feature, Picnic at Hanging Rock, brought him international attention and became the most successful Australian film of the 1970’s. Since then Weir has become a director of international standing with box office successes including Gallipoli, Witness, The Mosquito Coast, Dead Poets Society and Green Card.

Fedarasyon sonrası Avustralya’nın yapısını ve Gelibolu felaketini çok çarpıcı bir biçimde yansıyan Gelibolu belgesi de Avustralya’nın en iyi bilinen filmlerinden birisidir. Film 1915 Mayıs’ının Batı Avustralya’ında geçer bir şafak vaktinde kısa mesafe kısa mesafe koşu antrenmanını yapan Archy’nin görülüşünü ile başlar.

Bu, savaş meydana burada iki tarafın yaşadığı gencederar bir neslin olduğu kadar Archy’nin de hikayesi gibi, Archy açığın Frank Dunne (Mel Gibson) ile tanıştığından Perth şehrine giden üçüncü bucağı kurala göre yakalan anlar devam eden ve Çanakkale Gözü’nün kayalık sahillere kadar süren bir dostluk kuruluşu aralannır. Ulusal kimliği oluşturunun unsurları dolaylı olarak ve yerinin korkustryor Galibolu filmi, bunaltıcı bir arkadaşlığını iliskisini da duyularlığı olduğunu zürün, bir dostluk bagının zatenin kutlu yarım açığın. Keskin bir savaş karşıtı film değil ama savaş yalanısı hiç değil ve Dünyanın Savaşında Avustralya’nın yer almasını herhangi bir vaziyete dair maddi ve ziyaretçinin, her ne kadar olmasa da, Avustralya’nın kimlik arayışları açısından önem taşır, özellikle英格лизlerin silahlarından ve fotoğraflarından uzak betimlenmesi filmi Avustralya sinemasında önemli bir yere koyulur.

Peter Weir (Yönetmen)

Weir sinemaya üzerine ‘The Cars That Ate Paris’i yönetmeden önce, her biri ödül alınıp olan üç metrajlı filmle başladi. Bir sonraki uzun metrajlı filmi ‘Picnic at Hanging Rock’ uluslararası alanda ilgi çekmesini sağladı ve 1970’lerin en başarılı Avustralya filmi oldu. O zamanlardan beri Gallipoli (Gelibolu), Witness (Tanık), The Mosquito Coast (Sivrisinek Sahilleri), Dead Poets Society (Ölü Özanlar Derneği) ve Green Card (Yeşil Kart) gibi iyi hasatlar yapan filmleri ile uluslararası bir yönetmen oldu.
special thanks to the Australian Ambassador to Turkey, Mr. David Evans and the Mayor of the Greater Istanbul municipality, Mr. Teyyip Erdogan.

Tanya Whitehead
Abdul El Mahal
Seriat Güven (Alkazar Sinema Merkezi)
Hikmet Eren (Istanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı)
Ulwe & Salih Yavaş (ASU Bilgisayar)
Turanise Goodwin (Southern Star Film Sales)
Nin Gunbak (Australian Embassy)
Gürcin Özkan (Strategi)
Ayten Peker (press pack translations)
C. Ece Aktozun (brochure translation)
Kristina Andreev
Koniçka Fina (Australian Film Commission)
Seyra Karanfil
Nick Westwood (Australian Consulate General)
Ece Braun
Divina Stewart (Beyond Films)
Mel Karayel
Atuk Berkcan
Atu Yayı (Yay Matbaası)
Bamze Vatini (Cumhuriyet)
Seray Erkan
Sülay Uzun
Sümer Sanoglou (Haydock/Filma)
Küsten Boyd (TBMB-Barcode)
Yukan Eritcan (Tetris)
Mudal Bilal
Tas Delil
Jelen Bowden
Sonya Uçansu (Istanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı)
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Sofa
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Karen Abe (August Entertainment)
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Onat Kutlar
Paul Barron (Barron Films)
Paxton Winters
Peter Meyes
Rasit Atalık (Standard Film)
Roger Kilmartin (brochure & poster design)
Ruth Saunders (Australian Film And Television School)
Semih Kucukakın (TNT Express Worldwide)
Sevin Okyay
Sevna Aygün
Shane McConnochie (Australian Film Commission)
Sheila Abreu (Barron Films)
Sue O’Neill (Southern Star Film Sales)
Sungur Savran
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Grafic Design/Grafik Tasarım: Murat Demir
Editors/Editörler: Catherine Simpson & C.Ece Aktosun
Assistant Editors/Yardımcı Editörler: Bruce Jeffrey,
Müge Ochedowski, Murat Demir
Cover Design/Kapak Tasarım: Roger Kilmartin
Translations/Çeviriler: C.Ece Aktosun
Documentation/Dokümantasyon: Catherine Simpson
Printing/ Baskı: Yap Matbaacılık tic., ltd. sti
Yüzey Havuz Sokak 21/A Okmeydanı İSTANBUL
Dünya'yı size, sizi Dünya'ya ulaştıtırır.

NT Express Worldwide

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