

# L I M I N A

## **The Threshold Moment: Masculinity at Home and on the Road in Australian Cinema**

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*'The Threshold Moment' is a critical interrogation of the performance of masculinities in Australian road-genre cinema. The article scrutinises mythical articulations of national identity to assess the cultural and political significance of masculine conduct and iconography as it is represented in popular narrative film. Viewing the Mad Max trilogy and The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, as well as The Big Steal, The FJ Holden, Backroads, Stone, The Crossing, Metal Skin, Long Weekend and Malcolm, the article explores notions of violence, freedom, family and home. Vehicular masculinities are diagnosed as fantasies in opposition to domesticity, love and success, and this article identifies the mechanisms through which the films command approval for the irresponsibility, loneliness and loss of its heroes. The Australian landscape – its roads, its places, and the spaces in between – serves as a metaphor and an arena for the manufacture of mythical masculinity; a venue from which women are eliminated and difference is quarantined.*

Speed, annihilating distance and duration,  
reduced space to a volatile blur, and  
compressed the time it took for wishes to be  
fulfilled.

Peter Conrad.<sup>1</sup>

As a compelling icon of modernity, the car encapsulates the recklessness, impatience and irrationality of contemporary 'masculinity'. Frantic, and bewildering in its potential for inexhaustible destruction, the motor vehicle drives men through a series of misadventures that are random yet mythically proscribed. Australian highways are punctuated by the percussive and fatal clash of car 'accidents'. But these crashes are not accidental; they are natural, organic, and in the deafening slowness of the impacted moment, they are breathlessly anticipated. In an instant the

freakish horror of highway carnage becomes generic, statistic. And in that infinite, narrow juncture legendary masculinity is exposed and confirmed. Men kill, and are killed, on the vast and limitless lanes that traverse the Australian continent, and the steady rhythm of these 'accidents' becomes the regular beat of Australian masculinity.

Australian roads are hunting-grounds: stages upon which elaborate pursuits and counter-pursuits are played. They are proving-grounds: arenas for displaying unrelenting demonstrations of mythically defined masculinity. In the cities they are tangled, intersecting recurrently with the same sites of action; in the suburbs they circumnavigate the perimeter of the familiar, rarely venturing into unquantifiable or unknowable territory. And in the outback they are endless, promising nameless possibility, freedom, escape. But, in a narrative counterpoint to masculinity itself, each journey is circular. Bob Ellis, cataloguing Australia's cinematic propensity to represent defeated men, wrote of 'the pointlessness of every effort, since nothing ever changes, and you end at your beginning'.<sup>2</sup> Australian roads encourage movement and risk-taking, often frenetic and exhilarating, but lead nowhere.

This article examines masculine vehicular conduct in an inscrutable landscape, a combination which – screened for cinema audiences – transmits several compelling accounts of Australian history and national identity, narratives that this article scrutinises to assess their cultural and political significance. Opening with an examination of *Mad Max*, a pure exponent of the road genre, motoring masculinity is located within the fantasies of violence, freedom and liberation; fantasies that are performed in opposition to competing fantasies of family, law and control. The analysis operates as a diagnosis of scopophilia, psychopathy and the various homicidal mania that are conflated within vehicular masculinity.

Alternate outcomes for men on the road are then examined in other films where vehicular conduct exposes forms of familial organisation and anxiety. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* operates here as a text in which the meanings of 'home' are re-ordered through a masculine command of domesticity and family performed in a landscape loaded with narrative possibilities and discursive dead ends. Traversing family, freedom and defeat, these films about men, cars and roads are instructive manuals and cautionary tales in which Australian national identity is exposed as a deceptive and provocative dream.

With deliberate irony, the action in *Mad Max* takes place on and around Anarchie Road, and the film's post-apocalyptic vision was articulated by Meaghan Morris who wrote, 'What was "unprecedented" about *Mad Max* as Australian cinema was ... its convincing sense of spaces in which *anything might happen*.'<sup>3</sup>

Crucial to this observation is the 'convincing sense' which Morris identified; in the subtext of her reading lies the key: 'convincing' yet deceptive, 'unprecedented' but deeply familiar. Because the sense of

*possibility* in *Mad Max*, and in the entire genre of road and car films in Australia, is an ingenious ruse, duping the men who heed the siren-call of the roads whilst the audience cheerfully suspends disbelief, thinking (with the protagonist) that *maybe this time* he will get away. Ross Gibson, in his reading of *Mad Max*, identified precisely this component of audience complicity. He described the 'devices' and 'mechanics' of the film, rendering possible the 'reliably startling' modes of action. Gibson recognised, 'the audience acknowledges, somewhat sardonically, that it is *that device again!*'<sup>4</sup> We have seen it all before, each defeat is unsurprising, another hero is overcome. And yet, over and over, we respond to the faint glimmer of possibility – the sadism of cinema – that there is a chance for these mythical men. Each time, the hero is consigned to some existential limbo from which there is no prospect of release. It is a narrative cycle confirming the deep trouble of Australian masculinity, that desperate rearticulation of white, reactionary identities parading as 'evidence' of consensus and singularity. From the bush balladeers of the 1890s to Russel Ward's landmark history, this 'type' was entrenched in national iconography and 'revived' in the film renaissance of the 1970s.

In Ward's *The Australian Legend*, the 'typical' Australian was an outback man, 'a rollicking ramble-er'; he opens with an unattributed verse that proclaims, 'I'm a roving rake of poverty, and a son of a gun for a beer'.<sup>5</sup> That man was a powerful presence in the Australian self-imagination, less apparent, Ward conceded, in reality. He was a myth, a ghost. And *the dream* in which he appeared to the nation was a recurring narrative, a story told and re-told, gathering the most tenuous legitimacy through its repetition. He became the monolithic hero of our national cinema. He stalked repeatedly the tales which 'defined' the nation, 'described' the nation, which became 'Australia'.

Our cinematic heroes represent the fundamental impossibility of the masculine model they embody. The impossibility is staged repeatedly, and candidly addressed occasionally. But they – and we – are not released from the model. Its courage and bluster conceal a fragile core; taking to the road in a convoy of hybrid vehicles is an irresistible and anticipated diversion. But it is no solution.

Fredric Jameson identified the postmodern moment – and the cultural media through which that moment was transmitted – as enduring time in a 'perpetual present'.<sup>6</sup> He wrote that, in the psycho-social habitat that he famously termed 'the cultural logic of late capitalism'<sup>7</sup>, we have lost our capacity to retain [our] own past, resulting in the 'disappearance of a sense of history'.<sup>8</sup> Jameson's use of 'history' and 'nostalgia' assumes that the past – and the means by which it is recalled – is a fixed narrative, that history has already been made, leaving us only the discursive devices of allegory and pastiche with which to approach it. But a distinct *sense of history* is derived by consuming Australian genre cinema. It is *a certain* history of Australia, disclosed through cinema. It is a history of a pervasive sense of national

'identity', of the clamouring for a single, identifiable national 'voice', and of the attempt to transform Australians into an audience, looking up in the dark.

Interrogating the cultural imperatives that surround – and sometimes obscure – narratives of national 'identity', Meaghan Morris wrote that an iconic white 'masculinity' bears, at all levels of textual production in a great many films, the burden of generating 'Australian-ness'. At the same time, an interest in Australian history and sense of place is easily articulated as an anxiety about the singularity of its 'proper' national time, and space.<sup>9</sup>

Thus conflating notions of 'masculinity', 'nation' and 'identity', this paper challenges Jameson's claim that cinema leads to a 'disappearance of a sense of history'. Instead, the films under examination transmit masculinities as enduring, representing in the sincerest form *a sense* of history. 'Nation' and 'manhood' are screened for audiences using the same cultural devices, the same generic assumptions, and attempting to perpetuate a monolithic de-historical moment that remains captured on the screen.

Our cinematic – 'national' – heroes are typically stranded at some mid-point (a kind of narrative 'nowhere') between freedom and defeat. Their heroism is located not in victory, but in survival. Or, not uncommonly, in a posthumous expression of regret, which may be our nearest cultural approximation of respect. Graeme Turner, in his study of national narratives, identified a profound political imperative at work in these texts. He wrote that 'the Australian context ... uses the harshness of the natural environment as an alibi for the powerlessness of the individual within the social environment'.<sup>10</sup> In the contest between the individual and the environment, the landscape serves as a compendium of impossible odds stacked against the aspiring hero. Turner's analysis focuses the hero on an achievable outcome: survival. '[T]he difficulty of survival becomes the justification for failing to do more than that. ... [T]he environment is tough, but survivable if one accepts its basic dominion over the self.'<sup>11</sup> The hopelessness of the masculine drama as it is played out in cinema, despite the enthusiasm with which men hurl themselves into it, is exposed as nothing more than a performance of emasculation masquerading as virility.

Violence, humour, and honourable attempts deflect our attention from these serial humiliations, with possibility reduced to that which is imaginable or sustainable in our sense of mythical masculinity. In Turner's reading:

The pessimism ... is not simply a temperamental or metaphysical position; it is also a political one, operating to neutralise an ideological view of the power relations between self and society which proposes the futility of individual action against the status quo. The battleground of the metaphysical ascendancy, the self in search of spirituality, is largely a territorial reserve set aside by ideological treaty as

that area of criticism and conflict which Australian society can tolerate.<sup>12</sup>

The inscrutable Australian landscape is politicised, its impenetrability a metaphor for the cultural quarantining that determines the fate of masculine endeavour. In his analysis of the first two *Mad Max* films, Christopher Sharrett described the landscape as 'a devastated wasteland', and noted the films' capacity for 'exposing the spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy of the modern landscape'.<sup>13</sup> But the landscape of Anarchie Road, despite the screen title identifying the time as '*A few years from now...*' is not a 'modern landscape'. The Australian outback transcends temporal identity; it is ancient and futurist, a 'dead heart' and also eternal. And the 'bankruptcy' Sharrett claimed is actually a distinctive moral order, compressing a timeless narrative tradition. The film's director, George Miller, was an acknowledged devotee of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In an interview, he enthused: 'With all the hero stories, when someone goes into a dark landscape, they undergo these terrible and fabulous adventures'.<sup>14</sup> The hostile 'dark' environment of the outback tests the spiritual, intellectual and moral qualities of the hero. Though bleak and harsh, the landscape is a powerful moral arbiter, a threshold location, judging faith, sorting good from evil and staging elaborate executions of those men deemed unsustainable.

Exploiting the assumption that frantic vehicular displays enhance 'masculinity', Australian films of the car and road genre become exquisitely paranoid fantasies of masculine oppression and destruction. They become parables of power, where our heroes are ultimately deflated by their compulsion to fear. The car is unquestionably an agent of death; men and women who drive know this to be true. But speed and risk suggest the undeliverable promise of *change*, and in pursuit of something better – or simply something else – men perform the enthusiastic nihilism that underscores vehicular masculinity.

The *Mad Max* trilogy is an effective point from which to launch a consideration of men and cars on the Australian screen. Highlighting their creators' commitment to making pure-genre movies, these three films – *Mad Max* (1979), *Mad Max 2* (1982) and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) – were so deeply immersed in the genre that they were actually exploitative of their origins. In the first film, Max is a disaffected highway patrolman. During his attempt to free the roads of a marauding gang of motorcycle 'glory riders', Max's wife, baby and best friend are killed.<sup>15</sup> Max embarks on a vendetta against the gang, engaging in an escalating series of 'accidental' and 'orchestrated' vehicular attacks. At the end of the film, Max is avenged but alone. The film absorbs without hesitation the ritual features of American vigilante/heroic quest films, from Westerns to urban renegade cops (the Dirty Harry quintet) and the *Star Wars* trilogy.<sup>16</sup>

Max's relationship to his rivals exactly replicates that between the hero and villain in these Hollywood staples. But the right-wing commentaries

provided – and usually endorsed – by the American films are obscured in their Australian incarnations.<sup>17</sup> Jon Stratton, interpreting the *Mad Max* films as ‘conservative fantasies’ located their ideological stance in ‘the bourgeois unconscious’:<sup>18</sup>

It might be argued that in making the same assumptions about human nature which Hobbes made and by then demonstrating what happens when Hobbes’ strong State power is removed, these films become right-wing morality-tales about the importance of strong government.<sup>19</sup>

Stratton continued that, in ‘dystopic’ fantasies of this kind, ‘the hero figure will necessarily be on the side of the law because this is where the viewer’s point of view must be inscribed’.<sup>20</sup> Such an approach fits within the doppelganger model, where the gang members - specifically their leader, Toecutter, and the naive young novice, Johnny the Boy – are reflections of Max. Each is the direct product of the other and so they are – like a mirror – the same, yet opposite. Mark McAuliffe makes this even more explicit in his analysis of one moment in the narrative:

[A] correlation between anarchy and justice is implied when the image of the policeman with a rifle is preceded by the radio announcement to the other officer in the car, “We’ve got a cop killer”. But the glance from the policeman in the car hints that the following shot is the portrait of a “killer cop”.<sup>21</sup>

The Main Force Patrol and the criminals are reversible, interchangeable, inversions of each other. In her study of the male doppelganger effect in cinema, Christine Holmlund noted that it disturbs ‘the usual Hollywood alignment of a stable masculinity’.<sup>22</sup> Focussing on the anxiety within ‘masculinity’, the use of ‘doubles’ externalises conflicts that are ordinarily concealed within a single psyche. In classic examples, the effect relates to sexuality, with the villain taking on qualities that are feminine, homosexual and masochistic, whilst the hero embodies the masculine, the heterosexual and the sadistic. In his analysis of style in the Western genre, Martin Pumphrey offered a similar interpretation. The hero’s qualities, ‘coolness, resourcefulness, stoicism, combat and survival skills’, were inverted in his rival, ‘transformed into violent aggression, selfishness, deviousness and irrational obsession’.<sup>23</sup>

Given these criteria, *Mad Max* is a textbook example, too close to the formula to be unflirtatious. And it is this flirtation, this knowing wink at the audience, that deflates the argument that the film actually endorses the right-wing politics it parades so gleefully. All of the characters in *Mad Max*

– the police, the outlaws and the bystanders – are inscribed with qualities that are attractive to film viewers. The Nightrider, a gang member who has escaped in a police car, howls with psychotic pleasure into the radio: ‘I’m a fuel-injected suicide-machine’.<sup>24</sup>

Johnny the Boy, the Toecutter’s lust object, is ill-suited to a life of vengeful highway terrorism, but tries earnestly to impress with a series of poorly executed micro-holocausts. Bubba Zanetti, smouldering at the sidelines, is jealous of Johnny’s role as the leader’s favourite, and dutifully undoes Johnny’s errors in the vain hope that his devotion will be rewarded. And the Toecutter, in his grinning monomania, directs the erratic loyalty of his ‘boys’ in their gleeful pursuit of dangerous pleasure. Undoubtedly, the gang is the hero’s reflection: feminine, homosexual, masochistic. And yet viewer approval for them is encouraged through the gang’s devotion to misbehaviour and disobedience; in terrorising the highways they are funny and they are having fun.

The police – known as The Bronze – are fools, hapless and incompetent, yet also entertaining. The highway pursuits between the gang and The Bronze are a dangerous type of *play*, with one police officer recovering from a collision to report ‘We’re still in *the game*, OK?’ Only Max – calm, prepared and efficient – stands above the rest. Humourless and taciturn, he doesn’t say very much. He doesn’t need to. We have seen his type before; we know what he stands for; we know what he will do. The pleasure is in watching him move steadily through his vendetta, each step is another conspiratorial collusion with the viewer, each scene is loaded with cinematic footnotes. *Mad Max*’s cult credentials are confirmed in its punk appropriation of sources. We endorse Max *not* because he represents The Law, but *because he is the classic hero*. The film flaunts shamelessly its mechanics. Shortly before Max embarks (with some initial reluctance) on his violent quest, his Chief tells him, ‘They say people don’t believe in heroes any more. Well, damn them. You and me, Max. We’re gonna give them back their heroes.’<sup>25</sup> The only forum for staging these acts of heroism is Anarchie Road. On the roads, the police and criminals meet to demonstrate their respective relationships with The Law. Jim Goose announces to Johnny the Boy: ‘We’ll see you on the road, skag. We’ll see you on the road like we saw the Nightrider.’ The courts, in this post-Kafka narrative, are assumed not to exist. Chief McAfee says to his officers: ‘So long as the paperwork’s clean, you boys can do what you like out there’. The film demands an anti-conservative approach to law and lawlessness, using reactionary politics specifically to be radical. Its high-camp aesthetic refuses to take seriously the political gestures it flaunts, taunting the viewer with a crowd of attractive yet contradictory referents.

Ultimately, good and evil are simply a matter of *style*, with Max freely admitting this to his Chief: ‘I got a bronze badge to say I’m one of the good guys’. Bubba Zanetti distinguishes his own brand of villainy from the undisciplined antics of Johnny the Boy: ‘You just don’t have *the style*, do you? Chicken shit.’

Christopher Sharrett remarked upon the stylistic, rather than substantive, attribution of values to the police:

As members of The Bronze, Max and Jim Goose are demoralised, and they have a professionalism and allegiance to the group signified more by matters of *style* than by any belief in any legal code or social principle. The black leather uniforms and souped-up car reflects the cult of style, male beauty, and what is “cool” about the function of the male group discovered in *The Wild One*.<sup>26</sup>

The film’s radicalism is stylistic not because it is superficial, but because its sources are apparent on the surface (indeed, in every layer of the narrative). Sharrett’s reading permits the deconstruction of the doppelganger as an ‘effect’, repairing the artificial fissure between the hero and his ‘other’. He wrote:

We begin to recognise the cyclists as demons of Max’s own mind; Max is shown to be “mad” in the manner of numerous vigilante heroes of modern genre cinema, while allegiance to the laws of society and its civilising properties rapidly disintegrates with a regression to primeval savagery brought about by a slowly evolving distrust and contempt for civilisation; ... The darker side of the lawman does not finally give rise to a Noble Savage free of the structures of civilisation, but reveals a schizophrenic unsure of himself and unable to reintegrate into society. ... Toucher’s cyclists are indeed the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse; the metaphor is succinct since they suggest merely the evil that has been internalised by mankind.<sup>27</sup>

Sharrett’s analysis invokes in *Mad Max* a text so loaded with citations as to be formless and fragile without them. Old Testament, *Hamlet*, Hobbes, Rousseau, Nietzsche, *Lord of the Flies*, ‘Dirty’ Harry Callahan: the entire Western canon compressed with such concision into the outback legend of Max, a man with a grudge and a highly-modified V8 Interceptor.

Cluttered as it is with sources, *Mad Max* – the ‘deconstructionist’s dream’ – remains nevertheless a deeply political film.<sup>28</sup> But its political message is *not* the fascist fantasy in which a charismatic and powerful man eliminates social undesirables. The film does not mean *what it shows*. It means *what it is made of*: that collection of myths, ciphers and narrative devices through which we understand classical storytelling. *Mad Max* is a film about the

'political' implications of having a collective unconscious. And, for the purpose of the discussion here, *Mad Max* is a film about the collective compulsion to engage in, and applaud, murderous vehicular conduct on the roads.

*[A] piece from here and a piece from there...': Machining the Masculine.*

Miller exploits confidently that *formula of seduction* through which he demonstrates his knowledge of the mechanisms of male spectatorship.<sup>29</sup> The male viewing position, according to Steve Neale, requires the use of sadism, voyeurism and violence to 'cover up the underlying homosexual and narcissistic dimensions of a man's look at another man'. The male gaze, Neale argued, 'must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed'.<sup>30</sup> Following from this reading is the reliance on cinematic devices such as an aggressive *machining* of the male body to restore an unproblematic masculinity in the male viewer. The female viewer, as much important work on cinema spectatorship acknowledges, observes the male body from the point of view of the male viewer. The mechanics of cinema preclude the objectification or eroticisation of the male body; the female spectator consents tacitly to viewing the male body *as an agent of masculinity*. These contortions assume a level of male discomfort in the pleasure taken in watching men on the cinema screen, a sensation described by Paul Willemsen as 'the unquiet pleasures of seeing the male mutilated'.<sup>31</sup> Yet Kennedy and Miller, in *Mad Max*, must have recognised that viewer masculinity is fundamentally *protected* by the cinema; a dark sanctum limiting anxiety through the assurance that, for all of his looking, he can never touch. The male spectator can admire his hero with a complicity that is silent and nonthreatening to his masculinity.

Spectatorship and vehicular misconduct locate the convergence of multiple anxieties within hegemonic masculinity. Beatrix Campbell wrote about the spectators of the joyriding displays on Britain's housing estates in the 1990s. Her analysis of the impact of riot and masculine misbehaviour upon the viewing position here informs a broader consideration of the viewing position as it applies to cinema audiences watching similar demonstrations on the screen. Campbell wrote:

The performances were witnessed by people whose participation amounted only to watching but whose gaze gave endorsement to the drivers' audacity and, more than that, afforded them protection. The audience enjoyed an ambiguous status. "I didn't do anything, I was only watching," was its protest. Its innocence was entirely tactical, a conceit designed to cause confusion to the enemy. Passivity conferred a certain innocence on the audience.<sup>32</sup>

The innocence of the spectator is 'conferred' but never authenticated; the repeated defence – 'only watching' – reveals the implicit anxiety. Applying the instability of the spectatorial stance to the deliberately unsettling text of *Mad Max*, we see that this is a film in which these anxieties about male display are as much the subject of the film as the hero's highway vendetta. Lingered playfully on Max's tight leathers, raising the villains' suppressed homosexuality from the subtext and displaying it in plain sight, eroticising the sadistic machines and their components, all achieve a teasing provocation of the 'unquiet' viewing position; the malicious twinkle in the filmmakers' eyes dares us to squirm in discomfort – and pleasure.

The spectatorial position becomes additionally complex upon considering the viewer's gaze at the fetishised *machine*. Constructing the machine as an alternate site of visual pleasure, the films create an emergent fetish that may seek to replace or dislocate the 'unquiet' look at the screened male. Max's V8 Interceptor, the gang's motorcycles, and the exponentially elaborate technologies of *Mad Max 2* all act to sexualise the viewer's look at a machine. In some instances, the representation of the machine threatens to overshadow the displays of male flesh which become increasingly banal. The reconfiguration of masculine display into mechanical display transforms the movement and mutilation of machines into an eroticised contest that parallels corporeal battles between men.

Machining the masculine interrogates the relationship between men and technology, a conceptual space that narrows as we consider these films. The gang in *Mad Max* engages in a brutal attack upon a car; the audience is made to scrutinise the intimate violation of its body, but the assaults perpetrated upon its occupants are unseen, unspecified. The occupants flee, refusing to see their attackers brought to justice. But the shattered car remains outside the Halls of Justice, spectacular in its irreparable damage, the only remaining evidence of the crime. A group of youths inspects the wreckage, fascinated by this molested machine. Bubba Zanetti stands nearby, and a young man asks him what happened to the car. Fusing the vehicular with the corporeal, Bubba identifies with breathtaking clarity the masculine imperative at work on the roads. He suggests: 'Perhaps it's the result of an anxiety'. The car is the victim of masculine anxiety, but is also its agent, its tool and, ultimately, its monument. The crashed car is modern masculinity. The wreck is compelling evidence of performance, danger, trouble and defeat. Technology performs an ambivalent role as ally and adversary, a conflict that is 'resolved' when the men who crave machines are consumed by them.

*'This is a threshold moment, Johnny...': Murder, Manhood and Freedom*

Many of these films of the car and road genre indict and execute those men who engage in vehicular extravagance. A man's death-by-car is never simply a motor 'accident'; the manner of his death is always

selected, deliberate, making it an appropriate commentary upon his mode of masculine conduct. Dying in a car 'accident' confers a specific meaning upon one's masculinity, validating it whilst it is under examination. It is read as a death in action, but it is also a waste. Energetic and useless, heroic and tragic. But the manner of the motorised death is crucial, inscribed metonymically with what has gone wrong with this man. Beatrix Campbell's study of joyriders on British housing estates abandoned by social services makes a series of fundamentally political inquiries:

Car crash victims are people making their way but who will never arrive. They die in limbo, neither here nor there. But where were these boys going? Were they going anywhere they wanted to be? The imagery of motoring, travelling, speeding, of mass, fast perpetual motion, of going places, belonging to a landscape and always leaving it, speeding without seeing, fleeing, alludes both to the Club class air traveller and to the mythical Levi jeans boy: a nomad, a restless, rich but classless post-modern man. The irony of the deaths that caused the [1991] riot was that they came out of an apparently peripheral place, a closed culture which consumed these fantasies of modernity and movement but was dominated by men who seemed atavistic, parochial, uncool and crazy.<sup>33</sup>

Vehicular deaths are gendered sacrifices targeting specific individuals, exposing the political manoeuvres of a society that dismisses them as 'accidents'. Each car crash reduces to its essence the masculinity of its perpetrators and its victims.

In *Mad Max*, Max's mechanised murder of Johnny the Boy fits precisely this model. Having eliminated the rest of the gang, Max's final confrontation is with Johnny. Saving Johnny's death for the denouement reminds us that Max, in this narrative, has had multiple doppelgangers, the death of one immediately raising another to the surface, a hydra-headed monster reflected in the parallel mirrors capturing the hero. The Nightrider is replaced by Bubba Zanetti, followed soon by the Toecutter. Johnny, peripheral to the gang's agenda, but central to its homoerotic love-triangle, is saved until the end. Toecutter passes the mantle to Johnny the Boy in the scene in which Goose is cremated in a borrowed truck. Standing over the upside-down truck, with Goose trapped inside, Toecutter lights a match and gives it to Johnny. He says, 'This is a threshold moment, Johnny'.

In this moment, Johnny is on the threshold between 'random' road crimes and a deliberately plotted trajectory. He resists crossing over ('Toecutter, this isn't what I want'), but the Toecutter insists on him relinquishing irresponsible boyhood and ascending into the next narrative

stratum ('Do it for freedom and the Nightrider'). In their struggle, Johnny drops the match, and his generic destiny is confirmed: freedom, masculinity, death. His intricate death is reserved for the final scene, where Max finds him beside the highway, plundering the wreckage of an unseen crash, stealing the boots of a road victim. The wreck is leaking petrol. Unaware of his impending sacrifice and its necessity to this narrative model, Johnny greets Max with a cheerful 'Hi'. With the blank expression of embodied genre-performance, Max gives him a pair of handcuffs and says, 'Ankle'. Johnny fixes one cuff to his ankle and Max attaches the other to the wreck. What follows is an almost verbatim (if anachronistic) performance of Todd Gitlin's account of the postmodern, making the film a classic indicator of these cultural logics:

[A] certain constellation of styles and tones ... :  
pastiche; blankness; a sense of exhaustion; a mixture of  
levels, forms, styles; a relish for copies and repetition;  
a knowingness that dissolves commitment into irony;  
acute self-consciousness about the formal, constructed  
nature of the work; pleasure in the play of surfaces; a  
rejection of history.<sup>34</sup>

Suddenly realising his danger, Johnny begs for mercy. Max, rejecting any alternative narrative resolution, continues with his elaborate murder. Johnny pleads,

They [the gang] were bad people. I'm not responsible  
for anything ... Hey listen. I'm not a bad man. I'm  
sick, see. *Sick*. What do you call it? Psychopathic. I  
got a personality disorder. The court man, he said so.  
You're not gonna hurt me, are you? Jesus. You can't  
kill me! Not for stealing a man's boot. He was dead,  
for Christ's sake. What are you doing? *I wanna know  
what you're doing!*

His plea represents an encyclopedic collection of generic indicators: the refusal of responsibility ('I'm not responsible'), the saturation and corruption of disease ('I'm sick'), the non-specific but all-pervasive mental disorder ('Psychopathic'; 'personality disorder'), the denial of the inevitable ('You can't kill me'), an obsession with triviality ('Not for stealing a man's boot'), a demand for the impossible but self-evident explanation ('I wanna know what you're doing'). Johnny's desperate monologue *is* postmodernity: 'formal' and 'constructed' and taking pleasure in the superficialities that distract us from recognising this 'rejection of history' as the most faithful *imitation* of historical narratives, with teleological deference to historical destiny. In the nihilism of cultural logics that describe this narrative moment,

its plethora of referents can mean only one thing: doom. What interests the viewer, in our self-consciously *sick* compulsion to watch, is the trajectory of Johnny's last moments: the mechanics of this spectacular, pointless, thrilling act of retributive justice. Max explains:

The chain in those handcuffs is high tensile steel. It'd take you ten minutes to hack through it with this. (*Gives him a hacksaw*). Now, if you're lucky, you could hack through your ankle in five minutes. *Go!*<sup>35</sup>

Max has rigged up an impromptu incendiary device. He ignites it and limps back to his car. Johnny screams and cries after him as Max drives away, expressionless, towards the horizon, his eyes fixed on the road ahead of him. Max's ultimatum, in its brutal primitivism, is deeply satisfying. Again, 'formal' and 'constructed' but here there is evidence of a darkly playful invention. Max is a player in this staged psycho-drama, but in the multiplying reflections that reproduce his antitheses (his multiple doppelgangers), he is the *first* reflection – not the 'real' but the 'inaugural'. Each is a simulacrum, but Max transmits the most powerful signal, the clearest reception. And, moments later, when Johnny is incinerated in Max's spectacular inferno, our sole interest is Max, his revenge, his loneliness. Road carnage, though it offers a powerful sense of cultural appropriateness, can never lead to freedom or happiness. Living and dying by the rules of the road, these men have no outlet, no escape. Though caught up in the performative gymnastics of postmodern pastiche, *Mad Max's* conclusion is a political gesture. Trapped on the murderous highways, men like Max (the journeyman *actor*; everyman) confirm the inescapability of failure, the impossibility of masculinity.

*'It's good to be home': Returning to the Family*

Australian road genre films exploit the narrative expectation that the road provides a public arena for the performance and resolution of private humiliations. Domestic disputes, attacks upon the familial fortress, personal vendettas prompt staged highway spectacles. The fate of the family – explorations of safety, domesticity, nuclearity – is determined through public, often vehicular, conduct. Where Meaghan Morris described cars as 'mobile, encapsulating vehicles of critical thinking about the family and familial space',<sup>36</sup> it is out on the roads that these domestic narratives form 'moral' and 'national' iconographies. This conflation of private with public space, with its attendant erasure of those domains occupied by women who are often unseen, renders the family not only a site of conflict, but one that is contested – almost exclusively – by men.

As Max, now 'mad', takes to the road to avenge the assaults upon his family which, unavenged, seek to emasculate him, he transforms himself from 'bereaved husband'<sup>37</sup> to master of his domain. Meanwhile, his 'domain' has, through his retributive pantomime, inflated to occupy all of that public

space through which he moves. His home – in a compensatory gesture for failing to defend his family – is everywhere.

An adolescent variant on this depersonalisation of the private sphere can be seen in *The Big Steal* and *The FJ Holden*. Both films posit the boy's quest for vehicular prominence (a cinematically configured false start on the road to hegemonic masculinity) against the fate of his family, examining the car's relationship with domesticity. In both films, the boy travels a full circle, returning in the end to his family. In *The Big Steal*, he has learned his lesson about the mendacious allure of the car; in *The FJ Holden*, he has not. Asserting at the end that all is right again within the Clark family in *The Big Steal*, we are assured that Danny, after entertaining notions of owning a Jaguar, now drives a locally made car, with all of the egalitarian, familial and patriotic qualities this entails. In Kevin's case, though his car is Australian-made, it is highly modified, and he has ignored all of his father's warnings about the danger into which he is headed. At the end of that film, confirming the car's conclusive assault on the family, Kevin drives home at dawn following a series of misadventures in his life *at large*. He is met in the yard by his father and the police. His father announces, 'You've done it this time, Kevin. Look at the state you've got your mother in.' Andrew Ross, in his study of the interlocking fate of the family and the vehicle, wrote about the film *Tin Men* (1987), making an observation which has application here:

In the business of male bonding and male rivalry, it had been a story that posits the economy of the automobile, with its own "beautified" and feminised exterior, against the economy of the home and the family; an opposition in which a dented car, equated with dented virility, can arbitrarily determine the fate of the family.<sup>38</sup>

And yet, in the comparison of *The Big Steal* with *The FJ Holden*, the family's fate is not arbitrary; it evolves from a carefully described trajectory in which the hero must make the right choices if his family is to be spared. Vehicular choices are rarely rewarded: Max has lost his family and become 'mad' on the murderous highways, the boys and men in *Backroads*, *Stone*, *The Crossing* and *Metal Skin* are destroyed for engaging each other in vehicles, and the families in *Long Weekend* and *The FJ Holden* are split apart when men take to the roads in their attempt to assert a masculine command of space.

The family is rescued only when men recognise the limitations and dangers of meddling with machines. In *Malcolm*, the hero deconstructs (literally and figuratively) the car, utterly changing its meaning and its capabilities. In the film's gadget-addled conclusion, the car becomes nothing more than a decoy. Though he has built it from remnants of other machines with the intention of creating the ultimate getaway car, their bank robbery is

successful when he employs a series of other inventions; the car acts solely to distract the police and to hold up traffic, enabling their final getaway *in a tram*. As the credits roll we discover this 'family' in Portugal, where they also have trams. For this fundamental understanding *and rejection* of the car, Malcolm is rewarded and rescued. With Frank and Jude, he makes his triumphant escape; his counter-hegemonic mode of masculinity qualifies him for rescue.

In *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, another group takes to the road seeking something: freedom, adventure, *family*. Two drag-queens and a transsexual travel, in a bus named Priscilla, from Sydney to Alice Springs to perform a drag revue in the hotel run by Mitzi/Tick's ex-wife. They set out with a disrespectful rejection of the myths of a monolithic Australian interior hoping, in their mechanically unsound bus, to conquer the centre.

The bus – like cars – becomes a micro-habitat, a vehicular home. Priscilla's passengers are constituted as being *at home on the road*. But their bus – a kind of reconfigured domestic space – deflates the usual assumptions about domesticity. Neither public nor private, domestic nor social, masculine nor feminine, personal nor political, but also somehow all of these things together, Priscilla becomes a capsule in which stable categories – 'man', 'home' – become mobile, temporary. Priscilla, the bus, is as important for what it contains as for what it moves through, and its designated gender – 'she' – ascribes femininity to that elusive something – freedom – that men pursue on the roads; the cause of their deception or their undoing. Space and distance are there to be conquered, penetrated, and the feminisation of Priscilla underscores the gendered project of the road movie genre.

Bernadette toasts Mitzi before they set off: 'Here's hoping the desert's big enough for the two of us'. Mitzi informs her that there is a third member of this entourage, Felicia/Adam. Felicia announces her own intentions for the trip:

Felicia: To travel to the centre of Australia, climb King's Canyon – as a queen – in a full-length Gaultier sequin, heels and a tiara.

Bernadette: Great. That's just what this country needs.  
A cock in a frock on a rock.

Citing this exchange, Allan J. Thomas observed the masculine necessity of confronting the landscape; in *Priscilla* it occurs with an aggression that leans frequently towards violation. Thomas wrote:

Now, as we all know, it's not enough to simply go and look at the rock; you have to climb it, conquer

it, stand on top of it gazing triumphantly down on the landscape below ... This little story is repeated thousands of times each year by the tourists who come to visit the rock, to climb it and to stand on it, but it can also be understood as one of the archetypal narratives of Australian national identity. ... Taken in the broadest possible sense, what we're talking about here is a story about colonisation and invasion.<sup>39</sup>

Priscilla's three passengers drive inwards – towards the heart – without any critical insights into the perils of such a journey. They originate in the core (Sydney) which balances at the periphery (the coast). Unshakeably urban, they are also deeply self-obsessed; when not engaged in grooming or preening they squabble amongst themselves. Once they have left the limits of the city their quest to conquer Australia begins to unravel.

In Broken Hill their bus is vandalised with the slogan: 'AIDS Fuckers Go Home'. It is their first realisation that they are not *at home* in the extensive outdoors, with its narrow demands for acceptable – if ineffective – modes of masculine conduct; home is elsewhere. Leaving the sealed road, the bus breaks down. None of them has the first idea about vehicular maintenance; these are 'men' for whom gender is an endless masquerade, constantly fluid and open to negotiation. The substance of their identity, as they slowly discover, is in the community or family they have left behind. Here in the outback, they are lost, stranded, victimised and bored. Notions of centrality and marginality begin to enlighten this trio. Through a series of appropriations and impersonations, they discover the true power of drag. From the outset, the film's manipulation of masculinity has sought explicitly to demean and eliminate women. Australia remains a continent of men; wives and mothers are discarded and the family continues without them. In the presence of women, the film is awkward and profoundly humourless. Men have the most fun, the film proposes, when women are absent because when femininity is required, it is best achieved by men-in-drag. These men's fluidity, their liminality, is a position of considerable agency because of its adaptability. They no longer battle against domesticity and family; they reinvent it. Tick meets and accepts his young son and, with Felicia, they form a new kind of family, a drag family, with ever-metamorphosing roles.

The drag performance in Alice Springs is a shameless plundering of native flora and fauna, reducing the untameable landscape into a burlesque spectacle, a stunning sartorial achievement. They cannot absorb the full enormity of 'Australia' ('It never ends, does it? All that space...'). Instead they reduce it to a micro-drama in an obscure venue that sits within an overwhelmingly significant venue, playing to other white wanderers displaced in the spiritual 'heart' of the continent. This mode of rapacious tourism effects a 'muddling' of the landscape as a 'place' and as a 'performance', where the knowability of the Australian interior, for

these characters and for the audience, is delimited by cinema. For Simon Schama:

[I]t should be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making *metaphors more real than their referents*; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.<sup>40</sup>

In *Priscilla*, the landscape becomes a stage, a backdrop, a camp-ing site. It serves only as a metaphor: of exclusion, of peril, of difference, and is accessorised with a collection of mutated creatures that are perfect plunder for a drag revue. Ross Gibson, interrogating representations of the landscape in Australian feature films, observed:

The landscape becomes the projective screen for a persistent national neurosis deriving from the fear and fascination of a preternatural continent. (Hardly any of us ever see the never never, but we all know it's there, behind our backs).<sup>41</sup>

Gibson later adds, 'a movie screen which shows images of a landscape can be regarded both as a window on the existent world and as a canvas on which a created world can be represented'.<sup>42</sup> This latter point is essential. Certainly the landscape becomes a 'venue', a blank screen awaiting the projection and transmission of meaning but, crucially, the landscape is *on the screen*, the cinema screen. It is not 'behind our backs'; we know it is there because *we see it*, repeatedly, at the movies and on television, routinely performing the anticipated charade that describes semiotically the challenge/defeat narrative of national identity.

*Priscilla's* journey into the 'heart' of the landscape has given the trio an understanding of the importance of *home*. After a violent encounter with a crowd of rural rednecks, Felicia is comforted by Bernadette, who tells her:

It's funny. We all sit around mindlessly slagging off that vile stink-hole of a city [Sydney]. But in its own strange way it takes care of us. I don't know if that ugly wall of suburbia's been put there to stop them getting in or us getting out.

Their ambitious vehicular adventure has not been entirely a failure: although they have broken down, been harassed and assaulted, and their performance poorly received, they discover freedom, family, and an achievable model of masculine identity in the place they left behind. Back in Sydney, Felicia and Mitzi perform to a warm and receptive audience.

With Mitzi/Tick's son cheering in the crowd, they mime 'Mamma Mia', in an ironic reference to their newly invented drag-family. Affirming for Tick that he has finally found his own space in which to enact parenthood, domesticity and masculinity, he salutes the crowd and says, 'Thank you. It's good to be home.' *Priscilla* affirms the possibility of survival for men who quest on the roads. In their self-discovery they learn that vehicular manhood is a road to certain failure, and return instead to a mode of masculinity reconfigured to preserve home, family and domesticity in their own terms.

The road in Australian cinema does not lead anywhere. It does not move towards masculine affirmation, nor does it locate freedom. No one ever goes anywhere on the roads. They are a forum, a stage, for the performance of a series of cultural rituals. Underlying these displays are the texts and narrative logics that pre-determine their outcomes: gynophobia, technophobia, claustrophobia. Lured into believing that masculinity will be proven on the roads, men take to their cars in their mutually sustaining addiction to speed, distance and destruction. Some will learn that masculinity is impossible, unliveable. Many will be destroyed before they can learn. In either event, victory does not exist in these narratives. Graeme Turner attributed this nihilism to the suspicion of individualistic success in Australian narratives. The texts, he claimed, 'typically stranded their protagonists at the point of conflict between themselves, their social context, and the natural environment'.<sup>43</sup> All that we are left with, usually, is a journey. A trajectory. A complete circle. A dead end.

### *Filmography*

- Backroads*, (prod./dir. Phillip Noyce), Australia, 1977.  
*Long Weekend*, (prod./dir. Colin Eggleston), Australia, 1977.  
*Mad Max*, (prod. Byran Kennedy/ dir. George Miller), Australia, 1979.  
*Mad Max 2*, released in USA as *The Road Warrior* (prod. Byran Kennedy/ dir. George Miller), Australia, 1981.  
*Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, (prod. Terry Hayes and Doug Mitchell/ dir. George Miller), Australia, 1985.  
*Malcolm*, (prod. David Malcolm and Nadia Tass/ dir. Nadia Tass) Australia, 1986.  
*Metal Skin*, (prod. Daniel Schaf/ dir. Geoffrey Wright), Australia, 1994.  
*Stone*, (prod./dir. Sandy Harbutt), Australia, 1974.  
*The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, (prod. Al Clark and Michael Hamlyn/ dir. Stephan Elliott), Australia, 1994.  
*The Big Steal*, (prod. Nadia Tass, David Parker and Timothy White/ dir. Nadia Tass), Australia, 1990.  
*The Crossing*, (prod. Al Clark/ dir. George Ogilvie), Australia, 1990.  
*Tin Men*, (prod. Mark Johnson/ dir. Barry Levinson), USA, 1987.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Peter Conrad, *Modern Times, Modern Places*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998, p.1.
- <sup>2</sup> Bob Ellis, cited in Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p.58.
- <sup>3</sup> Meaghan Morris, 'Fate and the Family Sedan', *East-West Film Journal*, vol 4, no.1, 1989, p.128. Emphasis in original. Mark McAuliffe gives the following etymology for the name of Anarchie Road: 'This strange spelling [Anarchie] may be seen to reflect both the allusion to personal and political chaos (anarchy) as well as the reality of the area in which some of these sequences were filmed (near Anakie, an hour's drive from Melbourne).' 'As part of the campaign to keep the road toll down, huge skulls and cross bones were painted on the roads in the area around Anakie, as they were elsewhere in the state'. In Mark McAuliffe, 'Mad Max in Search of the Goddess: Australian Masculinity in Crisis', PhD thesis, La Trobe University, 1995, p.49, footnote 96 & p.54, footnote 109.
- <sup>4</sup> Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1992, p.160. Emphasis in original.
- <sup>5</sup> Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1970, p.1.
- <sup>6</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture* (first published as *The Anti-Aesthetic*), Pluto Press, London, 1985, p.125.
- <sup>7</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, vol.146, 1984; later published in the first chapter of his book, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991.
- <sup>8</sup> Jameson, in Foster (ed.), *Postmodern Culture*, p.125. For other works by Jameson on the themes of history, nostalgia, allegory and pastiche, see also the works cited in footnote 7, as well as 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', *Social Text*, vol.1, 1979, p.130; 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film', in Bill Nicholls (ed.), *Movies and Methods: Volume 2*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985; 'Nostalgia for the Present', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol.88, no.2, 1989, p.517.
- <sup>9</sup> Morris, p.120.
- <sup>10</sup> Turner, p.9.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.
- <sup>13</sup> Christopher Sharrett, 'Myth, Male Fantasy, and Simulacra in *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*: The Hero as Pastiche', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol.13, no.2, 1985, p.82.
- <sup>14</sup> George Miller, interviewed in *The Celluloid Heroes*, ABC documentary, written and directed by Robert Francis, 1995.
- <sup>15</sup> Not all viewers of *Mad Max* agree that Jessie, Sprog and Jim Goose are killed in that film. The film is deliberately ambiguous about the fates of Jessie and Goose, using terms like 'salvageable' to refer to Jessie and 'that thing' in reference to Goose. Sprog, however, is killed by the Toecutter's gang. The deaths of – or vehicular assaults upon – these characters are the narrative triggers for Max's 'madness'. Certainly we never see them again and, to Max at least, for the duration of the film, they are dead.
- <sup>16</sup> Discussions of the heroic trajectory in these film cycles can be found, respectively, in Christopher Frayling, 'The American Western and American Society', in Philip Davies and Brian Neve (eds), *Cinema, Politics and Society in America*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1981; Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992; Dennis Bingham, *Acting Male: Masculinities in the Films of James Stewart, Jack Nicholson, and Clint Eastwood*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1994, pp.180–194; Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1994; Elizabeth Traube, *Dreaming Identities: Class, Gender, and Generation in the 1980s Hollywood Movies*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992.
- <sup>17</sup> A discussion of the dialogue between right-wing politics and Hollywood blockbusters can be found in Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, and also in Katherine Biber, 'The Emperor's New Clones: Indiana Jones and Masculinity in Reagan's America', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, vol.14, no.2, 1995, p.67.
- <sup>18</sup> Jon Stratton, 'What Made *Mad Max* Popular: The Mythology of a Conservative Fantasy', *Art & Text*, vol.9, Autumn 1983, p.38.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.39.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> McAuliffe, p.95.

<sup>22</sup> Christine Holmlund, 'Sexuality and Power in Male Doppelganger Cinema: The Case of Clint Eastwood's *Tightrope*', *Cinema Journal*, vol.26, no.1, 1986, p.32.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Pumphrey, 'Why Do Cowboys Wear Hats in the Bath? Style Politics for the Older Man', *Critical Quarterly*, vol.31, no.3, 1989, p.82.

<sup>24</sup> The 'fuel-injected suicide-machine' in *Mad Max* is foreshadowed in Bruce Springsteen's 1974 song, 'Born To Run': 'In the day we sweat it out in the streets of a runaway American dream/ At night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines/ Sprung from cages out on Highway 9/ Chrome wheeled, fuel injected/ And steppin' over the line/ Baby this town rips the bones from your back/ It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap/ We gotta get out while we're young/ 'Cause tramps like us, baby we were born to run'. Lyrics by Bruce Springsteen, from the album *Born To Run*, CBS Records, 1975.

<sup>25</sup> The theme song from *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* is 'We Don't Need Another Hero', signifying the prototypic perfection Max embodies.

<sup>26</sup> Sharrett, p.85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.85-86.

<sup>28</sup> McAuliffe, p.50. McAuliffe wrote, 'Even Max's surname [Rokatansky], a deconstructionist's dream, embodies death itself, referring as it does to a particular method of medical deconstruction, the postmortem examination. The name seems to invite analysis of the film, a detective's search for clues which must explain the dreadful trajectory taken by the hero, a veritable descent into hell'. McAuliffe offered an explanatory footnote, "'With Karl von Rokitansky of Vienna (1804-78), the gross (naked eye) autopsy reached its apogee. Rokitansky utilised the microscope very little and was limited by his own humoral theory". (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)'.

<sup>29</sup> Meaghan Morris interprets Dermody and Jacka's analysis of cars in Australian cinema as 'Man + Car + Outback = spectatorial bliss': Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia Volume 2: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1988, cited in Morris, p.125. Sharon Willis, in her work on cinema as seduction considered the collectivity of the spectatorial experience. She considered seduction 'not as a privatised exchange, but as part of social libidinal channelling and mapping': Sharon Willis, 'Disputed Territories: Masculinity and Social Space', *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory*, no.19, 1989, p.9. It is through reading Willis and Morris together that I postulate a 'formula of seduction' through which cinema inspires complicity and consent.

<sup>30</sup> Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, Routledge, London, 1993, p.14.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Willemsen, 'Anthony Mann: Looking at the Male', *Framework*, no. 15-7, Summer 1981, p.16, cited in Leon Hunt, 'What Are Big Boys Made Of?: *Spartacus*, *El Cid* and the Male Epic', in Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim (eds), *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1993, p.67.

<sup>32</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places*, Methuen, London, 1993, p.33.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>34</sup> Todd Gitlin, 'Postmodernism: Roots and Politics: What Are They Talking About?', *Dissent*, Winter 1989, p.100.

<sup>35</sup> Mark McAuliffe identified Max's ultimatum as recalling the words of Mark in the Bible: 'And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched' (Mark 9:45). McAuliffe, p.105.

<sup>36</sup> Morris, p.116.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.117.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Ross, 'Families, Film Genres, and Technological Environments', *East-West Film Journal*, vol.4, no.1, 1989, p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Allan J. Thomas, 'Camping Outback: Landscape, Masculinity, and Performance in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*', *Continuum*, vol.10, no.2, 1996, p.98.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, Harper Collins Publishers, London, 1995, p.61.

<sup>41</sup> Ross Gibson, 'Camera Natura: Landscape in Australian Feature Films', in John Frow and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p.212.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.216.

<sup>43</sup> Graeme Turner, 'The Genres are American: Australian Narrative, Australian Film, and the Problems of Genre', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol.21, no.2, 1993, p.106.