You Look Normal To Me:  
The Social Construction of Disability in Australian National Cinema in the 1990s

Kathleen Ellis  
BA (Media Studies) Murdoch University 1999  
Graduate Diploma Media Production Murdoch University 2001

This thesis is presented for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, Murdoch University, Perth, 2004
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.
“You Look Normal to Me: the social construction of Disability in Australian National Cinema during the 1990s”

Abstract

This thesis examines the social construction of disability in Australian national cinema throughout the 1990s. During that decade, disability was an issue that remained in the background of many film narratives and is (still) under-theorised in academic scholarship. Disability continues to be tangential to many social critiques, particularly in relation to cultural diversity and national identity. When it is foregrounded, as in Liz Ferrier’s (2001) work, its theoretical premise is chiefly located in a damaged body, rather than examined through the lens of cultural construction.

The growing number of culturally diverse filmmakers in the Australian film industry during the 1990s initiated a critical focus on diversity, multiculturalism and minority group interests. However, an examination of the social construction of disability is conspicuously absent. I argue that a disability identity that focuses attention away from the body and onto society should be incorporated into notions of diversity concerning Australian national cinema.

In this thesis I investigate both thematic and stylistic representations of disability with reference to socio-political contexts and influences. A disability identity — as it is included or excluded from Australian national identity — is explored through a variety of close readings of local films. I examine the methods filmmakers employ to problematise diversity in relation to the limitations of dominant representations of disability.

This thesis recognises the historical lack of scholarship in relation to disability as a diversity issue in Australian national cinema of the 1990s and is an attempt to open up this field to new modes of criticism.
## Contents

### Acknowledgements

1

### Introduction

0.0 A personal beginning  
0.1 Problem statement and aim of thesis  
0.2 Disability, the damaged body and cinema  
  0.2.1 Australian national cinema during the 1990s: a discourse of diversity  
  0.2.2 Disability and cinematic diversity  
  0.2.3 Disability in Australia during the 1990s  
0.3 Outline of chapters  
0.4 A note on methodology

### Chapter One  

**Cultural Changes**

1.0 Introduction: contextual identity formation  
1.1 Disability  
  1.1.1 Disability in Australia during the 1990s  
1.2 Encapsulating the Australian film industry  
1.3 Globalisation and neoliberalism  
1.4 Multiculturalism  
1.5 Euthanasia and pluralism  
  1.5.1 Nazi Germany  
  1.5.2 Singer’s euthanasia discussions  
1.6 Immigration policies in Australia  
1.7 1990s National leadership: from Paul Keating to John Howard  
1.8 The Australian Disability Discrimination Act
Chapter Two  

Disability Debates

2.0 Introduction: Disability as Diversity in cinema  
2.1 Disability as culturally defined  
2.2 Barnes and ‘misrepresentation’  
2.2.1 Pitiable and pathetic  
2.2.2 An object of violence  
2.2.3 Sinister and evil  
2.2.4 Atmosphere or set dressing  
2.2.5 Super cripple or inspirational hero  
2.2.6 Object of ridicule  
2.2.7 Own worst and only enemy  
2.2.8 Burden  
2.2.9 Sexually abnormal/nonsexual  
2.2.10 Unable to participate in community  
2.2.11 Normal  
2.3 Norden’s Cinema of Isolation  
2.4 Darke’s ‘normality genre’  
2.5 Conflicting readings  
2.6 Australia  
2.7 Conclusion

Chapter 3  

Australian National Cinema

3.0 Australian films portray ‘embattled’ characters during the 1990s  
3.1 National cinema  
3.2 Identity politics  
3.3 Developing identities
### Chapter 4  *This Film is not About Disability*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0 Introduction: impairment in the plot</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Rehabilitating one group at the expense of another</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Key films</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 <em>Lucky Break</em></td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 <em>The Well</em></td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 <em>Romper Stomper</em></td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 5  *This Dance Ain’t no Pretty Waltz*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0 Introduction: what do we want to be positive about?</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Social construction of ‘positive’ representations</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Auteur theories</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 <em>Struck By Lightning</em></td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 <em>Bad Boy Bubby</em></td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 <em>Dance Me To My Song</em></td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**  

**Bibliography**  

**Filmography**
Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to thank the many people who made this thesis possible. To my father George Ellis and my grandfather George Ellis who both passed away this year — all three of us experienced neurological ‘incidents’ differently, in part due to social constructions. I appreciated the time I got to spend with you and the practical relevance for all of this theoretical stuff — this thesis is dedicated to you both.

I can’t overstate my gratitude to my supervisor Mick Broderick, whose humour, theoretical rigor, and his fantastic ability to explain things clearly and simply, enabled me to finish this thesis. I would have been lost without him. I also extend my appreciation to Martin Mhando whose supervised the initial stage of my candidature. His enthusiasm for cinema was inspirational. Thanks also to Garry Gillard who always entertained my odd ‘oz’ trivia questions.

Huge thanks to the inmates in TP3 and TP2 for providing a stimulating and fun environment in which to learn and grow. I am especially grateful to Gail, Joe, and Sharifa who proved it really could be done. Reg you only just beat me. To Fay, those coffees and muffins at 10:30 were so helpful, you’ve been a really great friend and support. Thanks Walks my proofreader for making it sound like poetry. To the Dr. Louisa Alessandri Memorial Fund scholarship committee for the money to make it happen. I really appreciate the interest you all took in my personal and intellectual well being this year.

To everyone who ever watched an Australian movie with me. Special thanks to Nikki and Cary for pretending with me that watching videos at home constituted a social life, to Amanda who couldn’t sleep, and to Dad who thought they were hilarious. I am extremely grateful to George, Carleen, Amanda and Leanne (thanks for the 4cm margins!) for putting up with me along the way. Thanks go especially to Carleen and my year 6 teacher Mrs. Atkins for instilling in me the desire for knowledge. I owe it all to Back to the Future.
Introduction

0.0 A Personal Beginning

When I began this research, my interest in disability was largely due to my own experience with disability. Following a stroke, I have for the last seven years lived with weakness and spasticity in the left side of my body and epilepsy.

In 2000 I made a documentary about my rehabilitation from stroke entitled *With Both Hands*. It highlighted the physical and emotional aspects of my impairment and rehabilitation but did not address environmental or attitudinal barriers. I individualised disability in this film. It was during this exercise that I began to notice that many able-bodied people who had not had similar experiences to my own were ‘reassuring’ me that I looked and seemed ‘normal’. My response to these comments indicated to me that representations of disability warranted further investigation.

Around the same time, I attended a conference where I heard a pitch for a documentary about a young disabled boy. The nondisabled filmmaker who did not actually know anything about the child’s impairment wanted to follow him showing how, even though he was ‘exploited’ by the other people who live in his village, he was still ‘happy’. This pitch troubled me because this filmmaker, who had not bothered to find out basic details of the boy’s impairment, wanted to represent his experience of it. At the same conference some commissioning editors present warned two white filmmakers against colonizing cultures after they had pitched a
film about a black community. The nondisabled filmmaker was not similarly warned. I felt isolated; like I was the only person in attendance that thought this filmmaker would exploit the boy more than the people in his village who paid him to do odd jobs — at least he could sometimes steal their money.¹ As I reflected on my own experiences as a film maker, audience member and disabled person, I realised that disability had not yet been recognised as a sociological construction. It seemed to me cinema was implicated in this social discontinuity.

I began this research hoping to answer two questions — how is disability represented in Australian national cinema, and why was I so keen to pass as able bodied in my own life? Was I somehow less Australian, less female because of my impairments? The more I read about the social model of disability, the more I began to question my own identity and the way others would have me behave. This new model resonated in my life and allowed me access to an identity of which I had previously been ashamed. I became absorbed in the debate as it ran through every aspect of my life, often seeping into practical aspects of my research. Why, for example, were the disability studies books placed on the top shelf of my university’s library? (I never received a response although they were moved two years after I enquired.) Why wouldn’t my university’s insurance policy cover me for overseas research travel? (Although the policy was supposed to be universal, apparently I was too expensive!) Why did the delivery trucks park in the disabled parking bays? (They were too big for the loading zone.)

¹ Several years later I found that another disabled person had witnessed this pitch and he felt the same way that I had about it.
But how were inaccessible books, parking lots and insurance policies related to cinema and constructions of Australianness? These disabling situations that have been left up to me as an individual to deal with (or preferably stay silent about), like a number of the cinematic representations addressed in this thesis, have nothing to do with my impairment. Disability is an ideological reality.

0.1 Problem Statement and aim of thesis

During the 1990s, the disability rights movement in Australia attempted to take the focus away from the traditional medical aspects of disability and concentrated instead on the contribution disabled people could make to society. As a result, an environment emerged where we were encouraged to ‘see the ability, not the disability’. While this framework removed the focus from medicine, it remained under the same ideological umbrella as disability remained an individual’s problem and disabled people were encouraged to deny their impairments in order to fit into an ableist society. Disability is individualised in Australian society; it is still considered a medical pathology, rather than a social construction. As a result, despite the focus on cultural diversity in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, disability continues to be largely unproblematised.

Throughout this thesis, after establishing a social model of disability framework, I consider the contextual influences on this textual environment and problematise the representation of disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s,
Introduction

particularly as disability is not considered a diversity issue (unlike race, religion, sexuality, and gender). Thus I aim to consider the ways disability has been implicated in notions of diversity in Australian national cinema during that decade.

0.2 Disability, the damaged body and cinema

We made up a game, we tried to think of degrees of death, to put them in order; relaxation, absent-mindedness, drozinesss, sleep, a hypnotic state, coma, paralysis, breath stoppage, heart stoppage, brain death, cessation of all metabolism, rigamortis, decay and disintegration of tissues helped by the quiet foraging of worms, insects, fungi and bacteria. Beatrice in *Breathing Under Water* (1993)

Disability reminds us of our vulnerability, that we will die (Dawidoff vii). While social factors have been recognised in discussions of other minority groups in Australia — particularly race, gender and sexuality — disability has remained outside questions of discourse, culture, communication and meaning. Disability has long been considered as suited only to a specialty, or medical field of inquiry, not covered in the scope of the humanities and social sciences (Goggin and Newell *Diversity as if Disability Mattered* 1). Most disability research has been conducted within the medical model rather than through a social model. The major in-built assumption of the medical model is that it sees disability as an individual pathology.

A cursory review of cinematic representation of disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s reveals a sense of uneasiness about this human condition. This uneasiness can be tied to the incidence or threat of impairment. When disability is represented in cinema it often works semiotically to project information about nondisabled characters. The audience identifies with these nondisabled characters
Feminist film analysts during the 1970s used psychoanalysis to discuss the spectator-screen relationship. They argued that cinema was structured on a process of patriarchal audience identification. Laura Mulvey in particular found that cinematic pleasure was derived by the way the female form was structured in classical cinema (749). Film spectators comprehend cinema via identification with a character on screen (Metz 46). Mechanisms of audience identification revealed gendered subjectivity (Jayamanne 52-3). Although I do not use psychoanalysis as a framework throughout this thesis, similar arguments can be applied to the representation of disability on screen. Cinema reinforces the boundaries of normality, which excludes disability (Darke Cinematic Representations of Disability 183). Despite the popularity of cultural diversity as a dominant theme in Australian national cinema during the last decade, impairment reminds us that anyone can become disabled (Dawidoff vii). A warped social imagery extends to disabled people as it does to other repressed subgroups (Norden Cinema of Isolation 1).

According to Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare, culture (including art, beliefs, customs and values) is a society’s system of interrelationships. It is the signifying system through which meanings are communicated and sets boundaries for what is normal and different. To become a member of society these cultural meanings must be learnt. Exploring disability within a cultural context, emphasises the ways in which ‘common meanings’ construct people with impairments as not ‘normal’ (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare 183-4). An influential social barrier for people
with impairments is the representation of disability in films (Safran *First Century of Disability Portrayal in Film* 467). Cinema is a powerful cultural tool in shaping society’s opinion of disability (Norden *Cinema of Isolation* 1). Therefore cinema can be considered a discourse under Foucault’s theorisation of power relations (Hayes and Black *Troubling Signs* 3).

Cinematic images of marginalised groups reflect shifts in social attitudes (Darke *Understanding Cinematic Representations* 181). Nonfiction material can provide meaningful social insight, particularly as cycles of work relate to specific social groups (Molloy 1). National identity carries with it many ideological and mythological implications at both the individual and the national level (Molloy 10). The Australian mythology of the bushman and battler have provided a way to bring people of isolated communities together as Australians through a mythical national identity (Molloy 13). Therefore, ideologically, cinematic representations contribute to the social construction of disability.

In discussing issues of disability and diversity, theorists often pay attention to personal identity and the impact outside definitions have on an individual’s experience. David Pfeiffer contends that due to several different versions of the ‘social model’ of disability, researchers must state the ideological stance from which they proceed, although these models and the ideological frameworks which give rise to them are all in fact interrelated (*A Comment on the Social Model(s)* 2). With regards to terminology, the difference between the UK model and the US model is
perhaps most illuminating (Shakespeare and Watson *The Social Model of Disability* 4). Americans and Australians are encouraged to ‘put the person first’ and refer to people with impairments as ‘people with disabilities’, and avoid use of the term ‘disabled people’. In this way, causality for social limitations is located in the body, not society. Jenny Morris criticises this terminology:

> [t]he government’s recent advertising campaign (‘See the person’) is so dangerous. We are asked to believe that it is progressive for non-disabled people to say to us, ‘I don’t see what makes your body or mind different from me, I just see you as a person’. This is not only an attempt to deny the feelings that people have about difference, it is also to deny that we are different — they deny the prejudice we experience, and deny the things we need to happen in order that we can have our human and civil rights. (*Reclaiming The Social Model* 2)

Morris explains that disability refers to oppression, not impairment. Further, the social model of disability which initiated this new definition, espouses use of the term ‘disabled people’ in recognition of difference, prejudice, and unequal access (*Reclaiming The Social Model* 2). Tom Shakespeare explains, “disability is being viewed as the product of a disabling society, not the individual pathological body” (*The Body Line Controversy* 1). Disability Studies argues for a recognition of the socially constructed difference, and places an emphasis on disability politics.

---

2 Although I am not operating within this discourse, Hayes and Black pose the argument that when it comes to movies, it is the impairment that is of central importance to the narrative. Therefore, if the filmmakers do not put the person first, then characters should be referred to as ‘disabled people’. With reference to *Rain Man* (1988), Hayes and Black contend that Raymond’s ‘unique’ personality is of little importance, rather it is his impairment and the consequential impact this has on his able-bodied brother that drive the narrative (4). Throughout their article Hayes and Black argue that: disability in the form of an actual physical or psychological condition is quite secondary in the construction of the character or in the movie’s plot. The story involves a struggle but not to overcome the disability per se but to overcome the confinement that a disability induces. (6) Therefore, in cinema, disability is causally linked to impairment, while throughout this thesis I argue that society *causes* disability and cinema is a cultural sign implicated in this construction. Hayes and Black also agree that ‘disabled people’ puts the focus on society and cinematic portrayals qualifies as such a context (4).
(Shakespeare *The Body Line Controversy* 1). Therefore, if disability is viewed as the product of society, it is imposed on top of the ‘person’ and the use of the term ‘disabled people’ is more appropriate to this study. The expression ‘people with disabilities’ encourages denial of this oppression and locates the problem in the damaged body. I do not adopt this latter terminology in this thesis, as it contributes to an environment whereby disabled people are encouraged to deny their impairments. While this movement attempts to remove focus from medical conditions, the social model puts the focus squarely on society without denying the existence of impairment (J. Campbell 5).

Throughout this thesis I conduct a post-structuralist analysis of disabled people as an oppressed minority group. My particular focus is on the role cultural imagery plays in the social oppression of this group. The social model of disability viewing disabled people as an oppressed minority group is a structuralist position based on the notion that disability is a collective experience (Shakespeare *The Body Line Controversy* 1). Most theorists have concentrated on a sociological methodology that refuses to consider impairment for fear of ‘weakening’ the model. Shakespeare contends that this has likewise resulted in a neglect of consideration of cultural imagery:

Oliver devotes just two pages to issues of cultural imagery in his major monograph on disability. Writers such as Finklestein, and the prevailing orthodoxy of the ‘social oppression’ theories underpinning the political movement of disabled liberation are generally in accord with Oliver’s proposition. Only recently have writers, predominantly feminists, reconceptualized disability. I would suggest that some of the lack of weight given to cultural imagery and difference stems from the neglect of
impairment: Liz Crow has recently suggested that the social model needs to be developed, in order to conceptualize this experience (Crow, 1992). If social model analysis seeks to ignore, rather than explore the individual experience of impairment […], then it is unsurprising that it should also gloss over the cultural representation of impairment.³ (Cultural Representations of Disabled People 1)

The following thesis will consider Crow’s reconceptualisation of impairment within the social model with reference to the power relations surrounding the construction of disability in Australian national cinema. The social model of disability has traditionally argued that impairments exist independently of their social construction. Deborah Marks identifies both the social model of disability and post-structuralism as being significant to any analysis of disability. By recognising an infinite number of signifiers and suggesting an instability of meaning, post-structuralism allows for pluralist readings. While the social model recognises the oppressive quality of social and environmental barriers towards people who have impairments, post-structuralism is useful when exploring discourses, which constitute disability:

We can only ever grasp ‘versions’ of the world. There is no direct perception. The logic of the post-structuralist argument is that not only disability but impairment is socially constructed. Post-structuralist theory thus challenges the notion of stable, prior or essential characteristics or identities of people in favour of a much more fluid socially constructed subject. (Marks 17)

³ Finkelstein and Oliver have been involved in the social research into disability since its early days. They are both disabled and their academic works deconstruct the ‘personal tragedy’ theory of disability.
Australian national cinema during the 1990s constitutes a discourse, which in turn presents disability as a cultural sign. Foucault’s theorisation of discourse allows us to think about disability as socially produced by and within power relations. Spatio-temporal coordinates are significant to an analysis of discourse (Foucault *Archeology of Knowledge* 120). Australian national cinema during the 1990s constitutes a discourse of diversity that excludes disability.

**0.2.1 Australian national cinema during the 1990s: a discourse of diversity**

Proceeding from Foucault’s re-examination of discourse as a network of meanings and practices, Hayes and Black identify two elements to film analysis in a disability context:

[to] examine what the object tells us about a particular set of power relations and how the object solidifies and codifies power relations. The focus then, is not so much on the object, in this case a person with a disability, but on the discourses and the concomitant power relations that surround the object. (3)

This mode of analysis enables an examination of how the object emerged in relation to history and power relations. By focusing on disability as the social interpretation of impairment (the ‘object’) throughout this thesis, I argue that disability and Australian national cinema are discourses. The social theory of disability reveals power relations that surround the representation of disability in cinema. In this way I am studying texts and their surrounding conditions of production. As Tom O’Regan contends:

national cinema analyses situate the cinema simultaneously as a natural object in the film world (its production and industrial context), as a social object connecting and
relating people to each other (its social and political context) and discursively through language, genre and knowledges (its representations). (*Australian National Cinema* 2)

An examination of disability and impairment in Australian national cinema during the 1990s reveals cinema as a natural, social, and discursive object that rests on historically contingent power relations. Impairment was represented in Australia cinema during the 1990s through an individualised discourse of disability. Disability continued to be located in the damaged body despite the more diverse focus of the national cinema that took the focus off the body in relation to other oppressed minority groups. This discourse of diversity did not extend to disabled people and a disability identity remained peripheral to the otherwise culturally diverse Australian national identity.

These two discussions intersect at the two points which distinguish a common national culture:

[t]here is the national political — the common political and civic culture involving citizenship and equality before the law; and there is the national cultural — the cultural core of memories, values, customs, myths, symbols, solidarities and significant landscapes shaping 'Australian' identity. [… N]o state can be workable without both a national political and national cultural sense of itself. The cinema […] matter[s] to public policy makers, interest groups, lobbyists, film-makers and audiences as targets for their national cultural and national political projects and ambitions. (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 67)

The social construction of disability is evident in both O’Regan’s the ‘national political’ and the ‘national cultural’. This construction works to exclude a disability
identity from an Australian identity while reinstating the inclusion of other minority cultures.

0.2.2 Disability and Cinematic Diversity

This thesis is concerned with a social theory of disability and how Australian national cinema during the 1990s excludes a disability identity. Disability is individualised as a medical pathology or personality defect that people who have impairments should seek to cure or hide, or at the very least not bother anyone with. Representations locate the problem in a damaged body rather than a discriminatory environment. To this end I will look at how the impaired body is positioned by the mise en scene, editing, and other cinematic devices to leave an impression of exclusion and isolation. The main films for analysis are *Romper Stomper* (1992), *Lucky Break* (1994), and *The Well* (1997). These films rely on the social intertext of disability in order to make a critique of Australian society that has nothing to do with disabled people as a minority group. *Dance Me to My Song* (1998), *Bad Boy Bubby* (1993) and *Struck By Lightning* (1990) illustrate the possibilities a social model of disability has for Australian national cinema.

0.2.3 Disability in Australia during the 1990s

I have grounded this cinematic study of disability within the specific historical context of Australia during the 1990s in response to the tendency towards culturally diverse or multicultural narratives in Australian national cinema in this period and the changes in the way Australian society in general began to view disability, as
evident in changes to legislation. During the 1990s Australian national cinema was considered a ‘diverse’ cinema committed to serving under-represented populations. However, its interest in disability was located outside a social/minority model. Often disability was presented under a ‘personal tragedy’ framework in order to give strength to a previously marginalised other. Mairian Corker recognises the significance of an analysis of cultural imagery in regard to a social model of disability affecting social change:

[p]recisely because disability is socially created, it varies in accordance with the nature of the associated problematic — ‘normalcy’. Texts of disability, like any text, are always ‘intertextual’. (199)

Australian national cinema during the 1990s re-examined public myths and presented a different kind of ‘normalcy’, influenced by multiculturalism and other forms of cultural diversity. Locating the representation of disability within the context of a national cinema highlights the intertextuality of normality and the outside forces at play such as legislation and government policy. Further, it highlights national identity as a marker of normality.

0.3 Outline of chapters

The structure of this thesis, like the recent considerations of Australian national cinema as simultaneously national and international, considers the intersection between the national and the international in the creation of a peripheral disability identity in Australian national cinema and identity. In Chapter One, I consider the relevance of this particular study to the 1990s and the temporal influences that
Introduction

prompted me to undertake this investigation. Hence, this dissertation could not have been written twenty years ago. Chapter Two considers cultural imagery and recent theorisations in order to situate the relevance of this study within the current discourse of the social theory of disability. In preparation for the two chapters that follow it, Chapter Three locates disability in traditional writings on Australian national cinema which most recently have focused on multiculturalism. Chapters Four and Five approach the actual representation of disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s via close textual investigations of six key films. While Chapter Four considers three films which adopt a tragedy framework, Chapter Five considers three that adhere to a social model.

The foundations for this thesis are laid in Chapter One, Cultural Changes, which examines the significance of the 1990s to disability as a social construction. This chapter is particularly important in the context of the whole work because it situates disability amongst a series of cultural changes that are historically contingent. Further, it reveals the power relations upon which disability is codified and solidified in Australian cinema and society. From a temporal perspective, disability began to be politicised during the 1990s. In the 1990s a shift occurred in the way disability was perceived both internationally and in Australia. While international theorists, many of whom disabled themselves, were developing a new model of analysis, the disability rights movement in Australia was adopting a neoliberal interpretation influenced by globalisation. As a result, in Australian society disability was presented as an individual’s problem to overcome and this was
Introduction

reflected in Australian national cinema. Neoliberalism offers the illusion of freedom molded around a ‘normative’ citizen. Disabled people exist on the underside of liberalism (F. Campbell 45). Chapter One also provides contextual information in preparation for the closer textual analyses in the latter chapters. The introduction of the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992), technological changes in relation to reproductive technology, and euthanasia debates all contributed to an environment where disabled people were devalued and discriminated against.

Chapter Two, Disability Debates, applies the social theory of disability to film analysis and reviews the current literature, identifying contradictions and inconsistencies in the main arguments. This chapter leads into a discussion of Australian-specific theorisation in order to situate my research internationally and locally, and to highlight the relevance of national identity in the creation of normality. This chapter is structured around the contention that a social understanding of disability is missing from Australian-specific research, while also arguing that international research around disability issues would benefit from a consideration of national identity.

Chapter Three, Australian National Cinema, expands this argument to consider writings on Australian national cinema and identity. This chapter highlights the importance of studying a national cinema and the role of the government in social and cultural constructions. Power and constructions of nationhood linked to disability and ideals of ‘them’ and ‘us’ will also be considered with reference to the
way a disability culture is denied in order to incorporate a previously excluded marginal group into the diverse Australian national identity of Australian national cinema of the 1990s.

Following forty years of limited activity, Australian national cinema was re-established in the 1970s as a cultural project with a strong focus on the local. The narrative frameworks established in this era continued to influence film production into the 1990s. However, during the 1990s, the Australian film industry also took a greater global focus and joined the global film economy (Verhoeven 153). Despite earlier theorisation suggesting the national cinema could be either global or local, film productions of the 1990s display a balanced global and local focus. This resulted in a greater diversity within the industry and Australia has continued to be a cohesive imagined community. This diversity came at the expense of the representation of disability, which was used to rehabilitate other minority groups previously excluded from the national identity as it was re-established in the 1970s. Chapter Three also introduces a rationale for film analysis that links disability film studies with concerns of multiculturalism in Australian national cinema during the 1990s.

In order to analyse a previously neglected aspect of Australian identity, Chapter Four, *This Film Is Not About Disability*, discusses films that include a disabled character, while ironically, denying disability as a subject matter. This chapter undertakes three close textual investigations of Australian films made in the 1990s. I
consider how disability is constructed as a personal tragedy preventing access to ‘normal’ Australianness via analysis of The Well, Lucky Break and Romper Stomper.

I have selected these three texts for in-depth analysis in Chapter Four as they offer points of discussion on aspects pertaining to Australian national identity from an inward perspective. In each film, impairment operates symbolically in order to normalise a previously established other and holds significance to the progression toward a multicultural national cinema. Although the socio-political environment in which they were produced is reflected in all narratives, each film offers a different perspective on who Australians are and who they might become, drawing on both the cultural climate at the time of their production and the previously established genre tendencies in Australian national cinema. This signals the intersection between O’Regan’s categories of the national object and the social object of national cinema analysis.

Lucky Break, The Well and Romper Stomper each use impairment to critique Australian national identity. While Lucky Break attempts to criticise pretending to be someone you’re not, The Well offers a site for women both in front of and behind the camera to include women in the traditional Australian identity. Finally, Romper Stomper critiques who we’ve become as a nation and suggests an alternate identity. In this chapter I explore the ways impairment operates as an icon both in terms of mise en scene and mythology in order to make this critique of national identity.
Therefore, disability is a cultural sign that operates within power relations of national and cultural significance. The filmic techniques employed in these films to represent the incidence of impairment rely on ableist myths. *Lucky Break*, *The Well* and *Romper Stomper* each depict an impaired female character who is taken advantage of and fulfills redundant cultural expectations of women, as impairment is positioned in the frame to mean loss of control. In contrast to the diverse cinematographic portrayal of most minority groups, Australian national cinema continues to marginalise those with impairments.

In Chapter Five, *This Dance Ain’t No Pretty Waltz*, I continue the film analysis while highlighting the significance of post-structuralism in relation to a social theory of disability and impairment and the consideration of cultural imagery in effecting social change with respect to disability issues. This chapter looks to films that reject the tragedy model and offer a cinematic disability culture in line with multiculturalism including *Dance Me To My Song*, *Bad Boy Bubby*, and *Struck By Lightning*.

These three films were selected because they offer points of discussion pertaining to Australian national identity in a multicultural context inclusive of disability. Likewise they uncover a social theory of disability and impairment. Each film demands recognition of the socially disabling interpretation of impairment. Similarly, they critique both the creation of and perpetuation of ableism in Australian nation cinema. While drawing from auteur theories and critical reception,
this chapter highlights the role of the writer-director as significant when attempting social change with respect to disability issues and including a disability culture in Australia’s multicultural cinematic national identity.

0.4 A note on methodology

In selecting these six key films for analysis I attempted to view every film made in Australia during the 1990s. In order to avoid the problems with defining ‘Australianness’ that other theorists have experienced (more on this in Chapter Three), and in keeping with the ‘national’ theme, I decided to only consider films funded by the Australian Film Commission (AFC) — although not exclusively. It was a 1990s tendency for funding to come from a variety of other sources. In the period 1990 to 1999 the AFC funded 284 feature length films; I was only able to view 114.4 Proceeding from the standpoint that disability was a cultural sign, I noted films that included the incidence of impairment (physical and mental) and considered how these impairments were visually represented and to what effect. In short, I attempted to uncover the symbolic meaning by taking into consideration narrative and style with intertextual reference to the national cinema and what was happening in Australian society during this period.

---

4 Films were selected on the basis of accessibility, I made use of the Murdoch University library, cult and festival video stores and ezydvd.com.au. Although successful in watching only 40% of total production during this decade, the sample group was certainly statistically sound. I covered all of the major releases and those films considered emblematic of production each year. I viewed all of the films nominated for the best picture category at the AFI awards in the period 1990–2000. Incidentally, each successful film in this category depicted a representation of impairment or disability during this decade.
Although I argue that disability continued to be marginalised and located in a damaged body in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, I also note the emergence of a disability identity as influenced by an emerging social theory of disability. Despite the continued representation of disability in Australian cinema throughout its history, this comprehensive study could not have been undertaken prior to the 1990s. While each of the films analysed in this thesis has something to say about disability as a diversity issue in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, when taken together I believe a clear trend is emerging. This trend has led me to theorise that disability was not considered as a diversity issue in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, although possibilities exist for a redirection. Finally, this work has been inspired not only by the films themselves (particularly those addressed in Chapter Five), but it has also developed from the numerous ideas of theorists spanning a number of disciplines. With this thesis, I am primarily concerned with offering a contribution to the field of film studies, cultural studies, and disability theory within the Australian context.
Chapter One
Cultural Changes

1.0 Introduction: Contextual Identity formation

“We’re an equal opportunity employer but we’ll be in touch”
Prospective employer to Mills who is pretending to have Tourettes syndrome in Dags (1997)

Arguably, it was a mistake to write Should The Baby Live? back in 1985. But that’s done now. I think the book’s done some good in alerting people to the nature of that particular problem and making parents of the disabled able to discuss it more openly.
Peter Singer (Baggini and Strangroom 21)

The issues of identity formation and its relation to filmic time and space are central to this thesis. ¹ Contemporary attitudes about disability have been shaped by the both the cultural values of capitalism, and further back, the lifestyles of the Greeks and Romans (Barnes A Legacy of Oppression 2). ‘Disability’ began to be politicised in the nineteenth century (Barnes A Legacy of Oppression 2), a process which gained momentum around the world by the 1990s. Further, issues of multiculturalism, particularly in Australia were recognised and problematised in Australian national cinema. As a result, a new public myth of the people emerged (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 20) altering the national identity, which was already undergoing transformation under the influence of globalisation.

¹ I refer to both narrative and industry time and space. Narrative with reference to Bordwell and Thompson’s definition: “a chain of events in [a] cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (62). Industry time and space will concentrate on Australia during the 1990s.
This chapter will focus on the interplay between disability culture, multiculturalism, and Australian national cinema and identity as they were connected by the technological, social and political changes brought about in the 1990s. Although it has been argued that during the 1990s Australian national cinema reflected a multicultural and gendered national identity (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 23), a disability culture remained peripheral and a disability identity marginal. Indeed, impairment was used to rehabilitate other minority groups.²

I will begin this chapter by addressing the importance of textual analysis as it relates to a specific period in time. My rationale for linking multiculturalism and disability with Australian national cinema will be explored throughout this chapter under the various paradigms of change, including social, political, and technological. Australian national identity is in part constructed by Australian national cinema. National cinema, by extension, “involve[s] relations between […] the] various social, political, and cultural contexts” (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 1) under which they operate as well as other national and international film texts. The influence of the social, political and technological context in operation during the 1990s on the national film production in Australia is particularly evident when looking at the preferred national identity or national character of this time. Further, this chapter will address the role of policy and the history of discrimination legislation.

² Callahan finds this multicultural identity to be problematic, particularly when considered with reference to Australia’s suburban liberal culture that blames the English heritage for unhappiness. He argues that representations of ethnicity in Australian cinema constitute little more than wish fulfillment and serve to reinforce the notion that white people are the unnamed norm (95).
1.1 Disability

During the 1990s the image of ‘disabled’ people in the media began to change, as there was some consultation with disabled people. However, Jane Campbell argues it was only on a superficial level. Disabled people wanted less emphasis on medical conditions and more on their contribution to society. There was (and still is) a need to watch out for the ‘ability, not disability’ syndrome (J. Campbell *Developing Our Image* 3).

This paradigm is less than desirable for a lot of disabled people it supposes to encompass as it continues to disregard and deny the culture of disability. This culture is appropriated by organisations that claim they can develop disabled people’s abilities and educate society into recognising these abilities and how ‘normal’ disabled people can be. More recently, an emancipatory approach has begun being developed around the principles of empowerment and reciprocity, encouraging self-reflection and liberation. It is not disabled people who need to be examined, rather the able-bodied mainstream society.

---

3 This aesthetic emerged from the way issues of disability continued to be discussed. During the 1950s to 1970s the emphasis was on rich people doing ‘selfless deeds’ to care for disabled people. Disabled people were not consulted; they were ‘acted upon’ and kept separate from fund raising events. By the 1980s disabled people became more visible in society as institutions were questioned as the only alternative. Able-bodied experts portrayed this shift into the community. Disabled people who ‘battled against all odds’ were favoured and ordinary disabled people remained silent and isolated. For example the 1981 International Year of the Disabled represented only courageous and exceptional people with disabilities and ignored the everyday stories (J. Campbell *Developing Our Image* 4).
Mike Oliver was integral in establishing a social model of disability by deconstructing the ‘personal tragedy’ theory of disability (see Oliver *Understanding Disability*). The ‘personal tragedy’ theory refers to the widely held belief that disability is a tragedy that occurs at random to individuals, requiring them to adapt (Barnes *Disabling Imagery and The Media* 20). This theory underpins the belief that the ‘problem’ can be located within the individual. Furthermore, the functional limitations assumed to arise from disability are believed to cause the said problem (Oliver *The Individual and Social Models of Disability* 3). As Mike Oliver and Colin Barnes argue, disability is no longer a medical problem, it is a civil rights issue similar to class, gender, race and sexuality (*Disability* 1).

Similarly, Finkelstein sees disability as a social construction based on lack of access. I will discuss Finkelstein at length later in this chapter, but for now my focus will remain on Oliver. Oliver’s redefinition of disability has formed the basis for further discussion on disability that has used a social framework. Oliver redefined disability in opposition to the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition. He focused only on social factors:

we define impairment as lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the main stream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression. (*Understanding Disability* 22)
The original WHO definitions according to the 1980 publication *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps* defined disability, impairment and handicap in the context of health experiences:

Impairment: any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function. (47)

Disability: any restriction or lack (resulting from impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. (143)

Handicap: a disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex, and social and cultural factors) for that individual. (183)

Thus, according to the WHO, impairment, disability and handicap are interrelated, one being the direct result of another. Although this model claims to identify social and cultural factors, by attributing these solely to impairment (the psychological or physiological dysfunction) the model achieves little in terms of social discrimination. It was in response to these definitions that the social model of disability was established, as social modellists separate bodily impairment from the socially created disablement (*Hevey Creatures Time Forgot* 16-17), while the WHO
model continues to locate impairment, disability and handicap in the body.\(^4\)

Based on the social model of disability, Mairian Corker and Sally French simplify this distinction describing disability as socially created and impairment as a physical attribute (2). This model argues that impairment and disability are unrelated in terms of causality, although impairment exists before disability. Disability is the social interpretation of impairment. This shift in emphasis situates disability in a cultural and political position. Using a minority group model, disability studies has been developed to disentangle impairments from the myth, ideology and stigma that influence social interaction and social policy.

Simi Linton highlights the importance of constructing words such as ‘Ableism’ and ‘Ableist’ as tools to organise ideas relating to a ‘nondisabled’ view of the world. Ableism describes the discrimination experienced by people with impairments. The concept is similar to sexism and racism. Fiona Campbell defines ableism as a network of beliefs that describes disability as “a diminished state of being human” (44f).

\(^4\) Disabled people’s organisations have been at the forefront of the rejection of the WHO schema. One such organisation is The Disabled People’s International, who developed definitions in direct opposition to the WHO:

- **Impairment**: is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment.

- **Disability**: is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.

Oliver cites the DPI’s definitions as being in line with his own and differentiates them from those provided by the World Health Organization, which he sees as being fundamentally causality based (Oliver, *Defining Impairment and Disability* 41).
Linton acknowledges that ableism is discrimination in favour of nondisabled people and then takes the idea further by,

> extrapolating from the definitions of racism and sexism [...] ableism also includes the idea that a person's abilities or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to nondisabled people. Although there is probably greater consensus among the general public on what could be labeled racist or sexist language than there is on what might be considered ableist, that may be because the nature of the oppression of disabled people is not yet as widely understood. (*Claiming Disability* 9)

Similarly, Susan Wendell argues that disability politics is still in an early stage, whereas racial politics have progressed to the point where ‘black’ is no longer recognised as a biological category. She also sees connections with feminist analyses of gender as socially constructed from biological differences (36). Cinematic representations contribute to this blurring of biology and society. Using this framework it becomes apparent that several Australian cinematic features of the 1990s portray disability as a biological difference in order to highlight the social construction of other differences that were once thought to be biological. Therefore, disability is a social construction.

### 1.1.1 Disability in Australia during the 1990s

The 1990s was a significant decade in Australia’s history in terms of opening debate around the issue of disability (See Table 1). As the below table demonstrates, after 26 years of anti-discrimination legislation in Australia, the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act* was introduced in 1992.
Table 1.: Discrimination-related Legislation significant to Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Prohibition of Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Handicapped Persons Assistance Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Racial Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>NSW Anti-Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Above Act (1977) extended to include physically disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Above Act (1977) extended to include intellectually disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Australian chapter of Disabled People’s International established along with the Disability Advisory Council of Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>South Australian Natural Death Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Victorian Equal Opportunities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>SA Equal Opportunities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>WA Equal Opportunities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Sex Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Disability Services Act (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Victorian Medical Treatment Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act expanded to include disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Qld Anti-Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>ACT Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Disability Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>NT Anti-Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Disability Services Act (NSW)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>ACT Medical Treatment (Amendment) Bill (defeated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>UK Disability Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Victoria Equal Opportunity Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>WA Voluntary Euthanasia bill (never passed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Act</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further, debates about euthanasia were prominent during the 1980s and 1990s when each Australian state and territory discussed voluntary Euthanasia bills (also chronicled in Table 1). These two moves — the introduction of Disability services Acts and euthanasia debates — appeared to have been operating at opposite ends of the spectrum of the disability debate. As such, they exemplify the struggle and confusion operating in Australian society during the time these laws were introduced. Robert Manne argues that the euthanasia debate was influenced by an economic rationalist view of the world (253). I will explore the link between globalisation and the devalued disabled life throughout this chapter before proceeding to in-depth textual analyses in later chapters.

As the above table suggests, disabled people are not the only minority group who have suffered discrimination in Australia and as a result required legislation for protection. Ian Parsons compares several human rights movements (including women, Aboriginal people, disabled people and gay men and lesbians) and finds a common thread with regard to social discrimination:

[1]hat thread is one that sees people’s place in the community, and their identity, defined not by themselves, but by the people who have power in the society in general. They experience exclusion and even brutality not because of how they see themselves, or because they have chosen to ‘opt out’ — but because society has defined its parameters so narrowly. (9)
Chapter 1 Cultural Changes

Debates around Civil Rights in Australia during the 1990s also impacted on the position of women, homosexuals, and racial minorities. For example, in 1992, Nick Toohen, a homosexual living in Tasmania, complained to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) that laws in Tasmania prohibiting certain kinds of sex violated his right to privacy and equality and encouraged discrimination. In 1994 the UNHRC confirmed that Tasmanian law violated Toonen’s rights. Instead of concentrating on the rights of the individual, the state Liberal government and the Federal Liberal opposition focused on the right of Tasmania to make their own laws. However, in other states the rights of homosexuals were being recognised; for example, in 1994 in the ACT, property rights were given to non-heterosexual couples in the event that one partner died (Linden and Gott 5).

In 1994, a report, Equality Before The Law: Justice For Women, also found that the position of women in Australian society was less than that of men. Women received less pay and suffered inequality before the law. Another report published the same year — Australian Immigration: A Survey of The Issues — found that migrant

---

5 The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights dictates certain standards to be met by undersigned countries. Australia has signed this Covenant, and it was argued that the Tasmanian laws regulating sex practices were in violation of these standards, particularly as only homosexuals had been prosecuted under the law.

6 Many Tasmanians were in support of a law that discriminated against this sexual orientation, as they personally did not like homosexuals (Linden and Gott 5).

7 Previously the family of the deceased could claim the house, ejecting the surviving partner, even if they had not seen the deceased in years.
women suffered double discrimination, due to their lack of financial resources and other cultural constraints. In the early 1990s, supporters of the Racial and Religious Vilification Act argued that existing laws did not go far enough in protecting people against discriminatory behaviour. However, critics argued that the bill impinged on freedom of speech (Linden and Gott 15-20).

1.2 Encapsulating the Australian Film Industry

There are an assortment of Australian fact books or dictionaries aimed at tourists explaining Australian culture, customs and language (Nicholson, S.Butler, Johnsen), as though there is something special or even ‘freaky’ about Australia and Australians that the rest of the world does not understand.8 For example, Margaret Nicholson claims to tell you “everything you need to know about Australia in one handy volume” in The Little Aussie Fact Book. She describes the Australian film industry during the 1990s in the following way:

[a]n excellent venue for local and overseas film-makers. The combination of endless homegrown talent, both in acting and production, reasonably secure government support and the best film-making facilities outside Hollywood saw an exciting transition in the film industry. This remarkable buoyancy, coupled with the willingness of Aussies to take a risk, resulted in new and diverse productions which took the world by storm. (243)

---

8 Australian cinematic narratives about finding an identity and language have been an integral part of the construction of Australianness in various artistic mediums (Rowse). They’re A Weird Mob (1966) is essentially about language, as Italian immigrant Nino, who has a good grasp of the English language struggles to understand what Australians are saying. For example, he meets a man in a pub who ‘shouts’ him a beer and expects Nino to shout in return. Nino did not hear the man shout and is confused. Mick Dundee encountered the same kind of language barriers in a pub in New York in Crocodile Dundee (1986). Likewise, in Hotel Sorrento (1994) three sisters representative of England, America and Australia discuss Australia’s obsession with vernacular at the dinner table.
This sort of description is not uncommon. Consider, for example, the description of the Australian film industry of the 1980s found in a special article produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1989:

> funding for short drama, documentaries and experimental works, provided primarily through the Australian Film Commission [...] created opportunities for upcoming directors to explore innovative ideas and techniques in film and to acquire practical filmmaking skills. Many resulting films were adventurous and inventive, drawing upon European and American film models for their cinematic modes, then remodelling to reflect Australian cultural and social moods and trends. Some of today's best-known feature film directors, such as Peter Weir and Gillian Armstrong, made documentaries and short dramas during this period. (The Australian Cinema)

While such encapsulated accounts do recognise the role of the Australian government in maintaining the film industry, they fail to address socio-cultural influences and concentrate on the business side of the industry while heralding the possible international success of the national cinema. Although global interests and influences were significant to the cinematic output of the 1990s in Australia, other socio-cultural factors must be equally addressed. I will extend this discussion in chapter 3 when I address Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka’s theorisations of the two industries of Australian cinema and Verhoeven’s third industry. In this chapter I want to address why Australians were willing to take a risk and develop diverse
productions that reflect a multicultural national identity.9

1.3 Globalisation and Neoliberalism

During the early 1990s, Australia experienced its worst recession since the Great Depression (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 353). As a result the national film industry was forced to look outward as local private investment diminished. This outward looking tendency in combination with the recession impacted on the television industry, particularly in terms of local content and Pay-TV. Terry Flew describes the situation as “a crisis of ‘entrepreneurial television’”, contending that the Australian television industry in the 1990s was in its worst state since 1956 (178). The recession led to cuts in advertising, which resulted in cuts to program spending. As a result, all stations reduced local programming. Channel 10 is the extreme example; in order to attract the 16 to 39-year-old age group, channel 10 turned to imported programming and attracted advertisers as the youth-orientated

---

9 The significance of the temporal has been established in discourse analysis, particularly in identity politics. Along with space, time is central to the understanding of social systems (Massey 143). In *The Archaeology Of Knowledge*, Foucault addresses temporality when attempting to analyse the homogeneous events that constitute discourse (189). For example, Foucault argues that “interrogating the being of madness itself” (35) can not discover madness. A discourse of madness is influenced by time:

The unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object ‘madness’, or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time. (36)

Foucault goes on to describe objects as shaped by measures of discrimination and repression and differentiated in daily practice, law, religion, and in medical codes and practices. Thus Foucault recognises the social construction of madness through various discourses and by extension these discourses constitute subjectivity. His argument is similar to the social problematisation of constructions of disability discussed earlier in this chapter.

The human body is a significant aspect of Foucault’s earlier theorisations. David Harvey argues that for Foucault the human body is the only irreducible, as it is the site at which all forms of repression are registered (45). He locates the significance of this in Foucault’s exploration of the power relations that have become institutionalised. He argues alternatively that these power relations can not be understood by some overarching theory. Harvey has also met with criticism from Gill who argued he forgot the impact of future technology (402). Thus subjectivity is contingent on institutional power, which in turn changes temporally according to sociocultural changes including technology.
programming sustained long viewing. Similarly, the Australian film industry began looking outwardly for production support during the 1990s. I offer further discussion of this in Chapter 3 when I turn to Australian national cinema and the film industry.

A perspective often taken to the Australian film industry during the 1990s is globalisation and how this phenomenon affected the production of multicultural and non-national specific narratives (see O’Regan *Australian National Cinema*; O’Regan and Venkatasawmy; Martin *Ghosts of a National Cinema*; O’Regan and Goldsmith; Reid *More Long Shots* and L. French). While such articles praise the situation as progressive in terms of variety of production and aesthetic qualities, globalisation has been recognised in other disciplines as damaging to weaker social groups, due to the link that exists between global politics and neoliberalism:

> [o]ne vehicle for the emergence of this situation has been policies that tend to subject the majority to market forces whilst preserving social protection for the strong (e.g., highly skilled workers, corporate capital, or those with inherited wealth). The policies are cast within a neoliberal discourse of governance that stresses the efficiency, welfare, and freedom of the market, and self-actualisation through the process of consumption. (Gill 401)

10 The introduction of Pay-TV in the early 1990s was expected to challenge the traditional oligopoly characterising Australian television since the 1950s. The *Broadcasting Services Act* was revised in anticipation of the media convergence. The result, according to Flew, was a “curious hybrid of neoliberal policy rhetoric and elements of deregulation.” (179). Pay-TV is not required to meet the local content requirement, but it drama-based channels must ensure 10% of their expenditure on new Australian drama. In this way it has impacted on the overall structure of Australian television.

11 *Green Card* (1990), for example, was filmed entirely outside Australia with a non-Australian cast and crew, with the exception of the director, Peter Weir. Further, it did not address ‘Australian’ themes. It was partially Australian financed and for this reason considered to be an Australian film. According to Reid, it was one of the few Australian government-backed features to have returned 100% of FFC investment and gone into profit (*More Long Shots* 24).
Neoliberal politics dominated the 1980s, affecting social movements well into the 1990s, particularly in the area of disability and resistance to the politicisation of disability. This ethos focused on the individual and denied the existence of community, thus negating the responsibility of the state to intervene in the form of welfare. Neoliberalism is both an economic policy and a social philosophy. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan articulated the philosophy in various ways.\textsuperscript{12} Neoliberalism has become widespread since the 1970s and is based on the following five premises:

1. The rule of the market
2. Cutting public expenditure for social services
3. Deregulation
4. Privatisation
5. Eliminating the concept of ‘the public good’ or ‘community’

(Martinez & García online)

The combined impact of these philosophies could be seen on both the Australian film industry and the disability sector in Australia in the 1990s. To begin with disability, neoliberal structural adjustments encouraged a questionable ‘mutual obligation’ view of disability and disability benefits. The Disability Reform package of 1991 sought to curb the growing number of recipients of the Disability Support pension (previously the Invalid pension) without addressing factors such as unemployment, age, and education. Its Active Society philosophy conformed with neoliberal beliefs that individuals are responsible for their own solutions to society’s

\textsuperscript{12} Both adopted a political and economic philosophy that favoured free enterprise above state intervention. Although it is still questionable as to whether neoliberalism and globalisation will remain economically and politically sustainable, during the ‘Reagan boom’ and the ‘Thatcher miracle’ premature claims of victory were made (Quiggin 258).
problems, branding those who fail to succeed as ‘lazy’. As Camela and Dertimanis quoted in Clear comment:

\[
\text{[t]he tone and substance of the discussion paper puts all the onus on people with disabilities to find employment and to make do with reduced income support. Frankly, the mutual obligation concept appears to be a one way street. (Clear 60)}
\]

This neoliberal aesthetic is a contributing factor toward the contradictory reactions to disability and what to do with disabled people in Australian society. The Richmond report of 1983 recommended the closure of large institutions caring for people with developmental impairments and psychiatric illnesses (Clear 60). Although a move that appeared to encourage the equality of disabled people in the community, the motivations were visibly in line with the neoliberalist tendency to cut public expenditure on social services.

However, the report also offered the alternative of community-based care, an ideal in direct opposition to neoliberalism, which in fact eliminates the concept of the community. As Clear observes:

\[13 \text{ Dead Letter Office (1998) problematises a similar neoliberal value but under a multicultural framework. The male romantic figure of the film, Frank, left Chile several years earlier amidst political turmoil, having witnessed the role of the government and other members of the society in the downfall of his family and community. At a dance in Australia he meets Carmen (also from Chile) who believes that individuals are responsible for their own solutions to society’s problems (accusing Latinos of being “allergic to work”). Although a minor part of the overall narrative, the scene in which this confrontation occurs aptly demonstrates the conflict and again highlights the multicultural aesthetic of Australian national cinema during the 1990s.}\]

\[14 \text{ This is problematised in Cosi (1996), where the Minister for Health and Errol who runs an institution for intellectually impaired adults have the following conversation:}\]

- Minister For Health: Halfway Houses and the like, you should know Errol, there’s a whole new emphasis on community care.
- Errol: Halfway Houses, community care! Come on you mean the government cuts the cost and chucks them on the street.
community in this context must be understood to mean the family home. The focus on community highlighted the role of mothers as unpaid carers and also the lack of a full range of alternative forms of housing and accommodation for disabled people. (60)

Such issues remained peripheral to a number of Australian films that adopted a tragedy view of disability, including Amy (1998), Death in Brunswick (1991), Muriel’s Wedding (1994), and The Sum of Us (1994), in each of which a family member opts to care for an impaired relative. Other films see family members remove impaired relatives from institutions, believing the best care could not be provided in a hospital — for example That Eye, The Sky (1994), Radiance (1998), Hammers Over The Anvil (1991), and Angel Baby (1995). Finally, impaired individuals may display enough consciousness to remove themselves as seen in The Sugar Factory (1998), A Woman’s Tale (1991), and Spider and Rose (1994). However, these individuals may be rejected in the family home — requiring them to adapt alone. Thus while the concept of community may have existed in Australian cinematic representations during the 1990s, the idea remained subversive and peripheral to the national identity. Indeed, most of these narratives operated within a multicultural community, which gained strength by overcoming the stress that comes with caring for an impaired family member. I will follow up this cinematic tendency as it has been analysed from various disability perspectives in the following chapter.

In the quote above, Clear is referring to the Home and Community Care Act of 1985, which emphasised the role of the community in supporting the disabled.
Therefore an inherent ambiguity can be seen to exist within the philosophy of neoliberalism, again illustrating the ‘one way street’ concept. Quite clearly, a disproportionate burden has fallen to women and the disabled. Linden and Gott find that these alternative supports have proved inadequate (25). They highlight the problematic nature of de-institutionalisation in line with indirect discrimination when they claim,

> it is ignorant to suppose that a person who has been deinstitutionalised is by this very act somehow normalised. Arguing that an intellectually disabled person may exercise his or her rights is meaningless if the person is unable to survive the wider community. (25)

Thus the community must also adapt and, as Jane Campbell suggests, examine itself. Although seemingly in opposition to my argument that disability is socially created, Linden and Gott are in fact in line with the more complicated points of the social model, as will become evident when I address indirect discrimination and impairment effect later in this chapter. Reentrance into the community is a process, and when introduced in Australian cinema thematically in films such as *Dance Me To My Song*, *Lilian’s Story* (1995), *Struck By Lightning* and *Bad Boy Bubby* the social obstacles are identified. These films are all discussed in Chapter Five. However, in other films such as *Cosi*, *The Sugar Factory*, and *Angel Baby* social obstacles are forfeited for entertainment’s sake. Darke argues that entertainment

---

15 The debate gained immense media exposure in 1994 when Dominic Sims, an intellectually disabled man, was charged with the digital penetration of two girls (aged six) in Melbourne. Sims was supposed to be attending a day program at the time of the offense. His parents argued that the Department of Health and Community Services placed him in this situation, which triggered a discussion about whether the community would see it as an abuse of rights if the intellectually disabled were forced into day programs. Sims was acquitted as a judge ruled he did not understand his rights when the police questioned him.
works by individualising problems and creating simplified worlds (Everywhere 11). This holds significance to an analysis of the representation of disability in Australian national cinema where disability is widely accepted as an individual’s problem. I return to this argument at various stages throughout this thesis.

1.4 Multiculturalism

Although I intend to discuss multiculturalism in depth in Chapter Three, I introduce it here in general terms to illustrate the neoliberal interpretation of this political framework and the implications for the disability movement, particularly when the framework claims a pluralist position. For Clarke, Forbes and Francis, multiculturalism asserts the legitimacy of difference through an acceptance of cultural difference. They conclude:

[m]ulticulturalism involves a claim for recognition which goes beyond merely accepting the existence of difference. [...] Recognition involves accepting difference according to the terms asserted by hitherto excluded and ignored groups in society. Recognition is about the self-defined identity of others; not the misrecognition derived from the re-assertion of the hegemonic power of dominant groups in the form of an ascribed difference. (xii)

Pluralism as a political concept assumes that in society there are groups of people all striving to live together, and at various times the interests of one or the other bubble to the top of the policy tree. Pluralism recognises that society is not homogenous, but has different groups. For example, The Heartbreak Kid (1993) recognises an Australian multicultural society. Within the diegesis, the Greek-Australian teenagers
are encouraged to take pride in their heritage (represented through sport — soccer) in the same way the Anglo-Australians do (through Aussie Rules football). Admittedly this occurs only after a certain degree of struggle, yet that is part of the process. The pluralist concept, however, does tend to see the many groups that make up society as homogenous without recognising the cross over (that a member of one group may also be a member of another). To use disability as an example, at some point in everyone’s life, impairment will be experienced and should therefore be considered normal (Fletcher 17).

In this way, pluralism, as it has been used with regard to multiculturalism, encourages cultural-insiderism where, although different groups are seen to exist, one is valued above the others. This can be seen in *Death in Brunswick* in which ethnicity is seen as an equally valuable cultural identity, while impairment is constructed as a punishment. Thus while pluralism is a concept that implies greater inclusion to minority groups, the current cultural hierarchy that exists within Australian national cinema combined with the unconscious ableism of wider society has resulted in a disability culture that remains peripheral. Instead, impairment is used to validate other minority groups.

Using the Australian example, Lechte and Bottomley identify the cultural outsider

---

16 While I celebrate the pluralist position as it recognises difference, within these discussions disability seems to be excluded from the framework, perhaps due to its relatively youthful position in terms of politics and civil rights.
as the non-Anglo migrant who is named in negative terms (as not being Anglo) within a discourse of pluralism that assumes homogeneous identities. Likewise, the impaired Australian is labeled in negative terms because they are outside the dominant able-bodied group. Although in theory the plural society exists, a cultural mythology has continued with preference always given to the un-named insider group of the culture. This concept focuses on the hegemonic aspect of culture, which concentrates on the image (the insider group) that is assumed to be representative of everybody without reference to class, race, gender, and impairment.

Lechte and Bottomley argue that the multicultural allows a greater understanding of conflict, not the opposite more generally accepted notion that “conflict explains the multicultural” (23). Drawing on Kristeva, Bourdieu, and Jameson they articulate a notion of the multicultural that uncovers the power struggles involved in the articulation of particular identities, the assertion of cultural identity, the nature of power relations, and why power and conflict are articulated. First, they suggest that current ways of thinking must be problematised, and objectivity must be recognised as a construction. The multicultural is innovative as it recognises and problematises how society can be symbolised, represented, and theorised (22). For Bourdieu, little or no attention is paid to the production of science and theory (Letche and Bottomley 22). The medical model of disability is treated in the same way. This thesis addresses the construction of such power in order to validate disability in a plural society and herald its multicultural value.
Chin Liew Ten argues liberalism offers an achievable framework for multiculturalism. In Ten’s words:

[the liberal solution is not to impose any single conception of what is good on all individuals and groups. Instead, each person is allowed to act on his or her own values as long as there is no harm to others. The state should therefore be largely neutral between different and competing conceptions of the good life. (55)]

This statement suggests a pluralist philosophy as one in which each individual or group is encouraged to live alongside one another in equality, as long as no one harms another. However, a neutral state does not unproblematically offer equality to all, as Bourdieu and Passeron argued in *The Inheritors* in 1964. They found that although the French universities offered equal access to all, children from working-class backgrounds did not succeed to the same degree as those who had inherited money (Macey 48). Likewise, the Australian *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) identifies indirect discrimination as occurring when an unreasonable requirement is placed upon a person who has an impairment. With regard to this Act, Maeve McDonagh has similar concerns. She finds that the ‘equal playing field’ concept is problematic and could in fact be considered discriminatory, as “requiring a disabled person to comply with requirements in the same way as an able-bodied person does can itself amount to discrimination.” (130). In this way, the impairment can not be treated as irrelevant; to do so would place an unfair requirement on a disabled person, as demonstrated by the earlier example of de-institutionalisation. Thus while members of society may not be actively harming others, their inaction means that there is no level playing field, as some members require certain considerations; for
example, not putting stairs in a building does not actively harm members, yet it disadvantages and disables wheelchair users. This will be discussed in depth in Chapter Five when I turn the focus to the individual film text, *Dance Me To My Song*.

At times, disabled people can not operate on an equal level to the able bodied due to the most basic structures of society. Within this pluralist society I have been discussing, disabled people are often not considered to be a group that can influence policy. Parsons notes that this is a misconception and that disabled people have in fact been a driving force in the disability rights movement in Australia. However, people who are not affected by the issues, for example professionals working with disabled people, established the movement (Parsons 16). Despite the numerous disabled people used for background atmospheric purposes, *Muggers* (1999) presents two able-bodied medical students — who are basically con men — as social activists trying to alleviate the plight of the disabled and terminally ill. I will return to the resulting problems of this movement later in the chapter when I address similarities with immigration policies in Australia, particularly the White Australia Policy.

Following the industrial revolution, disabled people were thought of as a group that used resources without contributing to them. The politicisation of disability

---

17 The Nazi euthanasia campaign of the 1930s also used this as a reason to eradicate Germany of disabled people. The argument was made that rising costs associated with wartime prevented distribution of resources to those who could not contribute to building the nation’s wealth.
problematises these pluralist ideals that fail to recognise disabled people as an effective human rights group or movement. Throughout this chapter, I also wish to challenge such notions by uncovering the influence of the social context of discrimination that has become structural within Australian society.

1.5 Euthanasia and Pluralism

I am particularly interested in Ten’s discussion of the good life and justice as it is connected to euthanasia. As mentioned earlier, this was debated during the 1990s in Australia. There was a strong tendency throughout the 1990s to include instances of heart attack, stroke, and cancer in Australian national cinema.\(^\text{18}\) These films almost always include some kind of ‘mercy’ death, particularly if the illness could lead to a physical or psychological impairment. \textit{What I Have Written} (1995), \textit{Cut} (1999) \textit{Under The Lighthouse Dancing} (1996), and \textit{Hotel Sorrento} are typical examples.\(^\text{19}\) I will quote Ten before offering a counter view that I believe is more in line with the essence of Letche and Bottomley’s redefinition of multiculturalism:

\begin{quote}
I have a right to life, then I may choose to go on living, even though my life is not worthwhile, even though my choice is unwise and imprudent, and even though others would be happier if only I would quietly kill myself. In these, and in other ways, one can accept that there are correct and incorrect answers to what a worthwhile life should be, and yet tolerate those who make the wrong choices. (57)
\end{quote}

\(^\text{18}\) Arguably this tendency is simply due to rising incidence of heart attack, cancer, and stroke during the 1990s, however the treatment of characters affected within the narrative is of interest in this thesis.

\(^\text{19}\) ‘Right to Die’ and Living Will laws were also being debated internationally during the 1990s, most prominently in America, the UK, and the Netherlands.
Ten’s decision to use the concept of a ‘worthwhile life’ to illustrate the neoliberal notion that social policy ‘trumps on’ individual rights disregards the rights of people who have impairments. Ten’s suggestion that individual’s rights (invariably of the unnamed ‘insider group’) are more important that social policy is also in direct opposition to his earlier argument that liberalism does not impose any single conception of what is good on all individuals and groups. The government recognises the disabled as a group as evident in benefits such as the Disability Support Pension (DSP), but the problem is more in the failure to recognise the disability sector as a cultural group. Ten’s analysis does not acknowledge the disabled as a cultural group able to contribute to social and political life. Rather, disabled people are seen as living (un)‘worthwhile’ lives and being people who make wrong decisions.

Likewise, E. Bates and Linder-Pelz claim to proceed from a pluralist perspective — uncovering the power struggles that exist between doctors, patients and politicians — when they argue that the medical technology used to keep alive disabled individuals imposes an undue burden on family members. They cite the difficulty of family excursions as evidence of this undue burden (125). It is this impairment-specific, individualised ideology that prompted the disability movement and its argument that it is structures in society that make impairment disabling, rather than the physical or psychological problem.
Arguments for euthanasia often refer to seriously ill or disabled people as supporting evidence for each side of the debate. Dworskin offers the pro-euthanasia argument that if suicide is no longer a crime in the US and it is lawful to uphold a living will that requires the individual not be kept alive by life support, then euthanasia is surely a viable option (183). He exploits the social model of disability when he argues that euthanasia should be legal, as many very sick and disabled people, although fully conscious can not commit suicide without the assistance of others (183). He cites many examples from the early 1990s to illustrate his case that euthanasia was a hot topic during the decade; however, each case fails to recognise the role of society in contributing to the disablement of certain individuals.

The ideology is countered by the social theory of disability, which in Harriett McBryde Johnson’s words claims “we shouldn’t offer assistance with suicide until we all have the assistance we need to get out of bed in the morning and live a good life ” (22). McBryde Johnson’s anti-euthanasia argument suggests euthanasia should not be considered until the social discrimination of disabled people is properly addressed. Helen Meekosha finds that representations of disability in cinema often suggest that disabled people have inherently worthless lives. In support of McBryde Johnson’s propositions, Meekosha reports:

[...] research found in the USA suggests that those in states where the ‘death option’ is mobilised, there are relatively fewer support services or structures available to make life ‘worth living’. (*Superchicks, Clones, Cyborgs and Cripples* 26)

---

20 As indicated earlier, providing services to disabled people is an important aspect of the social model; however, allowing a service to eradicate them from society is contrary to valuing their lives.
Thus the euthanasia debate is inherently tied to social services. A link can be made here with the Nazi euthanasia program, which Hugh Gregory Gallagher attributes to rising costs associated with war time (332). This is addressed in Muggers as the character of Professor Charles Lawrence complains, “There are two things the government loathes to spend money on — health and education.” In addition, the neoliberal aesthetic of Australian society, particularly with regards to health, is satirised in this film as the poor are allowed to die so that the rich can buy organs.

Robert Manne lists euthanasia as a major controversy of the 1990s in Australia. It is his concern that legalised euthanasia can offer no protection to individuals who may seek assisted suicide because they believe it is in their family’s best interest. This is addressed in Spider and Rose as Rose’s son — despite promising her a granny flat in his back yard — becomes apprehensive when she is well enough to leave hospital and it no longer appears as though she will die. She finds a ‘worthwhile’ identity by interacting with the equally socially marginal Spider and Jack, and rejects this pressure to die, escaping the confines of family obligation on her own.21 Manne argues that the economic rationalist view of the world has contributed to this

21 Despite problematising this tendency, Spider and Rose uses impairment and disability symbolically within the narrative to make this point. For example, as her son tries to pressure Rose to return to the hospital, he attempts to give her a cane to use. Within the narrative the cane operates as a symbol of incapacitation rather than enablement and Rose refuses to take it, arguing that he is trying to keep her old.
situation in which family members feel pressured to die.\textsuperscript{22}

1.5.1 Nazi Germany

The situation Manne describes is reminiscent of Nazi Germany where disabled people were officially killed as a result of pressures to cut costs on health (Gallagher 334). Although the exact number is unknown, it is estimated that beginning in 1938 and throughout World War II over 200,000 disabled German citizens were murdered under the Nazi ‘euthanasia’ program.\textsuperscript{23}

Friedlander argues that the murder of disabled people and the holocaust were ideologically linked, as both related to eradicating hereditary traits that polluted the Nazi ideal socio-racial utopia (65). This was an extreme implementation of popular Western philosophical and scientific arguments of the times (Gallagher 330).\textsuperscript{24} Prior to the euthanasia program, the Third Reich initiated a sterilisation program to prevent people from reproducing who had certain genetic conditions including:

- feeblemindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive insanity, genetic epilepsy,
- Huntington’s chorea, genetic blindness or deafness, or severe alcoholism. (Proctor quoted in J. Morris \textit{Pride Against Prejudice} 49)

\textsuperscript{22} For Manne, the obvious progression is from voluntary euthanasia to mandatory euthanasia. An economic rationalist view of the world, he argues, will eventually lead to social pressure to cut costs by rationalising the deaths of the terminally ill (253).

\textsuperscript{23} According to Snyder, the euthanasia program was a series of “Eugenics measures designed to improve the quality of the German ‘race’” (87). Further, eugenics is derived from a Greek word meaning ‘wellborn’.

\textsuperscript{24} Darwinian theories of evolution and the rediscovery of Mendelin Law encouraged Victorians in the belief that the biological world could be predictable. Social Darwinism sought to apply evolutionary and genetic principles to human society and breeding. Alfred Hoche (psychiatrist) and Karl Binding (lawyer) argued in a 1920s book \textit{The Destruction of Life Devoid of Value} that the medical profession should participate in health giving \textit{and} death making.
Chapter 1 Cultural Changes

This program was in line with other countries including Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Turkey and the American State of Indiana (J. Morris *Pride Against Prejudice* 48). In Germany, this sterilisation program ceased in 1939, the year the euthanasia program became official.

The program began in 1938 with the killing of infants but was then expanded in 1939 to include adults. Children up to the age of three who were born with a variety of impairments were reported to the government via questionnaires filled in by their local physicians. These impairments included:

- idiocy or Mongolism (especially if associated with blindness or deafness);
- microcephaly or hydrocephaly of a severe or progressive nature; deformities of any kind, especially missing limbs, malformations of the head, or spina bifida; or crippling deformities such as spastics. (J. Morris *Pride Against Prejudice* 51)

On the basis of these questionnaires it was decided if these children should live or die, “neither the assessors nor the review physicians ever saw the patient” (Gallagher 328). By 1941, the children’s program was expanded to include children up to 17 years old. Officially the program allowed for the “merciful death” of people with incurable illnesses, but in reality most of those murdered were not terminally ill, in pain, or anxious to die (Gallagher, 327). According to Friedlander:

---

25 Another 29 American states were to follow this sterilisation program. The first forced sterilisation was carried out in 1907 in the US (Marks 35). Due to the similar actions taking place in Allied countries, the Germans were not tried for war crimes in relation to this mass eradication of disabled people (Marks 37).

26 This process allowed people to participate in the program without being psychologically harmed as those ordering the killings never saw the people and those that saw the people never actually ordered their death, just forwarded their medical details to be assessed (Gallagher 328).
Although the people sterilized and later killed were called mental patients (Geisteskranke) the group included far more individuals without mental disorders: epileptics, the blind, the deaf, the mute, the retarded, the senile, alcoholics, and those with physical abnormalities. The Germans thus sterilized and killed persons who in the United States today are covered by the Act for Disabled Americans (ADA). (66)

Friedlander’s connection to the ADA is interesting because at the time the Nazis were sterilizing and killing people covered by the Act, America was also conducting overt discriminatory regulations against people with the same sorts of impairment. Jenny Morris writes that during the same period, Americans used Darwinist theories to “argue the superiority of industrial capitalism” (Pride Against Prejudice 47). Therefore, while it is important to recognize the impact of Nazi policies on disabled people, the ideology was not exclusive to Germany.

In Nazi Germany disabled citizens were called ‘useless eaters’, and the economics of euthanasia were widely discussed. The long-term care of patients who would not be economically productive made little sense in wartime when budgets were in deficit and health resources limited. Gallegher recognizes the importance of cinema in gaining support for this program and perpetuating the ideology that disabled people had lives ‘not worth living’.

1.5.2 Singer’s Euthanasia Discussions

There are alarming similarities between the Nazi philosophy on officially sanctioned killing and Peter Singer’s views on disability. It was also during the 1990s that
Australian philosopher Peter Singer rose to notoriety as an advocate for ending the life of children born with severe impairments. The values Singer promotes are similar to those Hugh Gregory Gallagher maintains are based on dangerous assumptions that can lead to ‘unspeakable acts’, including mass murder by the Third Reich (334). Singer first came to be known for his views on animal rights. He argues against human superiority (ix) and writes in favour of racial, ethnic and gender equality; yet he argues that parents should be allowed to euthenase disabled babies up to 28 days after their birth (Kushe and Singer 195).27

Singer argues that the clearest way to see the relevance of the moral principle of ethics is to consider the situation of disabled people (51). Singer attempts to align himself with the social movement of disability by claiming that it is not necessary to discuss how physically able a disabled person is. His definition is quite simple: they lack some ability that ‘normal people’ have (51). In addition, they sometimes require being treated differently.

Singer does not fully engage with the social model of disability, as he goes on to describe certain situations where equality is impossible. For example, he suggests a blind person would be unable to proof read or a person who requires the use of a

27 I am reminded of Singer’s preoccupation with speciesism when Meekosha connects eradicating disabled people with species-cide. This possibility will arise as audiences become aware of the discourse of disability and films question the moral right to survive into the next millennium (Superchicks, Clones, Cyborgs and Cripples 25). Singer frequently discusses the dangers of species-cide, but argues in favour of removing disabled people from society at birth.
wheelchair for mobility could not act as a firefighter. In contrast Vic Finklestein articulates such situations within the context of the social theory of disability. Finklestein illustrates this theory with the amusing story of a mythological place where everyone uses a wheelchair and the physical world is structured accordingly, as are social relationships. It is the ‘able-bodied’ visitors to the world who are disabled.28 Thus, disability can be related to how humans have chosen to construct the world (Finkelstein To Deny or Not To Deny). For example, the blind person is unable to proof read because the document is not in Braille, according to a social model of disability.

Recently, the social model of disability has come under scrutiny for its lack of emphasis on impairment. In order to stress the importance of social and cultural constructions, the relevance of impairment has been somewhat ignored. Initially, this social model appeared to provide a much needed discourse enabling people with impairments a way to articulate their experiences:

> it took me several years of struggling with the heavy door to my building [...] to realize (sic) that the door was an accessibility problem. [...] I interpreted it, automatically, as a problem arising from my illness [...] rather than as a problem arising from the built environment. (Wendell 46)

However, at times the social model does not go far enough, as Sally French argues,

28 Nora Groce studied the incidence of deafness in an island community in her book, Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language, and found that due to the unusually high incidence of deafness on the island of Martha’s Vineyard during the Nineteenth century, everyone spoke sign language regardless of their hearing capabilities. This anthropological study has given weight to Finklestein’s fantasy.
“some of the most profound problems experienced by people with certain impairments are difficult, if not impossible, to solve by social manipulation” (17). There have been calls for a social theory of impairment to note the existence and relevance of impairment (Shakespeare and Watson *Defending the Social Model* 1). Likewise, Wendell finds that “the biological and the social are interactive in creating disability” (35). Working from these expressions of dissatisfaction with the model and parallels drawn with feminist theory, Carol Thomas defined ‘impairment effects’ as ways to articulate the experience of impairment within the social model.

Thomas’ theory separates disability and impairment in the same way as the social model, but goes a step further in recognising that some limitations experienced are a direct result of impairment while still stressing the importance of social and cultural factors. Despite considerable criticism, Thomas is careful to stay within a social model when dealing with these traditional ‘medical model’ domains.

While I welcome these latest inclusions to the social model of disability, throughout this thesis I intend to stay true to the original definitions of disability and impairment as established by Oliver. I will use Thomas’ ‘impairment effect’ when discussing the implications of impairment that have previously remained unarticulated by the social model. These notes will be particularly relevant in Chapter Five, when I discuss *Dance Me to My Song* a key film in Australian national cinema of the 1990s that presents a social theory of disability and impairment.
To return to Singer, he recognises that the centuries of discrimination against disabled people are equal to the prejudice experienced by racial minorities. His examples include the way disabled people were locked up out of sight and used as slave labour and also the Nazi euthanasia program in which many intellectually impaired individuals were killed despite being capable of living and enjoying life. This has resonates with the contemporary phenomena of people being reluctant to hire disabled people for fear their business will fail. Again, Singer likens this form of discrimination to arguments in favour of discrimination against racial minorities.

It is only recently, claims Singer that we are considering disabled people as a disadvantaged group and thinking about the injustice done to this group. He suggests we need to ensure that legislation prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and gender also prohibits disability discrimination. Arguments for affirmative action proposed by these groups apply even more strongly to disabled people, and mere equality of opportunity is not enough. Singer argues that it is therefore justifiable to spend more on behalf of disabled people than on other people (53).

Singer argument’s is limited by the need to ‘draw a line’ somewhere. This allows him to justify the contradictions in his arguments regarding equality for disabled people and euthanasia and infanticide. For Singer, euthanasia is outside disability

---

29 This is demonstrated, largely unproblematically, in *Angel Baby* when Harry is fired from his job after his boss discovers he has schizophrenia. His boss’ main concern is how the customers will react. Despite constantly arguing in favour of their right to have a child, Harry and Kate seem to accept this discrimination as the way things ought to be. This is reinforced in the narrative as Harry immediately falls into psychosis following his boss’ decision to get rid of him.
discrimination. Although Singer encourages people to “emphatically [imagine] ourselves in their situation” (53) his subsequent argument is from an ableist position and prejudicial against disabled people who have been discriminated against as a group. Singer argues that if people without the full use of their legs were given the opportunity to take a pill to be able to walk they would. His evidence is that disabled people often seek medical attention to eliminate disability or pain. This argument fails to recognise the very fact that the social model of disability proposes that everyone experiences impairment at some point in life and good health care is essential and should be provided on the basis of need (Fletcher 17). The model, however, also proposes that medical solutions will not solve social ‘ills’. Singer does not address this argument.

Although he identifies the Nazi euthanasia program (discussed above) as an example of discrimination against disabled people, Singer recommends the same measures that led to that killing regime. He is in favour of killing infants whose lives are “not worth living” (184), citing children with spina bifida as an example. Again, this is alarmingly similar to the Nazi program — both in terminology and ideology. It seems his earlier argument about the civil rights of disabled people and the relevance of the social model of disability is easily negated by an ableist interpretation of the effects of impairment.

30 Singer connects this with limited resources, another alarming similarity with Nazi euthanasia programs, which some have argued evolved due to limited health funding during war time.
Singer is proud of breaking taboos that have been around since the fall of the Nazis. The politicisation of disability during the 1990s consolidated the question of euthanasia and its value for Singer (viii–ix). Singer’s rationale for the ethical justification of infanticide is related to both consciousness and value. He argues that infants should not be considered as humans because they lack the self-consciousness, the rationality, and the autonomy of adults, and that killing them is therefore justifiable (182). Singer is quick to make the distinction between killing disabled and ‘normal’ infants. Killing normal infants is not justifiable because parents do not regret the birth of a child without impairment (182-183). Singer’s discussion is predicated on the assumption that parents regret the birth of a disabled child. He also finds that disabled children are harder to adopt out. Yet non-white children are also harder to adopt and the logical extension of Singer’s argument is that they lack self-consciousness and are not valued and so should be killed also. But Singer disagrees with killing mixed race babies because they can not be adopted (McBryde Johnson 21). The difference is that Singer approaches disabled infants from a medical position while recognising the workings of racism in relation to the adoption of mixed race babies. Singer believes non-voluntary euthanasia should be extended to adults only if they are not self-conscious, rational or autonomous —

31 At times, the same argument could be applied to the birth of a female. Due to China’s one child policy trying to limit population growth, many female foetuses were aborted or killed as newborns. Parents regretted the birth of a female, particularly in rural areas where boys were prized as being able to work the land and support their families (Beech 8). A similar trend occurred in India, where eventually, in 1996, pre-natal sex determination screening was outlawed. Both countries now have a shortage of females (Allahbadia 411).
especially if mentally they have not progressed past infancy. 32 However, as Robert Mann suggests, the logical progression is from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia (253). I have demonstrated throughout this chapter that a link exists between euthanasia and economic rationalism, which results in less health services for the disabled and terminally ill.

Singer himself concedes that the inner perspective of people with some of the conditions he believes justify infanticide, such as hemophilia and Down’s syndrome, is not so ‘crippling’ that life is not worth living (187). Therefore Singer is in fact justifying infanticide on the basis of social interpretations of disability, although earlier claiming that equality is a basic ethical principle (21). This equality of course extends to racial minorities; however, when euthanasia is added to the picture it becomes problematic, especially under Singer’s inconsistent definition of social conditioning. When the voluntary euthanasia bill was introduced in the Northern Territory in 1996 it was resisted by the Aboriginal population as it was against tribal law (Australian Medical, Church Groups Challenge Euthanasia Law). Further, some Aboriginal people stopped seeking medical attention for fear they would be killed (Australian Territory Legalises Euthanasia).

This reaction to euthanasia by Aboriginal groups is not surprising given the decimating impact of colonisation on the indigenous population of Australia.

32 Singer distinguishes between voluntary, non-voluntary, and involuntary euthanasia. Non-voluntary euthanasia, according to Singer, occurs when the subject has never had the capacity to choose life or death or if a person who once had the consciousness to choose has lost it, and never expressed an opinion on the subject while still capable of choosing (181). Involuntary euthanasia occurs when the
Colonisation saw thousands of indigenous Australians die as a result of disease or murder. These results of colonization were explained at the time by the social Darwinist notion that only the fittest survive and Aborigines were destined to die (Tatz). This philosophy also underpins and justifies the discrimination against disabled people, particularly in the area of infanticide and euthanasia.33

1.6 Immigration policies in Australia

Before returning to the specific cultural climate of Australia during the 1990s, it is necessary for me to extend my analysis back to the early Twentieth century, particularly as I am attempting to connect a disability culture with multiculturalism. Prior to the multicultural policies in operation today, Australia has seen a number of changes in terms of immigration and colonialism. Following decimation, policies can be divided into Assimilation, Integration and Multiculturalism. Assimilation and Integration existed under the umbrella of the White Australia Policies. According to the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, a fear of Asian immigration, dependence upon British and American defence forces and a populist self-image of Australia as a white nation motivated the White Australia Policy (Abolition of The White Australia Policy). Multiculturalism experienced a backlash in the late 1990s due to globalisation and political movements such as One Nation and the Liberal party under John Howard’s reassertion of traditional values.

person killed was capable of consenting to their death but did not do so (179). Voluntary euthanasia applies to euthanasia carried out at the request of the person being killed (176). And genocide in the case of the Nazi ‘euthanasia’ program.
As Labor began losing votes in the early 1990s, it also attempted a return to less inclusive politics. I will return to these debates later in the chapter.

Post-WW2 Assimilation (1945 to mid-1960s) favoured British immigrants, allowing for other groups only under the understanding that they would fully assimilate into Australian culture by rejecting their own culture and languages. This also applied to Aboriginal and Islander people whose culture was denigrated in favour of assimilation and integration. Buckley and Wheelwright argue that when white immigrants colonised Australia, they brought with them a class structure and capitalist ideology (18). Although at that time there was little ‘purity’ of race in Australia, on either side (Aborigines or Europeans), “indigenous Australians were the first victims of racism which was later associated with the White Australia Policy.” (Buckley and Wheelwright 21). Therefore a ‘white nation’, like an ‘able’ nation today, was a socially constructed myth, not a reality, and prejudice was used to assert this unattainable mythology. As a binary process, one side of the dichotomy is named and therefore stigmatised. Goffman identifies these social trends and articulates a concept in relation to a process of normalisation and stigmatisation.

Goffman distinguishes between the *normals* and those who possess a stigma, which he has split into three different types. These include physical deformities, blemishes of individual character, and tribal differences (race, nation, religion). Goffman argues that those who have stigmas are discriminated against by the normals
because “we believe the person with the stigma is not quite human” (73). Although Goffman recognises that an ideology is created in regard to stigma to explain inferiority and rationalise fears about the stigmatised group, he places the stigma within the body similar to the medical model of disability.

Following World War Two, there was a great influx of Eastern and Southern European immigration, threatening the dominance of British-Australians. As migration grew and peaked in the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult to assert the popular mythologies of a white nation. The policy was altered in the mid-1960s to integration recognising the hardships experienced by immigrants when integrating into Australian society and suggesting that a total loss of original language and custom was not necessary. However, full participation in an integrated Australian society was the aim, as with the assimilation policy it replaced. The Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs attributes the emergence of multiculturalism in the 1970s to migrant groups. Following integration, migrant groups began forming associations with the aim of maintaining their culture — that is, their language and heritage (The Evolution of Australia’s Multicultural Policies).

They’re a Weird Mob was a UK production made in Australia before the 1970s Australian cinema revival, and it illustrates the history of Australia’s immigration policies both in terms of its representations and production. The film’s protagonist, Nino, is an Italian who immigrated to Australia to work with his cousin on a
newspaper for Italians in Australia. This film was released around the same period that Australia’s immigration policy changed from assimilation to integration, and followed a seven year drought of local filmmaking in Australia (Pike and Cooper). Integration policies recognised the importance of ethnic organisations to help with the resettlement process. This newspaper for which Nino works and his association with other Italians illustrate this idea. However, the film also depicts Australians (particularly British-Australians) devaluing the importance of these organisations. When Nino is entering the country, he meets an immigration official that he tries to tell about his magazine for Italians in Australia. The officer dismisses his attempts at conversation. I will expand on the theorisation about and the typical productions emerging from Australian national cinema after the 1970s in Chapter Three.

Australia’s foreign policy focused on Asia during the 1980s and 1990s. Paul Keating was Prime Minister of Australia from 1991 to 1996. His leadership was in line with the multicultural aesthetic of the late 1980s and early 1990s. He introduced native title legislation following the High Court Mabo decision, initiated moves to making Australia a republic, and promoted relations with Asia. His ‘big picture’ saw the future of a multicultural Australia bound to Asia (Singleton 1).

A multicultural Australia bound to Asia is reflected in *Aya* (1990), a film in which a Japanese war bride is able to reintegrate a Japanese cultural identity into her emerging Australian identity by divorcing her restrictive Australian husband (representative of old world values). Aya finds her cultural identity bound to food,
and along with another Japanese war bride, makes pickles using beer — thus symbolically combining Japan and Australia culturally through food. Frank sees himself as Aya’s saviour and attempts to dictate when she can embrace her Japanese identity and when she must reject it. However, as the marriage breaks down each retreats into their own original culture, exemplifying the struggle involved in a multicultural transition. Frank becomes possessive and irrational, adopting the Australian masculine identity. After discovering Aya’s emerging independence through her Japanese-Australian identity, he takes all of his own ties to Japan (pictures he drew while on service in Japan) buries them in her herb garden and pisses on them. The marriage breakdown occurs following Frank’s accident that left him with psychological impairment and an unwillingness to find employment. Thus Aya finds independence and cultural identity following the incidence of impairment. Other films that explore an identity as bound to Asia during the 1990s include Traps (1993), Turtle Beach (1991), Holy Smoke (1999), and Heaven’s Burning (1997). These films, through female protagonists, further problematise the Australian national identity as inherently masculine. I will address this construction in Chapter Three when I turn the analysis toward the male ensemble cycle of Australian filmmaking.

1.7 1990s National Leadership: from Paul Keating to John Howard

Keating suggested Australians alter their political perspective to the Asia-Pacific region and become a republic in order to pull together as a nation. Keating also drew distinctions between the old Australia and the new Australia. With his allegiance to
Britain, Bob Menzies (Liberal Prime Minister from 1939 to 1941 and from 1949 to 1966) was representative of old Australia while John Curtin (Labor Prime Minister 1941 to 1945) embodied the values of Keating’s vision of new Australia. Throughout his prime ministership Keating was able to combine the economics of the right with the contemporary social movements of the left, including environmentalism, feminism, multiculturalism, and Aboriginal and gay rights (Manne 69-70).

Despite a disciplined and united government that was considered economically responsible by the Australian public following four years of low inflation, Labor lost the 1996 election. Manne suggests Australian voters were seeking ‘politically incorrect’ candidates as a reason why Keating lost. Howard’s successful election campaign “for all of us” reflected the backlash against political correctness emerging in the 1990s. Anti-Mabo and anti-multicultural politicians including

---

34 Curtin removed Australian troops from the Middle East against the wishes of Winston Churchill. At the time, Curtin turned to American President Roosevelt.

35 Ironically, despite high levels of unemployment and inflation, Labor won the ‘unwinnable’ 1993 election during a recession (Henderson 113). Singleton cites a Keating supporter as saying “you can take the boy out of Bankstown, but you can’t take Bankstown out of the boy” (1) when Keating lost the 1996 election. This supporter was commenting on the aggressive nature of Keating’s style of government, particularly as he pursued matters such as “Aboriginal rights, the republic, and Australia’s move into Asia” (Singleton 1). Thus Keating pursued minority rights issues with aggressive determination while in government.

Terry McCrann of The Australian offered the suggestion that Australian voters were divided, separating Sydney-Melbourne-Canberra (the agenda-setting ‘triangle’) from the rest of the country. The triangle was pro-Labor — attracted to Keating’s ‘the big picture’. Voters outside the triangle were put off by Keating’s political correctness and voted liberal (Manne 69).

The Australian working class was largely amalgamated into ‘middle Australia’ by the 1990s. The ‘struggling’ lower-middle class — the new working class — were not attracted to Keating’s big picture, believing it was not in the interests of all Australians, rather in the interests of minorities. As a result, political loyalties faded and approximately one million Labor voters voted for the Coalition in 1996 (Manne 71).
Graeme Campbell, Bob Burgess, Bob Katter, and most famously Pauline Hanson won seats.

When John Howard won this election, he celebrated the end of 13 years of Labor political correctness: “people can now talk about certain things without living in fear of being branded as a bigot or a racist”. In the lead up to the election, Howard reconfigured Liberal Party philosophy in response to recent economic and political experience, reaching into Labor’s support base. Howard campaigned to the majority, not a “select few” — his slogan was, “for all of us”. The Liberal Party was traditionally anti-unionist and now feminists, environmentalists, the ethnic lobby, multiculturalists and ‘Aboriginal industry’ joined the Labor camp and were considered by Liberals as “noisy minority groups” (Brett 8-9).

Brett attributes the discourse of grievance opened by John Howard which allowed a place for others such a Pauline Hanson, to the previous government’s economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s in response to globalisation. Further, this resurgence of a politics of grievance has taken the form of racist politics (17). Howard’s election campaign against Keating was essentially negative, suggesting national identity was not something that could be imposed from above by elite’s such as Keating (Brett 25). This negativity encouraged a politics of grievance in the form of racism, despite Howard’s weak assurances that he did not agree with Hanson’s essentially racist philosophy.
1.8 The Australian Disability Discrimination Act

Similarities can be found between minority movements such as gays and lesbians, women and racial minorities, and the disability movement. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s several anti-discrimination laws were introduced in Australian (see earlier table for encapsulated account). In the 1990s, this led to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) being expanded to include discrimination against disabled people. In 1991 a HREOC report was drawn up specifically addressing discrimination against disabled people. The Hawke-Labor government believed in social justice for disabled people and in 1991 his Minister for Health, Housing and Community Services shared a vision of Australia as it included disabled people:

[...]he Labour vision of a fair society is one where all Australians can share equitably in the distribution of resources, especially employment opportunities; where all Australians have equal civil, legal and industrial rights; where there is fair and equal access to essential services such as housing, health and education; and where all have the opportunity to participate in community life and decisions which affect the community. (1)

The Hawke government saw “a better deal for people with disabilities” as an “essential part of that vision” (1), believing that as a group disabled people had suffered for too long. It is worth observing that this report noted all the causes of this suffering as being socially created. It did not refer to impairment at all. However, this was reconfigured and introduced in 1992 as the Disability Discrimination Act.36

---

36 The eventual Act focused more on impairment in order to avoid problems associated with state and territory Acts, although the outcome is debatable.
The introduction of this Act suggests a wider degree of tolerance was valued in Australian society during the period of national cinema that I am addressing in this thesis (1990 to 1999). However, this societal trend was largely not reflected in Australian national cinema at the time. I would like to address three possible reasons for this situation, drawing first on the wording of the Act itself and its relation to state specific legislation, then Letche and Bottomley’s cultural insiderism philosophy introduced previously. Finally, I compare the process of rehabilitating a nation from inherent prejudice to an individual rehabilitating after injury.

The Australian legal system is complicated. It consists of one federal, six state and two territory jurisdictions. As such, the Federal Disability Discrimination Act 1992 attempted to go further than state laws in terms of the protection it offered disabled people. The definition of disability and disability discrimination varies across the different jurisdictions. For example, the NSW legislation separates physical and mental disabilities and, for reasons I will explore later, people were reluctant to pursue claims because the Act required them to identify themselves as mentally disabled (for example people with epilepsy). The Western Australian legislation avoided this by having a single definition of impairment, but like the NSW Act required the complainant to identify the cause of the impairment. The Victorian Act, on the other hand, focuses on the effect rather than the cause of the impairment. This Act was also extended in 1988 to include organisms capable of causing disease to prevent AIDS related discrimination. However, HIV-related discrimination was

---

37 This is problematic because many disabled individuals can not identify the cause of their disability, providing just reason for the exclusion from protection of the Act (McDonagh 126).
not covered as the Act did not extend to organisms capable of causing AIDS (which then caused disease). The definition of disability in the Federal Act closely resembled the Victorian Act, but avoided the artificiality of defining psychological disorders as a ‘malfunction of part of the body’. The definition of disability in section 4 of the Australian *Disability Discrimination Act* includes:

(a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or

(b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or

(c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

(d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

(e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or

(f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

(g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour.

(*Disability Discrimination Act* 1992, Section 4)

Although this Act avoided problems in terms of its definition of disability encountered by the earlier state laws, the definition of discrimination proved problematic. The Act defined two forms of discrimination: direct and indirect.38

---

38 Disability discrimination is divided into direct and indirect discrimination according to the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992. According to section 5, discrimination occurs when a disabled person is discriminated against or treated less favourably due to their disability (impairment). Section 6 extends the definition to include indirect discrimination where disabled people are discriminated against by not being treated any differently. Indeed, a person is indirectly discriminated against when they require different accommodations, which are not provided.
McDonagh questions the validity of applying this model of anti-discrimination to disability, particularly as it is worded in the Australian Act. This model relies on the notion of comparability. While this is difficult for any form of discrimination legislation, it may be impossible to find a comparable work situation for people with similar impairments. Further, identifying the appropriate group for comparison is problematic, as there are a large number of different impairments. McDonagh claims that the most fundamental problem arises from the requirement that the feature in question (impairment) be treated as irrelevant. This is particularly problematic for disability because “requiring a disabled person to comply with requirements in the same way as an able-bodied person does can itself amount to discrimination” (130).

Likewise, the *Sex Discrimination Act* introduced in 1984 has been accused of causing, perpetuating, and exaggerating the inequality of women in Australia (Linden and Gott 15). In 1994, the Australian Law Reform Commission released *Equality Before the Law: Justice for Women*, which found that the rights of women were not equal to the rights of men, and that there was in fact a structural bias in the Australian legal system (Linden and Gott 15). The report lists five key areas in which this occurs:

1. Difficulty finding relevant information
2. Not being taken seriously
3. Given false information
4. Prohibitive legal costs
5. Barriers to Access

*(Equality Before The Law)*
The report found that barriers to access existed that were particularly discriminatory toward “women with special needs, such as Indigenous women and non-English speaking women” (Equality Before The Law). I would argue that women with impairments should be added to this list as they face barriers within the general community with regard to the first four points — especially the prohibitive legal costs, as disabled people are in general poorer than nondisabled people (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare 186). Although this report aimed to uncover the way the Australian legal system discriminated against women, going so far as to identify minority groups especially affected, it left out the disabled, in another example of cultural insiderism.

This was also reflected in Australian national cinema, where the social interpretation was still that disabled people were an homogenous group, separate from the able or even other minorities. The Disability Discrimination Act recognises the existence of another group in society, yet cultural insiderism has tended to encourage other minorities to identify away from this group, arguably at the expense of it. For example, in The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert (1994), a more inclusive environment for gay men in Australian popular culture is suggested. This was achieved by allowing a queer space in the more traditional rural settings of Australian cinema as opposed to the more recent urban locations. However, the film has been accused of denigrating Asian women, despite its inclusive outlook on homosexuality:

[w]hile all the main and secondary characters in the film were treated with respect, humanized and dignified, the Filipina was treated with condemnation, dehumanised and
Margison accuses the film of mainstreaming gay lifestyles at the expense of two other marginalised groups — Asians and women. This idea that marginalised groups can only be ‘rehabilitated’ (to use O’Regan’s words) at the expense of another relates to the tendency to see minority groups as homogenous. This fails to recognise the fundamental cross over that exists in relation to social discrimination.

Earlier I touched on Singer’s contention that if a magic drug were offered to disabled people to eradicate their impairment they would not hesitate to take it. This bears little relevance to an argument addressing disability as socially created, as no form of medical intervention can provide answers to the structural and systematic discrimination against disabled people, as demonstrated by the situation in US States that offer the death option. However, I would now like to turn to rehabilitation theory to connect the social interpretation of disability and the immigration policy of integration.

Wendy Seymour finds that following serious illness or injury, newly disabled individuals attempt to redefine themselves under able-bodied parameters. This demonstrates the hegemony of the medical model of disability, as people attempt to

---

39 Although I am aware of film theory approaching a single character as representative of the whole, and plan to do the same to a certain degree myself, I’d like to indicate here the implicit problems this kind of criticism has in terms of homogenising the other, an effect which I am constantly attempting to negotiate in this thesis.
hang on to the past when in reality they need to let go of their old self and explore new subjectivities (Seymour 42). This is similar to the policy of integration under which different ethnic groups were welcome as long as they redefined themselves in line with the dominant culture. The current ‘see the ability, not the disability’ movement has been criticised as encouraging an environment that attempts to render the difference invisible rather than taking pride in it in order to effect change. Thus disabled people exist within the able culture under the condition that they must strive to pass as able bodied. Parsons suggests this is not dissimilar to the assimilation policies of the 1950s, when Aboriginal people were encouraged to live like white Australians (16). This extends to Australian national cinema, where the disabled are encouraged to deny their social identity as disabled in order to fit into an able-bodied world.

This can be seen in *Angel Baby* when Harry feels social pressure to deny his impairment. Seeing medication as a symbol of his impairment and thus exclusion from society, rather than viewing it as an enabling feature, he decides to stop taking it in order to fit into an able-bodied employment world. Although this representation would appear to problematise this feature of an ableist society, it is left to hang unproblematically as the film takes a more dramatic turn. Thus, the onus is left on Harry to reintegrate without any responsibility being given to the social definitions of disability. I will discuss this film in more depth in Chapters Three and Four.
Chapter 1 Cultural Changes

1.9 Australian Bicentenary 1988

Australia’s 1988 Bicentenary provided an opportunity for the problematisation of similar issues pertaining to Australia’s national identity. It forced Australians to think about their history as a colonised country. A reflection on the archeology of knowledge around colonisation took place in many sections of the academy and Australian society in general. The bicentenary simultaneously evoked feelings of celebration and mourning amongst different Australians. The four-hour live television program, *Australia Live: Celebration of a Nation*, attempted to encourage a singular nationalism amongst Australians by disregarding Aboriginal protesters in its panorama of Australia past and present. By not problematising the colonial gaze and first world interests in and of this ‘celebration of a nation’, ideological differences were left out of the discourse. The program received serious criticism (M. Morris 160), as the Bicentennary became an opportunity for self-criticism amongst Australian cultural anthropologists.

Protests with regard to the celebrations took both individual and collective forms amongst the Aboriginal community. For example, on 1 January 1988, Aboriginal people launched their Year of Mourning by casting wreaths into Botany Bay. Later they were prevented from staging protests during Prime Minister Bob Hawke’s speech in Centennial Park (M. Morris 160). Oodgeroo Noonuccal changed her

---

40 While groups of Aboriginal protestors were excluded from ‘celebrations’, Aboriginal actor Ernie Dingo was part of *Celebration of a Nation*. Although Aboriginal, he is a non-aggressive figure, a black man who has succeeded in white man’s culture. He is not overtly political and refuses to be drawn into debates such as Aboriginal deaths in custody, and as such has been criticised by some groups for not being militant while others appreciate his accessibility (McKee 195-97).

41 In this way the national identity being promoted by the government disregarded a group perhaps most affected by colonization.
Chapter 1 Cultural Changes

name from Kath Walker in protest of the Bicentennial celebrations of 1988. By doing so, she symbolically returned to her Aboriginal language, history and land (Barczyk-Barakonska 128). Barczyk-Barakonska argues that the name Kath Walker was a medium of colonization under the language of assimilation and integration (128). Taking the name Oodgeroo Noonuccal rendered visible her difference. This cultural problematisation, particularly in the area of multiculturalism, became official in 1989 when it became a national cultural policy. As a result cultural diversity became more mainstream in television (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 23).

1.10 Disability Creation

Finklestein identified three stages of disability ‘creation’; the feudal era where there was no separate disabled group, the industrial revolution when the concept of able-bodied normality was established and a third stage yet to occur when the gaze would be taken off the body and put onto society. He paid particular attention to the second stage where the construction of disability as dependency was consolidated (Attitudes and Disabled People 6-8). This stage occurred during the industrial revolution, when production lines were geared toward able-bodied norms, and institutions caring for the disabled and insane were established. With the industrial revolution and the creation of new productive technology, boundaries of ‘normality’ and hence

---

42 O’Regan identifies cultural diversity as not just confined to race and ethnicity when he suggests diversity is encouraged through “the dissident, the marginal and the oppositional, supporting smaller films, feminist films, social problem films” (Australian National Cinema 24).
disability was created. Canguilhem believes that the term ‘normal’ is the effect of the nineteenth century revolution (in France) that also reformed medicine (237). Similarly, Foucault argues that two myths emerged around the time of the revolution,

> [t]he years preceding and immediately following the Revolution saw the birth of two great myths with opposing themes and polarities: the myth of a nationalized medical profession, organized like the clergy, and invested, at the level of man’s bodily health, with powers similar to those exercised by the clergy over men’s souls; and the myth of total disappearance of disease in an untroubled, dispassionate society restored to its original state of health. (*The Birth of the Clinic* 32)

Therefore medicine emerged as having all the answers and the wisdom of doctors was emphasised. Foucault argues that according to this myth medicine would be so successful that eventually it would disappear. During the industrial revolution production, lines were geared to able-bodied norms and people competed for work (Finklestein *Attitudes and Disabled People* 7). This phase was inaugurated with the growth of asylums and institutions to deal with the growing destitution and the notion of impaired dependency. Foucault argues that “the clinic gives medicine its true historical movement” (*Birth of the Clinic* 56). An emphasis on impairment encouraged the growth of the medical model, seeing disability as a personal tragedy.\(^{43}\) To return to Foucault and *The Birth of The Clinic*, clinical wisdom was valued after the eighteenth century and “clinical medicine became simply the examination of an individual” (57).

\(^{43}\) Of interest here: Kriegel argues that D. H. Lawrence’s Clifford Chatterly, the crippled character of *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, is the embodiment of Lawrence’s dislike of modern industrial society. (39)
Finklestein is confident that the third phase, which he argues is occurring now, will offset many of the prejudicial attitudes established during the second phase (*Attitudes and Disabled People* 8). Finkelstein’s third phase is characterised by technological change (*Attitudes and Disabled People* 8). Other theorists, however, are more wary of technological advancement and identify the ways disability discrimination is structurally built into these changes (see Oliver *Understanding Disability*; Sapey *Disablement in the Information Age*; and Hawthorne *Disability and Diversity*). Although technology under Finkelstein’s paradigm relates primarily to devices such as Braille keyboards that allow the blind to type, I wish to extend my analysis of technological change to the area of reproductive technology. 44 While legislation and policy change such as the introduction of the Australian *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992 is an important step toward removing environmental barriers to full participation, they often fail to address other forms of discrimination that exist outside of legal definitions. Disability is defined in sociopolitical terms, and barriers faced by people with impairments are subject to change and imposed on top of rather than being directly related to the particular impairment. 45 During the 1990s technological change, particularly in the area of reproductive technology, encouraged debate around the issue of ‘designer babies’ and by extension

---

44 The Internet, a defining feature of the information technological revolution, is enabling for disabled people. The Internet not only allows greater accessibility to a number of services for people with mobility impairments, it has encouraged cross fertilisation of ideas across the world with the establishment of several Internet discussion sites and email groups (Marks 5). I have personally participated with *Disability Research, H-Disability, OzAdvocacy*, and several *Yahoo* groups.

45 For Foucault, changing ideas of madness and medicine over time differently impact on experiences of madness (*Archeology of Knowledge* 174-5). Likewise, Sontag finds that the fantasies inspired by cancer today (and TB in the last century) highlight the era in which we live, where medical intervention is supposed to cure everything. Cancer can not be understood in this environment and as such it has become surrounded by myths and metaphors. TB as a disease of passion was reflected in literature during the 1800s, as has been the myth that cancer is a disease of repression more recently (22).
disability and discrimination.46

1.11 Reproductive Technological Changes

Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) in particular has contributed to debates about designer babies (Lee xiii). This technology, combining IVF and genetic testing, became available in the late 1980s and for the first time allowed future parents to select or discard embryos on the basis of the presence of a gene fault. Veronica English and Ann Sommerville define the term ‘designer babies’ as epitomizing the concern that reproductive technology has extended beyond the realms of acceptability (6). They connect the term with trivial decisions about a child’s characteristics and argue:

The use of preimplantation genetic diagnosis for the avoidance of disability, for example, is usually spared this label, presumably because it falls within the sphere of activity most people consider to be ‘serious’ and acceptable. (7)

As previously suggested, the motivation behind the Nazi eugenics and euthanasia program was to eradicate people with undesirable genes (J. Morris Pride Against Prejudice 58). As euthanasia adopts a neoliberal economic rationalist viewpoint so does reproductive technology that makes judgements of social acceptability.47

46 This technological change mirrors social values. Historically, people have engaged in less scientific ways to design ‘perfect’ babies. According to an article on newscientist.com, research conducted in Germany and at Cambridge in the UK has revealed that females selected mates based on looks (not brute strength) — presumably so that their offspring would also be attractive (Coghlan).

47 This is evident in Singer’s argument, in which he concedes that some disabled people, such as those with Down’s Syndrome can lead joyful lives. However, their probable lack of independence justifies abortion and euthanasia to eradicate the condition (187).
Debates raged throughout the 1990s — particularly within disability and women’s studies — about the pressure to conceive a genetically pure child and the measures available through pre-natal testing to ensure a child was ‘normal’. However, as English and Sommerville observe:

[w]hile there may appear to be some societal consensus about the desirability of reducing the risks of transmission of serious disease and disability, there is less agreement about how these concepts are defined. (8)

Sommerville and English also recognise the potential of pre-natal testing to pejoratively influence society’s perception of disabled people. Fletcher anticipates the future of pre-natal testing as a “culture of blame for parents of children with ‘undesirable’ characteristics that are preventable through PGD, pre-natal testing followed by termination of pregnancy and somatic and germline gene therapy.” (15). While Fletcher lauds the possibility of finding effective treatment for painful and fatal diseases through the international effort to map and sequence the human genome (15), she also understands that decisions are shaped by the social context in which they are made (18).

In the 1990 film Waiting, the women in the narrative display skepticism with regard to using doctors and not using doctors. A similar situation is faced by those in the designer baby debate as women are not fully provided with information and certain choices are treated as ‘common sense’. In Waiting, Clare considers input from

\(^{48}\) The National Childbirth Trust’s 1997 survey of pregnant women, The Stress of Tests in Pregnancy, uncovered the pressures experienced by new mothers to take tests and terminate pregnancies.
several different characters, each with a different ideological stance, before deciding to do what she wants to, which as it turns out is a total rejection of everyone else’s advice. Similarly, in *Angel Baby* Kate is strongly encouraged to see an obstetrician by her psychiatrists. They attempt to impress on her the probability that her child will inherit her or Harry’s condition and suggest to her that she should not have total autonomy over her own body. Kate rejects this argument and refuses to have an abortion, despite pressure from family and medical professionals.

The designer baby debate introduced in the 1990s exploded in 2000 when PGD baby Adam Nash was born.⁴⁹ In this instance PGD was used not just to avoid genetic disease, but also to provide the possibility of a tissue donor. Adam’s sister Molly had Fanconi’s disease and the embryo that eventually became Adam was selected because it was free of the disease and had tissue that matched Molly.

Disability activists were particularly interested in the debates around pre-natal testing and the social contexts in which decisions to abort were made. Erik Parens and Adrianne Asch released *Prenatal Testing And Disability Rights* in 2000, at a time when pre-natal testing had become common place. This collection of essays explores both the disability rights perspective and why the general public can not see the wider social impact of pre-natal testing on the position of disabled people in society. Asch connects pre-natal testing and abortion with disability discrimination when she claims:
A decision to abort based on the fact the child is going to have [an impairment] says that those characteristics take precedence over living itself, that they are so important and so negative, that they overpower any positive qualities there might be in being alive. (Fletcher 19)

This debate is fundamentally tied to earlier feminist moves to enable the woman’s right to choose with regard to pregnancy and abortion. Of particular relevance here is the 1994 High Court ruling that the Family Court could order the sterilisation of mentally impaired people without the consent of parents and in opposition to state or territory law to the contrary (Linden and Gott 26).

The technological advancements of the late 1980s in the area of reproductive technology eventuated in an environment in the 1990s where prenatal testing became normalised (routine procedure), an integral part of the planning and preparation of the birth (Sommerville and English 7). The disability sector has taken up such debates and articulated in various ways the effects this has had on disability as discrimination. This environment has effected the representation of disability in Australian national cinema.

1.12 Conclusion

A screen is a surface that displays pictures and yet can hint that something is concealed behind it. It is an emblem of ambivalence about what can be seen and not seen, what is spectacularly fascinating and what is fascinatingly secret, what is

49 The first Australian ‘designer baby’ is due in August 2004. Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis was used to match tissue to guarantee the foetus will be able to provide a bone marrow transplant for his brother who has an incurable genetic disease (Taylor).

50 On the other hand, pre-natal testing allows parents to plan for an impaired child and indirect discrimination can be avoided.
In this chapter I have attempted to reveal what is concealed behind the screen images that will be explored in depth in later stages of this thesis. Tom O'Regan suggests that nationhood was an important focus during the 1990s in Australian national cinema. Likewise, disability theorists have identified the 1990s as a significant time period in establishing a disability cultural identity. The social, political and technological changes internationally and nationally have contributed to a cinematic representation of impairment not dissimilar to the impact of immigration policies that have defined ethnicity in terms of the dominant culture. Throughout this chapter I have made the link between multiculturalism and the importance of a disability cultural identity in the same vein as Finklestein (Disabled People and Our Culture Development).

While theorists disagree as to the roots of disability discrimination, citing both the industrial revolution (Finkelstein Attitudes and Disabled People) or the Graeco-Roman era (Barnes A Legacy of Oppression), they agree on the impact of socially constructed definitions of ‘normality’. Disability has always been reflected in Australian national cinema, for example it was depicted in The Squatter’s Daughter (1933). The 1990s however, not only carried the legacy of Australia’s traditional interpretation of disability, the decade was also influenced by certain social, political, and technological changes that set it apart as both a period that influenced and was influenced by an ableist interpretation of disability.
The Information Revolution of the 1990s was arguably as crucial to the social construction of disability as the industrial revolution was (Sapey 619). This revolution grew out of globalisation, which in turn can be connected with neoliberalism. Globalisation was a significant movement in Australia during the late 1980s and early 1990s due to the input of Paul Keating and his ‘Big Picture’. This was extended further throughout the 1990s as the anti-political correctness movement affected politics and paved a way for grievance politics, which tended to be anti-multicultural.

While Australian national cinema post-1990 reflects a multicultural and gendered national identity, a disability culture remains peripheral and a disability identity marginal. Anti-discrimination legislation was introduced in Australia in 1966 but it was not until the 1990s that the significance of disability discrimination was consolidated in Australian society, with the introduction of legislation encouraging so-called equal opportunity for disabled people. However, neoliberal structural adjustments have encouraged a ‘mutual obligation’ view of disability and disability benefits that is questionable. A neoliberal aesthetic has resulted in some contradictory reactions to disability and what to do with disabled people in Australian society. These are exemplified in Peter Singer’s contradictory opinions about disability, equal opportunity and euthanasia. Euthanasia can be traced back to an economic rationalist view of the world, as disabled people are considered ‘useless eaters’. This extends to Australian national cinema in which the disabled
are encouraged to deny their cultural identity in order to fit into an ableist world. Disability studies, or the politicisation of disability, is a reaction to the liberal appropriation of pluralism, which devalues disabled people as a group.

Paul Keating drew distinctions between the old Australia and the new Australia. The Australian working class was largely amalgamated into ‘middle Australia’ by the 1990s, and this group was appropriated by the Howard government. Cultural insiderism has also been a significant part of this chapter, particularly as it allows the rehabilitation of some minority groups at the expense of others. Australia’s 1988 bicentenary provided an opportunity for a problematisation of issues pertaining to Australia’s national identity.

Pre-natal testing has also pejoratively influenced society’s perception of disabled people, arising from the same economic rationalist viewpoint as euthanasia. In addition, the definition of discrimination in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 assumes impairment to be the direct cause of discrimination — despite the ability of disabled people to become more involved in the community. This environment seems to have affected the representation of disability in Australian national cinema the most, as representations frequently locate discrimination in the individual’s damaged body rather than in the cinematic structures of isolation and general structures in society.
In the following chapter I move my focus to the specific debates that make up the discourse of disability film studies. While in this chapter temporal discourse analysis and the contributing outside forces have been central, in Chapter Two, I discuss the theoretical cinematic debate in depth. Central to the next chapter, and by extension the thesis as a whole, is the idea that disability is the social interpretation of impairment. I will attempt to shift the focus away from the damaged body.
Chapter 2
Disability Debates

2.0 Introduction: Disability as Diversity in cinema

“Some fundraisers would rip the calipers off a crippled leg”
Dakita Roth (fundraiser) in Struck By Lightning (1990)

Disabled people have been manipulated by imagery and stereotyping in order to fulfill the ‘needs’ of the non-disabled film — or programme-maker and audience.

Disabled characters abound, but the ways in which they are portrayed and the development of the narrative around them is relentlessly repetitive. Frustratingly, while it can be assumed that all media studies courses will […] contain modules that introduce students to the notion of cultural diversity […] the notion of disability as open to analysis or of disabled people as artistic contributors to the culture [has not yet been routinely added to this ‘diversity’].

(Pointon and Davies 1)

In the previous chapter I addressed how the social, political, and technological changes occurring in Australia in the 1990s were reflected in the national cinema. Often diversity and social problematisations were favoured during the 1990s in Australian national cinema. Despite being consistently represented during this period, disabled characters were not involved in the celebration of diversity, as social restrictions were rarely addressed. Although Death in Brunswick offered a more inclusive multicultural national identity, impairment was used to punish bad parenting. Many films depicting disability blame the individual for their own suffering and salvation in order to give characters from other minority groups an opportunity to rehabilitate their marginalised position in a pluralist society. For instance, in The Sum of Us, a young gay man is presented as a loving and caring son
whose whole world does not begin and end with being gay; in contrast, his father is not taught basic independence following a stroke. Generational differences are somewhat rehabilitated in Cosi, when Lewis (a university ‘drop out’) becomes a contributing member of society following employment at a mental institution. In the previous chapter, I also introduced the social theory of disability and provided the basic definitions required for an analysis. This chapter will move from the general debates with regards to discriminatory attitudes to the emerging field of disability film studies proceeding from a social framework concerning cinematic representations of disability and impairment in order to situate the relevance of this particular study.

Public opinion about the representation of minority groups shifted dramatically in the latter half of the last century. Values operating within society are now seen as a major part of the problem, and this has been reflected in Australian’s cinema output of the 1990s (The Heartbreak Kid; The Castle (1997); Deadly (1991); Radiance). However, the representation of disability in Australian national cinema during this period continued to adopt an ableist ideology while recognising the social factors involved in the construction of other minority groups. An unadaptive society is rarely attributed to definitions of disability in Australian national cinema, or even Western cinema internationally. Cinema is a dominant form of cultural representation and by applying the concepts of the social model of disability to film history and individual film texts, the ableist structures of cinema can be revealed. This chapter will provide a structured account of the theory with regards to
disability film analysis, both internationally and locally, in order to demonstrate the preference of the personal tragedy model in cinema.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first deals with general cultural representation theories as they apply to disability. I will begin with a review and analysis of the current literature in the international arena of disability film studies, to reveal the concerns and contradictions of the key theorists. Within this section my inquiry will focus on disability critiques of cultural representations as they have influenced disability film studies. The second section deals specifically with cinematic theories of disability. In the third section I turn my analysis to disability in the Australian cinematic context. This chapter is not structured in chronological order; I have attempted rather to discuss literature according to theme. Within each theme I have stayed as true to chronology as possible.

2.1 Disability as Culturally Defined

Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell argue that disability is an unexplored angle from which to examine diversity (Imagining Diversity 1). Like Wendell and Linton who I referred to in the previous chapter, Newell and Goggin propose:

[diversity discourse often features identities and categories such as ethnicity, culture, race, class, and sexuality. As yet, however, policy analysis, and just ‘talk’ on diversity do not conjure up ‘disability’, in the minds of many. (Imagining Diversity 1)]

They conclude by suggesting that the lack of a ‘diversity’ approach is a key barrier to access to the Australian film industry for disabled people, and they argue that
disability must be thought of from a critical diversity perspective (*Imagining Diversity* 12).¹ I will explore their paper in greater depth in the third section of this chapter as their analysis is based on the Australian film industry. The framework they suggest conforms to the disability studies approach recommended in the previous chapter — reiterated here drawing on Simi Linton, Susan Mello and John O’Neill. Pfeiffer and Yoshida combined the work of these three theorists and came up with a ‘Linton–Mello–O’Neill definition of disability studies’ (480). In line with Goggin and Newell’s diversity approach, disability studies uses a minority group model and:

> examines ideas related to disability in all forms of cultural representations throughout history and examines the practices and policies of all societies to understand the social rather than the physical or psychological determinants of disability. [This] focus shifts the emphasis […] to a social/cultural/political paradigm. […] The scholarship challenges the idea that the economic and social status and assigned roles of people with disabilities are inevitable outcomes of the condition. (Pfeiffer and Yoshida 480)

However, according to the definition of disability in the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992 provided in the previous chapter, disability is located in physical and cognitive parameters: it is a medical issue. This thesis proceeds from the view that disability should be located in societal processes. In contrast to the hegemonic medical model, a social model of disability emerged concurrently in Britain and America — each adopting a slightly different formula. I proceed from the definitions and terminology established by the British social model, as I wish to pay

---

¹ Goggin and Newell wish to move beyond an access and equity approach to considering disability in terms of diversity.
particular attention to the redefinition of disability as a form of social oppression, a redefinition that has not been articulated to the same degree in the American model (Shakespeare and Watson *The Social Model of Disability* 4). The British social model of disability connects academics, the disability movement and disabled people to think about how disability is constructed through material factors, social relations and political power (Gordon and Rosenblum 6). According to Shakespeare and Watson, the British model contains three main elements:

1. disabled people are an oppressed social group
2. it distinguishes between the impairments that people have, and the oppression which they experience
3. it defines ‘disability’ as the social oppression, not the form of impairment. (*The Social Model of Disability* 4)

Historically, impairment has been used to frighten people into moral behaviour and adherence to religious doctrine (Gordon and Rosenblum 13). Accordingly, disability is seen as a punishment from God. Gordon and Rosenblum conclude that this has influenced current public opinions of disability (13), which have been articulated by other theorists who I will refer to throughout the thesis. Josephine Tiddy comments that the nineteenth century English view that disability was an indication of divine disfavour continues to influence people’s perceptions of disability (143).

---

2 The American social/minority model, on the other hand, follows the tradition of political thought within the United States. Although identifying the first two aspects in line with the British model, Shakespeare and Watson argue that the model emerging in America has not “gone as far in redefining ‘disability’ as social oppression” (Shakespeare and Watson *The Social Model of Disability* 4).

3 As Martin Norden observed, “the bible, a major defining text for Western civilization, includes numerous passages that suggest a linkage of disease and disability with punishment from God.” (*Cinema of Isolation* 7) Colin Barnes agrees that disability is seen as a punishment from God due to biblical emphasis, “in ‘the Bible’ there are over forty instances in which ‘the cripple’ is connected to sin and sinners” (*Disabling Imagery and The Media* 11).
Impairments were seen as manifestations of evil and people who had impairments were excluded from society. This is called the individual model of disability and is underpinned by the ‘personal tragedy’ model of disability. Medicalisation is part of this model (Oliver *Understanding Disability* 31). This paradigm does not consider social and cultural influences.

It is only as disability is being seen as a social construction that the cultural origins of the medical model are being highlighted. Pointon and Davies also position the origins of public opinion regarding disability in The Bible and direct readers to Leviticus 21:16–20 (7). Nancy Weinberg and Carol Sebian cite Deuteronomy 27:27, John 5:14, and Mathew 9:2 (Norden *Cinema of Isolation* 7). Norden argues that the view that disability was a punishment from God originated prior to the twentieth century but has changed little since (*Cinema of Isolation* 7).

In addition to The Bible, Norden finds that “many ancient works of literature contain sections that equate physical perfection with spiritual goodness and disability with evil or a punishment for evil” (*Cinema of Isolation* 7). The text

---

4 Northrop Frye acknowledges that The Bible has influenced Western literature to such a degree that people without knowledge of The Bible misinterpret meanings by other authors of western English literature. He also finds The Bible to be inconsistent (xii). In terms of disability being a punishment for sins, The Bible is indeed inconsistent; however, this is never discussed by disability theorists. Consider for example John 9:1–3:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus.

Likewise, The Bible includes a verse very much in line with the social model of disability. Hebrews 12:13 "Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." Leviticus 19:14 has a similar sentiment encouraging people not make fun of the deaf or cause the blind to stumble.

Thus while The Bible as a cultural texts reflects an individualised notion of disability, it also offers some societal responsibility.
preceding Tod Browning’s *Freaks* (1932) highlights this tendency in ancient literature:

HISTORY, RELIGION, FOLKLORE and LITERATURE abound in tales of misshapen misfits who have altered the world’s course. GOLIATH, CALABAN, FRANKENSTEIN, GLOUCESTER, TOM THUMB and KAISER WILHEM are just a few, whose fame is world wide.\(^5\)

Often writings on disability and literature have concentrated on William Shakespeare’s Richard III (Hevey, *Creatures Time Forgot*; Kriegel; and Norden, *Victims, Villains, Saints and Heroes*). Kriegel argues that images of threat or compassion are the two most fundamental images of impairment in Western literature. Both are found in Shakespeare (32). He believes these images come in various forms, but have not been expanded beyond the two. I would apply this theory to Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. Frankenstein’s creation (variously called the daemon or the monster) is both feared and pitied. While characters in the book such as the De Laceys fear the ‘daemon’, the readers of the book empathize with and pity him.\(^6\) Kriegel continues his discussion by drawing on Goffman's stigma theory, in

---

5 This film has been heavily criticised by disability theorists for perpetuating the ‘freak’ status of disabled people (Pointon and Davies 7-8) and for using disabled people to create a sinister atmosphere and conjure up horror (Reiser and Mason). However, I would argue that Browning bestows his characters with ‘human’ qualities and does not present them as freaks at all. In fact, he uncovers the discrimination and violence extended toward disabled people. While Norden describes the characters as ‘obsessive avengers’, he commends the use of disabled actors, a decision which set the film apart from other horrors and made audiences feel uncomfortable (*Violence, Women and Disability*). The film’s title, *Freaks*, may extend to the two able-bodied antagonists, strongman Hercules and beautiful Cleopatra, who are also physical spectacles. As Bogdan suggests, Freak shows consisted of both citizens with abnormalities and those without (25).

6 De Lacey, who first meets Frankenstein (the monster) in the absence of his family, neither fears not pities him, however De Lacey is blind. For this reason, Frankenstein approaches him without fear, although perhaps there is a certain degree of pity on the part of Frankenstein as DeLacey is blind.
particular the ‘normals’ as they appear to the stigmatised. Jenny Morris agrees, particularly with Kriegal’s first image of fear or threat:

[w]riters over many years, in a number of different genres, have used physical or learning disability, and mental illness, to signify evil, badness, a state of something wrong. There are obvious examples of this: from Shakespeare’s Richard III to Doris Lessing’s *The Fifth Child* (which uses learning disability to transmit a profound sense of threat and unease); from Captain Hook to *The Phantom of the Opera*. (J. Morris *Pride Against Prejudice* 93)

Morris continues her argument with a discussion of the impact these cultural representations have on, and the things they say about the realities of the experience of disabled people. She places the blame for the fear, ignorance and prejudice on non-disabled people. However, I am less interested in trying to achieve a sort of ‘reality’ than in revealing the ideologies present in the construction of disability in the movies.

Deborah Marks argues that visual images constitute authority, dependency, savagery, and innocence. She maintains that western consciousness strives for human perfection, and that western art seeks to represent the perfect human body. The body is an area of control and self-expression. It is harder for disabled people to control their body. Disabled people are a reminder that we are not in total control and our bodies are vulnerable (154–6).

According to Tom Shakespeare, “the disabled people’s movement has focused attention on the power of images to define the experience of impairment, and to
foster prejudicial attitudes towards disabled people” (Art and Lies? 165). Disability is not just there; it is constructed by the boundaries of normality. Visual representations of impairment both reflect and reinforce disablement (Marks 168). Gill Branston and Roy Stafford further explain the impact of representation:

[...] the media give us ways of imagining particular identities and groups which can have material effects on how people experience the world, and how they get understood. [...] This is partly because the mass media have the power to represent, over and over, some identities, some imaginings, and to exclude others, and thereby make them unfamiliar or even threatening. (78)

Although I use this quote to refer to cinema, Branston and Stafford are more exhaustive in their analysis, covering mass media generally.7 Similarly, Kate Bowles argues that representation has become “commonsense shorthand for describing the way meaning is made when we communicate” (72). She contends media analysis should include a questioning of how the media portrays certain events, people, and ideas, and by extension, how these portrayals influence the ‘real world’. However, she finds representation to be problematic particularly with regards to reality:

[w]e persist with the value-based system of assessment for representations, using the word ‘realistic’ as a marker of approval, and effectively implying that the most superior and successful representations would be those which are indistinguishable from the thing they represent. This is a persuasive argument because the value of ‘truth’ is attached to it, but it is logically hopeless – this is because the moment at which a

7 Likewise, Goggin and Newell suggest that their investigation of the Australian film industry is somewhat limited in ability to comment on accessibility to the image industry, as they believe there may be less barriers to access in television, interactive media and radio industries. Perhaps, they suggest, there may be a wider range of disabilities amongst workers in these industries (Imagining Diversity 12).
representation becomes the thing it represents, it is simply no longer a representation (73).

Bowles is alluding to the process by which media is a signifying system and suggests representation is a series of choices heavily loaded with implications of power (73). Representation relies on symbolism and stereotyping (77–78).

Representation is both a political process and a normative function that reveals and distorts what is assumed to be true (Judith Butler 1). Representation is an area through which to examine the workings of ideology (Hayward *Cinema Studies* 194).

For Bill Nichols, ideology arises with communication and exchange, reproducing relations of production and limited to positions within the existing ensemble of social relations.

Social existence and consciousness are interconnected. He concludes that by becoming aware of ideological signs, these signs will no longer be accepted as common sense (Nichols 1–2). Likewise, national identity is a political construction

---

8 Following the revival in the 1970s, Australian national cinema maintained the hegemony of the ruling class through ideology. The political interests of film institutions (such as the Australian Film Commission) determine which films get made (Turner *Film as Social Practice* 132). As the Australia film industry came to rely less on government support (during the 1990s), a greater variety of productions eventuated (Turner *Film as Social Practice* 145).

Louis Althusser defines the state as an apparatus whose most basic function is to reinforce the interests of the ruling class (137). Drawing on Marxist theory he names the repressive state apparatus as consisting of the government, administration, army, police, courts, prisons and so on. He goes further and defines the ideological state apparatus, which present themselves as a number of specialised institutions. While the repressive state apparatus relies primarily on violence and force to maintain its position, it uses ideology as a secondary measure. Similarly, the ideological state apparatuses such as the family, religion, and cultural institutions rely primarily on ideology to maintain their position, using violence as a secondary measure.
that reveals what is assumed to be true through its normative function. National identity is constructed to serve specific interests (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema*; Turner, *Making it National*) and adopts a discourse of being true and adequate — unproblematic (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 20). National identity is in part constructed through national cinema. I return to this discussion in the following chapter.

Most fields traditionally use a medical model to view disability. Under this model, disability is a health question (Pfieffer and Yoshida 477–8). Ann Pointon and Chris Davies summarise the medical model in reference to common cinematic representations:

> [t]he medical model assumes that the impairment or condition a person has is the key problem, the responses to which are ‘cure’ or ‘care’. If the condition is not curable, the appropriate response of the disabled person is seen to lie somewhere on a spectrum between at one end a ‘realistic acceptance of their condition’ and at the other a ‘denial of its existence with affirmations of ‘normality’. (1)

Several films presenting these so-called appropriate responses of cure or care include *At First Sight* (1999), *Lorenzo’s Oil* (1992), *Article 99* (1992) and *Children of a Lesser God* (1986). In each example the characters respond to impairment by eventually striving to deny its existence in the pursuit of a cure. Alternatively, the impaired individual adapts so that they can pass as ‘normal’ as having made a realistic acceptance of their condition without any recognition of adaptations that
should be made by society. Of particular interest here is *Children of a Lesser God*, a film about the relationship between Sarah, a deaf woman working as a cleaner in a school for the deaf, and James, a new teacher. Sarah refuses to speak and James refuses to use sign language. Sarah’s refusal to speak is constructed as the result of psychological trauma rather than a kind of political resistance to hearing culture (Marks 162). Furthermore, James’ refusal to use sign language is constructed as rational and loving and Sarah is simply refusing to ‘recognise what’s best for her’ (J. Morris *Pride Against Prejudice* 99). In terms of specific cinematic stylistic devices, Sarah has been framed in such a way that the audience can not see her signing and must rely on able-bodied James to interpret what she is saying by repeating everything aloud.

I introduced Goffman’s stigma theory in the previous chapter to indicate ideology as implicit in the social construction of disability. Goffman has some useful observations regarding ideology as it relates to a stigma theory that I wish to apply to the representation of disability in Australian national cinema. He argues that an ideology has been established to rationalise the danger represented by those

---

9 The personal tragedy model, which I focus on throughout this thesis, and the medical model of disability are both derived from an individualised paradigm of disability (Oliver *Understanding Disability* 31). This ‘cure or care’ response described by Pointon and Davis does not aptly outline the tendency of disability representation in Australian national cinema. The cure or care response is an example of thematic disablement, while the situation during the 1990s was more frequently an example of stylistic disablement (more on this in Chapter Four).

10 In describing this scene I am reminded of the 2004 Australia Day concert, *Celebrate! Australia Day Live*, held on the steps of Parliament House in Canberra and televised live. Nikki Webster performed at this concert and signed during one of her songs; however, framing most often prevented a full body view of her signing as she was shown mostly in close up.
different to ‘normals’ and the resulting animosity between these two groups (15).
Similarly, national identity relies on stigma to define who is human according to
who does not fit into one of the three categories of stigma. This influences
definitions of Australianness and who is and is not Australian. Marks applies these
theories of stigma, hegemony, and ideology to disability and ableism when she says:

\[\text{[i]t is only by defining an ‘Other’ — someone who is fundamentally different —}
\text{that non-disabled culture is able to sustain an image of itself as rational, in control,}
\text{authoritative and knowing.} \ (163)\]

Therefore, definitions of disability operate on an ideological level through stigma,
and the hegemony of ‘ability’ is maintained as disability is individualised. Similarly,
Barbara Hillyer argues that everyone, disabled or not, hides aspects of themselves in
order to fit into certain social situations (136). Therefore, it would seem that
impairment in varying degrees is a fundamental aspect of ‘humanness’, yet it is not
embraced as an acceptable social identity.

This concept can be illustrated by a personal anecdote. Fairly recently, I went on a
holiday to Bali with four friends, one of whom has chronic fatigue syndrome. My
friends made a ‘group’ decision not to use taxis despite the uneven ground and stairs
and the difficulty my friend with chronic fatigue and I experienced while walking
around the city. We were expected to assimilate. However, about half way into the
holiday one of my ‘able’ friends sprained her ankle on the uneven ground and from
then on we caught taxis everywhere. Her impairment was acceptable and everyone
was happy to accommodate because it was temporary.
Likewise, aspects of class and gender may be suppressed at various times due to social convention. This is aptly demonstrated by Kate in the Australian film, *Envy* (1999) whose characterisation is contingent on her antagonist Rachel’s. Rachel and Kate, it would seem, are total opposites. Middle-aged Kate is a mother and has a successful career, while teenaged Rachel is a thief who lives in a run-down house with her boyfriend and another woman (in a possible threesome arrangement). However, Kate appears to be suppressing a ‘Rachel’ side of herself in order to fit into her upper middle class environment. When Kate gets “drunk, very drunk” at a party, she can no longer control this part of herself, calling her husband’s business associates “arseholes”. This side of her was seen earlier when she smashed a window in Rachel’s house. Kate releases this trait when she ties up Rachel and blackmails her into having sex with her son. Likewise, Rachel appears to have ‘Kate-like’ aspirations, as she is secretly saving money in a coin purse buried in the sand in a children’s playground, and she steals Kate’s clothes and claims to suit them better.

Ideology producing ableist cinema often goes unnoticed due to what Jacqueline Rose would call ‘the cult of common sense’ (86). Ideology, by its very process renders itself invisible. Significant theorization about the representation of disability in cinema began in 1987 with Paul Longmore’s article, *Screening Stereotypes*:

---

11 Rachel had previously raped him and he could not get over her, thinking he was in love. The film also opens up questions of identity in terms of masculinity, femininity, and power, as Kate’s husband (Phil) will not accept that Matt was raped as he had an orgasm and wasn’t penetrated. At first he appears to accept that something horrible has happened to Matt, but as soon as it begins to take Kate’s attention away from him, he suggests that Matt enjoyed it.
Images of Disabled People in Television and Motion Pictures. This article was pivotal to the movement in that it was so flawed. While his argument that disability is feared and stigmatised remains strong within the social theory of disability, his failure to contextualise his argument has been recognised by other theorists within the field (Darke *Understanding Cinematic Representations*; Shakespeare *Art and Lies?). Longmore, in this early article, concentrated on what he believed to be negative portrayals to demonstrate the popular tendency of stigmatisers transferring their hostile fantasies onto the stigmatised. While listing ‘negative’ portrayals is initially seductive, later theorists have recognised the need to acknowledge the context and how that has influenced the construction of positivity and negativity (Norden *Cinema of Isolation*; Hevey *Controlling Interests*; Shakespeare *Art and Lies?).12

Despite being an important article in the establishment of a disability film discourse, I will not review Longmore’s early article in depth. However, I will provide a brief explanation of the central argument before introducing other theorists who have been influenced by it. Later theorists, notably Barnes (*Disabling Imagery and the Media*) and Norden (*Cinema of Isolation*) have identified similar stereotypes, while also recognising contextual influences as I have done throughout this thesis. I address these stereotypes later in this chapter and refer to Longmore’s influence where necessary. I will, however, highlight several contradictions inherent in

---

12 Longmore does recognise the impact World War Two had on the visual representation of disability as he finds that immediately following, the maladjusted disabled person who is bitter and self-pitying emerged as a stereotype and remains the most durable (71). Unfortunately, Longmore does not address stereotypes throughout the article in the same way.
Longmore’s article that exist due to his failure to recognise the social context in which these texts occur and his unproblematic faith in cinema’s ability to record reality. The post-structuralist argument suggests that there can only be versions of reality.

Longmore identifies three main stereotypes, to which all representations can be tied. They are fundamentally negative and include criminality, adjustment, and sexuality. Looking specifically to the social function of these images, Longmore concludes that successful disabled people are used as an inspiration to the nondisabled, and disability remains an individual’s problem and not society’s. Under the guise of entertainment, these representations seek to reassure the nondisabled audience (Screening Stereotypes 66) and are an exercise in social functionalism (Darke Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability).

Longmore draws on Goffman to argue that disabled people are stigmatised, and presented as less than human. In addition, most films present the notion that it is better to be dead than disabled due to this loss of humanity. Longmore notes that often both criminals and monsters are eradicated at the end of the narrative.¹³ For criminal disabled characters,

¹³ Monsters, like criminals, are considered deviant by the social boundaries of normality. For example, John Merrick in The Elephant Man (1980) is not a criminal yet is killed off at the end of the narrative despite gaining a semblance of acceptance in the community.
death is a just punishment, while for monsters, death is a humane solution (Screening Stereotypes 69).

Portrayals of adjustment and sexuality are also fundamentally linked, as a loss of sexual functioning is frequently assumed to go along with disability. For example, in *Whose Life is it Anyway?* (1981) Ken seeks suicide because he no longer feels like a man due to loss of sexual functioning. Under these stereotypes, Longmore makes judgements on the realities of disability (Screening Stereotypes 73). His argument implies that there is a collective experience of disability, a single ontology, rather than a similarity in terms of social construction, which I suggest. I am not going to invoke the same ideological frame to argue against him as Darke has (*The Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability*). Rather, I intend to point out the contradictions and suggest an alternate direction, in line with the social model of disability, which may articulate what Longmore was perhaps trying to say.

Longmore’s criticism of the representation of disability and sexuality is contradictory in a number of ways, particularly with regard to his otherwise strong contention that disability should not be individualised. As with the previous two stereotypes, Longmore finds that blame is shifted onto the stigmatised individual when nondisabled characters are attracted to disabled characters who lack self assurance. However, his positive analysis of *Coming Home* (1978) utilises the same prejudicial framework he criticises with regard to *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (1946).
Both films chronicle the changed lives of returning war veterans. In *Coming Home*, set during the Vietnam war, the lives of Luke Martin and Bob Hyde revolve around the sexual awakening of Sally Hyde (Bob’s wife). Alternatively, the characters in *The Best Years of Our Lives* strive for a re-establishment of ‘normality’ and try to return to their old lives following World War Two. Homer, who is a double amputee as a result of war injuries was engaged before the war but is now reluctant to get married, feeling it would be unfair on his fiancée.\textsuperscript{14}

Longmore is critical of *The Best Years of Our Lives* because Homer apparently has no trouble finding someone to love him, when in reality disabled people may experience a lack of self-acceptance due to constant rejection. He argues that social reality is inverted in these narratives as disability (impairment) and the social consequences are individualized. Although *The Best Years of Our Lives* does not identify social factors of discrimination, Longmore’s analysis of *Coming Home* suggests that it does not either. Longmore is impressed with Luke’s ‘self-assurance’ while being unimpressed with Homer’s need for reassurance. Homer is unable to work through this ‘problem’ by himself while Luke is. For Longmore, Homer’s experiences “fly in the face of the real-life experiences of handicapped men and women who find that even the most minor impairments result in romantic rejection”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Actor Harold Russell who played Homer actually did not have hands and won a special Oscar (for being an inspiration to returning veterans) as well as a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for this role in 1947.
(Screening Stereotypes 73). Alternatively, Luke’s experiences are a positive portrayal. Longmore individualises Luke’s success, a characteristic he is otherwise critical of (Screening Stereotypes 74).

While Luke’s experiences may be a more positive representation, they also do not recognise the possibility of romantic rejection. Although Longmore’s argument is unclear, Luke’s romantic and sexual success is not attributed to his individual character, rather his diverse cultural identity. Thus judgements on what are positive versus what are negative portrayals appear completely arbitrary and do not address the ideological foundation of this functionalist exercise of cultural reassurance.

Similarly, Jenny Morris seeks to reflect on how different forms of Western Culture portray the lives of disabled people. She finds that stereotypes of physical attractiveness exclude disabled people. Disabled men, she argues, do not live up to

---

15 Later in his chapter Longmore argues that recent advertising (Levis, McDonalds, Kodak, and People magazine) are the most “positive media images of people with disabilities to date” (Screening Stereotypes 78). Longmore, ignoring his earlier contention that media images ignoring the issue of social discrimination are harmful to people who have disabilities (Screening Stereotypes 75), praises the ads for presenting disabled people as “attractive, active, and ‘with it,” involved and competitive, experiencing ‘normal’ relationships” (Screening Stereotypes 78).

16 Throughout this thesis I have argued that people with disability must be considered as another group within a culturally diverse national cinema. Likewise, Goggin and Newell propose that systemic exclusion occurs when disability is not thought of from a critically diverse perspective, recognising that disabled people have fulfilling experiences (Imagining Diversity 4).

17 Forrest Gump (1994) continues many of these narrative tropes and stereotypes, particularly in relation to war and American, masculine, and feminine national identity. However, a reflection of the influence of globalisation, neoliberalism, de-institutionalisation and the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) in the 1990s can be seen in the various identities Forrest adopts throughout his adventurous life.
the definition of masculinity as equal to strength, while women fail to meet the expectations of pretty passivity (*Pride Against Prejudice* 92). For Morris, the absence of impairment is central to Western culture’s definition of beauty, status, and authority. By extension ugliness and evil are defined by the presence of impairment.

Morris believes disability has become a metaphor that draws on prejudice and ignorance. She argues that these cultural representations are reflective of the attitudes of nondisabled people toward disability rather than of the lives of disabled people. Through repetition, this cultural stereotype is confirmed. During the 1990s, disability denoted a loss of masculinity through dependency and lack of autonomy (*Pride Against Prejudice* 93). This resulted in the further isolation of disabled women.

Morris looks to social stereotypes of masculinity when considering the representation of disabled men, which include strength, perfect bodies, not being vulnerable, a celebration of youth, and taking bodily functions for granted. She cites the examples of *My Left Foot* (1989) and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) to illustrate the contention that “dependency is hell for a man”. These films, she argues, rely on stereotypes of heterosexual masculinity (*Pride Against Prejudice* 93–7).
Morris’ discussion of *My Left Foot* reveals the inherent problems with identifying stereotypes and their consequential impact on the lived experiences of disabled people. She cites the ‘patronising’ scene in which Christy reacts to Eileen’s announcement that she is getting married. Morris describes Christy’s behaviour as not unlike a nondisabled man’s — oppressive, aggressive, intimidating, and obnoxious. Her initial criticism of Western films generally is that disabled men do not fulfill cultural stereotypes of masculinity, yet her specific criticism of *My Left Foot* is that Christy is behaving in a stereotypically nondisabled masculine way (*Pride Against Prejudice* 95). I will address the specific problems with approaching cinematic criticism using ‘reality’ as an indicator of success later in this chapter, after I address David Hevey and Martin Norden.

Morris concludes that it is impossible to imagine a woman transposed into film roles of disabled male characters when these narratives are essentially about masculinity and vulnerability. Essentially, she argues, these films are about masculinity, not disability. Disability is a straightforward representation of vulnerability and women do not need to be disabled to be vulnerable (*Pride Against Prejudice* 98). People associate passivity, weakness and dependency with disabled women. They do not associate heterosexuality, heterosexual relationships, work and motherhood (typical associations with ‘woman’) with disabled women. The overwhelming association with disability and women is passivity and deprivation. Therefore, films of the 1970s and 1980s did not explore femininity and dependency or vulnerability using
disability. Morris concludes that the majority of disabled characters have been men because women do not have to be disabled to be vulnerable.

Morris’ broad generalisations about disability and masculinity are perhaps too narrow, as they are based on only English or American representations. There is evidence of Western cultural portrayals that do not represent disability as a vehicle for masculinity and dependency, including, for example, Australian national cinema, particularly in the 1990s. Liz Ferrier has found that there is favouritism toward portraying female characters “with a disability” over males in Australian cinema during the 1990s (65). A comprehensive review of the literature regarding the representation of disability in Australian cinema takes place later in this chapter.

While Longmore focuses only on the text, Hevey believes the problem with the visual representation of disability lies with the means of production. Most disability representation initiatives see the beginning of reforming disability imagery solely within the image. For Hevey, the negative manifestations of disability representation are projected on to the impaired body of the disabled person by able bodied producers (Creatures Time Forgot 12).

---

18 Morris turns to Wait Until Dark (1967) to demonstrate how disability is used in a straightforward way to denote vulnerability and thus fear and helplessness. Morris is attempting to make the point that by the presence of impairment women become more vulnerable in cinema. I disagree with her use of Wait Until Dark to make this point, because it is due to her impairment that Susy is ultimately triumphant and not vulnerable. In Wait Until Dark Susy out-smarts the men who want to kill her by smashing all the light globes in her apartment so that they can not see her — this does not affect Susy’s pursuits of them because she is blind.

19 In support of her argument, Morris cites Klobas, who looked at 100 examples of wheelchair uses in film, and found that four out of five were men. However, there are few wheelchair users in Australian national cinema, particularly in the 1990s, with the exception of those used for background purposes.
Hevey argues that charity advertising and other visual representations of disabled people have constructed a view in which the impairment and disability are both contained within the body. In order to counter this, disabled people should be representing the experience of impairment in order to establish a disability access movement (Creatures Time Forgot 8). Hevey is not alone in this contention; other notable disability theorists, including Sutherland (Black Hats) and Morris (A Feminist Perspective) agree that only those who have experienced disability should represent it. I indicated earlier that representation differs from reality and indeed that reality was contextual. These issues have already been debated with regard to feminist film theory. I draw on Barbara Creed in particular.

Creed, in her discussion of the historical background of Australian feminist film theory, finds that initially Australian feminist film theorists were arguing in a similar vein to Hevey. These arguments paint themselves into an analytical corner because they adopt an essentialist foundation to argue against essentialism. An emphasis on ‘real experiences’ assumes that “cinema is a ‘neutral’ vehicle of communication, and that it simply holds a window and mirror up to the ‘real’ world and faithfully records what is placed before the camera” (282).

---

20 His critique goes further to suggest that charities reinforce the status quo by maintaining the economic structure whereby disabled people are disadvantaged and a sense of community is diminished, as I outlined in the previous chapter. Indeed, an economic situation where tax benefits are given to those who make donations rather than using the money to redistribute resources amongst the disabled reinforces the notion of impaired dependency (Marks 166).
To argue that there is a true or actual experience of disability is essentialist and problematic. This view regards the camera as a transparent medium faithfully recording the truth, which exists somewhere outside itself (Creed 283). Such arguments have been criticized in regard to feminist theory:

[in] claiming that women’s current social roles and positions are the effects of their essence, nature, biology, or universal social position, these theories are guilty of rendering such roles and positions unalterable and necessary and thus of providing them with a powerful political justification. (Grosz 84)

This argument also applies to disability theories, arising out of the belief that the social position of disabled people is a result of their physical capabilities. As the above quote suggests, the argument that there is an essential experience denies any form of social discrimination and actually provides a justification for such discrimination, negating possibility for change.

The essentialist position in filmmaking argues that the only viable cinematic representation is realism (Creed 283). However, the film text does not present us with a mirror image of the real world. Film is a signifying practice. Further, realism is a construct produced by specific codes and practices; it is an ideological process (Dayan 186–7). Despite these problems with viewing cinema as a transparent medium, which could faithfully record reality, Hevey acknowledges that disability image analysis must go beyond the text itself. He recommends reform take place at the point of production (Creatures Time Forgot 8).
This thesis proposes to direct attention away from the clinical or physical body to society’s disabling role. It will achieve this by examining the contention that the economic and social status and assigned roles of disabled people are inevitable outcomes of impairment. The acute indifference that disability studies has faced especially in cinema theory — requires at least a minimum effort at repositioning conventional wisdom on characterisation as well as some general assumptions about society and meaning.

2.2 Barnes and ‘misrepresentation’

Proceeding from the definitions of disability and impairment established by Oliver, Barnes conducted a study into the representation of disabled people in the media for the purpose of identifying ‘misrepresentation’ through stereotypes. Although offering stereotypes similar to those offered by Longmore, Barnes’ discussion remains strongly rooted in the need to change disability imagery at the production stage. He believes that the media teaches society about disability, and repetition of stereotypical portrayals perpetuates assumptions established in less enlightened times. Barnes identifies eleven durable and overlapping stereotypes that he believes to be a form of cultural oppression: the disabled person as pathetic, an object of violence, evil, atmosphere, a super cripple, an object of ridicule, their only enemy, a burden, sexually abnormal, unable to participate in the community, and ‘normal’ (Barnes Disabling Imagery and the Media).
2.2.1 Pitiable and pathetic

Within this stereotype the focus is exclusively on the impairment and characters are used to give more information about able-bodied characters, such as their goodness and sensitivity. This stereotype is based on the assumption that the benevolence of others ensures the well being of disabled people. For example, John Merrick in *The Elephant Man* (1980) demonstrates Dr. Treve’s goodness and sensitivity. Barnes’ coverage of this stereotype is extensive and he goes further than I am able to because he includes other forms of media including television, print and advertising.

Although quirky, the disabled characters that support Lewis, the able-bodied protagonist of *Cosi*, although quirky are pathetic (to use Barnes’ terminology). Like Lewis, who failed university, several have failed at life in general with respect to traditional gender roles. While Henry used to be a bank manager, Ruth was married to a successful businessman, and Roy is afraid of performing in public. By interacting with these people, Lewis is able to grow as a person and make something of his life.

2.2.2 An object of violence

Barnes locates his discussion of this stereotype within the context of the violence that has been perpetuated against disabled people throughout history — such as the Nazi Euthanasia program that I discussed earlier. Barnes then turns to *Whatever Happened To Baby Jane* (1962) to demonstrate how films adopt this historical tendency to further devalue disabled people. Barnes believes the result of these
Chapter 2 Disability Debates

stereotypes is twofold. First, it reinforces notions of pity and dependency (discussed above) and second, they reinforce convictions of Eugenics, whereby the natural solution to impairment is a violent death.\textsuperscript{21}

The disabled person as an object of violence is a stereotype that was frequently employed in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. Often the narrative is concerned with disabled women who attempt to assert their independence, for example Gabe in *Romper Stomper*, who is bashed by her neo-Nazi boyfriend Hando as he breaks up with her. In *The Piano* (1993), Ada’s finger is cut off by her jealous husband. Other examples include *Metal Skin* (1994), *Turtle Beach, Paradise Road* (1997), *Dance Me To My Song, Lilian’s Story, Father* (1990) and *Cut*.\textsuperscript{22} Incidentally, several of these films also feature incest and sexual abuse.

\textsuperscript{21} I am particularly interested in *Baby Jane* in the context of the personal tragedy model; specifically, who is afforded the blame for the car accident that resulted in Blanche’s impairment. Visually, the accident is portrayed in a montage sequence whereby it is impossible for the audience to discern which sister is driving and which is injured at the gate. The accident is shown as close-ups on the feet of both women — who are wearing the same pair of shoes. However, because of the atmosphere of competition portraying Jane as difficult and failing and Blanche as successful and sweet, we infer that it is Jane who was driving and thus blame her for ruining Blanche’s life.

Throughout the film Secondary characters (Mrs. Bates and Dehlia) gossip that Jane ran her sister down. However, as Blanche lies dying on the beach she confesses to Jane that it was her who was driving and that she was trying to run Jane down at the gate. Although Jane has a history of violence and Blanche made the childhood declaration that she would “never forget” how mean Jane was to her as a child Blanche’s dying admission is questionable. Earlier, two producers had had a conversation about Blanche wanting to make sure Jane always had work. This conversation took place near Blanche’s car, a different car to the one involved in the accident.

Klobas, however, accepts a literal interpretation of the film with Blanche’s attempt to run Jane down as an explanation of her acceptance of Jane’s treatment of her, “Blanche’s life was severely curtailed, because of the disability she had incurred” (120). Thus Klobas accepts Blanche’s impairment was her own fault, but this does not appear to fit into the film’s narrative.

A similar tendency occurs when serious illness is included in the narrative, for example *To Have and To Hold* (1996) and *Traps, Paradise Road* is another example also included in the impairment list. Of interest is the fact that all three females have developed malaria.
2.2.3 Sinister and evil

Like Longmore, Barnes argues that impairment is persistently used to denote evil. The character of Darth Vader in the Star Wars series clearly demonstrates this stereotype. Norden argues that Vader’s ‘evil nature’ is underscored by his impairments, including breathing difficulties and mechanical body parts (he is more machine than man) (Cinema of Isolation 294). The more recent prequels demonstrate the same notion through Anakin Skywalker’s descent to the ‘dark side’, as it is visually represented by his change from an energetic, able-bodied boy/young man to his having a bad attitude and mechanical hand.

Often fight sequences in Star Wars involve the severing of a character’s right hand at the wrist. Not only did Luke, Anakin and Vader lose their right hands in various fights, so also did many minor characters. Light sabers are an extension of the body through the force. Norden connects this impairment with the force as well, “it is Skywalker’s ‘power appendage’ – his sword-wielding right hand that Vader cuts off” (Norden Cinema of Isolation 294). In Return of the Jedi, as Luke faces Vader in the presence of the emperor, he severs Vader’s hand. Luke flexes his own mechanical hand after cutting off Vader’s, briefly pausing (eyes remaining fixed on his hand rather than the emperor) before declining to join the ‘dark side’. 23

23 The mechanical hand also makes an appearance in Dr No (1961). Dr No damaged his hand in a botched experiment (reflecting the idea of evil origins of impairment). Like Dr No, Dr Strangelove from the 1963 production is weird and evil, sits in a wheelchair, and at one stage even tries to strangle himself with his own leather clad hand.
Evil characters relying on mechanical aids were not featured in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. However, several minor characters possess impairments to add to a sinister atmosphere, including, for example, an intense bartender in *Mr Accident* (1999), a psychotic ex-boyfriend out for revenge in *Siam Sunset* (1999), and a violent dwarf tribal leader in *Black Robe* (1991). Similar stereotypes are invoked in *Metal Skin, Heaven’s Burning, Doing Time For Patsy Cline* (1997), *Dead To The World* (1990), *Muggers, Dogwatch* (1999) *Cut, Dark City* (1997), *The Nostradamus Kid* (1992), *Welcome To Woop Woop* (1997), and *That Eye, The Sky*.

### 2.2.4 Atmosphere or set dressing

For Barnes, minor depictions of characters who have impairments to enhance an atmosphere of mystery, menace, or deprivation “encourage a lewd fascination with impairment.” (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 12) This is evident in the Australian film *Till Human Voices Wake Us* (2001) in the character of Mrs. Sacks. The young Sam and Silvy spy on an old deaf woman who signs in anger or in her sleep. This elderly female character is used to enhance the mysterious atmosphere of the film. She fascinates Sam and Silvy and they wonder about who ‘really understands her’. As depictions of her are juxtaposed with their ‘word association’ game, the parallelism is that Sam and Silvy are the only ones who understand each other.

This stereotype introduces the idea of film as a visual medium that must adopt visual methods of storytelling, which I explore further throughout this thesis.
However, rather than taking this concept to the depth available, Barnes does not explore it further than a mention. However, physical impairments have become a part of film language, and have thus become another variable of meaning within the shot. This meaning is reliant on pre-existing social prejudice.

Sheela, Gidy, Pru and Estella display a lewd fascination with Devlin in *Sirens* (1994) as he is blind. The atmosphere of mystery is enhanced in *To Have and To Hold* by Luther’s missing right eye (particularly when it is left as a ‘gift’ for Jack). Several of the examples listed above under the stereotype of sinister or evil also act as atmosphere or set dressing.

### 2.2.5 Super cripple or inspirational hero

Barnes notes that in *My Left Foot* disabled people are given magical or superhuman qualities, as when Christy Brown is represented as ‘overcoming’ his disability. Barnes also takes the opportunity to introduce the idea that disabled actors should portray disabled characters, expressing dissatisfaction with the decision to cast Daniel Day Lewis in the key role.24 Barnes’ main concern with this stereotype is that through its prevalence it widens the gulf between the disabled community and the non-disabled community. The argument becomes unclear when Barnes contends “non-disabled people view super cripples as unrepresentative of the disabled community as a whole” (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 13). Like Hevey, Barnes

---

24 This argument has also been articulated differently amongst disability theorists. Later, I discuss Norden, who covers all bases, suggesting it is discriminatory toward disabled people not to cast them in these roles. Further, he finds it to be the worst kind of exploitation when disabled people are cast in such roles.
now falls into the trap of over-emphasizing the importance of ‘reality’ at the expense of acknowledging cinema as a signifying system.

Although there were no ‘super cripples’ as such in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, impairment was nevertheless individualised in the same way with characters being encouraged to ‘overcome’ their impairments. For example, Andy says to Martin in *Proof* (1991), “handicapped people shouldn’t sit around feeling sorry for themselves. They should have a hobby.” Likewise in *The Sugar Factory*, Sam, the therapist, operates from a similar ideological position, blaming individual characters such as Stephanie for ‘choosing’ their impairments. This relates to Longmore’s portrayals of adjustment, in which nondisabled characters need to ‘get tough’ on disabled characters before they can adjust to a life with impairment.

2.2.6 Object of ridicule

When impairment in film plays a minor role and is used for comedic purposes it becomes an object of ridicule. Barnes contends that disability has always been a source of humour. He uses *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988) to illustrate this stereotype. Ken, the character with the speech impairment, seemingly survives

---

25 Elizabethan joke books are full of jokes about various impairments. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries those who could afford to kept “idiots” as objects of humour, and visits to Bedlam and other mental institutions were a typical form of entertainment (Barnes *Disabling Comedy* 1).
through luck rather than any forward planning.\textsuperscript{26} Barnes dedicated an entire article to this stereotype the year before, likening it to sexist and racist humour, and encouraging the introduction of legislation (\textit{Disabling Comedy}). Barnes is more concerned with television in this discussion and as I have indicated earlier I am unable to cover such a breadth of material in this thesis.

Many impaired characters were subjected to ridicule as a source of humour in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, including the paraplegic man often dumped in the desert by his able-bodied associates in \textit{Heaven’s Burning}. Likewise, Sophie in \textit{Lucky Break} often experiences comic misadventures due to her impairments. Their impairments are individualised and, as is often the case in neoliberal societies, they are blamed and suitably punished for not fitting in.

\textbf{2.2.7 Own worst and only enemy}

This stereotype is an extension of the stereotype whereby disabled people are pitiable and pathetic; however, this time the pity is individualised and constructed as a barrier to full integration or recovery. Similar to the super cripples, these characters are believed to be able to ‘overcome’ their ‘disability’ if they just stopped pitying themselves. However, unlike the super cripples, these characters do not ‘rise to the challenge’. These depictions blame people for having impairments. Barnes

\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, Perry in \textit{Siam Sunset} lives a cursed life — but he always survives also only through luck. During his bus tour, many minor characters suffer injuries and carry the symbols of disability with them for the remainder of the film; these symbols include Dot’s walking stick, Martin and Stuart’s hand bandages, Celia’s plastered and supported arm as well as several burns and scars. The ever-present risk of serious injury in this film due to Perry’s bad luck, adds to an atmosphere of humour and ridicule.
argues that this is a recurrent theme of more recent films using *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and *Coming Home* as examples. However, he does concede that these films contain elements of a ‘step in the right direction’ as they include depictions of sexually active disabled people. Yet he believes that ultimately the films should not be considered social disability films because they do not “confront seriously the kind of issues which concern the majority of disabled people; employment, housing and the environment” (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 15).

Barnes’ argument is weakened as he reduces the problem to a simple stereotype, ignoring the stylistic devices of cinema. Taking housing and the environment as the point from which to proceed when discussing *Born on The Fourth of July*, we can clearly see that there is so much more to discuss when looking at cinema. There is a scene when Ron, searching for a new identity, meets up with old girlfriend turned protester. In terms of *mise en scene*, as Donna leaves Ron she stands in front of a staircase. Norden explores these stylistic devices amongst his numerous stereotypes, and I will return to their function later in this chapter. Ron’s lack of access is confirmed by the cinematography, which follows the wheels of his chair as he moves toward Donna but bumps into the curb. Ron has ‘no access’ to this place or this girl.

At other times, whenever there is a staircase present we assume Ron will not have access to these places either, but editing removes the need to look at access. If Ron is to be considered as sexually abnormal, another of Barnes’ stereotypes I will
discuss in this chapter, the stairs at the brothel in Mexico symbolise this. Likewise, as Ron is shot and paralysed after accidentally killing Billy, a fellow American soldier, his impairment is perhaps a punishment. When Ron goes to Billy’s parents’ house to ask for forgiveness, an establishing wide shot shows an inaccessible house with a large staircase to the front door. Ron is downstairs in the first scene then without addressing how he got there, upstairs in the next. These cinematic stylistic devices give added weight to Barnes’ argument but he does not acknowledge them.

During the 1990s in Australian national cinema, characters were often made responsible for their own suffering or salvation through an individualisation of impairment. Narratives therefore also implied those who do not conform are their own worst and only enemy. Sam in *The Sugar Factory* is at the forefront of individualising Angela’s loss of language functioning and, likewise, Gabe’s father in *Romper Stomper* implies that she is a drug addict when chastising her for not taking her anti-epileptic medication.

### 2.2.8 Burden

This stereotype also relies on assumptions of dependency. The body is regarded as the site of both impairment and disability, and society is absolved of responsibility. Meeting the differing needs of people who have impairments is viewed as a drain on resources by this stereotype. Films use the character that is caring for the disabled character as the site of burden. These characterisations are designed to bestow carers with ‘saintly’ qualities such as self-sacrifice. Thus the disabled character is used to
provide information about the more important able-bodied characters, ultimately perpetuating the belief that “society would be better off without disabled people” (Barnes *Disabling Imagery and the Media* 16).

This stereotype was somewhat reversed in 1990s Australian national cinema as it is the carers who become the minor characters. Despite remaining bestowed with saintly qualities, they were also often portrayed as being equally as marginal as the person they were caring for; for example, Gillian in *Shine* (1996) is an astrologer and Beryl is a single mother in *Mr. Reliable* (1996).  

### 2.2.9 Sexually abnormal/nonsexual

Like Longmore, Barnes believes that filmic representations of disability and sex perpetuate notions that disabled people are either asexual or sexually degenerate.  

While disabled men are perceived as impotent, disabled women provide alibis for men’s adultery. Although *Cosi* opens up such debates and creates problematic binaries, these are not focused on, and the narrative resolves as a reaffirmation of the status quo.  

27 The earlier Australian film, *Annie’s Coming Out* (1984), clearly is in line with Barne’s stereotype, as the film is more about Jessica (Annie’s carer) than Annie (the impaired character) and the impact Annie has on her life and relationship. Despite the at times negative impact, Jessica sticks with Annie because she is a carer bestowed with saintly qualities.  

28 This stereotype is otherwise referred to as ‘the Chatterley syndrome’ because in D. H. Lawrence’s novel, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, the affair between Lady Chatterley and her gamekeeper Meadows commences following the paralysis of Lady Chatterley’s husband. Within the novel, he is perceived as sexually inactive and this has persisted into film and popular culture.  

29 As suggested in Chapter One, *Cosi* problematises other issues such as an entrepreneurial view of medical institutions encouraged by neoliberalism and globalisation.
an alibi for adultery), and male characters such as Henry and Roy can not fulfill hegemonic male roles as providers.

For Barnes, his contention that disabled women are unable to perform the roles of wife and mother is unproblematic, while other theorists such as Wendell argue for the importance of cultural expectations in forming identities. According to Wendell, “cultural associations of disability […] overlap with cultural expectations of femininity so that […] a disabled woman is redundantly fulfilling cultural expectations of her.” (62) Wendell is referring to the culturally prescribed heterosexual roles of men and women, in which the man is seen as active and the woman as passive. Thus for Barnes, disabled women are seen as asexual and therefore unable to fulfill their role as wives and mothers (Disabling Imagery and the Media 16–17).  

30 However, Barnes does preface his report with the acknowledgement that he neglected to fully explore the position of women, and ethnic minority groups due to funding, time and space constraints (Disabling Imagery and the Media 4-5). His contention that he had to sacrifice these “important aspects” in order to give a short over view highlights a bias toward the experience of physically impaired males that exists within both the general culture and the social model of disability. This has been noted by several theorists including J. Morris Pride Against Prejudice; Thomas; Seymour and Wendell.

2.2.10 Unable to participate in community

By omission, the idea that disabled people are unable to participate in the community has emerged. Barnes has included this stereotype because disabled
people are rarely depicted in the media as participating in the community. He believes this adds to the segregation or isolation of disabled people (Disabling Imagery and the Media 17).31

Thus, there is also a need to look at films that offer no portrayal of impairment and how these contribute to an exclusion of disability from an Australian national identity. Despite the frequent establishing and atmospheric shots in Dating The Enemy (1996) there is no one with a visible physical impairment. Arguably, statistically, certain extras in this film do have an invisible impairment; due to the visual nature of cinema I make this argument, and agree with Robert Stam and Louise Spence who contend, “the absence of representations of an oppressed group” (320) can be as damaging as distorting stereotypes.

One such ‘statistical’ occurrence appears in Dust Off The Wings (1997) in which normality is offered as being a white, heterosexual, athletic male. Women are available for their pleasure but are a total nuisance anyway. It is not until the end of film in a very long montage that we see images of anyone outside this norm, including a pregnant woman, Asian tourists, and a man in a wheelchair. This single portrayal serves to further individualise disability and exclude it from white heterosexual hedonism.

---

31 Throughout his paper Barnes is meticulous in separating disability and impairment for the purpose of encouraging representations of disability (via Oliver’s definition). Yet here he complains that in non-fiction programs disabled people are rarely seen, except when programs are dealing solely with ‘disability’. Perhaps he means impairment, as he moves on to suggest disability should be political not medical and claims representations present impairment as the cause of the problem.
2.2.11 Normal

Barnes is troubled by this stereotype because it “perpetuates widespread ignorance about the realities of impairment” (Disabling Imagery and the Media 18). While as a title ‘normal’ may appear to be a positive stereotype, for Barnes this emphasis on ‘normality’ does not challenge discrimination. Further, constructions of normality are not addressed. It appears as though Barnes is arguing for recognition and representation of impairment in this category as part of the ‘reality’ of the disabled experience, claiming that “impairments are played down or ignored” when they are indeed “a fundamental part of a disabled person’s personality” (Disabling Imagery and the Media 19). Here Barnes wants impairment to be represented, yet earlier he is critical of it. I will incorporate this argument into my Analysis of Dance Me To My Song, a film that addresses both disability and impairment, in Chapter Five.

Characters often attempt to reassure other characters of their ‘normality’ following discovery of an impairment (Romper Stomper; The Nostradamus Kid; Life (1996)). This ability to reach a semblance of normality can be located in the body and considered an individual’s personal achievement. For example, in Life, Des claims in relation to having HIV, “there’s nothing wrong with you, you bring the sickness on yourself” and engages in a strict workout regime in order to maintain his physique and current level of health. As previously mentioned, the therapist in The Sugar Factory invokes this rhetoric as a means of group therapy. In The Nostradamus Kid, Esther considers her nervous breakdown a slight set back. Having
left a mental institution and meeting up with Ken again, he says, “I heard you’d gone crazy”. Esther attempts to normalise her experience by claiming “I’m better now”.

Barnes concludes by suggesting a number of ‘accurate portrayals’ of disability and, like Hevey, encourages media producers to turn to organisations of disabled people for assistance. However, an ‘accurate’ portrayal for one disabled person will be different to that which is ‘accurate’ for another. The disagreement amongst theorists within the field demonstrates this as Morris, Crow, and Thomas met with such criticism (Darke *The Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability*; Shakespeare and Watson, *Defending The Social Model*) when calling for a social theory of impairment.

### 2.3 Norden’s Cinema of Isolation

Likewise, Martin Norden’s comprehensive book *The Cinema of Isolation* is often used in discussions of disability and cinema. It offers a discussion of stereotypes in accordance with historical periods, including pre-World War II (freakish), post-World War II (rehabilitative), 1950s (freaksish again), and finally the mid-1970s (more enlightened) (Darke *Everywhere* 10).

The processes of producing meanings of normality mean disabled people are ‘different’. Norden frames his discussion of disability within an ideology of isolation:
In the case of people with physical disabilities, the movie industry has perpetuated or initiated a number over the years as part of the general practice of isolation — stereotypes so durable and persuasive that they have become mainstream society's perception of disabled people and have obscured if not outright supplanted disabled people's perceptions of themselves. (*Cinema of Isolation* 1)

Norden discusses the changing representation of disability in the movies according to socio-cultural factors, including the Vietnam War, technological advancements and the rise of independent filmmaking. He recognises that *how* disability is represented needs to be changed, not *how much*, because disability has always been represented in the media (*Cinema of Isolation* 14).

Norden agrees that the representation of disability and what it means to be disabled is normally through stereotypes. These stereotypes have endured throughout what Norden has termed the 'cinema of isolation'. Although I will not review each stereotype in depth in this chapter as I did with those put forward by Barnes, I will expand on them throughout the thesis where necessary. There are many of these stereotypes and at times they are self explanatory. They include the disabled person as a:

- human novelty
- comic misadventurer
- less than marriage material
- freakshow fascination
- tragic victim
- noble Warrior
- rescued
- able to make the audience or other characters ‘feel good’
• objectification of evil  
• sweet innocent (similar to Kriegel’s charity cripple)  
• unworldly maiden (sweet innocent’s adult counterpart)  
• miracle cure  
• fake disability  
• Elderly dupe  
• Able-bodied ‘rescuing’ disabled

Norden then applies these stereotypes throughout his book according to the different historical periods identified by Darke, sometimes modifying them to suit technological advancement. Previously in this chapter I have criticised other theorists who discuss cinematic representations of disability in the context of stereotypes as being limited in scope. However, by recognising the tools cinema has available to it, Norden is successful in incorporating disability theory into film analysis:

[1]he phenomenon of isolation is reflected not only in the typical storylines of the films but also to a large extent in the ways filmmakers have visualised the characters interacting with their environments; they have used the basic tools of their trade – framing, editing, sound, lighting, set design elements (e.g. fences, windows, staircase bannisters) to suggest physical or symbolic separation of disabled characters from the rest of society. (*Cinema of Isolation* 1)

Norden raises two further points related to disabled actors that I wish to explore in this chapter. First, that able-bodied actors portraying disabled characters, such as Tom Cruise in *Born on the Fourth of July* or Daniel Day Lewis in *My Left Foot* is “a type of fraudulence akin to white actors performing in black face” (*Cinema of Isolation* 17). Marks suggests that this is to reassure the audience that the film is just
entertainment and the problem does not really exist (160). However, Norden is later critical of films that employ disabled actors because they:

represent the worst kind of exploitation, in that the only kind of movies in which disabled actors could find work were those that paid undue attention to their disabilities. These performers were well aware of the general public’s fascination with human ‘defects’ and […] were forced by economic necessity to contribute to that interest in the unusual. (Cinema of Isolation 25)

Norden, like Hevey and Barnes, falls into the ‘realities’ trap despite his emphasis on the codes at work in the films, including the codes of narrativity and style. Andre Bazin criticises the fascination with the ‘realism’ of cinema as a way to judge actors; specifically pitting stage against film. While it may be possible to argue that a film is realistic, every element of that film is stylised (385). Others have argued that the actor is the only form of reality in cinema, it is the only physical presence while everything else is constructed (375). Due to the discontinuity of filmmaking, Leo Braudy contends that a film actor creates a life rather than performs a role (389). Therefore, acting is also stylized and reality can never be achieved. Norden argues that movies are powerful cultural tools that have perpetuated a number of stereotypes that both influence society’s regard for people with disabilities and differ from the realities of experiencing disability. Darke believes such essentialist

32 A similar argument could be made with the film, A Woman’s Tale. While this film is about dying of cancer, the actor (Sheela Florence) in the key role was herself dying of cancer.
33 Braudy describes an exercise often given to acting students where they are asked to perform an ‘embarrassing’ activity they would normally do in private. This exercise involves interpretation and students may scale down intimacy rather than discover and exaggerate it (392).
34 However, he is critical of early film director Thomas Edison for producing several films in the ‘cinema of isolation’ including the first that Norden knows of, Fake Beggar, in 1898. Yet Edison suffered hearing loss as a child and it was his reality (and was reflected in his films) that “disability did not have to lead to a life of poverty and beggary” (Cinema of Isolation 15). Thus Edison was encouraged to view his impairment as his problem to overcome and the social situations of disabled people as linked to their physical condition.
methods are ‘reductive’ suggesting there is no ‘true’ way to represent disability (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 183).

A weakness of disability film analysis exists in the tendency to ignore the language of cinema, offering discussion of only plot and story, effectively excluding *mise en scene* and style from a discussion of the disabling structures of cinema.\(^{35}\) As such, I tend to favour Norden’s framework as it suggests a method of analysis that includes all that is available to the filmmaker. Likewise, feminist film analysts have found that due to the signifying nature of film, semiotics is a useful tool to employ when uncovering the patriarchal ideology behind film texts:

> [a] semiological analysis is concerned with all the possible layers of meaning in a film text and how these are constructed through a range of codes: codes of image and dialogue, codes of narrativity, scale of shot and camera angle, codes of lighting, scripting, directing and editing. Semiology attempts to deconstruct an image through close analysis of the interplay of the codes at work in the text. (Creed 295)

In the next chapter, I will apply these theories to disability film studies and undertake a semiotic analysis of the films under discussion, addressing several layers of meaning. At times the analysis will be long and refer to form and style in cinematic terms. Other times I will refer only to subject matter or a single cinematic feature of an individual film to make connections with sociological positions.

---

\(^{35}\)Cinema and literature communicate differently. There may not be any visual language that remains distinct to a nation. In Chapter Six of *Arguing the Arts* Rowse contends that language is integral to the construction of Australian national identity. He compares the way language is used in different media — including literature, film, television and theatre — with regard to a ‘dinki-di’ emblem of nationality, and finds that while dinki-di may be ‘Australian’ it must also be approached from a gender and class perspective.
regarding disability and the position of disabled people in Australian society.

Creed also contends that images of women on screen tell us more about patriarchal myths of women than about the role of women in society.\textsuperscript{36} In her discussion of the possibilities feminism brings to reading texts, Creed argues that film naturalises ideology through icons (300). Sobchack and Sobchack explain that icons “compress information about story, characters, and theme” (222). Movies rely on visual shorthand (Branston and Stafford 91) originating from the early days of cinema when movies were much shorter and silent (Sutherland \textit{Black Hats} 17).

Freud found that both disabled people (he cited blindness as the example) and women incite a castration anxiety (Norden \textit{Cinema of Isolation} 6). Laura Mulvey argues cinema is arranged by the unconscious, which in turn is informed by the dominant order’s structuring of the pleasure in looking (747). In this way, with reference to the patriarchal order in which pleasure in looking ascribes to an active/male and passive/female paradigm, women become the image, while and men are the bearer of the look (750). Mulvey goes on to describe the basic cinematic techniques employed to perpetuate this situation, for example close ups of ‘fetishised’ parts of the female body:

\textsuperscript{36} Likewise, Darke (\textit{Cinematic Representations of Disability} 183) and Meekosha (\textit{Superchicks, Clones, Cyborgs and Cripples} 24) suggest that images of disabled people on screen tell us more about the threat disability poses to normality and stability.
[o]ne part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance Space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen. (751)

Sutherland, in a similar vein to Creed’s argument regarding patriarchal myths of femininity, maintains that visual metaphors associated with physical difference evoking negative stereotypes of disability are based on familiar falsehoods. He concludes that they are in fact an inefficient way of storytelling (Black Hats 16–17). As such, Sutherland is a strong critic of Syd Fields’ views on the topic of screenwriting (Black Hats 17). Fields encourages using disability as an icon to reveal aspects of characterisation:

[a] screenplay, remember, is a story told with pictures […] Pictures, or images, reveal aspects of character […] Physical handicap — as an aspect of characterisation — is a convention that extends far back into the past. Form your characters […] then reveal them by their actions, and possibly physical traits. (31)

Impairment is often used as an icon in Australian cinema to compress information about character and plot. This tendency can be seen in The Piano, where Ada who has ‘no say’ in her life is mute.37 Meekosha finds this to be a common thread in the representation of disability in Australian national cinema:

[w]ith some few exceptions, the public sphere is saturated with discourses which use disabled people as metaphors for horror, evil, fear and distress. The films are rarely reviewed in terms of the disability implications, unless they specifically ‘deal with’ disability issues. (Superchicks, clones, cyborgs and cripples 27)

37 In this way Campion is making a social statement about the patriarchy silencing women, and impairment is implicated stylistically.
Meekosha’s point is particularly pertinent to *Angel Baby* because despite the director’s assurances that the film is not about schizophrenia (impairment) (*Urban Making of Angel Baby*), it has been praised by disability analysts on The Disability Films Website (disabilityfilms.co.uk) for its attention to detail (*Angel Baby*).\(^{38}\) I return to Meekosha’s argument in Chapter Four when I discuss three indicative films of (1990s) Australian national cinema that use impairment to problematise identity and relationships. As these films often simultaneously attempt a representation of cultural diversity, the sometimes achieve problematisation by means of cultural insiderism.

### 2.4 Darke’s ‘normality genre’

Darke argues that cinematic representations reveal certain things about wider society, particularly with regard to changes in how a society views a minority group (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 181). Darke is a strong critic of other disability film analysts, finding their work to be limited in scope and little more than disapproving classification. Darke is most critical of the identification of stereotypes (that he believes to be archetypes anyway), and he also takes issue with the contention that abnormality is a by-product of the construction of normality. According to Darke, “abnormality is used in cultural imagery to define the parameters of normality, not vice versa” (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 183). Darke wants recognition of the role abnormality plays in the construction of

\(^{38}\) This site offers reviews of 2500 feature films that represent ‘disability’ in some way. The films are categorised according to 16 different impairments and are further divided into major or minor depiction. The site also offers recommendations.
normality. By identifying what he has termed a ‘normality drama’ genre, Darke believes he is moving beyond ‘simple classification’. He bases this principle on genre theory as established by Roger Altman (Cinematic Representations of Disability 185). According to Altman there are seven characteristics of genre films, and Darke applies each to his normality genre theory.

First, Altman argues that by setting up a binary opposition between cultural norms and threats to these norms, genres are dualistic. This is evident in the normality drama as impaired characters fight for a semblance of normality (Darke Cinematic Representations of Disability 192). Altman’s second characteristic is that genres are repetitive, as they follow the same basic pattern. For Darke this can be seen in the supremacy of normality at the expense of abnormality, particularly as normality dramas cross into other genres such as the horror (Cinematic Representations of Disability 193–194). Darke is critical of other disability film theorists because they “[examine] the impaired character in isolation from the rest of the characters in a film” (Cinematic Representations of Disability 188). For Altman, each sequence contributes to the overall effect of the film and is therefore cumulative. Darke believes this can be seen in the normality drama, as the representation of disability must be looked at in relation to the rest of the characters (Cinematic Representations of Disability 194). By viewing the past as somehow better than the present, Altman argues that genre films are nostalgic. Darke believes this is manifested in the normality drama through the frequent assisted-suicide/euthanasia story-lines (Cinematic Representations of Disability 194–195).
Altman next identifies the symbolic nature of genre films. He believes these films require wider interpretation. Darke connects this to his normality drama, maintaining that the questioning of normality and abnormality can be interpreted as a questioning of what it means to be alive (Cinematic Representations of Disability 195). Finally, genre films are functional — they address problems that society is unable to handle. Darke uses the example of euthanasia films to illustrate this point with regards to the normality drama.

While agreeing with Darke’s normality drama genre in theory, I fail to see how his analysis moves beyond simple classification, of which he is so critical. Earlier in his piece Darke writes that writers on disability imagery are beginning to move away from “simple classification and disapproval […] to a more synthesized way of looking at disability imagery.” This is achieved through an interdisciplinary focus:

many writers now combine cultural, literary, feminist, sociological, discursive and disability theory (in any combination) in a significantly more coherent and astute manner. (Cinematic Representations of Disability 183)

Darke, like other disability film theorists has not included film theory in his list. Although Darke draws on genre theory, he fails to utilise Altman’s methodology to its full potential. While Altman distinguishes between a semantic (character types, aesthetics, plot lines) and syntactic (relationship between genre and society) approach to genre analysis, Darke seems fixed on the semantic and does not offer any reflectionist reading as to why a normality genre exists. He argues against
categorizing yet he does the same; within his genre analysis he does little more than list several films that correspond to each of Altman’s characteristics. Altman’s work, which is primarily concerned with musicals, discusses structure and style in the neoformalist sense as well as these seven characteristics. Altman draws on structure, style, and common themes, recognising the importance of a common semantic type and a corresponding syntactic type to draw a genre together (Altman 115). His analysis provides the opportunity to deconstruct individual film texts, Darke’s does not. Thus as Darke suggests, disability imagery writers need to incorporate other disciplines into their analysis, especially film theory.

2.5 Conflicting Readings

Tom Shakespeare argues that the disabled people’s movement has always focused attention on the power of images in defining the experience of disability and their role in fostering prejudicial attitudes toward disabled people. Shakespeare writes that while Norden’s Cinema of Isolation and Darke’s ‘normality drama’ arguments are legitimate, ‘disability correctness’ is undermining the possibility of filmmakers dealing with disability at all (Art and Lies? 165). He uses the examples of Shine and Breaking the Waves (1996) to discuss how each film can have an alternative disability reading than the one adopted by the disabled community. For example, while Shine is embraced by much of the disability community, it fits into several of Norden’s stereotypes. Therefore I suggest a new method of film analysis that incorporates production, text, and reception.
This analysis can be applied to the more recent film, *I Am Sam* (2001). In this film an intellectually impaired man (Sam) fights for custody of his daughter (Lucy) after she is removed from his home because her intelligence has surpassed his. There could be several readings of this film using the variety of frameworks proposed by social theorists described above. Barnes would be most interested in the stereotypes adopted, of which there are many. Longmore may be interested in the sexual contexts, while Morris may be critical of the exploration of masculinity. I use these differing readings to illustrate Shakespeare’s contention that there is a need to take into consideration the intentions of the filmmakers.

Before proceeding to articles that specifically address the Australian representation of disability, I wish to acknowledge Shakespeare’s implicit argument. While he contends that the intentions of the filmmakers should be acknowledged as well as the text, he does not address a third area of inquiry that I am interested in: reception. Shakespeare suggests that the differing critical reception of the two films can be resolved by considering the intentions of the filmmakers. While on the right track, I feel his analysis is simplistic, as audience interaction should be acknowledged as equally important to the filmmaker’s intentions and the text itself.

Likewise, although I criticise Barnes and Shakespeare for citing stereotypes, and then myself proceed to list a series of Australian films that ascribed to these stereotypes, throughout the remainder of the thesis I address the intentions of the filmmakers, socio-cultural influences and audience reception in the construction of a
‘disabling’ cinema. When looking at a text, it is important to address stereotypes, but this must be within the context of the other three influences I have listed above. Further, the examination of a national cinema requires the consideration of the socio-cultural context in which film texts are produced.

2.6 Australia

Several theorists have noticed the prevalence of disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s and its symbolic value (Ferrier; O’Regan Australian National Cinema; Rayner; Goggin and Newell Imagining Diversity; and Gillard and Achimovich Representation of Madness). However, few have proceeded from a minority group standpoint, that views disability as a viable identity, or indeed a minority group. Perhaps this is because when it comes to the Australian media, producers are encouraged not to view disabled people as a discrete group. Indeed, the Australian Press Council has argued that “people with disabilities are most empowered when they are treated as fully participating members of the wider community” (Jakubowicz 107). As I revealed in Chapter One, The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 stipulated indirect discrimination to demonstrate that expecting disabled people to participate as nondisabled without any special consideration can amount to discrimination.

Normalcy is communicated through the public sphere (Jakubowicz 104). Impairment is considered abnormal (Darke Cinematic Representations of Disability 184). Therefore, if disabled people should not be considered a discrete group, the only option left is for disabled people to deny their impairments in a kind of
semblance to normality that can never really be achieved. Thus disabled people are encouraged by the Australian media to pass as nondisabled; their impairments have been individualised.39

In Australia, disability remains outside the “social construction of political power”, it is pre-social. However, other movements have recognised the body as post-social including gender, sexuality and colour (Meekosha Communicating the Social 62). Australian cinema has been criticized in the past for its bias toward male centered stories that valued strength and perfect bodies. Currently, the marker of power in Australia is white heterosexual bourgeois masculinity (Meekosha Communicating the Social 61; F.Campbell 46). Watson and Pringle argue that for a long time films marginalised women in the national myths of Australia (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 295). The successful integration of feminism in Australian filmmaking provided a precedent for the criticism of the representation of other minority groups and a call for:

[f]irstly, a multicultural cinema; secondly, an Aboriginal and Islander cinema; and thirdly, gay and lesbian film making. In each the same logic can be discerned of establishing separate public spheres, special consideration, and governmental

39 Goggin and Newell, who conducted a report for the AFC into access and equity issues in the Australian film industry, found that issues of passing influenced access to the industry and training institutions. Despite one educator from an unnamed institution claiming that students were selected on the basis of talent and were made to feel ‘normal’ while at the institution, Goggin and Newell cite the example of two hearing-impaired people who trained as directors. The deaf person who experienced greater difficulties with communication was considered by the institution to have less talent while the one who successfully completed training also found a job in the industry (Imagining Diversity 9–10)
acceptance of the evidence of discrimination as the basis for action to facilitate future contributions to storytelling in its diverse forms. (O'Regan *Australian National Cinema* 302)

As a result of these movements, Australia’s cinematic output throughout the 1990s incorporated what Ian Craven has described as a “remarkable diversity” (1). These movements argued that Australia can not have a simple identity and different socio-cultural identities both compete with and complement each other (O'Regan *Australian National Cinema* 305). It was not until the 1990s that this was recognised, as Australian national cinema redefined itself as a diverse cinema bringing minority perspectives to bear on film (O'Regan *Australian National Cinema* 167; Craven 1). Despite this reputation, disability is not valued as a point of diversity. The 1990s saw an increasing number of Australian feature dramas using disability as a representational device (Ferrier 64).

The character of choice in the ‘diverse’ Australian cinema of the 1990s was, according to Tom O’Regan quirky, eccentric and an individual (*Beyond Australian Film* 9). Many Australian films have depicted the quirky, eccentric individual as disabled. Often this is a conscious cinematic link made for greater visual power (*Babe* (1995); *Dead To The World*) or verisimilitude (*Angel Baby*; *Thank God He Met Lizzie* (1997); *Heaven’s Burning*). Michael Rhymer made his characters in *Angel Baby* schizophrenic because they were quirky and it made more sense to give them a mental impairment (more on this in Chapter Four). Liz Ferrier, in the most prominent article on disability in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, makes the claim that films depicting disabled character constitute a subgenre in
recent Australian cinema. She makes the further link with the quirky character other theorists are concerned with:

\[\text{d]riven by character rather than plot, they demonstrate a spatial rather than temporal logic, and attend to quirky details which particularise character and place rather than opting for emblematic locales less likely to distract from the onward progression of the narrative. In many ways the films thus develop distinctively Australian narrative traditions, even when working with Hollywood genres. (61)\]

Character-driven narratives, are a feature of Australian national cinema, particularly as they relate to the representation of disability. *Paradise Road* is one exception in which disability is used for both plot and atmospheric reasons, with little continuity from shot to shot. Alternatively, *Shine* features a quirky character while working within a Hollywood stylistic paradigm.

A feature that sets apart characters in Australian national cinema from international cinemas is their ordinariness, their ugliness. O’Regan argues that the “ugly, daggy, monstrous Australian” is part of the (multi)culture (*Australian National Cinema* 156). Indeed the protagonists of *Muriel’s Wedding* and *The Castle*, two quintessential Australian films of the 1990s, center around ugly people.\(^{40}\) Paul J. Hogan, writer and director of *Muriel’s Wedding* sought to make a film about the ‘ugly’ best friend (Muriel) in direct opposition to American films that feature physically beautiful characters (Tania) (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema*

---

\(^{40}\) Liz Ferrier, in her article about creative disability in Australian Cinema, encompasses disadvantage as well as impairment and makes the claim that Muriel in *Muriel’s Wedding*, although not disabled is disadvantaged and stigmatised by her difference. She is a social outcast (67). It is at this point that the difference between Ferrier’s and my own argument becomes particularly apparent. While Ferrier argues that Muriel is stigmatised for being a social outcast, I would argue she is a social outcast because she is stigmatised.
243). 41 Strictly Ballroom, another cinema success, does feature an ugly-duckling make over but Fran remains an outsider in the Ballroom Dancing community due to her penchant for dancing flamenco. Fran’s pride in her multicultural identity is focused on, and a marginal story is integrated as part of the national identity.

Ferrier further links these quirky characterisations with the prominence of disabled characters when she connects difference, oddball characteristics, and social exclusion with disability, in a cycle of films in the 1990s that feature disablement. As O’Regan comments, a particular image of Australians emerged during the 1990s, this image, he argued, was unflattering:

[Australia] is a nation of bit characters peopled by harmless though quirky people, by physically unappealing people with limited mental attributes, and by mongrel bastards who murder and dispossess their Aboriginal population, mistreat women, migrants and others. Australia itself becomes a place where weird things happen – both naturally and socially, something to be expected of a society derived from a nation of white crooks/slaves and jailers. (Australian National Cinema 256)

Ferrier finds these representations of disability and difference empowering, particularly as protagonists find success through creativity (For example, Amy; The Quiet Room (1996); Proof; The Piano; Bad Boy Bubby). 42 Writing in 1994, Serge Grunberg believed that Australian cinema had become too politically correct, complaining that “one is forbidden to overlook even the least minority” (29).

41 While O’Regan finds ugliness to be a common feature, he also cites Tulloch who, in comparison to Hollywood, identified ugliness as a marker of Australia’s poor production values. (Australian National Cinema 245).

42 While Ferrier locates this within an empowering paradigm, I find connections with the personal tragedy mode of disability, in which impairment is individualised, and those more able to control their body are celebrated while those that can’t are held responsible for their own suffering, becoming a constant reminder that we are not in total control of our bodies (Marks 155-6).
Likewise, Tom O’Regan argued that Australian cinema presented a diverse image of Australians that included minority groups:

Australian cinema becomes a cinema peculiarly able to air its society’s dirty linen, prepared to look seriously and unflinchingly at its own history, able to dramatize and give dignity to the ordinary, the handicapped and people on its margins, telling stories of people not normally centered in fiction. (*Australian National Cinema* 261)

O’Regan’s comments raise two important points regarding disability in Australian national cinema in the 1990s. Firstly, and most significantly, he recognises the importance of including disability in a diverse national cinema, and secondly, Australian filmmakers were more willing to represent disability during this period than in previous decades. However, due to the inclination toward the personal tragedy mode of representation discussed at length in the previous chapter, I disagree with his contention that representations looked seriously at impairment and gave dignity to disability. Again, I believe the exceptions were *Bad Boy Bubby*, *Dance Me to My Song*, *Struck By Lightning* and *Lilian’s Story*. Also as I have indicated, there were several Australian films made during the 1990s that offered general social problematisations that applied to disability issues but didn’t offer a disability identity.

For Goggin and Newell, access and equity problems should be addressed from a critical perspective, and disability should be considered an aspect of diversity with disabled people having fulfilling experiences and disability being located in society, not the individual (*Imagining Diversity* 1–12). Hevey finds that charity imagery is a
Chapter 2 Disability Debates

barrier to the recognition of disability as socially created (Creatures Time Forgot 3). This relates to Longmore and Bame’s stereotypes in which deliverance from disability is attributed to the pity and benevolence of others. In this way disability remains individualised.

After looking extensively at access and equity issues in the Australian film industry, Goggin and Newell found that systematic change is needed to tackle injustice and gain equity (Imagining Diversity 12). Respondents felt that lateral thinking would enable people with any sort of impairment access to the film industry, but a lack of consciousness (rather than direct prejudice) may put people off (Imagining Diversity 19). A suggestion for moving towards a fair film future was a total transformation through the development of a disability film funding-policy or body in order to combat prejudice, fear, and miscomprehension (Goggin and Newell Imagining Diversity 10).

Goggin and Newell also considered current representations (the national cinema) and suggested how they contribute to systemic barriers by failing to recognise disability from a critical diversity perspective. They argue that disability imagery reveals attitudes toward disabled people (Imagining Diversity 4). The stereotypical ways in which disability is currently presented in cinema can be termed ‘disabling’ cinema and include:

- disability is a tragedy, and that happiness occurs when it is overcome;
- disability is the problem of the individual, not society;
- disability is negative, that people with disabilities suffer a ‘deficit’ or ‘catastrophe’, rather than having fulfilling experiences;
• people dealing with the social conditions of their disability are ‘heroic’. (*Imagining Diversity* 4)

They conclude that, stylistically, disability is useful as it operates symbolically, conveying general themes and elements of character. More specifically, according to Goggin and Newell, Australian films move beyond and question these stereotypes. However, in terms of access, they continue to exclude disabled actors by casting nondisabled actors — with the exception of *Dance Me To My Song* (*Imagining Diversity* 4). While I agree that most of these films question the stereotypes, I would argue that they often do not move beyond them. For example, *Angel Baby* questions the stereotype that disabled people should not be parents and that they should hand over control of their body to the medical establishment. However, the death of Kate and Harry at the end of the narrative reconfirms these initially questioned prejudices. Further, most of the other features they cite continue to locate disability as a tragedy within the individual’s damaged body, for example *Muriel’s Wedding, The Piano, Proof,* and *Moulin Rouge!*. I will refer to these films throughout this thesis to demonstrate various arguments related to the contention that impairment was used symbolically in Australian national cinema during the 1990s.

### 2.7 Conclusion

Disability film studies is an emerging field and it has already experienced several theoretical revisions, very much in line with the evolution of the feminist

---

43 The films that Goggin and Newell refer to in support of this contention are drawn from the following list: *Proof, Muriel’s Wedding, The Piano, Bad Boy Bubby, Cosi, Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Angel Baby,* and *Dance Me To My Song* (*Imagining Diversity* 3).
movement. While the importance of both the text and the filmmaker has recently being recognised, the role of the audience is only implied, almost disregarded, as a site from which to examine disability diversity.

Internationally, disability film studies is concentrating on the way cinema ‘disables’ people with impairments through stereotypes and constructions of abnormality. Despite much disagreement and many subsequent amendments, all agree that impairment is individualised and disability is considered to be a problem within a damaged body.

In Australia, alternatively, the concept of disability as being a perspective from which to critically examine diversity is only just emerging. As a consequence, theorists have not really begun viewing disability as more than a tendency — a cycle of films. As such, analysis tended to focus on the symbolic properties of impairment, failing to recognise the way such representations isolate disabled people by individualising impairment or presenting it as a personal tragedy to be overcome. Goggin and Newell are the exception whose analysis is closest in focus to my own.

In the next chapter I turn my inquiry toward Australian national cinema specifically and examine the influences leading to the diversity of the 1990s. Further, I will introduce O’Regan’s four ways of problematising Australian nationhood and outline
the rationale for the selection of the key films of this thesis, to be examined in Chapters Four and Five.
Australian National Cinema

3.0 Australian films portray ‘embattled’ characters during the 1990s

“It's not an ideal world, is it an ideal world? We just have to make the most of it; this is the way we find it isn’t it? Oh it’s more ideal than it was. We’re privileged”

David in *Shine* (1996)

Writing about the ‘national’ of a cinema is undoubtedly either a brave or a foolish undertaking because of the dangerous pitfalls into which an author can tumble. It is often difficult to distinguish, for example, when one is addressing society or political culture but not necessarily (or even to the exclusion of) ‘nation-ness’.

(Hayward, *French National Cinema* ix)

In the last chapter I introduced the theoretical concerns of this thesis in the area of disability film analysis. The chapter ended with an indication of the direction Australian film theorists were taking regarding this topic in the 1990s. Australian theorists have noted the prevalence of disabled characters during 1990s Australian national cinema, calling the trend a subgenre (Ferrier) or cycle (O’Regan *Beyond Australian Film*). While these theorists argue that those films portraying embattled artists (or people) ‘overcoming’ disability (or disadvantage) are examples of diversity, a different picture emerges when they are considered using a social theory of disability. In films such as *Angel Baby*, *Cosi, Lilian’s Story, Struck By Lightning* and *Shine* these Australian theorists continue to locate causality for disability in the body (see Ferrier 67), while the social model recognises that vulnerability associated with impairment is a cultural construction. I continue the Australian-specific
discussion in this chapter by introducing the idea of a national cinema as it contributes to explanations of ‘normality’.

This chapter focuses on the creation of an Australian national identity within Australian national cinema, situating the representation of disability and impairment in this cultural construction, particularly during the 1990s. I investigate the significance of an Australian national identity and how this was reflected in the national cinema to the exclusion of disability. I also consider how disability has been used to open up other questions of diversity, often to its own exclusion. An understanding of Australian national cinema and identity is crucial to an appreciation of a disability culture, as it remains peripheral to an otherwise culturally diverse national identity.

I begin by exploring the assumptions and problems that go along with defining ‘national cinema’ before moving onto identity politics. After addressing Australian national identity as it relates to a fascination with the body in Australian national cinema, I offer a generalised account of how Australian national cinema both represents and constitutes disability. Finally, I introduce and provide a methodology for the analysis that follows in the next two chapters. I address Australian society,

---

1 While the social movement of disability has in general attempted to align disability with other forms of social discrimination, for example class, race, gender and sexuality, it has been accused of favouring certain impairments over others and ignoring the interrelationship between the social, psychological and biological (Marks 93). This thesis moves beyond the sociological to consider cultural representation in order to explore the way cinema ‘shapes’ bodies and, by extension, how they are perceived in the community.
political culture, and nation-ness as they intersect with cinema and identity to exclude a disability identity.

3.1 National Cinema

A national cinema may appear to be a simple concept to grasp without requiring much of a definition. Albert Moran finds the concept has been used as a description rather than a problematisation of the film activities and institutions within a nation-state (8). National cinemas are often compared to Hollywood (Crofts 50). Film industries of other nations have historically had a particular relationship with Hollywood as the dominant international film industry (Moran 7). In the previous chapter, I focused on Hollywood’s tendencies in disability representation and their critical uptake, and only briefly referred to Australian film production to indicate some of its distinctions from Hollywood.² Although Australian cinema primarily accommodates the Hollywood style, some stylistic resistance is offered (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 2 24); we ‘Australianise’ the form (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 1).³

---

² Sometimes the relationship a national cinema has with Hollywood is in direct opposition to certain conventions (third cinema), while others times the dominant stylistic paradigm is adopted (second cinema) (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 2 24).

³ Wendy Seymour has found that “women nursing men back to health after severe injury or sickness is a common theme in popular culture” (139). A variation on this tendency can be seen in Shine, where David once again becomes socially acceptable through the love of a woman. Jenny Morris suggests that many Hollywood films representing disability do so as an exploration of masculinity, “More recently, film-makers have used disability as a metaphor for dependency and vulnerability and as a vehicle for exploring such experiences for men” (Pride Against Prejudice 93). These films, she argues, rely on stereotypes of heterosexual masculinity.
However, national cinemas may also be approached from an inward-looking perspective, especially when attempting to address notions of cultural identity. For Andrew Higson, the relationship a national cinema has with an already existing national, political, economic, and cultural identity or set of traditions is a more adequate way to define a national cinema than simply to compare or contrast it to another national cinema, including Hollywood (38). I introduced the social and political climate in Australia during the 1990s in Chapter One, as it influenced the narratives coming out of Australian national cinema. I extended this discussion in Chapter Two to indicate that due to the cultural diversity of Australian national cinema, the representations of impairment differed from Hollywood’s offerings.

Dermody and Jacka argue in *The Imaginary Industry* that films made in Australia during the 1980s were lacking in terms of social commentary, particularly when compared to Hollywood films influenced by the contemporary socio-political environment in the United States.4 When these issues were tackled by Australian filmmakers in the 1980s, it was on the personal level, offering an insight as to why Australian national cinema during the later period of 1990s tended to represent disability as an individual’s personal problem. Dermody and Jacka describe the small number of films that go against this as low budget eccentrics (*Bliss* (1985); *Malcolm* (1986); *Mad Max* (1979); *Going Down* (1983)). They suggest that

4 These contemporary issues may include “the ecological crisis, the nuclear threat, the rejection of the welfare state, the growth of a radical right, the eclipse of the supremacy of the US economy, our changing relationship with Asia” and issues pertaining to the big business and corporate greed of the 1980s (Dermody and Jacka *The Imaginary Industry* 128).
Australian national cinema was too ‘well bred’ to tackle controversial political issues (*Imaginary Industry* 128 – 129). Later in this chapter I discuss the ‘AFC genre’ and its impact on Australian national identity. Because Australian feature film production was developed as a national cinema for cultural benefits its success is measured in cultural nationalist terms. Alternatively, the success of Hollywood which operates under a free market system, (Turner, *End of the National Project* 203-2) is measured economically. Therefore, in the case of Australian national cinema, an inward-looking approach is beneficial, particularly as I am investigating disability in cultural nationalist terms.

The idea of a national cinema carries with it many assumptions (Moran 10). However, national identity is constructed (Turner *Making it National* 123). For Moran, this problematises the idea of a national cinema in conceptual terms:

> [t]he ‘nation’ is an imagined community that attempts to supersede loyalties to other communities such as those based on class, region or gender and thereby marginalizes and displaces identities based on those other sources. (10)

Consequently, the relationship between the constructed national identity and marginalized communities illustrate the relationship a national cinema has with

---

5 Although not the most commercially successful group of films, the films influenced by the preferences of the Australian Film Commission gained the most international recognition and came to be seen as representative of Australian national cinema and Australianness (Dermody and Jacka *Screening of Australia* vol. 2 31).

6 Immediately following the revival, Australian filmmakers favoured ‘ocker’ (sexist, vulgar and satirical) comedies. Although successful amongst audiences, the films were not taken seriously by critics and the film-culture community (Dermody and Jacka *Screening of Australia* vol. 1 170-2). While government policy initially supported the ocker films, as the public began to intensely criticise the genre as crass and vulgar, policy was reformulated along a ‘higher standard’. Thus the AFC genre was established in opposition to the ‘embarrassing’ ocker comedies and was intended to be less ‘crassly commercial’ (O’Regan *Australian Film in the 1970s* 7–10).
itself when constructing a national identity. Dermody and Jacka find that Australia’s
cultural policies of the 1980s promote a difference which marked Australia off from
other nations and that this difference was more significant than differences within
Australia (The Imaginary Industry 119).

Australian national cinema has often been criticised for representing a particular
kind of national identity that favours masculinity. As Dermody and Jacka write:

[t]he essential Australian is male, working-class, sardonic, laconic, loyal to his
mates, unimpressed by rank, an improver, non-conformist, and so on. These
virtues are defined and redefined under the harsh conditions of the bush, workplace,
war or sport, in which women, and the feminine qualities, are considered to be
beside the point. (Screening of Australia vol. 2 62)

Many films produced in the 1970s and 1980s adopted this masculine national
identity. For example, Sunday Too Far Away (1975), Breaker Morant (1980),
Gallipoli (1981), the Mad Max films (1979, 1981 and 1985), and the Crocodile
Dundee films (1986, 1988 and the much later 2001 sequel). This masculine national
identity is exclusionary and xenophobic (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 132)

7 The archetypal Australian was established during the two decades 1895 to 1915. This mythical
Australian national identity had a definite masculine inflection and existed in such works as Dad and
Dave (1938), the various incarnations of the Ned Kelly stories and The Sentimental Bloke (1919,
1932). As these national identities could be seen to be emerging in opposition to English institutions,
some consideration must be given to those considered to be ‘insiders’ of this group, and by
extension, the ‘outsiders’ — “those who are set apart by sex, colour of skin, or nationality” (Molloy
12-14). Insiders were related to mateship and war — masculine virtues.
and has implications on representations of Australianness (Rayner 94). Later in this chapter I will return to Dermody and Jacka’s analysis of Australian national identity as produced through a discourse of Australianness that is identifiable in the AFC genre and the male ensemble cycle of films. According to Dermody and Jacka, the male ensemble gained the status of iconography and became a “populist invocation of Australianness” (Screening Of Australia vol. 2 62). Films without the support of the AFC often did not get made in the emerging Australian film industry (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 89).

Discussions of the Australian film industry (in the 1990s) often refer to the ‘renaissance’ of the industry during the 1970s and how it continued influencing Australian film production thematically into the 1990s. For O’Regan, these include the ‘ocker’ films and the ‘quality’ films (O’Regan Australian Film in the 1970s 1). From the 1930s until the introduction of government support in the 1970s, there was

8 Likewise, early Australian filmmakers were interested in exploring an Australian identity, and began to create ‘typically Australian’ films based around stories of convicts, miners, squatters, and bushrangers. Molloy cites the preface to Russel Ward’s third edition of The Australian Legend as both an explanation and an example of how this bush mythology was established and came to be seen as ‘typically Australian’:

This cluster of character-traits – adaptability, mateship, hatred of affectation and so on – was seen as typically Australian, not because most Australians ever possessed these traits, but because the majority of bush-dwellers that did, differed most graphically from the average Briton, and so were seen as identifiably Australian. (11)

Australians accepted these ‘typical’ Australian characters and stories regardless of whether they personally fit into such a characterisation, as they were markedly different to British stories.

9 Australian cinema, previously strong in the 1920s, suffered at the hands of international cinemas until the 1960s when the Australian government began expressing some interest in having and protecting a national cinema in Australia. In the period 1946 to 1960, the Australian film industry was dominated by overseas coproductions featuring Australian cast and crew or location films in which non-Australians held the creative and financial control. There were no major studios in Australia and independent producers were finding it increasingly difficult to distribute their films. During the post-war period, British and US production companies took over Australian distribution and exhibition, often excluding Australian films from cinemas. As a result, by the late 1950s the Australian film industry was in serious trouble (Turner Film As Social Practice 137–410).
little Australian film production (L. French 18). However by 1999, the Australian film industry had been nurtured by three decades of government support (AFC Report on the Film and Television Production Industry 6).

The political climate of social change and cultural re-examination that emerged in the late 1960s saw the development of an underground film culture that lobbied for government assistance. The dominance of overseas interests in the Australian film industry began to be questioned and Australians called for ‘genuine Australian culture’ and indigenous films (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 48). However, Australian national cinema was not to revive significantly until the 1970s, as a result of various governments providing financial assistance to the

---

10 With the introduction of sound to cinema, Hollywood was able to re-establish its place as the dominant cinema internationally (Turner, Film as Social Practice 9). The effects on the Australian film industry can be seen in films such as Tiger Island (1930), The Cheaters (1930) and Spur of the Moment (1931). As Hollywood was releasing talkies these silent films were technically inferior.

11 As Turner suggests, the decline of the Australian film industry until the 1970s was not inevitable and it was the failure of the Australian governments to protect the industry from foreign competition that led to this situation (Film As Social Practice 139).

12 The Vincent Committee — set up in response to community dissatisfaction with the lack of Australian content in film and television — produced a report in 1964 suggesting that the Australian film industry failed because it was left unprotected. The report, although shelved by the Menzies government, became a symbolic rallying point throughout the rest of the 1960s. The report included a recommendation of measures to assist the film industry in Australia, including:

- loans to approved producers
- tax concessions on film investment and profits
- government support for film marketing
- support with premises and facilities by State governments (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 50–2).
industry. The film renaissance began with the intervention of the Gorton (1968–71) and Whitlam (1972–75) governments. They established film funding bodies and the Australian Film Television and Radio School. A new generation of Australian filmmakers and actors emerged, ‘rescuing’ the industry. With this assistance came the idea of ‘genuine Australian culture’ and ‘Australian’ content. Promoting a sense of nationhood is one of the functions of cultural policy (Rowse).

However, for Rowse there is no such thing as Australianness, and nations are imagined communities. Approaching films from the perspective of a national cinema highlights the relationship between film and culture as one that depends on codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies. As Turner suggests, examining the ideology behind a film text reveals the relationship between text and culture and the

13 In 1968, the Australian Film Council was established and actively campaigned for Australian film content. The following year the Liberal Prime Minister, John Gorton, announced that Australian cinema would be re-established following an Interim Report compiled by the Film and Television Committee of the Australian Council for the Arts. As well as recommending protection measures in exhibition and distribution, this report recommended:
- a National Film and Television School
- an Australian Film and Television Development Corporation, with responsibility for the administration of a film and television fund and an overseas film and television marketing board;
- an experimental film and television fund for low budget productions and a television outlet for experimental films and programs (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 53–4).

The Australian Film Development Corporation (AFDC) was set up in 1970 in order to encourage the making of Australian films that could be distributed inside and outside Australia.

14 An Act of Parliament obliged the AFDC to support only Australian films, which it defined in Section 4:
- A film that has been made wholly or substantially in Australia, and in the opinion of the Corporation, has significant Australian content.
- A film that is to be made wholly or substantially in Australia, and in the opinion of the corporation, will have significant Australian content.
- A film that has been, or is to be, made in pursuance of an agreement or arrangement entered into between the government of the Commonwealth or an authority of the Commonwealth and the Government of another country (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 54-55).

This definition of ‘Australian content’ continued to influence government policy concerning Australian content requirements (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia vol. 1 55) These definitions are especially important because as previously suggested, what is considered ‘Australian’ is at its most basic a marker of normality.
equal importance of production and reception in maintaining the status quo (Film as Social Practice 145–6). In Chapter One I chronicled the social, political, and technological changes of the 1990s and indicated that these impacted on the representation of impairment during the 1990s. At different periods in Australian national cinema’s post-revival history, certain minority groups have been exploited and influenced by the interests of the ruling class. For example, in both the ocker and male ensemble cycles, women have been demonstrated to be beside the point.\(^{15}\) I return to the male ensemble later in this chapter.

### 3.2 Identity Politics

Early Australian filmmakers were interested in exploring an Australian identity, and began to create ‘typically Australian’ films based around stories of convicts, miners, squatters, and bushrangers.\(^{16}\) For Molloy, these ‘typical’ Australian characters and stories were a mythological and ideological construction accepted by Australians regardless of whether they personally fit into such a characterisation; this construction, and its ready acceptance, were in order to balance the overpowering

---

\(^{15}\) The ocker films relied of forms of social typage rather than psychological motivation, and were overtly sexist in attempting to self-consciously highlight Australianness. The emerging feminist movement of the 1970s saw “the worst instances of Australian sexism, misogyny and masculinism” in the Ocker cycle. Further, much of the humour came from bodily functions and protagonists were often considered as mental defectives (The Adventures of Barry McKenzie (1972); Stork (1971)) by other characters and audiences (O’Regan Australian Films in the 1970s 1-4). Thus impairment or perceived impairment (principally mental dysfunction) was used in Australian films dating back to the revival — particularly in the Ocker cycle.

\(^{16}\) Australia contributed to the development of an international film industry with its early films such as Soldiers of the Cross (1901) and The Story of The Kelly Gang (1906). Australian filmmakers responded quickly to overseas developments and were locally successful for the first twenty years of the twentieth century (Turner Film as Social Practice 137). The Story of the Kelly Gang began the Australian film industry’s fascination with representing a national identity and triggered a number of bushranger story-lines in the coming years, until the NSW police outlawed them in 1912. Australian Cinema thrived during the silent era (Routt).
influence of British culture. A mythical Australian national identity was established in opposition to British influences. National identity is constructed and produced through a discourse of nationhood. O'Regan suggests that Australia’s nationhood could be problematised in four ways by the 1990s. Diversity is the main focus of his argument, which proposes that Australian nationhood can no longer be considered in the singular, exclusionary way that Molloy suggests in his insider–outsider framework. These earlier representations, favoured by literary favourites such as Henry Lawson, were exclusionary and have provided the foundation of many of the representations of Australian national identity (Turner *Making it National* 5–6). This idea is not exclusive to cinematic representations, the same values and ideology can be seen to be operating in Australia’s immigration policies and laws as suggested in Chapter One. However, Turner argues that at the beginning of the 1990s Australia began to consider national identity in more varied terms that included a “diversity of ethnicities, cultural traditions, and political interests”. As a consequence, the ‘reality’ of national identity was revealed as a manifestation of oppression and discrimination (Turner *Making it National* 5).

While Katy Richmond contends that identities constantly change (22), Richard Jenkins finds that ‘primary identities’ are robust and resilient to change later in life (21). These include identities established in infancy such as gender, human-ness, and selfhood and in some circumstances ethnicity and kinship. For Jenkins these primary identities are definitively embodied and particularly resistant to change
(21).\textsuperscript{17} However, overlapping social relationships and constructions influence our sense of self. Masculinity and femininity, for example, are learnt in the context of specific social environments.\textsuperscript{18} This socialising process involves learning cultural norms.

Socialisation is an ongoing process and we are constantly re-socialised throughout life. There is no universal experience of being a man or a woman. Richmond contends that masculinity and femininity are learnt in the social contexts of communications of gender, sexual identity, and class and ethnicity (26). These identities are also learnt in the context of communications of disability, which is also a socially learnt identity. Our sense of self as male or female changes as our social environment changes.

A disability identity is established in the same way, particularly as identity formation is influenced by exposure to major groups (in a pluralist society). Often these identities are located in the individual’s character traits rather than in terms of culture and socialisation (Kellehear 7). For example, in \textit{Heaven’s Burning}, Colin

\textsuperscript{17} Although he does agree that changes in social situations can lead to changes in social identity, Jenkins finds that while change and mutability are endemic to social identities, they are more likely to occur in some social situations than others. The identities particularly resistant are our primary human identities, including selfhood, gender, ethnicity and kinship (Jenkins 21).

\textsuperscript{18} In an email to the disability history discussion list, \textit{H-Disability}, Paul Longmore, one of its founders, described the aims of the list as being political, sociocultural analysis from a minority group perspective. He describes disability history as multi-layered and contingent on interaction with the formation of other social identities and minority groups:

\textit{We study literary and artistic images of disabled people in order to uncover cultural beliefs regarding such matters as body image, masculinity and femininity, personal autonomy and selfhood, and, of course, disability itself, as they have impinged on disabled people. We investigate the histories of these attitudes, values, practices, policies, and representations in relation to the parallel histories of other minority groups and women. Therefore, cultural ideology influences the construction of disability, masculinity, and femininity, which are parallel and interact.}
and Midori offer a ride to a man in a wheelchair who has been dumped in the desert because he has annoyed the other men in the pub one too many times. Rather than viewing his eccentric behaviour as a reaction to the way disabled people are positioned in Australian society, he becomes merely a very irritating person. When he is not playing his accordion or mouthing off, his wheelchair is implicit in his annoyance as it emits an annoying whirring sound. He even remains defiant in the face of the barmaid who insists the chauvinist men use good manners with her or get a beer in the face. He is identified problematically as an outback Australian man — he used to shear, and now he is not welcome in the pub, yet he still wants to be there.\textsuperscript{19} I will take up this debate again later in the chapter when I discuss the importance of discovering a new subjectivity and identity following impairment, rather than redefining oneself under able-bodied parameters.

Jenkins contends that while identity is always in negotiation, some identities such as ‘human-ness’, in particular, are taken for granted and new identities are resisted. Impairment, according to Jenkins, undermines this most basic identity. Although recognising the implicit and explicit socially defined criteria around euthanasia debates as discussed in Chapter One, including Singer’s, he does not appear to see value in the life of an impaired individual. Disregarding those who have had impairment since birth, Jenkins cites perceived intellectual competence and acquired physical impairment as the most undermining (56). As such, the films selected for

\textsuperscript{19} Later in the film, this man is shown to be wheeling himself out of the pub, he appears disorientated and drunk. He travels into the desert himself thus opening the possibility that the other men from the pub did not dump him in there, he is doing it himself and people’s dislike of him is all in his head. This further individualises disability.
discussion in this thesis will explore themes around disability that include identity politics in terms of gender, cultural diversity, and family.

Jenkin’s analysis appears more of a chronicle than a problematisation of identity formation. He does not offer a suggestion for social change. In this way, the disability identity is further devalued. Alternatively, Meekosha offers this lucid account of identity and disability as it relates to other problematic identities and cultural insiderism:

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. (*Superchicks, clones, cyborgs and cripples* 26)

Thus social identity is constructed to exclude different ‘bodies’ that may also act as cultural identities, including disability. Ian Parsons finds that the lack of ‘pride’ in identity is a feature almost exclusive to the disability rights movement when compared to other human rights movements within Australia (12). He connects pride with accentuating the things that make a person different from the rest of society.20 While the gay and lesbian human rights movements privilege their difference from the mainstream, the disability movement almost suppresses it as evident through the ‘see the ability, not the disability’ focus.

---

20 Goffman’s analysis of stigma adopts a tone of irony as he addresses those he refers to as ‘normals’ who in fact are not ‘normal’ as they suppress aspects of themselves to fit into social situations or hold stigmatised individuals to a certain standard they do not apply to themselves (74-7).
3.3 Developing Identities

Australian national identity is a mythic construction based on ideologically coded representations. This identity is similar to the stereotypically nondisabled masculine qualities I quoted Jenny Morris as describing in the previous chapter. As a result, a disability identity was excluded along with an identity for women, and ethnic minorities. While I foreground disability issues in this thesis, the critiques of Australian nationalism have most often come from feminist, multicultural, or Aboriginal rewritings (Turner Making it National 7).

Dermody and Jacka describe two discourses of the Australian film industry, referred to as ‘Industry 1 and 2’. Industry 1 valued art and culture while Industry 2 aimed to be more competitive internationally. Industry 1 included the AFC genre and social-realist films. Industry 2, on the other hand, favoured contemporary settings and Hollywood style genres such as Richard Franklin’s horror, Patrick (1978), and Russell Mulcahy’s thriller, Razorback (1984). Dermody and Jacka summarise the differences in the table below.
### Table 2: Two Discourses of the Australian Film Industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry 1</th>
<th>Industry 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socially concerned</td>
<td>Social concern is not the business of film; entertainment is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search for an Australian identity</td>
<td>Australia is part of the world; national identity is regressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftish Labor</td>
<td>No pointed affiliation, but more like non-Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modestly budgetted films for local audience</td>
<td>Big-budget films for international audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didactic films; films with a message</td>
<td>Anti message-films as audience ‘downers’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in other arts</td>
<td>Anti-snobbery, anti-art, parading working class origins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film buffery</td>
<td>Anti art-film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti film-industry</td>
<td>Pro-Hollywood – ‘they do it bigger and better; we can learn from them.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In favour of government regulation of industry</td>
<td>For the ‘free market’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti cultural imperialism</td>
<td>‘Cultural imperialism? Never heard of it.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and political benefits for film not necessarily quantifiable</td>
<td>Bums-on-seats; box-office dollars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Dermody and Jacka *Screening of Australia* vol. 1 197-198)
Dermody and Jacka tentatively describe Industry 1 as a national cinema and Industry 2 as adopting the discourse of commercialism (*Screening of Australia* vol. 1 197). Therefore my analysis will concentrate on Industry 1 and only briefly refer to Industry 2. As suggested in the above table, Industry 1 (national cinema) was concerned with a national identity that could be supported by the government. In addition, the industry was socially aware and was interested in maintaining a relationship with national identity, even if it meant economic loss (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 100). The combination of didactic films with a constructed identity in national terms offers insight into the socio-cultural construction of disability, and other identities with which I am concerned in this thesis.

Following the revival of the Australian film industry, an aesthetic quality was repeated in several films, which later became known as the AFC genre. For Dermody and Jacka, the AFC genre consists of the period and nostalgia films prominent in the 1970s and the male ensemble films popularised in the 1980s (*The Imaginary Industry* 81). This AFC genre–male ensemble hybrid is character driven and divided along distinctive gender lines.

These films were often adapted from novels or plays and featured period settings. The characters were inscribed as having a particular Australian inflection in terms of

---

21 Alternatively, when addressing Industry 2, Australian cinema can be seen to be adjusting itself to compete internationally.
commonality of class, gender, race and place. The character motivation replaced a need for symbolic or structural factors. The AFC genre included period films such as *My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). Dermody and Jacka suggest that the conventions of the AFC genre films became so obvious that filmmakers followed protocols (*Screening of Australia, vol. 2* 34).

These films tended to represent the past in nostalgic terms and ascribed to the Australian content requirements. In the earlier years of the revival, often funding from the Australian Film Commission was crucial. There were some films that through commercial funding were made without AFC production support and restrictions, including *Mad Max* and *Crocodile Dundee*. The aestheticism of the AFC genre was criticised for avoiding contemporary Australia (and its associated problems) by falling back on nostalgia settings (Dermody and Jacka *Screening of Australia, vol. 2* 32).

*Caddie* (1976) was made with the assistance of the Women’s Film Fund of the AFC, although its director was male. *Caddie* appears to fit all of the characteristics of the AFC genre identified by Dermody and Jacka. Based on the (autobiographical) book by Caddie Marsh, the narrative presented the depression (the past) in nostalgic terms and was character driven. Although the film did address contemporary issues such as divorce, abortion, and women entering the workforce, these were masked by period setting. Around the time, critics were arguing that Australian cinema should
have been taking on contemporary problems in contemporary settings (Dermody and Jacka *Imaginary Industry* 128).

Of importance amongst Dermody and Jacka’s list of characteristics of the AFC genre is the period setting as it is represented through the location. The filmmakers were meticulous in their creation of the period setting in *Caddie*. Props and other *mise en scene* were naturalistic and intended only to reinforce the period setting. They did not act as metaphors. Dermody and Jacka suggest that naturalistic acting, which by the late 1980s became a skill so important for Australian actors, compensated for the episodic nature of the AFC genre.22

As Caddie becomes more comfortable in the working-class milieu, her demeanor and accent change until she eventually drops the ‘g’ from ‘betting’ (for example) after becoming an SP bookie. On Caddie’s first day at a working-class pub she is visibly uncomfortable, especially as fights break out at the six o’clock rush. Later, as she becomes more comfortable, her independence is signified as she rejects Ted’s offer to ‘knock around’ by tossing a coin as she turns her back to him.

---

22 As Donald Crombie, director of *Caddie* comments on the director’s commentary on the *Caddie* DVD:

The third part of *Caddie* was quite difficult to make because it’s very episodic. There are a whole lot of scenes that aren’t really linked by anything except Caddie herself and her circumstances, but they span quite a bit of time and I remember worrying about how to make it fairly seamless. The problem is largely solved because of Helen’s performance.

The director’s and producer’s commentary on the 2002 DVD release of *Caddie* is conscious of the conventions of the AFC genre and how their film fit into these, even adopting the same terminology as Dermody and Jacka, and explicitly addressing their points, for example period setting, episodic nature, and character-driven.
AFC genre films also included titles describing what happened to the characters after the film had ended (Dermody and Jacka Screening of Australia, vol. 2 33). For example, Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975) concludes with a voice-over explaining that the disappearances remain a mystery, and in My Brilliant Career a voice-over indicates that Sybylla published her novel. Titles at the end of Caddie reveal Peter (Caddie’s lover) did return from Italy but was killed in a motorcycle accident before they could marry, while Caddie herself died in 1960 at the age of sixty.23

The AFC genre was given a new lease on life by the male ensemble cycle in the early 1980s (Dermody and Jacka The Imaginary Industry 81). The films often stayed within the period setting but tended to favour masculine identities not seen in Caddie, Picnic at Hanging Rock and My Brilliant Career. In the male ensemble film, relationships with women are hindered by that male characters’ allegiance to other men. Further, these relationships with women are never considered as important as those with other men. Films such as Breaker Morant (1980) and Sunday Too Far Away (1975) illustrate this contention, as the absence of females in these films makes the bond of mateship stronger:

> [t]he Australian male characteristics most often represented within the […] male ensemble films remain consistent. The pastimes of drinking, gambling and womanising encapsulate the social activities which bond men to each other as ‘mates’. Male-to-male relationships, though strained by rivalries and competition,

---

23 The motorbike accident was explicitly included in the first draft of the film but the filmmakers’ decided to forego it in favour of endtitles, agreeing that it was a better ending. The American version deleted these titles, but Crombie and producer Anthony Buckley agree that leaving the titles in was “much better […] because it is true” (DVD commentary).
are pre-eminent, and male-to-female relationships never assume equal importance.
(Rayner 96)

*Breaker Morant*, although similar in theme and content to other Australian films such as *Gallipoli* (1981), *The Light Horsemen* (1987), and *Sunday Too Far Away*, is often used as the indicative film of the male ensemble cycle. For this reason, I turn my discussion of the male ensemble cycle to *Breaker Morant*. In this film, set during the Boer War, three Australian soldiers are on trial for shooting Boer prisoners, although they were following orders. Set up by the British as scapegoats to deter Germany from entering the war, the Australians put up an unexpectedly good defense due to the efforts of Major. J.F. Thomas. Peter Handcock in particular embodies the essential Australian character described by Molloy, Dermody and Jacka. During the trial he taunts each witness with a familiar ‘Australian’ disrespect for authority.

Peter connects his reasons for entering the war with his working-class masculinity, “I volunteered because there’s a depression back home and I’ve got a wife and kid.” Gill Valentine links masculinity, class and disability when he argues, for working-class men, their ability to endure physical hardship is crucial to their identity and livelihood. Thus hegemonic masculinity is predicated on the absence of impairment (Valentine, 169). Likewise, Australianness is predicated on hegemonic masculinity.

Women are demonstrated to be beside the point, again through Peter. The scene in which Peter says goodbye to his wife before leaving for the war is shot from behind,
suggesting a cold relationship and lack of intimacy. He tells her she will only hear from him if he has bad news, as he is not much of a letter writer. His wife holds their baby and he does not touch them before leaving. On the other hand, he is loyal to his mates, Harry in particular. Harry and Peter hold hands as they walk to their execution, displaying more intimacy than he is shown to have had with his wife, baby, girlfriends and even the “tarts in Bathurst.”

These portraits of Australian males correspond to local and international expectations and reinforce myths (Rayner 95). Due to this reiteration of stereotypes and the exclusion of an alternative, the Australian male of the male ensemble became the national identity. As a result, by the end of the 1980s, Australian national cinema was heavily criticised and came under pressure to become more self-sufficient (Reid *Long Shots to Favourites* 5). However, several films of the early 1990s signaled a turning point in the Australian film industry, including *Proof*, *Strictly Ballroom*, and *Romper Stomper*. These films were successful in both a

---

24 He also has purely sexual relationships with two married Boer women whom he does not respect; “a slice off a cut loaf is never missed.”

25 George is sentenced to life imprisonment rather than death by firing squad (also discovered via endtitles, a common feature of the AFC genre). I am more interested in the loyalty between the two mates than in the homoerotic undertones of the scene in which Harry and Pewter walk to their execution. However, it has been argued elsewhere that mateship in Australian cinema has homoerotic qualities. For example, *Gallipoli* has been accused of being a male love story (McFarlane 74 and Creed 298). Indeed, while in Egypt preparing for battle, the boys judge any display of female sexuality as amoral — including women in the general community, prostitutes and the women who posed naked on postcards. Incidentally, a picture of a donkey (an ass) is intermixed with these shots. Creed argues that this rationalises guilt about homosexual desire by displacing it onto the figures of women (298). Likewise, in *Sunday Too Far Away* friendship amongst males is celebrated at the expense of heterosexual romance when Beresford is called a queer for writing to his wife instead of looking at sheep with the other men. A homoerotic interpretation could also be made of the scene in which Foley and Ugly compete as they wash their clothes, and the fact that both are unconcerned when they lose their towels. Despite their nudity and close proximity, the shearers continue their competition. *The Sum of Us* intertextually references this scene when Harry (Jack Thompson — Foley in *Sunday Too Far Away*) does the dishes in the kitchen thus likewise signal the changing Australian masculinity in Australian national cinema during the 1990s.
commercial sense and in terms of critical performance (Reid Long Shots to Favourites 109).

These three early successes of the 1990s began to broaden the interests of Australian national cinema. Filmmakers began looking outside the AFC for funding, even turning to a guerilla, and moving to a credit-card-financed style of production. Love and Other Catastrophes (1996) started this trend and was followed by The Castle, Occasional Coarse Language (1998), and Redball (1999). This style of filmmaking is risky as production often begins before post-production finance is secured and there is no guarantee anyone will pick up the film (Reid More Long Shots 35). Stavros Kazantzidis, producer and co-writer of Love and Other Catastrophes did not want to make a ‘deep film’ (in a possible rejection of the AFC genre) and sought to emulate successful comedies coming out of America at the time, for example Clerks (1994). The filmmakers were also transparent in their references to other films and the filmmaking process in general, including quotes and imagery from many other Hollywood films (Reid More Long Shots 37). While International filmmakers and films influenced the style, the story remained Australian-specific, following a group of Melbourne University students.

26 The AFC did, however, provide the funding to complete the film for theatrical release (Reid More Long Shots 39).
Other film successes of the 1990s also displayed disillusionment with Australia’s Industry 1 practices and sought to infuse Industry 2 with an appreciation of cinema as art, for example *Kiss or Kill* (1997). While *Love and Other Catastrophes* represents the ‘quirky’ side of Australian filmmaking, *Kiss or Kill* is derivative of the road movie genre, critical of its cliches and sitting on the darker side of the national cinema (Reid *More Long Shots* 88). I return to a discussion of Australian national cinema as both derivative and critically distant later in this chapter when I address Verhoeven’s theorisation that a third industry should be added to Dermody and Jacka’s two-industry model. At the end of the 1990s, Reid attempted to situate the 1990s Australian national cinema in relation to previous decades in Australian national cinema and world cinema — as other theorists have tended to do:

[w]e create certain cohesive, convincing narratives about Australian filmmaking [...] — about it being typified by historical dramas and blockbusters during the 80s [...] then relocating to the multicultural suburbs in the 90s; [...] and with all this predicated on the new wave of filmmaking of the 70s — [...] seen through modern eyes as somehow more ‘serious’ cinema. (*More Long Shots* 110)

However, she concludes by suggesting that Australian national cinema is actually not as cohesive as these categories and argues that hindsight has rewritten history

---

27 *Muriel’s Wedding*, like *Kiss or Kill*, was an example of Verhoeven’s Industry 3 as it combined the recognition of cinema as art (Industry 1) with the commercial concerns of Industry 2. P.J Hogan writer-director of *Muriel’s Wedding*, another critical and commercial success of Australian cinema during the 1990s, was critical of the 10BA tax concessions. In 1981, Division 10BA of the *Income Tax Assessment Act* 1936 was introduced to encourage private investment in the film industry via a tax deduction incentive. Investors could write off 150% of capital expenditure on an acceptable project and be tax exempt for up to 50% of the net earnings. These figures were gradually reduced as it became evident that quality was sacrificed for quantity. In 1986, The Australian Film Commission released the *Green Paper* detailing the problems with the 10BA scheme, finding that the film industry was more suited to a financing system of lending rather than investment. As a result, the Film Finance Commission, a ‘film bank’ as such, was set up to replace the 10BA tax scheme. State-level funding bodies were also established.
without considering the original intent and reception of these different types of films (*More Long Shots* 110). While the Australian film industry prior to the 1990s, has been considered in a number of ways, the influence of globalisation and the low value of the Australian dollar on production and reception altered its focus to what Deb Verhoeven describes as a third industry. She is building on Dermody and Jacka's earlier theorisation that the Australian film industry could be considered in two ways — as two industries. Technological change has reshaped cinema and it can no longer be thought of only in terms of culture reference as it was in the 1970s (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 152). This technological and structural change has led to a greater reliance on global markets for profitability (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 153).28

Australian directors who wanted to employ local content or personnel to work with bigger budgets and international resources established the third industry. Industry 3, being both local and global, combines the cultural focus of Industry 1 and the global focus of Industry 2. However, it does not completely displace the two-model system, rather it undermines its neatness (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 162) and incorporates the significance of globalisation on Australian national cinema during the 1990s.

---

28 In Chapter Two I discussed Bazin’s views relating to cinematic realism. Verhoeven draws on Bazin when she discusses structural change. Bazin argued that technological development would lead to realism. For Bazin, ‘total cinema’ referred to verisimilitude. Verhoeven however has found that technological advancement has allowed directors to manipulate every aspect of the image. Thus there is no necessary relationship between what is filmed and what ends up on the screen (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 153).
Verhoeven combines and extends Dermody and Jacka’s table describing the two industries as they relate to Industry 3 (reproduced below in table 3). Dermody and Jacka’s Industry 2 suggested that Australian films joined the global film economy simply in terms of narrative and thematic choice, for example *Patrick* employing the generic conventions of the thriller. Verhoeven’s Industry 3, however, as demonstrated in table 3, incorporates change at the structural level, which saw international involvement not as negative or contrary to government support (163), rather as something to be combined with antipodean interests and artistic independence.29

29 Throughout the years, there have been several government inquiries into the Australian film industry addressing the dominance of international influences. In the 1920s, a Royal Commission recommended nationwide quotas on exhibition of Australian films. Due to lack of state government support and the take-up of sound cinema, the local industry was unable to sustain itself (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 154–155). Again, in the 1970s, the perception of international dominance led to calls for greater government involvement in the film industry (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 163).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Simultaneously international as well as national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In which everyone is a transnational citizen — actors and crew might find success both locally and internationally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can be read in a number of ways — they are both derivative and critically distant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use digital production technologies and are imbricated with other audio-visual industries and new media technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have narrative styles and themes that are different from big-budget Hollywood film, but sit comfortably alongside, often drawing on Hollywood for inspiration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Niche/Specific audiences across the globe rather than ‘local’ verses mass audience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filmmakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Won’t compromise local elements but will exploit territories outside the local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Move between the government/non-government divide from project to project and sometimes within the one film</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Industry 3 Characteristics
Chapter 3: Australian National Cinema

Heaven’s Burning adopts many of the features of Verhoeven’s Industry 3. The recognition of Australia as “the largest branch outside Japan” and the publication of Midori’s faked kidnapping in Japan, preventing Yukio from returning as he would have been disgraced, simultaneously position Australia as national and international. Midori is a transnational character; although she is Japanese, she can not ‘breathe’ until she is in the Australian outback.30 The film is both derivative and critically distant. It projects a disjointed landscape (filming a cross-country road trip from Sydney, through South Australia, back into outback New South Wales to a beach impossibly close to the outback) for a tourist gaze.31 While the narrative theme and style can be seen in Hollywood road movie productions, the relationships between characters are distinctly Australian. The avenging Afghani family possess a refugee status, retaining their customs and language. Colin’s father’s outback farm has failed due to the drought and kangaroos. Felicity Collins argues that the film invokes these traditionalist images of Australianness to project an:

ambivalen[ce] about the future of this island-continent in the Asia-Pacific region.

The final shot raises the possibility of abandoning the project of Australia

30 Likewise, Russell Crowe, although he considers himself an Australian, despite being born in New Zealand, has gained international success. In 1999, when Bryan Brown won the Australian Film Institute Award for Best Supporting Actor for his role as Pando in Two Hands (1999), his acceptance speech commended several Australian actors for contributing to Australian cinema and the ‘Australian identity’. He began with Jack Thompson and ended with ‘the great Chips Rafferty’. Although the list was long, he excluded several internationally successful actors who identify or are identified as Australian. Later, while presenting an award at the same ceremony, Russell Crowe (who looked annoyed during Brown’s speech) connected Australian cinema with Hollywood, claiming that Australian actors who managed to succeed in Hollywood (such as himself and Nicole Kidman), were not any less Australian — they were actually more adaptable.

31 Felicity Collins argues that this is because of South Australian Film Corporation investment, and is recognisable only to people familiar with the Australian landscape, as narrative-wise the film takes place only in NSW (Yukio marks Colin and Midori’s path across a map of NSW — Sydney to Broken Hill). Both Reid and Verhoeven identified this method of securing finance from multiple sources in Australia during the 1990s.
altogether. The film has shown its landscape to be a montage of images peopled by blind, stoned and otherwise ill-equipped figures, most of whom are male. Fathers have nothing to hand on to their sons except outmoded technology and fundamentalist ethics. (3–4)

Therefore, this film uses impairment to rehabilitate a multicultural woman in outback Australia and give her power in changing the course of her life. Despite initially being ‘rescued’ by Colin, Midori is more active in rescuing him throughout the course of the film: stealing a truck, staging a bank robbery and driving him to the beach — their final destination.

Verhoeven concentrates on commercial influence rather than government support as a way to place greater value on screen culture in Australia, yet she does this without approaching the industry from a boom and bust perspective. While government funding was still influential in the 1990s Australian film industry, it was shrinking (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 165). Although local production remained static during 1995 to 2000, total production in Australia increased significantly due to foreign productions and co-productions. Australian directors secured international funding to complete their films in Australia (*Babe: Pig in the City* (1998); *Moulin Rouge!*, *Holy Smoke*), foreign directors took advantage of the lower production costs to shoot their films in Australia (*Mission Impossible 2* (2000), *The Matrix*).

---

32 By writing the history of the Australian film industry as being synonymous with a history of film production, the global significance is misconstrued. For example, although a large number of Australian films were made during the 1980s, their international influence was low. However, while in the post-war period there was little local film production, outside interests were still high (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 156–7). Therefore Verhoeven’s Industry 3 extends the criteria for valuation of screen culture beyond volume or output.

Verhoeven concludes her chapter by suggesting legal changes must also come with technological advancement. The greatest challenge, argues Verhoeven, is the realignment of the value of the ‘local’ by policy makers, particularly with regard to cultural arguments:

> [t]he problem is how to rethink conventional arguments for a subsidised Australian film industry which relies on the idea of ‘local content’ as a strategy for maintaining a sense of national distinctiveness. […] As Australian audio-visual content producers embrace convergence as a technological, economic and cultural inevitability, these arguments for government support […] will also have to change. (17−172)

As Verhoeven argues, the incorporation of the Australian film industry to the global film economy is not at the expense of an Australian national identity or film culture. Indeed, the tendency of Australian films to adopt what Verhoeven describes as the Cinesound legacy: “comedic stories of battlers who triumph over government shortsightedness and commercial opportunism” continued through many 1990s Australian features, for example *The Castle*, *Reckless Kelly* (1993), and *Deadly*. In

---

33 The majority of Australian films rely on international sales, sales to TV and the video market for profit as theatrical release does not often enjoy a profit (Verhoeven *Film and Video* 167).

34 Ideology structures institutions as well as texts. This is particularly evident in the Australian legal system (Turner *Film as Social Practice* 132). Fiona Campbell argues that while the Australian legal system has protected some disabled people from inequality and discrimination, ‘disability’ continues to be thought of as a negative ontology and the law remains ableist (42).
films such as Muggers, Cosi, Children of The Revolution (1996), Mr. Reliable, Struck By Lightning, and Muriel’s Wedding this theme is often invoked in combination with impairment.

### 3.4 Australian National Cinema

I have drawn extensively on O’Regan throughout this thesis, and will extend the discussion further as I proceed to closer textual analysis in the following two chapters. Throughout O’Regan’s Australian National Cinema he cautions against approaching Australian cinema from a ‘quality’ perspective, particularly with reference to Hollywood films. He contends Australian cinema is messy and opens up many topics for discussion. Although adopting a slightly celebratory tone, O’Regan maintains Australian cinema should be neither celebrated, nor denigrated, simply attended to. In simply attending to Australian cinema, argues O’Regan, bad films can be as illuminating as ‘quality’ ones (Australian National Cinema 137). I proceed from the same position and suggest that while critics consider some of the films under discussion here poor quality, they offer points of discussion in relation to Australian society and further illuminate the ableist structures of Australian culture.

Throughout the book O’Regan attends to both the unity and the diversity of Australian cinema, turning to the ‘national’ aspect in part III. He begins his problematisation of Australian national cinema by highlighting a number of social critiques and dividing them into durable cultural differentiations: cultural cleavages.
His categories are similar to Jenkin’s primary human identities and can be summarised in terms of gender, region, demography and class.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore in the Australian context, and in identity politics more generally, identities as established through discourses of locale, gender, ethnicity, and kinship are particularly important and resistant to change. While these cleavages provide a point of discussion for Australian films and build on the issues raised by Dermody and Jacka with regard to the Australian film industry, the focus does not seem entirely fitting for a discussion of the 1990s. O’Regan tends to draw on films of previous decades similar to those favoured by Dermody and Jacka — for example \textit{Sunday Too Far Away}, \textit{Breaker Morant}, and \textit{My Brilliant Career}. I wish, however, to reveal the tendency to use ableist ideology to normalise a previously established ‘other’ as it occurred in the 1990s. O’Regan’s cleavages do not go far enough in providing an adequate framework for this critique. He extends his analysis to include four ways of problematising nationhood. Before returning to this more general outline I wish to engage with O’Regan’s four ways of problematising Australian nationhood, to highlight their relevance to 1990s Australian national cinema within a disability context.

While O’Regan finds cleavages (such as gender, religion, and locale) crucial to an understanding of Australians amongst themselves, the projection by filmmakers of an Australian nationhood in relation to other national societies is more closely tied

\textsuperscript{35} The full list of his cleavages includes Federal/State/interstate; city/country; locality; social class; generational and subcultural; sexual preference; religious; Aboriginal and Islander/Non-Aboriginal; national/international; and gender.
to the ethnicity of the people comprising the nation. In line with this, he identified four ways of problematising Australian nationhood with relation to ethnicity. The problematisations of Australian nationhood O’Regan is most interested in are Australia as:

1. a European-derived society
2. a diasporic society
3. a new world society
4. a multicultural society. (*Australian National Cinema* 305)

Filmmakers use these identities to debunk and reconstruct Australian national identity through film and suggest who we are and who we may become as Australians (*Australian National Cinema* 304–5). These identities also feature in Verhoeven’s *Industry 3* as films are both local and global. These films can be read as derivative, adopting a narrative theme and style different from yet inspired by Hollywood. In addressing O’Regan’s nationhoods, I wish to highlight the relationship impairment has in debunking and reconstructing the national identity under these four parameters — particularly within a 1990s context. I will locate my six key films of this thesis in his discussion throughout.

As suggested in Chapter One, multiculturalism was valued in Australian cinema during the 1990s. However, traditionally disability has been recognised as a medical condition, without much cultural significance or responsibility. This is aptly demonstrated in *The Sum of Us* when Harry is not rehabilitated following his stroke and is sent home to live with Jeff, as he is no longer ‘sick’. Despite this, and the fact
that Harry is (according to Jeff) always wanting to go out to the park, he is most frequently depicted lying in bed — a medical setting. Finkelstein argues that disabled people should be recognised as another group within a multicultural society; he also offers a definition of disability within a multicultural society that avoids the ableist interpretation that I suggest existed in Australia during the 1990s.

Finkelstein defines a multicultural society as one made up of different groups, each with their own contribution to make to society. Finkelstein proposes that disabled people should be recognised as a separate group with a contribution to make and, further, that this contribution to social and political life should be considered a right (Disabled People And Our Culture Development 2). However, historically a disabled group has been considered unable to make a significant contribution, at times being called ‘useless eaters’ (by the Nazis in Germany and more recently, in Australia, Peter Singer has made a similar argument suggesting a drain of resources). Borrowing from Finkelstein’s definition and considering the workings of social identity, this thesis will look at films in Australian national cinema that represent disability using an ableist interpretation or personal tragedy framework. Adopting the inward perspective in terms of national cinema and identity, I will also consider films that adopt a social theory of disability while also considering impairment effects.

Of these four problematisations, O’Regan’s discussion appears to be progressing toward the last — multiculturalism with regard to the 1990s. While multiculturalism
was and remains an alternative and oppositional Australian identity, it was (and still is) also a government policy (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 324). The progression of Australia’s official multicultural policies can be seen throughout O’Regan’s analysis. The official Government discussions around multiculturalism have progressed from 1968, when pluralism was offered as an alternative to assimilation, to the end of the 1990s, when multiculturalism was defined under civil, cultural, social, and economic parameters (for further discussion see *Australian Multiculturalism. The Evolution of multicultural policy*).

### 3.4.1 European Derived

The multicultural policies leading up to the 1990s led to a filmmaking environment in which Australia could be considered a European-derived society. However, an Asian identity was still ‘othered’. Despite the public embarrassment at the discriminatory history of Australia as a European-derived society, O’Regan contends that recognition of such is crucial in order to successfully negotiate a place in the Asia-Pacific region (*Australian National Cinema* 308).

As a settler society, Australia is largely ‘European-derived’, as are Australia’s political, legal, social and cultural institutions. Films which problematise the cultural differences within the nation do these with Australia’s European family, which becomes amalgamated into the larger white Australian identity (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 306-307). O’Regan’s example of *Metal Skin* is particularly relevant to my discussion as this film uses a variety of impairments to
highlight cultural differences within the European family which can be further located back to gender cleavages in terms of problematising Australians amongst themselves. In this film, despite each character’s possession of an impairment or psychological trauma (personal tragedy), recognisable impairment remains gender (female) specific throughout the course of the film. I will discuss this film in greater depth in the next chapter when I turn to Romper Stomper and its director Geoffrey Wright.\(^{36}\) Characters in The Well are closely aligned to the European-derived national identity with a total exclusion of any other racial group. The settler society aesthetic is adhered to as the film is set on an isolated windy farm where white Australians attempt an outback vocation regardless of their experience or suitability. The characters also display a strong loyalty to their colonial ties to Europe and America.\(^ {37}\)

O’Regan situates Romper Stomper in his discussion of Australian nationhood as being European-derived. He sees the inclusion of Davey’s German heritage as an indication of national embarrassment of the cultural fact of Australia’s Europeanness (Australian National Cinema 308). O’Regan extends this discussion of nationhood to the critical uptake of Australian national cinema. Romper Stomper,\(^ {36}\) I will later address the significance of auteur theories in the post-structuralist argument that we can only grasp versions of the world. This is significant to a theorisation of disability in cinema as socially created and culturally specific. A post-structuralist argument questions the validity of essential characteristics such as dividing people along disability–ability lines and favours the idea of socially constructed subjects (Marks 17–18).

\(^ {37}\) Additionally, the suggestion of an alternate sexuality offers at a diasporic society (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 271). However, The Well fails to actually transgress boundaries as desire is unfulfilled and the relationship between Hester and Katherine becomes codependent. This theme is carried through Lang’s following work, The Monkey’s Mask, in which a heterosexual suspect in a murder becomes involved with the investigating detective who is a lesbian. In addition, both films victimise lesbians to a certain degree as straight women, who use them for their own gain, easily take advantage of them.
Chapter 3: Australian National Cinema

he argues can be placed with other controversial films such as *Crocodile Dundee* that problematise Australian and world cinema. Under O’Regan’s framework, *Romper Stomper* could also be described as multicultural, as the film suggests a future as bound to Asia. Again, I will discuss this in more depth when I turn to *Romper Stomper* specifically and attend to the discussions it invokes in the next chapter. Critical discussion about moral choices provides a reference point for Dermody and Jacka’s proposition that Australian national identity and cinema is fundamentally masculinist. O’Regan describes this reading, addressing the unconscious masculinist ideology as essentially symptomatic (*Australian National Cinema* 335). The analysis of *Romper Stomper* later in this thesis will serve as a symptomatic reading of the unconscious ableist tradition of Australian national cinema.

This area of problematisation highlights the significance of O’Regan’s argument that Australian cinema should be simply attended to, particularly with regard to the kinds of debates it opens up. Despite the apparent limited scope of Australian cinema as a European-derived national cinema, it is reflected in the remaining three problematisations and does open a space for European identities other than Britishness to be incorporated into Australian national cinema. For example, while *Strictly Ballroom* and *Romper Stomper* are multicultural narratives, they do locate the drama within a European-derived identity. Discussion of Australian national cinema as a European-derived national cinema extends further back than when it is conceived in diaspora, new world, or multicultural terms.
3.4.2 Diaspora

O’Regan considers this aspect of Australian nationhood in three ways. First as a British-Australian diaspora, second as a collection of diasporas and finally as part-diasporically/part-non-diasporically defined (Australian National Cinema 311). Australia as a European-derived society may also be considered as a British-Australian diaspora. However, this is often not recognised as the dominant ethnicity is rarely considered as a diaspora.\(^{38}\)

Although Britishness is the dominant ethnicity, a diaspora exists with loyalty to the homeland; in addition, a feeling of alienation exists in relation to the harsh Australian landscape. This was reflected in the Hall and Chauvel films of the 1930s, which attempted to conflate the British-diaspora with mainstream Australia (marginalising other settler groups such as the Irish, German and Italian descendants and Aboriginal Islander groups).\(^{39}\)

The introduction of official multicultural policies saw the British-Australian diaspora lose its dominance by the 1980s. As the official policies continued to focus

---

\(^{38}\) Drawing on Safran and Mishra, O’Regan identifies six features of a Diaspora, including:
1. a dispersal from a center to two or more peripheral locations;
2. a mythologised collective memory of a homeland;
3. a feeling of alienation from the host society;
4. a belief that the homeland is their ideal home and descendents should eventually return;
5. a responsibility for the maintenance/restoration of this homeland;
6. a self-conscious definition of one’s ethnicity in relation to this homeland (Australian National Cinema 311).

Considering each of these features with reference to British migration to Australia reveals a British diaspora despite its being the dominant ethnicity.

\(^{39}\) This previous marginalisation of European groups highlights the significance of identifying Australia as a European derived and not just a British-Australian diaspora.
on the separateness of cultural groups, not yet seeing an Australian identity as multicultural, other diasporas emerged favouring pluralism. O’Regan argues that by the 1980s Australian filmmakers ceased defining the Australian identity in opposition to Britain and began to look inwardly or to Asia or America for points of reference (Australian National Cinema 313). This can be seen in No Worries (1993) as Australia is defined inwardly (farm life), with reference to Asia (Chinatown and ‘boat people’) and in opposition to Britain (farmers experiencing difficulties their fathers never did: high interest rates, drought, low wool prices and recession — these are all inward concerns). Likewise, Blood Oath (1990) uses Asia and America as points of reference, as the action takes place in Asia (Indonesia) where both Asia and America are implicated in the losses Australia experienced by entering World War Two.

As Britain lost its dominance in Australia, films began to favour other diasporas and considered different sides to the Australian identity in terms of loyalty. O’Regan sees the shift from Britain to America as the dominant power reflected in Australia’s national cinema. Impairment has been used in this context as a punishment for the dominant power making mistakes. While films such as Breaker Morant and Gallipoli used a war setting to define an Australian culture and identity in opposition to a British one, Blood Oath shifted the focus to America as the dominant power sacrificing Australia for political gain. While the earlier films used death to critique Britain, Blood Oath uses impairment to make a similar criticism of
In this film, Captain Cooper is the prosecuting lawyer for the war crimes trials on Amdon Island after World War Two. He is attempting to prosecute high-ranking Japanese officials who ordered the execution of several hundred Australian soldiers. Although he is convinced of their guilt, he is encouraged to forfeit justice to politics. Japanese honour, American politics and the impact of trauma on the surviving soldiers silence the facts.

Jimmy Fenton is the only surviving witness to the crimes, yet is so impaired as to be unable to communicate and participate in the trial. Captain Cooper is driven by the desire to prosecute “the bastards that did this” and Jimmy, in another individualised (‘stiff upper-lip’) portrayal of disability in Australian national cinema, commences recovery for the love of his brother Eddie who was murdered. Despite entering the courtroom with his arm closely pinned to his chest, Jimmy is able to raise his right hand and put his left hand on the bible. Immediately following his testimony, Jimmy dies.

---

40 However, this criticism is informed by medical advancements allowing seriously impaired individuals to remain alive when they would otherwise have died. In Blood Oath, Jimmy Fenton is experiencing shell-shock trauma due to the war-time atrocities he witnessed. Although his life is considered unfairly prolonged by the other characters, he does finally ‘overcome his impairment’ to become the prosecutor’s key witness. Portrayals such as this further individualise impairment and ignore the argument that disability is socially constructed (Barnes Disability Imagery and The Media 12).

41 Another character in the film (Sister Littell) describes Jimmy as” not really with us” as he hasn’t spoken for four months.

42 In line with Sutherland’s argument (Black Hats 18) that invisible impairment must be made visible for cinematic viewing (a visual exercise) Jimmy is heavily scarred, he limps, and his arm is cramped.
The settler culture as it is (and is not) defined diasporically is also problematised in *No Worries*, in which a young rural family is forced to move to the city to live with a relative (Uncle Kev) in Chinatown. The daughter Mathilda attends a school where there is no dominant ethnicity and children of many different cultural backgrounds learn together in a multicultural environment. Her teacher treats the class as though it were made up of many equal diasporas, including the European-derived students. An Irish student is chastised for his graffiti (‘boat people go home’) when the teacher points out that his Irish-Australian heritage can also be located back to transportation to the country via boat and that he is therefore a boat person himself. O’Regan comments on this tendency of the settler culture to see itself as non-diasporically defined. Tensions emerge, as the diasporically defined identity wants the non-diasporically defined culture to recognise its own migrant status. This structural tension sees the Australian identity as a fragment of somewhere else rather than as an independent Australian identity. O’Regan argues that each culture wants to reconstruct the other, a tendency towards which Australian culture is particularly prone because of its mixed ethnic base:

> [o]ne wants the mainstream settler culture to accommodate the diasporic identity of migrant minorities, and to recognize its own one-time migrant status as a condition of reconstructing the meaning of the Australian to be consonant with the Australian as so many diasporic identities. The mainstream culture wants the diaspora to emphasize the Australian part of its two loyalties, to emphasize one part of its bi-cultural identity at the expense of the other. ([Australian National Cinema](#) 317)

---

43 Mathilda and her parents are constructed as having migrated from rural Australia. The city environment is foreign to them and they seem quite alienated, particularly Mathilda. She continues to hold on to a mythologised memory of the farm, defining herself in relation to it and believing she will return one day. In addition, her parents take on the stereotypical role of foreigners to Australia — her father becomes a taxi driver and her mother encourages them all the make a go of it, while secretly wishing she was herself ‘back home’ keeping in touch with old friends.
Conflict emerges as the settler culture refuses to see itself as a diasporic identity, regarding the culture as ‘Australian’ and seeing any diasporic aspect as colonial in form. I see similarities between this and the tendency of the disability rights movement to emphasise the ‘ableness’ of the group.44

3.4.3 New World

The New World identity is an emerging identity and is predicated on immigrants’ willingness to take on a new identity and the host culture’s willingness to accommodate them. This aesthetic was reflected throughout Australia’s official multicultural policies as seen in the three rights and three obligations that were attached to migrants achieving equal status in Australia in 1989. These rights and obligations, outlined, required adaptation on the side of both migrants and the host society. O’Regan describes the New World cinema as a melting pot with utopian ideological underpinnings (Australian National Cinema 319).

The utopian ideological underpinnings and New World nationhood can be seen in Lucky Break (discussed in depth in the next chapter), as ethnically marked actors remain ethnically unmarked in the diegesis. The ethnicity of the protagonists is not

---

44 Thus the diasporically defined (or in this case disabled) culture is encouraged to disappear. Arguably eradicated. As Goffman argues, stigma often extends to the attempted eradication of the stigmatised by the normals. For example, the Nazi euthanasia program and government-sanctioned sterilisation of disabled people (in America and Europe during the first half of the twentieth century and in 1994 in Australia when the High Court ruled that the Family Court could order the sterilisation of mentally impaired people).
foregrounded and would seem to be an insignificant aspect of their characterisation. This lack of dominant ethnicity reflects the New World identity, as a cultural hybrid exists (Australian National Cinema 305). Anthony LaPaglia, who plays Eddie, is Dutch-Italian-Australian and Gia Carides (Sophie) is Greek-English-Australian. However, a detective (Yuri) is ethnically marked and offers insight into the social exclusion Sophie experiences as a disabled woman. His sensitivity toward her is highlighted in the scene where Eddie waits for Sophie’s cast to be removed. When Sophie emerges, revealing her ‘true self’, Eddie leaves her while Yuri remains supportive. For O’Regan, the use of ethnically unmarked characters and narratives — he cites The Man From Snowy River (1982) and Mad Max as examples — serves to normalise multiple ethnicities in Australian cinema and society (Australian National Cinema 320). While the unspecified ethnicities of the characters are significant to a theorisation of Lucky Break from a new world perspective, the utopian ideological underpinnings — particularly of the normalising function of impairment in cinema — reveals the ableist focus.

In Lucky Break, each character is shown to have a secret (‘real’) self, and it is only

---

45 Likewise, possibilities should be available to disability in Australian national cinema. In line with Meekosha I am critical of the use of impairment as a metaphor. In this film and others, unspecified ethnicity does not operate as a metaphor, rather it reinforces the culturally diverse Australian national identity. However, disability continues to be used as a stylistic device, and is not amalgamated into the multicultural aesthetic (including the New World nationhood, which does not specify origins). In order for this recognition to take place, impairment must be acknowledged and not aestheticised. Further, the social construction of disability must be revealed. I am not suggesting that impairment be played down or ignored in order to emphasise the ‘ableness’ of disabled people, rather I argue they should be represented as a viable cultural group within a multicultural society.
when this secret self is revealed that characters find happiness. Similarly, O’Regan’s discussion of *Strictly Ballroom* reveals a connection between the transition from a diasporic identity to a new world one in which the community is inextricably altered by migration to Australia. Doug’s destiny is achieved through Scott’s (and Fran’s) infusion of a flamenco style into ballroom dance. Each style is adapted to suit the other. What is significant here in relation to a disability analysis is the connection between socially marginal characters. Doug was marginalised and pathologised as he strived to alter the steps. His past is given value when Scott and Fran are applauded in the film’s final scene, for both their romantic union and their dancing style (*Australian National Cinema* 319). *Lucky Break* achieves a similar conclusion; however, at the expense of impairment. Sophie’s marginalisation is not presented as a social problem but rather as being located in her head and her own vulnerability, and thus it is individualised. Although Sophie, as a disabled woman, is finally granted access to a sexual and romantic relationship, her passing is celebrated, not problematised, and Sophie indeed returns to writing romance novels, living through

---

46 Likewise, the Greek community in *The Heartbreak Kid* is not a surviving Greek culture within Australia (diaspora); it is a culture recognisably altered by migration, becoming recognisably Australian (*Australian National Cinema* 319).
her fantasies as she waits for Eddie to return from his one-year jail term.47

Socially marginal characters achieve a utopian union in Heaven’s Burning attending to Australian national identity as recognised by Dermody and Jacka; they also pursue international aims, as recently recognised by Verhoeven. In the film, Colin and Midori both possess displaced identities with regard to the culture they come from. Midori is an alienated Japanese woman attempting to escape from her submissive position to an overbearing husband, while Colin’s displaced identity is in relation to a masculine Australian world. Colin is able to make peace with his father who was a shearer and come to terms with his own past when his father immediately accepts Midori. Felicity Collins sees the influence of the Hawke–Keating government’s deregulated Australia in Heaven’s Burning, and comments on the way impairment and addiction have been used to critique patriarchal authority. She also notes the way this film combines national interests

47 Sophie, therefore, was able to play both sides. Eddie was her reward for passing successfully in an ableist society. Many disabled people are aware of the benefits of passing and will attempt to do so. I personally have spent many hours in the gym attempting to build up muscle strength in order to ‘pass’. While I am able to live and work in the able world, I am constantly reminded that I am other when people stare at my foot at the shops and when people I have just met ask my friends why I limp. There are certainly benefits to passing that disability activists have long been aware of. Ed James, aware of the social restrictions placed on disabled people, worked twice as hard in his job as an associate professor at an American university during the 1970s in order to secure tenure, all while disguising the fact he was going blind. James, along with a colleague, orchestrated strategies such as attending meetings together, or arriving first in order to hide his impairment from people assessing his applications for promotions. James articulates his motivations for passing: 

[Both of us were aware of the anti-disability climate pervasive throughout academia at that time. We had seen newly hired disabled faculty held to a higher standard of teaching and publication than their not observably disabled peers. Since this was almost 20 years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, there was no protection for disabled employees. Our decision was to try to hide my continuing loss of sight as long as possible and push for early tenure. Norm, as a sociologist, and I as an anthropologist, both recognized we were employing a social phenomenon known as ‘passing.’

Although James recognises passing as a social phenomenon and appreciates the assistance of his colleagues in pulling off this grand deception, he does acknowledge that the social position of disabled people must change in order to make passing unnecessary.
with a potentially international audience as discussed earlier.

While not disabled, Colin and Midori are socially marginalised. The validity of romantic relationships between nondisabled people and disabled people is questioned by the disabling society, which in turn suggests disabled people should only form relationships with each other so as not to burden another ‘undeserving’ of a lifetime of care (Drake 132). However, some films couple socially marginal characters in order to highlight the importance of understanding the impact of socially defined parameters on the marginalised individual (Bad Boy Bubby, Dance Me To My Song, Heaven’s Burning). Midori is no longer Japanese and Colin is no longer European-derived as each is changed by their union and form a new recognisably ‘Australian’ identity at the Bachelor and Spinster’s (B and S) ball. The B and S ball is an icon of outback Australian dating and drinking, at which the male is active and the female is passive. At this ball, however, it is Midori who is calling all the shots, from what they wear to when they dance and finally to where they will die. At the ball Yukio (Midori’s estranged husband) attempts to kill the couple; however, Midori is able to kill him and take Colin to the beach where they both die — he from wounds inflicted by Yukio and she by shooting herself. Their deaths suggest that ultimately they have failed to amalgamate into the society and that the new world perpetuates a hegemonic identity.

Angel Baby does couple two socially marginal, disabled characters and initially questions the method by which they remain marginal, the resolution whereby they are eradicated from society reinforces the status quo of ableism.
The film, despite re-establishing a multicultural identity of Australianness, questions the validity of such, as the protagonists who enabled this identity die at the end of the film. In a similar way to the deaths of Kate and Harry in *Angel Baby*, one is a casualty of society who fights against their socially marginal identity, and the other takes their own life, feeling that now they know what love is they can’t go on without the other. Although I would argue their deaths have the same effect of reinforcing the status quo, Colin and Midori’s appear somewhat motivated in terms of the road movie genre while Kate and Harry’s is simply to maintain the current order of things. As Sargeant and Watson argue, road movies often project the

---

49 However, Darke argues that genre films are implicit in perpetuating a one-dimensional image of disability that glosses over social issues. Normality is often at stake in genre films as characters are divided into binaries of good and evil, normal and abnormal, with good and ‘normality’ being the ultimate victor (*Everywhere* 12–13). While Australian filmmakers may attempt to emulate Hollywood styles and genres, they Australianise the form (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 1). The gothic is a peculiar example of how Australian filmmakers have Australianised the form of several international genres (melodrama, film noir, science fiction, horror) with a literary style in order to make contemporary social critiques. O’Regan believes that gothic is part of a stream of Australian filmmaking that denounces Australian culture:

Such work often projects itself as an antidote to the unthinking celebration of Australian life and lifeways and its parochial, sexist, racist and ethnocentric outlooks (*Australian National Cinema* 248). Adding disability to this list is valid because when Australian gothic adopts the grotesque it criticises the Australian culture that fears disability. In *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974), cinematic use of the grotesque blames society for the impairments of the individuals. The grotesque allows us to deal with problems inherent in society in an easier way. This film critiques society’s treatment of people with impairments. While it could be accused of displaying a fear of disablement, this fear is social. The Paris community instigate the road accidents that cause these impairments and then exploit the injured by conducting medical experiments on them — a major theme in gothic literature. In *the Cars That Ate Paris*, with the blame firmly on society, audiences are able to reconsider how disability is understood.

However, when films aestheticise disability as cinematic shortcuts they strengthen the ‘unthinking celebration’ of the traditional representations of Australians.
myth that roads eventually lead to freedom and it is possible to start over. The protagonists in road movies, like Colin and Midori, naively fall into a life of crime and must escape from the past (8–9). They may pay with their lives, with freedom coming in the form of death. This is a commonly occurring conclusion of road movies (Easy Rider (1969), Thelma and Louise (1991)). However, romantic comedies do not often follow this narrative trope.

For O’Regan, ethnicity in a New World cinema, (for example Nirvana Street Murder (1990)) becomes simply another subcultural identity similar to the body-builder subculture in Body Melt (1993). The mix of identities in Death in Brunswick is particularly relevant to a discussion of Australia as a New World cinema. However, as previously mentioned, impairment is used metaphorically in these films yet is not offered as an identity, subculturally or otherwise.

In somewhat of a passing observation, O’Regan describes the New World cinema as hegemonic in its tendency to downplay ethnicity (Australian National Cinema 324). His description does offer a direction for the inclusion of disability as he argues that the New World cinema opens a space for other cultural cleavages outside birth, ethnicity and family (Australian National Cinema 323). In New World films ethnicity is downplayed to the degree that it is not an issue. When impairment enters, however, the downplay is almost to nullify its existence — an act in which there is no cultural value. The identity is unselfconscious. When this identity is selfconscious, however,
the struggle between disabled people and disabling society, focus will be shifted away from the body and on to society. Further, producers must recognise the importance of the audience in order to “bring the non-disabled world to us, not us to it.” (Hevey *Controlling Interests* 211–3). As multicultural policies have progressed to highlight the importance of a self-conscious identity in establishing and maintaining social equality, so Australian national cinema offers the possibility of becoming inclusive of a social model of disability.

### 3.4.4 Multiculturalism

In Australia, multiculturalism has been presented as a way to include difference and diversity in the national identity (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 324). O’Regan argues that multiculturalism projects cultural diversity as an organising social and national principle:

> [m]ulticulturalism privileges social and cultural mixing, hybrid identities, hybrid cultural forms and cultural crossovers. It becomes simultaneously a critical ethic, a civic comportment, an aesthetic project propelling Australian cultural production forward, as well as a national project remaking Australia and the Australian into something more culturally open. (*Australian National Cinema* 324)

As an aesthetic in filmmaking, multiculturalism has functioned as a national project assisting Australia to become culturally open. Multicultural films offer self-conscious insights into the perspective of the disenfranchised. These films confront Australia’s colonial history rather than progress on from it as they do in New World
Identity is not fixed or historically given, rather it is in the process of becoming. This is reflected in the multicultural policies throughout the 1990s, which attributed importance to the diversity of the population in terms of its social, cultural, and economic value.

O’Regan’s discussion of the multiplicity of identity amongst individual members concentrates on Tracey Moffatt. Moffatt refuses to adopt a fixed identity, preferring to adopt a number of social identities:

‘I want to be known as Tracey Moffatt, interesting film-maker’; ‘Tracey Moffatt, Aboriginal film-maker’; ‘Yes I am Aboriginal, but I have the right to be avant-garde like any white artist.’ (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 327)

This refusal to adopt a fixed public identity may resolve the issues facing disabled artists who want recognition of their art to be exclusive of their impairment. These issues are partially due to the continuation of able-bodied perceptions of what normality means. As a way to demonstrate this tendency I will digress to a personal anecdote. In 2002 I was a finalist in the Western Australian government Youth Awards in the ‘inspiration’ category. My fellow finalists included a singer who has muscular dystrophy, an organ transplant recipient, a sportsman who had had both legs amputated, someone who had recently died of cancer, and myself, a stroke survivor who makes documentaries. That is how we were described in the

---

50 The colonial aesthetic and national identity of earlier films including *The Club* (1975) and *Sunday Too Far Away* also excluded representations of impairment except as a humorous story. Both films fit within the male ensemble, focusing on strength and perfect bodies (or men who work in physically demanding jobs — shearing and football). Impairment is devalued in these films and presented as emblematic of sexual perversion (*The Club*) and poor hygiene and lack of social skills (*Sunday Too Far Away*).
newspaper. While I was pleased we were being recognized for our achievements in this way, I was also a little sad that we were not finalists in other categories like sporting, music and the arts. Our impairments had been used in this awards showcase and the various media outlets to make a social statement about disability. I remember one of the finalists being described as a person who “refused to believe he was disabled”. I knew then that I would not win because I strongly believe in the disabling factors of society and the social model of disability whereby these disabling factors are recognized as well as the physical impairment.

Although I found it disappointing that the finalists were not known for simply what they had done, I also criticise the New World cinema in which impairment is downplayed, ignored and defined in ableist terms. The multiplicity of identity achieved through a multicultural framework is preferable because it allows pride in a disability identity and does not require exploitation of stereotypes in order to normalise another identity.

O’Regan concludes his discussion with the contention that his problematisations of nationhood have not allowed for a sufficiently in-depth analysis of the cleavages he introduced earlier. He argues that they do not structure all other social problematisations, rather that they can be considered in combination with gender, region, demography and class (Australian National Cinema 323). While this comment may pre-empt my claim that disability should be considered when problematising Australian national cinema in terms of society and nationhood, his
cleavages do not approach this perspective to a sufficient degree. Indeed, his brief
mention serves mostly to divide the movement and attach greater worth to certain
impairments than others. In a tragedy mode he blames parents for the incidence of
impairment in their child, including all social restrictions.\textsuperscript{51}

3.5 Rationale for film analysis to follow

Marginalised groups will often attempt to ‘pass’ as members of the dominant group
in order to avoid stigma. Goffman argues that ‘normals’ carry hidden stigmas that
they suppress at certain points in their lives (77). This concept can be similarly
applied to the idea of a national cinema or national identity. As suggested in the
previous chapter, national cinemas encourage some groups into subordination for
the nation’s ‘best interests’.

Jenkins suggests ethnicity is an identity established early in life, and any change to
this identity is resisted. In previous decades, the subordination of multicultural
groups was encouraged through national cinema as being in Australia’s best

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Annie’s Coming Out} exemplifies the operation of the personal tragedy theory of disability in
Australian cinema on both a literal and a metaphoric level. O’Regan has noticed the connection with
parenting, “[t]he insensitivity of parents and carers to the physically disabled, but not mentally
handicapped, is explicitly narrativized” (\textit{Australian National Cinema} 264–5). In this film the severity
of Annie’s impairment was misdiagnosed for several years before being discovered by Annie’s carer
Jessica. Annie’s parents feel guilty that they did not pick up on the misdiagnosis but perpetuate the
problem by resisting Jessica’s claims because they can not face their error.

The characterisation of Jessica as Annie’s symbolic mother who is totally devoted to the
extent that she has no leisure time reveals society’s unreal expectations of mothers of children with
impairments. This is conflated by the binary oppositional characterisation of Annie’s real mother
who chose not to put in the effort that Jessica did. In her discussion of the frequency in which
mothers are blamed for a child’s disability, Hillyer asserts:

the fantasy of maternal omnipotence is at the root of mother-blaming amongst professionals and others
who are concerned with disabilities. It holds mothers responsible for the reactions of everyone else to
the disability, for the social restriction[s] […] and for the discomfort of the disabled person. (94)

Thus O’Regan’s analysis placing the blame on parents perpetuates the personal tragedy mode of
representation.
However, during the 1990s, Australia’s nationhood began to be problematised as O’Regan suggests and as a result became more diverse. Australian national cinema during the 1990s was inclusive of multiculturalism, but resisted disability. Jenkins argues that impairment threatens human-ness – the basis of all identity formations.

It has been argued elsewhere (Ferrier and O’Regan *Australian National Cinema*) that Australian national cinema of the 1990s did in fact include disability in its diversity. While I agree that there were many representations of people with both physical and mental impairments in 1990s Australian national cinema, these were ableist and reaffirmed the hegemony of the medical model of disability. In order to avoid what Darke describes as reductive categorisation of representation into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 182) I will draw on other disciplines to highlight the importance of pride in identity and suggest why this was still so resisted in the diverse social climate of the 1990s in Australia.

The *Disability Discrimination Act Australia* 1992 introduced a concept to Australian society (not to discriminate on the basis of ‘disability’), and the reactions in Australian national cinema were similar to those experienced by people who have just acquired an illness or injury resulting in impairment. Following impairment, the

\[\text{Likewise, Norden in his encyclopedic book of the representation of disability in Hollywood movies argues that the problem is not how much disability is represented rather how it is represented, as disability has always been represented yet isolated (Cinema of Isolation ix).}\]
individual must redefine him or herself. However, as new identities are resisted (especially those that threaten human-ness), initially this redefinition is attempted through able-bodied parameters. Unfortunately, perpetuating these restrictions is counterproductive as it prevents exploration of new subjectivities. Similar trends can be seen in the film productions of Australian national cinema throughout the 1990s. Thus Australian national cinema of this period both adopts and constitutes a readily available model of disability identity (Seymour 42). This identity is ableist and re-establishes the medical model of disability. A new identity needs to be negotiated, outside of the able-bodied parameters imposed on Australian society. Films such as *Dance Me to My Song*, *Bad Boy Bubby* and *Struck by Lightning* do attempt to renegotiate this disability identity and will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Following Dermody and Jacka’s exhaustive attempts to categorise cycles of Australian filmmaking, others have adopted the same method and ‘quirky’ has become a popular category. In such a process it is unclear whether films are being split into genres or thematic groups. I have chosen several Australian films made during (and indicative of) the 1990s for close textual analysis in the following two chapters. I am not attempting to suggest groups or cycles of films; instead I plan to link each key film to outside political and societal factors that contributed to the construction of nationhood through Australian national cinema at the expense of disability. I base my decisions on Jenkins’ identity politics, in particular those established early in life. The core of my thesis is based upon film theory and how
particular characterizations contribute to this mode of storytelling, as such the idea of a narrative tool, will feature heavily throughout the remainder of this thesis.

I have selected predominantly female-based representations for in-depth analysis in this chapter. As indicated earlier, Australian cinema favours masculinity as a national identity. However, disability is approached within a female context:

Australian films of the 1990s are characterised by vulnerable bodies; bodies which struggle with disabilities, physical or mental, that render them prone. At the same time, Australian protagonists, not always heroes, are feminised. They are often women — crazy women, old women, daggy women — or they are queers and queens, or emasculated, half-witted or eccentric men, none of whom embody hegemonic masculinity. (Ferrier 65)

Therefore this fascination is contrary both to tendencies in Australian cinema and worldwide trends in the representation of disability in film. As indicated in Chapter Two, an exploration of hegemonic masculinity is most commonly at stake with cinematic explorations of disability (J. Morris Pride Against Prejudice 93). Although Australian cinema is often accused of favouring masculinity as a national identity, focusing on strength and perfect bodies, films made during the 1990s also show a pre-occupation with the experience of being disabled (The Sugar Factory, Lucky Break, Dance Me To My Song, Struck By Lightning, Shine). These films display a further tendency toward women’s experiences (Lucky Break, Dance Me To My Song, Lilian’s Story, Muriel’s Wedding). Australian social convention regurgitates images that present women as vulnerable, while Australian men are rarely, if ever, presented as vulnerable, and impairment is used as a narrative tool. I
will, therefore, refer to Australian feature films that use impairment to problematise masculinity in a similar way to the thematic points of reference I have made to these particular representations of disabled women in Australian cinema. Although the intersection between femininity and disability is my main focus, questions of masculinity must also be addressed, particularly within the context of an Australian national identity.

Ferrier suggests that Australian films that deal with disability are often informed by the generic conventions of ‘feminine genres’, such as melodrama or the gothic. Rayner contends that the gothic is an atmosphere rather than a genre (25). Australian gothic, although exhibiting the influence of both the film noir genre and gothic literature, demonstrates disparity in terms of setting and characterisation. It does however, share three common elements:

[a] questioning of established authority; a disillusionment with the social reality that that authority maintains; and the protagonist’s search for a valid and tenable identity once the true nature of the human environment has been revealed. (Rayner 25)

Further, these themes are interrelated and display a doubt in the constructed national identity (Rayner 24–25). Dermody and Jacka find the Australian gothic has links with melodrama (Screening of Australia vol. 2 239–241). In the melodrama there is an excess of effect over cause (Neale Melodrama and Tears 6). Melodramas are often about familial relations and thwarted love and are based on codes of morality (Hayward Cinema Studies 214). The genre is characterised by continual surprises and “chance happenings, coincidences, missed meetings, sudden conversations, rescues and revelations, deus ex machina endings” (Neale Melodrama and Tears 6).
In the 1990s, according to Rayner, the Australian gothic took on the exaggeration of melodrama, using parody to create the ‘quirky’ character (132). These genres normally center on female characters:

> melodramas and gothic narratives commonly feature the figure of disablement; characters are regularly crippled, paralysed or disfigured. These genres inform many contemporary Australian novels and films. (Ferrier 64)

_The Well_ is informed by both gothic and melodramatic protocols and _Lucky Break_ adopts the conventions of the melodrama. _Romper Stomper_ is not as simple to classify; however, the dark aspect to the narrative arguably follows the gothic tradition, and Gabe’s search for love is in line with melodrama. Likewise, _Bad Boy Bubby_ is gothic, while _Dance Me to My Song_ and _Struck by Lightning_ both display features of melodrama. Nevertheless, a discussion of impairment and masculinity is particularly important to an analysis of Australian national cinema in the 1990s, as it has been argued that the image of masculinity was transformed during this period of Australian filmmaking (Rayner and Butters, _Becoming a Man in Australian Film_). These brief discussions will focus mainly on how disability and masculinity open up questions of ableism. Stereotypes of ableist masculinity are frequently premised on the impaired male body.

Thus, unlike the international films I discussed in Chapter Two, including _My Left Foot_ and _Born On The Fourth July_, representations in Australian national cinema do not (for the most part) explore the impact of vulnerability (as demonstrated by impairment) on hegemonic masculinity. It is rare to see impairment represented within a masculine context. _Hammers Over the Anvil_ appears to be the stand-alone...
exception; however, impairment occurs at the end of this film as a way to tie up loose ends. I have not included an in-depth discussion of the film in this thesis. Instead I offer comparisons of many films offering minor depictions of impairment and masculinity throughout the following chapters.

_Angel Baby_ is recommended for its verisimilitude as opposed to its using disability for comedy, horror, or thriller purposes; further, impairment is the main focus of the film. However, the film constructs impairment, particularly mental impairment outside the white, heterosexual male norm. Although recognisable as culturally diverse in many other ways, the film’s implicit medical focus places disability as a peripheral identity with few cultural implications.53

O’Regan offers pluralism as a significant focus of representation in and theorising about Australian national cinema during the 1990s, yet impairment has not been recognised as a viable group within this focus. Although O’Regan concedes that several answers may be offered to a single question using a pluralist framework, and that at times these answers may not be compatible (Australian National Cinema 354), I would suggest that questions of gender and nationhood in terms of Australian national identity frequently disregard disability due to cultural insiderism. Accordingly, this pluralist perspective must be opened up to include

---

53 I recently saw _House_, a play at the Disability in the Arts festival at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), which problematised and advocated for mentally ill and schizophrenic people by highlighting the social construction of mental impairment and how this is negotiated by the mentally impaired.
disability and impairment and the human rights movement must, for example, be reconsidered in line with the gay and lesbian movement.

Gender, ethnicity, and kinship are the foundation for each person’s primary human identity (Jenkins 21). During the 1990s Australian national cinema explored these identities as they intersected with impairment in a way that reinforced the personal tragedy model of disability and absolved society of responsibility, disregarding the possibility of social disablement. As such, the films selected for discussion in the next two chapters explore themes around disability that include identity politics in terms of gender, cultural diversity and family.

*Angel Baby* addresses politics of identity in explicit ways under a framework of multiculturalism. In the film, Kate and Harry, who both have schizophrenia, meet at therapy and upon finding they have a lot in common become lovers. Harry lives with his brother Morris, Morris’ wife Louise, and their son Sam. He appears to be a ‘normal guy’ with the assistance of medication, and in fact helps others to fit in. Kate, on the other hand, is more eccentric, believing Astral, her guardian angel, speaks to her through the television show *Wheel of Fortune*, and studiously records the messages ‘sent’ to her each day. After they move in together, everything appears to be going well for a time as they encourage each other to re-enter society and employment. Their psychiatrists and Harry’s family promise to support their relationship and goals as long as they continue to take their medication. They agree. However, when Harry finds a job he secretly stops taking his medication. Kate has
also been keeping a secret and admits she has been pregnant for two months when she believes Harry is settled in his new job. Although their psychiatrists express concern about the dangers of relapse brought about by pregnancy, Harry and Kate find that they now have a purpose in life. They decide to proceed with the pregnancy despite the misgivings also expressed by Morris and Louise. Harry, in his excitement and pre-birth research, discovers the possibility of birth defects as a result of medication and encourages Kate to stop taking her medication also. After Harry loses his job and Kate finds this out from one of Astral’s messages on Wheel of Fortune (“worst case scenario”) both relapse and are admitted to hospital.

Medication is a particular point of confusion for those in opposition to the social model of disability, even amongst disabled people. For example, Paul Simpson (‘Horizontal Paul’) positions himself as a disability advocate who disagrees with disability advocacy. His experience with the social model of disability is to see it as anti-medication and treatment (1). Longmore argues that medical treatment is a civil right and that it is when medical intervention ceases to be offered, as in states in America that allow death option, that the lives of disabled people are most devalued (Why I Burned My Book 124). With the recent inclusion of a social model of impairment (recognising impairment effects), the social model recognise the importance of medicine as well as social factors.

Writer and director Michael Rymer insists that Angel Baby, while “character driven”, is “not about crazy people” (Urban Making of Angel Baby). If Rymer had
set out to make a film about crazy people he would have gone about it in a different way, “it would have been more about the symptoms than about the people” (Urban Making of Angel Baby). Thus, the writer and director of this film that is often considered ‘favorable’ ascribes to a medical view of disability that equates disability with impairment. This aptly confirms Meekosha’s proposition that disability as a metaphor is not recognised in Australia as contributing to the representation of disability in cinema or indeed affecting the disability movement in any way.

Although Angel Baby, made in 1995, reflects a 1990s Australian production aesthetic as explained by Verhoeven’s Industry 3, aspects of each of O’Regan’s four ways of problematising nationhood exist within the narrative. The Irish accent adopted by Harry and his brother Morris suggests at Australia’s status as a European-derived society. However, its insignificance to the plot conforms to a New World society. Gallopoli had earlier emphasised the Irish dimension to the Australian national identity as Molloy described it and as referred to previously in the chapter. Harry appears comfortable in the film in both a family and an employment environment. His schizophrenia is therefore constructed as something that does not fit into his otherwise normal lifestyle. The scene in which Harry goes to take his medication demonstrates this visually. Harry looks at himself in the bathroom mirror, which is also a cabinet and opens it to get his medication. Looking at Harry you couldn’t tell

54 Rhymer, who wants audiences to leave the film feeling catharcised, suggests that while the film is accurate, it is a ‘cleaned-up’ version audiences will be able to watch because what schizophrenics go through is awful and ugly and difficult to watch (Urban Making of Angel Baby).
his condition, but his schizophrenia is behind his reflection: it is a personal tragedy but not a punishment.

However, when he decides to procreate despite the risk his condition could be passed on to his unborn child, through ‘defective’ genes, he is immediately punished with psychosis and eventual death. As Harry begins to become ‘paranoid’ when two work colleagues whisper to each other, he is closely framed sitting at his desk and a poster of a clown on the wall (earlier referred to by Sam as a “monster”) looks over his shoulder. The multicultural aesthetic is emphasised by the clubhouse environment, which consists of people from many cultural backgrounds. Both Harry and Morris’ partnering with white women confirm the diaspora as a feature of Australian nationhood, particularly as both women seem to adopt their partner’s cultural heritage. Impairment as a threat to human-ness is approachable by an examination of traditional gender roles and the heterosexual dynamic that exists in the narrative.

In a similar way to Singer’s seemingly contradictory debates about euthanasia and social disablement, Angel Baby offers some arguments with regards to the social position of people with mental impairments, ascribing to a social theory of disability, but significantly these are forgotten by the film’s resolution. When Kate becomes pregnant she faces opposition from all sides, but remains strong in her resolution to keep the baby. When Harry challenges Morris with the claim that they both have the same rights, Morris tells him that they are not the same. Kate flatly refuses to have an abortion, declaring that it is her body.
Angel Baby links disability and parenting with the suggestion that people with impairments cannot be good parents and should therefore be discouraged from having children. When she becomes pregnant, Kate’s doctor warns her that her child may inherit her condition. Although Kate carries the baby to term, the narrative is excused from fully exploring this controversial topic by the ambiguous ending as Kate has died and Harry has killed himself. Despite the new connection Morris and Harry have made as fathers, following Kate’s death, Harry seems to have sided with Morris’ earlier argument that he and Kate should not be parents. This is seen in his asking Morris to “look after her” before he leaves to stand on the bridge and imagines Kate saying she can’t go on without him — before presumably killing himself.

3.6 Conclusion

The Australian film industry was redeveloped in the 1970s as a national cultural project and can therefore be considered a national cinema. As the government supports the industry it is reductive to simply compare output to Hollywood, a free

55 Disabled females who are sexually active are presented as oversexed. Often oversexed characters are punished (Sweetie (1989), Angel Baby). In Sweetie, Sweetie’s sexuality is constructed as excessive in order to comment on her sister Kay’s lack of sexual drive. In this way, what would probably be considered a ‘normal’ interest in sex unites itself with attitudes within society for the purposes of revealing another character’s trait with little regard for the impact it will have on disabled women’s sexuality. This theme is further carried through in Campion’s work, The Piano, in which Ada adopts sexual practices that are also widely seen as inappropriate. These traits, including the daughter she had out of wedlock and her extramarital affair with Baines, reinforce the lack of control over her life that she shows.

56 Previously it is suggested that Kate’s schizophrenia is a result of bad parenting, her father raped her. Gillard and Achimovich suggest that the film is trying to cover all bases (3). Although I am uninterested in verisimilitude to medicine, Rhymer claims an accurate albeit aestheticised film in this respect; thus Gillard and Archimovich uncover an ideological disparity in the film and society.
market cinema. This highlights the importance of studying a national cinema and the role of the government in social and cultural constructions. An inward-looking approach is beneficial particularly as the preferred national identity has remained fairly constant. This collective identity is constructed and through repetition encourages the subordination of minorities. Ideology and stigma are implicit in this construction. Power and constructions of nationhood are linked to disability and ideals of ‘them’ and ‘us’.

By the 1990s, Australian national cinema, previously accused of being too well-bred, began to embrace a multicultural national identity. However, disability remained stigmatised and peripheral to this diversity. Impairment undermines the primary human identities of gender, ethnicity, and kinship (Jenkins 56). During the 1990s, Australian national cinema explored these identities as they intersected with impairment in a way that reinforced the personal tragedy model of disability and absolved society of responsibility, disregarding the possibility of social disablement. This also introduces a rationale for film analysis that links disability film studies with concerns of multiculturalism in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. As such, the films selected for discussion in the next chapter will explore themes around disability that include identity politics in terms of gender, cultural diversity and family.

The next chapter forms the main textual analysis of the thesis, discussing films that represent impairment under the personal tragedy model of disability and examining
how this has contributed to myths of Australianness, and by extension, interacted with identities considered socially acceptable. While Jenkins considers human-ness to be largely in the individual’s domain, the films under discussion will demonstrate the significance of outside definitions being placed on the experiences of individuals. I suggest how these representations construct disability as lying outside the national identity, despite the more culturally inclusive environment.
Chapter 4
This Film is not About Disability

4.0 Introduction: Impairment in the plot

“It’s purely an objective judgement based on established stereotypical criteria”
David in Occasional Coarse Language (1998)

The analysis and discussion of a national cinema represents the pursuit of three
more or less elusive entities: a national identity, a filmic culture and a commercial,
industrial context. Even this identification of subject areas must undergo a further
multiplication. Many national sub-groups may define alternative identities, and
trace their overt or covert expression through the medium of film.
(Rayner 1-2)

During the 1990s an abundance of Australian films featured disabled characters.
The narratives often did not center around these characters, as seen in Doing Time
For Patsy Cline, Heaven’s Burning, The Nostradamus Kid, Siam Sunset, To Have
and To Hold, Sirens, Muggers, Thank God He Met Lizzie, Dead To The World,
Black Robe, The Golden Braid (1990), Dark City, Wendy Cracked a Walnut (1990),
Welcome to Woop Woop, and The Craic (1999). However, the character’s
impairment remained essential to the plot and relied on cultural myths and
ideologies to present information about the protagonists or whatever social
problematisation was being made. There were also a number of features that had
disabled protagonists — Hammers Over The Anvil, Struck By Lightning, Romper
Stomper, The Sum of Us, Proof, Muriel’s Wedding, Metal Skin, What I Have
Written, The Piano, Lucky Break, Shine, Cosi, Angel Baby, and The Well. Rather
than projecting a disability culture or encouraging pride in a disability identity, these
films (depicting both minor and major characters with impairments) most often
encourage the subordination of the disabled in order to rehabilitate another minority group. For example, *Metal Skin, Cosi, The Nostradamus Kid*, and *Doing Time For Patsy Cline*, each take youth culture ‘seriously’, while *The Sum of Us* offers pride in a gay identity and *Muriel’s Wedding, The Piano*, and *Lucky Break* attempt to renegotiate a place for women in Australian national cinema. Following the rationale introduced in the previous chapter and drawing on the theoretical material introduced earlier in the thesis, in this chapter I undertake close textual investigations of three key films made during the 1990s in Australian national cinema. As suggested in the previous two chapters, a disability identity remains peripheral to the Australian national identity due to constructions of normality and Australianness. While the 1990s cinematic pre-occupation with diversity is reflected in the films selected for textual analysis, a tendency toward the personal tragedy mode of representation continues to marginalise a disability identity.

The three films selected for analysis (*Lucky Break, The Well* and *Romper Stomper*) involve a personal tragedy mode of narrative, previously discussed, whereby a female protagonist’s impairment holds significance to the overall plot, contributing to an individualistic portrayal of disability as synonymous with impairment. This may occur thematically through a narrative that revolves around the incidence of impairment (*Lucky Break*) or via a stylistic semiotic connection with weakness or vulnerability (*The Well, Romper Stomper*).
This chapter is divided into three sections according to film, and to a lesser extent, theme. Each analysis refers to the inherent contradiction as disabled females are redundantly fulfilling cultural expectations of femininity, and therefore considered vulnerable due to their impairment. I begin with an analysis of *Lucky Break* as it contributes to constructions of femininity and an exclusion of impairment from emphasised femininity. Mulvey’s theories of the gaze will inform the discussion of *The Well* and a more specific generic analysis of impairment as cinematic shorthand or icon. *Romper Stomper* highlights the mythology and ideology behind using impairment to critique Australian national identity. I will refer to other films in less depth where appropriate to demonstrate the national pre-occupation as influenced by the political and economic environment of the 1990s.

### 4.1 Rehabilitating one group at the expense of another

The ideas of cultural insiderism and the rehabilitation of one minority group at the expense of another as well as the tendency of Australian national cinema to project culturally diverse identities while still excluding a disability culture, were introduced in Chapter One. In this chapter I combine the ‘inward perspective’ approach of critiquing a national cinema, introduced in Chapter Three, with the social theory of disability discussed in Chapters One and Two, to demonstrate how Australian national cinema during the 1990s re-examined the national identity in a globalised industry. Here I will concentrate on the representations of impairment in this cultural construction, particularly as they were used to rehabilitate other minority groups. O’Regan’s problematisation of Australian nationhood will inform
this discussion, as it provides a way to discern how Australians presented themselves locally and internationally (Australian National Cinema 8). He combines the inward perspective with international concerns and contends:

> [s]pecifying who the Australian people are, and might become, provides Australian cinema with something to represent, to be, and with materials to exploit. Audiences and critics recognize themselves in films and use them as a source to project their society and nation in a certain kind of way. Policy makers, film-makers, critics and audiences rely on the existing political, civic and descriptive projects through which Australian society is represented to itself and the larger world. (Australian National Cinema 8)

In Chapter One I chronicled the political, civic, and descriptive projects that influenced the representation of impairment in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, for example, the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and an economic rationalist view of the world. Further, in Chapter Two I revealed an emerging theoretical framework and reviewed how internationally, critics were debating a kind of misrecognition of a disability culture in films that represented impairment. Finally, in Chapter Three I introduced the idea of Australian national cinema as a way of projecting Australian society and nation (normality) both nationally and internationally. In this chapter I have selected films for discussion that problematise who Australians are and suggest at what they might become. Through close textual analysis I reveal the social environment that invokes ableist mythology to critique the discriminatory representations of previous eras.
4.2 Key Films

I have selected *Lucky Break*, *The Well*, and *Romper Stomper* for in-depth analysis in this chapter, as they offer points of discussion on aspects pertaining to Australian national identity from an inward perspective. In each film impairment operates symbolically in order to normalise a previously established other, and its depiction holds significance to the progression toward a multicultural national cinema. Although the environment in which they were produced is reflected in all narratives, each film offers a different perspective on who Australians are and who they might become, drawing on both the socio-cultural climate at the time of their production and on previously established tendencies in Australian national cinema. *Lucky Break*, *The Well* and *Romper Stomper* each use impairment to critique Australian national identity. While *Lucky Break* attempts to criticise pretending to be someone you’re not, *The Well* offers a space for women in the traditional Australian identity. Finally, *Romper Stomper* critiques who Australia has become as a nation and suggests an alternate identity.

Later in this chapter I will explore the ways impairment operates as an icon, both in terms of *mise en scene* and mythology, in order to make this critique of national identity. The filmic techniques employed in these films to represent the incidence of impairment rely on ableist myths. *Lucky Break*, *The Well* and *Romper Stomper* each depict an impaired female character who is taken advantage of and who redundantly fulfills cultural expectations of women, as impairment is positioned to mean loss of
control. In contrast to the diverse cinematic portrayal of most minority groups, Australian national cinema has continued to marginalise those with impairments.

### 4.3 Lucky Break

In *Lucky Break*, the female protagonist, Sophie, writes romance novels specialising in the ‘Trojan horse’ position. She has post-polio impairments and uses crutches for mobility. While writing one such story, an attractive man named Eddie spies her as he selects jewelry books in a library. He approaches her and asks her on a date. Instead of accepting this date (due to her impairment) she begins to spy on him at work. While attempting to remain undetected, she breaks her leg and is able to pass off her polio impairment as a ‘normal’ accident, fooling Eddie into believing she is only temporarily disabled. Eddie, meanwhile is a jewelry thief. As they get to know each other and their respective deceptions are discovered, the traditional boy meets girl romance problematises impairment, sexual eligibility, and cultural identity.

When Sophie and Eddie meet in a library, after he eavesdrops on her writing a raunchy scene for her romance novel, he doesn’t realise she is impaired and she doesn’t realise he is a high-class jewelry thief who is about to propose to his girlfriend Gloria. Acutely aware of social restrictions placed on her as a disabled woman, Sophie does not accept his offer of a trip to Paris, or at least a coffee date. Puzzled, but unperturbed, Eddie returns to Gloria. Sophie, however, is intrigued and proceeds to spy on Eddie as he and Gloria go on dates. When she breaks her leg (allowing Eddie to think she is only temporarily disabled) she feels confident to pursue Eddie. Everything that was available to Gloria becomes available to Sophie.
She takes advantage of her newfound identity as an athletic woman “injured in a skiing accident” and proceeds in a more than platonic ‘friendship’ with Eddie.

As a new world of romantic dinners and getaway weekends opens up to her, Sophie rejects her old lifestyle and disabled associates to be part of the ‘able’ world. Eddie oscillates between both women and it becomes increasingly unclear who is the ‘other woman’. He can’t commit himself totally to one only. Despite finding out Eddie’s secrets quite early in the relationship, Sophie continues the affair, which is quickly ended when Sophie’s own deception is made known. Gloria also attempts to undermine Sophie’s claim on Eddie as she reveals knowledge of Sophie’s permanent impairments.1

While the film has an opportunity to critique social restrictions placed on top of impairments, such debates are not fully negotiated within the text, and the interaction between the diegetic environment and Sophie’s impairments reinforce the pressure to pass as nondisabled in an ableist society. This in turn highlights the limitations of O’Regan’s model of problematising nationhood under the four headings explored in Chapter Three. While Lucky Break adopts the concerns of Australian national cinema in establishing an appropriate identity and the tendency to be someone you’re not for the benefit of others, this is not resolved with any great success. Perhaps a more appropriate vehicle from which to approach Lucky Break is

---

1 Gloria undermines Sophie by adopting the rhetoric of charity, telling Sophie she has been to her house and considers her courageous due to the accommodations she has made to her lived environment. While Sophie would consider these accommodations normal, there is a pre-existing discourse enabling Gloria power over her.
Verhoeven’s Industry 3, as the film follows an Australianised version of the romantic comedy genre making it simultaneously national and international.

Although suggested, the ethnicity of the main characters is not explicitly addressed in the narrative. Yet, the director felt it necessary to assign Sophie a specific, recognisable impairment. In a 1994 interview with Andrew Urban for Cinema Papers Lewin commented on the genesis of the character of Sophie:

[...]the character started as a handicapped woman. She has a lower-limb disability, which forces her to walk on crutches. Technically it’s identified as polio, but that’s just to put audience minds at rest. (Urban Ben Lewin Interviewed 39)²

As Eddie’s jewel thieving is revealed to Sophie, another character enters the narrative. Yuri is a Russian taxi driver/police detective who is investigating Eddie. He is another possible love interest for Sophie. His ethnicity is explicitly addressed within the narrative to align him with Sophie in terms of being outside the dominant culture. While telling a story of his own secret past in Russia he discovers a photograph of Sophie wearing a brace on her leg as a child. At the time he is having dinner with Sophie and her agoraphobic housemate, thus he represents the part of herself Sophie wishes to hide in order to be with Eddie.

² Judi Levine, Lewin’s wife and producer, comments on the film’s now defunct official website, “The last thing it is about is disability”, claiming instead the film is about how people “hide their vulnerabilities” (Orion). Several of the films I discuss in this chapter, including Lucky Break, The Piano and Proof, are “not about disability” according to their filmmakers. However, as Meekosha suggests, invoking a social model analysis of disability in the cinema, the disability relevance is often an unintended consequence of the representation of disability in film (Superchicks, Clones, Cyborgs and Cripples 24–25).
Therefore, despite O’Regan’s claim that disability is a subcultural cleavage that is significant when discussing Australians amongst themselves, while ethnicity is of more importance when looking at Australia in relation to other national societies, this narrative highlights that both impairment and ethnicity are of similar importance to characterisation. The link, I would argue, is Verhoeven’s Industry 3, which sees Australian national cinema during the 1990s as being simultaneously national and international (162). Further, while impairment is a universal experience, disability can be measured in terms of social interpretation (Groce Disability in Cross-Cultural Perspective). While impairment-specific narratives may aid in problematising Australians amongst themselves, the interaction that commonly occurs with multiculturalism suggests a point of reference to other national societies and, therefore, becomes as Verhoeven suggests simultaneously national and international. This is a significant feature of nationhood that O’Regan disregards.

Norden’s framework is particularly relevant to an analysis of Lucky Break, as the film employs stylistic tools to symbolically separate Sophie from the rest of society (Cinema of Isolation 1). For example, when Sophie first meets Eddie and rejects his offer of a date, the camera is trained on his leg. After he leaves, puzzled by her

---

3 By “universal” I do not mean that every disabled person has the same experiences. By using this word I am not attempting to essentialise impairment and disability. I am simply arguing that impairment can be experienced anywhere in the world and therefore that disability is culturally specific and will vary across cultures.

4 Although I previously suggested that O’Regan regards disability as a subcultural identity, this is not explicitly stated, and indeed he invokes discussions of impairment to comment on other socio-cultural identities and aspects of filmmaking (Australian National Cinema 262). For example, O’Regan discusses disability in the context of Annie’s Coming Out to highlight a way in which parenting becomes a socio-cultural problematisation (Australian National Cinema 263).
rejection of him, Sophie stands and her brace and crutches become visible in the shot, explaining to the audience her reluctance to go on a date. *Struck By Lightning*, a film I discuss in the following chapter, does not follow this tendency. The use of wider shots allows movement within the frame that does not direct an investigating (desiring/fearing) gaze onto the impaired body and allows interaction with the environment without exploitation.

Norden specifies stairs as a basic set design element filmmakers have employed when visualising their disabled characters interacting with their surroundings. As Sophie stalks Eddie (inherent isolation) while he is with Gloria, the couple almost walk into her, oblivious to the world as they are totally caught up in each other. In order to get away she gets on an escalator. Stairs are also visible in the frame. The fact that stairs would be difficult for Sophie to use with her limited movement reinforces the image that there is something less than desirable about her that Eddie and Gloria do not share. Hence stairs are a motif in this film that suggest visually and iconographically that Sophie should not have access to a sexual relationship.

Norden also identifies several stereotypes and the way these reinforce a strategy of isolation when it comes to disabled people. He describes one of these as the comic misadventurer. Norden defines this stereotype as:

[a] disabled person victimized by one or more able-bodied people, and a disabled person whose impairment leads to trouble, whether self-directed, other-directed, or both. All in the name of comedy, of course. (Cinema of Isolation 20)
By refusing to identify as disabled and regulating her interaction with other impaired people, Sophie is successful in her ability to ‘pass’ and she is not victimised. However, her impairment does lead to trouble, particularly as it is the reason she rejects Eddie’s date, which in the cause–effect relationship led to her following him. The second time she does this, Eddie is again with Gloria and they come within meters of Sophie. Sophie tries to get away, and the camera frames her affected leg in close-up as she ‘runs’ uncoordinatedly.\(^5\) The editing juxtaposes the happy couple and Sophie’s limp foot. Eventually she falls in a scene reminiscent of Norden’s comic misadventurer stereotype, “in the name of comedy of course”.\(^6\) Thus in terms of both narrative and style, this film adopts an individualised mode of disability representation. This individualised mode allows Sophie to re-establish her identity along ableist lines.

Thus Sophie’s identity begins to be formed anew. In a similar way to the New World nationhood O’Regan describes, Sophie must alter her original identity so that she becomes more like the hegemonic settler culture. However, as I suggested in the previous chapter, due to the ableist focus, the New World identity O’Regan describes does not fully apply, as in this instance the host culture appears unwilling to incorporate aspects of the new (disability) identity. Sophie’s comic misadventurer characterisation does, however, align her with the spate of ‘quirky’ comedies

\(^5\) Previously, when Sophie had rejected Eddie’s date, the camera remained focused on his leg. This choice of shot is puzzling because at this stage the audience does not yet know Sophie is disabled. However, later in the film these two scenes operate as a parallelism, each offering information about the other.

\(^6\) Norden bases this stereotype on pre-1910 cinema and 1930s slap-stick comedies. Sophie’s hyperbolic facial expressions and speed of action reinforce this connection in Lucky Break.
featured throughout 1990s Australian national cinema. O’Regan and Rayner separately note that marginalised identities around differences in age, gender, race and sexuality were foregrounded throughout the 1990s to encourage diversity. Rayner contends that both individual and communal rites of passage narratives were common in Australian national cinema during the 1990s; in these, characters search for meaning and national identity while struggling against authority figures (162). While other peripheral identities distinguished by age, gender, race and sexuality take communal rites of passage, the disability identity remains marginalised as rites of passage are individualised. Further, the identity most disabled characters eventually strive for is one in which their impairment, culture, and difference are denied.

In *The Sum of Us*, following his stroke, Harry ascribes to the comic misadventurer stereotype, although he appears to have a certain degree of control over it as he embraces the comic misadventurer identity. He claims, “The trouble with having a stroke is the people that treat you like a fuckwit afterwards”.7 Harry’s stroke is intended in the film to consolidate the love between father and son, and to make the contention that love takes many forms. His son Jeff is gay, but Jeff does not want his whole world to begin and end with being gay, and “even likes women”. By depending totally on Jeff for his basic survival — including “going to the lav” — one minority group (queer) is rehabilitated at the expense of another (disabled).

---

7 Being treated like a fuckwit following a stroke is something I am very familiar with.
FollowingHarry’s assertion to the audience that he is being treated like a fuckwit, the scene cuts to a close-up on Harry’s face as Jeff wheels him through the supermarket. He looks half-awake and barely conscious, perhaps even dribbling saliva. Thus stylistically, Harry is a fuckwit and the film proceeds along the comic misadventurer format. Harry sees Greg, Jeff’s potential lover, and begins to beep incessantly on the bell Jeff had rigged up to the chair so that Harry could still communicate despite the loss of his language function. Harry then knocks the shopping basket off his lap, with his affected arm no less! This leads me to believe Harry was a candidate for rehabilitation who could have learnt to wipe his own bum at the very least. However, as Longmore argues, when it comes to movie images, most of the time they strive to reinforce the notion that disabled people have nothing to live for (Why I Burned My Book 119). Rehabilitation threatens this widely held belief, so in films such as The Sum of Us rehabilitation never begins. In this way movies present a totally one-sided argument and distort the alternatives (119).

Although Sophie can use the escalator, Gloria uses it in a far sexier way. By extending her arms to hold both sides, Gloria’s body is emphasised, particularly her chest and hips and she becomes an icon of female sexuality as described by Mulvey. Sophie would not be able to do this given her use of crutches. While Sophie is exposed to the investigating gaze, Gloria is subjected to the desiring gaze. There is a similarity in the way women and people with impairments are represented visually in cinema. While the female figure is objectified sexually, the impaired figure is objectified for the purposes of fear or revulsion. Lucky Break depicts Gloria in this
way, and Sophie too — however, only when she is passing as temporarily impaired. When she is recognisably impaired, and suffering from polio, the focus is on the symbols of this impairment and she herself becomes an icon of ‘disability’ and of the fears and obsessions of society around disability and becoming impaired.

Cinematic representations of disabled women often suggest they are unable to be intimate, as they don’t fit the ideal nondisabled image of femininity. Seymour regards this an important aspect of identity:

[a] woman who has experienced severe bodily damage must remake her embodied self within [the] rigid social categories [of emphasized femininity]. Faced with the harsh components of the social construction of sexual woman, how can a woman reconstitute her damaged self after disease or injury? Society, not clinical losses, may determine her future. (132)

To be nondisabled is ideal and any divergence from the perfect body is unacceptable. The most common assumption about people with extensive bodily impairment is that they are asexual (Norden Violence, Women, and Disability 86). Before she undertakes her transformation, thus enabling her to pass and ultimately gain access to a heterosexual relationship, Sophie is sexless and only able to express her desires through dreams and fantasies. She is never afforded the opportunity to be with a man, until she can nullify the impaired part of herself.8

8 After meeting Eddie and prior to breaking her leg, Sophie is framed in a conventionally fetishistic way only once. She is sitting on her bed, taking off her brace, as the camera stays on her shapely legs; she throws her brace under the bed. The brace is again a symbol of disability rather than mobility.
In order to avoid this, disabled women will often strive to pass as nondisabled in a manner similar to Sophie. While the benefits of fitting into an able-bodied society as a non-disabled member may appear great, ultimately passing is:

- demoralizing,
- anxiety provoking,
- and harmful to the passer’s health and relationships. It also deprives society as a whole of knowledge about our diversity […] and it maintains and reinforces the very repressive system that causes it. (Hillyer 150)

*Lucky Break* had the opportunity to critique this tendency; however, the final scene, in combination with the attempted sex scenes throughout, reinforce ‘passing’ as acceptable and necessary. Thus *Lucky Break* both reflects and strengthens this disregard for disability and sexuality. Social pressures placed on females to be more sexually desirable and available to men are also largely unproblematised in this film.

Myra, Sophie’s hospital roommate who is getting an ‘arse lift’ to please her boyfriend, overhears Sophie writing an erotic story. She asks Sophie if she is the biggest nymphomaniac in the world or whether she just “dreams this stuff up?” Sophie replies that yes she does only dream. Disabled women constantly hear messages such as this about their perceived lack of physical attractiveness, that it hampers their ability to be intimate like other women. These images point at the failure of the disabled person to re-enter community, leaving the onus on the
Darke proposes that representations of disability constitute representations of abnormality, which in turn are more likely to be about normality (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 183). Editing and juxtapositioning are one of the visual tools used in this film to reinforce normality through representation of abnormality. After she is released from hospital, Sophie goes to a party with the idea of pretending she is only temporarily injured, in order to become involved with Eddie. While there she has a conversation with a man who asks about her plastered leg. She tells him she’s a ‘full-time cripple’. Oblivious to Sophie’s discomfort, he begins to tell her a story about a woman with an amputated leg. She tells him she’s a ‘full-time cripple’. Oblivious to Sophie’s discomfort, he begins to tell her a story about a woman with an amputated leg, who

---

9 Often the disabled person is constructed within the narrative as ‘self-pitying’. This in turn may result in an able-bodied character ‘getting tough’ so that the disabled character may re-enter society. Barnes suggests this tendency and I explored it in depth in Chapter Two. *Spider and Rose* offers somewhat of a role reversal. Although initially self-pitying Rose becomes stronger and more independent as the narrative progresses. As Spider and Jack believe in her and remove disabling barriers in terms of discriminatory attitudes, she takes on a carer role when (able-bodied) Spider becomes self-pitying due to a temporary impairment. However, this film does tend to individualise impairment by adopting a ‘stiff upper-lip’ format suggesting that impairment is merely something for the individual to overcome and those who don’t or can’t are simply not as strong.

10 The scene in which she comes up with this idea likewise follows Norden’s comic misadventurer stereotype. The scene in which Sophie rings Eddie following the party is equally illuminating, as she hides in the backyard to make the phone call. As her housemate is agrophobic and Sophie has modified her lived environment to compensate for her impairment effects, Sophie’s house becomes representative of her ‘real self’. Eddie does not go to her house until he needs a place to hide from both Gloria and the police, and even then they move on to a motel.
‘could really please a man’.11 Again disability is highlighted as ‘other’ to rational Western civilized man (Marks 162). The disabled woman and indeed Sophie are mysterious and therefore available for exploration and conquering. In the next scene, by crawling along the floor to get to Eddie, Sophie is further minimized.12 Directly following is Eddie and Gloria playing a vigorous game of squash with sexual overtones suggesting that Sophie is not, was not, and never will be an athletic woman like Gloria and could therefore not satisfy Eddie. As Darke suggests, as an impaired character, Sophie is abnormal, which reinforces Eddie’s normality.13

Eddie takes Sophie with him on a business trip and one night at dinner an old friend of Sophie’s, Nicholas, played by prominent impaired comedian, Steady Eddy, happens to be in the same restaurant.14 He says “hello” and Sophie becomes very

11 This character appears to be adopting Marks’ contention that by their vulnerability, disabled women are constructed as being closer to nature and therefore available for sexual exploration and conquering (162). In addition, Barnes argues that an ‘accurate’ portrayal of disabled people excludes imagery that is voyeuristic (Disability Imagery and the Media 22). However, Kath Duncan and Gerard Goggin pose a strong argument in terms of disability and sexuality. While exploring amputee fetish, they consider the implications of being desired because of impairment in relation to Duncan’s self-reflexive documentary My One Legged Dream Lover (1998). Goggin and Duncan suggest that in Dream Lover, the impaired body is the ‘norm’ against which nondisabled people are measured (4); further, through engagement with the fetishists Kath asserts her right to be sexually adventurous (6). Thus, Kath’s taking pride in her identity that includes her impairment is crucially different to the Australian disability rights movement, which attempts to privilege how ‘able’ disabled people are. Kath progresses along the lines Parsons suggests will lead to power, that is confronting prejudice by taking pride in difference and accentuating that difference in an ‘in your face’ manner (5). Lucky Break does not accentuate this difference or take pride in a disability identity that includes desire and fantasy. All of Sophie’s stories are centered around able-bodied characters.

12 Myra’s boyfriend insisted on leaving Sophie’s crutches in the car. Again, as an icon of disability Sophie’s crutches must be excluded from a fun night out.

13 Gloria’s reaction to Sophie’s sexy anthology reflects this notion that disabled women are ideally sexless, and any indication of sexuality is considered excess. Society values youth and the ‘body beautiful’. This influences disability-related film and the devalued status of people with impairments (Hayes and Black 12). When sexuality isn’t associated with youth and beauty, it isn’t ‘sexy’. Disabled women having sex are often viewed in this way or constructed as promiscuous or ‘oversexed’. When any sexual activity is deemed inappropriate, the smallest amount is too much.

14 Steady Eddy is a comedian who has been criticised for his self-reflexive jokes about impairment (he has cerebral palsy). His jokes are ‘in your face’ and accentuate the difference rather than play it down. Further, he defines able-bodied people against himself, which he constructs as the norm.
nervous as he tells her she looks fantastic and enquires about her taking up skiing, questioning Eddie’s explanation of how she broke her leg. Nicholas does not reveal Sophie’s secret, although it is obvious he knows. Eddie does not catch on, thinking instead that Nicholas is an ex-boyfriend.

Scott Murray argues that when male characters want to have sex in Australian films they are not particularly interested in the artistic or intellectual pursuits of their prospective partners (133). While Eddie is attempting to seduce Sophie in their hotel room, his interest in her artistic pursuits is purely because they are of a sexual ‘Trojan horse position’ nature. He asks her to tell him a story, she begins but her leg has a spasm and she knocks Eddie in the head causing him to bite his tongue, requiring stitches and he begins to speak like Nicholas (who has a speech impairment). Throughout this scene they are framed so that Sophie’s leg is at the centre of the scene (the spectator must unavoidably pay most of their attention to Sophie’s plastered leg). This puts the focus on Sophie’s impairment and conversely Eddie’s ‘normality’. More specifically, this provides an example of Norden’s description of filmmakers using impairment as it interacts with the environment to reproduce the message that disabled people should be isolated and that they are not part of the community. Thus, in terms of plot, Sophie does not have access to a sexual life until she is able to ‘pass’ to a sufficient degree, a fact that is reinforced through her placement within the scene even when she can pass. Therefore Sophie’s leg, as an icon of ‘disability’, has denied access to sex.
While O’Regan’s model of New World problematisation of nationhood remains relevant in these scenes, further reference to Verhoeven’s Industry 3 and the significance of impairment to characterisation incorporate a syntactic film analysis. Such a consideration also addresses the neoliberal and globalised approach to cinema and society in Australia during the 1990s. These scenes take place overseas, suggesting a transnational citizenship by representing local elements in an international territory. As the couple moves to the bedroom and Sophie’s leg spasms injure Eddie, each of the three characters (Sophie, Eddie and Nicholas) become defined by impairment. This in turn symbolises secrecy and hiding your real self. Eddie’s tongue injury is causally linked to his secret affair with Sophie. Sophie is hiding a permanent impairment and Nicholas becomes implicit in this secrecy. Thus Sophie remains mysterious and sexy enough to manipulate both men.

When he returns home, Eddie cannot have sex with Gloria and she is not very sympathetic. By not being able to have sex, Eddie is now isolated from the Australian masculine national identity, in which men will have sex anywhere, anytime — for example, the car bonnet in the *FJ Holden* (other films in which sex is depicted in places that remove intimacy between couples include *Stone* (1974), *Metal Skin*, and *Romper Stomper*). Murray contends for the Australian male, “sex is a need to be got out of the way when nature calls”. The lack of interest in the female partner excludes and sidelines women from male society (133). Eddie’s inability to have sex makes him reconsider his need for companionship as he begins to take interest in Sophie’s “intellectual and artistic gifts” (133). However, the relationship
remains unconsummated. Later he tries to have sex again with Sophie, but when he sees his blood on her cast from their earlier attempt, he has to stop. Sophie then says: “You can’t talk properly, I can’t walk properly, we can’t make love properly, what kind of a relationship do we have?”

Barnes identifies the negative impact of this particular stereotype of the disabled woman: “the message is clear; disabled people are sexually dead and therefore their lives are not worth living” (Disabling Imagery and the Media 16). It is for this reason, and the lack of another option within the current disability movement in Australia, that a disabled director portrayed a disabled character as being so keen to pass as nondisabled, if only for a short period.

Following this encounter, Sophie convinces her doctor to leave her cast on for two more weeks. She then conjures a story about two cat burglars who become lovers. Sophie’s female cat burglar cannot take off her mask, just as Sophie won’t take off her cast. Her voice-over states that the cat burglar’s ‘real self’ is under the mask. This offers a parallelism to Sophie’s ‘real self’, which is under her cast: the ‘real self’ that Eddie does not know. Once again, this film manages to strengthen the ableist notion that disabled women must strive to appear as nondisabled as possible in order to be attractive. This is reinforced when Eddie leaves Sophie following discovery of her secret. Despite his shady undertakings and infidelity, the break-up is blamed on Sophie’s pretenses. Again the responsibility of disability is placed on the individual’s shoulders. There is no criticism of society for encouraging Sophie
to ‘pass’, rather, she is reproached for pretending to be someone she is not, while Eddie seems to get away with it.

Thus, as Parsons suggests, Sophie, like other disabled Australians, is encouraged to “conform according to the values and standards that are already established within the community” (12). The disability rights movement embraces this aesthetic at large and employs a very different rhetoric in comparison to other movements:

[...]the women’s movement does not primarily emphasise the ‘maleness’ of women. The [A]boriginal movement does not primarily emphasise the ‘whiteness’ of [A]borigines. The gay and lesbian movement does not primarily emphasise the ‘heterosexualness’ of gay men and lesbians. But the disability movement does, it seems, very much emphasise the ‘ableness’ of people with disabilities. (Parsons 13)

Sophie is encouraged to pass by an ableist society and is punished when she does not succeed. Further, the disability rights movement appears to encourage this as the best course of action. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that the writer–director of Lucky Break also has post-polio impairments. In an interview with Andrew Urban, Lewin comments that the film is about a writer who spends most of her time in a fantasy world. Her disability, according to Lewin, merely provides a point of reference as to why she would prefer fantasy to reality (Ben Lewin Interviewed 101). Urban gets to the point of the issue when he asks Lewin, “In terms of the ‘be yourself’ moral, where does that third-eye view that Sophie should realize she is as normal as anybody else come from? Is that something you believe in?” Lewin’s response is that as a concept this is not a difficult one for him
to deal with. He suggests that “at a certain point in your life you have to come to terms with what you are; you have to live with that” (*Ben Lewin Interviewed* 101). However, the danger here is that Lewin, Urban, the film, and indeed society seem to place all responsibility for the exclusion of disabled people from society on disabled people themselves.

People who have impairments are feared by society and considered as an ‘other’. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes proposes that this fear of ‘others’ was neutralised “in one of two ways: transforming them into parts of itself or condemning them” (Norden *Cinema of Isolation* 107). Norden cites Robin Woods, who describes this as a ‘cure or kill’ philosophy. Quite clearly Sophie has attempted the cure, even if only momentarily. Kate and Harry from *Angel Baby*, on the other hand, align with the kill philosophy as both die at the end of the film. When Gloria finds out her secret, Sophie pleads with her not to tell Eddie, as she only has the cast for one more week and then she won’t see him again. By deciding not to pursue a relationship with Eddie once her cast is off, Sophie is reinforcing the message that disabled women have nothing to offer a relationship. Impairment is reinforced as a point of undesirability.

---

15 Without making reference to the way Sophie interacts with the environment with attention to *mise en scène*, framing and editing, this scene would appear to problematise disability and sexual eligibility; however, the real issues are left hanging with preference given to stereotypes.

16 Within the current disability rights paradigm, Sophie could easily be seen as not letting her disability define her, she’s focusing on her ‘ability’. Thus this movement places responsibility on the disabled person and not society.
The direction that this projection takes is to urge the disabled person to disappear from society or blend in (pass). As Anthony Enns argues with regard to the representation of impairment in films, “disability is […] represented as making membership in the community and meaningful life itself impossible, and death is preferable” (142). Better dead than ‘disabled’ seems to be the message of these films aptly reinforcing Woods ‘kill’ interpretation of Barthes’ argument.

When Eddie tries to call off the wedding between Gloria and himself, her father bribes him with his knowledge of the jewel-thieving, saying, “how could you leave a disabled girl at the altar?” At the wedding, Gloria’s plastered arm is prominently framed between herself and Eddie. Eddie leaves Gloria at the alter, prompting her to call the police and tell them about Eddie’s jewelry deals while Eddie goes to Sophie’s house. Sophie accepts Eddie despite his recent hostility toward her ‘real self’. Meanwhile, Yuri has been investigating Eddie for jewelry fraud and begins to close in on him.

Sophie’s crutches are a point of significance in the film. Later, as the police are ready to arrest Eddie, it is her crutches that lead them to him, due to a bug planted in one during a police interview. After Eddie finally decides to leave Gloria (at the

---

17 An interesting question because the real disabled girl has already been ‘left’. Perhaps this is what prompts Eddie to return to Sophie.
18 Lewin, in his interview with Urban, places great emphasis on the notion of his characters as an exploration of the concept of ‘real self’, above issues of disability, romance, and vocation.
19 Despite the fact that Eddie has already broken up with her because she kept her polio a secret from him. Sophie refuses to cooperate with the police.
he returns to Sophie and despite Yuri’s attention (he knows her ‘real self’) she accepts Eddie. They make love in a motel room as the police wait to arrest Eddie. Her crutches — a symbol of her impairment and evidence of the way she must interact with her environment — have let Eddie down again. Instead of signifying empowerment and pride in a disability identity, the crutches have become a symbol of weakness and loss of control. Sophie’s crutches, like wheelchairs in society in general, should be considered in Barnes’ words, “a mobility aid, just like a pair of shoes” (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 21). However, the ableist interpretations of the ‘see the ability’ catchphrase take no pride in the different ways the same things can be achieved.

On the day of Eddie’s trial, he and Sophie get married, allowing his lawyer to argue that by marrying Sophie, Eddie is on the pathway to total rehabilitation and is being a true Good Samaritan. Again Sophie is put in a passive position and is acted upon, her artistic talents and intelligence are no longer of relevance. In the end, Eddie is given a minor sentence (only one year) and Sophie dreams of him coming home, living through her fantasies once again. Her stories reflect her belief that had it not been for her broken leg they would not have gotten together. Thus, her impairment is a nuisance and an unacceptable deceit until Eddie can use it in his own deception. By utilizing Sophie’s impairment in such a blatant way, to elicit sympathy and therefore leniency, Lewin leaves the audience with the impression that disability is
not desirable. Sophie’s impairment and artistic and intellectual pursuits have been devalued throughout the course of the film; however, now as the film ends, her impairment is exploited for the benefit of a jewel thief who had also kept a secret.

Representations of disabled women offer an interesting point of discussion for two reasons. First, it has been argued that disabled women have been excluded from feminist discourse (Drake 131; Thomas 66) and second, there is not much artistic interest in portraying disabled women, as women are already vulnerable (Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare 196). By suggesting that representations of impairment operate on a similar level to pornography, Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare reiterate my earlier connection with visual pleasure, as impairment becomes an icon. In both pornography and disabling imagery the focus is on the body and serves to subordinate the objectified subject of the image by manipulating an emotional response from the viewer (201).

Martin in *Proof* is one of the few impaired male protagonists of 1990s Australian national cinema. He is blind, and this impairment is made more cinematically visible through a walking stick, dark sunglasses and an almost totally immobile head. He interacts with his surroundings in a similarly revealing way. His

---

20 Lewin, also a writer, believes this film’s argument is that disabled people need to laugh at themselves (Urban *Ben Lewin Interviewed* 40). While this is something I agree with, I don’t feel that he achieves the Steady Eddie ‘in your face’ style he was aiming for, and he constantly reinforces the ideology he is attempting to critique throughout the film.

21 However, Jenny Morris (*A Feminist Perspective* 25) problematises the way women have been culturally constructed the exclusion of disability from these popular discourses. Barnes on the other hand comments that disabled women are unable to fulfill traditional female roles, but does not offer further problematisation (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 16).
impairment is individualised and operates as a cultural sign within the narrative to
denote a loss of control and dependency on others.

Social restrictions were sometimes addressed through the depiction of bad parenting
in Australian cinema in the 1990s but ultimately these restrictions were seen to be
the result of a personal tragedy. For example, in *Proof*, Martin’s inability to trust his
mother explains the social restrictions he experiences later in life, such as his not
being able to form a sexual relationship. When Martin was given a camera for his
tenth birthday he thought it would help him see. He takes photos to prove that the
world is as people describe it to him. However, he has never found anyone he trusts
enough to describe the photos to him. His housekeeper, Celia, wishes he trusted her
because she is in love with him. When Martin meets Andy, he thinks he can trust
him enough to get him to describe his photos, but Celia manipulates Andy into lying
to Martin.

Martin’s attraction to Celia is hinted at, but not entirely explored within the
narrative. However, they do engage in a kind of power struggle. Celia moves
furniture so that Martin is constantly bumping into things; he is unable to control his
environment. In these scenes the camera is framed on Martin’s face, perhaps to
reinforce his blindness as he stumbles. It is only after Martin has stumbled, that the
film cuts to the obstruction on the floor. Martin attempts to regain power by refusing
Celia sex, so that he can pity her.
At one point Celia almost succeeds in seducing Martin, but he pushes her away, telling her that he doesn’t need anyone. The flashbacks portraying Martin’s relationship with his mother are juxtaposed with his present relationships with Andy and Celia, locating the origins of his problems interacting with people in his relationship with his mother. Martin believes that he embarrassed his mother and that she lied to him about what was in the photos he took. At the end of the film Martin has fired Celia, and Andy describes the first photo Martin ever took exactly as his mother did. Throughout the film, Martin’s mistrust of the people around him is individualised and the focus is on his relationship with his mother, who he falsely believes lied to him just because she could.

Andy Kimpton-Nye argues that representations of disabled people in cinema have more to do with the fears and desires of the filmmakers, who are often not disabled (Gump and Co! 35). Likewise, Norden suggests that society has a fascination with deformity and disability. The investigating gaze and the desiring gaze exist on a continuum and pleasure can be gained by watching disability on screen (Cinema of Isolation 6). In order to avoid discomfort amongst the audience, these images are aestheticised and made watchable. This is, according to Kimpton-Nye, due to the guilt experienced by filmmakers (Gump and Co! 35).

For O’Regan, the study of a national cinema is a complex task, particularly as inward discussions may dominate and take the focus away from international concerns (Australian National Cinema 4). O’Regan tends to locate disability
amongst other cleavages and cultural problematisations, such as parenting. He views disability as a cultural cleavage that is able to explain Australians amongst themselves. Although he does not specify disability, instead favouring examples of ethnicity, he contends that “other cultural cleavages will inevitably criss-cross” (*Australian National Cinema* 265). His treatment of a disability identity suggests disability would be located as a ‘criss cross’. Thus, disability remains located in the local. In Chapter One I argued that the cultural construction of disability has been influenced by several social, political and economic factors, including globalisation. Verhoeven tends to take a more globalised approach to national cinema than O’Regan. While I would argue that Sophie’s emerging identity along ableist lines ascribes to the same features as a new world nationhood, if disability can be considered a cultural identity, the film is better suited to analysis using Verhoeven’s Industry 3 model.22

### 4.4 The Well

Unlike *Lucky Break*, *The Well* is concerned with repression in a social rather than sexual context. There is never any offer of romance in this film.23 *The Well* explores the relationship between Hester, a club-footed spinster who lives alone with her ailing father on a farm, and Katherine, an effervescent teenager with a questionable past. After Hester’s father dies, they sell the farm and move to an isolated old cottage. When Katherine accidentally kills a man while she is driving home, Hester

---

22 I do recognise that while Verhoeven published at the end of the 1990s and was therefore able to consider the decade as a whole, O’Regan published midway through the 1990s. I am not rejecting O’Regan’s model, rather incorporating it into Verhoeven’s in a way that suits my method of analysis.

23 Although there is a suggestion of unfulfilled lesbian desire on Hester’s behalf.
disposes of the body in their well. Strange things begin to happen and their friendship deteriorates.

Hester has lived alone with her father on an isolated windy farm for her whole life. She was taken on a European holiday with her governess, Hilde, when she was about 12 years old. Now Hilde is gone and the only people Hester has contact with are her ailing father, his financial advisor Harry Bird who visits overnight once a week, and Molly their cantankerous housekeeper. So she decides to hire Katherine. Hester refuses to share Katherine’s attentions with anyone, claiming Katherine is “just for her”. After Katherine attempts to quit, Hester re-hires Molly to do the more physically demanding work and she embarks on a personal friendship with Katherine. Harry disapproves of the friendship and attempts to discuss financial matters with Hester away from Katherine. When Hester’s father dies, Harry suggests she sell the farm. Hester is horrified. Under Katherine’s influence, Hester has been spending a lot of money and this worries Harry. While Hester is sick with a migraine, Katherine negotiates a sale of the farm whereby Hester retains ownership of a cottage on the property’s border.

This cottage is isolated and has an empty well in the front yard. Hester and Katherine move in and plan a year-long overseas holiday to Europe and America. As Katherine and Hester become more codependent, mistrust develops. They attend a party together and Jen Bordem, the new owner of Hester’s farm, accuses Hester of stifling Katherine. Perhaps as a way to prove she is not stifling Katherine, Hester
allows her to drive home despite it being dark and only Katherine’s second time driving. While driving home, Katherine accidentally kills a man. Following Hester’s suggestion to put his body in the well, they are united in their secret, but upon discovering the money from the sale of the farm is missing, they begin doubting each other’s intentions. While Hester retreats emotionally, becoming obsessed with the missing money, Katherine professes to be in love with the man they disposed of in their well.

Critics who reviewed *The Well* almost always referred to Hester’s physical impairment (Stratton; Scott; Lasalle; W. Morris; Nunn; Davis; Keough; Brussat and Brussat; Jardine). Some hypothesized that her walking impairment symbolized her inner repression (Scott; LaSalle; and Davis), often agreeing that it contributed to the gothic ‘mood’ of the film (Urban *Samantha Lang: The Well*). Thus the film was seen critically as being in line with Field’s encouraged method of film production, which is to use impairment as a character or plot device. Within this film Hester works as what Sutherland would describe as “an inadequate or incomplete able-bodied person” (*Black Hats* 18) — an outsider. Sutherland goes on to describe the significance of making nonvisible impairments more visible, as stereotypes around impairment differ in cinema, which is a visible medium:

> [b]ecause this whole process is largely about visible immediacy, non-visible disabilities are much less common. When they are covered, films can be observed working to make them more visible. (*Black Hats* 18–19)
Sutherland concludes that such a tendency serves to individualise impairment. The nonspecific emphasis on Hester’s affected foot suggests that her impairment has a mythology. Sutherland contends that the mythology of a limping impairment indicates a deficient character. Further, disabled women indicate a loss of attractiveness — they are ‘sexual losers’ (*Black Hats* 18). Hester is interpreted as repressed, not quite whole; she is a sexual loser.

In an interview with *Cinema Papers* in 1997, director Samantha Lang highlighted the importance of Hester’s inner world. Although she did not explicitly address the issue of Hester’s impairment, she suggested that the film explored “a darker side of the female psyche” (Hunter 26). Further, “the landscape is supposed to reflect, to provide a metaphor for Hester’s inner world” (Hunter 26). Lang began the interview by suggesting the filmic perspective of *The Well* was ‘heightened reality’. Heightened reality for Lang is:

[w]here you allow the film to take on a symbolic value. A cupboard for example, can mean more than a cupboard. The things within the frame are significant; they are not arbitrarily there. (27)

The different emotional focus of each character plays out in the visual representation of Hester’s foot. Although *The Well* is adapted from the Elizabeth Jolley novel of the same name and Hester does limp in the book, I am interested in the placement of her foot within the frame and the relationship the plot has with impairment and Australian national cinema. *The Well* is suited to a critical examination in terms of landscape and how Lang utilises the Australian landscape to convey inner isolation. As the landscape has come to take on symbolic meaning in
Australian national cinema (Gibson; Murray; and Rayner) so too has impairment which must therefore be likened to *mise en scene*.

The portrayal of Hester as a disabled woman has been aestheticised in a manner so that audiences do not have to think about what they’re watching on screen or indeed the social interpretation of disability. The use of fat characters, for example, to denote greed and corruption is familiar in films such as *Sunday Too Far Away*, in which the overweight cook is recognised as lazy and corrupt. Impairment in films is used in a similar way, as Hester’s limp connotes a repressed, sexual loser. Hester’s impairment holds a prominent iconic position through various cinematic techniques, including cinematography and *mise en scene*, which work together as cinematic shorthand.

Parallelism operates in this film as a way of communicating differing character traits. Hester is positioned in the film in relation to able-bodied Katherine and she is defined in terms of her sexual repression, which is manifested visually through her foot. This reinforces Darke’s contention that impairment is used in cinema to symbolise abnormality, which in turn sustains a hegemonic image of normality. Katherine runs around with either no shoes or high-heeled boots, while Hester wears orthopaedic shoes. Hester’s abnormality reinforces Katherine’s normality. Katherine, in her excitement about her friend Joanna coming to stay, talks about how Joanna can borrow her shoes. This adds to Hester’s annoyance and jealousy. When Katherine says she’s in love with her new boots, Hester pushes Katherine’s legs
from the dashboard of her new car. Hester walks with a lop-sided gait, while Katherine always runs or skips.

*The Well* displays a colonial anxiety about the landscape. This is reflected in early Australian novels and has remained a fixed part of the Australian cultural national identity. The bush was thought to foster madness and eccentricity (Ferrier 66). The Australian landscape was alien to the European settler aesthetic (Ferrier 66). From the innocence of the boy and girl in *Walkabout* (1971) to the struggle between Aboriginal and white customs in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), the landscape has been used as a reflection of mood and inner feelings in Australian national cinema. In his short review, Urban concentrates on how director Lang created the mood of the film and describes the landscape as a symbol (*The Well*). Such landscape would be even more formidable to a disabled person. O’Regan connects narratives that portray Australian national identity as European-derived with European art films. He finds that these films tend to drive characters apart and rarely have conventional happy endings (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 63). In *The Well*, paranoia drives Hester and Katherine apart, and Hester is destined for a lonely life. Australian national cinema has been as influenced by European cinemas (Britain, France and Italy) as by Hollywood (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 307).

In this film, the landscape drives Hester and Katherine apart and provides a visual reference for Hester’s inner world. Hester has a strong desire to leave the farm to
spend a year in Europe and America, while it has always been Katherine’s dream to live on a farm. Hester wants to recreate the European holiday she had with Hilde when she was 12 years old. This was the “best time” of Hester’s life. The atmospheric shots of the landscape add to the gothic feeling of isolation in this film, and further reinforce Hester’s inner repression. After she hears that Joanna is coming to stay, Hester cries behind a rock. She is emotionally isolated, an ‘emotional cripple’.24 After she kills the man on the road, Katherine adopts the foetal position, as Hester puts the body down the well. Katherine falls in love with the dead man and Hester only cares about the missing money.

As suggested in the previous chapter, the intersection between the representation of impairment and the gothic mode is a tendency of narrative depiction of female characters.25 The difference between these two women is exemplified in a traditional gothic mode when Hester stares at herself in the lid of a pan she is cleaning. Her reflection looks monstrous and distorted; she seems fascinated and pleased by this image.26 This scene is juxtaposed with one of Katherine lying on her bed alone in her bedroom with her bare legs in the air; she stands to go and look at herself in the mirror, adjusting her hair to make herself look more attractive. Again

24 This comparison relies on linguistics, and as Sutherland argues, people are not described as having an emotional limp. Indeed Sutherland believes Fields is linguistically sloppy (Black Hats 16).
25 The line between reality and imagination is blurred in this film. Did Hester really see that hand float up in the well or was it an illusion like her dream in which her hair had her pinned to the floor? Does Hester have a clubfoot only for the audience’s benefit, who immediately recognise her status as a repressed character? This is also evident in an early example of the Australian gothic, The Night The Prowler (1978). Did Felicity really encounter that sick old man? In another example of Field’s suggestion to use physical impairment to visually symbolise aspects of characterisation, the old man’s decrepit body reflects the location and symbolises Felicity’s psychological state.
26 Dermody and Jacka describe typical gothic characterisations as pathological. While the gothic comments on ‘normality’, social and psychological stereotypes are not often considered (Screening of Australia vol. 2 51).
legs are a point of significance indicating sexual attractiveness in a manner similar to the scene in *Lucky Break* in which Sophie tossed her crutches under the bed as the camera frames her leg in the traditional fetishistic way. These character’s legs are thus icons of female sexuality or impairment and, therefore, asexuality (or as an icon of wasted sexuality). Impairment is again subjected to an investigating gaze, while the female body is held under the desiring male gaze through basic camera framing.

Following Hester and Katherine’s move to the small cottage, there is a scene in which they dance. The camera frames Hester’s clubfoot and she looks awkward (similar framing is used on Sophie’s affected foot as she runs in *Lucky Break*). This framing is continued whenever there is an emphasis on Hester’s repression. There are many close-ups of Hester’s foot, but none of her face, while there are several extreme close-ups of Katherine’s face displaying her unrestrained emotions. Mulvey argues that the pleasure in looking produced through cinema can be related to the current cinematic conventions, which focus attention on the human form and its relationship with its surroundings (749). In a similar way to the conventional fetishisation of women in films, as seen in the earlier cinematographic dissection of Katherine, the spectator is manipulated into a dismissive response by the focus being placed on Hester’s impairment.

Hester is excluded from the family who buy her farm, while they embrace Katherine. Katherine dresses up in Jen’s clothes (which Hester calls “cheap”), flirts
with the farmhands, and plays with the toddlers, while Hester struggles to walk up the stairs of her old home.\textsuperscript{27} The visual representation of a woman who limps relies on the stereotype that a disabled woman is a ‘sexual loser’. She is not a wife or mother, and if she is in a relationship she becomes overly dependent on it because she is unlikely to find another (Sutherland \textit{Black Hats} 18). This expectation is confirmed when Jen says to Hester, “You shouldn’t keep her shut away like you do. Not everyone wants to be single”. Hester is overly dependent on Katherine. Katherine appears to be equally dependent on her, but by ultimately taking off with the money, she is seen to hold the power.

While Hester comes across as a prude and a sexual loser due to the semiotic connection with her limp and costuming, Katherine appears oversexed and ready for anything. The same long blue skirt and off-white blouse covers Hester’s body for the film’s duration while Katherine, who is forever dressed in purple, has permanently erect nipples. In a photograph of Hester with her governess Hilde, taken when she was a young child, Hester is wearing a yellow hat and jumper; later Katherine wears this hat and Hester makes her a yellow dress. Often the camera lingers on Hester as she stares at Katherine as though she is scrutinising her, perhaps seeing something in Katherine that she herself possessed in the company of Hilde.

In a review for \textit{Cinema Papers} Diane Cook suggested that \textit{The Well}, although lacking in other areas (such as faithful adaptation from the original Elizabeth Jolley

\textsuperscript{27} In this scene Hester carries a silver gravy train. This is another subtle incidence of symbolism in this film, where everything has a symbolic value, including Hester’s clubfoot.
novel), pushed already heightened tensions to a terrible climax. Within the mutual dependency of the two women, the forces at play and battle of wills are obvious, including:

[chaos and order, age and youth, feminine and masculine, isolation and companionship, wealth and poverty, profligacy and meanness, sexuality and enforced celibacy, control and abandon, affection and self-concern, internal and external life wrestle for control (Cook 36).]

By listing these binaries, Cook highlights the importance of characterisation to the overall plot of The Well, and implicitly recognises the way internal thoughts are manifested externally for a visual medium. As previously mentioned, Lang highlights the inner world as being important. Hester represents age and enforced celibacy, and wrestles for control of her life, adopting a forced order to retain ‘control’, while Katherine, unencumbered by physical impairment, is flighty and her life is full of chaos and abandon. Katherine does not attempt to wrestle for control and ultimately she has the most power (and money). Therefore an unrecognised binary is the battle between ‘disability’ and ‘ability’.

O’Regan sees the representation of disability most frequently in what he describes as social problematisation films, and relates them to the social, political, and cultural contexts of Australian national cinema. Yet he does not address the way impairment has been used to present character traits, in films such as The Well, which may not be described in this category. Again, his focus is directed more toward the ‘Australians amongst themselves’ identity rather than a national identity projected internationally. He finds that often, where social problematisation films are
Chapter 4 This Film is not About Disability

concerned, the government and distributors who fund and release the films are ahead of the audience (Australian National Cinema 263). However these films are influenced by many of the factors I identified in Chapter One, such as neoliberalism and economic rationalism, which O’Regan does not consider. While O’Regan finds multiculturalism to be an important feature by which Australians project nationhood, he does not consider the disabled as a group with similar cultural experiences to one another and therefore worthy of being considered a distinct cultural group, which is part of the multicultural society, in the way that Finklestein recommends (Disabled People).

Analysis of The Well from a disability perspective offers a symbiosis of O’Regan’s inward and outward perspectives. Although he attempts to keep these separate, he acknowledges in his initial definition of national cinema that they are related. Verhoeven describes this interrelation as Industry 3 and argues that during the 1990s Australian national cinema favoured films that were both local and global. As previously mentioned, The Well adopts many of the semantic elements of the European art films, but Australianises them by locating the narrative in an Australian landscape. At a very basic level, the landscape highlights the contention that disability is socially created.28 The art film also rejects Hollywood-style happy endings (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 63). Within a disability context, the ending of The Well reinforces a semiotic connection between impairment and vulnerability. The lack of control is perpetuated as Katherine gains ultimate power

---

28 The connection between the land as a metaphor for emotion and impairment as a metaphor for emotion is of particular importance to an analysis of The Well.
by stealing all the money, and Hester is left alone in the desert and forced to accept a ride with the Borderns — people she despises. She is particularly devalued as she is obliged to sit in the back seat with several bratty children. Hester has never in her life been exposed to children, having always interacted with adults, even when she was a child herself. Narratives such as this resist the possibility that disability could be included within a multicultural framework, and the ‘problem’ is again located in the body.

4.5 Romper Stomper

Romper Stomper, like The Well and Lucky Break, presents a female protagonist who has an impairment. In Romper Stomper a group of neo-nazi ‘skinheads’ fight against a Vietnamese gang for supremacy on the streets of Melbourne. Romper Stomper is about the implosion of this neo-nazi street gang. The story centres on Hando, the gang’s charismatic leader, and the changing relationship he has with his best mate, Davey, and quasi-girlfriend Gabe. Gabe has epilepsy and this impacts on her relationships with Hando, Davey, and her father, Martin. Her impairment is used by the filmmakers to critique discriminatory practices in Australia. For this reason I am not addressing Gabe’s impairment in a literal sense, rather, I will reveal the mythologies and ideology exploited in order to make this critique.

In Chapter One, I suggested that a frequent narrative trope is that one minority group is rehabilitated at the expense of another. In Romper Stomper an anti-racism message is presented by invoking ableist ideology. Impairment as it intersects with
female sexuality is of particular interest here. Gabe’s epilepsy is an aspect of her characterisation, especially with regard to her sexuality, and is depicted at three crucial moments to drive the story forward and comment on Davey and Hando’s changing relationship. This in turn is reflective of an emerging multicultural Australia. A multicultural Australia in this film is contingent on other aspects identified by O’Regan namely Australia as European-derived and a diaspora. While Hando feels an affinity with the Aboriginal people whose land was stolen by white people, he identifies with a German-Australian identity (one which is European-derived and diasporic in nature). However, he is not afforded an actual heritage in the same way as Davey (his grandmother is German and his father travels around the world in a kind of new world search for belonging). Yet, Davey’s identity is more new world, as he expresses embarrassment at his Nazi association while around his grandmother. Further, his connection with Gabe offers him the possibility of an economic and cultural new beginning, an identity in the process of formation.

The different ways Hando, Davey, and her father, Martin, approach Gabe sexually reveal the ableist ideology that excludes a disability culture from Australian national identity. Gabe’s epilepsy adopts ableist myths by signifying a number of experiences throughout the course of the film and it operates as an icon (Sobchack).

---

29 Epilepsy is depicted in a purely medical paradigm, being communicated through seizures or reference to medication. While the three seizures comment on Gabe’s relationships with Davey and Hando, her father’s lecture about not taking her medication reinforces the personal tragedy Gabe has been experiencing in the form of sexual abuse and highlights the control Martin wishes to have over her life.
or aspect of characterisation (Fields). To Hando, it proves that she is ‘tainted’; to Davey, it heightens her femininity; and to her father it is a point from which he can control her. Gabe’s uneasy characterisation exists outside mateship and her introduction to the gang ultimately brings about its downfall. Nevertheless, Davey’s escape from the group signals Wright’s critique of this masculinist and xenophobic lifestyle.

Gabe is an integral part of this critique as she represents access to civilised society for Wright and Davey. By choosing a monogamous heterosexual relationship over violent gang life on the street, Davey acknowledges the flaws in Hando’s violent philosophy. Like The Well, this film would not strictly be considered a social problematisation film, as impairment is used as a character trait. The possibility of a disability culture is again negated as Gabe’s epilepsy provides Davey with the possibility to reject and critique violent racism. Wright uses Romper Stomper to argue that Australia’s future is in creating wealth, and not in reactionary discrimination. The film’s ending, where Japanese tourists photograph Hando, Davey and Gabe’s burning car as they engage in battle on the beach below, demonstrates Australia’s future as being bound to Asia. Davey must likewise forge

---

30 Incest is a sub-theme of this film worthy of closer examination, as it is evident in a large number of Australian films made during the 1990s. Often, impairment is offered as a factor in the incidence of incest, as issues of vulnerability and parental control and abuse are foregrounded. However, I can not explore this site of social problematisation in this thesis.

31 Gabe, as a disabled woman, is excluded from and stigmatised by society, yet in this narrative represents access to civilised society. As a member of a street gang, she doesn’t ‘create wealth’ and therefore can’t afford medication. She does of course have the option of enduring sexual abuse and incest and her father will support her. Her relationship with Davey saves her from life on the street and her father’s abusive home, and further represents a possible future — a multicultural future.
a new future for himself and Gabe away from the street gang, and by killing Hando they are able to embark on this future.

In 1992, when *Romper Stomper* was released in Australia, local film critic David Stratton refused to give it a score on the long-running SBS television program *The Movie Show*. He believed that the film encouraged racial violence (Reid *Long Shots to Favourites* 80). On the other hand, Wright insists the film is anti-racist (Reid *Long Shots to Favourites* 80). Margaret Pomerantz, David’s *Movie Show* co-host, gave the film the full five stars (Wright *Director’s Commentary on Romper Stomper DVD*). Reid sees the film as an unexpected cinema success of the 1990s and a turning point in Australian national cinema. On the director’s commentary of the recent DVD release, Wright claims that he wanted to make a film in direct opposition to the ‘safer’ Australian features from *Picnic At Hanging Rock* to *Strictly Ballroom*. He describes these films as ‘quaint and prosaic’. Thus *Romper Stomper* rejects many of the features of The AFC genre described in Chapter Three. His exploration of homeless youth in Melbourne who find a ‘family’ in a neo-nazi street gang was (and remains) controversial. During the 1990s, it became less important for a film to secure government finance in order to be made (Verhoeven 165). As a result the narratives began to adopt more urban settings. Wright adopted a gritty, urban setting as a vehicle for presenting his contemporary theme and reacting against the picturesque rural period settings favoured during Australian 1970s and 1980s national cinema (Reid *Long Shots to Favourites* 77). *Romper Stomper* is both derivative and critically distant.
Wright’s criticism of Stratton on the DVD release matched the level of criticism Stratton himself leveled at the film. Stratton led the frequent attacks on the film as racist, while Wright argues that the film is anti-racist due to the ultimate demise of the neo-nazi gang. By the end of the movie each member is either dead or arrested, with the exception of Davey and Gabe who choose to leave and, by their romantic connection, re-enter society. While I agree that Romper Stomper is an appropriate vehicle for a discussion of the workings of race relations in Australia, I wish to use the social theory of disability to reveal the ableist nature of the movie, particularly in terms of national cinema and identity, and the rehabilitation of a multicultural Australia. Although integral to the multicultural critique, Gabe’s epilepsy is an unexplored feature of this controversial film. Thus, again, there are several levels of meaning in this film; for example, gender, disability, and multiculturalism.

The cast and crew of the film were recognised with nominations at the Australian Film Institute Awards of 1992, yet Jacqueline McKenzie (Gabe) was ignored. Wright believes McKenzie was experiencing a backlash against her role, which was interpreted as a ‘weak’ female, an unpopular identity in Australian national cinema of the 1990s. At the time, argues Wright, Australian national cinema was seeking

---

32 Arguably, this is in line with the ‘see the ability, not the disability’ mantra of much of the disability human rights movement of the 1990s and, therefore, considered inclusive. This tendency is ultimately ableist due to the lack of pride in identity that it displays and its similarity to the integration aesthetic of previous Australian immigration policies and by extension society and film.

33 In arguing this, I am drawing on comments made by Meekosha regarding films that have a disability significance as well as a feminist one (Superchicks, Clones, Cyborgs and Cripples 24).

34 Successful nominations included the categories of Best Achievement in Sound (Steve Burgess, David Lee, Frank Lipson), Actor in a Lead Role (Russell Crowe), and Original Musical Score (John Clifford White). Nominations were also seen in the categories of Best Achievement in Costume Design (Anna Borghesi), Editing (Bill Murphy), Production Design (Steven Jones-Evans), Actor in a Supporting Role (Daniel Pollock), Director (Geoffrey Wright), and Best Film (Ian Pringle, Daniel Scharf).
females who could be role models (Romper Stomper DVD Special Features: Interviews). Wright’s argument that Gabe’s confidence in kissing Davey demonstrates she is not a weak character, but rather one who pursues her desires, is somewhat negated by the cultural stereotype that disabled women are out of control sexually. Gabe kisses Davey after Hando criticises her and then sees her having a seizure, which prompts Gabe to try to convince him that she isn’t crazy. While Hando treats her dismissively following the seizure, Davey protects her during it. This is Gabe’s second seizure; she has one earlier during the riot, at which time Davey also protects her, whereas Hando does not even notice. Culturally, Gabe’s epilepsy positions her in the passive/female stereotype of heterosexual sexuality. Likewise, in The Piano, Ada is controlled by the men in her life. Her father sells her into marriage, her husband refuses to take her piano to his settlement (thus taking away her voice) and then sells it to his neighbour Baines.

As mentioned earlier, the cinematic portrayal of disabled women often locates them as being close to nature and open for exploration. Sirens positions a disabled male in a similar way. Estella sees Devlind as closer to nature. He is blind and is fooled into a sexual encounter with Giddy when he thinks she is Estella. Prior to losing his sight, Devlind was regarded quite differently, according to Tony, “he had a dangerous reputation”.

Devlind is emasculated in the narrative — women are now able to control this ‘dangerous’ man. As Freud argued, “the fear of going blind, is often enough a
substitute for the dread of being castrated” (Norden *Cinema of Isolation* 6). Indeed, upon having him, Giddy decides he is not ‘good enough’ for her to have penetrative sex with. In *Proof*, Martin conforms to the characterisation of a castrated man. Celia attempts to dominate him and he becomes disorientated and afraid after touching her breast.

Disabled people are vulnerable to abuse; they are limited in the ways they can protect themselves from the scrutiny of others (Seymour 140). 35 In *The Piano*, the house staff gossip about Ada, speculating that there could be no fate worse than being dumb, except perhaps being deaf, or even deaf *and* dumb. Dependence on others heightens vulnerability to sexual, physical, psychological and domestic abuse (Seymour 140). Ada is subject to all of these forms of abuse: sexual abuse when Stewart tries to rape her, physical abuse when he cuts off her finger, psychological abuse when Baines calls her a whore, and domestic abuse when Stewart locks her in the house. To return to *Romper Stomper*, Gabe also experiences abuse from the men in her life: her father sexually abuses her, and Hando physically and psychologically abuses her. 36 The vulnerability of those with impairments is heightened in times of abuse and is used as a cinematic technique to reinforce the dominance of the

35 For Marks, quality-of-life debates regarding whether the disabled have lives worth living can be seen in the way the seriousness of crimes committed against disabled people are diminished. She finds that when crimes are described as ‘abuse’ they go unpunished and disabled people (victims) are silenced. For example, women are raped while disabled women are ‘sexually abused’ (41).

36 Gabe’s father rescues her from her previous boyfriend’s house, who domestically abused her. While this storyline is taken from the final edit, it remains obvious that he is very violent.
Chapter 4 This Film is not About Disability

heterosexual antithesis of active/male and passive/female, and ultimately propogate ableism.37

Minority groups such as disabled women are positioned in terms of the ‘acceptability’ of their bodies (Wendell 44). In this way disabled women are encouraged to ‘pass’ as nondisabled in order to retain their desirability, like Sophie in Lucky Break. Cultural standards of beauty and social acceptability urge disabled women to pass as nondisabled (Hillyer 147). Women who do not attempt to pass, such as Hester in The Well, do not reach standards of beauty and social acceptability and are therefore considered lacking: Hester is sexually repressed. Australian films further encourage this interpretation in that it is only the disabled women with this ability to ‘pass’ who remain to be constructed as potential sexual partners, a representation not generally afforded to disabled women. For example in Cosi, Julie is the only patient at the mental hospital whose condition is made known to the audience. She is a junkie, therefore the audience can reason that she’s not ‘really’ disabled and can be viewed sexually by Lewis. Similarly, Ada is not instantly recognised as ‘disabled’ as her being mute is more of a narrative technique to make a feminist statement regarding the lack of control women have had in their lives.38

37 In both films, the disabled woman is symbolically powerless through sexual assault. Disabled people are indeed more susceptible to sexual abuse (Seymour 140; Barnes Disabling Imagery and The Media 10). This was cited as a reason behind the 1994 High Court decision to allow the sterilisation of mentally impaired people.

38 Verhoeven offers this feature as an example of the transnationalness of Australian national cinema during the 1990s. For Verhoeven, Campion’s use of big name Hollywood stars in this film assisted in establishing Industry 3. She escaped accusations of a lack of authenticity by making one mute, while widening her audience (162).
This impairment is individualised in order to critique another aspect of an exclusionary society.

In *Romper Stomper* Hando is fanatical about maintaining a ‘pure’ white race, citing *Mein Kampf* as his inspiration. To Hando, Gabe’s epilepsy represents impurity to this perfect race. She has a seizure after Hando criticises her pasta as ‘bloody wog crap’. Hando and Gabe talking about her epilepsy are later juxtaposed with the group discussion about shooting the ‘head gook’, thereby likening her to the ‘impure’ Vietnamese. Gabe, while sitting behind a transparent curtain that has generic Asian characters printed on it, tries to reassure Hando of her ‘normalness’. The curtain separates her but its transparency includes her, the calligraphy reinforces her connection with impurity. While the Vietnamese are ultimately given an important position in a multicultural society, Gabe is not afforded a cultural identity and seems to redundantly fulfill cultural expectations as a vulnerable woman. Although an equally violent gang, the Vietnamese display a link to the community as they easily mobilise and come to each other’s aid in the riot scene. Gabe, on the other hand, relies on the protection of Davey and Hando. Although Gabe and the Vietnamese represent the same thing to Hando, they do not

---

39 Previously I described the nationhood evident in this film as being European-derived; this rejection of Italian heritage (despite Italy’s association with Nazi Germany) suggests the European roots are specifically German. Further, although this scene communicates a lot of information about Hando and his relationship with Gabe and his views on society, it also hints at the emerging relationship with Davey which was suggested by Gabe’s earlier seizure during the riot, when only Davey took any notice of her.

40 Earlier in the film when Hando, Davey and Gabe break into a shop to steal a jacket (which as a motif representing Gabe’s affections becomes important as both Hando and Davey give it to her at different times), the rest of the gang set off the alarm and terrorise a street person. This ‘wino’ has what looks like a seizure and is treated with disrespect by the gang in a manner reminiscent of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Thus Gabe is again likened to impurity and street scum.
receive equal weighting in O’Regan’s multicultural projection of nationhood. Gabe is not afforded the opportunity to adopt a hybrid identity and rejects her impairment throughout the course of the film. She moves from one man to the next offering her sexuality as capital while attempting to pass. Her passing is an unrecognised, uncritised aspect of the overall critique of a mono-Australian identity in which diversity is rejected.

Davey considers Gabe’s epilepsy to be ‘his problem’, wanting to protect and love her, seeing her as vulnerable. He punches Sonny, who laughs at Gabe’s convulsions, calling her a spastic. Therefore Gabe, like Ada, is susceptible to the scrutiny of others; however, Gabe is able to rely on a man for protection. Davey protects Gabe from Hando when he accuses her of calling the police. While Gabe’s first seizure during the riot hinted at the emerging relationship between herself and Davey, her last seizure in the film consolidates it.

Gabe’s incestuous relationship with her father is reminiscent of Jane Campion’s 1988 film Sweetie. In both films, although the father views their daughter sexually, they still talk in a ‘fatherly’ way. This emphasises their vulnerability and the power games at work between the disabled and abled. In her discussion of the abundance of narratives concerning disabled characters that emerged during the

---

41 Hando views Gabe as an object and after physically and verbally abusing her, he offers her to Davey — “I was going to give her to you anyway”.
42 Sexual abuse is not an uncommon feature in Australian cinema that has disability as a theme or characterisation. Kate in Angel Baby admits to Harry that her father raped her. The prevalence of sexual abuse in which fathers go unpunished and the rapes are treated as bad parenting but not crimes highlights the way disabled people are silenced in society and not granted access to certain parts of society, in this case protection under the law.
1990s in Australian cinema, Ferrier found that disability is linked to bad parenting, particularly hopeless fathers (Ferrier 60). Sexual abuse should be considered as very bad parenting, yet in cinema, when viewed in the context of impairment and punishment, it is usually the abused child who suffers, for example Gabe in *Romper Stomper*; Kate in *Angel Baby*; and Nic in *Kiss or Kill*. Arguably *Sweetie* problematises this tendency; however, when considered with reference to Woods’ ‘cure or kill’ philosophy, *Sweetie* is indeed eradicated. In a way, *Sweetie*’s father is punished and experiences a personal tragedy as he survives her death, which could be blamed on him, so he must live with the guilt. However, there is no wider social critique and the film, like *Romper Stomper*, utilises sexuality in the context of impairment to invoke a stereotype about disability and loss of self-control.

There are many Australian films that blame the occurrence of impairment in a child on bad parenting. Although this is relevant to my analysis of *Romper Stomper* I will digress to consider *Shine* before returning to the intersection between parenting, impairment and the personal tragedy mode of representation in *Romper Stomper*. In *Shine*, David’s breakdown is blamed on the pressure placed on him to excel as a pianist. David’s father is obsessed with him playing the piano. He enters David in competitions, forcing him to play pieces that are especially difficult for a child. David goes on to win the state finals, but his father continues to make life difficult for him and he begins to show signs of emotional and mental impairment. During David’s childhood, his father continually mentally abuses him and shows him
affection only if he wins competitions. Ultimately, his father seems to be the cause of David’s breakdown.

In the following chapter I refer to the significance of the director (auteur) in representations that critique a personal tragedy mode of representation. Wright demonstrates the iconic use of impairment as a cinematic tendency. He persistently uses impairment as a way to compress information about character and theme in order to critique society and cinema. While I recognise Wright as an auteur, particularly as he problematises Australian society, he demonstrates a fear of impairment through his frequent symbolic use of disabled characters. He does not criticise disabling society and instead invokes a personal tragedy view of disability in which impairment is used iconographically. Before returning to the analysis of *Romper Stomper* I will digress to consider Wright’s work, in particular *Metal Skin* in order to situate the discussion with auteur theories.

Wright wrote and directed *Metal Skin*, a film that followed the activities of a suburban petrolhead subculture — another instance of what O’Regan termed cultural cleavage. The disillusioned youth, like those in *Romper Stomper* find family comfort in a group on the peripheral of society. Each female character in this film has an impairment of some kind and is not treated with any kind of significance in the overall diegesis. Often female character’s impairments offer insight into the male character’s motivation or psychological state. For example, Rosalyn bears the
scars of her relationship with Dazey in the form of burns that resulted from a drag race gone wrong.\textsuperscript{43}

Joe thinks Dazey has the perfect life because girls really like him, but Dazey’s scars are not visible. He too suffered from the drag race, bad parenting, and the breakdown of his relationship with Ros. When Joe discovers Ros’ scars, he attempts to control her as he does with Savina throughout the film. Joe ascribes to the hegemonic view of Australian masculinity in which men can fight hard and protect, yet control, their women. At this film’s conclusion each of the disaffected male youths go insane, yet women have been constructed as mad or scarred throughout the films’ duration.

Savina is recovering from leukemia and exhibits signs of insanity as she casts spells and worships the devil. Her mother has obsessive-compulsive disorder, as she is constantly de-linting clothing. Finally, Ros is also mentally scarred by her relationship with Dazey and the drag race crash they experienced. This is made visible by the severe burns and her constantly walking around looking confused, scared, and out of place. Like \textit{Romper Stomper}, the film does not offer a happy ending, instead suggesting everyone is haunted by their own demons and that society (and parents) have no regard for its youth. This film critiques the way youths

\textsuperscript{43} While Rosalyn’s scars are physically visible, Dazey’s are internal. As Dazey is of more significance to the narrative, Rosalyn functions to make Dazey’s invisible impairments more visible in the way Sutherland described earlier. This in turn highlights the masculinist focus of this film.
are treated in wider society, but has no critique of impairment, instead using it as a vehicle to get make another point.44

In Wright’s following feature, Cherry Falls, virgins are slaughtered by a mass murderer. This problematises the Hollywood horror genre because most often the sexually active are killed first, as they are, for example, in Halloween (1978), Nightmare On Elm Street (1984), Texas Chainsaw Massacre (1974). However, the film does stay within certain ‘Australian’ fascinations with gender and madness. Madness is again blamed on bad parenting and ultimately the actions of the father (more on bad fathers later).

Similarly, in Romper Stomper, Gabe’s father’s actions toward her are significant to her characterisation, which in turn reveals much about both Davey and Hando. Gabe is often constructed as a little girl. The first image of Gabe is of her sitting on a fence singing to herself. She is childlike in appearance.45 This construction is continued whenever Gabe is positioned with or juxtaposed against her father, who always tries to molest her. She wears the same baby-doll dress and sings to herself,

44 Idiot Box (1996) likewise problematises the position of youth in a neoliberal society; it positions impairment as being in the domain of charity rather than government protection. In the scene in which Kev and Mick steal money from someone collecting money for The Wilderness Society, they run past a woman in a wheelchair collecting money, presumably for the disabled. They do not steal from her; her need of charity is recognised by these two guys with very little respect for society. As mentioned earlier, charity, particularly charity advertising, serves to further individualise and isolate disabled people, and it operates under a personal tragedy paradigm.
45 In addition to Gabe’s constructed childlike appearance through costuming and dialogue, the actress chosen for the role has a little-boy-like body shape; she is petite and flat chested.
runs down stairs, plays simple songs on the piano, or jumps up and down on a bed. 46 Like *The Piano*, *Romper Stomper* could also offer a feminist reading whereby Gabe’s relationship with Davey is empowering, yet the inclusion of impairment as a means to weaken a strong female character and its operation as a narrative device undermines this reading.

Within the first four minutes of the film, Hando and Davey’s names are revealed via subtitles. This implies a certain degree of importance. The largely insignificant character of Gabe’s father Martin is given a name in under eight minutes. By not giving Gabe a name until literally half way into the film, she is a nameless female available for sexual pleasure. 47 Hando, throwing her over his shoulder, telling her that it is now time for her to pay for the jacket he stole for her, and carrying her off to his room, exemplifies this. While it has been argued that this is an instance of rape (Sheckels), the act is without question consensual. This is, however, an instance of the female body being used as capital as Gabe is exchanging sex for a place to stay, food, and clothes. Gabe is without power in this relationship because she appears more concerned with an illusion of love than her own welfare. The sound is lowered as Gabe asks if he loves her, suggesting that Hando holds the power in the relationship. Next, a train goes past, symbolizing intercourse and orgasm directed to male pleasure. Later they have fast and violent sex — ‘doggy-

46 When Gabe goes home to see her father she wears plaits in her hair and Wright comments on the DVD: “right now with Jackie’s hair and make-up we’ve got a kind of little kiddy thing happening, kind of reverted to childhood.” The make up artist confirms that the plaits were deliberate as Gabe was “going back to see dad.”

47 The film is 89 minutes long, Gabe is not named until 43 minutes into the film and it is Davey who says her name, not Hando (her boyfriend) or Martin (her father).
and Hando changes position only to push Gabe’s head into a wall with a swastika on it while pulling her hair back. There is a heavy metal sound track. This scene is inter-cut with a loud and drunken party.

The swastikas with which Hando has adorned his room (his territory) reinforce his chosen identity as European-derived. Yet Hando’s European-derived identity is problematised throughout the film by other characters such as Davey, Gabe, and the Vietnamese. Davey rejects his heritage as it is associated with the Nazis, while Gabe insults it and proves she is not a very good girlfriend by cooking Hando “bloody wog crap”. Despite Hando’s knowledge of Mein Kampf, the area’s history and his charisma, the Vietnamese are shown to be more organised, economically viable, and smarter. Thus in Romper Stomper, Australia’s Europeanness is “usefully problematized in ideological and political recognitions” (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 310).

Again, Savina in Metal Skin is a ‘strong’ female character who is weakened by her mental state and the sexuality that defines her, which drives her to insanity. Unlike the other characters in the film, Savina is not afraid of people who have authority over her, defying her mother and stealing from the shop at which she works. But she is visibly insane and this detracts from her individual strength. In a similar scene to that analysed above of Hando ‘fucking’ Gabe at a party, Savina and Dazey have sex in a church following a scene depicting a loud and somewhat agitated party. The violent sex and Savina’s willingness to be with Dazey above Joe, who seems
genuine in his concern for her, suggest that she is indeed unstable. Joe’s crazy father and shy disposition locate him outside the hegemonic Australian male and hint at his own mental instability.

At the same time, Ros is having ‘missionary’ sex in the back of a car with someone from the party. She does not appear to be fully there and her partner certainly does not seem to care about how she is experiencing their intercourse. This highlights my earlier proposition that disabled women are either presented as asexual or oversexed. Savina is oversexed and she is punished with death, while Ros is asexual and eventually rewarded with the return of her relationship with Dazey.

Dazey, although suffering, stays within the confines of Australian masculinity. He does not voice his fear to the world in the way that Joe does. Dazey remains strong — hanging up the phone on Savina as she threatens suicide, and defending himself to his father who doesn’t think he is good enough. Dazey drives fast and fucks a lot of girls; he’s an Aussie guy. Joe, on the other hand, can not talk to girls and loses drag races. His own father is mad and Joe can’t protect him either. He is generally a loser. Dazey survives the film; Joe does not, and as Joe dies Dazey yells, “I beat you, I beat you”, as though it were a competition, which neither appeared to be engaging in until this final moment (Joe wanted to ‘be him’ not ‘beat him’).

---

48 Sexuality is generally thought of in terms of the active male and passive female contraposition of traditional heterosexuality (Childers and Hentzi 274). Disabled males appear to fare worse than females. An article from Hustler magazine promising “new hope for the disabled” illustrates this disregard for female sexuality within a disability context:

Sex is never a simple proposition for a paralysed person… [However] a woman with a severed spinal column is usually able to have sex…. since her role in bumping uglies can be as passive as providing a warm, wet hole for a prick to call home. (Legario 45)
Impairment is an icon compacting character information, similar to *mise en scene*, conveying information about story, theme and plot. *Romper Stomper* makes use of impairment in the same way it does *mise en scene*. The filmmakers seemed particularly conscious of the workings of *mise en scene*, often describing Steven Jones-Evans’ production design as ‘layered’ and ‘crazy’ on the director’s DVD commentary. However, Gabe’s impairment worked on an unconscious level. The filmmaker’s acknowledge her seizures are indicative of the changing character arc of Gabe and Davey’s relationship.⁴⁰

When Gabe goes to see Davey after breaking up with Hando and calling the police, she finds him living in a yellow granny flat with a heart on the door (a ‘love nest’). This setting evokes a different mood, especially when compared to the renovations taking place at her father’s house and Hando’s swastikas. Davey has even removed the Nazi badges from his clothing.⁵¹ The *mise en scene* of Davey’s flat which includes soft lighting combined with the intense soundtrack of church bells and a heartbeat, illustrates the different relationship Gabe will have with Davey. They fully undress each other and the sex is slow and in several different positions —

---

⁴⁰ After Savina dies, he does, however cry to Ros.
⁴⁰ In the interview with Jacqueline McKenzie included on the DVD, she describes the original script in which drug addiction was an integral part of the plot. As it was cut from the film, she explains that the epilepsy storyline took on greater importance.
⁵¹ He does this for his grandmother’s benefit, signaling his return to family and escape from the gang (his second family). By travelling around the world, Davey’s father is embracing a quasi-settler-culture, European-derived identity. He never stays in one place for very long, so this identity takes on new world qualities. Although Hando is constructed as the father figure of the gang, no information about his own father is provided. This is not true of Davey and Gabe who both have ‘absent’ fathers.
she’s even on top sometimes — and the camera angles also change. They both say, “I love you”. This time the sound is lower on Davey.

This love triangle between Gabe, Hando and Davey is slightly different to the traditional triangle seen in Australian national cinema due to it being a more inclusive cinema that recognises women in its representations. In line with Dermody and Jacka, I highlight the ‘love triangle’ of the *FJ Holden*, as illustrated by Anne’s sexual relationships with Kevin and Bob. Unlike the triangle in *Romper Stomper*, in which Hando and Gabe fight for the affections of Davey, Anne comes between mates — Bob and Kevin. Initially sleeping with both of them, Anne embarks on a more serious relationship with Kevin. Ascribing to the male ensemble cycle, their heterosexual relationship can not withstand mateship. The downfall of Kevin’s relationship with Anne comes once she realises that although he is having sex with her, he is looking at Bob who is in the next room, watching the couple.

In *Romper Stomper*, Hando adopts a father figure role within the group, and when Gabe takes on the role of his girlfriend she attempts to appropriate the mother role. At one stage in the film, Hando, like a father buying his son a new toy, lends Davey money to buy a Hitler youth knife while Gabe ‘mothers’ his cut hand. Her femininity is acknowledged; she takes on the traditional female role of motherhood,

---

52 *Romper Stomper* begins as the more traditional love triangle, as Davey and Hando compete for Gabe’s affections. Both times Gabe is with Hando, Davey appears to have ‘just missed out’. It is unclear who she is originally looking at in the pub and before Hando grabs Gabe at the party, Davey was trying to get to her but the crowd was in the way. As Hando and Gabe are together, Davey takes his frustrations out on a punching bag. Gabe appears to be little more than a ‘punching bag’ to Hando anyway.

53 This bandage remains on his hand until the scene in which Gabe kisses him.
but when her impairment begins to influence her sexuality, through her partnering with Davey, her suitability for this role is called into question. Bubs’ death is a direct result of Gabe’s revenge on both Hando and her father.\textsuperscript{54}

*Shine, Hammers Over The Anvil*, and *The Piano* offer similar presentations of parenting and disability. I will concentrate on these films in the following discussion on social guilt and parenting, which relates to the personal tragedy mode of representation.\textsuperscript{55} In the case of disabled children, this social guilt is attached to mothers through blame. Hillyer has found that professional literature locating blame for a disability on ‘parents’ almost always refers solely to ‘mothers’ (89). In her discussion of the frequency in which mothers are blamed for a child’s disability, Hillyer asserts:

> the fantasy of maternal omnipotence is at the root of mother-blaming amongst professionals and others who are concerned with disabilities. It holds mothers responsible for the reactions of everyone else to the disability, for the social restriction[s] […] and for the discomfort of the disabled person. (94)

This relates to Wendy Seymour’s claim regarding disability and social constructions (132). However, within the Australian context, films such as *Romper Stomper; Muriel’s Wedding; Shine; To Have and To Hold; Hammers Over The Anvil;* and *Sweetie* suggest a different trend. They identify fathers as the source of the problem.

\textsuperscript{54} Certain aspects of the body, particularly those which remind us of our mortality, are aestheticised in cinema in order to make films entertaining to watch. Bubs’ death is depicted in a slightly different way in both the DVD and video release. In the video release, Bubs’ death is aestheticised and only a small wound is shown, while on the DVD version, Bubs’ death is depicted with more blood and gore. \textsuperscript{55} Dr John Bowlby stressed the importance of the mother/child relationship in the 1940s. Based on research conducted on orphans who had neither their mother nor father present, he argued that
There are some films such as *Proof* and *Envy* that identify bad mothering as the source of impairment.

Due to the tendency of films to present images of the tortured body, the body in pain, rather than the social construction of this body, “parents of children with disabilities may take blame for their less-than-perfect ‘production’, as if they had ‘contaminated’ the race.” This socialised guilt, like the Nazi regime discussed in Chapter One, enables oppression against disability (Avery 118).

Although a relationship between disability and a bad father is displayed in *The Piano*, a problematic relationship between disability and motherhood is also evident. When Ada is sent to New Zealand by her father to marry a settler she has never met, she takes with her Flora (her daughter) and her piano. Ada began playing the piano around the same time she stopped talking, thus suggesting that she preferred to speak through her piano and voluntarily gave up talking. Once in New Zealand, her new husband, Alistair Stewart, a man who professes to prefer his women ‘silent’, refuses to transport her piano to his settlement. By leaving the piano on the beach, Stewart further takes away Ada’s already ‘muted’ voice. Stewart will take her body to his settlement but not her voice because her sexuality is an acceptable factor while her impairment makes her different. George Baines, a neighbour, buys the piano from Stewart and compels Ada into a sexual relationship with him and she

---

56 Similarly in Rolf de Heer’s *The Quiet Room*, the girl gave up talking voluntarily because of her parent’s excessive fighting. This can be related to the common representation of impairment in conjunction with bad parenting.
eventually falls in love with him. Like Gabe in *Romper Stomper*, when Ada’s impairment begins influencing her sexuality, the role of motherhood becomes unavailable to her. Flora turns against Ada, becoming an informant for Stewart, who physically abuses her.

Likewise, in *Hammers Over The Anvil*, as East becomes too possessive of Grace and too comfortable in his quasi-father-figure role in the trio of himself, Grace (childless), and Alan (motherless), he suffers a serious head injury and the paternal role is taken from him — as is his hegemonic masculinity. In Australian national cinema the personal tragedy model of disability often works with bad parenting to punish the parents (*Death in Brunswick*). Although the representation of impairment and disability in *Bad Boy Bubby* will be shown to be in line with the social model in the following chapter, bad parenting is also significant to the narrative. Bubby’s mother severely slows his development by keeping him locked in a filthy apartment his entire life (35 years).

Throughout Australia’s history the suitability of persons with epilepsy to undertake parental responsibility has been questioned, for both the risk of passing on the condition and of rearing the child to adopt antisocial behaviour. For example, in 1926, Leonard Darwin maintained:

> [it] is true that what is passed onto his descendents by the epileptic is not always the propensity for epilepsy; for the defective taint may manifest itself in various forms, including mental deficiency, alcoholism, hysteria, suicide, bad temper, etc. When two epileptics marry, all the offspring are as a rule defective in some way or other;
and when only one parent is thus afflicted many of their offspring even if apparently normal, must be the carriers of the seeds of this malady. (Bladin 163)

The discrimination and ignorance in this proposition are blaringly obvious, yet sentiments similar to it continue in popular culture, and can be seen in *Romper Stomper*. Wright initially envisioned the character of Gabe as a junkie, and although drug references were taken out of the final edit, audience members still interpret her as being an addict.\(^{57}\)

Recently, the *Lancet Neurology* published a study reviewing representations of epilepsy in the last 75 years of cinema, in 62 movies of nine different genres across four continents. *Romper Stomper* was singled out as being particularly damaging. Although I am less interested in verisimilitude to the experience of epilepsy that is the focus of this article, it raises some points regarding stereotyping that are pertinent to my argument about the ideological motivations of using impairment to make a multicultural statement. Across the different genres and national cinemas the author, Dr. Baxendale, found a strong gender bias exists in the representations of epilepsy. Females are presented as weak and vulnerable, while males are mad, bad and dangerous (10). The criticism of *Romper Stomper* for perpetuating myths and stereotypes regarding epilepsy is conducted from a medical perspective in this

\(^{57}\) On a fan web site dedicated to Romper Stomper: [www.1worldfilms.com/romper_stomper.htm](http://www.1worldfilms.com/romper_stomper.htm) several posts refer to Gabe as a drug addict including:

Hatemonger: “In real life I could assure you, [if] a *junky bitch* turned in some skins and caused one of their deaths, the rest of them would have beaten her to a pulp.”

Gman: “Why is Gabe’s character sympathetic? She fucked everything up. **Druggies can not be trusted and should be corrected.**”

k8ybyrd: “It’s a typical movie about lousy friends leavin for a *stupid gurl* (sic). She wasn’t even a skinhead.”

hairsycotsman: “The film focuses on trust (with the girl) and how trust is abused.”
article. For example, Baxendale suggests that Gabe’s attempts to communicate while having a seizure are contrary to physical possibility (5). While this may be true, literal interpretations such as this often miss the point in a film that is attempting to critique a national identity.58

Baxendale, like Stratton, places much emphasis on the Nazi activities of the street gang. She finds in Romper Stomper an association of epilepsy with “disaffected youth in violent racist gangs” (7). Gabe brings about the demise of the violent racist gang and offers one member an escape from it. Therefore, I argue that Gabe’s epilepsy is offering an anti-racist message at the expense of a disability culture. Baxendale’s article is concerned with the medical experience of impairment while my analysis deconstructs this portrayal of impairment in terms of the social definition of disability. Nevertheless, her article suggests the emergence of sociological concerns in the medical community.

Many consider Romper Stomper to be a story about white supremacy, however others see it as a love triangle, a competition between heterosexual love and mateship, a fight for Davey’s affections.59 Racial hatred didn’t break up the group, a

58 I disagree with Dr Baxendale, as I do not believe Gabe attempts to communicate at any point while having a seizure. She does ask Davey to stay with her while she’s shivering on the beach at the end of the film. This could be misinterpreted as a seizure. She had just had her head held underwater by Hando.

59 Geoffrey Wright sees it as a comment on destructive violence and alternatively an encouragement in wealth creating. He sees the future of Australia to be inextricably tied with creating wealth, a practice he argues homeless violent youth fail at — none have jobs. Only one member (Flea) is gainfully employed, in the armed forces, and the others treat him with disdain. He told the rest of the gang he wanted to shoot guns, but in reality it was a way to get himself an education, and probably a way out of the gang, as he leaves Melbourne just before the riot. Perhaps Hando considers Flea is also ‘impure’, as he stutters.
girl did. Hando is representative of the old Australian male, the one identified by Dermony and Jacka as part of the ‘male ensemble’. However, by aligning with Gabe over Hando, Davey represents the new Australian male gaining popularity in Australian films of the 1990s:

[m]ateship is thus seen as a stage through which it is necessary to pass before attaining adult masculinity. […] Mateship is clearly not the heroic and fulfilling bond it once was in Australian culture; if anything films [of the early 1990s] represent it as an adolescent relationship which needs to be outgrown for a boy to reach adulthood. (Butterss *Becoming a Man* 87)

In older Australian cinema that favours the masculinist tradition, mateship is regarded as the most important relationship a male could have well into adulthood. In *Sunday Too Far Away*, females plays a minimalist role. There are suggestions at a relationship between Foley and the Cocky’s daughter; however, she is shown to be ineffective in Foley’s time of crisis after old Garth dies. As Foley begins to cry, she runs away, not knowing what to do.\(^\text{60}\)

In *Romper Stomper*, mateship can not ultimately coexist with heterosexual coupling, as Hando dies at the end of the film. This suggests a critique of the male ensemble identity, from which women are excluded and treated as objects. During the 1990s, strong female characters were challenging the masculine national identity and men began to be presented as ineffectual and in need of female direction (*Muriel’s Wedding; The Big Steal* (1990); *Radiance; Secrets* (1992); *Hotel Sorento; The Last
Days of Chez Nous (1992); Road to Nhill (1997)). These films often ascribed to a multicultural identity and recognised value in diversity, in areas such as Aboriginality, age (both young and old), and the role of females in public and private settings.

Butterss argues that throughout Romper Stomper, women and other minority groups are consistently victims of violence (When Being a Man is all You’ve Got 41). He discusses the remasculinisation of Davey as occurring in this final scene. For Butterss, Hando’s death restores “proper patriarchal relations between Davey and Gabe”, and redefines Australian masculinity away from ‘protest masculinity’, of which violent mateship is a feature (44). Several recent Australian films, including Mullet (2001), Bootmen (2000) and Idiot Box illustrate this philosophy. In each film in a manner similar to Romper Stomper, a woman comes between brothers or best mates. They engage in a sexual competition to gain her or each other’s attention, and one of the mates dies in order to allow for a heterosexual relationship.

Romper Stomper ends with Davey using the knife Hando bought for him to literally stab him in the back as he assaults Gabe. Hando attempts to ascribe to the hegemonic masculine protector and reassures Davey. However, Davey has chosen to ignore Hando’s assertion that Gabe is sick and will ultimately bring him down:

Hando: I’ll get you through this I promise.

60 Apparently there was intended to be a romance between the two but this was edited out of the plot. I also found it interesting that this girl was never given a name other than Miss. Dawson; she was credited, however, as ‘Sheila’ — Australian slang for a woman.

61 These films also signal the despair of urban life in a similar way to Romper Stomper and Wright’s other Australian feature, Metal Skin.
We just have to stick together.

[...]  
She’s sick mate.
She’s trouble.
She doesn’t really want you, she’ll just use you.
We won’t get nowhere with her Davey.
She needs medicine or something.

Davey: She’s my problem isn’t she?
Hando: Listen to me.
Davey: Take your hands off me. I’m sick of listening to you alright.
Hando: She’s desperate.
    She’ll drag you down Davey.
    She doesn’t love ya if that’s what you think. Is that what you think?
    She’s fucking desperate, that’s all.

As he dies, Hando has a seizure. In the end, it is Hando who is ‘trouble’ and shown to be impure, and impairment is the defining point of his contamination. In line with the *Lancet* article I would argue that this image rests on outdated stereotypes of epilepsy. Baxendale also notes that portrayals of males with epilepsy tend to present characters as mad, bad or dangerous. Hando does not have epilepsy; thus I am reminded of the social interpretation of epilepsy in colonial times that proposed any person exhibiting any form of convulsion was an epileptic (Bladin 16) and therefore mad, bad and dangerous. Seizures are the physical manifestation of an otherwise invisible impairment. Ableist representations of disability in cinema can be traced back to the silent era, when a highly visual shorthand was required to convey character and plot information in a shorter period of time. As Sutherland argues:

[c]inema has remained a medium that is more visual than linguistic. It looks to make things visual, and to attach meaning to visual appearance. [...] So when
visible disability is introduced into films, it [...] often acts as a metaphor. (Black Hats 17)

It is due to this “increasingly complex and sophisticated visual vocabulary” (Sutherland Black Hats 17) that non-visible impairments are less common. When they are used, they are made more visible to fit in with the conventions of cinema that remain more visual than linguistic. Sutherland argues that while epilepsy is often not a visible impairment — being controlled by medication — it is, however, one of the most stigmatised (Coming Out Disabled 2). Thus in cinematic terms, seizures related to epilepsy provide a highly visible icon offering points of reference to ‘general otherness’ (Baxendale 10).

4.7 Conclusion
O’Regan contends that by the 1990s four ways of representing Australian nationhood were competing for prominence (Australian National Cinema 305). These projections of nationhood coexisted and offered problematisations of each other and Australian national identity in terms of diversity. As Reid and Verhoeven suggest, a general fascination with diversity existed across the national cinema and films, although in attempting to be internationally successful it problematised who Australians were and who they could be. Lucky Break, The Well and Romper Stomper used impairment to critique Australian national identity. While Lucky Break attempts to criticise pretending to be someone you’re not, it ultimately reinforces the critique along ableist lines. The Well offers comparable identities —
binaries of Australianness to include women but exclude disability. Finally, *Romper Stomper* critiques who we’ve become as a nation and suggests an alternate identity; again, at the expense of a disability culture.

In order to make this critique of national identity, impairment operates as an icon both in terms of *mise en scene* and mythology. The filmic techniques employed in these films to represent the incidence of impairment rely on ableist myths. *Lucky Break*, *The Well* and *Romper Stomper* each depict an impaired female character who is taken advantage of and who redundantly fulfills cultural expectations of women. One means by which this is achieved is by impairment being positioned in the frame to mean loss of control. In contrast to the diverse cinematic portrayal of other minority groups, Australian Cinema continues to marginalise those with impairments. During the 1990s Australian filmmakers adopted a tragedy mode of representation. By individualising impairment as iconographic character traits, filmmakers personalised the experience and absolved society of responsibility.

These three key films draw together the concerns of three theorists who have been referred to extensively throughout this thesis — Tom O’Regan, Deb Verhoeven, and Mary-Ann Reid — to offer insight on Australian National Cinema. The incidence of impairment in each narrative highlights the significance to Australian national cinema in terms of diversity and cultural identity, not to mention a projection of nationhood. Indeed, a disability identity should be recognised not nullified or

---

62 This can be seen in *Angel Baby* as Kate’s fear of blood and being cut reinforces her mental impairment, as does her and Harry’s obsession with numerology.
negotiated. By combining the work of O'Regan, Verhoeven and Reid it becomes apparent that the individualisation of disability is a national project which encourages the continued subordination of disabled people. Alternatively, the recognition of disability as being culturally constructed would extend the scope of analysis surrounding Australian national cinema as a diverse, national and international activity.

In the following chapter I will turn the discussion to films made during the 1990s in Australian national cinema that reject the personal tragedy mode favoured by the films discussed in this chapter and offer a representation in line with the social theory. Auteur theories will underline the discussion in the following chapter to demonstrate the validity of Longmore’s post-structural argument that production, text and reception should be taken into account in a social model of disability film analysis and production.
5.0 Introduction: What do we want to be positive about?

“Modern medicine in some ways has become a panacea for the problems created by modern living. Rather than helping people to become healthy individuals we just patch up the problems created by modern society.”

Mike in *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996)

I can not honestly say that I took any particular pride in my identity as an epileptic – I use the term ‘epileptic’ deliberately, because I am not just a ‘person with epilepsy’; my disability is an integral part of my identity, and those who wish to know me these days must accept that fact, not disregard it as if it were somehow separate from the ‘real me’.

Allan Sutherland (*Coming Out*)

In the last chapter I explored the prevalence of films that constructed disability within a personal tragedy mode in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. Often, this construction has gone unrecognised due to the emphasis on positive verses negative portrayals and the acceptance of stereotyping. In a culture so divided on positive and negative portrayals, the question must be asked within the restructuring of disability representation on film, “what do we want to be positive about?” (Hevey *Controlling Interests* 210). Many films depicting disability attempt a ‘positive’ representation of the disabled person contributing to society ‘despite’ their impairment. In *Lucky Break*, Sophie’s relationship with Eddie could be considered a positive representation of a disabled woman as a sexual person, within the current discourse of positive representations of disability. In *The Piano*, Ada
begins lessons to learn how to speak and herself offers piano lessons despite her finger prosthesis. In *Heaven’s Burning*, a blind man who runs a clothing store is able to laugh at his impairment as he speaks in sight euphemisms. For example, ‘Looking for anything?’ and ‘Just what you see’. These representations do not address stigma and side step the issue of discrimination (Barnes *Disabling Imagery and The Media* 18).

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on how the medical model of disability influenced disability as a (non-) diversity issue in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. This chapter focuses on the possibilities a social model of disability has for disability as a diversity issue. Although I have offered the social model as a preferred framework for considering a disability culture in minority terms, so far I have focused only on those films that do not ascribe to this model.

In *Arts and Lies?* Shakespeare suggests an inherent danger in this is that continual criticism or so-called ‘disability correctness’ will discourage filmmakers from representing disability at all:

> [w]hile it is appropriate to critique simplistic and one-dimensional representations of disability, it is too easy to reject complex and nuanced works of film art which do not comply with politically charged notions of ‘positive imagery’. There is a dangerous willingness to take offence at supposed violations of equality principles.

---

1 For Darke, images of visual impairment on screen reinforce boundaries of normality (*Eye Witness* 36). The paradoxical task of representing visually the unrepresentable invokes fear in the audience who is engaging in a visual experience of *watching* the film. Thus they become concerned that they will one day be unable to do what they are at that moment doing (Darke *Eye Witness* 37). As Kimpton-Nye suggests, the representation of impairment becomes more about the fears and desires of the filmmakers and the audience (*Gump and Co.* 34-5).
Moreover, the desire for a positive representation can obscure the elements of cliché and distortion in films which are heralded as ‘good’ portrayals. (165)

Shakespeare suggests a consideration of the filmmaker’s intentions would enable a more sophisticated approach. I will attempt this throughout this chapter as I investigate the significance of a disability identity to Australian national cinema during the 1990s as demonstrated through three key films and two auteurs (Rolf de Heer and Jerzy Domaradzki). Within these investigations I will remain constantly aware of interpretation within the context of the disability rights movement, which espouses notions of positive and negative in terms of ‘realistic’ representations.

I begin this investigation by briefly problematising several films that offer ‘positive’ representations of disability, but do not operate within a social model. These films perpetuate discrimination and encourage disabled people to accept an identity established by an ableist culture. As discrimination is not addressed in these films, they do not offer a disability identity in terms of diversity. I will demonstrate the necessity of being aware of the way the social model of disability distinguishes between disability and impairment, and the importance of identifying the intersection between the two by focusing on the contextual nature of positive verses negative imagery. Following that, I engage with auteur theories to highlight the importance of self-consciousness in affecting social change around disability issues. I consider the role of the auteur in the politicisation of disability in the Australian context of the 1990s. The political dimension in cinema offers a connection to the community in terms of the possibility of explaining the structure of society (Monaco...
6). The chapter is divided into three sections as I undertake close textual investigations of three films (Struck By Lightning, Bad Boy Bubby, Dance Me To My Song) as they pertain to disability, auteurism, and Australian national identity.

5.1 Social Construction of ‘Positive’ Representations

Flirting (1991) shows Danny, a socially inept school dag with a stutter, find pride in his identity. Through the love of a woman he loses his stutter. Similarly, in Sample People (1999), Len’s stutter decreases as he finds a kindred spirit in the equally socially marginal, DJ Lush Puppy. The majority of Australian national cinema during the 1990s appears to conform to Hevey’s contention that “where impairment enters, the character is proven to be socially dead” (Hevey Controlling Interests 210). The personal tragedy model influences these representations as impairment is used as a symbol or metaphor.

Representations of disabled characters as the living dead (Death in Brunswick, The Sum of Us, The Well, Hammers Over The Anvil) or actually dead (Angel Baby, What I Have Written, Metal Skin, Envy) have cathartic meaning for an ableist society that fears death and mortality (Hevey Controlling Interests 211). These representations serve both to reassure able-bodied audiences of their normality and disavow the possibility of impairment. This conforms to Finklestein’s second phase of disability construction in which production is geared toward able-bodied ‘norms’ in a capitalist society and the fear of impairment is increased. As Wendell suggests:

[t]he lack of realistic cultural representations of experiences of disability not only contribute to the ‘Otherness’ of people with disabilities by encouraging the
assumption that their lives are inconceivable to non-disabled people but also increases non-disabled people’s fear of disability by suppressing knowledge of how people live with disabilities. (43)

Indeed, the fear of disability is both introduced and perpetuated through cultural representations of normality. I discuss this in more depth during the analysis of Dance Me To My Song later in this chapter.

However, instead of arguing that a lack of realistic portrayals has resulted in an ‘othering’ of disabled people, I have highlighted the similarly contextual nature of ‘realism’ and the role of social construction throughout the previous chapters. The social construction of normality also applies to ideals of positive and negative, because interpretation is contextual. Therefore, it is reductive to declare some representations as positive and some as negative. Although neglecting to recognise realism as culturally constructed, Wendell does highlight the environment and other disabiling structures when contextualising power and a social definition of disability:

> definitions of impairment and disability should recognise that normal (i.e. unimpaired) physical structure and function, as well as normal (i.e. nondisabled) ability to perform activities, depend to some extent on the physical, social, and cultural environment in which a person is living, and are influenced by such factors as what activities are necessary to survival in an environment and what abilities a culture considers most essential to a participant. However, they should also take into account the possibility that some members of a society may have a vested interest in defining ‘normal’ structure, function, and ability for most members in ways that disadvantage those other members and/or mask ill treatment of them. (22)
Hevey suggests positivity and negativity as cultural constructions “exist [only] with the positioning of the piece” (Controlling Interests 212). In this chapter I turn the discussion toward how disability can be and is (infrequently) represented in Australian national cinema within a social framework. For Hevey, a political dimension will shed light on this positive/negative divide and also offer an alternative mode of representation:

[a]re we positive about impairments? Are we ‘positive’ about being oppressed or discriminated against? Or are we positive about naming that struggle between people with impairments and disabling society? (Controlling Interests 210)

Bearing these questions in mind, Flirting and Sample People can be approached quite differently. Do Danny and Len stutter because they are socially ostracized or are they ostracized because they stutter? In any case, their stutter is a symbol of their social exclusion. A political element is not considered as Danny finds pride in his identity as the school dag:

people like to have someone to look down on, it makes them feel better about themselves. No one realises what a great community service I was providing by being the school dag. I didn’t care; I’d met this girl.

As I argued in Chapter Two, drawing on Shakespeare, positive imagery is simply another exercise in power and other factors must be considered, including the intentions of the filmmakers (Art and Lies? 165). Theories of auteurism allow such consideration while acknowledging the distinctly visual conventions of cinema.
5.2 Auteur Theories

Auteurism was founded on three premises. First, that despite the collective nature of film production, cinema was an example of individual expression. Second, the equivalent of the author in literature or the artist was the film’s director. Finally, that cinematic authorship could be found even in routine output (as well as in art cinema and Hollywood) (Neale Genre and Hollywood 11). The auteur was seen as demonstrating an individual personality across all (or most) of his/her films, adopting both a stylistic and thematic consistency. However, the auteur was also distinguished from the filmmaker who merely continually communicates his own obsessions (metteur en scene). The auteur, on the other hand, was said to express their “emotions, experience and ‘world-view’” through their films (Caughie 9–10).

The auteur inscribes their individuality through mise en scene, camera movement and placement, and the movement from shot to shot. These peculiarly cinematic features are important as they free the discussion from literary models that have dominated the discussions about disability in cinema and directed attention toward a visual discourse (Caughie 13). Auteurism allows a systematic discussion of form, style, theme and mise en scene (Neale Genre and Hollywood 11). Disability is frequently considered a thematic feature of cinema and directors who address disability thematically often do so repeatedly for example John Woo (Enns).² Such a practice is often regarded as being consistent with auteurism. However, as I have

² However, this recognition is frequently under a medical model of analysis as I will demonstrate later in this chapter when I offer a post-structuralist auteur reading of Rolf de Heer that considers the ideological role of the audience in creating meaning.
demonstrated throughout this thesis, impairment is used repeatedly as a motif or symbol to convey information in shorthand.

Marks argues that the body is a symbol. If a body is damaged, that person is not strong, and disabled people are a constant reminder that we are not in total control (155). Disabled people are stereotyped by their impairments. Impairment is not an incidental characteristic like hair or eye colour. In a study of British media, Barnes found that the portrayal of impairment in popular culture did not reflect its statistical incidence in society (Disabling Imagery and the Media 17). Although I have found similar trends in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, there are portrayals in which characters are not stereotyped by their impairment, and instead are offered as members of the community — sometimes as statistical incidences while at other times their impairment is an incidental characteristic. These examples include people with physical impairments in the background of scenes in films such as Dingo (1991), Strictly Ballroom and Lilian’s Story. However, there are many other films that have impaired individuals in the background of scenes, operating in a symbolical manner. For example, a man with a walking stick sits in the audience of the settler’s play during The Piano, a woman has a walking frame in Looking for Alibrandi (2000), and a woman has a motorised wheelchair at Guy and Lizzie’s Wedding in Thank God He Met Lizzie. However, these impairments operate symbolically, as issues of class are addressed in The Piano; Looking For Alibrandi considers generational identities in multicultural suburban Australia; and social constructions of masculinity and femininity are problematised in Thank God He Met
Chapter 5 This Dance Ain’t no Pretty Waltz

Lizzie. These representations invoke stereotypes that I discussed in Chapter Two and separate disabled people from Australian society while highlighting the social meanings attached to other minority groups.

In the previous chapter, I focused on Geoffrey Wright for his repeated use of impairment cinematically, particularly as it related to femininity. However, Wright uses impairment stylistically, not thematically, and I would suggest that the differentiation between the auteur expressing individuality and the filmmaker conveying obsessions lies in the differing definitions of disability and impairment. In this chapter I will suggest two directors who, as auteurs, demonstrate individuality in terms of both stylistic and thematic consistency.

In terms of their arguing for social change, parallels exist between feminist film theory and disability film theory. Auteurism has been recognised with regard to feminist social change through cinema. Su Frederich articulates the process:

> whenever I set out to make film, my primary motive is to create an emotionally charged, or resonant, experience — to work with stories from my own life that I feel the need to examine closely, and that I think are shared by many people. I then try to find a form which will not only make the material accessible, but which will also give the viewer a certain amount of cinematic pleasure […] since I do like to play with the frame, the surface, the rhythm, with layering and repetition and text, and the other filmic elements. (Zryd Sink or Swim)

While Wright is unquestionably an auteur, often exploring sub-groups and the darker side of suburban life, utilising innovative sound and camera techniques, he does not recognise a social interpretation of disability and uses impairment symbolically to invoke fear, in a way that individualises disability. Therefore his fascination with disability conveys his fears rather than his individuality.
Thus the social change auteur is self-reflexive and attempts to make a social comment whilst entertaining. Ableism is considered unconscious, yet the decision to represent impairment in film, particularly chronicling the ableist structures in society, is conscious. However, this argument pays little attention to the role of the spectator, ideology and the textual environment in which films are produced. I return to this discussion later in the chapter when I address the three stages of theories of auteurism and the position I proceed from with regard to disability, impairment, social change and auteurs in Australian national cinema during the 1990s.

As Woods contends, there is no single film theory (including montage, realist, and auteur) that is all encompassing, rather, “each can offer insights into different areas of cinema and different aspects of a single film” (475). Thus, I commit myself to auteurism only as it offers insight into the social model of disability and how this translates effectively in film. I have selected auteurism for use in this chapter because it addresses the conscious political possibilities of cinema. In order for social change to occur, the focus of disability must be taken away from the body and placed on society. It must be politicised:

[t]he disability movement is the articulation that (a) impairment and disability are no longer focused as one, and (b) they are no longer exclusively focused on the body. (Hevey Controlling Interests 212)

Further, this process of change must be recorded, rather than merely presented in constructions of binaries of positive and negative.
I am inclined to combine Caughie’s assertion that filmmakers who are not auteurs nevertheless offer a stylistic and thematic consistency with Kimpton-Nye’s suggestion that representations of impairment often reflect filmmakers’ fears of disablement (Gump and Co. 35). Thus, a disability auteur is a filmmaker who thematically explores the representation of disability as the intersection of social discrimination and impairment. I differentiate the disability auteur from filmmakers who nonetheless may be auteurs, but who rely on pre-existing stereotypes for stylistic purposes. Furthermore, Barnes’ contention that the representation of impairment often acts as the sole determinant of personality (Disabling Imagery and the Media 22) supports my argument that impairment, when used as a symbol or motif to compress information about character and plot, is a stylistic device rather than a thematic concern. The films under discussion in this chapter address disability (and sometimes impairment) as a thematic concern and characters are not one-dimensional or intended to convey quick information to an audience versed in the visual code. Therefore, Wright’s portrayal of Gabe, Savina, Joe, Rosalyn, Dazey, Joe’s father and Savina’s mother reflects his obsessions, or rather his fear of disablement, rather than a thematic consistency. Longmore finds this to be a common feature of cinema and suggests a link between representations of disability and the fear of disablement, which in turn is disabling for disabled members of society:

we harbor unspoken anxieties about the possibility of disablement, to us or someone close to us. What we fear we often stigmatize and shun and sometimes seek to destroy. Popular entertainments depicting disabled characters allude to these
fears and prejudices or address them obliquely or fragmentarily, seeking to reassure ourselves. (Longmore Screening Stereotypes 66)

Finklestein agrees that cinematic representations of disability reflect the fear of disablement demonstrated by the able bodied majority:

\[
\text{working in the context of dominant able-bodied perceptions of disability […] representation of disability has […] more to do with the perceptions and fears of able-bodied people. (Images & Employment of Disabled People 3)}\
\]

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter through a close textual analysis of Romper Stomper, with reference to Metal Skin and Cherry Falls, Wright’s treatment of disability reflects a fear of becoming disabled — to the point of obsession. The personal tragedy mode of representation offers him a pre-existing pervasive tool of artistic characterisation.

In Chapter One I considered Foucault’s Madness and Civilisation and indicated that in later years he criticised this work for neglecting to consider a social construction of madness. Derrida also reviewed this publication as he engaged in post-structuralism and deconstruction (see Cogito and The History of Madness). Derrida used Foucault’s consideration of ‘madness’ and ‘reason’ as mutually exclusive to demonstrate the foundation of deconstruction. For Derrida, a definition of madness relied on the certainty of not being mad, in a similar way to Darke’s contention that an ideology of normality exists due to a definition of abnormality.

In Chapter Two I considered Darke’s normality genre theory as it pertained to film analysis under a social theory of disability to suggest that impairment is constructed
as abnormality in cinema in order to perpetuate a hegemonic image of normality (the absence of impairment). Therefore, just as Derrida argues that a definition of sanity relies on the existence of madness (32), Darke sees normality as being only able to exist due to an understanding of abnormality (*Cinematic Representations of Disability* 183). Thus Darke relies on a post-structuralist interpretation of the social theory of disability, which recognises that films communicate via a culturally specific, historically contingent understanding of disability. Like Darke, I reject the reductionistic structuralist methodology that does not consider an infinite interaction of signifiers and meanings. My investigation of films made in Australian national cinema during the 1990s is politically motivated and in line with post-structuralism, and suggests that our understanding of disability as a personal tragedy solely within the medical domain is a social construction that is ideologically motivated.

Auteurism, as it has been revised to consider the influences of post-structuralism, is particularly suited to a consideration of the construction of disability in film. I recognise that the intentions of the director are important and will investigate these through a thorough textual analysis concentrating on *mise en scene*, editing, and camera movement and placement. I will also briefly examine the critical uptake of these films via consideration of O’Regan’s comments, reviews by David Stratton, and reviews on Andrew Urban’s website www.urbancineline.com.au. These authors are selected because they are Australian and I am interested in the way a disability
culture has been denied in Australian national cinema.\footnote{I use ‘Australian’ as an unproblematic description in this context, despite having raised Dermody and Jacka’s concerns regarding cultural policy in Chapter Three. At times, throughout this chapter, I will also consider the audience responses to issues of disability in these films, society, and the Australian cinema landscape by drawing on student responses as posted on the Oz Film Database (http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/film/dbase/).} I wish also to take into consideration Verhoeven’s Industry 3, which views Australian national cinema as operating internationally as well as locally. Thus, where appropriate I will consider international responses posted to the internet on both The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and the Disability Films web site (disabilityfilms.co.uk).\footnote{A similar use of the internet when considering critical response and disability issues pertaining to the representation of disability in film has been employed by Shakespeare in Art and Lies? Indeed, according to Finklestein, the internet and the resulting technological revolution is a feature of the third stage of disability, which we are undergoing now.}

Although I invoke theories of auteurism in this chapter with particular regard to stylistic and thematic consistency under the social theory of disability, I acknowledge the limitations with this model in that nothing else but the director/auteur is recognised as creating meaning. Barthes suggests that although the concept of the author is powerful, “it is language which speaks, not the author” (209). Auteur criticism concentrates on the how more than the what of cinema as art (Sarris 66). However, as Sarris suggests, cinema is constrained by certain conditions of craft and culture (66). Bordwell and Thompson agree that “fictional cinema has tended to be dominated by a single mode of narrative form” (76). While these arguments build on the first stage of auteur theory by highlighting the underlying structure of the text, they do not indicate the significance of the spectator or ideology. Hevey argues that disability arts needs to establish a counter-culture in which disability is revealed artistically and impairment is represented in a totally
different manner. He argues that the gaze needs to be moved off the body, and that the success of the counter-culture resides in the ability to “position meaning” (Controlling Interests 212).

Hevey’s suggestions follow on from the third stage of auteur theories, which acknowledge the interplay between production, text, and reception. In this post-structural model the auteur and the spectator have equal weighting, as ideology and context are acknowledged. Semiotics has brought the auteur and the spectator together as equal subjects within the textual process, which in turn acknowledges intertextuality, as there is no form of ‘pure’ text (Hayward Cinema Studies 26).

Therefore, in using auteur theories, I do not wish to make evaluative judgements claiming one director’s superiority to another. I have attempted rather to highlight two directors who have created work that records the progress of change, and thus offers a disability identity. I am not suggesting disability representation can be broken into ‘good’ and ‘bad’, as this in itself is contextual, reductionist and little more than disapproving classification (Darke Cinematic Representations of Disability 183). I have drawn extensively on Hevey throughout this chapter to articulate the contextual nature of disapproving classification. Thus, in conducting a semiotic analysis and acknowledging a theory of textuality, I hope to move beyond disapproving classification to incorporate Shakespeare’s suggestion of taking into account the intention of the filmmakers, the role of the spectator and ideology (Art and Lies? 165).
According to O’Regan, films are a means of interrogating the civic culture, particularly as they intersect with the fears of the public (Australian National Cinema 21). Due to the sheer volume of representations of impairment in Australian cinema during the 1990s, disability is clearly a national fear. However, O’Regan also suggests:

[films investigate contemporary public issues, they render social divisions and the incommensurate purposes of people. They register disturbing social and cultural truths, and foster alternative identities within the country. (Australian National Cinema 21)]

Although I have alluded to their existence, I have not yet offered a significant discussion of films that investigate disability as a contemporary issue and offer an alternative identity. A disability identity does exist in films such as Dance Me To My Song, Bad Boy Bubby, Lilian’s Story, and Struck By Lightning. However, such representations are not in large volume in the mainstream and remain clouded by the bulk of those that abide within a personal tragedy framework. Australian directors have continued to isolate a disability identity through an underlying fear of impairment manifested structurally in cinema by the way the impaired body has been seen to interact with the environment (Lucky Break; The Well; The Nostradamus Kid; Thank God He Met Lizzie). Disabling structures remain unrecognised as the problem is presented as lying within the damaged body (Lucky

---

6 This becomes especially evident when examining the critical uptake of these ‘social model’ films. The reviews often remain within an individualised or medical discourse, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter.
Chapter 5 This Dance Ain’t no Pretty Waltz

This is partially due to the continuation of ableist perceptions of ‘normality’.

Shine is often praised for its portrayal of disability, even by reviewers within the disability sector (Kimpton-Nye Shine On!; Keith; and disabilityfilms.co.uk). However, if the film is examined beyond a superficial level, it becomes apparent that disability is again located in the damaged body (Shakespeare Art and Lies? 166). Shakespeare argues that although the film could be seen to be positive, it operates entirely within a medical setting and political issues are glossed over (Art and Lies? 168). He identifies several damaging stereotypes operating within this film, including the ‘able-bodied woman as saintly carer for disabled man’; ‘parent bashing’; ‘compensatory abilities’; and the ‘sweet innocent’ stereotype identified by Norden (Art and Lies? 167–8). This relates back to Hevey’s claim that interpretation is contextual and positivity and negativity are a construction. The representation of Helfgott as a ‘sweet innocent’ with a ‘saintly carer’ operates within the current discourse of disability rights, particularly as he is given compensatory abilities.

Not being able to walk is an impairment, while disability is the failure to provide ramps. However, a culture of access for people with impairments involves more than the provision of ramps and lifts in cinemas. There is an urgent need to look at how cinematic representation continues to marginalise and disable those experiencing impairment, particularly within the general discourse of
problematisations of difference. The continued marginalisation of disability empowers other minority groups in cinema and is an issue that must be addressed.

Parallels can be made between *Shine* and *The Jim Conway Blues* (1998), as both focus on impairment and music rather than disabling structures in society. Jim Conway is an internationally recognised Australian harmonica player who has multiple sclerosis. His documentary explores both his music and the effect MS has had on his life. It has won several awards and received critical praise:

> [t]his remarkable movie treads a fine line between exploring Conway’s music and his MS without ever succumbing to sentimentality. It is an unswervingly honest look at a musician’s need to triumph over life’s problems. In the end the human spirit glows and wins against great odds. (Elder cited on *Jim Conway Blues Press Release*).

The film’s synopsis heralds Jim as a “person of determination” for surviving both the music scene and multiple sclerosis. A sequence in the documentary likely to have been intended to highlight this determination is when Jim climbs a tall staircase with difficulty. He is going to the movies to see a film about a character with a similar impairment to his. Jim’s own impairment that necessitates the use of a wheelchair does not physically prevent him from watching this film. According to a social interpretation of disability, in this situation the staircase is the disabling structure.

Representation of disability under the social model requires greater consideration. Such portrayals oblige filmmakers to reflect on a different worldview rather than
regurgitating one-dimensional cinematic shorthand to build a characterisation in conjunction with *mise en scene*. Rolf de Heer and Jerzy Domaradzki are two Australian directors from the 1990s who, by exploring their own emotions and experiences, have achieved representations of disability and impairment in line with the social model I have suggested throughout this thesis. By displaying a general fascination with the social disablement of people who have impairments they offer a disability identity that is not peripheral.7

Their films are often difficult to watch and the films selected for discussion in this chapter are especially so.8 These films do not attempt to aestheticise impairment in order to make it entertaining, as the films mentioned in the previous chapters do, including *Angel Baby, The Piano, Lucky Break, The Well*, and *Romper Stomper*. Hevey claims this is the first step in offering adequate representations of disability:

> Picasso said that taste was the enemy of creativity and, eventually, those disabled artists who pursue that path of affecting taste will find their work stagnate, since they are facilitating an outsider’s vision of themselves. (*Controlling Interests* 213)

Indeed, the cinematic depictions of *Dance Me To My Song* and *Lucky Break* are considerably different, despite the similar character motivations, and the incidence of disabled writers. The difference is that *Dance Me To My Song* is not aestheticised and addresses political dimensions while *Lucky Break* attempts to follow the

---

7 Within these films a disability identity is not peripheral yet due to the low volume, a disability identity remains peripheral to the national cinema during this period.
8 While impairment in general is difficult to watch on screen as it reminds audiences of their own mortality, films which highlight the intersection between disability and impairment are particularly confronting as they force audiences to consider their role in the social disablement of people who have impairments. Likewise audiences must admit the possibility they too may one day become impaired.
romantic comedy storyline closely, and in so doing must gloss over the issue of
discrimination. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Barnes considers it particularly
important that filmmakers do not gloss over impairment for the purposes of
entertainment. However, in separate interviews both Lewin (director of Lucky
Break) and Rhymer (director of Angel Baby) have admitted to Urban that they
attempted to make the harsh ‘realities’ of impairment easier to watch. Darke argues
in Everywhere: Disability on Film that this is due to the confines of what constitutes
‘entertainment’ (11). When a social (not personal) image is presented it rarely
reaches a wide audience because it is not entertainment.

The first auteur I address is Jerzy Domaradzki. Prior to the 1990s he had not made
any films in Australia. In fact, Struck By Lightning, made in 1990, was his first
English language film. Since that time he has made one other film in Australia,
Lilian’s Story. I begin my in-depth textual analysis with Struck By Lightning. This
film is a stand-alone feature in Australian national cinema of the 1990s, highlighting
the disabling structures in society and cinema. I will make comparisons to Lilian’s
Story to highlight the similarities in this director’s emerging body of work.

Although Struck By Lightning is Domaradzki’s first Australia film, he is known in
Europe for addressing controversial issues in his films. For example, Wielki bieg
(1981), which satirised the corporate state was suppressed under marshall law
eventually being released in 1986 when it won a series of awards (Struck By
Lightning Press Kit 5). Similarly, Bialy smok (1986) satarised Cold War politics,
and war, sex and romance were problematised in *Luk Erosa* (1987). Domaradzki’s extensive filmography is subversive and the issues put forward in *Struck By Lightning*, addressing the disabling structures of society with regards to intellectually impaired adults, are no departure. Domaradzki wrote several of the films he directed; however, *Struck By Lightning* is not among these.

Although auteurism encompasses the writer-director-producer’s entire body of work, it does acknowledge that “great directors […] make great films every so often” (Sarris 588). The second auteur I will address is Rolf de Heer. I will begin by outlining the thematic and stylistic concerns of de Heer’s entire body of work throughout the 1990s, to suggest that each of his films is a variation on similar themes.9 In this way my discussion will tend toward thematic concerns, reserving structural analysis for my later in-depth discussion. I will offer in-depth analysis (thematic and structural) of two of his films — *Bad Boy Bubby* and *Dance Me To My Song* — to highlight the possibility of success in establishing an Australian disability identity.

De Heer’s main thematic concern across his entire body of work is childhood. During an interview with Peter Malone he claimed, “[t]he preciousness of childhood for me is important, above almost anything else. I can refer all other themes to childhood”. De Heer is attracted to material that is positive, and childhood allows

---

9 Although I will not address de Heer’s earlier works, *Tale of A Tiger* (1984), *Encounter at Raven’s Gate* (1988), and his more recent, *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* (2001), *The Tracker* (2002), and *Alexandra’s Project* (2003), I wish to recognise their fascination with socially marginal individuals. Further, he often highlights communication problems.
him to consider all of the issues in the world today. In its broadest sense, de Heer believes we must consider how children will be affected by what we do. Malone argues that another continuing theme in de Heer’s work is a sense of identity and growth. I am particularly interested in de Heer’s work as it pertains to issues of disability, communication, identity, judgement, and the need for society to take responsibility.

De Heer’s 1990s filmography begins with *Dingo*, a film in which a man (John) must travel to Paris to reconnect with his musical idol before he can find himself. John’s journey begins in his childhood, when the three issues that torment him into adulthood are introduced. These are his love triangle with Peter and Jane, meeting Billy Cross, and his lack of confidence in himself. Many of de Heer’s later thematic concerns are visible in this film.

For example the protagonist’s search for identity in a judgmental world in *Bad Boy Bubby*. Another example is de Heer’s thematic and stylistic incorporation of art. Each character’s chosen mode of artistic expression dynamically enters the narrative. As O’Regan suggests with regard to *Dingo*, “[d]e Heer cuts and frames his shots as much as possible to music, attempting not just a film about jazz but a

---

10 De Heer’s use of the word ‘positive’ highlights the subjective and contextual focus of this word. De Heer’s films are frequently about social issues; for example, environmentalism in *Epsilon* (1997), disability in *Dance Me To My Song* and the treatment of Aboriginal people in *The Tracker*. It would be unusual to consider his films as ‘positive’; however, by affording power to these minority groups and issues, he is suggesting a different kind of positive.
jazz film” (Australian National Cinema 174).\(^{11}\) The girl communicates through profoundly symbolic drawings and poetry in The Quiet Room, and shots are structured accordingly. Bubby’s quasi-poetic song lyrics are treated in a comparable way in Bad Boy Bubby. Finally, Julia’s desire to dance in Dance Me To My Song operates in a similar manner — particularly as this is realised only when she spends a romantic evening with Eddie and again as they are re-united at the end of the film.\(^{12}\)

Dingo features childhood fascinations and traces how these are carried through to adulthood, themes that continue to be explored through such films as Bad Boy Bubby, The Quiet Room, and Dance Me To My Song. De Heer’s films are also recognised for their treatment of the concept of societal responsibility, in conjunction with a viable and entertaining Australian national identity. O’Regan situates de Heer in a long line of other Australian directors (auteurs) who display a stylistic and thematic consistency across their films including Dr George Miller, Carl Schultz, Paul Cox, Yoram Gross, Henri Safran and Igor Auzins. O’Regan comments that their offerings of diversity go beyond their “ethnic last names” (Australian National Cinema 322). De Heer’s thematic concerns are particularly

\(^{11}\) Jazz is the unrestrictive auteur mode in music. This can be seen through John and Billy’s attempts to (and success in) perform according to the way they want, rather than what the audience traps them into. They both stay true to their unconventional framework, despite audience encouragement to conform. Billy in fact encourages John to be avant-garde and discourages him from adopting Billy’s standards.

\(^{12}\) Although art is not a chosen mode of expression for any of the characters in The Tracker, it dynamically enters the narrative to convey extreme violence. As I will argue throughout this chapter, de Heer’s films are uncompromising and often difficult to watch. Yet this is necessary in effecting social change. De Heer’s use of art in this context enables cinematic representation of the unrepresentable (death).
pertinent to Australian national cinema as it moves away from a European-derived identity to a new world:

[t]his emergent culture and identity was not and is not monocultural, it was simply working from different principles of diversity - ones defined in a new world fashion. (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 322)

*Bad Boy Bubby* is a prime example, as is *The Quiet Room*, in which childhood fascinations are given credibility. *Dance Me To My Song* also illustrates this point through Julia’s unrelenting determination to be treated with respect and ‘equality’.

Pride in a disability identity is implied in *Dingo*. This contention becomes more obvious throughout de Heer’s body of films during the 1990s. This pride is best illustrated by Julia telling Eddie she is attracted to him in *Dance Me To My Song*. The view that impairment represents a new beginning and viable identity first introduced by the character of Billy Cross (who had a stroke altering his musical abilities) in *Dingo*, stayed with de Heer throughout his 1990s career.

Barnes argues that disabled people are largely absent from representation in the media, “disabled people are conspicuous by their absence from popular culture”

---

13 I use the term equality as it is defined under the social model of disability; impairment that recognises this equality may require assistance.

14 What is interesting about this characterisation and its visual depiction is that de Heer does not demand further physical manifestation in order to make the lasting effects of the stroke more visible to a cinema audience. Billy Cross is very matter of fact about having a stroke and simply views it as a new beginning and no longer wants to do the same old thing. His decision to get up on stage and play a song later with John would be interpreted in most other films as ‘overcoming’ his disability, but in *Dingo* it is simply Billy recognising that John’s performance is not the same old thing over again and that he has something special. The dingo within him suggests that John is special and can play like he does because of his own experiences. A social theory of impairment can likewise be applied to this aspect of *Dingo*. Billy’s stroke altered his perspective on jazz, again presenting jazz as an unrestrictive auteur mode. The effects of his impairment prompted Billy to reconsider his musical abilities, which had become static.
(Disabling Imagery and the Media 17). He claims that disabled people are rarely seen unless the narrative is dealing solely with issues pertaining to the person’s impairment. However, both Norden and Longmore have found that impairment is frequently represented in cinema. Norden asserts that these depictions have tended to further isolate the disabled population as members of the general community (Cinema of Isolation 1). Longmore, on the other hand, believes films often center on issues of disability, but critics and audiences misinterpret them (Why I Burnt My Book 119). Bad Boy Bubby and Struck By Lightning are two such films. Dance Me To My Song, the other film chosen for in-depth analysis in this chapter, does not meet with such misinterpretation because it deals specifically with impairment issues.15 However, as I demonstrate later, certain reviews do not recognise a difference between disabling structures brought about by and in society and the effects of impairment.

Earlier I mentioned Marks and her contention that the body is a symbol of society, with reference to minor portrayals of disabled characters (particularly physically impaired) in the background of scenes of many Australian features made during the

15 Although the characters are visibly impaired in Struck by Lightning, the focus is more on how society disables these people rather than on their impairments. However, audiences may focus on the impairment effects and interpret the film as being about people ‘overcoming’ their ‘disability’. As this is a little known film I experienced difficulty in finding audience reaction to it, with the exception of one user-comment on the Internet Movie Database. Her reaction concentrated on the saintly qualities of Pat and suggested that he inspired underprivileged kids, although the film is supposed to be about adults:

[I] like Brian Vriends character in this movie he is good with those under privileged kids teaching them how to play soccer, this kind of movie brings out the best in people and movies like these can certainly make you cry!! I think this is a really good movie and these kids are inspired by Pat. Therefore, while Domaradzki intended to make a film about the social neglect towards and prejudice against disabled people as they grow into adults, this user-comment demonstrates the tendency of audience members to interpret films in line with the personal tragedy mode, despite their social framework of disability.
1990s. In judging whether such characters or even disability in wider society was being stereotyped or used symbolically, I took into account the positioning of the camera in specific scenes and in the overall narrative.

_The Boys_ (1998) may appear to be the only purely incidental instance of physical impairment in Australian cinema during the 1990s. However, when considered within the context of a narrative which is concerned with ‘protest masculinity’ — Brett returns from jail and attempts to reassert authority over his brothers in his mother’s (Sandra) house (Butterss _When Being a Man is All You’ve Got_ 40) — this instance can also be interpreted symbolically. Sandra’s new boyfriend, George (Abo), limps, but this is not addressed in the story and does not appear to be an aspect of his characterisation. In addition, the camera does not direct audience gaze toward this feature of his body, either through angles or editing. Within the narrative Abo demonstrates Sandra’s limited options for love and masculine protection. Abo provides a counter masculinity to Brett’s protest masculinity (Butterss _When Being a Man is All You’ve Got_ 41). Bearing this in mind, Abo’s limp can be considered with reference to stereotypes of impotence. As Barnes suggests, “disabled people [are…] portrayed as incapable of sexual activity”, and films often display a preoccupation with impotency (_Disabling Imagery and the Media_ 16). In Chapter Three I argued that hegemonic masculinity was predicated on the absence of

---

16 According to Phillip Butterss, protest masculinity is an identity embraced by men who feel alienated and powerless. In order to regain power they attempt to exert force over each other, as Brett does with his brothers in _The Boys_ (as does Rico in _Blackrock_ (1997)), or “over those with less power than themselves: women, gays, and ethnic minorities” (Butterss _When Being a Man is All You’ve Got_ 41). Hando in _Romper Stomper_ seems to best exemplify this type of masculinity. Protest masculinity is an exaggeration of hegemonic masculinity and is self-consciously discriminatory toward groups with less power (women, ethnic minorities and homosexuals).
impairment (Valentine 169) and, furthermore, Australian masculinity was at stake in sexual potency (Murray 133). In The Boys, impairment therefore takes on symbolic meaning: Sandra is ‘protected’ by a powerless male, as indicated by Abo’s glass jaw. Brett easily knocks him out. Although I suggested earlier that the gaze was a significant feature of cinematic disablement, and there is no gaze on the impairment in this case, the overall stylistic choices of this film pre-empt this counterargument.17 There are, however, instances of atmospheric or background occurrences that demand social responsibility in several films, including Turtle Beach, Blackrock, Paradise Road, Blood Oath, Muggers and Idiot Box.18

I now turn the discussion to in-depth analysis of the key films highlighted at the beginning of the chapter: Struck By Lightning, Bad Boy Bubby, and then Dance Me To My Song. In a similar way to the previous chapter I will attempt to locate these films within O’Regan’s paradigm of problematising nationhood. Likewise, following a synopsis, I will proceed to a semiotic reading. I will also attempt to discuss the director’s motivations and audience reactions, paying greater attention to

17 Throughout the film the characters are not framed in a conventional way. Indeed the camera rarely stays on the person speaking, instead concentrating on other people’s reactions. Bob Connolly, the producer explains on the DVD:
emotionally the audience was always peering around corners, seeing people at the end of hallways. The drama came from what you weren’t seeing, from what was happening just out of frame. That generated a huge amount of tension.

18 However, similar instances of atmosphere that attempt to demand social responsibility have met with criticism from academics and social theorists with regard to the verisimilitude to the experience of impairment. These critics argue for ‘more accurate’ representations of madness. I refer in particular to Garry Gillard and Louis Achimovich, who criticise Australian cinema for being ambivalent with regard to the causation of mental impairment:
psychosis is shown as being contributed to by trauma, whereas the conventional psychiatric view is that madness is something outside of human influence and control. (The Representation of Madness in Some Australian Films)
Further, I would argue that these representations extend social responsibility under a tragedy mode.
auteur theories.

5.3 Struck By Lightning

Pat is a dedicated soccer teacher who wants to change people’s lives. He will do anything to get his students on the right track, including trashing the unhealthy school canteen. After being driven away in a police car, Pat is fired from the Education Department. The only job available to him is a recreation officer at a day centre where adults with Down’s Syndrome and other mental impairments work in a factory-type environment. Olly, an alcoholic who is hardened by his experiences struggling with bureaucracies, hires him — he was the only applicant after all.

In the film, two impaired characters, Gail and Spencer begin a sexual relationship after meeting at Pat’s soccer team. Domaradzki uses sport and sexuality to address the social construction of disability. After her first sexual encounter with Spencer, Gail turns to her social worker, Jill, for support. Jill’s reaction is to focus not on Gail, but on whether Pat should have encouraged the relationship. The irony of her reaction is highlighted and the narrative puts forward the argument that Jill should have been more concerned with accessibility to information and contraception.

O’Regan argues that Australian national cinema has conveyed a problematic national identity (O’Regan Australian National Cinema 69); he contends that Australian cinema has been innovative and coherent in its films about marginal interests and minority groups, including the disabled (O’Regan Australian National
Chapter 5 This Dance Ain’t no Pretty Waltz

Cinema 70). He cites Struck By Lightning as a key example. While I have taken issue with O’Regan elsewhere for his inclination toward the tragedy model, I agree that Struck By Lightning is innovative in its treatment of the disabled as a minority group. However, I would go further to suggest it offers a disability identity that includes impairment and oppression. Additionally, it addresses the intersection between the two, which involves naming the struggle between people with impairments and disabling society.

Domaradzki describes Struck By Lightning as an ‘issue film’, and contends that he aimed to problematise the confusion over what should be done with people with mental impairments (Struck By Lightning Press Kit 5). He favoured a ‘universal’ approach in the film:

[t]he Down’s Syndrome people are shown as ‘normal but different’. They are in some ways more happy; they don’t have a past or a future, but live in the present.
Making this film might help us understand not only these people, but also ourselves. (Struck By Lightning Press Kit 4)\(^1\)

Domaradzki does not subject his impaired characters to an intense scrutinizing gaze and prefers to shoot his characters in medium or wide shots in this film. In this way, impairment is not individualised as a symbolic aspect of the characters. Likewise Andre Bazin has suggested that montage highlights the difference between image

\(^1\) While this quote may appear to ascribe to Darke’s normality genre theory in that the filmmaker hopes these people will help us understand ourselves, I would argue that this is an instance Shakeaspere describes, in which Darke’s normality genre invokes disability correctness, and an overcensorious reading disregards the nuances of the film (Art and Lies? 165). It is my interpretation of this quote that the filmmaker hopes to shed light on the disabled people are treated due to a cultural fear of impairment.
and reality. He argues that the “montage […] did not give us the event; it alluded it” (156). Bazin prefers longer takes and unobtrusive ‘realism’. He praises directors who adopt similar techniques to de Heer and Domaradzki lauding them for laying their films bare. For Bazin, if the world were looked at closely, it would reveal reality, rather than add to it (159).20

A similar technique can be seen in Lilian’s Story, where Lilian is sent to an insane asylum by her father during adolescence. She is not released until she is quite old. Like Bubby in Bad Boy Bubby, Lilian does not have an impairment, she is simply socially unaware due to her having been imprisoned by a ‘bad parent’ for so long. The narrative oscillates between the events leading up to Lilian being committed and her life as she re-enters society outside the asylum. The difference in camera technique is particularly evident in these two different narratives. Compared to Lilian in the present, as she is released from the asylum and shot in long, wide shots, the flashbacks are framed much closer. This in turn comments on the way disability is constructed in cinema: it pays most attention to the body. Before Lilian leaves the hospital she recites poetry and is framed in a long, wide shot. This shot is continued

20 I quote Bazin to highlight my contention that Australian national cinema has not only reflected a personal tragedy mode of disability, through its cinematic structures, it has likewise defined it through cinematic features.
as she begins to recite poetry in the park and interacts with other characters.21

Many social disability theorists argue that the greatest obstacle to full inclusion for disabled people is prejudice and negative attitudes (Barnes, *Legacy of Oppression*; Longmore *Why I Burned My Book*; Marks; J. Morris *Pride Against Prejudice*; and Hayes). Indeed these negative attitudes must invariably be most frequently manifested in the language used to describe people with (or with perceived) impairments. At various times throughout history, people with impairments have been named and renamed. For example, categories such as ‘cripple’, ‘spastic’, ‘gimp’ and ‘retard’ are considered pejorative today and their use is discouraged. I am also offering a redefinition of what have become established categories of people. The affirmation of a new name signals a new identity. There is, however, always intense debate over the use of such terms, as different labels mean different things to different people (Gorden and Rosenblum 6). The people I am describing in this thesis as disabled people or people with impairments have at various times been described as ‘handicapped’, ‘disabled’, and more recently in Australia, ‘people with

---

21 Although I am not reviewing this film in depth, I feel that this audience response, posted to the *Oz Film Database*, is particularly illuminating with reference to the social model of disability: [r]ather than simply creating a film which documented the personal suffering of Lilian, […] Domaradzki uses an external point of view to tell Lilian's tale and in doing so positions us to examine the social problems at hand rather than simply the internal struggle of the character. I feel that this external point of view used to tell most of the story is one of the major failings of this Social Problem film. (Jones) [my italics]

The author of this piece is operating in a personal tragedy domain in her criticism of the film. Her viewing experience was made uncomfortable, as the film encouraged consideration of social issues — unlike other films within this genre that focus on internal personal struggles, including *Angel Baby, Cosi* and *Shine*. 
disabilities’.22

In *Struck By Lightning*, Olly’s main issues are with the politicians that run the center rather than with the actual brain damaged people, a theme only touched on in *Cosi*, as mentioned in Chapter One. He chooses not use the euphemisms that Pat does, preferring to “live in the real world”. Olly recognizes and is bitter about the way the government treats and represents the residents, while Pat is still coming to terms with the bureaucracy. Thus Olly embodies the intersection between impairment and disabling society, and does not ascribe to the ‘saintly carer’ stereotype. His rejection of political correctness, in particular disability correctness, highlights that they are in fact constructed, contextual notions.

*Struck By Lightning* uses language that is not politically correct to name disability as the intersection of social discrimination and impairment.23 As Gordon and Rosenblum argue, naming is a key process in the creation of categories. While those outside the ‘named’ group see such distinctions as arcane, to those inside it is an important process in terms of social identity, movement goals, and ideological orientations. Categorising, particularly when producing dichotomies, encourages

---

22 I consider the use of the label ‘disabled people’ as it was established during the industrial revolution to be different to the term (‘disabled people’) that I am using throughout this thesis; the difference is in terms of causality. The earlier use of disabled people located disability in the body, while the term I use today locates disability in society.

23 According to Berger, disputes over political correctness shed light on the way language affects how we think about different groups of people. Feminists, Marxists, and other radical socialist groups have been accused of politicising the humanities with left-wing ideologies, and *political correctness* has become a pejorative term, undermining the validity of these arguments. Political correctness is tied up with multiculturalism. These radical groups argue that the furor over political correctness that came about during the 1990s was the result of the establishment of multiculturalism as the ‘other’ to be feared and stigmatised (142–144).
stigma. Gordon and Rosenblum contend that as one side of the dichotomy is stigmatised, impairment becomes a ‘deficit’, not an alternate ontology.\textsuperscript{24} The impaired person is given a negative identity by society regardless of their self-image and social life becomes a struggle against this imposed image (12). Olly, who is very aware of dichotomies, categories and stigma, problematises this debate in scenes with Pat, who is shocked by Olly’s frankness. Following his successful interview, Olly invites Pat to “Come meet a retard”. Later, as Pat drinks from a mug at Saltmarsh, Ollie asks him, “Doesn’t worry you that a Mongoloid might’ve drunk out of that?”, but then ‘reassures’ him, “Don’t worry, its not catching”. Pat attempts to counter this by offering a medical definition of Down’s Syndrome, but Olly quickly stops him. Like Bad Boy Bubby, this film does not attempt a social comment through aesthetics and its power in fact lies in the bad taste. These quotes highlight the ideological process that goes into naming categories of impairment and Pat’s reaction reveals the dominance of the medical model over recognising the social construction.

As suggested in the previous chapter, Australian national cinema during the 1990s favoured narratives that put forward the suggestion that impaired characters should

\textsuperscript{24} I would like to highlight the issues in offering a redefinition at this early stage in the disability rights movement. In the current environment, despite my redefinition of disability as social prejudice and discrimination and impairment as a physical or psychological dysfunction, a negative ontology will continue to exist as impairment will be considered as lack. Further, disability will continue to be thought of as a personal tragedy whereby disabled people must attempt to pass while receiving ‘charity’. However, I persevere and maintain my argument that impairment is a culturally specific, historically contingent sign. Disability has not always been thought of in terms of pity. According to Hayes, during the Freakshow era identified by several theorists, including Norden, Darke, and Bogdan, disabled people were not pitied, and their attraction was not reliant upon how difficult life was for them. While they were considered human curiosities, their medicalisation is a more recent phenomenon (5).
not become parents as they would invariably fail and detrimentally effect their child
\((\text{Romper Stomper, Metal Skin, Angel Baby, Radiance, Children of The}
\ Revolution))\textsuperscript{25} Bad parenting was often implicated in the representation of disability
in Australian cinema during the 1990s. Further, as I suggested in Chapter Four, bad
parenting may have been in the form of fathers sexually abusing their daughters.
This is highlighted in \textit{Lilian’s Story}, where Lilian’s father is sexually attracted to her
as she is going through puberty and attracting the attentions of a teenage boy. Rather
than address the problem within himself, he abuses her and then checks \textit{her} into a
mental institution where she stays until he is too sick to keep her there in his old
age. Therefore Lillian is only disabled by her father, who can not cope with her
emerging sexuality. Just as society disables people who have impairments, Lilian’s
father disabled her by placing undue attention on her body. Her brother is also
implicated in this abuse as he witnessed it and did nothing. It is interesting that he
joined the Salvation Army as an adult, a theme also explored in \textit{Bad Boy Bubby}.

To return to \textit{Struck By Lightning}, after Gail and Spencer’s first sexual encounter, the
reactions of other character’s in terms of parenting, normality, passing, and
contraception address the social construction of disability.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Struck By Lightning}
questions the belief that intellectually impaired people should not be allowed to

\textsuperscript{25} Likewise, disability and parenting are not fully explored in \textit{Praise} (1998). Cynthia is constructed
as oversexed and when she gets pregnant she has an abortion and discovers she has genital warts. She
says, “fuck this body: diseased, pregnant” and warns her boyfriend Gordon he may get cancer of the
penis. Gordon has a much lower libido than Cynthia, which adds to her construction as an oversexed,
impaired woman. Gorden likewise can be interpreted as being characterised symbolically. He has
asthma and is therefore unlike the ‘normal’ Australian male as he can not be as active or as vigorous.
\textsuperscript{26} Pat and Jill’s own secret relationship acts as a parallelism, highlighting the socio-cultural
constructions enforced via parents. Pat’s grandmother hopes he will marry a nice virgin and he is
involved with a sexually active career woman.
have sex lives in case they produce ‘retarded’ children, and that therefore they should not be educated about sex. As mentioned in Chapter One, this belief resulted in the sterilisation of intellectually impaired women and girls in Australia throughout the 1990s (Linden and Gott 26). In order to address the social oppression involved and disabling barriers experienced by people with impairments, Jenny Morris has constructed a breakdown of rights, particularly with regard to parenting and disability. She identifies human rights, civil rights, and entitlements. She argues that although a difference exists between each, they are interrelated:

‘Disabled people have the right to be parents’ — *a human right*.

‘Disabled parents have the right to sit with their children in the cinema’ — *a civil right*.

‘Disabled parents have the right to assistance with looking after their children in their own homes if they need it’ — *an entitlement*.

(J. Morris *Reclaiming The Social Model* 3).

While these rights show the relationship between discriminatory attitudes and disabling physical barriers, they are not often addressed in Australian cinema. Although *Struck By Lightning* does not explicitly address the issue of impaired people becoming parents, it does put forward an argument in favour of a human right to have sex. Although Gail’s mother, Olly, and Jill attempt to keep Gail and Spencer apart, Domaradzki rejects this stance through Pat, who encourages their relationship.

Gail’s mother believes Gail can be normal, and as such does not want her with Spencer. She attempts to keep Gail and Spencer apart. She is horrified at the thought
of them having sex. Olly puts Spencer in full time care after he finds out that Spencer and Gail have had sex. Jill is upset because sex did not turn out the way Gail thought it would because Spencer did not know what to do. Instead of being upset that they weren’t taught about sex, she is upset that Pat encouraged them.

Gail’s mother, like Lilian’s father, is focused on the sexual development of her child and wishes to control it. In *Lilian’s Story*, although he views her sexually, Lilian’s father continues to speak to her in a ‘fatherly way’ — their relationship is similar to the relationship between Gabe and her father in *Romper Stomper*, described in the previous chapter. It is not the fact that her daughter will have sex that worries Gail’s mother, it is that she is having sex with Spencer, who is obviously impaired. In fact she appears quite excited at the suggestion that Gail could have sex with Pat’s brother, until she realises that he too is disabled. As a way to highlight his argument that anyone should have access to a sexual relationship, Pat suggests they have sex. In a sort of parallelism to what she wishes for her daughter, she appears interested, but Pat ultimately rejects her and then gets in trouble at work.27

The isolation of intellectually impaired adults is highlighted in the film in several ways. Olly suggests people raise money for intellectually impaired children because they don’t believe they will grow into adults. When they do, they are forgotten. Disabled people are treated like children; the halfway house is run by an

---

27 Gail’s mother appears to have total power over her daughter and the people she associates with. Olly puts Spencer in a locked ward because Gail’s mother did not want him associating with her daughter. Likewise, Olly chastises Pat for his inappropriate conversation with Gail’s mother, despite her encouraging it at the time.
organization for kids. Society does not want to hear about disabled adults. Hevey argues that charity advertising is a form of social oppression that constitutes disability (Creatures Time Forgot 3). Charity advertising does not address indirect discrimination, whereby people with impairments require what Morris has termed entitlements in order to realise human rights. For example, under the charity model, obtaining assistance in order to raise children in the home would be considered charity rather than an entitlement. This serves to keep impaired people out of sight, like the focus of disability imagery in the 1950s summarised in Chapter One. In Struck By Lightning, a woman employed to make a television advertisement for a fund-raising event hires nondisabled actors to play the residents. Such a move serves to aestheticise disability and reassure audiences that disability and impairment do not really exist. Pat disagrees with this suggestion. Yet even Jill would prefer to keep them out of sight, believing she can ‘help’ them without having to talk to them. However, as the narrative progresses, her attitude also changes.

Hevey argues with regard to charity advertising that the observed should begin to do their own observing (Creatures Time Forgot 8). This is explored in Struck By Lightning with particular regard to constructions of normality. When Pat is explaining the rules of soccer, he asks Spencer why Pat as the goalie can use his hands but the rest of them can’t. Spencer says that it is because Pat is ‘normal’ and everything is for normal people. Noel’s grandmother explicitly addresses the issue
of speaking for the disabled when she tells Pat not to talk about Noel as if he is not there, and to address his question to Noel rather than to her.28

Despite opening up debate around several issues relevant to the social model of disability, including sexuality, autonomy verses charity, recreation, parenting, and disabling language, Struck By Lightning is not recommended by the Disability Films Website. It is barely considered, being listed under general disability and given only a four sentence synopsis.29 Perhaps this is because this site concentrates on narrative rather than style. Throughout the preceding analysis I have undertaken a close textual analysis of this film as it pertained both to auteur theories and the social theory of disability with reference to Australian national identity. Struck By Lightning is significant to the Australian cinema landscape and has been recognised repeatedly by O’Regan for its treatment of marginal issues regarding the disabled and thus expanding the scope of the diverse Australian national cinema of the 1990s (Australian National Cinema 69, 177; Beyond Australian Film 6).

5.4 Bad Boy Bubby

Bubby has lived for 35 years alone with his sexually abusive mother (Ma) in a filthy apartment, believing the air outside will kill him — then Pop comes home. As Ma attempts to re-establish social norms in Pop’s presence by rejecting Bubby sexually,

28 Again, the film employs a sort of ironic humour, as Noel’s grandmother says this in front of Noel and is in fact engaging in the same practice she is admonishing Pat for.
29 The synopsis concentrates on the plot rather than the politics, which is an interesting omission for a supposedly comprehensive site. Lilian’s Story is not considered at all.
he becomes increasingly confused and is eventually thrust into the world outside.\textsuperscript{30} He is totally asocial and naive but eventually finds identity and belonging with a punk rock band, a group home for the severely disabled, and an overweight woman named Angel.

I previously touched on O’Regan’s suggestion that de Heer’s body of work ascribes to New World conventions. This is demonstrated in \textit{Bad Boy Bubby} as it creates a “socially functional story space” (O’Regan \textit{Australian National Cinema} 322), critiquing judgmental Australian society. \textit{Bubby} offers a multicultural framework that goes beyond the current pluralist tradition in Australian national cinema that disregards disability. Unlike the films analysed in the previous chapter — including \textit{Romper Stomper}, \textit{Metal Skin}, \textit{Lucky Break}, and \textit{The Well} — \textit{Bad Boy Bubby} recognises disabled people as a minority group within a pluralist society, and portrays them as being disabled mostly by structures in society, often manifested through judgmental beliefs and having nothing to do with biology.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} When asked if Ma is inherently evil, de Heer gives insight into her seemingly repugnant character and suggests that she too is a product of her upbringing:

\begin{quote}
I don’t see her as being evil. I see her as a product of her upbringing. She might have been 17 and brought up in a rigorous household, protected from the world outside to a great degree. Then somehow, she was seduced by the Pop character. And he disappeared, of course. She found herself pregnant and unable, in the society that she lived in, to reveal that she was pregnant. (Malone 61)
\end{quote}

Thus she cut herself off from the world and, according to de Heer, she became more and more disconnected from society by hiding in that cellar; therefore, she must be considered under the theme of childhood (62).

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Strange Planet} (1999) is a film I have not yet referred to in this thesis, which fits into Verhoeven’s Industry 3, being both derivative and critically distant. This film shares this view regarding the relationship between the social and the biological, both in terms of the narrative and the characters themselves. This film deals with changing social interpretations of gender, depression and medical intervention (dropping Prozac versus going to therapy). Neil feels disabled in a post-feminist world where women know the answer to every question known to man. Joel attempts to comfort him by explaining, “Neil it’s not possible to explain all human behaviour through biology.”
De Heer claims *Bad Boy Bubby* is more about childhood than any film he had made prior (Malone 58). Further, he argues, “the film is about the way we judge people, usually by superficial appearances, almost always by arbitrary standards, often wrongly and unfairly” (Malone 62). Unlike the directors I addressed in the previous chapter, de Heer sought to make an issue film in a “confronting way” (Malone 59).32 He did not attempt to inscribe taste to make it entertaining.

Critics appreciated that not everyone would enjoy *Bad Boy Bubby*, due to its confronting material. Phil Herring suggested that the subject matter would “discomfort most viewers” (*Bad Boy Bubby Reviewed*). David Stratton described the film as daring and provocative, interpreting it as a critique on contemporary Australian life, and likewise warned that it was a confronting viewing experience (*Bad Boy Bubby*). Despite its difficult subject matter, the film received many favourable reviews from critics, who saw aspects of social problematisation in its thematic and stylistic treatment of a man who knew no judgement.

However, academic discourse has reacted differently and offered readings informed by various established cultural theories, which invariably have an ableist focus. For example, although David Callahan describes the film as “powerful” (108) and recognises the social commentary it makes, he also argues that films such as *Bad Boy Bubby* and interestingly, *Angel Baby*, ultimately allow filmmakers to gloss over

---

32Again, while Wright did seek to confront his audience with *Romper Stomper*, this confrontation disregarded disability and indeed used impairment to rehabilitate several characters and a minority group.
issues of ethnicity and locate social problems within the personal domain. He does not see Bubby as representative of any social group (108). The following reading of *Bad Boy Bubby* will attempt to subvert some of these arguments and map a social space for a disability identity in Australian national cinema during the 1990s.

Bubby could be interpreted as being intellectually impaired (Ferrier 67), but further reflection reveals that Bubby is merely asocial: he does not know how the world expects him to behave. He doesn’t know about the established social systems that dictate norms and acceptable behaviour. It is only later as “the world or rather the people within it teach Bubby how to be [that...] he learns from them how to behave.” (*Director’s Statement*)

In *A Feminist Perspective*, Jenny Morris contends that ugliness and evil are defined by the presence of impairment. Further, she suggests that this makes more of a comment on the attitudes of nondisabled people than the experiences of disabled people (22). As impairment is repeatedly used as an evil metaphor, this cultural stereotype is confirmed. More recently, impairment has denoted dependency and lack of autonomy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, disability as a metaphor for evil has been identified separately by Barnes (*Disabling Imagery and the Media* 11), Longmore (*Screening Stereotypes* 66) and Shakespeare (*Art and Lies?* 165). The

---

33 In this way Bubby is similar to Herzog’s, *The Enigma of Kasper Hauser* (1974), in which a man in his thirties has been confined to an empty, windowless room his entire life. As a result he can not envision the world around him, due to a total lack of human interaction. *Bad Boy Bubby* problematises a number of features also evident in Herzog’s film, including mockery, emotional growth, familial interaction, innocence, judgement, and fear resulting in murder.
reputation of a serial killer (the ‘clingwrap killer’) that Bubby obtains after murdering his and Angel’s parents arguably conforms to this stereotype. However, this narrative offers a problematisation of this stereotype and the way society constructs metaphors through cultural representations.

Bubby has a very limited point of reference. He has known only his mother and as such has no way of judging or even understanding the world. The peculiarities and inconsistencies of society are viewed through Bubby’s eyes. This is a recurring feature of de Heer’s work as seen in the girl in The Quiet Room, who is puzzled by the activities of adults, “What are you supposed to do with adults who behave like kids? Kids who don’t talk anymore?” Likewise, in Epsilon, the woman from Epsilon expresses disbelief at the way people from Earth treat their own planet: “‘the Earth Mentality’ is the worst insult there is. Intelligent life decided Earth was beyond help.”

Although de Heer is concerned with the theme of childhood, aspects of Bad Boy Bubby adhere to the social theory of disability. Bubby’s interaction with severely impaired characters exemplifies this, particularly his presexual relationship with an impaired character named Rachael. His total acceptance of her demonstrates
Chapter 5 This Dance Ain’t no Pretty Waltz

society’s ableist structures. Bubby, who is naïve and unaccustomed to societal rules, is able to communicate easily with Rachael. Rachael lives in a home for severely impaired adults who are separated from society, and no other characters except for those in paid positions try to communicate with them. Even then, despite their training, the professionals do not understand her.

In his director’s statement for the London Film Festival Guide, de Heer claims the character of Bubby is a true innocent:

Bubby has only met one other person in his life, on whom he is completely dependent. He has a very narrow value system, but one that is uncorrupted by TV, radio, books, pictures. He is uncorrupted by the pressure to conform, by aspiration. He has no real basis for comparison, therefore no real basis for making judgements about people.

Bubby is untrained in society’s protocols and behaves in a manner not suitable for a man of his age. He copies other people and repeats what they say even if it does not fit the context of the conversation; for example, he tells a woman at dinner, “You’ve got great tits Flo”. In addition, he carries his dead cat around with him wrapped in glad wrap. Audiences are also subjected to images of Bubby’s dead parents as

34 I would again like to draw on this audience response to Bubby’s relationship with disabled characters posted on the Oz Film Database:

Upon killing his mother and father with cling wrap, he ventures outside and here we are taken on a journey with Bubby as he struggles to come to terms with life outside his apartment. Bubby has a tendency to repeat what others have spoken to him, or what he has heard, and much of his dialogue is this. He then decides to go under the persona of ‘Pop’, he joins a pub band, he orders cats pizzas, he learns to communicate with disabled people who cannot communicate as well as others, and then falls in love with the nurse who looks after them. (Dunlop)

This reaction draws on several features of the personal tragedy mode of disability, including primarily the causality of disability. Dunlop locates disability in the damaged body as he refers to people who can not communicate as well as others, rather than the idea that de Heer puts forward that people do not communicate with the disabled. Further, the carer is of more importance than the disabled individual. Bubby sees both Angel and Rachael as attractive women; he just loves Angel and respects Rachael for loving him, although he does not feel the same way towards her.
corpses. These images work together to remind the audience of their own fragile mortality.

Bubby is socially inept and his sexual preferences are considered ‘unconventional’ (O’Regan *Australian National Cinema* 246). However, just as his lack of understanding of social rules heightens his sensitivity to the marginalised, his cluelessness as to what is sexually desirable positions him as more sexually stable than some of the other characters. Bubby is attracted to Angel who is overweight, and turns down a threesome with two conventionally attractive females because he thinks their breasts are too small (they think he must be a virgin). Early in the film, Bubby has a sexual encounter with a woman in the Salvation Army; she sings a song for Jesus as they have sex. It is she, a character highly trained in society’s moral code, who is constructed as sexually abnormal.35

Due to Bubby’s total lack of socialisation, he treats everyone he meets equally. After returning to the punk rock band having just met the group of disabled people, he demonstrates his total acceptance of them by mimicking the disabled people in his punk routine in exactly the same way he mimics everyone else he has met. Throughout the film, rather than conversing with people, Bubby simply repeats what they say. He gains both entry to certain groups via this method (The Salvation Army, the punk rock band, and rich yuppies) and exclusion (Pop). However, rather than simply mimic the disabled as he does everybody else, he converses with

35 Likewise Ma/Flo subjects Bubby to strong religious beliefs. She tells him that Jesus can see everything he does through the crucifix, which ironically does not have a head on the statue of Jesus.
them. This highlights issues of communication, and the difficulties disabled people experience on top of their impairments when attempting to communicate with the able-bodied. I will address this in greater depth later in this chapter when I turn to a close textual analysis of Dance Me To My Song, another of de Heer’s works that highlights a social model of disability. Issues of communication that are often addressed in de Heer’s works (Dingo; Bad Boy Bubby; The Quiet Room; The Tracker; The Old Man Who Read Love Stories; Alexandra’s Project) are particularly suited to the impairment (cerebral palsy) of the protagonist of Dance Me To My Song. Communication is of specific concern to disabled people who are spoken for or silenced.

Bad Boy Bubby, although not specifically about a disabled character, highlights identity as socially constructed and subverts many of the ableist myths usually perpetuated by Australian national cinema. Instead of being used to rehabilitate a previously marginalised other, Bad Boy Bubby uses a disability identity to expand a diverse Australian national identity to include disability. Although most evident in terms of narrativity, a more diverse cinematic interpretation of disability is encouraged by the use of wider shots which encourage movement in the frame. Although these shots do not place an investigative gaze on the impaired body, they do not deny the existence of impairment either, and in fact force the audience to consider

36 I would like to thank Laura Smith for this insight.
their own mortality in a way that does not perpetuate fear of the disabled. This cinematic technique was likewise utilised in *Struck By Lightning*.

### 5.5 Dance Me To My Song

In *A Feminist Perspective*, Jenny Morris draws on the work of Dai Thompson and suggests media representations of disability are limited and generally only in the form of ‘pathetic little cripple children’, ‘blind beggars’, or ‘brave war heroes’ (27). In addition, an individual’s anger is never seen. Thus instead of acknowledging the basic humanity of people with impairments, they are constructed as helpless things who deserve pity, or ‘super cripples’ gallantly fighting to overcome insurmountable odds. Behind these constructions is the mindset that it is horrible to be disabled and disabled people can, if they try hard enough, look almost ‘normal’. These issues are addressed and problematised in de Heer’s film, *Dance Me To My Song*.

Julia is severely impaired and, in order to live alone requires a carer. Therefore through the provision of something extra (an entitlement — not charity) Julia gains equality. In order for this to happen Julia’s impairments must be acknowledged and she is not required to comply with the same requirements as an able-bodied person. Her carer, Madeline, is manipulative, lonely and bitter, and tries to get Julia to depend on her more than she needs to through mistreatment. Julia and Madeline both fall for Eddie, a man with questionable connections who forms a friendship with Julia. By sleeping with him first, Madeline steals him from Julia, but then Julia steals him back.
While *Dance Me to my Song* could be accused of adopting the ‘super cripple’ format — it has all the features of the inspirational role — the focus on disabling structures and prejudice prevents this classification. Most critics, however, have not discovered the discourse that would enable a more political reading that problematises able-bodied society, and their comments tend toward sentimentality. As Louise Keller writes:

[Dance Me To My Song] is a startling look beyond the obvious physical handicap and explores the intricacies of a strong mind that battles against totally inconceivable odds, and manages to overcome being a victim. (*Dance Me To My Song*)

In Andrew Urban’s synopsis of the film, he writes: “Julia is crippled with cerebral palsy, lives in a wheelchair, waits for her carer to come and clean her, feed her, in a daily cycle” (*Dance Me To My Song*). Thus, these critics are operating within the only disability discourse (personal tragedy) available to them, and that is to see Julia as refusing to be a victim, but helpless nevertheless.

Clearly, Julia does not *live* in a wheelchair; she lives in a house and uses a wheelchair for mobility. According to the social model, Julia does not live in a wheelchair any more than Madeline lives in shoes, and this is demonstrated in *Dance Me To My Song*. As de Heer contends, “She’s just Julia, no longer the disabled character any more than Madeline is the character with brown hair or Eddie is the character with the muscular body” (*Dance Me To My Song*). Additionally,
Julia does not wait for Madeline, she goes outside and sits in the sun (where she met Eddie) and often sees Rix and has a few drinks.

Jenny Morris argues that super cripple stories are comforting because the nondisabled world finds disability and injury difficult to understand. Other people’s pain is frightening, and therefore most people want to deny it could happen to them, because lack of control is frightening, particularly if it means dependency. Stories of overcoming lessen this fear of disability and provide greater entertainment value. However, they also assure nondisabled people of their normality. Yet *Dance Me To My Song* is not an overcoming story, as Urban summarises an interview with de Heer: “Rose and Stahl embarked on a script, believing that a film about a woman like Rose could work; but it had to be a dramatic story, not another ‘disability’ film” (*Dance Me To My Song*).³⁷

Morris also suggests that the perception of disabled women is that they are either pitiful, full of pain, (a senseless tragedy) or inspirational beings deserving awe (*A Feminist Perspective* 27). Julia is presented as uncomfortable and perhaps in pain frequently throughout the film, but this is a reality that can not be ignored. In fact, Julia’s constant laboured breathing is heard throughout the entire film, and in this way impairment is not aestheticised. Thus the film also reflects the new developments of the social model which include impairment effects. While her

³⁷ The ‘disability’ films de Heer refers to are films that ascribe to the stereotypical super cripple role. Impaired people are seduced into this role as it seems to be the only positive role that is available to them, but it separates them from other disabled people and offers only a conditional acceptance.
impairments impact significantly on her daily life, Julia’s struggle is shown to result from outside disabling barriers.

Further, certain scenes depicting Julia as suffering are intended to demonstrate the different social positions of the impaired and the nondisabled, as well as Julia’s specific need for a carer so that she can operate on an equal level to nondisabled members of the community. For example, the film opens with laboured breathing and then Julia appears on scene looking uncomfortable in bed. This scene is juxtaposed with images of Madeline, who is snugly covered by a huge doona. Furthermore, she is ignoring the beeping alarm clock, until which time she gets up to go to the toilet. Meanwhile, Julia continues to look uneasy in bed. Finally, while staring at herself in the mirror eating vegemite toast slowly, Madeline at last remembers Julia.

The difference in Madeline and Julia’s morning routines is huge, Julia’s being made extremely more difficult by Madeline’s harsh treatment of her. As Susan Wendell suggests:

> people with disabilities often regard the accommodations they make to their physical conditions as ordinary living arrangements and their lives as ordinary lives, despite their medicalization by professionals and most people’s insistence that they are unusually helpless or dependent. (30)

As Madeline and Julia finally move through Julia’s morning routine, it becomes apparent that Julia must use ‘accommodations’ to perform the same activities as
Madeline. De Heer lingers on Madeline’s attitude and rhetoric of dependence to demonstrate how disabling her prejudice is for Julia.

Julia’s friendships with Eddie and Rix also demonstrate this point, as neither indicates resentment at Julia’s mode of ‘ability’. Rix goes out joy-riding with Julia on her commode while Julia is in her wheelchair, and laughs at her misspelling words on her voice synthesizer while drunk. Eddie, on the other hand, assisted Julia going to the toilet on their second meeting, after Madeline had again left her alone.\textsuperscript{38}

Jenny Morris cites Klobas as identifying a common theme in the filmic portrayal of disability being a nondisabled person acting as a catalyst for the disabled person to come to terms with their disability by addressing their anger and bitterness. *Dance Me To My Song* reverses this portrayal as nondisabled characters appear to draw strength from Julia, arguably the strongest personality in the film. Able-bodied Madeline is angry and bitter and through her bitterness tries to make Julia believe she can not function without her:

> you don’t understand do ya? If it wasn’t for people like me, people like you would be stuck. They’d still have you back in that institution. All I have to do is resign and then back you’d go. You couldn’t have your independence without me.

Ironically, when Julia decides to fire Madeline despite the possibility of returning to ‘that institution’ (Seawinds), it is Madeline who is ‘stuck’ and begs for her job back;

\textsuperscript{38} The narrative also highlights the fact that films have the ability to hold back certain information. Rix suggests to Julia she herself isn’t as perfect as Julia is making her out to be, using her behaviour in the morning as an example.
Julia has found increasing confidence in herself as a person — both as a sexual person and a disabled person.

Throughout the film Madeline, whose love life is always in a state of disarray, continually tells Julia that Eddie would never look at her, or else would get bored with her quickly. Madeline’s angst at the state of her love life, is seen in her placing all her self worth in the ability to keep hold of a man, and her projecting her inadequacies elsewhere:

why can’t I get a decent man? I know I’m good looking. I know I’m good in bed. I can’t understand it; there must be something else wrong with me. At least I’m better off than you I suppose.

Julia has quiet confidence in herself and is able to ‘steal’ Eddie from Madeline simply because of this assuredness and willingness to share with him her intimate hopes and dreams. Madeline, on the other hand, is guarded and will not allow Eddie to speak to her about herself or Julia. Julia is open and strong in her identity as a disabled woman, and Eddie has no option but to accept this identity. Whereas Madeline, who has little self-confidence despite her bravado, was only able to seduce Eddie by pretending to be Julia on the phone in order to get him to come to the house.

Despite the fact that sexuality, like disability, is considered a ‘personal problem’ that should be dealt with at an individual level (Wendell 128), the disability and
sexuality cleavage is one of the first sites of a political representation of disability. As Paul Longmore writes:

> [r]ecently, a few productions have presented people with physical impairments as attractive and sexual. What distinguishes these is the self-assurance of the disabled characters regarding their own sexuality and romantic value. They enter relationships out of the strength of their own identities as persons with disabilities. (*Screening Stereotypes* 73)

Julia is self-assured in knowing what she has to offer a relationship — with anyone, not just Eddie. Throughout the whole film we see the world from Julia’s perspective, the point of view shots are in large part restricted to what Julia sees, taking the gaze off her impaired body.

Some critics find fault in de Heer’s characterisation of Eddie, who it has been argued is not provided with enough motivation for a main character. As Stratton writes:

> [i]f the film has a flaw, it’s in the rather shallow character of Eddie, who’s seen entirely from Julia’s perspective. We’re never told who he is, what he does or how he feels about Julia, and must take everything at face value. (Variety 2)

However, I would argue this is the point of *Dance Me To My Song*: it does not matter that Eddie is a rather shallow character, it is Julia’s confidence and Madeline’s prejudice that are of most importance.

---

39 This can be seen in her interactions with Madeline and Rix. Despite Madeline’s harsh treatment toward her, Julia seems to understand that Madeline is experiences a different kind of suffering. When with Rix, Julia remains constant in her identity as a drinking buddy, even trying to seduce Rix at one stage.
For Jenny Morris, films about disability are not about emotions and experiences. Rather, they are about how the nondisabled world reacts to disability and what it means to them. While *Dance* does address how nondisabled people react to impairment, this is invoked through what it means to Julia. For instance, when Julia tells Eddie she “needs to poo”, he reacts by saying he doesn’t know how she does it. She says, “Same as you”.

After helping her, he claims he has found a new respect for Madeline, despite having just found Julia trapped in her house with the wheel-lock on her chair. The irony is highlighted when Eddie finds a condom and asks if its Madeline’s — even though he is in Julia’s bathroom. Thus, at first, Eddie ascribes to all the same stereotypes and prejudices Madeline attempts to perpetuate regarding Julia. However, as the film progresses he comes to recognise that Julia’s experiences and emotions are of most importance. For example, while in a corner shop getting an ice cream he agrees with Julia who thinks the prices are too high and later apologises for talking about her as though she were not there. Thus, I disagree with Stratton’s ‘flaw’, because Eddie’s past is somewhat irrelevant as de Heer is most concerned with Eddie’s developing friendship with Julia, and his emerging respect for the disabled as they experience daily prejudice.

Likewise, the shopkeeper ascribes to the belief identified by Morris that impairments are personal problems related to individual’s attitudes. She addresses Eddie in an overly pleasant and charitable way regarding Julia, but does not speak to
her herself, and tells them to leave after Julia swears. This shopkeeper would rather Julia leave her store as she attempts to avoid having to gaze on a disabled person. The message is that disabled people are usually isolated from society. To the shopkeeper Julia has a bad attitude; perhaps she hasn’t come to terms with her disability, hasn’t overcome it. Stigmatized individuals are required to attempt to pass or be pleasant.

Often in cinema non-disabled characters are portrayed as more ‘expert’ than disabled characters. This is problematised in Dance Me To My Song as Madeline is shown to be more dependent on Julia than Julia is on her, despite Madeline’s position as carer. After being date-raped Madeline returns to Julia’s for support and comfort and cuddles up to her in bed. Julia, familiar with feelings of loneliness places her hand on Madeline’s in a show of support.40

In summary, in the previous chapter, I discussed filmmakers who strived to make disability entertaining and therefore easier to watch by aestheticing impairments, along with others who place an investigative gaze on impairment in a similar

40 While in some respects the role reversal between popular cinematic representations of the able and the disabled is empowering in this film, I feel that this date-rape punishment could be going too far. Perhaps this scene is intended to demonstrate that while Madeline thinks she’s better off than Julia, (being good looking and good in bed), she is treated as though she is worthless by the men in her life. Julia, on the other hand, knows that she is not worthless as she has pride in her disability identity. Alternatively, this scene may have been intended as a parallelism to the scene in which Madeline accuses Eddie of raping Julia and being a sexual degenerate because he finds a disabled woman attractive. Again, Julia demonstrates more personal strength in these two scenes. Despite these two interpretations, I feel that this scene somewhat detracts from the overall strength of the film and that Madeline is exploited to rehabilitate Julia’s disability identity.
fashion to the male gaze as identified by Mulvey. De Heer does neither in this film. *Mise en scene* does not attempt to aestheticise Julia. Her body is always visibly impaired. However, shots are neither correspondingly investigative either, placing undue attention on impairment.

De Heer prefers to frame Julia in mid-shots. In the scene in which Madeline leaves Julia sitting on the toilet as she steals her voice synthesiser to place a phoney message of approval to the agency at which Madeline works, the camera slowly closes in on Julia’s face to show her emotions. We come to know Julia through her consistent personality, camera and editing, not through exploitative gazing on her impairment as we did with Sophie in *Lucky Break*. In addition, Julia is not expected to attempt to pass. Arguably the extent of her impairments prevents passing as a possibility, but Julia also refuses to ascribe to the cheerful cripple identity, accepting her position in the world, overcoming her disability. She finds stability in her disability identity.41

**5.6 Conclusion**

The more popular [range of marginal issues explored in cinema are] race, gender and sexual difference. Supposedly topics falling into the category of illness, physical and mental disabilities and society’s treatment of the aged and the dying though needing discussion, lack the glamour and the fashionably political tensions.

---

41 Despite applying an auteurist reading to *Dance Me to My Song*, I do not wish to diminish Heather Rose’s important creative contribution. She co-wrote the script and performed a significant part in the project’s realisation by taking on the role of Julia. However, in undertaking a close textual reading of *Dance Me to My Song* my focus was on the visual manifestation of the story (in line with auteurism) in the context of de Heer’s other works.
A film that deals with any of these issues is therefore immediately important, if only because it is being brave. (Tanskaya 59)

Despite our different focus, I have quoted Tanskaya because I believe she articulates my concerns throughout this chapter, and indeed the entire thesis, and offers another possible direction for social problematisation — the aged.

Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated the way two filmmakers, as auteurs, represented disability using the social model of disability, including a politicisation of the current personal tragedy construction. While critics have tended to focus on the positive–negative divide, I have attempted to demonstrate the contextual influences of production, text and reception. Thus directors, cultural context and audience reception all play a part in the possibility of bringing social change to the discourse of disability in Australian national cinema.42

Although Australian filmmakers attempted to incorporate disability as a diverse

---

42 Arguably, a focus on auteursim implies a contradiction in my thesis as auteurs are considered to have superior filmmaking abilities. However, this is not my argument. Auteurism is a framework I employed to avoid dividing representations into ‘good’ or ‘bad’ categories in response to Shakespeare’s framework that filmmaker, text and reception should be considered when undertaking a disability reading of films. He fears that the current focus on good and bad representation is discouraging filmmakers from representing disability at all. He argues that a focus on production, text and reception will allow critical analysis without discouraging filmmakers (Art and Lies 165). His framework is very similar to the current theories around auteurism when production, text and reception are all considered (Hayward Cinema Studies 26).

Other authors have made a connection between auteursim and disability without using the social model of disability. For example Verhoeven (1999) examines the work of Ken G. Hall in the 1930s and 1940s within the context of Australian national cinema at that time. She focuses on Hall’s repeated reference to disability/impairment as him striving to emphasise his creativity in a national cinema and articulate wider cultural doubt about representation itself. Verhoeven argues that like his impaired characters, Hall’s films should be considered within the context of a national cinema, not fully formed, “a disfigured vestige, a shadow, a cinema not-quite-there” (Verhoeven When Familiarity Breeds 65). My thesis is a critique against this kind of analysis, as it does not address the social construction of disability. As argued throughout this thesis, the use of impairment as a visual shortcut contributes to social disablement.
identity in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, their focus was on ‘positive’ representations, which were invariably framed within a medical, individualistic, personal tragedy model. A positive representation is as equally constructed in cinema as are images of ‘reality’. I have compared films that adopt a personal tragedy mode of representation with those that follow the social theory in order to highlight the futility of encouraging positive representations of disabled people re-entering society. Instead, the disability movement should focus attention on the intersection between disability and impairment and the role cinema plays in the social construction of disability.

Although I have mainly focused on the intentions of the filmmakers, I have also recognised the importance of audience response and critical reception in establishing a disability identity as represented in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. While it has been argued (Darke *The Cinematic Construction of Physical Disability*) that an investigation of the audience and critical reception is not necessary to a discussion of the ideology around disability representation in cinema, I disagree. While wanting to effect social change is an important starting point for the filmmaker, audience reception is crucial to the acceptance of this change. An active audience engaged in politics accepts social responsibility (Hevey *Controlling Interests* 213).

Continuing the film analysis, this chapter has been significant in identifying films that reject the personal tragedy model and offer a cinematic disability culture in line
with multiculturalism. Drawing on auteur theories — most notably the third stage, which recognises audience reception as significant — this chapter highlights the importance of self-consciousness when attempting to reject an unconscious ideology.

While many Australian films made during the 1990s use impairment to encourage diversity in another area of minority interests only a handful name the struggle between people with impairments and disabling society. Therefore the motivations of the filmmaker must be considered, as naming this struggle is a conscious, political decision and therefore relevant to discussions of auteurism. While an ableist representation of disability reflects the filmmaker’s fear of disability, a social interpretation displays a fascination on the part of the filmmaker, but not a fear.

A disability identity exists in films such as Dance Me To My Song, Bad Boy Bubby, Lilian’s Story, and Struck By Lightning. These films highlight the disabling structures in society and cinema. Both Rolf de Heer and Jerzy Domaradzki use innovative stylistic techniques to remove the focus of disability away from the body and place it onto society. However, the audience and critics must be willing to accept these representations that problematise the ideology that is fundamental to ideals of normality upon which definitions of nationhood and Australianness rest.
Conclusion

“This is a country that honours ordinariness above all else”
Meg in Hotel Sorento (1994)

Australian cinema is a hybrid form made of objects, people, stories and problem solving. It is a social fact, a figure of discourse, a site for a range of actions and the domain of a range of problematisations.
(O’Regan Australian National Cinema 10)

Australian films, which have been the focus of this thesis, conform to O’Regan’s notion of the hybridity of cinema with relation to social problematisation. In his explanation of his own theorisation of Australian national cinema, O’Regan remarks on the importance of both the inward and outward analysis that I have concentrated on throughout this thesis:

Australian cinema is a combination of statuses. It is a naturalized part of the international cinescape, taking its part alongside other national cinemas and Hollywood cinema. It is a social bond uniting (and excluding) diverse people. Australian cinema serves as a vehicle of popular socialization and as a forum for telling uncomfortable truths about its society. Australian films and film institutions negotiate cleavages of ethnicity, gender, race, class and nation. It is an object of knowledge which narratively and discursively connects Australia, society, the cinema, genre and various cultural differences. It is a domain of problem solving which includes strategies for economic viability, excellence, industry training and equal opportunity for disadvantaged minorities. (Australian National Cinema 10)

Despite his failure to mention disability — my area of inquiry — I have quoted O’Regan at length to demonstrate the suitability of including disability as a diversity issue in Australian national cinema. However, regardless of its similarity to these other cleavages O’Regan describes, particularly in the areas of economics, training,
Conclusion

and equal opportunity, disability was not included as a diversity issue in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. Instead, disability was used to open up discussions around other minority groups that are striving for equal opportunity. These social problematisations that excluded disability were frequently premised on constructions of nationhood. The rehabilitation of ethnic minorities occurs in *Romper Stomper*, *Death in Brunswick* and *Traps*, while women are welcomed into a European settler aesthetic in *The Well* and *In the Winter Dark*. Impairment is used in *Lucky Break* and *Angel Baby* to Australianise the romantic comedy genre alongside and in opposition to international interpretations. In *The Sum of Us*, Jeff achieves equal status in a masculine society when his father Harry suffers a stroke and becomes unable to care for himself. Opportunities for marginalised groups are created in these films at the expense of a social problematisation of disability, which remains located in the body.

The overarching aim of this thesis has been to show the ways Australian national cinema has devalued a disability identity by perpetuating the personal tragedy mode of disability which places causality for exclusion from society in a damaged body. I have argued that developing a disability identity reveals the ideology behind the way Australians present ourselves amongst ourselves and in the international arena. Jane Mills also hints at the importance of cultural representation as it contributes to an Australian identity or construction of normality when she observes:

> o]ur national cinema plays a vital role in our cultural heritage and in showing us what it is to be Australian. But the picture can be blurred by unruly forces including competing artistic aims, inconstant personal tastes, political vagaries, constantly
changing priorities in screen education and training, and technological innovations and market forces. (Martin The Mad Max Movies v)

Throughout this thesis I have addressed how these unruly forces have contributed to an exclusion of disability from what it is to be Australian, and by extension the way disability has been invoked both thematically and stylistically to rehabilitate a previously marginalised cultural heritage.

In Chapter One on Cultural Changes I discussed the social, political, and technological changes occurring in Australian society during the 1990s. More specifically, I argued that despite their focus on social change and pluralism, these changes encouraged an individualistic model of disability which locates the problem in the damaged body. Chapter Two, Disability Debates, extended the social theory of disability introduced in the first chapter to a method of film analysis that is currently being debated internationally. This theory works on the premise that disability is a problem with society, as it refuses to recognise people who have impairments as viable, contributing members. Chapter Three, Australian National Cinema considered the importance of national identity and revealed the way in which current theorisation and representation around Australian national cinema was implicated in an exclusion of disability from issues of diversity. In Chapter Four, This Film Is Not About Disability I undertook close textual investigations of three 1990s Australian films that used a personal tragedy mode of representation to offer a diverse identity that did not include disability. I also presented a cohesive method of analysis that addressed production, text and reception when considering
disability and representations of nationhood in Australia. And finally, Chapter Five, *This Dance Ain’t No Pretty Waltz*, featured auteur filmmakers who were concerned with diversity yet rejected the tragedy model and offered a cinematic disability culture as a part of multiculturalism. Throughout these chapters, I highlighted how disability as a social construction can be seen in the peripheral disability identity evident in Australian national cinema during the 1990s, despite the cinema of this period having a reputation for being diverse and multicultural.

In addition to this, throughout the dissertation I have shown the ways in which disability, as a personal tragedy, is a social construction that is ideologically motivated. Cinema is implicit in this construction as “films are the unconscious instruments of the ideology, which produces them” (Comolli and Narboni 683). Disability has always been represented in the movies, and as Martin Norden in *The Cinema of Isolation* finds, “even as the first motion pictures flickered across European and American screens, filmmakers were turning to the world of physical disability issues for exploitable material” (14). In 1898, for example, Thomas Edison’s short film, *Fake Beggar*, told the story of a beggar who pretends to be blind and is caught out and comically chased by a policeman. In this way, the first disability film utilised two stereotypes still prevalent today. Firstly, disability was a source of humour, and secondly, there emerged the stereotype of nondisabled people pretending to be disabled in order to manipulate or abuse the ‘generosity’ of the community. Disability continues to be individualised in cinema in this way and civil rights are regarded as either charity or an unfair advantage. Therefore, this
thesis aimed to significantly extend knowledge in the area of Australian national cinema and disability studies more generally.

In this thesis I argued that while Australian national cinema was committed to serving under-represented populations during the 1990s, its interest in disability was founded in a medical model and not a social one. The major emphasis of disability studies is shifting from a medical to a social model and this has implications for the film industry. However, with a few exceptions, such a shift was not evident in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. This is related to Liz Ferrier’s contention that:

> [t]he image of the vulnerable body conveys anxiety about the shifting ground within and without Australia’s cultural industries, and a sense of loss of control over cultural boundaries. Uncertainty about boundaries is linked with uncertainty about audiences – local, national and international. (63)

This quote from Ferrier touches on several of this thesis’ concerns, particularly my argument that both semantic and syntactic elements of a film text must be considered when addressing a social problematisation (Altman 115). In this context, Ferrier also notes the social construction of disability as it is influenced by changes in the national film industry, and the relevance of production, text and reception in the perpetuation of ideology. In addition, it considers the way Australian national cinema during the 1990s strived to be both national and international.

Since the 1970s and the revival of the Australian film industry, (following its decline in the 1930s), the types of films being produced in Australia have changed
quite significantly. As a result, Australian cinema can no longer be considered as either cultural or commercial in the way Dermody and Jacka suggested during the 1980s. While Verhoeven recommends a companion to Dermody and Jacka’s two-model theorisation that recognises the 1990s context of globalisation and the cinematic maturity of Australian directors, O’Regan considers ethnicity to be the most illuminating when considering political issues and highlights the most prevalent social concerns problematisations in Australia during this period. A consideration of disability amongst these problematisations of Australian nationhood during the 1990s recognises the national and international concerns of the industry as it began to depend less on government support and sought funding from outside sources. The above quote from Ferrier suggests cultural stereotypes of disability as a weakness or lack of character and control both thematically and stylistically impacted the narratives being produced in the 1990s.

I have referred obliquely to bad parenting as a thematic and stylistic tendency in the representation of disability (particularly when considering causation) in films made in Australian national cinema during the 1990s. Likewise, O’Regan recognises the role of bad parenting in his theorisation of subcultural groups and contends that the impact of the actions of parents is a site for the social problematisation of the disabled (Australian National Cinema 263). Further, Ferrier poses a similar argument to suggest disability can frequently be blamed on bad parenting, particularly bad fathers (60). Throughout the preceding chapters I often made references to sexual abuse and identified a nexus between disability, sexual abuse
and bad fathers. However, I was not able to go into great depth as this is a topic peripheral to my own. In concluding this thesis I recommend further investigation of this particular narrative trope. An incorporation of disability into O’Regan’s model of nationhood would enable such a study.

Although I focused on the 1990s throughout this thesis, similar tendencies can be seen in more recent films. In Walk The Talk (2000) impairment is addressed thematically, a disabled woman is taken advantage of and redundantly fulfills stereotypes of vulnerability and femininity, and disability is again located in the damaged body. Likewise in Moulin Rouge! (2001) impairment is used stylistically to invoke an atmosphere of excess and debauchery, particularly in a sexual context. However, a scene in the recent Australian film, Thunderstruck (2004), reflects a social model of disability while invoking traditional images of Australian national identity. Thunderstruck has everything I would want to see in an Aussie film: bogans, mateship, loving your brother’s best mate for over ten years, being stuck at home with your olds, acca dacca, and a wonderful scene where a disabled rugby team show up an able-bodied loser with a bad attitude. The rugby team combine impairment effect (running their wheelchairs into Sam’s legs, taunting him as to how he feels not having use of his legs), disabling language (“walk away” and “stand up for ourselves”), and sport with Australian national identity to embrace a disability culture. This national identity, inclusive of disability does not rehabilitate another minority group and instead offers pride in a disability identity. However, Quentin (an icon of the ‘little Aussie Battler’ from his childhood days on A Current
Affair), who appears in this key sequence, rejects any association with the ‘mentally ill’, who throughout this thesis I have argued should be included in a social model of disability that recognises people with both physical and mental impairments.¹

*Under The Radar* (2004) is another recent Australian film with a disability theme. This film has a fairly high profile due to prominent Australian comedian Steady Eddy playing one of the lead characters. After Brendan, a promising young surfer, assaults a young man with Downs Syndrome who drops in on him in the surf, he is sentenced to a month’s community service at a home for the intellectually disabled. Rather than miss out on an important surfing competition while serving out his community service, Brendan offers to take Adrian (who has a short-term memory disorder) to the beach. Trevor, a resident who has cerebral palsy, invites himself along. The trio then pick up a hitchhiker Jo, who happens to be a mobster’s girlfriend. After Adrian witnesses a murder they are held hostage by two different groups of gangsters.

Although the film ascribes to Hevey’s recommendation with respect to bad taste and social change, and does not objectify the impaired body, there is a discontinuity regarding intellectual verses physical impairment, which the film does not entirely negotiate. *Under The Radar* relies on ironic humour; as Trevor attempts to untie

¹ Quentin himself is a real-life example of the suggestion in *Struck By Lightning* that people are comfortable supporting disabled children because they are cute and are never considered as growing into adults. Quentin practically grew up on *A Current Affair*, however, he was largely forgotten as an adult. He has gained recent exposure through his own production company, which satirises Australian (and international) media institutions such as *Big Brother*, *Australian Idol* and *The Academy Awards*. 
Brendan’s hands he says, “my hand’s rooted”, and offers to burn the rope off instead. However, although beginning as a comment on social disablement, the scene in which Trevor drives Brendan’s car ends in such a way as to reinforce the prevailing belief that disabled people can’t drive — a view espoused by the two able-bodied characters. Further, throughout the film Trevor is variously referred to as a “numnut”, “dickhead” and “spastic”, although he is obviously the most astute and sensitive character in the film. At one stage, a mobster admonishes another mobster for calling Trevor a “spastic” and begins to explain that Trevor has cerebral palsy and is therefore not intellectually disabled. However, Trevor lives in a home for the intellectually disabled; thus the film can not resolve this argument as the narrative is likewise guilty of uncertainty when it comes to a distinction between physical and intellectual impairment. Despite this tendency, the film is successful in opening areas of debate around the social disablement of disabled people. This is largely due to the social, political, and technological changes that occurred in Australia during the 1990s and the shifting social position of disabled people.

Social, political, and technological changes that occurred in Australia and internationally during the 1990s contributed to an environment in which disability defined as personal tragedy was represented in the national cinema. During the 1990s Australian national cinema was used as a vehicle of problematisation for issues of diversity, especially as they pertained to nationhood or national identity.
At the same time a social theory of disability was emerging internationally, and as this theory was applied to film studies, several contradictions and inconsistencies emerged. While borrowing from the overarching theory that society must take responsibility for disability (structural and ideological exclusion) rather than an individual for their damaged body, I constructed a method of film analysis specific to the Australian example during the period of the 1990s. Drawing on several film theories that have been otherwise critically ignored by disability theorists (including auteurism, national cinema, and neoformalism) I assessed areas of local and international concern. Analyses of nationalism are what is primarily missing from international research and a social understanding of disability is chiefly absent from local research. Power and constructions of nationhood are linked to disability and ideals of ‘them’ and ‘us’.

Curiously, I witnessed a similar ideological negotiation in a discussion at a conference I attended in Missouri two years ago. Despite the promise of “diverse views and visions”, following my paper on disability in Romper Stomper it was suggested to me that a discussion of race relations was a more important site of social problematisation within Australian national identity during the 1990s. Further, during a coffee break between sessions, another delegate indicated to me that she thought disability was simply ‘in fashion’ at the moment and as time passed people would again become unconcerned with this variation of problematising the ‘other’.
I have not suggested throughout this thesis that disability is the most significant problematisation of Australian nationhood in the study of Australian national cinema. Rather I have suggested that the exclusion of disability is significant, particularly because impairment as a signifier of weakness has been used to strengthen a multicultural national identity. In a cinema fascinated with social constructions, disability has remained located in the biological. I do agree with the above-mentioned delegate that disability is perhaps in fashion at this time. However, I would argue that this is due to the changing nature of the Australian film industry and the international politicisation of disability — not to mention the social, political, and technological changes — that took place in Australia during the 1990s, and have taken place since.

These changes also affected the social position of the mentally ill and despite the similarities to the social position of people with physical and psychological impairments, a more concentrated study on the mentally ill would be beneficial in relation to Australian national cinema and identity. Recent Australian films such as *Thunderstruck* and *Under The Radar* depict physically impaired characters resenting any conflation with people who have psychological impairments or the mentally ill. Despite my reservations about such resentment the recent additions to the social theory of disability that include a social theory of impairment indicate that a separate study of the position of this minority subgroup is required.


Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. *Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy*. revised. 26 November 2003. fact sheet government web site. Public Affairs Section, Department of Immigration


Bibliography


Keith, Lois. "His Film or Mine?" Disability Arts in London 123 1997: 16-17.


Add the following entries to the bibliography:


---. "Melodrama and Tears." Screen 27.6 1986: 6-23.


---. "The Individual and Social Models of Disability." Joint Workshop of the living options group and the research unit of the Royal College of Physicians, 1990. 17.


Bibliography


A Clockwork Orange. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. 1971

A Fish Called Wanda. Dir. Charles Chrichton. 1988

A Nightmare on Elm Street. Dir. Wes Craven. 1984

A Woman’s Tale. Dir. Paul Cox. 1991

Alexandra’s Project. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 2003

All Men are Liars. Dir. Gerard Lee. 1995


Angel Baby. Dir. Michael Rhymer. 1995

Annie’s Coming Out. Dir. Gil Brealey. 1984


At First Sight. Dir. Irwin Winkler. 1999

Aya. Dir. Solrun Hoaas. 1990

Babe. Dir. Chris Noonan. 1995

Babe: Pig in the City. Dir. George Miller. 1998

Bad Boy Bubby. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 1993


Bedevil. Dir. Tracey Moffatt. 1993


*Filmography*

- *Blackfellas*. Dir. James Ricketson. 1992
- *Black Robe*. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 1991
- *Bliss*. Dir. Ray Lawrence. 1985
- *Body Melt*. Dir. Phillip Brophy. 1993
- *Born on the Fourth July*. Dir. Oliver Stone. 1989
- *Breaker Morant*. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 1980
- *Breaking the Waves*. Dir. Lars von Trier. 1996
- *Caddie*. Dir. Donald Crombie. 1976
- *Cars that ate Paris, The*. Dir. Peter Weir. 1974
- *Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, The*. Dir. Fred Schepisi. 1978
- *Cheaters, The*. Dir. Paulette McDonagh. 1930
- *Cherry Falls*. Dir. Geoffrey Wright. 2000
- *Children of a Lesser God*. Dir. Randa Haines. 1986
- *Club, The*. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 1980
Clerks. Dir. Kevin Smith. 1994

Coming Home. Dir. Hal Ashby. 1978

Cosi. Dir. Mark Joffè. 1996


Crossing, The. Dir. George Ogilvie. 1990

Crocodile Dundee. Dir. Peter Faiman. 1986

Crocodile Dundee II. Dir. John Cornell. 1988

Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles. Dir. Simon Wincer. 2001

Custodian, The. Dir. John Dingwall. 1993

Cut. Dir. Kimble Rendall. 1999

Dad and Dave Come to Town. Dir. Ken G. Hall. 1938


Dark City. Dir. Alex Proyas. 1997

Dating the Enemy. Dir. Megan Simpson Huberman. 1996


Dead to the World. Dir. Ross Gibson. 1990

Deadly. Dir. Esben Storm. 1991

Death in Brunswick. Dir. John Ruane. 1991

Diana and Me. Dir. David Parker. 1997

Dingo. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 1991

Dogwatch. Dir. Laurie McInnes. 1999

Dr. No. Dir. Terence Young. 1962

Dr. Strangelove. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. 1964

Dust off the Wings. Dir. Lee Rogers. 1997

Easy Rider. Dir. Dennis Hopper. 1969


Encounter At Raven’s Gate. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 1988

Enigma of Kasper Hauser, The. Dir. Werner Herzog. 1974

Envy. Dir. Julie Money. 1999


Fake Beggar, The. 1898

Father. Dir. John Power. 1990


Flirting. Dir. John Duigan. 1991

Forrest Gump. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. 1994

Frauds. Stephan Elliott. 1992

Freaks. Dir. Tod Browning. 1932

Garbo. Dir. Ron Cobb. 1992

Gallipoli. Dir. Peter Weir. 1981

Going Down. Dir. Haydn Keenan. 1983

Golden Braid. Dir. Paul Cox. 1990

Green Card. Dir. Peter Weir. 1990

Halloween. Dir. John Carpenter. 1978

Filmography

Head On. Dir. Ana Kokkinos. 1998


Heaven’s Burning. Dir. Craig Lahiff. 1997

Holidays on the River Yarra. Dir. Leo Berkeley. 1990

Holy Smoke. Dir. Jane Campion. 1999

Hotel de Love. Dir. Craig Rosenberg. 1993

Hotel Sorrento. Dir. Richard Franklin. 1995


Idiot Box. Dir. David Caesar. 1996

Interview, The. Dir. Craig Monahan. 1998

In the Winter Dark. Dir. James Bogle. 1998


Kiss or Kill. Dir. Bill Benett. 1997


Life. Dir. Lawrence Johnston. 1996

Light Horsemen, The. Dir. Simon Wincer. 1987

Lilian’s Story. Dir Jerzy Domaradzki. 1995

Looking For Alibrandi. Dir. Kate Woods. 2000

Lorenzo’s Oil. Dir. George Miller. 1992

Love and Other Catastrophes. Dir. Emma-Kate Croghan. 1996

Love in Limbo. Dir. David Ellick. 1992

Love Serenade. Dir. Shirley Barrett. 1996

Lucky Break. Dir. Ben Lewin. 1994
Filmography

*Luk Erosa*. Dir. Jerzy Domazadzki. 1987

*Mad Max*. Dir. George Miller. 1979

*Mad Max 2 The Road Warrior*. Dir. George Miller. 1982

*Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Dir. George Miller and George Ogilvie. 1985


*Man From Snowy River, The*. Dir. George Miller. 1982

*Mary*. Dir. Kay Pavlou. 1994

*Matrix, The*. Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski. 1999


*Me, Myself I*. Dir. Pip Karmel. 1999

*Metal Skin*. Dir. Geoffrey Wright. 1994


*Moulin Rouge!*. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. 2001

*Mr. Accident*. Dir. Yahoo Serious. 1999

*Mr. Reliable*. Dir. Nadia Tass. 1996

*Muggers*. Dir. Dean Murphy. 1999

*Mullet*. Dir. David Caesar. 2001

*Muriel’s Wedding*. Dir. P.J Hogan. 1994

*My Brilliant Career*. Dir. Gillian Armstrong. 1979

*My Left Foot*. Dir. Jim Sheridan. 1989

*My Mother Frank*. Dir. Mark Lamprell. 1999
My One Legged Dream Lover. Dir. Penny Fowler Smith and Chris Olsen. 1998


Nirvana Street Murder. Dir. Aleksi Vellis. 1990


No Worries. Dir. David Elfick. 1993

Occasional Coarse Language. Dir. Brad Hayward. 1998


Paperback Hero. Dir. Antony Bowman. 1998

Paradise Road. Dir. Bruce Beresford. 1997

Patrick. Dir. Richard Franklin. 1978


Picnic at Hanging Rock. Dir. Peter Weir. 1975

Praise. Dir. John Curran. 1998


Radiance. Dir. Rachel Perkins. 1998


Rambo First Blood. Dir. Ted Kotcheff. 1982

Razorback. Dir. Russell Mulchay. 1984

Reckless Kelly. Dir. Yahoo Serious. 1993


Road to Nhill. Dir. Sue Brooks. 1997
Romper Stomper. Dir. Geoffrey Wright. 1992
Sample People. Dir. Clinton Smith. 1999
Secrets. Dir. Michael Pattinson, Michael Pattison. 1992
Sentimental Bloke, The. Dir. Raymond Longford. 1919
Sentimental Bloke, The. Dir. F.W. Thring. 1932
Shine. Dir. Scott Hicks. 1996
Siam Sunset. Dir. John Polson. 1999
Sirens. Dir. John Duigan. 1994
Soft Fruit. Dir. Christina Andreef. 1999
Soldiers of The Cross. Dir. Herbert Booth and Joseph Perry. 1900
Spider and Rose. Dir. Bill Bennett. 1994
Spotswood. Dir. Mark Joffé. 1990
Spur of The Moment. Dir. A.R. Harwood. 1931
Squatter’s Daughter, The. Dir. Ken G. Hall. 1933
Star Wars Episode I - The Phantom Menace. Dir. George Lucas. 1999
Star Wars Episode II – Attack of the Clones. Dir. George Lucas. 2003
Star Wars Episode III – Revenge of the Sith. Dir. George Lucas. 2005
Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope. Dir. George Lucas. 1977
Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi. Dir. George Lucas. 1983
Stone. Dir. Sandy Harbutt. 1974
Stork. Dir. Tim Burstall. 1971
Filmography

Strange Planet. Dir. Emma-Kate Croghan. 1999
Strictly Ballroom. Dir. Baz Lurhman. 1992
Struck By Lightning. Dir. Jerzy Domaradzki. 1990
Sum of Us, The. Dir. Geoff Burton and Kevin Dowling. 1994
Sunday Too Far Away. Dir. Ken Hannam. 1975
Sweetie. Dir. Jane Campion. 1989
Tale of a Tiger. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 1984
Texas Chainsaw Massacre, The. Dir. Tobe Hooper. 1974
Thank God He Met Lizzie. Dir. Cherie Nowlan. 1997
Thelma and Louise. Dir. Ridley Scott. 1991
They’re A Weird Mob. Dir. Michael Powell. 1966
Thunderstruck. Dir. Darren Ashton. 2004
Tiger Island. Dir. Gerald M. Hayle. 1930
Till Human Voices Wake Us. Dir. Michael Petroni. 2001
To Have and to Hold. Dir. John Hillcoat. 1996
Tracker, The. Dir. Rolf de Heer. 2002
Traps. Dir. Pauline Chan. 1993
True Love and Chaos. Dir. Stavros Kazantzidis. 1996
Turtle Beach. Dir. Stephen Wallace. 1991
Two Hands. Dir. Gregor Jordan. 1999
Under The Lighthouse Dancing. Dir. Graeme Rattigan. 1996
**Filmography**

*Under The Radar*. Dir. Evan Clarry. 2004

*Video Fool For Love*. Dir. Robert Gibson. 1995

*Wait Until Dark*. Dir. Terence Young. 1967

*Waiting*. Dir. Jackie McKimmie. 1990

*Walkabout*. Dir. Nicolas Roeg. 1971

*Walk The Talk*. Dir. Shirley Barrett. 2000

*Welcome to Woop Woop*. Dir. Stephan Elliott. 1997


*Wendy Cracked a Walnut*. Dir. Michael Pattinson. 1990

*What I Have Written*. Dir. John Hughes. 1995

*Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* Dir. Robert Aldrich. 1962

*Whose Life is it Anyway?* Dir. John Badham. 1981


*With Both Hands*. Dir. Katie Ellis. 2000