Indigenous Youth and Ambivalence in some Australian Films

Dave Palmer and Garry Gillard

At least since the Enlightenment, social theorists have understood that the ‘self’ is fashioned through relationship with its Other, so that the making of one’s identity rests upon negating, repressing or excluding one’s opposite. In other words, the stranger, described by Georg Simmel as the one who crosses borders between inside and outside, and the one who is ‘both near and far at the same time’, is a highly important figure and often the object of fascination. For thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, this means that the Other is crucial to subjectivity, indeed ‘all desire (for the Other) is the metonym of the desire to be’. As Julia Kristeva has written, those who are most feared, those who are distanced and constructed as the Other, those who are subjected to abjection (loathed, expelled, rejected and found most horrid) are often those who shape the identities of others in the most profound of ways. To use Mikhail Bakhtin’s metaphor, one cannot see their own face without some form of mediation from a stranger or Other. The fact that a group is forced to both insist on the otherness of strangers and simultaneously, if unconsciously, recognise the necessity of their acceptance for the purpose of self-identification means that the attitude of that group to the other will be one of profound ambivalence.

Consequently, the presence of the stranger can be highly disturbing, prompting uncertainty, challenging taken-for-granted ideas about order, and blurring boundaries and identities. Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman posits that the stranger calls into question the social, undermining ‘the spatial ordering of the world — the sought-after co-ordination between moral and topographical closeness, the staying together of friends and the remoteness of enemies’. For Alberto Melucci, encountering the Other is deeply troubling, as it demands exposing ‘oneself to the abyss of difference … difference which attracts us precisely because of the richness that it contains, but which is also fraught with risk and instant danger’. Scholars have mapped the conceptualisation of young people as strangers, as associated with crime, delinquency and antisocial behaviour, and as a feared, separate population. The very formation of the youth category is premised upon it being ‘established as a separate and different type of human being through a range of dividing practices’. Other work concerned with the study of Aboriginality has arrived at analogous conclusions, with commentators claiming that similar discursive work goes on in relation to the lives of Indigenous Australians. As a consequence, ‘Indigenous youths’ have regularly featured as familiar strangers, unsettling the lives of those who see themselves as respectable citizens.

An old and familiar stranger has recently appeared in a number of prominent Australian films. This stranger is the figure of the Indigenous Australian youth, and it appears in films including Rabbit-Proof Fence, Australian Rules and Beneath Clouds. This article reviews the treatment of young Indigenous people in
these texts, focusing on the work that they, as symbolic figures, are asked to do in these films. This article does not set out to make judgements about the quality, successes or adequacy of these three films in relation to their treatment of the topic of Indigenous youth. Rather, we will focus on the different ways each film uses Indigenous youth to problematise neo-colonial discourse and taken-for-granted ideas about youth.

This article argues that one of the consistent features of all three films is the importance of ambivalence in producing conditions that unsettle and disrupt. These disruptions ensure that otherwise-accepted ideas about groups such as Indigenous youths become vulnerable to challenge. According to Homi Bhabha, this makes total mastery of the Other difficult and creates space for marginalised subjects to insert their own meanings. This disruption also ensures that, in subtle and often uncanny ways, Indigenous youths perform an important function in shaping the formation of Australian identity. The three filmic texts are treated in chronological order and in relation to the periods of their settings. However, as they were all made at around the same time, we argue that they all show a similar ambivalence in the attitudes of their non-Indigenous characters toward Indigenous Australian youth.

**Rabbit-Proof Fence**

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2001) won the prize for Best Film at the 2002 AFI Awards, perhaps as much for its political importance as for its aesthetic qualities. The significance of the film for Indigenous politics was signalled by director Phil Noyce’s decision to let the writer of the book on which the film was based do most of the talking at the presentation of the award (on 7 November 2002, as broadcast on Channel 10). Doris Pilkington Garimara’s account of her grandmother’s story, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, dramatises the ordeal experienced by some of those young Indigenous people now referred to as the Stolen Generation. The film traces the epic journey of three young Indigenous girls taken from their family in the remote Western Australian community of Jigalong and transported across the state to the infamous Moore River Native Settlement. The group of three, led by Molly, the eldest, escape and set off from Moore River, heading east to find the rabbit-proof fence, which they know runs all the way back to Jigalong — more than fifteen hundred kilometres to the north.

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* challenges some popular conceptions of Indigenous youth as the stranger. One of its most noticeable features is the strength of character, resilience and intellectual and cultural prowess possessed by the young Indigenous characters, particularly the fourteen-year-old Molly. They stand in sharp contrast to much popular myth-making about Indigenous youth, which tends to characterise them as dangerous and violent criminals, self-harmers or passive victims. Rather than rely on a view of Aboriginality that positions Indigenous youth as distant and on the periphery, the film thrusts the three characters to the centre, presenting them as capable, intelligent and multidimensional.

This is also a film that serves a didactic function, offering a powerful and critical commentary on the injustice of past policy-making and encouraging those who believe that contemporary non-Indigenous Australians ought to make amends
for the injustices committed by earlier generations. The film reminds its audience
that a troubling ambivalence is often experienced when Indigenous youth is
considered. On the one hand, certain kinds of fears tend to be harboured about
what might happen should Indigenous youth be allowed to go ungoverned. On the
other hand, youth is seen as ‘the future’, the holders of all manner of potential.
One of the key figures in the film is A O Neville, the chief protector of Aborigines
and one of the main architects of the assimilation policy shift that was responsible
for the systematic removal of children on the basis of ‘skin colour’. Neville, who
acts as the symbol of colonial governance, was torn about how to deal with what
he called ‘Australia’s Coloured Minority’. Neville saw ‘half-caste’ young people
as both a central problem for government and as a solution to the future of a new
and functional Australia.15

In the film, Neville (Kenneth Branagh) is perhaps the most troubled of all. His
project of governance, that of assimilating ‘half-caste’ Indigenous children ‘for
their own good’,16 is set to fail as a result of a series of competing forces and
contingencies. On the one hand, he firmly believes — as the character says in the
film — that ‘the problem of the half-caste will not go away’ — indeed, his view
is that ‘if it is not dealt with it will simply fester’. On the other hand, his
Aborigines Department is desperately under-resourced. Clearly the depth of the
conviction that the state should care for and train Indigenous children is not shared
by those who have allocated his budget. In addition, his colleagues in the Police
Department have little commitment to resolving the problem of three girls going
missing. Nor is his plan for assimilation aided by Indigenous people themselves,
who resist by returning home, caring for their children, hiding from the authorities
and appealing to higher political forces. As the story progresses, Neville appears
to gain a deeper appreciation of Indigenous resolve in this regard, reminding
himself (and the viewer) that ‘just because these people use Neolithic tools doesn’t
mean they have Neolithic minds’.

This film not only deals with Indigenous youths as strangers, it also deals with
the contradictions and paradoxes that result from the confrontation with
Indigenous youth as unfamiliar outsider. The ways in which Indigenous youth is
dealt with is far from settled and consistent. In the film there are many different
responses to the girls and their family. Initially they are taken into custody by a
local police constable (Riggs), who is legalistic and unsympathetic yet is also the
agent of the ‘Protector’ of Aborigines. In Riggs, the viewer is immediately
introduced to a person who is, by virtue of the social position he occupies,
confronted by considerable ambivalence. Here is a man who is torn, not
necessarily because of his individual idiosyncrasies but because of the
contradictory roles he carries out.17 Ultimately this proves too troublesome for
Riggs. Late in the film he is confronted by Molly’s mother while attempting to
take the girls back into custody. She threatens to attack him, and he retreats.

There are other ambivalent characters in the film. On their return journey, the
girls arrive at a farm and are caught stealing eggs. Initially, the white woman
confronts Molly about the theft and reprimands. She is wary of the girls, making
sure they are kept at some distance so as not to jeopardise her own family.
However, she is also concerned for the girls’ welfare, offering food, some
clothing, a little moral advice, and instruction on how to find their way to the
rabbit-proof fence. This woman plays an important role in the film, calling on ‘feminine instinct’ and reminding the viewer of the collective obligation to protect the vulnerable.

Perhaps the most torn of all the characters is the Indigenous tracker Moodoo (David Gulpilil). An important sequence of the film cuts between the girls as they cleverly struggle onward and Moodoo, who has been trapped into assisting the authorities. Moodoo is forced to stay at the Moore River Settlement and collaborate so that he can maintain contact with his own daughter, who is herself interned. Moodoo is apparently among the most talented of trackers, and he carries out his duties in a most thorough and methodical way. In this role he is required to play a leading part in the process of removal, of which he is also a victim. However, as the film progresses Moodoo is seen to grow in respect for the aptitude and resolve of the young women, and he pretends that even his considerable skill is not enough to follow the children’s trail, due to their skill in hiding it. As Noyce’s camera lingers on his face as he examines the end of the trail, Moodoo is seen to experience a moment of ambivalence. A subtle change to his facial expression shows that he decides to set aside his pride in his work in favour of allowing the resourceful children to escape.

Gulpilil’s character plays a central role in demonstrating the skill and dexterity that young Indigenous people possess: the girls manage to outsmart Moodoo, the exemplar possessor of knowledge and magical powers, the quintessential knower of country. By managing to make it home, the girls not only show that the great forces of colonial governance can be beaten but also that the wonderful Indigenous traditions and knowledges possessed by the old people are living on. In so doing, the girls challenge the longstanding image of Indigenous youth, particularly young Indigenous people of mixed descent, as culturally impoverished.

There is no doubt that the material dealt with in Rabbit-Proof Fence brought to a wide audience the realisation that the policy of assimilation had a devastating effect on the lives of many young Indigenous people and their families. (It is estimated that some 30,000 Indigenous children were removed under the instructions of authorities such as A O Neville.) However, the film does not do this in a way that accepts neo-colonial power as absolute, total or without its fault-lines. On the contrary, the film offers a range of examples of colonial ambivalence at work, disturbing the aspirations of those who seek to eliminate Aboriginality.

Beneath Clouds

The importance of Beneath Clouds (2002) was also signalled at the 2002 AFI Awards, where the prize for Best Direction went to Indigenous director Ivan Sen. A key characteristic of the film is that it is built firmly upon tensions, uncertainties and unsteady relationships. It involves an exploration of competing interests, contrasting identities and the oscillation that occurs in the negotiation of Aboriginality. Beneath Clouds explores the effects of ambivalence, featuring its disruptive consequences in contemporary Australian life.

The film’s central relationship is the complex interplay between two young Indigenous people, Lena (Danielle Hall) and Vaughn (Damien Pitt). Both characters appear to be alienated from their families, but possess a powerful
resolve to undertake a journey that involves renewing a relationship with a parent and therefore with a cultural heritage.

Lena’s Indigenous mother has brought her up in a rural town that offers little in the way of material or cultural sustenance. Her father, about whom she knows very little, is an Irish immigrant with a different set of cultural traditions. Lena appears to know enough, at least enough to satisfy her, about her Aboriginality. However, she only knows what she can glean from library books and tourist brochures about her father’s culture. He is an exotic Other, distant and mysterious. Lena realises that her town and her life do not offer her much of a future. Confronted by family problems and the threat of violence, she decides to head off to Sydney to find her father.

On her way south, Lena accidentally meets up with Vaughn, who has successfully broken out of a juvenile detention centre. He too is keen to travel south in the hope of seeing his mother, who is reportedly very ill. What is known about Vaughn is that he has been estranged from his family and appears, at least initially, to lack the desire to make any contact with them. However, there is a hint that times were better when he was much younger and had a close relationship with his mother. He keeps with him a photograph of himself, his mother and sister when he was a boy. In the photograph a clear-eyed Indigenous child is seen, innocent and happy.

Lena and Vaughn are both closed to outsiders and have formed a hard and protective exterior, and their lives fraught with internal tensions. Lena appears ambivalent about her own identity and future. She has been shaped by her Indigenous heritage via her mother, and by the poverty and isolation in which they live. She has been abused, and there is some suggestion that she has been sexually violated. She is much more drawn to her Irish father, whom she does not remember, and is keen to extend her knowledge of Irish culture and life. Vaughn also has no shortage of demons. He seems disinterested when he hears about his mother’s serious illness, but is secretly in considerable anguish.

The two main characters of Beneath Clouds reproduce the kind of ambivalence often found in popular discourse on youth. Lena and Vaughn represent their own opposites. She is fair-skinned, and her Aboriginality is not evident to Vaughn until an older Indigenous character reveals it as obvious to her. She is a young female, vulnerable to abuse and in need of care. In this way, Lena’s character draws on the long-standing conception of youth as associated with an extension of the innocence and vulnerability of childhood. Here, youths are those who are virtuous until spoiled by the cruel distortions of adults. The obligation of those responsible for the care of young people is to protect them from the evil influences of adult life. Young people need to be restricted, not so much for the protection of adults but for their own good.

Lena is also visually and metaphorically the golden girl, young, blonde and attractive. Her character follows long-standing romantic traditions that see youth represented as the golden age, those who possess the potential to revive an ‘aged and sclerosed society’. In this regard, young people are seen as the harbingers of hope and are conceptualised as the guardians of the future. In this mode, youth is often yearned for and seen as something to be preserved or sought after.
In contrast, Vaughn is dark both physically and emotionally. He is the classic figure of the Indigenous youth as the masculine delinquent, violent and uneducated, angry and fixed in his view of the world. His character draws on well-established discourses that associate youth with crime, delinquency and anti-social behaviour. Vaughn is a young man who is suffering from the psychological phenomenon of storm and stress often associated with youth. He is undergoing a time in his life that is characterised by volatility, instability and unpredictability.

In the film, Lena and Vaughn see the other as both repulsive and desirable, which hints at the power of ambivalence to shift people’s subjectivity, identity and life circumstances. In part, this reflects the fact that identify formation demands a certain level of ambivalence for it to function. Indeed, Bhabha goes so far as to suggest that ambivalent identifications of love and hate are central in self-formation. As Bakhtin reminds his reader, being in two minds about our Other is critically important because the Self can only be constructed through the making of, and dialogue with, the Other. In fact, it is necessary that we live on the very border of our opposite in order for us to shape and configure our sense of identity.

Paralleling the way ambivalence operates in colonial discourse to produce slippages, threaten its own authority and create new cultural forms, Lena and Vaughn’s relationship is reconfigured and strengthened.

Sen’s treatment of Indigenous youth in Beneath Clouds is far from straightforward. Not only does he avoid presenting a didactic narrative about neo-colonial relations, he also avoids the presentation of power as exercised in simple, clear-cut ways. Sen’s film is much more about uncertainty and unresolved questions than it is about preaching moral truths. To give one visual example: throughout the film, which is principally about a journey involving a long walk down a highway, Lena and Vaughn rarely walk alongside one another. Instead, they exchange the lead, one may follow far behind at one moment but leads the way at another. In this way, the film deals with the ambivalent relationship between the two main characters, careful not to privilege one as the master over the other, seeing the situation as involving a constant relationship of intersubjectivity, as both Lena and Vaughn share the roles of dominant and subaltern.

This relationship serves as a metaphor for the necessity of alterity to identity formation. In using the two protagonists in this way, Sen comments on the multifarious and inconsistent discourse relied upon when thinking about Indigenous youth, but he also critiques the image of Indigenous youth as the Other, the distant stranger. In the same way that Lena and Vaughn are dependent upon one another in their journey south, so too are non-Indigenous Australians inextricably bound up with Indigenous youth on their journey toward identity formation.

Beneath Clouds does not treat young Indigenous masculinity with great hope. As the film progresses it becomes increasingly clear that Vaughn’s future looks grim. His life, his anger, his family and ultimately his Aboriginality may not be able to survive. The film leaves the viewer with the bleak realisation that his time may be but moments from being up. Nevertheless, white masculinity, particularly as it is symbolised by the brutality of the police, comes out of the film bruised and bruised.
battered. Like the two violent and racist policemen who are left beaten on the side of the road, colonial masculinity is in a damaged state.

Despite its pessimism, *Beneath Clouds* does give the audience an impression of an Aboriginality that is both intelligent and resilient. Lena is a representation of Indigenous youth with considerable promise. However, this is a reading that is far from resolved. On the contrary, Sen seems almost resigned to the fact that tension and ambivalence is a part of the life of young Indigenous people like Lena. Indeed, he seems to be suggesting that Lena’s greatest quality is her awareness of this: the knowledge that Aboriginality, by definition, involves negotiating tensions, complexities and unsettled identities. Fundamentally, the film positions its young Indigenous characters as resilient achievers. Like the young women in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, both Lena and Vaughn complete their epic journey. Although the film does not provide a happy ending, it does close with a sense of hope. The parting scenes leave the impression that out of the harshness that Lena and Vaughn have confronted will come tough and robust characters.

*Australian Rules*

The final and most recent Australian film to be discussed is the Australian drama *Australian Rules* (Paul Goldman, 2002), based on the novel *Deadly, Unna?* by Peter Gwynne. This book is a fictional account of Gwynne’s youth in the town of Port Victoria, near the Point Pearce Indigenous community on South Australia’s Yorke Peninsula. The book gives a modified account of a shooting incident that actually took place. The film tells the story of South Australian teenager, footballer and part-time poet Gary ‘Blacky’ Black, his family, his football team, and the ugly side of racism in contemporary Australia.

Blacky is a young person who has inherited the culture of the colonisers. Although his birthright offers him some advantages, he sees himself as quite ordinary. Blacky’s best friend is Dumby, an young Indigenous man who lives on the local ‘mission’. Dumby is bright, popular, has flair and is a star footballer. As the film progresses, Blacky forms a relationship with Dumby’s sister, Clarence.

The film tells the story of a small group of young people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who try and negotiate growing up in a rural town dominated by belligerence, alcoholism, violence and prejudice. Prospect Bay, the ironically named setting where these young people deal with their adolescence, is a hotbed of racism where drunken non-Indigenous men demean Aboriginality in one bar while Indigenous men socialise in another. Other young people have taken on the values of older townsfolk, hurling racist abuse in the street.

Like many examples of Australian cinema dealing with the topic of reconciliation, *Australian Rules* has ambivalent characters. Tensions in Blacky’s family highlight the disparity that exists between neo-colonial discourse and the violence that comes out of domineering white masculinity. Blacky’s father personifies racist Australian masculinity. He expresses disdain for Indigenous people, attacks them physically, and appears to see young Indigenous people as a challenge to his position, livelihood and culture. When he catches Blacky in an intimate relationship with Clarence, Dumby’s sister, he takes offense, seeing it as a form of cultural and familial betrayal. Blacky’s father’s racism is played out to its ugly but logical conclusion when he shoots and kills Dumby while he is
carrying out the petty crime of stealing. There is some resemblance in this situation to historical instances of frontier violence where scores of Indigenous men were shot while engaged in what revisionist historians describe as frontier resistance.30

Unlike her husband, Blacky’s mother appears to possess a quiet respect for Indigenous people. She also has a very good head for football tactics. She challenges the style and tactics outlined by the team’s coach Arks, who beseeches his charges that there is to be ‘no more kicking the ball backwards, no more buggerising around the flanks’. Instead, she argues that the way to win against larger and stronger opponents is to use the flanks — zones of ambivalence — to maintain possession and run to the spaces. To the horror of the club coach, and largely through the agency of Indigenous players, the team takes on this approach and manages to turn the game around to win. The clear message is that with cleverness, patience, flair and an attitude of reciprocity and teamwork, the underdog can overcome adversity and triumph over the forces of domination. The central ingredient in all of this is the contribution of Indigenous youth.

Blacky, the offspring of neo-colonialism, must reconcile the consequences of the ambivalence produced by his parents’ conflicting attitudes toward Indigenous people. His dysfunctional family provides him with seemingly little in the way of honourable role models. His father is a thuggish bully and his mother is too powerless even to care for her own children, the younger of whom Blacky has to shelter and protect on the occasion when his father flies off the handle. However, Blacky chooses neither his mother’s nor his father’s path, becoming neither a monster nor a victim. On the contrary, he is something of a sensitive type whose two closest friends are young Indigenous people. In the end he stands up to his father and the worst of the town’s racist features and leaves with Clarence, seeking a different kind of future to the one offered by Prospect Bay.

As the film’s narrator, Blacky further demonstrates the complexity of the treatment of Indigenous people. As the key white character in the film, a product of ‘settled’ Australia, he inhabits the in-between space, refusing to be the person his father would like as his son. His identity is quite unsettled culturally; he is not at all a part of, or assimilated into, his physical or social environment. While he may have white skin and the heritage of non-Indigenous Australia, he is not quite white. To further symbolise this rather ironic twist in cultural identity, Gwynne, the original author, gives him the name ‘Blacky’. So this character acts as something of a menacing influence in the film, who in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.31

One of the features of the film’s representation of ambivalence is the way in which it deals with the crucial part played by Indigenous people in the maintenance of old but failing institutions. Prospect Bay, the scene for the story, is in Blacky’s view ‘bloody hopeless’. Like many Australian rural towns, Prospect Bay clearly has a failing economy, diminishing social capital and few opportunities for young people, most of whom leave as soon as they are able. There is also no shortage of dysfunction in the town, with clear evidence of racism, ugly domestic violence and juvenile delinquency among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people.
The footy team is seen by locals as the last hope for the future, the one remaining cause for some optimism in an ailing town. It is the ‘biggest thing to happen since we won the second prize in the South Australia Tidy Town Competition’. However, the football club, the personification of white Australian masculinity, is a place where racism is often played out most forcefully, yet it is also a place where black and white collaborate. The club’s coach, president, and others associated with its leadership (including Blacky’s father) are clearly bigots. This is demonstrated when, after the grand final, Blacky’s friend Dumby, who is the best player in the team, is not awarded the medal for ‘best on ground’. However, over half of Blacky’s footy team is made up of ‘boys from the mish’ (mission). As Blacky reminds the viewer, ‘without them we wouldn’t be in the Grand Final … without them we wouldn’t even have a team’. Blacky’s analysis is proved correct when, after the major crisis in race relations caused by Dumby’s death, the Indigenous boys leave the football club, triggering its demise.

The Prospect Bay Football Club serves as a metonym for contemporary white Australian’s discomfort and strange relationship with Indigenous Australians. There is a regular association throughout the film between the footy club and death. As Anna Dzenis notes, one of the visual motifs that recur throughout the film is the relationship between images of dead meat and the football club. Early in the film, members of the team seek out dead carcasses to set up a business selling maggots as fish bait. Blacky’s only white confidant is the old fisherman Darcy, who makes a living producing gents (maggots) for fish bait. Every time Blacky sits down to talk to this old fella, they are ‘feeding’ festering meat to the maggots. The team’s coach is himself the town’s butcher. After the grand final celebrations, the Premiership Cup sits amid a display of different cuts of meat. Finally, Dumby’s blood is shed on the evening of the football club’s greatest victory.

This kind of imagery serves to remind the film’s audience of the ‘hollow victory that is built on blood and violence’. But perhaps the demise of the club and its link with death also serves as a warning to ‘settler’ Australia of what is likely to happen if its disturbing past in relation to Indigenous Australians continues to be repressed and if their contribution continues to be ignored. Ultimately, the film is about the end of the line: the death of the football club, the symbol of white Australian masculinity.

Nonetheless, there is also some hope in *Australian Rules*, uncertain as it may be. It exists in the figures of Blacky and Clarence, young people intertwined in a relationship of love and compassion. In this relationship is a hint of how white Australians might overcome their cultural poverty and find comfort and redemption with Indigenous Australians. The answer implied by the film is that the important part Indigenous people play in cultural life and key institutions must be acknowledged. *Australian Rules* suggests that we must all listen and watch the way that the innocence of youth deals with difference, and come into communion with those who have wisdom when it comes to ‘playing the game’. The key to moving beyond our current dysfunction is in taking inspiration from the new and different relationships being forged by some young people.
Conclusion

Recently, scholars such as Gordon Tait, Judith Bessant, Howard Sercombe and Rob Watts and Giovanni Romano have reminded their readers that discourses concerned with youth are never straightforward. They are endlessly ambivalent, split and unstable, never quite able to secure certainty. The same is suggested by people such as Bhabha about colonial discourse and its treatment of groups such as Indigenous Australians. As a consequence, the image of Indigenous youth is ambiguous, which means that the business of dealing with the topic through representations such as those in films can often be disconcerting and troubling.

This article canvasses three Australian films, each of which deals in important ways with the lives of Indigenous youths. It engages with the many and varied instances of ambivalence in these films. Inspired by Bhabha, it argues that this ambivalence acts in a rather menacing way in film, regularly challenging popular ideas about Indigenous youth and threatening to make the endorsement of neo-colonialism unsteady. In subtle but profound ways, the presence of Indigenous youths in these films problematises the position, the identities and otherwise taken-for-granted status of settler Australians. Such instances of ambivalence trouble, and constantly threaten to recall, things previously concealed or forgotten. As a result, settler Australia’s power of representation is far from secure and complete.

Bhabha might say that this serves to show how important constituted groups such as Indigenous youth are in identity formation. They feature in uncanny ways to recall some of those things denied or otherwise repressed about colonial discourse and its unsettled selves. As John McLeod writes, ‘this serves as a reminder that exclusive, exclusionary systems of meaning are forever haunted by those that are written out and erased’. As the distant and strange Other, Indigenous youth facilitates the drawing of boundaries around the self. As the redemptive figure, they offer deliverance and hope for a brighter and more ideal future.
though’. Personal communication Gertie Johnson, Nepabunna, 2002. She thought the photograph was of Jack Forbes, Rebecca and their two sons.

60 Bell, op. cit., p 23.
64 Transcript of interview with Daisy Shannon, Quorn, 2001.
65 ibid.
66 ibid.
70 Personal communication, Frank Warwick, Adelaide, 2002.
73 Personal communication, Frank Warwick, Adelaide, 2002.
75 Drusilla Modjeska, Timepieces, Picador, Sydney, 2002.
76 Clendinnen, op. cit.

Author’s note: ‘Personal communication’ refers to informal conversations regarding the research. ‘Conversation with’ refers to formal but unrecorded interviews. ‘Transcript of interview with’ refers to formal and taped oral history interviews conducted for this research.

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9 ibid., p 12.
11 S Mickler, The Myth of Privilege: Aboriginal Status, Media Visions, Public Ideas, South Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Centre, 1998; D Palmer, ‘Youth work, Aboriginal young people and


14 D Pilkington (N Garimara), *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1996.


16 A Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines and Government in the South West of Western Australia 1900–1940*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, WA, 1988.


23 ibid., p 5.

24 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit., p 149.


33 ibid., p 40.


35 Bessant, Sercombe and Watts, op.cit.


38 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit.

39 McLeod, op. cit., p 160.

40 ibid., p 165.

41 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, op. cit.


43 McLeod, op. cit., p 220.

**Giving the Indigenous a Voice — further thoughts on the poetry of Eliza Hamilton Dunlop**

John O’Leary would like to acknowledge the support of the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University, which hosted him during his research on the poetry of Eliza Dunlop.

For an account of the Myall Creek massacre and the trials that followed it, see Brian Harrison, “The Myall Creek Massacre and its Significance”, BA (Hons) thesis, University of New England,