Articles:

Movement Within a Filmic Terra Nullius: Woman, Land and Identity in Australian Cinema

Anthony LAMBERT – Murdoch University.

Central to the Aboriginal memory of invasion and colonisation is the damage and dispossession wrought in the name of Terra Nullius. Ros Haynes aptly demonstrates, using the desert as an example, the centrality of this particular kind of thinking about the land to the nineteenth century exploration narratives. Along with the myth of the unchanging desert, terra nullius was effectively a means of ‘nullifying substance’. It is all but axiomatic to underline the etymological and semantic implications of this phrase (‘no-one’s land’ / ‘land of nothing’) given the social, cultural and political changes in Australia over the passage of two centuries. In a theoretical and conceptual context it can, and must be read as a denial, or convenient misreading, of that which has gone before, used with particular potency and effect within colonial and neo-colonial discourses. This discussion explicitly takes terra nullius as a strategy of culture and politics and of Australian self-description both in and out of culture. The foregrounding of a hidden relationship between women, land and identity in Australian cinema will be undertaken through an understanding of this strategy.

A Dialogue on Identity, Intersubjectivity and Ambivalence

David PALMER and Denise GROVES – Murdoch University.

A body of literature and commentary encouraging people to think about the multitude of ways Aboriginalities are, to use Trinh T Minh-ha’s notion, ‘born over and over again,’ and are negotiated by a range of players in complex and dynamic ways now exists. A solid tradition of calling into question the employment of old binary oppositions and encouraging people to take up a multitude of speaking positions also exists. On the other hand, there is clearly a strong view (often expressed by Indigenous people) that old essentialisms are helpful and sometimes of strategic value. It is not unusual in our experience to hear the argument that Indigenous Australians are the only people who can legitimately speak about matters pertaining to indigeneity.

Art and Cultural Consciousness: Deconstructing the Colonial Imagination

Kathryn NEVILLE - Murdoch University.

The aim of this paper is to identify and explore a nexus between visual art and the relationship of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Particularly, it is to locate and examine art as a paradigm of cultural interaction; to explore its communicative potential and its ability to engage, illuminate and expand our individual and cultural consciousness. This I do through a reading of three paintings by Australian artist Gordon Bennett: Home Sweet Home; The Nine Ricochets (Fall Down Black Fella, Jump up White Fella); and Untitled (Nuance). Concerned with the historical intersections of Anglo-Australian and Aboriginal
cultures, these exemplary works stage an intensely powerful exploration of, and critical inquiry into, some of the most fundamental (and privileged) formulations of identity in Australia. It is through a reading of such works that I aim to reveal an analogue between (reading) art and our ‘cultural literacy’, or, more simply, I wish to demonstrate how art may assist in (re)generating a better understanding of ourselves and others.

Ploughing


This poem arose out of recollections of the poet’s childhood, north of Ballarat, Victoria.

On Their Own Terms: Aboriginal Women’s Evidence in Native Title Claims


Aboriginal women who choose to protect their culture and their country through the Australian court system are constrained by a process which may be incompatible with their very objective. The choices exercised by Aboriginal women in the Hindmarsh Island litigation were described in the following way: ‘But Aboriginals, just like all their fellow members of the community, if they wish to avail themselves of legal remedies, must do so on the law’s terms.’

These constraints also exist in proceedings for determination of native title brought under the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth). Ultimately, however, Aboriginal women retain the choice of the evidence they give in the proceedings, and the manner in which they give it. The choices available to Aboriginal women in native title proceedings may be wider than those previously enjoyed under statutory land rights proceedings. The way in which the female witnesses in the landmark case of Ben Ward & Ors v State of Western Australia & Ors (‘Ward’) navigated their way through the legal and cultural factors which inform these choices provides an example of how Aboriginal women have maximised their ownership of the native title claims process, as far as possible within the confines of the Australian legal system.

‘What’s in a Name?’: Wadjula Self-labeling and the Process of Reconciliation

Farida TILBURY – University of Western Australia.

What it means to be white is a major issue in contemporary social science in Australia – it is also a significant feature of the lived experience of ‘ordinary’ Australians. To an anthropologist who has just returned ‘home’ from New Zealand, this phenomenon is quite striking. This paper explores the use of the term Wadjula as an aspect of white self-identity in Nyoongar regions of Western Australia. While it parallels the use of the term Pakeha among white New Zealanders as a political statement of postcolonial identity that acknowledges implication in a colonial history of oppression, there are also a number of differences in its use. These similarities and differences are explored, and an argument made for the ethnogenesis of a white identity which is consciously linked to that of Aboriginal people and
particular regional spaces. As such, it is less an identity based on an ‘imagined community’ of like-minded individuals, than one which is a counterpoint to another imagining – that of the Nyoongar people. Yet this simple naming has the potential to be an important element in the transformation of the politics of race in Australia.

Justice and Colonial Law and Order in Aotearoa New Zealand

Stephen PRITCHARD – Monash University

In 1987 the New Zealand government commissioned a report, the “Roper Report” as it became known, which examined violence in a broad range of contexts. Although many commended the report, it was widely noted that very few submissions were received from the Maori community. Many critics suggested that the failure to consult Maori on such issues reflected the more general social and political inequalities which give rise to the social conditions that create violence in the first place. Titewhai Harawira, for example, argued that any report which considered the relationship between Maori and violence should consider the social and cultural context in which such violence occurs. In other words, it must take into account the uneven distribution of power and wealth within society and the ‘violence’ that establishes, maintains and is produced by such relations; it must look beyond matters of ‘law’, ‘order’ and ‘criminality’ to consider the historically and culturally specific conditions under which violence is produced. Thus, Harawira’s concern was not merely with what was in the report, but with what its approach passes over and leaves unaddressed: systemised, institutionalised racism implicit in the legal and criminal justice system. She argues:

The major part of the Maori submissions that were made in Tamaki were about the violence of racism, and how in fact that has been perpetuated on Maoris for 150 years. When you talk about violence let’s talk about the history of the violence of racism: how it has completely stripped our people of their land, their language, of our Heritage. So that today we are the highest unemployed, the worst housed, and our health figures are the worst.

Here Harawira foregrounds the relationship between the exclusion of Maori perspectives on violence and the violence itself. Moreover, she argues that this exclusion is itself a form of violence, inseparable from forms of ‘criminal’ violence involving Maori. For Harawira, the problem with the Roper Report was that it failed to consider the relationship between Maori violence, violence against Maori, and issues of sovereignty and authority.

Situating Belonging: The Role of Historical Archaeology in Locating Cultural Relationships Using Examples From Australian Pastoral Domains

Alistair PATerson – Centre for Archaeology, University of Western Australia.

Australian archaeologists have begun to interpret colonial-period interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by exploring the location and organization of cultural engagements, and the potential uses of material culture in interpretation. The origins and development of cultural processes and colonial systems have implications for how the past – in this case the colonial legacy – is manifested in the present. In contemporary Australia – as in other post-colonial settler societies – the colonial period has continuing relevance in social, political, cultural and legal arenas. The ways the past intrudes into the present have relevance for the construction of identity and senses of ‘belonging’. The introduction to the first volume
of Balayi, borrowing from Frantz Fanon, describes how colonialism requires people to constantly ask “who am I?” This paper sees the contribution of historical archaeology as being able to address the question “Where have we been?” In addition, it raises questions as to what an archaeology of colonialism would resemble.

Book Review: Rethinking Indigenous Education  by Cathryn McConaghy

Kevin GILLAN – Principal of Hainsworth Primary School in Girrawheen.