

The Reel Thing

Film And Cultural Memory In Australia

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2000

Acknowledgments

It is a long road to the end of a thesis and no one ever reaches it without a great deal of help. I would like to thank the many people who supported me along the way and made it all possible. First of all I am indebted to my supervisor Paula Hamilton who gave me the kind of guidance that allowed me to see my way when I was overwhelmed with the scope of what I was attempting. I particularly valued her encouragement in the early stages when I really hated everything I wrote, and later on when she understood the stop/start nature of the work done by a part time candidate. I want also to express my gratitude to my family, not only for their combined support, but for the ways in which they gave me something special of themselves: to Andrew for tea and sympathy; to Julian and Stephen for keeping my computer alive and for answering my desperate calls for help when things went wrong at 2 am; to Danielle for her concern, her insightful comments on drafts and particularly for her graphic design skills; but mostly I want to thank my husband David who encouraged me throughout, learned to sleep with the light of the computer monitor in his eyes and turned out to be a deft hand at proof corrections.

This study would have been impossible without the generosity of the many people who discussed their thoughts about history and film with me, and especially those who were so open in sharing their memories and experiences: Ken Cameron, Penny Chapman, Shelia Hale, Sister Myree Harris, Linda Petersen, Pat Grocholski, Sister Deride Murphy, Helen Sciacca, Christine Campbell, Marisa Crawford, Kerrie Cassidy, Maggie Mason, Anne Symonds, Judith Strachan and Sister Margaret Piccone. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Gillian Rosen who, in addition to doing an outstanding job of proof reading the thesis, actually read every word with the kind of attention that writers dream about but rarely get.

To all of them go my most sincere thanks.

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on one of the elements surrounding a paradox in modern interactions with the past in Australia – namely that while the numbers taking formal history courses have declined markedly over the past twenty years, this decline has been matched by a proliferation of interest in other forms of history in popular culture. While the ambient factors which inform how the past is understood in popular imagination range from personal and family memories through museum exhibits and a wide range of cultural artefacts, mainstream historical films, particularly Hollywood-style films, have a global reach and the potential to influence the perceptions of millions. This thesis investigates the interactions between mainstream historical film and Cultural Memory using narrative analysis of film as text together with Cultural Studies methodologies common to Oral History and historical research. The thesis has an Australian focus and is based on case studies for which mainstream Hollywood-style narrative films constitute a major primary source.

The films discussed are fictional in one way or another, cover a wide range of genres and represent the kinds of historical information to be found in that format. The argument proceeds along two major axes; one following the ways the past is shaped by interactions between stylistic features of mainstream historical film and the socio-historical context; the other concerned with social or political actions which, in one way or another, suggest a significant influence from a film (or a group of films).

The thesis is divided into three main sections. Section One gives an overview of the thesis, its theoretical foundations, the methodologies adopted and the reasons behind those choices. Each of the two sections which follow deals with one of the main areas of investigation noted above. The thesis concludes that historical film influences Cultural Memory by creating a ‘memory’ of surfaces of the past and by contributing to the stock of images and narratives about the past which circulate in culture. However while that influence is significant, it is tempered by the degree to which the film can be understood as relating to the present, and particularly by the kinds of intersections it makes with the other texts of culture. The thesis argues that regardless of the fact that much historical film is used as a space for reinforcing dominant ideological perspectives, mainstream film can be regarded as a vehicle for presenting history, provided we consider it as history in another genre.

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The Buddy From Nam

Begin at the beginning.

Explain the situation – why you did this thesis.

State your argument.

Good advice. But where is the beginning?

To answer that question is to engage in the same processes of blending memory and drama, myth and data, narrative and content which intrigue me about the ways that visual formats like film shape the past. Like history itself, my narrative puts a shape on the multiple possible stories I could tell, stories which would in one way or another constitute reasonable connectedness between the past and the present. So, of all the reasons I could choose, of all the quasi-objective observations I could make about questions and issues in society, I choose a personal one, a symbol which encapsulates for me the complexities of the interaction between film, history and the concerns of society – the buddy from Nam.

The buddy from Nam was a second-generation symbol of the Vietnam War and the questioning of values that it came to represent in America. He appeared out of the past of the heroes of a number of eighties films and TV shows, and soon became a resident in popular imagination. The buddy from Nam came in a number of different models: the twitchy one (he was sure to die in the end); the mean macho biker (he'd let hate eat his soul – or alternatively he was just plain mean and actually liked it in Nam. He died too, usually horribly); the long-haired ageing hippie (he knew the score, man – Nam had made him see a better way. He usually rode off into the sunset). The buddy from Nam was a social fantasy, a Hollywood stereotype, an archetype who could be the guide or the trickster, a personification of national historical anxieties and cultural mythology. Wherever he came from, the buddy from Nam was trouble. Placed somewhere between the loner and the misfit, he had a claim on the hero that just couldn't be ignored. There were 'things' that had happened in the past – and they made a difference. The buddy from Nam knew 'things' about the hero, or had shared experiences with the hero that set them, and by implication, all Vietnam vets apart from society. Whatever they did 'in-country', they did for us. It changed them, and it was best that the rest of us just didn't know. The buddy from Nam was a combination of symbol, historical shadow and plot element. Audiences read his meaning from the film text as easily as they did all the other mythic elements of narrative and genre, and added the encoded notions of the past he represented to the other narratives about the war that circulated in culture.

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This character occurred for me at a particular intersection of aspects of my life. In my working life, I was involved with groups of teenagers who tended to see history as irrelevant, who seemed to have only the most elemental and fragmentary ideas about the past, and who were turning away from formal study of history at the first opportunity. But when I came home to a house filled with the chaos of boys in their early adolescence, I found a similar teenage group involved with the past – provided it was packaged in particular ways. This was an audience that voluntarily watched videos which were ‘historical’ in the broadest sense, with (clandestinely hired) Action-Adventure films set in Vietnam high on the favoured list. Individually, the boys might have had only the vaguest idea of the historical record and might not even know where Vietnam was. But collectively, they all knew that very minor figure, the buddy from Nam; what he meant, how they were supposed to feel about him, and what his presence signified in the plots of the movies.

Did the untutored decoding of the functions and meanings of the buddy from Nam indicate *only* that these boys were sophisticated consumers of movies? Even though the films fulfilled macho fantasies for fourteen-year-olds, and even though this audience was obviously reading the ideology as the film producers had intended, it did not appear that these boys were the passive receptacles of whatever the film offered. The older boys at least were quite aware when the hero was being excessively macho, excessively patriotic, etc. and, in later conversations about the movies with their friends, they could occasionally be overheard explaining this to one another in terms of setting and the intricacies of battle tactics. While this may have been more recognition than resistance, it certainly indicated that the group possessed a considerable amount of film-generated knowledge about genre and accepted codes of realism. Moreover, this audience was measuring the truth claims of foregrounded and historical narratives by different standards. If they had learned all this almost intuitively, what else had they learned – about the past for example?

I knew also that, in addition to documentary, *Gallipoli*, *The Killing Fields*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Schindler's List*, *The Mission*, *Gandhi* and other films were used frequently as adjuncts to formal historical study. So clearly there was a feeling in society that historical films, even fictional films, were ‘true’ in certain ways, and seen as containing information about the past. But what kind of information was it? How does genre influence the shaping of the past on film? How does audience knowledge of genre influence the way they understood that information? Why do audiences with limited formal knowledge of the past consider certain films as authentic but not others?

The results of these questions and the winding paths through Academia down which they have led me are here in these pages. Rather than anything definitive, I see this thesis as an investigation into the very complex interactions that exist between entertainment, film text, social context and memory. Even as I reach towards these relationships, I can often think of examples where the connections I posit in the thesis are less than clear. But in a way I am glad that this is so, as I would

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hate to see so amazing and subtle an art form as film pinned down and still as a specimen under glass. It is my hope that this thesis will form a voice in the ongoing conversation about what seems to me to be an increasingly important topic. Given the extreme rapidity with which global communication is becoming multi-dimensional – with the visual leading the way – I think that the more there are interchanges of ideas about the possibilities of a visual medium like film, the more likely it is that forms of communication about the past will match the information delivery modes of the future.

My interest in historical film and its effects falls into the gaps between historian's debates about the decline of 'formal' learning, Film Studies and Film Histories about film itself, and the Public History focus on professional and non-academic history. This then is an interdisciplinary thesis within the fields of popular culture, film, and history and is about the relationships between mainstream film and popular perceptions of the past. This kind of thesis is as yet rare in Australia where there has so far been very little attempt by historians to engage with questions relating to history on film. In Australia most of the work on film has come from Film Studies or Cultural Studies and from linkages between these two disciplines. Attempts to analyse film as historical text, or to analyse the part that historical film plays in historical discourse in this country, is underdeveloped by comparison with the volume of work in America¹ on the subject both in general terms and with respect to specific topics.

The thesis is somewhat different in emphasis from other work in this area of scholarship. Firstly, it is based on a large variety of Hollywood-style mainstream film considering not only those which are self-consciously 'historical' but others which, for less historical reasons, set the action in the past. Like their seriously 'historical' relatives, these films also have the potential to influence *Cultural Memory* in one way or another and are therefore, in my opinion, worthy of attention in the context of this thesis. Secondly, rather than dealing with issue of how a film 'should' represent the past, I am interested in the *actual*, in the ways that mainstream film actually does interact with cultural memory. My aim is to unravel some of those inter-actions between film text and culture which play an important part in determining the meaning and significance of a particular film for popular audiences.

As discussed below in the Methodology section of this chapter, the thesis has an Australian focus and I use individual films (and groups of films) as primary source material. My approach is one which combines the perspective of film viewed as film, with that which considers film as both cultural artefact and historical text. Where appropriate, I have used interviews along with popular

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newspapers and magazines to establish a context for the reception of the more significant of the films considered.

The fundamental understanding of history in this thesis is grounded in the views of new historical scholarship which accepts that while 'events' of the past certainly occurred, there are innumerable possible narratives which could be written about them, making all historical accounts interpretations in one way or another. The line of argument proceeds along two major axes; one following the ways the past is shaped by stylistic features in mainstream historical film; the other concerned with social or political actions which, in one way or another, suggest a significant influence from a film (or a group of films).

My conceptualisation of the issues involved in discussing the intervention of film into cultural memory² is informed by four basic understandings namely: an perception common to a number of disciplines but formulated in the context of historical knowledge by Raphael Samuel³ as 'Unofficial Knowledge' – viz. knowledge is acquired from numerous sources in the process of doing something else; Robert A. Rosenstone's⁴ argument that all visual representations of the past are to some extent fictional; Mary Hoban's⁵ insight that historical film presents history in another genre, a view which builds on Rosenstone's argument that visual communication must be judged by standards different from those used to judge the written word. Finally, I agree with the theoretical approach developed by William J. Palmer.⁶ His postmodern 'holograph of history' derived from the theoretical positions of Michael Foucault, Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra emphasises the significance of interactions between film text and society in determining the meaning (and hence the social impact) of mainstream film. Palmer sees Hollywood as the creator of historical discourse in clearly defined texts which comment on, and participate in, contemporary social history. Where those texts deal with the past, they do so in a manner that relates to the present, in that the meaning of the events themselves are a matter of dispute in the present, or that the issues raised in the past of the film text comment directly on the present. Palmer points out that, even when films are set in the past, the meanings generated in the binary discourse between text and the social context can initiate vehement debates about the issue as it is understood *in the present*.

Inevitably, the fact that mainstream historical film is built around a number of cinematic conventions and narrative codes has an effect on how the historical is understood *in general terms*. Mainstream films consists of numerous visual and scripted narrative strands which structure history as drama focused in the personal, and concern with the effects of this is germane to the discussion of all films (and their effects) in the thesis. In Section Two in particular, I am interested in the various layers and kinds of myth which operate through this complex structure as genre, emplotment, connotation of images etc. I argue that while these elements are influential in shaping meaning and audience response, they are not determinative as meaning is made in culture where the different layers and types of meaning in film intersect with other narratives in cultural memory.

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Moreover, the enormous potential available through film's layered texts, subtexts, mythic meanings and stylistic emplotments makes it possible for mainstream cinema to perform those tasks of entertainment and authentic historical representation simultaneously with other ideological and social functions. Not all films will do this of course. But it is possible – and it has been done in mainstream film.

One the important contentions in the thesis is that, in fact, mainstream film is (potentially) able to entertain, inform and challenge notions of the past almost as easily as it can confirm existing beliefs *because of* audience familiarity with the conventions of mainstream cinema. Certain of the case studied in this thesis are directed towards establishing the validity of this proposition. I argue that, rather than being seen as a single narrative (perhaps supported by sub plots) mainstream film should be understood as being composed of numerous different strands of narrative, numerous small narrative scenes bound together like the strands in a rope. While overall they constitute a story, the various narratives which constitute the multiple strands of text in the film contain different kinds of information which make distinctly different claims about what kinds of 'truth' they re-present. Thus, audiences can accept that a film with a fictional foregrounded narrative constructed according to generic codes, can still be an authentic representation of the past. The way the past is treated in the film is very much a matter of genre and accepted notions of surface historical detail. But, as I discuss in Chapter Two, both this aspect and the shape of the historical narrative of the film will depend for authority to a considerable extent on intertextuality between that representation and other texts circulating in culture. In other words, I argue that fiction can reveal history and that mainstream film can be a culturally acceptable representation of the past. In this thesis I explore the ways in which a number of films have become a part of the social negotiation about the past, those that supported the status quo, those that challenged our notions of the past, and a few which prompted public controversy sufficient to result in social or political action.

In this thesis I see narratives, images and memories of the past – the official, the public and the private – as forming part of the group understanding or cultural memory that is intersected by the historical representation in the film text. I use the term *Cultural Memory* rather than the more usual *Collective Memory*, because, as used by some American scholars particularly by Marita Sturken, that term more closely matches the emphasis in the thesis. Sturken defines cultural memory as 'memory that is shared outside that avenue of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning'.⁷ She stresses the importance of cultural artefacts such as film as devices which can promote the sharing of personal memories, moving the boundaries between personal memory, cultural memory and ultimately historical narrative.

As Sturken uses the concept in her book *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembrance*, cultural memory is a social phenomenon made up of layers existing somewhere between written history and personal memory. As she puts it:

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Cultural Memory represents the many shifting histories and shared memories that exist between a sanctioned narrative of history and personal memory.⁸

While cultural memory is an important part of cultural identity, providing both a sense of the past and a sense of belonging to a community with connections to that past, it is also a field of cultural negotiations through which different stories vie for a place in history.⁹ According to Sturken, “cultural memory both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed”.¹⁰

One further aspect of memory appears to me to have an influence on the ways in which film intervenes in cultural memory. The interpersonal drama in the foregrounded narrative of mainstream film operates through a sense of realism (as the audience of the day conceives of it), and in this it appeals to a kind of memory based on cultural understandings of human behaviour, derived from both inherited beliefs and individual experience. Within the limits of genre, it is important to the authority of mainstream film that the psychological validity of the foregrounded narratives be confirmed by this form of memory, i.e. by cultural experience of human behaviour. This is particularly important to the truth claims in historical film where there needs to be a perceived correspondence between human behaviour, even extraordinary behaviour, of the characters in the person centred drama of the foregrounded narrative, and the historical events which caused such reactions.

Section One

The thesis is divided into three main sections. Section One gives an overview of the thesis and explains the methodology I have adopted and the reasons behind those choices. As the thesis is about the intervention of film in popular understanding of the past, I begin Chapter Two by discussing the question of how historical information is actually acquired in popular culture, drawing on statistical and other information now available from research in North America.¹¹ The results of one major national survey show that, in Roy Rosenzweig’s words ‘in America at least, the past is very much alive, even if textbook narratives and the national past seems to be dying out’.¹² Two-thirds of the 1500 respondents in Rosenzweig and Thelan’s survey described themselves as deeply connected to the past. That past is not, however, the past of official rhetoric or official national history, but a past intimately connected with family and identity, a past learned essentially outside traditional channels.¹³

I then move on to a discussion of the concepts on which the thesis is based and of some of the main ideas that have influenced me. As most of the mainstream films that I deal with in the thesis are fictional stories of the past, I also look briefly at the issue of whether fiction can be history. The

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main emphasis in this discussion however, lies with the way in which the representation of the past is shaped by the conventions of mainstream film, narrative conventions being particularly significant. As already noted, I argue that a film should be read as a *suite* of layered narratives which audiences understand as making different truth claims, this being one of the more important themes running throughout the case studies in this study. I further argue that while both scripted and visual narratives are enormously important in shaping the historical representation in the film text there are other, deeper layers of meaning coded into the narrative structures themselves. In many ways the obvious narrative strands in a film represent the surface layers of deeply embedded cultural and ideological meanings constructed by the various kinds of myth that are either coded into narratives or constructed by them.

As myth is one of the most tangled of concepts, used with different (but related) meanings across disciplines, the chapter devotes some attention to what I mean by 'myth'. Essentially, I see myth as a meaning system deeply embedded in the structure of a great number of the foregrounded narratives; as a narrative strategy which promotes social cohesion and suggests solutions in the narrative which would be impossible in culture; as a strongly ideological component of the different strategies used in the creation of images and narratives; and a structuring device for different kinds of narratives of identity at the level of gender and also nation.

The final section of the chapter looks at the question of authority in the film text. The ideas that I discuss there concerning the sites or sources of filmic authority are – like questions about the relationship between historical meaning, narrative, audience, context and cultural memory – issues which I pursue throughout the thesis.

Section Two

The three chapters in this section are based on (mainly) Australian material. In this section the emphasis is on relationships between the film text and elements beyond the movie screen which help to determine how the past is shaped in the filmic interpretation and how it is understood in culture.

Chapter Three

This chapter deals with Australian films that represent the past, mainly those of the Revival Period of the seventies and eighties, and places some of the essential issues explored in the thesis into an Australian context. The chapter builds on a body of research by film scholars and looks at the way that historical context, issues of funding and audience, together with the conventions of genre shaped the representation of the past in those films. My interest however, centres on considering Australian historical film as a participant in historical discourse in this country. The main argument

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of the chapter centres on two issues; the significance of historical context to the way the past was represented in these films, and the importance that the kinds of historical narratives circulating in popular culture had for the way a film was received by the audiences of the day.

I view the Period films in the context of the upsurge in nationalism at the time and argue that Australian Period films served historical interests in the present. The films drew on cultural memory to support the authority of a particularly narrow version of Australian identity, particularly the then-current politics of identity, viz. a government-sponsored desire to project Australia internationally as a sophisticated nation with a history and cultural heritage to be proud of. Another of the important themes of the thesis is introduced here, and that concerns the use to which the historical is put in the film text. Besides reflecting the celebratory intent of their backing, Australian Period films reflected many of the concerns of then-contemporary society, particularly the influence of the women's movement together with more enduring anxieties, notably those concerning 'mateship' and the construction of Australian masculinity.

The theme of the second section of the discussion – the importance to the historical meaning of a film of audience perceptions and prejudices – is well illustrated by the poor public reception of *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*. The past as represented in that film confronted the amnesia over race relations in the well-known and flattering version of white struggle and triumph that forms the core of the Australian Legend. Such a version of the past clashed with the social context of celebration which supported film-making at the time and found little support from the narratives of the past circulating in popular culture.

The final part of the chapter also considers social context and its influence on how a film text interacts with cultural memory, this time in relation to the differences in how contemporary audiences view Australian Period films and the way they were received by audiences of the day. The particular focus here is on the decline in popularity of historical film and its virtual disappearance from Australian cinemas, an issue which I relate to an increasing discrepancy between the concepts of identity and the understandings which informed the historical films and those which operate in the present for Australian audiences.

Chapter Four.

Historical representation in mainstream film in contemporary culture has to measure up to the expectations of audiences whose high level of visual literacy and sophistication in reading film ideology demand that, within an entertainment genre, a film should represent the past in ways that can sustain criticism with respect to authenticity. But this has not always been the case. Certain film genres (like Westerns) have played a part in establishing cultural memories of a past which bears little resemblance to the historical record. In this chapter I give some attention to the ways that

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social factors which have helped bring change to cultural memory have also transformed the ways in which some aspects of the past have been represented on film. Such changes in understanding in popular culture turned the Western genre on its head and virtually eliminated costume drama as a popular genre.

The main subject of the chapter, however, is concerned with an alternate process – the ways in which film itself can affect such change focussing on *Flirting*, John Duigan's 1991 film which articulates views of the past challenging to dominant constructions. The characters and the narrative in this film are fictional and neither of the main characters is presented as representative. However, the film constructs its view of the historical era as authoritative. While *Flirting* was reasonably popular, it was never a major film. Nor was it particularly constructed as an historical film, being the story of a boy's coming-of-age as an outsider in a country boarding school in the 1960s. I chose *Flirting* because it demonstrates that a film does not necessarily have to be confrontational to contribute to the process of articulating alternate perceptions, contesting dominant interpretations, and allowing submerged elements in popular understanding to be expressed. It is therefore typical of the dozens of films that contribute to popular understanding of the past through the cumulative presentation of visual and other narratives of the past. The emphasis in this part of the chapter is on those elements in film as text that can contribute to changing popular historical perceptions.

Chapter Five.

This chapter deals with the same period as *Flirting*, the mid-sixties, and develops a number of the threads explored in Chapter Four, particularly the importance to cultural memory of negotiation of the meaning of a film text. In the chapter, I look at the Australian mini-series *Brides of Christ* in which those personal memories of many Catholic women about their schooling in the sixties became public, providing an alternate strand to the dominant popular historical understanding of that time as an era of sex, drugs, miniskirts, rock'n'roll and rebellion. In using the term *Personal Memory* in this thesis, I am speaking of one of the many strands which make up cultural memory of the past. Though such memories are not widely known, they do circulate in small groups and families, generally as individual variants of the kinds of memories shared by groups with similar experiences. Such memories can be (and frequently are) in conflict with dominant media representations, particularly those images and narratives that have coalesced into a generic signifier of period.

Although the characters in *Brides of Christ* are fictional, the discourse about the historical period is located in a fictional narrative about a real event – the effects on society of the directives of Vatican 11. As with *Schindler's List*, (Chapter Seven) the historical issues which underpin the events are abstract and complex. But both films provide a perspective on the issues and specificity in the

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effects by filtering the past through its limited effects on a limited community, in this case an order of nuns and their charges in a girls' boarding school. In this chapter I have used oral histories to demonstrate correspondences between the narrative strategies and tropes of the oral histories and the mythic structures and archetypes used in the series. The chapter argues that, even though dominant representations of the fifties and sixties are heavily laden with nostalgia, these correspondences between personal memory, narrative structures and re-visioning of the past on film created a truth effect of 'seeing the past as it really was'. Additionally, the narrative of *Brides of Christ* illustrated some of the ways in which film can participate in the process of changing Cultural Memory, *Brides of Christ* was involved in the creation of a kind of mythology of its own, a myth of origins which updated Australian national historical mythology to take account of the position of women in the late twentieth century. Apart from those aspects intrinsic to the film text, the effect of the miniseries on popular historical understanding depended on secondary negotiation of meaning in the popular press and in society in general. That negotiation fed off areas of curiosity about Catholics as well as interests of other kinds in popular culture, interests tinged with the erotic derived from other popular cultural constructions of nuns, schoolgirls and sex in the sixties.

Section Three

Each of the films in this section can be shown to have had an impact on cultural memory which was sufficiently strong to result in change. In all three film groups of this section, the impact on popular understanding can be seen to be the results of the film and its interaction with then-current social contexts and issues, individual memory located within wider cultural understandings, or contestations within popular historical consciousness over meanings of the events portrayed. Frequently, orchestration of response through agencies within popular culture, particularly manipulation of the media, has been important in various ways in this social negotiation. However, of these, the essential interaction is between the authority constructed in the film text and the degree to which the film intersected already existing narratives and images in cultural memory.

Chapter Six

This chapter is based on films about World War II and the Vietnam War, and links the emphasis on film as historical text and cultural artefact in Section Two to a new focus on historical film as a participant in contemporary social debate and political action. In both groups of films the past has been used primarily as a site for the construction of ideologically-charged narratives which had direct relevance to the political issues of their day and very little correspondence with the historical record. The chapter argues that, despite the effects of genre and ideological direction, these films had significant influence on the way the past was understood in popular culture and their influence often went beyond the shaping of cultural memory. War films helped define post-war ideals of masculinity and the Vietnam War films in particular become a site for contestation over political

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ideology. As vehicles for influencing the way that conflict was remembered, Vietnam War films played an active part in influencing government policies in both America and Australia.

The chapter falls into three sections. While all the material is linked by its common theme, the various film groups discussed in the chapter illustrate a number of different ways in which film can influence understanding of the past. Firstly I argue that the ideological discourse on masculinity and myths of nationalism contained in the American World War II Combat films had a significant impact on sections of the American population who were of age for service in the Vietnam War. Secondly, I consider the effect of social context and cultural inheritance on the ways in which a film is read in different cultural contexts. For example, Australian troops were *not* influenced in the same way as their American counterparts by Combat movies and Westerns – yet both sets of men would have been exposed to the same movies. By comparison, in Australia, cultural memory of the Vietnam War has been strongly influenced by American Vietnam War films – yet the Australian and American experience in Vietnam were substantially different.

In the third section of the chapter, by focussing on the ways in which American filmic representations of the Vietnam veteran changed over a ten-year-period, I also discuss interrelationships between filmic representations of the past and current political concerns. In particular, I look at the way Hollywood took up the highly emotive and very political issue of the whereabouts of those Americans listed as 'Missing In Action' after 1975. Although this very serious concern was grafted on to a particularly macho version of the Action-Adventure genre, it was a significant intervention into the American historical vision of what had happened in Southeast Asia. According to H. Bruce Franklin, Hollywood's ability to manufacture essential images for the contested MIA issue helped entrench a particular version in American popular consciousness allowing the subject to become part of American mythology of the Vietnam War and the official post-war rationale for continuing economic hostilities against that country.¹⁴

Chapter Seven.

In Chapter Seven, I look at *Schindler's List* and *JFK* as examples of films which have had very powerful interventions in popular understanding. Whereas all the characters and all of the stories in Chapter Six are fiction, each of the films in this chapter is based on actual people and a version of real and specific events. Each film dealt with historical material which was already well-known and strongly controversial.

Schindler's List used the little-known story of a real person and a real incident to deal with the issue of the Holocaust. Spielberg framed his foregrounded narrative within the well-known film strategy of personal awakening – a version of the mythic Hero's Journey. I emphasise in this chapter that the impact of the film on popular understanding was not only a result of decisions made about

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appropriate narrative, aesthetic approach and modes of discourse in the film itself, but that it was also the result of a deliberate policy to open up the area of private memory and to turn it into a permanent record. I use the term *private memory* here to mean highly personal memories, often of a traumatic nature, which have rarely been narrated.

In the film's historical context of the present – that is in negotiations of meaning *outside* of the film text – in popular culture, the film addressed the revisionist, anti-Semitic positions of those who claimed that the Holocaust never happened. It also addressed in practical terms aesthetic, moral and academic questions about representations of the holocaust. The fact that the film was a Hollywood blockbuster meant that the film text and its associated publicity created public space for discussion of historical and moral questions surrounding the Holocaust, and did so *in popular culture*.¹⁵ Moreover the popular appeal of the film as a *human story* tended to create conditions conducive to the revelation of private memory, an historical source highly valued in popular culture.¹⁵ However, the major intervention is likely to come from two (Spielberg sponsored) ongoing processes which popular response to the film made feasible. The first is a world-wide project to collect video testimony from Holocaust survivors and the second an education program, *Facing History and Ourselves* which, with the film as centrepiece, probes the sources and processes of prejudice, placing the Holocaust at the centre of 20th century European history.

JFK like *Schindler's List* produced a major social movement. This is a film in which a fictionalised version of an investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy (in the form of the case against Clay Shaw), so influenced popular understanding that it achieved what the actual investigation had failed to do thirty years previously. In this chapter I consider the form of the film and the questions that the director's choices in this respect raised about the nature of evidence and historical truth, both as part of the film text and subsequently in popular culture where the film caused an enormous stir. Despite its striking formal structure, the overall narrative is configured within conventional movie genres and, like *Schindler's List*, delivers ideological messages from within the particular application of the mythic construction of the Hero and his roles in culture.

In this chapter I also consider the impact that the film has on popular historical consciousness and argue that the Kennedy era had special cultural meanings deriving from how it was understood at the time and subsequently, as revelations of the President's marital infidelities, his alleged associations with Mafia figures, and revisions of his policies added new currents to popular understanding and kept the era alive in popular historical consciousness. Moreover the Kennedy era and the assassination are associated in popular memory with the Vietnam War and the repercussions of that period on American political agendas and ideological values. Finally I relate the impact of the film to the anxieties of a (then) increasingly conservative nation. I argue that in producing its impact on popular historical consciousness, and subsequent social action, the film tapped personal memory, popular historical consciousness and current concerns about 'things going

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wrong'; provided a suitable scapegoat in unknown shadowy coalitions of government, the military, the Mafia, and big business; and finally, provided a solution by an appeal to American individualism, civic duty and the innate goodness of the American constitution and way of life.

Chapter Eight.

This chapter deals with an actual historical episode but uses a fictional narrative of two representative (but fictional) main characters to bring an essentially unknown episode in Australia's past to the forefront of popular knowledge. As one of my main contentions in this thesis is that the ways in which film intersects with narratives and other texts in culture has a significant influence on the authority and influence of the film text, in this chapter (more than elsewhere in the thesis) I concentrate on the social context and the processes through which the historical information in *The Leaving of Liverpool* fostered social controversy and led to legal action. In this context, I also give particular attention to the social factors that made it possible in the early nineties for a film to deal with issues like child abuse and paedophilia in institutions when information on these matters had been neglected and sometimes hidden for fifty years.

I argue that the interpretations of events in both the documentary *Lost Children Of The Empire* and the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool* provoked controversy not only over the events portrayed, but also over deeper, more ideologically-based questions about Government responsibility and public trust. By making public, collective and guilt-free a version of the past which, as personal memory, had formerly been fragmented and private and frequently traumatic, the films encouraged a flood of fresh accusations from former child-migrants. However, even though generic conventions in *The Leaving Of Liverpool* focussed the historical into a sentimental tale of victimage which tended to predispose audiences towards accepting accounts of former child migrants over counter-claims by institutions, that alone could not account for the political impact of the series. As with *JFK* and *Schindler's List*, *The Leaving Of Liverpool* demonstrates that the impact a filmic version of the past has on the present is dependent on more than a sympathetic and/or aesthetic rendition of events. In Australia, the authority of *The Leaving of Liverpool* as historical text was virtually guaranteed by the fact that it was an ABC co-production. From the outset, the ABC and other broadcasters treated the issues as factual, significant and important to contemporary society. In addition, extensive and on-going coverage from print media, ensured that the controversies over the meaning of events reached a huge cross-section of the population. Like *JFK* and *Schindler's List*, *The Leaving Of Liverpool* demonstrates the potential of the past to on film to produce results in the present –providing that the historical content is seen as authoritative, important and active in the present.

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Chapter Nine. Concluding Chapter

In this chapter I draw together the main issues and concerns of the thesis and the conclusions I have reached.

Methodology

As this thesis sits at the intersection of Cultural Studies and History, I have used Cultural Studies methodology common to Oral History and historical research as well as a kind of narrative analysis of film as text. Overall, the thesis is based on case studies in which mainstream Hollywood-style narrative films constitute the primary sources. Though not all the films are Australian in origin or content, the thesis has an Australian focus overall and the films chosen represent the spectrum of the correspondence between historical film and the framework of historical fact. In certain instances I have used films which are based on European and/or American historical experience because the events themselves have had a major impact on the 20th century and because their representation on film can be shown to have had a significant influence on perceptions of the past in popular culture.

The individual chapters focus on different kinds of interactions between film and society with the social and historical context and/ or the reception of the film being more important in some chapters than others. I have therefore also used other primary sources as the situation warranted, decisions that I discuss below. Where my concern has been with historical events as represented in popular culture, or with the reception of films themselves, I have used various daily newspapers, popular magazines and current affairs periodicals as primary material because of their value as indicators of the kinds of media-generated narratives current in popular culture. In the *Brides of Christ* chapter in particular, I have also used interviews both to gather information about aspects of the production and also as oral histories in their own right.

Why Hollywood-style mainstream film?

The decision to base the thesis on a study of Hollywood-style narrative film results from the simple observation that, regardless of the use made of the past in such works, these films reach millions of people. Moreover, particular genres shape the past in specific ways and as these are repeated over and over in different variations, they have enormous potential to influence cultural memory, not only as cultural understandings of filmic genre but also as 'memory' of the past. I use the term *Hollywood* to refer both to the film industry and to its characteristic product – narrative film designed to suit the taste of a large mainstream audience. Though many films in this thesis were made in Australia, they still use the same narrative codes and conventions as those made in Hollywood. They are thus Hollywood-style or mainstream movies. While films are by no mean the only sources of historical knowledge in a community, nor the most highly valued, it is still the case that for many they are the major (sometimes the only) source of information on a particular aspect

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of the past. From the most sophisticated to those that give history on film a bad name, these films – not the art-house film, not the avant-garde, not the experimental – are the ones that people actually see.

I am very much in agreement with Raphael Samuel that historical knowledge is acquired in many different ways, often in the process of doing something else.¹⁶ Consequently, I have included films like *Westerns* and *Missing In Action* (MIA) films which stretch the very concept of ‘history’ however one looks at it, as well as other films like *Schindler’s List* which are the fictionalised versions of the actions of real people in recorded historical circumstances. Regardless of their standing as representations of the historical, they all offer audiences the same opportunities for gleaning historical information – even if this is only a matter of the surface look of the past – and even if such information is entirely a fantasy. At the other end of the historical spectrum, according to Robert A. Rosenstone, Hollywood film can construct ‘real history’, a case in point in his opinion being the moderately popular film *Reds*.¹⁷ However, in between the positions of the past in Hollywood film as ‘real history’ and the past as an exotic dehistoricised setting, there are bodies of work where the past in these films constitutes a location for the construction of ideological messages, frequently as ideologically motivated narrative sites for contestation over social and political issues of the present.

Another reason for treating mainstream film seriously as a transmitter of historical information is that Hollywood is usually quite reactive and timely in its handling of social history. As has been pointed out by William J. Palmer who explores the relationships between film and social history, Hollywood films, individually or as groups, have always explored either directly or metaphorically what is on the mind of the public.¹⁸ Although interrelating with social unease may be more closely related to the nature of the movie business rather than to any sense of altruism or social responsibility, the reciprocal reaction between film text, popular historical understanding and social action can be significant.

Not only can the film texts which result from Hollywood’s address to present anxieties have the power to create images which verify and reveal history, they also shape historical issues in the mould of present concerns, a factor in mainstream film which I address in Chapters Six and Seven. In Chapter Six I look at ways in which war films re-visioned the past in particular genres where the address of the film was really to issues in the present. In particular, I look at the ideological discourse on masculinity contained in both the American World War II Combat films and the Vietnam War films discuss the possible impact on Australian understanding of extreme forms of this interaction through the popular MIA films. In Chapter Seven, the power of Hollywood film to create images and mythic narratives which speak to unformulated popular apprehension, is fundamental to my analysis of the outstanding social interventions of the film *JFK*.

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Hollywood films as historical representation are interesting for other reasons as well. Hollywood film is first and foremost a commercial product designed as entertainment, and one of the main things that historical film holds out to audiences is the potential for re-experiencing the past. There are significant tensions between this as an outcome and the analytic approach, multiple perspectives, and ambiguities that mark historical formats. Moreover, mainstream film works within conventional frameworks in respect to genre and narrative codes, and in attempting to meld cinema, history and popular entertainment, historical film is always treading the limits of *what is possible*. The films that Rosenstone speaks about as fulfilling the potential to represent history on film are really about the potential of the aesthetics of film to communicate, the limits of film as media. Those films fail to offer identification, that essential ingredient without which film becomes another creature altogether. Rather like a master painting such films as *Distant Visions*, *Still Lives* are beautiful and moving – but essentially uninvolved, ‘other’.

For the purposes of this study, under the banner ‘Hollywood-style movies’ or ‘mainstream’ I have included other formats like video, tele-movies and miniseries which reach large audiences, use mainstream filmic conventions and share common ground in the commercial nature of production. Indeed, in a thesis dealing with an Australian context for popular understanding of the past, it has been essential to include the mini-series as, for commercial reasons of guaranteed audiences and pre-sale, this format has become the home of filmic narratives about Australia’s past. Individually and collectively all of these forms of visual communication form part of the multi-layered interactions in popular culture between cultural products, personal memory, cultural memory and social negotiations of all kinds to form popular understanding of the past.

Historical documentary, a somewhat less popular but more authoritative filmic genre, is also an important element in this process. However, as this thesis focuses on the interventions of Hollywood-style film in cultural memory, and as the rhetoric and reception of historical documentary is a substantial field of its own which has already received academic scrutiny,¹⁹ I have reluctantly assigned documentary to the margins of the discussion. Because documentary is understood in popular culture in an entirely different way to the kinds of truth effects generated by the Hollywood product, the combination of historical authority with emotive meanings centred in a narrative about individuals can make enormous differences to the significance that the historical subject has in popular culture and to the degree of influence that it has on popular understanding of the past.

Whilst I agree with Rosenstone²⁰ and White²¹ that documentary and narrative historical film share many of the same fictive elements in structure and narrative, historical documentary is received as more authentic, more nostalgic and certainly more unreachable than other representation on film. Partly because of the different focus and different receptions of these two formats, (historical

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'genres' in Mary Hoban's terms),²² there is (or can be) a complementarity between historical subjects represented as documentary and those represented as narrative film and other forms of communication about the past.

The issue of demonstrating how those kinds of construction intervened in popular understanding has been much more problematic. In developing an approach to this problem, I have been very aware that 'popular understanding' is not a singular effect and that popular culture is fragmented and composed of contesting points of view, partial understandings and shifting concerns. Though I know that quantitative methodologies have an important place in the social sciences, I am wary of depending on the limited information that even the most extensive, stratified and thoroughly prepared surveys could give me with respect to how particular films or groups of films affect understanding of the past. Oral histories and interviews, though they can provide quite fascinating material (and I have used them in parts of the thesis), do not really provide answers to this central question either. I follow Raphael Samuel in believing that unless a film makes a strong conscious impression on a viewer, a person is generally not aware of exactly how, or if, or to what extent, a film may have influenced their understanding of the past. What is more, the memory of an experience and its influence on us is subject to constant reconstruction in the present as more recent experiences cause us to re-remember and allocate new levels of influence to past understandings.

Consequently, in those chapters of the thesis where I look at particular types of interventions, I use social and/or political action as an indicator of the influence of a film or group of films on popular understanding.²³ The American productions *Schindler's List* and *JFK* and the Australian/British co-production *The Leaving Of Liverpool* can be shown to have intervened in popular understanding of the past to produce social results in which there are direct relationships between the screening of the films and the subsequent action. In the case of those films that deal with war, the World War II Combat films and the Vietnam War films, the kinds and degrees of the intervention of these films is more contentious but nevertheless demonstrable as having particular effects on social attitudes and actions of particular social groups in America and Australia.

I am of course very aware that a film can have a profound effect on historical understanding for groups and for individuals without having any noticeable effect within society. In those chapters where my main aim has been to demonstrate the techniques used in film to build popular understandings of the past, I have not given the same degree of consideration to the problem of demonstrating the extent of the film's effect on popular understanding. The films in this section, all of them Australian, have been very well received in this country. *Brides of Christ* for example was, at the time of its initial screening in 1991, the ABC's most popular miniseries ever and was subsequently shown all around the world. Yet, apart from audience rating figures and anecdotal evidence, it is difficult to prove that a perception exists that this series had enormous effect on understanding of the past.

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Though internal psychological processes of identification and desire have been shown by film scholars to be very important in the way that film impacts on individuals and on culture, the significance of its impact on popular understanding of the past cannot be adequately explained in these terms. My thesis tries to unravel some of the *other* mechanisms that are in operation by which *information* and *attitudes* as well as information about the past are conveyed by Hollywood movies.

People use the past in a variety of different ways, as has been demonstrated by a major survey conducted in America in the mid-nineties by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan for The Centre For History Making at Indiana University. Their work shows that when confronted with historical accounts constructed by others, they sought to examine them critically and connect them to their own experiences or those of people close to them.²⁴ In many ways this is exactly what mainstream historical film does. The foregrounded narrative constructs history in a way that is meaningful to people, as a drama of its impact on individuals. As do other forms in popular culture, film provides a means of identifying with the past and may even create a community through that identification. Even though Rosenzweig and Thelan's work indicates that people do not necessarily trust the view of the past represented on film²⁵, it also shows that most people are regularly exposed to information about the past conveyed in that format.²⁶ The situation is likely to be similar in Australia. Historians in this country have not, however, engaged with film as history in the way that this has become important in America, an issue I discuss later at greater length in Chapter Two.

I believe it is important to attempt to untangle the ways by which historical information in a film text is understood in society, how it is evaluated and used by the people who consume it because, in an age of overabundant knowledge and near-instant communication around the globe, a medium that tells us simple and involving stories has a special status and power. The plethora of information available to us and the speed at which the focus on events and issues changes means that on the whole we have a smattering of information about more and more. This potentially gives enormous power to the simple narratives which form the bulk of mass-mediated translations of both the present and the past. Mainstream film – which packages social problems into digestible narratives, and resolves in its mythic story lines things irresolvable in real life – also shapes complex historical issues into narratives focused on the personal in ways that make them real and significant for individuals. A better understanding of mainstream film – what it is and what it does in cultural memory – is not only desirable, it is essential

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¹ The film as history has been treated from different perspectives by numerous American authors. There is also a very substantial body of work on particular historical episodes like the American Civil War and the Vietnam War. For some of the more general approaches see:

– Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies In The Reception Of American Cinema*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992.

– William J. Palmer, *The Films Of The Eighties: A Social History*. Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville. 1993.

– Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions Of The Past: The Challenge Of Film To Our Idea Of History*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995

– Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1996.

– Robert Brent Toplin, *History By Hollywood: the Use and Abuse of the American Past*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago. 1996.

– Vivian Sobchack (Ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*. Routledge, New York and London, 1996.

– Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1997.

– Kenneth Cameron, *America On Film: Hollywood and American History*. Continuum, New York, 1997.

In Australia there was some interest in this area during the film revival period of the late sixties to the mid eighties and there were three Film and History Conferences in Australia in 1982, 1984 and 1987. The first conference corresponded with the peak of Australian historical film making, when historical film in Australia had virtually become a genre and the final conference took place at virtually the same time as the popular appeal of the genre had run its course. The greater interest has come from the areas of Cultural Studies and Film Studies.

See Notes 1– . Chapter Three.

² See definition below Page 5.

³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London & New York, 1994.

⁴ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea Of History*., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995.

⁵ Mary Hoban, 'Realer than Reel' in *Public History Review*, Vol. 3, 1994. pp.107–123

⁶ William J Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1995 Edition. 1993.

⁷ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, University of California Press, Berkley. 1997. P.3

⁸ Marita Sturken, " The Wall, the Screen and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. *Representations*, No, 35, Spring 1991, p.119.

⁹ Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*. p.1

¹⁰ Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, p.1

¹¹ P. Seixas, 'Historical Understanding Amongst Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting' *Curriculum Enquiry*, Vol. 23, NO.3, 1993, pp.301–327.

P. Seixas, 'Mapping the Terrain of Historical Significance' *Social Education*, Vol. 61, No.1, 1997, pp.22–27.

Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998.

¹² Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*, p.180.

¹³ Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*, p.177.

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¹⁴ H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A: or Mythmaking in America*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1993.

¹⁵ Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence Of the Past: Popular Use of History In American Life*.

A study by these authors has shown that, on a 1 to 10 scale for trust worthiness, the respondents in their national survey rated personal accounts from grandparents or other relatives at 8, just ahead of conversations with someone who was there, (7.8) and slightly below the reliability of museums, (8.4)

¹⁶ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London & New York, 1994.

¹⁷ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea Of History*, p.104.

¹⁸ Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. p.xi.

¹⁹ Dirk W. Eitzen, 'Bringing the past to life': The reception and rhetoric of historical documentaries. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Iowa, U.M.I. Ann Arbor, MI, 1994.

²⁰ Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images /History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film". in *American Historical Review* Volume 93. Number 5. December 1988,. pp.1173-1211, p.1197

Both the articles by Rosenstone and White were part of a special *AHR Forum*

²¹ Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty." In *American Historical Review* Volume 93. Number 5. December, 1988,. pp.1179-1180.

²² Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', pp.107-123

²³ I am very aware of course that a film can have a profound effect on historical understanding for groups and for individuals without having any noticeable effect within society. However for the purposed of this thesis, I have confined my choices to situations where such social effects are clearly present and clearly related to the film.

²⁴ Rosenzweig and Thelan. *The Presence Of The Past: popular Uses Of History In American Life*, p.179.

²⁵ See Appendix 2., Table 11. in Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: popular Uses Of History In American Life*, p.246.

In many ways I am not surprised at the findings of this research about people's feeling of connectedness to the past and about the different degrees of trust they place in the divergent sources of information. The findings of this study support my contentions that audiences ascribe different kinds and degrees of authority to the various narrative strands in film. It also supports my claims about audience sophistication in their understanding of genre. As responses to the survey have underlined, audiences do not passively accept filmic versions of the past. The authority of a film text and its meanings for society are determined by a process of interaction between the narratives of cultural and personal memory that circulate in society and the meanings proposed in the film text.

²⁶ Eighty one percent of the national sample had watched movies or television programs about the past in the last twelve months, only two percent lower than those making the active decision to take films or videos to preserve the past.

See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*. Appendix 2, Table 5, p.238.

I saw it in a movie somewhere . . .

The question of popular knowledge of the past

Governments in Australia in this last year of the 20th century may not be exactly in the grip of millennium neurosis, but many policy makers see Australia as a society in which historical knowledge is seeping away. In New South Wales where, for over twenty years there has been a steady decline in the number of students voluntarily opting for formal study of the past, measures are in place to force a particular version of what constitutes historical knowledge back on to the compulsory curriculum. The 'History' that many politicians fear our society is losing is history in the upper case; understandings based on a very chronological, male-centred view of a past comprised of wars and treaties and acts of parliament – with bits about 'culture', 'social progress' and 'women' added in as optional extras to the main events. Yet, I doubt that formal study of History has ever been the major way that information about the past has entered cultural memory. On the contrary, popular historical consciousness has always had many unofficial sources, and is composed of contesting and coalescing fragments of individual and group memory, of images and narratives, mythically and ideologically influenced perceptions of every kind. As Geoffrey O'Brien has observed in his reflections on the impact of film on historical imagination and visualisation in the 20th century, 'The most powerful influence was exerted at the peripheries, where the stray pieces of pseudo-information tended to crop up'¹. He is speaking, of course, of film; of the innumerable pieces of trivia and the equally innumerable ideas about connections between events and things, historical or otherwise, which constitute the landscape of our historical understanding.

His memory of making connections and parallels, 'equivalences', between a French aristocrat of the *ancien regime* and a Chinese war lord of the 1930s, between a Mexican peon of the revolutionary era and a Vietnamese rice farmer determined to resist a Communist take-over², reminds us just how much of the understanding of historical events like wars and revolutions is a matter of making such connections; and equally how much chance, narrative and visualisations are involved in the process of acquiring historical information. It also reminds us of the scant attention generally paid to understanding the ways in which ordinary Australians acquire information about the past³, despite the high political concern over the role of history in the national consciousness.

Chapter 2. I saw it in a movie somewhere

Recent research in both Canada⁴ and America⁵ indicates that the assumption that formal learning is the main way people learn about the past, passively imbibing lessons from schools and official sources, is almost opposite to the reality. In fact, the respondents to the American survey told researchers that they felt less connected to the past in that setting than in any other setting asked about in the survey.⁶ The American research found overall (in David Thelan's own words) that:

Americans feel at home with their past: day to day, hour to hour, the past is present in their lives. Encountering the past, examining it, interpreting it, living and reliving it, they root themselves in their families – biological or constructed – and root their families in the world.⁷

Given the similarities between North American society and our own, the same is likely to be true of Australia also, an hypothesis already supported by the results of a small Australian Research Council Project, 'Australians and the Past'.⁸ These findings suggest that personal and popular interpretations of the past play a significant role in the way Australians from diverse social and ethnic groups understand their sense of identity in the Australian nation, influencing the way they negotiate their relationships to the broader Australian community.

Despite falling enrolments in courses of formal instruction, History is very much alive in Australian popular culture. We live in a society saturated with historical information – information different from that posited in official rhetoric about the past – but information rich in the myths, fragments and perceived connections between past and present. Modern societies are bombarded with historical information with the visual being particularly significant, surrounding us as photographs, advertisements, posters, museums, exhibitions, history walks, popular history features in the daily media, and above all in film. Films like *Ghandi*, *Tarzan*, *The Thin Red Line*, *The Last Emperor*, *High Noon*, *1919*, *Farewell My Concubine*, *Sands of Iwo Jima* – the good, the bad and the just plain ludicrous – are often as close as many people will ever come to parts of the past.

Whilst Australia may not be making films about 'historical' subjects at this time, history is a staple of serials, miniseries, documentaries, and is abundantly represented in film from other countries. History assails us in successful cultural products like the recent Academy Award winners and nominees *Saving Private Ryan*, *Shine*, *Titanic*, *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*, or through the recent success of filmic translations of the prestigious literary works like those of Jane Austen. In the less authoritative but more central and pervasive medium of television, the immense recent popularity of the series *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as the somewhat less successful *Kangaroo Palace* (which deals with the Australian Exodus to London in the 1960s) or *Kings in Grass Castles* (the story of an Irish Immigrant family in Australia during the second half of the 19th century), all show just how much the 'historical' surrounds us in our daily lives. To a greater or lesser extent, these works create a version of the past that lives again at twenty-six frames a second.

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And while that may not be ‘history’ as understood in the academy or in the corridors of power in government, it is a very important part of the scaffolding of the cultural capital on which cultural memory draws. We make educated guesses, but actually know really very little about, how the general public acquires historical knowledge; how people feel about the various pasts and versions of past experience to which they are exposed; what use they make of the quantity of historical material in circulation in popular culture.⁹ Previous work in Australia has tended to be either in Cultural Studies, Education or History explicitly - with little attempt at crossing disciplines. As I argue in this thesis, ‘history’ is understood in many ways – and most of them aren’t going to fit nicely into the boundaries of existing intellectual disciplines. Moreover, the intellectual, abstracted ways in which certain forms of historical scholarship have viewed ‘history’ do not have power to determine the kinds of connectedness to the past that ordinary people feel. For many people, film offers that kind of access to the past.

Research into the popular experience of the past in Australia is clearly necessary. In this thesis I am particularly interested in the ways that cultural memory is influenced by film, not just by films which are self-consciously historical, but also by those films which tell fictional stories of individuals and events where the past functions as everything from the source narrative motivation to an exotic location for dressing up. As the thesis draws on scholarship from several disciplines and fields of study, this chapter focuses on some of its key ideas and concepts, and the understandings that inform them. In particular, it deals with certain of the issues that arose for me out of the questions of whether or not fiction on film can convey historical information and if so, what kind of understandings are constructed, and how is that information influenced by the form which contains it. Specifically, I consider the ways that conventions of genre and narrative structures in mainstream film shape the representation of the past and the mechanisms by which audiences determine what is authoritative in film and what is not. Although the ideas I discuss can be seen to operate in the majority of mainstream films and in their interactions with society, I do not see them as definitive. As the combination of art and text in film creates a multi-layered mode of expression in a medium which is itself capable of great subtlety, and as the relationships between the film and other texts in culture is always dynamic; it would seem both arrogant and foolish to take that position. The thesis then is an exploration of the possibilities and constraints operating in the representation of the past in mainstream film and an attempt to unravel some of the interactions between film and society operating beyond the film text. This chapter serves to give an overview of a number of issues pertinent to that investigation and gives some indication of the ideas which have informed my thinking.

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The Film As History – Robert A. Rosenstone

Robert A. Rosenstone, whose pioneering work on history-on-film is the starting point for this thesis, maintains that the visual media can be legitimate ways of doing history. Fundamental to Rosenstone's argument are the insights of modern scholarship which demonstrate that all history, including written history, is a construction shaped by the conventions of genre and language. Rosenstone emphasises the fact that, as all representations of the past are governed by the possibilities and limitations of the medium, the ways in which the written and visual media represent the past *must* be different. Where written forms privileges elements like fact, analysis and linearity, visual formats present another form of history in which there can be simultaneity, montage and juxtaposition and where sound, vision and feeling can be major modes of expression.

Rosenstone argues that in the important differences between the ways that words and images create versions of 'reality', a central difference is to be found in the role that 'invention' plays in the visual format. His argument runs that while history is a 'true' story, *literal* truth is never possible in any form – oral, written, or visual.¹⁰ They are all representations and, to a greater or lesser extent, all subject to a convention of 'condensation' which allows a selection of evidence to stand for the larger historical experience, and for a sampling of reports to represent the collective experience of thousands, even millions who took part or were affected by the events documented.¹¹ In Rosenstone's analysis, condensation in visual historical texts, along with the other more obvious forms of 'invention' viz. – *Alteration*, *Invention* and *Metaphor* – are essential to the representation of the past because they work together 'to summarise, generalise, synthesise and symbolise – in images.'¹²

Rosenstone points out that, while we can never know exactly what happened in the past in terms of precise location and all the physical detail of furnishings, climate, etc., these are just the kinds of specifics the camera demands. So, he argues, the representation of an event in visual media, even one based on the most thorough research, can never be *literally* what happened. It can only ever be an approximation. And such approximations – such inventions – form the basis of *every* scene in a film, as well as *every* description of an event in a written account. The same is true for *every* character. Both specific people and representatives of groups (like soldiers or factory workers) can never be more than approximations who behave, move and sound as we assume them to have acted on the basis of the evidence available to us. Rosenstone sums up the situation thus:

Film will always include images that are at once invented and true: true in that they symbolise, condense, or summarise, larger amounts of data; true in that they impart an overall meaning to the past that can be verified, documented, or reasonably argued.¹³

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Perhaps Rosenstone's most contentious argument is that the tendency in some historical films to invent characters and incidents for the sake of dramatic effect, narrative continuity, etc. does not necessarily violate the historical record overall. As Rosenstone sees the situation, there is, however, a difference between 'true' invention and 'false' invention. Certain filmic inventions are 'false' because they ignore the discourse of history. Others however, even though they invent a character or a scene in order to compress an otherwise unwieldy body of historical information, are 'true' because they actively engage with that discourse. Moreover, invented episodes or repeated images can act as metaphors for elements like internalised decisions, etc. and convey information in ways which are understood differently from the more logical process of cognition.

Overall I agree with Rosenstone that all representations of the past are inventions, but I do not always agree with the way he applies the idea of 'true' invention and 'false' invention. As I discuss more fully later in this chapter, for audiences the significance of inventions Rosenstone speaks of in *Mississippi Burning* and *JFK* can be problematic because of what the audience knows of film conventions and the narratives of the past circulating in culture. For example, Rosenstone places *Mississippi Burning* in the category of false invention because it ignores historical work which shows that, in the Freedom Summer of 1964, black Americans worked as a community to alleviate their own oppression. However, Alan Parker (the director of *Mississippi Burning*) made a deliberate choice in representing his foreground narrative as he did because he wanted the meaning of the film to be understood in respect to the present, in what he saw as a disturbing rise in white supremacist thinking in the United States. Whilst I agree with Rosenstone with respect to his analysis of the way invention operates in mainstream film, I think that modern audiences understand the layers of narrative operating in a film as containing different kinds of meaning. As I argue below, the foregrounded narrative of *Mississippi Burning* was generically that of a buddy movie and audiences would not expect that aspect to be literally true. That particular element was a well-known device of the movies but not a story with currency in the narratives of the event that circulate in cultural memory. By comparison, the historical narrative of racial violence in America's south and of the murder of the civil rights workers was widely known. Together, the two different layers of narrative have different historical meaning, where audiences understand the situation as a *story set against an historical situation*.

For similar reasons, I tend to disagree with Rosenstone about elements of inventions in *JFK*. Rosenstone sees the invention of Willie O'Keefe, the prisoner who gives evidence against Clay Shaw, as part of the conventions of mainstream historical film whereby Oliver Stone 'is doing no more than finding a plausible way of summarising evidence that comes from too many sources to depict on screen.'¹⁴ As I see the historical aspect of that film, one of the main reasons it had a strong impact on political action was because it intersected with a discourse about *evidence* in cultural memory and in culture generally. When Oliver Stone used the common convention of

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invention to summarise evidence, he actually crossed the line into false invention because of the specific emphasis in that film *about evidence*.

However, my concern in this thesis is not with the question of whether or not film really represents the past, but with the ways that film intervenes in cultural memory, with the ways that film frames the kind of information that becomes part of cultural memory. As I argue in the thesis, it is quite possible for film to construct a version of the past that is almost entirely fantasy, a situation seen in film versions of old-fashioned musicals like *Oklahoma* or in the American Western or the Tarzan films. The past in such films may be little more than an exotic setting for other kinds of dramas entirely. But even there the surfaces like costumes, buildings, etc. convey historical information of a kind, and such information (which may even be entirely false to the historical record) becomes part of the repertoire of information in cultural memory. Authentic or otherwise, film contributes images, narratives, memories and understandings to culture, forming part of the process whereby cultural memory is constructed.

In general, when Rosenstone speaks of film as a potential means of 'contesting, visioning and re-visioning history'¹⁵ he is discussing quite exceptional works like *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* or *Walker*. In these films those very exceptional qualities of structure and/or aesthetics which make them good vehicles for re-visioning history, also make them problematic for large audiences. Even though the producers of the thirteen films discussed in *Revisioning History* may have been serious about both the historical and the commercial potential of their products, in practice (with the exception of *Reds* and *JFK*) they have not reached large audiences on a scale achieved by the Hollywood-style product. Whilst I agree with Rosenstone that innovative films which resist traditional genres and contest the very basis on which Hollywood-style films construct their historical world can present challenging ways of representing the past, I see that possibility existing in mainstream films as well.

Just as film may, in Rosenstone's own words, 'stand adjacent to written history, as it does to other forms of dealing with the past such as memory and the oral tradition',¹⁶ so too certain mainstream films stand adjacent to the more experimental film. Mary Hoban's analysis of historical film as 'history in another genre' is helpful here.¹⁷ She argues that popular history is usually constructed inside a narrative form according to very specific conventions with teleology, naturalness, universality and authority being 'critical' in how popular history is represented.¹⁸ Those films, books and miniseries which are popularly accepted as historical are framed by audience expectation, particularly expectation of 'quality', and those expectations help form the characteristics of a genre. According to Mary Hoban, while the individual is at the heart of popular history, the content must be 'significant and interrogated, full of inherent social drama challenging or exposing the co-ordinates of private lives and providing the viewer with meaning through a formal closure of the narrative'.¹⁹ By this standard, both experimental and mainstream

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historical films represent different genres – not only genres of history but also genres of history-on-film.

The Film Text and social negotiation of meaning

While Rosenstone is clearly aware of the importance of social context to the impact of film on popular historical consciousness²⁰, his discussions of the possibilities of constructing real history on film are related almost entirely to the techniques of historical representation and methods of constructing meaning *within the film text*. The attention in recent decades to the ways in which the film is received in its social context has shifted our thinking considerably towards consideration of the role of the audience as *readers and interpreters* of text. Moreover, if we see the film text itself as multi-layered (polysemic), a combination of texts, the potential range of meanings becomes enormous – all the more so if we accept Barthes' view which extends this plurality to the subject as well. For Barthes, the viewer is not a unified "I", a centre form which meaning and interpretation emerge, but rather a combination of 'texts', a being who may react to different aspects of a subject quite differently. Janet Staiger²¹, who uses *reception studies* as an umbrella term to encompass understandings of the various complex and intriguing ways that readers decode and interpret text in the media, divides the ways we construct meaning from a text into three main areas – text-activated, reader-activated and context-activated readings. Though one or other may have primacy, all three can operate simultaneously for the same individual, or the same person may react differently at different times to the same material. Thus, in postmodern culture, a decentred subject may construct meaning from a text, decoding with, or against, the meaning embedded in the multi-layered sets of codes, symbols and texts which constitute the historical film.

This has had considerable impact on my thinking about the ways in which film intervenes in cultural memory. Although Rosenstone's insights are of the greatest importance in the analysis of how history is *represented* in film, I tend to agree with writers like William Palmer²² and Marita Sturken,²³ who emphasise the fact that the film text itself is only one part in a complex relationship between existing historical discourse, popular culture, film and memory. The kind of intersections between film text, social context and individual and cultural memory, together with the kind of exposure that the *issues* receive in the popular media, determine the way film's historical referents are *understood* in society.

William Palmer, who uses the term 'the holograph of history' to define the process in which multiple historical discourses act as contributors to the negotiation of meaning in popular culture, emphasises the inter-relationships between the historical event, its representation on film and its meaning to contemporary society. Palmer's understandings draw on postmodern critical theories, particularly those of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra, to argue for a view of history as a

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holograph composed of multiple layers of narrative – the result of the multiplicity of levels of interpretation of texts, hidden emplotments, and interactions with contexts. In particular, he sees historical event and film text as interacting in a binary discourse with meaning being the result of negotiation between film text and social context.

Palmer points out that Hollywood, for commercial reasons, is keen to exploit social anxiety about historical issues because the context of interest is already in existence. Although the surface texts it creates to give form to these ideas are constructed from a limited number of conventional mass modes of discourse, the way that the *other* layers of text in film are understood by audiences gives them both historical and contemporary meaning and makes it possible for films ‘not only (to) comment perceptively upon contemporary social history but actually participate in it’.²⁴ That interactive relationship takes place outside the cinema in popular culture.

Marita Sturken discusses a similar area of interactivity but her emphasis is on the production of cultural memory. She writes that cultural products such as film are ‘*technologies* of memory in that they embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory’s production’.²⁵ Rather than vessels of memory in which memory passively resides, products like film (as she understands them) are ‘technologies’ of memory, techniques of representation which stimulate the processes through which memories are shared, produced and given meaning.²⁶ Sturken also uses the idea that history (understood as narratives of the past which are somehow culturally sanctioned), is entangled with private and cultural memory, a situation which is borne out in the reception of *Brides of Christ*.

Even though that series used mainstream formats which did little to disturb the comfort of audience understanding of genre and realism, *Brides of Christ* still fulfilled Rosenstone’s view that, an historical film should contest, vision and re-vision popular perceptions about the past. In this thesis I argue that, *Brides of Christ* demonstrated how effectively mainstream film could give voice to marginalised narratives which dispute the way the past is understood in the dominant strands of cultural memory.

Mainstream film may not challenge the discourse of history itself, but can influence the way certain issues and events of the past are understood in popular culture. Whilst I am deeply aware of the fact that for individuals the process of making meaning from a film can be highly idiosyncratic, it is also true that dominant understandings in culture are the result of a number of social processes – contestation over meaning being only one of them. Filmic representations of the past are another. They reach huge numbers of people, are built of layered texts and codes of meaning, and the preferred meanings embedded in them must be considered as a significant factor in the process of establishing, maintaining, or disrupting dominant perceptions. And it is this process, the ways in which authority and meaning is determined in the interactions between the

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historical in mainstream film and the various discourses circulating in popular culture, that is one of my major concerns in this thesis. I see my discussion in this thesis as building on Rosenstone's analysis and adding to the conversation about history on film by looking at what mainstream film can do (and does) in the process of intervention in cultural memory.

Narrative and Treatment of the Past in Historical Film

As audiences understand it today, mainstream film (including historical film) is built on the concept of narrative. First and foremost, audiences *like* narratives, a situation pointed out by Bill Nichols who sees contemporary culture as hungering for information about the world but desiring it 'in the form of narratives, stories, that make meaning, however tenuous, dramatic, compelling, or paranoid they may be'.²⁷ The attraction of narrative is that it offers structure and order to the flux of events and it confers meaning and value. This is particularly true of mainstream film where the narrative acts as the integrating principle for all the data encoded in its multi-layered communication.

In culture, narrative is one of a number of codes which structure perceptions of reality and, as Hayden White has pointed out, one which has a fundamental effect on how the past is shaped.²⁸ Narrative is a subject that has been extensively theorised in a number of disciplines and engaging with the debates surrounding those diverse understandings is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a number of understandings of the deep structures of narrative are important to the work.²⁹ Just as Clifford Geertz³⁰ found in his examination of cock fighting in Bali that these ritual contests expressed many of the important features of Balinese society, film in modern Western society encodes many of the myths and fantasies that structure our reality. And much of that function is bound up with narrative which I see as having functions well beyond employment and integration. In many ways narrative itself is the integrated result, the connected surface of many of the 'deep structures' of meaning which communicate the social mythologies of gender, ideology, social values, and history that are resident in some way in every mainstream historical film.

Narrative Strands and the effect on meaning

In what follows, I look firstly at the narrative strands present in film and consider their potential effects on meaning and secondly at their deeper mythic structures and the kinds of information that they communicate.

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Emplotment

As noted earlier, Hayden White has pointed out that fundamental story telling structures in culture shape the raw material of the potential narrative so that no representation of the past is historically transparent. Speaking of written history, he has suggested that all historical narratives follow four basic plot structures: comedy, tragedy, satire or romance.³¹ However, that situation becomes very much more complicated when historical material is presented on film. Mainstream film actually tries to create the illusion that it is a window on the past, masking the fact that the way the past is understood and represented is actually an interpretation. Moreover, the historical interpretation – the historical narrative – is only one aspect of the communication in film and it is likely to be contained within another narrative structure altogether. For example, in *Mississippi Burning* (1988) the historical episode of the shooting of three civil rights campaigners in Mississippi in 1964 and its aftermath was shaped to emphasise white involvement rather than that of African Americans. That interpretation was then emplotted as a buddy movie.

Story narrative / historical narrative

Comments made by the director Alan Parker in responding to critics at the time indicate something of the complexity in the relationship between narrative and history in that film. The *story narrative* (the growing co-operation of the two agents in the F.B.I. investigation) was a fabrication at all levels. But the *historical narrative* (the murder of the civil rights activists and the investigation) was a blend of incidents that were 'typical' in the struggle for civil rights in the American South, with aspects of a specific incident that occurred near Philadelphia, Mississippi, in 1964. Most audiences would have recognised familiar elements of 'tough, older, streetwise cop versus softer, younger, college-educated cop' in the story about the relationships between the white FBI agents. That did not necessarily detract from other kinds of historical information in the movie. In fact, it is quite likely that the clear generic elements in the foregrounded narrative actually marked that aspect off as either fiction or as a fictionalised version of events. The real issue of the status of the film as history lay in the fact that the blend of fact and fiction in the *historical narrative* looked like history rather than fiction – but actually stood on the border of both. Historical events like those of the movie did happen; but that particular narrative (narrative in the sense of total scenario – story and history) did not.

According to Robert Brent Toplin, both the screenwriter Chris Gerolmo, and the director have pointed out that the movie is not really about the Civil Rights Movement. Rather it is about why there was a *need* for that movement.³² Parker openly acknowledged that in underplaying the role of African Americans in the struggle for equality, *Mississippi Burning* did deviate from the historical record. Parker clearly understood that audiences go to mainstream cinema to be entertained – a situation that he saw as resting to a considerable extent on the framing narrative.

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He felt that a mainly white audience, at whom the political message of the film was directed, would relate more to white protagonists.³³

In shaping the past as he did, Parker was using the past to make a point about the present. His main interest lay in highlighting the on-going issue of racism and white supremacist violence in the present, rather than in simply presenting a dramatic rendition of an historically important incident which had likewise focussed American national attention on those same issues. There were deliberate resonances between the way the film used setting and the actual historical location, and echoes of authenticity in parts of the dialogue, which were based on extracts from historical transcripts. These documentary aspects of the film intersected with knowledge circulating in culture as both cultural memory, and functioned in the film text to lend credibility to the *narrative* and its discourse about racism. While the incident the film addressed in a fictional form may have occurred in the past, it was not sealed there as both the incident itself and the wider social conflict from which it arose was still alive in the present.³⁴ Indeed, Parker intended the subtext of the movie to be a comment on racism in Reagan-era America.³⁵

Multiple narrative strands

Moreover, it is arguable that like *Mississippi Burning* the typical film does not develop along one narrative axis but acts more like an orchestrated score, with a number of intertwined stories developing throughout.³⁶ On the whole I tend to agree with this position; but as the films I discuss in the thesis demonstrate, the most marked narrative strands in mainstream film tend to proceed to narrative closure and are subsumed into an overall pattern, most commonly that of the Hero's Journey. This narrative structure and its archetypes as outlined by Joseph Campbell (discussed below) can be seen in dramatic and narrative patterns across most mainstream genres in the cinema. According to Campbell, while the details are almost infinitely variable, the essential narrative structure with its meanings about the journey through life is universal. In some historical film such a narrative functions as a simplifying device creating community between the storyteller and the audience, sometimes (but by no means always) de-historicising the raw material, giving the action the simplicity of myth. Such renditions of the past were particularly evident in American Westerns and World War II Combat movies.

From the point of view of history on film, universals embedded in narrative structure can create a text that is about cultural concerns of the audience in the present rather than about the specific historical episode that the film purports to represent. A case in point is to be found in the MIA films (Missing In Action) sub-genre, which developed once Hollywood began to deal with the Vietnam War. The MIA issue was, and still is, highly emotionally charged in the USA. The historical evidence for the existence of American prisoners secretly held captive – or worse still, abandoned – in Southeast Asia is highly contentious. But the foregrounded action/adventure

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narrative of the films fulfilled a national rescue fantasy which was a part of rewriting and re-imaging the Vietnam War back to a fifties vision of idealistic Americans heroically battling hordes of sadistic Orientals. In this case, an unidentified historical setting – a Hollywood version of Laos – serves as an exotic location and the quasi-historical as a plot motivation. Even though the action/adventure narrative is predictable, clichéd – even simplistic – its meaning was in be found the present to which these movies played initially. No one expected the story of the movie to be *literally* true. The promotion of the films as action/adventure stories together with inter-textualities surrounding actors like Sylvester Stallone, Chuck Norris and Gene Hackman ensured that audiences understood that aspect clearly. But the cultural and historical content was an entirely different matter. Beyond their function as exciting, action-packed macho fantasies, the films of this genre served to further already existing images and explanations for America's loss of the Vietnam War, namely that of a nation run by bureaucrats, politicians and secret agents who betrayed the nation's true warrior heroes.

Foregrounded Narrative and Meaning

Although the ways in which the historical narrative is emplotted does influence the meaning of the past in the film, the generic story line and the historical narrative contain different kinds of information and have different meanings. I think that in considering the ways in which film impacts on the way the past is understood in popular culture, this is absolutely fundamental. Most modern audiences are quick to understand genre, to recognise its elements and to see them as markers of the degree of authenticity and authority attributed to the suite of narratives that make up the film. The stories of individuals (and even events) in the foregrounded narratives of most mainstream films do not interact with information circulating in culture and are not usually understood as literally 'true'. The cultural knowledge they tap is associated with stars, genres and individual movies. The superficial details of historical setting on the other hand do intersect with such information and are understood as authentic, to a greater or lesser degree. In fact, unless the historical person or incident is well-known, it is actually more difficult for a film to make truth claims about a foregrounded narrative than it is to establish the validity of the historical representation. Directors like Steven Spielberg for example, have had to go to a great deal of trouble to establish the authenticity of the historical in the foregrounded narrative in the film texts of *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*. By bringing each film into the present in documentary mode – with the an old veteran (supposedly) the present-day Ryan at the war cemetery in the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*, and with Holocaust survivors and their children at the grave of Otto Schindler in the final scene of *Schindler's List* - Spielberg has made a strong truth claim for the totality of each of his films. In other words, he asserts to the audience that these are true stories about actual people. Even there, this is a difficult task as the elements of genre are still visible in the films and tend to counter any claim to transparency – so that audiences recognise the story as being a Hollywood version of a 'true' story.

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The fact that mainstream film is structured around generic elements in its foregrounded narrative does not mean, however, that audiences must necessarily understand the issues and historical elements in the film text as fantasy also. In fact, the opposite can be the case. As I argue in this thesis, the degree of historical authority which the film generates is very much a function of how the past is treated in the film. Where the historical is a serious subject, as in *Brides of Christ*, the familiarity of the pattern of the foregrounded narrative can actually make the historical more accessible to an audience. The historical in films like this provides the structural turning points which move the narrative along, a case in point being the Papal Encyclical forbidding artificial birth control which constitutes the crisis for Catherine in her decision to leave the Convent. There can be an interesting kind of circularity in the interrelationship between foregrounded story and history in a film where history is the engine that drives the story, as it does in both *Schindler's List* and *Brides of Christ*. Even though both narratives clearly follow a familiar pattern, a mythic narrative of self discovery in which a reluctant protagonist develops from self-centred conniving to heroic concern for others, it is the historical events themselves which make these story engrossing. Because the story *is* engrossing, the audience is drawn to its specific motivation – the historical events.

Even here there are other layers on interconnection between narrative and the historical import of a film. The complex patterns of narrative and discourse formed by inter-relationships between the multiple strands of narrative can have interesting effects for the way historical material is shaped, providing a number of potential readings of a film in addition to, or even in opposition to the preferred reading. For example, in *Brides of Christ* the overall narrative is a positive story of women achieving personal independence through following the Hero's path to self-knowledge. At the same time, the discourse of the film tells a story of repression and of lives hemmed in by narrow constructions of femininity which can only be overcome by personal struggle. As with *Mississippi Burning* there were subtexts and meanings about issues related to the social context of the present, in this case as intersections with well-known social discourses about high profile Catholic women in positions of power.

Myth and Meaning in Film

Within those many strands of story narrative, plot, historical narrative, etc. there are other structures which also construct meaning. In this thesis I am in agreement with Graeme Turner who points out that like any other medium of representation film does not so much reflect or record reality as *re-presents* it by way of a series of codes understood as part of the signifying processes of the medium; the conventions, myths and ideologies of culture. A film works through these systems to reproduce, reaffirm, reinterpret or even contest those meanings.³⁷ We differ however, on the matter of the degree to which the deep structural levels of mythic meaning contribute to this

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process. Turner argues that the social dimensions of narrative are not to be found at the deep levels identified in the structuralist approach of Propp or Levi-Strauss but at the level of discourse in the ways in which the story is 'told, inflected, *represented*'.³⁸ Overall I agree with this, particularly the latter understanding of the importance of the cultural knowledge bound up in codes and conventions of representation. However, I see other signifying processes – those which tap emotive and ideological responses – *within* many of those codes of representation in films which sophisticated audiences read with ease. As discussed below, I view the structural elements of narrative as understood in Propp, and more especially in Campbell and Vogler, as having an important role to play in those cultural meanings. Moreover I emphasise the ideological functions of myth as understood by Levi-Strauss and more particularly again in Barthes, as being very significant in the cultural meaning of images and narrative and in the kind of information they carry.

I argue that mythic structures in narrative are also deep processes and that they are particularly important to methods of reproduction, reaffirmation, reinterpretation or contestation in film texts. In particular, I see myth in film functioning not as a unity, but as various ways of making meaning which act in concert with the narrative strands and the discourse as ideological filters which, in shaping the meaning, can be as important as the selection and emphasis of content. (A case in point would be many of the American combat films where the deep mythic structures in the scripted and visual element of the a story narratives of the Second World War functioned as a discourse on masculinity and American national ideology.)

Consequently, in the section that follows, I discuss the different ways that myth is encoded into structures and the different ways it contributes to the function and meaning of the various narrative strands. In using the term *myth* in this thesis I draw on understandings from psychology, anthropology and structural analysis and use the term as does Roger Horrocks who drew from similar sources. Horrocks defines myths as '*collective fantasies*, that give substance to a society's political, social, economic and cultural existence, and also help to structure the individual's existence'.³⁹ Horrocks uses the term 'fantasies' as it is currently understood in psychotherapy – as a term denoting the way the mental life of individuals and societies is constructed through narratives, scenarios, and collections of images.

In the literature on film analysis 'myth' is used with a variety of meanings which could all be said to draw ultimately on the description arrived at by Branislav Malinowski in his classic study of myth in primitive societies. As he expresses it:

it (myth) expresses, enhances and codifies beliefs; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man'.⁴⁰

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However, as Malinowski's definition indicates, there are different strands in social mythology and though they all work together, as he argues, certain elements rather than others can be seen operating in film. Consequently, as dealing with the specific *functions* of myth in historical film is central to this study, at times I use the term 'myth' in the specific way in which it is understood in the work of Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Joseph Campbell (who bases his ideas on Jung). The particular relevance of those theories to the way myth operates in film is discussed below. One further aspect of myth which I see as part of the system of codes employed in film is one constructed from the intersection of a number of mythic systems – national mythologies. I use the term 'national mythologies' to describe ideological constructions of national character or national identity, hegemonic notions both formed by and supporting a romanticised (and selective) version of the past.

Levi-Strauss

There are clear affinities between the roles of myth in society, as Malinowski defines them, and the understandings derived from the discipline of anthropology. What modern anthropology contributes to the understanding of myth, particularly in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, is a focus on the normative function of myth and on the ability of myth to become displaced and/or transformed into other stories and practices. Levi-Strauss, working from a structuralist perspective, attempted to uncover the unconscious foundation of *systems* of making meaning which are exhibited in numerous cultural practices ranging from modes of dress to aesthetic practices. It is however his analysis of myth which is of central interest to Cultural Studies – and here to my interest in film as a cultural product. Claude Levi-Strauss argues that while myth has a degree of cultural specificity, common structures in myth cross cultural boundaries. In his view, all myths have a similar socio-cultural function – 'to provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradiction',⁴¹ an understanding that has particular significance for the workings of myth in film. As Levi-Strauss sees the situation, myth functions in society as an anxiety-reducing mechanism which promotes social harmony by translating abstracts into culturally concrete representations and providing imaginative solutions in story form to irreconcilable conflicts in culture.

In modern society, film is one of the sites where social anxieties are reflected and mythic resolutions suggested. For example, in *Forrest Gump*, the extremely contentious issues of the legacy of the Vietnam War for American society in general, and for Vietnam veterans in particular, is smoothed over at the narrative level by a character-based resolution. Captain Dan arrives at Forrest Gump's wedding with new legs made from space age material and an Asian (presumably Vietnamese) fiancée. Such a representation contains the ideological message that for Americans the struggle over national political ideology (which the Vietnam War represented) is

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now behind them, reintegrated into normalcy by the passage of time and the processes of historical change, overcome in the lives of those who suffered by a combination of American technology and good old American values. While this may be debatable in lived experience, the mythic solution it offers on the screen makes for a feel-good narrative in which deep mythic structures reaffirm the core values of society. The audience – or the people for whom the dominant message is the one coded into the deep layers of narrative – can leave the theatre with the issue resolved on the screen, untroubled by the messy unfinished business of its actuality in daily life.

Certain other elements of the connection between myth and ideology can be explained by Levi-Strauss's analysis of the mechanics by which myth constructs its representations. He sees myth as being based on sets of binary oppositions that gradually build up an ideologically based picture of the world. In culture a process like colonisation for example, could appear natural and right through the accretion of meanings which accumulated around the civilisation/savagery opposition. In film, particularly in the Cowboys-and-Indians version of the American Western, the patterns of associations clustering around culturally specific images of settlers and Native Americans, binary opposition in those films led to the representation of a past where the 'good' was stacked on one side of the divide and the 'bad' on the other.⁴²

Roland Barthes

The emphasis on the ideological meanings and functions of myth in Levi-Strauss links it to the understanding of the roles of myth advanced by Roland Barthes. Barthes approaches myth from a different perspective, that of semiotics, but nevertheless concurs on its socio-political functions. As Barthes sees myth, it is a system in which meaning is made and circulated and he has pointed out that the *meaning* of an image or narrative goes beyond the specific denotation (primary signification) to broader concepts based on connotation (secondary signification). These connotations may be coded into the product but they are *activated* from the already existing cultural knowledge of the audience. Barthes argues that it is at this secondary level of signification that *myth* is produced and consumed. Applied to film, or other visual media, Barthes' insights into how social mythology is constructed and the ways in which it functions, highlights the enormous power of film to intervene in cultural memory. Not only does film place a particular shape on the past through the structure of the narrative, but in addition, casting, lighting, sound and all the subjectivities coded into the aesthetics of image and music also work together to create a representation which is deeply layered with secondary meaning and thus with ideological values. Projected into a culture with a shared cultural repertoire, such myths are powerful in structuring consensual popular understanding of the past – all the more so as they appear naturalised, invisible, an intrinsic part of the world. As Barthes puts it:

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Semiology has taught us that myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal.⁴³

A number of other elements of Barthe's insights have a bearing on this thesis – in particular the emphasis on shared cultural context which points towards the interaction between film text and audience in determining meaning. As social mythology is always made up of many different (and frequently competing) strands, myth and the ideological meanings it carries in a film may seem 'natural' to some audiences whilst appearing blatantly propagandist to other groups. Moreover, the ideological meanings deeply encoded in elements like representations of gender may remain untouched by the arguments centred around more topical and/or more marked representations – race relations in *Mississippi Burning* for example, or national mythologies of colonial dominance in *Gallipoli* or *Breaker Morant*. This is important in the social discussions of meaning in film as it has significant impact on which meanings will become dominant and which less so. It is also important to the kinds of narratives which circulate and their relative strengths in cultural memory.

The dynamics of cultural mythology are such that, even though dominant mythology is constantly challenged by alternate versions, chameleon-like, myth (as Barthes understands it) is able to absorb alternate narratives without necessarily changing any of its really deep ideological meanings. The American Western for example, metamorphosed into the Word War II Combat movie with little more than superficial changes. By retaining the same narrative structures and patterns of opposition while changing the setting and the ethnicity of the opposition, the ideological beliefs about America's role in the 20th century which constitute the secondary meaning of Westerns were transferred easily to Word War II Combat movies. By comparison, in *Brides of Christ* the updating of Australian national mythology to take account of the social roles of women at the end of the 20th century represents a change to both the content and the meaning. However, both drew on and added to mythic discourses circulating in cultural memory. In the case of the combat movies the effect was a reinforcing of ideological perceptions without necessarily adding substance to historical information circulating in popular culture. In *Brides of Christ* the effect was to create a new narrative which worked antithetically to the dominant narrative of nation in popular culture, challenging accepted discourse in which women played a restricted role.

Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell

Just as structuralist perspectives can be seen to inform the insights of Levi-Strauss and Bathes about the way myth functions in culture, so too research by Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell into fundamental components of narrative have likewise led to insights about mythic elements intrinsic to narrative structures themselves.

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Structural narratologists seeking to uncover some kind of ‘morphology’ in narrative seized on the work of Vladimir Propp who, earlier in the century (1928), had analysed a group of Russian fairy tales to see if they shared common properties.⁴⁴ Propp had proposed a basic structure for all fairy tales with thirty-one functions organised in a broader pattern of narrative development of preparation, complication, transference, struggle, return and recognition. While any of these functions might or might not occur within a given story, any that do will appear in a fixed sequence. Additionally, he found that the *functions* of the various characters could be reduced to eight roles or spheres of action because one character can occupy a number of these areas. These functions too occurred at fixed junctures in the narrative.

While Propp’s analysis has been used to reveal the narrative structures in a number of films and television programs,⁴⁵ in itself Propp says nothing about universalises in the meaning of myth. However, his work shares many similarities with Joseph Campbell’s analyses of the narrative structures which underpin the universal narrative in *The Hero’s Journey*, a study that he originally published in 1947 in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.⁴⁶ Campbell reached a position similar to Propp’s working directly in the field of myth. Though not a theory of narrative *per se*, Campbell’s analysis of the narrative structure of *The Hero’s Journey* describes the skeletal framework of one of the most persistent themes in oral tradition and recorded literature. Like the understanding of myth in Levi-Strauss, this theory proposes that behind the cultural specificity, there are similarities in narrative structures and fundamental meanings which cross cultural boundaries. Like Propp, he saw those structures conforming to very specific patterns with a narrative trajectory moved by specific mythic elements. His formulation of the narrative pattern does not necessarily either affirm or deny that *meaning* in myth is developed by the binary oppositions proposed by Levi-Strauss. Rather than dealing with the mechanisms by which cultural ideologies are generated, like Propp, Campbell proposed a clear narrative structure to myth regardless of subject and regardless of culture. Campbell’s understanding of meaning in myth was formulated in terms of the personal rather than the social or the political.

The Hero With A Thousand Faces which focuses on the many tales of heroes who overcome great odds to perform impossible tasks, is an attempt to unite the world’s mythologies into what Campbell called a ‘monomyth’, a single underlying story told by all myths. Campbell’s thesis is that myths are not merely entertaining tales, but are allegorical instructions that seek to teach us about our humanity. The consistent pattern that Campbell discerns in the tales of heroes across cultures and time can be summarised as follows –

The hero is called to an adventure which she accepts, perhaps reluctantly, and she is given charms or magical weapons by a protective figure who is older and wiser. The hero then journeys into an unknown land where she meets demons and undergoes great suffering. Eventually the hero triumphs over the obstacles, but only after facing a supreme ordeal through which she is

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symbolically reborn. Armed with new insights that will benefit her people, she then returns to her homeland.

Campbell saw this story as primarily representing an inner battle in which the hero undergoes a kind of self-psychotherapy, confronts her own darker side, and gains a greater understanding of herself and her culture in the process. The hero emerges transformed, often refined beyond the normal human frailty and thus is understood as having redemptive powers. In modern times the narratives and symbols in our myths are different – reflections of our age and culture – just as the princesses, the tricksters, the magic swords, etc. were symbols to another era and culture. But, according to Campbell, both narratives and both sets of symbols have the same intrinsic meanings.

Narrative, Archetype and Meaning in Film

A number of things make this structure important in historical film, but none more so than the fact that narrative codes and structural practices place emphasis on certain narrative elements which move the narrative forward, elements which in Propp's terms are character functions and in Campbell's terms, archetypes. Archetypes are characters and character roles created from fundamental human patterns that recur in dreams, ritual, myth and literature, including the narratives of mainstream film. Jung understood archetypes as part of the collective unconscious – images and associated meanings that are present in all societies. On the individual level they occur in dreams and on the cultural level they are represented as myths.

In film, archetypal characters and archetypal functions form part of recognisable codes and conventions, narrative shortcuts with which certain types of plot functions and even certain kinds of narratives are associated. They also act as points of engagement, triggering recognition and forging relationships that tend to establish a resonance between the past on the screen and the present of the audience. While this may add to the immediacy and emotional impact, these characters are mythic in the ways described by Barthes and the depth of cultural signification associated with archetypes tends to over-determine the meaning of any character represented on film as an archetype. Moreover, archetypes in film can provide the template for cultural stereotypes and rendered invisible and 'natural' by the cultural and historical specificity bestowed by clothing, speech, mannerisms or setting, almost any archetype can disappear into the narrative. Such archetypal (now stereotypical) characters appear oddly familiar, acting as devices which contribute to the truth effect of the historical representation – regardless of the fact that most aspects of historical and/or social ambiguity have been removed from such a representation.

In *Mississippi Burning* for example, the use of cultural stereotype was one the many points of dispute in the debate that surrounded the way history was interpreted. According to Robert Brent Toplin, the director Alan Parker, who had a reputation for making dramatic use of the contrast

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between 'good' characters and 'bad' characters, brought to the production strong personal views about ways to depict racial tensions in the American South.⁴⁷ This was demonstrated clearly in the film by the representation of the Ku Klux Klan as vicious bigots, not an unreasonable perspective under the circumstances of the historical episode depicted in the film. However, while this had emotional force and helped communicate a sense of the terror that beset the lives of those who struggled for racial equality in Mississippi at the time, it did little to explain anything beyond the well-known and the stereotypical in cultural memory of the historical circumstances. In some ways over-determination of meaning was inevitable as many characters were not conceived of as individuals. They fulfilled narrative functions similar to those described by Propp and Campbell, and represented the roles played by groups in the situation. Even the wife of the deputy sheriff, who represents the conscience of white Mississippi moderates, is a recognisable amalgam of qualities – in Rosenstone's terms, a condensation of facts true to the spirit but not the detail of an historical incident.⁴⁸ She is not quite a stereotype because of her singularity in this film, but her role and its meanings is familiar in mainstream cinema.

Brides of Christ used a similar form of visual shorthand in representing particular nuns. By combining archetype with stereotype from inherited cultural understandings of behaviour, this production established parameters in the meanings of certain of the nuns (particularly Sister Agnes) and generated almost instant recognition for various sectors of the audience. Historically, this combination, clothed in period precision and acting in ways based on the detail of thorough research, was a very powerful stimulant to personal memory.

The Hero

At the heart of most mainstream film narrative is the hero archetype. A hero, both in myth and the rhetoric which creates public heroes in modern times, is really an archetype whose story has common elements across time and culture. Though historical events in lived experience generally involve groups, history on mainstream film demands that the action be centred on an individual – a hero, (male or female). All of the heroes of myth have survived some form of the rite of passage – a rite of separation, initiation, and return – and this is the foregrounded structure which binds all the other narratives in the majority of mainstream historical films. The circumstances of the separation etc. may belong to the historical narrative, but the psychological motivation which propels the outcome belongs to the hero of the foregrounded narrative.

Though the narrative may be centred on the journey, the construction of the archetype at its centre falls into two major categories, both of which influence the way in which the past is represented. Either the hero is perceived as someone who has survived, triumphed and gone beyond the parameters that bind other humans to represent a cultural ideal (Jim Garrison in *JFK*); or the hero is understood as a sacrificial victim, the archetypal divine king who, like the central motif in Sir James G. Frazer's monumental *The Golden Bough* becomes the scapegoat in a rite of sacrifice

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(e.g. Archie in *Gallipoli*). However, according to Carol Wilkie Wallace, in the mythic construction more prevalent today in the mass media the hero is a scapegoat.⁴⁹

The notion of the hero as victim runs through many historical films in Australia. Graeme Turner argues that many Australian films which centre the narrative in the individual work within a dominant Australian representation of using 'the harshness of the natural environment as an alibi for the powerlessness of the individual within the social environment'.⁵⁰ This is clear in films like *Sunday Too Far Away*, *Gallipoli*, *Breaker Morant* and *The Irishman* where, despite the nationalistic construction of the hero as a battler or larrikin distinguished by his personal resistance to powerlessness through irony and humour, there is a strong element of the hero as victim.

This strand in the national representation of the hero is particularly strong in the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool* where the child heroes are victims, both of the harshness of the Australian continent and many of its inhabitants and of the uncaring attitudes of the British and Australian governments. Whereas Lily, initially the weaker of the two survives the ordeal, Bert is broken by his experience. The narrative of victimage which framed the series and the representation of the hero as a sacrificial innocent are part of the deep meaning of the narrative structure. This, together with the implied social guilt for which atonement needs to be made, appears to me to be a significant factor contributing to the strength of popular response and outrage following this program.

The Hero's Journey and mainstream narrative film

In different cultural guises the narrative structure of the Hero's Journey on film taps into experiences which, according to Campbell, well up from a universal source and reflect shared universal concerns. According to Christopher Vogler, a story analyst who has evaluated over 6000 screenplays for major Hollywood picture studios, this key structure with its archetypes and symbols is the basis of the majority of the most powerful of these stories.⁵¹ Film makers like George Lucas and George Miller openly acknowledge their debt to Campbell and according to Vogler, Campbell's influence can also be seen in the films of Steven Spielberg, John Boorman, Francis Ford Coppola and others.⁵² In applying Campbell's mystic approach to myth to the pragmatics of film scripting, Vogler concentrated on the structural aspects of that analysis. He equates the three-act structure of most films with the twelve stages of Campbell's Hero's Journey.⁵³ According to Vogler, the journey of the hero in modern film is often a psychological one which, like the physical journey, can be charted in a similar twelve-step process.⁵⁴ Both of these narrative trajectories, the actual and the psychological, are important to the narrative structure in many movies such as *Schindler's List* in which the progress of the protagonist is represented as much in psychological terms as in dramatic action.

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Not all films will follow this pattern – but many do, and that makes the subject of mythic frameworks in narratives a serious one. As Graeme Turner notes in speaking about the degree of fit between Propp's 'spheres of action' and the characterisation in *Stars Wars*:

It (recognition of the mythic elements in the structure of film narrative) does suggest, however, how applicable to film studies much of the work on the cultural function and structural characteristics of narrative could be. At the very least, it underlines the possibilities that the modern feature film and the primitive fairy tale serve similar functions for their respective audience.⁵⁵

The emphasis in this thesis on mythic aspects of narrative in film does not mean that I underestimate the importance of understandings about subject positions, identification and pleasure found in the psychoanalytic approach of many cinema theorists. Rather, because I am interested in the cognitive and ideological information about the past conveyed by film, I believe that the cultural information inherent in mythic narrative structures is relevant to the shaping of historical interpretation and to the effects the film has on cultural memory. Though the historical narrative of *JFK* for example, was a major focus in that production, the foregrounded story narrative was that of the well-known cinema genre of a murder investigation and trial. That narrative centred on the Hero archetype, and repeated the narrative structure of the Hero's Journey in Jim Garret's psychological progress. He is forced by mounting evidence to the moral imperative of leaving his ordinary world to mount a case against Clay Shaw for the Kennedy assassination. The film follows the mythic narrative structure outlined by Campbell through Garret's initiation, trial, sacrifice and final return, seen in the closing shot of the hero, now reunited with his family, returning to his ordinary world after having been purified through the sacrifices he made in serving his country.

National Mythologies

The energy which propels the message of *JFK* is to be found in the national mythology which shapes the entire ideological perspective of the film (Chapter Seven). National mythology, though similar in function to myth as discussed by Levi-Strauss, can be understood in film as forming a separate layer of myth; a form of ideological discourse that shapes perceptions of the past in mainstream film. In lived experience, although various versions of the nation and its history contend for dominance, at any one time a particular set of perspective functions to create consensus and obscure divisions in society. National mythologies appear as narratives that, by highlighting certain issues and events over others, construct a view of the past which reduces the complexity and chaos of historical experience to a manageable series of events. The view of national qualities and accepted priorities that they construct is highly value-laden but is

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naturalised, 'proven' by the setting in the past. Although highly ideological, such narratives are not 'myths' in the sense of falsehoods, but shaped versions of the past which express important values.

History on film cannot, therefore, be ideologically innocent. Either it reflects the way that the past is understood in dominant version of the past in society, or, by representing another view, it contests them. This situation is illustrated well by Australian films of the Film Revival period of the seventies and eighties where the greater proportion of historical film produced was constructed around the discourse on nationalism drawn almost exclusively from a mythologised past and peopled with its archetypes. As discussed in Chapter 3, the social realist films of the period which showed a grittier version of Australian society in the present were inherently challenging to that formulation.

The shape that Australian national mythology gives to the past in collective memory is one which is reinforced by the general shape of mainstream film. The bulk of the hundreds of individual narratives which give overall shape to the bush legend in Australian national mythology foreground male experience as the authentic experience of Australian history, and constructs the male as the active principle and the female as the secondary object. Like the typical mainstream film, their foregrounded narratives are based on the already-mentioned Hero's Journey and find at the level of character, narrative closure and resolution to conflicts which cannot be resolved in culture. Moreover the filmed versions are layered in mythic meanings generated by the combination its various signifying systems, ideological discourses and different layers of narrative. Besides the shape that this intricate structure gives to an event of the past, it also constructs in cultural memory a version of what constitutes history.

In Australia for example, acceptance as natural the 'fact' that action in Australian history is male action, also produces an understanding that historical subjects are constituted from areas like farming, business, politics and war, traditionally thought of as (white) male spheres of endeavour. Perhaps more importantly, this tends to produce a secondary discourse about Australian masculinities, a situation which supports Barthes' arguments that the ideological function of the mythic meanings engendered through secondary signification in visual (and other) material. As Barthes suggests:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary it functions to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of arbitrary explanation but that of a statement of fact.⁵⁶

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Authority and the Film Text

A considerable part of this thesis is based on films where a strong connection between the film and subsequent socio/political action can be demonstrated. Given the degree of exposure to image and film of all kinds in society and the sophistication of audiences in reading and understanding the truth claims of genre, why is it that some films provoke such reactions – and many lesser ones – while other films do not? The answer, as I see it, is directly related to both the content and the form. While the kind of narrative the film foregrounds, the genre, the aesthetics, are all important, the degree of authority that a film text can generate – the way the past is used in film – remains the most significant element.

In many movies the past functions as an exotic place for adventure narratives, heroic action and dressing up. In fact, in movies like this, it is the setting in the past which actually creates that fantasy distance from the audience which allows them to accept the excesses of the filmic genre. *Indiana Jones*, *Captain Blood* and *Gone With the Wind* are filled with the romance of daring deeds and dashing heroes that are the stuff of dreams – because lived experience isn't like that. As argued above, audiences are very familiar with genre and expect different degrees of truth from the different narrative layers. In the foregrounded narrative for example, they expect psychological validity and emotional realism of the hero's reactions but are prepared to accept (or reject) the fantastic in its narrative motivation according to commonly understood codes of genre. The authority present in the historical texts of the film is rather a more complex matter.

The type and density of (apparent) historical detail in surfaces is an important indicator of the kind of truth claims that a mainstream film is making, an approach used extensively in the long-running Australian serial *The Sullivans*. However, truth claims about historical authenticity can also be flagged in the film text by the incorporation of cultural products of an era such as music or television, and by the use of archival film footage, still photographs, news headlines and other kinds of historical documents. To be authoritative however, such inter-textualities must be more than decorations. Many now old-fashioned, but still impeccably researched, British costume dramas like *The Onedin Line* for example, contained a plethora of historical detail in surfaces of setting and clothing yet remained adrift in a never-world where the past was little more than an exotic setting for interpersonal melodrama.

By comparison, films like *Braveheart* or the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan* impressed as historical. Within the narrative structures of these films, neither used visual reference to other media as locating and authenticating devices⁵⁷ yet each proclaimed its authority in the aesthetic of realism, epic style, outdoor locations and the enormous scale of the individual productions. In particular, the complexity of the *mise-en-scene* of the battles celebrated the ability of the medium to reproduce the spectacular, while the density of the detail in the sequences overwhelmed audiences with the virtual impossibility of comprehending them during their brief time on screen.

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This latter aspect, as Graeme Turner has noted is a characteristic device in many historical movies where scale, spectacle and detail are used to convince audiences of the power of the medium and presumably the authority of its representation and interpretation.⁵⁸ Moreover, although the way the films represented their content was new and startling, numerous versions of the historical narratives were already well-known narratives in cultural memory. The social effect is necessarily subsequent to the film's release, but in order for this effect to occur at all the film text needed first of all to be understood as a 'good film' – a moving and authoritative representation of the past – one supported by other texts in cultural memory.

There are issues however surrounding the question of why a few films – films like *Schindler's List*, *JFK* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* – appear to be instrumental in provoking social action. As with most historical films, they work within accepted genres, and use codes of realism which intersect with the various layers of memory and historical understanding in cultural experience. But these latter films provoked social controversy and political action while others did not: why? In each of the films mentioned the director or some group involved with the conceptualising and/or production took steps to ensure that the film had specific resonance with the present. Primarily these resonances were the result of the shape put on the past in the film text, as well as the subtext generated by the intersections of the issues and images in the film and some aspect of the current social context. Here again the different meanings delivered by the multiple narratives in a film were important. In films like *Schindler's List*, *JFK* and *The Leaving of Liverpool*, the foregrounded narrative may have had a generic shape which reached closure – but the historical narrative was alive in one way or another in the present. *Schindler's List* for example, addressed concerns in the community about the rise of Fascism in Europe and extremist groups in other countries. *JFK's* compelling visual format not only stirred up unresolved issues of evidence in the Kennedy assassination, it also tapped deeper agitation in society. The film found resonance with social unease over values in America in the nineties together with lingering doubts about the accountability of those with access to enormous amounts of power in the government and elsewhere. *The Leaving of Liverpool* likewise had significant bearing on the present. However, in this case the authority of the production was guaranteed by the ways in which it was inserted in the public domain as a media event backed by the national broadcaster, the ABC, and surrounded by public affairs programs on the issues. More than most, this film actually opened up the space for public controversy. The major difference here between this program and *Schindler's List* or *JFK* was that the issue of paedophilia stirred by *The Leaving of Liverpool* was a criminal offence and charges, if substantiated, would provoke criminal prosecution.

By contrast, in films like *Gandhi* or the miniseries *Come In Spinner*,⁵⁹ the effects of the historical events that the films depict may continue into present reality but on the whole the audience isn't stirred – or invited – to *do* anything about it. While their respective historical narratives were dense in historical information, the past in these films was not used as a way of encountering

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issues of the present as was the case with *JFK* or *Mississippi Burning*. In fact I think that, for a narrative of the past to have any significant impact on cultural memory, something about the film or the issues that the narrative raises must intersect with either similar issues in the present or with current ramifications of past events.

Significant as these connections between past and present may be, they do not entirely account for the translation of issues from screen to society. Several more factors at the point of reception have a bearing on the situation – the size of the audience that the film reaches; the ways (both aesthetic and narrative) in which the film frames the historical subject to form a discourse about an issue relevant to the present; the various ways that the film functions in the social negotiation of meaning; and the other narratives about the subject (or even the lack of them) which already exist in cultural memory.

Experimental, art-house and independent cinema often deal with socially-relevant subjects and subjects from the past where the events have left an unsettled legacy in the present. But our society does not patronise such forms in large enough numbers for the subject matter to have an impact sufficient to change the secondary status of the issue in popular contestation. As many commentators have said about *Schindler's List* it would barely have ruffled the surface if it had been a made in any of the Eastern European countries or by anyone other than Spielberg⁶⁰ – but it was not. *Schindler's List* was a Hollywood blockbuster and whatever else it did, it shaped its historical subject within the cultural values of entertainment, spectacle, style, glamour and emotional engagement. It reached a huge audience, not because of its subject, but because of its potential for entertainment. There have been many films that represented the horrors of Nazism but they have not been Academy Award winners. The subject provoked a huge popular response in *Schindler's List* because its significance to audiences was shaped by superb handling of a form that audiences understood – without having the form denigrate the subject by clichéd representation. Clichés may work in a Bruce Willis mega-violence-with-predictable-but-miraculous-escape style of film. They are part of the genre. But in an historical piece which strives for historical authenticity, the generic convention is not so liberal. For audiences who have learned to expect the extraordinary in film technique, unless an historical piece rises above the generic conventions in some way or other, the result is a clichéd production which will drop from popular view with great speed. It will thus miss out on the fundamental element of exposure to a large audience.

An historical film with resonances in the present strong enough to result in political action must both engage audiences as a film and convince them of its authority as history. For sophisticated popular audiences – and the a majority of audiences for mainstream film do fall in to this category – authority is equated with the creation of an historical verisimilitude which takes audiences beyond what is already known to share in a new perception, a new ideological understanding, or a

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particular artistic vision. Audiences recognise a cinematic *tour de force* and generally accept levels of inter-textuality and devices within the film which call attention to its status as a cultural product, a situation evident in recent historical films like *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line*. In mainstream cinema, a film that is superbly directed and/or superbly scripted is going to have more impact than a lesser film; an important consideration when the ideological content of the film is of prime importance.

Well handled, the aesthetic and technical competency reinforces the film's authority. However, where filmic authority is at stake, apart from the inter-textualities between the film and what the audience already knows about actors and genre, etc. cinematic codes of realism are extremely dominant. Even though 'realism' is both technologically and ideologically based and therefore constantly changing, mass audiences have not shown a desire to break from it and pursue the kind of film which Rosenstone speaks of as desirable vehicles for historical discourse on film. This is not to say that they could not – it is simply that they have not.

Conventions of some kind are always going to apply to any symbolic representation and the conventions used in many of the more experimental historical films have not been widely accepted by popular audiences. However, conventions can be stretched and still retain audiences, and still be both challenging and entertaining. For example, Quentin Tarantino's very successful *Pulp Fiction* broke with convention to produce a film which re-ordered time sequences and used multiple narratives, multiple time frames and multiple points of view. The seventies film *O! What A Lovely War* which mixed the surreal into other representational codes in its main narrative, also achieved reasonable success with mainstream audiences. In that production the acceptance of the surreal as a metaphor for the futility and senseless waste of lives during World War I was due at least in part to the fact that the narratives in cultural memory also conceptualised the war in that way.

It is still the case that mainstream films are the ones which represent some kind of interaction with social constructions of the past and they are still the ones seen by millions. 'I saw it in a movie somewhere . . .', is a very important piece of information about our society and its access to the past. I think it important then, to try to understand the complex interactions between film text, social context, and audience which contribute to the kinds of information and attitudes which make up cultural memory. Mainstream film has limitations as a transmitter of the historical – but it also has strengths. We really need to understand both.

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¹ Geoffrey O'Brien, *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York, 1993, p.132.

² O'Brien, *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century*, p.132.

³ Some recent work on the subject of historical imagination and historical consciousness by Australian historians includes

– Chris Healy, *From The Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, CUP, Melbourne, 1997.

– Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, CUP, Melbourne, 1996

⁴ P. Seixas, 'Historical Understanding Amongst Adolescents in a Multicultural Setting' *Curriculum Enquiry*, Vol. 23, NO.3, 1993, pp.301–327.

P. Seixas, 'Mapping the Terrain of Historical Significance', *Social Education*, Vol. 61, E.1, 1997, pp.22–27.

⁵ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1998.

⁶ Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*. Columbia University Press. New York, 1998, p.179.

The six 'occasions' of the survey were:

Gathering with your family

Visiting a history museum or historic site

Celebrating holidays

Reading books about the past

Watching a movie or television about the past

Studying history at school

See also results tabulated by age, gender, education and income. pp.248–251.

Rosenzweig and Thelan, *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life*, p.36

⁸ Goodall, Hamilton, Ashton & Connors, 1998.

The results of this preliminary project led to a successful application Large-Grant Application to the Australian Research Council by Goodall, Hamilton, Ashton & Connors 1998 and that project is now underway. When the results of the study are complete, it is likely that researchers will be able to speak more authoritatively about the effects of film and to approach audience studies from an expanded theoretical perspective.

{Private Communication from Paula Hamilton – August 1999.}

⁹ The material recorded by the researchers working with Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan and discussed by those two authors in *The Presence Of The Past: Popular Uses Of History In American Life* goes some way towards filling this gap with respect to American interactions with the past and the value placed on various sources of information. The project now underway in Australia (see note 8 above) is similar to the American survey. However, to date there has not been any large-scale quantitative research as to how people in either of these countries actually *acquire* that knowledge. A major difficulty in this area one I encountered myself early in the research for this thesis arises from the fact that, as sources of historical knowledge are varied and overlapping and often contesting, it is difficult for anyone to know exactly how any piece of information is acquired and/or the degree to which perceptions are influenced by ideology.

¹⁰ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, p.69

¹¹ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.70

¹² Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.71.

¹³ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.71.

¹⁴ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.125.

¹⁵ Robert A. Rosenstone, 'Introduction' in Robert A. Rosenstone (Editor), *Revisioning History: Film And The Construction Of A New Past*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1995, pp.3–13, p.8.

¹⁶ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.77.

¹⁷ Mary Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', in *Public History Review*, Vol. 3, 1994, pp.107–123

¹⁸ Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', p.108.

¹⁹ Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', p.119.

²⁰ As already noted (see note 13 above) one of the Rosenstone's key statements about 'invention' and 'truth' in historical film is that film will always contain images which are 'invented' in that they are an approximation and 'true' in that they impart an overall meaning to the past which can be verified, documented or reasonably argued. He therefore needs to deal with the question of 'how can we know what can be 'verified, documented or reasonably argued'. His response is that historical film, 'like any work of written, graphic or oral history, enters a body of pre-existing knowledge and debate. . As with any other work of history, a film must be judged in terms of the knowledge of the past that we already possess'.

Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to our idea of History*, p.72.

²¹ Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the historical reception of American cinema*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, p.35.

²² William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*, Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1993.

²³ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*. University of California Press, Berkley, 1997.

²⁴ Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. p. xi.

²⁵ Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, p.10

²⁶ Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, p.9

²⁷ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indiana, 1994, p.ix.

²⁸ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973, pp.170ff.

²⁹ I am not using the term "deep structures" here at it is understood in semiotics but rather as a term to describe the kinds of mythic meaning which are contained in a number of more fundamental elements – the basic structures of narrative outlined by Hayden White, the mythic structure of certain narratives in the theories of Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell. I also consider the mythic discourse contained in images, etc. mythic in the sense described in Barthes as operating below the surface in filmic narrative.

– Hayden White, *The content of the form: narrative discourse and historical representation*. John Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1987.

– Vladimir Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*. University of Texas Press, Austin, Texas, 1975.

– Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII, Princeton University Press, 1972.

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture' and 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' in Geertz *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Basic Books, New York, 1973.

³¹ Hayden White, *Metahistory*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973, pp.170ff.

³² Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1996, p.42.

³³ Both Robert Brent Toplin, *History By Hollywood* and journalist Rita Kempley *Washington Post* note this as a view expressed in the production notes for *Mississippi Burning*.

– Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1996, p.36 and Note 21 p.232.

– Rita Kempley, *Washington Post* Staff Writer, December 9th 1988. Review *Mississippi Burning*.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/vty...os/mississippiburningrkempley-0c9de.htm>

³⁴ The case has remained open since 1964 and early in 1999 arrests were made in conjunction with the murders of the Civil Rights workers.

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³⁵ Robert Brent Toplin and William J. Palmer who discuss these issues from different perspectives both mention the director's intention in framing the history as he did, and in using the a buddy story as the foregrounded narrative.

–Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*, pp.24–44.

– William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*, p.9.

³⁶ The whole area of narrative in film is surveyed in Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, (1988) 1996 Edition, pp.120–155

³⁷ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice. Second Edition*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p.78.

³⁸ Turner, *Film as Social Practice. Second Edition.*, p.79.

³⁹ Roger Horrocks, *Male Myths And Icons: Masculinity In Popular Culture*, St. Martin's Press Inc, London, 1995, P.17.

⁴⁰ Branislav Malinowski, *Myths in Primitive Psychology*, 1926 ; reprinted in *Magic Science and Religion: the other essays*. Anchor, New York, 1974, p.101.

⁴¹ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Allen Lane, London, 1968, p.229

⁴² See Will Wright, *Sixguns and Society: A structural study of the Western*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1975.

In this study, Will Wright uses Levi-Strauss's structuralist methodology to analyse the Hollywood western. Wright's principal focus is on how the myths of society, through their structure communicate a conceptual order of that society. (p.17) Wright maintains that, in order to understand the social meaning of myth, it is important to analyse the narrative structure, the progression of events which leads to the resolution of conflicts.

⁴³ Barthes, *Mythologies*. p.155.

⁴⁴ Propp, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale*, 1975.

⁴⁵ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, note that the best known Proppian analysis has been applied to *Sunset Boulevard*, *Kiss Me Deadly* and *North by Northwest* with the best known being Peter Wollen's 1976 study of *North by Northwest*. Graeme Turner also notes that as well as these morphological studies, John Fiske (1987) has looked at television programmes like *The Bionic Woman* and *The A Team* and found 'an extraordinary degree of correlation' between Propp's functions and the narrative structure of the television series.

Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, 1996 Edition, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988. p.131–134.

Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice. Second Edition*. Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p.71.

⁴⁶ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII, Princeton University Press, 1972.

⁴⁷ Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use And Abuse of the American Past*, p.31.

⁴⁸ As noted earlier, Rosenstone did not approve of the kind of invention that occurred in *Mississippi Burning*. He mentioned this film specifically as an example of 'false invention' because it violates the knowledge of the past that we already possess. However this may be, it does not negate the fact that the kind of compressions and inventions that he speaks of as integral to the filmic language of historical film do occur in this film in exactly the way as they occur in other films like *Glory*. As Rosenstone points out, the problem of 'false invention' tends to apply to the central or overall meaning of the film rather than to smaller details.

⁴⁹ Carol Wilkie Wallace, "Rhetorical Devices For Hero Making: Charles Lindbergh and John. F. Kennedy." in Susan J Drucker and Robert S Cathcart (Eds.), *American Heroes in a Media Age*, Hampton Press, Inc. Cresskill, New Jersey, 1994, pp.168–187, p.180.

⁵⁰ Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature and the Construction of an Australian narrative*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1986, p.9.

⁵¹ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic structures for storytellers & Screenwriters*, Michael Wiese Productions, Studio City, CA, 1992.

⁵² Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic structures for storytellers & Screenwriters*, p.13

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⁵³ Vogler notes that he has amended the outline given by Campbell slightly to provide a diagram in which he list the stages of the Hero's Journey and equates them to the three act structure of most screen plays. His list of stages is as follows:

1. Ordinary World
2. Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Meeting the Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold
6. Tests, Allies, Enemies
7. Approach
8. Supreme Ordeal
9. Reward
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Return With the Elixir

Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic structures for storytellers & Screenwriters*, p.15.

⁵⁴ Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic structures for storytellers & Screenwriters*, pp.236–237.

⁵⁵ Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, p71.

⁵⁶ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p.156.

⁵⁷ I have earlier noted the fact that Spielberg has gone to a great deal of trouble to establish the fact that the main narrative is a filmic representation of a true story. The close upon the real Ryan as he is in the present which ends the introductory sequence of a family visit to a war cemetery morphs into the first battle sequence of the landing on Omaha beach. However, after the locating sequence, there is no specific reference to other media or to other kinds of historical documentation to support the historical truth claims that the film makes so strongly. The truth claims of the remainder of the film rest on that sequence together with inter-textualities between this, other war films and the innumerable images and narratives which circulate in culture. An added element of this representation is the current discourse in film about technology and the ways in which it creates effects of 'the way it must have been' which also builds on the aforementioned sources.

⁵⁸ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice. Second Edition.*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p.61.

⁵⁹ *Come In Spinner* had a considerable impact in opening up the myth of Australian/American wartime unity and, to some extent, that effect does continue into the present in individual and group memory as well as in subsequent political interactions. However, there was no invitation to the audience, either over or implied, that anything any action in the present was desirable.

⁶⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, 'Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*' in Vivian Sobchack (Editor), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, And The Modern Event*. Routledge, London, 1996, pp.14–183, p.149, & N19, p.180.

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When a film opens to vistas of vastness, blue sky, intense light and outback landscape; when Bryan Brown or Jack Thompson seem to look with larrikin directness through the screen, a large (though declining) proportion of Australian popular audiences feel a powerful sense of consensual identification with 'Australianness'. It is ironic that this should be the case, not so much because of Australia's growing multi-cultural population but because we are a nation where most of the population has always lived in towns and cities; where in the late 1990s a mere 4% of the population live on the land; and where the non-conforming male loner is more a social misfit than a hero. But the 'Australianness' that iconic characters and motifs in films appear to articulate is a construct and throughout Australia's relatively short history, literary and other representations have sought to define it. In fact so much of Australian literature has been, until quite recently, about identity that Australian film a very literary-based product in the seventies and eighties, was also substantially about defining that which was specific to this nation and those elements in our past which created those traits.

That body of film and its relationships to identity has been considered in a now considerable collection of criticism and analysis dealing with issues pertaining to thematics, texts, contexts, policy influences and funding in Australian film. Historical film, partly because of its appearance (and disappearance) at a particular historical intersection of these elements, has received significant attention from the areas of Film Studies and Cultural Studies – from people like Albert Moran¹, Tom O'Regan², Graeme Turner³, Sylvia Lawson⁴, Susan Dermody, Elizabeth Jacka⁵, Stuart Cunningham⁶, and others. Many works like *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of National Cinema*⁷, Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka's analysis of the films from the perspective of both industry and text, reflect a blending of the approaches of both disciplines.

Historians however, have been noticeably absent from this discussion – as already alluded to in general terms in Chapter Two. Apart from work in Public History, the occasional article in an academic journal and responses to critical reviews and debates in the popular press, historians have not generally engaged with the relationships between historical film and their own discipline⁸ in the way that this has occurred in America. Studies of film as a way of understanding the past, film as historical text, even film as a genre of history are reasonably well-advanced in that country.⁹ The Australian situation may reflect the fairly marginal status of Film Studies in the Academy during the seventies and early eighties when most Australian historical film was produced, as well as the dearth of 'historical' film in Australia since that time. However, with the concern in this country

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and elsewhere over the decline in the formal learning of history, it is surely in the interest of those for whom history is both a passion and a profession to look realistically at the modes through which people in the community interact with the past. For better or worse, mainstream film plays a significant part in the transmission of the historical images and narratives circulating in popular culture. There is an urgent need for historians to engage with issues arising from that fact, particularly as mainstream film is a medium designed as entertainment, its narratives and representations of the past constrained by audience expectations and filmic conventions.

This chapter, indeed this thesis, attempts to enter into that under-represented area by considering Australian historical film as a participant in historical discourse in this country.¹⁰ In focusing on the way the historical has been shaped in Australian film and the factors impinging on that shaping, I draw on a wealth of existing scholarship in Australian film, particularly with respect to the influence of funding on the film industry of the era and the thematics which pervade the works themselves. However, the two-way flow between the ways in which film intervenes in cultural memory of the past, and the reverse process through which film itself is shaped by narratives and ideological perceptions existing in culture is a major theme in this chapter. I am especially interested in the relationships between cultural narratives and their visualisation in mainstream film, particularly where the representation in the film text was generally not supported by narratives in popular culture as occurred in the popular reception of *The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith*. In the latter part of the chapter I return to the question of the relationship of socio-political context to the authority of film, and consider the effects that changed social demographics and changed political consciousness have on the rhetoric of identity reflected in contemporary Australian film.

The effect of the socio-political context on the representation of the past in Australian films

Although all historical film could be said to be about identity in some way, Australian historical film appears to be explicitly so. This can be linked to a need at a particular historical moment to articulate a form of identity that was valorised in Australia, and designed to demonstrate Australia's credentials internationally as a sophisticated, multi-cultural nation. The past in the Period Film was a past used in the service of the present, the meanings in Australian historical films of the Revival period being intrinsically bound up with historical developments in then-contemporary society.

The revival of the film industry in Australia in the late sixties and early seventies was not an historical accident but an historical event closely allied to government policy.¹¹ But even that institutional push cannot be isolated from the broader social context which saw a surge of

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nationalism that affected many aspects of daily life from politics to home-grown television. Australia's own image of itself had been changed by the combined processes of decolonisation, the change in Britain's international status, post-war migration, better education, and consumer-oriented prosperity. In the fifties and sixties the processes of de-colonisation had forced Australia to become more involved in Southeast Asia, being increasingly forced by political situations in Malaya, Korea, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia and Vietnam, to make independent foreign policy decisions. Not surprisingly, this was one of the many factors leading to a rise in Australian historical consciousness. By the seventies Australia and its culture had become a serious study, and courses in Australian Studies, Australian Literature, Australian Sociology, etc. began to appear in universities across the country. Its international identity however, was being projected somewhat differently.

In 1969 support from State and Federal funding had helped kick-start the Australian Film Revival but by 1974 (when Australia officially became a multi-cultural nation) Australia was being represented to the world through a series of 'ocker' comedies like *Stork*, *Alvin Purple* and *The Adventures of Barry Mackenzie* – films which did little to represent Australia as a sophisticated nation. These films embraced the permissive counter-culture of sixties 'sexed' cinema, where the depiction of explicit sex, violence, and coarse language had very different social values from those of today. The ocker films presented a cheerfully vulgar view of Australian society as a philistine's paradise – masculine, hedonistic and beer-swilling, with an emphasis on sex and bodily functions.

The ocker films, firmly set in the present, were regarded in many quarters as projecting an image of Australia that pandered to the cultural cringe, representing the nation as a colonial backwater inhabited by a race of crass, hedonistic oafs. Hindsight however, gives these films an historical context and can find a number of things to recommend ocker films as indicative of the vitality of sixties Australia. Tom O'Regan¹² for example, argues that the ocker films were an outgrowth of the interconnections between television, literature and popular journalism, particularly the off-beat home-grown comedy of *The Graham Kennedy Show*, *Aunty Jack*, and *The Mavis Bramston Show*. For O'Regan, the energy, textual thematics, and the stylistic innovations in their quirky comedy can be related to the combination of the foibles of the Australian way of life in novels like *They're a Weird Mob*, combined with the avant-garde in experimental revue theatre. Bruce Molloy sees them as reflecting the new urban face of popular mythology and capturing the popular imagination in ways reminiscent of the Rudd family of *On Our Selection*.¹³ The conflict with arbiters of culture, however, revolved around the content, not the innovation.

As cultural product, the ocker films had meanings which were intensely political, bound up with issues of government funding and with the politics of identity. Despite their authentically Australian historical mainspring and their general connectedness to aspects of the international art-house cinema, the ocker films defined themselves in relation to a particular fraction of Australian society

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at a time when Australian identity had become especially socially and politically significant. The ocker comedies left little room for the national pride and consensual identification associated in popular culture with traditional expressions of identity.

The Australian Film Commission saw film, with its combination of art, ideology, history, and technology as a highly suitable vehicle for displaying Australia's cultural maturity internationally, for affirming a sense of nationalism locally. Beneath the realities of funding and audience were serious ideological debates over which version of Australian identity was to be presented to the world, whether Australia as a nation was to be defined by the past or the present. The present was already represented by the ocker comedies. That left the past.

This led to a preoccupation with history in films which, in both content and aesthetics, attempted to demonstrate the advanced sensibilities in Australian culture. Such films were not about to advance a process of challenge to dominant notions of nationalism. Those films produced by government funding defined identity in opposition to the contemporary, urban, hedonistic ockersim and soft porn of previous productions. The version of the identity represented in what Dermody and Jacka call 'the AFC genre' was historical, rural, genteel and family-oriented. It drew heavily on the quasi-historical in the Bush Myth and the Australian Legend, versions of the past formed in popular literature in the 1890s, in the years preceding Federation when identity and nationalism had also been to the fore. Though quite out of step with contemporary reality, the safe, nostalgic past which Period Films constructed operated internally to create community and identification; internationally as a flagship of a vibrant, decent, beautiful and sophisticated country.

Historical Representation and the Period Film

The Bush Myth and Australian Legend as historical perspective in the Period Films is reasonably valid as *one* view of the past. Its hegemonic status as the *natural* view of the past, however, is not. The society that Bush Myth and the Australian Legend promoted as a reality may never have been a part of most Australian's lived experience. But for the greater part of the 20th century, it has been the way that the social history of Australia has been defined in popular representations, film being one of the strongest mediums of its visualisation. The work of John Tulloch and Sylvia Lawson has established that rural subjects and rural locations have dominated Australian film from the beginning.¹⁴ John Tulloch places the Bush Legend as the central concern of Australian film of the silent and early film eras. He has argued in *Legends of the Screen* that the key opposition in early Australian cinema was that between the 'natural', organic society of the country and the urban-industrial, class-ridden society of the town. In fact, so appropriate to the melodramatic conventions of the screen of the day were the patterns of opposition that, naturalised as filmic narratives, those

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worked to naturalise other ideological constructions of reality as well. The Bush Legend subsumed within it particular value-laden assumptions about the bush and the family, the role of women, the class structure with its embedded ideas of equality and mateship and made them all 'natural'. Its strength in popular culture, its 'naturalness' and degree of popular acceptance made it fundamental to the discourse of nationhood and identity in the Period Films as well.

Filmic visualisations of the past like those of the Period Films which aimed at consensus incorporated the iconic, but left in place the silences in the historical narratives and the mythic transformations of experience which make scripted and visual narratives into ideological statements. In other circumstances, a less nostalgic and more challenging view of Australia's past could have interrogated popularly accepted views, particularly the ideological emphasis on the 'common man' and the egalitarianism of his worldview. In fact such an approach had a great deal to recommend it as drama. All the potential tension of class struggle is there in the legend, just as available to an interpretation which challenged the generally accepted mythology as they were to the idealisation and harmony created by mythic resolutions based on character. Familiar elements like the opposition between town and country or the struggle of the farmer against the squatter could easily have been constructed as drama about a class-ridden nation where the camaraderie between bush folk is the solidarity of a large underclass struggling to even up social inequality. However, by validating the struggle of the majority while emphasising its futility, the legend itself and its representation in the Period Films resolve the impasse by deftly shifting emphasis away from issues of class towards ideals, finding spurious resolution to powerlessness in mateship, larrikin resistance and deprecating humour. In film, this ideological approach elided almost perfectly into a view of history represented in a foregrounded narrative focussed on the individual in which narrative resolution was achieved at the level of character in circumstances where resolution in culture would have been impossible.

According to Ross Gibson¹⁵ the thematic concerns that shape the narratives of many of the Period Films are deeply ingrained in the way Australian history is conceptualised. He traces this to attitudes and experiences of the founders and early white settlers and to the ways in which they understood themselves in relationship to the new land. Unlike the traditional owners who saw the land as their mother, Europeans attempted to subdue the South-land to the way of their northern forebears – attempts which met with repeated failure. Gibson maintains that in such circumstances failure had to be naturalised, ennobled and rendered emotionally satisfying as myth.¹⁶ In the generic Australian story, as Gibson interprets it, geographical conditions gave society *en masse* little hope of reaching out to cover the unsubdued continent.¹⁷

His analysis appears to be borne out in the themes that run through much of Australian historical film. For those who attempted to impose coherence on the land's vastness, there was 'heroic failure'; (*Burke and Wills*). For those who tried to live with it on its own terms, there was 'heroic

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individualism'; (*Crocodile Dundee*, *The Irishman*, *The Man From Snowy River*). Ironically, although the land might not be conquered, it might hand over riches of an unexpected kind (like equality and independence) for those who suffered through its initiation rite.; (*On Our Selection*). The bush was harsh but through the suffering it enforced it offered redemption, the key to a higher, simpler, more noble state of innocence; (*Journey Among Women*). The society founded on inequalities and cruelty for men and women transported here against their will, gave birth to a southern utopia, a classless society of independent, resourceful, anti-authoritarian citizens – or so the mythology goes. Whatever their particular emphasis, the majority of such films demonstrated that utopia came at a price – one which reflected the Protestant work ethic and ideological desirability of a land of hardworking yeoman farmers. In that ideological construction of the past success could only be won by a struggle with the environment, and the hard work and sacrifice needed to gain possession of the land was understood as legitimising the fact of ownership. Until very recently the fact that, for the Aboriginal people, the traditional owner/guardians of the land, the colonial experience was one of invasion, dispossession and genocide was not an understanding of the past that figured at all in dominant constructions.

Film is, however, a cultural product and as I argue in this thesis, it is always concerned to some extent with the present. As well as being related to the desire to exhibit Australia to its own citizens and to the world as a sophisticated, modern nation with sensibilities and technological achievements equal to the best in Europe, Period Films *as text* were also reflections of the present. For example, the number of 'women's' films – that is films made by women, featuring stories with women at the centre – were a reflection of the contemporary concerns cast backwards into stories of the past. There was also a new thematic interest in growing to maturity and defining identity in films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Getting Of Wisdom*, *My Brilliant Career*, *The Devil's Playground*, etc. developments that Bruce Molloy sees as relevant to the then contemporary phase of national development.¹⁸ This new phase of nationalism in a country now more independent in its foreign policy allowed these films to re-examine Australian-British relationships which had always been a minor narrative in the Bush Legend, this being a foregrounded element of *Breaker Morant* and *Gallipoli*. But such new directions did not disturb the major outlines of our comfortable view of the past, nor force us to look with new eyes at our own record as colonisers. According to Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, the perception of the past that the genre created was one which encouraged a gentle nostalgia, not one which confronted the mythic, nor one which was likely to disturb our sense of the present.¹⁹

Clearly then, existing parameters and structuring oppositions in cultural perceptions of Australian history had a major influence on what was highlighted in narratives of the past and on how these narrative were emplotted in the films of the Revival Period. Even though there was great potential as drama for interpretations of the past which challenged dominant narratives and ideological perceptions, it would have been extremely difficult for film of the era to adopt this approach. Not

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only did government funding favour celebrations of Australian nationalism, the ideological underpinnings of dominant versions of the past were so implicitly accepted as to be invisible. As I discuss later in the Chapter one of the reasons for the box office failure of *The Chant O Jimmy Blacksmith*, a version of the past which confronted deeply entrenched beliefs but failed because at the time that kind of story was virtually absent in the strands of historical narrative circulation in popular culture.

Another of the things which gave the Period Film such cultural authority at the time was the fact that in its texts, national mythology combined almost seamlessly with the conventions and cultural expectations of film. The Australian legend has the popular appeal of the battler, the individualism of colourful characters as heroes, larrikin humour and awe-inspiring landscapes – all of which moved smoothly into the dominant realistic aesthetic of the movies. For local audiences of the time, the period film offered a lyrical and beautifully-shot perception of ourselves and our past that was secure and unproblematic. For international audiences, the Australian version of the archetypal cinematic hero offered the appeal of the culturally novel combined with the generically well-known, while the rural landscape and period setting offered the potential for spectacular cinematography.

The bushman icon of this historical construction also offered a great deal to film, film being like the Legend itself a cultural construction which works in the mythic and foregrounds a narrative centred on the individual. For international audiences, the bushman and his alter-egos in Australian mythology was a readymade vehicle for a male star, an 'exotic' Australian substitute for the cowboy of the American Western and/or an attractive half of the male couple of the buddy movie. For local audiences he was familiar as the independent, laconic, inventive loner who wasn't too keen on intimate personal compatibility with a woman but was capable of loyalty to the end for a 'mate'. For audiences of the seventies, after a long absence of Australian accents and Australian settings, seeing the nation represented on film in ways that were aesthetically beautiful, ideologically confirming and 'natural' within filmic conventions was a very powerful way of overcoming scepticism and confirming a consensual discourse about a very narrow set of definitions of nation and a shaped perception of the past.

Not only was traditional Bush Mythology extremely suited to the narrative strategies and conventions of mainstream film, it tapped cultural discourses of Australian identity based on nostalgia for a bygone lifestyle intimately centred on the bush. Perhaps of even greater importance for local audiences was the fact that the construction of masculinity in the Period Films was directly linked to our most deeply respected myths of identity and nationhood. Culturally, the bushman had translated easily into the digger and this framework of the national type formed a construction of Australian masculinity that until the sixties had been hegemonic, enduring and very limiting.

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Beautiful to look at, the Period Film combined an ideologically directed version of history with the production values and aesthetics of cinema as an art form. The cultural values of the one seemed to authenticate the authenticity of the other. The historical narratives proclaimed to local and international audiences alike that Australia had a past; a past based on struggle, ingenuity and egalitarianism whose values were intimately connected with the present. For a time at least, the pleasure of seeing Australian accents and Australian themes in outstanding cinematography outweighed other considerations about the validity of the historical representation. Even though there were some dissenting voices amongst the critics, the reputation of the films internationally seemed to add to the authority of their nationalism, liked as it was to well-known and prestigious narratives of Australia's past in popular culture.

Landscape, Archetype and Meaning in Australian Historical film

In the translation from cultural narrative to film, a medium which operates through condensation and metaphor as well as narrative, the various ideological constructions of the Bush Myth and the Australian Legend have become encoded as recognisable motifs, cultural stereotypes and thematic concerns. Two aspects in particular – the use of landscapes and the functions of archetype – have been powerful in establishing the kinds of connections between film text and audiences which help to establish filmic meaning and give authority to its shaping of the past.

Ross Gibson goes so far as to say that in many ways, the majority of Australian feature films have been about landscape.²⁰ In his view it is impossible to understand the mythology underlying popular awareness of Australian settlement and historical development, unless we take into consideration the ways that the land forms (represented culturally as landscape) have helped to shape and transmit that tradition. For example, a sense of the past has been realised through a strong emphasis on landscape in popular movies like *The Man From Snowy River*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Irishman*, *The Year My Voice Broke* and *Flirting*. Gibson argues that by featuring land so prominently in the stories, all of these films stake out 'something more significant than decorative pictorialism'.²¹ The featured landscape can be used to establish a nature/culture opposition, or to emphasise its 'otherness', or to create a setting and a reason for the actions and attitudes of the particular assortment of 'typical' Australian characters. In films like those cited above, landscape is a part of the realism that nominates the situation as authentic and that helps to ground the authority of the way in which history is presented.

Just as cinematic representations of landscape have had an enormous influence on popular imagination and have formed part of the unconscious popular schema for understanding Australia's past, so too meaning in film can be coded into the very structure of narrative itself through the functioning of archetypes. In the Period Films, while the contexts in which heroes like Joe in *A*

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Town Like Alice, or patriarchs like Dad in *On Our Selection* function reflect the historically specific, they are archetypes grounded in collective unconscious and expressed in narrative. Each narrative is a local, particularised variation of the tendency of myth in general to convert specifics of time and place to the service of the particular ideology. As icons (in this case more a combination of icon and archetype) are symbolic constructions involving some form of ritual and consensual bonding with the audience, there is an attachment and an element of desire in audience recognition of their own membership of the group. In addition the iconic recognition that the main characters often trigger suggest that bonding with a desired personal identity is at least partly involved in popular reaction, and that resonances which the films may have in collective (and cultural) memory are mediated by this response.

In Australian film the archetypal characters play special roles in popular historical consciousness. All archetypes promote recognition and establish bonds between audience and film character, providing points of identification which appear to authenticate certain versions of the past rather than others. However, in the case of the Australian historical films, this was augmented by the intersections between the past as visualised on the screen and emotive identification with the bush common in the personal and family memories of large sections of the population.

Australia is a highly urbanised country and the flow of population to the towns has been an ongoing feature of Australian history. For city families who have themselves come from the bush, or whose connection dates to their parents, grandparents or relatives in the country, there is often an oral family history or a family photographic record which supports the salient features of the Bush Legend. Like the legend itself, these family memories are generally constructed around particular types and stereotypes clothed in the specifics of time and place. In *The Myths We Live By*,²² Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson point out that life-stories should not be seen as blurred experiences or even masses of fragments, but rather as shaped accounts in which some incidents are dramatised, others contextualised, yet others passed over in silence.²³ The sense of identification with a rural past may be an illusion based on the moral high ground that the Legend claimed for itself. But it has been a powerful force in establishing the Bush Myth as a basis for scaffolding cultural memory of Australian history. In addition Raphael Samuel's and Paul Thompson's observations about the way the past is shaped in narrated memories point to an interesting correspondence between film and cultural memory. The neat way the past appears to fall into place in films does not jar our sensibilities about historical processes because those are the strategies we ourselves use to narrate our own memories.

Translated to feature film, the pervasiveness of landscape reinforces the dominance of one body of myth or discourse as the accepted way of representing the nation, bolstering particular constructions of Australianness and particular versions of Australian history. Tim Rowse relates this limited and mythical way of viewing the past to a very unadventurous canon of film realism which contributes

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to a situation confining Australian film's exploration of Australianness to 'a sense of recognition, a heightened awareness of what is already known'.²⁴ His comment draws attention to a major element in the ways that feature film intervenes in cultural memory – namely the way that film employs recognisable narrative codes to exploit, reinforce and negotiate that understanding. One of these codes, documentary realism, has been a feature to a greater or lesser extent in the historical films of the period of film revival in Australia in the seventies. Documentary realism is a form that locates individual problems and contradictions within a larger historical framework so that the narrative about the individual is understood as signifying a narrative about a whole class or historical movement on a wider historical scale.

A good example of this can be seen in the film *Sunday Too Far Away* which tells the story of Foley, a gun shearer nearing the end of his prime. The story is set against the Shearers' Strike of 1956 and is in many ways a celebration of a dying socio-occupational group. The film's subject, ostensibly Foley, is marked out as being a whole class and an associated way of life by the use of end titles which place the film in history and deny its fictional structure. The narrative and emotional interest is centred on Foley – but the meaning of the film makes him representative rather than individual. The film effectively deflects the interest (and meaning) through the various narrative strands which are customarily woven through mainstream film, moving from character to setting, from plot to social structure. In all of this it manages to set up its own authority for the way it tells the story. Thus structured, the film presents a view of this historical event that celebrates the richness of the culture of the shearers; group solidarity, mateship and its little recognised corollary, competitiveness. Many other interpretations of the strike were possible, but they are likely to be outweighed in cultural memory by the personalised, dramatic, and somehow elegiac representation in *Sunday Too Far Away*.

Another aspect which makes this film resonate so readily with aspects of cultural memory is the fact that the film contains levels of reference to aspects of life which have potential meaning for audiences totally unconnected with shearing, even those totally unconnected with Australia. John Dingwell's screenplay constructs a story about professionalism of all kinds – about the frustration of those in highly demanding jobs which lack the social status that society prizes. The punch line that flashes on-screen in the final frame: 'It wasn't the bloody money. It was the insult.' nails the meaning down and yokes it to experiences in individual memory that authenticate not only the feeling of the characters in the film but the entire construction of the past that made the anger valid.

Recurring patterns in Australian Historical Film

Films like *Sunday Too Far Away* or *Newsfront* combined popular desire for narrative, culturally accepted modes of realism, and forms of representation, to confer on their interpretation of the past

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a sense that it was both authoritative and unmediated. But even those films can be seen to contain one of the recurrent thematic concerns of Australian film – powerlessness in relation to the movement of the historical periods in which characters are placed (as already noted). Films as diverse as *The Odd Angry Shot*, *Caddie*, and *The Irishman*, have narratives which structure perceptions of Australian history in this way. These films were peopled with characters governed by forces beyond their control, ending up in positions of historical – though not moral – defeat at the end of the film. Tom Ryan had drawn attention to the contrast between this construction of the individual in history and that of American historical movies.²⁵ By contrast with the powerlessness which is a feature of Australian stories of the past, American narratives are typically stories of strength where the hero achieves mastery over geographical areas or political situations. American narratives favor success stories featuring ‘the great man’ construction of historical progress. In Australian films the individual, in contrast, is relatively powerless. As Tom Ryan emphasises:

it is not that Australian films should place their characters in positions of power, in the interests of ‘national identity’ and similar nonsense, it is simply that they do not.²⁶

The issue of the ineffectualness of the protagonist in Australian narrative, both literary and filmic, is central also to Graeme Turner’s analysis of the patterns that dominate the Australian literary tradition.²⁷ Turner does not accept the customary opposition between city and country, seeing instead a unity in perceptions of the Australian context which ‘uses the harshness of the natural environment as an alibi for the powerlessness of the individual.’²⁸ He further argues that the typical protagonist in Australian fiction operates from an ideological position that negates the value of individual action and legitimises powerlessness and subjection. Such thematic and political postures of defeat are employed in a narrow range of characterisation and celebrated in nationalistic constructions such as the battler and the larrikin. Films like *Newsfront*, *Breaker Morant*, *A Town Like Alice* and *The Odd Angry Shot* are typical of this construction in that the view of the past that they represent is predicated on the identity and supposed national characteristics of the male hero.

However in films like *The Odd Angry Shot* or *My Brilliant Career* for example, the essentially historical impotence of the main characters may be transformed by a discourse about individual achievement. This is both a feature of filmic conventions – mythic resolution of problems in the foregrounded narratives attained at the level of character – and an ideological perception of history. Both are made to appear ‘natural’ through the operation of generic codes and correspondence with existing narratives in cultural memory. In *The Odd Angry Shot* for example, camaraderie in the face of traumatic personal experience or in *My Brilliant Career* personal triumph over social and economic opposition through the publication of the heroine’s novel, establish mythic resolutions to historical powerlessness. Individual moral achievement may be attained – but the impersonal historical imperative in these films remains as unassailable as ever.

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The Irishman, a film that Sandra Hall's film review described as 'the best example of Australian picaresque shown so far' (1978) is an interesting example of the narrative of defeat combined with the exploitation of superb landscape, mythic story line, and the Bush Myth of heroic failure combined with personal integrity. Like *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Irishman* also deals with the end of an era for its protagonists, with the voice-over of the son rather than the use of end titles marking its meaning as representatively historical. This film locates its narrative in a precise historical moment when the bullock team is just about to be overtaken by the motor lorry. In the film, Paddy is defeated by a precise historical circumstance combined with the defining stubbornness of his own character in refusing to adapt to the new order. The moral framework in which the film constructs its version of the past is a romantic one that places value on Paddy's integrity over the inevitable change that he knows will bring about his demise. In the real world of daily experience, audiences would be likely to see such behaviour as perverse stubbornness if not outright stupidity. But in the context of the film, the message is that history is unstoppable and the 'little man' will forever be the victim. What he must hold on to is the sense of his own worth. Again the solution posed here can be seen as an application of the concepts of mythology proposed by both Barthes and Levi-Strauss – mythic resolution, (in this case powerlessness transmuted to moral integrity) and a solution promoting harmony which also favours the dominant groups.

As with *Sunday Too Far Away*, *The Irishman* draws on culturally shared understanding of human behaviour in the present as validation for how things probably were in the past. In this case, narratives in cultural and individual memory about unemployment being brought about by the historical processes of change – particularly technological change – support the film's claim to represent history. The filmic genre in which the fictional narrative of Paddy's family is told can readily be understood as history as one *particular* version in the multiple narratives of change and disenfranchisement in strands of cultural memory.

Masculinity and History in Australian film

Another of the almost unexamined perceptions in cultural memory prior to the sixties was the apparently natural 'fact' that action in Australian history is male action. The Bush Legend and its reverberations in cultural memory, foregrounds male experience as *the* authentic experience of Australian history and constructs the male as the active principle and the female as the secondary object. As Dermody and Jacka have pointed out, traditional narratives in the Australian legend predicate a male hero or heroes where there is any form of action to be contemplated, and within that understanding is a tightly-furled recipe for masculinity.²⁹ The repetitive restatement of a particular type of masculinity in Australian literature and in accounts of the past borders on the obsessive and, like the dominant construction of identity in the Australian Bush Legend, can be traced to popular representations of the 1890s.

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Amongst the sub-themes in the 1890s literature on nationalism is a discourse on 'national type' and masculinity which has become conflated in a sanctioned form of male to male bonding known as 'mateship'. As Scott Murray has observed, in a country that is, at least on the surface, homophobic, Australian films of mateship iconise 'a platonic homosexual bond' between men.³⁰ Inscribed within constructions of the qualities of the acceptable national type and sanctioned in our culture, mateship masks, or at least balances out, male conflict and hierarchies within groups. It provided the mythic resolution of two incompatible opposites, allowing the notion of 'equality' in the Australian legend to maintain its existence, in the face of obviously contradictory elements of competition and power structures that are also valued as marks of masculinity.³¹ In popular consciousness of the past, this construction of society with all its interrelated myths has proven remarkably resilient and has outlasted almost a century of political and social change. Such perceptions were generally translated, rather than examined, in the foregrounded narratives and cultural assumptions of many Period Films. Even if modern perceptions of masculinity are changing in lived experience, in cultural memory, the area drawn on by the Period Films, the bond of mateship as 'historical fact' is virtually unchallengeable. Similarly, the ways in which the idea of 'mateship' explains cultural memories of how men acted in significant historical events like war went unchallenged.

Masculinity has very often been a subtext in Australian films, particularly those like *Breaker Morant*, *Gallipoli*, *The Odd Angry Shot*, *Phar Lap* etc. which have a predominantly male cast. As Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka have pointed out,³² the construction of the working class hero in these films is not an appeal to class solidarity but a gesture towards the classless common man which also underlines the historically representative nature of the hero's role in the films. Such a representation succeeds in presenting the experience of the lone, working class or lower-middle class, white male as the authentic experience.

If history equals male, what does masculinity equal? This anxiety appears to run through those apparently historical films with male protagonists. The ostensibly historical subject in many of the films is displaced in favour of another subject – group hierarchies, norms, mores, rituals and ritualised prescribed freedoms. A telltale sign of the co-opting of history to a discourse on masculinity can be seen in the construction of the hero and in the narrowly defined terms of the socially sanctioned male-to-male bond of mateship, a particularly strong feature of *Gallipoli*.

These films fabricate a male hero of the Australian legend; one who is working class, unimpressed by rank, loyal to his mates, an improviser, non-conformist, sardonic, laconic, and so on. He is the product of the conditions of the bush workplace, war, or sport and he inhabits a world in which women and the feminine qualities are marginalised, of no great consequence to the life he leads. Certain 'stars' – actors like Mel Gibson, Jack Thompson, Bryan Brown and Sam Neil – seem to rouse and articulate a consensual form of clear-cut Australianness that audiences recognise as iconic

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– Australianness and a particular form of (white) masculinity being understood as synonymous. Clothed in personal qualities derived from a pared down version of the Bush Myth, these iconic heroes of the Australian screen are a second wave emanation of the archetypes of the films of earlier periods. In many works, as in the case of Archie in *Gallipoli* or The Breaker in *Breaker Morant*, the hero is an archetype with the cultural specificity of historical time and place adding to the authority of the historical veracity of the interpretation.

When these ‘male ensemble’ films (as Dermody and Jacka call them) present a representation of the past, the range of characters frequently allows the narrative to display a range of attitudes to the past events. In *The Odd Angry Shot* for instance, beneath the obviously staged joke sequences and the rather heavy handed moralising of the group leader played by Graham Kennedy, it is often difficult to see the ways in which the group faced the conflict as anything other than a reasonably transparent view to the past – fictionalised perhaps but clearly a representation of ‘how things were’. Though some films are obviously fables, it can be sometimes difficult to understand films like this as an ideological construction working in the framework of varying levels of myth. This is of course the intention of the film. As Barthes says:

Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.³³

In *The Odd Angry Shot*, the hero’s loyalty is to the group rather than society at large. In fact, the group feels abandoned by society. This assertion was already strong in popular discourse at the time (1979), and it is one which has become more central to cultural memory since then, through reinforcement from similar understandings in the far more numerous American movies made after that date. In focusing on the reactions of the characters involved in the conflict, *The Odd Angry Shot* avoids complex historical questions about the Vietnam War through reproducing stories of mateship in the Bush Legend overlaid with the more obvious aspects of the pragmatic, anti-authoritarian digger of the ANZAC tradition. However, for all its limitations this is a story of the war. It is history focused in the personal, the way that most of those involved in the conflict understood and experienced it. Cultural memory needs narratives and it is in particular need of comprehensible narratives to encompass so political and complex an issue as Australia’s role in the Vietnam War. *The Odd Angry Shot* provides those kinds of narratives in its episodic structure, while its lack of heroics and its tone of bitterness give it resonances with the stories about the war that circulated in popular culture at the time and since the film was current.

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Contesting Voices in Australian Mainstream film

The visibility of Period Films as a genre tends to obscure the existence of quite a substantial body of film in the social realist tradition telling other stories set mainly in the recent past of the film's release date. These are not 'historical' films *per se*. Yet, because popular constructions of Australian history have tended to explain our past in terms of assumed qualities of (white male) identity, films which challenged those assumptions also implicitly challenged the foundations on which much popular historical understanding³⁴ and cultural memory are based.

Films like *Don's Party*, *Puberty Blues*, *The Devil's Playground*, and mini-series like *Vietnam* and *The Dismissal* presented versions of Australian society which diverged from the Bush Myth with its central male icon of the bushman/digger, intersecting instead with less dominant narratives in popular culture. Contesting voices in the national rhetoric of mateship and masculinity appear also in films like *The FJ Holden* (1977), *Puberty Blues* (1982) and *The Year My Voice Broke* (1987). Like *Don's Party*, they deal in the territory of male chauvinism in action presenting its rituals in a way that is quite a contrast to the morally holy construction of mateship in period film. By stripping away the halo of mateship they are implicitly challenging to those other nostalgic understandings of an historical record based on men's actions, in which egalitarianism and concern for are understood as a driving principle and present an often unpleasantly familiar view of male society.

Although the competitive males at Don's party or in the vans on the beach in *Puberty Blues* may be more recognisable in lived experience than the laconic loner/larrikin in *Gallipoli*, it is the latter who remains the icon of Australian history. Quite apart from the fact that most versions of national identity are mythic, in the historical circumstances surrounding the development and consumption of these films, contesting versions of identity didn't have sufficient power to outweigh the stronger and more entrenched narratives enshrined in the Australian legend. Certainly bodies of film, even individual films, can have considerable effects on how the past is understood. But this will not happen unless the issues raised are significant in some way in the present. Unless there is public dialogue on the concerns of the film, it will be only a small part of the process of informing and transforming popular opinion. In the Australian context where production of film has been too spasmodic and diffuse to form a repeatable genre of themes and techniques, the degree to which a film intersects with other texts in culture and memory is vital to the impact it has on cultural memory.

This is borne out in the popular reception of two other films, *The Devil's Playground* and *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, both historical films that did undermine the traditional narrative. Though not dominant in cultural memory, there were adequate numbers of social 'texts', personal memories, and historical narratives circulating in popular culture to support the challenge *The Devil's Playground* offered to traditional representations. *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, by

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contrast, was far too confrontational and far too marginalised as an issue in popular circulation to win support for itself as a film or for its view on the past.

The Devil's Playground

Fred Schepisi's semi-autobiographical *The Devil's Playground* (1976) stands on the borderline of nostalgia and other attempts to look at significant cultural forces in Australia's past. *The Devil's Playground* is a starkly told story of a coming of age in a Catholic seminary, in the style of Juniorates that have since been abandoned for the kinds of reasons that the film makes clear. Set in 1953 in Victoria the film refers, a little obliquely perhaps, to the decline of orthodox religion in 1950s Australia. More directly the film had resonance with then-current debates about contraception, promiscuity and revisions in social thinking about sexuality in general, and reflects back to audiences the sort of religious guilt about sex – the Catholic version in this case – that has troubled generations of Australians.

The film was immensely popular at the time and achieved a formidable critical reputation having been the only Australian film of 1976 to be selected for the Director's Fortnight at Cannes. Like *Brides of Christ* in 1991, for Catholics and even for those indifferent to religion, *The Devil's Playground* opened to popular view a fast-fading taboo area of the present – the ritual instruction/indoctrination methods of the Catholic Church. At the same time, the aesthetic standards of the film and its structure as a coming-of-age narrative protected audiences from having to confront anything too unpleasant. Because the developmental task of achieving sexual maturity is universal to adolescence, and because it is also one that is commonly hemmed around with particular cultural limitations, the foregrounded narrative has almost immediate reverberations in popular memory. The historical narrative tapped personal memory as the rigidity of the prohibitions of the Catholic Church regarding sexual experimentation was a memory held in common by a sizeable percentage of audience members. The film placed at least some of these collective cultural memories into an historical format which could act as a touchstone for more private memories, creating a space for them to be aired and thus placed in the public arena.

But beyond that, the narrative referred to the context of the (then) present, marshalling concerns about quite sweeping changes in the functioning of the Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II. These changes were making themselves obvious in society in the number of former priests, nuns, and brothers that were leaving their orders and in other visible changes to ritual and role in Church organisations. The historical content may have been relatively slight in terms of traditional history, but as a social document the film is like all those others where settings in the past help build popular historical knowledge. As I have argued elsewhere, this kind of material adds to what is perhaps the greatest source of popular memory; 'unofficial knowledge', as Ralph Samuel calls it³⁵ that

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constructs the cumulative understandings that a community shares to a greater or lesser degree through exposure to the same culture, particularly that transmitted through popular mass media.

One of the ever present discourses in culture expresses a belief that the past (of whatever era) was 'different', the nostalgic site where innocence reigned, where so many of the wrongs of the present were yet to happen. Though *The Devil's Playground* challenged that view in many ways, its foregrounded narrative still carried the positive ideological view of the Hero's Journey. Moreover, the historical narrative was supported by both social context and personal memory. The poor public reception of *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* shows, by contrast, just how important those latter elements are.

The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith

Sited among a group of films which celebrated the Bush Legend *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* (1978) was a film which did not sit well with then-current discourses about the past in cultural memory. The film, based on Thomas Kenneally's book of the same name, took a harsh and uncompromising look at the subjugation of the Aborigines by the agencies of white control and ventured into those areas that were, at the time, silences in dominant narratives of Australia's past. The film was overwhelmingly bleak. It didn't comply with many of the concepts of genre established by the period film; it didn't succeed in constructing the hero's death as a noble sacrifice; and its historical narratives didn't find support from any but the most marginal of discourses in cultural memory. The social context, which, today, might support a film like *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, was underdeveloped at the time. It was too early in the process of change to cultural understandings of the past for its perceptions to be taken up in the popular media by Aboriginal groups struggling at the time even to understand their potential as a voice about the past.

Reviewing the Bush Legend about white settlement in Australia from an Aboriginal perspective, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* placed into the popular arena some of the reasons for understanding this almost 200 year long event as invasion and subjugation. Even now, this still is a difficult issue for white Australia. In 1978 when public and political agendas had yet to acknowledge constructions of the past which were alternate to the tale of glorious struggle by white settlers to overcome a stubborn land, it was both unpopular and highly confrontational. According to Sean Maynard:

The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith is not an attempt to mythify Aborigines. It is rather an attempt to prod liberal conscience and to shake the audience's complacency about colonial Australia.³⁶

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Although the film narrative fictionalised versions of historical events, other than the fact that Jimmy strikes back, Jimmy's story typifies the many different ways that colonialism impacted on the indigenous population. Jimmy's light skin had apparently given him a passport into white society, but in his search for acceptance he confronts white paternalism and betrayal in a number of the many forms that it has taken in our past. Jimmy experiences meanness and suspicion from farmers who exploited him, paying him a fraction of the agreed upon price for his labour. This is outdone by the brutality of the troopers who demonstrate systematically the ways that power can be misused to mistreat and abuse others who don't have it. Jimmy is deceived into marrying a white girl believing that he is the father of another man's child. His employers, the Newby family, give him his first home (a tin shed) making him believe that there was perhaps a way into the white world – until they find out that he is married to a white girl. They want to take his wife away, to make her 'respectable' by giving her a new start in the house and blackmail him with starvation for his family until he agrees.³⁷ Jimmy goes on to a rampage of axe murders and his fate is sealed. As with other films, Jimmy's story in the foregrounded narrative is to be read as a personal history while the conditions which drove him to murder are structured as representative of attitudes and actions of the past. The bleakness in both layers of narrative had little to recommend them as *entertainment* – an overriding need in mainstream film.

The film was very uncomfortable and confronting for the audience – uncomfortable in that the audience had not been asked to relate to the film as a genre where violence is expected, and confronting in that it raised uncomfortable and complex questions about justice and the limits of human endurance. Most confronting of all, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* made audiences face the very unpleasant reminder that the dominant historical narrative of a land of settlers facing and overcoming a hostile environment was a fabrication which overlooked a history of inter-racial conflict marked at best by injustice and at worst, by attempted genocide.

In addition, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* raised other equally uncomfortable issues. The complexity of inter-racial issues in the film leave it open to readings which could confirm prejudices on both sides of the issue. Jimmy is a part of what is now known as 'the stolen generations'. In this case however, his removal from the tribe was not violent, nor was he cut off from possible relationships with them. His foster-parents have treated him very well. In fact, Jimmy does not fight white society. He wants to join it. But as the film shows, he is in caught in a social vacuum, detribalised by his upbringing and rejected by the society that he believes in. In addition, Jimmy and his brother were not fighting on behalf of Aboriginal people and tribal life. Even so, as the film shows, the damage done is none-the-less traumatic for all that. Jimmy has been psychologically removed and turned into a white man with black skin. In terms of cultural memory, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* presents in dramatic form to predominantly white audiences one of the many forms of loss that Aboriginal people have had to experience since white settlement/invasion.

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Just as other films focus on the personal perspective in history, positioning the audience as spectators or allowing various forms of emotional identification, this film too presents the world as Jimmy experiences it. But in the context of the time, sympathy for the main character was in short supply. Nor did the film succeed in engendering in audiences a sense of moral confusion sufficient to overcome their horror at the violence (more implied than explicit) in the serial killing of women and children by an axe murder. This was no *Friday The Thirteenth* where horror and gore were understood as fantasies. The treatment of the past in the film had sufficient inter-textuality with representations of Australia's past in other films and other formats to inform audiences of its serious historical intention.

Even so, no other film to that date had confronted the subject of Aboriginal history in the way that *The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith* did. However, this was of little consequence as the film has never drawn large audiences. Lack of popular support for an individual film does not necessarily mean that its message will not affect popular historical understanding. In fact a film which provokes public media controversy, even if it does not draw a large audience, can actually place issues in the public sphere.³⁸ Frequently it is the repetition of ideas and images through a genre and the circulation of associated knowledge in other formats which influence cultural memory of the past. However, this is not the case with films on the subject of Aboriginal/white historical relationships. Here the question is "What films? What Genre?" And here we are reminded again of the significance of the issue raised at the beginning of this chapter – the difficulty of finding thematic continuities in an industry where production is intermittent.

Although there has been a smattering of films on the subject like *Jedda*, *The Last Wave*, *We Of The Never-Never*, *The Fringe Dwellers*, and particularly *Lousy Little Sixpence* and the series *Women Of The Sun*, none of these have been popular and collectively there have not been enough films to have made a significant impression. Moreover, the films did not form part of a significant popular discourse as, prior to the mid-eighties, those constructions of Australia's past which included an aboriginal perspective were rarely to be found in popular literature. Nor were they widespread as public discourse and mainstream social concerns until well after the Bicentenary. If a film like *The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith* were to be made now when Aboriginal issues are at the forefront of politics, the situation might be different. Certainly films like *The Leaving of Liverpool* (which is the subject of a later chapter) have shown that film can play a major part in creating public awareness and in actually intervening in political processes. But again this is difficult to predict. The film *Dead Heart* for example, though made in 1997 was ignored by the public and did not draw audiences large enough to keep it on the screens until Bryan Brown made a public appeal. That film appeared when public discourse on Aboriginal deaths in custody, land rights and the stolen generations was widespread. Just as Hollywood could not deal with the legacy of the Vietnam War for ten years after the event, and then only when found in particular kinds of acceptable stories, it is

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likely that Australia faces a similar kind of situation now. It is likely that contemporary relationships between indigenous and other Australians are too emotionally charged, too burdened with unwelcome legacies of the past, for narratives to be found which do not gloss over historical issues, patronise or hector. Moreover, the kind of mythic resolutions on which mainstream films are built are not politically correct in the current climate. Where *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* may have had too little to do with the narratives circulating in popular culture of the time, *Dead Heart* may have been too deeply connected with divisive issues to serve as entertainment.

New historical context/ new directions in film

The period film was a limited phenomenon, and by the eighties Australian audiences had tired of both the style and content of this genre. While the bourgeois nature, the lack of action, and the lyrical sameness in the films themselves seem likely to have played a part in this, I see a great deal of that boredom as being related also to historical currents which changed significant aspects of Australian society itself.

The 'shock of the new' – the pleasure of seeing a flattering version of ourselves and our past in the cinema, the pride of international recognition for the aesthetics and technical mastery in Australian cinematography – lasts only so long. To sustain this romanticising of the past, other needs in society have to be present. This was not the case. By the eighties the social and political ferments that had fostered the resurgence in Australian filmmaking were already a generation away. Australia had been changed irrevocably by the women's movement, by the ideological repercussions of participation in the Vietnam War, by the effect of inflation on economic policies and attitudes towards money, and by the decline of the welfare state more generally.

Since the mid to late eighties there has been a definite change in the direction of Australian film with Australianness being a part of the diegesis – the setting, the idiomatic expression or in the density of visual references – but definitely not a foregrounded element. It would appear that the less nationalistic style of representation has been the one that has proven the most adaptable in the way that film speaks to the present. For a society facing globalisation and the information revolution, the seventies 'shock of the new' has become the millennial 'boredom with the passé'.

Contemporary thinking on the subject of Australia as a nation accepts that attempts to define 'Australianness' as residing in some core, in some particular combination of attitudes or in some recurring myth, is an illusion. More recent critics of Australian culture like Graeme Turner (*Australian Fictions*)³⁹, Ross Gibson (*The Diminishing Paradise*)⁴⁰ or Richard White (*Inventing Australia*)⁴¹ propose that the idea of a nation is not a fixed, unitary one and that the search for an illusory essence is but another form of myth making. There is a definite contrast between modern

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understandings (which see multiple, heterogeneous and evolving perceptions of ourselves as the basis of national identity), and former perceptions in literature, popular press, film and other forms of popular information in wide circulation. The great majority of the latter have sought to define Australianness through the search for a national type, explaining a particular construction of Australian history (the Australian legend) through the interaction of landscape, national type, and circumstance.

Since the 1980s the great tradition of the heroic failure has, according to Ross Gibson, been on the wane. In everything from beer commercials to corporate recruitment the battler has been superseded by a 'far sleeker, better groomed and motivationally primed individual'.⁴² Gibson argues that this tendency was reflected and even stimulated by the 'Mad Max' trilogy which he reads allegorically as a chronicle of a loss of faith in the drive to conquer the environment. From the early 1980s on, most film that relied on the impact of the pictorial qualities of the landscape began to treat traditional constructions of the past differently, with a sense of self-deprecation and a conscious desire to revise old myths. Films in this category include *Crocodile Dundee*, the *Mad Max* trilogy and *The Adventures of Pricilla Queen of the Desert*.

Not surprisingly, cultural memory reflects the various ways in which Australian history has been understood. Besides the elements of contestation and fragmentation, always present in collective memories of the past, there is a strong generational aspect to what constitutes the general body of popular or communal memory in Australia. In a society which has developed from a jingoistic outpost of the white colonialism to a multi-cultural society in a little under fifty years, there is a declining likelihood that the community shares a narrowly similar construction of the past or that its members have been exposed to the same degree of historical acculturation. Increasing numbers in the Australian population share cultural and family memories that are not those of the Anglo/Celtic past represented strongly in the majority of Australian historical films. Moreover, even Australian-born children do not necessarily share a common background in history, as would have been the case in former times. The staples of Australian history – convicts, explorers, bushrangers, settlers, Anzacs – have been replaced by exposure to a range of historical material that is much broader and more eclectic.

A quite pronounced effect of this has been the fact that the range of narratives of identity and history circulating in present day Australian culture is now substantially different from that in existence in the society which responded to the first release of the period films. Additionally, modern cultural diversity has considerable significance for the ways in which filmic translations of the past have impacted on popular historical consciousness in Australia. Not only can we expect there to be significant differences in cultural memory over two or three generations, but we need also to understand that there will be gradations in film exposure. Older Australians have been much more exposed than their children and grandchildren to the kind of films generally thought of as

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being 'historical'. Few people under twenty-five have any memory of the Period Films of the seventies and early eighties, and very few people under fifty have ever seen the sentimental moral fables of the thirties, forties, and fifties. Historical material has now become the province of television in serials and mini-series and, even in that format, history is under-represented in the current situation. Historical films, at least those constructed in the tradition of validation of past mythology, are not in favour with a public highly literate in the way of cinema.

Postmodern audiences of the nineties who can recognise *Crocodile Dundee* as both a send-up and an exploitation of the Bush Myth, – and still enjoy it – do not have the same naïve relationships to film and to popular constructions of the past that existed even twenty years ago. At the end of the millennium, successful films that deal with the past apparently need to do more than intersect with the historical narratives and images in culture. They need to operate in a framework that acknowledges audience sophistication and uses it as part of the whole meaning of the film. The traditional Bush Legend view of Australia's past no longer fits the present in either of these areas. Youthful audiences tend to take Australianness in local films for granted, something obvious perhaps in the setting but not something that is foregrounded, or something that is necessarily a subject in itself. In comparison with earlier films the recent crop of Australian films do not seem to be preoccupied with either 'Australianness', or specific historical events which demonstrate this national mythology in action.

A further complicating fact in consideration of the effect that the body of Australian movies may have had on cultural memory is the fact that film is a cultural product and as such is consumed and understood in different ways by different audiences at different times. Conditions in the present can, and do, influence the viewing of a film despite the care with which its authors structured its intended meanings. For example, a film like *Caddie* may once have tapped into viewers' communal memory to sustain meanings about the values of community and friendship that were supposed to exist in the past. The same film may be viewed by younger audiences in the present as an indictment of the subservient position of women in that same past. While these (and probably other) readings of the film have always been possible, ideas and beliefs from the present tend to predispose audiences to see the latter meaning over the former. Moreover, time changes the strength of different memories and cultural narratives in the cultural memory of audiences. Audiences who saw the film twenty years ago would be far more likely than audiences in the present to be influenced in their reading of the film text's connectedness to personal or family memories of the depression.

Representations of the past in Australian film and television have tended to propose continuity from a radical past with a commitment to egalitarianism, to the present. That perception is still the warm and fuzzy way that most Australians like to see themselves, but it is a construction that is having difficulties in surviving the contradictions of everyday experience in the present. For most

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audiences, increasingly multi-cultural, increasingly urban, increasingly sophisticated in reading film, the Period Film with its lack of problematisation of Australian culture represented nostalgia – its narratives and issues more divorced than ever before from the realities of their daily lives. New ways of seeing issues like national identity, masculinity and the process of colonisation and decolonisation – both of and by Australia – have forced changes in the ways film reflects society (and by inference, history) back to us.

In addition, changes in perceptions of Australian identity, and pluralism in the voices that articulate it have caused some revision of the Chips Rafferty/Bryan Brown/Jack Thompson stereotype and the national mythology that promotes this type of masculinity as representative of ideological mores in ‘the real Australia’. Formerly marginalised elements in national mythology, new constructions of what we perceive as important to our history, and new ideas as to how we are to understand the past, can now be articulated with acceptance. However, it is unlikely that that we seriously question that greatest of Australian stories, the Anzac legend. And while that remains an almost sacred subject, it is unlikely that cultural memory will question its corollary, the larrikin derring-do and unselfish bravery of individual male action that is so strong in Australia’s historical consciousness as to be the dominant framework for understanding actions of the past.

Even so, the most recent of Australian films move away from presenting a nostalgic and romantic view of the past in favour of a grittier present. In fact Tom O’Regan goes so far as to say that Australian cinema has become:

a cinema peculiarly able to air its society’s dirty linen, prepared to look unflinchingly at its own history, able to dramatise and give dignity to the ordinary, the handicapped and people on its margins, telling stories not normally centred in fiction.⁴³

Films like *Romper Stomper* and *Muriel’s Wedding* in which violence, racism, sexism, and homophobia show the seedier side of Australian society appear to attack those traditional filters through which Australia has viewed its past. They are a direct contradiction to the national self-righteousness in film which, in the guise of history, has frequently provided an opportunity for parading national self-esteem. In this respect, as O’Regan points out, national self-esteem, with its close ties to chauvinism and exclusivity, ‘is the last thing a self respecting nation wants or needs’.⁴⁴

It remains to be seen whether newer, more pluralistic representations of national identity in contemporary film will cause cultural memory to be recast – or whether cultural memory will construct *the past* as being built from a set of understandings different from those which operate to deconstruct *the present*. But changes from nostalgia to critical scrutiny do not happen over night. In between those films which shaped the historical as nostalgic and unproblematic and the more

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critical stance of the contemporary in Australian film, there have been a number of works that have played a part in the processes of transition. This will be the subject of the next two chapters.

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- ¹ A. Moran and T. O'Regan, (Eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney,
– *Images and Industry: Television Drama Production in Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985.
– *The Australian Screen* Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1989.
– *Moran's Guide to Australian TV Series*, Australian Film Television and Radio School, Sydney, 1993.
- ² Tom O'Regan, 'The Man From Snowy River and Australian Popular Culture', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (Eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, p.241–151.
– '“Fair Dinkum Fillums”: the *Crocodile Dundee* Phenomenon', in S. Dermody and E. Jacka (Eds.), *The Imaginary Industry*, Australian Film and Television School, Sydney, 1988, pp.15–175.
– 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films', in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (Eds.), *The Australian Screen*, Penguin Books Australia, 1989, pp.7–98.
– 'The Enchantment of the Cinema: Film in the 1980s', in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (Eds.), *The Australian Screen*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1989b, pp.118–145.
– *Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996.
- ³ Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of Australian narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986.
– 'Art Directing History: The Period Film', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (Eds.), *Australian Screen*, Penguin, Ringwood, Victoria, 1989, pp.99–117.
– *Nation, Culture, Text: Australian Cultural and Media Studies*, Routledge, London, 1993.
– 'Cultural Policy and National Culture', G. Turner (Ed.), *Nation, Culture, Text: Australian Cultural and Media Studies*, 1993, pp.67–71
– *Making It National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994.
- ⁴ Sylvia Lawson, 'Towards decolonisation: Film History in Australia', in S. Dermody, J. Docker and D. Modjeska (Eds.), *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends: Essays in Australian Cultural History*, Kibble, Malmsbury, Victoria, 1982, pp.19–32.
- ⁵ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, (Eds.), *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of National Cinema*, Volume 1., Currency Press, Sydney, 1987.
– *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of National Cinema*, Volume 2., Currency Press, Sydney, 1988.
– *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the later eighties*, Australian Film and Television School, Sydney, 1988.
- ⁶ Stuart Cunningham, 'Hollywood Genres: Australian Movies', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (Eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, pp.235–241.
– 'Kennedy Miller: "House Style" in Australian Television', in Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (Eds.), *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the later eighties*, Australian Film and Television School, Sydney, 1988, pp.178–199.
– 'Textual Innovation in the Australian historical mini series', in J. Tulloch and G. Turner (Eds.), *Australian Television: Programs, Pleasures and Politics*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989, pp.29–51.
– *Framing Culture Criticism and Policy in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992.
– Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Eds.), *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993.
- ⁷ Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of National Cinema*, Volume 1., Currency Press, Sydney, 1987.

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Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of National Cinema*, Volume 2., Currency Press, Sydney, 1988.

⁸ Whilst this is so in general, there were three Film and History Conferences in Australia in 1982, 1984 and 1987. The first conference corresponded with the peak of Australian historical film making when historical film in Australia had virtually become a genre. The final conference occurred virtually at the same time as the popular appeal of the genre had run its course.

⁹ The film as history has been treated from different perspectives by numerous American authors. There is also a very substantial body of work on particular historical episodes like the American Civil War and the Vietnam War. For some of the more general approaches see:

– Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies In The Reception Of American Cinema*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992.

– William J. Palmer, *The Films Of The Eighties: A Social History*, Southern Illinois Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1993.

– Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions Of The Past: The Challenge Of Film To Our Idea Of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995.

– Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1996.

– Robert Brent Toplin, *History By Hollywood: the Use and Abuse of the American Past*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1996.

– Vivian Sobchack (Ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, Routledge, New York and London, 1996.

– Robert Burgoyne, *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1997.

– Kenneth Cameron, *America On Film: Hollywood and American History*. Continuum, New York, 1997.

¹⁰ Although the historical found a place in Australian mini-series during the seventies and retains that niche in the nineties in Australian film production, I have confined the discussion in this chapter to film, particularly the Period Film. Later chapters deal with the miniseries, specifically with *Brides of Christ* Chapter Five and *The Leaving Of Liverpool* Chapter Eight.

¹¹ Tom O'Regan notes that government subsidies began in 1969 with the Arts Council Report that advocated the production of low budget commercial films as part of a strategy to gain initial success with Australian audiences. It also set up The Australian Film Development Corporation AFDC and the Experimental Film Fund EFF to provide assistance for the development of such films. Many critics and politicians saw a misfit between the cultural nationalism this funding was to support and the ocker films it was producing.

Tom O'Regan, 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films', in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (Eds.), *The Australian Screen*, Penguin Books Australia, 1989, pp.75–98, p.89.

¹² O'Regan, 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films', pp.75–98.

¹³ Bruce Molloy, *Before The Interval: Australian Mythology and Feature Films, 1930–1960*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1990, p.210.

¹⁴ John Tulloch, *Legends of the screen: The narrative film in Australia 1919–1929*. Currency Press, Sydney, 1981.

– John Tulloch, *Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982.

– Sylvia Lawson, 'Towards Decolonisation: Film History in Australia' in Susan Dermody et al. (Eds.), *Nellie Melba, Ginger Meggs and Friends*, Kibble, Malmsbury, 1982.

¹⁵ Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984.

¹⁶ Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, pp.174–175.

¹⁷ Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.73.

Molloy, *Before the Interval: Australian Mythology and Feature Films, 1930–1960*. p.210.

¹⁹ Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*, Volume 2., p.34.

²⁰ Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.64.

²¹ Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.64.

²² Rachael Samuel and Paul Thomson (Eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, pp.1–23.

²³ Samuel and Thomson, *The Myths We Live By*, p.P5.

²⁴ Tim Rowse and Albert Moran, cited in Susan Dermody in collaboration with Elizabeth Jacka, 'Australianness and the Film Industry: Between that Rhetorics of Business and National Culture' *Media Papers*. No 18. Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, The New South Wales Institute of Technology, 1983, p.18.

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²⁵ Tom Ryan, 'Historical Films' in Scott Murray (Ed.), *The New Australian Cinema*. Nelson, Australia, 1980, p.120.

²⁶ Ryan, 'Historical Films', p.120.

²⁷ See Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of Australian narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986.

²⁸ Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of Australian narrative*, p.9.

²⁹ Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of A National Cinema, Volume 2*.

³⁰ Scott Murray, "Australian Cinema in the 1970s and 1980s", in Scott Murray (Ed.), *Australian Cinema*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p.82.

³¹ David Buchbinder discusses various explanations of the origins of mateship in Australian history and culture in the light of recent understandings of masculinity. He exposes some of the contradictions between the explanation and the workings of these constructions of masculinity in the present and applies them to the film *Gallipoli*.

David Buchbinder, 'Mateship, *Gallipoli* and the Eternal Masculine' in Patrick Fuery, *Representation Discourse & Desire*, Longman Cheshire, Australia, 1994, pp.115–137.

³² Dermody and Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of A National Cinema, Volume 2*. p.59.

³³ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, London, 1973, p.156.

³⁴ I use the term 'popular historical understanding' in a specific way to mean the more cognitive elements of collective cultural memory.

³⁵ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Verso, 1994.

³⁶ Sean Maynard, 'Black and White Images: Aborigines and Film', in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (Eds.), *The Australian Screen*, Penguin Books, Victoria, 1989, p.222.

³⁷ A film review by Sandra Hall in 1976 presented the catalogue of betrayal in the popular Press, in much this way, adding to way that the film was perceived by the general public. The text of that review was published in Sandra Hall, *Critical Business: The New Australian Cinema in Review*, Rigby, Sydney, 1985, p.77.

³⁸ The original film of Nabokov's novel *Lolita* is a good example here. It was banned in many countries and though this amongst other reasons prevented many people from seeing the film, it still stirred controversy and provoked a storm of popular comment in newspapers and magazines

³⁹ Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, film and the construction of Australia narrative*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986.

⁴⁰ Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1984.

⁴¹ Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Image and identity 1699–1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

⁴² Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, p.174.

⁴³ Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, p.256

⁴⁴ O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*. P.257.

Chapter 4 - Flirting

FLIRTING

Modern audiences may look at the fantasies that passed as historical representation in costume drama, American Westerns and films about colonial Africa and wonder just how seriously their counterparts of former times took those images. Did they cringe at the unselfconscious nationalism, blush at the flagrant praise of colonialism, laugh at the prissy sentimentality? Just how much were they influenced by those versions of the never-never land of the past where men were Men, women were decorative, war was glorious and those who weren't 'us' were 'them' – and deserved to die on that account? (How did we get from there to *Titanic* – and is that really such a big step?)

In this Chapter, I look at particular film genres (like Westerns) that have played a part in establishing cultural memories of a past which bore little resemblance to the historical record, as well as the ways in which such cultural understanding can be changed. For this latter aspect I focus on *Flirting*, John Duigan's 1991 film which articulates views of the past challenging to dominant constructions.

Though reasonably popular, *Flirting* was not a 'major' film recognised as being about Australia's past in the way that *Breaker Morant* or even *Picnic at Hanging Rock* were popularly understood to be. *Flirting* is representative of the many films¹ which, cumulatively, are quite influential in the way the past is constructed in cultural memory. Though set in a past time, such films are not self-consciously 'historical'. However, by naturalising in the narrative a view of the past that opposes the way things are understood in dominant versions or by focusing on less visible strands in narratives of the past, films like *Flirting* can form part of the process by which both national mythology and popular understanding are gradually altered. Whatever their subject, the aesthetic of realism in which these films operate creates a perception of a past time which has, depending on the degree of authority with which the film maker intends to endow the product, greater or lesser faithfulness to the period they represent. These surface details intersect with other images and narratives in popular culture and, together with foregrounded story lines which reproduce the essential components of Campbell's Hero's Journey, win the assent of popular memory – even when the 'historic' setting is entirely a fabrication as it was in the American Western and the Tarzan movies.

In the second section of this chapter, I address the question of what audiences could learn about the past from a film like *Flirting* which, though set in the past, foregrounds a love story between two fictional characters. I introduce a number of related arguments which I take up at greater depth in a subsequent chapter: namely, that where the historical is essentially the engine that drives the

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narrative, mainstream genres and mythic narrative structures can actually facilitate access to historical information; and that a very large part of the way that a mainstream film impacts on popular historical understanding has to do with the kinds of authority a film can generate, first as cultural text and subsequently as part of the multiple discourses about the past that circulate in any society. In this I agree with Mary Hoban that film can be a genre of history and argue that although a film may be a fiction, it can produce a kind of learning about the past that begins to undermine entrenched versions of events and attitudes and can lead to a reassessment in popular understanding.

Flirting is set in country boarding schools in mid-sixties Australia and tells the story of a defining love affair in the lives of two adolescents, both outsiders in the respective social settings. The narrative follows the adolescent Danny Embling from his hometown to a strict boys' boarding school. The film deals with the ordeals of finding oneself and determining personal ideas in an era with parochial horizons and in a climate of rigid social conformity. The narrative centres on a love affair between Danny, the school dog and Thandiwe Adjewa, the daughter of an Ugandan nationalist lecturer working in Canberra.

In the diegesis of the film, the location in the sixties is more than an exotic setting in the past, and the film's construction of the social attitudes of the times makes historical attitudes a significant factor in the plot and the discourse. However, even though the historical is treated very seriously in the film, it is the love affair and not the historical conditions that is foregrounded as the centre of interest. This strategy has a quite significant effect on audience understanding of the past. The narrative is constructed within a realistic aesthetic and there is no question about the generic direction towards verisimilitude. If audiences can accept this fictive world as representative of external reality, then there is also an unconscious acceptance of the authority of this construction of history. It is this acceptance that plays a part in changing popular understandings of the past.

The film has the 'look' and the high production values of the AFC genre but, apart from the kind of nostalgia associated with any rite of passage movie, unlike them it is the opposite of nostalgic. The country town of the setting is ignorant, class-ridden and living in a conservative past that is shown to be a fool's paradise. The awkward, physically weak boy who hates sport is cast as the hero who proves to be the individual, the 'character', who (conventionally) gets the girl.

In casting the male lead, Noah Taylor, the film used his physical appearance and reputation to signify meanings of 'difference, individuality' in the hero. This construction was more relevant to urban culture than the iconic 'look' and encoded character traits of the traditional male hero in earlier Australian movies. This too is significant to popular understanding of the past as that very

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physicality signifies to audiences what kind of action they should expect from such a character. For example, audiences would be unlikely to expect Noah Taylor to storm the trenches at Gallipoli whereas they would expect it of Archie (Mark Lee), the golden-haired, earnest and sacrificing bushman/digger icon played by the lead character in the film *Gallipoli*. If such an unlikely thing were to happen to a character represented by Noah Taylor, it would be understood as a remarkable *personal* act by the character Noah Taylor represented rather than as a symbol of *Australian* youth and Australian behaviour in battle.

Although *Flirting* would not necessarily be thought of as an historical film, any film which sets any part of its action in the past must inevitably contribute to a popular understanding of the past. This may not amount to anything more than one or two locating devices and a display of the surfaces of the period. In fact, as film relies heavily on visual recognition it is often in the film maker's best interests to use as a kind of visual short hand, versions of particular kinds of images which have widespread popular recognition. As Raphael Samuel points out so well in his discussion on the 'unofficial' knowledge that popular memory gleans from aspects of everyday life, images provide us with 'our stock figures, our subliminal points of reference, our unspoken points of address'.² Through their widespread dissemination in the popular media, particular images located in popular culture may become metaphors, which condense the multiple meanings of a particular historical event and become the locus points for popular understanding of the period.³ Such images do not even need to be particularly authentic. Whatever the version, if it is not challenged by competing constructions in other popular media then it appears that truth effects are produced simply by the fact of repetition and recognition. This is evident from the success of Hollywood movies in creating their own versions of both place and time. Hollywood created film after film which built up the fantasy land of America's Wild West as it never was. And, with Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan, Hollywood's image-factory fleshed out a version of colonial Africa which had lived only in the kind of derring-do adventure story beloved of comic books and Boy's Own Annuals.

This point is illustrated in a sequence in *Flirting*, a ninety-nine – minute feature film released in 1991, written and directed by John Duigan and set in rural Australia in 1965. In a sequence which highlights aspects of the anti-colonial discourse that runs through the film, a deftly postmodern form of self-referentiality where film makes its point by referring back to the popular experience of film in general, Danny Embling (Noah Taylor) comments in voiceover on the influence of images from popular culture on the construction of his understanding of Africa.

When I started thinking about Africa, I realised that the only images I knew were from old annuals, Tarzan comics and Hollywood movies.

Superimposed on the litany of exotic place names Danny recites, the film shows a series of scenes from old films along with a number of dramatic narrative illustrations from the kind of pre-World War II books that the library of his school kept as educationally-sound research tools. The content

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on the image is always a variant of the same theme – intrepid explorer in immaculate safari outfit faces unspeakable danger from savage and uncontrolled continent. Excessive and mannered, the images parade before the audience, their ideological message embarrassingly naïve and obvious. Although this sequence serves as an illustration of my point here, in the film it is linked to both the narrative and to the strong discourse about bigotry and ignorance which runs through the film. These attitudes are subtextualised in the way the film depicts Danny's British-style boarding school and its ethos as well as in the manner in which it displays the ignorance, complacency, and assumed superiority that marked parts of Australia in the 1960s.

The images Danny finds in his library and those taken from popular film intersect with discourses of history, memory, and popular culture which circulate in society. For some audience members, the collation forms part of personal memory. For others the images are iconic, divorced from original context but alive through their re-use in popular culture on cards, posters, ads, tee-shirts and the like as signifiers of the past. In the context in which the sequence is used in the film the images are at once funny, critical, nostalgic, and specific in the way that film can be through its ability to produce many different kinds of meanings at once. The various images clearly depict the colonial mythology in which white, usually British, men bring their superior civilising influence to a continent where savage nature lurks menacingly around them – or resists with terrifying ferocity. The heroes triumph by personal courage and moral superiority. The question of their right to be where they are doesn't even arise. Britain's civilising mission is an assumption naturalised in the image, as is the justification for subsequent colonial policies.

Edward Said has shown how such Western discourse on non-western culture has constructed a body of 'knowledge' of the East and colonial countries which defines those areas in the interests of the power of the west.⁴ There are basically two imperial plot structures – white colonisers succumbing to the primal power of the jungle in the *Heart of Darkness/Apocalypse Now* mode, or the Tarzan version. This latter myth is the story of whites who, because of their supposed racial superiority, impose themselves on the jungle and its inhabitants.

The African continent is 'OTHER', clearly constructed as not really inhabited by human beings of flesh and blood but peopled (if at all) by convenient stereotypes: at best savage and uncivilised semi-humans of no particular culture or at worst, by cannibals with bones through their noses who have been waiting all their lives for a nice pot of *Englishman de jour*. The multiple languages of the different cultures condense to the single phrase 'oo-wan-ga-lae-ma'. It covered any emergency – as well as an invitation to dinner. However much this now seems to be the projection of an ignorant and self-serving ideology, it was for years the dominant discourse of popular and historical accounts. As the collage of images in *Flirting* testifies, one form of popular representation reinforces the other, constructing, through repetition and breadth of circulation, a narrowly ideological but dominant perception. The currency of this construction of history in 1965

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Australia (at least as *Flirting* sees it) is emphasised by Danny Embling's voiceover and by an Australian girl's smug and superior comment on the first morning of Thandiwe's arrival – 'has anyone got a banana'?

For the modern audience, *Flirting's* audience, which possesses a sophistication derived from having seen thousands of movies it is both the content of the images and the style of their representation that signal the gap between these representations and the present. That this is a Saturday matinee version of Africa, a fantasy rather than an historical representation is conveyed through audience recognition of out-dated generic devices like the melodramatic sound-track, the terrible over-acting, the badly edited black and white images and the incongruity of the sound of the kookaburra laughing out of the African jungle. The set pieces of the genre were in the 'Gee whiz' category like the larger-than-life battles between Tarzan and the lion/tiger/hippopotamus/anaconda (take your pick – the anaconda was my favourite). They all signified the 'otherness' of Africa and they all used popular melodramatic constructions of the hero to forge identification and to naturalise colonial concepts of the superiority of the white hero – who somehow got misplaced in Africa.

Forms of representation have moved on since Tarzan's heyday and modern audiences have other sets of images to work with; TV images of famine and violence, the kind seen in a later sequence in the film. Perhaps they are more 'authentic' in the sense that the events themselves were not staged; but they are just as stereotyped and through repetition, act in the same way as the colonial-era images in establishing an easily-recognisable and limited view of the subject. Within this century the dominant representations have gone from 'savages' to an amalgam of both 'savages' and 'victims', neither an appropriate concept for the complexity of African nations and cultures, but each of them a creation that suits dominant ideological strands in our culture.

Regardless of the degree of authenticity the more that elements of location, dress, manner, architecture, etc. build on images with wide currency in popular culture and the more that similar images (or even whole scenes) overlap from film to film, the greater the authority for the truth claims of the re-construction. Where there is no alternate construction – or where there is limited exposure to alternate perceptions – filmic images and narratives with their ideological content either naturalised within them and/or explicitly spelled out in dialogue play a very significant role not only in the construction of popular historical understanding but also in the ways what constitutes that history is to be understood. The gaps, the silences, and the prejudices rarely become apparent while the discourse of the film stays close to the dominant versions. But this can change – and does so – where a combination of events introduces alternative versions into popular media.

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Challenged by alternative images of Africa on television news coverage, Tarzan's star may have been waning by the 1960s but the influence of the Western, Hollywood's other historical never-never land, was still strong. Its hold on American (and probably Australian) imagination was so pervasive that many American conscripts went to Vietnam with some vague notion of cowboy-style heroics as their main ideal of the mission, a situation which I discuss in Chapter Six. The John Wayne-style hero combined American myths of masculinity with righteous, self-sacrificing nationhood so powerfully that the historical validity of the Hollywood sets for frontier town, saloon, Sheriff's office, etc. didn't matter. The Western served effortlessly for approximately sixty-five years as a vehicle for American self-definition. According to Pat Dowell, the Western was *the* cultural production that continuously refurbished the national foundation myth of agrarian equality for 'a twentieth century superpower with imperial ambitions'.⁵ Prior to the Vietnam War, the strength of audience acceptance of the ideological stance of these films combined with repetition of generic features of landscape and plot to lend an acceptance of this re-creation as a reasonable reflection of the history of the period. Of course audiences were not stupid and, as in other film genres, there always appears to have been degrees of understanding that this was a Hollywood version of events with certain generic conventions. However, the sheer number of repetitions of variants of similar narratives and surfaces in film and also in cheap Western novels and comics, made this a formidable body of popular 'historical' understanding for a very long time. It was not until 1970 that the Western's version of the past was attacked by an outgrowth of the Civil Rights movement in the form of a growing social consciousness of the histories of minority groups within the community, including that of the American Indians. Arthur Penn's revisionist *Little Big Man* marked the end of the dominance of the long-standing Hollywood narrative in its many variations, of the history relations between colonists and Indians in the American West. In this movie 'oo-wan-ga-lae-ma' had been replaced by authentic native speech subtitled in English, the Indians emerged as fully human beings, and filmic versions of relationships between Indian and settler would never be the same again.

However entrenched the Hollywood version of history may appear to be, it seems that filmic versions of the past do not survive long where their particular historical re-creation has been successfully challenged by alternate constructions – especially where those alternate versions of history have wide popular exposure. The American Western, particularly the Cowboys and Indians version, quickly fell victim to changes in popular understanding of the fate of the American Indian nations. *Little Big Man* and Alf Nelson's *Soldier Blue*, both produced in 1970, successfully turned the genre on its head by using the Indians as victims (and metaphors for the Vietnamese) and making the whites the perpetrators of atrocities. These film texts intermeshed neatly with emergent discourses and were rapidly accepted as a revelation of 'the real story'. In 1990, when *Dances with Wolves* revived this almost extinct genre, the changed understanding about who were the oppressors and who were the oppressed in the relationships between American Cavalry and the Sioux Indians formed the basis of the narrative. What had formerly been silences had become

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dominant narratives. In other words, changes in the way that relationships between the American Indians and the colonising peoples were being negotiated in popular media in the present, had made it politically impossible to use Hollywood's former construction and point of view about relationships in the past. As the contrasts between this film and the Westerns of the forties demonstrates, historical understanding is based on far more than a particular narrative agglutination of events. The way in which these events are assembled and relationships drawn between them is very much a matter of values and attitudes in the present.

When *Flirting* produced a version of the past with a discourse on colonialism and a version of rural Australia in the sixties that was in conflict with other representations, it did so in a context of a public rethinking of the past with reporting of historical debate by the popular media a prominent feature. Although a vein of anti-British sentiment runs through our national mythology, it has not always been dominant nor have the versions of the past usually presented in Australian films been critical of colonialism generally. This is particularly the case where colonialism's present day influence in the form of single-sex, independent boarding schools is still discernible and where such institutions are still prestigious. However, *Flirting* was in production only a few years after the Bicentenary celebrations when there had been quite serious and extensive public debates about Australian identity and Australia's history. Contestation about the past had forced colonialism onto the public agenda in the recognition that there could be at least two major and conflicting constructions of white settlement/invasion in Australia. Moreover, it became apparent – if not exactly accepted – that multiple versions of other 'accepted' constructions of past events were also possible and that the great Australian myth of fairness and egalitarianism might just have holes in it. Particularly if the viewer is an Aboriginal Australian.

Colonialism had not come out too well in the process, having suffered also in the (then) recent past from a highly public piece of British bashing over the Maralinga Royal Commission (1984–1986). Regardless of the degree of Australian culpability in the atomic testing affair, this melodrama of post-colonial politics had been played out in the popular media as discourses of nationalism where the rhetoric of British bastardry, British duplicity, and British betrayal figured prominently. Stephen Alomes, writing in 1987 in what Graeme Turner describes as 'unalloyed, raw mythology offered as history'⁶ felt that the Royal Commission had effectively finished off Australian deference to Britain and signalled Australian psychological independence from colonialism.

An Australian commission exposed British deceptions and Menzies' colonial servitude through hearings held in part on British soil. Furthermore, Jim McClelland savaged contemporary English inefficiency. The colony was no longer deferential and obedient.⁷

With the campaign for Australia to become a republic already a topic of popular debate, it is not surprising that *Flirting* was able to present a point of view that in many ways ran counter to the

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national mythology and its construction of Australian history. Just as filmic discourses and representations of Africa and the American West had followed, and contributed to, changes in popular understanding of the past, so too *Flirting* was following that same path in its interventions in understandings of the past in Australian popular culture.

However it is still important for a film which intends to shift the parameters of historical understanding, even a little, to make a very strong case for the validity of its own ideological stance. Its construction of the past needs to be naturalised to such an extent that the changed construction does not appear controversial at all. While *Flirting* is not a particularly 'historical' film in the sense that it is self-consciously so, the historical context is very much under scrutiny. It is the social values of the particular historical setting which shapes the action, defines the two main characters as outsiders and gives significance to their actions. *Flirting*'s construction of rural Australia as class-ridden, self-satisfied, narrow-minded, and insular confronts the Australian Bush Myth which sees the country as the home of 'dinkum Aussies' with all that construction's overtones of egalitarianism and openness. The film needed to establish its claim as to historical validity and does so by inter-weaving the many elements of this complex medium to develop a fabric of self-reinforcing illusion.

The African sequence in *Flirting* is a good example as it acts as just one of the many devices used to establish this authority. The meaning of the African images in *Flirting* is somewhat more sophisticated than their surface comic intention. They are a visual translation of the concepts of 'ignorance' and 'racism'. *Flirting* expects its audience to recognise the African images as depictions of ideological attitudes and not historical – or even geographical – reality and to wonder how anyone could ever have accepted them as anything other than nonsense or propaganda. The film thus underscores the racism and ignorance expressed in the students' reaction to Thandiwe by exposing the simplistic ways in which such attitudes were transmitted in popular media. In part, by establishing a point of commonality between film and audience, drawing on the audiences' prior knowledge of filmic genres and enlisting its recognition of the ridiculous nature of the content of the sequence, *Flirting* constructs itself as an authoritative perception of rural Australia even though the picture it paints is a departure from the generally accepted construction.

The star is used in a similar way as one of the many layers of reinforcement of the film as an authoritative interpretation of the past. Noah Taylor's image as a star had enormous drawing power after the success of his performance as the outsider in his previous film *The Year My Voice Broke*. According to Richard Dyer,⁸ the physical features of the star have a signifying function, placing him as a recognisable social type and thus investing him with deep iconic meaning. As a star, Noah Taylor denotes difference. His physical appearance gives meaning to the Danny Embling character that he represents and authority to that character's detached observations about his society. We see society through Danny's eyes and, though the character himself is highly

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individual, there is nothing in the universalising construction of the film to suggest that his perceptions are either idiosyncratic or inaccurate. The film is very serious, even savage, about the values and processes of the schooling system. While this is scarcely a unique position, it is different from others of the genre in that it points to the post-colonial incongruity of the system in the Australian context. This historical position is built into the fabric of the film with a naturalness derived from the sequencing in the narrative of the film and from the aesthetic construction of the images. For example, the stone archways and dark interiors of the school are elements transplanted from another place and another time and stand in stark contrast to the light and the expansiveness of aerial views of sheep, flat open countryside and a sprawling country town. Shots of dark panelling and claustrophobic studies, spartan and dehumanising living conditions, form part of the visual construction of a discourse of post-colonial opposition to the outdated and imposed values of Britain exemplified in an institution that helped to maintain it – the British boarding school.

The apparent naturalness of the film is part of a realist aesthetic which draws on audience recognition of dominant representations from other areas of popular culture. However, in *Flirting*, creating a visual sense of the past – one that the audience would instantly recognise – was not the simple matter that it may appear from the ‘natural’ sense of the past that appears in the finished product. Even though the film does use many of the stock methods for signalling the historical period (like using surface elements of clothing and architecture and texts like the television broadcasts), the limited nature of the action and the setting in a traditional institution restricted the scope for exploiting them. Most of the action takes place in the interiors of traditional boarding schools and the actors wear generic private school uniforms. In the circumstances the opportunity to use the surfaces – clothing, hairstyles, etc. – though not absent altogether was obviously limited. Admittedly images of conservative boarding schools have a currency of their own in film and, while they may denote a past time, that time could be almost anywhere from the late forties to the mid eighties, when boarding schools were rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Given the limited historical meanings in popular culture that can be derived from the boarding school, *Flirting* needed to use other means to establish the naturalness and authority of its point of view. The primary solution in *Flirting* is to anchor the general socio-cultural context to specific, recognisable historical events. The establishing shot carries the legend ‘Rural Australia, 1965’. The date is again flagged early in the film by a few seconds of a television broadcast showing the landing of the first American combat troops on a beach near Danang. The specific year, 1965, as well as forming an anchor for the codes of values of the society is there also as a plot element. The deteriorating situation in Uganda in 1965 forces the recall of Thandiwe’s father and leads to the crisis of the film, where Danny and Thandiwe are discovered in a motel room spending the night together before Thandiwe must return to a very uncertain future in Uganda. The privileged positions given to these historically locating sequences appears to emphasise the historical

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specificity of the setting, establishing the desired contract between audience and film maker, creating that historical authority so necessary for the filmic version of Australian rural society in 1965.

For that temporal and social environment is more than a backdrop to the action; it is the shaping force of the narrative. The film carries historical meaning for the audience only in as far as it can convince those watching that this is a seamless re-creation of reality. However, displaying social forces in action is a complex task and one which rapidly degenerates into soap opera if not handled with subtlety. Whatever success a film may have in this respect arises from a combination of two quite different aspects – the techniques of the medium and audience habits of ascribing referential meaning to what is denoted in individual scenes. Technically, film codes meaning into every aspect of the image creating authority through self-referentiality. Moreover, what we read as a continuous narrative is actually an assemblage of fragments – shots and sequences – tiny narratives edited together to construct amongst other things visual representations of attitudes that will, if necessary, be read by audiences as representative of something beyond a particular perspective constrained within as particular narrative. It is the totality of these small narratives rather than any single one of them that defines the socio-cultural landscape of the situation. In *Flirting* for example, discourses about racism and ignorance centre on Thandiwe. The discourse is so closely woven into the narrative that it does not appear to be there at all. From the opening scene, little by little, she is constructed as the outsider – urbane, intellectual, mature – everything that the others reject and everything that the others are not. Cameo scenes (like the scene where her partner from the boys school complements her on her command of English) thus acquire a referential meaning emphasising the ignorance of the ingrained attitudes of the students and, by implication, those of the community. Our ability to read the abstract meaning is partly the result of the voiceover which anchors the preferred meaning, and partly the result of the complex web of signs and meanings in the visual narrative. It is also a part of the cultural capital that the film maker can expect the audience to bring with them to the movie.

What Do We Learn About History From Flirting?

Flirting, though a fiction, succeeds in establishing authority for its presentation of rural Australia in 1965 as conservative and parochial by the use of scenes like those discussed as markers of social consciousness. But in many ways *Flirting* also presents an unproblematic and partial view of the era which does not quite escape from the nostalgia written into images of pale grass and endless blue sky. Nor does it escape the sentimentality that is at the heart of 'coming-of-age' films. It is also true that in some ways the narrative of *Flirting* does not go much beyond being an Australian variant of a narrative which has international currency – 'boy/girl triumphs over rigidity/hardship/cruelty of the boarding school to find personal worth'. So the question arises

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‘What does an audience learn about history, particularly about 1965, from a film like *Flirting*? I suggest that the answer is:

‘ Quite a bit’.

While all the above criticisms are true to some extent, such perceptions are based on a very reductionist view of the load of information that such a film carries and a reductionist view of how the process of communicating culture operates. Whilst the foregrounded narrative clearly fits the mythic structure of the Hero’s Journey, there is nothing in that structure which precludes it from being the vehicle for social criticism. As every stand-up comic knows, the impact of the story is in the telling rather than in the content. Take Amy Heckerling’s 1995 comedy *Clueless* and the 1996 film of Jane Austen’s classic novel *Emma* for example. Stripped of historical detail and social setting, both films present the same story about the same culturally constructed ‘universals’ of human conduct. Each positions the audience in the same way, allowing them to see the reality that is hidden from the main character by her own wilful construction of the situation. But the films are not the same; and what the audience takes from each – particularly about the historical and social setting – is likely to be very different and considerably more than the reinforcement of cultural values.

Flirting is very specific about its historical content and what is true of *Flirting* can be true of mainstream film in general. There is in any film a dynamic tension between the universals and the details of a story which allows the audience to draw both meanings and more cognitive information from the film text, particularly where there is an intention in the film to present serious historical and/or social comment. The very fact that most audience members are sophisticated readers of movie texts and highly adept at anticipating plot developments through knowledge of genre, means that the film needs to maintain attention through the introduction of *novelty* within overall expected outcomes. Where history is part of the engine that drives the narrative, or even where the plot revolves around particular historical social attitudes, the *novelty* is supplied by the historical setting.

In *Flirting* for example, the central characters are outsiders. But where the film goes beyond the outsider-as-hero plot function is in the fact that bases the cause of the marginalisation of the central couple in historical attitudes. Thandiwe has experienced a world where the horizon is not limited by the parochial world view and class divisions of 1965 rural Australia. Danny, who comes from the local pub and fits neither the dominant class nor the dominant stereotype of masculinity, has little choice to be other than a fringe-dweller. Moreover, his situation is exacerbated by his tendency to reflect and to analyse, attributes which set him apart from the herd and its mentality which is promoted in the school as a socially desirable end. As film is a medium that works through the audience’s ability to construct a unity from the interplay of fragments, it is essential that the film itself direct audience attention towards those elements that are essential to the

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meaning. In *Flirting* these characters are outsiders because they stand apart from the historical attitudes. Although the film has foregrounded their love affair, it has ironically also shifted audience attention back to the source of conflict – the socio-historical situation which made lovers of two outsiders. In other words, the audience can understand the totality of the film text only if that audience understands the significance to the generic plot of other narrative strands in the film which deal with the historical situation.

Moreover, the multiple ways in which film makes meaning and the many narratives that combine to make up its totality can produce a powerful discourse about matters different from those of the foregrounded narrative. For example, while the narrative of *Flirting* may concern first love, there is a very strong element in the discourse of the film about the nature of the society in which the narrative is set. Within the limits of the story, the film presents that quite forcefully. Superficially there is no obvious analysis of the cultural or ideological underpinning of the society in the way that is traditional for written history. But it is a mistake to say that it is not there. The guiding dictum for film is – ‘Don’t tell me; show me’ – and that is exactly what *Flirting* does. And it does so with those small narratives and cameo scenes that wind through the film like strands in a rope.

The film’s depiction of Danny’s boarding school is a case in point. The images of the opening sequences (augmented by the voiceover) clearly set up the boarding school as a socially desirable environment where those with wealth and social station – or pretensions to it – are groomed for the place that they will hold in society later on. But, as the cold brutality of the opening scenes of corporal punishment demonstrates, the values it upholds are more than mildly shocking. The school fosters the regimentation of the herd mentality, models a limited range of acceptable male behaviours promotes football as a secular religion, and actively works against any personal individuality or originality of thought that might disrupt the status quo. This is the heartland of conservative, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Australia. It is hardly a flattering picture. In the real world outside these boundaries colonialism is coming to an end in often-violent confrontations with the institutions and values of the past. But this section of rural Australia in 1965 was still trying to reproduce the anachronistic values and practices of pre-war British boarding schools. Again, not an uncritical picture.

The discourse of the film highlights the inherent opposition between the backward-looking values of the school environment and the situation in Australia in 1965. Australia in 1965 was on the verge of entering the Vietnam War. The TV footage of the American marines landing at Danang has ominous overtones and for those in the audience who know anything of the period, it underscores the limitations of a socio-cultural environment where major conflicts in the world do not ripple the surface. For the audience, nomination of the Vietnam War in film or voice has become iconic with meanings that transcend its referential meaning and it stands as symbolic of a turning point in the ways that America (and Australia) understood itself. In the film the news

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about Vietnam, so lightly dismissed as irrelevant, acts as a symbol of impending social changes and changes in the world view of many nations including Australia. The boarding school and its referential meaning, Australian society in 1965 is a fool's paradise – and the film definitely says so.

Seen from the audience perspective of the 1990s, the kind of future that these boys are being prepared for has already been overtaken by world events. It doesn't matter whether or not the members of the audience have the historical knowledge to take this understanding further. The film makes its points in the terms that it sets up for itself within the film. But for those of the audience who have even a rudimentary knowledge of events of the 1960s, the implied irony is that even in 1965, that future was approaching at breakneck pace. The Vietnam War was to be the catalyst for sweeping social change and would stir up the kinds of questions about authority and government that had been virtually dormant in Australia since 1916. In the reality of that past that the film re-presents boys like these would, at twenty years of age, have found themselves confronted with a ballot for conscription. The lifestyle and the social attitudes that the boys were being prepared to meet were already vanishing; and this type of boarding school with its outmoded authoritarian concepts of discipline would be one of the victims of impending change.

Social criticism in *Flirting*, particularly its view of the school system and the values that fostered it – and which it in turn advances – is very strongly shaped by the tendency of film to show moments of excess and high drama. However, the point here is not whether the representation is or is not valid; the point is that the film presents a perception of history that is composed of multiple points of engagement and that on at least one of the points it presents a view that is as ideologically based, analytical and critical as that of more academic history.

Of course not all the audience will see the film in an historically specific way. Every frame contains so much information that it is virtually impossible for average cinema-goers to notice and remember everything that appears on the screen. So what an historian or a film theorist might see in a film, and what it means to average film-goers, is likely to be very different. What many will see in *Flirting* is a world, clearly dated 1965, which is socially very different from the one from which it is viewed. The degree to which the audience understands the historical information of the film will be dependent on the amount of information the audience already possesses. And this must inevitably be the case, to a greater or lesser extent, with every film. Even in documentary there has to be some point where the film maker makes the assumption that this is the base line of the audience's knowledge.

What is probably most significant about the way that any one film constructs popular understanding of the past is the fact that it does not stand alone as *the only* possible source of information. A great deal of the appeal of *Flirting* lies in audience recognition, recognition based

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on either personal experience or on the experience of similar narratives and images that circulate in popular culture. Moreover, while films like *Flirting* contribute images and narratives to the public elements of cultural memory, by interacting with personal and group memory, they also open the past they re-present of those images etc. to social negotiation.

Such fictional re-presentations of the past do not fit with the high culture forms of written Academic History, being more like popular understandings of the past. But that does not exclude the possibility that both are forms of history. According to Mary Hoban⁹ the historical content of films like *Flirting* presents history in another genre, a genre that is strongly influenced by audience expectation and characterised by history re-presented as personal drama. While these may be marks of a particular generic code, generic coding is a cultural practice that affects almost all branches of the arrangement of information including Academic History.

Flirting presents one view and it is inscribed into the viewers experience to be assimilated, forgotten, dismissed, re-assessed, or whatever in the same way that all observational learning is processed. That view of the past may be limited, partial and nostalgic in many ways – but it reproduces history in the way that most of us experience it – in the personal. It is *one kind* of historical narrative. It does not tell the whole story. But it may be as valid as any other kind of historical narrative.

Flirting's representation of rural Australia as seen through the eyes of Danny Embling is a fiction. But, if we accept that it constructs a reality that many people can recognize, then it may be as valid as any oral history of the period. Oral histories in general demonstrate that they are reconstructions of past lives seen from the perspective of the present. Most are structured as narratives which illustrate certain understandings about the past in the same way that the main character in *Flirting* presents – as a framing structure for the narrative of coming-of-age – a discourse about the narrow-mindedness and ignorance of the social milieu of his adolescent life.

The characters in *Flirting* are fictitious and the story didn't happen. But it could have – and therefore has some historical truth. It is the physical, the social, and the attitudinal that are important for audiences in their understanding of the film as a reflection of the past. It doesn't matter if these things are attached to a narrative that is fictional – provided that cultural experience grants it plausibility under the circumstances. Moreover fictional representation of the past recasts history in a form that audiences can readily comprehend at a visceral level and on a scale that has individual meaning. What academic historians think of as historical truth may have little in common with what other people think of as truth, and in many ways *Flirting* represents historical 'truth' as that term is *experienced*. When considering the ways that film might intervene in popular understanding of the past it is important to accept that there is a difference between history as it is written by the specialist and history as it is received by the non-specialist. Mary Hoban¹⁰ puts it

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well when she says that at their best, popular histories resist official explanatory narratives and reframe their content because they seek the engagement not simply of the intellect but more significantly of the emotions, the senses and ultimately memory.

If all that the audience has learned is that rural Australia may have been a very conservative place in 1965, then they have learned something of historical value as this potentially expands the collective memory, the 'experience' of the past. It certainly provides an external referent for negotiation of knowledge if that opportunity should ever arise. Knowledge acquired incidentally from a film that foregrounds a coming-of-age narrative may ultimately become so integrated into 'tacit knowledge' that it becomes a basis for further understanding of a quite different kind. The emotional result of the identification with a central character like Danny could be that incidental historical knowledge will ultimately be assimilated into a personal 'memory' of a past that was never experienced. On the other hand it may help to explain the conflicting mentalities that committed Australia to the Vietnam War and brought demonstrators to the streets in protest, by giving emotional force to an understanding of that the past in a way that written history, documentary footage and academic study never could. Regardless of how much or how little impact *Flirting* may have on popular memory, it reflects a growing attitude of the last decade of this century that the traditional narrative of Australia is beginning to look a little threadbare and that there just might be other ways of understanding the past.

¹Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka in *The Screening of Australia* list a number of films as 'interestingly eccentric' to the main group of Australian films, which 'situate themselves as Australian without anxiety or nationalist gestures'. Amongst these the authors number *Shirley Thompson Versus the Aliens*, *Backroads*, *Third Person Plural*, *Newsfront*, *Going Down*, *Winter of Our Dreams*, *Lonely Hearts*, *Monkey Grip* and *Goodbye Paradise*. They also give an extensive list of 'social realist' films that deal with social problems and social issues.

Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema Vol.2*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1988 p.38 and pp.39–43.

² Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Verso, 1994, p.27.

³ For example, the image of the naked napalm burned Vietnamese child children fleeing in terror from an allied bomb strike, or the image of a suspected Vietcong Vietnamese civilian being shot in the head in a summary execution, are examples of such images. They condense an enormous number of meanings so that, beyond their reference to the Vietnam War, the images have far more abstract meanings about the morality of conflict, and about moral positions on a wider scale.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, England, 1985.

⁵ Pat Dowell, 'The mythology of the Western: Hollywood Perspectives on Race and Gender in the Nineties', in *Cineaste*, Vol. Nos. 1–2, 1995, pp.6–10, p.6.

⁶ Graeme Turner, 'Semiotic Victories: Media construction of the Maralinga Royal Commission' in John Frow and Megan Morris (Eds.), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p.188.

⁷ Stephen Alomes, *A Nation at Last? The Changing Character of Australian Nationalism 1880–1988*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, Australia, 1988, p.230. Cited in Graeme Turner, 'Semiotic Victories: Media construction of the Maralinga Royal Commission', in John Frow and Megan Morris (Eds.), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p.188.

⁸ Richard Dyer, 'Stars as Signs', in Tony Bennett et al. (Eds.), *Popular Press and Film*, London BFI, 1981, pp.236–269.

⁹ Mary Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', in *Public History Review*, Vol. 3, 1994, pp.107–123.

¹⁰ Hoban, 'Realer than Reel', p.119.

Brides of Christ

In Chapter 3 I have argued that those films normally thought of as historical representations of Australian history present a view of the past framed within the ideology of the Bush Myth. In that Chapter I pointed out that a great number of the most popular of the films on Australian history repeat variations of the Australian Legend, in which there is an implicit acceptance of the masculine as the universal, authentically Australian experience. This perception, articulated most strongly in the works of writers like Lawson and Furphy in the 1890s, was never really representative – even then. A century later such a construction of ‘Australianness’ and the understanding of Australian experience central to this view, is increasingly at odds with the experience of a highly urbanised, multi-cultural nation. In particular, it leaves little room for the representation of women’s experience in the dominant mythology of nationhood. While national mythologies are essentially symbolic narratives of cultural desires and values mapped over a particular version of the past (the historical referent in white Australia being the 19th century) neither the Australian Legend, nor the dominant representations of women in popular culture, really provide an historical background to the roles and aspirations of women in Australia at the end of the 20th century.

This Chapter centres on the outstandingly successful Australian miniseries *Brides of Christ*, a filmic version of the past which addresses both these issues. Set in the sixties, an era critical to understandings of the contemporary roles of Australian women, the series not only focuses on women’s experience, but does so in ways which challenged representations dominant in cultural memory. As I was educated in a Catholic school during the sixties, to a considerable extent I am engaging with much of the material of *Brides of Christ* from a personal perspective. I speak from the skewed position of an insider in the kinds of discussions that occur within small groups about shared experiences of Catholic schooling in the sixties. These memories were never secret: but they were personal and they were often a sharing of individual experiences which seemed more suited to intimate revelation than to public discussion. As a result of the series many of those memories of nuns, Catholics, women, and the sixties did become public, either as a spontaneous response at the time of viewing or afterwards in the process of discussion stimulated by the high profile that the series had at the time. The public nature of the material in the series appeared to change the way individuals viewed the status of their own memories. In many instances what had appeared as a private matter now appeared as a part of history and not subject to the same degree of delicacy in relation to how it was told, or to whom. This repeats in a minor way the manner in which the screening of *The Leaving Of Liverpool* and the publicity surrounding that series created the circumstances under which traumatic memories could be aired publicly. Like that series it also tended to create the form in which memories would be cast; for example ‘innocence betrayed’ rather than ‘street brat saved’, etc. However, unlike *The Leaving Of Liverpool* which tended to

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confine the kinds of narratives which would subsequently become public, the film text of *Brides of Christ* allowed a range of experiences, both positive and negative, to enter the public sphere.

In preparing for this Chapter I interviewed some twenty women – nuns, former nuns, former pupils of different kinds of convent schools and others who had been educated in other systems. The selection process was random, a matter of serendipity as is often the case in oral histories. Primarily, I work from the position that memory is not a direct reflection of experience but a narrative of images, knowledge and feeling states that is constantly under revision. Interviews and life stories are rather like a conversation – dramatic pieces influenced by numerous aspects of the context, particularly by the relationships between the subject and the people present. Consequently, I was not attempting to ‘prove’ the validity of *Brides of Christ* through correspondence with personal memory or to validate one by the other. My purpose was to elicit life stories and to see if the structures and tropes in these intersected with those of *Brides of Christ*. The main discussions in the interviews revolved around the question of whether *Brides of Christ* was a reasonable representation of the past and the question of whether or not *Brides of Christ* had any resonance with personal memories of their own schooling. The analysis that I make in this Chapter is based on my own understandings and on the results of those interviews.

In the Chapter, I build on the work of Robert A. Rosenstone who argues that film is a legitimate form of representing history. But whereas Rosenstone primarily discusses films which are generally shown in the art-house circuit and reach limited audiences, I argue that mainstream productions like *Brides of Christ* can present those complex perceptions and challenges to received opinion that mark the less popular formats which Rosenstone discusses. *Brides of Christ* was successful as popular entertainment and successful as a serious representation of the past. I argue that in *Brides of Christ* the form of the miniseries, while clearly based on the narrative structures of myth common in mainstream narrative film, in fact contributed to the historical impact of the film. The key to the dual role of the series lay in synthesis. Although many layers of integration contributed to this, three elements were essential; the first being the quality of the research and writing which underpinned the series. This enabled writers to select incidents from the historical record, group memory, and individual experience where the broad shape of those experiences matched the broad outlines of common, ‘typical’ experiences in cultural memory. Mapped onto historical specifics these incidents provided numerous points of intersection with cultural memory, as well as stimulating a response in the memories of individuals.

The second essential element lay in the fact that the historical verisimilitude and techniques of audience involvement in the series created a social situation in which personal memory became public. Unlike the intensely private memories of many former child migrants, these memories did form a limited discourse in popular culture but they had hitherto circulated in small groups. Such memories, on the whole, tended to support the historical representation in *Brides of Christ* and

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while this does not mean that either the memory or the film was somehow 'true', it does mean that the film gained enormous authority as a result.

Where Rosenstone centres his argument on the representation of historical issues in the film text I argue that as well as the film text, the complex interaction between film, known historical discourse, existing narratives in popular culture, and the levels of memory stimulated and revealed by the film text play a highly significant part in influencing popular understanding of the past. But even in this interaction, one more factor is important and that is the existing social conditions which give the film text relevance in the present.

The representation of the sixties in *Brides of Christ* offered complex audience viewing positions in that it challenged certain accepted perceptions while upholding many others. In addition, the series intersected with curiosity about nuns and the possible connections between Catholic schooling and the success that many Catholic educated women have achieved in public life in Australia.

In developing this discussion I have followed a number of the themes intrinsic to the argument of the thesis as a whole. I look firstly at the different kinds of narrative structures in *Brides of Christ* which constitute the skeleton on to which historical information must be mapped. I then consider the ways in which the historical in *Brides of Christ* did in fact follow Rosenstone's 'contesting, visioning and revisioning' of its historical subject matter through the use of mainstream cinematic conventions. As the thesis attaches a considerable amount of importance to the ways in which film text and the social context interact in the determination of meaning, I then look at the response to the series. In this section I discuss the ways in which the understanding in Australia of the historical miniseries as cultural product and historical representation tends to create space for negotiations about the subject matter in popular culture, particularly where the film acts as a technology for stimulating and realising personal memory. I use extracts from the oral histories to illustrate some of the correspondences between tropes in individual memory and aspects of the film text which may have worked to produce the popular perception that *Brides of Christ* was 'real history', a factor which is also likely to have enabled the series to intervene in popular understanding of the past. Finally, I consider the idea that the meaning of the past is related to aspects of the present, and speculate on the ways in which some of the issues that were important at the time *Brides of Christ* was released may have been important to the ways in which that series was understood in the present.

Narrative Structures in Brides of Christ

Brides of Christ is a six part miniseries which went to air in September 1991, written by Sue Smith and John Alsop and directed by Ken Cameron for the ABC. The series received enthusiastic

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reviews and was ultimately the most successful series ever produced and put to air by the ABC. According to the A.C. Nielsen people-meters, more than a million Sydney viewers on average (in a total population of 4 million people) tuned in to the ABC to watch *Brides Of Christ* over two nights for two weeks in a row during September 1991.¹ As it is reasonable to assume that not everyone watched all of the series and that different people watched at least part of it, this figure would actually under-represent the degree to which some knowledge of this representation of the past was dispersed through the community. Moreover, as there have been a number of re-runs of the series, information about the series and the way the film interpreted its historical subject is likely to have remained in circulation in cultural memory, greatly increasing the chance of the series having a significant impact on popular historical understanding of the period.

The narrative centres on a group of nuns and some of their pupils in a girls' boarding school during the 1960s, a time of great change in the Catholic Church. At the historical centre is a specific event; a directive to Religious Orders of the Catholic Church to return to the spirit in which their various orders had been founded – a directive resulting from the deliberations of Vatican II.² At the narrative centre is the story of Dianah/Sister Catherine spanning the years from 1962 when she joins the convent to her departure in 1968. This structural choice allows the series to follow the chronological development of the historical subject from within a familiar filmic structure; a tale of psychological struggle and search for new understanding, i.e. Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey.

Overall, both the foregrounded narratives and the series of subtexts they contained presented a view of the sixties in Australia which cast women's experience of that era in a new light. Not only were these stories different from the popularly understood narratives of rebellion, music, sex, drugs, and change, but they opened up historical issues which had been marginalised in the mainstream historical record and in cultural memory.

In *Brides of Christ* the historical is a serious subject, treated as far more than period setting. The whole series develops a sense of its attitudinal and psychological milieu. Besides the foregrounded personal stories of the main characters, there are numerous strands of historical narrative densely packed with information about social changes in a particular society, viewed from the perspective of their impact on the lives of a few individuals.

In its concentration on a narrow historical subject and setting and its concern with multiple points of view, the series could be thought of as sharing some of the approach of micro-history or even perhaps the practice of 'thick description'. This technique, developed some years ago by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in describing the practice of cock fighting in Bali³, interprets an alien culture through the precise description of events and practices. *Brides of Christ* certainly demonstrates something of this in its scripted and visual narratives, its strong basis in historical research, and the power of the various strands of narrative to use micro-history to suggest wider

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socio-historical issues and more abstract concepts. Whether or not an historical narrative can ever be 'thick' enough to deal with the entanglements of sequence of events, intentions of the actors in the events, institutions, modes of thought, etc. is a very significant question and one which Peter Burke has raised in respect to traditional forms of historical narrative.⁴ Film however, with its enormous amount of visual detail in every shot and with its power to use different narrative methods simultaneously, would appear to have much to offer as an alternative way of representing the past.

This kind of approach – a reduction in scale as a means of presenting an in-depth approach to socio-political history – can be seen in a number of avowedly historical works like Simon Shrama's *Citizens* and Natalie Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Where these examples share a disputed boundary between history and literature, historical miniseries like *Brides of Christ* are likewise hybrids. Although these visual narratives are stylistically related to both film and television serials, they can also be said to have taken over many of the attributes of the 19th century social realist novel. There are certain parallels between *Martin Guerre* (both novel and film) and *Brides of Christ* when both are considered as historical representations in non-traditional forms. Davis, whose intention was not so much to show the structures themselves but the way that peasants 'experienced the constraints and possibilities of their lives',⁵ makes deliberate and repeated references to the values of society in her work (both book and film). Her goal was 'that of embedding this story in the values and habits of sixteenth century French village life and law, to use them to understand central elements of the story and to use the story to comment back on them'.⁶ In that Natalie Davis's book can be read as both a serious historical piece and as a good story, it is similar to *Brides of Christ* which also functioned on the dual levels of entertainment and historical representation which explored historical issues and attitudes. In both cases the historical setting – physical, social, and psychological – is the engine of the story. As with *The Return of Martin Guerre*, the embedding of 'the values and habits' of the period is clear in *Brides of Christ*. Both pieces were conceptualised historically, and in both the many layers of the narrative technique reveal a great deal about attitudes and other structures which shaped women's lives in the respective periods.

Mythic Narrative structures - The Hero's Journey and Brides of Christ

While many narrative techniques are discernible in *Brides of Christ*, a fundamental scaffolding is that of the mythic Hero's Journey outlined in Chapter 2. In *Brides of Christ*, in the narrative of Dianah/Catherine which binds the series and in the stories of the individual episodes, there is a strong parallel between the narrative development and the stages of the journey (as Vogler identifies their operation in film).

The series establishes this narrative trajectory in the opening sequences, where years after experiencing a mystical religious experience as a child, the adult Catherine is preparing for her

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wedding. Her attempt to remain in this Ordinary World and to resist the inner urge to enter the convent (her Call to Adventure) is unsuccessful and, almost on the eve of the wedding, she leaves her fiancée and commits to the Adventure. Entering the Special World of the convent she meets her mentor, Mother Ambrose, but is rapidly engulfed in the stage in which allies (Veronica), tests (the noviciate), and enemies (Sister Agnes) feature strongly. As the Hero enters deeper into this world she undergoes the supreme ordeal, a symbolic death of self, in this case the surrender of her diary which represents Catherine's individuality. Having survived the ordeals of the initiation into the convent, the Hero becomes a new self, a valued member of the convent community where she helps others in the often traumatic changes which occur as a result of Vatican II. But Catherine now has to deal with the consequences of her new life in the form of a widening gulf between her ideals and the dictates of the Church. At this stage she must decide whether to re-enter the Ordinary World or remain in the Special World. This crisis and the decision to leave the Special World is a kind of Resurrection where she realises that in abandoning her old self she has been reborn, not as the self of the Special World but as a more knowing, more integrated being who has grown stronger and purer as a result of her trials. Catherine returns to the Ordinary World, as a Hero must. But the journey will have been pointless unless she brings back with her a lesson from the Special World, an elixir or potion with the power to heal. In the closing scene of the series Dianah demonstrates the healing power of this new knowledge in her return to the convent at the launch of her new book. Dianah's final words verbalise the construction the series has put on the lives of nuns and on the convent as a community.

Regardless of doctrine, ideology or even imagination, the fact is – I was surrounded by strong, luminous women intent on doing good. And it is this flame that will draw others to it whatever the numbers, whatever the forms, no matter how many blind alleys the Church as a whole may stumble into.

Historical function of Archetypes

Such an analysis of course strips away all the narrative sophistication in the series. But it does demonstrate Graeme Turner's point that a simplified analysis of structure underlines the possibility that the modern feature film and the primitive fairy tale serve similar functions for their respective audiences.⁷ Moreover another feature of the structure of the Hero's Journey is the use of *archetypes* which provide broad areas of audience recognition onto which cultural and historical specifics can be mapped. One powerful demonstration of such an archetype can be found in the character of Sister Agnes in *Brides of Christ*. Susan Ryan, Former Minister for Education and Women's Affairs in the Hawke Labor Government spoke for large sections of the audience who had actually experienced Catholic schooling in the sixties when she said:

I remember saying to Penny Chapman when the series opened – 'Look the only one that is really authentic is that Sister Agnes, that's the old Irish one who was so cranky and

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lectured the novices about how they should stand, how they should walk. I said, well I mean all of ours were Sister Agneses, you know. Not just one.

That power to jolt recognition and memory derives from the various ways in which archetypes can function, particularly when our attention on them is focussed by the camera lens. As Threshold Guardian archetype, Agnes is the menacing threat who keeps the unworthy from entering. Translated from folk tale to 20th century film in Catherine's story, Agnes is a source of conflict and drama – the embodiment of all the intellectual and physical impediments to Catherine's acceptance of, and by, the Religious Order. In other ways, too, she functions as the Stern Father archetype, the binary opposite of Mother Ambrose whose archetypal role is that of Nurturing Mother and Mentor in Catherine's story. The archetypal aspects of both Agnes and Ambrose and their broad emotional meanings have resonances with collective experience even when that experience has nothing to do with nuns or with the historical aspects of the film. At another more specific level of recognition, variants of both characters are familiar in popular culture, Ambrose as the stereotypical nun represented in the popular media; Agnes as the character recognised by a great number of Catholics.

Agnes, who comes alive in the role played by the Irish actress Brenda Fricker, is a combination of archetype, historical fact, memory, observation and sensitive acting. Agnes has the archetypal characteristics of scripted authoritarianism and shrewdness, interpreted by the observant actor in the narrowing of the eye and the look of rapid appraisal with its subliminal signals of shrewdness and confrontation. Fricker's Irish accent and physical attributes acted as instant translations of the fact that a large number of nuns in the fifties and sixties were Irish women. She had that iconic 'look' which was clearly recognisable in both popular and individual memories. In fact, according to Penny Chapman the initial selection of actresses was made with a paper cut-out placed over photographs 'because not everybody *looks* like a nun'.⁸ This remark reflects the fact that while there are strong stereotypical images of nuns in popular culture, many former pupils also saw their teachers as living constructions. In many cases, as shown in the film text in the sequence where novices were shown how to walk like a nun and act like a nun, this perception was not far from the truth. According to Sister Margaret Picone, when a novice entered the convent she was expected to leave her former self behind to be re-formed as a new, spiritual creature. This 'other-worldliness' was to be clear to all in the modesty of a nun's demeanour.⁹ In the years before Vatican II introduced changes into the traditional spirituality of many Orders, nuns' lives were constrained by the rigidity of monastic discipline and by the Victorian etiquette that accompanied it. According to Madeline Sophie McGrath:

It was said that many congregations of nuns were the last stronghold of the very studied manners of the middle class of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

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A certain demeanour (often aloof and disciplinarian) was considered appropriate for a nun, doubly appropriate for a nun and a teacher. However it was the habit, more than any other factor, which turned nuns into remote, artificial beings. Consequently when this combination of archetype, icon, and deliberate construction was adeptly interpreted by actresses in *Brides of Christ* the result was not only historically resonant but also a strong stimulus to personal memory.

Form, Synthesis and Historical Representation

Although there is a certain amount of nostalgia in *Brides of Christ*, and although the historical narrative was structured within the conventional film narrative of self-discovery, it was generally received in Australia as history – a representation which broke from national mythology and from an uncritical representation of the past. In this respect (and in a great many others) it seems to satisfy the analysis of history in film offered by Robert A. Rosenstone, who maintains that the visual media can be legitimate ways of ‘contesting, visioning and revisioning history’.¹¹ While in no way as avant-garde or extreme as *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* or *Walker*, films which Rosenstone sees as challenging the way history is represented on film, *Brides of Christ* does, I believe, perform the functions which Rosenstone describes and does so using mainstream conventions. Although it follows Hollywood-style cinematic conventions which represent history as drama and foreground the personal, *Brides of Christ* actually opened up the kind of ‘large gap between the abstract idea and the specific instance’ through which, according to Rosenstone ‘the historical film finds the space to *contest* history, to interrogate either the meta-narratives that structure historical knowledge, or the smaller historical truths, received notions, conventional ideas’.¹² In fact it is very much the formal conventions of the miniseries that allows *Brides of Christ* to operate as a revisionist historical account of aspects of the sixties in Australia.

According to Executive Producer Penny Chapman who conceived of the series and worked on both its initial treatment and script development, *Brides of Christ* was always intended as both popular entertainment and as serious historical representation.¹³ This dual intention was highly significant because as Mary Hoban has pointed out, notions of audience and purpose are intricately tied not only to each other but also to form and to the specific mode in which content is represented.¹⁴ The key to the success with which *Brides of Christ* realised those aims lay in ‘synthesis’ – synthesis of mainstream conventions and historical material; synthesis in the translation of historical issues into drama; synthesis of historical record and fictive narrative focussed in the personal; and synthesis of conventional form and historical framing.

While some degree of synthesis of form and content is necessary in any historical film, the hybrid of forms in the miniseries endow it with great possibilities as a vehicle for visual history. According to Albert Moran¹⁵ the miniseries has taken over many of the features of the 19th century social

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realist novel in its narrative organization, blending them with structural elements from serials, series and drama, and visual techniques from documentary. Like its written predecessor, this tele-visual representation of the past is marked by accuracy of historical detail, an elongated time scheme, and a narrative trajectory for the main characters which though centred on the personal, intermeshes with more public aspects of the historical experience. This creates a distinctiveness of form which, according to Stuart Cunningham in his discussion of style, form, and history in the Australian historical miniseries, has been a major factor in enabling the challenges to national history that were mounted by Australian miniseries like *The Last Bastion*, *Bodyline* and *Cowra Breakout*.¹⁶ As in those mini-series, the focus on a group of central characters in *Brides of Christ* is part of an epic sweep encompassing a variety of narratives and the accumulation of a great deal of social history. And just as those series presented the public with alternative perspectives on the past, the stories that *Brides of Christ* presents intersect with, but differ from, the dominant perceptions in popular media, contesting received ideas and conventional understandings.

Another of the reasons that *Brides of Christ* was so successful in this respect lies in the fact that it uses a variety of narrative structures. While it is episodic and has the large cast of characters and the multiple narratives of a serial, it is able to bind these to a linear story in much the same manner as that employed in classic social realist novels like *David Copperfield*. At the same time, the sectioning of the miniseries into an anthology structure allows the writers to explore issues by restricting the focus and, by concentrating on different sets of characters in each section, to create a mosaic of experiences.

While this makes good commercial sense in terms of keeping existing audiences interested and attracting others, it also compounds the variety of historical perspectives. Thus the series can represent opposing points of view without compromising its narrative integrity, its potential as entertainment, or its authority as historical interpretation. In fact this may even enhance the authority by doing away with simplistic representations that run counter to a level of shared experience which tells audiences that disagreement in the interpretation of similar circumstances is the norm rather than the exception. There is a great deal of common-sense validity in the fact that *Brides of Christ* can present the directives of Vatican 11 as both destructive and freeing; Catholic schooling as restrictive and empowering; the sixties as both conservative and forward-looking.

This production moved along both axes of its intention as history and popular entertainment by mapping original research and the existing historical record onto an essentially universal narrative of personal struggle (the Hero's Journey). Historically, the directives of Vatican 11 which demanded a shedding of traditional practices in convents provoked, for the majority of nuns, a questioning of the fundamentals of the institutional practices which had previously shaped every facet of their lives and their relationships with the rest of society. The real tensions inherent in this massive revision served the entertainment convention of rendering history as personal drama by

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providing a superb (and historically authentic) source of conflict based on collision of opinion on issues as diverse as the authority of the Catholic Church and the nature of personal commitment. In the synthesis of mainstream film and historical representation, the character of Catherine is the dramatic embodiment of historically-determined tensions within the convent and her story acts on the dual levels of narrative of the particular and metaphor. The narrative about her years in the convent carries the historical time frame while offering the audience the engagement of a narrative of personal discovery which as already discussed, closely parallels the steps in Joseph Campbell's analysis of the Hero's Journey. On the metaphorical level Catherine is symbolic of the new era and of the means by which convents as institutions traversed the complexities of change. This synthesis of fictional narrative, cultural myth, and historical re-presentation creates layers of referentiality, integrated through inclusion of the little-known and historically specific (in the form of the impact of Vatican II on Australian convents), with the widely-shared in cultural memory (through incidents like the country wedding) and the culturally determined (seen in the structure and anticipated outcomes of the dominant narratives).

Through this narrowed focus, *Brides of Christ* presents a perspective on Australia in the sixties which is quite different from conventional understandings of that era as a time dominated by the Vietnam War, youth revolt, drugs, sex, and rock'n'roll. It tells other stories of large historical currents like reform in the Catholic Church confronting small lives in convents, where women have to transform their entire understanding of their vocation; of the lives of schoolgirls in a conservative past which looks quite unlike the widely-held images of youth rebellion in the sixties; of quite rigid concepts of Catholic femininity; of the confusion for Catholics confronted with the power to control fertility and a directive forbidding them from doing so, forbidding the use of the (then) new birth-control pill; of women – nuns, schoolgirls, women in the community – facing the contradictions inherent in being *ordered* to think for themselves by paternalistic systems in the Church and the education system yet being confined to exercising that freedom only within defined limits. Not only were these stories subversive of the dominant representations in popular culture, but the inter-linking narratives themselves formed an historical context; an historically-based, psychological world picture of some of the values and parameters which informed social action in the era.

In *Brides of Christ* the customary formal arrangement of linking multiple narratives to the one historical event, is actually one of the major ways through which the series contests widely-held popular understandings of women's experience in the sixties in Australia. Even though this may owe more to Hollywood conventions than to philosophical positions on the nature of historical narrative, it does serve (intentionally or otherwise), to demonstrate the different ways in which individuals experience and understand similar historical forces. The stories of the nuns Ambrose and Veronica, and the schoolgirls Rosemary and Frances, for example, all tell stories of women coming to terms with questions about sexuality, authority and commitment. However, in the lives of individuals this end result is a product of narrower issues and different sources. The

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circumstances of change in the convent force Ambrose to confront questions about love and ageing. Veronica in the same circumstances faces the issue of her own maturity and the depth of her commitment to opposing choices; the convent or Jack. Frances is drawn into the clash between Catholic attitudes to divorce and individual happiness in the matter of her mother's divorce and re-marriage. Rosemary challenges social attitudes towards youth and sex, but more from ignorance and anger than from personal conviction. Yet in many ways these particular confrontations are related to wider issues associated with the era, such as changing constructions of femininity and female sexuality, and conflict over relationships between women and traditional patterns of patriarchal power.

Conceptualised with a degree of sophistication and treated with subtlety in the writing, the multiple narratives and epic dimensions intrinsic to the miniseries offer opportunities for the creation of a rich historical texture. Some issues like the Vietnam War, commonly thought of as dominating the era, are marginal in the lives of many characters while others such as Catholic attitudes towards divorce, celibacy, and birth control, marginalised elsewhere in historical accounts, are central to their lives. Certain other issues of the era like the *OZ* pornography trials, the employment of lay teachers in Catholic Schools, and social divisions over Vietnam fuel the narrative motivation in other strands of the miniseries where they form a dense historical foil to the emphasis on personal struggle in the foregrounded narratives. For example when the all-male school council insists on the dismissal of Ian McGregor, the first lay teacher at the school, the ostensible reason is that he has shown the girls a copy of *OZ* magazine which they see as pornographic. The deeper reason is that his liberal opinions, particularly his views on Vietnam, clash with the conservative opinions of influential fathers at the school. The historical is thus integrated into the narrative subtext where it functions to reveal the deep-rooted conservatism of the male Catholic hierarchy, supplying the kind of historical context which makes sense of the actions of several of the main characters and tends to explain the kinds of frustrations which fed into the women's movement. Similarly, through the character Jack who leaves the priesthood for reasons of conscience, *Brides of Christ* deals with an issue which was considered shocking and threatening by many staunch Catholics of the period and one which remains quite a well-known narrative in collective memory. In the film text Jack is treated as an outcast, unwelcome even the vicinity of Veronica's local church. The viewer's perception of the historical situation is skewed towards that of the series, as the sympathetic portraits of Ian and Jack in the narrative and the visual text are set against a representation of the Catholic hierarchy and conservative male laity in which both are constructed as repressive and even as figures of fun.

All together, the various subtexts of the series build a representation of an era which was conservative rather than revolutionary and one in which these opposing forces are locked into power struggles which reverberate into the present. All the individual narratives of the anthology structure mesh together dramatically and historically – dramatically in the foregrounded narrative to

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form the context for Dianah/Sister Catherine's decision to leave the convent, and historically to sketch in the cultural context for the changes in the social position of women, associated in popular culture with the sixties.

Responses to the Film

Cultural Status of Miniseries in Australia

At its release date in 1991 *Brides of Christ* was the most successful series ever put to air by the ABC, both in terms of critical reception and audience response. In pre-series publicity parts of the media, particularly the popular magazines, understood the series as a consumer commodity and emphasised a set of social meanings for the film based on the star's image. However, such neat packaging could not confine the meaning of the series, and ensuing public discussion was not framed in that way. Popular response as letters to newspapers, in talk-back radio, television forums, and individual recollections make it clear that, despite the way that magazines attempted to shape response, the *reception* by individuals and by audiences in general seems to have been centred around historical aspects of the series. The intensity of the debate was perhaps surprising but, as Stuart Cunningham reminds us, a rhetoric of quality generally surrounds Australian historical miniseries and many viewers regard them as presenting 'significant – verifiable or falsifiable – historical arguments'.¹⁷ For many others the miniseries is a way of inscribing new knowledge into viewers' experience. When both these viewing positions are combined with the attraction deriving from the status of a new miniseries as media event and the kinds of authority claimed by the film text itself, it is not surprising that the series opened up a number of historical issues to negotiation.

This combination of wide audience appeal, high media profile, and public discussion of the way it shaped perceptions of the past created the social conditions which allowed individual and group memories of Catholic education to become public. In this process the film text of *Brides of Christ* seems to have acted as the site which *proposed* a range of narratives. But the site where the range of understandings was *established* was a social one – in the interaction between the interpretation of the film text, existing cultural knowledge and personal memory. While this thesis emphasises that this is as important to the meaning of historical film in general, I think that it is particularly significant here. Marita Sturken's argument that, in the tangle of personal memory, cultural memory, and historical discourse, films act as '*technologies of memory that embody and generate memory*'¹⁸ appears to be especially relevant to the reception of *Brides of Christ*. That series changed the status of the discourse of personal memories about women's lives in the sixties (and about Catholic schooling in particular) from a minority discourse known only to a few, to a narrative in the public arena which challenged dominant historical perceptions – at least

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temporarily. It is the significance of this process in the relationship between film and popular understanding of the past that I would like to consider at this point.

Significance of the 'typical' in interactions with personal and cultural memory

In *Brides of Christ* the historical text, grafted onto an almost generic narrative of self-discovery, was a layered construction drawn from dominant strands in the history of Australia in the sixties, combined with the 'typical' found in collective memories of groups of Catholic women, and the specifics of individual memories. Of these, the typical is of special importance as a point of intersection with the audience. The typical uses the broad sweep, the fundamental structure of the experience and/or environment, as the parameters of recognition and taps into similarly broad general categories in collective memory working in much the same way as types and archetypes. The 'typical' interacts with either individual memory or with the form of shared cultural understanding which constitute both popular and cultural memory, the layers of narrative, historical and cultural specificity carrying the different but inter-linked meanings. The story of Dianah/Catherine for example is, at its broadest, a version of the mythic Hero's Journey (as discussed earlier). At this level it taps into the collective memory of cultural experience and draws on popular narratives of the individual's internal struggle over major life decisions. But, clothed in the historical specifics of a young woman entering and then leaving the convent, it is related to the particular historical circumstances and 'typical' of the kind of thing which happened many times during that era. In this instance, this is a part of the tendency of audiences to infer the general from the specific. However, other aspects of the typical in *Brides of Christ* like the school dance or the country wedding, etc. appeal to individual memory of cultural rituals, which may be quite different in detail but which retain the same shape by virtue of their ritualistic nature. While less historically specific they help create, through their compounding of the familiar with the historically specific, the social space in which memory could respond to film text.

Rosenstone has noted that to be considered 'historical' at all, a film must engage however obliquely with the issues and arguments of the ongoing discourse of history.¹⁹ My own experience and the oral history interviews confirmed this in respect to *Brides of Christ*. The density of the visual and narrative historical reference in the series certainly stimulated personal memory. But it also touched many known, but marginalised, narratives and areas of mystery and vicarious curiosity in popular culture. These factors, combined with the immense popularity and high profile of that series, created a social need which demanded a response as to the authenticity of that representation from participants who lived the kind of experiences represented on the screen.

Intersections between Film Text and Personal Memory

In the oral histories certain themes such as repression, idealism, anger with the dictates of the Catholic Church, development of ideas of social justice, and inculcation into particular types of femininities were common threads. There was an expected range of individual experiences and attitudes. Many of the personal narratives of the past were cast within over-arching tropes of differences between the past and the present and of amazement by the narrator that she could have been so bound by the limitations and boundaries which then-current social values placed on her life. As noted earlier, in presenting these oral narratives, I am not suggesting that either personal memory or the film text is somehow 'true'. But as memories of participants have enormous value and cultural authority, I feel that intersections between strands of personal memory and the film text bolster the claim to authenticity by the series and take its status beyond entertainment towards that of historical representation. The following extracts from interviews demonstrate many of the kinds of intersections between film text, historical discourse, and memory which gave the historical fiction in *Brides of Christ* the power to represent itself as 'real history' and to intervene in popular understanding of the past.

Pat

Pat, who is not a Catholic, remembers attitudes depicted in *Brides of Christ* as authentic and as not being confined to Catholics but widespread in the community. Pat's stories have the performative quality and kind of humour in the telling that comes from their having, with repetition, settled into a particular narrative structure. But even allowing for the humour of her stories and the ironic distance it creates between her present self and behaviour which now seems incredible, certain strands of sexual prudery seen in *Brides of Christ* are directly reflected in her narrative. Even though Pat's family was open and liberal in many things, her mother who was still having children when Pat was at high school, had an almost Victorian attitude towards discussing anything to do with sex.

How did I find out about all sorts of things about growing up? How did I find out about menstruation? I can't remember... can not remember having a conversation with my mother. I have an older sister and she must have told me... Because I cannot remember, recall, ever having been given any instruction on that at all.

I went to university... I had done... I went to a state high school, I've got a brother who is five years younger than me, and I don't know how I'd managed to but I'd never heard the word 'penis'. Now this is a true story. When I went to university I was seventeen years of age; I'd been to a state school, a co-ed school; we'd done physics and chemistry but I'd never done biology, right, except for the eye in year seven. I don't know how I could have been this naive but I was. I enrolled in Psychology 1. I was doing Psychology 1 and doing Freud and doing penis envy. Right. And of course my parents,

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*I would get home in the evening and they would say 'What did you learn at university today'. 'Oh we are doing Freudian Psychology and he was talking about the difference between men and women and talking about how women suffer from penis envy. Well what's a penis anyway?' It's a true story. It's embarrassing. And my brother, sitting beside me said 'Look it up in the dictionary'. So I did. But do you know what it said in the dictionary – male member. How helpful is that! How helpful is that!*²⁰

At the time of the interview it had been more than five years since Pat had seen *Brides of Christ* and she had no recollection of the parallels between incidents in the series and her own experience. She did not see the whole series and probably did not see the episode about Rosemary. However, her narrated memory included several stories which could have come directly from the text of *Brides of Christ*, especially from the episode which focuses on Rosemary.

Rosemary, a character who grew up in a household where sex was a taboo subject surrounded with shame and guilt, is used in a variety of scenes to display the extent of sexual ignorance amongst the girls of her class. She covers her profound ignorance with bravado and a worldly-wise attitude, which is all too successful in convincing others of her status as a 'bad girl'. In one scene the girls in the boarding school are shown deriving their real sex education in a time-honoured way – from salacious passages in a novel. Rosemary professes to have read the novel 'years ago' but is in fact abysmally ignorant. Rosemary, who knows the emotional cost of sexual ignorance, is shown in one scene comforting a younger girl who is terrified and hysterical at the sight of blood from her first episode of menstruation. In yet another, Rosemary tries to save her younger sister from the ignorance about sex that she had found so painful and is discovered by her parents who treat the subject with repugnance and shame. In her final year, Rosemary becomes pregnant through sexual encounters which were acts of defiance lacking warmth and satisfaction. She has her baby in a home for unmarried girls and, in a narrative resolution more in touch with nineties sensibilities rather than harsh sixties realities, keeps the child.

In this strand of the narrative *Brides of Christ* was particularly effective in building a picture of the complexity of the emotional and moral issues that surrounded sex for young women of the 1950s and 1960s. While Rosemary's story is full of dramatic conflicts and the kind of universals of confusion over identity and puberty that intersect with audience's understandings of rites-of-passage narratives, in its detail it is also historically recognisable; a not unfamiliar story in the memories of many women, including myself, who share the experience of Catholic education in the sixties. Perhaps it is not surprising that the series features such typical stories as all the writers shared a similar background in Catholic education spanning the fifties, sixties and seventies.²¹ This knowledge enabled them to recognise, perhaps intuitively those specifics in the subset of memories shared by groups who went to Catholic schools which would resonate with the common threads in

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the more generally shared cultural memory. Pat's story for example is a particular, personal account of a 'typical' story which has many levels of intersection with audience experience and with the specific narrative details in *Brides of Christ*.

My sister the nurse, we decided that the two younger sisters were not going to be brought up with the same ignorance that we had. And we brought the little cartoon things, you know, 'Where do I come from?' for my sisters. We bought other little books, you know and Mum said "Oh no. I don't know about this, you know. I don't know". My mother gave me a book that her... that my father gave her. She was married in 1945. She was still a virgin. She knew nothing. And on their honeymoon her husband bought her this book on sex. When I was about twenty, my mother gave me the same book. There wasn't anything in it about sex that I could work out. I found out... you'd read novels, you know. I can remember as a young woman reading 'Portnoy's Complaint' and things like that. You know you were reading these things ... and Guy de Maupassant short stories to find out about sex.²²

I was determined that my little sisters weren't going to have that sort of ignorance. I remember when Maria was... Maria is the one who is 16 years younger than me... when she was 12, which would have been, she was born in 1965, what year would that be... it was 1977... Catherine the nurse bought her a copy of Our Bodies Our Selves. And Dad was horrified. He said it was pornography and Mum said "It's hardly the thing to give a ten year old". "Mum, she's not ten, she's twelve". Well I suppose in many ways it's pretty risqué stuff really, but we didn't want the girls to ... and we had the conversation with Dad – "Dad there's a difference between innocence and ignorance, and it was only good luck that we managed to survive. And we don't want them to make mistakes because of ignorance. We want them to be informed so they can make informed choices."²³

Similar memories of confusion and guilt about sex in other interviews make particular reference to the attitudinal climate in which their values were formed and to the roles that sex education in Catholic schools had on their emotional lives. It wasn't that sex education was lacking. Education for women in convent schools of the sixties definitely included sex education. But many recall it as education that was close to indoctrination, the kind that dealt with moral prohibitions against – something – never too specific except in a diagrammatic way, and with emotive innuendo about what you were never to let *him do to you*, a situation captured in *Brides of Christ* with surreal humour. There is a wonderfully realised sequence following from a scene in which Rosemary has just learned the facts of intercourse. As Rosemary is unable to get the details from Sister Agnes who finds an anatomical explanation more than adequate and views Rosemary's innocent questions as perverted, she seeks more information – from a pamphlet in the church. She is so unprepared for

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the agitation caused by the chaotic mixture of desire and repulsion, curiosity, defiance, and guilt that the prohibitions of the instruction booklet play on her mind. A sonorous voiceover using the kind of solemn, chanting cadences of Church services of the era is surrealistically superimposed on the actions of her daily life. The effect is witty, a verbatim narrative and visual translation of the notion of 'Catholic guilt'; an ironic summation used frequently by Catholics (and former Catholics) in the kinds of personal stories which constitute strands of collective understanding in popular culture.

Maggie

Not all Catholic women received this kind of instruction – but many did. *Brides of Christ* goes some way towards explaining why these perceptions of female sexuality, distorted through the filters of patriarchy, Victorian prudery, and a particular form of Catholic misogyny were often a bitter legacy of Catholic schooling. Memories of this kind, so different to notions of sexual freedom which form part of dominant popular perceptions of the era, were personal and while not necessarily hidden, they were often painful, not generally discussed and thus not normally a part of the wider cultural memory of the sixties. Women like Maggie for example, tell of struggling with the conflict between her own active sexuality and what she learned at school. Though the subject of sex was bound up in a labyrinthine entanglement of inadequate knowledge, guilt, and shame it was abundantly clear in the form of Catholic culture to which she was exposed that women's sexuality was of the passive 'lure of Eve' kind which somehow had to be kept in check. In this prescriptive view of sexual relations, women were the recipients (and custodians and constabulary) of male sexual desire. Explicit statements like those of the helpful little instruction booklet stated a woman's 'duty' clearly – protecting the male from his own sexual appetites is the woman's responsibility. Any idea that women had a sexuality of their own which could be enjoyed was not only unspeakable; it was unthinkable. But in lived experience, attitudes could not alter the fact that even good Catholic schoolgirls went through the same sexual changes and awakening of sexual desire that is normal for all human beings at puberty. Many women have memories of suffering secret torments through the idea that they must be perverted if they acknowledged, or worse still, *desired* such feelings. Maggie recalls the relief of having a very close friend to whom she could tell 'one or two little things about my secret evil life' – 'or I would have exploded with guilt'. The 'secret evil life' consisted of clandestine explorations of her own body – 'touched myself' as the euphemism of the day went. Maggie feels strongly that there were so many taboos associated with sex in the kind of Catholic education that she received, that for many women of her generation ignorance and unfounded guilt often confined a woman's sense of personhood. The gender ideology that Jill Mathews sees as dominating the construction of femininity in Australia this century was akin to that fostered by Catholic schools. It allowed only one legitimate expression of feminine sexuality: in heterosexual, monogamous marriage.²⁴ Sex was for marriage. Marriage was

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for pregnancy. Pregnancy within marriage was unavoidable and pregnancy outside marriage was unthinkable.

Ann Symonds.

Yes. Women do talk about that (the limited allowance made for female sexuality) I certainly had conversations with my friends about that. And I mean there was... Um... it was the awful limiting nature of the fear of the experience. The one thing that was truly limiting was the fear of pregnancy. My God. I mean we all saw, we all had pointed out to us, in subtle and not so subtle ways, the girls who were tramping up to the altar, up the aisle, because they had to. You couldn't think – I couldn't think of anything more disgraceful that could possibly occur. I was alarmed that you would even allow the thought! I mean how would you be able to cope!²⁵

This kind of memory has been virtually erased in the popular construction of the period. Memory, even the memory of how society was reflected in popular film, is also associated with forgetting. In present day society memory of such popular sixties films as *A Taste of Honey* and *The L Shaped Room*, which deal with the problems of young women who have an ex-nuptial pregnancy, have been overtaken on the whole by the memories of a later, more permissive era where the shame and guilt have been erased. However, in many ways the issue of women's fertility and sexuality is central to an historical understanding of the sixties and to the ways in which it has been represented in popular media. For a great many women (and men) the ability to control fertility easily and with a high degree of success is at the heart of differences between the sixties and the nineties in (Western) society in general and the roles of women in particular. In the memories of many women the pill and what it represented was a great deal more important, more personal, more liberating and more full of conflict than the superficial presentations of sexual freedom and youthful challenges to authority that dominate representations in popular media.

Brides of Christ takes up the issue of birth control in ways that sets it apart from dominant representations. For the young nun Catherine, the Papal Encyclical is the penultimate piece in her growing estrangement from the authoritarian nature of the institutional Church and the one that convinces her that her role in life is not that of a nun. Its application is the final blow. Catherine has seen the mother of Brigid, one of the school's star pupils, suffering first from morning sickness and then from a miscarriage, the implication being that she had, in desperation from inescapable, repeated pregnancies sought the services of a dangerous and illegal backyard abortionist. The visual narrative makes it clear that Brigid's mother and father have tried the Church's solution of celibacy and that this artificial solution to the problem of repeated pregnancies has caused family tensions. Catherine advises Brigid's mother to take the pill, a shocking departure from orthodoxy.

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But the older woman is restrained by her upbringing and, after a struggle of conscience over what she wants to do and the unrelenting prohibition of her Church, she abandons the pill as a contraceptive. Neither of these women conform to the dominant representation of 'beautiful young things' flaunting past moralities in the face of new-found sexual freedom. Even Rosemary, who stands a good chance of representing the youth revolution on the basis of her age and conduct, demonstrates a part of the way in which the contraception issue influenced Catholic women of the era. Rosemary does not take any precautions against pregnancy because, quite illogically, to do so renders her 'a slut' – a woman who is actually prepared for sexual encounters rather than the passive vessel (and victim) who fails to restrain male passion. This attitude which many, not only Catholics, recognise as ingrained in the certain interpretations of the male/female power relationship is actually verbalised in the film text by Brigid's brother, the boy Rosemary really loves. She, on her part, accepts sex with him as a substitute for love. He, for his part, has sex with her as a kind of sexual initiation – his initiation – before he goes to Vietnam. He is open about wanting sex. But he doesn't want any 'slut' who is equally candid about her desires and her motives.

The visual representation of women's lives in this and other strands of the historical representation of the series intersects with the knowledge in popular culture that social changes since the sixties have produced major shifts in constructions of femininity, changes reflected in the acceptance of women in positions of power. Significantly, a large number of independent, well-educated and outspoken Catholic and former-Catholic women have attained high profile public positions in society, politics and the arts. Consequently, certain of the remarks made in interviews with a number of these women on a Radio National *Encounter* Program (22/9/96) on the ABC has bearing on the issues of female fertility, male authority, and Catholic doctrine raised in *Brides of Christ*. One section of the program deals with the way in which different women reacted to the Papal Encyclical on birth control that features in Catherine's dilemma in *Brides of Christ*.

A strong thread running through the reflections of the women interviewed is that, while the issue of contraception may have been the trigger, the problem for many Catholic women with their religion lay much deeper. For many the issue of artificial contraception was sited within an even broader controversy, that of women and authority in the Catholic Church. For many women this represented an insoluble conflict within the Catholic Church as an institution. Like Catherine in *Brides of Christ*, they chose their own path which was either to walk away from the institution or to remain within and to deny its authority to make such decisions.

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Genevieve Rankin

In those days I would have thought about the laws of the Church, the infallibility of the Pope and the Encyclical on the pill and would have thought that those things were very out of date and not very in touch with where I was heading. And I think that it was those very issues to do with the restrictions on women which led me to leave the Church. I think the... It seemed to me that there was a big gap between reality, the reality of my life and my values and what the Church said was right and wrong.²⁶

I married very young. I had my first baby a year after I was married so I was then twenty-one. I could suddenly see some of the older Catholic women who were thirty or so already had six kids and I thought... Oh, this can't be right. So I then started thinking why is the Church insisting on this and why are they asking us to use this ludicrous rhythm method which doesn't work instead of a pill which does work? If the intentions are the same why should we go the unsatisfactory route rather than the satisfactory route to the same outcome? And the debate in the Church at that time was very low level about these things. I mean it was basically – just well this is what we are telling you. We can't really justify it but this is the instruction and you just have to follow it. So I suppose the rot set in there... Um ... Then I went to live in Vienna quite young, I was about twenty-three with my husband at the time who was a young diplomat. My second baby was born just after I arrived there and I certainly didn't want... and I had been quite ill in the pregnancy... And there I was with two babies in a foreign country and no money and no family back-up. So I didn't want to continue these, you know, close pregnancies. And I went to confession in Vienna and the priest thought that I was absolutely mad because Austrian women – Catholics – you know 93 percent of them or something were Catholics – had been using contraceptives for years. And the priest just thought it wasn't a matter you should really raise with a priest. So I thought ... Oh oh ... so its not actually universal.²⁷

For a long time I would describe myself as a Catholic on strike because I just didn't... I wasn't a lapsed Catholic. I wanted to be a Catholic. But it was difficult or impossible for me, particularly in a power structure where I saw decisions being made by men, that suited men, that preserved a male power structure. And in any social system, if you get any one group dominating the power structure and controlling it, they will make

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*decisions in their interests. And those decisions will often be totally antithetical to the decisions of those who are excluded because the interests of those who have the power is in continuing to exclude the others.*²⁸

As these stories demonstrate, in *Brides of Christ* the fictional, the personal and the historical intersect. Moreover this intersection demonstrates that even a fictional narrative focussed in the personal can constitute, in Mary Hoban's terms 'history in another genre'.²⁹ Both foregrounded narratives and subtexts in *Brides of Christ* demonstrate the widening gulf between women's dilemmas, the moral stance of the Catholic Church, and the specific form of patriarchal authority it represents. In so doing it displays one of the many points of conflict in the growing trend towards the assertion of women's rights which fostered the women's movement. As represented in the series, the issues and pressures which forced women like Catherine to begin to make choices about her life and role is understood as indicative of the origins of major historical changes in the status of women, popularly understood as dating from this period.

In many respects the series can be understood as a piece which was directed towards updating aspects of Australia's national mythology, where the male-centred narrative of foundation and development leaves little place for women except as helper and mate. National cultural meaning, national mythology in that sense, is always under revision and active contestation. While the social roles of women have changed dramatically since World War II, there is clearly a huge gap in national stories which derive from the 1890s Lawson and Furfey tradition in Australian literature and the popular understanding of Australia in the late eighties and early nineties. Inevitably, as already indicated, the narrative in *Brides of Christ* about Catholic Schools and the role they played in the education of young women in Australia intersected with popular knowledge about the subsequent public success of certain women educated by nuns during the fifties, sixties and seventies.

Penny Chapman

Penny Chapman who played such a major part in bringing *Brides of Christ* to the public is herself an example of the kind of woman who embodies such issues. A country girl, educated by nuns in both the country and in Sydney, she has fond memories of her education combined with an awareness of the rift many women experienced between male authoritarianism in the Catholic Church and new roles for women as independent members of society. She was thus part of the restricted group who shared personal memories of nuns and Catholic schooling in the sixties, and also a member of the even more restricted group of former-Catholic women who have attained influential, high profile positions in public life. As originator of the series, she had perceptions of Catholic schooling and of the way society views its more successful graduates, which were very

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influential in conceptualising the series. She expressed something of this in an interview with *Woman's Day* when the series first went to air. She pointed out that she wanted to tell a story about women and authority in the series, noting that some of Australia's most successful women were educated by nuns and are on record as having credited nuns with being formative influences in their lives.³⁰

I have always been struck by the contradiction – that an institution as authoritarian as the convent, based on the notion of obedience, could turn out so many interesting, outspoken, independent women.

Woman's Day, Sept 3rd. 1991, p.44.

Women on both sides of the Liberal/Labor divide in Australian politics are on record as maintaining that the nuns who taught them encouraged them to make a contribution to the community. Among them are women like Carmen Lawrence, former Premier of Western Australia in 1990 who moved into Federal Politics in 1994; Susan Ryan, a feminist activist who became Minister for Education and Women's Affairs in the Hawke Government; Mary Easson who was the Federal Member for Lowe from 1993 to 1995; Ann Symonds, a member of the Upper House in New South Wales; Genevieve Rankin who has been on the Southerland Shire Council for many years and has been involved in a number of grass-roots issues; Kerry Chikarovski, leader of the Opposition in New South Wales; Marlene Goldsmith, a current Member of New South Wales Parliament and Katherine Greiner, wife of a former New South Wales Premier and now a Sydney City Councillor. In a society where sectarian divisions have been historically significant, the Catholic background of these women was often one point of curiosity which drew audiences to the series.

An *Encounter* program mentioned above voiced (and responded to) many of the questions and issues surrounding the Catholic background of these women in popular understanding. The program invited interviewees to speculate on the relationships between the experience of Catholic education and their present career. To many the nuns appeared as strong, independent women who encouraged the notion that their pupils as individuals have a responsibility to actively do something for the community, reflecting the positive perception held by Penny Chapman and reflected in parts of the series. Some, like Kerry Chikarovski are quite unequivocal about the relationship between the influence of the nuns and Catholic schooling on their career choice.

Kerry Chikarovski

The reason I'm a politician and I know that it sounds incredibly corny and more cynical people tend to roll their eyes around when I say it, but the reason that I went into politics was because I wanted to have a career in which I could do things for people. Now I'm not good with blood so it was never going to be anything medical. Social work I didn't

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consider because I didn't think that I could be dispassionate enough about playing that role. And it seemed to me that politics was a way that I could do that – get things done for people. Now that fits in with how I was brought up and that fits in with what I was encouraged to believe at school. And I have no doubt and I make no apology nor am I ever reluctant to admit that the influences that I had at Monte through those nuns in particular, encouraged me in that belief that that was a way in which I could actually achieve what I thought would be a personal goal and that was to get things done for people.³¹

Even the negative effects of the patriarchal practices in the Catholic Church, practices which the film text represents so clearly, could be understood in retrospect as having played an important part. Genevieve Rankin for example relates her career in politics to a particularly anti-female attitude in the Catholic Church in general.

Genevieve Rankin

Well yes I can recall one particular experience that probably set me on the path to becoming a politician and that is the day that the Parish Priest came into our Class room and asked for volunteers to be Altar Boys. And after he had gone I said to the teacher 'Why can't girls be Altar Boys? Why does it have to be boys?' And she told me because girls would defile the altar. Now I knew what defile meant and I didn't accept it frankly. I didn't see that I was so much worse than the boys in my classroom. So that set me on the path to literally questioning the values that one was given, the assumptions in society, the notion that things have to be the way that they are. And I can thank my Church for that – at least the teachings at Saint Joseph's College.³²

The statements of both women, though antithetical in content, represent one way of understanding the situation – a construction responding to a particular kind of question focussed on personal motivation. It is also true, as Ann Symonds points out³³, that the relationship between women of that generation and politics could be understood differently. The situation could be traced to deliberate policies by the Labor Party, a party which traditionally has a strong Catholic basis. In the seventies, the Labor Party promoted access to politics by women and the Liberal Party responded with similar initiatives. Both memories are valid. One set is suggested by *Brides of Christ*: the other is not. Moreover it is likely that the source of motivation for each woman (cited above) towards a career in politics was far more chaotic and less focused than the way the women concerned construct the circumstances in an interview situation now. In most oral life stories a retrospective view of the past from the present allows the speaker to discern connections between events in the past – associations which may not have been apparent at the time – and to re-interpret

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them as significant in the linkages they now see between past and present. According to Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson this kind of narrative shaping is typical of life histories, which they understand as:

shaped accounts in which some incidents were dramatised, others contextualised, yet others passed over in silence through a process of narrative shaping both conscious and unconscious, myth and reality, played significant parts.³⁴

Clearly the narratives of memory are interpretations, quite variable interpretations, of the past. Clearly also, both mainstream cinematic narrative and oral recall share many of the elements in their narrative construction of the past, particularly in the tendency to link events by causality or by temporal succession. As Sarah Kozloff expresses it:

Out in the real world things can happen totally at random, but in stories they are linked in by temporal succession and/or causality. One of the things that TV, like all other narrative forms, takes advantage of is the viewers almost unquenchable habit of inferring causality from succession.³⁵

Both the oral recall and the film narrative work with the same kind of teleology of relationships between past and present, sharing many of overall tropes displayed in the histories. Correspondences between these two modes of recollection of the past contribute to the apparent naturalism of cause and result in the series and bolster the authority of the interpretation of the past in the film text.

Intersections between the film text and socio/political context

Brides of Christ clearly fulfilled its purpose as popular entertainment. However in order for it to fulfil the second half of its dual purpose, serious historical representation, there needed to be a 'readiness' or need in society, a part of that pre-existing knowledge and debate in popular culture which the film text touched. Popular readiness to deal with issues as entertainment – or lack of that readiness – was, as I have argued in Chapter 3, a significant factor in the poor box-office rating for the 1978 film *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*. This concept of 'social readiness' is supported in the work of Pierre Sorlin (with respect to film in general), and Stuart Cunningham and John Tulloch with respect to the roles of miniseries in challenging accepted views on the past. Pierre Sorlin maintains that the past can be active or obsolete in society and proposes an hypothesis that an historical period cannot be the subject of popular film unless there is a readiness in society to accept it.³⁶ Stuart Cunningham observes this as significant in miniseries which appear to take seriously the radical historiographical dictum that the past is only interesting politically because of something that touches us in the present.³⁷ John Tulloch emphasises the importance of the context as a necessary part in any understanding of the ways in which Australian miniseries have in the past contributed to re-working dominant nationalistic myths.³⁸

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Nuns and Popular culture

One of the many reasons why *Brides of Christ* was successful as historical revision centres on the variety of narratives about nuns which circulated in popular culture and on the meanings that those narratives had for different sections of the population. At one level the series responded to an unfulfilled popular curiosity about nuns and convents which, like the historical question of why so many Catholic women from this era appear to hold socially prominent positions in the present, could be traced (at least in part) to sectarianism in Australia's past. At another, it tapped into the idea of nuns as 'the other'; a construction surrounded by secrecy and by a particular mythology which was essentially a construct of the popular media. Prior to the release of *Brides of Christ*, apart from the infrequent and highly stereotyped approaches adopted by popular media, not a great deal was known in popular format about the lives of nuns and even less about nuns as historical subject. In the romanticised image of nuns in popular culture historical aspects of convents and nuns were surrounded by myths which owes a lot to Gothic romances and contain more than a hint of sexual taboo. Moreover, erotic connotations of bondage and subjugation cling at a subliminal level to sites where women are confined physically or psychologically – an understanding coded into the title of the series.

The mystique and the ceremony that surrounded convent life were definitely attractive to viewers with certain of the more ritualistic elements being highlighted in the series. The ritual of the wedding-like Profession Ceremony or the Chapter of Faults or the petty details of convent life like the prayers during dressing and even the obsessive polishing of every surface *were* historical realities. But seeing them was a little like voyeurism, an apparently authoritative insight into a taboo subject – and definitely one of the attractions of the series. The publicity generated by the screening was clearly aimed at both the stereotypical and the more sensational narratives of nuns in popular culture. Even though the series itself offered a revision of those attitudes, its own publicity capitalised on the sensational rather than the historical. In the narrative image that was used in the pre-screening promotion in newspapers and women's magazines, the title *Brides of Christ* (in a suitably updated Gothic script) appears over the image of a group of pretty young women dressed as brides. The text reads:

Cloistered within the walls of a Catholic convent, there is a secret world of ancient ritual. Some revelations may shock you. The emotions will compel you. A stunning new six part series. Commences Wednesday September 4 at 8.30 pm.³⁹

The tabloid-style sensationalism of this and similar articles leaves little doubt as to the strength of this version of nuns and the life of the convent in popular culture. Drawing on prejudice and

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stereotype, on historically mediated images and Gothic narratives in cultural memory, the tabloid rendition with its play on exotica and the secrecy of the convent was quite removed from the more mundane versions of convents and Catholic schooling in the memories of many women. The tension between these various narratives – the sensational media representation, the mythic popular culture versions, the historical nuns, the nuns of individual memory, and the nuns of the screen version – was significant in the amount of interest generated by the series and consequently in the degree to which it intervened in popular historical understanding. In fact according to Marita Sturken it is the contested aspect of these memories and histories that produce the meanings, contributing to the social dynamic which allows diverse spectators to perceive themselves as part of the national audience.⁴⁰

Other issues

Another of the factors contributing to the 'readiness' in Australian society for an alternative perception of Australia in the sixties arose from particular events and issues pertinent to society at the beginning of the nineties. In placing *Brides of Christ* in an historiographical context, Albert Moran⁴¹ maintains that this series can be related to a wave of memoirs and autobiographical pieces written by ex-priests and former-nuns about their experiences while part of their respective Religious Orders. Although the series itself indicates something of this context in the final scene in which Dianah is launching her memoirs there were other, larger, issues in Australian society of the early 1990s which gave the series much of its resonance. Primarily the series spoke to an audience aware that present-day Australia was quite different from that which the series depicts, with the place of women in the work force a particularly significant element. Moreover at the beginning of the nineties when *Brides of Christ* was in pre-production there had been considerable debate in popular media about issues related to the roles of women in society, particularly regarding political decisions about affirmative action policies in the work place. This, in conjunction with discussions of whether or not women faced a 'glass ceiling' in attaining positions of power in many enterprises, had put the subject firmly into the public arena. *Brides of Christ* thus addressed a glaring need in the present to give an historical perspective to the differences between the place of women in current society and the ways that women's roles were structured in the Australian nationalist mythology.

It seems apparent that any understanding of why *Brides of Christ* was successful both as entertainment and as historical representation, must go beyond the discussion of the version of the past contained in the film text itself to issues of reception. As discussed earlier in the Chapter, where film makes significant inroads into popular understanding of the past it does so through an

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interactive process between film text and memory, between preferred meaning inscribed in the film text and pre-existing knowledge and debate in society. To a considerable extent, *Brides of Christ* was popularly understood as a reasonably valid representation of the past because it made those kinds of intersections.

In this Chapter I have argued that what could have been an obscure piece of historical interpretation was made accessible by the mainstream format of the series in which the historical functioned as a kind of engine driving a typical mythic narrative of self-discovery. Essentially, the form of this visual successor to the social realist novel of the 19th century created a synthesis between mainstream narrative cinema and historical meanings, providing rich and layered narrative and historical contexts which intersected with existing historical discourse, cultural memory, and individual recollections. The material of the series was well-researched, striking numerous chords of audience response and recognition because, along with its meticulous attention to historical verisimilitude it imposed a sense of narrative order onto the complexity of historical events. Reconstructed in hindsight, the historical narrative of the series seems not only plausible but also creates a sense of fit between historically attested trends and memory.

While the series certainly provided a perception of the past which was different to that which prevailed in popular culture, many of the issues that it dealt with are ones in which there are perceived connections between the past and the present. Many elements in *Brides of Christ* appealed to unsatisfied curiosities and beliefs in popular culture about 'secrecy' and ritual associated with Catholicism. These concerns circulate in narratives derived from sources as diverse as Gothic tales, erotic fantasies, and historically determined sectarian prejudices. Most significantly the multiple narratives and discourses in the series stimulated and interacted with many different kind of memories – vaguely understood perceptions, personal memory, popular constructions, loose associations of events, feelings, impressions, etc. – a situation which helped *Brides of Christ* attain the status of an authoritative and authentic representation of its subject. Many different people with many different attitudes were able to recognise themselves or some aspect of their past in the fictional past that *Brides of Christ* re-presents. Central to that recognition is the fact that the story line of the series and of the individual episodes is structured around the archetypal cultural myth which Joseph Campbell calls The Hero's Journey. However, the success with which the series melded the mythic and the historical rests primarily on research and memory on the part of the writing team. As participants in the situation they dramatised, they were able to draw on understandings in group memory to find incidents which could be understood as historical particularisations of broader, less detailed, more 'typical' (and therefore more recognisable) in the broadest of popular memories.

The series used numerous filmic devices, particularly the high degree of period verisimilitude found in the film's representation of clothing, hairstyles etc., together with the inclusion of extracts from

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then-contemporary television, pop music and written documents which acted like primary source material in written history 'guaranteeing' the authenticity of the interpretation. But what amounts to the most important aspect of the impact of the film on popular understanding of the past is the fact that it was a mainstream product which reached a wide audience. Certainly the series was not without faults as popular entertainment or as historical representation. However, it managed to find acceptance as involving fiction at the same time as it was understood as a serious representation of the past. As a production which produced 'history in another genre' *Brides of Christ* demonstrated that it is possible to challenge accepted ideas of the past, to present complex perceptions of the past – and to do it in a format which means that authentic history is not confined to being found only between the covers of academic tomes.

¹ Sydney Morning Herald 17/9/91, p.4.

² Vatican II was the Twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church and was convened by Pope John XXIII in 1959. It was the first such Council since Vatican I of 1869–70 and opened in 1962. The Council reviewed the working of the Catholic Church in the 20th century and the deliberations instigated sweeping changes in its workings and symbols, but no essential change in its teachings especially on the controversial issue of artificial fertility control. In 1965 the Council addressed the question of the functions of religious institutions and issued the Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfecta Caritas*). The practical implications of this were that each order was to work through a process of renewal and to return to the original inspiration behind a given community.

³ Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture', in Clifford Geertz *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* Basic Books, New York, 1973.

⁴ Peter Burke, 'History of Events' in Peter Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.240.

⁵ Natalie Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, p.1.

⁶ Natalie Z. Davis, 'On the Lame', *American Historical Review*, No.93, 1988, p.573.

⁷ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice, Second Edition*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p.71.

⁸ Diana Simmonds, 'Pennies From Heaven', *The Bulletin*, 3/9/91.

⁹ Interview Sister Margaret Piccone. November 24th 1996.

¹⁰ Madeline Sophie McGrath, *These women? Women Religious in the History of Australia, The Sisters of Mercy Parramatta, 1888–1988.*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, Sydney, 1988, p.161.

¹¹ Robert A. Rosenstone, 'Introduction' in Robert A. Rosenstone (Ed.), *Revisioning History: Film And The Construction Of A New Past*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 199., p.8..

¹² Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film And The Construction Of A New Past*, p.9.

¹³ Penny Chapman has given a number of interpretations in interviews as to the intention of the show, including a statement in *Woman's Day* (3/9/91) that the story reflected her experiences of growing up in the 60s. However in my interview with her she replied to direct questioning that the writing team intended the series to be an authentic representation of the subject and that they always saw the series as contesting popular perceptions about nuns and the 60s. Interview, February 1997

¹⁴ Mary Hoban, *Public History Review*, Vol.3, 1994, pp.105–121, p.112.

¹⁵ Albert Moran, *Image and Industry: Television Drama Production in Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985 p.207.

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- ¹⁶ Stuart Cunningham, 'Style, Form and history in Australian mini-series' in John Frow and Meaghan Morris (Eds.), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, pp117–132.
- ¹⁷ Stuart Cunningham, 'Style, Form and history in Australian mini-series', p.123.
- ¹⁸ Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, University of California Press, Berkley, 1997
- ¹⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, p.72.
- ²⁰ Interview with Pat Grocholski, December 12th 1996
- ²¹ Interview with Penny Chapman, February 28th 1997
- ²² Interview with Pat Grocholski, December 12th 1996
- ²³ Interview with Pat Grocholski, December 12th 1996
- ²⁴ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, London and Boston, 1984, p.111,
- ²⁵ Interview with Ann Symonds, January 23rd 1997
- ²⁶ Genevieve Rankin, 'Women, In Time, Will Do Much', ABC Radio National, *Encounter*, September 22nd 1996. Written and presented by Julia Baird.
- ²⁷ 'Women, In Time, Will Do Much',
- ²⁸ 'Women, In Time, Will Do Much'
- ²⁹ Mary Hoban, *Public History Review*, Vol.3, 1994, pp.105–121, p.110.
- ³⁰ The extract given here was from an interview given by Penny Chapman in 1991 and published in *Women's Day*. She repeated this idea in similar words in my interview with her in February 1997
- ³¹ Kerry Chikarovski, 'Women in Time Will Do Much'
- ³² Genevieve Rankin, 'Women in Time Will Do Much',
- ³³ Interview with Ann Symonds, January 23rd 1997
- ³⁴ Rachael Samuel and Paul Thomson (Eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p.5
- ³⁵ Sarah Ruth Kozloff, 'Narrative Theory and Television' in Robert C. Allen (Ed), *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, London 1987, p.46.
- ³⁶ Pierre Sorlin, *The Film In History: Restaging The Past*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p.44.
- ³⁷ Cunningham, 'Style, Form and history in Australian mini-series'. p.121
- ³⁸ John Tulloch, *Television Drama: Agency, audience and myth*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p.93.
- ³⁹ *New Idea*, September 7th 1991, p.100.
- ⁴⁰ Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The Aids Epidemic And The Politics Of Remembering*, p.257.
- ⁴¹ Albert Moran, *Moran's Guide to Australian TV Series*. Australian Film and Television School, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p.94.

Telling it like we'd like it to be

In this Section of the thesis I focus on a number of films where the interpretation of the past they presented to audiences of the day sparked more than debate. All of the films discussed here produced controversy over how the past was understood and all of them resulted in political action of one kind or another. Film as a cultural product has become deeply involved in what William J. Palmer calls 'the holograph of history'. The various levels of inter-textuality between film, historical discourse, communal and private memory, interact in a complex process (one for which this thesis argues) in which historical film can become a forum for carrying on the mass cultural debates about trends of contemporary history.

This chapter looks at the ways in which films about war have been used as sites for quite intense social negotiation. The chapter is based on two sets of films, Second World War Combat movies and a set of Vietnam War era films. In this latter group the Vietnam veteran became symbolic of America's on-going desire to re-negotiate the war back into its former vision of itself, and fantasy narratives about the rescue of soldiers missing in action served a very serious political agenda. All the characters in the films discussed here are fictional, as are all the incidents. In their use of the past, these films are quite different from *Brides of Christ* or *The Leaving of Liverpool* where historical verisimilitude and correspondence with both the historical record and personal memory were important to the kinds of interventions that these films made in contemporary society. In many of the films considered in this chapter the past has been used primarily as a site for the construction of ideologically directed narratives, which had relevance to the political issues of their day, and very little correspondence with the historical record. Despite this, collectively the films of both groups had important effects on popular understanding, due in part to the combined influence of social anxieties and historical circumstance on the film text, and partly to the many mythic elements incorporated into the film narrative and image. The later section of the chapter also gives some attention to the different ways in which these films were interpreted in the different cultural contexts of America and Australia and the quite different effects that these filmic translations of the past had on certain groups in the two countries.

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Always, there is the whisper of complicity, the suspicion that Hollywood lent its imagination to the disaster [America's role in the Vietnam War]. The notion is preposterous, self involved, and worth pondering: the notion that the projection of 1941 – 1945 mediated American entry into Vietnam by predisposing a movie-going generation to expectations of bloodless flesh wounds and Production Code endings. Before the all-too-real horrors of the in-country spectacle, Vietnam vernacular spat out a telling phrase: I hate this movie.¹

As Thomas Doherty has pointed out, when the fear is removed and the reality of war is replaced by images enjoyed from the comfort of the cinema the pleasures of the spectacular imagery of war combined with the vicarious thrills of combat, horror and destruction of the Second World War film, 'have lent war and cinema a tight kinship'.² The outstandingly successful American combat movie, with its strong ideological messages about American nationalism and macho masculinity, built on a filmic formula with a long history in popular imagination. It was the Siamese twin of the Hollywood Western, Hollywood's most enduring genre, which according to J. Hoberman had been, over a period of time, how America 'explained itself to itself',³ articulating America's frontier mythology in the pseudo-historical context of Wild West.⁴ The genre was replayed and replayed and replayed – until its tropes and structuring concepts were recognised everywhere, not only in America but all over the world wherever Hollywood movies were shown. However, just how deep and significant that vein of influence was in American culture went almost unrecognised until the Vietnam War forced Americans (and others) to face the reality of the ideological messages of the Western/Combat movie in action. While it may have been reasonable to suspect that repeated exposure to particular kinds of films would have long-term effects, this demonstration that popular film had made such a deep impression on sections of its youthful audiences was something of a revelation. As Loren Baritz, writing in 1985 about the relationships between American culture and that nation's entry into combat in Vietnam, observes:

It is astonishing how often American GI's in Vietnam approvingly referred to John Wayne, not as a movie star, but as a model and a standard. Nineteen year old Americans, brought up on World War II movies and westerns, walking through the jungle, armed to the teeth, searching for an invisible enemy who knew the wilderness better than they did could hardly miss the connections. One after another said, at some point, something like 'Hey, this is just like a movie'.⁵

For many it was more than 'just like a movie'. The structuring concepts of the Western became, according to Richard Slotkin one of the major symbolic systems through which many soldiers interpreted their war. He writes:

Soldiers and medical officers agreed in identifying one of the major mental problems as something called 'John Wayne Syndrome', and the 'traditions' of

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Indian warfare were often cited as models for atrocities by soldiers whose only knowledge of wars derived from movies like *The Searchers*.⁶

The now-substantial literature of the Vietnam War tends to support this observation. The influence of the Western/Combat genre, distilled into the forms of its most famous stars, occurs again and again. For example in *Rumor of War* Philip Caputo, a platoon leader in Vietnam writes of longing, in basic training school, for the romance of the Hollywood fantasy version of glorious battle – ‘the sort of thing I had seen in *Guadalcanal Diary* (1943) and *Retreat, Hell!* (1951)’.⁷ His psychological perception of what war would be like and his place in it was modelled on what he had seen in movies and his identification of the heroic masculinity it propounded.

I saw myself charging up some distant beachhead, like John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*, and the coming home a sun-tanned warrior with medals on my chest’.⁸

He even carried that illusion into battle.

I was John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*. I was Aldo Ray in *Battle Cry*.⁹

While it is tempting to think that Caputo was simply the victim of an over-active imagination the fact that so many other authors, quite independently of each other, conceptualised their own situation in the same way suggests otherwise. In his book *Nam* Mark Baker speaks of his reaction to battle in almost the exactly the same terms. ‘I had a flash of images of John Wayne films with myself as the hero’.¹⁰ Most famous of all, Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* – an account of the time he spent with frontline troops as a journalist is full of his own connections between scenes from movies and actions in combat and those he observed in the actions of others.¹¹ Ron Kovic’s memoir *Born on the Fourth of July*, which became the basis for Oliver Stone’s film of the same name, tells of Kovic’s hero-worship of John Wayne in *Sands of Iwo Jima*.¹² Likewise Gustav Hasford’s *The Short Timers*¹³ which is the basis for the film *Full Metal Jacket*, is imbued with Wayne allusions particularly through the perceptions of Private Joker who does Wayne vocal impressions.

The screen personas of stars of these movies were enormously influential on the ways in which many soldiers in Vietnam conceptualised themselves and their roles. The machismo that many young men (and some not so young) acted out was based largely on these figments of the collective – and screen – imagination. John Wayne was the embodiment of the ‘hero’ *par excellence*. The cultural mythology that he represented, and the desire for which he was a sign¹⁴, had particular psychological resonance.¹⁵ Writing in 1996 David Harris, America’s best known draft-resister of the Vietnam War, places ‘the John Wayne thing’¹⁶ symbolically at the centre of the cultural and psychological world view that led Americans into the Vietnam War:

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I suppose each of us has his or her own version of who led us into that morass (the Vietnam War). My favourite candidate is John Wayne. He was just a movie actor but I cannot imagine this war without him. John Wayne was the man those of us who were eventually called to take our turn in the tall grass were supposed to be. We'd been raised in his shadow.¹⁷

While these accounts occur in memoirs of battle by white males and probably do not reflect the perceptions of the African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans, they nevertheless represent an understanding of the war shared by a huge section of the American military contingent.¹⁸ Combat memoirs record the effects of Hollywood movies on the imagination as affecting individuals in similar ways. For many, the ability of the enemy to blend into the surroundings and to apparently melt away in the face of the search-and-destroy tactics that we so often used against them, had an eerie *deja vue* quality. Others found themselves taken by surprise by the ways that the combat situation forced conscious links between present reality and memories of childhood role-play games. Alternately the circumstances triggered flashes of recollections of similar scenes in films where the only links between present reality and screen representation were imaginative ones.

Regardless of whether they made these identifications personally or not, images drawn from movies informed non-military descriptions of the situation and became part of everyone's vocabulary in the combat zone. Reconnaissance scouts were 'Kit Carsons' and even the high command used the term 'Indian Territory' to denote enemy controlled territory. The common term for the actions of a soldier who performed a suicidally heroic act was 'doing a John Wayne'. Collectively, large sections of the combat troops shared a mental landscape – the product of a lifetime of Westerns and Combat movies, one which superimposed itself on the reality of the Vietnam situation. As Geoffrey O'Brien has observed in *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century*, there are layers of understanding and reference existing in popular culture as a result of the movies, observations which the Vietnam experience appeared to bear out: 'Films get their hooks into you by propping up memory, or perhaps more accurately by substituting for memory.'¹⁹

While it is very difficult to determine the exact ways in which Westerns and Combat movies had affected individual and cultural memories, it is feasible to argue that long term exposure to particular narratives about the past and particular ideological positions did influence constructions of the self and perceptions of the world. Not only do the memoirs of many veterans attest to the presence of some kind of movie-induced collective memory of the past, but they also demonstrate broad similarities in the ways in which that memory had been shaped by the ideological framework in which the narrative and information were embedded. Moreover, various veterans perceived combat movies and Westerns as having influenced their understanding of the Vietnam War and their roles in it.

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In addition, combat memoirs like those mentioned earlier tell how for some soldiers, previously forgotten scenes from movies sprang into consciousness at odd times and once in consciousness, were understood as bizarre parallels between the movie world and reality. Memory, as Freud first demonstrated and as Samuel and Thompson maintain in respect to oral history²⁰, is inherently revisionist. In memory, certain relationships are inflated or deflated in importance retrospectively. Half-remembered events may leap to prominence should circumstances create pertinent mental linkages. Combat in Vietnam often provided those circumstances as a kind of hyper-reality which not only allowed such linkages to be made, but also brought to the surface cultural elements like role models and models of masculine behaviour which had played a part in building self-concepts and which could now be played out in legitimate forms of self-dramatisation in battle.

Michael Herr's *Dispatches* records many such occurrences. One episode in particular encapsulates the surreal nature of such identification. During a night attack on the perimeter of a base at Khe Sahn a marine crawls by, Indian-fashion, and then dead-eyed in a traditional gunfighter pose, gun steadied against the forearm prepares for the final shoot out with the enemy.²¹ In living out his fantasy he had modified his uniform, the symbol of his role as a soldier, taking on the symbols of the Hollywood version of the Western Hero. He wears a bandanna and a hip holster which carries 'an obviously well-loved' cut-down M-79 grenade launcher. So bizarre was the episode under battle conditions that Herr wondered if he hadn't hallucinated the soldier. The actions of the soldier belong to the hyper-real. By acting out the Hollywood fantasy the soldier transcends the limits of reality, symbolically interacting with the ideas that the cowboy represents; particularly his power over life and death. In the soldier's imaginative construction of himself he is the ultimate hero, greater than any film image as he is *the real thing* and the danger is *the real thing*. His actions may represent the extreme, but they underline Ralph Donald's assertion that there should be little wonder that the first generation of young males brought up with television images of masculinity should display the results of the conditioning power of television and movies.²²

By comparison with other contingents of soldiers who had faced battle in former times, large sections of this group had a collective prior referent for their experience – one that had been imprinted on their psyches almost before they had been capable of recognising it. The generic twins, Westerns and Combat movies, had blended the historical and the ideological with such apparent naturalism that the combination of the quite disparate concepts of patriotism, masculinity, and sanctioned violence appeared to form a narrative about expected behaviour. Collectively the Vietnam recruits and draftees all knew the model of expected masculine behaviour which had been delivered to them in the guise of narratives of the past. Hollywood cinema, as a major vehicle for the transmission of ideals of masculinity, had taught them to:

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say few words and say them with a growl, keep a hard jaw and a tight ass, not snivel, stifle feelings, take orders, never cry, dish out punishment to the bad guys, fire from the hip, know we were right because we were Americans, always win. But die like heroes if our luck runs out.²³

Although it is very difficult to unravel the influences that determine subjectivities such as how individuals understand their identities, the formative effects of movies on the soldiers may have been more far-reaching than the superficial correspondences between battle situations and scenes from films would suggest. Why should the relationships created be between real circumstances and *movies*? What was it about these films that made them so memorable? Why should 'historical' movies rather than other types of films be the ones to create these effects? No doubt part of the answer is linked to identification and desire on the part of the audience, induced by the attentive states²⁴ entered into in the process of watching a movie. Clearly too, movies provide both cognitive and emotional experiences that go beyond the range and possibilities of what a person is likely to encounter in lived experience. Combat sequences in particular can appeal to contradictory drives of sadism, masochism, exhibitionism, voyeurism – all lumped together in a few seconds in ways that are pleasurable and quite beyond the possibilities of actual experience. At the same time, while the situation may be totally unfamiliar – even fantastic – there is still a degree of audience recognition of the familiar in reactions like fear, joy, etc. to be found in the foregrounded narrative. This rapport between the unknown of the screen and the known of the world of the audience encourages recognition and identification, facilitating the potential for deliberate imaginative re-creations of versions of the self.

The question of identification is central to the work of film theorists like Metz and Mulvey and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into those debates. However, in respect to the use of the past as a site for the construction of ideological discourses, I think that 'identification' is only part of the answer and that cultural myth expressed in generic narratives and codes is also significant. In the case of the Western/Combat genre the setting in the past, under normal circumstances,²⁵ created emotional distance from the audience. In such a space a narrative could be constructed which, beneath the detail of generic elaboration, has the simple framework of myth. Such narratives, coded as a series of recognisable signs, lack the formlessness and messy detail of lived experience and are ideal vehicles for ideological discourse. This distancing is also found in epics set in the future or in some distant and little known country, rather like the 'once upon a time' mode of story telling in which ideologically based tales and mythic story lines are culturally acceptable – providing they have the backing of accepted forms of probability based on narratives of culturally accepted beliefs about behaviour. A setting in the past appears to confer on the situation a sense of authority – a teleological connection between what has been and its fruits as experienced in the present. In particular, these quasi-historical films of the Western/Combat genre used the past as a site for the

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construction of ideological discourses about nationalism and did so in a generic structure that presented both unambiguous models of masculinity and a mythic story line of heroism and sacrifice.

As cultural ideals of masculinity such constructions were particularly relevant to young boys – the same young boys who grew up to be the infantrymen of Vietnam. Although there were a number of films like *Diary of a Sergeant* (1945) which dealt with the post-war situation of a disabled veteran or *The Best Years Of Our Lives* (1946) and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1956), complex social melodramas of veteran readjustment, from 1949 onwards the genre was dominated by themes like the burden of command, the force of tradition, and particularly by sanitised guts-and-glory narratives replete with historical amnesia. To the adult viewer, there were always contradictory elements even in the most gung-ho of Combat movies. Even parts of the iconic *Sands of Iwo Jima* could be read as a statement about the futility and waste of war. To an adult perspective on the world, the fact that many Combat films were less than paeans to the glory of war, was quite clear. The situation was very different for the young.

Contradictory subtexts in these films were generally lost on the youthful and male-dominated audiences. Moreover, particular sets of meaning tended to solidify as the result of both the inter-textuality of movies of a genre and the fact that these films, as television repeats, were often seen by audiences oblivious to those layers of social meaning given to the film by socio-political conditions current in society when they were first released. Thus the excessive patriotism and demonisation of the enemy in films released during war, intended at the time as a incentive to maintain the war effort, became in the years following the allied victory, a validation of the superiority of American ideals endorsing racism and excessive constructions of a narrow range of masculine behaviours. The iconography of the Combat movie even entered cartoons which were consumed by very young audiences. As Ralph R. Donald sees the situation, in a culture where American boys become socialised largely by admonitions about what they must *not* become (stereotypical images of women and homosexuals) and where ideals of masculinity are rarely verbalised by men in ways which avoid cliché and prohibitions, boys find male heroes in popular culture 'are amongst the most accessible, frequently encountered, and publicly approved models for manly socialisation'.²⁶ These portrayals are simplistic and they are the ones in which the male aggression is least inhibited by the moderating influence of civilisation. But for many boys these models represent masculinity – the rugged he-man; resourceful, resilient, and capable of coping with overwhelming odds.

The film role models, augmented by similar constructions in other popular media. especially comic books,²⁷ were then (as now) a source of male role-play simulations in which boys could indulge their ideal selves as cowboys, superheroes, gangsters, or soldiers. As Norma Pecora points out, adult constructions of gender and role are complex and subject to conscious re-evaluation, but for children such learning comes from parents and the media. Mediated models of the rules of life, heroes (both real and fantasy) are very significant in teaching 'what is

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acceptable, desirable, attractive successful and possible'.²⁸ While ideals of masculinity vary among different American groups, screen heroes of the Combat genre displayed all of the core values common to most constructions: courage, toughness, endurance, lack of squeamishness when confronted with shocking or distasteful stimuli, avoidance of displays of weakness in general, and reticence about emotional or idealistic matters.²⁹ Moreover, the clear-cut moral positions of these films along with the heroic story line and the display of desirable masculinity, tended to coincide with the psycho-social developmental stage of the predominantly teenage audiences of the era. As Thomas Doherty puts it: 'Nourishing sweet Homeric dreams and luxuriating in the manly compensations of combat, trailers and one-sheet advertisements [*for combat films*] took dead aim at the teenage male temperament'.³⁰

In the years when most of the Vietnam generation were growing up, historical issues in contemporary American society lent resonances and other layers of significance to these particularly excessive constructions of masculinity and nationalism. In the late forties, the praise for masculinity and sacrifice in the films related not only to the past but to the then-present and the need to induce women to leave paid employment; to consider domesticity and femininity as inseparable. In the fifties American involvement in Korea extended the pertinence and apparent historical reality of screen action while the escalating Cold War added layers of referential and social relevance to the ways that film articulated America's role as the flag carrier of democratic freedom. Throughout the fifties and early sixties, most of America understood Communism as a monolithic entity with a unified platform of world domination.³¹ The prospect of a real war, more terrifying and more destructive than its cinematic counterparts, was thought to be ever present, and nuclear annihilation appeared as a distinct possibility. In this context, the Combat movies spoke to national anxieties and functioned as psychological reassurances of America's power, of the moral superiority of American ideals, and of the certainty that right would triumph.

In popular culture, film was one of the many sites for the celebration of America's position in the world and a site for posturing in the ideological battles of the Cold war. The dominant version of World War II (the one that Hollywood supported), or 'the good war', was the version that passed from one generation to the next. The flattering conflation of masculinity, war, and history in both official constructions and popular understanding effectively silenced alternate discourses. Moreover, it was very difficult for counter memories of war to be voiced publicly in the didactic political climate of a nation which supported McCarthyism. A society ready to find 'Reds under the bed' in anything but the most politically sanctioned articulations of nationalism was not a place to nurture subversive versions of the past – and this included counter narratives of the war. As Steven Cohan points out in his study of masculinity and the movies in the 1950s,³² Cold War politics required a 'hard' masculinity as the standard when it came to defending the nation's boundaries and the suggestion that war produced emotional wrecks was not one to appeal to a nation that constantly saw itself on the brink of a showdown with Communism. Moreover, war neurosis or 'battle fatigue'

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despite its frequency was understood as something shameful, the sign of hidden weakness (read effeminacy) which didn't fit with the dominant construction of the triumphant nationalism and its intertwined construction of masculinity.

In countries like America and Australia which have avoided 20th century conflict on their own soil, the civilian population had little conception of what frontline experience really meant, and the war that was constructed on film was a fantasy. Official rhetoric played on patriotic notions of war – a disembodied war, built on understandings of the national war aims and attitudes towards the enemy. It ennobled its subject, sanitising (and frequently silencing) veterans' perceptions of another war entirely – a visceral, brutal one where rhetoric was empty and where it was all too possible for ideals to disintegrate, even prove false. On film similarly sanitised and acceptable approximations of actual warfare, recreations of images from the visual record circulating in popular culture and with surface details of period, were fused to confer a kind of historical verisimilitude on mythic action-adventure tales which carried ideological discourses addressed to the (then) present.

Historical elements were little more than locations which conformed to the overall structure of the incident – more or less; generally less. Throughout the fifties and after, Hollywood mined pivotal campaigns, brand-name battles, and prestigious regiments for material with that tinge of historical authority. *Okinawa* (1952), *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), *Merrill's Marauders* (1962), *Battle Cry* (1952), – all conjured up the majesty of war; beachhead taken by assault, an impregnable fortress taken by daring and cunning, a combat unit covered in glory. Such a pseudo-historical basis of name battles linked to variants of generic backgrounds and iconic signifiers – beaches and blasted palm trees for the war in the Pacific, tanks and bombed out buildings for the European war – did little more than give a degree of authority to a limited and insular world view.

Moreover, as has been pointed out by both Eben J. Muse³³ and Gilbert Adair³⁴, the films that were made about the Korean war gave no indication of the significant historical fact that this was the first war America waged as a peacekeeping force – in other words, as a matter of policy rather than in reaction to another country's aggression threatening to itself. If there was any social confusion about America's new role as a world power, these films (with the possible exception of a few made with the benefit of hindsight)³⁵ were 'serenely untroubled'.

Hollywood made twenty-four combat movies during the war years and after 1951, at least one film of the genre each year thereafter until 1970.³⁶ With such an output there was little chance that the movie-going public, increasingly adolescent and increasingly male during this period,³⁷ would not absorb the historical referent and the ideological messages as a unity – history as ideology and ideology as history. For this group, far removed from the complexity of experience and far removed from the visual sophistication of today's audiences, these movies conveyed an updated version of the frontier myth now understood as encompassing *an historically-based* perception that

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Americans fought fairly and honourably against evil aggression. Other components of the message of Combat movies – elements like racism, the construction of Asians, the implicit notion of America's preordained historical role in world affairs, and the explicit notion of America's ideological role as the guardian of democratic freedom on the American model – were to prove destructive notions when projected forward onto the conflict in Indo-China.

As Jeffrey Pierce points out, a nation's willingness to participate in a war is predicated upon its population's perceptions of the experience of past conflicts.³⁸ For American audiences the official version and the popular version of the events of World War II presented it as 'the good war' fought for noble purposes against evil ideologies – and that was the dominant way the film versions told it also. The dual appeal of the Combat film as spectacle and as psychological reassurance during the Cold War gave the quasi-historical content of the genre a validity which would, according to Eben J. Muse, 'profoundly influence America's perception of what warfare was and could be'.³⁹ Amongst the many attitudinal elements that these films reinforced was an apparent forgetfulness of the brutality of war and an inherently racist sense of the superiority of American values. In Combat films as in Westerns, the foregrounded individualism of the moral, white hero made colonialism, imperialism, inequality, and racial intolerance natural and therefore invisible in narratives of the past, just as it appeared for many years to be natural and equally invisible in the American understanding of the reality of their nation. The Korean War films served to confirm the viewpoint of the World War II films; that 'Asians', a generic group distinguishable only by their flags, were savage, deceitful and ultimately no match for American individualism. In the screen world America might struggle against 'naturally' inferior Asian enemies who lacked both individuality and courage, but ultimately success was assured. Seen through this filter the American government was a benevolent custodian of the 'authentic' American spirit which stood for truth, justice, equality and above all, democratic freedom. In his analysis of the cultural beliefs with which America entered the Vietnam War, Loren Baritz has said: 'Our national myths showed us that we were good, our technology made us strong, and our bureaucracy gave us standard operating procedure. It wasn't a winning combination.'⁴⁰

The kinds of influences that the Combat/Western genre in film had on American perceptions of masculinity and nationalism demonstrate the fact that while the past may be beyond reach, it has many uses in the politics of the present. Moreover, the way the past was used in these films and the part this may have played in inducing initial popular acceptance of America's entry into the Vietnam War demonstrate how significant a role historical film can have in national agendas. However, while identification and role modelling are clearly involved in the relationship between historical films (as understood in Hollywood mainstream) and their effects on mass audiences, there are other aspects to the socio-historical relationship between film text and audience. Shared cultural understandings about the symbolic translation of national mythology appear to have played a part in the particular way that these films intervened in American popular understanding of the past. Both Australian and American audiences were

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exposed to similar movies and television shows during the period 1945 to 1970 and yet they did not affect Australians in the same way as they did Americans.

While the film heroes like John Wayne might have been boyhood heroes for Australians as well as for Americans there is no evidence that, for Australians, these filmic models of masculinity were conflated with Australian versions of nationalism. In fact, the American national mythology of conquest and expansion that these films promulgated was the antithesis of Australia's Bush Myth and the Anzac Legend which are expressed as narratives of heroic struggle and valiant defeat. This was perhaps the most significant reason for the difference in the interpretation of the meanings the Western/Combat genre had for white Australian and white American audiences. A war myth was at the heart of Australian national (male) identity and it was unlikely that it would be much influenced by memories of a very different iconography. For Americans, the iconography was part of a continuum of film images which were intertwined with national ideology and American masculinity, and the possibility of association of images in memory was much greater. World War II was grafted on to the American national Frontier myth of conquest as an expression of 'manifest destiny'. In fact Hollywood re-cast the conflict as a myth of expansion and military victory – even though most of the battles in the Pacific had been retreats. In cases like this, where the facts didn't fit the myth, the situation could be interpreted through another ideological mould; that of traditional American masculinity. For Australian audiences with a very different cultural construction of national heroes and Australian masculinity, this had the effect of opening up the historical constructions to question because the ideological discourse was not naturalised, and therefore not invisible, for this audience.

Australian obsessions with masculinity were bound up with different icons, particularly the digger and his other manifestations as the bushman, the sportsman, the lifesaver, and the blue-collar ocker. The Anzac, the Australian digger, is an ideal-type; a distillation of important qualities that Australians are thought to hold dear – mateship, equality, bravery, irreverence. He is an icon, an artefact of nationalism – but he was clearly different from the iconic heroes of American movies. Most American film heroes were either too verbally adept for the laconic Australian model, too obvious in their display of heroism for his self-deprecating reticence, too evangelic in their belief in their ideals for his larrikin humour, or too sincere in their nationalism for his anti-authoritarian personality. Because the American combat movie had so frequently used history as a plot device for the display of masculinity and national ideology, these differences in perception as to the construction of the hero had significant effects on how the historical – such as it was – in these films was understood in Australia.

Australians might share the thrill of the Combat movie, the interest in heroic masculinity, the admiration of images of patriarchy triumphant, even the racism of the American

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Western/Combat genre – but they understood them as ‘American’. Even though there was virtually no local film industry between the end of World War II and the Revival Period of the seventies to show Australians images of themselves, particular constructions of the Australian identity were quite entrenched. They circulated in many other ways in popular culture and cultural memory and these constructions were widely understood as signifying ‘Australian-ness’. John Wayne was a hero – but he was not Chips Rafferty. The American Combat movie might have been influential in presenting Australian audiences with a particular version of the past and it might also have been influential in providing role models of masculinities and femininities; it certainly interacted positively with the accumulated wisdom of inherited cultural understandings of human behaviour which operate in popular culture to give (or withhold) validity for certain ideological understandings of how people and society work; but the films did not have the same ideological meaning as they did for their national audiences. In consequence, their structuring of history was widely understood as just that – a view of the past shaped to extol national virtues.

As I have argued elsewhere in this thesis (and as the differences between Australian and American reaction to the Combat/Western genre in the Vietnam War demonstrate) the meanings that film has in popular culture and the ways that it acts as a transmitter of information about the past, are not simply products of the preferred meanings and discourse in the film text. Though very similar in outline, Australian and American societies are quite different in the specifics of their historical and cultural heritages. As William J. Palmer has pointed out ‘American films, no matter how trivial or serious, are always about America’⁴¹ and the American Western/Combat genre films did not connect with national constructions in Australian mythology, nor did they intersect with historical narratives in Australian cultural memory about Australians and war. In fact, it is likely that where these constructions of masculinity, nationalism and World War II did inter-connect with other narratives in Australian popular memory, such connections worked against identification. The memories of the American presence in Australia during World War II and the narratives they generated in popular culture tended overall to specify difference rather than similarity between Australians and Americans. Significant too for the differences in the impact that these filmic constructions had – or failed to have – on frontline troops, is the fact that the Australian experience in Vietnam was generally quite different from that of the Americans.

Not only was the Vietnam War a different physical reality for Australia and America, it was fought differently and had different social meanings. Vietnam was Australia’s most significant commitment of force overseas since World War II, but in terms of the scale of the conflict in Vietnam it was only a small, symbolic force.⁴² Australian objectives were limited and Australian forces were engaged in a specific exercise of the containment and eradication of North Vietnamese troops in Phuoc Tuy Province. About two thirds of Australian troops were

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Regular Army and the force was therefore older and more mixed in ages than was the predominantly teenaged American army; discipline was good and fragging (the killing of unpopular or inefficient officers by their own men) was virtually unknown. A military situation such as this encouraged the soldiers' identification of themselves as *soldiers* – committed to hierarchy, co-operative action and loyalty to the group. It is not surprising in such circumstances that Australians did not identify with the individualism and lone heroics of the Western/Combat genre.

Moreover, Vietnam meant different things in America and Australia. In America commitment to the war was officially presented as a moral crusade against Communism, part of America's manifest destiny. In Australia the familiar notion of 'other people's wars' dominated, even though the Australian government played up the rhetoric of self-defense and tapped into the deep strain of xenophobia and anti-Asian racism in Australia's history. Despite the rhetoric, the Australian population knew that the real reason for Australia's presence in Vietnam was the fact of American involvement. Although this was a more morally ambiguous war than those Australia had fought in before, the Vietnam War did not pose the kind of cultural challenges to Australia's view of itself that it did in America. For America as a nation, the Vietnam War seemed to be the event at the heart of the historical period between the Kennedy era – remembered in popular culture as a time of innocence – and the disgrace of Watergate. The Vietnam War was a rupture in the fabric of the public myth of American nationalism and has since functioned as a metaphor for loss in that culture. For Australians it was yet another war born out of moral obligation and geographical dependency on other nations and has since functioned as a metaphor for the politics of military dependency. This knowledge was encapsulated in a contentious slogan used by Prime Minister Harold Holt 'All the way with LBJ'. Consequently, in Australia there was no strong ideological narrative in popular culture that would encourage a soldier to see his enlistment for service in Vietnam as the kind of masculine crusade and moral sacrifice which might later dispose him to identify with these elements in film heroes from Westerns and Combat movies.

The post-war reputation of Australian troops in official culture was that they were very professional and successful on the whole in achieving the limited aims allocated to them. This does not of course mean that either element in this view is true or uncontested. Australian *civilians* however had trouble differentiating the Australian experiences from the American. American film constructions of the crazy, dangerous Vietnam veteran became the way that large sections of the Australian public understood the Australian situation as well. In fact overall, the ways in which the Vietnam War was remembered in Australia was shaped by American representations of an experience which was quite different in a great many ways from that of the Australian troops.

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Even during the war, Australian understanding of the situation was influenced by the American version of the experience. According to Rodney Tiffen 'the performance of the Australian press was overwhelmingly timid' and the Australian public remained ill-informed on crucial issues of the Vietnamese revolution right throughout the war.⁴³ Although the activities of the 1st Australian Task Force were reported they rarely received the prominence that went to the Americans. Not only were the 'big' stories of the war not to be found in Phuoc Tuy, but the American forces were more open in their dealings with the media and allowed reporters greater access and freedom of movement that did the Australian military.⁴⁴ Limited access to the war zones for Australian television crews meant that in this first television war Australians shared with American audiences a very similar bank of American-oriented images of the war, even before Hollywood began its interpretation.

Television had provided the world with a huge stock of images of the Vietnam War but in a guerrilla war which lacked clear battle lines, television news appeared both piecemeal and incoherent and was, according to Thomas Doherty 'a blizzard of white noise and snow, pointless statistics and random action.'⁴⁵ The nature of the medium which severely limited the amount of verbal explanation, the nature of the conflict, together with the confusion in reporting American search-and-destroy tactics, the lack of reliable means of judging success, and the fragmentation resulting from daily reports all meant that television had been virtually unable to place any coherent narrative shape on the conflict. Hollywood stepped into that void and gave a shape to this largely unstructured visual memory.

The illusionist power of the cinema may create the impression that the Vietnam War films are detailed re-enactments of history (especially the later ones like *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*). The reality is that they are 'highly encoded generic melodramas'⁴⁶ whose meanings are bound up with their ideological perspectives and the ways in which they interpret a recent period of American experience. Another thing belying this illusion is the fact that genre has had an enormous influence on cultural memory through its power to determine which stories will be told, how the narratives will be shaped, what will be emphasised, and what will be ignored. In the ways that Hollywood film shaped popular perceptions of the Vietnam War, it was the generic characteristics of the narrative rather than concern for historical accuracy which had the greater influence in determining how the war would be interpreted. Two quite distinct sub-genres developed – the MIA genre, a back to Nam rescue fantasy, and a series of films that Par Auferhide terms 'the noble grunt films'⁴⁷ – films which attempt to capture something of the perspective of the ordinary combat soldier. Together they reflected two very important social contestations in American society; the POW/MIA issue, and the need to acknowledge and memorialise the experience of Americans who served in Vietnam. While neither of these genres was a particularly appropriate rendition of the American experience, they were hopelessly inadequate as a translation of the Australian experience.

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Dearth of production in Australia has meant that there has been very little in the way of counter narrative of the Australian experience, and the essential translator of the Vietnam experience for Australians has been Hollywood. However, the few Australian films that were made about the Vietnam War do reflect particular historical specificities and resonate with echoes of the socio-political debates and issues of the time. Australia made two miniseries, *Sword Of Honour* and *Vietnam*, both in 1987. Both are based on the stories of families in which a set of representative characters form a microcosm of the complex social currents that intersected and interacted with one another in the Vietnam era. Of the two *Vietnam* is the more extensive, a hybrid of documentary and fiction. It is grounded in the techniques of popular history on film using historically accurate dates and settings, archival footage, and fictional representations of real people, along with the foreground narratives of fictional people, in which drama and a focus on the personal give access to the issues of the era. The epic sweep of the miniseries allows it to explore significant national events like the conscription issue, the youth and sexual 'revolutions' of the sixties, as well as post-war social issues like the effect of the war – seen in the alienation of the son Phil, a conscript, who returns from Vietnam with a mild form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

There was only one major Australian movie of the Vietnam experience, *The Odd Angry Shot* made in 1979 when the Vietnam issue was fresh and raw. Like the majority of American movies, this film deals with the experience of the troops 'in country' and although it follows mainstream cinematic forms, the way in which it interprets the experience is significantly different from the way that the American mainstream product frames its material. *The Odd Angry Shot* signals this difference even in its title. "The odd angry shooters" was (according to Stephen Garton⁴⁸) a nickname given by other returned soldiers to Vietnam veterans, a derisive term belittling the fighting effort of the Vietnam force. As a title, *The Odd Angry Shot* not only summarises the theme of futility that dominates the film but also captures the mode of deliberate understatement seen as typical of the Australian male in dominant constructions of Australian masculinity. Moreover, as a synopsis of Australia's role in Vietnam the title has historical resonances with the feelings of many Australian troops that the professionalism of the Australian regiments was being wasted in futile pursuits. That perception was not necessarily an historical reality, but it is one of the narratives of Australian participation in the Vietnam War which has become part of the cultural memory of the experience.

The Odd Angry Shot is part of an active dialogue between history on film and popular understanding of the past and it both reflected and contributed to the post-war reputation that Australian soldiers were well-trained and superior to their American counterparts. Though the film indicates the presence of national servicemen in the Australian contingent the emphasis was on soldiers in the Regular Army, depicted in the film as men skilled and disciplined in their trade. In *The Odd Angry Shot* the emphasis on the co-operative nature of the action of the unit marks it out as

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different from most American representations. The mateship which is both celebrated and interrogated in the film is thus given a particular context and a *raison d'être* beyond the commercial decision to play on both the male ensemble and ocker traditions in Australian film.

Moreover, many of the psychological effects of PTSD – e.g. the feeling that only another soldier would understand the psychological aftermath of war – can be seen to have origins in not only what the soldiers faced personally but in the ways in which belonging, alienation, friendship, aggression, and grief became bound up with the experience. Contrary to all the movies in which the John Wayne-style solitary hero of American mythology undertakes some preposterous military mission, the unit and the combined interaction of units is the essential element of modern battle doctrine. As Leo Crawley, a former infantry squad leader in Vietnam points out, there is almost no human activity as intensely social as modern warfare.⁴⁹ In complete contrast to the foregrounded heroics and feats of strength of the male lead in American movies of the Vietnam conflict, the historical reality of war is that courage has little value or relevance when the artillery, fired from miles away, kills and maims indiscriminately.

The Odd Angry Shot shows war as bloody and terrible, where both friend and foe scream in pain and weep in loss, and where living or dying in combat is very much a matter of chance. In the course of the movie men who feature in the film text, screen personas with whom the audience have established relationships, are wounded and die in battle. But this is not made the occasion for filmic spectacle in the name of realism or used as shock attacks on the sensibilities of the audience. While the way in which the film text gives attention to the details of combat manoeuvres creates suspense and the sense of danger, these sequences are not set up as a prelude to a spectacular death scene. Death is haphazard, unexpected when it comes. The audience, like the soldiers in the field, suddenly find themselves confronted with a terrible spectacle of a badly wounded or dying man while their attention has been directed elsewhere. One sequence in particular brings this home to the audience. A routine search mission unexpectedly encounters the enemy and one of the unit is seriously wounded in the chest. The fact that the film accurately depicts the battle tactics used in by the Australian army in Phuoc Tuy turns the filmic reconstruction of the ambush that follows into one of the more harrowing and least sanitised scenes in movies of this kind. The screams of the dying man, the panic, the frantic and futile attempts to save his life, ensure that combat appears more shocking than heroic, more haphazard than glorious.

Scenes like this (and the climactic one in which Bung is killed by 'the odd angry shot') are intense – but they are not the central concern of the cinematic narrative. Rather, they act as dramatic high points, in many ways paralleling the reality of combat experience of most soldiers. The film challenges the myth of 'heroic' battle, emphasising instead the non-heroic routine of the day to day. In this text, the ordinariness of the soldier's life, the oppression of the banal in things like the constant fight against tinea, the boredom of army food, and the loneliness, constitute their own

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brand of heroism. Most soldiers drink heavily, a representation which intersects with the historical evidence that alcoholism (rather than the abuse of other drugs) was a problem amongst Australian troops in Vietnam. The drinking rituals, the, verbal competitiveness and sexual banter are clearly a balm for loneliness, the ritual nature of mateship providing a setting that simultaneously establishes and disguises intimacy.⁵⁰

In conveying to an audience a tangible sense of conditions for Australian troops in Vietnam, the film uses both fiction (in the sense of imaginary events) and the filmic devices of invention, compression and metaphor which Rosenstone⁵¹ sees as essential in that media as a way of suggesting larger historical ideas and pressures. For example, there is a sequence in the film in which a friendly interaction between the Australians and an American unit disintegrates into a melee and free for all. In a film which does not construct war as glamorous and full of action, the game is clearly represented as a distraction from the tension between boredom and extreme danger in the combat zone. And despite the fact that the incident is constructed as a piece of ocker comedy, it acts as a metaphor for Australian competitiveness with Americans. Though the incident is an invention, it is true to the spirit of numerous accounts from Australian veterans and others who reported the Australian experience in Vietnam. American Peter Bourne for example, a psychiatrist who was attached to the Australian forces in 1966, noted that Australian forces seemed to suffer from isolation and resented their marginal status. In his book *Men, Stress, and Vietnam* he quotes a saying about inter-cultural relations in Phuoc Tuy. 'The Vietnamese hate the Americans. The Americans hate the Vietnamese. Americans hate other Americans. The local Chinese are hated by the both the Vietnamese and the Americans. The Australians hate everybody.'⁵²

According to Jane Ross Australian troops were critical of technical aspects of the US military performance and there was 'intense feeling' that the whole war in Phuoc Tuy was between the diggers and the Viet Cong.⁵³ While this pride in the standards of the Australian army cemented bonds within the units, it also fanned resentment towards other troops and authorities at home. Though the action of the film takes place in Vietnam, the film also places the war in a political context of attitudes in the civilian population. Much of the comment is given to Harry, who sees things through the resigned cynicism of a man for whom the army is a perverse alternative to a failed relationship and an uneasy place in civilian life. He voices his (and the film's) understanding that the war is being fought by the lower classes and that the troops are pawns in a political game. Though the soldiers carry out their duty with a great deal of professionalism, many of them are aware that their efforts mean little to anybody. They are making little difference to the outcome of the war, even though they see their friends die in the effort. Bung asks Harry the question 'Why are we here then?' In a film like this one, there can be no satisfactory answer. Harry gives him a surreal response that nevertheless encompasses both the nobility and confusion of the role of Australia's military force in Vietnam:

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You're a soldier, the same as every other silly prick in this tossed-up fucked-up never-come-down-land, and that's why you're here, because there's no one else and everyone's gotta be somewhere and you're here, so get used to it.

As *The Odd Angry Shot* represents the historical situation, many Australian soldiers felt alienated and isolated, believing that the civilian population either didn't care or actively rejected their role. One such reference in the film text alluded to the refusal of the wharfies to load supply ships for Vietnam, and another to anti-war demonstrations which were obviously disturbing and which loom so large in the memories of many veterans. According to Jane Ross the soldiers tended to see the 'lefties' rather than the politicians as responsible for the ambivalence in Australian support of Australian troops in Vietnam.⁵⁴ Peter Cochrane has argued that although there was never the level of opposition in Australia to the Vietnam War that existed in America, the demonstrators were the peers of many of the Vietnam troops, both regular Army and National Service recruits and in dress and actions this group seemed to be rejecting the warrior tradition and masculine ethos that the soldiers represented and that many espoused.⁵⁵

By 1979 some of the disappointment with post-war treatment of the returned troops was beginning to be felt in society and the likelihood of this situation arising is foreshadowed in the film text. Many soldiers in the film express a naïve belief in the kind of government benevolence that they would receive as gratitude for their services in war. It is not so much the nature of the belief that is emphasised, but the degree of expectation that parallels the understanding in popular culture that veterans of all wars were treated better than they in fact were. The final scene in the movie supports yet another (mostly erroneous) understanding in cultural memory, namely that troops were returned to Australia with no recognition. This is a better understanding of the situation in America than in Australia. In America soldiers were regularly sent individually as replacements and were returned in the same way when their tour of duty ended. In Australia this certainly did happen and it, like the opposition from anti-war protestors, figures strongly in the collective memories of many returned servicemen. However the overwhelming evidence is that the troops generally returned with their units and paraded through the streets. Thus the final scene of *The Odd Angry Shot* reflects a myth of cultural memory which is in keeping with the discourse of the rest of the movie; that the entire effort was futile and that the population as a whole, as Harry puts it in the vernacular, 'didn't give a rat's arse'.

The film leaves the audience with an uneasy picture of the returned veteran and his place in society. In this respect it meshes with representations in American society where, especially after the revelations of the My Lai massacre in 1968, the veteran was often looked on as a violent psychotic, a baby killer, a drug addict, and/or a malcontent of one form or another. In the years following the war images of crazed, gun-wielding Vietnam veterans going berserk in

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civilian society became a common theme in newspaper reports, books, television, and films about the war. In Australia this image was superimposed on those resident in communal memory as a result of press and television images originating in America during the war, and became a commonly-held perception of both the war and its effects on those who fought it.

If film does act as William J. Palmer suggests – as a text which interacts with issues in society (a view this thesis supports) – then America was a nation with an enormous problem in dealing with the visible reminders of the Vietnam War, the Vietnam veterans now returned to civilian life. Palmer points out that the surface texts of films are constructed out of a limited number of conventional modes of discourse as plots and conventions of genre. But the subtexts consist of socio-historical discourses or themes which are focussed on issues and contexts such as politics, social consciousness, revisionist history, or moral messages.⁵⁶ In post-Vietnam War America the veteran walked out of the warscape of the television news reportage into the community, and unlike the veteran of World War II he was not a hero, not a sign of America's greatness but a sign of American defeat, social unrest, and confusion of ideals. As Eben J. Muse puts it:

They wandered through our streets, into our homes and among our families; whereas in the fifties anyone you knew might be a Communist, in the sixties he might be a veteran who could suddenly burst out in uncontrollable violence. Those who doubted the danger the veteran represented were reprimanded by the occasional and celebrated outbursts by vets who had failed to adjust to civilian life, who found it impossible to resume their previous lives or who failed to reject the violence they had been forced to embrace (or eagerly embraced) in the War.⁵⁷

Hollywood paraded before its audiences an extraordinary array of disturbed veterans, shattered and transformed by the experience of war. The Vietnam-made-man was cast as the social misfit, the outcast, the disturbed homeless drifter, the crazed psychopath, the avenger, the staple of the biker film, the vigilante who uses his training to save his town/family/friends/others – until finally he emerged as *Rambo*. There is a curious tension in these films between the notion of violence that purifies society and the violence that tears it apart, an ambiguous situation reflecting the ambiguous status of the veteran. In the early eighties *Rambo - First Blood* introduced John Rambo, a hippie he-man cross between an Apache and a Hell's Angel – all pumped-up muscle, dreamy eyes and a deeply wounded soul. Rambo's plea for tolerance appealed across the board. He was a hero and a victim, and when he is taken away to prison at the end of the film, it is clearly for our sins.

His less haunted equivalent was Thomas Magnum, a private investigator in the series *Magnum P.I.* set in Hawaii. But even Magnum had frequent flashbacks and often exuded a brooding melancholy that had something mysterious to do with both Vietnam and a lost love. These two

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heroes along with *Simon and Simon* a detective duo of two brothers, one who had been in Vietnam and the other who had been against the war, began a re-visioning of the war and the place of the veteran in society. These versions of the returned veteran were really not about veterans but narratives in various genres with subtexts that reflected truths about America's problems with the Vietnam War itself.

For most Australians, and for many Americans, Hollywood's narratives of the War were far from the truth. Though readjustment was probably a difficult time but for most veterans of the Vietnam War in both Australia and America, most Australian veterans re-established their lives and according to Jane Ross the typical veteran – in the sense of being the most commonly occurring case – is likely (in 1990) to be 'a reasonably adjusted, forty-year-old with two children and a mortgage'.⁵⁸ This view is supported by Jeff Grey⁵⁹ and also by Ian McNeill⁶⁰ both of whom argue that most veterans in Australia lead stable, productive lives and that the incidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is far lower in Australia than it is in America. Nevertheless, the stereotype of the 'troubled veteran' has become a recognisable figure in Australian popular memory. Steven Garton has argued that even though revisionist historians distinguish Australian from American military experience, it is fruitless to make such distinctions when:

...the cultural context of return for Australians was shaped as much by American influences as Australian. It is impossible to entirely disentangle the Australian 'memory' of Vietnam from the American when so many American stories gained ready acceptance and popularity in Australia. Australians, veterans and non-veterans, consumed the wider American story of disenchantment, and it is this that frames memories of rejection.⁶¹

Jeffrey Grey makes the same point explicitly when he says that the 'uncomfortable place' of the Vietnam veteran in Australian society is due in part to the diverse nature of Australian involvement and 'more importantly' to 'the impact of American views and experiences of the veteran, the war, and America's place in it'. He sees this as having 'directly shaped' attitudes expressed by the media, those held in popular culture and those of particular groups of veterans.⁶²

Stories of rejection elide easily into stories of the veteran as outcast, and the representation in American film has been supported in the popular culture by the media attention in Australia given to instances of veteran violence. The complex circularity of life and reportage, stories and images, has had the effect of privileging the sensational, distorting the situation and in turn producing and amplifying such constructions. As Stephen Garton has noted, when a veteran was accused of a crime (especially of a violent crime) newspaper reports always drew attention to the veteran status of the offender. Even if the offence was a minor thing like shoplifting, a connection was made between the offence and service in Vietnam. The *Australian* declared that many veterans, especially those who had been exposed to Agent Orange, were marked by violent reactions and suicide.⁶³

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Jane Ross says that the image of the Australian veteran of the Vietnam War was 'non existent' in the years following the war until the Vietnam Veterans Association (VVA) and the Agent Orange issue established it clearly in Australian consciousness.⁶⁴ She agrees that prior to this happening, the image was filled out by acceptance of the construction of the veteran in American popular culture. Such easy acceptance was built on the stock of shared media images generated from the American coverage of the war and on the lack of differentiation in popular understanding between American and Australian experiences. Here, as in the case of the American heroes of the Combat genre and their influence on society discussed earlier, the ways in which the Vietnam veteran was understood in popular culture and the way that the war was remembered was very much the result of the interactions that occurred between the images and discourses in the film text and the kinds of narratives and negotiation that occurred in popular culture. Whereas in the case of the Western/Combat genre national inflections in the construction of the hero worked *against* acceptance of the ideological messages of the films, *lack of national inflection* in understanding of the Vietnam War in Australia created a situation which fostered acceptance of the images, messages and the way the past was shaped in the American film texts. In both cases popularly circulating ideological constructions of the meanings of the Vietnam War, together with images and narratives in other texts particularly in the popular media, played an important role in constructing the dominant perceptions.

Moreover, although the veteran community has never been a monolithic entity, the VVA has been particularly successful in focussing media attention on its claims that Vietnam veterans suffered a disproportionate share of war-caused problems because of the nature of the combat. In doing so they have added to popular perceptions gained from films that the Vietnam War was less like the kind of rite-of-passage common in World War II Combat films and more like a lifetime scarification of the psyche. The whole area of post traumatic stress is highly contentious in Australia, all the more so because the issue has become entangled with another; claims about chemically-induced disorders through exposure to toxic herbicides. Though many veterans of other wars have returned home suffering myriad symptoms of depression and anxiety, and though the general population is sympathetic and repatriation authorities are willing to accept psychological disorders as pensionable, some veterans (and the VVA as a group) reject the notion that the cause of the stress is internal. Against a huge volume of evidence that, except in insolated cases, Australian soldiers did not have contact with toxic herbicides the VVA have pursued a case claiming that the causes of veterans' problems lie outside themselves due to the special conditions of the war and particularly through contact with Agent Orange.

Stephen Garton speculates as to the reasons why, when the ostensible aim is to obtain benefits for its members and when the claims of psychological damage usually meet with such success, this association would pursue such a difficult course of action. Certainly there is still a degree

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of prejudice in the community towards psychiatric illness whatever its origin. Whether it is called shell shock, war neurosis, battle fatigue, or post traumatic stress syndrome, the fact that it affects certain soldiers and not others lays its victims open to the often unspoken stigma of failure of masculinity. Stephen Garton's conjecture about the reasons behind the Vietnam veterans' desire to seek a cause outside themselves is that in doing so they were 'proclaiming their innocence' – claiming to be victims of a particular kind of warfare, making a statement of principle that in the situation of supposed community neglect they were worthy to be part of the Anzac tradition.⁶⁵ I am entirely in agreement with Garton when he says that by disavowing stress reactions the veterans were also making a claim that they were not the psychopathic failures of myth.⁶⁶ As with the effects of movies on some of the American soldiers in Vietnam, this is another situation in which the way historical film shaped narratives of the past has had significant impact on the present. These historical fictions have created a space for the symbolic contestation of issues in the present. Both situations illustrate Palmer's idea of historical film as a holograph of history. In both cases Hollywood has not only recorded a version of the past but in doing so has participated in the construction of social history.

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Hollywood did however find ways of coming to terms with the war and the veteran which were both commercially successful and psychologically satisfying. Hollywood rewrote a role for a movie favourite, the special forces soldier, now returned veteran who re-fights the war in a back-to-Nam fantasy with a better ending. In this ending the answer to Rambo's question. "Do we get to win this time?" is definitely "yes". He beats 'them dam commies' – and the bureaucrats – and whoever else appeared as the reason for preventing American victory. The special forces soldier defies both logic and historical reality to function as the generic hero for whom no feat of daring is impossible. This would be simply a harmless fantasy if it were not repeated in innumerable versions giving, by its repetition, a sense of authority to historical misinformation in the same way as the cowboy hero of the Western represented historical reality for generations not provided with any accessible counter narrative in popular culture. In the Vietnam War films, in movies like *Apocalypse Now*, *The Deer Hunter* and *Rambo* the use of the special forces soldier as the protagonist not only represents a fantasy of a nation with a fetish for the skills of the warrior, but also fills the generic role of the super-hero-fighting-machine with popular stars like Martin Sheen, Robert DeNiro, and Sylvester Stallone. Continuing the ideological identification between war and masculinity in the World War II Combat films, these stars signify 'real men' and war as an occupation for 'real men'. In this way these films propound two more historically misleading myths. Firstly they side-step emotive issues surrounding the draft and the sending of boys to war by suggesting that the wartime presence of boys in their late teens was the exception rather than the rule⁶⁷. Secondly, by recasting the trauma and disorientation of war into a rite of passage, they promulgate one form of a cultural

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mythology of masculinity that flies in the face of the experience of the very significant proportion of former combatants who suffer from some form of post traumatic stress.⁶⁸

But more importantly for film as an influence on cultural memory, the structuring of Vietnam War narratives around the movie myth of the lone combatant masks significant realities of the historical situation of the Vietnam War with respect to the technologies of war possessed by each side. Americans, according to Crawley, like to think that the technological and material advantages of war are on the enemy's side, a situation which makes their moral choices and victory all the more admirable.⁶⁹ But in Vietnam the situation was hideously reversed. In the Vietnam War movie, a focus on a solitary hero operating alone using cunning, daring, and stealth rather than B52s, napalm, and frag bombs⁷⁰, does tend to reverse the situation somewhat. In the war made digestible on film, the Americans rather than the Vietnamese are the guerrilla fighters; the Americans fight with the partisans rather than against them; America plays fair, man against man, rather than through loads of bombs raining down from B52s flying so high that they could never be seen, only heard. In its filmic representation, the Vietnam War is generally portrayed as being fought in jungles where these differences between the technological capabilities of the two opposing sides are more or less nullified. In film the combat is all fair and equal – just the way it wasn't in reality. Because these films tend to match most of the others in their degree of historical verisimilitude, presenting a partial representation based on the limited perspective of the individual infantry soldier involved in jungle warfare, the internal consistency of the body of Vietnam War films gives a degree of authority to the erroneous and a-historic idea of military missions being completed by single warrior-heroes as a normal and chivalrous method of conducting a war.

Whilst films like *Rambo* do not become popular just because they are cultural reflections of currently significant political topics, I have to agree with those authors who see connections between a body of film and issues in society – particularly on issues like these. This is the finding of Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud, who developed a chronology of salient events occurring in the U.S., Vietnam and other areas around the world as a way of contextualising American fiction and documentary film dealing with the Vietnam War and its effects.⁷¹ Though they do not see a direct correspondence between the events of a given year and the films produced directly before and after, the chronology does suggest reciprocation.

One noteworthy correlation appears to be between those films with a narrative interest in vengeance and heroic rescue and the increasing debate over U.S. intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean. They sum the relationship up as:

Overall the contextualisation shows that even when films are masked as retrospective historic narratives, they embody values that prove influential in current and subsequent debate.⁷²

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In *M.I.A. or Mythmaking In America*⁷³ H. Bruce Franklin goes further. In his controversial study of how and why, with so little validating evidence and a huge body of evidence to the contrary⁷⁴, so many Americans believed that American POWs were being held in Indochina he sees a more direct correspondence between Hollywood's MIA films and popular understanding. By 1976, the House Select Committee investigating claims that Americans were still being held in either Vietnam or Laos had determined that of the thirty-six men credibly thought to be missing throughout Indochina, there was evidence of capture in only eleven cases. Of these six, were known to have died and there was no evidence that four of the others had survived later than 1969. Total missing – one, and that man was identified in their final report as a collaborator.⁷⁵ Yet in a 1991 poll done by *The Wall Street Journal /NBC News* 69% of the people surveyed believed that Americans are still prisoners of war in Southeast Asia and 52% believed that the government was not doing enough to get them back.⁷⁶ This enormous difference between official findings and public belief does not of course validate one against the other. However, it does indicate the persuasive power of elements in popular culture – news reports, books, magazines, films etc. in influencing popular opinion to one side in the public contestation over what is a sensational and emotive issue. Among them Franklin sees film as particularly important. As he sees the situation:

The story of heroic American prisoners abandoned in Southeast Asia could not become a major American myth until the Hollywood dream factory geared up the assembly line for mass production of the images.⁷⁷

The case Franklin makes for the use of the POW/MIA issue as an emotive element of the increasingly conservative political situation in America in the seventies and eighties and the accompanying retreat from détente, is well supported by political historians. The relationship of the MIA films to political conservatism and the MIA issue is also supported by historians interested in the way the issue was represented on film particularly in the case of *The Deer Hunter*. The POW/MIA issue rose to prominence in the late sixties, and its use at that time can be reasonably understood as part of the political agenda – emotional support after damning revelations about Vietnam in 1968 (Tet, details of American War Crimes, My Lai, Con Son Island). Ostensibly because of Vietnam's failure to account for all American combatants missing in Indochina, America had refused to formalise relations with Vietnam and had used its veto in the United Nations in 1976 to block Vietnam's UN membership.⁷⁸ Such is the contestation over the meaning of the war that this move was, and is, understood by various groups as a just action against a sadistic and peevish enemy and, conversely, as a punishment for winning the war meted out to Vietnam by a humiliated (but still powerful) loser. Until recently the POW/MIA issue remained the official reason behind American policies which placed a trade embargo on Vietnam and also kept that country from obtaining loans from the World Bank.⁷⁹ Consequently, when MIA films like *The Deer Hunter*, the *Rambo* series or any of the Chuck Norris comic book style of action genre films are cited in this

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historical context, it is difficult to see them as anything other than participations in the construction of historical mythology.

The spate of MIA films coincided with a period of historical revisionism in the Academy⁸⁰ and though that form of history lent authority to the ideological positions of the films, the films appealed on a more human level, solving on screen things beyond human endeavour. The impossibility that these films appealed to was a deep desire for the dead be alive; but the films also provided a mythic re-fighting of the Vietnam War where the Americans were still the heroes who fought with altruism which was rewarded by success. As John Hellmann writes:

myths may always be debunked as falsifications of reality. But simplification is their strength, since only by ignoring the great mass of infinite data can we identify essential order...Myth...can have a powerful role in compelling people to defy rational limits and change facts.⁸¹

The great strength of myth, besides its ability to achieve cultural solutions impossible in reality, is its ability to develop consensus by extreme over-simplification. *The Deer Hunter*, released in 1978 when President Carter was publicly pulling back from détente, was the first of the films to use the Vietnam War era as a period and a setting in order to construct the parables that reinterpret the Vietnam War experience in the context of the developing climate of opinion in the later 1970s and 1980s, a period of decline in the American economic and political hegemony throughout most of the world. *The Deer Hunter* is a film where the theme reveals the developing conservative climate of America in the seventies with a return to Cold War stereotypes – Russian roulette, Oriental decadence, Communist torture.⁸²

According to Franklin, *The Deer Hunter* succeeded not only in radically re-imagining the war but in transforming POWs into crucial symbols of American manhood.⁸³ As he sees the film the re-imagining was a quite conscious process involving a deliberate re-staging of the pivotal images of the Vietnam War, reconstructing the past so as to make Americans the victims and the Vietnamese the perpetrators of atrocities. In this reversal of meaning, the central metaphor of the sadistic Viet Cong forcing their prisoners to play Russian Roulette with a loaded revolver is framed so as to match precisely the sequence seen by millions of Americans in which the Chief of the Saigon secret police assassinates an NFL prisoner. Other images like the bodies falling from the helicopter and the captives in the tiger cages are, this time, images of Americans at the mercy of their demonic captors, not the other way round. Moreover, the opening sequence in which as a special forces soldier (Robert DeNiro) shoots a uniformed Vietnamese soldier who has thrown a grenade into an underground shelter full of women and children and then mown down a woman and her baby, is a reversal of the pictures of the My Lai massacre printed in *Life* magazine.

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From the point of view of the movie industry the MIA films overcame the problems of representation for the Vietnam War and permitted the whole production to veer into fantasy, allowing all the fantasy associations with the hero to be explored in an ever more violent and spectacular way. Stars like Chuck Norris and Gene Hackman contributed the macho-men images of the Vietnam War rescue fantasy, the format of which reached its apotheosis in *Rambo – First Blood Part II*. Although the Vietnam War in the Chuck Norris/Van Damme versions is little more than an exotic location for bad actors with big muscles to do a great deal of mega-macho stuff, and even though the critics have labelled them 'mindless', the new opportunities for violence and the display of the fetishised male body meant that a new sub-genre with historical messages about POW/MIAs as a subtext became a distinctive feature of American culture.

It is highly doubtful that anyone in the cinema thought that the audience was viewing a serious representation of history. But as Rafael Samuel has pointed out, knowledge is gained in unusual ways and from unusual sources, and the ideological messages of the films helped create historical illusions that time could well set into definite memories. These films reduce the complexity of the Vietnam War era to the morality of soldiering and re-fight the war back into the national historical mythology. The justification for America's action is a noble one that comes straight from the tradition of the Founding Fathers – America's role as the champion of democracy, saving Asians from Communist domination. In no way is there any form of recognition that the war was not an accident – but rather the historical outgrowth of longstanding French and American imperialistic policies. The Vietnamese and other Third World people are stereotyped and dehumanised 'others' in much the same way as they appeared a generation earlier in World War II Combat movies. The civil war aspect of the conflict is glossed over, and where it is essential to the action it is structured as Americans helping less-bad-Orientals fight really-bad-Orientals. Cumulatively the MIA films create the illusion that America actually won in battle but was cheated of the victory because of either political manoeuvring or lack of support on the home front – or both. As Rambo says, 'We could have won the war but they wouldn't let us'.

No American film can be oblivious to the general turmoil that the war created in American society, and the tone of bruised innocence or defiant outrage in the various MIA films feeds into the now generally accepted position that the war was a tragic mistake – for America. The horrific cost to Vietnam and the Vietnamese is nowhere to be seen. The Vietnam War, known in Vietnam as the American War, was the longest single war of the 20th century; it produced seven million displaced persons, one-third of the population of South Vietnam; it saw a Third World country pounded by the greatest volume of firepower the world had ever seen; it caused personal and environmental devastation on an unprecedented scale. According to Gabriel Kolko the war precipitated a forced urbanisation which was 'the most brutal and disorienting that a large Third World nation had ever

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experienced'.⁸⁴ It was America's most challenging military experience ever and its first defeat; and it produced in America a profound questioning of national morality that is still reverberating throughout America today. Very little, if any, of this appears in even the most anti-war of the Hollywood representations.

The conservative political stance of the mythic re-visioning of the Vietnam War seen in this genre demonstrates precisely the function of myth as described by Levi-Strauss. Historically the period 'was a watershed in American politics – a period of opposition to the war and to the world view that sustained it – as well as of challenge to the economic inequalities at home'.⁸⁵ Yet the various ways that Hollywood historical narratives shaped perceptions of this episode of the past reconciled these ambiguities and contradictions in society by ignoring them. In comparison with some of the films of the alternative 'noble grunt' genre that developed somewhat later, there is no sense in the MIA films of the anti-war movement or of the dominance that it gained for a few years in America. The foregrounded heroics of the white male hero in the MIA genre also ignored the fact that most soldiers didn't want to be in Vietnam at all and that some actually opposed the war. Moreover this new form of guts-and-glory, while it reflected and contributed to a particular form of mythology about the war, did little to memorialise the perceptions of those 2.15 million who went to Vietnam and the 1.6 million who were in combat.

Like the majority of American World War II Combat movies, the Vietnam War movies rewrote the historical war into an action-adventure genre set in an exotic and exciting location in the past. The movies provided a symbolic space in which social contestations over the past could be played out as a series of narratives vying for precedence amongst all the other elements involved in the formulation of cultural memory. As social texts the movies reflected and even structured many of the anxieties within society over the numerous unsettled aspects of the war and its meaning. They responded, to different emphases in issues at the forefront of social concern as the World War II Combat movies had done at different points in their own history as cultural artefacts. Such response was generally a part of the subtext and the discourse while surface codes conformed to mainstream expectations.

For Australians, while differences in cultural narratives had allowed most of the national audience to see the ideological discourses of the American Combat genre as American constructions of their own versions of history, there was very little in the way of cultural narrative about Australia's role in the Vietnam War to challenge the American construction of the experience. The only Australian film which dealt with Australia's role in the Vietnam War made differences between the Australian and American experience in Vietnam quite clear in the narrative and visual construction. The two more extensive miniseries placed the war in a social context and, while they stayed close to the historical record and the particulars of the Australian experience of the era, they did little to suggest that the combat experience of Australian troops was different from that of the Americans. If

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anything they tended to reinforce the American version of youth rebellion, divided families, anti-war protests, etc. as major tropes of cultural memory, because historically the process in Australia and America followed similar pathways. The significant differences that Ann Curthoys points out⁸⁶ were not the kinds of things that readily lent themselves to the processes of condensation and metaphor which Rosenstone sees as major parts of the language of historical film. There was just too little produced in Australia about the Vietnam War for this to become more than a possible strand of counter narrative in the face of the volume of filmic material from America. While it is likely that both Australian and American audiences understood the MIA films as fantasies the discourse of the lone vet betrayed by his country built on other discourses in society, which encouraged both societies to see the Vietnam veteran as more likely than not to be a victim of a special set of circumstances which made him at best an outcast, at worst a threat.

War is, for any society, a major rupture in connections between past and present. Although modern audiences are becoming more sophisticated in their understanding and consumption of film, film is responding by becoming more high tech in its mechanisms of reproducing the apparently palpable. It is little wonder that the combination of significant events like war and the ever increasing ability of film to convince audiences that they are at last gaining that transparent window on the past, should have made films about war a highly significant site for social negotiation and the construction of social memory.

¹ Thomas Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p.286

² Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*. p.2.

³ J. Hoberman, 'Vietnam: The Remake', in Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (Eds.), *Remaking History*, Dia Art Foundation Discussions of Contemporary Culture No 4., Bay Press, Seattle, 1989, p.194.

⁴ The frontier myth is best known in the classic articulation by Fredrick Turner in his 1893 lecture, *The significance of the frontier in American history*. For a modern analysis of the significance of the frontier myth for American memory in the twentieth century see Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*, Antheum, New York, 1992.

⁵ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*. Morrow; New York, 1985 & 1998, 1998 Edition, p.52

⁶ Richard Slotkin, 'Gunfighters and green berets: *The Magnificent Seven* and the myth of counter-insurgency', *Radical History Review*, 44, Spring, 1989, p.67.

⁷ Philip Caputo, *A Rumour of War*. Ballantine, New York, 1977, p.100.

⁸ Caputo, *A Rumour of War*, p.8.

⁹ Caputo, *A Rumour of War*. p.255.

¹⁰ Mark Baker, *Nam*, Berkley Books, New York, 1981, p.23.

¹¹ Michael Herr, *Dispatches*. Picador, London, 1978.

¹² Ron Kovic, *Born on the Fourth of July*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976, p.44.

¹³ Gustav Hasford, *The Short-Timers*. Bantam, New York, 1980.

¹⁴ See Richard Dyer, *Stars*. British Film Institute, London, 1979. and Richard Dyer, 'Stars as Signs' in Tony Bennett et al,(Eds.), *Popular Television and Film*. London. BFI, 1981, pp.236-269.

¹⁵ John Wayne's influence has been extraordinary over a very long period. Although Wayne had never served in the military, General MacArthur thought he was the model of an American soldier; the Marines gave him their 'Iron Mike' award; and the Veterans of Foreign Wars gave him their gold medal. For 25 of 26 years, from 1949 to 1974, John Wayne made the top ten in distributors list of stars with commercial appeal, and he was in the top four 19 times. In 1993 he came second in a sample poll of 1,000 Americans which asked 'Who is your favourite Star?' In 1995, he was number one, receiving twice the number of votes of the number two contender, Mel Gibson – and Wayne had been dead for 16 years!

¹⁶ David Harris, *Our War: What We Did In Vietnam And What it Did To Us*, Times Books, Random House, New York and Toronto, 1996, p.43.

¹⁷ Harris, *Our War: What We Did In Vietnam And What it Did To Us*, p.42.

¹⁸ Overwhelmingly representations of the Vietnam War represent the perspectives of white working and middle class Americans. In the 'Afterword' to *Memphis, Nam Sweden: The Story of A Black Deserter*, Jeff Loeb notes that as of 1977, of the nearly 1000 memoirs of the Vietnam war only seven are authored by African-Americans. In addition there are only three novels by African-American veterans, Terry Whitmore, *Memphis, Nam Sweden: The Story of A Black Deserter – as told to Richard Loeb*. University Press of Mississippi, 1997 Edition.

¹⁹ Geoffrey O'Brien, *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century*, W. Norton & Company, New York, 1993 p.25.

²⁰ Raphael Samuel & Paul Thomson, *The Myths We Live By*. Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p.7.

²¹ Herr, *Dispatches*, pp.116–117.

²² Ralph R. Donald, 'Masculinity and machismo in Hollywood's War Films', in Steve Craig (Ed.), *Men Masculinity and the Media*. Sage Publications, Newbury Park, London, 1992, pp.124–136, p.125

²³ David Harris, *Our War: What We Did In Vietnam And What it Did To Us*, p.43

²⁴ While many theorists consider the act of watching a movie to be passive, like a dream or a trance, that position does not sufficiently take into account other research that shows that the very act of following a movie involves audience members in a complementary and very active mental state *at the same time*, I have therefore used the term 'attentive states' to describe this process.

²⁵ This is linked to the codes of realism used in the films. Very few, if any, Second World War film dealt with death and mutilation in a way that departed from accepted codes. certainly not in the way that *Hamburger Hill* broke with convention in relation to the Vietnam War. This fact is strongly acknowledged in Stephen Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* where the harrowing first 25 minutes is devoted to a kind of realism which is designed to narrow that space between filmic representation and audience experience.

²⁶ Donald, 'Masculinity and Machismo in Hollywood's War Films' p.124.

²⁷ See Norma Pecora, 'Superman /Superboys/Supermen: The Comic Book Hero As Socializing Agent', In Steve Craig (Ed.), *Men, Masculinity and the Media* Sage Publications, Newbury Park London, 1992, p.61–78.

²⁸ Pecora, 'Superman /Superboys/Supermen', p.62.

²⁹ Sexual competency also ranks amongst the core but, in 50's films, because of the restrictions of the Production Code, this aspect was generally intimated rather than displayed.

Stouffer, S. A., Lumsdaine, et al., 'Masculinity and the role of the combat soldier', in D. S. David & R. Brannon (Eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role*. Addison-Wesley, Boston, 1976, pp.179–183.

³⁰ Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*, p.274.

³¹ International events with arguably different antecedents, like the general turmoil occasioned by the withdrawal of Colonial powers in Southeast Asia, the Chinese Revolution in 1949, the crushing of the Hungarian revolt in 1956, the Berlin wall, the Cuban Missile Crisis, appeared as historical proof of the threat of Communism to all those not strong enough to resist it.

³² Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: masculinity and movies in the fifties*. Indiana University Press Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1997, p.xii.

³³ Eben J. Muse, *The Land Of Nam: The Vietnam War in American Film*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc, Lanham, Md. & London, 1995, p.17.

³⁴ Gilbert Adair, *Hollywood's Vietnam: From The Green Berets to Full Metal Jacket*, Heinemann, London, 1989, p.8.

³⁵ Eben J. Muse (p.19) points out that some of the films that appeared just as America negotiated a peace with Korea, raised questions about the nature of war itself and about America's 'manifesto destiny'. He sees later Korean War films like *Pork Chop Hill* 1959, *War Hunt* 1962, *The Hook* 1963 and *War Is Hell*

1963, as raising questions about whether America's commitment was as historically preordained as it had at first appeared.

³⁶ Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1982

³⁷ During the fifties and sixties attendance at movies declined as a result of the impact of television. Whereas movie going had previously been a pastime of families and a range of ages, during this time those demographics changed and more and more of the audience was composed of teenage males. See Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice*, Routledge, London & New York, Second Edition, 1993, p.96.

³⁸ Jeffrey Grey, 'Vietnam, Anzacs and the veteran,' in Peter Pierce, Jeff Doyle & Jeffrey Grey, *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam*. Penguin Books, Australia, 1991, pp.63–96, p.63.

³⁹ Muse, *The Land Of Nam: The Vietnam War in American Film*. p.16.

⁴⁰ Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Vulture Led Us into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*. p.54.

⁴¹ William J. Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1993, p.9.

⁴² Although 46,852 Australian military personnel served in Vietnam over the period of the conflict, this total commitment fell short of the 58,000 Americans actually killed in battle. At its peak strength the Australian Military presence in Vietnam numbered only 8300 persons. In total some 500 Australians lost their lives and 2398 were wounded. By comparison some 2,700,000 Americans were involved in active service in Vietnam, and besides the death toll, 300,000 were wounded.

⁴³ Rodney Tiffen, 'News coverage of Vietnam' in Peter King (Ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australian in the Second Indo-China War*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp.165–187, p.187.

⁴⁴ Jeffery Grey, 'Vietnam, Anzac and the Veteran', p.79

⁴⁵ Doherty, *Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture and World War II*, p.297.

⁴⁶ Michael Klein, 'Historical Memory, Film, And The Vietnam Era', in Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (Eds.), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1990, pp.19–40, p.23.

⁴⁷ Pat Aufderheide, 'Good Soldiers,' in Mark Crispin Miller (Ed.), *Seeing through Movies*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1990, pp.81–111, p.103.

⁴⁸ Stephen Garton, *The Cost OF War: Australians Return*, Oxford University Press. Melbourne, 1996, p.239.

⁴⁹ Leo Crawley, 'The War about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth', in Linda Dittmar and Gene Michaud (Eds.), *From Hanoi To Hollywood*, pp.69–80, p.71.

⁵⁰ David Buchbinder in his article 'Mateship, Gallipoli and the Eternal Masculine', states that the attributes of masculinity are culturally determined and that certain kinds of behaviour determines what is the culture defines and accepts as masculine. These typically require a man to affirm his sexuality at all possible opportunities and to enter into competition with other males. Power and sexuality become relatively easy to substitute for one another as markers of masculinity.

David Buchbinder, 'Mateship, Gallipoli and the Eternal Masculine' in Patrick Fuery (Ed.), *Representation, Desire & Discourse*, Longman Cheshire, London, 1994, p.115–137, p.119.

⁵¹ Robert A. Rosenstone *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film To Our Idea of History*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, pp.74–75.

⁵² Peter G. Bourne, *Men, Stress, and Vietnam*. Little, Brown, Boston, 1970, pp.167–186 (on Australians) p.170.

⁵³ Jane Ross, 'Australian Soldiers in Vietnam: product and performance,' In Peter King (Ed.), *Australia's Vietnam: Australian in the Second Indo-China War*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 72–99, p.83

⁵⁴ Ross, 'Australian Soldiers in Vietnam: product and performance,' p.91

⁵⁵ Peter Cochrane, 'At War At Home: Australian Attitudes During The Vietnam War' in G. Pemberton (Ed.), *Vietnam Remembered*, Weldon Publishing, Sydney, 1990, pp.165–185.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *The Films of the Eighties: A Social History*, p.10.

⁵⁷ Muse, *The Land Of Nam: The Vietnam War in American Film*. p.55.

⁵⁸ Ross, 'Australia's Legacy: The Vietnam Veteran' in Gregory Pemberton (Ed), *Vietnam Remembered*, Weldon Publishing, Sydney, 1990, pp.186–214, p.187.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Grey, 'Memory and Public Myth' in Jeffrey Grey & Jeff Doyle (Eds.), *Vietnam: War Myth and Memory*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp. 137–153.

⁶⁰ Ian McNeill, 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War,' in Peter Pierce, Jeff Doyle & Jeffrey Grey, *Vietnam Days: Australia and the Impact of Vietnam*. Penguin Books, Australia, 1991, pp.11–61.

⁶¹ Stephen Garton, *The Cost OF War: Australians Return*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p.237

⁶² Jeffery Grey, 'Vietnam, Anzac and the Veteran', p.77.

⁶³ Garton, *The Cost OF War: Australians Return*, p.236.

⁶⁴ Ross, 'Australia's Legacy: The Vietnam Veterans', p.187.

⁶⁵ Garton, *The Cost OF War: Australians Return*, p.294.

⁶⁶ Garton, *The Cost OF War: Australians Return*, p.294.

⁶⁷ Over 60% of those who died in Vietnam were between the ages of seventeen and twenty one. Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1991*, Harper Collins, New York, 1991, p.319.

⁶⁸ Marilyn Young cites the work of Ellen Frey-Wouters and Robert S. Laufer, *Legacy of War: American Soldiers in Vietnam*, Armonk NY., M. E. Sharpe Inc., 1986, (p.52) who state that a massive study of Vietnam-era veterans revealed that those who had been 'exposed to a significant amount of combat and/or witnessed or participated in abusive violence against prisoners, civilians, etc demonstrated long term problems' with disabling memories of war. She also states that some 700,000 veterans suffer some form of post traumatic stress disorder PTSD, Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1991*, Harper Collins, New York, 1991, p.321–322.

⁶⁹ Crawley, 'The War about the War: Vietnam Films and American Myth', p.72.

⁷⁰ These were bombs, filled with metal or later with plastic fragments, were designed to destroy people rather than buildings. The detonated above the ground, the flying fragments causing massive injury. Such bombs were designed to force a maximum number of enemy to be involved in the care of the injured.

⁷¹ Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (Eds.), 'Chronology: The United States, Vietnam and American Film' in Linda Dittmar & Gene Michaud (Eds.), *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick and London, 1990, pp.298–299.

⁷² Dittmar & Michaud, *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, p.299.

⁷³ H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1993.

⁷⁴ Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, pp.86–112.

⁷⁵ Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, p.113.

⁷⁶ Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, p.xv.

⁷⁷ Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, p.134.

⁷⁸ Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1991*, Harper Collins, New York, 1991, p.301.

⁷⁹ The USA did not lift its trade embargo on Vietnam until February 1994. Full diplomatic relations, marking a formal end to the war, were established between The United States and Vietnam in July 1995.

⁸⁰ See Marilyn B. Young, 'Revisionists Revised: The Case of Vietnam,' *Newsletter of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations*, Summer 1979, pp.1–10.

⁸¹ John Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, pp.1x–x

⁸² Klein, 'Historical Memory, Film, And The Vietnam Era', pp.19–40, p.23

⁸³ Franklin, *M.I.A. or Mythmaking in America: How and why belief in life POW's has possessed a nation*, p.133

⁸⁴ Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, p.201.

⁸⁵ Klein, 'Historical Memory, Film, And The Vietnam Era', p.24.

⁸⁶ Ann Curthoys, 'The anti-war movements', in Jeffrey Grey & Jeff Doyle Editors, *Vietnam: War Myth and Memory*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp.81–107. Ann Curthoys points out that although the anti-war movements followed similar trajectories, and the Australian movement freely borrowed images, slogans and practices from its American counterpart, the similarities arose from similar responses to similar stimuli rather than from borrowings. For example the conscription issue had very different historical meaning for Australia and America; the war itself had different meanings for the two societies; there was no equivalent in America of the Australian Labor Party.

JFK & Schindler's List

For contemporary society, it seems entirely predictable that the narrow perceptions of masculinity and nationalism intrinsic to American Westerns and Combat movies would have left indelible impressions on the psyche of a nation at a time when television was making its way to the centre of our society. Yet the reality of that effect came as somewhat of a surprise to many of the Vietnam War generation. Today film, with its increasing ability to produce the 'never real' from the combination of familiar documentary footage and images produced through the sophistication of digital technology, is truly blurring the boundaries between the 'actual' and the imaginary not only with respect to the present but also as a representation of the past. Now again it is appropriate to reflect on the question of whether film can be instrumental in provoking social or political action, an issue which will form the subject of this chapter.

The whole issue of the potential effects of film on individual and group perceptions, actions and behaviour is highly contentious, particularly when it concerns filmic violence in television programs. For example, while there are frequent reports of copy-cat crimes inspired by movies, or of stars taking out injunctions against obsessed fans (even the attempted assassination of former President Regan as a bid to impress Jodi Foster), these actions would normally be regarded as the consequences of individual maladjustment. In such cases, the cause would have to be understood as internal and individual with only the *form* of the acting-out being attributable to the influence of film. However 20th century experience has shown us that films can, and do, influence action on a far wider scale. Film as propaganda has been widely used in both war and peace with the more sophisticated pieces exploiting the cinematic qualities of the medium rather than treating the work as a visual form of a written structure. And while we may be familiar with the concept of propaganda on film the idea that a serious, sober representation of the past could prompt direct social action seems far-fetched – at first. But if recent atrocities like those that have occurred in Rwanda and Bosnia and those that are occurring in Albania come to mind then it is clear that the past, its memories and the myths and hatreds that surround them, does influence the present in the most dramatic ways. In an age where film is the great communicator, history as defined at the box office is part of our reality. But the representation of the past in any film text does not necessarily determine how the large numbers of people who see a mainstream work will understand the past. As I argue in this thesis, other inter-linkages between memory, social concerns in the present, film as text, and film as emotive representation play a part in this process, particularly in those unusual circumstances where there is a clear relationship between film and subsequent social response.

Chapter 7 JFK and Schindler's List

In this chapter and the one that follows, I deal with particular examples of historical film and in each case I argue for a relationship between the film and subsequent social and political responses. Chapter Seven is based on *JFK* and *Schindler's List*, both outstanding examples of the way that historical film has influenced popular action in the present. I have chosen these two in particular because both affected large numbers of people and were intrinsic to two quite different, but highly visible, forms of social response. The subject matter of both *JFK* and *Schindler's List* was of international concern and was well-known to the public. By comparison the subject matter of the next chapter, child migration from Britain depicted in *The Leaving Of Liverpool* and *Lost Children of the Empire* had particular relevance to Australian and was virtually unknown to the majority of the Australian population. While information about the events had begun to appear in popular culture in two significant books as well as in isolated newspaper reports, the films were the catalysts to public response. By translating a little-known social scandal into images and involving narrative *The Leaving Of Liverpool* and its predecessor, the British documentary *Lost Children of the Empire*, provoked enormous public outrage resulting in legal action. Chapter Eight therefore, concerns the ability of film to change historical perceptions by bring to light aspects of the past that have been hidden either by processes of chance, perceived lack of historical significance, individual reluctance to remember, or deliberate processes of concealment.

JFK touched on an event, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in November 1963, that has become invested for a great many Americans with meanings of loss, mourning and anxieties about the ideals of their nation. In a narrative which foregrounded the investigation of Jim Garrison leading to the trial of Clay Shaw, Oliver Stone not only put the verdict of the Warren Commission on trial he also challenged the ideals of democratic action enshrined in the American Constitution. In using the readily understood conventions of the murder investigation and trial, Stone gives a cohesive narrative shape to a variety of otherwise bewildering conspiracy theories. In addition, the discourse of the film was an appeal to a nostalgic ideal of community that intersected with present day contestation over these ideals and values in American society. In historical terms the film itself clearly makes a case for a wide-ranging conspiracy to kill the President, and clearly argues against the official verdict of a single gunman acting alone, casting that conclusion as little more than a politically expedient result based on biased and partial evidence. In ideological terms the climax of the film – Jim Garrison's impassioned closing argument to the jury in the trial of Clay Shaw – is really Oliver Stone's challenge to the American nation; 'It's up to you'. The result was an unprecedented series of government actions to release files regarding the affair in a direct response to that challenge.

Schindler's List intersected with the present in a number of ways. The film was clearly a counter narrative to the rise of the ultra-conservative right, Neo-Nazi parties and an industry of Holocaust denial. It intervened in a compelling need felt by large numbers of Jewish people to bear witness to the Holocaust. Its mainstream format made its own contentious response to arguments about

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representation, where there has been an ongoing concern that commemorations of the Holocaust be presented in a form that cannot be distorted or trivialised. These pertinent issues were beyond the story of Oskar Schindler which carried the historical narrative of *Schindler's List*. But they were important in the historical messages and meanings that it imparted.

Although based on Thomas Keneally's book *Schindler's Ark* which tells the story of Oskar Schindler in the context of the Nazi regime in Poland, *Schindler's List* has generally been understood as an epic tale of Jewish experience in Nazi Europe during the World War II. *Schindler's List* takes the position that it is possible to use an optimistic narrative of an unconventional hero, structured within cinematic conventions of melodrama and use it as a perspective on the reality of the Holocaust without trivialisation and excessive sentimentality.

The effect of this film cannot be judged only on the strong impact which it had on historical sensibilities around the world. Certainly, as with *JFK*, the production generated more than the hype produced by the film's publicity machine, provoking a huge response in the popular media particularly in respect to the memories of survivors. But the more lasting effect is likely to arise from the Spielberg Archive Project, which Spielberg initiated as a result of the impact of the film on popular culture. To bridge the gap between historical awareness, sensibilities, and the need for an analysis more searching than the film text could give Spielberg began two projects – one an international effort to record the testimonies of survivors on video, and the other an educational one with *Schindler's List* as the central text in an interdisciplinary education program accessed annually by 600,000 American children. The film serves as the emotional connection for its audience to its historical referent and as the intellectual stimulus towards investigation of broader questions about racism and the relationships between power and conscience in the idea and ideals of government. Just as the release of the sealed documents concerning the Kennedy assassination can be seen as a secondary consequence of the effect of that film on popular understanding and sensibilities, so too the Spielberg Archive Project and the Righteous Persons Foundation for Jewish and Holocaust Education¹ were developments which came into being as the result of similar interventions and reactions in popular culture.

JFK

'Murder most foul as at best it is, But this most foul, hideous and unnatural'.

The murder of the President of the United States, perhaps the most powerful man in the world, was more than murder or treason. To Americans of the day it was the desecration of the most taboo symbol in the whole paraphernalia of nationhood, a symbol even more significant and evocative of the power of their nation than the national flag. There was something psychologically destabilising in the all-too-clearly demonstrated mortality of such an icon. The incomprehensible nature of the crime was exacerbated when the equally impossible occurred. The suspect, declaring his innocence and claiming to be 'a patsy', was shot dead before the nation's news cameras. The shooting of the suspect Lee Harvey Oswald denied American society the social rituals of arrest, trial and explanation of motives that could have been the foundation of a healing process.

Those authors, including *JFK's* writer/director Oliver Stone, who have described the situation as a national trauma have rightly pointed to the psychological aspect of the national reaction for, as with cases of trauma, the lack of a satisfactory ending prevents the event being re-negotiated back into perspective as history. This meant that there was little chance of the nation grieving for the man that Kennedy was. The process of grief was turned towards the symbolic meaning and the nation grieved for the fracturing of the image of the imagined community for which Kennedy was the emblem. Since then, despite later revelations of philandering and accusations of pre-election dealings with the Mafia, the life of John F. Kennedy has become an American myth symbolising youth, vigour, progress, and glamour – his hero status in fact augmented by the extraordinary circumstances that ended his life. In death, Kennedy became a 20th century manifestation of Frazer's mythic sacrificial king, enshrined in a rhetoric which establishes his assassination in 1963 as a point of separation of *what might have been* and *what has been* in the historical record of American history since that date.

When a film touches such a subject as this, it is touching something more than the controversy over the historical record – and something even more than a desire for justice. It reaches into the struggle over who controls national memory, and it speaks to the heart of questions about nationhood, community and the social contract between citizens and governments. But even beyond that, *JFK* touched beliefs in the community that were both deeply held and generally unarticulated. It intersected with psychological perceptions and anxieties about government and

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authority, with culturally determined understandings about the nature of history, and with the ideology of nationhood and sacrifice – a mythology that performs personal and national functions of affirmation and compensation. Even though there was a highly publicised controversy over the historical record and the interpretation of the past in film, its astonishing cinematic form left very little room for it to be read by audiences as anything other than a serious piece of history.

JFK has been seen variously as a distortion of history, an exercise in paranoia, a socially responsible approach to a major travesty of justice, an amazing movie but a rotten piece of history, a remarkable example of postmodernism, and as a viable exercise in presenting history in images. Whatever the critics may have thought, the public flocked to see Stone's film and there can be little doubt that *JFK* stands as a major intervention in popular understanding of the past.²

Screening when it did, in a time of renewed public debate about the values that underpin the 'meaning' of America, *JFK* not only added to the contestation in the present, it mobilised particular memories and mythologies of the fifties, sixties and later decades that formed part of personal and national historical consciousness to intervene in what James Keller calls 'the circulation of social energy'.³ He sees the sociological objective of the film as the creation of an atmosphere that would generate processes which would ultimately make the classified information available to the public. Its success in this objective was astounding.

In his roles as writer and director, Oliver Stone had an enormous influence on what went into the film and why. Perhaps the supreme filmic translation of a director's political intentions is to be found in the now-famous scene in *JFK* where Jim Garrison sums up his case against Clay Shaw. When Kevin Costner /Jim Garrison turns to the jury exhorting them to show the world that 'this is still a government of the people, by the people' by demanding the release of fifty-one CIA documents about Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby, the actor crosses the distance between the screen world and the audience to say 'It's up to you'. This scene was enormously powerful as cinema, enormously powerful as politics.

The physical presence of actor Kevin Costner carried accentuated meaning from the star's public persona, which fitted neatly with those of the character of Jim Garrison. As the hero, he was the ordinary man who had been called on to do extraordinary things; to leave the ordinary world of his daily life and enter into the other world of the investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy. The extraordinary Hero's Journey cost him dearly in terms of his family and his personal life. But the goal he sought – the truth – was worth the fight. Or so the film would have us believe. At this point of the film Jim Garrison/Kevin Costner had reached the limit of what he as one individual could do. The next step is 'up to you', all those other ordinary people who can become heroes in pursuing the ideals of the nations. It is powerful stuff.

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Even though Stone deliberately makes it impossible in the film for audiences to know exactly what he thinks happened on November 22nd 1963, he has made it abundantly clear elsewhere what he thinks the next step should be – the release of (then) classified documents.⁴ In a medium where every single second of film footage is there as the result of a conscious decision by someone, this climactic scene is the visual and dramatic translation of Oliver Stone's guiding intention in making this film. Few appeals to a sense of social responsibility and a desire for justice have had such a dramatic effect, let alone an appeal to an imagined audience by a non-existent image/character on film.

Rarely has a contemporary film attracted the attention and animosity of *JFK*. One of the indicators of the 'circulation of social energy' of which Keller⁵ speaks is to be found in the enormous amount of discussion that Stone's film provoked in popular (and other) media and the vehemence with which the issue was debated. Many of the more influential newspapers and current events magazines in America responded aggressively to what they saw as inaccuracies, distortions and/or downright fabrications in the way the historical record was used.⁶ The controversy reached its apex on the cover of *Newsweek* with the headline 'The Twisted Truth of *JFK*: Why Oliver Stone's New Movie Can't Be Trusted'.⁷ Undoubtedly the extremely public nature of the controversy helped at the box office and as Art Simon points out, the cultural appeal of the film was enhanced by the journalistic space turned over to Oliver Stone which afforded him 'something like a second sound track, a weekly opportunity to counter the critics and reinterpret the film'.⁸ Moreover, in 1991 there was an already pre-constituted audience and culture for the subject of the Kennedy assassination in the sub-markets of publishing and television. As an amplifier and catalyst for the assassination debate, the film opened a space for a resurgence in popular historical interest in the Kennedy assassination. Books like *Rush to Judgement* and *Best Evidence* were reprinted and critics who had been active on the lecture circuit thirty years before found that their careers were revived. There was also a renewed interest throughout America in symposia on the assassination as well as a rekindling of disagreements over the debate in the left-liberal media.⁹ In an even more populist form, the tabloids and the talk shows took up the issue of the assassination itself as well as its representation in *JFK*. Geraldo Rivera devoted a show to the assassination in December 1992 as did Oprah Winfrey a month later, while the *Today* show gave a week to the process of reviewing all the conspiracy theories in February 1993.

According to material collected by William D. Romanowski,¹⁰ even while the film was showing some of the significant figures involved in events surrounding the Kennedy assassination and subsequently investigation came forward to defend the parts they had played. Navy pathologists confirmed their findings from the autopsy and former Warren Commission staff defended the conclusions of their investigation.¹¹ Most significant of all, on 27th October 1992 former President George Bush signed into law Senator David Boren's resolution establishing an independent five-member committee appointed by the President to review and release files accumulated by the

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Warren Commission and two later congressional investigations. In addition Senator David Boren's resolution prompted the Director of the CIA to deny any involvement of his organisation in any conspiracy or cover-up and voluntarily to authorise the immediate release of a number of CIA files. In August 1993 the National Archives unsealed some 90,000 pages of CIA documents and evidence, followed in May 1994 by 50,000 more documents pertaining to the Senate Committee Inquiry into the work of intelligence agencies. In reference to this quite major change in government policy, a number of legislators are on record in public statements crediting the unprecedented response directly to the film *JFK*.¹² With the introduction of the joint House-Senate resolution declassifying thousands of pages of documents on the Kennedy assassination, a film centring on Jim Garrison's investigation into the assassination had succeeded in doing what the real life Jim Garrison had failed to do.

Why did the film have such an effect? As the film *JFK* itself demonstrates, it is very difficult to draw up all the threads of connectedness between cause and effect. First and foremost, few subjects have such iconic, psychological, and political meanings as the Kennedy assassination. Any film that deals with that subject will be venturing into an area where it will confront a substantial amount of highly contested knowledge and opinion circulating in certain sections of the population. Beyond that threshold of already existing popular interest and knowledge, a large measure of the impact of the film had to do with the enormous persuasiveness of the arguments offered and with the kinds of 'evidence' used on screen to support it. In this respect *JFK* pulled many of the half-known, partly-understood, contesting elements in popular historical consciousness together into a coherent narrative, constructing a convincing hypothesis through this particular combination of history, fiction, and speculation in such a way that average audience members could feel that, at last, they had a grasp of this significant but extraordinarily complex issue. Moreover, the film resonated with issues of the time – with the debate about whether America as the world's most powerful nation held a responsibility to act as the world's policeman, and with the even deeper levels of cultural conflict over values in American society. These values touched the heart of national identity, about what it meant to be an American and what values that nation was to hold collectively as the cement of community.

Beneath all of that the historical issues of evidence, subversion, conspiracy, etc. that have surrounded the assassination since 1963, issues that were at the centre of the film, are considered by large sections of the American population to have a strong bearing on their own understanding of government and nationalism in the present. Most significantly it would seem that the great majority of Americans do not agree with the findings of the Warren Commission. Every poll taken during the last twenty-five years has shown between 60% and 80% of the population favour an explanation which involves some kind of a conspiracy.¹³ Most people really want there to be answers in the past that can be revealed by uncovering *all* the evidence.

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Public response to the film has consistently indicated the strength of popular faith in the possibility of arriving at an accurate historical explanation, and in the belief that it *is* possible to collect all the 'relevant' historical facts. If there is no acceptable explanation to be had then this means that all the 'relevant' material has not yet been assembled. Americans and others wish for some form of closure, even if it is only that of establishing the final linkages in the chain of causality between Kennedy's death, the bullet and the one/s who pulled the trigger/s.

The film *JFK* answered that need. It supports the popular belief that events are explainable, that there is an explanation of the Kennedy assassination. As Janet Staiger points out, even for hostile critics of *JFK*, the debate is not about whether one can describe such an event visually and verbally but whether *JFK* got it right.¹⁴ Moreover, the film accords with popular belief that historical truth may have eluded us in this case because certain people lied and the evidence that might have countered this has been overlooked. *JFK* presents the kind of evidence, that of dubious and marginalised witnesses, whose testimony might normally be overlooked and whose evidence – the other 'relevant' material – could possibly could make sense of the confusion over the assassination. Oliver Stone's film with its jostling and jarring images and its scenarios that individually seem more than valid yet together seem impossible, is located right in the middle of the unrealisable desire in popular consciousness to catch the past that somehow managed to escape from proper scrutiny when it was still the present. Just like Jim Garrison in the film *Americans* (and others) have obsessively attempted to retrieve and assemble facts about the incident, trying to fix a shape on events of the past or trying to find a definitive truth among the multiplying and shifting phantoms that such accounts offer. Discussing this aspect of 'our national fixation on the assassination', Andrew O'Hehir of the *San Francisco Weekly* points to the Puritan legacy in American culture 'which has left us as a people with a taste for absolute doctrine and a taste for history where all the ends are neatly tied up'.¹⁵ What Oliver Stone has done on screens all over the world is to satisfy a deep psychological need for the past to 'make sense'.

In this he repeats a process that is not dissimilar to the method of historians, a position which Stone has argued quite vehemently in defence of his film as an excursus into historiography.¹⁶ Historians order material, create a narrative to encompass it, and supply hypotheses where particular aspects do not fit. Stone followed these precepts down to the visual sequence at the beginning through which he established his thesis. He sees any charge of biased selection of evidence and ideologically-directed interpretation as holding equally true for both his methodologies and those of the Warren Commission. Whatever its faults, *JFK demonstrated* rather than *argued* the potential validity of Oliver Stone's interpretation and Stone's assertions that he was attempting to redress the 'myth' offered by the Warren Commission. The intense debate the film provoked in popular forums demonstrated all too clearly the difficulty of ever establishing the absolute 'truth' about what happened in Dallas on November 23rd 1963 and how it should be understood. A huge factor in the psychological impact of the film is the fact that in

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speaking about an unresolved issue from the past it raises very strong anxieties about the present, about the very nature of the State, while suggesting a social remedy – 'It's up to you'.

This appeal to the present addresses a particular part of popular historical sensibilities; a popular mythology that places the death of John Fitzgerald Kennedy as a marker of 'where things started to go wrong in America'. Even though the historical Kennedy was not the pure king – the Knight in shining armour poised to usher in the era of America's Camelot, but rather the vain, philandering, upper-class politician who presided over a divided nation – the myth which has grown up around him is a significant one as a trace of America's political psyche. Andrew O'Hehir suggests that the Kennedy assassination is the creation myth American society uses to understand the discords in the present. It is:

the tale of the fall from grace, for which we vainly seek redemption. If it hadn't happened, we would have had to invent it.¹⁷

In an account that makes clear the mythic presence of Kennedy in American society and the regret for the unfulfilled promise of a better future that the myth includes, Oliver Stone has said that he believed that 'the world would be a healthier place' if Kennedy had not been killed.¹⁸ In an interview with *Newsweek* in 1991 he expanded on the central thesis of his film, namely that Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy by the military-industrial complex because he would have stopped the Vietnam War. According to Stone, had Kennedy lived the war in Vietnam would not have continued and millions of Vietnamese lives would have been spared; there would then have been no necessity to cut back on the planned spending of Johnson's great society; America (and the world) would have been spared the inflation of the seventies, and the whole economic shift in the world since that time could have been prevented.¹⁹

JFK played to an audience for whom a series of indelible images have become pivotal in the nation's collective memory. Images like the riderless horse in the funeral cavalcade, a widow in a black veil and a tiny son giving a childish last salute are iconic in their meanings of incomprehension and loss. This was a major element in the psychological context into which the movie played. For many audiences, particularly younger audiences, *JFK* re-told a cohesive story while contextualising some of the debates and fragments of information which circulate in popular culture. The film, which re-plays the assassination in the present tense, resonates with the 'if only' in popular nostalgia for what might have been. This is certainly one of the reasons why *JFK* has had the power to intervene so strongly, not only in popular historical consciousness, but also in the political life of America.

The film *JFK* was a part of the struggle over social values and national identity in the nineties, just as the psychological meaning of the Kennedy years was also bound up with the meaning of

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American nationalism in the historical context of the early sixties. Even then Kennedy's presidency was seen by many – both positively and negatively – as a point of departure from the repressive conformity in the style of nationalism of the era that had preceded it. In psychological terms the Kennedy era was widely understood at the time as a break away from the artificial sense of community that was particularly noticeable in the environment of America in the fifties. As Peter Gabel sees the fifties,²⁰ it was a decade of artificial and rigid patriotic unity, sustained in large part by an equally rigid and pathological anti-Communism. Communism was the 'OTHER' whose evil America needed to exterminate, or at least contain, to preserve the illusory sense of connection, meaning, and social purpose. In the fantasised images of the pseudo-community of the fifties, there was a 'perfect' America where everyone was white and clean and happy, and looked the same, and marched in step towards the future which was inevitably bright and filled with washing machines and cars and other symbols of American post-war prosperity. Not only was this a denial of social reality, but the cultural climate of the 1950s was actually a massive denial of the desire for true connection and meaning. This cultural image-world of the fifties was sternly held in place by a punitive and threatening system of authoritarian male hierarchies symbolised most graphically by the McCarthy hearings, the House of Un-American Activities Committee, and the person of J. Edgar Hoover.

In 1960, after Kennedy won by the narrowest margin in American history, his election appeared to symbolise the triumph of the currents of forward movement over the dam of repression. It seemed to many that the society posited by the ideals of the American Constitution could possibly come into being – and along with, it a real sense of belonging. According to Peter Gabel, the three years of the Kennedy administration witnessed what he calls 'the opening up of desire' – which he understands as being:

. . . a feeling that Kennedy was able to evoke – a feeling of humour, romance, idealism, and youthful energy, and a sense of hope that touched virtually every American alive during that time. It was this feeling – 'the rise of a new generation of Americans' – that more than any ideology threatened the system of cultural and erotic control that dominated the fifties and that still dominated the governmental elites of the early sixties – the FBI, the CIA, even elements of Kennedy's own cabinet and staff.²¹

The assassination, described variously as a national trauma or a loss of innocence seemed to point to the fantasy nature of that desire. Even those opposed to Kennedy who disputed his interpretation of a racially equal society still held dear the concept of a community based on law and order. Perhaps John F. Kennedy was not universally mourned but the deed that took his life made Americans, and others who saw their own situation reflected in aspects of American life and

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culture, uneasy and unable to deny the disorder that threatened America. Kennedy's death united America – at least temporarily. There should be little wonder then that Kennedy's assassination should have mass psychological consequences causing in Gabel's view, a sense of loss and a sudden disintegration of the desire that Kennedy had signified. Oliver Stone appears to address part of the message of *JFK* explicitly to this nostalgic desire for community – particularly when he exhorts the audience to intervene in THEIR government to force it to public accountability. In 1994, in an address to the commencement class at Berkley in the Institute for International Studies Oliver Stone said that in probing national traumas like the Kennedy assassination he was attempting to expose people to the trauma in a way that attempted to restore a spiritual element, a sense of community, to American life.²²

Controversies over *JFK* have all tended to see links between the movie and possible effects on audience understanding of the past. This has not always been overt, as the contestation tends to revolve around the manner in which the film combines archive, re-enactment, invention, and hypothesis into a seamless and riveting story about a lone crusader fighting the forces of corruption in American institutions. The covert fear is that the public will be 'deceived' (by what these critics see as a misuse of history) and cajoled into believing Oliver Stone's thesis through the persuasiveness of the sensory experience of the movie.

Those critics who were more overt in voicing their fears about the effect of *JFK* on popular historical understanding tended to centre on the apparent paranoia of the film which they said may leave some audiences wondering if there was any American government authority that was *not* involved in a plot to kill Kennedy. Robins and Post²³ cite evidence which suggests that audiences not only accepted the political message of *JFK* but that those beliefs engendered by the film had an impact on life outside the theatre. According to their evidence, a survey and analysis of viewer reaction to *JFK*, this film and others like it can produce:

markedly altered emotional states, belief changes spread across specific political issues, and ... an impact on politically relevant behavioural changes. [*JFK* viewers] reported emotional changes, [became] significantly more angry and less hopeful ... Those who had seen that movie were significantly more likely to believe [the various conspiracies depicted in the film].²⁴

While survey instrument/s like this cannot tell us what other factors in the person or in society at the time may have contributed to this effect, they do lend a certain kind of support to various claims about the social effects of this particular film.

The film's persuasive power has been variously interpreted as an effect related to the form of the film and/or a construct which derives from the psychic outlook of the writer/director. Bill

Nichols²⁵ for example sees a paranoid outlook as part of the crisis of agency and the loss of linear chronology in the event, which lead to an obsessive attempt to seek out and find every last element that might establish this agency. In *JFK* this anxiety is represented in the accumulation of 'neglected' testimony, and is soothed by the identification of a kind of agency in an account of a conspiracy to cover up the original crime. Mary Ann Doane offers us a more psycho-analytical perspective. She likens the view of the film to that of a psychic paranoid or of a social movement paranoid who sees social processes as polarised – them and me – becoming, as a consequence, obsessed with evidence and interpretation in an attempt to solve the problem of causation. In Oliver Stone's case she relates this to his Vietnam War experience and sees his 'paranoid vision' as springing from a feeling of betrayal by his country, his father-land.²⁶ Either way, this aspect of the underlying ideology of the film is naturalised in the film and is therefore to most audiences, invisible – and potentially more influential because of this.

Other writers link the outlook more closely and more openly to (potential) influences on public sensibilities and historical consciousness. Robins and Post, whose paper to the American Political Science Association in 1997 combines the outlooks of Psychiatry, Political Psychology, and Political Science see films like *JFK* as part of a sub-genre into which they place films like *Silkwood* and *Missing*.²⁷ They take a position that begs the question as to whether films lead or reflect popular consciousness. As they see the social impact of these films:

It (the social harm) creates a broader intellectual pollution. Each paranoid film gives weight to a popular mentality of paranoid belief. If event after event is shown to be the product of malign conspiracy, then the public will accept that is how the world works.²⁸

Unlike Mary Ann Doane, they maintain that the paranoid insinuations of the film do not necessarily come from the director's beliefs but are driven by the commercial and narrative needs of the form. The filmic depiction of events needs a continuity and order that is generally lacking in genuine events, and it also needs the kind of dramatic tension that grabs audience attention. The paranoid perspective supplies all these things by providing a view of reality that parallels the heroic quest and struggles of mythic narratives. For example, a paranoid perspective constructs a simplified view of reality – us/them, good/bad, etc. – which creates a coherence where there is in reality only a confusing mass of discontinuities. The protagonist takes a moral stand and struggles to achieve the truth, which is conceived of as simple in essence but immensely complex in its details. These elements are inherently dramatic and work particularly well as a narrative structure for docu-drama. The great strength of the paranoid message in this format lies in its capacity to add an element that both explains an event and testifies to its importance.

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In Kennedy's case it perfects the myth. In the absence of an extraordinary supernatural event like a tornado or an earthquake as a cause of the death of the mythic hero, something other than the kind of mundanities and accidents that occur in real life is more emotionally satisfying. The alternative possibility of some human source of evil – a source greater than the irrational, chaotic act of an individual – has greater mythic power to provide resolution – even if it is only to create a scenario in which no real resolution is possible because of the power of the guilty. The multiple possibilities of conspiracy that *JFK* posits provide just this kind of explanation which provides narrative resolution and fulfils audience desire for understanding.

According to Robins and Post the persuasive power of such an understanding commits 'social harm' that goes beyond what they see as a distortion of history. As they point out, films are not just entertainment, they are also cultural, intellectual, and political influences. When we consider the cumulative propagandist effect of American Westerns and Combat movies as one of the elements of national discourse which created the climate of values that committed America to the Vietnam War, there may be an element of truth in that understanding. However in post Vietnam War America, popular cynicism about politics and power has been so fuelled by manipulations and lying at the highest levels of government on subjects like Watergate, the Contra scandal, etc., that distrust of government action has become a strong element in the popular culture of political cinema. In popular fiction, narratives involving plots by the CIA, the FBI and even in the White House are now commonplace. Moreover, whether or not the worldview of these films should be considered paranoid or not may well be a function of the particular political leanings of the viewer. The idea that the visual media construct a worldview is only partially true. A less alarmist view would place film among a number of popular discourses, accepting that this kind of influence could occur – but only if the filmic version of the world were to be supported by other perceptions in popular circulation; and only if it also resonated with the kind of popular memory about the workings of similar situations that is central to cultural experience. The suggestion in *JFK* that Kennedy was killed as the result of a conspiracy would not have had the effects that it did if such theories were not in popular circulation and if the discourse had not appealed to issues which matter to the present.

Stone however, seems to shift between understanding his film as art, as fiction, and as history – and there is no reason to believe that it should not be interpreted as all three, providing that the understanding of 'history' is not one which expects absolutes in its narration of the past. Rosenstone points out that both fiction and history tell stories, but the difference between them is that history is a 'true story'.²⁹ This question of 'truth' takes us back again to questions of evidence and interpretation – which is exactly the area where Oliver Stone (and most Americans) find problems in the interpretation of history by the Warren Commission, and where Stone's critics find fault with his interpretation. Perhaps the most satisfactory understanding of *JFK* lies in Stone's claim that the 'truth' which is contained within the film needs to be understood as 'spiritual truth',

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of the kind attributed to art.³⁰ Stone's film needs to be understood as an interpretation of the past which uses – and extends – the techniques of film to make its case. Again as Rosenstone analyses it:

Film neither replaces written history nor supplements it. Film stands adjacent to written history, as it does to other forms of dealing with the past such as memory and the oral tradition.³¹

JFK is historical – but where the narrative is linear, the historical discourse is not. There are layers of historical representation and interpretation in *JFK* just as there are in written works. But where written work is necessarily *linear* in its processes of representation of evidence, exposition, argument, and analysis, a visual work can work through *simultaneous* processes which do similar things but in different ways. Although Stone has been meticulous in the physical detail that gives his film so much of its authority, the film's subject (in the abstract and historically-analytical sense) is the Kennedy assassination. The film actually brings together quite a large body of analysis and interpretation from the sixties, seventies and eighties and maps it onto the narrative of Jim Garrison's trial of Clay Shaw in the form of a search for evidence which could piece together the sequence of events at Dealey Plaza.³² The linear narrative about Jim Garrison acts as the dramatic centre which gives Stone a way of welding together four historical threads – the trial of Clay Shaw (the only official prosecution to have occurred in relation to the Kennedy assassination); the events at Dealey Plaza; the background to Oswald; and the thesis of the movie – viz. that the verdict of the Warren Commission was both wrong and inadequate and that the assassination was the work of a conspiracy. This latter element is the real subject which works through a visual montage of the threat that Kennedy posed to the military-industrial complex and the monologue by the Mister X character, who is a dramatised rendering of revelations and theories of Fletcher Prouty. Likewise, although the real life Garrison conducted an inept investigation and flawed trial, the Garrison of the film – represented as a lone crusader – is actually a metaphorical protagonist composed of the theories of a number of conspiracy researchers.³³ The so-called paranoia that the film displays is thus the combined possibilities of existing/conspiracy narratives circulating in popular culture which are known in vague outline to a great number of people.

Various interpreted as it has been, the charge of paranoia in the film's outlook contains recognition of the persuasive power of film and the ways in which film intervenes in the process of memory. This perspective on the film sits at the intersection of a number of popularly held views – not only about the event of the assassination itself but also about the authority of historical 'fact' and historical representation. Adherents of the view of *JFK* as a manipulation of popular historical consciousness claim that the docu-drama form of the film distorts the historical record (either greatly or a little) and in doing so projects a paranoid attitude towards society, a view which

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implicitly joins conservative elements in contestation over who controls the nation's memory. Moreover, the film's view of the past intersects in the present with highly contested ideological positions about capitalism, power, government agencies, law and order, etc. It thus joins into the broader contestation over political attitudes and beliefs in society as a whole. Where such a piece works successfully as a film – and *JFK* is superb in this respect – it was bound to stir up the kind of engagement that sparked social debate, at the very least. *JFK*'s intervention in politics in the present is remarkable. But what may be more significant as a pointer towards the future is the fact that an avowedly commercial product in popular culture was the vehicle for such a response. Moreover, the form of the film points firstly to a degree of popular sophistication in understanding images, and secondly to the significance of information circulating in popular culture as an essential element in the process of making meaning in film. *JFK* presented an interpretation of the past which provoked discussions not normally associated with popular culture – discussions about evidence, about the limits of what can be known about the past, and the impact of form on the meaning of film as a form. Perhaps then the question about *JFK* should be not why was it so powerful in its intervention in popular historical consciousness, but why are there not more films like *JFK*?

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Popular understanding of history as a 'true' narrative of what happened in the past is more often than not the site of a struggle between competing understandings of the present. This becomes particularly apparent in the often acrimonious debates surrounding the history of the Third Reich. Who decides what is to be remembered? Why do some perspectives gain historical authority and others not? What are the relationships between memory, mourning and justice? Though the answers to these questions are at issue in a large number of historical experiences which remain unsettled in the present, they are particularly alive in matters surrounding the Holocaust. *Schindler's List* appeared in 1993 at the end of a worldwide recession, in a social situation in which there was renewed support for the far right, and where an industry of Holocaust denial developed some popular support through apparently 'objective' and 'scientific' proof. The film, and its inter-textuality with the social context, opened up these issues in the world's view and opened them up in the sphere of popular culture through the agency of commercial, Hollywood-style epic.

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Nazi crimes and horrors have been documented (and dramatised) many times in film, in literature, in historical accounts, and even in dramatic presentations.³⁴ In popular media, the documentary form has been the usual vehicle for posing and probing such questions as how could such a thing happen? Who was responsible? What must we understand about ourselves to prevent such a thing from happening again? But audiences have to *choose* to watch such productions and, while the number of such representations have built up a plethora of images which define the Holocaust in popular memory, on the whole only a limited section of the popular audience make that choice in respect to any one representation. This is a very different situation from that of the commercially successful *Schindler's List*. *Schindler's List* was aesthetically outstanding. It won seven Academy Awards including Best Picture in 1993 and it did reach vast popular audiences worldwide. In so doing *Schindler's List* offered a form of understanding that is somewhat different from that of other forms like traditional documentary or like *Shoah* where the interest is centred on the memory and history in the present.

It has been said that virtually no director other than Spielberg, whose success at the box office is legendary, could have persuaded those in Hollywood with the power of the purse to finance such a subject as the Holocaust. The *subject* of the Holocaust, as many people understand it, is singular – singular as an historical event, singular in its lessons to humanity, and different in meanings from other acts of genocide. Even though the Jews of Europe were not the only targets of the Nazi plan for extermination, they were the main target. For many Jewish groups the literal meaning of the word 'Holocaust' – sacred sacrifice – with its connotations of burning and turning to ashes is also the historical meaning. For some, this event is beyond representation. When Spielberg made *Schindler's List*, he was entering into an emotionally and ethically charged area where there were extensive debates about the issue of the Holocaust and representation. For example, an influential conference in Los Angeles in 1990, "Nazism and the 'Final Solution': Probing the Limits of Representation" attracted a large numbers of scholars prominent in the debate about the nature of 'historical truth'. The convenor Saul Friedlander has noted that with the Holocaust:

We are dealing with an event of a kind which demands a global approach and a general reflection on the difficulties that are raised by its representation.³⁵

I would like to consider some of the issues in this debate here, before looking at the translation of history that occurred in *Schindler's List* because it seems to me that two issues in particular had a considerable influence on projects that Spielberg initiated as a result of the success of his film. Firstly, one of the justifications for producing a film about the Holocaust which would (potentially) be seen by millions, was the need to counter the resurgence in Fascism and the (then) increasingly strident claim that the Holocaust had never taken place. Both camps in the representation debate tended to agree that as witnesses to the past, and in any counter narrative to both these developments, the testimony of the survivors was of the greatest significance. This was

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without doubt the most revered form of narration of the Holocaust. But in many cases those memories had been heard in the most limited of circles and in some cases not at all. Secondly, if the justification for making *Schindler's List* was that increased popular understanding of the Holocaust could be a step towards preventing its repetition then it was clear that the film text could go only so far in any analysis of the causes, both general and historical, of those tragic events. A highly desirable result of the film would be that it created sufficient interest in popular culture to cause the whole subject to be opened up to discussion and that, as a result, a more permanent method of perpetuating that inquiry be found. Spielberg did institute such programs, but their inception and chance of success depended first and foremost on the success of the film as an intervention into popular understanding of those events of the past.

As Saul Friedlander defined the essence of the debate:

Our central dilemma can be defined as confronting the issues raised by historical relativism and aesthetic experience in the face of two possibly contrary constraints: the need for 'truth' and the problem raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of the language as such.³⁶

Those who see the events of the Holocaust as beyond representation (including Claude Lanzmann the creator of *Shoah*) insist on the singularity of the Holocaust as an event that defies depiction, the horror of which renders any attempt at representing it obscene. Thus for proponents of this view all forms of fictional narrative, all figurative speech, all dramatisation must be seen as misrepresentation. A middle ground in the debate is represented by Ilvan Avisar³⁷ who, while agreeing with Lanzmann that there can be no representation of the killing machine that was Auschwitz, still accepts the possibility of a more limited representation. Avisar concedes that successful *narratives* on the Holocaust are possible when they focus on the peripheral dimension of the concentration camp universe, on the plight of the victims before they entered Auschwitz.³⁸ However, he too opposes dramatisation, seeing the classic narrative of 19th century concepts of history and representation by classic realist drama in particular as an impossibility.³⁹ As Avisar sees the situation, the Holocaust *cannot* serve as the premise for dramatic conflict as it denies all the fundamentals of drama. In Hitler's 'Final Solution', there was no significant conflict that could cultivate moral sensibilities in the audience, nor was the Holocaust an ethical clash between good and evil: there could be no resistance and no ennobling suffering: there was no climax or resolution to the overall narrative. There was nothing ennobling in the day-to-day of the extermination process. Nazi records show that the average inmate's existence lasted three months. Those who survived, by their own admission, did so because of the undramatic element of sheer luck and/or ruthlessness towards their fellow prisoners.⁴⁰

But at the heart of the question of representation of the Holocaust is the paradox that such an event defies representation and yet demands it. In the face of a worldwide resurgence of Fascism and denial that the Holocaust ever transpired, it seems that urgent knowledge of the genocide reaches wide audiences in ways that give it personal meaning. The horrific truth is that while the human destruction and brutality of the Holocaust is almost beyond comprehension it was neither the first nor the last genocide of the 20th century. As Herbert Hirsch⁴¹ has pointed out, in this century the mechanisms and techniques of mass destruction have increased in efficiency from the systematic extermination by the Turkish government of one to one-and-a-half million Armenians in 1915–17, through to the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust, to the advent of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capable of the extermination of a whole nation or culture. He signals the urgent need for societies to understand the process through which memories of hatreds are passed from generation to generation to provide a justification of violence though invoking some higher 'good' – such as 'self-defence', 'purifying the race', or 'saving democracy'. And it is for reasons such as these that there is another side to the representation debate.

Many survivors, like the hundreds of survivors who voluntarily staff Holocaust museums around the world, want to communicate the experience to others. But such passing on of memories reaches comparatively few, considering the global scale of genocide and the need for humanity to face the extremes of behaviour that 'civilisation' is capable of. Movies however, do reach millions and the question of representation becomes a moral dilemma – whether the need to communicate information about the Holocaust and to provoke means of understanding and preventing genocide outweighs other concerns about the form of representation and its limits in this medium as used in the mainstream. Spielberg's *Schindler's List* represents his decision in the debate. By producing a mainstream Hollywood blockbuster Spielberg, the director for whom nostalgia and happy endings had been a trademark, went to the heart of the matter – beyond whether the Holocaust should be 'tamed' through representation in a narrative format, to whether so incomprehensible an episode in human history could ever be used as entertainment.

In choosing to present a narrative of the Holocaust by telling the story of Oskar Schindler, Spielberg's film stays within the boundaries as Avisar defines them – but it also uses the devices of mainstream narrative film in the Hollywood-style. First of all the story of Oskar Schindler (fictionalised in the way that all film is to some extent a fiction) is essentially a true story, a primary necessity in any narrative of the Holocaust but also a significant means of establishing authority in this film. The historical material revealed through the foregrounded narrative, though shocking and emotionally painful, is (mostly) peripheral to the death camp at Auschwitz. With Oskar Schindler as the protagonist, Spielberg was able to attach the more serious moral and historical material to the familiar story of a character who gains new insight and moral stature as the result of a series of events requiring morally important decisions. This is very much the same as the approach Oliver Stone adopted in *JFK*, representing the complex issues of evidence and

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interpretation through a similarly foregrounded story based on the narrative organisation of the mythic Hero's Journey.

Where Lanzmann in *Shoah* insisted that it was impossible to put the obscenity of the Holocaust on the screen, Spielberg chose to do just that – even using a dramatised version of some of *Shoah*'s testimony. Philosophically Lanzmann insists on the singularity of the event, Spielberg on its potential repeatability, his (Spielberg) reason for making the film being 'that it might never happen again'. In depicting 'the daily unrelieved confusion, shock, and the disorienting squeeze of people torn from their lives and constantly buffeted against the obscene plan for their demise',⁴² Spielberg has structured into his film the potential for the kind of knowing that is a combination of the affecting and the intellectual. *Film Com*'s Tom Keogh has described *Schindler's List* as 'probably the closest approach that American cinema will ever take to a perceptual experience of the Holocaust's unimaginably grim reality'.⁴³

Schindler's List it is actually very specific as to setting and as to the exceptional nature of the story. But while foregrounding a story of escape, the film necessarily also tells a story of entrapment. The potential for the film to communicate some of the horrors of the ghetto and the plight of those caught up in its terrors derives from the ways in which the narrative of the film text is superimposed on broad general understanding in popular culture narratives (admittedly simplified narratives) of Hitler's Germany and of images of concentration camps and Nazi brutality. What *Schindler's List* does is to give very specific shape to that fragmentary knowledge. The issue then becomes – does this do justice to the topic? Has this film represented the Holocaust?

I don't think that there can be an answer to those questions, particularly where the issue is the adequacy of the representation. The absolute answer has to be 'no' – because it cannot be otherwise. The vast scale and multiple dimensions of the Final Solution rule out the possibility of totally inclusive treatment of the historical experience in any one work on it regardless of discipline, genre, or the work's size. Additionally, in absolute terms again, since the business of Hollywood is entertainment, preferably of the kind that is sentimental and optimistic, there is something intrinsically jarring about re-creating the horrors of the Holocaust for the edification of the audience. But absolute answers are rarely adequate. Consider the alternative; what if there were no popular representations of the Holocaust that emphasised its human dimensions? What if audiences, fifty years removed from the event, were left to feel (as many still do) that the Holocaust was something that happened to an amorphous and stereotyped group – the Other – a long time ago? Did numbers commensurate with audiences for *Schindler's List* actually watch the nine hours of *Shoah*? No. Thomas Elsaesser has noted in respect to the place of the two films in the public sphere that, although *Shoah* screened in many countries, 'it had to contend with

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minority television channels'⁴⁴ while *Schindler's List* was one of the major international successes of 1993/94.

Even when the issue of the adequacy of the representation of the Holocaust is framed in less absolute terms than those proposed by Lanzmann, the question is still none the less complicated. It begs questions that are intrinsically bound up with the subject of this thesis. What kinds of translations of the past occur in mainstream, commercial film? In what ways do they intervene in popular historical consciousness? Can the historical representation in this form be understood as 'real' history? Is it possible for fictional film to be historical? Modern reflection on the nature of history and historiography has made it clear that there can be many valid ways of understanding and representing the same events. Film, particularly the Hollywood-style of narrative film, tends towards a style of re-creation of the past where events are focused through the lens of a foregrounded personal story. The individual is at the heart of filmic genres. As discussed elsewhere with reference to Natalie Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, the personal can be history in itself. It can also intersect and illuminate larger currents of historical events as discussed in Chapter Five with respect to *Brides of Christ*.

Clearly the formal demands of film make it different from its written counterpart with very different limitations and achievements. Films generally create context and minor characters with a great deal of economy, a situation posing a number of specific problems where the film aims at an authoritative representation of the past. Except in exceptional circumstances (or in exceptional structures like that of *Rashomon*) the strong narrative movement forward constrains attempts at the presentation of ambiguity over events and their motivation. In addition, conventional methods of indicating broad historical trends can result in a shallowness in the presentation of complex historical events together with a tendency towards stereotyping, the latter being a situation which in the representation of Schindler's Jews, *Schindler's List* is hard-pressed to avoid. Minor characters and background actions are understood as referring to a more general class of events, an economical signifying practice but one that blurs specificity and reduces the historical particularity of incidents.

However, while there may be shortcomings in terms of historical analysis and presentation of a broad picture there are gains in the immediacy of the experience and in the kind of rapport that specific representations have with culturally shared emotional reactions. Superficially, the apparent reality and the sense of immediacy that film engenders appear as poor relatives to the complex information and interpretation offered by the written form. However, it is important to recognise that there are multiple kinds of 'understanding' (as opposed to cognition) and that when we speak of 'understanding' we are also speaking of a particular 'emotional knowing' that is

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associated with 'intellectual knowing' in varying proportions.⁴⁵ In historical film there may be deficits in terms of abstract analysis and so what is potentially learned is a process of understanding in which *cognition* is the primary form of knowledge. However, there are gains in terms of tangibility and vitality of experience. At the other extreme from abstract analytical understanding based on cognition, it is possible for emotional resonances and cultural memory to establish a sense of validity in what is presented. These forms of 'understanding' are different and hopefully complementary. Seen in these terms history, written narratives, documentary and historical elements in commercial film open up *different* historical experiences.

Moreover, as debates over the question of the limitations to a representation of the Holocaust show, the form chosen is implicitly ideological. As Hayden White points out, all theorists of historiography generally agree that some form of interpretative strategy is intrinsic to all historical narratives.⁴⁶ He argues that every representation of the past has specific ideological implications and the form of interpretation has its origins in different kinds of ideological commitment.⁴⁷ This is true of *Schindler's List* and of every other representation of the Holocaust as well. No particular style of representation has a monopoly on historical verisimilitude, transparency, truth, or moral superiority. The historical content in every form of representation is shaped by that form and constrained by its possibilities and limitations. In addition, every form of historical representation is subject to the effects of the practitioner's skill in handling the chosen medium. *Schindler's List* was undoubtedly shaped by particular versions of generic elements common in Hollywood -style narrative movies. But it was still history, history in another genre, as Mary Hoban has argued.

In his analysis of the ways in which film as a medium represents history Robert A. Rosenstone points out that 'facts' never stand alone and that they are always embedded in the form and that the contribution that film makes to history is through the way its particular form, its genre, is put to use.⁴⁸ *Schindler's List* uses a form of communication with which audiences are familiar, one in which 'realism' is the dominant mode of presenting a story history as drama in which the subject is personalised, emotionalised, and focussed through individuals. But the film uses the techniques of invention, compression, and metaphorical analyses which Robert A. Rosenstone argues as being essential structures in historical representation on film in the ways which give a great deal of historical information beyond that of the foregrounded narrative. With this in mind I propose to look briefly at certain elements in the form of the movie and at the kinds of historical knowledge that they offer.

The narrative of the film *Schindler's List* centres on actual events in the life of Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist and wartime profiteer who made a fortune as a munitions manufacturer off the slave labour of Jews. Although a Nazi party member, as Schindler witnessed the Nazi military atrocities he evolved into a secret saviour who spent his fortune in bribes to spare his 1200 Jewish

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workers from the death camps, even effecting a personal rescue of the women and children when they were mistakenly sent to Auschwitz. While the raw material of the story is true narrative structures, as Hayden White suggests, are always fictions so that Spielberg's narrative of the Holocaust is a quasi-fiction that contains a truth. While particular forms of emplotment and structure of narrative in *Schindler's List* have been employed for dramatic effect, they are different only in *degree* to the manipulation of story elements that is part of any narrative structure, even that of the witnesses whose memories are probed in *Shoah*.

Overall, Spielberg's film follows the conventions of characterisation in the classic realist Hollywood narrative. There are clear-cut good guys and bad guys, suspense and last minute rescues and above all, a happy ending. But that does not prevent it from presenting historical verisimilitude with sophistication nor does it make it a simplistic film. Oskar Schindler is placed in the moral scale of things by occupying the middle ground between Yitzhak Stern (Schindler's accountant) the 'pure soul' of the film and Amon Goeth, the Commandant of the Plaszow Camp who embodies the sadism, dandyism and emotional perversity that is symbolic of the Nazi regime. The melodramatic ending in which Schindler breaks down and displays the depth of his concern for his workers is pure Hollywood and pure pathos in its attempt to underline the depth of Schindler's metamorphosis and to attain narrative closure. However, in other ways Spielberg departs from the shorthand conventions of the archetypal Hero's Journey to create a character who is enigmatic. Schindler is neither good nor evil. He is charming, selfish, greedy, manipulative, and opportunistic. His sins are those of the flesh and his virtues are those of the bon vivant. But somehow he comes to see what thousands of others refused to see; the evil of the violence of the holocaust. Why he came to do so is left unexplained – just as people's motivations are often inexplicable in reality. Such an answer would trivialise the whole issue. In that way he stands as symbolic of the belief that whatever the situation, one person can make a difference even in the face of apathy and mass evil.

Negative criticism of *Schindler's List* as a representation of history presents the view that if audiences were to rely on the implicit understanding of the film, then the Holocaust would have appeared to have been caused by the SS as the one source of evil. From this perspective, foregrounding the story of Oskar Schindler allows audiences to believe that not only were there were good Germans⁴⁹ but that there were many good Germans and that the Nazis were only the minority, a disturbing misrepresentation. However I believe that while some audiences may have understood the historical meaning in that way, it is not one that is justified by the conventions of the film, conventions in which audiences would have been well-versed because of the familiarity of the form. Neither of these interpretations that of causality limited to the military and Nazis, or that many people helped the Jews – is borne out by the either the literal narrative, the visual narrative or the discourse and definitely not by the generic conventions of a narrative of self discovery resulting in good.

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Historically the story of Oskar Schindler is an extremely atypical story of the Holocaust, a story of rescue of some 1200 in a context where six million Jews were methodically exterminated. Moreover, for every person who saved Jews there were thousands of people who deliberately turned Jews over to the Nazis. The film almost goes out of its way to emphasise the fact that Schindler's actions were *un*-typical, to the extent that the unusual nature of what happened is the essential point of the story and is intrinsic to the construction and development of the main character. Additionally, although the film is restrained in its depiction of the horrors of the Holocaust, it shows fully and plainly the brutality of the slaughter in the clearing of the Krakow Ghetto. The horrifying thoroughness with which the Nazis murdered the inhabitants of the ghetto and then destroyed the bodies serves to demonstrate the extremely unusual, even extraordinary, nature of the survival of Schindler's Jews.

As the narrative of *Schindler's List* develops, it points to the fact that the Holocaust was not just the result of a few extraordinary sadists and SS officers. Certainly the latter element in the SS is obvious and Goeth, the psychological sadist, is the embodiment of those whom popular historical understanding thinks of as responsible for the Holocaust. He kills the Jews who help and those who obstruct. He kills randomly for sport and systematically for policy. He is singular in his sadism. However, he is not the only soldier in the film and in representing the young soldiers who attack the ghetto, Spielberg captures something of the enigma at the heart of the brutality. Superficially the soldiers are nice young men who chuck children under the chin and call old women "Mother". They are not psychopaths like Goeth. Yet as the film shows, and as history attests, those same young men shoot at point blank range and slaughter the defenceless like cattle. Certainly this point had been made before in films like *Shoah*, but it is underlined in this narrative by the harrowing scenes of the clearing of the Krakow Ghetto. As the camera draws back from scenes involving individuals to a long shot of Schindler viewing the scene from horseback, the appalling extent and thoroughness of the slaughter is all too clear.

Spielberg does not shrink from demonstrating the domestic and civilian context of the horrors, indicating that this disaster against which there could be resistance happened to ordinary people and that ordinary lives were ripped apart. With considerable understatement and restraint in the cinematic narrative civilians are exposed as willing participants in the Holocaust, overt in their racial hatred of their Jewish fellow-countrymen. The most harrowing scenes are certainly the violent clearing of the ghetto. But the detachment of the killings is almost equalled by the visceral force of the hatred with which the townsfolk pelt the Jews with rocks as they are forced from the countryside to the crowded conditions in Krakow and then again into the greater misery of the ghetto. However, Spielberg's most telling images of civilian complicity involve children. Children evoke sympathetic identification and strong emotional responses as we react to their vulnerability. In *Schindler's List* their use as victimisers is particularly shocking. He uses them as a reproach to all the claims of 'We didn't know'. There is the memorable image of the young

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Polish girl screaming in an ecstasy of hatred 'Goodbye Jews' as her neighbours are taken from their homes. In another scene a little boy makes the universal gesture of slitting the throat as the Jews in cattle cars pass by on their way to Auschwitz.

In this narrative form these events are fictions – but from the perspective of the audience they are understood as historically representative. The film emphasises its authenticity and truth claims by the use of its Krakow location, its explicit use of the artefacts of Auschwitz, and particularly by its ending when, in real life, the survivors of Schindler's work force place stones on his grave. Moreover, the statement from this section of the film that the descendants of Schindler's Jews now number over 6000 while the entire Jewish population of Poland is about 4000 makes clear statements about the horrific thoroughness of the Final Solution in Poland. It also indicates that in resisting it, one man did more than a whole nation. As in many other modern representations of the Holocaust, the emphasis is on survival rather than on genocide, an ideological and commercial choice but one which does not violate the historical record. Rather, it interprets it differently with different emphasis.

Another significant element in establishing the meaning of the form of representation is the fact that *Schindler's List* has been shot in black and white. As a representative device, it creates a kind of emotional distance from the subject while at the same time casting the whole work in an elegiac emotional tone. The tonal variation rather than the immediacy of colour also spares the audience some of the lurid redness of gushing blood of hapless victims shot at point blank range. In addition to the emotional distancing of the black and white images, there is also a physical distancing as many of the more dramatic incidents are seen in long-shot (like much of the clearing of the ghetto) or are seen indicated rather than displayed graphically (as where Goeth shoots his personal servant). But perhaps of greater significance is the referential quality and authority that the black and white stock gives to the events. Its black and white images and authentic settings have visual 'echoes' of archival or contemporary newsreel footage and draw on the authority that the documentary mode has in society.

In addition certain postmodern elements in the aesthetic construction of the film draw attention to its own techniques, maintaining a duality of how the representation is to be understood – simultaneously as an authoritative re-creation of the past, and as an artistic creation. Certainly most audiences would not be consciously aware of the layers of visual references and other self-referential elements in the medium. But there are many members of many audiences who are highly visually literate, who would be read the historical text of the film in conjunction with those extra kinds of meanings. *Schindler's List* is full of inter-textuality with multi-layered meaning in the visual references to German Expressionist film, in the disjunctive elements of the interplay between sound track and image and in the deliberate technical referencing to *Citizen Kane* (to which it stands as a counterpoint in the hero's progress to lofty ideals rather than decline from

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them). They are all significant – not only to the communication of historical information but also to the ideological meaning inscribed in the preferred readings of the film. For those who experience the inter-textuality consciously it can create a kind of Brechtian distance which works against sentimentality. However it is not necessary for audiences to consciously be able to delineate these meanings. The technical virtuosity creates an aesthetic experience which calls attention to itself as a tour de force, acting as a yet another source of authority for the whole professionalism underpinning the production as film and as history.

It certainly can be argued that the sanitised version of events that the film offers is intended as a cathartic and unifying experience for audiences whose identification is with personal feelings in the present rather than with the reality of the historical experience. Moreover, the optimistic transformation of Schindler from opportunist to saviour provides that degree of sentimentality that allows audiences to leave the theatre comfortably stress-free but with their affective reaction towards the Holocaust intact. While I agree that the 'feel good' ending and the fact that the film brings the audience back to the present in the last scene creates an emotional space between the film and the audience, I cannot agree that the audience is entirely stress-free as a result of the film. The fact that their affective reactions are intact, that audiences have been moved by the film, that audiences have felt a kind of identification with the survivors on Schindler's list, is an important part of the ways in which the film will have meaning in popular understanding. As Mary Hoban has argued in respect to *The Fatal Shore*, evocation of the past is not enough. In popular history 'reality must be portrayed and what better way to evoke the 'real' than to appeal to the emotions and the senses'.⁵⁰

In translation of his message, Spielberg's most significant tool is that of the commercial filmmaker – *engagement* – which he exploits at both the level of aesthetics, historical verisimilitude, and emotional identification with character and situation. Moreover, a narrative focused in this way, though it substitutes 'everyman' for the specific Jewish victims, goes a long way towards achieving his stated aim of underscoring those elements of universality of *meaning* in the event.

Steven Spielberg defends the universality built into his film as a deliberate message and not merely as an element intrinsic to the nature of commercial film. In speaking publicly about *Schindler's List* he has made it clear that he understands the Holocaust as something that concerns all of humanity, and sees his film as a deliberate intervention in popular historical consciousness directed by a desire that a holocaust might not happen again.

There are far too many places where hate, intolerance, and genocide still exist. Thus *Schindler's List* is no less a 'Jewish story' or a 'German story' than it is a human story. And its subject matter applies to every nation. Schindler's List is simply about racial hatred – which is the state of mind that attacks not what makes us people but what makes us different from each other. It is my hope

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that *Schindler's List* will awaken and sustain an awareness of such evil and inspire this generation and future generations to seek an end to racial hatred.⁵¹

There can be no doubt about the popularity of *Schindler's List* nor about the fact that product and subject, it broke taboos, confirmed certain views and challenged others – particularly about what can be done with the past and in what forum. Most particularly, it made its own statements about the contestation over representation of the Holocaust and about what stories can be told, and what they mean, and whether or not popular commercial ventures have any right to use the Holocaust as subject to entertain and make a profit – even if desirable results occur in popular historical consciousness and popular historical sensibilities. The film generated enormous public debate, in part going over issues of the representation debate but also emphasising the need to bear witness. However in its enthusiastic popular reception, there were questions about the depth of the message in *Schindler's List*.

A certain strand of criticism pointed to the historical issue that while what we see in the Holocaust scenes in *Schindler's List* is clearly shown to be the terrible results of Hitler's rise to power, the results of the policies of the Third Reich, the film does not direct us towards the questions we should be asking – quite different questions about the *causes* rather than the *results*. It has also been argued that by producing emotional engagement for audiences and supplying them with a happy ending, *Schindler's List* was aimed at creating community in a way that absolved audiences from having to deal the real historical issues of how did such a thing happen? How, in a predominantly Christian world where 'Thou shalt not Kill' is a universal commandment, did a state enforce a policy where the efficient extermination of an entire race was government policy? Is it possible that ordinary people co-operated in such a venture?

These are important issues which need to be addressed, not only in respect to the past but also for their relationship with the present. But the film alone cannot be the forum. *Schindler's List* is a cultural product, finite in what it presents, and did not, could not, address all the issues surrounding the Holocaust as an historical event, as a major trauma of the 20th century, and as an event that each generation must come to understand as warning about the fragility of those moral beliefs about progress and human perfectibility that have become associated with the notion of civilisation. However an educational program could potentially provide a site for extended discussion and analysis of these issues, particularly if the audience felt a level of personal engagement. Because of its longer duration, its ability to focus on numerous issues and to consider them from different perspectives, a well-planned educational program could look at issues of racism and personal responsibility in ways that were more detached and more thorough than the necessarily emotive and incomplete perspective provided by a film. That is the course of action that Spielberg has pursued. While it is clear with both *JFK* and *Schindler's List* that the intentions and interventions by the individual directors were extremely important in the social

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consequences of the films, it needs to be remembered that it was the effect of the film text which set up the social processes to which Spielberg responded.

Either directly or by personal action, Spielberg has funded two extensive programs designed to intervene in the way that the Holocaust is understood in popular culture. One enterprise, the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation is training volunteers and film crews all over the world to collect the testimony of Holocaust survivors on video tape and is a direct challenge to the quite vocal minority which denies that the Holocaust occurred. Spielberg says that he was moved by the Holocaust survivors who journeyed to Poland, 'using the film as a cushion to find closure to their nightmare'.⁵² After *Schindler's List* was released Spielberg used \$3 million of his own money to set up the Foundation and succeeded in persuading a list of influential companies like Time/Warner, Sony, MCA/Universal to support it. The project is expected to cost \$60 million over three years and will interview as many as 50,000 of the estimated 350,000 Holocaust survivors around the world. The plan is to have the collected material available by late 1997, accessible via a computer network from five major centres in North America including the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.⁵³ Though this intervention is not a specific result of the film *per se* it is a very direct consequence of the film's popularity in a social situation where bearing public witness to the horror of the past is a compulsion for many survivors of the Holocaust and where the form that such public witness should take has been a subject of public controversy.

The second form of intervention relies far more on the film itself but like the Survivors of the Shoah Projects,⁵⁴ it too is a mediated intervention. Spielberg's production company Amblin Entertainment and Universal Films have funnelled profits from the film into the *Facing History and Ourselves* Program, a program that has been running in American high schools in a more limited fashion since 1976. The *Facing History* program is an interdisciplinary program which the US Department of Education's National Diffusion Network recognises as exemplary education and worthy of replication. *Schindler's List* is the key text in the study to issues of violence and racism which form the core of the program. The multi-cultural address of *Facing History* uses the methods of the Humanities – inquiry, analysis and interpretation to consider issues that exist on screen within the limited world of *Schindler's List* as well as those other issues (like the Depression of the 1930s) which are outside of the filmic narrative but which nevertheless have a direct bearing on it.

Spielberg's company has provided a video copy of *Schindler's List* free to every high school in the United States and has also provides the funding for an in-service network and an extensive teaching guide/study guide. By 1995 more than a million children in the USA had seen *Schindler's List* and more than 600,000 students each year encounter *Facing History*, either as a stand-alone course or as a part of other courses. The line between this kind of intervention and

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propaganda can be very thin. There is definitely a political agenda behind Spielberg's generosity. But if we are prepared to admit that all education is ideologically-based and that a great deal of what occurs in classrooms is actually social engineering in various guises, then this program is not particularly different from any other. Moreover, at the pragmatic level, the focus on the Holocaust can be defended on the basis that accessing the program is voluntary; the teaching guide cautions teachers to give careful consideration to their own rationale for the lessons; and the methodology encourages pluralism and discourages over-simplification and stereotyping. Looked at as an alternative view of history, a focus on the Holocaust offers students a way of seeing historical process in the 20th century that is different from the chronological, hierarchical dates-and-states approach to human behaviour that underlies many traditional history courses.

Again, I think that it needs to be stressed that Spielberg's film would have been merely a well-intentioned piece that would have lingered on video shelves – and little more – if it had not been the popular success that it was. It would be unlikely to have moved into the educational sphere and even if it had, it would not have had the authority that it now carries through massive popular approbation. There were obviously commercial realities working in Spielberg's choice of a narrative of hope as a vehicle to carry the historical material. For Spielberg's message to have a significant impact on popular historical consciousness it was important that it reach a mass audience – and mass audiences do not go to see tales of despair with unhappy endings, no matter how important the subject and no matter how faithfully the narrative matches the historical record.

Schindler's List does not challenge popular historical understanding in the way that *JFK* does. Rather, it reinforces the meanings of those fragmentary images of swastikas and concentration camps by allowing them to become the minutiae of an active past, offering popular audiences a perception of the horror of the Holocaust that is probably the closest they will ever come to that historical reality. This aspect is particularly important because it accesses elements of cultural memory where its potential as *personal* experience is horrifying. This internalising may be regarded as sentimental – and it is – but it is also a powerful counterbalance to the tendency of non-Jewish audiences to push the Holocaust away from personal meaning through assigning it to a category of events that happened to 'others'. Though this response is not one that could be classified as a visible social effect, it may be *the* major intervention of the film.

For many non-Jews insistence on the singular nature of the event, the European context of the Holocaust and on the Jews as its particular target, has tended to obscure universal implications. It is just not relevant to their lives. A lack of detail in popular historical consciousness, combined with limited emotional interaction with the events of the Holocaust, have produced a tendency to be horrified by images of the Holocaust but to relegate it to something that happened to *the other*. As Alan Stone of the *Boston Review*, speaking from the perspective of his own Jewish heritage points out, in popular imagination it is difficult to reconcile an understanding of the Jews as an

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oppressed minority with the fact that the 'Chosen People' appear as a group to have prospered. In this context and in today's society where so many people and groups legitimately claim victim status, the modern world ...

.... has grown weary of the Jew as the specialist in suffering, and all the Jewish dirges about *their* Holocaust. From the rabid denials of the new anti-Semites to the yawns of the sympathetic but bored listeners, the answer to 'Never Forget' is 'Enough is Enough'. The non-Jewish world wants no more of the Holocaust and for many Jews, like this writer, the subject is at once too painful and too sacrosanct for Hollywood.⁵⁵

However he also goes on to point out that in choosing the story of Oskar Schindler as the basis of his depiction of the Holocaust, Spielberg solves two basic psychological problems at once. Schindler as a non-Jew mediates the Holocaust experience for this population by providing someone to identify with and creates an emotional connection to the events of the film. Because of his (Schindler's) 'otherness' for the Jewish population, he keeps Jews at a safe emotional distance from re-experiencing their terror.

Though *Schindler's List* may have had a way of impressing its meanings on audiences that must be understood differently from that operating in *JFK*, it was like them in that the historical material on the screen *mattered* in the present. In 1993 the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Jewish survivors was less than two years away and carried with it, as all anniversaries do, all the pressure of needing to understand the event before it was too late. Even the character of Schindler, the well-dressed, smooth talking, big-spending manipulator and opportunist was still a familiar figure from the experience of the eighties. In other ways, the physically impressive Liam Neeson as Oskar Schindler is iconic of certain ideals of nineties masculinity – externally strong, shrewd, gregarious, but internally kind and driven by noble ideals. He also represents the father, but the caring father who does not kill and will sacrifice himself for his children, a development that Susan Jeffords sees as a key characterisation and narrative device of the 'new' Hollywood masculinities of the eighties and nineties.⁵⁶ More importantly, at the time of the release of *Schindler's List* events in America (and to a large extent worldwide) in the eighties and nineties, gave particular strength to the feeling that a public forum dedicated to a critical examination of Fascism was especially urgent. The most immediate and urgent was the resurgence of Neo-Nazism and the extreme right. But perhaps more insidious and more threatening to those who had experienced it all before was the growth in the political power wielded by groups with rigid ideologies who attempted to validate their beliefs by seeking to have particular events in the past represented and understood in a particular way – and only in that way. In this social milieu *Schindler's List* was understood as having a joint significance. It was vitally important to a large number of people to have the reality and the legacy of the Holocaust recognised for what it was historically. But it was equally important that its legacy be understood in the present.

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The ability of *Schindler's List* to raise an emotional response has been criticised as a too-easy form of sentimentalism. However, in the modern world where genocide is today's front-page news it is essential that the Holocaust enters into popular historical consciousness as an event that is not an anachronism of the past. *Schindler's List* reflects another society and another time. But its warning is that it could be now. As Professor Robert Pollack, former Dean of Arts and Science at Colombia College puts it:

The lessons of the Holocaust don't need to be taught to Jews. We live with the memory of it every day. Everyone should share with the Jewish community the task of assuring that everyone is taught the lesson of the Holocaust – that hell opens up under your feet even in a very civilised country.⁵⁷

Schindler's List is not in any way *the* representation of the Holocaust. But it is *a* representation which carries a great deal of historical information. As Alan Stone has pointed out, *Schindler's List* does not pose deep philosophical questions but it does provide some answers. Amon Goeth is a concrete answer to the abstract question of why so many Jews went unprotesting to their deaths. The locomotives packed with human fodder is another. The unrestrained hatred of the Poles; the indifference of the 'good' Germans – these are all concrete answers.⁵⁸ The history that Spielberg presents is an *interpretation*, as all historical narratives are, and one that is mediated by the demands of the Hollywood form. But it does not mean that it is inauthentic to the memories of the survivors nor to the actuality of the artefacts that remain. Spielberg managed to confront the explicit horror of the Holocaust but not in a way that would drive Jews from the theatre. Fifty years from the event, modern audiences are expected to bear witness to the enormity of calculated genocide. But we are not required to watch it. *Schindler's List* makes it very clear what 'genocide' means and how it could be so chillingly thorough – but Spielberg leaves us outside of the process of Auschwitz and the gas chambers. Spielberg made a film that made that Holocaust part of popular culture. The stunned silence which was the experience in most theatres as the house lights went up is testimony to the power of the way he put it on the screen.

¹ According to *The Sydney Morning Herald* (17th September 1995) Steven Spielberg funnelled the profits from *Schindler's List* into the setting up of this foundation.

² Frank Mankiewicz, writing for the 1992 book, *JFK: The Book of the Film*, could say that more than 15 million Americans and 'many millions abroad' had seen the film by that date and that 'recent public opinion samplings indicate it will be the most sought-after home video in many years.' In his address to National Press Club (15/1/92), Oliver Stone stated that by the time the film will have been played out in video cassettes, he expected some 50 million more Americans to have seen the film.

Frank Mankiewicz, 'About the Debate', in Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar (Eds.), *JFK. The Book of the Film*, Applause Books, New York, 1992, pp.187–189, p.189 & p.187; and Oliver Stone 'Speech to the National Club', pp.403–409, p.408.

³ James D. Keller, 'Oliver Stone's *JFK* and the "Circulation of Social Energy" and the "Textuality of History"', *Journal of Popular Film and Television* Vol. 21, No2, Summer 1992, pp.72–78, p.73

⁴ See Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar Eds., *JFK. The Book of the Film*, p.253 and p.248.

In an interview with Roger Ebert for Universal Press Syndicate (17/12/91) and in a letter to the Editor of the *New York Times* (22/12/91), Oliver Stone stated that 'we should get the House Select Committee to release their files that were embargoed till 2029' and that there was 'absolutely no excuse whatsoever for the American public to wait until 2029 for the House Select Committee records to be released'

Robert Ebert, 'Interview with Oliver Stone', pp.249–253 p.253.

Oliver Stone, 'Via The Director's Viewfinder' pp.246–248, p.248.

⁵ Keller sees the sociological objective of the film as the creation of an atmosphere that would make the classified information available to the public. Keller, 'Oliver Stone's *JFK* and the "Circulation of Social Energy" and the "Textuality of History"', p.73.

⁶ Robert Brent Toplin in his chapter on *JFK* discusses many of these criticisms and Stone's response to a number of them. See Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana & Chicago. 1996, pp.45–78.

⁷ *Newsweek* 23rd December 1992. The article accompanying the cover appeared on pp.46–49. Kenneth Auchincloss, *Twisted History*. Reprinted in Kenneth Auchincloss, Ginny Carroll, Maggie Malone, 'Twisted History' *JFK. The Book of the Film*. Ed. Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, Applause Books, New York, 1992, pp.289–293.

⁸ Art Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*, Temple University, Philadelphia., 1996, p.206.

⁹ Simon, *Dangerous Knowledge: The JFK Assassination in Art and Film*, p.207 and N 255 lists the following:

JFK Assassination Information Centre hosted an Assassination Symposium in Dallas in 1991 and again in 1993.

In 1992, they were host to a conference of the Assassination Archives and Research Centre of Washington D.C.

In April 1992 *The Village Voice* sponsored 'An Assassination Salon' in New York featuring well known researchers.

In June 1992, the first annual Midwest Symposium on the Assassination of John F. Kennedy was held in Chicago and a second conference on the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King was held in 1993.

There was a clash in the pages of *Nation* primarily between Oliver Stone and John Newman, (author of *JFK and Vietnam*) and Alexander Cockburn, who was outraged at the image of JFK as a peace-maker and Wesley Liebeler, former assistant counsel to the Warren Commission. *Nation* May 18th 1992, p.650 & pp.676–680.

Tikkun March April 1992 and *The Progressive* March 1992 also directed editorial to the debate.

¹⁰ William D. Romanowski, 'Oliver Stone's *JFK*: Commercial Filmmaking, Cultural History, and Conflict', *The Journal of Film and Television*. Vol.12, No 2, Summer, 1993, pp.63–73, p.63

¹¹ The debate on evidence returned to aspects of the original evidence of 1961 and the Warren Commission. The very high profile of this debate by very public figures was a part of the development of popular historical awareness and of the call, from both pro-Warren and conspiracy factions, to open sealed documents. Art Simon (p.208) notes the 'schizophrenic opinion' towards evidence of the assassination, by the editors of *Journal of the American Medical Association* who held a press conference in May 1992 to announce the publication of an interview with autopsy doctors James J. Humes and J. Thornton Boswell. They did, however, call on the government to declassify and publish the still secret assassination files. This opinion was publicised on the editorial pages of the *New York*

Times. Lawrence K Altman, "Doctor's Affirm Kennedy Autopsy Report", *New York Times*, May 20th 1992. However Cyril H. Wecht who reviewed the autopsy material in 1972 and disagreed with the findings of the Warren Commission, had already published a letter to the Editor of *The Washington Post* in a very public controversy which had been running for some weeks about the assassination, the evidence and JFK. (January 11th 1992). He was supported by Harold Weisberg, author of *Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Commission*, who disputes the 'magic bullet' theory and the medical opinion that supports it. Both were responding to a defence of the findings of the Warren Commission by Gerald R. Ford and David W. Belin 'Kennedy Assassination: How About the Truth?' (*Washington Post* December 17th) in *JFK. The Book Of the Film*, pp.265–266, (Wecht), pp.266–267, (Weisberg), pp.253–256, (Ford & Belin).

¹² Sources cited in Romanowski, 'Oliver Stone's *JFK*: Commercial Filmmaking, Cultural History, and Conflict', p.70. Senator Robert Boren is one of those who made such a statement.

¹³ Jeffery Morley, 'The Political Rorschach Test' in *JFK. The Book Of the Film*, p.231. Reprinted from a review *Los Angeles Times*. December 8th 1991.

¹⁴ Janet Saiger, 'Cinematic shots: The Narration of Violence' in Vivian Sobchack (Ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*, Routledge, New York, 1996, pp.39–54, p.50.

¹⁵ Andrew O'Hehir, 'JFK: Tragedy Into Farce', in *JFK. The Book Of the Film*, pp.269–273, p.271. Repeated from *San Francisco Weekly*. December 18th, 1991.

¹⁶ Stone has defended the accuracy of his research and the plausibility of his account of his account vis-à-vis any other, particularly that of the Warren Commission on innumerable occasions in speeches, forums, interviews and in the visual and printed media. For a sample of his statements in the print media debate see Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, Eds., *JFK. The Book Of the Film*, particularly 'Stone's *JFK*: A Higher Truth?' pp.198–202; 'Stone Shoots Back' p.229–230; 'An Interview with Oliver Stone' pp.249–253; 'The JFK Assassination—What About The Evidence?' pp.257–261; 'Who Is Rewriting History?', pp.2765–277; 'JFK Is Not Irresponsible – Choosing to Ignore The Evidence Is', pp.335–336; 'Oliver Stone Talks Back', pp.349–357; 'Speech to the National Club' pp.403–409.

¹⁷ A O'Hehir, 'JFK: Tragedy Into Farce', p.270 Repeated from *San Francisco Weekly*. December 18th 1991.

¹⁸ David Ansen, 'What does Oliver Stone Owe History?' *Newsweek*, December 23rd 1991, p.49.

¹⁹ Ansen, 'What does Oliver Stone Owe History?' p.49

²⁰ Peter Gabel 'The Spiritual Truth of "JFK"', *Tikkun* March /April. 1992. Repeated in <http://www.ratical.com/ratville/JFK/Gabel.html>

²¹ Gabel, 'The Spiritual Truth of "JFK"', *Tikkun* March/April, 1992. Repeated in <http://www.ratical.com/ratville/JFK/Gabel.html>

²² Oliver Stone, *Searching For the Spiritual*. Keynote Address to the Senior Commencement Class, Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkley. May 10th 1994. <http://blogetrotter.berkeley.edu/stone/stone~grad1.html> <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Stone/stone-grad1.html>

²³ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, 1997 *Political Paranoia as Cinematic Motif: Stone's 'JFK'*, p.2. Repeated in <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/robins.htm>

Paper presented at the August/September, 1977, meeting of the American Political Science Association. Washington. D.C. by Robert S. Robins, Professor of Political Science, Tulane University, New Orleans., and Jerrod M. Post, Professor of Psychiatry, Political Psychology and International Affairs

Those authors use the term 'paranoia' in the broad sense to subsume both clinical paranoid illness as well as a paranoid style and paranoid outlook. They further note that an important aspect of paranoid style is a pattern of disowning uncomfortable personal feelings and attributing them to others, the psychological defence mechanism of projection. They state that although the paranoid outlook may affect many areas of human affairs, it is most evident in the adversarial world of politics where it is a constant feature

²⁴ Butler, L. C. Koopman, and P. Zimbardo, 'The psychological impact of Viewing the film *JFK*, in *Political Psychology*. 16 1995: 237–258. Cited in Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, 1997 *Political Paranoia as Cinematic Motif: Stone's 'JFK'*, p.2. Repeated in <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/robins.htm> Paper presented at the August/September 1977 meeting of the American Political Science Association. Washington. D.C. by Robert S. Robins, Professor of Political Science, Tulane University, New Orleans., and Jerrod M. Post, Professor of Psychiatry, Political Psychology and International Affairs.

²⁵ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Question d of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1994, p.129.

- ²⁶ Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, p.131–133.
- ²⁷ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, 1997 *Political Paranoia as Cinematic Motif: Stone's 'JFK'*, p.2. Repeated in <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/robins.htm>
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- ²⁸ Robins and Post, 1997 *Political Paranoia as Cinematic Motif: Stone's 'JFK'*, p.5.
- ²⁹ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, p.68.
- ³⁰ Oliver Stone, 1994 *Searching For the Spiritual*.
- ³¹ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to Our Idea of History*, p.77.
- ³² Oliver Stone, *History and The Movies: Conversations with Oliver Stone* by Harry Kreisler. Institute of International Studies University of California, Berkeley. April 17th–27th 1997.
<http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/Stone/stone-con6.html>
- ³³ Oliver Stone, 'Stone's JFK: A Higher Truth? The Post George Lardner and My Version of the JFK Assassination.' *The Washington Post*, Outlook, June 2nd 1991. In Oliver Stone & Zachary Sklar (Eds.), *JFK. The Book Of the Film*, pp198–202, & p.199.
- ³⁴ It should be noted in this context that there are thousands of images of Nazi Germany in circulation in popular culture, many of German origin, and that such images tend to act as nodal points which 'define' the Holocaust in cultural memory.
- ³⁵ Saul Friedlander, "Introduction" in Saul Friedlander (Ed), *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* Harvard University Press Cambridge Massachusetts, 1992, pp.1–21, p.1.
- ³⁶ Friedlander, "Introduction" p.4.
- ³⁷ Ilvan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988.
- ³⁸ Avisar, 'Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable', p.51.
- ³⁹ Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*, p.47–51.
- ⁴⁰ Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable*, p.48.
- ⁴¹ Herbert Hirsch, *Genocide and the Politics of Memory: Studying death to Preserve Life*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill & London, 1995, p.2.
- ⁴² Tom Keogh, 'Schindler's List: A Masterpiece', in *Film Com Reviews*. 1996.
<http://www.film.com/filma/reviews/quickrev.idc?REV=614>
- ⁴³ Tom Keogh, 'Schindler's List: A Masterpiece'.
- ⁴⁴ Elsaesser, Thomas, 'Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*', in Vivian Sobchack (Ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, And The Modern Event*, Routledge London, 1996, pp.145–183, p.177.
- ⁴⁵ I see this as quite distinct from sentimentality and as being a form of understanding that is validated by personal experience and cultural memory. (Of course the result may be sentimental as a consequence of personal outlook. But the process is not inherently sentimental).
- ⁴⁶ Hayden White *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978, p.51.
- ⁴⁷ White *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, p.69.
- ⁴⁸ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of film to Our Idea of History*. p. 124.
- ⁴⁹ Although *Schindler's List* was set in Poland, for most audiences, the general referent of the images is Germany.
- ⁵⁰ Mary Hoban, 'Realer Than Reel'. *Public History Review*. Vol.3. 1994, pp.107–123, p.119.
- ⁵¹ Steven Spielberg, "Steven Spielberg and Facing History Bring *Schindler's List* to the Nation's Schools" from the *Facing History & Ourselves* Newsletter
<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/Holocaust/facing.html>
- ⁵² Helen Greenwood, 'Like releasing water of the dam', *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 27th 1995.
- ⁵³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 27th 1995.
- ⁵⁴ The Shoah Project is the name now given to worldwide collection of videotaped Holocaust testimony supported by the resources from certain of Spielberg's enterprises. A number of oral history projects collecting memories of Holocaust survivors were already in existence in many places before Spielberg made *Schindler's List*. However, because of Spielberg's international prominence and the

size of the organization, the Survivors of the Shoah Foundation is capable of recording more testimonies than all individual oral history projects put together. The foundation plans to assemble the largest online multimedia Holocaust archive from these personal videotaped testimonies. The tapes are digitised and catalogued for a digital library.

⁵⁵ Alan A. Stone, 'Spielberg's Success', *Boston Review*. Reproduced in
<http://www-polisci.mit.edu/BostonReiew/BR19.3/stone.html>

⁵⁶ Susan Jeffords, 'Can Masculinity Be Terminated?' in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (Eds.) *Screening The Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993, p.254.

⁵⁷ Robert E. Pollack, 'Holocaust Teaching Gaining a Niche, but Method is Disputed', *The New York Times*, . April 12th 1995.

⁵⁸ Alan A. Stone, 'Spielberg's Success', *Boston Review*. Summer, 1994. Vol. XIX No.3-4. Reproduced in
<http://www-polisci.mit.edu/BostonReiew/BR19.3/stone.html>

The Leaving of Liverpool

A few days after the beginning of 1998 the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* carried an article under the headline 'New priests' code seeks to exorcise sexual abuse'¹. The report commented on the draft of a code of conduct prepared by the Catholic Bishops' National Committee for Professional Standards – *Integrity and Ministry: A Document of Ethical Standards for Catholic Clergy and Religious in Australia*. The code specifically forbids Catholic priests, brothers, and nuns from administering corporal punishment to children under any circumstances. Moreover, it outlines rules to safeguard the boundaries of acceptable behaviour for those in religious orders, particularly in circumstances where there could be sexual implications. As no priest or other clergy will now be allowed to provide advice on marriage guidance, etc. unless professionally competent to do so the code of ethics has, in many ways, the potential to change historically determined relationships between clergy and their congregations quite considerably.

The origins of that code can be traced directly to the pastoral statement of April 26th 1997 in which the bishops apologised on behalf of the Catholic Church to the victims of clerical sexual abuse. But the fact that such a statement should be made at all can be related directly to the escalating effects of media reports in which two television programs, the documentary *Lost Children of the Empire* and the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool*, were pivotal in creating public awareness of the issue and in facilitating an ongoing process of social, political, and legal action.

Lost Children of the Empire, a British Granada documentary produced and directed by Joanna Mack with Mike Fox as co-director which screened in Australia in November 1989, spelled out the facts of child migration from Britain with apparent authority and objectivity. *Lost Children of the Empire* framed its content as historical narrative, placing an essentially historical frame around the ideologies and social attitudes which saw child migration from Britain as a good thing for all concerned. However, the most affecting parts of the documentary were the often heartrending on-camera accounts by former child migrants of how such decisions had impacted on individual lives. *Lost Children of the Empire* presented children as victims and the authorities involved as, at best, the unthinking perpetrators of a great tragedy. Historical decisions which resulted in the transportation of children and the subsequent neglect that many suffered were presented as the outgrowth of imperialism, class distinction, various social philosophies, and ordinary human failings.

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Lost Children of the Empire was followed four years later (in 1992) by the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool*, produced for the ABC by Steve Knapman and written by John Alsop and Sue Smith who had also collaborated on the script for *Brides of Christ*. The later series while confining the timeframe to the post-World War II period, supported *Lost Children of the Empire*'s structuring of the child migration issue as a tragedy – presenting children as innocent and powerless – victims of callousness, neglect and outright cruelty. *The Leaving of Liverpool* relates the historical episode of child migration to Australia through the story of two spirited children, Bert and Lily, who were sent from Liverpool to orphanages in Australia. Though the children are separated on arrival in Australia Lily succeeds in finding Bert and escapes with him to an independent, but tentative, existence together. Lily, who manages to grow through her experiences towards some kind of personal and social stability, is ultimately reunited with her mother; a situation which departs from the historical record to provide some form of narrative resolution. The ending is not, however, completely contrived as the series leaves Bert suicidal and psychologically scarred by his experiences, with the prospect of a bleak future. Although the miniseries was fiction, it was the kind of fiction that was uncannily factual with the foregrounded story reproducing common experiences and life trajectories of child migrants. However, it was the detail in the incidents which appeared to correspond most closely with the actual, particularly the visual and scripted narrative surrounding Bert and St.Bede's Orphanage which paralleled many of the features of Bindoon Boy's Town in Western Australia.²

Both documentary and miniseries were outstandingly successful and created widespread awareness of a hitherto little-known subject. *The Leaving Of Liverpool* was one of the highest rating shows ever to be shown on the ABC and it won the prize for the best original miniseries of the year from the Australian Writers Guild. It also prompted enormous controversy over the truth of the representation. The two key programs³ framed public understanding of the events in particular ways, creating a public discussion space and initiating a general predisposition towards sympathy in public attitudes which made it possible for former child migrants to speak out about their experiences. Many did identify themselves publicly, particularly those with traumatic personal memories, initiating a new emphasis on paedophilia in the already-controversial historical episode.

This chapter argues that these films marked escalation points in the development of public awareness about the issue of child migration. Both programs, but particularly *The Leaving of Liverpool*, intervened in individual and cultural memories. By reaching a wide public and structuring the issue into an accessible form the films made it possible for many former child migrants to speak out about the past, particularly where the stories they told exhibited similarities with incidents in *The Leaving of Liverpool*. The films helped make collective and public knowledge which had formerly been fragmentary, known only to individuals and small groups. A number of factors in the inter-textuality between film text and other discourses in society were important in producing the snowballing effect that the programs had on individual and public

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response. The framing of the historical issue within a narrative of victimhood and survival intersected with a number of other significant factors in society which had created a kind of social readiness to deal with such disturbing material – material which in other circumstances had met with denial and cover-up.

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the importance of the social context of the film and the significance that narratives circulating in culture have for the kinds of interventions films make in cultural memory. Whereas elsewhere in the thesis I have focused either on the layers of meaning in the films themselves or on the inter-relationship between the mythic meaning and issues in society, in this chapter I place more emphasis on the historical currents and *processes* which created the conditions whereby *The Leaving of Liverpool* acted as a catalyst for social, political, and legal action.

Pertinent elements of the inter-relationship between the film text and social context can be summarised as follows. Firstly the results of some twenty years of social changes were active in aspects of the social dynamics of the eighties. A certain amount of public attention had been drawn to social attitudes and values of the past through changes to social legislation, which gave new freedoms of access to government records in general and birth records in particular. This, along with certain sensational cases over the legal use of repressed memory and associated claims of paedophilia, represented the tip of the iceberg in what it represented about changes in public morality and in what was considered private and what was not. In addition the issue of the Stolen Generations⁴ in the history of relationships between Australia's indigenous communities and white government was becoming better known in this country. The similarities between the callous paternalism operating in government actions in the case of the child migration and that of the Stolen Generations were obvious. In part, the story of the stolen white children may even have been understood as a kind of counter narrative to that about the treatment of Australian Aboriginal peoples.

Secondly the issue was framed in public opinion by the mass media in ways which over-determined certain meanings and virtually precluded others. Both the documentary and the fictional miniseries were placed within the television programming and advertised to potential audiences in a manner which clearly proclaimed that the material was to be understood as both media event and authoritative content worthy of special attention. *The Leaving of Liverpool* in particular was framed by a prestigious public information forum and supported by help lines, much in the way that television handling of elections nominates that medium as pre-eminent in conveying authoritative information to the public. In addition the programs recommended themselves as entertainment. *Lost Children of the Empire*, *The Leaving of Liverpool* and another program on the issue, *The Boys of Saint Vincent* from Canada, came to Australian audiences with the prestige and authority of having won major international awards.

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These filmic interpretations of the past, particularly the fictional *The Leaving of Liverpool*, were effective communicators of their subject matter primarily because of their success as mainstream film. While the uncovering of the scandal and its aftermath in contemporary society needs to be seen as an ongoing process, by reaching huge numbers the films accelerated the diffusion of information throughout the community and made possible the strength of public response. *Lost Children of the Empire* broke the historic silence about the Child Migration Scheme while *The Leaving of Liverpool*, shown later when public awareness was building dealt openly with child sexual abuse in its narrative.

Moreover, the revelations themselves were alarming and dynamic in nature. The subject matter was inherently sensational, shocking not only to popular understandings of the past but also to public morality and the kind of trust which society generally has in the good intentions of government policies (regardless of how paternalistic) and in religious and charitable institutions. The two series provoked and then fuelled strenuous (and unusually emotive) public debate in popular media with reactions ranging through shocked disbelief, denial, public outrage to demands for redress. Most importantly for many of those involved in the events the new strands in cultural memory created a situation in which hidden personal histories could be told, often for the first time. Once in the public arena, this subject was not one that surfaced and went away. It received extensive media coverage over an extended period of time, as various facts were revealed and as legal action began to take its course.

A final element is to be found in the inter-relationship of all of these factors. While public knowledge may initially have been rudimentary and fragmented, the ongoing nature of the issue built public awareness, creating in popular culture a variety of narratives linked by similar themes. Such cumulative information, coming as it did from a variety of sources, helped establish a widespread public consciousness that actions by governments and other institutions may not (in the past) have met the standards we now expect, particularly with regard to the treatment of children. Once established as an issue in public view and interpreted as a narrative of victimhood, the child migration issue escalated into a scandal demanding redress in the present.

Though the initial focus was on the fact of child migration, the revelations had embedded in them stories of institutionalised cruelty. Such revelations were only a breath away from others about sexual abuse which were not only morally offensive but also, in legal terms, a far more serious offence than cruelty. Not surprisingly, once the floodgates had been opened the revelations led to legal actions and had a snowballing effect on public awareness and responses. Public attention – claims and counter-claims, debate and analysis – fixed at first on the situation of former child migrants, rapidly centred on the heretofore hidden subject of child abuse in Catholic and other institutions and to the hitherto ‘unspeakable’ issue of paedophilia in our society.

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The two television programs can be seen as vital as the initiators of perhaps the most significant element in changing popular understanding, the reinforcement loop created by various popular media. Parliamentary involvement and the escalating legal battles over criminal charges and civil suits meant that the matter was continuously evolving into new patterns, new meanings – newsworthy at least and frequently sensational, ensuring ongoing reporting in the daily papers. The potential for the subject to be hammered into the popular consciousness was increased by the fact that as it evolved from child migration to child abuse to paedophilia it was grist to the mill for a number of different program formats, from news reports and debates to personal stories on both television and in print. Here was a blend of sensational material, media exposure in different reporting formats,⁵ frequency of the reports and extended length of time of development combined with ongoing variation of the subject. The lingering issue, the less sensational one, is the question of moral and political responsibility – England v Australia.

Although film was not the only factor involved in changing people's perceptions, I maintain in the chapter that the documentary *Children of the Empire* and the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool* were turning points in the ability of society to respond to events that had, in some cases, lain dormant for up to fifty years. Moreover, the enormous popularity of *The Leaving of Liverpool* in particular and the virtual 'tabula rasa' hitherto existing in cultural memory ensured that the ways in which these programs had conceptualised and realised the historical material would translate itself into a shaping of popular understanding.

The Process of Revealing the Child Migration Scheme

When evidence of unaccompanied migration from former child migrants seeking information about their origins began to surface in Britain and Australia in the 1980s most people, even many professionals involved in child welfare, were unaware that Child Migration Schemes had ever existed. In fact, child migration from Britain (i.e. children who went abroad without parents or relatives to parts of the British Empire as part of initiatives sponsored by the government or a private group) had a long history, some 350 years long. The numbers involved over the period were enormous, somewhere between 100,000 and 180,000 in total.⁶ Children went to many parts of the Empire – but most went to Canada. The 1988 Canadian Government Archive Division puts the figure at 90,000. Australia also received a considerable number. Alan Gill estimates that since the beginning of white settlement up until 1967 when such schemes ended, some 83,000 British children had been sent to Australia.⁷

Yet when the scheme and its extent became public in the 1980s, many former child migrants themselves were ignorant of the fact that groups other than their own had been involved. Margaret

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Humphreys, the British social worker generally credited with being the major force behind the disclosure of the child migrant scheme, comments on the legacy of confusion resulting from the layers of obfuscation associated with the scheme throughout its history. As she puts it:

They [the former child migrants] were unaware that they had been part of a huge social experiment. They felt, in a curious way, that it was their fault.⁸

Though historical forces may have created the context in which these schemes could be revealed, Margaret Humphreys' role was crucial. In addition her book *Empty Cradles* published in 1994, formed part of the process by which the information reached the public. The narrative is structured as a personal account, a kind of detective story with a focus on the impact of the scheme on individuals with terrible experiences. Margaret Humphreys makes a direct connection between the 1975 changes to legislation about adoption in Britain and her involvement in uncovering the child migration. As a social worker she was concerned with the social consequences for individuals and groups of the fact that adopted adults now had access to their birth certificates. She established a small self-help organization 'Triangle' in Nottingham in 1984.⁹ By 1986 this had led her into agreeing to help in a search for the birth records of a adopted child who had inexplicably been sent as a four-year-old from Nottingham to Western Australia, some 1200 miles away – without a guardian.

Records at the General Register Office revealed that there had indeed been several schemes for sending British 'orphans' to Australia and elsewhere. According to her account of events, she could only pursue the material she had uncovered in Britain by working on the major part of the puzzle in Australia. Unable to obtain funding to pursue the problems she had uncovered, Margaret Humphreys' approached the British Association of Social Workers and was advised to try to get support from Fleet Street.¹⁰ The editors of *The Observer* newspaper felt that the story held sufficient potential to induce them to pay Margaret Humphreys' airfare and to send an investigative journalist, Annabel Ferriman, with her. This was to be an important factor in the way the issue was to develop. From the outset, media involvement meant that what could have remained as an important issue contained and frustrated by bureaucratic complexities became a subject with the potential to bypass obfuscation and to become a public scandal.

The first national exposé in Britain on the subject of child migration was *The Observer* article published on 21/07/87. It was picked up and reprinted in full by papers in Sydney and Melbourne. In Britain, media interest in the wake of *The Observer* piece prompted potential documentary makers to seek Margaret Humphreys' co-operation. Because she felt that the Child Migration Trust would simply fade into obscurity without further publicity, Margaret Humphreys agreed to co-operate in a documentary to be produced by Joanna Mack whose work on *Breadline Britain* (a documentary about living in poverty) she had admired.

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Again the decision to represent the issue in a visual format had far-reaching consequences. By far the most significant element in changing cultural memory has been the influence of popular media, with the filmic representations *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* having an enormous effect. Firstly Joanna Mack's documentary *Lost Children of the Empire* placed the narrative of child migration in the public arena and prompted a huge public response, not least from former child migrants. That program alerted them to the existence of organizations that could possibly help and also had the effect of creating the potential for mutual support and group action where before there had been ignorance and a complete lack of power. The subsequent revelations of cruelty and abuse had their own momentum and eventually shifted the focus to claims about sexual abuse, an area where there was a possibility of redress through legal actions.

The entire episode of child migration, and the abuse that many suffered in institutions after arrival, already had credibility when *The Leaving of Liverpool* went to air. The miniseries was heavily promoted and enormously popular and succeeded in introducing the whole situation in a digestible narrative that did not overly sanitise the situation. In fact it made explicit the case for sexual abuse of some of the children. These programs need to be seen firstly as *results* of intersecting historical events, and secondly as events themselves in the process of bringing the issue of child migration to the surface and effecting changes in cultural memory.

The Question Of Social Readiness And Historical Revelation

As with all historical events, the question arises as to why this particular issue and these particular revelations should surface at this time in history and not before. The indications are that former eras had either been unprepared to acknowledge the issue, or incapable of accepting its import. In 1953 there had been negative publicity in both the *West Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* based on an independent report by Richard Henry Hicks, head of the New South Wales Department of Child Welfare into the running of state children's institutions in Western Australia.¹¹ Rather than provoking public outrage at the circumstances in which children lived, the response to the report came mostly from institutions. Outrage, such as it was, focussed on a possible sectarian prejudice in the report, on damage to the government, and most especially on the damage done to reputations particularly that of the Salvation Army 'about which generally nice things have been said'.¹² Though this response has a lot to do with the amount and kind of exposure that the information had in the public eye it seems clear that the reports intersected with social views and values very different from those current at the time of later revelations. What had changed between 1953 and 1992 to make it possible for a society to discuss and act on events which had remained hidden in some cases for up to fifty years?

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Clearly the answer is social context and a comparison between public response in 1953 and that of 1992 demonstrates just how significant the social context is to the way that issues are received and understood. In the recent situation, while a clear relationship existed between investigations into the Child Migration Scheme and legislation of the seventies and eighties which gave adopted children increased access to birth records, there had been other, more fundamental changes in social attitudes which had made such legislation possible. Over time, changes in popular attitudes towards sex and marriage had led to the virtual removal of the illegitimacy stigma. The Supporting Mothers' Benefit introduced in the early seventies, together with legislation about equal pay for women, made it possible for women to keep ex-nuptial children – whereas adoption had been the norm prior to that time. By the seventies and eighties, changed public acceptance had resulted in legislation which opened the formerly secret dealings of adoptions.¹³ As a result, former child migrants had legal rights to information about their identities long withheld due to now passé ideological positions on fertility, marriage, and society.

Significant as these changes were, at an even deeper level of social dynamics were shifts in the degree of willingness among large sections of the public to be satisfied by official explanations and to be confined by authoritarian attitudes in general. Theorists of postmodernism would see such attitudinal shifts as part of the process of the breakdown of certainty together with its attendant mistrust of totalising theories and master narratives. In practical terms this meant that long-term shifts in thinking and more recent consequences of those shifts (like the legislation above) made it possible for elements of the past, long-hidden in the naturalising processes of dominant ideologies, to become visible and be examined from a changed perspective. In the late 1980s for example, emphasis in popular culture on Australian history for the Bicentenary began to demonstrate that there were at least two major, and opposite, ways of looking at the events of 1788 and following – white settlement or white invasion. Increasing popular knowledge of Australia's history of the abuse of our indigenous peoples demonstrated that it is possible for large sections of the population to live with a dominant version of the national past that is either blind, or chooses to forget elements that conflict with the master narrative. The 'sudden' popular visibility of contestation over land rights, the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody, and the then-emerging issue of the Stolen Generations are indications of this kind of attitudinal change.

The issue of the Stolen Generations in particular, though apparently unrelated to Child Migration schemes, did in fact become a subtext to that issue. There were obvious similarities in ways that ideological concerns about the racial superiority of white people had directed actions by governments in both cases. In Western Australia the two sets of circumstances actually overlap, with a small number of Aboriginal children and child migrants being sent to the same Christian Brothers orphanages. Though this was not generally the case in other states, the series drew attention to parallels between the two sets of circumstances by opening the second part of the series, the one centred on Lily, with a scene between Lily and an Aboriginal girl at the same orphanage.¹⁴

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Among the other social changes contributing to the readiness in society to accept the claims of *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* was a thirty-year decline in the view which bestowed psychological authority on church personnel by virtue of their office alone. By the nineties the authority of the churches, particularly of the Catholic Church, together with the numbers in religious orders and their social standing had been declining for thirty years. While allegations of the sexual abuse of child migrants were still shocking at that time, particularly as many of the accused were people in religious orders, it was however *possible* to make such charges in the nineties, and to have a reasonable expectation that the accusations would get a fair hearing. This had not always been the case. Former child migrant Karl Davies for example who, according to Alan Gill 'stunned listeners when he was interviewed on ABC Radio by Andrew Ollie in 1993' insisted that in all the years that had passed since he left the Bindoon orphanage in 1944 he had never discussed his treatment as a child migrant until television made the affair public.¹⁵ Personal trauma and social taboo had formerly made such disclosures impossible. Many other child migrants tell a similar story.¹⁶

Paedophilia

The revelations of cruelty and paedophilia in many of the institutions receiving child migrants were much more shocking to public perceptions than the initial disclosure about child migration itself, and it is not surprising that they were a secondary development as the revelations gained momentum. Paedophilia remains a taboo subject in our culture, but is still a crime. Shame and guilt often cling to the victims rather than to the perpetrators and thus help to prevent revelation of the crime – except under traumatic circumstances. During the 1980s paedophilia drew media attention through criminal cases of sexual abuse based on claims about repressed memory recovered through hypnosis. This technique whereby memory is 'recovered' by hypnosis, dream interpretation or regression therapy, is now generally discredited for legal purposes. However, at the time there were a number of particularly notorious cases in Australia that received wide media coverage.¹⁷ That notoriety did bring the taboo subject into the public domain but it was still generally under the heading of the bizarre, a topic for gossip rather than serious consideration. However, increased public knowledge based on a build-up of information from material published mostly in the popular press did ultimately make it possible for the subject of paedophilia to be discussed and, most importantly, for victims of abuse to speak out.

The Significance of Lost Children Of The Empire

The fact that this little-known aspect of the past has had such a degree of impact on cultural memory and social processes is very closely associated with the role of the mass media in society, particularly the role of television. Unlikely as it seemed when Child Migration schemes were first revealed in the mass media, this aspect of the past had not actually been

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hidden. But it was unknown to the general public, particularly in terms of its scale and the systematic nature of the enterprise.

In a sense, child migration has never been a secret. Information has always existed in obscure history books and government archives, or untouched in the records of the records of the charities and the religious orders.¹⁸

Television changed that situation dramatically. Even though *The Observer* article had been reprinted in Australia and isolated reports had occurred in the press, particularly in Western Australia, those sources did not have the power to penetrate society in the way that television did. Both *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* put the information together as a story and placed that story in the public eye. *Lost Children of the Empire*, the first major popular exposure, presented material confronting to public sensibilities – shocking not only to ideologies enshrined in cultural memory but also to public morality. Its revelations were inherently challenging to the kind of trust which society generally has in religious and charitable institutions, and in the good intentions of government policies.

The authority conveyed by the historical basis of the program's narrative and of the accounts given by on-camera participants made its claims difficult to deny, impossible to ignore. In any case our society confers on documentaries a status and prestige that derive from their factual nature and public beliefs about the 'worthy' intention and the objectivity of the presentation. Through the emphasis on the human dimension of the situation in their diegesis, documentaries like *Lost Children of the Empire* that deal with social issues also offer the audience the attraction of drama and the presence of a subtext that calls for action. In so doing they offer the audience the a sense of ritualistic participation in a form of social criticism, of being a part of the process of upholding cultural values and rooting out those things which would destroy them. Audiences may be shocked but they are also morally gratified – and entertained at the same time. *Lost Children of the Empire* was no exception.

The documentary established clear linkages between past and present and, in the way that it analysed the historical dimension and re-constructed events, there could be no doubt for audiences that here was tragedy that was not hermetically sealed in the past. Perhaps most importantly the documentary constructed a frame for the interpretation of the event's meaning, a particularly important element as the film addressed an audience largely unaware of the existence of the Child Migration Scheme. Whatever the personal meanings for the audience may have been, there can be no denying that the scandal of its shocking revelations was an attraction. Scandal sells – and the personal stories presented by the documentary were generally so tragic as to constitute not only an historical scandal but also a current one as many of the alleged perpetrators remained unpunished. Despite this, the narrative of the documentary gave the impression of being reasonably balanced in

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its presentation in that it placed the schemes in an historical context and dealt with countries other than Australia. Margaret Humphreys called it 'a powerful and balanced documentary'.¹⁹

The version of events that *Lost Children of the Empire* presented did not however go uncontested in the popular media, either by those who ran the institutions or by some former migrants themselves.²⁰ As accusations in the popular media about abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse, overtook the initial revelations about child migration the emphasis rapidly devolved on the roles of church organizations, particularly on that of the Christian Brothers. Alan Gill details public statements in support of the Brothers by many prominent men who were educated in Christian Brothers schools and notes that similar support can also be found among former child migrants.²¹ He also points out that there are 'different truths' arising from the individual circumstances and experiences of former child migrants. It is quite possible in cases where two different people give diametrically opposed accounts of contact with the same individual for both stories to be 'true'.²² Another factor adding to the confusion of opposing viewpoints is the fact that the present has an influence on how stories are re-constructed in individual memory, on what kind of things are articulated, on what is emphasised and what is suppressed. The context of the early nineties favoured the perception of victimhood, a position which the charges of sexual abuse seemed to substantiate. Clearly this was not a situation conducive to alternative memories of life in the orphanages as times of camaraderie, and such memories became marginalised by the weight of evidence to the contrary.

The degree of authority and apparent realism that the two programs *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* brought to their versions of the subject matter was of major importance in shaping the ways in which these events were understood by the public. If we are to judge from the aspects taken up by the media over the long-term, and from the adversarial sense in which ensuing media programs framed notions of guilt and innocence, it is clear that they responded to the perpetrator/victim element in both documentaries. Both for the ways in which they shaped their views of the past and for the fact that they constructed scenarios that implicitly called for a response from those set up as victimisers, these programs must be understood as having had a major influence on cultural memory. To a very large extent *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* were instrumental in determining the understandings against which audiences would, in future, measure those arguments cited by institutions and individuals in defence of the actions of those involved.

Politics, Program Scheduling And Public Response

While television has enormous potential to reach a wide audience, this does not mean that any particular program will fulfil this potential – and it certainly does not guarantee that audiences will respond to the intended message. There are regularly programs on television that are authoritative,

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well-researched, which have socially significant content, and which are shocking in themselves; films like recent documentary and current affairs reports of abuse and child slavery in Pakistan and elsewhere. But they do not have the impact on popular consciousness or in shaping cultural memory that has been the case with *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool*. The difference in reception could well be understood in terms of the proximity in time of the subject matter, and the effects of the sense of community fostered by the mode of address of television, and the domestic siting of its consumption. The revelations about overseas countries were 'other', not connected to 'us', while the revelations in *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* concerned Australia and were extant now. But perhaps more than that, three other elements appear to have been significant in the impact that *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* had on shaping popular understanding. Firstly the content of these programs had confronted comfortable beliefs about the past; secondly everything possible was done to create an audience and to underline the social significance of the exercise; and thirdly, these programs were only a part of the extensive exposure that the situation had in the popular media.

In addition while Australians have in the past been able to block out uncomfortable social memories of abuse of Aboriginal people, the very similar events of forced separation, cruelty, and lies portrayed in *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* dealt with white people. For the audience the implicit accusations had the ability to undermine complacency about the validity of our trust in governments and our sense that we as a society share a degree of certainty about the past. Perhaps worst of all the accusations of physical cruelty and sexual abuse of children were still at the core of taboo subjects, particularly shocking as they link paedophilia to a traditional area of public respect; the churches and religious orders. Although these taboos were weakening at the time, they were still strong enough to cause enormous denial and contestation about the truth of this version of the past.

Everything about the screening of the documentary (and the later miniseries) was orchestrated to deliver maximum impact and to effect public response. Given that ABC programs rarely rate as well as programs on commercial channels, the degree of pre-publicity and the care with which the program was inserted in the overall programming schedule is an indication of the way that network viewed the content. In Australia the ABC recognised the potential of '*Lost Children of the Empire*' altruistically and realistically: altruistically as part of the ABC's social role as a public broadcaster aware of its potential to rally public opinion; and realistically as a 'hot property' that could be promoted so as to attract audiences beyond the norms for that network.

In Britain the documentary had 'pricked the conscience of a nation' – to quote Margaret Humphreys.²³ It was expected to have a similar reception in Australia – and it did. By the time *Lost Children of the Empire* was released in Australia (November 1989), it had already won a gold medal in New York and had been nominated for the Bafta Award. It therefore came to Australia

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with the tags of 'quality television', 'responsible social reporting' as well as the promise of shocking revelations in the content. As in England, a barrage of publicity preceded the screening of the documentary. Margaret Humphreys flew to Australia to help handle the personal responses from former migrants that the program was expected to elicit. The ABC installed help lines (and publicised the fact), a socially responsible precaution as the British experience had shown – and a necessary one as was demonstrated by the fact that hundreds of calls poured into the ABC after the screening until four o'clock the next morning. That such lines were to be open after the program had the effect of lending an enormous authority to the program even before it went to air. In addition to the more cerebral and socially responsible elements of the promotion, the ABC also milked the sensationalist aspect in the teaser segments shown throughout the week preceding the screening.

Almost everything that could be done prior to screening time to maximise audience size, engage viewer curiosity and to establish preferred readings of the documentary was done including considerations about the insertion of *Lost Children of the Empire* into the programming schedule. Day, time, rival programs, and follow-on program were all-important. However, in this case the framing of the documentary with a *Couchman* program was of major significance in reinforcing public perceptions that the program contained significant information. The *Couchman* program, known to deal with controversial issues in a debate format, had its own degree of prestige and authority. The fact that it was to focus on the issues raised by *Lost Children of the Empire* signalled to the potential audience that the content of the documentary was not mere muck-raking but something to be taken very seriously. As Alan Gill has pointed out, *Lost Children of the Empire* was conceived as a straight-forward documentary. The issue was not whether it was supposed to be fact, but whether or not it was true.²⁴ The presence of major stake-holders including former child migrants in the specially invited audience emphasised the historical linkages of past to present and moved the focus from an historical problem limited to the past, to a social problem that remained unfinished in its impacts on present lives. The discussion that followed focused public concentration on the potentially contestable issues and questions raised by the documentary, formulating them clearly and providing space for them to be debated while audience reaction was still fluid.

Framing the Issue of Child Migration in Cultural memory

After the first wave of revelations about the existence of Child Migration schemes it was the abuse of the children after arrival that became the dominant theme in the media. Indeed 'abuse' was at the centre of the controversy. Even before the claims of sexual abuse made sensational headlines the abusive nature of the scheme in its totality was important in popular reaction to revelations of the scheme's existence:

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To take children from their families and their countries was an abuse; to strip them of their identity was an abuse; to forget them and deny their loss was an abuse. Within this context and within our culture, few tragedies can compare.²⁵

Abuse was a strong theme in the most widely-circulated books on the subject, *Lost Children of the Empire* (Bean and Melville), *Empty Cradles* (Margaret Humphreys), and *Orphans of the Empire* (Alan Gill) and in the less well-known of the published personal accounts of the past as well. Though each book differs in emphasis and in scope they each present a similar understanding of the past, particularly in relation to the physical and sexual abuse of the children. While Alan Gill's work is the more analytical and thorough of the three, there is nothing in any of the books contradictory to the interpretation presented in the visual pieces. Books and film have different modes of circulation and while the written work helped create stories about child migration in popular culture, written accounts did not have the same impact on popular perceptions as did the visual. However in creating, framing, and building discourses about the past in society the similarities in the representation of the events together with the inter-linkage between the detail of written forms and the emotional involvement of the films helped overcome suspicion and promote popular acceptance for their interpretation of events.

The construction of the past in the books about child migration and in the two films was a challenge to social memory and the dominant belief in past social actions of governments and charitable institutions as arising out of patriarchal but well-intentioned care for the community. In this respect *Lost Children of the Empire* would have been even more sensational as a debunking of popular perceptions, had not a sequence dealing with sexual abuse been left out the first time that it was shown.²⁶ This aspect of the controversy was explicit in *The Leaving of Liverpool*.

The Leaving Of Liverpool as a Translation of The Past

The two-part drama series *The Leaving of Liverpool* was first transmitted in Australia in July 1992. It was more aggressively promoted than *Children of the Empire* and according to Alan Gill it 'is widely recognised as a landmark increasing public awareness of a hitherto little known subject.'²⁷ *The Leaving of Liverpool* differs in its construction of the past from *Lost Children of the Empire* in that it is a fiction and the historical is accessed through the narratives of Bert and Lily.

Steve Knapman, the producer of *The Leaving of Liverpool* maintains that the production was not intended as a 'knocking' series, nor as an exposé.²⁸ The series was numbing – but it was not excessive. In my opinion, it dealt with the complexities and controversies in the historical record and in personal memories with remarkable even-handedness. The Brothers for example, are shown as a diverse group. Brother Martin is genuinely compassionate and Brother Jerome the paedophile

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is presented as a kindly but flawed character, and his crimes are all the more shocking for that. This representation goes some way to showing why there is controversy in memories of the past and why some boys had horrific experiences with certain Brothers while other boys remember them almost fondly.

The leading adult male role is that of Brother O'Neill, played by the actor Bill Hunter. Brother O'Neill who is in charge of St Bede's Orphanage somewhere outside Sydney in New South Wales, is clearly modelled on Brother Frances Kearney from Bindoon in Western Australia – even down to the horn-rimmed glasses and details of dress. However even in the representation of Brother O'Neill there is a complexity which captures some of the many sides of a person whom many thought of as 'a great man' while others, who knew his less public persona, often speak of him as a monster. The vitality in the character of Brother O'Neill is peculiarly charismatic, with the emphasis on 'peculiar'. The enigmatic combination of a particular kind of 'great vision' of Kearney, the-builder with the arrogance and indifference to human suffering which allowed him to use children as slaves in carrying out his dreams, is captured brilliantly in the film. In fact the characterisation by the writers and its interpretation by Bill Hunter even tends to explain that strange warping of sensibilities as the result of the kind of masculinity that Kearney embodied and which he saw as desirable in the boys. His regime is the translation of a construct of 'manliness' which promotes an excessive form of toughness, discipline, hard work, minimal attention to creature comfort, physical punishment and success by passage through the hierarchy of the herd. While Kearney's regime may be an extreme manifestation, this ideal of masculinity has at different times informed the organization of many all-male institutions and it is recognisable to large sections of the community.

The character of Brother O'Neill – who encourages dissension by favouritism, sharing treats with the elect and then choosing a rival – is very much an archetype, a combination of the evil father and the good father. This archetype is frequently seen translated as the sadistic drill sergeant or the ruthless leader of a gangster mob. Yet in very many ways O'Neill is an accurate translation of the memories of a number of former Bindoon Boys. Pleasing the father (as well as rebelling against him) is perhaps an archetypal response familiar from mainstream film. But it is also a response demonstrated in institutional circumstances. In representing Brother O'Neill *The Leaving of Liverpool* demonstrates how those archetypal qualities, seen through childish eyes in a warped social order, could make him both admired and feared – and in doing so demonstrates several possible reasons why so many former orphans joined the Christian Brothers. Both the overseer David and Bert decide to become brothers. As a suicidal Bert later says to Lily "Why did you come? I was going to be a Brother. I was going to be somebody."

Not surprisingly, many viewers saw Brother O'Neill as Brother Kearney and St. Bede's as Bindoon. However the scriptwriters John Alsop and Sue Smith maintain that the story is fictional but add 'it

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(St Bede's) is a fictional place but fiction that would be a complete nonsense had there not been somewhere like Bindoon'.²⁹ In some ways the series was obviously a story built on conventions that audiences recognised without hesitation. But it translated the detail of the historical record (from various sources) into the diegesis of the narrative in ways that intersected with already-existing discourses in society, giving it the kind of authority associated with documentary.

For example, as the various investigations have revealed, children were generally transported to various locations in the Empire without the consent of relatives and subsequent attempts to find them were met with evasions and lies. In a key scene in the first few minutes of the first episode the children listen to a lecture about the Empire and what they can do for its welfare, and respond to an invitation to sign up for different countries with total incomprehension thinking the whole process is a game. Later, when Lily's mother returns to collect her child after six months as she promised, she is told that Lily has been adopted in Ireland and that all attempts to find her are futile as her name has been changed. She is also given the balm (which many accepted) that this is for the best and that the adoptive family will give the child what the mother cannot give – a position which Lily's mother does not accept. Lily likewise is told that her mother has abandoned her and is shown a signature, supposedly consenting to the right of the orphanage to send the child anywhere it wishes. Such consent forms did exist but the parents rarely understood the extent of the powers that they were handing over to the orphanages at the time. However the film does give space to an alternative construction of the situation, showing that many orphans like Bert were the children of unmarried mothers from wartime Britain who had placed their children in care and virtually abandoned them. It does not however condone the perception that the parents were therefore trash and that the children were the refuse of Liverpool, a view articulated many times in the film by receiving authorities in both Australia and Britain.

Certain elements in the film script are direct translations of the historical record, but others are the kind of symbolic translations that Rosenstone speaks about which capture general trends in a single narrative or a single scene. In the first section of the miniseries Brother Martin is the embodiment of all those who knew about the cruelty and deprivation and who were either too timid or too powerless to do anything about it. Brother Martin, a man who sincerely cares for the children and who shares their situation, is the silent witness who does not have the courage to stand up against the wrong. His one attempt to challenge Brother O'Neill about the conditions in which the boys live and the isolation in which they live is dismissed in a personal slur about Martin's manhood. Brother Martin solves his problem by leaving the Order. Historically, and in the context of the miniseries, there seems little that he could have done. In the series when the little deaf boy Watson, is traumatised by having been sexually molested, the evidence of paedophilia is very clear to the doctor. Brother Martin sees it as a chance to open up the situation at St Bede's to public scrutiny. But the suggestion of the good Catholic doctor that the case be investigated and reported is easily overruled by O'Neill's assurances that it will be taken care of; O'Neill's solution is to beat into a

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pulp the supposed (but innocent) perpetrator David, in an unequal boxing match which leaves him with permanent facial injuries.

Both of these episodes are fiction. But they are the kind of fiction which conveys historical truths. Sexual abuse within institutions was not unknown and the kind of cover-up portrayed in the series illustrates how it was possible for criminal offences like this to remain the business of the Order and not of the law. The weight of evidence now indicates that Brothers who had been accused of paedophilia were simply transferred by their superiors.

The combination of fiction and historical information in *The Leaving of Liverpool* was potent in its message. However, we must remember that this painful piece was also a subject for popular entertainment. Like *Brides of Christ* which Sue Smith and John Alsop also wrote for the ABC *The Leaving Of Liverpool* has high production values and aesthetic appeal. Like *Brides of Christ* the script was supported by detailed historical research which was translated into superb historical verisimilitude including some documentary footage of the 1953 Royal Visit, combined with historical re-creations involving the characters of the series. The narrative about Lily follows the structure of the Hero's Journey and for her there is a happy ending. However the script has not been so tied to conventions of mainstream that it does violence to the historical record through suggesting that former child migrants overcame their disadvantages and lived successful lives – some did – some didn't. The script emphasizes that Bert ended up broken in spirit. Yet, at the beginning of the series, Bert was a leader, full of energy and life. In poignant final scene Lily shows Bert a photograph taken back in Liverpool. Bert says that the boy in the photo is not him. *He was someone people listened to*. Whatever Bert may have been in Liverpool, his spirit, his imagination and his vitality meant that he was not the bottom of the heap. The Bert we see at the end of the series is now a real misfit with a criminal record – alone, suicidal, unable to read and write.

The Intervention of The Leaving Of Liverpool

The fictionalised narrative in *The Leaving Of Liverpool* was widely assumed to be based on the events at Bindoon and the impact of the drama on individuals and on society in general was immediately obvious. In the first forty-eight hours after the screening the ABC received some 700 calls. VOICES³⁰ likewise received a rush of support after the screening. On the basis of the public response and on the revelations following the series it is feasible to argue that *The Leaving Of Liverpool* not only intervened in the way the past was understood in society, but also intersected with personal memories of former child migrants in a number of ways. It is difficult to know the extent to which the program affected *what* was remembered by individuals. However its impact

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could be seen in *what was now revealed* and *how it was narrated*, i.e. *the shape, emphasis and tropes* in those memories.

Certainly the physical similarities between the images in the program and the actual were potentially an aid to inducing the kind of flash-bulb memory in which forgotten or things unmindful at the time are recalled. More particularly, by re-framing the position of the children in orphanages – from ‘trash who should be grateful’ to ‘innocent victims’ – the programs allowed personal memory to be cast in that way also. In other cases it gave vindication to personal convictions that the orphanage authorities had indeed been cruel and unjust. Moreover the controversy over whether the former child migrants were exaggerating their claims, talking themselves into believing that things were worse than they actually were, revealed that the same incidents were sometimes remembered by different people in different ways and that individuals had a strong investment in having the general understandings correspond to their personal perspectives.

It is interesting that fiction should have this effect on personal memories – but not so surprising when we think about it. Historical accounts, as Rosenstone points out, cannot be other than approximations and amalgamations of the innumerable possible stories that could be told about any event. Traditional historical accounts attempt to reflect this situation by including in the narrative both common elements and significant divergences where that is the case. This is essentially the method operating in *The Leaving of Liverpool* also. Like *Brides of Christ*, this series was based on historical research and personal accounts and used the same kinds of synthesis as discussed in Chapter Five. Like traditional historical narrative the intertwined stories of Lily and Bert (though fictional) amalgamate the similarities underlying the circumstances and experiences of a great number of child migrants. At the same time the individual stories of the two protagonists illustrate two quite different personal outcomes, reflecting the different ways that similar historical events can affect individuals. The synthesis of mainstream conventions and historical material, historical record and fictive narrative, created a foregrounded personal drama which was involving and compelling while its suite of historical narratives served as the vehicle for negotiating memories of the past. As in *Brides of Christ* the historical was the engine which drove the narrative, allowing what was fictional to intersect in numerous ways with the typical and the personal in individual memory.

Not surprisingly *The Leaving Of Liverpool*, like its predecessor *Lost Children Of the Empire*, caused controversy. Even Margaret Humphreys stressed to journalists that not all migrants complained of harsh treatment and some felt that they had been treated with kindness and compassion. The issue of ill treatment aroused quite powerful reactions by those who had been to religious schools, particularly those run by the Christian Brothers. Memories of schooling are for the most part laden with significance for the individual. As represented in cultural memory and the literary and filmic representations of schooling in popular culture this seems to be particularly true

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of private and Catholic schooling, possibly because of the emotional investment these schools make in their culture and because of the explicit emphasis on enculturation. Accusers and defenders of the Christian Brothers in particular did so on the basis of personal memory. For some, denunciation of the Christian Brothers cast aspersions on the validity of their own memory and of their understanding of identity within the situation as they remember it. The constructions that many of them placed on physical punishment in their own identity can make it difficult to see the claims of others as anything other than exaggeration or unmanliness. As Alan Gill says:

The custom of treating severe and sometimes bizarre punishment rituals as initiation for manhood, does not help rational argument. Nor does the practice of treating that whole thing as one big joke.³¹

Moreover sectarianism, both the latent kind and the obvious kind, was without doubt a contributing factor to both defence and denunciation by those who were not directly claimants of abuse. This touched the 'them and us' streak in the memories of school culture of the past (and of the present in some cases) where each side was pre-disposed to believe the worst about the other. In this contestation about which version of the past was to emerge as the dominant one a strong vein of 'conspiracy to defame' has been pitted against an equally strong belief in 'vindication at last'.

The Leaving of Liverpool had placed the historical issue of paedophilia in institutions squarely in the public view. Its narrative which encouraged sympathy for the children used a number of filmic techniques associated with documentary, together with a density of reference to images already in cultural memory to promote its historical authority. Moreover, the public reputation of agencies like the ABC and the *Couchman* program through which the material reached the public seemed to preclude any possibility that the claims were untrue or exaggerated.

In many ways popular reaction to the series had been over determined and while not particularly-heavy handed in its representation of the past, it was clear in the film text where sympathies were to be placed. A few of the authority figures involved were portrayed sympathetically as unthinking perpetrators unaware of the great tragedy they were creating or as small pawns who, like the children themselves, could do nothing to change powerful decisions. More usually however they were portrayed as knowing exploiters and abusers. The series emphasis on children and the very sympathetic portrait of helplessness, confusion, loss, courage, and life journeys scarred by events in which the children were pawns, is virtually bound to gain popular support. Mainstream film is a format in which 'engagement' is paramount. Providing that the representation is not an obvious exercise in sentimentality (and sometimes even then) such a re-construction of events is likely to be more powerful than the denials of authority figures and appeals to 'historical context'. Having had a sense of involvement in Lily's strength and Bert's tragedy audiences were far more likely to feel anger at the perpetrators of such misfortune, more likely to judge the past by the standards of the

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present, than they were to weigh up past actions against the more abstract idea of ideological context.

The question of whether the claims inherent in the series were true or not was rapidly answered by those former child migrants who not only responded to the help line service which accompanied the screening of the series, but also pursued the matter through the courts. In fact, did the aspect of physical and sexual abuse in the drama influenced popular perceptions of the past so strongly that Margaret Humphreys was concerned that the shift in emphasis to the involvement of the Christian Brothers and the Catholic Church was deflecting concern away from helping child migrants to recover their identity. She felt that the longing that they all had to understand their origins and identity was the larger issue, now in danger of being lost in the emphasis on other more sensational elements of this part of history.³²

John Alsop, too, saw the restoration to former child migrants of their history and sense of identity as one of the aims of the drama.

One of our aims in writing this series was to look at the damage caused by loss of history; loss of the ability to identify or know oneself once the background is removed. One of the biggest crimes committed against these children was ripping that background away from them; denying them a past, their parents, everything.³³

This aim clearly informs a number of telling scenes in the film. A key moment of adult deception – when the children who think they are playing some sort of game sign up to go abroad – serves as a prelude to a number of others which clearly demonstrate the lack of care for the children as individuals. Quite disturbing to modern sensibilities are episodes of arbitrary and unthinking cruelty – one in which the frightened children are lined up like cattle for tonsillectomies prior to departure and another on arrival when the children are split up, regardless of relationships and feelings.

While scenes like these are bound to involve audiences in identification with the human cost of the scheme other more social processes were involved in the ways in which the film affected cultural memory. Apart from the techniques of promotion, the impact of the content, feed-back loops of revelation and changes in public opinion more revelation and more publicity in the popular media were of major significance, as was the ideological perspective which coloured the way the episode was represented in the film text.

The Leaving of Liverpool in particular not only created a public space for discussion it also framed the issue in both personal memory and popular perception, allowing victims of abuse to speak out

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as victims. Private memory has prestige in our culture and personal testimonies of former child migrants (many later supported by criminal charges against the paedophiles) were in their turn immeasurably important in helping to solidify popular understanding as to what happened and where the guilt lay. Here again we can see the operation of the circular processes sometimes observable in the relationships between film text and social context. The film text helped prompt revelations which in turn confirmed public perceptions about the authority of the interpretation of the past in the miniseries.

The entire process serves as a demonstration of Palmer's claims that films do not simply portray history or diffuse historical information:

they [the films] actually interpret history in the same way that literary criticism interprets a novel and, in some cases, such as the powerful effects on mass consciousness of the Vietnam war films of 1978–79 or the equally powerful effect of *The Day After* (1983), they actually participate in the making of history by motivating the mass mind of society to its own historical interpretation.³⁴

When screened in Britain *The Leaving of Liverpool* created an enormous sense of outrage – as it had done in Australia. Although the issue of child migration had first been raised in Australia in the late eighties³⁵ there can be little doubt about the importance of *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* in influencing the way the past was understood in popular culture both here and in Britain. The meaning of certain public events in both Australia and Britain therefore need to be understood in terms of the effect of that mobilisation. The events and statistics listed here are those that are in the public arena.

Australia:

On July 3rd 1993 the Christian Brothers took out advertisements in the *Australian* and the *West Australian* admitting that abuses had occurred in their institutions and giving an apology, an event which was featured in television news bulletins around the world. In December 1993 Margaret Humphreys received the Order of Australia for her work for child migrants and for the community generally. In July 1994 a petition, supported by 24,000 signatures, calling for a Judicial Inquiry of a Royal Commission into the running of orphanages by religious and charitable organisations was presented by Dr Judyth Watson to the Western Australian Parliament. By 1997 legal actions against offenders had resulted in many convictions on charges related to sex offences. According to material collected by Alan Gill and based on research from newspaper reports of the previous four years as well as on data collated by Broken Rites, some nineteen priests have been jailed or given non-custodial sentences for sex offences in the four years prior to 1977. These are in addition to thirteen male serving or former members of religious orders and nine lay teaching staff who had already been convicted. Several took their lives. A further seven priests and eight members of

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religious orders have cases pending.³⁶ On April 26th 1997 the Catholic Bishops of Australia apologised on behalf of the Catholic Church to the victims of clerical sexual abuse.

Britain:

In Britain the Child Migrants' Trust which normally receives some 2000 letters of enquiry annually, received some 500 letters in a single week following the screening of *The Leaving of Liverpool* – as it had done after *Lost Children of the Empire*.³⁷ Shadow Health Secretary David Blunkett openly called for a public enquiry into child migration. Labour's Social Services spokesman David Hinchcliffe said the government had a 'clear obligation' to provide proper funding to the Child Migrants' Trust. On the whole the British Government has been slow to act but has belatedly instituted an inquiry (1997). Early in 1999 the British Government agreed in principle to partial compensation for children sent from Britain under the child migration schemes. The matter continues.

The Question of Blame

The British decision with respect to compensation suggests that Britain has accepted some measure of the responsibility for the schemes. Quite apart from its human dimension this has been a part of the nagging political questions which ran beneath the surface of virtually all the books and programs on this topic. The issue of responsibility was implicit in both *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool*. It had however already been made explicit to a limited public in Bean and Melville's book *Lost Children of the Empire*, an account which attempted to place an historical framework around the policy decisions taken with respect to child migration and the ideologies that informed them.

Bean and Melville, whose book and the documentary based on it were influential in the way the issue was first represented to the public, challenged the most frequently cited in defence of child migration schemes – 'context of the times'. This justification drew on a particular social understanding – a narrative of the past which sees socio-economic conditions in Britain in the immediate post-war period as desperate and authorities as acting out of a sense that they were doing the best for the children. As Bean and Melville saw the situation rather than the result of a misguided paternalism the child migration schemes were a deliberate policy born out of racism, class interests, and notions of Empire.

Bean and Melville maintain that many children in homes and orphanages were part of the human cost of the World War II. In its wake tremendous social and economic upheaval in Britain and elsewhere resulted in an increased rate of marriage breakdown and a sharp rise in illegitimacy, a situation translated with great economy in *The Leaving Of Liverpool* in scenes which show Lily's

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mother dancing with sailors while Lily watches from behind a curtain.³⁸ Of the children sent to the Empire as 'orphans' most had one and sometimes both parents living. Some children were illegitimate; some were just poor. Many had been placed in temporary care and most parents when they gave their children into the care of an institution had no idea that the children would be sent abroad – as Lily's story makes clear. The legality of the actions of both the government and the institutions in sending abroad children left under such conditions is questioned implicitly in both *Lost Children of the Empire* and *The Leaving of Liverpool*.

A more chilling claim in the question of responsibility and blame is that the schemes were part of a government-sponsored program of eugenics. Bean and Melville maintain that behind the rhetoric of 'saving' children and offering them a bright future, an entrenched mode of thinking about British colonial supremacy and British racial superiority informed the schemes. For those who subscribed to this view there was no confusion between the supposedly philanthropic view and the political one, and according to Bean and Melville 'the organisations sending children out to distant parts of the Empire were convinced that they were doing them an enormous favour'.³⁹ Preserving the Empire was considered all-important and the need for British children (who could easily be enculturated into the new country) as a safeguard to white racial supremacy in the Empire was piously equated with the children's perceived need for wide open spaces and opportunity.

The same questions and the same conclusions were prominent in Margaret Humphreys' *Empty Cradles*. Like Bean and Melville, she too maintains that importing children to Australia was deliberated social policy and cites evidence that officials in Western Australia knew about the deficiencies of the way that the children were treated and did nothing to intervene.⁴⁰ She cites as evidence a copy of a briefing paper from the Prime Minister of Australia to the state premiers at a conference in January 1945, which was sent to her anonymously. This paper makes it clear that the Federal Government was aware of the shortcomings of the scheme with respect to the conditions in the orphanages.⁴¹ Another report, an official 'fact finding report' from Britain in 1956 again reported on shortcomings. It attacked the very basis of sending children to institutions like the Fairbridge Society or Roman Catholic orphanages and recommended that children be brought up in 'circumstances approaching as nearly as possible those of a child living in his own home'⁴²; nothing changed.

Australia too appears implicated in the question of the legality of the transportation of children. This country was anxious to increase its post-war migrant intake from Britain where migrants of British stock, 'migrants of the right type' – i.e. white – complied with the racial bias in Australia's immigration policy. The number of children leaving Britain for Australia actually increased. Between 1956 and 1966 boatloads of as many as 750 to 1000 children left Britain for institutions in Australia. Some 10,000 British children were sent to Australia after World War II. It was not until

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1982 that it became a necessary legal requirement for voluntary associations to get the consent of the Secretary of State before sending a child abroad.

As already noted the issue has been controversial in contemporary society partly for its historical meaning, more significantly in terms of international responsibility, and probably most pertinently in terms of its impact on individuals and institutions. Behind all of this lies the issue of compensation. The controversy has been compounded by the fact that not all experiences of child migration were bad. Some former child migrants went on to establish successful lives. A number of the Fairbridge children were sent to Rhodesia to become a white elite and they were successful from that point of view. Some look back with fondness on their time in institutions that others recall with horror. Moreover, different people attending the same institutions at the same time have reported diametrically opposed versions of their experiences. Alan Gill has suggested that there could indeed be different truths⁴³, reports of different experiences being so different because that is the reality of the situation – as the characterisation of Brother Jerome in *The Leaving of Liverpool* has demonstrated. Moreover he notes that ‘as in other facets of life, tales improve with the telling’⁴⁴ and while some exaggeration is likely the balance of evidence favours the interpretation seen in *The Leaving of Liverpool*.

Whatever the legality of the decision to send children abroad may have been the consequences were indeed played out in people’s lives, often with tragic consequences – as *Lost Children of the Empire* and later *The Leaving of Liverpool* spelled out. Though the human rights aspect of the schemes remained a subtext to the miniseries, programming decisions when both programs were first shown ensured that the other historical and political questions associated with the issue were also raised in a public forum from the outset. In subsequent public debate in Australia while initial reactions focussed on the issue of abuse another over-arching question which framed public reaction was that of moral and political accountability. As constructed in most media accounts the situation appeared to suggest that firstly the governments concerned and secondly the receiving institutions failed in their basic duty of care – either outright or at least in a large number of cases.

In this chapter I have argued that the documentary *Lost Children of the Empire* and the miniseries *The Leaving Of Liverpool* were powerful stimulants to popular interest in the issue of child migration to Australia, with *The Leaving Of Liverpool* playing a key role in shaping popular understanding. A great deal of the attraction of both programs lay in their visual format, which was able to appeal on both an intellectual and an emotional level. However, the authority and overall meanings of the films were the product of the intersections between the ways in which their narratives shaped the issue and other discourses in popular culture.

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Changes in popular understanding thus created brought about a situation in which formerly private and often hidden memories could be revealed. The escalation in the number and nature of the charges of former child migrants against former guardians can be seen to relate directly to this exposure. Many of the stories of former child migrants supported the version of events suggested in the ABC programs' stories, pushing public understanding towards acceptance of that particular version of the past.

It is interesting to speculate on the shape those narratives might have taken had the situation been represented differently – or whether they would ever have become public at all. Given a silence as long as fifty years in some cases it would appear that changed social values in themselves were not enough to bring these matters to light. A catalyst was needed – and that catalyst proved to be a filmic rendition of the past.

The popular media were extremely important in agenda-setting and in agenda maintenance in this case. In this context clever manipulation by the ABC of the multiple functions of television in our society ensured that both programs shown on that network had every chance of setting up personal responses among audiences and of initiating a socio-political agenda. The high audience ratings of both *The Lost Children of the Empire* and later *The Leaving of Liverpool* combined with the prestige of their source, ensured that the programs themselves attracted wide media coverage as entertainment. The shocking nature of their content and their meanings as socio-political documents meant that the issues they presented would be debated in the public sphere. As with *Brides of Christ*, this widespread knowledge in turn stimulated negotiation of those meanings in the private sphere through the operation of normal information networks. The strength of the contestation was unusually lively because of personal agendas among sections of the population and because for many whose lives had been influenced by religious institutions particularly Catholic schools, the interpretation was bound up with personal memory and personal identity.

Prompted to respond publicly, those institutions explicitly and implicitly charged with malpractice particularly the Catholic Church and the Christian Brothers added to the public contestation of memory and fuelled even more media involvement. Over an extended period the child migrant story kept changing into ever more sensational a form. Television in particular found the developing public scandal, prurient to the core, perfect material for high rating current affairs programs – thus keeping the situation before the public in a form and at a depth of contestation that would have been unlikely under other circumstances.

In the contestation that followed the revelations the questions of 'truth' and blame were argued out from individual memory. Cultural memory was strongly influenced by the way in which the situation was first presented to the general population but in that shaping there were many other

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aspects involved, including pre-conceptions and elements of identity and personal memory for the audience. The 'truth' of the situation however seems to have been settled in legal actions where 'dominant' and/or 'challenging' constructions do not count for much. The law attempts to make decisions on 'fact' which needs to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Popular culture may possibly have some concern with the processes of law but there is a general acceptance of the 'objectivity' of evidence. So once a conviction has been made that generally seals the way in which the story will be remembered; so too in this case.

Although historical events themselves are chaotic it is never the less possible to see a coherent form of linear progression in the inter-linked relationships between television and other mass media revelation, and social consequences. A linear overview of the way in which the documentary, the miniseries and other revelations in the popular news media intervened in cultural memory would run something like the sequence of events in the table on Page 225.

With the shift in emphasis from child migration itself to abuse in orphanages and convictions by former offenders for sex offences narratives in cultural memory appear to place emphasis on the latter elements, and to be less interested in the historical attitudes and governmental policies of both Australia and Britain. There were responses from both the Australian and the British governments but those elements generally occupy marginal sites in the way that this piece of history is now narrated in cultural memory. Just as the revelations about the separation of Aboriginal children from their families gave rise to a debate about blame and collective guilt, this same debate lingers with respect to the Child Migration schemes in relation to the degree of responsibility which must accrue to both Australia and Britain, to states, and to the various sending and receiving institutions.

Quite apart from the ways in which it affected those involved the whole sorry scandal has been an object lesson of how an apparently dormant past can become active in the present. It also underscores the very great significance that visual media can have in shaping popular consciousness of the past. At the individual level a combination of the different appeals and degrees of authority of documentary and miniseries created the *immediate* social circumstances in which hitherto private memories of taboo subjects could not only be revealed in public, but could also seek redress through public legal processes. The impact of both films on social action highlights yet another significant aspect of the relationship between film and cultural memory – the importance of the intersections between the film text and the current narratives in society.

At the level of intersection with cultural understanding of the past, as with *Brides of Christ* the fictional piece *The Leaving of Liverpool* appeared to act as a condensed version or summary of the historical event. Provided that it meets the condition of having all of the attendant historical elements used appropriately it would appear that a fictionalised version of the past can perhaps have an even greater validity as 'real history' than a less coherent 'objective' account. Each narrative is

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a construction, the imposition of narrative order onto the chaos of historical events. In the case of the fictional narrative it appears that the focus on the individual and the coherence of a narrative structured from start to closure represents a view of history that is close to the way that ordinary people experience it – or at least of the way they re-construct their experience of it. It certainly is one that mirrors those narratives we tell ourselves to make sense of events and as an aid to our memory of them.

Forgetting can be just as much of the way the past is shaped in cultural memory as is remembering. As Margaret Humphreys' comments on the history of child migration reminds us, history can be a site where the power structure of the different eras is reflected in what is remembered and what is forgotten.

As the power and influence of the Commonwealth waned, the children sent from Britain's shores were forgotten; they faded from the country's consciousness.⁴⁵

Because of the very powerful effects of good historical research, talented screen writing and a conceptualising of the past as a drama of human proportions television has redressed that situation. The result is not a version of the past that stands without contestation. It may not be a form of representation of the past that traditional scholarship can accept. It suffers from the skew of its ideological and commercial intentions. But the television documentary *Lost Children of the Empire* and the miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool* have re-constructed cultural memory in ways that have altered the way that we understand the present. Perhaps more than anything else the representation of this episode of the past *on mainstream film* has demonstrated the power of that medium to frame an issue in the popular mind. Limited as it is by intention, filmic conventions and the need to engage audience emotions and tied – as text – to negotiation through the intersection of its interpretation with the narratives circulating in culture mainstream films like these do exercise a powerful ability to alter the landscape of the past in cultural memory shaping even the memories of those who lived through the events being represented.

Appendix.1

Revelation of the Child Migration Schemes in the popular media – Australia

Australia	Event	Notes
July 21 st , July 28 th 1987	<i>Observer</i> article published	Then published in full in papers in Sydney and Melbourne
1987	Child Migrants Trust established	Establishment of the Trust announced in the <i>Observer</i> article by Annabel Ferriman
August 15 th 1987	Andre Malan (former editor) writes article ‘The Nightmare at Bindoon’ as his last assignment for the <i>Western Mail</i>	First report anywhere in Australia of alleged physical and sexual abuse of former British child migrants. Largely based on material supplied by Gordon Grant
June 1 st 1989	Question without notice in Parliament by Senator Grahme MacGuire about the 10,000 British child migrants sent to Western Australia as orphans and later subjected to physical and sexual abuse	(lost seat June 30 th 1993)
July 1989	<i>Western Australian</i> publishes an article about the efforts of a former Old Boy of Bindoon to have his autobiography published.	Rejected by the mainstream as too contentious. Article read by the owner of a small publishing company who was shocked by the disclosures and decided to edit and publish.

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Revelation of the Child Migration Schemes in the popular media – Australia

1989	<i>Lost Children of the Empire</i> – several awards including a gold Emmy at the New York Film Festival	Gradual revelation of sexual abuse
April 1990	<i>Geordie, Orphan of the Empire</i> by Lionel Welsh published Bruce Blyth's P&B Press	Autobiography of Lionel Welsh, a former Bindoon Boy
January 1991	<i>The Bindoon File</i> by Lionel Welsh	Both have modest circulation but cause enormous media interest
May 1991	VOICES established	Bruce Blyth co-founder. Gordon Grant – first president
July 1992	<i>The Leaving of Liverpool</i> screened in Australia	The program was matched with a <i>Couchman</i> program and supported by help lines at the television channel
1993	<i>Ultimate Betrayal</i> shown on ABC television	Documentary dealing with sexual abuse by clergy. Dr. Peter Horsford, Dean of the Uniting Church 's theological college in Melbourne, claims that up to 15% of Australian clergy had committed some form of sexual violence
January 1993	Margaret Humphreys receives the Order Of Australia medal	Only 24 non-Australians have received this since its inception in 1975

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Revelation of the Child Migration Schemes in the popular media – Australia

May 23 rd 1993	<i>60 Minutes (Channel 9)</i> named and located a man (Lawrence Murphy) accused of serious sexual offences by more than 40 Old Boys of orphanages	Repeated with some new material, September 1 st 1996.
May 25 th 1993	<i>Inside Edition (Channel 10)</i>	Serious Questioning of Bro. Gerald Faulkner the then Provincial
July 3 rd 1993	Apology from the Christian Brothers in an Advertisement in <i>The Australian</i> and <i>The West Australian</i> newspapers	Admitting that abuses in its institutions had occurred
July 4 th 1993	<i>60 Minutes</i> Follow up Program	More allegations. Claims that Faulkner knew of allegation against Murphy and failed to act. Murphy was shifted and allegedly repeated the offences.
1993.	ABC. Andrew Ollie – interview with Karl Davies	
August 1993.	<i>The Boys From Saint Vincent</i>	Channel 10
1993	<i>The Boys From Saint Vincent</i>	Cannes Television Festival - Best Production Award – Best Acting Award .
1993	<i>The Boys From Saint Vincent</i>	Banff Festival - Outright Winner - just beat <i>The Leaving of Liverpool</i>

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Revelation of the Child Migration Schemes in the popular media – Australia

November 1993	<i>The Leaving of Liverpool</i> won the AFI Award for the best television mini-series and best screenplay in a television drama	
December 13 th 1993	Margaret Humphreys receives the Order of Australia for her services to child migrants and the community at large	<i>Empty Cradles</i>
Jan 19 th , 20 th 1994	<i>The Leaving of Liverpool</i>	Repeat on ABC
April 1994	Second interview of Brother Faulkner by Marie Mohr (Channel 7) who had changed employers from <i>Inside Edition</i>	Filmed in the same week that former Christian Brother Gerald Dick pleaded guilty to various offences committed in the 60's. Questions raised about the paucity of police prosecution
1995	<i>Ultimate Betrayal</i> repeated on ABC	
July 22 nd 1995	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> – article by SMH journalist Richard Guillatt	Critical of the Christian Brothers but comments on the value of the education that they gave to the poor
May 27 th 1996	<i>Four Corners</i>	Details of sexual abuse at St Vincent's Boy's Home South Melbourne in the 50's and 60's. Order paid the alleged victims an undisclosed sum.

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Revelation of the Child Migration Schemes in the popular media – Australia

May 31 st 1996	Response to the <i>Four Corners</i> program by the NSW State Treasurer Michael Egan, supporting the Brothers	Numerous other statements in support
June 1996	<i>The Boys From Saint Vincent</i>	Repeat
September 1 st 1996	<i>60 Minutes</i>	Repeated of program of 23 rd May 1993 (with some new material after Brother Coldry's Secret report)
July 15 th , 16 th 1993	<i>The Leaving of Liverpool</i> shown in Britain	Huge build-up by press

Revelations about the Child Migration Schemes – Britain

July 1993	Questions asked in British Parliament about child migration	
July 15 th 1993	British Prime Minister rejects calls for a public enquiry	David Hinchcliffe, MP for Wakefield (and until mid-'95 British Labour Party spokesman on health and social services) chairs meeting in the Houses of parliament at which Margaret Humphreys is a guest speaker.
November 2 nd 1993	Question to the Prime Minister by David Hinchcliffe re continued secrecy about Child Migration	Prime Minister John Major replies that concern about the treatment of child migrants is essentially a matter of concern for the receiving countries
1999	British Gov. agrees to pay compensation to former child migrants	The matter continues.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 7th 1988. p.1

² Bindoon in Western Australia was one of the more notorious of the orphanages run by the Christian Brothers. There have been numerous charges of sexual abuse against former Brothers from Bindoon with the now deceased former head, Brother Carney being regarded as excessively brutal by very many who have spoken about their experiences there.

³ Another mini-series, *The Boys of St Vincent*, was screened on the Australian Channel 10 Network in August 1993 and repeated in June 1996.

⁴ The Stolen Generations is a name now given to successive generations of Aboriginal children who were taken from their parents on the pretext that their living conditions were a threat to their moral and/or physical welfare. This was part of a deliberate government policy to take light skinned Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal children and to bring them up to become part of white society. The children were taken to orphanages, where they were to be trained for domestic or other manual labour in white society. The living conditions in the orphanages were often harsh and uncaring. Many children suffered physical and psychological abuse while supposedly in the care of the Government. Most children were denied contact with relatives and were led to believe that being Aboriginal was something to be ashamed of.

⁵ See attached table

⁶ Margaret Humphreys. Quoted in Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, Millennium Books, Sydney, Australia, 1997, p.73

⁷ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.79.

⁸ Margaret Humphreys. Quoted in Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.10.

⁹ Margaret Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, Corgi, London, 1995, pp.29–30. 1997 Edition

¹⁰ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, pp.57–60.

¹¹ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, pp.600–605.

¹² Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.604.

¹³ As the Child Migration Scheme covered Australia, Rhodesia and Canada and the different countries passed legislation on this matter at different times, the time span given is an approximation of the various pieces of legislation.

¹⁴ There were parallels – but there were also very significant differences. In the case of the Stolen Generations, the parents and other controlling relatives were generally alive and the children were forcibly removed. Nearly 70% of those taken between 1903 and 1930 were girls with light skin between the ages of 12 and 15 who were sent as domestic servants to white families.

See Peter Read and Coral Edwards (Eds.), *The Lost Children* Doubleday, Sydney, 1989.

¹⁵ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.308.

¹⁶ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, pp.553–554.

¹⁷ A particularly notorious example in New South Wales was the “Mr. Bubbles” case of 1988. It had particularly wide publicity as it involved accusations against the owners of a kindergarten and it touched unspoken fears amongst numerous parents about the safety of their pre-school children. The case was dismissed in 1989 partly because of concerns of the reliability of the increasingly bizarre accusations of three to five year and partly because of improper conduct by the police. The committal hearing took six weeks and was sensational throughout. The timing of the extensive media reporting is important here as the major publicity a little prior to, and then after, the screening of *Lost Children of the Empire*.

¹⁸ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.372

¹⁹ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.189

²⁰ In 1992, details of the conditions and punishments at Bindoon (given by John Hennessey, former deputy Mayor of Campbelltown, a suburb in the south-west of Sydney) were published in an article in *The Good Weekend*, part of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the first major exposure of these events in the eastern States. The Christian Brothers accused him of lying. His report has since been confirmed by numerous others. However, Brian Tennant, a Perth identity, told the west Australian that he and thousands of others regard the Christian brothers as ‘foster parents’. He never saw or heard of sexual abuse.

²¹ See Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, Chapter13. pp.384–410.

²² Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, Chapter19, pp.544–561.

²³ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.190.

²⁴ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.505.

²⁵ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.373.

²⁶ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, pp.508–509.

These segments focused on the claims of Gordon Grant concerning Brother Kearney at Bindoon. The reasons for the omission were somewhat complicated. However the complete version was shown on

July 12, 1992 in *True Stories*. By that time, there had been numerous similar claims and *The Leaving of Liverpool*, although a work of fiction, had been explicit in this respect.

²⁷ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.514

²⁸ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.510.

²⁹ John Alsop, quoted in Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.511.

³⁰ VOICES (Victims of Organised Cruelty, Exploitation and Supporters) was formed in May 1991 by Bruce Blythe (a former child migrant) and others. Gordon Grant was its first president. This organisation has become one of the more vocal support groups for former child migrants in Australia.

³¹ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.339.

³² Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, pp.300-301.

³³ John Alsop, quoted in Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.512.

³⁴ William J. Palmer, *The Films of The Eighties: A Social History*, Southern Illinois University Press. Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1993, pp.10-11.

³⁵ An article by Andre Malan 'The Nightmare at Bindoon' published in the *Western Mail* on August 15th 1987 was the first Australian newspaper report of allegations of physical and sexual abuse of British migrant children. A few more articles about child migration appeared in the Western Australian press in the late 80's and early 90s. Beginning in 1989, questions were raised at irregular intervals in the Western Australian Parliament on humanitarian and legal issues surrounding aspects of child migration.

³⁶ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, pp.473-474.

³⁷ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.504.

³⁸ Phillip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, Unwin-Hyman, London, 1989, p.29.

³⁹ Bean and Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, p.4.

⁴⁰ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.305.

⁴¹ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, pp.306-309.

⁴² Quoted in Phillip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire*, p.134

⁴³ Gill, Chapter 19. 'What is the Truth?' *Orphans of the Empire*, pp.544-561

⁴⁴ Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, p.552.

⁴⁵ Humphreys, *Empty Cradles*, p.372

Concluding Chapter

When Professor Ian Beckett of Luton University, a specialist on military affairs of World War I, spoke at a recent New South Wales History Teachers Conference on *Images and Realities of the War on the Western Front, 1914–1918*,¹ he was not speaking about the academic image. Whereas during the last ten years, a broad consensus has emerged amongst professional historians that the war was necessary (though unexpectedly costly), popular perceptions are still dominated by the image of the war as a futile and mismanaged debacle. The images of desolation captured by the limited technology of World War I photography continue to have influence in the nineties in the unlikely forms of satire and comedy in both *Oh! What a Lovely War* and the popular *Blackadder Goes Forth* – which Beckett describes as ‘brilliantly scripted and acted’ but ‘definitely not history’.² While I tend to agree with him about the status of *Blackadder* as history, the issues surrounding film as history and its influence on Cultural Memory are complex. They are the ones which underpin much of the discussion in this thesis.

Beckett’s particular concerns with respect to World War I pivot on a common feature of Cultural Memory – namely the fact that matters central to traditional historical constructions may well be marginalised in popular perceptions, significant only in as far as they impact on the *experience* of the event. Such a view of history can be quite different from that which is the focus of most work by history professionals – but quite similar to that represented in mainstream historical film. In fact, one of the strengths of mainstream film as form of history can lie in the many parallels between the ways in which the past is remembered and narrated in Cultural Memory and the ways in which it is represented in mainstream film.

Hollywood style film is a constrained form which operates through well understood conventions which, like the structures of oral history, foreground the personal, the dramatic and the sentimental, while giving the narrative specificity through location in the observed surfaces of the past. While this does not give mainstream film any special status as history, it does tend, at some deep level, to confer a kind of authority on its visualisations and interpretations. One of the tasks of this thesis has been to examine how those conventions shape the way that the historical is presented in that format, and how in its turn that construction interacts with Cultural Memory.

Essentially, mainstream film transmits the historical as surfaces and narratives – the images having a quite strong effect on how we ‘remember’ the past, or at least its movie-made representations. The impact on Cultural Memory of the stories films tell about the past is a far more complex matter,

laden down as these narratives are with myth, ideology and invention. In this thesis I have examined a broad cross-section of films which could be seen as 'historical' in one way or another, and it is clear to me that the conventions of mainstream films can be made to work both in favour of film as historical interpretation as well as against it. Perhaps it would be fair to say that the great majority of historical films produced in the past have a highly dubious status as history. However, as I have argued in the thesis, it is very possible for mainstream film to be a vehicle for the transmission of history – and, for reasons discussed below, that possibility is likely to be realised more frequently in the future. I see films like *Schindler's List*, and series like *The Leaving of Liverpool* as history – but history in a genre (or genres) quite different from those of written history. Even when the main story is fiction, the key to authenticity in the way that film represents the past appears to lie firstly in the selection of an appropriate story; secondly in the quality of the research and scripting on which the movie is built; and finally in synthesis of those elements with the conventions of mainstream film.

In as much as mainstream film is a commercial product which need to find and engage an audience, it attempts to establish consensus and is unlikely to challenge dominant ideological perspectives. Moreover, mainstream film is deeply layered with myth – in the multiple forms in which I have used that term in this thesis – much of it unexamined, acting as an effective ideological filter on the way we see the past. Additionally, the very specificity of setting which the camera lens demands, combined with the need for audiences to be able to read off meaning in the visual narrative without interruption to the flow of the film, frequently means that mainstream film uses the stereotypical and the iconic in images and symbols as a kind of visual shorthand. Moreover, in the kind of binary discourse between film text and social context which Palmer points out, filmic representations of the past may be more a reflection of present concerns than they are of what they purport to represent, opening up a space in which opposing perceptions of both past and present may be contested. These practices may work towards the success of the film as visual communication, but tend to work against the ambiguities and particularities of the events as history.

All of the above opens up a number of inter-related questions about the content of history on film. Does mainstream film do anything more than reflect the present back to audiences? Are audience notions of history so malleable that 'anything goes' and scriptwriters and producers able to represent the past in any way they want – and call it 'history'? Are there boundaries to the kinds of 'invention' which Rosenstone sees as intrinsic to filmic versions of the past – and if so, who constructs them, where does history end and fantasy begin? The answers to those questions are of course highly contentious. My view is that when we are speaking of a modern film that is self-consciously 'historical', the answer is that anything definitely does not go.

The degree of credibility accorded to film as historical text is influenced by a number of factors, most of them socially driven – the need for commercial success being one of them. Though

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frequently thought of as a consideration operating against the authenticity of mainstream film as historical text, the commercial nature of mainstream historical film can actually contribute to a striving towards that end. As financial success or failure can be determined by a film's pre-release publicity and by the kind of popular exposure it receives, even films with huge advertising budgets must be capable of withstanding the scrutiny of film reviews and associated commentary in the popular media. As historical films are rarely capable of generating the computer games, the action figures and the lunchbox stickers which help make films like *Star Wars* attractive commercial propositions, historical films which fail the test of media examination of their credentials as history are unlikely to be financial successes.

Another commercially-motivated factor working against an 'anything goes' approach to historical representation relates to audience expectation. Historical films need to be successful in the cinemas rather than the shopping malls and this means that emotionally, aesthetically and historically, the need to match audience sophistication as consumers of film and the increased levels of education and (media-generated) historical awareness amongst film-goers in general. The cultural capital created by the circulation of information and images in our media-saturated society operates strongly as yet another influence urging mainstream film towards greater historical complexity in its interpretations of the past. More than ever before, audiences demand of mainstream film that it should provide cognitive as well as emotional satisfaction, virtually ensuring the unacceptability of fantasy constructions of the past such as those in the Tarzan movies and classic American Westerns.

Moreover, the need to outperform rival releases leads to a slight but constant shifting of notions of realism⁴ in the film text – a situation which likewise tends to work towards a greater authenticity in the way that the past is represented. Moulded to levels of audience knowledge and driven by both technical advances in movie-making and innovations in other films, such changes affect both representation of surfaces (and hence audience 'memory' of the past) as well as the kinds of stories that can be told. The representation of combat in *Saving Private Ryan* for example, has altered acceptable standards of realism in this area and introduced a kind of historical legitimacy which new films of the genre, for strictly commercial reasons, will need to match or better.

Significant as such changes may be to developments of conventions, it can nevertheless be argued that, in many ways, they represent little more than manipulations of surface features while the more significant forces like deeply encoded myth and invisible ideology which shape the way that the past is represented remain unchanged. *Forrest Gump* for instance plays with audience notions of the past by inserting Forrest into pivotal moments in cultural memory of America in the twentieth century. However, despite its technical innovation, awareness of its audience, and somewhat ironic approach to its historical subject matter, the film still constructs the past through a persuasive mix of deeply ingrained social mythology about the role of the individual, suggesting that innate goodness will conquer and heal all. In *Forrest Gump*, as in most mainstream productions, the need

to reach a satisfying and uplifting conclusion leads to a mythic and facile solution at the level of character of things un-solvable in culture.

Similar criticisms can be fairly levelled at perhaps the greater bulk of mainstream historical films. But their corollary – that audiences passively imbibe the filmic construction – is far less certain. The tendency in film analysis to concentrate on how the film interprets the past and the elements that shape that representation is undeniably important in arriving at an understanding of the effects of mainstream film on Cultural Memory. However, regardless of the authority a film constructs for itself in its diegesis, authority is unlimitedly the result of interactions between the film text and things external to it and I have argued for equal critical emphasis on the conditions of reception and the processes of meaning-making in culture.

Mainstream historical film may foreground the personal and the dramatic, but this is not the only strand in the story. The film as text consists of a suite of narratives to which audiences attribute different meanings and from which they expect different kinds of authenticity. While audiences may look for accepted versions of psychological validity in the foregrounded, person-centred narrative, they *expect* verifiable correspondences between those historical narratives which drive the action in the dominant story and the texts about the past which circulate in culture. These interactions between films as historical text, social context and the narratives circulating in Cultural Memory play a part, often a very big part, in determining what meanings a film will have for audiences.

However, as the years of audience acceptance of the fantasy past in classic American Westerns has shown, there can be no guarantee that the narratives of the past circulating in Cultural Memory will actually challenge even the most ideologically skewed filmic constructions of the past. World War II Combat movies – a form more concerned with masculinity than with combat – are yet another example. While today the blatant nature of their ideological messages borders on the comic, for many young Americans who fought the Vietnam War, they nevertheless provided the reference point for what war was like. In Australia, a similar situation exists with respect to the popularly held view of Australia's past. The Furphy/Lawson view originating in the 1890's has been tenacious in the maintaining its dominance in Cultural Memory. For historical reasons beyond the film text (and no doubt for the very fact that this was the dominant strand in Cultural Memory of Australian history), this skewed and outdated view was the version that informed Australian historical films of the Revival Period. From my point of view, what is most significant in each of these cases is the fact that the perspectives these films presented in the historical strands of their narratives were those repeated endlessly in other formats like comic books and novels. At the time, in the cultural milieu into which these films played, there was very little to challenge the way they represented the past, nor was there an adequate counter narrative in culture to expose the silences and the ideological shaping which made those elements invisible to the great majority of film goers. The narratives of

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Cultural Memory were still important but, in this case, they confirmed rather than challenged the movie-made past.

Modern audiences appear more willing to accept a film which challenges their sense of the past – providing it is first of all a ‘good’ film; one which informs and entertains, a film based in a density of historical detail surpassing already-existing representations in apparent authenticity. Such a film may stretch existing conventions – providing it does not do so to a degree where the challenge of the form overcomes both the entertainment and the challenge it poses to accepted versions of the past. Audiences have demonstrated that they do not always want a version of the past that is sanitised and pleasant. On the other hand tolerance has its limits and sentimental vistas on the past have a huge hold on the way we *like* to perceive the past. *Gone With the Wind* is still amongst America’s favourite films ranking high on the list of 250 favourite movies on the Internet Movie Database.

As I have demonstrated in the case studies of this thesis, mainstream historical film can confirm or challenge Cultural Memory. Its recourse to formulas at once familiar yet capable of constant re-interpretation means that the history it represents will inevitably be a history shaped by audience expectation and the desire on the part of the film-makers to construct a fit between the world depicted on the screen and the ideological perspectives of their audience. For Australian audiences, Australian historical films contribute to the network of beliefs that constitute our perception of ourselves as individuals and our place in the various communities to which we belong. The past as represented in such films will continue to play a part in the construction of Cultural Memory. But it will never be the kind of history that belongs between the covers of a book be it historical novel, biography, coffee table picture book, or academic dissertation. The history that we receive from mainstream film is another genre of history entirely.

The history that we receive through the camera lens is a view of the past re-visioned as most people experience it – as events focussed in the personal, structured retrospectively as a narrative which repeats the tropes and social mythologies of our culture. It is film received by people – people sophisticated in reading images, people who desire their narratives of the past to be sentimental and entertaining. While the visual may give us our subliminal points of reference, mainstream historical film is a medium which makes demands on our beliefs, our cultural mythology, our construction of identity. Film helps form a society’s Cultural Memory. But, perhaps because of film’s peculiar status as entertainment and social discourse, its meanings lie somewhere between what the film text proposes and what the narratives of memory and culture determine it to be.

It is impossible to say the last word about a subject that is evolving with great rapidity as digitised media assumes even more diverse forms, speaking to audiences which are evolving along with it. In trying to untangle the relationships between film as historical text and Cultural Memory what seems

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most problematic, what is most difficult to pin down, is what audiences can *actively* recall about a film and what 'forgotten' information that they can recall at the level of recognition. Presuming of course that we can identify 'an audience', then the latter aspect is probably the more significant for this latent learning or this latent memory is what is stimulated by encounters with new information. To date in Australia there has not been anything like the extensive survey conducted by Rosenzweig and Thelan in North America which might shed some light on Australians' involvement with history. Work which addresses, in the Australian context, both how audiences relate to the past and what film-driven information may be resident in Cultural Memory is clearly necessary. My study of the ways in which film intervenes in Cultural Memory in Australia – specifically the processes within film which help to shape it as historical text and the forces in society which negotiate its meanings – make it plain that the latter element is crucial and that we know too little about the ways in which the film text and its social contexts interact.

As I noted in Chapter 1, I see this thesis as an investigation into the very complex interactions that exist between entertainment, film text, social context and memory, as a voice in the ongoing conversation about an increasingly important topic. More than ever before 'the medium is the message'. More than ever before film, television, video, and interactive multi-media swamp us with information overload. More than ever before a medium that reaches millions, that tells stories which engage our emotions and our fantasies, that simplifies and interprets, that uses the past as a space to contest the present, is a medium we really must understand.

¹ Address to the New South Wales History Teachers' Conference, Sydney, September 1998.

See Ian Beckett, 'Images and Realities of the War on the Western Front, 1914–1918', in *Teaching History*, Vol.33, No.1, March 1999, pp.4–9.

² Beckett, 'Images and Realities of the War on the Western Front, 1914–1918', *Teaching History*, p.5.

Primary Sources

Films

ADVENTURES OF BARRY MACKENZIE, THE (1972)

Directed by Bruce Beresford

Writing credits – Bruce Beresford, Barry Humphries

ADVENTURES OF PRICILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT, THE (1994)

Directed by Stephan Elliott

Writing credits – Stephan Elliott

ALVIN PURPLE (1973)

Directed by Tim Burstall

Writing credits Alan Hopgood

Television series (1976)

Directed by Maurice Murphy, Ted Robinson

BATTLE CRY (1955)

Directed by Raoul Walsh

Writing credits – Leon Uris

Based on the novel by Leon M. Uris

BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES, (1946)

Directed by William Wyler

Writing credits – MacKinlay Kantor, Robert E. Sherwood

Based on the novel *Glory for Me* by MacKinlay Kantor

BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY (1989)

Directed by Oliver Stone

Writing credits – Oliver Stone

Based on the novel *Born on the Fourth of July* by Ron Kovic.

BREAKER MORANT (1980).

Directed by Bruce Berisford

Produced by Matt Carroll

Writing credits – Bruce Berisford, Jonothan Hardy, David Stevens

Based on the play by Kenneth Ross

BRAVEHEART (1995)

Directed by Mel Gibson

Writing credits Randall Wallace

BRIDES OF CHRIST (1991).

Television miniseries Australia

Directed by Ken Cameron

Produced by Sue Masters, Penny Chapman (executive)

Writing credits – John Alsop, Sue Smith

BURKE AND WILLS (1985)

Directed by Graeme Clifford

Writing credits Michael Thomas

References

CADDIE (1976)

Directed by Donald Crombie

Writing credits – Joan Long

CHANT OF JIMMMY BLACKSMITH, THE (1980.

Directed by Fred Schepisi

Writing credits – Fred Schepisi

Based on the novel *The Chant OF Jimmy Blacksmith* by Thomas Keneally

CLUELESS (1995)

Directed by Amy Heckerling

Writing credits – Amy Heckerling

CROCODILE DUNDEE (1986)

Directed by Peter Faiman

Writing credits – John Cornell, Paul Hogan

DANCES WITH WOLVES (1990)

Directed by Kevin Kostner

Writing credits – Michael Blake

DEER HUNTER, THE (1978)

Directed by Michael Cimino

Writing credits – Michael Cimino

DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND THE (1976).

Directed by Fred Schepisi

Writing credits – Fred Schepisi

DISMISSAL, THE (1983)

Television miniseries

Directed by George Miller, Phillip Noyce

Writing credits –Terry Hayes

Story outline by Ron Blair

DISTANT VOIVES STILL LIVES (1988)

Directed by Terrence Davies

Writing Credits –Terrence Davies

DON'S PARTY (1976)

Directed by Bruce Beresford

Writing credits –David Williamson

Play by David Williamson

ELIZABETH (1998)

Directed by Shekhar Kapur

Writing credits – Michael Hirst

FJ HOLDEN, THE (1977)

Directed by Michael Thornhill

Writing credits –Terry Larsen

FLIRTING (1991).

Directed by John Duigan

Writing credits — John Duigan

References

FULL METAL JACKET (1987)

Directed by Stanley Kubrick

Writing credits – Gustav Hasford, Michael Herr

Based on the novel *The Short Timers* by Gustav Hasford

GANDHI (1982)

Directed by Richard Attenborough

Writing credits – John Briley

GALLIPOLI (1981)

Directed by Peter Weir

Writing credits – Peter Weir, David Williamson

GONE WITH THE WIND (1939)

Directed by Victor Fleming

Writing credits Sidney Howard

Based on the novel by Margaret Mitchell (I)

HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR (1959)

Directed by Alain Resnais

Writing credits – Marguerite Duras

IRISHMAN, THE (1978)

Directed by Donald Combie

Writing credits – Donald Crombie

Based on the novel by Elizabeth O'Connor.

JFK (1991)

Directed by Oliver Stone

Writing credits — Oliver Stone, Zachary Sklar

Based on the books *On the Trail of the Assassins* by Jim Garrison and *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy* by Jim Marrs.

JOURNEY AMONG WOMEN (1977)

Directed by Tom Cowan

Writing credits – Tom Cowan, Dorothy Hewett.

Story by Tom Cowan

KANGAROO PALACE (1997)

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by Robert Marchand

Writing credits – Deborah Cox, Andrew Knight

KINGS IN GRASS CASTLES (1997)

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by John Woods

Writing credits – Mary Durak

Based on the book by Tony Morphet

LEAVING OF LIVERPOOL, THE (1992).

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by Michael Jenkins

Writing credits – John Alsop, Sue Smith

LITTLE BIG MAN (1970)

Directed by Arthur Penn

Writing credits – Thomas Berger, Calder Willingham

Based on the novel *Little Big Man* by Thomas Berger

References

MAD MAX (1979)

Directed by George Miller

Writing credits – James McCausland, George Miller

MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER, THE (1982)

Directed by George Miller

Writing credits – Fred Cullen. John Dixon

MAN IN THE GREY FLANNEL SUIT, THE (1956)

Directed by Nunnally Johnson.

Writing credits – Nunnally Johnson

MERRIL'S MARAUDERS (1962)

Directed by Samuel Fuller

Writing credits – Samuel Fuller, Charles Ogburn JR.

MISSISSIPPI BURNING (1988)

Directed by Alan Parker

Written by Chris Gerolmo.

MURIELS WEDDING (1994)

Directed by P.J. Hogan

Writing credits – P.J. Hogan

Story by P.J. Hogan

MY BRILLIANT CAREER (1979)

Directed by Gillian Armstrong

Writing credits –Eleanor Witcombe.

Based on the novel *My Brilliant Career* by Miles Franklin

NEWSFRONT (1978)

Directed by Phillip Noyce

Writing credits – David Elfick, Bob Ellis

ODD ANGRY SHOT, THE (1979)

Directed by Tom Jeffrey

Writing credits – Tom Jeffrey

Based on *The Odd Angry Shot* by William Nagle

OH! WHAT A LOVELY WAR (1969).

Directed by Richard Attenborough

Writing credits – Charles Chilton, Len Deighton

Based on the play *Oh! What A Lovely War* by Charles Chilton

OKINAWA (1952)

Directed by Leigh Jason

Writing credits – Jameson Brewer

ON OUR SELECTION

Dad and Dave: On Our Selection (1995)

Directed by George Whaley

Writing credits – George Whaley.

Based on the stories by Steele Rudd.

ON OUR SELECTION (1932)

Directed by Ken G. Hall

Writing credits – Bert Bailey, Ken G. Hall.

Based on the stories by Steele Rudd.

References

ON OUR SELECTION (1920)

Directed by Raymond Longford

Writing credits – Raymond Longford, Lottie Lyell.

Based on the stories by Steele Rudd.

PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK (1975)

Directed by Peter Weir

Writing credits – Cliff Green

Based on the novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1995).

Television miniseries

Directed by Simon Langton

Writing credits – Andrew Davies

Based on the novel *Pride And Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

PUBERTY BLUES (1981)

Directed by Bruce Beresford

Writing credits – Margaret Kelly

Based on the novel *Puberty Blues* by Gabrielle Carey and Kathy Lette.

PLATOON (1986)

Directed by Oliver Stone

Writing credits – Oliver Stone

RAMBO FIRST BLOOD (1982)

Directed by Ted Kotcheff

Writing credits – Michael Kozoll, William Sackheim, Sylvester Stallone

Based on the novel by David Morrell

RAMBO FIRST BLOOD PART II (1985)

Directed by George P. Cosmatos

Writing credits – Kevin Jarre, Sylvester Stallone

Story by Kevin Jarre

REDS (1981)

Directed by Warren Beatty

Writing credits – Warren Beatty, Trevor Griffiths, Robert Towne

ROMPER STOMPER (1992)

Directed by Geoffrey Wright

Writing credits – Geoffrey Wright

SANDS OF IWO JIMA (1949)

Directed by Allan Dwan

Writing credits – Harry Brown, James Edward Grant.

Story by Harry Brown.

SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE (1988)

Directed by John Madden

Writing credits – Marc Norman, Tom Stoppard

SCHINDLER'S LIST (1993)

Directed by Steven Spielberg

Writing credits – Thomas Keneally, Steven Zaillian

Based on the novel *Schindler's Ark* by Thomas Keneally

References

SOLDIER BLUE (1970).

Directed by Ralph Nelson

Writing credits – Theodore V. Olsen, John Gay

Based on the novel *Arrow in the Sun* by Theodore V. Olsen

STORK (1971)

Directed by Tim Burstall

Writing credits – David Williamson

Bases don the play *The Coming of Stork* by David Williamson

SUNDAY TOO FAR AWAY (1975).

Directed by Ken Hannam

Writing credits – John Dingwell

SWORD OF HONOUR (1986) .

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by Pino Amenta and Catherine Miller

Writing credits – Tom Hegarty, Peter A. Kinloch, Kathy Mueller, Roger Simpson

TITANIC (1997)

Directed by James Cameron

Writing credits – James Cameron

THIN RED LINE, THE. (1998)

Directed by Terrence Malick

Writing credits – Terrence Malick

Based on the novel by James Jones

TOWN LIKE ALICE, A. (1956)

Directed by Jack Lee (III)

Writing credits – W.P. Lipscomb, Richard Mason . Based on the novel by Nevil Shute.

TOWN LIKE ALICE, A. (1981)

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by David Stevens

Writing credits Tom Hegarty Rosemary Anne Sisson

Based on the novel by Nevil Shute.

VIETNAM (1986)

Television miniseries (Australia)

Directed by John Duigan, Chris Noonan

Writing credits – John Duigan, Terry Hayes

YEAR MY VOICE BROKE, THE. (1987)

Directed by John Duigan

Writing credits – Jon Duigan

WALKER (1987)

Directed by Alec Cox

Writing Credit – Rudy Wurlitzwer

WILLS & BURKE (1985)

Directed by Bob Weis

Writing credits – Phillip Dalkin

Newspapers and Magazines

The Age (Melbourne) 1990 – 1999
The Australian 1991 –1992
The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 1990 – 1999
The Good Weekend - The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney) 1990 – 1999
The Guardian Weekly – International Edition
The Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney) 1990 – 1999
Sun Herald 1991 – 1996
The Australian Women's Weekly 1990 –1993
Woman's Day 1990 – 1993
TV Week 1990 – 1996
Ita 1991
New Idea 1991 –1993
The Bulletin 1990 – 1999
Time 1990 –1999

Internet Newspaper Resources

The Guardian
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardian>
The Guardian Weekly
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/gweekly>
The Los Angeles Times
<http://www.latimes.com>
Newspapers online
<http://www.newspapers.com>
The New York Times
<http://www.nytimes.com>
Tikkun
<http://www.tikkun.org/index.html>
The Sunday Times
<http://www.sunday-times.co.uk>
The Times
<http://www.the-times.co.uk>
USA Today
<http://www.usatoday.com>
The Village Voice
<http://www.villagevoice.com/>
The Washington Post
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

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Interviews

Ken Cameron	November 5 th 1996	Sydney	Notes in author’s possession
Christine Campbell	December 13 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Kerrie Cassidy	10 th January 1997	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Penny Chapman	February 28 th 1997	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Marisa Crawford	7 th December 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Pat Grocholski	December 12 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Shelia Hale	December 7 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Sister Myree Harris	October 3 rd and October 29 th 1996	Sydney	Notes and Tape in author’s possession
Maggie Mason	December 12 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Sister Deirdre Murphy	November 15 th 1996	Sydney	Notes in author’s possession
Linda Petersen	January 15 th 1997	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Sister Margaret Piccone	November 24 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Helen Sciacca	December 13 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Anne Symonds	January 23 rd 1997	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession
Judith Strachan	December 5 th 1996	Sydney	Tape in author’s possession

Commercially Available Interviews from ABC Radio National Tape in author’s possession

Interviews with

- Kerrie Chikarovski
- Mary Easson
- Katherine Greiner
- Marlene Goldsmith
- Carmen Lawrence,
- Genevieve Rankin
- Susan Ryan

“Women In Time Will Do Much” *Encounter* September 22nd 1996

Written and Presented by Julia Baird.

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