Sounding Country: Tracking Cultural Representations in the Soundtracks of Contemporary Australian Landscape Cinema

Johnny Milner

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School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics
College of Arts and Social Sciences
The Australian National University

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This thesis is solely my original work, except where due reference is given.
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Abstract

While recent scholarship demonstrates a significant increase in the level of interest in Australian film music, very little attention has been focused on the soundtracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema — including films that explore the contentious aspects of Australia’s colonial legacy. This thesis is intended to respond to this research gap, in particular by employing textual and production analysis methodologies to track cultural identifications and representations within four recent landscape films. The films are Rabbit-Proof Fence, The Proposition, Australia and Samson & Delilah; and I look specifically at their sonic dimensions — namely, the amalgam of score, dialogue and sound effects.

The study explores the particular aesthetics and ideologies of the soundtracks; it is concerned with codification and how the soundtracks amplify — consciously and subconsciously — new and oppositional insights with respect to contemporary understandings of Australian identity and landscape. The study also argues that the soundtracks are powerful modes of expression and, as such, are themselves engaged in contemporary debates surrounding Australian history such as the ‘history wars’, ‘Mabo’ decision and the Bringing Them Home report. Unlike other important studies on Australian cinema and more specifically Australian landscape cinema, my research suggests that attending to the hitherto neglected soundtrack may present an opportunity not only for achieving a more comprehensive film criticism but also for extending the ways we address Australia’s past. Such a project, focusing on the sonic dimension, may also prove to be of fundamental significance to our present-day challenge of securing a more productive social and psychological engagement with Aboriginal Australia.
Terms and Terminology

Although, in recent times, the field of film sound studies has begun to develop vocabulary that is “more attuned to the way in which film sound makes, rather than merely processes, meaning” (Altman et al. 1992, 249) there is still conflict among particular terms and terminology used, even at the most fundamental level. While I address specific terms when raised throughout the thesis, from the outset, a few key terms need to be defined so as to avoid confusion in the coming pages. The first commonly confused term addressed is ‘soundtrack’. The confusion arises from the way it is used with two meanings. The first meaning concerns a combination of the different elements of film sound (e.g. music, dialogue, sound effects and atmospheres); whereas, the second meaning refers to a film’s accompanying musical album. A musical album consists of songs and music from a film that sell in an audio-only format and as extra promotional material (e.g. on CD or as MP3s through digital outlets such as iTunes). Drawing on the distinction made by Rebecca Coyle in Reel Tracks (2005) the thesis uses ‘sound track’ (with a space) to refer to the first meaning (that is the overall sound mix and elements of a film) and ‘soundtrack’ (as one word) to refer simply to a soundtrack album.

Another loosely used term is ‘score’. This term can “mean the notated musical cues drawn up by the composer and/or arranger/orchestrator to guide musicians in their performance for the film music” (Coyle 2004, 3). In this thesis, the term ‘score’ (unless otherwise indicated) describes all of the musical elements of the film. Such elements include both the composer’s input and pre-existing forms of music selected by a music supervisor or producer.

The terms ‘source music’, ‘pre-existing music’, ‘popular music score’ and ‘compiled score’ are used interchangeably to describe musical items not originally written or recorded for the film. Also, the terms ‘dramatic score’, ‘composed score’ and ‘orchestral score’ refer to music commissioned and composed specifically for the film. Furthermore, in many Australian films, there is also an ‘in-between stage’, that is adaptations/arrangements of compositions originally composed by someone else. I refer to these as ‘adapted compositions’.
As I explore in Chapter Two, I am using the term ‘Australian landscape cinema’ to refer to Australian cinema that takes place in the Australian outback or bush, raising the landscape from mere backdrop to the level of ‘character’ just as important as any character in any narrative. Ross Gibson developed the notion of ‘Australian landscape cinema’ in his important film Camera Natura (1986) and his influential work South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia (1992). The term is, however, also used in several other important volumes on Australian cinema such as Australian National Cinema (O’Regan 1996) and Australian Cinema After Mabo (Collins and Davis 2004). As implied, the terms ‘post-1970 Australian landscape cinema’ and ‘post-2000 (or contemporary) landscape cinema’ refer broadly to specific periods of film production. The term ‘colonial-themed Australian landscape cinema’ refers to films that deal with colonial themes and Aboriginal and settler relations and representations.

In continuing a vocabulary initiated by the influential film music scholar Anahid Kassabian (2001), I have chosen to use the hypothetical ‘perceiver’ over that of the ‘spectator’. My reason for this is because the term ‘spectator’ implies the dominance of a film’s visual construction influenced by a long tradition of belief that cinema is seen rather than heard. Because cinema incorporates words, sounds, images and music, the term ‘perceiver’ is in my opinion more appropriate. I address other terms and concepts elsewhere in the thesis.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 — Introduction .........................................................................................1
  Research Plan ............................................................................................................9
  Chapter Outline .......................................................................................................10

CHAPTER 2 — Analytic Framework, Context, Methodology ..................................18
  Situating Australian Sound Track Scholarship .....................................................19
  A New Way .............................................................................................................29
  The role of Composers and Sound Designers. Manipulation of the Perceiver’s
    Emotions ...............................................................................................................31
  Representations of the Australian Landscape and Conflicted Strands of
    National Identity .................................................................................................34
  Global Practices, Local Themes ............................................................................48
  Contesting the Colonial Story: The History Wars ..................................................51
  Methodology .........................................................................................................60
  Textual Analysis ......................................................................................................62
  Close Analysis Methods ..........................................................................................64

CHAPTER 3 — Working Towards an Australian Sound ..........................................67
  Sonic Elements .......................................................................................................67
  Speech and Accent ..................................................................................................68
  Environmental and Nature Sounds .......................................................................69
  Instrumentation .....................................................................................................71
  Scoring Approaches .............................................................................................72
  Monumentalising the Cinematic ..........................................................................75
  Exceptions .............................................................................................................78

Case Study: Picnic at Hanging Rock (Synopsis and Background) .........................80
  Engaging the Perceiver .........................................................................................81
  Sound effects: Visceral, Psychological, Emotional ..............................................82
  Dialogue, Dream Sounds, Piecing Together the Puzzle ......................................86
 Oppositions: Nature versus Culture .......................................................................88
  The Score: Anachronism/Perception/Narrative Function .....................................93
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................97

CHAPTER 4 — Representations of Aboriginality and Landscape in Rabbit-Proof
  Fence ......................................................................................................................99
  Sounding Aboriginality .........................................................................................101

Case Study: Rabbit-Proof Fence (Synopsis and Background) ................................108
  Bringing Them Home .............................................................................................109
  A Controversial Affair .........................................................................................111
  Universalising Cinematic Language .....................................................................113
  Emotional Devices .................................................................................................114
  An Audiovisual Contradiction: Visual Alienation and Sonic Oneness ................116
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 5 — Revisionist and Gothic Soundscapes in <em>The Proposition</em></th>
<th>128</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why <em>The Proposition</em>?</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gothic and an Australian Appropriation</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terra Australis</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Australian Silence</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study: The Proposition (Synopsis and Background)</strong></td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gothic Cave</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptations</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An anti-Western/Gothic Western</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry and Landscape</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanticism, Realism and Fresh Hell Sound Effects</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 6 — Soundscapes of Nostalgia and Homage in <em>Australia</em></th>
<th>157</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nostalgia and Australian Landscape Cinema</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Orchestral Film Score</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering One’s Youth Through</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Music</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaping the Perceiver, Reinforcing Archetypes</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study: Australia (Synopsis and Background)</strong></td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artificial Visuals, Sonic Realism and Aural dreaming</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longing for the Landscape Through Orchestral Score</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homage and Eclecticism</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhere Over the Rainbow in a Far-Off Land called Oz</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-existing European Classical Music: Longing for the Old Country</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER 7 — Sounding a New Indigenous Realist Approach in <em>Samson &amp; Delilah</em></th>
<th>194</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognising the Power of Sound, Contemporary Indigenous Approaches</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study: Samson &amp; Delilah (Synopsis and Background)</strong></td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Intervention</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Holistic Approach</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence and the Sound of True Love</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotony, Repetition and Landscape</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Track as Contextualiser</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CHAPTER 8 — Conclusion                                                      | 218 |
|                                                                             |     |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY                                                                | 230 |
| FILMS CITED                                                                 | 256 |

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World Music ........................................................................................................121
World Music in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* .................................................................123
Conclusion ............................................................................................................126
Chapter One: Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased level of interest in Australian film music research. Seminal volumes such as *Screen Scores* (Coyle et al. 1998), *Reel Tracks* (Coyle et al. 2005) and the *Screen Sound Journal* (Coyle et al. 2010-2015), for instance, feature interdisciplinary approaches that investigate the discursive contribution that film music can make to Australian national cinema culture and identity. However, although such studies are on the rise, one area of focus has attracted little sustained examination; namely, the role that film music and sound play in contemporary ‘Australian landscape cinema’ — including films which explore the contentious aspects of Australia’s colonial legacy and feature representations of Aboriginality, Aboriginal themes and characters.

This thesis seeks to address this gap in the research by addressing three broad research questions:

1. In what ways can the cinematic sound track highlight the Australian landscape as a complex template of national identity in the post-2000 era?
2. What roles, if any, have recent cinematic sound tracks played in the national process of reviewing Australia’s colonial past?
3. Could an analysis of sound track reveal new, negotiated or oppositional readings of the selected films?

I address these questions by examining and tracking cultural identifications, markers and representations within the sound tracks of four recent, but very different films. These are, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Philip Noyce 2002), *The Proposition* (John Hillcoat 2005), *Samson & Delilah* (Warwick Thornton 2009) and *Australia* (Baz Luhrmann 2008). The works were chosen because of their cultural significance, impact-status, timing of release and historical and contemporary setting. They were also chosen because they are representative of a recent cycle of films that contain aural significations that provide new and complex articulations of Australian identity, Aboriginality, history and landscape. The films and their sound tracks draw on or
react to the mythological narratives that comprise the Australian landscape tradition and they implicitly or explicitly deal with Aboriginal-settler relations, reconciliation, Aboriginality and Aboriginal native title. They can be categorised as what has been termed ‘post-Mabo Cinema’\(^1\) and can be interpreted within the context of recent debates surrounding Australian history — debates known collectively as the ‘history wars’.

In the following pages, I explain in detail why this study is confined to the sound tracks of contemporary live-action feature films that draw on the landscape tradition and that engage with themes relating to Australia’s colonial history. At this stage, however, I note that my interest in this area stems from a simple premise: namely, that Australian landscapes and in particular colonial-themed Australian landscapes — both period-set and contemporary-set — are key elements that distinguish Australian cinema from other national cinemas. As the film historian Graeme Shirley notes:

> Without the outback, Australian cinema might have been interchangeable with any number of other national cinemas. With it, Australian filmmakers have used the landscape to forge an identity that is of the land, while still seeking to understand its enigma (Shirley 2011, par. 35).

As noted in important studies such as Gibson 1992; McFarlane 1987; O’Regan 1996; and Dermody and Jacka 1988, the landscape has also played a dominant role since Australian cinema first emerged in the early twentieth century, and its dominant presence is a manifestation of a longer artistic and literary tradition that reaches back to early British settlement. Indeed, non-Aboriginal Australian art, literature and cinema has used the landscape as the primary site of yearning, as the predominant point of call in a search for belonging. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, despite its obvious dissonance with a mostly urbanised Australian society, the landscape continues to influence and occupy Australian cinema of the twenty-first century.

\(^1\) As argued in the influential book, *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (Collins and Davis 2004), the term ‘post-Mabo cinema’ refers to Australian films that were produced after the 1992 Mabo Native Title decision. As explained in the book’s blurb, the Mabo decision “overruled the nation’s founding myth of *terra nullius*” and has “changed the meaning of landscape and identity in Australian films”. I explore these concepts in more detail in the coming pages.
While the visual and narrative elements of landscape cinema are of course critical and deserve careful consideration, their sound tracks are also embedded with meaning. Sound tracks can provide information on a film’s construction and intention — they can affect the way a filmgoer receives and perceives a film and its ideologies, and they also can tell us something about the society in which we live and the landscape with which we are so concerned. As noted by Rebecca Coyle:

Sound can trigger images of specific locations for the hearer/viewer, and images on screen can be associated with locationally-specific sounds to assist in the rendition of place. Yet sound and music personnel contributing to a production may be physically dispersed and bring a diverse range of sounds to the mix. Ultimately, too, sound as a phenomenon is difficult to ‘contain’, so mapping place via sound offers an intriguing future prospect (Coyle 2010, 7).

The sonic dimensions of cinematic landscapes also differ on a fundamental level from that of visual representations of landscape. While visuals can be tweaked to some extent by the mechanisms of the camera (e.g. focus, positioning, montage, effects, colour, shape, movement etc.), they are limited in some ways because they are largely contained within the frame of the image track. The sound track tends to provide a more abstract, often ambiguous, and, in my opinion, interesting interpretation of the landscape and its dimensions of space and time — and the landscapes’ regional sense of place and history. Even more than visual landscapes, sonic landscapes are transparent and ephemeral — they are not discrete concrete objects. As Harper and Rayner note, the aural elements of landscape are “experienced in relation to what we see on screen; what we hear adds, questions, progresses, extends, completes or challenges the actions, image, movement colour or shape” (2010, 19). With this in mind, film sound may be interpreted as playing a supportive and subservient role to the image track. However, as Harper and Rayner further explain:

…were we to reverse ideas of this relationship in terms of the visual and aural in cinema, we could view film as a transparent map for its sound. Maps represent, and endeavour to embody the physical. They are successful if they become transparent; no longer objects themselves, rather they are the canvas on which the representation finds form. Sound and music, as with image, have
a perspective (19).

Influenced by a determination to highlight the sound perspective and the aural landscape, my research interrogates the many sonic elements that comprise a film’s cinematic assemblage; that is to say, sound effects, atmospheric sound, diegetic sound, non-diegetic sound, compiled scores and the use of pre-existing popular music and popular classical music, originally composed scores, dialogue and accents. Thus, the thesis deals with ‘sound tracks’ not only ‘soundtracks’. It is not only concerned with film music, as is the case with the vast majority of studies that focus on Australian sound tracks. I use textual and production analysis methodologies — which I outline in more detail in Chapter Two — to examine how these sound tracks force engagement with the films’ narratives, imagery and reception, as well as their cultural/political/ideological contexts. I also demonstrate how the sound tracks of the four case-study films seize on strategies that stand outside of typical Australian sonic and musical cinematic language. I examine how basic audio techniques such as synchronicity, layering, shaping, placement and movement — typically determined through vision — are reconsidered to form more complex spatio-temporal relationships. In doing so, I draw insights regarding the specific aesthetic and compositional approaches — and ideological standpoints — of directors, composers, music supervisors, sound designers, financiers and other film personnel.

Here I note that the thesis is not primarily a musicological examination of film scores. It does not provide an in-depth theory of film-sound perception (e.g. Weis and Belton et al. 1985; Gorbman 1987; Chion 1994; Kassabian 2001), or a new interpretation of acoustics and semiotics (e.g. Leeuwen 1999). Nor does the thesis focus on the practical and technical dimensions of audio production (Sonnenschein, 2001), or examine in detail the audio recording business and film-sound industry in Australia (e.g. Hannan 2008 and 2010) — although, of course, all of these elements are considered and explored at particular points where relevant. Rather, this research addresses an academic tendency to neglect the cultural dimensions of the sound tracks of Australian landscape cinema. Although I have identified some essays that refer to sound track and landscape within an Australian setting, I have not yet found one that has investigated this area in detail — and specifically vis-à-vis the issues indicated in the following chapter outline. The primary sound tracks discussed in this thesis have
had little written about them, even though each sound track provides much scope for potentially revealing analysis.

In complementing existing research — and by providing a sonic perspective regarding Australian cinematic sound track — this thesis seeks to offer a fresh perspective. For instance, it is a response to themes introduced in the significant volume *Reel Tracks* (edited by the late Rebecca Coyle). I focus on the way cultural identities, geographies and histories (real or imagined) are reflected in the music and sound of contemporary landscape cinema — highlighting in particular Aboriginal and colonial-themed cinema. My findings demonstrate ways in which sounds and music contain selective associations with particular locations and industry practices. The findings, however, also disclose the manner in which sounds and music are mediated and manipulated, sometimes unintentionally to convey geographic and cultural location and dislocation. There is rich complexity in the way sounds and music are positioned within a fictional time and place.

The thesis seeks to develop and qualify the insights presented in crucial Australian film studies texts such as *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, which argues that the overruling of the nation’s founding myth of *terra nullius* has changed the meaning of landscape and identity in contemporary Australian films. However, while *Australian Cinema After Mabo* focusses on the political via a predominantly visual aesthetic, this study aims to link contemporary themes/views/debates of Australia’s colonial history to representation more generally, with sonic landscapes as a focal point. In arguing that sound and music are powerful modes of expression engaged with contemporary debates, the thesis suggests artistic possibilities for investigating the struggle between Aboriginal and settler relations. Consider a film such as *One Night the Moon*, directed by Rachel Perkins in 2001. It utilises musical signifiers of Aboriginal culture and white Australian culture to explore two musical perspectives on land ownership (i.e. an Aboriginal perspective and a white perspective). These perspectives are signified both through instrumentation — for instance, the use of Aboriginal instruments such as the didgeridoo and instruments that have come to signify colonialism such as the violin — and through the words of the film’s central songs. The song, ‘This Land is Mine/This Land is Me’, for instance, is sung by the
two protagonists — the farmer, Jim Ryan (Paul Kelly), and the Aboriginal tracker, Albert Yang (Kelton Pell). The farmer’s lyrics invoke the experience of arduous work on a piece of mortgaged land to earn a living. The words also suggest an understanding of land ownership — defined by a clear geographic demarcation as well as written legal documentation:

This land is mine  
All the way to the old fence line  
Every break of day  
I’m working hard just to make it pay  
This land is mine  
Yeah I signed on the dotted line

By contrast, the tracker’s words communicate the sense of being part of the land, rather than owning the land:

This land is me  
Rock, water, animal, tree  
They are my song  
My being’s here where I belong  
This land owns me  
From generations past to infinity

The musical dialogue between farmer and tracker — expressing contrasting relationships to land — is juxtaposed to a chorus, sung by both characters together, in harmony. The lyrics of that chorus — ‘They won’t take it away, They won’t take it away, They won’t take it away from me’ — convey poignantly a joint anxiety regarding the dispossession of land. As I will explore further, One Night the Moon (like several other contemporary landscape films) — in addition to its narrative message — contains a powerful sound track which in itself sharpens our understanding of what is at stake in the issues of native title and reconciliation. It is a sound track that achieves a dimensional depth and complexity more profound than that of sound tracks produced when Australia had a different sense of national self-understanding — before Mabo, the history wars, and so on.
As I will explain, my findings suggest that contemporary sound tracks challenge many of the established tropes and themes that permeate the landscape tradition — for instance, the ‘great Australian silence/emptiness’ trope, which has come to signify the silencing of Aboriginal culture and a preoccupation with the displacement felt by the early settlers. In light of the so-called history wars (a debate concerned with the British settlement of Australia and the treatment of Aboriginal people), contemporary sound tracks also help to address a problem identified by the Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton, namely, a long history of racial codification hidden within the realm of film practice (Langton 1992). The research also argues, however, that while some film sound tracks consciously avoid elements of tokenism, inauthenticity and so forth, others unfortunately continue to contribute to the frequent sonic and musical ‘other-ing’ operating in the British settler view of Australian history, landscape and Aboriginality as manifested in many prior films. Thus, unlike other important studies on Australian cinema, my research suggests that attending to the hitherto neglected sound track may present an opportunity to extend the ways we address Australia’s past — a project which is so vital if we are to achieve a better understanding of our present-day challenges. I develop this post-colonial approach towards the end of Chapter Two and throughout the analysis chapters (i.e. Chapters Four to Seven).

I am defining the films I focus on as Australian. My reasoning for this is that the films are set in Australia, explore Australian issues and themes, utilise Australian locations and their direction, scripts and actors are credited primarily to Australian people. They also constitute valuable social texts because of their widespread audience and critical recognition. The films performed well at the domestic (and in some cases international) box office. They rank among the top five highest-grossing Australian films in the respective years in which they were produced — *Australia* is situated among the top ten highest grossing Australian-made films of all time (Screen Australia 2016b) — and, of course, a strong performance at the box office indicates (for better or worse) that a film resonates with a large audience. Also, a strong performance tends to spark significant public commentary and criticism — despite whether such commentary/criticism is of a promotional or controversial order. The four films and their accompanying sound tracks all received critical acclaim on a
local, national and international level but were also divisive and controversial in their depiction of Australia — both past and present. In other words, the films targeted in this thesis do not fall within the protocols of what O'Regan has described as a “mundane national cinema that has no expectation of dominating the box office in its own market” (O'Regan 1996, 113). They are ambitious and aspirational films.

With respect to the films’ Australianness, however, issues such as transnationalism; globalised film practices; offshore investment; non-Australian production teams (including producers, actors, composers, and other film personnel) means that defining what constitutes an Australian film or an Australian sound track can be very problematic and uncertain. I discuss these issues in further detail in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

A number of important post-2000 landscape feature films possess sound tracks that engage with the issues mentioned above. These include: The Tracker (Rolf de Heer 2002), Van Diemen’s Land (Jonathan auf der Heide 2009), Ten Canoes (Rolf de Heer 2006), The Sapphires (Wayne Blair 2012), Japanese Story (Sue Brooks 2003), One Night The Moon, Ned Kelly (Gregor Jordan 2003), Mystery Road (Ivan Sen 2013), Charlie’s Country (Rolf de Heer 2013), Satellite Boy (Catriona McKenzie 2012), The Rover (David Michôd 2014), Mad Max: Fury Road (George Miller 2015) and Goldstone (Ivan Sen 2016). I frequently cite these films in developing the broad arguments pursued throughout the thesis. Although films such as Mystery Road, Goldstone, Charlie’s Country, The Rover and Mad Max: Fury Road were released at a late stage of this thesis they also function as useful and complementary additions to my primary texts. As stated, the case-study films are connected through the way they call into question the core narratives that shape Australian landscape cinema and Australian identity. They also challenge the colonial gaze evident in many previous films that extend an “intellectual, cultural, and material construction of white colonial hegemony on Aboriginal culture and identity” (Rekhari 2007, 2).

Despite the several similarities between the case-study films, part of the rationale informing the selection of films is (if somewhat paradoxically) also that of diversity. As mentioned, the films analysed in this study were released within a
decade boundary and differ in approach, theme and aesthetic. In fact, as I discuss throughout the analysis chapters diversity is even encountered in the sonic, visual and thematic depiction of Aboriginal characters and Aboriginality.

**Research Plan**

The structural framework of the study comprises two main sections. The first section, consisting of Chapters One, Two and Three, provides the academic context — conceptual and methodological groundwork — for studying the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema. It places the thesis in the context both of artistic (especially sonic) scholarship and of current Australian socio-political debate. This section centres on the problem of how to ‘read’ Australian film sound tracks from the perspective of the defined perceiver and aims to establish a framework for analysing the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema and particularly colonial-themed landscape cinema.

The second section of this thesis consists of four analysis chapters (Chapters Four to Seven) and a conclusion (Chapter Eight). As mentioned, the analysis chapters feature case studies beginning with *Rabbit-Proof Fence* in 2002 and ending with *Samson & Delilah* in 2009. This decade-long time span covers films that have by now settled into the public canon of culturally significant cinema. Also, by structuring the case studies in this chronological way, I am able to establish a broad diachronic perspective of Australian sound track practice in relation to contemporary landscape cinema — as well as an understanding of the interconnection between Australian sound tracks and significant social developments and pertinent narrative themes, issues and aesthetics emerging over the first decade of the new millennium. This method allows my research to establish a broad outline of the way sound track analysis can offer insights into how culture changes and travels through time. However, at this point it is important to signal the limitations of focussing on the four films made between 2002 and 2009. While the films pointedly relate to historical developments both in production and in terms of the dates of release, in late 2016 they are not all that recent. Furthermore, I use these selective films to explore specific themes and issues relating to the colonial landscape, Aboriginal and settler relations,
Aboriginality and so on, while ranging widely over connected texts. The films are indeed key works over the past fifteen years and have implications for a broad understanding of sound in Australian landscape cinema, nonetheless, they are just four examples.

The analysis chapters are themed, highlighting such concepts as ‘nostalgia’, ‘the Gothic’,2 ‘the exotic’, ‘tedium’ and ‘realism’. In drawing out themes such as the Gothic, and focusing on the films’ sonic, visual and thematic workings, my method is to establish links, groupings and comparisons with other cycles of Australian landscape films. I also seek to place the films in context, outlining relevant socio-cultural and political issues circulating at the time of their release. At this stage, it is important to acknowledge that while the broad themes provide a framework for each case study, the films often reach beyond such categorisation. The themes, that is to say, are porous: they sometimes accommodate overlapping issues and interweaving lines of argument, and — as the chapter outline suggests — digress into other pertinent areas.

Each chapter introduces the main themes through a survey of prior and subsequent Australian sound tracks. The analysis that follows begins with a plot summary and a consideration of the films’ critical reception and the social/political/cultural/historical context in which it was released. I then proceed to an examination of the films’ sonic, musical and verbal dimensions. The following chapter outline indicates more closely the way the argument is developed throughout the thesis.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter One states the research plan for the thesis, providing the key research questions and problems the thesis aims to address. It also details the reasons why I

2 I am using the term ‘Gothic’ to describe a specific Australian variation of European Gothic literature. I am then applying this concept to The Proposition’s sonic, musical colonial and landscape workings. As I explore in Chapter Five, however, the Gothic is not a term automatically applied to music or sound.
have chosen the specific filmic texts and gives a chapter outline that indicates the way the research unfolds.

Chapter 2: Analytic Framework, Context, Methodology

Chapter Two provides the analytical framework for the thesis. This includes a review of the existing literature and themes in the field of Australian sound track scholarship and a more detailed examination of the rationale and motivations for the thesis, the background and cultural context informing the thesis, and the methodological approach through which the texts are analysed. I begin this chapter by outlining my fundamental interest in the various functions of Australian cinematic sound tracks — looking not only at film music, but all sonic elements manifest in a film’s audiovisual assemblage. This is followed by the review of the existing literature, outlining the current state of research in the field. Here, I position my research in the context of Australian film sound studies — a recent field of research (encouraged, for instance, by seminal volumes written and edited by Rebecca Coyle), and one that has not yet given serious attention to landscape film. I also suggest that certain epistemological limitations have affected existing scholarship. I argue that much of this scholarship sits uneasily within the field of musicology and film theory, and has tended not to take into account aspects of sound track other than music. I emphasise in particular here the lack of scholarly attention afforded to Australian landscape sound tracks, and to the way such sound tracks are entangled in socio-cultural contexts.

I then further narrow the focus to the sound tracks of contemporary (i.e. post-2000) cinema and suggest that perceptions and representations of landscape are undergoing substantial changes. Such changes are a response to controversial debates surrounding Australia’s history and colonisation, incorporating issues and landmark events such as the Mabo native title ruling, as well as other identity issues relating to geography, place and belonging (e.g. globalisation and transnationalism), which have gained traction in the new millennium. I argue that the extraordinary cycle of post-2000 Australia film sound tracks examined in this study can be interpreted as reflecting and contributing to such debates, issues and perceptions.
Having outlined the rationale behind the thesis focus, the final section of Chapter Two provides an account of my methods of analysis. Further elaboration is required here because the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach and the collection of data demands a combination of close analysis methods catered specifically to my focus on Australian sound — methods that in important ways go beyond the formalistic approaches of musicology and film theory. Thus, this section aims to address the specific technical problem of how to read Australian cinematic sound tracks, particularly those that incorporate a number of different musical and sonic elements — that is, originally composed score, Australian and non-Australian, pre-composed or pre-recorded popular music songs, diegetic sound, non-diegetic sound, sound effects (including environment noise), dialogue, and so forth. This section details the ways that the data was sourced, collected and interpreted, and outlines the professional and practical skills and the experience in film sound and music employed in this study. I position my methodological approach within the field of textual analysis and explain the benefits to be gained by using such an approach when analysing the aural elements of Australian cinema. I then provide an account of other important analysis methods I draw upon, including those of film music and sound theorists such as Claudia Gorbman and Michel Chion, as well as film scholar Laura Mulvey’s³ methods for approaching repetition and return.

Chapter 3: Working Towards an Australian Sound

Having stated the motivations, rationale, literature survey and methodology informing the thesis in Chapters One and Two, Chapter Three discusses the primary features and compositional approaches that characterise Australian film music and sound, focusing specifically on the sonic elements of landscape cinema. This discussion helps to identify key sound and musical aesthetics which are pursued in the later analysis chapters. Here, I raise the question: is there an identifiably local sound in Australian sound tracks?

³ I am drawing specifically on Mulvey’s methods of viewing texts. Her work is typically associated with gender issues, which are not broached in this thesis.
I look at the obvious signifiers of Australian sound track practice as apparent in sound effects, dialogue and instrumentation. I provide an overview of the two typical approaches to Australian film scoring. This overview is followed by a consideration of composers who transcend such typical and standardised approaches. I also consider globalised and internationalised ways that Australian sound tracks variously signal Australia, using the Sydney Olympic opening and closing ceremonies as a template to explore such issues.

The second section of this chapter features an illustrative case study of the significant and influential Australian landscape film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir 1975). This film was produced at an earlier period than that of the primary films focused on throughout this thesis and thus enables an ideal gateway and introduction to the sonic and musical world of Australian landscape cinema, as well as a useful reference point for the post-2000 sound tracks. It is possible, therefore, to compare in the following analysis chapters how the themes, trends, styles and aesthetics are maintained, challenged or altered. As discussed throughout the thesis, some contemporary film sound tracks highlight the landscape as an inward or nostalgic representation of national identity emphasised through originally composed orchestral score or European classical music, a strategy reminiscent of that employed in films such as *Walkabout* (Nicolas Roeg 1971), as well as other period pieces of the 1970s — for instance, Gillian Armstrong’s 1979 film *My Brilliant Career*. In other cases, a more open, less nostalgic approach is portrayed as evidenced in the sound track of, for instance, George Miller’s iconic *Mad Max* (1979). In combination with the methods of analysis outlined in Chapter Two and the investigation into Australian sonic signifiers in the first part of Chapter Three, this introductory case study aims to implement and test the basic analytic tools and vocabulary for reading and understanding music and sound from the perspective of the film perceiver. These tools are put to use in the subsequent analysis chapters.

*Chapter 4: Representations of Aboriginality and Landscape in Rabbit-Proof Fence*

Chapter Four examines one of the most important Australian landscape films to emerge during the twenty-first century, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. This is the first major
feature film to respond directly to the *Bringing Them Home* report. It is also representative of a subsequent cycle of period films that critique colonial narratives by confronting audiences with instances of violence against, and oppression of, Aboriginal Australians. However, while *Rabbit-Proof Fence* progressively responds to such important issues at the thematic level, the film contains a new type of racial codification and tokenism, which is conveyed through a heavily abstracted sound-effects track and a generically ethnic world music score. I argue that there is a conflict and indeed contradiction between the film’s sound track, which seeks to evoke a sense of Aboriginal oneness with the land, and its cinematography, which aims to emphasise the isolation and loneliness the Aboriginal protagonists feel within their surroundings. This analysis of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is preceded by an introductory survey that examines significant aural representations of Aboriginality — many of which are intrinsically tied to the representation of landscape and can be interpreted through a long history of spurious stereotyping and codification. More broadly, this chapter argues that while the delineating of colonial culture and the representation of Aboriginality in Australian landscape cinema are progressing, in some cases the sonic and musical dimensions of such films convey a counter message.

*Chapter 5: Revisionist and Gothic Soundscapes in The Proposition*

Chapter Five explores the concept of what might best be termed as the ‘Australian Gothic’ as a key theme in the audio tracks of contemporary colonial-themed Australian landscape cinema, focussing specifically on the music and sound of the recent revisionist Western film, *The Proposition*. Here, I trace the origins of the Gothic (a theme that relates to a style of fiction that emphasises the grotesque, mysterious, and desolate) to a range of Australian literary and cinematic tropes. I argue that the sound tracks of many contemporary Australian landscape films, and especially contemporary period films dealing with colonial narratives, draw explicitly on the aural and epistemological Gothic traits of Australia — the representation of the outback perceived as an unfamiliar space during the time of settlement. Drawing on

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4 The *Bringing Them Home* report was a national inquiry that was released in 1997 and investigated the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their parents under the Australian Government’s assimilation policy, which occurred between the 1930s and 1970s. See “Bringing Them Home: Report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families”. Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
the work of Belfrage (1994), I look specifically at issues such as the trope of the ‘Great Australian Silence’ or ‘Emptiness’ which built upon the *terra nullius* thesis and portrayed Australia as ‘uninhabited’ and ‘un-owned’, because it was inhabited by ‘unfamiliar’ people who had no written legal codes documenting land ownership. I then connect this narrative theme — the Gothic — to the use of sound and music in many Australian landscape films.

The second section of the chapter provides a close reading of *The Proposition* — looking specifically at its sonic elements, namely, the fusion of the score, dialogue and sound effects. I consider the way the film’s sound track draws from the Western genre and its various sub-genres, and how the sound track is designed to parallel the film’s revisionist thematic objectives (e.g. the way it contests notions relating to Australia’s history, colonisation and the landscape tradition). Released three years after *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, and at a time of heated debates surrounding Australia’s history, *The Proposition*’s sound track presents a very different approach in dealing with the trauma of the frontier wars and colonialism more generally speaking. As I will explore, *The Proposition*’s sound track is loud, confrontational and also at times delicate and poetic.

*Chapter 6: Soundscapes of Nostalgia and Homage in Australia*

Chapter Six explores the sound track as central to the projection of nostalgia in contemporary Australian landscape cinema and focuses specifically on the widely acclaimed box office success, *Australia*. This chapter begins with an extensive survey of Australian nostalgia landscape films, concentrating on their musical elements. I look at how such films draw from pre-existing sonic, musical, cinematic, popular culture material and convey nostalgia for distinctive eras and locations. I also explore how the films’ sound tracks can emphasise an idealised representation of the past that has the capacity to help combat the revisionist and violent musical projections of Australian history, identity and landscape as manifest in films such as *The Proposition*. In other words, the sound tracks of landscape nostalgia cinema foreground a preferred history of Australia (by the filmmaker and for the perceiver). The chapter then moves to a detailed analysis of *Australia*’s score and sound design. I
suggest that while the film seeks to use the sound track as a means of reconstructing the past for a contemporary audience, it also employs sound and music to other cultural, social, ideological and aesthetic ends. For instance, the film uses nostalgic music and sound to deal with a story that outlines the cultural concerns of European settlers in Northern Australia, and contemporary issues focusing on the rights of Indigenous Australians. Importantly, there has not been a thorough investigation into Australia’s use of sound and music; neither has there been a thorough study on the issue of nostalgia in the context of an Australian cinematic sound track.

Chapter 7: Sounding a New Indigenous Realist Approach in Samson & Delilah

Chapter Seven focuses closely on the sound track of the highly acclaimed film Samson & Delilah. Unlike the three case studies focusing on Rabbit-Proof Fence, The Proposition and Australia (i.e. Chapters Four, Five and Six), Samson & Delilah is a contemporary-set film directed by Warwick Thornton (an Aboriginal filmmaker), and is representative of a new Aboriginal realist approach to Australian landscape cinema and cinematic sound track. Unlike, for instance, Rabbit-Proof Fence, which adopts a Westernised, exoticised and international mode of sound track design, Samson & Delilah seeks to provide a particular Aboriginal perspective. The film uses sound and music to convey the felt monotony and tedium of the physical and social environment and the reality of living in remote Aboriginal communities. The chapter examines the complex web of environmental sound and pre-existing music. It suggests that these sonic forces are carefully orchestrated and amplify meaning beyond the already heard and already familiar. I look at how the score uses music that is widespread and popular in Aboriginal communities rather than relying on an overly essentialist use of mysterious didgeridoos and other Aboriginal instrumentation — as manifest in many iconic Australian landscape films. The chapter also examines ways that the sound track conveys the narrative theme of love (i.e. between the two central characters and how this may differ to other love narratives within Australian landscape cinema) and monotony (i.e. the monotony and tedium of the landscape and world that the characters inhabit). More broadly, this chapter looks at some specific

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5 In this sense Australia also provides a revisionist account of Australian history.
ways in which sound and music can comment on how colonialism has affected contemporary Aboriginal societies living in the remote outback.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The final chapter brings together the various findings of the thesis. I argue that the analysis of film sound/music can contribute to a reframing of our understanding of contemporary Australian landscape cinema. It is the concentration on landscape film that is innovatory with respect to my sonic analysis. I argue that sonic landscapes and their apparent aesthetics, ideologies and themes, provide a fresh and revealing perspective on how Australian landscape stories are told and how the colonial legacy is manifest in contemporary Australian landscape cinema. I suggest that the sound tracks focused on are part of a global system but also, conversely, identifiably local. In the final chapter I provide as well a broad outline of how the sonic representation of landscape in Australian cinema has travelled over the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In this thesis I have sought to demonstrate how an analysis of the sonic aspects of landscape film — an exercise entailing the close reading of the production, layering, synchronicity and shaping of sound, in addition to the discerning of specific musicological features, can enrich an analysis based primarily on visual reading. In each chapter I cite examples where a sonic approach offers understandings that differ from those derived from visual understandings — in some cases supplementing the visual insights, in other cases actually contradicting them. Within the sound tracks themselves there is often a significant degree of complexity and contradiction. What is beyond doubt is that these filmic sound tracks (as with all sound tracks) are not neutral in their depiction of Australian history, culture, identity and landscape. The sound tracks are embedded and loaded with a range of ideological resonances, geographical sentiments and cultural imaginings. Standing back from my immediate concern with landscape film, this thesis has the broader aim of seeking to provide a new contribution to a growing body of international film music and sound research that focuses on the cultural aspects of a national cinema.
Chapter Two: Analytic Framework, Context, Methodology

As noted in the Introduction, the aim of this thesis is to examine how cultural identifications and representations within the sound tracks of contemporary Australian cinema can provide a new understanding of Australian landscape cinema and contemporary-set or period films that deal with Australia’s colonial legacy and which feature Aboriginal themes. To narrow the focus, I have structured this chapter into four sections.

First, I provide a brief summary regarding why Australian sound tracks deserve attention and a broad overview of the existing literature, detailing the relevant themes, methodological limitations and gaps in the field. The literature review situates the study in an Australian sound track scholarship context, but also paves the way for the historical and cultural context informing the focus on landscape cinema, as well as the methodology.

The second section outlines my reasoning for focusing on the sound tracks of specific landscape cinema. Here, I draw on the literature of cultural critics such as Ross Gibson to describe the important role that the landscape has played in Australian national cinema and Australian culture and identity more generally. I focus specifically on the colonial and historical dimensions of landscape representation. I then relate these observations to the sound and music of Australian cinema.

The next section argues that Australian landscape sound tracks have changed in recent times. I look at how such changes are the result of issues such as globalisation and contentious national events and debates regarding Australian history and representation, most notably those interpreted within the context of the history wars. Here, I argue that these issues have impacted on the representation of landscape in film, as well as Aboriginality, history and Australian identity, providing examples where relevant.

The final section of the chapter details the methodological framework for the thesis. This section describes the various ways in which the texts were analysed,
drawing on textual analysis and close reading methods. This section also helps to resolve some of the methodological problems relating to Australian sound track analysis as outlined in the first part of the chapter. Broadly, this chapter and Chapter Four set the necessary groundwork for studying Australian sound tracks.

**Situating Australian Sound Track Scholarship**

Since the late 1920s, with a period of flux into the early 1930s, the sound track has played a crucial role in cinema — a role that is just as vital as a film’s visual and narrative components. The sound track, which can be thought of as a single event or a combination of multiple sonic and musical material (e.g. a pop song, improvised accompaniment, an originally constructed cue, sound-effects and dialogue) has developed into a complex communicative system that can be read by perceivers in a range of different ways. Leading film music scholar Kathryn Kalinak sums up some of the most common functions and usage of the sound track:

> It [the sound track] can establish setting and specify a particular time and space; it can fashion a mood and create atmosphere; it can call attention to elements both onscreen and off-screen, thus clarifying matters of plot and narrative progression; it can reinforce or foreshadow narrative developments and contribute to the way we respond to them; it can elucidate characters’ motivations and help us to know what they are thinking; it can contribute to the creation of emotions, sometimes only dimly realised in the images, both for characters to emote and audiences to feel; it can unify a series of images that might otherwise seem disconnected (2010, 1).

However, while these general functions of cinematic sound and music assist in the narrative workings of the film, they can also reveal information and insights about society on a broad socio-cultural level. In fact, the sound track can act as a “powerful signification that both constitutes society and is constituted by it” (Kassabian 2001, 29). The sound track is not only a cinematic construction that is deployed to make sense of imagery and narrative — but it is also a cultural, sociological and ideological construct, whereby paths to identifications are created and challenged. Thus, the study of the sound track not only requires a study of its relationship with other texts, and its musicological or psycho-acoustic construction/intention, but also “requires and enables the study of the political and social relations of contemporary life” (2). Sound
tracks are informed and mediated by culture, but they also engage perceivers in critical processes of producing and reproducing meanings and ideologies. If we are to accept this premise, investigative work into the sound tracks of specific national cinemas is of utmost importance.

Over the past four decades, there has been a flowering of sound track studies focusing on Hollywood cinema or national cinemas deriving from Europe. In terms of academic reach, the most significant of these studies have been the work of Bazelon 1975; Manvell and Huntley 1975; Prendergast 1977 and 1992; Weis and Belton et al. 1985; Gorbman 1987; Altman et al. 1992; Kalinak 1992; Flinn 1992 and 2004; Brown 1994; Chion 1994; Smith 1998; Kassabian 2001; Brophy et al. 1999, et al. 2000, et al. 2001a and 2004; Dickinson et al. 2003; Hillman 2005; Mera and Burnand et al. 2006, Goldmark and Kramer et al. 2007; and Beck and Grajeda et al. 2008.

Some studies mentioned above touch on issues relevant to this thesis, namely, the relationships between film music/sound and landscape; the ways that sound track can review a country’s past; and how analysing sound tracks can reveal oppositional readings of films. However, such questions are not their central focus; nor do these studies concentrate on films outside the Australian context. While I draw on this research in more detail throughout the thesis, I briefly state its focus in the following paragraphs.

Significant works include Gorbman (1987), who deals with the Classical Hollywood period, looking at the role of orchestral scores and how they can convey meaning. Prendergast (1977 and 1992) examines the technology, aesthetics and history of European, United States and Russian film music dating back to the early silent period. Kalinak (1992) provides a history of American film music and demonstrates the importance of the score as an articulator of screen expression and initiator of spectator response. Flinn (1992) draws on poststructuralist, Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytic criticism and uses the film music of Hollywood melodrama and film noir to investigate concepts of nostalgia and femininity, linking film music to a sense of an idealised, lost past. As implied by the colonial and post-colonial focus, the idea of nostalgia and whether or not it looks and sounds different
in Australian cinema is crucial for my project. Chapter Seven, for instance, explores issues around nostalgia in Baz Luhrmann’s Australia. This chapter also considers how the landscape in films such as Red Dog (Kriv Stenders 2011) and The Dish (Rob Sitch 2000) contains a type of nostalgia and yearning for community that helps to deal with what Collins and Davis describe as the “aftershock of colonial history” (2004, 126) and the realities of contemporary Australia.

Kassabian (2001) draws on gender perspectives and uses a contemporary canon of Hollywood films to argue her theory regarding affiliating and assimilating cultural identification processes (a theory that I explore and draw upon at a later stage of this thesis). Hillman (2005) investigates the use of pre-existing classical music in New German Cinema but also provides Australian, American and European examples. He looks to how such music functions as a historical, nationalistic and cultural marker or reference. Chion (1994) is concerned primarily with film-sound perception looking at films from Asia, Europe, and the United States. The Cinesonic Series, edited by Brophy (1999; 2000; 2001a; 2004), provides phenomenological readings of the sound and music of films from the US, Europe, Russia and Japan. Mera and Burnand (2006) explore specifically European (e.g. British, French, German, Greek, Irish and Italian) film music texts, composers and approaches to film scoring. They look at issues such as the historical resonances of film music — for instance, the way film scores give rise to the imagined landscapes of France’s past.

As in many other national cinematic contexts, the dimensions of Australian sound tracks deserve careful attention. As a self-reflexive, middle-sized Anglophone industry with a significant output and diversity of films that feature on the local, national and international arena, much can be said about the sonic and musical dimensions of Australian cinema. Much can also be said about how Australian cinematic sound tracks reflect and shape perceptions of Australian society; how they convey or represent Australian history and colonisation; and, how they contribute to

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6 While it is beyond the scope of this study, an interesting point of comparison regarding the ‘Anglophone’ (a widely embracing term) and its representation through sound and music may be made with the Canadian film industry, with a separate French (i.e. Francophone) element. Strangely, despite the several well-known Canadian film composers (many of whom operate primarily within the United States — for instance, Howard Shore), little scholarly attention has been afforded to the cultural dimensions of Canadian film sound/music.
the critical acclaim and economic success or failure of Australian cinema more broadly.

However, despite the fact that Australian sound tracks provide a useful template to explore matters relating to Australian culture, society, history and issues relating to landscape representation, until recently, relatively little attention has been given to this area. This gap in the literature has been noted in recent work by Australian film music scholars Michael Hannan, Rebecca Coyle and Michael Hayward, who in conjunction with a major research project conducted between 2007 and 2010 developed a database that specifically focuses on detailed data relating to Australian music and sound. This database provides a resource for statistical observations about the use of music and sound in Australian feature films.

In the following extensive quote, I cite Michael Hannan’s 2008 survey that draws on this database and details how major works on Australian film have made little reference to Australian sound tracks. Here I also note the few observations made regarding sound track in Australian film studies works are casually bound by visual and narrative metaphors and language and tend to focus on the imitative and emotional ways in which the score matches up with the mise-en-scène (Redner 2011, 5). Hannan sums this coverage up as follows:

Bertrand (1989) includes a number of references to live music performance in the silent era; Collins and Davis (2004) make single-sentence comments on the music of six films; Dermody and Jacka (1987) contains no references to music or sound; Dermody and Jacka (1988a) involves only a two-sentence reference to Cameron Allan’s score for Heatwave (Phillip Noyce 1982); Dermody and Jacka (1988b) includes four sentences devoted to music; Hall (1985) reviews 118 films but briefly mentions the music for only 12 of these; Hamilton and Mathews (1986) contains interviews with American critics and Australian film production ‘talent’, but excludes composers and sound designers; Lewis (1987) makes no reference to sound or music in Australian films; McFarlane (1983), discussing nine Australian films adapted from novels, makes six short references to music; Moran and O’Regan (1985) refers only to the pan-pipe music of Picnic at Hanging Rock (Weir 1975); Moran and O’Regan (1989), an anthology of articles and reviews of Australian cinema, contains nine references to music; Murray (1994) has three brief mentions of music; Murray (1995), a critical survey of 343 Australian movies
includes mention of the music or sound for 50 of its entries; and in the introductory section of the filmography by Verhoeven (1999) three songs are mentioned (Hannan 2008, par. 7).

As a way of filling such a large gap in the literature, Hannan, Coyle, Hayward and others (all of whom I discuss shortly) have sought to promote the importance of Australian film scores. They also provide new and valuable understandings relating to the history of Australian film music and film music research. Despite this recent (i.e. the past 15 years) scholarship on Australian sound tracks, the body of scholarship before the mid-1990s was particularly slim. The following discussion contextualises the relevant Australian film sound track scholarship and provides insight into the reasoning behind the historical gap in the literature. This discussion also draws attention to the methodological limitations of some of the literature (i.e. film studies/theory and musicological-based approaches), thus helping to make way for my methodology, which as discussed at the end of the chapter combines textual analysis with a series of close reading methods.

The reason for the lack of attention devoted to Australian film sound tracks may relate to a lack of musical training or an impoverished sonic vocabulary within the film studies field. Indeed, it appears that for some film researchers “the existing limits of language can prove too restrictive to adequately convey the way sound works, the way it moves and the way it sounds” (Stevens 2006, par. 2). Perhaps it is simply that such film researchers’ strengths lie in other areas. The important film sound academic Rick Altman astutely comments on the restrictions film theory imposes on the study of the sound track:

Defined as image study, film study had a hard time accommodating sound, for sound analysis does, in fact, require a different range of knowledge, a different set of skills and different interests (Altman 2003, 69).

With these issues and observations in mind, much of the discussion relating to Australian sound tracks has been restricted by the limitations of the field of film
theory and perhaps to a lesser degree the compartmentalisation by industry. Moreover, while film theory might offer some insights into the aesthetics of the sound track, it tends to reveal more about the film’s image and narrative workings. As suggested by Kassabian, while film researchers seem hesitant to talk about music and sound, they often seem comfortable in talking about other aspects of a film without “professionalising themselves in the fields of art criticism or linguistics” (2001, 10).

As noted in important works on Hollywood film music, such as Kassabian (2001), Kalinak (1992) and Gorbman (1987), film studies’ failure to appreciate socio-musical interaction within cinema, also relates to broad historical impasses entrenched in philosophies surrounding music. In particular, these film music scholars attribute this lack of interaction to notions relating to the ‘absoluteness’ of Western classical music (i.e. Art music); the idea that such music is the most absolute, abstract and pure of all the arts, and thus can not be spoken about in the same way as other art forms (Dahlhaus 1991). On a similar line of argument, Robert Walser and Susan McClary attribute scholarship surrounding the lack of music and its social interaction to the notion that classical music contained a kind of greatness that has been “ascribed to its autonomy from society” (1990, 283). According to this school of thought, classical music is non-referential and non-representational; it does not take a distinctive form or shape and, therefore, differs on a fundamental level to, for example, words or pictures. With these understandings in mind, it has been thought that music can only be talked about in terms of form and aesthetics rather than meaning, or representation — Bazelon (1975) and Eisler and Adorno (1947) also advocate this idea. Here, however, it must be acknowledged that in terms of musicology these are all very much comments of their time. Nowadays, the idea that Western Classical music is non-referential, non-representational and contains no meaning is very much a

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7 While interaction between various film personnel occurs in the pre-production and production phases of a film, sound designers (and at times composers) perform the bulk of the work in the post-production phase with completed, often digital, images. This compartmentalisation of the filmmaking process has resulted in a dearth of understanding surrounding film sound process and integration. The notion that sound design is more of an afterthought, rather than a holistically integrated element, has perhaps also impacted the level of interest in sound as a meaning-making process. We can see evidence of this ‘lack of interest’ in the relatively small amount of primary source material (i.e. interviews with sound designers, content documenting directors talking about sound design, etc.).

8 The history of music, and debates surrounding it, of course spans a much longer period than the history of film, and originally composed film music. I am not saying that these debates were directed towards film music, but rather they have contributed to the mystique of classical music and by association the mystique of film music.
problematic assertion wide open to criticism and indeed flies in the face of most-contemporary musicology — for the extreme, see the strident arguments put forward by scholars such as Gary Tomlinson (2003). I should also acknowledge that the opinions of the scholars in question have also since changed — for example, see Walser’s chapter “Popular Music Analysis: Ten Apothegms and Four Instances” in *Analysing Popular Music* (Moore et al. 2003), one of the very important articles on musical analysis of recent years. The idea that music is devoid of representational meaning is, of course, a ridiculous proposition in the context of a film. After all, the primary purpose of post-silent era film music10 is to help add meaning and coherence to a film’s narrative. As I reiterate throughout this thesis, film music and film sound can represent culture, people, landscapes and ideologies in powerful and meaningful ways.

I cannot venture too far into these debates — indeed, their scale far exceeds the scope of this study — but note that beliefs about ‘absolute music’ have contributed to creating a kind of expert formalist discourse, which has dominated the fields of musicology. This discourse has resulted in an epistemological failure to appreciate elements of film sound track beyond the formal and aesthetic aspects of film music. By association, film researchers have felt uncomfortable or hesitant in talking in-depth about socio-cultural relationships of music and sound within the context of cinema. Thus, while Kassabian and others have argued the reasoning for this gap within a United States context, I believe the same argument applies in an Australian setting. Coyle also alludes to this argument in her Ph.D. dissertation “Scoring Australia” (2002) — an important work that I discuss at a later stage of this review.

A second historical and epistemological impasse concerning the study and commentary of Australian film music — as well as music from other national

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9 This is particularly important for Adorno, a cult figure of the Frankfurt School and also the subject of much criticism in contemporary American musicology.
10 This argument is perhaps less easily made within the context of silent cinema, when the sound track was interchangeable, but the images were not; where musical responses would vary from performance to performance. Though one could surmise that the musical accompaniment performed by the musician (often a pianist) would inevitably assist in clarifying meaning and providing coherence. Furthermore, many of the film music codes that we experience in cinema today were developed and standardised in the silent-era period.
cinemas\textsuperscript{11} — relates to a lack of interest in film music by the academy of musicology.\textsuperscript{12} Several books devoted to Australian classical music typically avoid discussion of film music. These studies include, Covell 1967; Kerry 2009; Richards 2007; and Bennett 2008; as well as articles devoted to Australian composers (some of whom created film music) such as the works discussing Peter Sculthorpe (e.g. Matthews 1989),\textsuperscript{13} and Ross Edwards (e.g. Hannan 1986; and Stanhope 1994). While it is not clear why these studies avoid discussion of film music, some broad explanations for the lack of interest in Australian film music might relate to the notion that Australian sound tracks are not worthy of detailed analysis and that they are uninspired and lack imagination (see, for instance, Phillip Brophy’s 2009 lecture titled “Why is Australian Film Music So Boring?” and his piece “Local Noise: Sound and Music in Australian Film” (2001b). In the latter example, Brophy laments that in twenty years (i.e. 1981-2001) there has been no appreciable change in the state of Australian film music. For Brophy, Australian composers are still entrenched in nineteenth century Romanticism, completely unaware of the experimental and progressive approaches of composers abroad:

Australian movies continue to be made as if sono-musically literate directors like Robert Altman, Joel and Ethan Coen, Francis Ford Coppola, Jacques Demy, Jean Luc Godard, Alfred Hitchcock, Derek Jarman, Akira Kurosawa, Fritz Lang, Spike Lee, Sergio Leone, David Lynch, Michael Mann, Jacques Tati, James Tobak, Orson Welles, Robert Wise and Robert Zemeckis had never made films and never engaged major composers and sound designers to actively contribute to their films (Brophy 2001b, par. 8).

What Brophy also seems to be pushing for are new and exciting types of sound tracks and also perhaps deeper analysis:

…what I am yearning for here is a self-centred picture of Australian cinema, wherein I want movies to have dynamic soundtracks, inventive film scores,

\textsuperscript{11} Key non-Australian publications in adopting this line of action include: Thomas 1973; Weis and Belton et al. 1985; Nelson 1946; Manvell and Huntley 1957; and Marks 1979.

\textsuperscript{12} In recent years, the musicology discipline has demonstrated an increasing interest in film music and sound, see, for instance, Wierzbicki (2009).

\textsuperscript{13} An exception to this is Skinner (2007), which includes a number of brief observations regarding the music of Peter Sculthorpe.
and openly creative approaches to sound design\(^{14}\) and audio-visual construction (par.9).

He concludes by suggesting that Australian cinema culture is devoid of the modern sound track, and notes that this is in part the reason Australian cinema is “so unappealing, so unengaging and so desperately insecure” (9). Here, I note, however, that some other articles by Brophy concede a more innovative sonic approach in Australian film and particularly Aboriginal cinema (I explicate on such observations in the coming pages and in Chapter Five). While I certainly endorse Brophy’s call for more imaginative sound track approaches and respect his far-reaching and highly insightful contribution to the field of film sound studies, I am not of the opinion that Australian sound tracks (particularly contemporary ones) can be painted with such a broad brush stroke. Indeed, to my mind, such analytical neglect regarding Australian film sound and music cannot be justified on such terms. Even if we are to accept that some Australian sound tracks are not particularly inspiring or stylistically novel; we must acknowledge that they can still reveal a great deal about Australian culture and society. They can tell us something — be it through their production, distribution or reception — about our national cinema and more broadly about our national self-understanding and psyche. Thus, on these grounds, and as I seek to argue throughout this thesis, Australian sound tracks warrant detailed analysis.

To date, a moderate number of studies of Australian sound tracks have focused on the non-diegetic orchestral score (namely, originally composed orchestral film music whose source is absent from the image and is external to the story). These studies include Dianne Napthali’s Ph.D. dissertation “Music for the Movies: an Overview of the Australian Contribution during the Seventy-Five Years, 1894-1969” (1994). This thesis, for instance, provides a historical account of original music and the use of a largely European classical repertoire of pre-existing music in early Australian films. Other studies include the edition “Composing for Film and Theatre” (Atherton 1990), which uses pre-1990 films as a template to explore compositional approaches and techniques relating to non-diegetic film music, as well as case studies concerned with conducting in-depth musical analyses of a given score. Such studies

\(^{14}\) The term ‘sound design’ refers to the design of a film’s various sonic components — for a more detailed discussion on these terms see the introduction to Sonnenschein (2001).
typically concentrate on harmonic structure and language, musical cues, orchestration, notation, methods of composing and other essential building blocks of music such as tonality, melody, rhythm, timbre, instrumentation and form. While these are all important considerations — and my research seeks to explore similar issues as they relate to contemporary film texts — there are significant limitations to focussing solely on non-diegetic orchestral music. On a very basic level, we can see a decline in the traditional orchestral score in Australian cinema. Indeed, while contemporary films\textsuperscript{15} may still utilise the aesthetics and compositional devices associated with the orchestral score, they typically do so in combination with pre-existing excerpts of music and indeed diegetic music (namely, music that occurs within the world/diegesis of the film). Moreover, the placement/positioning, intended meaning and aesthetics of the orchestral score are impacted through the treatment of other elements of the sound design, such as dialogue and sound effects. As previously stated, an isolated focus on orchestral music is a problem, because film sound, after all, is a multidimensional and multi-medium force; a force that manifests in various (musical and non-musical) forms and layers. My approach, as I explore in further detail in the methods of analysis section, is interdisciplinary. It combines textual analysis with a series of close reading methods to examine all the elements in a film’s sonic composition. In doing so, I avoid overly technical language and prevent the formalistic entrapment of both film criticism and musicology. I also aim to treat all sounds on an equal plane, acknowledging a sound’s importance is measured within the context of cultural value. Can it tell us something about Australian cinema and in particular landscape cinema? Can a sound track comment on the Americanisation of Australia, multinationals in Australia and multiculturalism in Australia? Can it tell us something about how landmark events such as Mabo and \textit{Bringing Them Home} have changed Australian historical understanding? Can a sound track help facilitate a more productive engagement with Aboriginal Australia? Can a sound track challenge the Anglo-Irish masculine depictions of Australia? Can these sound tracks act as a template of national identity?

\textsuperscript{15} Here we must acknowledge that such changes can also be located in prior films. Consider, for instance, the synthesizers which amplify a type of digitalised orchestral sound in Peter Weir’s \textit{Picnic at Hanging Rock} and \textit{Gallipoli}.  

| P a g e | 28 |
A New Way

Beyond the analysis of the non-diegetic orchestral score, there has in recent years been a movement towards more detailed analysis of other aspects of Australian film sound tracks. Encouragingly, since the mid-1990s an increase of specific interest in the various possibilities of Australian film sound and music has emerged. Academics such as Rebecca Coyle, Philip Brophy, Jon Stratton, Tony Mitchell, Bruce Johnson, Gayle Pool, Marj Kibby, Michael Hannan, Adrian Martin, Mark Evans, Philip Hayward and Bruno Starrs have been active in applying cross-disciplinary methodologies to the study of the Australian cinematic sound track. Such applications can be found throughout Australian and international film and media journals such as *Filmnews, Cinema Papers, Metro, Screen Education, Senses of Cinema, Screening the Past, Realtime Magazine* and *Perfect Beat: The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary and Popular Music*. In some cases, journals have devoted entire issues to the subject of Australian film sound and music — an example being the recent “Sound Media, Sound Cultures” issue in *Media International Australia* (Aveyard and Moran et al. 2013). Amongst these works, those edited and/or written by Rebecca Coyle represent the most substantial contribution to the field. These include the two volumes *Screen Scores* (1996) and *Reel Tracks* (2005), the online journal *Screen Sound* (2009-2015) and Coyle’s Ph.D. thesis “Scoring Australia” (2002). I use Coyle’s focal points throughout my thesis, (i.e. how sound tracks can impact culture and how culture can impact sound tracks) but my focus differs in that I am dealing specifically with the sound and music of contemporary films and films that deal with the politics of representation within a colonial landscape setting.

Also, seminal, global contributions to the field were Philip Brophy’s Melbourne *Cinesonic* conferences held between 1998 and 2001, which were later collected into three edited volumes: *Cinesonic: The World of Sound in Film* (1999), *Cinesonic: Cinema and Sound of Music* (2000) and *Cinesonic: Experiencing the Soundtrack* (2001). While there are few studies within these three volumes that focus

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16 While Brophy has focused primarily on non-Australian film sound applications, he has been one of the leading researchers in the broader field of film sound scholarship and should therefore be mentioned here.
on Australian sound track practices per se, the sheer magnitude and quality of the *Cinesonic* project (which included contributions from many leading international theorists and practitioners such as Claudia Gorbman, Anahid Kassabian, Caryl Flinn, Sarah Kozloff, Rick Altman, Royal S. Brown, and well-known sound designers such as Randy Thom) has generated much interest in film sound and music within Australian academic and practice-based circles. Since Brophy’s *Cinesonic* series, several Australian conferences and journal editions have been devoted to the study of film sound and music (e.g. Australasian Association for Literature Conference 2013, Modern Soundscapes 2013 and the recent symposium at the ANU titled Current Work in Film Music/Sound Studies, 2015, etc.). Particular essays in Brophy’s volumes that I have drawn upon include Claudia Gorbman’s insightful piece, “Scoring the Indian: Music in the Liberal Western” (2000), which focuses on how Native American Indians are represented and musically codified in the American Western genre. In Chapter Four, I look at similar issues but in an Aboriginal context. Rebecca Coyle’s piece, “Speaking Strine: Locating ‘Australia’ in Film Dialogue” (2000) examines the way Australian films utilise local vernacular and dialogue linking them to identity and place while establishing an Australian sound. The last section in Brophy’s essay “How Sound Floats on Land” (1999) is also worth mentioning. Brophy laments the preoccupation with Australian landscape and in particular the heroic foregrounding of it through films and advertisement but then suggests that Kevin Lucas’s *Black River* (1993) provides a different take on the landscape. He highlights the way in which the haunting presence of a decimated Australian Aboriginal culture emerges through sound effects and the film’s original composed atonal score. I expand on these key themes/topics in Chapter Five.

While some essays within *The Screen Sound Journal, Reel Tracks, Screen Scores* and the *Cinesonic* series provide readings of multiple films and touch on some of the issues that my thesis draws upon (namely: the representation of the Australian landscape; the representation of Australian identity; representations of Aboriginality and colonialism; ways in which the sound track can be used to assist in narrative; the integration of sound effect, dialogue and music), their format does not allow for an in-depth investigation into several texts with a unifying central theme. I acknowledge that exceptions to these studies are Coyle’s Ph.D. thesis “Scoring Australia” which
looks to the use of popular music and how it can inform and extend narrative explorations of Australian cultural and multicultural identities in the iconic films *Young Einstein* (Yahoo Serious 1988), *Strictly Ballroom* (Baz Luhrmann 1992) and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott 1994) and Bruno Starrs’ Ph.D. thesis “Aural Auteur: Sound in the Films of Rolf de Heer”, which examines the sound tracks of the films of Rolf de Heer (e.g. *The Tracker* and *Ten Canoes*). Starrs draws on auteur theory and film sound studies/theory to argue the unique imprint of the director’s vision as manifest within the films’ sound tracks. However, my research differs in that I am providing an in-depth reading of four contemporary films by different directors, focusing on their sonic and musical dimensions all in relation to debates, themes and representations relating to Australia’s colonial landscape — both physical and mental.

**The Role of Composers and Sound Designers. Manipulation of the Perceiver’s Emotions**

The role of the composer and sound designer in constructing a sound track is broadly relevant to my thesis. Indeed, the composer and sound designer can construct sonic material that can help perceivers emotively, intellectually and psychologically respond to cultural issues, themes, characters, places, ideologies and people. To examine the intention of such devices, we must think about how the composer and sound designer operate within the film industry. These issues have been the focus of some studies, which include Jude Magee’s unpublished thesis “From Fine Cut to Mix: An Exploration of Processes and Issues in Australian Film Score Composition” (1996). This study, for instance, investigates the processes and factors relating to Australian film music composition but also considers the particular status of the composer in the film industry. Magee also draws attention to the notion that filmmakers and producers are often unaware of the importance of the composer in the film making process. Likewise, Michael Atherton’s overview of Australian feature film scores, “The Composer as Alchemist: An Overview of Australian Feature Film Scores 1994—2004”, which appears in Coyle’s *Reel Tracks*, features interviews that are primarily concerned with the Australian film industry and film music aesthetics. Based on these interviews, Atherton offers several current film music practices (for
example, classical legacies, hybrids and compilations, popular voices, musical offerings, and innovation), and provides insight into issues such as music processing, digital technologies and techniques relating to the use of source music (Koay 2010, 83).

Other works in Coyle’s volumes that shed light on the industrial and economic factors impacting film sound professions include her introduction to Reel Tracks. Here, she provides a series of definitions of the “multifunctional” role of the music supervisor in the Australian film industry. She explains the various tasks involved in this role, including liaising with composers, negotiating licensing, arranging recording sessions, budgeting and negotiating soundtrack album deals. Whereas Mark Evans’ piece in Screen Scores provides a detailed account of the nature of copyright in the context of current film production, thus, giving a legal grounding to the complexities that affect many present-day composers and indeed sound designers.

Other recent books that discuss the role of Australian composers and sound designers include Andrew Ford’s The Sound of Pictures: Listening to the Movies, from Hitchcock to High Fidelity (2010). This engaging work provides a series of insights and observations on film music of over four hundred films, looking specifically at the various ways that music can emotionally manipulate the perceiver. Ford’s book also includes interviews with prominent composers and directors, some of which are Australian — for example, Bruce Beresford and Peter Weir. These interviews provide valuable observations into how directors and composers make decisions regarding scores. These interviews also shed light on the intentions behind specific well-known instances of Australian film music. Another work to emerge in 2010 was Andrew Zielinski’s biography of the Australian sound designer James Currie, titled Conversations with a Sound Man. Again, this work provides a first-hand account of the way many well-known Australian sound tracks from the 1970s onwards are put together, looking at the creative possibilities of sound, silence, dialogue and music and the way sound designers can manipulate the perceivers’ emotions. This book also draws attention to the important but often undervalued role of sound designers and composers (as well as other sound personnel such as sound
recordists, foley artists\textsuperscript{17} and music supervisors) in the film industry, and how they function within the filmmaking process. This focus invites questions such as: Are these sound personnel given any creative freedom or are they tightly controlled by the film’s director or indeed composer? What are their creative intentions? Are there any other industrial, economic, cultural or political factors impacting screen composers and sound designers? Moreover, and in relation to my primary research questions, what role do film sound personnel play in representing Australian culture, identity and landscape?

While these issues are all relevant to my research — I note that the films I investigate have engaged composers who play a fundamental role (from the outset of the filmmaking process) in the films’ sound design. Such composers are of central importance in the way the themes, aesthetics, ideologies and narrative functions are developed in their respective film projects. In fact, in some instances, the distinction between composer, sound designer and filmmaker is non-existent. Consider, for example, the films of Warwick Thornton or Ivan Sen. Sen not only directed his works but also in some cases (e.g. \textit{Beneath Clouds} [2002] and \textit{Toomelah} [2011]) composed the music and designed the sound. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, Sen’s sound tracks are ideologically and politically driven and draw from his own experiences as an Aboriginal Australian. The sonic awareness demonstrated by directors such as Sen and Thornton suggests a critical shift in Australian sound track production, which coincides with this thesis’ period of focus. It may be significant that before Rachel Perkins’ \textit{Radiance} in 1998, very few feature-length films were directed by Aboriginal filmmakers and even fewer of these films contained sound tracks by Aboriginal Australians. With respect to the new perspective which developed at the turn of the millennium, one might also think of Nick Cave’s capacity as both screenwriter and composer in \textit{The Proposition} and director Baz Luhrmann’s heavy involvement in \textit{Australia}’s epic sound track — for which Luhrmann himself wrote the lyrics to some of the leading songs. My research also takes into consideration how a film itself may be influenced and shaped by a composer — including by the previous experience, work and traits of that composer. This blurring of distinction between director and composer is by no means unique to Australian film (think of, for instance, the films of

\textsuperscript{17}The term ‘foley artist’ refers to a person who generates original sound effects using a range of material within a studio.
Charlie Chaplin, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and David Lynch), but it is a characteristic of the films under study that requires consideration. As I will examine, the directors’ holistic approaches to sound and music not only challenge the typical compartmentalisation of the industry, as discussed earlier in this chapter, but also allow for a powerful, considered and at times deeply personal and integrated sonic exploration of Australian history and identity politics.

Although primarily focusing on film music, some of the works in Coyle’s volumes look at not only the purpose and effect of film scoring, but also at sound design, and the way sonic and musical forces interact and combine. Melissa Iocco and Anna Hickey-Moody’s “Christ Kid, You’re a Weirdo: Aural Construction of Subjectivity in Bad Boy Bubby” (2005), provides a discussion of the recording process in Rolf de Heer’s film, Bad Boy Bubby (1993), looking specifically at the creative possibilities of binaural microphone technology. The authors consider music and sound as inextricably combined in representing specific emotions and characters. Ross Harley’s article, “Creating a Sonic Character: Non-Diegetic Sound in the Mad Max Trilogy” (1998), points to the narrative function of sound effects, highlighting examples within the Mad Max films. Within my own study, I build on such observations, pinpointing components of sound design which are relevant to my study and articulating the role of sounds and sound design elements within a colonial/landscape discourse. However, while the above-mentioned works take into consideration aspects beyond film music, namely, the narrative role of sound effects, my research provides a more evenly spread focus, seeking to address the interrelationships between various aural elements. My research aims to avoid an aural hierarchy; it actively embraces a democratisation of sound in film sound track.

**Representations of the Australian Landscape and Conflicted Strands of National Identity**

As noted in Chapter One, this study is informed by the notion that cinematic sound tracks can provide an arena for working through conflicted strands of national identity in the post-2000 era. However, to comprehend the evolutionary process and rationale behind my focus on this area, we must first ask the questions: Why is the
Australian landscape so important in the context of Australian art and cinema? Moreover, why is it necessary to re-evaluate the landscape through a film’s sonic and musical dimensions?

Here, it is important to note that the concept of ‘landscape’ in this study is multilayered. I am not only interested in the aesthetic qualities of a particular place/terrain as represented through the film sound track — although such elements, of course, play a very significant role. I am also concerned with the sound tracks’ respective responses to the social, political, cultural and ideological fabric of the environment, and by extension, how these responses relate to colonial narratives and representations. I also take into consideration the overlay of human presence and sense of place on a particular location. I am interested in the idea that landscapes and place mean different things to different people both within the world of the film and at the moment of reception. I consider the characters/protagonists that operate within given cinematic landscapes and their representation through the spatiotemporal renderings and combinations of sound, music, image and narrative. This thesis is interested in the sound tracks that belong to films that fall within the category and scope of Australian landscape cinema. Here, it is necessary to point out that the term ‘landscape’ is distinguished from the terms ‘terrain’ and ‘place’. ‘Terrain’ tends to denote the physical dimensions of a particular area, whereas ‘place’ refers to the human/social attributes of meaning and significance of a particular region for their inhabitants and users.

My interest in Australian landscape cinema was inspired by Ross Gibson’s book *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (1992), which explores the crucial role of landscape in Australian art, literature and cinema. Gibson makes the point that many Australian films partake in a “landscape tradition which, for two hundred years, has been used by white Australians to promote a sense of the significance of European society in the ‘antipodes’” (64).18 He also

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18 The continuing prominence of the landscape in Australian art is reinforced by a recent exhibition entitled, *Australian Art Over Two Centuries*, at the Royal Academy of Arts Piccadilly London 2013. The exhibition comprises the largest body of Australian works ever to be displayed overseas. The running theme through the exhibition is landscape, which as curator Kathleen Sorinaio noted “is inextricably linked” to the story of Australian art. It should be noted, however, that the landscape connection was scathingly criticised by some media outlets, see Miller (2013).
notes that the preoccupation with the landscape in Australian cinema is the manifestation of non-Aboriginal Australia’s status as a “relatively young society searching for and under-endowed with myths of belonging” (64). With these issues in mind and as I will explore several times throughout this thesis, the cinematic landscape (and in particular its sonic dimensions) can also function as a site for the struggle to reconcile settler/Aboriginal issues, themes and myths.

In similar terms, Graham Shirley has pointed out in his essay for the National Film and Sound Archive, “Outback on Screen” (2011), that when cinema made its first global appearance in 1896 (five years before Federation) this search for belonging in Australia had reached an unprecedented intensity — especially as interpreted through the arts such as literature and painting:

Australian novelists, short story writers and ballad writers during this period used the bush and outback (for instance, Botany Bay, The Back of Bourke, Kelly Country, the Overflow, Van Diemen’s Land, Snowy River and other landscapes that bear mythic connotations) to define what it was to be Australian. The painters Tom Roberts, Frederick McCubbin and Arthur Streeton created their own myths about frontier and farm life (Shirley 2011, par. 3).

Such painters “exploited Australia’s rural scenery and drew from the stories of the mythic frontier” (McFarlane 1988, 6). They also diverged from earlier Australian landscape painting19 towards a more distinctly Australian painting practice, method and colour palette that sought to capture the physical, as well as psychological vastness, isolation, and idiosyncrasies relating to the Australian landscape.20 It was perhaps then unavoidable that such characterisations and settings were transposed to the moving image and later when ‘talkies’ made their appearance, integrated into the sound effects and musical tracks of Australian landscape films. Such films and their sound tracks perpetuated the literary, visual, musical and oral myths of belonging and

19 For instance, the work of John Glover, which drew from eighteenth century European landscape traditions.
20 The obsession with landscape, as manifested through Australian art can also be located in the work of many influential twentieth century artists — for example, the group of artists known as The Antipodeans (which included Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Robert Dickerson and John Perceval), as well as significant painters such as Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan and Fred Williams.
stories relating to the colonial landscape — eventually, however, they would question and extend them (Shirley 2011, par. 3).

Though I discuss some pre-1970s landscape films in relation to sound in the following section and throughout the analysis chapters, this thesis is concerned primarily with the post-1970 — particularly post-2000 — landscape cinema that engages with potent and current debates surrounding Australia’s controversial colonial history. That said, it must be reiterated that the landscape has played a vital role across Australian cinema history. Indeed, the ubiquitous Australian landscape features in films from the thriving early silent period — for instance, *The Drover’s Sweetheart* (John Gavin 1911), *The Squatter’s Son* (E.J. Cole 1911) and the world’s first feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (Charles Tait 1906) — and Australian landscape film production could even be said to have achieved a creative peak in the years between the First World War and the coming of the sound period. In some films produced then ‘outback and bush’ actually drives the narrative — see for instance *The Breaking of the Drought* (Franklyn Barrett 1920) and *On Our Selection* (Ken G. Hall 1932). The 1930s saw a decline in film production and aside from the exceptional *Forty Thousand Horseman* (Charles Chauvel 1940), virtually no landscape-inspired films were produced during the Second World War. From 1945 to 1970 less than three feature films were produced annually in Australia; yet a high percentage of these including *The Overlanders* (Harry Watt 1946), *Eureka Stockade* (Harry Watt 1949), *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (Leslie Norman 1952), *The Shiralee* (Leslie Norman 1957) and *Shadow of the Boomerang* (Dick Ross 1960) — take place in landscape settings and rehash familiar outback themes, conflicts and mythology. The post-1970 films which are my concern in one sense participate in this landscape heritage; but I will show how many of them (including some films which achieved international success) challenge traditional understandings and representations.

Two recurring landscape motifs in Australian cinema essential to this study are the ‘lost child theme’ and the ‘coming-of-age’ tale. The lost child theme suggests the real threat of the bush with white people (often children) vanishing in the outback. This theme, however, also has deeper cultural significance relating to the theme of
belonging. As Pierce argues:

Symbolically, the lost child represents the anxieties of European settlers because of their ties with home which they have cut in coming to Australia, whether or not they journeyed here by choice. The Child stands for the apprehension of adults about having to settle in a place where they might never be at peace (Pierce 1999, xii).

The lost child theme has gained traction in the social imaginary through issues — some of which are discussed later in this chapter — such as the ‘stolen generations’

Similarly, the coming-of-age story, which involves youths transitioning into adults and struggling over their identity can be interpreted as a metaphor for Australian cinema and the Australian nation itself:

Mirroring dominant ideas of childhood/adulthood dichotomies in the public sphere, the child protagonists in these films are apparently on a transitional journey from childhood as dependence, to adulthood seen as independence, as if a metaphor of the shift from ‘colonial dependence’ to postcolonial independence (Gottschall 2015, 50).

Importantly, the films studied in this thesis draw from these themes (i.e. the lost child and coming-of-age motifs), but also challenge them on a representational level. For a start, the landscape films Rabbit-Proof Fence, Australia and Samson & Delilah all contain stories that revolve around Indigenous Australian children. All the case study films feature carefully considered representations of Aboriginal people and received advice regarding representation of culture and place from Aboriginal consultants. In contrast to many prior films, post-2000 landscape cinema demonstrates a more complex understanding of the landscape, its inhabitants and its colonisation. The inclusion of Aboriginal children (and indeed Aboriginal culture) is of particular importance because historically, Indigenous Australian children have been absent in Australian films (especially pre-1970s films). This absence, in the sense of the denial

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21 The ‘stolen generations’ is a term coined by the historian Peter Read and refers to Aboriginal children who were taken from their parents under the Australian Government Assimilation policies. See Read (1982).
of the right to speak, has long been critiqued as part of the colonial project (Said 1985).

Ryan has suggested that the changing face of the landscape in contemporary Australian cinema can be interpreted as reflecting “an ongoing engagement with the shifts in Australian social and cultural politics over the past decade and beyond” (Ryan 2005, par. 11). My particular concern is with the way Australian cinema does this sonically as well as pictorially. While my thesis focuses on contemporary cinema that engages with recent issues/debates/events relating to the colonial experience (e.g. the history wars, Mabo, etc.), there are several other social and cultural issues that have changed the course of landscape representation throughout Australian cinema history. I address some of these matters in the analysis chapters. Here, however, let us briefly consider the role of government and cultural policy. After all, the government and its funding bodies are not only the gatekeepers of the Australian film industry, but they also have helped to shape the cycle of landscape films produced during and after the 1970s. Australian cinema, it should be recalled here, is distinctive in being primarily funded by government bodies, and this consideration needs to be taken into account asking how far that cinema reflects the ideologies of the political party in power.

A significant development in landscape cinema took place in the late 1960s and 1970s. During this period, a sense of Australian-ness and perceived Australian identity — which relied heavily on the prioritising of the Australian landscape — were carefully cultivated through government arts and film policy. The policies of this time sought to establish, maintain and develop Australia’s cultural independence (O’Regan 2001).

One of the most important initiatives was developed by Prime Minister John Gorton in the late 1960s and then implemented by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam’s Labor Government. Gorton was concerned by the lack of local film production and felt that “something had to be done to forestall the American takeover of our imagination” (Williams 2014, par. 5). Gorton also expressed a need for greater representation of Australian landscapes and Australian stories on screen. In the
opening words of a report commissioned by Gorton and assembled by the politician Barry Jones and journalist Phillip Adams, “it was time to see our own landscapes, hear our own voices and dream our own dreams” (par. 5). Gorton established an experimental film fund and developed a proposal for a film foundation (i.e. the Australian Film Development Corporation), which was later replaced by the Australian Film Commission (i.e. AFC). Similarly, Gough Whitlam felt that cinema and the arts more broadly in Australia since the Second World War were in decline. The Whitlam Government sought to rectify this situation by amalgamating the various ineffective, inefficient and overly bureaucratic existing artistic institutions in order to form one central council: The Australian Council for the Arts.

A major objective of Whitlam’s cultural policy was to redirect the arts away from Australia’s enslavement to British colonial roots and to foster artistic representation characterised by essentially Australian values, people and locations. As a result of such policies the film industry began to give preference to ‘quality’ and ‘cultural content’ over ‘entertainment’ and ‘commercialism’ (McKee 2014, 47). Australian film of the 1970s drew heavily on the Australian landscape tradition and tended to emphasise a “perceived ‘Australian-ness’ with faithfulness to social realism” (Ryan 2001, 3). The mid-1970s also saw the emergence of what came to be interchangeably known as quality films, art films or the AFC genre — a term that was coined by Dermody and Jacka (1988), but has also “come to be closely associated with the term, Australian landscape cinema” (Collins and Davis 2004, 77).

We can surmise that many Australian films from the 1970s onwards feature colonial narratives that depict the incongruity of British culture in a new world context. Such cinema also contains landscapes that represent “something much more than the environmental setting for local narratives” (Gibson 1992, 63). From period pieces such as Sunday Too Far Away (Ken Hannam 1975) and Breaker Morant

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22 As Tom O’Regan notes, the first half of the 1970s produced a cycle of films known as ‘ocker films’ (e.g. Stork [Tim Burstall 1971], The Adventures of Barry McKenzie, [Bruce Beresford 1972] Alvin Purple [Tim Burstall 1973], etc.), which were often comedies set in suburban Australia and dealt with white, masculine Australian identity. By contrast, the mid-1970s onwards saw the emergence of what came to be known as quality films (e.g. Picnic at Hanging Rock, My Brilliant Career, etc.). Incidentally, ‘quality cinema’ tends to comprise period pieces set in the Australian outback and dealing with colonial narratives and the incongruity of British culture in the new world (1995, par. 1-2).
(Bruce Beresford 1980), horror films such as Razorback (Russell Mulcahy 1984) and Wake in Fright (Ted Kotcheff 1971), contemporary-set epics such as Crocodile Dundee (Peter Fairman 1986), apocalyptic Westerns such as Mad Max, to road movies such as The Adventures Priscilla Queen of the Desert and lost child mysteries such as Picnic at Hanging Rock and Walkabout, which also fit the description of coming-of-age films — the landscape is not simply “decorative pictorialism; it is the common denominator, a leitmotiv and ubiquitous character” (Gibson 1992, 62). As a direct result of these governmental initiatives, Aboriginal characters also started playing a greater role in landscape cinema (e.g. The Chant of Jimmie Black Smith [Fred Schepisi 1978], Storm Boy [Henri Safran 1976] and The Last Wave [Peter Weir 1977]). These 1970s films present Aboriginal people as “helpful, kind and the knowledge-keepers of the land” (Korff 2015). While the characters are somewhat mysterious and misunderstood, they contrast starkly with many landscape films produced before the 1970s — see for instance, The Romance of Runnibede (Scott R. Dunlap, William Reed and Wallace Worsley 1928), Uncivilised (Charles Chauvel 1936) and Bitter Springs (Ralph Smart 1950) — which focused on the conflict between white settlers and Aboriginal people and typically portrayed Aboriginal people as uncivilised and primitive. Many Aboriginal Australians in pre-1970s landscape films were also played by non-Aboriginal people in ‘blackface’ and “lacked any resemblance to the actual peoples or their customs and traditions” (McNiven 2016, par. 4). For instance, despite the liberal message conveyed in their plots both Jedda (Charles Chauvel 1955) and Journey out of Darkness (James Trainor 1967) cast white actors (in blackface) as Aboriginal characters. Importantly some of these landscape films were not primarily reliant on government funding. Rather, they were produced by British production companies who also had their own agenda in representing Aboriginal Australians on screen. The original script for Bitter Springs, for instance, ended with the “massacre of Aboriginal people at the hands of the white settlers”, but this was changed to a more positive ending at the insistence of Ealing Studios (Kemp 1999, 145).

The landscape films of the 1970s and ’80s provided a more nuanced and complex understanding of colonial impact on Aboriginal culture and they even began to recognise issues such as stolen land, children, wages and massacres bestowed on

As I will discuss, there is a noticeable representational difference between the films of this period and contemporary landscape films that feature Aboriginal characters. Government-funded television such as the ABC and SBS have helped to produce more films that address Aboriginal issues and experiences and what it means to be Aboriginal in contemporary Australia. As noted on the Creative Spirits website, the post-2000 period has been a time where films “start laying bare Australia’s racist past and the abuse of Aboriginal people, making audiences identify with Aboriginal characters, even if this meant siding against the white characters” (Korff 2015). These reconciliation efforts help to differentiate post-2000 landscape cinema from pre-2000 landscape cinema.

As stated, this thesis examines landscape cinema that features representations of colonialism, Aboriginality, and Aboriginal themes and issues. I have chosen films that construct imagined subjective positions conveying Australia’s fauna, flora and geography, accents and communities, and those that communicate affect and ideological meanings. Here, I briefly acknowledge some of the government-funded, landscape-driven films of the past fifteen years that do not deal specifically with Aboriginal themes or even Australian landscapes but do share some of the more adventurous aesthetics outlined throughout the thesis. For instance, *Partisan* (Ariel Kleiman 2015) is an Australian-produced film set in an apocalyptic future. The film’s interiors were shot in Australia, but its exteriors were shot in Georgia (Eastern Europe), giving it a distinct Soviet feeling — a distinctly non-Australian setting, but one in which the way the characters function within the landscape links broadly to an Australian landscape tradition. This link is evident in particular in the film’s evocative use of grey colours and grimy locations, helping to conjure an atmosphere of isolation and desperation (Kenigsberg 2015) — which is a hallmark of much of Australian landscape cinema. Similarly, *Ruin* (Michael Cody and Amiel Courtin-Wilson 2014) was made by Australian filmmakers, funded by Screen Australia and shot in a foreign location. The story takes place in Cambodia and makes use of jungle settings. As with
much of the post-1970 Australian landscape cinema, the film adopts an impressionistic approach to image, sound and dialogue. As noted by one reviewer “The beauty of some of the images — figures emerging from the water, a fire burning in slow motion, a traditional dance — lingers as the story turns darker and more ambiguous” (Maddox 2014, par. 10). As I will explore in relation to films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, these are common traits in the representation of Australian landscapes and relations to land. Another notable film to mention here is, *Somersault*, a coming-of-age tale set in Jindabyne, NSW. The film utilises the mountainous alpine landscape to evoke the coming of winter and to foreground one of the film’s prevailing themes, alienation. As noted in Dan Edward’s review of the film, “the colour scheme reflects the mental state of characters living in an emotionally ossified world, caught between passion and fear, distance and warmth, fear and desire” (Edwards 2004, par. 7). Although this film does have an Australian setting, it does not deal directly with Aboriginal or colonial themes. It is in its portrayal of alienation through landscape that this film reaffirms a common anxiety identified in many of the films discussed throughout the thesis. The question that arises in examining all these films is whether there are specific characteristics that define a distinct cinematic approach in representing landscape. While beyond the scope of this thesis, one litmus test would entail examining films such as *Ruin* and *Partisan*, which are not even set in Australia.

It is clear, however, that cultural policy has assisted in shaping the aesthetic and ideological development of a distinctive Australian landscape — a visual landscape and (of key concern in this thesis) a sonic landscape. As suggested by O’Regan without “cultural policy there would be no Australian cinema beyond a trivial level” (1996, 26). With these issues in mind, Australian landscape cinema can be considered as a national project; a manifestation of the Australian landscape tradition, cultural arts policy and various other social, political and economic forces. My study takes landscape cinema as its focus, using key contemporary films which have not been analysed in much depth with regard to the sound track. I explore how they extend Australian landscape cinema but connect this notion specifically to their sonic dimensions.
A key motivation for the focus on the sound tracks of Australian landscape cinema is that despite their apparent importance, there is only a small amount of interest and scholarship devoted to ‘the subject’. Moreover, this is the case not only regarding Australian film literature and the more limited sound track literature (as discussed earlier in this chapter), but also the literature focusing specifically on Australian landscape cinema. In fact, while many studies have examined the anxieties and sentiments that arise from the Australian landscape, (e.g. O’Regan 2000; Dermody and Jacka 1988a and b; Collins and Davis 2004; McFarlane 1987; Gibson 1992; McFarlane 1987; Turner and Rayner 2010, etc.), it is my understanding that little on this issue has been explored concerning the role of sound and music. While these studies are helpful in my critical thinking surrounding the social, cultural and political dimensions of landscape within an Australian cinematic context, they are predicated through visual and narrative-based frameworks. Such frameworks frequently deploy representational modes such as symbol, metaphor, image and allegory (see, for instance, Helene Forscher’s 2007 Ph.D. dissertation “Animals in Landscape: An Analysis of the Role of the Animal Image in Representations of Identity in Selected Australian Feature Films from 1971 to 2001”) but do not generally use such modes with regard to the cinema sound track. For instance, while Turner and Rayner call for a greater emphasis on aural aspects of the landscape in the introduction of their book Landscape Cinema (2010, 19-20), their chapter on Australian landscape cinema features no reference to sound or music. Similarly, and as noted earlier, Collins and Davis’ study only makes single-sentence comments on the music of six films. While Gibson’s foundational work on Australian landscape cinema South of the West provides some reference to sound and music, again it does so in no great detail. Nevertheless, and as I later expand on, these texts have been crucial in my thinking regarding Australian landscape cinema and in particular contemporary landscape cinema focusing on Aboriginal and colonial themes.

Importantly, some recent articles/chapters argue the ability of Australian sound tracks to interact with a film’s societal and cultural context and in some cases focus on issues relating directly to landscape representation. Consider, for instance, Philip Hayward and Harry Minassian’s chapter in Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema (2009). Their chapter (“Terror in the Outback”), which is the only one
in the volume to focus on Australian cinema, provides a case study of the sound track for the contemporary Australian horror film *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean 2005), but also takes into consideration several other works from the genre (e.g. *Razorback* and *The Cars That Ate Paris* [Peter Weir 1974]). The authors argue that “*Wolf Creek* illustrates the potential of contemporary genre cinema to retain diversity and local address without sacrificing box office potential” (247). Moreover, they suggest it does this through a combination of Hollywood scoring approaches and distinctive sounds derived from the Australian environment. They go on to say that the director and composer of *Wolf Creek* have “established enduring sound signs of lost and alienated urban travellers untuned to the country they traverse and isolated in the face of adversity” (247). Some of these issues I deal with in more detail in Chapter Five, focusing on the Australian Gothic film *The Proposition*.

Rebecca Coyle’s inaugural issue of the *Screen Sound Journal* (2010) was also devoted towards the concept or central theme of place. Several articles in this issue explore how Australian sound tracks at the close of the first decade of the millennium refer to place and locale. For instance, Philip Hayward’s article “Numinous Ambience: Spirituality, Dreamtimes and Fantastic Aboriginality” looks at how score and sound design are used to foreground the Aboriginal concept of the Dreamtime, taking Peter Weir’s film *The Last Wave* as its primary focus. This piece also explores the cultural associations of Aboriginal instrumentation such as the didgeridoo. As demonstrated in Chapter Four, this research proves useful in my discussion on representations of Aboriginality in films such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

However, other articles in this issue focus on films that take place in urbanised settings, for instance, Liz Giuffre’s “Sounding East Of Everything: Australian Television, Music and Place”, or genre films such as James Wierzbicki’s essay “Undead and its ‘Undecidable’ Soundtrack”. This article, for instance, explores the way the zombie genre film *Undead* (Peter Spierig and Michael Spierig 2004) draws from a set of Hollywood conventions but explores issues such as settler and Indigenous Australian identity, as well as contemporary conservative attempts to keep migrants/refugees (‘aliens’) out (Coyle 2010, 8).
Some essays within the volumes *Screen Scores* and *Reel Tracks* investigate representations of Aboriginality through the sound and music of a single film or series of films. These works, which I explore in more detail in the following section on contemporary landscape film sound tracks include: “Sound, Cinema and Aboriginality” (Kibby and Neuenfeldt 1998); “The Sounds of Rabbit-Proof Fence” (Kibby 2005); “Moon Music: Musical Meanings in *One Night the Moon*” (Winchester 2005); and also Fiona Probyn’s article in the journal *Senses of Cinema*: “This Land is Mine/This Land is Me: Reconciling Harmonies in *One Night the Moon*” (2002). As I outline in the following section, my study engages with the arguments and positions emerging from this literature.

Here, I note that a recent and significant international study on film sound tracks titled *Understanding Sound Tracks Through Film Theory* (2015) features chapters and case studies on two Australian films, namely, *Ten Canoes* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. These studies fall within the postcolonial section of the book. They explore ways that music and sound design can explore Indigenous Australian and settler themes, Aboriginal culture and the impacts of colonialism. These works are not only noteworthy because they focus on what I am calling contemporary landscape films (i.e. films of the twenty-first century) but also because they avoid overly technical musical language and methodology while at the same time draw out key cultural identifications used in the films’ sound tracks. Walker’s case study on *Ten Canoes* argues that an authentic Aboriginal perspective of landscape and culture features in the film’s sound track whereas her case study on *Rabbit-Proof Fence* argues that the filmmakers deploy a language of the coloniser. This colonising musical language is a key issue I address in my chapter on *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and in fact an article I published in the *Metro Magazine* in 2013, which precedes Walker’s book chapter by two years. More broadly, *Understanding Sound Tracks Through Film Theory* provides observations and insights by Australian sound designers and composers, including a quote that begins the book by the Australian sound designer James Currie. The strong Australian focus in this volume suggests a new awareness of the depth and scope of contemporary Australian sound track practice. I turn to these studies in further detail in the chapter focusing on *Samson & Delilah*. 
As frequently demonstrated throughout this thesis, the comprehensive examination of individual Australian film scores within the volumes edited or written by Coyle are extremely useful for my work. They are important in terms of providing a platform for further studies and also help to position local screen sound analyses in international context. Evidently, however, there is still uncharted territory. As Hannan wrote in 2008, “of the approximately 1500 feature films that have been made in Australia since the advent of sound films around 1930, only about 60 film scores have received detailed scholarly attention” (par. 11). Furthermore, a much lesser number have focused on aspects of sound track other than film music, let alone the way such elements provide meaning to the politics of landscape representation, national identity and colonial themes.

As discussed in this chapter, the gaps in the literature and dearth of cultural identity explorations have provided the motivations informing my focus on the sonic and musical elements of Australian landscape cinema, and cinema that in some way engages with Australia’s colonial history. The following section provides a further focus and helps to define the scope of the study, outlining the analytical context informing why I have chosen specifically to work on contemporary sound track texts. I look to some of the key issues facing contemporary sound tracks, including matters such as globalisation and national events and debates such as the history wars.

Part of the way this thesis differs from previous ones is that it looks at the transformations of landscape and sound track in the twenty-first century. Indeed, while landscape representation in Australian cinema of the twenty-first century maintains a kind of box office clout and cultural ubiquity (especially in relation to its status as physically and culturally challenging terrain), it also gains a degree of complexity and controversy that has not been seen nor heard previously. In recent times, compositional practices relating to the sound track have also undergone important production and aesthetic transformations. These transformations relate to socio-political and cultural debates and events (which I explore shortly) but also issues such as funding initiatives, increasingly complex co-production strategies and
offshore investment,\textsuperscript{23} as well as industrial and technological developments in the Western film industry (e.g. the accessibility of digital editing and production technologies, and the accessibility of online music and sound effects databases and catalogues). In clarifying the interrelationship between pre-2000 and post-2000 identity issues in a world governed by market driven economies, the question is thus raised: where are we now? Where perhaps is any nation, and concretely Australia, now, as the ‘national’ aligns against the transnational?

\textbf{Global Practices, Local Themes}

Many issues focused on in this thesis can be interpreted within the context of the effects of globalisation, multiculturalism, and transnational flows of images, music, sounds, capital and people, which contribute to an increasingly peripheral and weakened role of culturally important films in a world governed by market-driven economies (Sidhu 2003, 73). The spread of Western products and culture — and this includes films, music, and indeed film sound tracks — have mostly been thought of as ‘corrosive’ resulting in branded homogenisation of cultural experience, and “thus obliterating the differences between locality-defined cultures that had constituted national identities” (Tomlinson 1999, 269). In an Australian context, Ross Gibson has questioned the authenticity of many Australian landscape films that emerged during the 1980s and ’90s on the grounds of an effect he labels “international contamination” (1992, 81). According to Gibson, and to expand on my earlier discussion in Chapter One on the definition of Australian cinema, the cultural values and aesthetics of many Australian films are changing because they draw heavily from the global system of political, economic and cultural exchange, whereby global forces and emerging distribution models, among others, are challenging the scope of cultural policy and culturally-specific cinema.

A recent and relevant example of this global system operating in a contemporary Australian landscape cinema context can be found in \textit{Mad Max: Fury Road}. In this instance, the filming was moved from Broken Hill (NSW) to Namibia.

\textsuperscript{23} As noted on the Screen Australia Official Website (2016), the Australian Government has co-production agreements with nine countries. Official co-productions are eligible for nationally-available benefits or programs of assistance. \textit{Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles} (Simon Wincer 2001) and the television series \textit{Farscape} (1999-2003), for instance, are both unofficial Australian/US co-productions.
after unexpected heavy rains caused wildflowers to grow in the desert — creating a landscape that was considered to jar with the director’s visual aspirations (Hildebrand 2011). While *Mad Max: Fury Road* maintains an emphasis on distinctly Australian characters and accents, and is credited as an Australian-American co-production, its uniquely African geographic setting — with crimson deserts, stark horizons and spectacular dunes — raises the question of whether or not a film has to be shot in Australia to qualify as an Australian production, let alone a specifically Australian landscape film.

One can also see much evidence of international filmmakers directing films in Australia. However, the films themselves often focus specifically on Australian characters, settings, themes and narratives (e.g. Werner Herzog’s 1984 film *Where the Green Ants Dream* and scenes from Philip Kaufman’s 1983 film *The Right Stuff* and Wim Wenders 1991 film *Until the End of the World*). In other cases, the films by international directors have gone on to become emblems for Australian national cinema — for instance, *Wake in Fright*, which was directed by Canadian Ted Kotcheff in 1971, and *Walkabout*, which was also released in 1971 and directed by the English filmmaker Nicolas Roeg. Films such as *Walkabout* and *Wake in Fright* hold important cultural value within the context of Australian cinema and history and demonstrate a shift in the representation of Australian people and landscapes. In fact, they remain as two of the most iconic films made in Australia, notwithstanding their lack of local box office success and local reception at the time of release (Forscher 2007, 31). Considering the films’ accumulated cultural importance, one could argue the potential benefits of an outsider’s view of Australia. As one reviewer of *Walkabout* noted, Roeg is able to “see and understand local issues with a clarity often unimagined at home” (Murray 1994, 72). As I argue elsewhere in this thesis (e.g. Chapter Three), *Walkabout*’s sound track also demonstrates a complexity beyond most other sound tracks of the period. For the most part, *Walkabout* sonically portrays the Australian landscape in such a way to make it beautiful and poetic, rather than harsh, empty and sinister. The sound track also explores inter-cultural and inter-sexual relations, utilising authentic un-manipulated didgeridoo performances. This sound track also avoids the racial codification — namely, the dissonance and atonality that

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24 Other potential locations included the Atacama Desert in Chile and Chott el Djerid in Tunisia.
frequently accompanies Indigenous Australian protagonists — featuring in earlier films dealing with similar themes (e.g. *Jedda*). Despite these unique portrayals of the Australian landscape and culture, it would be difficult to argue, nonetheless, that *Walkabout* or indeed *Wake in Fright* had somehow bypassed that global system of exchange.

With regard to contemporary Australian cinema, let us consider a term that sociologist Roland Robertson (1995) has coined as ‘glocalization’. This term brings together the concepts of ‘globalisation’ and ‘localisation’, and refers to a new outcome of local conditions toward global pressures. This could mean films that are relevant within local communities (bringing together local themes, issues, locations and cultural imperatives), but are reflective of global operations and practices. Examples of such films include the already mentioned *Wake in Fright* and *Walkabout*, but also contemporary films such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Proposition* — which although set in Australia and produced by Australian filmmakers was chiefly financed by the UK Film Council and a range of other British production companies.

Thus, in drawing on global compositional practices and aesthetics, as well as creative contributions that come from people belonging to nationalities outside of Australia, contemporary Australian film sound track production raises important issues and questions regarding the local and global. For instance, can a sound track constructed by composers and sound personnel from one cultural background (e.g. *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which relies on the British composer Peter Gabriel and his British team) with global filmic notions frequently at play, convey a story or represent a landscape that is uniquely Australian when that success is reliant upon international standardisation and formulaic modes of filmmaking? And how are we to perceive the multitude of generic scores (some of which are indistinguishable from a Hollywood-based musical idiom) commissioned by high-profile foreign composers and reliant on offshore investment and global practices, and so on?²⁵

²⁵ For example, John Barry’s score for *Walkabout*; Maurice Jarre’s score for *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Peter Weir 1982) and *Mad Max: Beyond the Thunderdome* (George Miller and George Ogilvie 1985); Basil Poledouris’ score for *Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles*; Hans Zimmer’s score for *Green Card* (Peter Weir 1990); and Marco Beltrami’s score for *Knowing* (Alex Proyas 2009). See Hannan (2010).
Debates about nationalism vis-à-vis transnationalism and globalisation all in relation to filmic sound tracks are negotiated at other stages of this study (e.g. most notably in Chapter Five). From the outset, however, it should also be mentioned that while some sound tracks are certainly more grounded in, and relevant to, Australian culture than others, it is difficult to locate an Australian cinematic sound track that does not to some degree draw from the impact of globalisation. It is near impossible to find a sound track that avoids influence from Hollywood, whose pervasive cultural presence holds a hegemonic position in Australian society and culture, as well as many other cinematic cultures around the world.

In addition to the decisive and salient role globalisation and global practices play in contemporary Australian sound track aesthetics, there are other social, political, cultural and national identity issues that have gained momentum over the past few decades that also require consideration at this stage. Indeed, as it has been suggested national events have been at least as “significant as international contamination… in the rewriting of national myths, and in the renewed force of the landscape tradition” (Collins and Davis 2004, 76). Such events and issues include, reconciliation, land rights, the stolen generations and perhaps to a lesser extent the climate change debate, the mining debate, immigration debates, the republic debate, free trade agreements and education reforms. These issues/events/debates which are evident in the resurgence of historically based Australian landscape films (and their accompanying sonic and musical elements), suggest a “national identity crisis” and an attempt to create “new collective memories for a new collective past” (Lake 2009, 4).

These issues are given particular currency within the context of a national discourse known as the history wars. Here, it is necessary to briefly describe the politics behind this discourse and then provide some suggestions on how this discourse impacts the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema.

**Contesting the Colonial Story: The History Wars**

According to the historian Stuart Macintyre the history wars is a debate that is concerned with the “obligations of the historian and the demands of patriotism” and
which arises “when historians question the national story” (2003, 77). The history wars have centred most intensely on the past treatment of Aboriginal people and the politics of land since the Mabo decision (Collins and Davis 2004, 5). The Mabo decision refers to the 1992 High Court Mabo Land Rights decision.\textsuperscript{26} The Mabo act, which overturned Australia’s foundation myth of \textit{terra nullius} (meaning land belonging to no one), had a profound effect on Australia. According to an interactive learning resource focusing on Mabo on the National Film and Sound Archive website, the aftershocks of Mabo are still rolling across the country:

The Court’s rejection of \textit{terra nullius}, and recognition of native title, has generated frantic legislative activity, intense political debate, and a vast amount of media and academic attention. It fundamentally altered the legal, political and social relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people: and, in recognising the traditional rights of Murray Islanders, it changed Australia forever (“Implications of Mabo” 2015).

The history wars comprise two ideologically opposed perspectives of Australian history. On one side of the political fence are the ‘neo-conservatives’, who nostalgically reminisce about mythological narratives of the colonial period and, have “sought to defend the old account of Australia’s past as a nation of well-intentioned, hardworking British settlers” (Collins and Davis, 6).\textsuperscript{27} Through their criticism of recent films that address issues such as the stolen generations, the neo-conservatives have opted for the status quo; that is, the glossing over of Australian history; the refusal to accept the wrongdoings by the British colonisers; and the maintaining of national identity that is based on British heritage. The neoconservatives also advocate the maintaining of a long-standing tradition of artistic and cinematic practice that relies on familiar and essentialist Australian archetypes, tropes and landscapes. These staples are intended to locate, unite and give a unifying sense of coherence to an

\textsuperscript{26} See \textit{Mabo and Others V. Queensland} (no. 2) [1992] 175 CLR.
\textsuperscript{27} The neo-conservatives are particularly concerned with the issue of reconciliation and its associated debates, claims and events. Consider the widespread controversy caused by Prime Minister Paul Keating’s ‘Redfern Speech’ on December 10 1992, (see Keating 2000). As opined by Collins and Davis, this particular event suggested a moral flaw at the very centre of Australian identity and “outraged many Australians, especially neoconservatives, including the opposition leader of that time John Howard” (2005, 6).
Australian society or community. Examples of Australian neoconservatives advocating or criticising a certain type of cinematic practice can be found in Costello (2008) and Vasek and Perpitch (2009).

By contrast, the other, left-liberal side calls to attention a different interpretation of Australian history and colonisation, including a history of gross mistreatment of Aboriginal people; race, and class division; frontier conflicts; land rights; and other dispossession issues. This perspective suggests the settlement of Australia constituted an invasion. As Collins and Davis note, “the history wars have also forced Australians to rethink ‘race relations’ and the colonial past as integral to what Tim Rowse describes as a morally illegitimate national identity” (2004, 4).

In their seminal text, *Australian Cinema after Mabo*, Collins and Davis argued that the history wars have for more than a decade played out in the public cinematic arena. However, as I reiterate a number of times throughout the thesis, the themes/views/debates/ideologies connecting to history, colonisation and landscape, can also be related to the issue of representation, and, in particular, representation through film sound and music. Film sound tracks play an active role in the way a filmgoer discerns such issues; they facilitate responses within filmgoers. Indeed, contemporary debates surrounding Australian history influence the aesthetic and ideological approaches taken by directors, composers and sound designers. Furthermore, without the history wars, Mabo and the various associated events/debates, contemporary Australian sound tracks might still contain the typical musical clichés, conservative musical aesthetics, racial codification manifest in many previous films. I’ll expand on this phenomenon in Chapter Five, which examines representations of Aboriginality in Australian landscape cinema.

With such notions in mind, and as my findings suggest, it is fascinating to compare the different sonic and musical approaches taken in contemporary Australian landscape cinema. Consider, for instance, a film such as *Australia* and the way it conveys through sonic iconographies of the Australian bush and landscape, well-

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28 While films such as *Red Dog*, *The Man from Snowy River*, etc. are perhaps more aligned with the neo-con view of Australian history, we can identify examples of the neoconservatives advocating a kind of cinematic practice that falls out of this paradigm. See, for instance, Bolt (2009) who although lamented the leftist politics of *Samson & Delilah*, provides a generally positive review of the film.
known musical numbers, and sweeping orchestral accompaniment an affectionate, heroic and nostalgic representation of Australian identity and landscape. Such a sound track also contributes to the general shaping of an Anglo masculine national character and reflects nationalist identities and desires and imagined geographies.

In this sense, and to play on a concept developed by the sociologist Benedict Anderson, such sound tracks could in some ways be considered ‘imagined sound tracks’ — formulated and reformulated cultural inventions that seek to convey a sense of community and nationhood in the consciousness of the listener. A recurring and indeed unifying theme in much of the scholarship surrounding Australian sound tracks (e.g. Coyle et al. 1998 and et al. 2005) seems to be whether or not one can, in fact, isolate a national cinema or, more importantly, a national sound. As noted by David Sanjek in a review of Rebecca Coyle’s *Screen Scores*:

> While it is indisputable that there are assumptions and assertions one might make about the whole of Australian cinema, there are fewer firm statements that might be made about whatever sonic democracy either the citizens of that nation or their film makers collectively inhabit (1998, par. 2).

Nevertheless, these sorts of issues (i.e. investigating whether or not there are in fact national sounds) have helped to prompt my research questions regarding the colonial landscape — which perhaps is the most imagined and re-imagined aspect of Australian art.

While the study expands on this idea of imagined sound tracks in further detail in Chapter Seven, here I note that the sonic dimensions of films such as *Australia* and *Red Dog* contrast starkly with other successful and influential Australian landscape

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29 In his ground-breaking study *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson has argued about the concept of national character, stating that it is often false nationhood, a type of cultural artefact, or an ‘imagined community’. Anderson also pointed out that despite what inequities and injustices may exist, societies still claim a strong and horizontal comradeship: “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in their minds each lives the image of their communion” (2006, 6). With such a concept in mind, scholars, critics, policy makers and production companies alike have used the idea of ‘imagined community’ and a sense of comradeship as a device to fund, brand and categorise national cinema, seeking to construct the notion of nationhood. As one might gather, however, this form of branding, under conditions of geography, is contestable and in some cases extremely insensitive, especially in regards to nation states that contain ethnic and regional minorities or states that are engaged in struggles and conflicts over disputed borders and displaced peoples.
films of the period — films that use sound and music to problematise the notion of a unifying national character or essence, and indeed engage directly in the history wars debate. Think of the highly critical, loud and distorted sonic and musical perspective of rural colonial Queensland in *The Proposition* — a revisionist film that presents a very different interpretation of Australian history, the Australian story and indeed the Australian landscape. Similarly, contemporary-set post-apocalyptic landscape films such as the *The Rover* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* provide environmental perspectives of the Australian landscape. In the case of *The Rover*, this film presents a future depiction of the Australian landscape as a mining resource for China following an economic collapse; a third world wasteland without law and order. It explores concepts of resource exploitation and sustainability that penetrate the colonial experience — concepts that also resonate with current debates surrounding corporate mining ventures, the super profits resource tax, as well as the climate change debate. *The Rover* contains a score composed by Antony Partos and a sound design by Sam Petty that deploys sparse, dissonant tones, accidentals and drawn-out metallic drones that emphasise the primitive, violent and alien environment that the characters inhabit. The sounds themselves seem to texturally correlate with the precious raw materials that are being exploited and exported.

*The Rover*’s sound track functions very differently from that of *Red Dog*’s sound track, which deals with the theme of mining and was partially funded by mining conglomerates such as Rio Tinto, Woodside and Westrac.30 Speaking of the company’s investment in *Red Dog*, the CEO of Rio Tinto noted the film created an “exciting opportunity to showcase your industry, our people and the story of the Pilbara to the world” (“Resources Sector Backs ‘Red Dog’” 2010). With such vested interest in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that *Red Dog* features sonic representations that glorify and sentimentalise the past pursuits of the Australian mining industry.31 The film’s promotional-style depictions of life in the outback directly correlate to the recent promotional-style advertising campaigns that put a

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30 Other films partially funded by mining companies include *Mad Bastards* (Brendan Fletcher 2010), *The Drowner* (Fred Schepsi, yet to be filmed), *Beneath Hill 60* (Jeremy Sims 2010), *Banjo and Matilda* (Produced Bill Leimbach, yet to be produced) and *Satellite Boy*.

31 Interestingly, some landscape films (which relied on financial backing from the mining industry) provide a more subversive perspective. Think of *Satellite Boy*, and the ironic terms of its narrative, namely, the plight of happiness and existence through the evils of mining.
glossy spin on the mining industry, portraying it as glamorous (Boyde 2013, 127-28). Such portrayals include montages of saturated sunset desertscape; turquoise seascapes; shimmering open cut mines and machinery; human-wildlife interactions; and lifestyle and leisure activities such as having BBQs on the beach, rounding up cattle, and so forth (128). This imagery is combined with real-world diegetic sounds such as train horns, hydraulics compressing and conveyor belts — sounds which function like spot-effects that provide drama and expressive depth and also resonate with the film’s central themes of progress, development and industry. *Red Dog’s* popular music score also enhances the appeal of working in the outback — the upbeat music typically accompanies the jolly, hardworking miners. As explored in further detail in Chapter Six, the specific use of pub rock music in combination with Australian vernacular dialogue, also reinforces aurally many of the familiar archetypes and masculine qualities and themes (e.g. ‘mateship’, egalitarianism, etc.) that are central to much of Australian national cinema.

We might also consider contemporary landscape films that challenge the Anglo masculine dominated landscapes in works such as *Red Dog*, by exploring concepts of nationhood through narratives that promote women to the status of ‘comfortable in the environment’ and marginalise the men to being ‘vulnerable in the environment’ and lacking local knowledge. As Forscher argues, *The Goddess of 1967* (Clara Law 2000) and *Japanese Story* are both significant in this regard:

In both films, the characterisation of the female protagonist has developed into that of a woman at home in her environment and confident of her role within it. The character of B.G. has progressed even further, being at one with the landscape, while Sandy is seen to be working towards that aim (2007, 111).

Importantly, these films use music to emphasise such forms of characterisation. In the opening cue to *Goddess of 1967* we hear a soaring, trilling female vocal “propelled by a musical bed of mesmerising density” (to use the words of Green 2001, par. 5). The effect is jovial and captivating, but it also asserts from the outset the dominant female presence that the film seeks to encapsulate, as well as an aural presence in the landscape that connotes the dominant female characters. However, while the men in these two films are guided through the outback by the female protagonists, it must be
noted that they are not white Anglo-Irish men but rather the stereotypically more passive Japanese men. However unlikely, it would be interesting to see and hear a film that subverts stereotypical portrayals of white Anglo Australian males as apparent in *Red Dog* and *Australia*, subjugating them to the passive and lacking initiative — sexual, pragmatic and otherwise (Forscher 2007, 112). Thus, the investigation of such sound tracks raises uncertainties, controversies and spatial anxieties relating to history, place, identity and belonging.

Contemporary Australian ‘cinesonic landscapes’ can also respond to the history wars on more complex levels, for they even have the capacity to assist in reconciling issues relating to the Australian landscape, Australia’s history and colonisation. As mentioned in Chapter One, Rachel Perkins’ *One Night the Moon* was released at a time of intense, heated political debate regarding reconciliation and adopts two musical approaches to explicitly explore two viewpoints of land ownership. These include a white viewpoint, which suggests a legal or moral right to the land and an Aboriginal perspective of belonging, which suggests a connection or rapport with the region. As Fiona Probyn notes in her essay:

The film is the result of collaboration between musicians, songwriters, and scriptwriters and indeed the necessity of collaboration between black and white is one of its principle themes; signalling the ongoing process of reconciliation outside of public policy debate. The music, which is a collaboration between Paul Kelly, Kev Carmody and Mairead Hannan, is a vehicle for moving the narrative forward (2) and underscores a central theme of the film. That is, the music’s polyphonic and hybrid form signals the effectiveness of harmonies which both acknowledge and celebrate differences of viewpoint, producing what might be called reconciling harmonies that rely on a sympathetic discordance of voices and sound. (2002, par. 2).

These sorts of observations have helped to raise my primary research focuses and questions, namely, the way the cinematic sound track can highlight the Australian landscape as a complex template of national identity in the post-2000 era. And, the role of sound track in the national process of reviewing Australia’s colonial past. This is because many contemporary sound tracks highlight the different perspectives and understandings of native title and reconciliation, and demonstrate a dimensional depth and complexity beyond sound tracks constructed when Australia had a different sense
of national self-understanding — before Mabo and the history wars. Furthermore, the contemporary perceiver can examine the subtext of a film’s audiovisual workings, in a way that would not have been possible in, for instance, the 1970s. Contemporary landscape sound tracks can help to address what Jacka describes as “unfinished business” when it comes to telling stories incorporating an Aboriginal perspective (Dermody and Jacka 1988b; Probyn 2002).

As I argue in answer to my research questions, another inter-related difference between contemporary (i.e. post-2000) Australian sound tracks and earlier sound tracks is that recent examples provide acknowledgement of a pre-settlement culture. As explored more thoroughly regarding the Australian Gothic in Chapter Four, many twentieth century films silenced Australia and presented the landscape as a European projection of some “sublime, unknowable, interior void” Collins and Davis 2004, 76). This portrayal of landscape differed greatly from, for instance, the “green pleasant land of England” (as described by Ross Gibson), where every “hectare has been ridden over, written about and inscribed into an elaborate and all-engrossing national history” (Gibson 1992, 65). Contemporary Australian sound tracks — especially the one’s accompanying films that deal with Aboriginal themes and characters — recognise the Australian landscape as an important part of Aboriginal culture. Such sound tracks highlight the notion that Australia was written over by indigenous languages, stories, songlines and law for more than forty thousand years (Collins and Davis 2004, 76). Take, for instance, Rabbit-Proof Fence, which is filled with environmental sounds and music that connote a non-European culture existing within the Australian landscape, and before the British settlement of Australia. In such a sound track, and as Kibby suggests, “the land regains its voice” (Kibby 2005, 151). By contrast, however, some recent films (especially Aboriginal productions) convey through sonic and musical means the reality of living in the remote Australian outback for many people. As explored in Chapter Seven, the sound tracks of Samson & Delilah, Beneath Clouds, Toomelah and Mystery Road foreground the landscape

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32 It is acknowledged, however, that this is not necessarily such a novel idea in other forms of Australian art. In correspondence with Albert Tucker in 1949, one of Australia’s most acclaimed artists Sydney Nolan talks of how his work was inspired by an Aboriginal viewpoint of the landscape. Nolan notes, “They show you that the country is a gentle declaiming one, the barrenness and harshness is all in our European eyes and demands” (Tucker, Nolan and McCaughey 2006, 110).
as monotonous, uninspiring and weary. These qualities are, of course, at odds with many views of Aboriginal relations to land and indeed prior Australian films that typically use sound and music to foreground the mythological, mysterious and dangerous aspects of the landscape.

More broadly, and in light of the history wars, my findings suggest that the sonic elements of some contemporary landscape films (e.g. *Samson & Delilah*, *The Proposition*, etc.) help to address a long history of racial codification concealed within the broader realm of filmic practice. This problem was outlined by the Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton in her ground-breaking work:

Film and video can make invisible the racist and sexist import of the cultural material they represent. The conventional styles and constructions of melodrama, documentary and popular genre will continue to trap producers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, in conventional racism and sexism (Langton 2003, 123).

As I will explain, while some film sound tracks consciously avoid those elements of tokenism, inauthenticity and so forth, others unfortunately contribute to the sonic and musical stereotyping featuring in the British settler perspective of Australian history, landscape and Aboriginality as evident in many prior films. Thus, for proper representation and indeed reconciliation sound tracks need to be scrutinised. Racial codification needs to be identified. Film and film sound/music all play an important role in informing non-Aboriginal Australians about Aboriginal Australia, about colonialism, about the landscape.

Using a selection of films whose sound tracks (not only musical scores) have not previously been examined in depth, this thesis invites further focus on the role of film sound and music in the representation of rural Australian landscapes (be it the desert, the hinterland, the bush or mountainous or Agricultural terrain, etc.) and their associated themes. This study suggests that sound and music are the integral link in

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33 The term ‘outback’ was coined in the mid-nineteenth century and referred to the country west of Wagga Wagga (New South Wales). Previously anything beyond the settlements was classed as ‘back’ country. It most likely started as slang, short for ‘out in the back country’ but it became a sacred word (McGrath 1991, 117).
achieving the ever-present status of the landscape in much of Australian cinema, and they can reveal insights into the fears, aspirations, pleasures and pains associated with particular locations, which are charged with particular stories. This study suggests that in the twenty-first century significant representational and thematic shifts, which are a result of specific social, political cultural issues/debates, have taken place in the cinematic representation of landscape and Australia’s colonial history. More broadly, this study suggests that sound tracks can function on deep and sometimes unconscious levels. Sound tracks provide more than a means to materialise actions occurring on screen or to give emotional resonance to an environment; they are rather, I suggest, embedded with meaning — meaning that is at times ideologically, politically, culturally, socially and psychologically constructed, conveyed and hidden.

Methodology

This thesis focuses on the intersection of Australian sound tracks, Australian culture/identity and the representation of the Australian landscape. My focus is on the area where these areas meet. The film sound track elements considered include music, dialogue (and its accents), sound effects, diegetic and non-diegetic sound and narration. My research data includes films (DVDs and online), film sound tracks, scores, sound track albums and marketing products (CDs, iTunes and online sources). My research sources include scholarly publications, film criticism and reviews, and filmmaker/composer interviews (DVD extra features, director/composer commentaries, etc.).

I have approached the sound track texts by examining their intertextuality, production processes and methods, and the contexts in which they were produced, marketed, screened and received. The sound tracks are interpreted through textual analysis and a series of 'close reading methods' in combination with the views of the filmmaking teams, critics and analysts. I examine critical writing about, and reviews of, Australian cinema and the different films and sound tracks of the cases studied, as well as their relation to other cinematic, musical and literary texts and the above-discussed discourses surrounding national identity issues such as the history wars and globalisation. My interest lies in the symbolic codes, histories and the culture within
which the sound tracks operate. Thus, as outlined in the following section, this thesis has required an interdisciplinary approach.

This thesis is intended to contribute to a growing body of scholarship focusing on Australian film sound and music, but also the broader field of cultural studies (that is in itself perhaps the most interdisciplinary of all academic disciplines). I pursue the central methodology of cultural studies — namely, textual analysis but specifically adapt this approach to the analysis of sound track. I also draw upon other broad disciplines and methodologies. These include film music theory, film theory, musicology, popular music studies, sound studies, Australian film studies, landscape studies and Aboriginal studies. A series of ‘close reading methods’ are also utilised. These were developed throughout the thesis and also through my personal practice creating films and composing/producing scores and sound designs for film, animation, television, theatre, installation art and advertisements. Such practice has allowed an understanding of the creative and technical processes and methods involved in developing sound tracks for creative media. These experiences have also provided an understanding of how sounds and music in conjunction with visuals and dialogue are layered, edited and manipulated, as well as an understanding of the various analogue and digital effects such as equalisation, compression, reverb, and so on. Such experience has also facilitated an understanding of the commercial and operational processes involved when working in the film industry.

My reasoning for adopting a textual analysis approach over a strictly musical analysis approach is that I have found it more adequate in discussing the sound track in relation to a film’s various other cultural and aesthetic dimensions. A sound track, after all, is not simply music. As noted earlier in this chapter, a sound track is the nexus of multiple sonic elements (e.g. music, sound effects, atmospheres and dialogue). These different elements can combine to create various film systems of meaning. They forge relationships with each other as well as relationships between the image and narrative. Indeed, film sound and music “shows us the image differently to what the image shows alone” — and by the same token the image makes us hear the sound differently to how we would hear it without its audio (Chion 1994, 21). Furthermore, and as Greg Redner notes,
Film music responds to external stimulus, and someone other than the composer often alters its final positioning and placement within the film. Unlike art music, film music does not exist in a vacuum (2011, 4-5).

Thus, all filmic elements must be considered together, otherwise an in-depth understanding of the various spatial, temporal, psychological, cultural and narrative powers of the sound track can never be fully realised. I have chosen to avoid overtly musicological terminology and theory. This is not because I question its efficacy, but rather I want to contribute to a recent body of work that goes someway in dispelling the notion that sound tracks can only be talked about through in-depth musicological analysis. While I do not feel it is necessary to provide a thorough consideration of the methodology or history behind textual analysis or indeed the associated field of cultural studies, a few considerations at this stage should be made about the research undertaken in this dissertation.

**Textual Analysis**

Textual analysis highlights a text’s status by referencing texts that exist in the audiences’ world. The textual analysis approach draws attention to the complex ways in which meanings are constituted through relationships to other texts and narratives. As John Scott’s dictionary reference notes:

Textual analysis is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition of textual interpretation and has most recently been organised around the particular procedures implied by work in semiotics. Hermeneutic philosophy stresses the interpretation of a text must always be undertaken from the reader’s particular standpoint. The inference of meaning is possible only by relating the text to some other frame of reference and entering into a dialogue with the text. We must comprehend a text by understanding the frame of reference from which it was produced, and the researcher’s own frame of reference becomes the springboard from which this becomes possible (Jupp 2000, 97).

Thus, textual analysis is a data-gathering process used to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in the texts.
While textual analysis is an approach that stems from linguistic and literary-based disciplines, the textual dimensions of cinema also provide much scope for revealing investigation. The textual approach, as Deborah Thomas comments:

... can invite those to whom they are offered to revisit the films and see for themselves, enriching their experiences with new depth and bringing significant details to their attention in fresh and productive ways, while ultimately encouraging such viewers to make up their own minds as to how true to their own experiences of the film the readings may be, and how illuminating and important the issues that they raise (Thomas 2001, 1-2).34

While much literature has drawn attention to the benefits gained from a textual approach to analysing film and television (e.g. Cardwell 2005; Creeber 2006; Jacobs, 2001; Caughie 2000), there are also epistemological limits to this methodology (McKee 2003). Perhaps the main concern is that when one conducts textual analysis on a text (be it a piece of literature, film or musical composition), one must make an educated guess at some of the text’s most likely interpretations (1-2). McKee highlights the subjectivity of the individual conducting the analysis and explains that while textual analysis draws on the field of semiotics (namely, the science of signs) and the social sciences more broadly, it does not rely so much on quantitative criteria when analysing the structure of communicative systems, particularly those of visual and musical media. Conversely, however, the strength of textual analyses within the context of the broad remit of cultural studies lies in its ability not to be restricted by rigid protocols or the confines of one disciplinary approach. As McKee notes,

Some academic disciplines (particularly in the physical and social sciences) are extremely rigorous about their methodologies, with a small number of long-established ways in which it is acceptable to gather and process information. Media Studies and Cultural Studies do not police their methodologies in this way. Indeed, one of the key insights of Cultural Studies has been that rigorous methodologies can limit research to a great extent: if you only ever ask the same questions, in the same way, you will continue to get very similar answers. By contrast, by asking new questions, and coming up

34 Some scholars even argue that textual analysis has given credibility to the field of film studies. See, for instance, John Caughie (1981).
with new ways of thinking about things, you can get different kinds of knowledge (2001, 139).

Similarly, this thesis’ methodology is not restricted by a set of fixed or immutable questions or approaches, but rather openly embraces a multidisciplinary approach to analysing the particular filmic sound tracks in question. Indeed, because sound track is just one among many elements comprising a film’s multifaceted assemblage, a certain flexibility is required in the analytic interpretation of the text.

My approach to the analysis of the sound tracks in question also relates to the concept of ‘polysemic texts’, or the notion that texts are open to a number of possible meanings and interpretations, rather than a rigid or fixed meaning (Fiske 1986). In citing Stuart Hall, Joanne Hollows explains, “although a text might have a preferred reading, it does not mean that it will be decoded in the same way by everyone” (2000, 24). Thus, an open text may have a variety of meanings dependent upon the age, sex and cultural background of a film viewer and of course the filmmaker. With this consideration in mind, my project takes into account that different audience members perceive films and their sound tracks differently. It also considers the way the particular films were received (critically and commercially) by audiences and reviewers at the local and international level. I am necessarily, therefore, placing my own subjective interpretations as valid devices of critique, and moreover, supplementing this critique by drawing on audience research and popular discourse.

**Close Analysis Methods**

In addition to these general comments regarding the process behind the interpretation of the four sound track texts, I also adopt a combination of, and variation on, some basic audiovisual close analysis methods for observing the sound tracks and films. On first viewing of each of the films, I write brief notes into a hand drawn linear timeline graph. These notes typically relate to elements of the sound track that seem to be of importance and that contain inter-textual significance (i.e. their relationship to other Australian films, themes, and tropes). This method helps to identify quickly where such elements occur and how they function within the film’s broad narrative structure. I then create a structural map of the film — somewhat
reminiscent of the early model provided by the seminal film music scholar Claudia Gorbman (1987). I describe the film’s shot sequence, the shot length and its relative synchronicity to the score and other sound track elements. I then consider key musical and sonic elements as they relate to the film’s narrative, for instance, sound effect placement and manipulation, leitmotivs, melodic and thematic content and harmonic structure.

In addition to these procedures, I draw from the methodology of Starrs (2009), which adopts a series of established close reading methods, including feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey’s concept of repetition and return, whereby repeated viewings of the texts in question achieved chance insights and unexpected encounters (2005, 23-24). The process of repeated viewing of the entire film or a particular sequence within the film is rarely possible (or affordable) when the film can only be watched and heard in the commercial cineplex. Obviously, however, with the advent of VHS, DVD’s, Blu-ray and audiovisual playback mediums such as QuickTime, such a technique is readily achievable.

I draw from the methods of sound theorist Michel Chion. Particularly influential to my understanding of how sound and music can add value to image and narrative is the last chapter in Chion’s Audio Vision (1994). The chapter, “Introduction to Audio Visual Analysis” (185-215), which contains sections such as ‘Methods of Observation’, ‘Points of Synchronisation’, ‘Mode of Listening’ and ‘Comparison’ suggests a practical guide to follow when performing close readings of sound tracks. Under the heading ‘methods of observation’ are two basic modes of perceiving sound tracks. These are summed up as follows: First, is the ‘masking method’, which is a technique that involves playing a chosen sequence of a film (that is, a videotape, DVD or digital format such as Quicktime) several times but in vastly different ways. When playing the sequence, one component is masked. The first screening includes the usual combination of audio with visual; the second is with sound muted and the third is with image removed (i.e. masked). While the most productive approach will always be perceiving the film with both image and sound, thus gaining the full potential of ‘synchresis’ (a concept I will explore in more detail throughout the thesis but relates broadly to the mental image one constructs when
perceiving an audiovisual sequence), the process of removing image and sound on separate screenings can inspire new readings and insights into the inner workings of a film’s sound track.

The second method is ‘forced marriage’, which is achieved by cutting out the original sound and experimenting with alternative music or sounds. It helps to highlight the emotional, spatial and psychological effects that sound can give the image and the importance of sound as a meaning-making device. While this procedural technique is extremely time consuming when conducting examinations of multiple filmic sequences, it has proved to be a very effective form of close reading — particularly at the preliminary stages of analysis.

The overall methodology as discussed in this section informs the primary way I gather and analyse information within my academic research. By adopting a flexible approach, I am able to discuss a range of film sound and music relationships as they relate to Australian culture, Australian history, the Australian landscape and a broad semiotic system. In analysing Australian sound tracks I consider a) relationships between the sound effects track, the dialogue track and music track; b) relationships between the sound track and the image track; c) relationships to the narrative and the world that the film creates; d) relationships between sound track and socio-cultural contexts.

In this chapter, I have provided a current overview of Australian sound track literature, established my reasoning for studying the sound tracks of contemporary colonial-themed landscape cinema, and outlined my methods for analysing contemporary Australian landscape sound tracks. The next chapter examines the various elements comprising the Australian sound track, namely, dialogue, sound effects and music and considers whether their sonic qualities are distinctive with respect to other national cinemas. I also provide a close reading of the sound track to Picnic at Hanging Rock — a reading that is designed to demonstrate, implement and test some of the points and themes outlined in Chapter One and Two.
Chapter Three: Working Towards an Australian Sound

To conduct an investigation into the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema, it is necessary to undertake some groundwork relating to the specific characteristics of earlier sound tracks of Australian cinema. This chapter provides an introductory discussion of the primary aural elements (namely, dialogue, sound effects, instrumentation and music) that have comprised Australian films over the years with a particular focus on landscape films. I then examine the dominant Australian film scoring approaches that were developed from the 1970s to 2000 — looking specifically at their origins, history and lineage, as well as key composers and other personnel. Following this section, I use the example of the Sydney Olympics opening and closing ceremonies as a means to examine how Australian film music can function as an internationally recognised signifier of Australianness. I extend an observation made in Coyle (2005) that the global identity sought through film music at the Sydney Olympics presents a kind of paradox, raising questions about how Australia can be internationally recognised and engaged, yet specifically — nationally — unique.

The second part of this chapter features a case study of the iconic Australian landscape film Picnic at Hanging Rock, as a foundation for the central analysis chapters of the thesis. By examining this sound track, I highlight ways that sonic landscapes engage the perceiver, contribute to the fundamentals of the film’s narrative, foreground nature and culture oppositions, and reveal insights regarding Australia’s history and colonisation. I am also able to introduce the key concepts, terminologies, approaches and theories pertaining to film sound.

Sonic Elements

Rebecca Coyle (1998) has noted that much of the relatively small body of Australian sound track scholarship is concerned with identifying a particular Australian ‘sound’ or approach and this still holds true (e.g. Hannan 2013; Johnson and Poole 2005), though one must acknowledge, however, that the Australian sound track is an ever-changing medium. Thus, characteristics of Australian sound track
practice are often time-specific and vary from decade to decade. The technological transmission of sound, of course, has been completely transformed since 1998 (when Coyle’s important study was published), and as I argue we can also identify significant alterations in the colonial vestiges and reappraisals of the sound tracks of twenty-first century Australian cinema. Nonetheless, while there is not a substantial consensus on exactly what a unifying Australian ‘sound’ entails (period-specific or otherwise), the majority of claims are concerned with clichéd Australian accents used in dialogue and stereotypical sound effects and music. In the following discussion, I briefly consider these elements of Australian sound tracks and examine how they are designed to be unique to an Australian sound track idiom.

**Speech and Accent**

An Australian accent is a very powerful and important marker of national identity (Cox and Palethorpe 2007, 1). In the context of a film, it can provide information about the particular background of a character. Such information might include the character’s age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, social class, as well as the period and locational setting of the film. For example, the accent of the actor Chips Rafferty, with its broad intonation and rural drawl indicates an Anglo larrikin Australian character type that could be interpreted within a particular post-war era of filmmaking. Such an accent used at this time sought to promote a perceived sense of Australian-ness and was a reaction to the BBC accent (i.e. a more cultivated British-sounding accent) that many Australian broadcasters had emulated in the 1930s (Inglis 2006, 23). One might also consider the distinctiveness of Aboriginal accents and languages, which vary greatly depending on geography, language and culture, or ethnocultural Australian English varieties — for example, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Greek, Italian, Balkan accents. These accents, with their unique phonetic and lexical characteristics and structures, belong unquestionably to the Australian soundscape, especially when used in conjunction with a film’s other aural elements.

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35 Interestingly, Peter Weir has it both ways in *Gallipoli* (1981) in that Colonel Robinson (John Morris) — the character who uses the Australian troops as a decoy for the British and sends them into the firing line of the Turkish army — has a cultivated British-sounding accent. Though the audience will assume the character was English, he was in fact Australian. This tampering with historical fact foregrounds the film’s promoting of anti-British sentiment.
The distinctiveness of the Australian accent is perhaps further emphasised through its apparent disconnectedness when featuring in non-Australian cinema. Many Australian actors who go on to become successful in the United States (e.g. Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe) are required to alter their accents to a more neutral sounding speech.\footnote{This is a two-way phenomenon. There are several instances in Australian cinema where international (non-Australian) actors/actresses play Australian characters with Australian accents. Such cases include the American actress, Meryl Streep, who plays Lindy Chamberlain in Evil Angels (Fred Schepisi 1998) and the American/South African actress, Charlize Theron, in Mad Max: Fury Road. Perhaps the most critically acclaimed attempts at an Australian accent, however, come from the English actress, Kate Winslet, in The Dressmaker (Jocelyn Moorhouse 2015) and English actor, Dev Patel, in Lion (Garth Davis 2016).} In some cases, the Australian accent is so concerning for the United States audiences that international versions of Australian-set films are produced whereby the dialogue is completely re-dubbed. As noted on the popular movie website IMDb, such an instance of this concern is apparent in Mad Max, which was re-dubbed with American accents, because the distributors “feared that American audiences would have had problems understanding the thick Australian accents spoken by the actors” (“Max Max Alternate Versions” IMDb website). In other cases, however, it is not the accent that presents the problem but rather the way a film might include broad colloquial Australian slang. In Crocodile Dundee, for example, the term ‘sticky beak’ was replaced with the more commonly understood term, ‘busy body’ (Harmetz 1986, par 1). Minor changes to dialogue are also apparent in the iconic Australian film, The Castle (Rob Sitch 1997), where terms such as ‘rissole’ and ‘two-stroke’ were changed to ‘meatloaf’ and ‘diesel’, respectively (Walters, 2004). As these above examples suggest, and as I will reiterate throughout this study, Australian accented speech, along with idiomatic expressions and local vernacular, help to define the unique characteristics of Australian sound track practice.

Environmental and Nature Sounds

Other claims associated with a specifically Australian ‘sound’ or sound approach, relate to the use and placement of environmental and nature noises. An example of this is Michael Hill’s insightful chapter in Screen Scores (1998), which focuses on composer Guy Ross’ music for the animated Blinky Bill series (1993-2004). Hill attempts to show how the Australian bush settings for the animated characters are brought to life by their idiosyncratic sounds. More specific examples of
environmental and nature sounds in Australian cinema include rain on corrugated iron, wind blowing through eucalyptus trees, desert ambience, and water trickling through creeks and billabongs. One can also identify in many Australian film scores the integration of more obscure (but still uniquely Australian) environmental resonances that blur the distinction between sound effect, sonic atmospheres and film music. An example of blurring is Alan Lamb’s high-tension wire recordings, which provide ominous undertones for the films *Wolf Creek, The Boys* (Rowan Woods 1998) and *Little Fish* (Rowan Woods 2005). In *Wolf Creek*, for instance, the wire recordings supply an atmospheric bedding for the score — their tones and resonances complement it. At times, it is difficult to distinguish between score and sound effect. This is also a feature of David Lynch’s sound tracks (e.g. *Mulholland Dr. 2001*), and also, of course, of the whole tendency introduced to classical music in Edgar Varese’s contribution to concrete music.

Obvious sound effects that clearly signify ‘Australia’ include animal sounds — for instance, bird calls, insects, marine life and mammals. While I explore the use of animal sound effects in more detail in the case study on *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (and extensively throughout the thesis), I note here that such sound effects are also very important to urban/suburban-set cinema. Two important post-2000 films, *Animal Kingdom* (David Michôd 2010) and *Lantana* (Ray Lawrence 2001), both rely on environmental sound effects for psychological and symbolic effect, and emotional and visceral affect. *Lantana*, for instance, takes its name from the invasive weed and uses that plant as a motif throughout the film. The sounds of insects and frogs, as collected and implemented by the well-known sound designer Andrew Plain, increase in volume and density throughout the film, foregrounding an oppressive, overwhelming and sinister atmosphere, but also in combination with Paul Kelly’s score help to create a palpable sense of a hot sticky Sydney summer. Such creative deployments, as evident in *Lantana’s* sound track, bring to attention the notion of distinctive and individual approaches to Australian sound designs. For instance, Plain’s dense and omni-present deployment of environmental sounds — in particular, frogs and insects — create similar claustrophobic atmospheres in other mystery films such as the 2006 film *Jindabyne* (also directed Ray Lawrence).

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37 For an interesting discussion of these elements in *Lantana’s* sound track see Coyle’s chapter in Reel Tracks (2005).
While Australian animal sound effects (e.g. the squawk of sulphur-crested cockatoos, the laugh of a kookaburra, the droving of cattle, the baa-ing of sheep, the barking of a Kelpie sheep dog) can provide a film with an instant sonic evocation of place, they are, however, at times misappropriated and misrepresented. Indeed, the effects of transnationalism, globalisation (as outlined in the previous chapter) and technological advancements in film and audio production can all complicate such sound effects and their connection to a particular culture, geography or national cinema. The advent of online databases and libraries, the loosening of copyright laws and the absence of performative foley artists mean that sound effects are often used interchangeably and without proper consideration. In some Australian films, we can hear birds and other animals that would not typically feature in the natural soundscape. Conversely, when we watch some films produced and set in foreign locations we can at times hear specifically Australian sounds. The laugh of the Australian Kookaburra, for instance, not only connotes an Australian setting, but also has come to signify exotic locations more broadly — for instance, South American or African Jungles as evident in *West of Zanzibar* (Harry Watt 1954), the many Tarzan films (e.g. *Tarzan the Fearless* [Robert. F. Hill 1933], the Indiana Jones films (e.g. *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* [Steven Spielberg 1981] and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* [Steven Spielberg 1984]) and more recently *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow 2015), which is set in Costa Rica. The misrepresentation of some sound effects thus constitute a type of acoustic anomaly. In the following discussion on *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, I will look at the anomalies and dislocations relating to the film’s time dimension (i.e. musical anachronisms).

**Instrumentation**

In terms of identifying a specifically Australian approach to film music, what tends to stand out is musical instrumentation rather than melody, rhythm or timbre. Particularly important in this regard are instruments associated with Australian bush ballad, poetry and literary traditions, and instruments that signify colonialism, British and Irish ancestral roots, and Anglo-Celtic settler society (violins, steel string guitars, harmonicas, tin whistles, uilleann pipes). As I explore at a later stage of the thesis (e.g. Chapter Five), while these instruments are used in very Australian ways, they are
not, however, unique to Australia — they are of course used in many other countries, cultures and cinemas from around the world. There are, nevertheless, instruments that have emerged within the Australian context. Examples of this phenomenon include Rolf Harris’ wobbleboard and Ted Egan’s beer carton (both of these are apparent in Baz Luhrmann’s *Australia*), and the lagerphone (which, for instance, occurs in Henri Safran’s 1983 film *Bush Christmas*). Perhaps the most iconic and uniquely Australian instrumentation, however, derives from Aboriginal culture. Such instrumentation includes didgeridoos, clap sticks, bullroarers, and so on. These instruments are used frequently in Australian cinema, but similarly to the use of animal sound effects, they are also at times appropriated and indeed misappropriated. I explore this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter Five.

**Scoring Approaches**

While instrumentation on its own can evoke the landscape and the notion of Australian-ness, there are few Australian film composers — or concert composers for that matter — who can claim to have used such instruments to develop a distinctively Australian ‘sound’. In fact, as Coyle (2008) argues, the two dominant types of Australian film music that have occurred over the past four decades associate more with mainstream Hollywood cinematic scoring practices and aesthetics, as opposed to practices that could be classed as identifiably local. The following section briefly considers these two approaches as they provide some background for the scores of contemporary Australian landscape cinema.

The first type of approach comprises composers trained in classical and jazz traditions. The approach exemplifies a preference for traditional compositional, structural and narrative devices, heavy orchestration, swirling grandeur and harmonic richness. Importantly, these qualities are hallmarks of the ‘symphonic style’ music score, which gained traction during the 1930s in Hollywood. The symphonic score could be described as a continuation of a late-Romantic and musical idiom typified by the compositional attributes of composers such as Puccini, Verdi, Mahler, [Richard] Strauss, Wagner, and Brahms (Phillips 2003, 8—9). This preference for the Romantic
mode in Hollywood and subsequently in Australia is deeply rooted in historical forces, which at this stage of my argument require some brief consideration.

A key factor contributing to what has come to be known as the orchestral approach was the European heritage of many film music composers, directors and producers that began a new life in the United States. As Kay Dickinson has pointed out in *Movie Music, The Film Reader*:

The influx of German and Central European immigrants into California in this period bore with it not only men who were to become the movie moguls, but also a considerable number of composers and performers. From Europe, many of these conservative-trained musicians brought a comprehensive understanding of the types of music which had dominated the concert halls in the late 19th century (2003, 2).

As Hannan explains, while Australian cinema came to adopt the Hollywood orchestral approach, it lagged behind the trend elsewhere — occurring in the 1940s as opposed to the 1930s,\(^{38}\) and this delay was a reflection on the inadequacies of the technology available in Australia:

…the lack of infrastructure for orchestral music composition and for synchronisation of music to sound technological equipment as well as the unavailability of experienced composers, meant that this original music orchestral underscore practice for feature film making was effectively delayed by a decade compared to the situation in US, Russia, England and France (2013, 62).

Moreover, while original synchronised orchestral score finally made an appearance in Australian cinema, from 1930 to 1969 only one hundred Australian feature films were produced (or in other words, less than three per year) and only eight Australian composers wrote three or more scores in that period. Hannan writes that:

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\(^{38}\) During the 1930s, pre-existing songs and instrumentals were typically used in Australian cinema and were performed or broadcast within the diegesis of the film (i.e. as source music). An example of this is Rachmaninoff’s ‘Prelude in C Sharp Minor’, which appears in *Lovers and Luggers* (Ken G. Hall 1937), see Hannan (2013).
In the post-war period...all the big Australian theme projects funded by foreign film studios used non-Australian composers. These included British composers John Ireland, John Greenwood, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Ronald Whelan, John Addison, Matyas Seiber, Kenneth V. Jones, Benjamin Frankel, and Edwin Astley. Some prominent American composers such as Sol Kaplan, Alfred Newman, Ernest Gold, and Dimitri Tiomkin were contracted as well as French composers Georges Auric, Michel Emer, and Henri Croila. From 1962 the trend to use specially imported composers on Australian feature film projects effectively ended, although there are a few notable exceptions over the next four decades including Maurice Jarre, John Barry, Alan Silvestri, Bill Conti, Michael Nyman, Mikos Theodorakis and Peter Gabriel (2008, par. 2).

Suffice to say, this was a difficult environment for film composers to develop unique, specialised skills or to develop a professional profile for screen composition (par. 2). Nor was it a situation where an identifiably Australian scoring style or approach within the industry could grow and mature.

The orchestral approach, however, gained momentum and was developed among Australian composers during the revival of the Australian film industry, which occurred in the 1970s. At this time, filmmakers began to rely upon composers from the media and entertainment industries, particularly from advertising and television variety shows (par. 4). Such composers, many of whom still compose film scores, include Bruce Smeaton, Bruce Rowland, John Clifford White and Paul Schultze, David Hirschfelder and Nigel Westlake. These composers, as I explain with regard to Bruce Smeaton in the following case study of Picnic at Hanging Rock, drew heavily on the Australian landscape, its perception as an unfamiliar, exotic and vast space, as well as on the elements relating to Australia’s colonial history.

Another typical Australian film scoring approach emerged during the 1980s. It followed international trends and comprised composers trained in rock, pop and jazz music and a range of other styles and genres. Composers that demonstrate this composite approach include Peter Best, Martin Armiger, Mario Milo, Rory O’Donoghue, Brian Cadd, Roy Ritchie, Michael Carlos and Hans Poulsen. High-profile conductors, jazz composers, performers and musical directors who delved into film music at this time include William Motzing, Don Burrows and John Sangster. This approach emphasises a tendency to include popular music in sound tracks...
Such music is selected and implemented by the composer and is used to inform and interact with the composer’s original score. Reflecting on this approach, and to expand on my earlier discussion in Chapter Two, the composer and academic Martin Armiger has commented on the significant challenges for the composer:

A lot more responsibility rests with the composer. The Hollywood industry, the studio system, or the BBC system, have very structured, tightly organised music roles (like music editor and music supervisor) that don't exist in Australia. Here as composer, you take on these roles. You're responsible for the music editing and the overall shape of the thing, and quite often get involved in deals that get your source music, your acts and guest artists. Quite often you do your own fixing or your engaging of musicians. All that's kind of a challenge, and also gives you a bit more independence, a bit more free wheeling (cited in Coyle and Hannan 2005, par.16).

The use of specific music supervisor and editor, however, has become more common within Australian cinema and particularly in the Australian television industry. Furthermore, technological and industrial developments have altered the way music is sourced and implemented. Similarly to that of sound effects, production music can be accessed instantly online through music databases and catalogues.

**Monumentalising the Cinematic**

While the two broad approaches mentioned above do not necessarily demonstrate musical characteristics that are distinctly or uniquely Australian, that is not to say that instances of Australian film music cannot be iconised or instantly recognisable as belonging to Australian cinema. In fact, many cases of Australian film music are cemented into the public (both domestic and international) consciousness. Evidence of this is clearly manifest in landmark events such as the Sydney 2000 Olympics opening and closing ceremonies (held at the Homebush Stadium in NSW), which capitalised on the power and widespread popularity of Australian film music.

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39 This statement can be supported by my own experience working in film music — for instance, a number of my compositions have been sourced by notable music supervisors and synchronised to popular Australian television and film (e.g. the television series *The Offspring* Season One [2010] and *Three* [2012]).

As Collins and Davis noted, the Sydney Olympics opening and closing ceremonies were a “particularly self-conscious media event” that combined Aboriginal themes with an inherently white patriarchal portrayal of national identity (2005, 7). They prove useful in the context of discussing Australian sound tracks as they relied heavily on a series of Australian cinematic and film music references and clichés. These references and clichés were used to carry the event’s celebratory message and to project what O’Regan describes as a ‘tourists-eye’ view of Australian identity (O’Regan 1996, 54). Such projections of Australian identity were undoubtedly familiar to many Australians of that time because they relied on the films that were domestically and internationally successful. As Rebecca Coyle notes in her introduction to Reel Tracks, signifiers of popular Australian culture and cinema were highlighted in segments in both opening and closing ceremonies. Moreover, these signifiers effectively linked national identity with both recent film successes and their representational strategies. The closing ceremony, for instance, featured references to Australian international hit films and celebrities that promoted Australian global successes (2005, 4-5).

Coyle goes on to explain how the opening and closing ceremonies used musical or musically based extracts to represent the particular films (5). Specific usages included an original score by composer David Hirschfelder, popular music such as George Young and Harry Vanda’s famous disco hit ‘Love is in the Air’, which features in Strictly Ballroom, and other pieces from the films The Adventures Priscilla Queen of the Desert and Crocodile Dundee. Perhaps the most iconic passage, however, was Bruce Rowland’s orchestral score for The Man from Snowy River (George Miller 1982), which accompanied a large group of horse riders cracking stock whips and dressed in Australian bush attire. Based on Banjo Patterson’s poem of the same name the film and performance can be understood as a metaphor for Australian colonialism and frontiership. Rowland’s score highlights this metaphor through what Gorbman calls the “epic quality or spectacle of landscape shots and action sequences” (1987, 68). In other words, the musical score helps to monumentalise the visual sequences within the film, which then, of course, resonate as memorable moments for Australian and international audiences. In addition to specifically Australian film music references, film scores from international
blockbusters were also used — for example, John Williams’ theme from *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg 1975), accompanied the iconic Australian golfer Greg Norman (also known as The Shark). Such a usage helps to emphasise the widespread influence and power of film music. In this instance, film music perhaps functions as what Kassabian describes as a “musical lingua franca” as understood in “contemporary Western industrialised societies” (2001, 8).

As Coyle notes, the cinematic constructions of the Sydney Olympic ceremonies suggest a curious situation, whereby the fictional diegesis of the filmic references are in these contexts “allowed to stand for, or seemingly represent (as in re-present) Australia to an international audience” (2005, 5). Or in other words, these events were concerned with portraying a particular image of Australian-ness — much of which relied heavily on the concept of landscape — manifested through cinematic reference and film music to a global audience. Yet, inevitably, such film references do not so much represent ‘the nation’ but rather a single set of filmic and musical explorations of culture and place (5).

Although the projection of Australian-ness at the Sydney Olympics through film music built upon pre-2000s film music constructions such as the successes of landscape films such as *Crocodile Dundee*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and so forth, a similar musical ‘tourists eye view’ projection is perpetuated in subsequent (post-2000) Australian landscape films. Most obvious of these are Luhrmann’s epic *Australia* and Stenders’ *Red Dog* as discussed in Chapter Six. These films can be interpreted as an homage to, and a celebration of, Australian music, film music, cinema, Australian popular culture and identity. Conversely, however, the Sydney Olympics also presented the opportunity to close the chapter of tokenistic and cliché representations of Australian identity, as perpetuated in films such as *Crocodile Dundee*. Perfectly and temporally poised the Olympic ceremonies present a catalyst for a new type of filmmaking, film scoring and sound design that is less representative of the outward looking internationalist approach and more reflective of the current domestic concerns of Australian identity and colonial history. *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, *The Tracker*, *Beneath Clouds* and *One Night the Moon*, for instance, were released between 2001 and 2002 and set the
foundation for a new wave of Australian filmmaking. This new cycle of films also contains powerful and considered sound tracks that engage — aurally, aesthetically and ideologically — with the contentious issues surrounding Aboriginal/settler conflicts.

Exceptions

While most Australian films contain sound tracks that are constructed within the realm of the commercially and/or internationally marketable approaches mentioned above, some practitioners have ventured beyond the confines of the orchestral music, genre music, production music, popular music and the Hollywood approach. These include directors Peter Weir and Rolf de Heer, and Aboriginal filmmakers such Warwick Thornton and Ivan Sen — all of whom are noted for their unique and sophisticated approaches to film sound and music. The particular attention given to sound and music by these filmmakers might distinguish them as what Chion labels “visualists of the ear” (Chion 1994, 134). Indeed, some scholarship even describes these filmmakers as aural auteurs (e.g. Starrs 2009; Johnson and Poole 1998). Composers that have transcended typical film music standards include Carl Vine and his score for Bedevil (Tracey Moffatt 1993), the various scores of Brian May and Graham Tardif, the abstract scores of Philip Brophy and the film music of Peter Sculthorpe.

Sculthorpe is a particularly significant Australian composer. This is because he is credited for possessing a distinctive aesthetic influenced by, and evocative of, the Australian landscape and using indigenous instruments like the didgeridoo. Sculthorpe who did in fact write film music — for instance, Age of Consent (Michael Powell 1969) and Burke and Wills (Graeme Clifford 1985) — wanted not only to create aural depictions of any particular landscape, but, in his words, “to find the spirit of the land and the landscape — the sacred, if you like — in nature” (cited in Schweitzer 2014, par. 3). In citing an interview with Sculthorpe, Kathleen Steele notes that he “sought to capture a sense of time and space that many Australians have repeatedly failed to access” (Steele 2007, 33). She goes on to explain that unlike typical cinematic, artistic, literary or musical representations and evocations of the
Australian landscape, which project a sense of nothingness and vastness, Sculthorpe’s musical response to the landscape is full of life and vibrancy (33). Likewise, Ross Edwards has also developed a somewhat distinctive Australian style that draws inspiration from the sonic qualities of the landscape. As Magee notes, Edwards’ score for *Paradise Road* is indicative of his distinct approach which is characterised by:

...short, intense ostinato, rhythmic gestures made up of repeated textural clusters, patterns with constant time signature changes (modelled on the unmetred repetitive sounds of insects in the bush) and idiosyncratic use of piano, clarinet and percussion with strings (2005, 193).

Another notable composer to draw from the landscape was John Antill. Inspired by his attendance at an Aboriginal ceremony his most famous piece the ballet, *The Corroboree*, sought to express “something of the spiritual values of the original inhabitants of the country” (Hort 2007, par. 7) and at the time of its release was hailed as a coming-of-age milestone in Australian cultural life (Potter 2004, 11). Antill’s vibrant, percussive and rhythmical music, which borrows elements from Aboriginal musical culture was also used in Australian documentary film between the 1940s and 1960s, most notably *School in the Mail Box* (Stanley Hawes 1947). Thus, both Antill and Sculthorpe have produced compositions that suggest a more complex and varied lineage deriving from Aboriginal musical practices.

Like much of Australian art, Australian sound tracks can be interpreted as a hybrid of different practices, procedures and aesthetics. Despite their apparent stand-alone originality, Australian music sound tracks are “neither ‘young’ nor ‘reckless’ but increasingly the product of hard-edged industrial determinants — however mediated by authorial vision” (Coyle 1998, 160). Australian sound tracks often mirror the creative and technological developments and techniques occurring abroad (e.g. Europe and the US), but are given a local quality by utilising a palette of sounds and music that evoke elements of Australia and importantly the Australian landscape. As I argue in the following case studies, if there is a uniquely Australian cinematic sound track idiom, it emerges from a combination of all the above-mentioned sonic, musical and verbal constructs. These include the score and its various components (e.g. instrumentation, melody, rhythm and timbre), dialogue and sound effects, and in particular their signification to Australian themes, stories, characters, landscape,
colonialism and landmark socio-cultural events and issues. Nonetheless, trying to define the principles of what may or may not be a specific Australian sound per se is a difficult task, but nevertheless relevant to investigating the cultural impact of cinema and soundscapes.

With all this in mind, the following case study of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* analyses an example of film sound track from an important era of Australian cinema. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has influenced subsequent Australian cinema and media, and close analysis provides a way for examining the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema. Moreover, this sound track — which is eclectic in form, style and aesthetic — provides a means of introducing key tools, terms, concepts and terminology that are relevant to the continuity of my approach in the analysis chapters. In this case study, I look at three broad themes as they relate to the sound track’s various thematic, aesthetic, compositional, structural, psychological, temporal, spatial, historical, cultural and social elements.

**Case Study: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Synopsis and Background)**

Based on Joan Lindsay’s novel of the same name, *Picnic* is one of the most important films to emerge from the so-called New Wave or renaissance of Australian filmmaking during the 1970s — a renaissance that was a result of the governmental initiatives mentioned in Chapter Two.\(^4\) Under the direction of Peter Weir, the story revolves around the disappearance of, and search for, three teenage schoolgirls. These girls were last seen at the geologically unique Hanging Rock outcrop near Macedon in South Eastern Victoria on St Valentine’s Day 1900. The film encompasses much of what is considered as Australian landscape cinema. Probing the mystery of the land, it communicates the incongruity of Victorian sensibilities against the harsh and savage Australian landscape. Similarly to that of other significant Australian landscape films — for instance, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Fred Schepisi 1978), *Sunday Too Far Away* and *My Brilliant Career* — *Picnic*’s lighting, visual composition, costumes and set design draws upon the impressionistic works of seminal Australian landscape

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\(^4\) Celebrating the forty-year anniversary of its release David Stratton, for instance, noted that it was the “industry’s first really major success for a ‘serious’ film, a film that subsequently played in art house cinemas the world over” (2015).
painters such as Frederick McCubbin and the Heidelberg School. Along with other key films of the period such as *Wake in Fright* and in particular *Walkabout* (which I use as a frequent counter example throughout this case study), *Picnic* can be read as a pre-Mabo critique of Western expansionism in Australia and its ideological implications. The film also draws from a national myth deriving from environmental and cultural exploitation — including the ill treatment and abuse of Aboriginal Australians.

Most academic analysis of *Picnic* has been grounded in literary, visual and theoretical frameworks. While some studies have examined elements of the film’s music, there has been surprisingly little investigation of its other sonic elements — surprising, because the sound is a crucial and complex component. The dynamics of action seem embedded in the sound track; images are coloured in part by sound. Sound strategies are employed to smooth visual transitions, and bridge shifts in time and space — so necessary for the journeying and searching aspect of the narrative. However, as I will now demonstrate the sound track works on even more complex and unique levels, which relate to landscape representation and Australia’s colonial past and self-understanding.

**Engaging the Perceiver**

*Picnic* contains an unresolved narrative. There is no obvious explanation regarding the disappearance of the schoolgirls and aside from the character Irma (Karen Robson), they are never found. As with much of Australian landscape cinema, this mode of storytelling falls within the realm of art cinema — a style that as Bordwell sums up, “defines itself against the classical narrative mode, and especially against the cause-effect linkage of events” (Bordwell 2002, 775). It appears, however, that early in *Picnic*’s production this unresolved narrative posed a central problem for director Weir — namely, how to stay true to the ambiguity of the original story, which does not contain a conventional ending and still maintain audience participation and appreciation? In an interview with Michael Bliss, Weir comments:

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42 The Oz Film Database website, for instance, contains an entry detailing a bibliography of more than twenty-five pieces of literature focussing on the film’s narrative and thematic dimensions. See Gillard (2015).
In *Picnic*, which involves a mystery without a solution, I knew that I had to, in a sense, mesmerise the audience, to induce in them a kind of dream state in order that they wouldn’t have the expectation of a conventional ending (Bliss 2000, 190).\(^{43}\)

As a means of addressing this problem and “mesmerising the audience” Weir deploys a range of sound effects that transcend typical usages in cinema and expectations of what a sound track should amplify. Before looking at these unique sonic deployments, however, let us first briefly consider the typical role of sound effects in the film.

**Sound Effects: Visceral, Psychological, Emotional**

In examining their role in film, the influential sound designer Marvin Kearner (1989, 11-15) outlines three key functions of sound effects: simulate reality (which refers to ‘hard sound effects’ that materialise specific visible actions that happen on screen); create illusion (which refers to off-screen sounds that do not correspond or synchronise to onscreen visual imagery, but rather create an illusion of action occurring, provide spatial depth and additional information relating to the film’s narrative); and create mood (which can manifest in both on-screen and off-screen forms, and tends to refer to creative and aesthetic-based applications that are specifically deployed in order to establish mood or atmosphere).

*Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s use of sound effects exemplifies all three of these modes. For example, the first mode (i.e. simulating reality) is apparent in the sounds that synchronise to footsteps, doors opening and closing, horses trotting, and so on. The second (i.e. creating illusion) is manifest in the various ambient animal sounds and human sounds that occur off-camera. However, it is perhaps the third mode (i.e. creating mood) and variations of the third mode, that play a significant role in addressing Weir’s initial concerns regarding audience participation and involvement. Some sound effects in the film help to establish mood, atmosphere, ambience and drama — for instance, the sound of wind gusts which increase in volume.

\(^{43}\) In another interview Weir notes, “I did everything in my power to hypnotise the audience away from the possibility of solutions” (Dawson 1976, 83).
incrementally and help to create a sense of impending doom. Other sound effects, however, are deployed in even more unusual and inventive ways. Perhaps the most interesting of these are the sub-bass tremor sounds, which occur from the moment the film starts. These sounds were generated through the manipulation and slowing down of earthquake recordings (Carr 2005, 126). According to Weir, the earthquake sounds were included because they resonate on deep unconscious, physical and visceral levels. Weir notes he used these sounds as a way of “accessing the audience's unconscious, since this sound is supposedly part of those collective memories that we all have with respect to sounds or vibrations” (Bliss 2000, 190). In the following quote Weir expands on this last observation:

I used this sound in both Picnic and The Last Wave. We did experiments to make sure that we got it onto the optical track, even though you’d have to be in a theatre with a good sound system to hear it. Under optimum conditions there is at times a slight vibration in the theatre itself, as well as in the viewer’s breastbone!...in both films, this attempt was really part of experimenting with how far cinema can go in the sense of getting past the guardians of logic and freeing up and gaining access to unconscious areas and bringing the viewer into the film, having them join in its making. That’s what I wanted to have happen right from Picnic’s opening credits (190).

According to Weir the use of the earthquake sound seems to have achieved its initial purpose: “I’ve had comments from people...saying that there were odd moments during the film when they felt a strange disassociation from time and place” (cited in Rayner 2003, 79).

Importantly, similar environmental sound effect manipulations are deployed in the sound tracks of many subsequent Australian landscape films. One example of such a deployment is the manipulated sound of a magpie call in Rabbit-Proof Fence. In this instance, the sound was slowed-down and pitch-shifted to a low register and seamlessly integrated into the film’s score (Gabriel, 2002). However, while Picnic at Hanging Rock augments natural noises into dislocating, haunting and supernatural ambiences, the sound in Rabbit-Proof Fence is intended to emphasise a spiritual and
cultural connection between the protagonists and the landscape they traverse. Other examples of this phenomena arise in films such as *Walkabout, One Night the Moon* and *Satellite Boy*. In *Satellite Boy*, for example, ominous earth rumbling sounds (also suggestive of tectonic plates shifting) are used in combination with heavenly synth swells and drones, which occur in conjunction with cosmological imagery such as the stars, the sun, and the Milky Way. These elements are all significant to Aboriginal culture and belief systems. Incidentally, all of these examples contain narratives revolving around children lost in the Australian outback — a theme otherwise known as the ‘lost child motif’. As I explored in Chapter Two, this theme has played an important role in the history of Australian literature, art and film and at times as an indirect statement about the ‘stolen children’ (e.g. Pierce 1999).

Importantly, the foregrounding of the natural soundscape through magnification, speed changes and filtering as a means to elicit different psychological effects are apparent elsewhere in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Take, for instance, the meticulous documenting of Australian wildlife intercut through the narrative — a technique that echoes the likes of *Wake in Fright* and *Walkabout* and as I will come to explore influences several contemporary Australian landscape films. This animal imagery is accompanied by correlating animal sounds that were recorded at an extremely close proximity to the sound source. In using such microphone configuration, a kind of proximity effect, emphasis on bass frequencies and clarity in high-band frequencies occurs. This method is evidenced through the closely microphoned sound of a bird fluttering its wings, the trilling of parrots and ants scuttering over a nest. It is extremely unlikely that one could hear such sounds in a typical environmental and exterior setting. Thus, it must be asked, why use this creative technique? What is its overall intention? And whose (acoustic) point of view are we being presented with?

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44 The seismic infrasound used to unsettle the audience and disturb their relationship to space in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* can be connected to the opening scene in *Rabbit Proof Fence*, which deploys bass notes to convey a sense of dread. The film’s director, Philip Noyce, labels these sounds as “sub sonics” and similarly to Weir, suggests that they work on deep visceral and emotional levels: “Even if you could identify those sub-sonics, which is unlikely, your brain wouldn’t even be involved — it’s just a sensory experience”. See “Noyce on Sound” by Peter Cowie for *Kamera* (2005).
Although it is difficult to conclude the exact reasoning behind the closely microphoned animal sounds, their implementation might relate to psychological themes of threat and intimacy. Indeed, the effects of threat, shock and affection produced in the use of visual and sonic close-ups have been well-documented and identified variously as resulting from representations, which are ‘jolting and excessive’, ‘aggressive’ or ‘confrontational’ (Persson, 2003, 136). As the great Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein once said, “A cockroach filmed in close-up seems on the screen a hundred times more terrible than a hundred elephants captured in long shot” (1974/1940, 112). With such a scenario in mind, perhaps the same could be said about the closely microphoned sound of ants in Picnic at Hanging Rock, or cockatoos in Walkabout and flies in Wake in Fright. In all of these examples, the highly present and confronting qualities of the sounds help to elevate the role of landscape to ‘character’, rather than simply setting — they also, as I come to explore shortly, feed into broader anxieties about the Australian natural environment and Australia’s colonial past.

Here we should also consider another related aspect of Picnic at Hanging Rock’s sound design, namely, the emphasising of natural/environmental noises by silencing or attenuating other elements of the sound track. Film-music theorist Claudia Gorbman distinguishes three modes of silence: diegetic musical silence (where there is silence within the film world or diegesis, but non-diegetic music – audible only to audiences – can be present), non-diegetic silence (when there is no music or score but diegetic sounds can be heard) and structural silence, which refers to when a sound, previously used at a certain point, is later missing from similar places (1980, 192-194).

Picnic at Hanging Rock exploits variations on these forms of silence whereby certain elements of the sound track are left out. Take, for instance, the sequence where the girls disappear and the sound track shrinks down to silence except for a moaning amplified and synthesised wind whipping through the monolithic rocks (Reznick 2011, par. 4). Think also of those moments before the girls vanish behind a gritty wall of stone, where all environmental sounds are attenuated and we hear the sound of a rock falling — a descending quiver of reverb initiating a calm and silent atmosphere.
within the *mise en scène* (par. 4). This is followed by the piercing scream of Edith (Christine Schuler), which permeates the surrounding space. As I argue in Chapter Five in relation to *The Proposition*, the foregrounding of such sound effects and music in combination with atmospheric silence can be interpreted through the concept of the Australian Gothic and its associated colonial preconceptions of Australia as an unfamiliar space.

**Dialogue, Dream Sounds and Piecing Together the Puzzle**

It is not only the sound effects track, however, that helps to bring the viewer into the world of the film. Contributing in this regard are the many fragments of voice-over and diegetic poetry that combine with visual montage and overt sound effects intercut throughout the film. The fragments of poetic dialogue assist in creating a sense of ambiguity and temporal distortion, as well as heightening the film’s surreal aesthetic. These fragments of dialogue also facilitate an unusual level of audience participation, where the perceiver is required to look back and reflect on what had previously been unclear (Melbye 2010, 105). Melbye terms this notion as “retrospective dynamism” (105). Such strategies are evident in sequences that feature the girls (and especially Miranda) who appear as “revenants in frequent flashbacks” (Gullatz 2001, 7) and cold sweat nightmares subsequent to their disappearance. This effect is aptly conveyed in the scene where Miranda (Anne-Louise Lambert) manifests as an angelic figure juxtaposed — through cross-cutting, overexposure and soft focus camera techniques — over a white swan, a symbol that is frequently deployed throughout the film. The use of the white swan is curious. Is it a symbol of Miranda and her pure white innocence, or is it indicative of the destruction European culture has bestowed on Aboriginal people and the Australian landscape? In this sequence, a visual flashback is cued in through music, and we hear the disembodied asynchronous voice of the young French Teacher Mademoiselle de Poitiers (Helen Morse), who accompanied the girls at the picnic. Here, de Poitiers provides a distant

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45 An example of this notion can be found in the work of the Wiradjuri artist and outspoken grass roots activist Kevin Gilbert (1933 to 1993). In 2013, a retrospective exhibition (*I Do Have a Belief*) was held in conjunction with the Canberra Centenary celebrations. The major piece in the exhibition ‘Colonising Species’ (1989), for instance, features a white swan (an emblem of European nature) clutching around the neck a lifeless black swan (an animal endemic to southern Australia) — blood dripping, over the lower red half of a backdrop that seems to evoke an Aboriginal flag. See Milner (2013b).
statement referring to an early scene where she describes Miranda as a Botticelli angel. This scene also demonstrates a dislocation of time in the direction of myth (i.e. the angel) and earlier European history (i.e. Botticelli and Beethoven).

Similar usages of dialogue are echoed and initiated elsewhere in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, such as the opening scene where the image of the rock and Macedon landscape appears. In this scene, we hear the introductory voiceover of the character Miranda who quotes a famous Edgar Allan Poe poem: “What we see and what we seem are but a dream…a dream within a dream” (1849). These words can be interpreted through Chion’s concept of Internal Sound (1994, 76) meaning sound that corresponds to the physical and/or mental interior of a character (e.g. heartbeats, voices, imagined or recollected). In this case, the words transcend the film’s diegetic boundaries and can be interpreted as a premonition of events that occur later within the narrative such as that afternoon’s picnic and the schoolgirls’ disappearance. Picking up on this example David Melbye comments:

When we witness her emerging from her sleep in the next shot we can only assume that she is the speaker until we can actually see her speaking in the subsequent shot. Later we are called upon to recollect her poetic phrase in light of similar musings she offers within the Hanging Rock vicinity such as “everything begins and ends at exactly the right time” (Melbye 2010, 104).

In such instances, the fragments of dialogue can be read as ‘dream form’. In fact, similarly to those opening poetic lines, what we see and what we hear is often dreamed content (105). This surreal quality is given further substance in the scene where Michael (Dominic Guard) searches for the missing girls at the Macedon rock and enters a responding dreamlike state. Here, information is transmitted and revealed (in aural form) that he could never have known otherwise, allowing for the mind’s transcendence of time and space (Melbye 2006, 148).

While toing and froing fragments of dialogue contribute to the dreamlike retrospective quality and invoke imagined and unconscious states, they also render *Picnic at Hanging Rock* as a complex puzzle contrasting with symbolism and metaphor. The film requires the perceiver to engage in solving the mystery by using the characters’ dreams and the audiovisual signage manifest to make sense of the
narrative. As Melbye goes on to say, “memory becomes a crucial factor in this regard as it functions within the procession of a dream’s events” (Melbye 2010, 109). As with the previously mentioned sound effects, the integration of poetry, music and stylised imagery throughout Picnic at Hanging Rock evokes similar audiovisual synthesis in contemporary landscape cinema. Take, for instance, The Proposition and Van Diemen's Land. Both of these films include fragments and passages of well-known and newly written poetry to enhance the film’s poetic and surreal qualities, as well as to literally foreground the starkness of the physical and colonial mental landscape.

While we have touched on some ways that Picnic at Hanging Rock uses sound, dialogue and landscape themes and imagery to enhance audience participation, there are other sonic forces at play and other justifications for the particular sounds’ usage. The following section looks at such sonic and musical forces in relation to perhaps the most important theme and cultural identification in Picnic at Hanging Rock, but also, in much of the Australian landscape cinema. This theme is the ‘nature versus culture’ opposition as manifest through the film’s sound effects and musical tracks.

**Oppositions: Nature Versus Culture**

As with many Australian films, Picnic at Hanging Rock’s entropic empowering of the natural, mythological landscape is at odds with the British colonialists and the rationality of British colonial edifice. In the film, Weir is attempting to create a world of irrationality — a place where conventions (mainly European conventions) have no stature with the Australian landscape. This idea is reinforced through the interaction between the sounds of nature and the sounds of white culture. As Bruce Johnson and Gaye Poole pick up on in their assessment of the film, “the organic timeless sounds of birds, wind and insects set against the ‘little fidget wheels’ of clocks and chimes in muted Edwardian interiors invoke the nature/culture polarity” (1998, 129).
One might also consider the earthquake sound as mentioned earlier, which demonstrates how sound effects can undertake several important roles. This sound not only enhances audience participation through its deep resonances, it also highlights key narrative themes such as the intractability of the landscape and indeed broad spatial anxieties relating to the landscape as perceived by the film’s white protagonists. Take, for instance, the scene where the coach driver (Martin Vaughan) and Miss McCraw (Vivian Gray) make assumptions about the age of the rock. While Miss Mcraw talks about the volcanic eruption behind the rock’s formation and makes a calculated estimation of its dimensions, the coach driver trivialises the rock’s age. Immediately following this sequence, we see a shot of the monolith accompanied by the rumbling earthquake sound. The rumbling sound heightens the irrational qualities and mythical aura given to the rock and helps to outweigh any empirical geological assessment of it. This resonating rumble is repeated for a similar effect several times throughout the film. On each occasion, from now on, the rock’s magnitude and gravity in size (both sonic and visual) correspondingly reduces the weight and significance of the human figures that come within its presence. The particular timing, placement and presence of this rumbling sound foregrounds an incongruity between the Australian outback and the white people who inhabit it. It creates a sense of the supernatural in a natural setting and renders the landscape as unstable terrain (an idea revisited several times throughout this thesis). This example echoes similar scenes in *Walkabout*, which also deals with European concepts of time in the Australian landscape. Furthermore, it underscores the notion that European concepts of time are arbitrary and insignificant in the ancient landscape — a notion that is manifest, as I now briefly consider, in other aspects of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s sound effects track.

Concepts of time and timelessness are important sub themes in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Consider, for instance, the moment where Miss Mcraw’s watch mysteriously stops and we are presented with a spectacular silence — or, for example, the ticking of the clock in Mrs Appleyard’s office, with its heavy intimations of

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46 Comparatively, the subsequent works of David Lynch (e.g. *Blue Velvet* 1986) also deploy subsonic tremors, low register sounds and white noise to convey similar oppositions between nature and culture, good and evil, etc. Such sounds often provide a sinister quality to the seemly bland landscapes of white American suburbia.
fatality and doom. These clock sounds correlate to the noise and rhythms of the search party slapping sticks together when searching for the girls. Importantly, the slapping sticks are a duplication of the sounds made earlier by Edith, who rapped a stick against the sides of the rock. These examples suggest a collapsing of different time schemes (Bliss 2000, 51).

Moreover, oppositions between nature and culture, as well as time and timelessness in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* are also evident in the film’s musical workings. An example of such an opposition occurs in the garden party scene, which features the light, breezy, entertaining serenade ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’ (by Mozart), played by a string quartet on a platform by a lake. In this scene, the music accompanies the formally dressed guests who “try to behave in a way incompatible with the laws of the new land” (Hatlof 1996, 36). As the camera pans across the guests and the well-maintained fragment of lawn it is revealed that bush surrounds the place of the gathering. The Mozart piece contributes to the film’s aural décor, by adding colour and atmosphere to the scene, but it also highlights the absurdity of European culture’s attempt to dominate and cultivate the Australian landscape.

More broadly, the use of rhythm-based as opposed to tonally-based music helps to activate associated “oppositions between abandonment and restraint: drums versus harmony, rock versus Mozart” (Johnson and Poole 1998, 129). As Haltof notes, “the visual opposition of nature/culture (Hanging Rock/Appleyard College) has its musical equivalent in Gheorghe Zamfır’s ‘primitive’ panpipe music and the sophisticated music of Beethoven” (1996, 36). Indeed, the iconic panpipes contribute significantly in this regard. This is because they are sharply symbolic of a pagan (perhaps even Aboriginal) world outside the Judea-Christian norm and embedded in the mythology of the Australian landscape (Carr 2004; Bladen 2012; and Catania 2012). By association, they also function as an opposition to the European classical music used.

*Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s score includes two panpipe pieces by the Romanian folk musician Gheorghe Zamfır. The first piece we hear is ‘Doina: Sus Pe Culmea

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47 This article, for instance, links the use of the panpipes and other elements of the story to the Greek god Pan.
Dealului’ (or the Miranda theme). This piece embodies a fragile and ambiguous quality. It is introduced less than two minutes into the film and occurs several times thereafter in association with the character Miranda. Perhaps the most iconic and recognisable piece of music associated with Picnic at Hanging Rock is the central theme ‘Doina: Lui Petru Unc’. This piece accompanies imagery of the rock and the lure it has over those who come into its contact. The delicate, ethereal, intensely ominous qualities of the music highlight the mysterious power of the stone formation.

As one online reviewer of the film notes, the meandering pipes hint at a “lightness and piquancy while the sustained chords of the organ invoke sinister solemnity” (Cory 2012, 1). According to composer Bruce Smeaton, the music’s pagan association was endorsed by Weir himself. Smeaton notes that in their initial consultations regarding the score; Weir repeatedly asked for music that was ‘pagan’ (Powers 2013, par. 30). This claim is also supported by Weir in a recent interview:

You might be tempted to say, with such an ancient instrument, that it was connecting to the side of the film that was really touching on the power of nature, on the great unknown of this country, at that particular time. Here was European culture in the outback, as it were; without playing the didgeridoo — which wouldn’t have worked — it invoked, I think, a hidden world (Ford 2010, 262).

However, while Weir makes the point that the didgeridoo would not have worked in such a situation, it could be argued that the panpipes echo the Aboriginal didgeridoo. They do this by evoking through their resonance what Marj Kibby and Karl Neuenfeldt label a sense of “primitive spirituality [in] an exotic landscape” (Kibby and Neuenfeldt 1998, 73). Further supporting this notion is their excessive use of reverberation. Reverb is an acoustic phenomenon that is created when a sound is reflected causing a number of reflections to build up and then decay as the sound is absorbed by the surfaces of objects in the space (Lloyd 1970, 169). It helps define the vastness and reflective dimensions of space and distance often used in conjunction with landscape imagery. As I explore elsewhere in this thesis, as an audio effect, reverb frequently occurs in association with Aboriginal music and in particular didgeridoo music, evoking spiritual or ritual connotations.

48 This piece accompanied the film’s various promotional materials such as its official trailer.
The oppositional forces in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s sound track differ from that other important landscape films of the 1970s, namely, *Walkabout*. While in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* European culture is interwoven throughout the narrative — for instance, the Botticelli image that Miranda embodies and the Beethoven-propelled swan that she morphs into — the sound track suggests that European culture has no place in the Australian outback. By contrast, in *Walkabout*, the signifiers of Western culture gradually outweigh in importance the signifiers of nature (e.g. the animal sounds) and Aboriginal culture (e.g. the didgeridoo music). In *Walkabout*, the dominance of Western culture transpires through John Barry’s lush and heavily orchestrated European-in-style score and also by the presence of the diegetic sound emanating from a transistor radio that accompanies the children on their journey through the outback. In his insightful piece on the film, O’Shaughnessy notes,

…the radio is the source of the popular music tracks and a number of ‘educational’ programs about cooking, etiquette, mathematical problems, science and philosophy, presenting aspects of Australian culture in particular and white Western culture in general (O’Shaughnessy 2004, 83).

He goes on to say, “what is significant in the resolution of this opposition is that as the film proceeds the ‘natural’ sounds are gradually dominated by the musical and radio sounds; Australian sound-landscape discourse is replaced by European music discourse” (83).

By contrast, in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, European culture is unable to conquer or indeed explain the natural environment; in fact, Western culture and European people do not belong in this environment. In addition to the above example, this idea can be interpreted through the way the girls are consumed by the rock and the fact that they are oblivious to Edith speaking to them as they walk up into the rock, but also the characters’ inability to solve the mystery.

*Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s various thematic oppositions and dichotomies are important factors when considering the reasoning behind the film’s composed and pre-existing musical elements/compositions. These oppositions are significant because there is a notable historical, geographical and cultural disconnection between the music used and the period and place the film seeks to depict. The next section
looks further into the anachronistic aspects of Picnic at Hanging Rock’s score and again stresses that this is a key ingredient of contemporary Australian landscape film sound track. Following this, I offer some more explanation as to why such music was used, looking specifically at the music’s fundamental narrative functions.

The Score: Anachronism/Perception/Narrative Function

In contrast to many historical dramas, which tend to deploy incidental music and period songs as a means to help root the narrative action to a particular era and immerse audiences in the sensibilities of a different age (e.g. Red Dog), Picnic at Hanging Rock’s score complicates a narrative sense of time and place. In fact, many of the film’s musical selections could be questioned on the grounds of historical and cultural accuracy and suitability. A poignant use of musical anachronism is evident in the panpipe pieces. The panpipe pieces might seem inappropriate within the given setting — after all Picnic at Hanging Rock contains a narrative, period and locational setting far removed from Romania.49 The use of extracts from pre-existing classical music also demonstrates such disconnection. This includes Bach’s ‘Prelude No 1 in C Major’ (from The Well-Tempered Clavier collection), Ludwig van Beethoven’s Piano ‘Concerto No 5 in E Flat Major (2nd Movement)’, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik (2nd Movement)’, and Andre Tchaikovsky’s ‘String Quartet in No 1 in D Major’. Differing from the other classical musical excerpts, Bach’s baroque prelude is played by the characters (i.e. the school girls) within the world of the film. Thus, although it is conceivable that this piece was known by the patrons of a boarding school in outback Australia at the turn of the twentieth century, it was composed in Germany in 1722 more than one hundred and fifty years prior to the film’s narrative time.

This disconnection was picked up on by the film’s composer Bruce Smeaton, who expressed concern regarding the locational, historical, cultural and aesthetic inconsistencies apparent within the film’s score. He suggests that one of the roles of his additional music was to bridge the inconsistencies between the musical selections put forth by the film’s director Peter Weir. In a statement that demonstrates the often-

49 Despite the geographical and cultural dislocation, this was Australia’s, and possibly well beyond Australia’s, introduction to the panpipes. In this sense, the music was not clearly linked to Romania.
tumultuous relationships and frequent tensions that can occur between composer and director, Smeaton notes:

…my music was an attempt to join the Zamfir to the Bach, which is why I wrote it in 17/8 almost like a two-part invention. There were also bits of Tchaikovsky and Beethoven and everything mixed up. But whereas filmmakers are in film because they have a great sense of visual style, they’re not necessarily quite so sensitive to aural things (Powers 2013, par. 12).

Paradoxically, however, it could be argued that Smeaton’s music is also out of sync with the film’s narrative time and space. This is because it is stylistically reminiscent of the repetition and iteration of minimalist, tonal classical music. Minimalism is an approach that, notwithstanding some early evidence in the works of nineteenth and early twentieth century composers (e.g. Erik Satie), did not gain traction until the 1960s and was developed most notably by composers from the United States. However, it must be acknowledged that although Smeaton’s music might not stylistically correspond to the world of the film it does in some ways correspond to the mood of the film (i.e. it functions as mood music that underscores the hypnotic power the rock has over the schoolgirls). It is also implemented in conventional and stereotypical ways — echoing the structural and compositional devices of a late-Romantic musical idiom (an approach that is criticised by important commentators such as Brophy [2001b], who call for more frenetic, more modern sound tracks). Consider, for instance, ‘The Ascent Theme’, which features piano, choral, and synthesised instrumentation supplemented by overt keyboard sound effects. ‘The Ascent Theme’, occurs on several occasions and functions as a leitmotiv (e.g. “an associated melodic phrase or figure that accompanies the reappearance of an idea, person, place or situation” [Merriam-Webster, 2004, 711]). This includes instances such as when the girls climb the rock, then during Michael’s ascent of the rock in pursuit of the missing girls, and later when Albert (John Jarratt) does a similar climb. As implied in its title, the musical motif is associated with the theme of ‘ascent’.

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50 In an interview conducted by Philip Powers, Smeaton claims that it was in fact he who identified and suggested the music’s usage (2013). Conversely, Greg Bell, Picnic at Hanging Rock’s sound supervisor, confirms that such sound track sophistication “all flows from Peter” (Catania 2012, 86).

51 In using leitmotivs, film scorers can help clarify narrative elements for the audience, by assigning musical fragments to characters or ideas that occur within the story.
‘The Ascent Theme’ also demonstrates other ways that music can contribute to narrative, for instance, ‘musical parallelism’. Parallelism is a technique broadly described as duplicative and scoring practices that match visual and aural information (Kalinak 200, 26). This device occurs, for example, in the scene where the music parallels the girls ascending the rock. Here, the ascending musical notes and the choir’s rising voices (an effect produced by Smeaton’s playing of a mellotron electronic keyboard) correspond to the ascending visual movements occurring within the image track. The use of parallelism echoes similar scenes in Walkabout. Consider, for example, when the ascending music parallels the rise of water as the Aboriginal boy sucks it up from the desert; or, for instance, when composer John Barry’s rapidly descending musical scale emphasises the white boy while he is rolling down a dune (O’Shaughnessy 2004, 83).

In considering Picnic at Hanging Rock’s out of sync musical qualities it is important to briefly acknowledge Michel Chion’s concept of ‘synchresis’, which brings together the concepts of synthesis and synchronism. ‘Synchresis’, according to Chion’s ground-breaking work Audio Vision: Sound on Screen describes a kind of mental and perceptual image that occurs when a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon occur at exactly the same time (Chion 1994, 63). Chion argues that this psychological effect is crucial to the way we generally process sound in cinema and that it can function “out of thin air — that is, with images and music that strictly speaking have nothing to do with each other forming monstrous yet inevitable and irresistible agglomerations in our perception” (Chion 1994, 63). The acceptance of the juxtaposition of such elements indicates the habituation of audiences to build and accept links between sounds, music, and visual phenomena. It indicates the remarkable tolerance for sounds — any sounds — to seem as though they belong to the image. Thus, the moment when we perceive the imagery of the rock combined with the sound of the ethereal panpipes we immediately make a perceptual association that simply accepts the apparently disconnected audiovisuality.

52 The most prominent type of parallelism is the compositional device of ‘mickey mousing’, which matches or synchronises the beat, pitch or tonality of the music to physical action or movement in the image (Kalinak 1992, 85).
53 This idea is derived from various scientific studies which investigate the way “spatially and temporally coincident acoustic and visual information are often bound together to form multisensory percepts”, See Andersen, Tiippana and Sams (2004, 301-308).
Chion’s notion of ‘synchresis’, however, is complicated when considering *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s use of a well-known classical repertoire — for instance, Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, and so on. This is because the immediate and necessary mental fusions constructed can be inflected by a prior relationship “not between music and screen image but between (familiar) music and mental image or associations” (Hillman 2005, 8). In other words, pre-existing classical music is open to interpretation through the perceiver’s cultural and personal experience. Engagements can be constructed and conditioned by a range of musical experiences outside the cinema context — thus allowing for multiple subjective positions and a variety of responses (Kassabian 2000, 3). That said, and as discussed in the previous section, it is very clear that the intention of some of the music in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is to signify European culture and in particular the culture of the colonisers. However, if Britain is the colonising force, a further question arises: why not include music more representative of cultures, histories, geographies and landscapes within Britain (e.g. George Frederic Handel, Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughn Williams), rather than Germany (i.e. Beethoven and Bach), Austria (i.e. Mozart) and Russia (i.e. Tchaikovsky)? After all, British composers such as Elgar appear to signify England (though in different ways) in other Australian films — for instance, the use of *Pomp and Circumstance March No 1* for orchestra when the credits roll in Ken G. Hall’s 1933 film *The Squatter’s Daughter* and the ‘Nimrod’ from his orchestral work the *Enigma Variations* in the final scene of *Australia*. The British pastoral music composer Vaughn Williams also makes an appearance in Australian cinema. As discussed in Chapter Six, his piece ‘The Lark Ascending’ functions as the central theme for John Duigan’s 1987 film *The Year My Voice Broke*.56

54 Interestingly, in an interview Bruce Smeaton (1980) mentions that early in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s production, French impressionist music was considered (e.g. the music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel). In some ways, French impressionist music (e.g. pieces such as Debussy’s ‘Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun’ composed in 1896) might align with the film’s impressionist visual style and pagan qualities. There is also of course a French character in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, namely, the teacher Mademoiselle de Poitiers.

55 Anachronisms are evident in other aspects of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* such as the characters’ hair and make-up, which is identifiably 1970s (e.g. long straight middle-parted hair, cat’s-eye black eyeliner, frosty eye shadow, etc.).

56 Vaughn Williams also composed original orchestral music for other Australian films such as Ralph Smart’s 1950 film *Bitter Springs*. 

| Page | 96 |
Despite the apparent inconsistencies between the music and setting, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*’s score seems to have resonated with audiences and also influenced the audiovisuality of subsequent media productions. Many contemporary Australian/New Zealand landscape period films — some of which I will discuss in this thesis — utilise music that does not historically or culturally correspond to the narrative. Examples of this include Michael Carlos’ score for *Storm Boy* and Michael Nyman’s commercially successful score for Jane Campion’s *The Piano* (1993). Nyman’s score adopts a similar piano-based musical style characterised by arpeggiated chords, metric shifts and chromatism while underscoring the film’s Gothic themes, elongated shots of harsh landscapes and so forth. As one reviewer states, Bruce Smeaton’s score “must have inspired Nyman’s music for *The Piano*” (Cory 2012, par. 3). While I am unsure about this connection I can certainly understand the equation both composers faced, in rendering colonial themed landscapes. Nyman also borrows thematically from Scottish folksong.

We should also acknowledge that the panpipes have since influenced many Australian media productions and sound track practices — in some cases they have become synonymous with the Australian bush and landscape. For instance, a similar combination of panpipes and bush locations and imagery can be found in productions as diverse as the television drama series *McLeod’s Daughters* (e.g. ‘The Italian Stallion’ [Donald Crombie, 2002, Season Two Episode 19]). Furthermore, according to a recent poll by the ABC, Zamfir’s panpipes and Smeaton’s score are together ranked at number twelve in a list of the one hundred best film scores of all time.57 This poll signals the panpipes widespread influence and popularity.

**Conclusion**

In this case study, I have looked at some of the conventional, unique and significant ways that sound, music and dialogue operate within the iconic landscape film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. I have provided arguments that relate to the way the film deploys a poetic — both sonic and visual — mode in conveying the limitations of Western colonial culture when confronted with the realities of the Australian

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57 See, for instance, the ABC’s 2013 Music and the Movies Poll and accompanying CD.
outback. The differing ways of communicating landscape, from one film to another, is the central disparity dealt with in this thesis. I have also argued that the sound track assists in bringing the perceiver into the world of the film and that it engages on various visceral, psychological, emotive and intellectual levels (e.g. aiding the perceiver in solving the mystery within the narrative). Attention was given in particular to the ways that the sound track foregrounds anxieties relating to the Australian landscape, emphasising the culture and nature oppositions within the film. Finally, I suggest that while Picnic at Hanging Rock uses music and sound to assist in the cohesion of the narrative, the sound track does not necessarily correspond to the period or geography in which the film is set. While this disjunction happens in films far beyond Australian cinema, it is important to identify it in Picnic at Hanging Rock — which has a seminal sound track which radiates out across time periods and is very atypical of Australian film at many levels. The following four chapters explore in more detail many of the issues raised in this case study, but examine them in relation to contemporary landscape, colonial-themed cinema.
Chapter Four: Representations of Aboriginality and Landscape in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

The land’s geography defines the acoustic shell. An ever-changing soundscape emerges from the interplay of the flora, fauna, the weather patterns and the passage of human beings. The land is a container for this sound, its past, its songs, its flora, its fauna, and its original inhabitants (Ros Bandt 2001).

How then have representations of Aboriginality and landscape been conveyed through sound and score in Australian landscape cinema? This chapter suggests that the sound track for *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Phillip Noyce 2002), one of the first and most important Australian landscape films to emerge in the twenty-first century, adopts a type of codified sonic assimilation that has some unfortunate parallels with the cultural assimilation themes which the film condemns. In doing so, this award-winning sound track (which has attracted accolades such as Best Original Score and Best Sound at the 2002 AFI Awards) also epitomises a new type of sonic exoticism, evident through the representation of Aboriginal people, Aboriginality and the landscape in Australian cinema. Despite this observation it must be admitted that the film moves beyond the established gestures of exoticism contained in the Western art music that dominated the twentieth century, and, in particular, the codified ‘toolbox of exotica’ (which I will come to explain a little later). Instead it relies upon two main strategies:

1. A heavily abstracted, effects-manipulated and reverberant sound-effects track which tries to evoke a mythical connection of belonging between human and terrain.
2. A pastiche of world music: gospel vocals by The Blind Boys of Alabama, mysterious didgeridoo by Ganga Giri, African tribal drums by Babacar Faye, and over fifty other artists and instrumentation from various musical lineages.

These two approaches to the sound track highlight that although the film’s primary themes and objectives seek to respond to the issue of cultural assimilation — which had been cemented in public consciousness five years earlier with the *Bringing*
*Them Home* report — they are compromised, if not contradicted, by the film’s exotic sound track, which is made up of ambiguous sound effects and generically ethnic performances without specific referents. What complicates the situation even further is the British and colonialist mindset of the film’s sound track: its chief architect, Peter Gabriel and his team are British, and they adopt a pastiche of textures and timbres rooted in world music, as well as international sound track techniques to emotionally enhance a narrative that criticises the imperial policies of cultural assimilation. Furthermore, this chapter argues that there is a conflict between the film’s sound track, which seeks to evoke an Aboriginal oneness with the land, and its cinematography, which aims to emphasise the isolation and loneliness the Indigenous Australian protagonists feel within their surroundings and the landscape more generally.

In order to make sense of the sonic dimensions in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, this chapter begins by providing a historical examination of some key Australian landscape cinema sound tracks that feature representations of Aboriginality and which predate *Bringing Them Home*, showing how these films contain instances of sonic and musical tokenism, codification and stereotyping. This, I believe, will help to demonstrate how *Rabbit-Proof Fence* has in some ways moved on from the codification of musical stereotypes of the twentieth century, but in other ways has contributed to such stereotypes. Following this examination, I then provide an overview of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and its public reception, with a specific focus on the timing of its controversial and provocative release. I argue that while the film promotes a post-*Bringing Them Home* cultural paradigm shift in Australian historical consciousness, this is compromised through the representation of landscape and Aboriginal subjects, which are driven primarily by the commercial demands of an international production team. I look at how the universalistic framings of director Phillip Noyce (and the various other contributors) support the commodification of the original story. I then examine the role of the sound track and cinematography, specifically focusing on the film’s heavily abstracted sound design and its use of production-rendering techniques. Here, I explore how British composer Peter Gabriel’s score sidelines the possibility of authentic musical and cultural representation, and instead opts for a more generically ethnic and ‘world music’
sounding sound track. I suggest that a possible reason for this approach relates to the notion that world music can provide the required emotional recognition (at the moment of reception) of the stolen generations. As I explain in a later chapter on the film *Samson & Delilah*, this idea is questionable — there are many ways of sonically conveying pertinent Aboriginal issues and representation without being tokenistic.

**Sounding Aboriginality**

Through much of Australian post-settlement history, the artistic representation of Aboriginality has contained tokenistic, racist and stereotypical qualities. These qualities have manifested in a diverse array of artistic forms. This includes pre-settlement literature that idealised the ‘noble savage’; caricatured ‘savage’ portraits from the nineteenth century; and, more recently, the twentieth and twenty-first century cinematic depictions that fetishise, mythologise, iconise and stereotype Aboriginal people and the land they inhabit (Cuthbert, et al. 2002). Cinema depictions also tend to represent Aboriginal people as disconnected from their land and country — showing them as “nothing else but victims, alcoholics, fringe, and slum dwellers” (Kearney and Syron 1993, 57). Such representations and icons of Aboriginality are derived primarily from white Anglo perspectives and often from people who, as Marcia Langton has pointed out, “have never had any substantial first-hand contact with Aboriginal people” (Langton 1993, 24). This is of course a serious problem because as Elizabeth Jacka has commented, the colonialis constructions of the ‘native’ in Australian films have been the main ways for non-Aboriginal Australians to know about Aborigines, and therefore, “their knowledge has always been of a second order” (1998).

In addition to these issues, much of the Australian landscape representation in Australian cinema has, as Felicity Collins notes, “anchored national identity to British settlement of the land” (Collins and Davis 2004, 4) regardless of whether Aboriginal subjects feature in the films. While much of this tokenism features in visual and narrative-based forms of cinematic representation, it is also clearly evident in the sound tracks of many Australian landscape films that have acted as the cultural flagship of Australian identity. When film sound tracks utilise specific

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58 For more on this issue see the recent SBS series *First Contact* (hosted by Ray Martin 2014), which explores the deep divide between Aboriginal Australians and the rest of the nation. The series places six non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal communities and immerses them in Aboriginal culture.
indigenous or exotic instrumentation, melodies and rhythms — be they authentic or imitative — these suggestions can involve racial, cultural and national identity issues.

Typical sonic exoticism that can be identified in cinema throughout the twentieth century is rooted in the musical frameworks developed in the cinema and stage productions of the early twentieth century, and especially the proliferation of the ‘stock Indian music’ in early North American cinema (Gorbman 2000, 234-53). Such frameworks relied on what Michael Pisani (1997) has labelled the “ready-made toolbox of exotica”. This codified orchestral approach is characterised by the use of atonality, sustained fifths, parallel fourths, static harmony, tritones, pentatonic or non-standard scales and chromatic motions (such as tremolos) to represent their indigenous and exotic subjects and locations. In representing the ‘other’ in Western cinemas, the toolbox of exotica has frequently been deemed necessary, in spite of the geographical and cultural location of where the film is set. Consider, for instance, the use of tom tom drums to broadly signify the pan-American Indian in countless Westerns of the 1950s, or, as the Hollywood composer Daniel Goldsmith has observed, “if we see a picture shot in China, we immediately have the fourths and gongs” (cited in Kassabian 2001, 58). Thus, regardless of the cultural lineage and specificity, the same music may be applied interchangeably to cultures as geographically and ethnically diverse as those of Europe, Polynesia, South Asia, the Indian subcontinent, North America and West Africa. Indeed, as I come to explore, Rabbit-Proof Fence includes instrumentation from all of these continents and geographies. This includes instrumentation such as Punjabi drums (by the Dohl Foundation) in the compositions ‘Stealing the Children, Running to the Rain’ and ‘Gracie’s Recapture’; Ivorian drums (by Manu Katche) in the film’s closing credit sequence; Brazilian berimbau (David Rhodes) in the composition ‘Follow The Rabbit-Proof Fence’; Irish bodhran drums (by James McNally) in the scene where the three girls escape from the Moore River Settlement.

In a historical Australian landscape, cinematic context, the toolbox of exotica and its intrinsic codified implications are clearly evident in early feature-length productions, such as in the infamous corroboree sequence in Charles Chauvel’s Uncivilised. As the musicologist RJ McNeill notes, in this scene:
Regular drum pulses, long pedal points of bare fifths and sections with conventional tonal melodies and harmonies, accompany images of Aborigines dancing and chanting around a fire. The small orchestra is supplemented by harmonies from a wordless male chorus. At the height of the sequence, Mara, the white chief of the tribe, bursts into full-throated baritone song, cast in regular periods and based on the main motif of the section (McNeill 2005, 2).

Perhaps a more pointed criticism can be aimed at *Jedda*, also directed by Chauvel. This film deals specifically with the theme of cultural assimilation, and contains Aboriginal characters at the very centre of the narrative. In this film, the semi-naked and nomadic figure of Marbuck (Robert Tudawali) is foreshadowed by ambiguous instrumentation and melodic structure, such as the sinister bassoon motif in Marbuck’s march scene, and the atonal orchestral music in the cave scene, which manifests in the form of an operatic mad scene where Jedda (Ngarla Kunoth) is hysterical and Marbuck loses his mind. In these sequences the music renders Marbuck as primaeval, mysterious and ‘other’.

In many Aboriginal-themed Australian landscape films, elements of the ‘toolbox of exotica’ have frequently been used in combination with Aboriginal instrumentation, namely the didgeridoo, the bullroarer, the clap sticks and singing in various Aboriginal dialects. In order to gain a better understanding of where *Rabbit-Proof Fence* sits within this cinematic sound track milieu, let us consider some key usages. Examples of such films range in style and genre. This includes the post-Mabo but pre-*Bringing Them Home* ‘camp’ road movie, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of The Desert* and the more recent blockbuster epic *Australia*. However, if we backtrack a little further, the misrepresentation and de-localisation of Aboriginal instrumentation is nowhere more obvious than in the highly lucrative *Crocodile Dundee* franchise. In these films, instruments such as clap sticks, the bullroarer and the didgeridoo are not linked to the Aboriginal characters. Instead, these instruments are used to support the mythical aura of the white protagonist, Mick (Paul Hogan). One of many examples of such tokenism occurs in a scene within the second *Crocodile Dundee* film (John Cornell 1988), where we are presented with a silhouette of Mick Dundee swinging a bullroarer, looking out across the vast vista of the Australian outback. In every image within this scene the sound of the bullroarer
permeates: a kangaroo hears it, a water buffalo hears it, the rocky landscape hears it, the South American gangsters who are pursuing Mick hear it, and importantly Sue (Linda Kozlowski) also hears it back at the campsite. This all-consuming sound, combined with the sunset image of Mick Dundee, is given a romanticised and ethereal quality through reverberation filtering. As Marj Kibby and Karl Neuendorf comment in their essay “Sound, Cinema and Aboriginality” the major cultural misrepresentation issue is that Dundee uses the bullroarer, an Aboriginal man’s initiation tool, which is used in ceremonies and burials to ward off evil spirits and whose sound should never be heard by Aboriginal women, as a gimmicky bush telephone (1998, 73).

A second example of culturally misrepresented Aboriginal instrumentation occurs in a scene in Crocodile Dundee where Mick, Molly and Sue are driving in the bush in a 4WD and come across a wild Asian water buffalo, standing in the middle of the road and obstructing the pathway. After sounding the horn and telling the buffalo to — “move dopey” — Mick disembarks from the car and slowly approaches the animal. Accompanying this imagery are loud reverberant clap sticks that occur in rhythmically-sporadic intervals. A low, haunting drone contributes to the brooding tone and long drawn-out zipping insect sounds occupy the higher frequency register — helping to supplement the overall sound track balance. The buffalo’s nostrils flare; this arouses a bemused look on Mick’s face. He stares into the animal’s eyes, and holds its gaze. Mick raises his hand, his thumb and little finger separated. Mick tilts his own head and makes a peculiar kung fu-ish vocal utterance. In a strange concoction of animal whispering, shamanist chant and sound-effects reminiscent of 1980s martial arts films, a spell is cast over the beast forcing it to collapse to the ground. Sue watches from the car, utterly amazed. As this happens a synthesised backing string section feeds into the sonic mix. The clap sticks crescendo whilst corresponding to the visual intensity of the drama unfolding. The use of clap sticks in this scene’s audiovisual make-up not only helps to reinforce the mythical and exotic effect Mick is having on Sue; the clap sticks also convey that the magical bushman’s powers that he possesses are in fact of an Aboriginal nature, even though he himself is clearly not Aboriginal. A similar scene features in Simon Wincer’s later film Crocodile Dundee in Los Angeles, where Mick uses his bushman’s powers to coerce a
chimp into drinking a can of diet Coca-Cola on camera. This perplexing scene is also accompanied by Aboriginal instrumentation such as clap sticks. Here I note that while cultural misappropriation is an important issue, not to be trivialized, films such as Crocodile Dundee in no way claim ethnographic accuracy, and are probably self-satirical.

Similar to the bullroarer and the clap sticks, the didgeridoo has received widespread misappropriation, and has come to function as the dominant sonic signifier of Aboriginality within the Australian film scorer’s palette of sounds. This instrument is geographically and culturally problematic, because as Kibby and Neuenfeldt note, while “traditionally confined to Aboriginal groups in the far-north of Australia, the instrument has come to be the singularly defining cultural artefact of a pan-Australian Aboriginality” (1998, 73). In much the same way as the gong has come to generically represent the oriental (examples of this phenomenon can also be found in Australian cinema such as Peter Weir’s film The Year of Living Dangerously, which is set in Indonesia in the 1960s during the overthrow of President Sukarno), the didgeridoo has come to broadly signify Aboriginality. The extent of the cultural misrepresentation can be found in diegetic forms of score in other landscape films, such as that of Mad Dog Morgan (Philippe Mora, 1976), which is set in the southern non-didgeridoo states of Australia in the 1880s and features didgeridoo performances by Morgan’s Aboriginal sidekick Billy (David Gulpilil). It can also be located in non-diegetic dramatic scores, often in combination with larger ensembles, such as Philip Kaufman’s The Right Stuff, which as Philip Hayward (2010, 24) has identified contains a scene that takes place near Muchea (in the traditional lands of the Noongar clan of Australia’s south-west coast), and indeed in Rabbit-Proof Fence, which is also set in Western Australia. One possible reason for the widespread use of this audiovisual icon of Aboriginality is that it can instantaneously capture a kind of idealised version of Indigenous Australian culture. But to reiterate, using instrumentation in such ways is problematic because Aboriginal cultures are as

59 Here we should note that many people at the time these films were produced would not have been aware there were ‘non-didgeridoo states’. So what chance did Hollywood audiences have, probably the ‘ideal audience’ when financing the Dundee franchise. At the same time, we accept the fiction of scenes being shot in geographically quite different places — for example, Peter Weir’s Gallipoli landings were filmed on the Spencer Gulf and some of Terrence Malick’s Guadalcanal scenes (The Thin Red Line 1998) were filmed in Queensland, etc.
Langton notes “extremely diverse and pluralistic; there is no one kind of Indigenous person or community” (Langton 1993, 11).

Though the didgeridoo aurally signifies Aboriginality, it also provides a cue to location while at the same time reinforcing the exoticism of the bush and the outback, often evoking a mythological aspect to the land. Examples of this can be located over the black opening image in Young Einstein, over the Warner Brothers logo in Reckless Kelly (Yahoo Serious 1993), over imagery of Uluru in the opening scene to Evil Angels and also in combination with other instrumentation in the opening sequence to Rabbit-Proof Fence. Curiously, in all of these examples, there is not an Aboriginal person in sight; instead, the mysterious drone of the didgeridoo functions as a cultural signifier that locates the audience geographically, clearly stating: ‘this is Australia’. Expanding on this phenomenon Philip Brophy comments,

…whenever an Australian film, TV show, advertisement, company logo or video clip cuts to a shot of an unending Australian desertscape (almost always without Indigenous people present, often with a lone 4WD), the sound of a didgeridoo is applied like black face make-up: it is the ghostly absence of an Indigenous presence, rendered as a disembodied meme upon the imagescape of European framing of the land (2008, 44).

In some Australian films, however, the didgeridoo does not always operate in stereotypical ways. In Walkabout, for instance, the didgeridoo music occurs in the opening scene and is superimposed over shots of a Sydney cityscape — it is raw and powerful, and unfiltered by reverberation. This approach, as manifested in Walkabout (a film released thirty years prior to Rabbit-Proof Fence) differs from typical uses of the didgeridoo that tend to contain an ethereal or mysterious quality. However, it must be acknowledged that the particular locations where the film is shot complicate the usage of the didgeridoo. For instance, the narrative begins in Sydney and then moves to a location a few hours’ drive from Sydney — that is to say, to the scene where the father (John Meillon) attempts to kill his children and then commits suicide. When the children escape they seem to traverse much of Australia in just a few days. We are taken to locations such as the Flinders Ranges and Lake Eyre in South Australia, Alice Springs, Darwin, Arnhem Land, the Central Australian Desert and Kakadu. Only some of these locations are associated with the cultural practice of didgeridoo
music. Moreover, the didgeridoo performances in *Walkabout* are not credited at the end of film — this of course resonates with concerns and issues relating to Indigenous Australian rights and cultural and intellectual property. Indeed, while in recent times significant measures have been introduced to mitigate the exploitation of Aboriginal culture, art and artefacts, a lack of equal and fair distribution of money, accreditation and other benefits still exists and were commonplace in the past (Simons 2000).

Adding to the complexity of this issue is the fact that in many outback representations, the didgeridoo sound is not generated by an authentic didgeridoo. Rather, an imitation of a didgeridoo is either rendered through sampled or synthesised means of production, or created by other instruments that can produce similar timbres, pitches and drones (Brophy 2008, 21-34). Such usages can be found in productions as diverse as Australian television series *The Great Outdoors* (1993-2009) and *Getaway* (1992-2009) and feature-length productions such as *Burke & Wills* (Graeme Clifford, 1985) and *The Last Wave*. Moreover, if a didgeridoo is used, there is a strong possibility that the player is not an Indigenous Australian.

In regards to these issues, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is a significant film. Although Indigenous Australian musician Ganga Giri actually plays the instrument on the film’s sound track, Peter Gabriel and his English associates are also credited with playing the same instrument, as well as other Aboriginal instruments such as the clap sticks. Many of these performances are also heavily abstracted through digital editing processes such as filtering and reverberation, thus changing the sound, if not entirely, from its original state. Moreover, the didgeridoo’s commercial status as an iconic and cosmological marker of landscape and Aboriginality can clearly be linked to the universalistic framings within *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, as well as the film’s commercialised construction and its intention for widespread release. As is common in Australian cinema, it also however functions dramatically to emphasise the ‘non-visibility’ of Aboriginal people. In examining this problem of cultural misrepresentation through film music and sound an intriguing question arises: what if we were to reverse this situation? For instance, what about an Aboriginal person playing a jazz saxophone, or a Bach cello suite? What about the Japanese elements in the score for *Radiance*, a film by an Aboriginal director? I explicate on this issue
within the context of *The Sapphires* and its use of African American Motown music in Chapter Seven.

As the above survey demonstrates, the evoking of Aboriginality through both traditional and imitative Aboriginal instrumentation (even when there is not an Aboriginal person in sight), insinuates that the many Australian films that capitalise on the outback as an icon of Australian identity tend to privilege commercial and economic concerns over cultural ones. Perhaps then, the cinematic use of the didgeridoo, the bullroarer and so forth is simply logo-istic — a way that Australia and indeed Australian cinema can celebrate itself, iconise itself, and brand itself. Having discussed some of the key representations of Aboriginality in Australian landscape cinema, the following case study provides an in-depth analysis on the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence* with a particular emphasis on its sonic workings.

**Case Study: *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Synopsis and Background)**

As some studies on the film have suggested, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, at its very core, is international, commercial and emotionally charged in its design. The cinematic adaptation is simple and powerful, working from a familiar Hollywood ‘capture, escape and chase’ narrative structure. The film is based on the book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, written by Doris Pilkington Garimara (the real-life daughter of the protagonist Molly), and traces the children’s arduous journey home. These children, under the orders of the chief protector of Aboriginal people, AO Neville (Kenneth Branagh), and the Commonwealth sanctioned cultural assimilation program of the 1930s, are forcibly removed as ‘wards of the state’ from their families in the Northern Kimberley region and resettled in the Moore River Native Settlement north of Perth. After escaping from the settlement the two sisters, Molly (Everlyn Sampi) and Daisy (Tianna Sansbury), and their cousin Gracie (Laura Monaghan), are pursued by the Western Australian police force and the black tracker Moodoo (played by the

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60 While this policy was intended to help children, such as those profiled in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, in many cases it resulted in abject misery and a sense of displacement.
iconic Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil). The girls use the famous rabbit-proof wire fence as their guide while traversing 1500 miles of Pilbara landscape back to their homeland of Jigalong.

At the heart of the cinematic adaptation is director Philip Noyce, who following a successful period in the United States working with high-profile actors (e.g. Harrison Ford, Denzel Washington, etc.) on blockbusters such as Patriot Games (1992), Clear and Present Danger (1994) and The Saint (1997), returned to Australia in 2001 to direct Rabbit-Proof Fence. Noyce’s decision to come home was partly due to a dispute he was having whilst working on the production Sum of all Fears (Phil Alden Robinson 2002). According to Noyce he was “fed up” with the constraints of the Hollywood system. Thus, Rabbit-Proof Fence provided the perfect opportunity for creative freedom and for making a film about ‘real issues’ (Collins and Davis 2004, 133).

**Bringing Them Home**

Released at a time of heightened tension regarding issues relating to Indigenous Australian land rights, sovereignty and the stolen generations, Rabbit-Proof Fence is both politically and ideologically charged. The film directly arises from, and responds to, the controversial 1997 Bringing Them Home report, which investigated the thousands of Aboriginal children who were separated from their families by state authorities between 1900 and 1970. The political scholar, Robert Manne, has argued, “no inquiry in recent Australian history has had a more overwhelming reception nor, at least in the short term, a more culturally transforming impact” (Manne 2001, 5). The immediate response to the report included “crowds turning out in large numbers to express their regret by signing Sorry Day books, participating in reconciliation walks, and offering other symbolic gestures” (Kennedy 2008, 59). According to Collins it was “an intense moment of national shame and collective remorse that crystallised around the question of a national apology to Indigenous Australians” (Collins and Davis 2004, 135).

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61 Australian cinema has frequently drawn upon Gulpilil to play the role of the tracker. Rabbit-Proof Fence is yet another example of Gulpilil’s long history of translating ‘Aboriginality’ into Australian film and television — for example, *The Dreamtime Series* (1978), *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Tracker* (Probyn 2005; and Collins and Davis 2004).
In fact, *Bringing Them Home* set in motion a series of significant events that directly address the issue of reconciliation: these include the annual National Sorry Day (which was first instigated in 1999), and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s formal apology on the 13th of February 2007 (more than ten years after the *Bringing Them Home* report was first brought to public attention). On this day, “Rudd tabled a motion in parliament apologising to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, particularly the stolen generations and their families and communities” (“Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations” [website]). Since Rudd’s formal apology, the opening of the Federal Parliament’s two houses is preceded with a ‘Welcome to Country’ (that is to say, a short speech to acknowledge the land’s traditional owners). As a consequence of *Bringing Them Home*, the Mabo Native Title Act and the various events that followed, there is now a general acceptance at the political and legal level that the events in question had taken place and caused profound grief, loss and suffering to many Aboriginal people.62

Notwithstanding the impact *Bringing Them Home* had on the social and political landscape of Australia — indeed along with the Mabo Act it has changed the face of Australian self-understanding — it has also had a profound influence on the production of artistic and cultural works. The change in the perception and understanding of Australian history through *Bringing Them Home* has manifested itself in a growing body of cinematic work, which is frequently set in the outback and re-examines colonialism and its aftermath. These works are comprised of films by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal directors. They also traverse a wide range of genres and stylistic forms. Included in this cinematic canon are dramas such as: *Radiance, Beneath Clouds, The Tracker, Australian Rules* (Paul Goldman 2002), *The Proposition, Ten Canoes, Australia, Mad Bastards, Samson & Delilah, Toomelah, Mystery Road, Goldstone* and *Last Cab to Darwin* (Jeremy Simms 2015); musicals such as, *One Night the Moon, Bran Nue Dae* (Rachel Perkins 2009) and *The

62 In contrast to the Howard Government, there is now consensus among the Australian Liberal Party that a formal apology to the first Australians was a necessary act. For example, on the announcement of Rudd’s retirement from politics Prime Minister Tony Abbott paid tribute to Rudd’s apology noting it was “something to crown an amazing public life” (Crowe 2013, par. 3).
Sapphires. I will discuss the sound tracks of some of these films in more detail and in relation to Warwick Thornton’s *Samson & Delilah* in Chapter Seven.

Although *Rabbit-Proof Fence* was not the first film to address the issue of the stolen generations, it could be argued that it was the first film which brought this issue into the realm of mainstream cinema. Robert Manne, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald* asserts that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is the “first important feature film on the subject” (Manne 2001). Following its release, the film was a critical and commercial success, winning local accolades, such as Best Film, Best Score and Best Sound at the Australian Film Institute Awards (2002) and Best Film at the Inside Film Awards (2002). The film was also received well internationally, picking up prizes at the Edinburgh Film Festival, San Francisco Critics Circle Film Awards (2002), and London Critics Circle Film Awards (2003). Peter Gabriel’s score was nominated for a Golden Globe Award (2003). The sound mix by John Penders, Craig Carter, Steve Burgess, Ricky Edwards and Andrew Plain won Best Sound Editing in a Foreign Feature at the Golden Reel Awards (2003). Worldwide the film grossed more than sixteen million dollars at the box office (“Rabbit-Proof Fence Box Office” Mojo [website]).

**A Controversial Affair**

*Rabbit-Proof Fence*’s status as an incisive and self-critical piece of Australian landscape cinema can also be located in the heated and controversial debate it provoked — on the lead up to, and after, its release. The contentious sentiment the film stirred up is typified in the various promotional media material it used — material such as the North American poster release that poignantly stated, “What if the government kidnapped your daughter?” Director Philip Noyce played a crucial role in the contentious release of the film, as he was the main architect behind the film’s advertising campaign. Noyce’s team produced a press release, free tickets to the film’s premiere, two trailers, a website, a documentary titled *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Darlene Johnson 2002), postcards, a study guide, evocative posters of the actress Everlyn Sampi with the text “A True Story”, multiple premiere screenings of the film in Aboriginal communities, and the CD of Peter Gabriel's score (Kibby
2005, 148). Noyce also fuelled the debate vocally. When receiving the accolade for Best Picture at the Australian Film Institute Awards 2002, he used the occasion to openly condemn Prime Minister John Howard, and his refusal to apologise on behalf of the government for their role in the stolen generations (Maddox 2002, par. 1).

Whilst the provocative release of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* capitalised on the public outcry to the findings of *Bringing Them Home*, and thus assisted in the film’s widespread reach, a backlash to this provocation manifested itself in scathing criticism from journalists, academics and social commentators alike who responded negatively to the film and its telling of Australian history, and indeed the film’s poster. Liberal MP, Peter Slipper, for instance, castigated the American promotional poster for the film. Slipper argued that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* was “grossly distorting of what actually happened” (cited in “Australia Associated Press” [website]). Another particularly potent example of such criticism came from the neo-conservative tabloid columnist Piers Akerman, who questioned the historical accuracy of the film and its characters. For Akerman, the events depicted in the film were both misleading and fabricated (2002). As Collins has stated “this type of criticism reflected the wider rhetorical stance of the ongoing campaign against the *Bringing Them Home*” (2004, 135).

*Rabbit-Proof Fence* also received criticism relating to the tokenistic qualities of its narrative, visual/sonic elements, and the lack of authentic Aboriginal cultural representation, a notion which was intrinsically linked to the affective dimensions of the film, and the way they are conveyed through Hollywood structures and aesthetics.\(^63\) Returning to Akerman, we find a similar line of thought where he dismisses the film’s contribution to national culture and history on the grounds of an effect mentioned previously, namely, ‘international contamination’ (Collins and Davis 2004, 135). For Akerman, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* cannot be regarded as an important cultural work because the representations within the film are culturally inauthentic, or in his words “a Tinseltown version of an Australian story” (136). Akerman “accuses the filmmakers of taking licence in their representation of

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\(^{63}\) An example of this can be found in McCarthy (2004).
historical reality, suggesting that the film fails as a work of history because its primary aim is to elicit emotion” (136).

Though Akerman has his own conservative political agenda to push, in this particular assessment he is perhaps not too far off the mark. In some ways Rabbit-Proof Fence’s ‘Tinseltown’ approach to an Australian story is the result of the divided market the film was aiming at. According to one prominent commentator on the film “this market ranged from a polarised but relatively informed Australian audience, to a relatively uninformed and less politically aligned international audience” (Hughes d’Aeth, 2002). Therefore, a way to cater to this divided audience was to speak in a “universalising language of emotions” (Kibby 2005). The following section suggests that Rabbit-Proof Fence’s primary cinematic elements draw upon Hollywood cinematic practices and an international and globalised audiovisual approach, rather than an accurate attempt to cinematically reconstruct Garimara’s original story.

**Universalising Cinematic Language**

With the aim of creating a film that not only resounded with a local and international audience, but was also true to the essence of Garimara’s story, Noyce led a nation-wide search to find three young girls to fill the starring roles. Early in the process, Noyce said that “they found that kids living in urban communities possessed a much more homogenised body language, reflecting the popular culture influences that increasingly make kids all over the world the same” (Darlene Johnson 2002). To solve this problem Noyce began the search to find kids from more remote areas, who had no acting experience, but were in contact with the landscape and the traditional Aboriginal lifestyles (Kibby 2005, 149). Aside from this somewhat essentialist criterion (that is to say, the reduction of an Aboriginal person to the dark-skinned ‘primitive’ of the bush), the lead protagonists needed to be able to engage immediately and emotionally with a mainstream audience.

In the documentary of the making of the film, Following the Rabbit-Proof Fence by Darlene Johnson, Noyce describes the experience he had whilst auditioning and photographing Everlyn Sampi, (who played the lead character Molly). He
comments “It is hard to describe, I’ve seen it before in both movie stars and in models. It’s something that happens between the lens and the performer, this transfer of incredible energy” (Johnson 2002). As this testimony suggests, Sampi had the star quality Noyce was looking for — a quality that was evident in the actors he had been working with in Hollywood; and a quality that complemented the universal and global language that the film encapsulates.

In addition to Noyce’s input, it should also be noted that the screenplay, by the New Zealander Christine Olsen, was also recognised as playing a key role in the dramatisation and commercialisation of the original story. The Indigenous Australian scholar Philip Morrissey notes the screenplay both “provided additional historical context” and “edited out superfluous detail and context” (2007, par. 8). Importantly, however, the extent of this filtering process seems to have come as a surprise to the author of the original novel Doris Pilkington Garimara, who also happened to be the film’s Aboriginal consultant:

I was so arrogant to believe that the filmmakers would follow my book very very closely, as for the scripts, I was like ‘Is this my story?’ but it’s a matter of knowing and seeing the point of view of the filmmakers. I was coming from a writer’s perspective so I had to shift a little to realise how the book makes a good film, makes a good story (“Doris Pilkington; Quotes” 2016).

Though Rabbit-Proof Fence’s performances, direction and screenplay provide a crucial foundation for engaging the audience empathetically, as I explore in the following section, it is the audiovisuality that achieves the full potential of the film’s emotional reach and scope.

**Emotional Devices**

Rabbit-Proof Fence employs two key ambient and emotional devices. The first of these is the highly stylised cinematography by Christopher Doyle. Doyle, although born in Australia had lived in Taiwan since the late 1970s and had never

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64 Olsen is also credited as the producer for the film. Her other producing and directing credits include the documentaries *Hephzibah* (Curtis Levy 1998) and *My One-Legged Dream Lover* (Christine Olsen and Penny Fowler-Smith 1998).
worked on an Australian film before. Instead, he built a formidable reputation in Hong Kong shooting films such as *Temptress Moon* (Chen Kaige 1996) and *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai 1994). The second device under discussion is the sound track, which for the purposes of this chapter is examined as two separate entities: the world music score and the heavily abstracted sound-effects track, which was constructed by Bronwyn Murphy, Craig Carter, Ricky Edwards and John Penders. Although many people collaborated on the musical score of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, it is the former British pop star Peter Gabriel and his long-time associates David Rhodes and Richard Evans who had the dominant input.

Both the cinematography and the sound track take on added roles in the film; these emotionally charged cinematic elements are placed at the forefront of the filmic text. They compensate for the limited dialogue in the film’s narrative, and they contribute to the scope of the film’s affect and the universal accessibility of the story. As Sabra Thorner has noted in her essay “Changing the Rules of Engagement”, these elements assist in creating an emotive texture to the narrative — a narrative that “relies upon the faces of Molly, Daisy and Gracie, and the themes that permeate their interaction with supporting characters” (2007). Tony Hughes-d’Aeth takes this line further and notes that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is “not interested in the oral” (or dialogue) but is “profoundly interested in the aural, and draws affective power from Peter Gabriel’s score *Long Walk Home*” (2002). However, the sound effects must also be recognised as contributing significantly to these affects and effects. Take, for example, the overdubbed and almost deafening breathing sound in the scene that features a terrified Molly walking to meet AO Neville (Kenneth Branagh) for the first time. In this scene the claustrophobic breathing noise places the perceiver in Molly’s position. It conveys her internal impression of the torment, anguish and fear she is being subjected to. As the well-known mixer/editor and writer David Sonnenschein notes in his highly cited work, *Sound-design: The Expressive Power of Music, Sound Effects and Dialogue in Cinema*, “by using this technique, the filmgoer can get inside the head of the character, they can hear what the character is hearing and can

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65 Doyle had also worked in the United States on large-scale productions such as *American Psycho* (Gus Van Sant 1998).
66 While seventeen people are credited in the film’s sound department, the four people mentioned above were the creative force behind the film’s sound design and were listed in the category recipients for Best Sound at the 2002 Australian Film Institute Awards.
therefore have a strong bond with that experience” (Sonnenschein 2001, 177). In this sense, the breathing sound helps to evoke emotion and orientate the viewer, and thus it could be argued that it is the most crucial cinematic element in the scene’s audiovisual assemblage.

An Audiovisual Contradiction: Visual Alienation and Sonic Oneness

While the cinematography and sound track appear united in the desire to develop an immersive and ambient world for the leading protagonists, these two devices contradict one another.

Doyle’s cinematography typically embodies a stylised visual aesthetic, characterised by a distinctive use of vivid colours, shades and shadows, and saturated film stock. In *Rabbit-Proof Fence* this style is combined with both handheld first-person camera shots to create a sense of subjectivity, and wide shots juxtaposed to extreme close-ups to convey the immense expanse of the land and the vulnerability of the three girls within it. In one interview, Doyle spoke of how he wanted to create dislocation between the girls and the environment they traverse, or in his words, to evoke the cruelty of the journey, the loneliness, the isolation and the expanse (Petzke 2007, 234). Perhaps this visual dislocation relates to what Collins calls a “new post-Mabo approach to landscape representation” (2004, 141), which embodies an Aboriginal notion of ‘country’. That is the idea that Aboriginal people belong to a particular area of land, have customary obligations to that land and are physically and emotionally affected when they are taken from their ‘country’” (Collins and Davis 2004, 141)

According to Doyle, the saturation of colours and unconventional camera angles not only dislocate the girls from the land but also help to distinguish the film’s representation of the outback from the typical trope of Australian landscape art, which as he describes “contains blue skies and realistic colours” (Johnson 2002). Doyle notes that such happy colours would not be appropriate for the film: “We don’t want beautiful blue skies because the reality is that the sky is not blue for the girls” (Garimara and Bassett 2002, 17). Strangely, this visual alienation differs from that of
the film’s aural intention, which, by contrast, seeks to create a sonic oneness between the girls and the land.

The sound track to *Rabbit-Proof Fence* holistically integrates sound effects, score and dialogue. The forces work in a mutative fashion and at times it is difficult to tell them apart. The abstracted sound-effects track seeks to underscore a mythical connection between the girls, the landscape and the native flora and fauna. In the scene where Moodoo (David Gulpilil) rides his horse through a running stream in pursuit of the three girls (while they hide in the riverbed reeds), the sound track conjures up various birdcalls, animalistic growls (such as that of a dingo) and environmental materialisations (such as water trickling). Along with the abstracted didgeridoo playing by Ganga Giri, which embeds the other sonic elements through its low-frequency tone, these sounds function in a percussive fashion. They weave in and out of the rhythmical design of the *mise-en-scène*. It is possible that the animal utterances correlate to the film’s location setting, and in the case of the birds, at times they do in fact correspond to the imagery within the frame. However, the fact that they are filtered through effects systems, and that they merge into the pitch, timbre and rhythm of the musical score, make it difficult to distinguish. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge, and as both Noyce and Gabriel have stated, many of the sound effects (e.g. wind, rain, birds, insects, animals and running water) were recorded, or could have been recorded at the filming locations (Gabriel 2002). Importantly, however, Noyce contacted Andrew Skeoch and Sarah Koschak from the environmental sound effects production company *Listening Earth* in early 2002, and requested several of these environmental sounds for use in *Rabbit Proof Fence*. As cited in Kibby (2005), according to Andrew Skeotch, Gabriel had anticipated using environmental recordings gathered during the making of the film but because of time and financial constraints it was just not possible. Thus, *Listening Earth*’s recordings became the raw material from which Gabriel’s team constructed the ‘sound of Australia’ that accompanied the girls on their journey home (Kibby 2005, 150).

67 The freshness of water plays an emotional role in the film. Consider, for instance, the imagery and sounds of rain-soaked vegetation and wildlife, which offer a sense of hope when the girls first escape. By contrast when the girls venture farther into the arid desert and are in need of water these sonic and visual materialisations disappear, thus enhancing the characters’ sense of tiredness and desperation.
In one interview Gabriel explains some of the methods used to manipulate the sound effects within the film. He notes that through reverse filtering and time-shifting, the sounds of the desert are placed at the forefront of the mix, and are abstracted heavily. Gabriel gives one example:

We took some Australian bird sounds. It is mainly a magpie that you hear. I decided we could slow that down, and get a moodier thing that was of that sound but not exactly that sound. And then Richard Evans took it into the computer and started manipulating it a bit further, slowing it down and putting a little vibrato into it. We then sink it into the soundtrack. One of the places that we used it was The Return where the kids are coming back home. There’s a big string section behind it, but for me it’s still very evocative (2002).

This blurring occurs throughout the film’s aural make-up, especially when the idiosyncratic Australian bush sounds are present. These include a cockatoo’s screech morphing into an eagle call; whipbirds whipping then seamlessly merging into sustained musical accompaniment; the electronically manipulated sound of stones basking on the sand in the hot sun; insects multiplying, fluctuating; the echoing remnants of a crow call; and artificial wind interacting with the surrounding flora and natural architecture of the landscape. Another notable sound effect is that of the whistling kite — a bird that accompanies Molly on her journey and acts as her totem. This reverberant kite call suggests a spiritual, almost primaeval essence to the land, blurring the distinction between human, animal and landscape, and is perhaps more evidence of tokenism. It is worth noting that this sound effect shares some similarities with the iconic but almost always misappropriated reverberant Red-tailed Hawk screech sound effect. The Red-tailed Hawk is perhaps one of the most widely recognised sound effects in cinema history. It typically occurs (and has done so since the many cowboy and Indian Westerns of the 1950s) when any type of eagle or hawk (although almost always the majestic bald faced eagle, which has a less impressive call) is onscreen; whenever an American Indian is on screen; and whenever a cliff or mountain is shown (especially if it is high). While *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is in fact one of the few films to accurately portray a raptor call (Black Kite — otherwise known as Fork-tailed Kite), it is heavily saturated with reverberation, thus the distinctive qualities that render the sound unique are somewhat blurred.
So how are we to interpret the ambiguous sonic atmospheres within the film? On one level they function in a cinematically conventional manner. That is to say, they materialise the actions and events that take place in the narrative, and they provide aural resonances to the textures and contours of the vast landscapes that feature throughout the film. However, because the abstraction occurs most prolifically while accompanying scenes that feature the three girls walking along the fence, it can be assumed that this audiovisual signage has a deeper meaning.

Here, I want to develop this discussion on reverberant sounds further because I believe they play a key role in creating this ‘deeper meaning’ in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, namely, they help to create a sense of oneness between the characters and landscape. The reverberant qualities of the sound track suggest a subjective impression of the landscape from the perspective of the girls. This subjectivity is reinforced through the low camera angles, which positions the viewer at the height of Molly, and the general hand-held filming technique. It is also heard in the various sonic and musical passages, which are generally reflective and reverberant and accompany the landscape imagery throughout the film.

As discussed previously in the discussion on *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, this spatial aesthetic is achieved through artificially generated reverb filtering. Characterised by its multiple reflections, roll off in high frequencies, slight bass increase and its gradual decrease in amplitude; reverb can instantly add a sense of depth, warmth, space and body to a sound. However, in *Rabbit-Proof Fence* these qualities are acoustically illogical (an allusion that parallels the echoing and reverberant synthesiser in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*), because the outback environments that they correspond to are typically flat and have no reflective or cavernous surfaces. One example of this illogical spatial resonance happens following the scene where Molly is caught by a rural house wife stealing eggs from a hen house. The woman shows compassion to Molly and the girls, and offers them provisions and directs them east towards the rabbit-proof fence. The girls head out into the landscape. The camera circles them at ground level; a synthesised and sustained chord occupies the lower frequency register, building in intensity. The rhythm of an electronically generated and echo-effected kick drum conjures up an atmosphere of tribal ceremony.
Reverberant frogs and insects can be heard intermittently in the background. The camera steadies itself in front of the girls, and then trawls backwards while they walk forward towards it. This camera movement and perspective is suggestive of the spiritual pulling force of the fence. Non-diegetic, but again reverberant and diffuse Aboriginal singing begins. A groaning, howl-type noise somewhat reminiscent of a dingo, interacts with the Aboriginal vocal soundscape and reinforces the portrayal of the girls as one with the land; as ‘patrons of nature’s gifts’.

These scenes, which feature heavy doses of reverb, always occur in association with Aboriginal characters within the landscape, whereas European markers and representations typically dominate the scenes that contain little or no reverb. Consider, for instance, the scenes that take place in Neville’s office; the street scenes in Perth; the presentation that Neville gives to the Women’s Society; scenes that feature police officers; and scenes that take place at the Moore River Native Settlement. Thus, when white characters are present (even in combination with landscape shots) there is no reverb, whereas when Indigenous Australian characters are present, so is reverb.

Perhaps the ethereal and dreamlike nature of the sounds can be interpreted as an attempt to construct an immersive Aboriginal Dreamtime world, where space and time are distorted, sped-up and slowed-down — where the landscape is aurally present; where the landscape is given a voice. In one interview, Gabriel noted that he wanted to create a sound track that “comes from the earth” and a sound track that expresses the “Aboriginal oneness with the land” (Gabriel, 2002). Such a notion is also supported through the use of surround-sound imaging, where environmental noises are placed in different speakers and move intermittently across the panorama of the imaging spectrum. Rabbit-Proof Fence’s dreaming aesthetic as evident in its sound design differs from that of Picnic at Hanging Rock. In Rabbit-Proof Fence the dreaming sounds are used in conjunction with the Aboriginal characters, creating a sense of wholeness, oneness, belonging, and so forth, whereas in Picnic at Hanging Rock the dream sounds are used in conjunction with the white protagonists, creating a sense of dislocation and not-belonging to the landscape.
Oddly, Gabriel’s intention to convey a sense of Aboriginal oneness through the sound design is contradicted by Doyle’s cinematography, which intends to do the opposite. When considering the reasons behind these contrasting elements, the question of cultural as well as aesthetic interpretation must be raised. Ultimately, these interpretations have less to do with providing authentic or realistic Indigenous Australian perspectives (in the manner of the book the film is based on), and more to do with European, American and white Australian forms of artistic expression. Just as Gabriel makes a judgment on which sounds signify spirituality and connections to the land, Doyle makes a judgement on which colours evoke beauty and happiness and which colours evoke cruelty and loneliness. That said, we must also acknowledge the intent of the sound track to express an appreciation of land that differs from European conceptions; an attempt to create an Aboriginal perspective of land as a living thing with a spirit and a voice. After all, in Aboriginal knowledge systems, the boundary between material and spiritual realms is easily crossed. Similarly, the boundaries between humans, animals, plants, and natural elements are also permeable (Castellano 2014, 278).

As the following section suggests, essentialist undertakings are also echoed elsewhere in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*’s sound track, most significantly in the world music score, whose scripted musical themes have origins in the folklore of Aboriginal culture and several other indigenous cultures.

**World Music**

The amorphous genre of ‘world music’ is generally characterised by the fusion of various indigenous musical traditions and the production, rendering and marketing of such music towards an international audience. The success of global music fusions in contemporary cinema is steeped in the world music phenomenon that occurred in the 1980s. This phenomenon was fuelled by the establishment of WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance), of which Peter Gabriel was a founding member, as well as high-selling collaborative works such as Paul Simon’s album *Graceland* (1986), Peter Gabriel and Youssou N’Dour’s single ‘Shakin’ the Tree’ (1989) and Ernie Watts with Gilberto Gil’s ‘Afoxé’ (1991). The collaborative element to these landmark albums is
significant. Such collaborations not only helped to diversify world music but also commercialised it — a notion strategically promoted by the music industry. As the musicologist Jack Bishop has commented, “the techniques employed by a relatively small group of multinational record labels significantly contributed to introducing elements of non-Western music to Western audiences” (2003, 171). Such methods included the combining of indigenous musicians, who had previously held marginalised positions in the industry, with mainstream contemporary artists. As Bishop goes on to say, “the ‘Western’ pop star, an accepted musical expert among consumers, is regularly used by the industry to introduce the artists to Western audiences while simultaneously validating the music” (172). With such commercial imperatives in mind it is perhaps unsurprising that world music has been promoted on celluloid and specifically by films that contain representations of indigenous characters.

In the influential study “Scoring the Indian” (2000), Claudia Gorbman surveys the music of the American Indian in Hollywood cinema roughly since the Second World War. From the pre-war savage on-the-war-path accompanied by lush orchestral romance, a much broader vocabulary evolved including authentic chants, drums, and other ceremonial instruments, post-tonal modernism and finally mixtures of other world music. Gorbman traces the origins of world music within a contemporary cinematic context, and again, draws both an economic and a social imperative. Gorbman explains that the accessibility and universality of world music allows audiences a new-found possibility of immediate social identification, noting:

…exotic ethnic music became the raw materials to pass through the mills of global media and commodification and consumption by Western markets, a world music soundtrack began to stand for a style in itself defining the film audience as much as the film music (113).

Perhaps then, through the fusion of the local and global, the traditional and modern, world music has greater potential for identification amongst filmgoers than that of Western art music — the mode and style that had previously dominated cinema? Here, I note that films that fulfil the implied criteria (namely, using world music in combination with indigenous themes and representations) vary in scope and medium. Think of Aaron Blaise and Robert Walker’s 2003 animated Disney production
Brother Bear, which deals with native American characters and themes and also utilises a world music palette of sounds (Tulk 2010).

In an Australian cinematic context, elements of world music are rare but can be traced back to films as early as Picnic at Hanging Rock, which features reverberant Romanian pan flutes. As discussed in Chapter Three, this music — with its primitive associations — functions as a kind of siren call, casting a trance over the girls, calling them into the monolithic crevasse. It signifies something mysterious, something ancient and possibly something Aboriginal at play. A more recent, post-Bringing Them Home example of world music used in Australian cinema occurs in Paul Kelly and Dan Luscombe’s sound track for Jindabyne, which adopts an eclectic range of ethnic instruments and musical styles. Compositions from the sound track album, such as ‘Power Lines’, combine impassioned female singing that operates within Arabic-style scales, as well as instrumentation suggestive of an Eastern European influence, whereas the composition ‘Troitsa Bratya’, is adapted from a famous Bulgarian folk ballad. Importantly, it is the ethnic-style music used on this sound track that corresponds to the mysterious nature of the landscape, the tension between non-indigenous and indigenous people.

**World Music in Rabbit-Proof Fence**

The world music influences mentioned above are immediately apparent in the film cues of Rabbit-Proof Fence. All of the fifteen compositions of the film’s dramatic score feature collaborative performances by many different world musicians, many of whom Gabriel has previously worked with. Notably, the scenes that contain the most world music are the most emotionally charged.

The opening sequence to Rabbit-Proof Fence, which is accompanied by a composition titled ‘Jigalong’, plays a pivotal role in establishing the film’s characters and themes, and is particularly representative of the diverse ethnic music that the film employs. The scene begins with a black screen; abstracted Aboriginal singing then fades in. This singing rises in volume and shifts within the panorama of the surround-sound system. Text then emerges, poignantly stating that in “Western Australia Mr
A.O. Neville, legal guardian of every Aboriginal person in the state, had the power to remove children from their parents”. These emotive words are punctuated by various manipulations of percussion, didgeridoo and ambient and immersive tribal tones. Now melodic swells of synth and samples slowly fuse into the sonic mix, rendering the atmosphere exotic, mysterious and other-worldly. The elderly real-life Molly then takes over the story, speaking in her native dialect (her words translated into subtitles), recollecting the events that took place. The image of the familiar red Australian outback fades in; the camera traverses the landscape, giving us a bird’s-eye view of its contours. A twangling guitar alternates between two notes, creating a sense of suspense. Now bird song, wind samples and an instrument that sounds like a jew’s harp contribute to the brooding tone. The camera tilts up into the blue sky, lingers there for a moment and then tilts back down. We are now in a different time and space, back when Molly was a little girl in her homeland of Jigalong. A syncopated Amazonian drumbeat fades in. The thrust and tempo of its rhythm assist in the drama unfolding and the emotion that Molly’s story encapsulates. Aside from the Aboriginal singing, brief moments of didgeridoo and sound effects such as the whistling kite and the cockatoo, very little of the music used in this sequence, as with many of the other sequences, is rooted in Australian cultural traditions. Yet a sense of a spiritual, mythical and numinous Australia is conjured up.

Considering the sensitive issues that *Rabbit-Proof Fence* explores within its narrative, in particular those relating to *Bringing Them Home*, how are we to interpret the rich tapestry of world instruments and performances within the film, beyond the economic and social benefits mentioned above? The fact that various indigenous music and instrumentation, which rarely has specific referents, is used to evoke Aboriginality, raises several questions. For example, is there an ethnic-based sonic reduction taking place in the film, and if so is it simply an indigenous to non-indigenous binary? Or is the music used in the film a way of conveying solidarity among indigenous cultures across the world?

An observation made by John Connell and Chris Gibson perhaps sheds some light on the hidden meanings and connotations of world music within films like *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Citing Taylor (1997, 26-27), they relate world music in *Rabbit-
Proof Fence to the “timeless, the ancient, the primal, the pure, the chthonic”; they suggest that this aspect of world music is what listeners are concerned with, this is what they want to buy “since their own world is often conceived as ephemeral, new, artificial and corrupt” (Connell and Gibson 2004, 341-61). In her essay on the soundtrack of Rabbit-Proof Fence, Marj Kibby takes a similar tone commenting that “the instruments and vocal styles used may not be instantly recognisable as belonging to particular contemporary locations or areas but instead might be understood to evoke a time-less space for a Western viewer” (2005, 156).

However, it must be acknowledged that catering to the needs of the Westerner in Rabbit-Proof Fence is problematic, and for a few reasons. First, the assimilation and fusion of different indigenous musical traditions shares some unfortunate parallels to the type of eugenic assimilation that the narrative of Rabbit-Proof Fence explores. Indeed, as some important works have argued, world music is inherently an essentialist and colonial form (Connell and Gibson 2004; Khesti 2012, 286; and Guilbault 1993).

Secondly, this makes the assumption that Aboriginal music on its own, and/or music that Aboriginal people actually listen to, is not a sufficient means to capture the imagination of a commercial audience. As I have suggested elsewhere, this idea is questionable — there are many ways of sonically conveying pertinent Aboriginal issues and representations without being tokenistic. Take, for example, the critically acclaimed Samson & Delilah, which contains a sound track devoid of Aboriginal instrumentation and overly saturated effects that conjure mythical connections to place, instead opting for music that is popular in Aboriginal communities, such as country and western.

On a broader level, it needs to be acknowledged that although the strategic and commercial construction of world music has allowed social identification among perceivers, in a market context the production and distribution of world music is “defined by a radius that extends from a Western centre” (“World Music” Wikipedia), and at the heart of this centre are Gabriel and Noyce. Therefore, as Kalinak has asked, is the commodification of world music yet another example of the West co-opting
non-Western cultures for commercial gain (2010, 89)?

**Conclusion**

In his essay on landscape in Australian cinema, film scholar Graham Harper contextualises *Rabbit-Proof Fence* as a global co-production filtered through many processes, noting that many of the depictions within the film are shaped by the economic imperatives familiar to directors like Noyce. Harper comments that “the input of international film makers whose experiences and demands of Hollywood, Hong Kong and, to a lesser extent, European filmmaking, give *Rabbit-Proof Fence* an internationalism, not otherwise present” (2010, 250). However, the question must be raised; does this mode of filmmaking (which in some respects disregards authentic cultural representation) compromise the culturally sensitive issue of *Bringing Them Home* and cultural assimilation? I believe it does and this is particularly evident in the inner workings of the film’s cinematography, in its sound-effects track and especially in its world music score (which is perhaps the most international and codified aspect of the film’s make up).

Thus, the broad argument is that while the humanising of Aboriginal people and Aboriginality within the sound tracks of Australian landscape cinema has undoubtedly progressed since the codified stereotypes that plagued many films of the twentieth century, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* is evidence that musical and sonic clichés still exist — they are simply evident in a different sonic disguise. It is intriguing that the film chooses to use clichéd means of representation, considering the way it embraces landmark socio-political and legal developments that have falsified Australia’s cultural assimilation policies of the twentieth century. In its defence, one could view the sound track as a synthesis of the two opposed forces, some blend (ideally) emerging from the conflict between coloniser and colonised.

Having focused on representations of Aboriginality, landscape and colonial history in this chapter, we will now look at another key element of Australian landscape cinema apparent in sound and music, namely, the ‘Australian Gothic’. I provide a case study of the sound track of the Gothic Western, *The Proposition*, a film
released three years after *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. It is also a film that features Indigenous-settler conflicts and presents a very different revisionist account of Australia’s colonial history, and indeed landscape.
Chapter Five: Revisionist and Gothic Soundscapes in The Proposition

*But this our native or adopted land has no past, no story. No poet speaks to us* (Marcus Clarke 1876).

The Australian Gothic is a very important but underexplored trait and theme within contemporary Australian landscape cinema. Indeed, while recent studies demonstrate a significant increase of interest in the sound tracks of Australian cinema, very little analysis is concerned with the way sound track can convey the Gothic within an outback-cinematic context. This chapter attempts to address this issue by providing a close reading of the Australian Gothic Western *The Proposition* — looking specifically at its sonic dimensions. I argue that the film’s sound track draws from a range of Australian literary and cinematic tropes and engages specifically with the aural and epistemological Gothic traits of Australia, the outback and its perception as unfamiliar space during the time of settlement. It also explores how the sound track reacts to the history wars debate by providing a sonic-revisionist account of Australia’s colonial history — one that differs significantly from that of other recent landscape films.

This chapter begins by examining key Gothic themes and their Australian appropriation in literature and film. Focusing on the landscape and the importance of its aural properties I look at how such properties have become key motifs in Australian Gothic cinema. From this, the discussion moves to a detailed analysis of sound in, *The Proposition*, and in particular its utilisation of an expanded and eclectic sonic palette. This includes an evocative score, lyrical dialogue and poetry, manipulation of song text and instrumentation, discordant musical motifs, counterpoint, and intense and ever-present sound effects and atmospheres — all to convey a specifically Australian Gothic narrative. I demonstrate how the score also draws from a stylistically rich set of influences. This includes Nick Cave’s own Goth musical background and the sound tracks of anti-Westerns and Spaghetti Westerns of the 1960’s — genres of cinema that have also heavily influenced Australian landscape cinema and their sound tracks.

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68 In this sense, Goth refers to a sub culture that developed in England in the late 1970s. Its imagery and cultural practices draw from nineteenth century Gothic literature and horror films. See Wilson (2008) and Siegel (2005).
Why The Proposition?

In many of its applications — art, literature, music and film — the Gothic implies an alternative aesthetic idiom that counters or offends mainstream ‘classical’ styles (Brooker 2003, 115). At its starkest the Gothic is portentously gloomy, horrifying, surreal, uncanny, and is invoked against a conception of civilisation and against normative conceptions of ‘the real’ (115). This concept is very important in much of Australian outback cinema and especially in the recent Gothic-Western The Proposition, which offers an alternative perspective on the typically romanticised and idealised representation of colonial Australia and its landscape. Like the Gothic novel The Secret River (Kate Grenville 2005), The Proposition (also released in 2005) is a story of careful observation. It has a dark and cynical tone — foregrounding themes such as horror, barbarism and a breakdown of Australian historical values, understandings and pioneer narratives such as those that are represented in terms of ‘mateship’, ‘dinky-di’ and the ‘Anzac’ (Harper and Rayner 2010, 251). The film combines recognisable elements of the Australian Gothic and the anti-Western, looking at the poignant issues of settler conflicts, the treatment of Indigenous Australian people, religion and secularism, unforgiving and sparsely populated landscapes as well as race and class division. By doing so, The Proposition expands the boundaries of an already established ‘outback Gothic tradition’ — one that focuses on the outback as dystopia rather than ‘rural idyll’. As I explore, The Proposition is also notable for it is one of very few Australian Western landscape films to emerge in recent times. Gregor Jordan’s film Ned Kelly, very different in style and approach, was released in 2003. In locating a Western before Ned Kelly we have to backtrack to Quigley Down Under (Simon Wincer 1990), an American co-production. Subsequent to The Proposition however, some important Westerns have emerged. These include Ivan Sen’s contemporary-set Aboriginal Western Mystery Road and the post-apocalyptic Western, The Rover. Tellingly, these films draw on revisionist themes.

Most critical analysis of The Proposition has been grounded in literary and visual frameworks, see for example, Hart (2006), Collins (208) and Dalziell (2009), as well as more theoretically based studies such as John Stratton’s article “The
“Murderous State” (2009), which provides a reading of the film in terms of neoliberalism. This is despite the crucial role played by sound and music in the film. The Proposition’s aural elements were conceived and implemented by Nick Cave, who received various awards for its score, which include: Best Musical Score, AFI Awards, 2005. This chapter suggests that the period and location depicted in the film are represented through a distinctly Gothic lens and the sound track plays a key role in realising the Gothic tone. Furthermore, The Proposition’s sound track can be read as exemplifying the narrative themes and aural tropes of the Australian Gothic and demonstrating new trends and compositional techniques of the genre. We can hear the influence of these traits in the sound tracks of other Australian Gothic Westerns that have followed. For example, in Van Diemen’s Land a similar score is used to enhance the nightmarish dreamlike location where the film is set, emphasising the brutal violence that is committed, and unwillingness of the convicts in question to be civilised. In order to examine how The Proposition’s sound track exemplifies the Gothic, we must first consider the term and how it has come about in the Australian context.

The Gothic and an Australian Appropriation

The word Goth or Gothic originally referred to Northern European tribes of the fourth to sixth century, with the pejorative connotations of uncouth, ugly, archaic or barbaric (Brooker 2003, 114-115). The term was later adopted in the architectural styles from the twelfth century to sixteenth century (therefore pre-Renaissance to after Renaissance) — in a derogatory way to mean anything not classical (Greek and Roman) — and therefore ugly. The Renaissance was considered a renewal of everything classical after the Dark Ages in Europe. Renaissance critics thought (wrongly) Gothic architecture was created by the barbaric Germanic tribes — the Goths. In the late eighteenth-century Romantic period, following the release of The Castle of Otranto (1765) — there was an upsurge of interest in the Middle Ages and the term Gothic came to be associated with diabolism, incest, murder, the supernatural. As Brooker neatly summarises, it also came “to denote anything vast, gloomy or medieval in architecture, or to describe signs of decay and wildness in buildings and landscapes” (Brooker 2003, 115). Walpole’s novel was followed by a
large spate of works that fed on a pleasing sort of terror, which catered to an increasing prurient interest in the sensational and the dramatic. Thus, Gothic fiction or Gothic horror is perhaps best described as a combination of horror and romance.

In no sense did the Australian Gothic occupy the same historical space as the Gothic in English Romantic literature — or indeed European Gothic architecture (e.g. Gothic cathedrals), which stress the vertical, the exact opposite of Australian landscapes. However, considering the deeply malevolent beginnings of colonial Australia as well as the colonial perception of the land as an unfamiliar space, it is perhaps inevitable that the ‘dungeon down under’ theme was embraced in Australian fiction. Although the Gothic was not immediately apparent in Australian literature of the early nineteenth century, evidence of a Gothic presence can be found in Australia’s pre-settlement imagining as a “grotesque space”, a land peopled by monsters (Turcotte 1998), in the deportation and arrival of British convicts, the subsequent genocide of Aboriginal populations, and the general harshness of living in the outback. The ‘Antipodes’ was, as Turcotte has noted, “the dark subconscious of Britain” (1). By the mid-nineteenth century Australian Gothic literature started to take shape. Seminal literary works of the early Australian Gothic tradition include: For The Term Of his Natural Life (Marcus Clarke 1870), a loosely based novelisation of the life of the notorious convict Alexander Pearce, who ate his companions during two different escape attempts from the Macquarie Harbour Penal Settlement; Bush Studies (Barbara Baynton 1902), a series of short stories that display a grim realism and depiction of female suffering in the Australian bush of the nineteenth century; and The Bush Undertaker (Henry Lawson 1892), a bleak account of life in the outback.

**Terra Australis**

Similar to British Gothic literature, the environment played an integral role in many early Australian works. However, instead of the moors, heath, swamps, ravines and run-down medieval castles that feature in, for example, the novels of the Brontë sisters or Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the unknowable and expansive Australian outback presented a physically and spatially different, but similarly unstable, setting. Indeed the Australian landscape directly relates to what Turcotte describes as, “fears
and themes that are endemic in the colonial experience: isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown” (Turcotte 1998, 1). The Australian environment, with its droughts, floods, bush fires, tropical cyclones and dust storms was, for many, completely out of sync with the relatively safe, cultivated and controlled European environment.

With this perception of Australia in mind, it is unsurprising that Australian cinema has readily embraced the psycho-geographic backdrop of the outback as a Gothic-mode of representation. In films, ranging from Mad Max to Rogue (Greg McLean 2007), the landscape serves as more than simply a setting where the action takes place. Instead it functions, as previously mentioned, as a “leitmotiv or ubiquitous character” (Gibson 1983) and carries uncanny and possibly supernatural forces. This can occur ambiguously, as manifest in a film such as Jindabyne or explicitly foregrounded in horror-orientated films such as Lake Mungo (Joel Anderson 2008).

While studies such as Rayner (2001) have used visual and narrative frameworks as a means of examining the relationship between landscape and the Gothic in Australian cinema, sound track has often been overlooked. This is surprising, as in many cases it is the sonic atmospheres that are the essential element in bringing to fruition the character of the landscape and the uncanny qualities contained within it. Take, for example, Wake in Fright — a Gothic landscape film that has been described by Australian directors such as Bruce Beresford as the catalyst for the Australian New Wave of films. Directed by a Canadian, Wake in Fright is also part of a canon of films — see for instance, Summerfield (Ken Hannam 1977), The Cars That Ate Paris and Shame (Steve Jodrell 1988) that revolve around the transgressions within rural communities — that is to say, small isolated communities in the Australian outback that have secrets that are often uncovered by outsiders. The residents in these rural townships are depicted as perverse, as subverting the outsider’s gauge on what is normal. In Wake in Fright it is the middle-class British schoolteacher John Grant (played by Gary Bond) who is the outsider.

In Wake in Fright, the ‘otherness’ of the outback and the grotesque people
who inhabit it is highlighted through the sci-fi-associated sound of the Theremin instrument. Just as the Theremin had previously provided the sound of distant galaxies and monstrous aliens in films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise 1951) and *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks 1951), its unearthly, eerie and atonal presence in *Wake* directly corresponds to the strange barren Australian interior, which itself, like the rural outback Australia depicted in *The Proposition*, could be interpreted as a far-off distant planet. In thinking about the sonic and musical workings of *Wake in Fright*, we might also ask the question whether the grotesque people have always been that way, or has inhabiting the outback made them that way? How are we to understand, for instance, the lengthy scene where the most grotesque of all of them (i.e. the alcoholic doctor played by Donald Pleasence) plays Italian opera on his turntable?

In other landscape-Gothic films such as Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, the sound track plays an important role in highlighting the landscape’s status as unstable terrain. In *The Last Wave* this is suggested through dissonant and unnerving sound design, which also underscores the cosmological importance of the unusual weather patterns (which of course resonates with issues such as climate change), as well as Aboriginal tribal symbolism more generally. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (as discussed in Chapter Three) this unstable terrain theme is implied through slow-motion cinematography and blurred focal lengths. It is also implied through the ethereal Romanian pan flute music (with its pagan associations) in combination with low-register broadband frequency noise that resonates at the same frequencies as natural environmental phenomena: thunder, tidal surges, and earthquake-type rumblings such as tectonic shifts and movements at the core of the earth. Purely as a sound effect, such usage can be linked to Lynch’s unsettling take on US suburbia — for example, the opening scene to *Blue Velvet*; however, unlike Lynch — whose use of such noise is decidedly not mythical — *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave* (like *The Proposition*) sonically reinforce Australian cinema’s preoccupation with a mythical, dreamlike and spiritually-charged landscape.

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69 The Theremin is an electronic instrument that features two antennas (one for amplitude and one for frequency). The instrument is controlled and played without physical contact but through placing one’s hands in the sphere of the antennas.
The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith also deals with the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This film, however, demonstrates a different direction and approach in aurally conveying Gothic themes. The award-winning score for Schepisi’s film\textsuperscript{70} incorporates traditional Irish ballad type passages played by characters within the film’s diegetic space. This music, similarly to the music in *Wake in Fright, Ned Kelly* (Tony Richardson 1970), *One Night the Moon* and *The Proposition*, creates a sense of Irish-ness and also highlights themes such as clashing racial confrontations. However, it is the visceral sound-effects used throughout the film, which are particularly interesting (for example, the chopping of meat and whirring of boomerangs). These sound effects and their accompanying imagery are audiovisual signage and symbolic of the events that subsequently unfold. The chopping of meat, for instance, correlates directly to a later scene where Jimmie brutally butchers five white women with an axe in order to exact his revenge on the white society that never accepts him. When the butchering scene occurs — as well as other scenes, such as the one where the characters approach the graffitied and vandalised sacred Aboriginal rock site — Schepisi adopts typical Gothic/horror film scoring devices such as orchestral atonality to highlight the mystical madness stewing in Jimmie’s mind. Here, we also encounter meat-chopping imagery with suitably accompanied bodily and visceral sound effects. This device, though handled differently, recalls similar meat images and sounds intercut throughout the narratives of other important Australian landscape films such as the previously discussed *Walkabout*. In *Walkabout*, imagery such as when the young boy spears a kangaroo is intercut with flashes from a butcher shop; thus Aboriginal culture is compared with contemporary white culture. More broadly, perhaps the frequent emergence of such butcher scenes in Australian landscape cinema is symbolic of the genocide that took place in the Australian frontier wars, and the overall plight of Aboriginal people since British settlement.

\textsuperscript{70} Bruce Smeaton won the award for Best Original Music Score at the 1978 Australian Film Institute Awards.
The film *Black River* also explores concepts of land, Aboriginality, Aboriginal deaths in custody,\(^{71}\) cultural ignorance and prejudice within Australian society all through a Gothic sonic prism. The film is an adaptation of an opera about an Australian Aboriginal woman whose son is found hanged in gaol after being arrested for fighting an accused rapist. The story takes place in an outback town during a severe flood that causes five people (including the mother played by the award-winning mezzo soprano, Maroochy Barambah) to seek refuge in a remote police station as torrential rains cause the Black River to rise to unprecedented heights. The film also has an unusual sound track which is organised through it libretto and comprises a sharp, explosive sound effects track and composer Andrew Schultz’s orchestral score, which “martials the postwar atonality of the European avant-garde and imports it as an utterly displacing and dyspeptic sonorum into the yawning openness of the Australian outback” (Brophy et al. 1999 and 2012). In his assessment of this film Brophy talks about how sound and music are used to challenge typical cinematic portrayals of the Australian landscape, which are devoid of people, culture, enterprise and history. For Brophy, such portrayals contain a lack of understanding and articulation and claim an an undeserved legacy. In the following long quote, Brophy expands on how *Black River* explores such issues through sound:

…throughout *Black River*, land is depicted as time, while time is depicted as occupation. Throughout this drifting divide between land and landlessness — perfectly symbolised by the rising river and its Gothic aftereffects — characters are sonically placed as vocal types. The utterance of the film’s ‘Our Father’ summarises the innate chauvinistic stubble-scaring nicotine-stained maleness which represents Australia so well it hurts. The oratorical tone of the white cast beautifully represent the stubborn pomposity of all that passes as ‘culture’ in this country. And Maroochy Barambah’s voice is a fitting snake of hissing revenge — her sibilance acute through every audio-visual moment when she appears. *Black River* is the result of a director touching the land on which we walk, and conducting its vibrations into cinematic form (211).

Here, we should also take into consideration the work of another prominent Indigenous Australian director, namely, Tracey Moffatt. In a similar way to Lucas,

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\(^{71}\) The term ‘Aboriginal deaths in custody’ refers to the relatively high number of Aboriginal Australians who had died in jail. During the 1980s this concern was particularly acute and some sections of the community suggested that these deaths were caused, either directly or indirectly, by the police. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was established in 1987 to investigate these allegations (see Cunneen 2006).
Moffatt explores concepts of the Australian Gothic and challenges Australian cinema and its typical portrayals of Australia (in particular its landscape, its original inhabitants and the white culture which has come to oppress the original inhabitants). In *Night Cries — A Rural Tragedy* (1990), for instance, Moffatt expands on and reimagines Chauvel’s film *Jedda*, which as previously discussed in Chapter Four, is a film about the cultural assimilation of Aboriginal people. As noted by Turcotte, Moffatt’s *Night Cries* explores the horrific effects of assimilation, by centring on the main character Jedda, and on her white adoptive mother Sarah McMann, but set forty years in the future:

The title is written in a traditional Gothic script which makes ironic the pointed subtitle: *A Rural Tragedy*. As with Patrick White’s work, Moffatt’s films make clear how the everyday, the commonplace, can be the stuff of Gothic. The domestic — the sound of the music box that is fractured by the crack of a whip, the evening meal scraped across a plate by the fractured hand of an elderly woman — is truly Gothic. The set is deliberately artificial, there is no dialogue, and the soundtrack is harsh and grating. McMann is enfeebled and crippled, a metaphor for white culture perhaps; Jedda is middle aged, impatient in her role as caretaker, and yet devastated too when her adoptive mother dies. In a spare, uncompromising film, Moffat at once reverses the viewer’s sense of the positive effects of assimilation, and brilliantly misuses the conventions of the Gothic to disorient and to make clear that the predatory monster — the Gothic terror — is white social policy (1998, 11).

Philippa Harvey’s heavily edited noise-scape, which foregrounds domestic sounds (e.g. galvanised iron, the creaking and banging of screen doors, the sound of kettles, etc.), ambient aural effects (e.g. textured wailing and weeping sounds and strange whistles and screams), helps to emphasise the film’s Gothic dimensions. Here, we should also acknowledge the use of music by the Aboriginal pop singer Jimmy Little. As noted by Meagan Morris, “Moffatt’s use of Jimmy Little in *Night Cries* is unsettling, even macabre, at times; he’s miming ‘Love Me Tender, Love Me True’ during the scene when the daughter is cracking the whip, and the mother is shuddering and sighing, with pain or pleasure, we can’t be sure” (2004, 7). Regarding this music, again one cannot but help think of the films of David Lynch, in particular *Blue Velvet*, which uses the same song combined with violent sinister themes with highly-accentuated sounds of a domestic environment.
The Great Australian Silence

One theme that emerges again and again in Australian Gothic fiction and landscape cinema is that of silence. In order to gain a better understanding of the importance and influence of this silence it is necessary to briefly consider the aural and psychological dimensions and traits of the outback. For many early settlers the outback was a bleak, eerie and dislocating place full of unfamiliar sounds including wildlife such as: laughing kookaburras, whipping whip birds, mimicking lyre birds, the green catbird (which has frequently been misconstrued as a baby crying), howling dingoes, buzzing flies and other insects, as well as the more demonic nocturnal sounds of possums growling, koalas mating, Tasmanian devils, fruit bats, gliders, other flying marsupials, and the densely orchestrated calls of cicadas and frogs. These aural atmospheres, for many, were unlike anything previously heard in Europe; they contributed to a settler mythology of landscape.

Ironically, the outback’s audible strangeness gave rise to the trope of the ‘Great Australian Silence’ (Belfrage 1994), an idea that is very important in *The Proposition*’s sound track as well as many other Australian Gothic film sound tracks. As Belfrage explains in her discussion on the topic, the silence trope built upon the *terra nullius* thesis, which contended that Australia was ‘uninhabited’ and ‘un-owned’, because it was inhabited by ‘unfamiliar’ people who had no written legal codes documenting land ownership. In a similar way, the Australian silence and stillness were evocative of the experience of displacement felt by early settlers and signified not so much an absence of sound, but rather the “presence of a silence coloured by unfamiliar sounds” (cited in Kibby 2005, 151). *Walkabout*, for example, achieves much of its Gothic tone by foregrounding idiosyncratic outback sounds. Many elongated shots of Australian wildlife — birds, lizards, insects, scorpions, kangaroos — are materialised at much higher than normal sound-effects volume readings. Similar examples are evident in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and other Gothic-style Australian films such as *Mad Dog Morgan, Fringe Dwellers* (Bruce Beresford 1986), *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *Wolf Creek 2* (Greg McLean 2013) and *The Proposition*. For example, one scene in *Walkabout* features a loud flight of white
cockatoos “streaming out shrieking like evil souls” — to use Marcus Clarke’s words (cited in Wilding, 2011) — across an expansive desertscape. In The Proposition this exaggeration of sound effects occurs most prominently in scenes that contain the buzzing of flies.

Contributing to the establishment of a repertoire of unfamiliar acoustic properties of the outback are sonic materialisations of elements such as water, heat and wind interacting with the design of natural and artificially constructed environments. Such aural manifestations might consist of blistering gales resonating over vast sand and scrub deserts, trees such as iron bark and spotted gums that stretch, creak and moan in hot weather, and when subject to fire explode due to the high oil content of their leaves; corrugated iron roofs that crackle when baked by the sweltering sun and also produce high-metallic frequencies when in contact with strong winds and rain; or vast stretches of fencing and telephone wires that fluctuate and vibrate at haunting resonances in wind. Indeed, many Australian Gothic film sound tracks capitalise on these haunting soundscapes. Consider, for example, Francois Tetaz’s score for Wolf Creek, which includes telegraph wire recordings by the Australian sound artist Alan Lamb. These recordings were created by capturing chaotic and unpredictable wind resonances via the placement of contact microphones at varying intervals along great expanses of abandoned telephone wires (Hayward and Minassian 2009, 238). In Wolf Creek, the recordings are implemented at different intensities throughout the film score, regardless of whether wires are visibly apparent in the film’s imagery. They not only convey a uniquely Australian sound, but their unsettling, metallic and fluctuating tones (which become more present as the film’s protagonists venture further inland) imply the landscape is active, observing, waiting. This idea is supported by occurrences such as the crater scene where the characters’ watches strangely stop (a reference to Picnic at Hanging Rock) and the final scene where Mick Taylor’s silhouette vanishes on a sun-drenched horizon. It is also echoed in the cinematography as director McLean notes:

In the first part of Wolf Creek, the landscape is depicted as though we are observing it; in the second part it’s observing us. The shots of the sun rising and setting to me are like eyes watching the characters going out of their minds, and not caring (Scott and Biron 2010, 316).
The concept of the Australian silence, loneliness, emptiness is also evocative on other levels, for example, the silencing of native languages and knowledge. Belfrage, for instance, argues that dialogue between the Europeans and Aboriginal people was rarely possible for there was no common language to speak or hear: “grievous silences were imposed as the Indigenous peoples were killed and removed and forbidden by law to speak their languages; a silencing of the sounds of Australian knowledge” (Belfrage 1994, par. 7). Picking up on Belfrage’s assessment, the Australian sound artist Jay-Dea Lopez elaborates on this loss of language in his online article “Silence, Colonisation, and the Australian Soundscape”:

As the colonial territory expanded the 500 Aboriginal language groups that had existed prior to 1788 were systematically silenced. English was imposed as the dominant language and along with it the cultural system in which to interpret the world. The introduction of reading and writing further devalued the Aboriginal cultures’ aural interpretations of the Australian landscape; Western society favouring the visual sense above all others. Today only 250 Aboriginal languages remain. This silencing has resulted in the loss of indigenous knowledge and ways of listening to the environment throughout Australia (2011, par. 2).

In The Proposition, similarly to Samson & Delilah, this silencing is explored through a general lack of dialogue and conversational exchange. In The Proposition, the silencing of native languages/culture can also be interpreted through the absence of both authentic and non-authentic indigenous-style music/instrumentation, as well as a restraint in ethereal, otherworldly and overly-saturated sound effects. Here, I note that The Proposition’s reliance on, or response to, this key trait of the Australian Gothic differs significantly from that of Rabbit-Proof Fence. The Proposition explores through sonic means the complexities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people. The film foregrounds the horror of the settlers and focuses on what Collins notes as the “unredeemed violence of retribution as the irrefutable truth of the frontier” (Collins 2008, 55). Rabbit-Proof Fence, on the other hand, could be interpreted as responding to the ‘great Australian silence’ or ‘emptiness’ in a different kind of way. Despite the concerns outlined in the previous chapter — and indeed to perhaps contradict some of my earlier observations — Rabbit-Proof Fence fills its sound track with various environmental and musical sounds. Such sounds symbolise Aboriginal songlines and oral traditions and as mentioned previously could be viewed
as a synthesis of the two opposed forces, some combination emerging from the conflict between coloniser and colonised — between world music and traditional Aboriginal music. Such an approach could only be made possible in light of landmark events such as Mabo and Bringing Them Home. For Belfrage, such events have played an important role in revoicing the landscape and Aboriginal culture: “just as native title has been recognised, knowledges and knowledge practices native to the land can also be restored” (Belfrage 1994, par. 56). In the following quote she expands on the potential of this healing process:

Healing from terra nullius, a silencing of the land and the Indigenous peoples, is a collective national process fuelled by collective political will. The land was neither ‘empty’ nor ‘silent’. Decolonisation in Australia must include hearing and recognition of Australian knowledge and knowledge practices... decolonisation in Australia can be facilitated by a more profound listening to Indigenous peoples’ spoken-aloud verbal texts (par. 56).

With these issues in mind, the sound tracks of contemporary Australian landscape cinema might therefore play a role in addressing the great silence bestowed upon Aboriginal people, their culture and the landscape (which to reiterate is the key trait of the Australian Gothic) — these sound track elements can perhaps also (as Belfrage argues) help the healing process.

Having established some key aural traits in Australian Gothic sound track culture, I turn to a detailed analysis of the variety of musical, verbal and sonic strategies used in the landscape film The Proposition. I look at how the film’s dark sonic style is a reflection of its chief architect Nick Cave, a self-proclaimed Goth who wrote the screenplay and composed the score. Next, consideration is given to how the sound track draws on scoring approaches relating to the anti-Western, a genre that relies heavily on landscape representation and shares many thematic similarities to that of the Gothic mode. In this section, I also link The Proposition’s sound track to an emerging Australian Gothic Western cinematic tradition. Having traced the sonic narrative that informs The Proposition, focus is then directed towards the aural construction of its other Gothic themes. But first, however, let us consider the film’s narrative and contextual background.
Case Study: *The Proposition* (Synopsis and Background)

The film is set in Winton, central Queensland, in the 1880s; the story revolves around the violent demise of the fictional Burns Gang (a family of Irish Bushrangers). After a violent shootout, recently arrived British policeman Captain Stanley (Ray Winstone) apprehends two brothers from the gang, Charlie (Guy Pearce) and Mikey (Richard Wilson). He presents the boys with a non-negotiable proposition: he offers to pardon them both providing Charlie locates and kills his older brother as well as ringleader Arthur (Danny Huston) within nine days. Arthur’s brutality and notoriety is mythologised in the film — he is a ghost, a learned man and a mad killer; he is wanted for the rape and murder of the Hoskins family; his hideout unnerves bounty hunters and Aboriginal trackers refuse to go there. Only Charlie knows the way in but if he deceives the captain then, by the terms of Stanley’s proposition, the youngest sibling Mickey will be hanged from the gallows on Christmas Day.

Financed by the UK Film Council, as well as a range of other production companies and organisations such as the Pacific Film and Television Commission, *The Proposition* constitutes an Australian-UK co-production. Similar to *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, the film also includes contributions by non-Australian film personnel, such as that of the French cinematographer Benoit Delhomi. The acclaimed musician and Australian icon Nick Cave wrote both the screenplay and score for the film. John Hillcoat, a long-time-friend of Nick Cave, who had established himself as a successful music video director for international acts such Depeche Mode, directed the film.

Released in Australian cinemas in 2005, *The Proposition* received generally favourable reviews. Jim Schembri, writing in Melbourne’s *The Age* newspaper, stated that *The Proposition* is “Easily one of the best Australian films in more than a decade and one of the most skillful Westerns ever” (2005, par.1). He goes on to call it “a startling, sometimes shocking evocation of Australia’s colonial adolescence that is as brutally compelling in its portrayal of frontier violence as it is in its honesty” (1).

Internationally *The Proposition* was also received well. Joe Morgenstern of
The Wall Street Journal, for instance, labelled the film as “a visionary tale of a fragile civilizing impulse crushed by family loyalty and a lust for revenge in the vast Outback of the late nineteenth century” (Morgenstern 2005, par. 11). Some reviews, however, were concerned with the film’s use of overt violence. While praising some aspects of The Proposition, the Australian film critic David Stratton noted that violence was “almost unwatchable” (Pomeranz and Stratton 2005). Somewhat more critical of the film and indeed its use of music was Paul Byrnes from the Sydney Morning Herald. Byrnes noted, “Hillcoat tries to make the film work with blood, death, degradation and loud music. In the end, it’s just too nihilistic and self-conscious to be convincing or involving” (2005, par, 11). Despite such criticisms, however, The Proposition’s musical score won several important awards on the 2005 awards circuit. Such accolades included Best Musical Score at the Australian Film Institute Awards, Best Score at the 2005 Inside Film Awards and Best Musical Score at the 2005 Film Critics Circle of Australia Awards. Having established some of the contextual background to the film, let us now consider the fundamental musical, aesthetic and thematic contribution by Nick Cave, an artist who has drawn heavily on Gothic themes throughout his career.

Gothic Cave

In an Australian context it is striking that the expressive and conceptual workings of the film music play such a key role in facilitating the main Gothic themes and tones throughout The Proposition. This is perhaps not so surprising considering Nick Cave’s Gothic origins and the degree of his input into the film’s assemblage. In addition to writing the screenplay, Cave collaborated with violinist Warren Ellis to develop a carefully-constructed sonic narrative. Under this partnership the soundtrack — which is made up of sixteen ballad-type musical segments that Cave describes as “soft chamber pieces, ghostly moodscapes and whispered laments” (Cave and Ellis 2005) — is placed at the forefront of the filmic text.

Cave’s and Ellis’ scoring approach extends well beyond this film. They collaborated in bands such as Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and Grinderman, and also in a number of other soundtracks to Western-style landscape films, including the
Gothic Western, *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (Andrew Dominik 2007). Their scoring approach lies in the synthesis of manipulated instrumentation and melodies, dissonant and electrified motifs, deep ominous drones, sound track counterpoint, and musical aesthetics that engage with folk imaginings and colonial subject matter. Rather than simply employing instruments, lyrics, musical themes in a conventional melodious fashion — for example, the wall to wall Irish-style jigs found in bushranger landscape films such as *Ned Kelly* (1970), the score stretches, contorts and abstracts its musical elements to reinforce the film’s dark revisionist themes. The score’s palette includes instruments such as: violin, mandolin, banjo, tambourine, accordion, guitars (both acoustic and electric), brush sticks on tom toms, snare and cymbals, kick drums, honky tonk-style pianos, and deeply masculine vocal lines. At times the instruments are conventionally played as in the case of the violins in ‘The Sad Violin’ theme; at times they are deliberately un-tuned, as in the case of the guitars and vocal line in ‘Happy Land’; at other times the instruments are treated with various filtering, looping and time-shifting devices, making it difficult to distinguish between the compositions themselves. For example, ‘Proposition 1’, ‘Proposition 2’ and ‘Proposition 3’ are all confined to the same key and feature similar loops of lamenting violin motifs against a flat drone. Other tracks such as *Moan Thing* and *Gun Thing* also demonstrate unorthodox instrumental techniques such as loud and deep bass lines that glissando right across the neck of the guitar and thus their frequency spectrum. As a by-product of this glissando technique we hear sliding fingers on the guitar’s fret board, scratching strings as well as feedback. In the composition ‘Moan Thing’ the discordant and tempered glissando sound accompanies both a night-time image of Charlie in a drunken stupor stumbling around on his horse in a landscape that cares little for his wellbeing and an image of Mikey in a prison cell. Both brothers look to the stars in the sky. As is the case in most film scores, dissonance and atonality in this scene signify the ‘other’, the monstrous and the condemned (Brophy 1998). Importantly, and as discussed in the previous chapter, dissonance and atonality also frequently accompany representations of Aboriginality, but perhaps however to the same effect — that is to say, the ‘other’, the monstrous and the condemned.

*The Proposition*’s distinctive musical style also clearly reflects Cave’s earlier
work: for example, his 1970s band The Birthday Party, which drew inspiration from Old Testament imagery and Gothic narrative themes such as the Anti-Christ, sin, curses and damnation. Many scenes throughout The Proposition contain musical dissonance and atonality which are reminiscent of The Birthday Party, for example, the scene where Arthur sits perched on a rock for an entire night staring insanely out at the full moon; this image includes a violin shifting in and out of different key signatures and ends a with a dissonant bowing tremolo effect. Furthermore, Cave himself draws a strong connection between the approaches his former bands took with the music on The Proposition’s sound track. With regard to the film’s screenplay, he notes: “I always heard it musically and I guess it’s written rhythmically as well” (Cave and Ellis 2005). However, he also stresses how the actual compositional process for the film was “emphatically different” from that of the records he made with previous bands, adding that while “some of the pieces grew from improvised accompaniment to big-screen projection, many also incorporated violin loops pre-recorded by Ellis at his home studio in France” (ibid.). Importantly, Cave and Ellis’ collaborative scoring work with its rich textures and evocative qualities has proven to not only service the needs of the characters and themes within their films but can also be appreciated independently from the film itself. Testament to this is the widespread release and success of White Lunar (2009) — a double disc album that contains several tracks from The Proposition, and The Assassination of Jesse James, as well as from three other films that include compositions by Cave and Ellis.

Adaptations

The manipulation of instrumentation and musical motif occurs not only in Cave and Ellis’ original compositions but also in some of the adapted compositions that feature throughout the film, for example, American hymns such as ‘Clean Hands, Dirty Hands’ and ‘There is a Happy Land’, patriotic British songs such as ‘Rule, Britannia’ and traditional Christmas songs such as ‘12 Days of Christmas’. Although these musical segments are loaded with cultural and historical affiliations, whereby the viewer’s prior experience or connection with the music leads him/her to connect with it in specific ways, their associations are complicated and deeply conflicted. ‘Rule Britannia’, for example, is sung both out of tune and out of time by the vile
drunken police officers shortly after they massacre a tribe of Aboriginal people. Rather than evoking an imperial, majestic British Empire, their rendition evokes the dregs of colonialism. An interesting counter example to this particular scene is the memorable sequence in the *Hayseeds* (Beaumont Smith and Raymond Longford 1933), which features a drunken and crude performance not of a song of the empire but the traditional anonymous Irish-Australian ballad “The Wild Colonial Boy” (Hannan 2013, 66). The way in which the song is positioned within the film and the way it contrasts with other pieces of music suggests a distrust of the ruling class and the British more broadly.

One adapted song, which is particularly interesting in regards to the Australian Gothic, is ‘Happy Land’, which accompanies the opening title sequence. The song features the lulling, somewhat creepy voice of a young boy accompanied by two slightly out-of-tune nylon-string guitars and a waverong accordion-type instrument that follows the vocal melody line. As the song progresses a weeping violin enters the musical space. The boy’s voice is sweet and pure in timbre, but flat in pitch as he sings the lyrics ‘There is a Happy Land far far away/Where saints in glory stand bright, bright as day’. While the song plays the *mise en scène* conjures up a slide of bleak archival-type photographic depictions of dusty and desolate frontier life. The photographs at first appear authentic to the period and include the famous image of the Kelly Gang’s Joe Byrne;72 lifeless positioned up against a wall after the siege at Glenrowan. However, as the sequence progresses, and well known actors such as Guy Pearce and David Gulpilil appear, it becomes apparent that some of the images are in fact stills from the film. This usage recalls the earlier discussion of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which also places such signposts directly into the film’s narrative — informing the perceiver of what is to come, but perhaps paradoxically also confusing them. The innocent tone and purity to the boy’s voice resonates over the images like broken hope. The lyrics’ references to God, their utopian sentiment, as well as their American frontier origins tonally contrast with the Gothic colonial subject matter. The words and the song title itself are a potent reminder of the sheer geographical and psychological distance that the old country (Britain) was for early settlers. Unlike those who migrated to the United States, a trip to Australia was indefinite, primarily

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72 This choice of photograph is curious because the name Byrne (which although is spelt differently), is pronounced the same as the bushranger characters in *The Proposition*. 

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because of the treacherous and potentially fatal six-month journey by ship.

The ‘Happy Land’ music in the opening title sequence contributes to the overall brooding mood of the world we are about to be plunged into and initiates some of film’s narrative themes, but its impure wavering timbre and imperfect tonal qualities have other meanings and connotations. This is perhaps most evident in the inclusion of audible breathing; it is not clear whether this sound is generated by the child (although unlikely as its rhythm and timing occurs out of sync with the singing) or by the performers of the other instrumental accompaniments. Whatever the case, these ambiguous noises, along with throat clearing, tape hiss, hums, scratching and obtrusive background sounds and so forth, are, in the recording industry, typically considered as undesirable spillage. Importantly, here the breathing fuses with the sweet sound of the child’s voice, giving him a very realistic, but also flawed quality. This intentional aesthetic (and it is intentional because it could just as well be removed through equalisation filtering) combined with the grainy diffuse imagery, creates a technically imperfect audiovisual temporality that in turn underscores the harsh and imperfect reality for many colonial Australians of this period. Moreover, like the aged and faded images that begin the film, the scratchy aged-sounding recording has parallels to the aged crumbling buildings, structures and landscapes the film depicts, all of which are key ingredients in Australian Gothic fiction. Following the sombre ‘Happy Land’ introduction title sequence, the film suddenly erupts into a loud, violent and deliberately bewildering scene that depicts the Burns Gang being fired upon by the police. The sound track cuts to diegetic sounds such as the bombardment of gunfire, screams and groans. This is succeeded by unsettling silence, when the proposition title is made. Instrumental variations of the song There is a Happy Land are used in later scenes to underscore the stereotypically ‘pompous’ local British aristocrat, Eden Fletcher (David Wenham), as well as imagery depicting lawful, clean, well-dressed Englishness.

One of the more conventionally adapted songs that appear in The Proposition’s sound track is the love ballad “Peggy Gordon”, which is used to enhance the film’s dark and melancholic tone. The song occurs when Mikey is repeatedly flogged in public display in front of the town folk. In another diegetic
space we encounter the beautiful, angelic and pitch-perfect singing of Samuel Stote (Arthur’s young and extremely sadistic Irish protégé), accompanied by the sound of a comforting crackling fire and the inclusion of dramatic orchestral strings. The emotionally-charged vocals coincide with a series of close-up shots of the lead characters and various perspective shots of the town folk. The camera purposefully focuses on the people within the community who happen to be of diverse racial and cultural descent. To begin with, the onlookers have an obvious appetite and curiosity for such retributive violence; but as Mikey is flogged to a pulp, and rain starts to pour, this curiosity soon turns into disgust and perhaps indifference, as some of the onlookers simply drift away (Collins 2008, 64). The singing continues and then climaxes with dramatic orchestral strings. Cave states in an interview that this scene is both “brutal” and “very sad” (Lazarus 2005).

As an intriguing aside, the aftermath of violence in this scene as depicted in the shots of faces, bodies and the landscape is, as noted by Collins “a matter of more than one temporality, one horizon, one kind of camera distance” (Collins 2008, 65). If this is the case, then what about the sound track? Could the sound track, and specifically this ballad, which functions not as a montage but rather a fluid and uncut piece of music, provide the glue and logic that connects these multiple temporalities?

This same ballad is used for similar effect and affects in a later scene, namely, the film’s final and horrific showdown at the Captain’s homestead, where Arthur demands the boy sing the beautiful song while he violently and sexually assaults the Captain’s wife, Martha. As is the case in the infamous rape scene accompanied by ‘Singin’ in the Rain’ (music by Nacio Herb Brown, lyrics by Arthur Freed 1929) in A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick 1971), in this scene, both the beautiful angelic melody and the lyrics, which tell a story of a man who is madly in love with a woman and how he longs to be with her, dramatically contrast with the violent and bleak tone of the events taking place — a kind of poetry of violence. In terms of Australian landscape (and indeed Gothic) cinema, several similar examples can be identified. Consider, for instance, an early scene in Walkabout where we hear Rod Stewart’s ‘Gasoline Alley’ as the father attempts to kill the children and then commits suicide. Or in the scene where we hear the ‘cheerful’ hospital music program playing when
the Aboriginal boy (David Gulpilil) is left behind, dead. A more recent, brash and perhaps clunky counter example can be found in the kangaroo scene in Wolf Creek 2 where Mick Taylor (John Jaret) — the sadistic murderer — is chasing a backpacker along a remote outback highway when his semi-trailer is suddenly swarmed by a mob of kangaroos. Throughout this scene we hear the feel-good song ‘The Lion Sleeps Tonight’ (popularised in 1961 by the doo wop group The Tokens), contrasting with the gruesome but almost comical imagery of the kangaroos being run over by the psychotic maniac.

While The Proposition’s score reflects Cave and Ellis’ distinctive experimental musical style, and also demonstrates new compositional techniques such as the manipulation of instrumentation and adapted song, it also draws influence from the anti-Western — a genre that as I explain shares many thematic similarities to Australian Gothic cinema and indeed Australian landscape cinema more broadly.

An anti-Western, a Gothic Western

The Proposition has been dubbed as an Australian Western (Kibby 2005). Director John Hillcoat, for instance, likens the film to many tales from the American Wild West, noting: “there is a primeval conflict between good and evil, with human nature pitted against itself as if on a blank slate” (Roddick 2006). Despite the broad thematic and stylistic links to the American Western, a more specific classification for the film might relate to its anti-Western qualities. After all, like the anti-Western, the associated Revisionist Western, and Spaghetti Western, The Proposition does not present what Stegner and colleagues (1993) call a “geography of hope”, but rather a ‘geography of terror’ and a reimagining of colonial frontier history. This terror is paralleled in the Australian Gothic where themes such as isolation, racial inequality, tales of sin, unforgiving landscapes and immigration to harsh desolate lands are brought to the forefront. More broadly, comparisons can be established through the way the anti-Western and the colonial-Gothic mode foreground a critique of society, values and aesthetics. We must also keep in mind that The Proposition was released at time of intense debate surrounding Australian history and in many ways reflects more about the time of the film’s production than the period in which it was set (Stadler
This heated debate is best illustrated in a speech by the then Prime Minister John Howard at the 2006 Australia Day. Howard used his speech to “berate postmodern approaches to historical truth” (Collins 2008, 55) — meanwhile, *The Proposition* was receiving critical and popular acclaim at the cinemas.

Importantly, a criticism of society, values, colonialism and history can be read not only in *The Proposition*’s narrative themes but also in the way the score reacts to mainstream classical styles and aesthetics — namely the conventional scoring approaches adopted in many American Westerns and Australian bushranger films. Examples of mainstream musical approaches can be located in the films of John Ford in the 1940s and ’50s and later films such as *Silverado* (Lawrence Kasdan 1985). These films employ Romantic scores that draw from the Classical Hollywood film music model characterised by a reliance on leitmotivs, an idealised focus on the individual, their transcendence over social and historical reality and a celebration of epic landscapes. We can locate parallels to such ideological scores in typical Australian period films, which foreground the ‘rural idyll’ and pastoral heroism of the outback. One example of such a film is the recent *Ned Kelly* (2003), which places lush consonant symphonic arrangements over majestic pastoral imagery. David Hirschfelder’s score for *Australia* signals characters and themes, provides formal and rhythmic continuity between shots, channels emotion and perhaps most importantly highlights the grandeur of the Australian landscape. Compositions such as ‘Return to Faraway Downs’ (which combine lush washes of strings, booming brass and big-ensemble percussion with the sounds of cattle mustering, horses crossing rivers and imagery of dusty tracks, ragged outcrops, expansive vistas) also evoke other cinematic clichés and ideologies. This audiovisual synthesis also recalls the orchestral cues that gave rise to the heroic landscapes found in Classical Hollywood Westerns such as John Ford’s *My Darling Clementine* (1946) and *Stagecoach* (1939).

*The Proposition*’s sound track at times subverts such consonant, essentialist and idealistic scores by emphasising the overlap between the film’s diegetic sonic.

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73 While Ford certainly drew heavily from this model of Classical Hollywood film music, he also integrated folk songs and church music (in particular protestant hymnody) directly into his films’ narratives. As Kalinak (2007) has observed, Ford used folk song as a way of constructing the geographical and ideological space of the American West.
textures with elements of the score such as noise, distortion and feedback. Such musical qualities can be associated with Gothic traits such as vulgarity, violence and incongruity (Pattison 1987). These aesthetics, which fall somewhere between Avant-rock and all out noise music, can be found throughout the film but are perhaps most obvious in scenes that feature moments of insanity and impending brutality. One example of this occurs when Charlie, of unsound mind, charges ferociously on horseback with the Burns Gang close behind — hoping to assist in saving Mikey from the gallows on Christmas Day. These events are superimposed over a steadily-increasing aural intensity, which includes galloping horse hooves, loud distorted guitar, screeching industrial noise and whispered husky demonic lyrics. This same aural combination accompanying imagery of the Burns Gang charge is echoed elsewhere in the film — for example, the scene when Arthur sets fire to his possessions and heads out with the gang to butcher the police officers at an outpost dwelling.

Historically speaking, The Proposition’s score is of course inaccurate to the period that the film depicts. The use of electrified distorted guitars invokes the Spaghetti Western — a style that “began with Ennio Morricone’s twangy guitar in A Fistful of Dollars (Sergio Leone 1964)” (Brophy 1997). This idea has been further developed through the more recent ground-breaking Gothic-tinged Western by Jim Jarmusch Dead Man (1995), which superimposes spontaneous, real-time electric guitar of Neil Young over bleak black and white images of the American wilderness. Although in an Australian period-film context the use of contemporary music is by no means a new phenomenon — take, for example, Picnic at Hanging Rock (as previously discussed) or Michael Nyman’s popular minimalist score for Jane Campion’s The Piano (also a colonial-Gothic film set in a remote location), there are very few period films that predate The Proposition, which push the boundaries and conventions of rock and folk music. As the following section demonstrates, such approaches are, however, becoming more frequent, especially with the emergence of an Australian Gothic Western genre.

To expand on the earlier discussion of musical anachronism in relation to Picnic at Hanging Rock in Chapter Three, similar musical approaches being used for
anti-Western and Gothic associated purposes can be found in a post-2000 Australian outback cinema context, for example, the scores for *The Tracker, Van Diemen’s Land* and *Lucky Country* (Kriv Stenders 2009). *The Tracker*, for instance, (which also won an Australian Film Institute award for its sound track) draws on aspects of rock and soul music — namely, the iconic Indigenous Australian artist Archie Roach, whose songs function as allegorical commentary on the horrific injustices and barbarism imposed on Aboriginal people in early twentieth century Australia. The musical assemblage throughout the film includes haunting gravelly vocals, strong drum rhythms, riffy electric guitar, gospel-type organ and deep baselines that gather in momentum. One scene in *The Tracker* that demonstrates this aesthetic occurs early in the film when the tracker and the party of white law enforcers storm a group of Aboriginal people. When this scene climaxes and the Aboriginal people are massacred, the music abruptly cuts out and we are left with the sound of gunshots and a painted image of the massacre taking place. The severity of the cut — that is, from electrified dramatic score to the sound of gunshots placed over an otherwise silent diegesis — combined with the motionless image, allows the perceiver to imagine just how these people were killed. The effect is poignant and unnerving.

The electrified and distorted score to the film *Van Diemen’s Land* further extends what Cave and Ellis achieved in *The Proposition*. Like *The Proposition* this film contains some of the starkest Gothic-inspired imagery on Australian celluloid, and also relies heavily on incongruous and excessively amplified electric guitars and violins that improvise around pentatonic modes and twelve-bar blues minor progressions. The music in the film intensifies the landscape’s atmospheric claustrophobia; a strange effect considering the entirely outdoor environmental setting. In the grim score, distortion underscores the horrific actions and incongruity at play, but also, like *The Proposition*, when combined with extra-diegetic narrative poetry it greatly enhances the impenetrable, dreamlike quality of the landscape imagery.

In all the above-mentioned films, discordant strikings of guitar and other instrumentation punctuate key moments, layered drones create atmosphere and unease, the music responds to the image in an impressionist free-form manner, the
score accentuates what the image alone does not tell us and what the characters in the film do not know. This, of course, transcends the tightly synched orchestral fare found in typical Australian period films set in the outback, such as *The Man From Snowy River* or indeed as I will explore in Chapter Seven the period accurate popular music score in *Red Dog*. Although such mainstream orchestral and popular music scores can frequently convey information to viewers beyond what the characters (can) perceive, their codified and rigidly structured form does have limitations.

**Poetry and Landscape**

Poetic callings from the landscape are not at all uncommon in Australian Gothic cinema. Take *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which begins with the ethereal words of American Gothic poet Edgar Alan Poe: “What we see and what we seem are but a dream, a dream within a dream”, placed over imagery of the ancient monolith in Mt Macedon, Victoria. In a similar fashion, *The Proposition* uses voice-over and diegetic poetry to heighten the film’s surreal tone. We see evidence of diegetic uses of poetry in the dialogue of two central characters, the psychopathic killer Arthur, and the eloquently racist bounty hunter Jelon Lamb (John Hurt). Both characters have an aesthetic appreciation of poetry, and quote lines from popular poets of the period such as George Burrow. However, other forms of verse and rhyme (written by Cave specifically for *The Proposition*) are also deployed in the film’s extra-diegetic score. Consider, for instance, the emblematic ‘Rider Song’ that begins when Charlie heads out into the formidable landscape. He is guided by melancholic words (spoken by Cave) that seem to emanate from the earth:

> ‘When?’ said the moon to the stars in the sky  
> ‘Soon’ said the wind that followed them all  
> ‘Who?’ said the cloud that started to cry  
> ‘Me’ said the rider as dry as a bone

The rhythmical and metaphorical verse recurs in various intensities throughout the film as aural interlude, sometimes spoken, sometimes sung, sometimes whispered; and, finally at the end it appears in a complete rendition with all the lyrics (Collins 2008, 66-67). Melancholic lines such as “‘Me’ said the rider as dry as a bone”
reference the lonely, sun-drenched state that Charlie is in whilst riding through the parched outback. This literal connection between words and imagery is further extended when Charlie (utterly dehydrated) rides past a cracked and dried-up creek bed and we hear the verse — “‘No’ said the river that refused to run”. As Collins has pointed out, this ‘rider’ motif acts as “an allegorical conversation between personified nature and violence” (66). However, in true outback-Gothic fashion it also blurs the distinction between what is real, what is a dream, what is a hallucination.

**Romanticism, Realism and Fresh Hell Sound Effects**

While realism and Romanticism have typically been divided by a rhetorically clear line in fiction, much writing produced in the Australian colony blended elements of each, and it is perhaps in this way that Australia began to map out a specifically local variant of the Gothic mode (Turcotte 1998, 3). *The Proposition* provides a grim take on both of these dimensions. In confronting Romanticism, the untamed dangerous environment and its stark picturesque qualities are brought to the forefront. *The Proposition* embodies the romantic alienation of such films as *Walkabout* or *Picnic at Hanging Rock* — in which the white people are helpless strangers, lost and wandering in a landscape of unknowable harshness (Byrnes 2005). In *The Proposition*, the theme of whites not being compatible with the Australian environment can be read through the various dialogue cues throughout the film, for example, when the bounty hunter Jelon Lamb states: “I have been to Russia, China the Congo, oh I have travelled among unknown people in lands beyond the seas but nothing, nothing could have prepared me for this god forsaken hole”; and when Captain Stanley says: “make no mistake Mr Burns I will civilise this land”.

The disruption of Romanticism can be further interpreted through the way *The Proposition*’s sound track creates those familiar symbolic and thematic opposites typically manifest in Australian landscape cinema (as explored in Chapter Three with regards to *Picnic at Hanging Rock*) such as ‘harsh savage land’ against ‘civilised English living’. The ‘harsh savage land’ narrative theme is manifest through sonic materialisations of incessant flies, insects, crows and other desert sounds, which perhaps more broadly symbolise themes such as heat, death and rot. In contrast,
narrative themes relating to civilisation can be located through the sounds of fine china, cutlery, church bells, horse and carriages and other ways in which Stanley and Martha attempt to cultivate their environment. Thus, much of the film is entrenched in the task of placing sonic and visual markers of European culture in the vast, contoured, deeply ambivalent Australian landscape. *The Proposition* is heavily concerned with capturing the strangeness and absurdity of these spatial relationships through the nature/culture polarity.

Perhaps a more prominent element in the film is the effect of realism. Following the advice of historians and Indigenous Australian consultants the filmmakers sought to accurately represent the period, the location and the characters that inhabited it — a feat rarely seen in Australian cinema. As Hillcoat notes: “There was a conscious decision to try and be realistic, not gratuitous” (Roddick 2006, par. 14).

The realism can be read in depictions of Aboriginal characters, who are either aligned with or pitted against the various migrant populations. This can be found in varying degrees in characters such as: Jacko (David Gulpilil), an Aboriginal tracker who works for Stanley; Toby (Rodney Boschman), Stanley’s man servant; Two Bob (Tom E. Lewis), an Aboriginal outlaw who rides with the Burns Gang and who eventually slits Jacko’s throat calling him “a traitorous dog”; Queenie (Leah Purcell) Arthur’s half-caste mistress who tends to Charlie’s wounds; and other supporting characters such as the chained group of Aboriginal people who are apprehended and brought down from the hills. Importantly, the complexity manifest in the film’s Aboriginal characters is rarely seen in Australian cinema.

Benoit Delhomme’s cinematography — which is captured entirely on location — also heightens a sense of realism through close-up shots of leathery wind-swept faces, yellow rotting teeth and sweat-drenched clothes. In a similar fashion the sound effects track is used to significantly boost the grim realism at play. The size of the film’s sound department, which consists of more than twenty contributors including foley artists, location recorders, mixers and editors, is perhaps testament to the careful
consideration and detail directed towards accurately representing the actions and events that take place.

In an early scene following the capture of the two Burns brothers this idea is especially apparent. The scene starts by Captain Stanley striking Mikey with his pistol; a loud thud sound helps to materialise this image. Here it is worth mentioning that the filmmakers stressed that the violence needed to be chaotic, sudden and sporadic because that is how violence was in the real world, and “nation building was founded on violence” (Hillcoat, Cave and Pearce 2005). Following this action Mikey then groans and whimpers, we hear blood gurgling from his lip, sweat dripping from his brow and flies buzzing around occupying the full panoramic scope of the Dolby surround sound system. Hot winds resonate on the curved sheets of corrugated iron, foley sounds such as clothes rustling, and the wiping of sweat and blood from the pistol’s handle — are brought to the forefront of the mix and add to the overall grittiness of the scene. “What’s happening Charlie”, Mikey says quivering, “It’s alright Mikey, it’s all right”, Charlie replies in a thick Irish accent. At this point Captain Stanley walks to the window, looks out to a fractured mirage-image of an Aboriginal tracker (David Gulpilil) and a group of officers who appear to be digging graves. The heat emanating from this depiction is uncomfortably visceral. A high metallic noise evokes the sun’s beaming rays. The flies persist and the sound of shovels hitting dirt crescendo. “Australia, what fresh hell is this”, utters Captain Stanley in a thick rugged cockney accent. A similar amplified effect is echoed the moment when Martha is punched in the face and the blood drips from her nose and chin.

Conclusion

Despite the common outback terror trait apparent in many Australian landscape films, the Gothic is not a term that is instantly recognisable. As Thomas has pointed out, “it is a category that stretches across the spectrum of Australian Cinema and is thought to be more of a style, and even a critical apparatus, than an identifiable genre” (2005). While The Proposition is no exception, drawing as it does from a range of thematic and stylistic influences, its sound track can in many ways be read as
a map of a distinctive Australian Gothic style and tradition (both literary and cinematic). This can be perceived through the manner in which the sound track foregrounds the violence, oddness and melancholy of the outback, through various dialogue exchanges, and a visceral, palpable, immersive sound-effects track. The film extends colonial landscape tropes such as the ‘great Australian silence’, and reinforces the dislocation that both the colonisers and Aboriginal populations felt in the colonial period through sparse dialogue, suppression of vocalisation, the highlighting of the idiosyncratic Australian soundscape and the tampering with and manipulation of song.

*The Proposition* contains a poetic, dark lyrical tone, both in its narrative dialogue and also through a highly stylised and painterly audiovisual synthesis. It demonstrates as well new compositional approaches and signals an emerging Australian Gothic western landscape sound-track tradition; a tradition that challenges established perceptions of Australian cultural history and memory. Furthermore, through the synthesis of score, sound, and dialogue *The Proposition* destabilises a tradition of Australian period landscape films that feature the landscape as an ‘awesome opponent’ (Gibson 1983) and that foreground the heroisms of the outback through pitch-perfect, tightly-synched orchestral fare. The colonial Australia depicted in *The Proposition* is not one that poses opportunity, prosperity and happiness — it is an environment simply to survive in. Significantly, this idea manifests through aural means — through a sound track that as Cave has noted was conceived well before the film script itself, a sound track that contains what Cave describes as moments of “intense violence” and “long, lyrical, quiet sadness” (Cave and Ellis 2005).

In the following chapter, I focus on a film sound track positioned as the polar opposite to that of *The Proposition*, namely, the sound track of *Australia*. While this latter film deals with the politics of land and the effects of colonisation, it also re-establishes a key theme in Australian landscape cinema, namely that of nostalgia. This chapter also features a survey of nostalgia as manifested through the originally composed and pre-existing scores of Australian landscape cinema.
Chapter Six: Soundscapes of Nostalgia and Homage in *Australia*

*It is time to see our own landscapes, hear our own voices and dream our own dreams.* (Philip Adams 1969).

In showing how the sound track is central to the projection of nostalgia in contemporary Australian landscape cinema, this chapter focuses specifically on Baz Luhrmann’s 2008 epic *Australia*. The film features familiar characters and archetypes and takes place in a distinctive era and location (i.e. the Northern Territory just before and during World War Two). In contrast to films such as *The Proposition* and *Samson & Delilah*, *Australia* is representative of a resurgence of works that idealise the Australian landscape and Australian history. While *Australia*’s sound track reinforces this favourable depiction of the past, it also directly engages in its particular way with the history wars debate by exploring issues such as the histories of racism on the northern frontier (including Government-sanctioned assimilation policies). The film, I will note, also employs sound and music on behalf of other cultural, social, ideological and aesthetic strategies.

To frame this area of interest, let us first examine key nostalgia themes and their appropriation in a wide variety of Australian films, looking specifically at how landscape and nostalgia are inextricably connected. To this end, I provide in addition a series of background snippets of films that are relevant to the time-period of *Australia* but also function as a general (national) film history that contextualises the concept of nostalgia. I then focus on the two main forms of film music that convey nostalgia, namely, originally composed Romantic orchestral score and pre-existing popular music. Drawing on the work of Caryl Flinn, I explore the utopian and nostalgic functions of the orchestral film score, its aesthetic traits and its use of structural devices such as leitmotivs and repetition, relating this specifically to Australian landscape cinema. This discussion is followed by a focus on pre-existing popular music scores, which typically reinforce familiar Australian archetypes and themes and are also used to evoke nostalgia for a past era or one’s own youth. This section contextualises the following case study within a broad canon of Australian landscape nostalgia film sound tracks and in particular the film *Red Dog*. 
The second section of this chapter examines the projection of nostalgia through a case study of *Australia*’s sound track. *Australia*’s sound and music provides a fruitful template for exploring this issue because while it features an overly sentimental and heroic musical depiction of the outback and further extends many of the musical nostalgia themes raised in prior analyses of Australian landscape cinema, it also seeks to confront problems relating to Aboriginal-settler relations, racism and cultural misrepresentation. In order to explore this area of interest, I first provide some background context on the film. I begin with a discussion of the film’s narrative and its contentious release. I then outline the various contrasting problems relating to issues such as Aboriginal representation and the overly sentimental visual and musical depiction of landscape and its characters, as well as the somewhat contradictory faithfulness to realism evident in the film’s sound effects track. It is argued that *Australia* draws from a canon of pre-existing sonic and musical material, which contains a variety of popular culture references and associations in circulation. I suggest that the film can be read as a homage to Australian cinematic and musical culture, and that there is also a deliberate blurring of historical reference. I focus on the film’s various musical components including its commissioning of high-profile Australian and international pop stars and musicians, as well as its various appropriations of the cinematic song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’. The final part of the chapter looks at *Australia*’s use of pre-existing classical music and raises the question of whether or not this music is used to convey a sense of longing for the old country, namely, Europe and specifically Britain. More broadly this chapter argues that while *Australia*’s sound track reinforces many of the previously established themes, aesthetics and narratives, it also, conversely, demonstrates alternative sonic expressions of landscape and nostalgia in Australian cinema.

**Nostalgia and Australian Landscape Cinema**

The term ‘nostalgia’ can take on a variety of meanings in a cultural, social and cinematic context. Let us begin however with Morris Holbrook and Robert Schindler’s definition of nostalgia:

A preference (general liking, positive attitude or favourable effect) towards experiences associated with objects (people, places or things) that were more
common (popular, fashionable or widely circulated) when one was younger (in early adulthood, in adolescence, in childhood or even before birth) (1991, 330).

The phenomenon of nostalgia manifests through the senses: sound, sight, smell, taste, touch — for example, the scent of blossoms in the springtime, the shrilling of cicadas in the summer heat or the melody of a pop song that was well-loved in one’s formative years. Such personal stimulation may consciously or unconsciously conjure up past experiences that can have a profound emotional impact on the subject.\(^{74}\)

Nostalgia can also function on collective levels relating to cultural identity, representation, history and landscape. For instance, nostalgia can be interpreted as a rhetorical response that provides a modernist sense of certainty and stability, a comforting notion in a time of confusion about cultural goals (Aden 1999, 43). As Davis notes, “the nostalgic evocation of some past state of affairs always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties, or uncertainties” (1979, 34). In the midst of this change returning to a time and place we know reaffirms a sense of who we are by reminding us of where we were. Alternatively, when our recent histories are painful, we can return to a favourable past to regain our bearings (Aden 1999, 43).

The cultural production of nostalgia plays an important role in a settled country such as Australia, which contains a colonial history marked by frequent violence, economic recession and hardship, as well as atrocities and land dispossession with respect to the Indigenous Australian population. To deal with moments of national emotion or anxiety (this could mean a war or a contemporary debate surrounding an issue such as native title or the stolen generations), Australian cinema, art, music and literature have often drawn on the landscape and, in particular, the bush for comfort, reassurance and identity formation. Consider, for instance, the 1890s economic recession, which coincided with cultural nationalism and a move towards Federation — where the colonies were united into the Commonwealth of Australia (Collins and Davis 2004, 95). In this period, a large amount of literature, art, music and theatre engaged in a search for belonging and a distinctive Australian style. The poetry of Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson and the art of the Heidelberg

\(^{74}\) The impulse to remember one’s past and often youth has also inspired great works of musical, artistic and literary traditions — consider, for instance, John Lennon and Paul McCartney’s famous pop song ‘Yesterday’ (1965).
School demonstrate a nurturing of nostalgia for the bush and outback and a romanticisation of figures and archetypes such as the swagman, bushman and drover. The manifestation of the ‘bush legend’ in the works of these artists and writers also catered to an Australian population that even then mostly lived in cities but viewed the landscape in nostalgic terms; contrasting the beauty, serenity and nobility of the bush with the squalor, corruption and disorientation of the city (Shirley 2011). Take, for instance, Banjo Patterson’s poem ‘Clancy of the Overflow’, which immortalised the bush, the drover and the old way life:

In my wild erratic fancy visions come to me of Clancy
Gone a-droving ‘down the Cooper’ where the Western drovers go
As the stock are slowly stringing, Clancy rides behind them singing
For the drover’s life has pleasures that the townsfolk never know

A continuation of this mythmaking activity (i.e. romantic archetypes, nostalgia for the bush and distrust of the city) features in Australian cinema spanning back to the early twentieth century. Films of the silent era such as The Drover’s Sweetheart, The Squatter’s Son (E.J. Cole 1911) and The Breaking of the Drought showcase rural settings filled with Anglo farmers, herds of sheep and endless fields of wheat, typifying the notion of the bush being more wholesome than the city. In The Breaking of the Drought, for instance, the symbolism of outback-versus-city is located in the farming family, the Galloways, who are depicted as staunch, honourable and stoic when confronted with the drought that sees a bank take possession of their sheep property (Shirley 2011, par 20). Cinema of the early sound period often also conveys the country’s vast open space and the adventure and opportunity in the lives of early pioneers. Think of the opening sequence to the ‘Bushland Symphony’ in Ken G. Hall’s film On Our Selection, which comprises a series of shots of the bush and sounds of distinctive Australian birdsong. Hall’s motivation was to create “a rural mythology” (Zielinski 2007, 137). Here we should also consider the opening scene in The Squatter’s Daughter (also directed by Hall) which presents “a celebratory montage of thousands of sheep swarming across an Australian landscape” (Shirley 2011, par, 10) and then cuts to an interior shot of a bustling woolshed filled with

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75 Already by 1891 seventy per cent of Australia’s 3.2 million people lived in cities and suburbs (Shirley 2011, par. 13).
shearers, wool classers and rouseabouts. This scene, which draws likely influence from Tom Roberts’ famous painting ‘Shearing the Rams’ from 1890 also features the typical imported sounds of European culture as imposed on the Australian landscape (e.g. sheep baaing, kelpie dogs barking, farmers whistling, shearers’ mechanical cutters and combs running through wool, horses, etc.). Similar elongated shearing scenes feature in several other Australian films, most notably, Ken Hannam’s Sunday Too Far Away, which centres on the lives of shearers on a sheep station in rural Australia in the 1950s.

Since the 1970s renaissance of Australian filmmaking, nostalgic evocations and imaginings of the past have continued to play an important role, providing the required escapism for a society confronted with a range of anxieties regarding where Australia fits in the world historically and contemporarily. We see a rehashing of familiar archetypes such as the Stockman in The Man from Snowy River, the Digger in Gallipoli, the romanticised Bushman in Crocodile Dundee, the stoic farmer in Dad and Dave: On Our Selection (George Whaley 1995), the bushranger in Ned Kelly, the Aussie battler in The Dish, the laconic miner in Red Dog and the Drover in Australia. In box office terms, these are also the films that rank among the most popular Australian cinema of all time (Screen Australia 2016b). Indeed, of the top ten highest grossing Australian films, four are period films set in eras considered to be significant and exciting times in Australia’s economic and cultural development and seven of the top ten films take place in the outback or bush. These films, as Stadler notes:


76 Similar scenes and settings feature in other significant films — for instance, On Our Selection (Raymond Longford 1920), The Pioneers (Franklyn Barrett 1916) and Heritage (Charles Chauvel 1935).

77 As demonstrated throughout this thesis, there are, of course, several counter-narratives — for instance, The Cars that Ate Paris and Wake in Fright.
Importantly, pertinent examples include sound tracks that assist in conveying and exploring the relevant cultural themes and representations, including the nostalgic representation of the outback and its iconic figures.

Strangely, however, as the next section examines, there is little detailed scholarly reference to the sonic and musical dimensions of Australian nostalgia landscape cinema. This lack of attention is surprising because the sound track is a vital component in the conveying of nostalgia. We must therefore ask the question: how do these sound tracks convey nostalgia? In terms of film music, Australian landscape nostalgia cinema relies upon three modes of score. These are originally composed orchestral score and pre-existing popular music and also — as will be examined in detail in the case study — European Classical music.

The Orchestral Film Score

It is in using remembered and familiar tunes and sometimes orchestral “grandeur” to support the spectacular cinematic images of the Australian landscape that Australian film music can often transport perceivers back to a kind of idealised past or an alternative place. Historically, many Western feature films employ lush symphonic score, drawing on nineteenth century Romanticism and its melodies, timbres, rhythms, textures, narrative and structural devices and emotional intensity. Citing Flinn (1992), O'Shaughnessy suggests that these scores “contain a ‘utopian function’ and nostalgic drive that is especially suited to mainstream cinema” (2004, 86). Such a score can provide a sense of something better — it can convey an impression of “perfection and integrity” in an otherwise (allegedly) imperfect time (86). Early Australian examples of such orchestral scores include Bush Christmas (Ralph Smart 1947) where the children find tracks of the horse thieves and then follow in pursuit into the Blue Mountain Ranges. Highlighting this joyful portrayal of youth and adventure in this scene is the non-diegetic narration (e.g. “all that day the children followed those tracks through the wild mountain country”), but also the German-born composer Sydney John Kay’s symphonic score. As the children ride off on horseback we are presented with a sweeping string section punctuated by harp plucks and played in a major key. The music provides a “heroic and playful air to the
children’s exploits” (Byrnes n.d.) and is typical of Kay’s style, which (in his own words) abides by three cardinal rules for writing background music: “it must be descriptive, follow faithfully the emotions sought after in the script, and be heard but not overheard” (Mann 1949). This last rule recalls Gorbman’s foundational work *Unheard Melodies*, which explores the narrative functions of music in the Classical Hollywood period and argues that such scores of this period are relegated to viewer’s sensory background — the “area least susceptible to rigorous judgement and most susceptible to affective manipulation” (1987, 12).

A more poignant and explicit example of longing and nostalgia is conveyed through the orchestral score in the final scene of *Walkabout*. In this scene, we encounter a businessman (John Illingsworth) who arrives home as his wife (Jenny Agutter) prepares dinner. While he embraces her and speaks about his day at the office, she remembers the utopian scene where the three children (i.e. herself, her brother and the Aboriginal boy) play and swim naked in a deep pool in the outback. Accompanying this idealised flashback sequence are the sounds of water splashing, birds chirping and British composer John Barry’s sweeping romantic score. The music features an emotive string section that complements the film’s utopian resonances. The audiovisual synthesis in the scene resonates with the familiar ‘lost child’ theme discussed elsewhere in thesis, but also the theme of lost (idealised) cultures. Emphasising this notion is that the Aboriginal boy dies while the two white children survive their journey through the outback, but also that the lush orchestral score gradually outweighs (in volume and presence) the sounds of Australian fauna, flora and Aboriginal culture. Throughout the film, the theme of lost culture is contrasted with the theme of stifling modernity and this is evident through the way the abrupt sounds of progress and development (e.g. cars, city noise and the boy’s battery-powered radio, which provides the children with a crucial link to the civilised world) are increasingly juxtaposed to imagery of the landscape.

As was typical of several Australian films produced between 1945 and the early 1970s and funded by foreign film studios, the composers Kay and Barry are both non-
This is significant because inevitably they imposed their own styles and cultural influences on the Australian films. Barry’s music, for instance, draws heavily from the British classical music tradition (especially its choral elements) but also specific British songs, for example, the ‘Cock Robin’ theme which “takes a traditional English nursery rhyme and gives it a full choral treatment” (O’Shaughnessy 2004, 85).

As with *Bush Christmas*, *Walkabout* and many other Australian landscape nostalgia films, the structural and narrative devices and aesthetics of the orchestral score are used to foreground a relationship between characters and place; in particular, the characters’ longing or sense of belonging to a given location, landscape or environment. Music that evokes and signifies these relationships typically unfolds through particular leitmotivs, musical phrases or melodic lines that link characters to a special place. These leitmotivs that delve into the personal realms of the emotive and intangible are evidenced in the ‘Main Theme’ from *The Man from Snowy River* and the ‘Never Never’ theme from Peter Best’s score for *Crocodile Dundee*. This ‘Never Never’ theme, for instance, fuses lush, spacious consonances, drawn-out reverberant flute gestures and bedding strings, which signify and cue in Mick Dundee’s sense of belonging within, and longing for, the rugged Australian outback, regardless of where he is at that particular time. For example, in an early scene in *Crocodile Dundee* 2 featuring Mick and Sue in New York, the cue is introduced at precisely the same time that Mick mentions to Sue that he misses his home — the outback.

Importantly, in the above examples, repetition is significant. The more times we experience the music in conjunction with the characters and their constant longing for a particular place the more stated and evident the signification becomes. O’Shaughnessy talks about this very notion in his assessment of *Walkabout*’s score:

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78 As evidenced in Hannan’s research, non-Australian composers of this period included: John Ireland, John Greenwood, Ralph Ronald Whelan, John Addison, Matyas Seiber, Kenneth V. Jones, Benjamin Frankel, and Edwin Astley and John Barry, as well as prominent American composers such as Sol Kaplan, Alfred Newman, Ernest Gold, and Dimitri Tiomkin and French composers Georges Auric, Michel Emer, and Henri Croila and German composers such as Sydney John Kay (2008, 1).
79 In the New Zealand production *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson 2001), Howard Shore’s hobbit/shire theme performs a similar function. This musical theme first appears on fiddle, then whistle and finally in full orchestra “suggesting a longing for their (the Hobbits’) homeland — the wholesome shire” (Mathijs 2006, 308).
We enjoy hearing music we already know as we can anticipate what is coming. However, repetition is also pleasurable because hearing the music takes us back to the past, to the times we first heard the music — there is thus a built-in nostalgia factor when we listen to music that we already know. In films it is common to repeat the main theme several times — this is because we will enjoy it more as we become familiar with it, but also to take us back to the moments when we heard it previously (2004, 85).

Here it is acknowledged that the repetition of such scores, especially symphonic scores, can also have the reverse effect. Such an effect typically features in films that are overscored or where there is an imbalance between sound and image. In such cases the audience can become weary of the score, which may increase the more times they hear it.

Flinn asserts that psychoanalytic approaches to music explore the way that “Music contains both the notion of reunion and the reminder of an eternally lost union” (1992, 63). O’Shaughnessy connects this idea to the final piece of music in *Walkabout*, noting it is common for such films to “end with a reprise of the central orchestral theme… For listeners, this is an expected payoff, but one which already has an element of loss since we have now reached the end of the film: it is over” (O’Shaughnessy 2004, 85). As I explore in the following case study, *Australia* relies on these familiar film music codes and leitmotivs. However, unlike the other orchestral examples in the films *The Man from Snowy River*, *Crocodile Dundee* or the previously discussed scene in *Walkabout*, the film does not conclude on its central originally composed orchestral theme. Instead, *Australia* ends with a precomposed piece of music not previously used in the film, namely, Elgar’s ‘Nimrod’ from the *Enigma Variations*.

Turning from the orchestral score and its nostalgic elements, let us now look at another discrete component of the Australian nostalgia film, namely, the popular music (and, in particular, rock ‘n’ roll) sound track. This type of score typically anchors a film to a given period (often a post-1950s setting) that audiences may have experienced. Such a sound track can also facilitate an audience response whereby perceivers can interpret the musical/sonic signifiers against their own cultural
knowledge in such a way that ‘can’ — but does not necessarily — create a nostalgia effect.

**Remembering One’s Youth Through Popular Music**

Unlike the narrative film music of the Classical Hollywood period, which as Gorbman argued in *Unheard Melodies* (1987) was supposed to elicit an emotional response in the perceiver without calling attention to itself, period-specific popular music is intended to be ‘actively heard’. Such music typically relies on prior associations and cultural and personal experience that the perceiver may have with the music. Audiences are likely to engage with well-known popular music tracks as they have already forged a link or prior connection with the artist, the song, or at the very least the musical style, outside the film context. Kassabian terms these relationships as ‘affiliating identifications’ (2001, 3). With such a temporal association in mind, filmmakers, directors, music supervisors and composers choose songs that were broadcast and circulated in the same period and same location that their films depict and that audiences are likely to recognise. Such a strategy can intensify nostalgia and reinforce the film’s status “as memorable by engaging viewers in shared pleasures of reminiscence” (Cook 2010, 154). Nostalgic bonding is especially prevalent if the perceiver’s personal interaction with the music first occurred during a “critical period of preference formation in the vicinity of age twenty (give or take a few years in either direction), thus creating a lifelong preference for that object” (Holbrook and Schindler 2003, 109). It is often the case that directors choose songs that have had frequent airplay on ‘golden oldies’ radio stations and elsewhere in the public domain, and that cater to Baby Boomers and Generation X. These demographics are, of course, significant on account of their size alone. These generations have also now started to reach an age where “nostalgia begins to matter in a ‘Big Way’” (Holbrook and Schindler 1991, par. 5). On these grounds, one might surmise that the presence of nostalgic pop songs in cinema and indeed modern society is increasing.

Many Australian nostalgia landscape films include popular music scores that are not only emblematic of youth culture but also foreground familiar storylines that centre on a momentous occasion, a historical event or a cultural moment that
audiences might have experienced, thus creating a sense of generational belonging. Consider *The Sapphires*, for instance, which centres around four Indigenous Australian women (Jessica Mauboy, Deborah Mailman, Shari Sebbens and Miranda Tapsell) from Cummeragunja (a mission settlement on the banks of the Murray River), who are discovered by a talent scout (Chris O’Dowd), and form a music group and travel to Vietnam in 1968 to sing for troops during the war. In this film, classic Motown hits recapture the sound of the Vietnam War period but also draw parallels between the American civil rights movement and social developments for Aboriginal rights in Australia. *The Sapphires’* Motown score manages to both convey its anti-prejudice message but still evoke feel-good nostalgia. Similarly, *The Dish*, which provides an account of how the Parkes (a town in rural NSW) Observatory relayed via live television the first steps on the moon during the Apollo 11 mission in 1969, showcases an eclectic range of late-1960’s rock and pop music (e.g. Steppenwolf, Oliver and The Moody Blues). This music is used to achieve what Collins describes as a “tongue in cheek style of populist nostalgia for a benignly bucolic Australia” (2004, 29). The music’s “life-affirming rhythms, intoxicating melodies and many apropos lyrical references to flight or firmament” (Green 2000, par. 3) also attempt to recreate the hysteria and atmosphere of the space race in that era, and in particular Australia’s important role in the worldwide broadcast of the event. The synthesis of the high-energy rock music and imagery of advanced technology (e.g. satellites and so forth), suggests a further cultural achievement, namely, a moment when 1960s Australia, a relatively small country somewhat limited in its global outreach, finally enters the international stage.

Likewise, *Red Dog* (which tells the story of how a red kelpie that wandered the Pilbara looking for his master entered the hearts of a mining community in Australia’s North West during the 1960s and ’70s), fuses pub rock, country music, pop music and a composed score with frequent referencing of kitsch and retro fashion and items such as stubby shorts, summer barbeques and beer. The pub rock score is used not only to situate the action within a 1970s timeframe and particular sociocultural milieu but also to emphasise an idealised take on the vibe and atmosphere of outback Australia at the beginning of the mining boom (arguably a vital time in Australia’s economic prosperity). Consider, for instance, the scene where
we hear the 1973 Australian country music song ‘Way Out West’ (The Dingoes). The song follows the mining employee Jocko’s (Rohan Nichol) inspiring speech regarding the resurrecting of a statue in honour of Red Dog, and which blasts out of the pub jukebox:

Way out west where the rain don’t fall
Got a job with the company digging for ore
Just to make some change
Living and a working on the land

Here we have an example where the song’s lyrics (sung in full chorus by the various punters) speak to and comment on the particulars of the film’s narrative elements — namely, working as a miner in the outback in the 1970s. The fact that the characters within the film are singing the lyrics also reminds the viewer that the characters are consumers of the music.

Perhaps more significantly, the song demonstrates the characters’ cultural and geographical sense of place in the outback. As the song progresses, and the camera focuses on the different characters — many of whom appear to be of diverse racial and cultural descent — the sense of place and belonging is further established. The music conveys a sense of communal unity — the idea that no matter who you are or where you come from, out there in the Pilbara, you are all the same. The fact that the characters are of different cultural and ethnic descent resonates with issues such as multiculturalism and also the offshore worker debates surrounding mining in Australia. That said, this is, in fact, the only point in the film that features an Indigenous Australian character. The lack of Aboriginal representation is indeed puzzling because Aboriginal people are not only the Pilbara’s original inhabitants they also constituted a significant portion of the Pilbara mining populace of the 1970s and ’80s (Holcomb 2005; Taylor 2006).

80 The founding of a statue in honour of Red Dog can be linked to the famous song ‘Dog on Tuckerbox’, which was inspired by a nineteenth century bullock driver’s poem that told the story of a dog who loyally waits for a master that never returns, until he eventually dies by the tuckerbox. This poem became a legend unto itself and was celebrated by the famous bronze statue of the dog just outside of Gundagai on the Hume highway (NSW).
81 The lyrics of the Dingoes’ song were changed for the film from “Got a job with the company/Drilling for oil” to “Digging for ore”. See liner notes on the film’s sound track and analysis in Imagined Landscapes (Stadler 2015).
Thus, rather than confronting racial and dispossession issues and instead of allowing Aboriginal characters to occupy roles within the film, *Red Dog* chooses to leave them out and in fact leave out the presence of Aboriginal culture and music altogether. Comparatively, *Australia* portrays a past and remote outback setting that features Aboriginal characters who occupy speaking roles (Burnside 2011, 1) and are central to the film’s narrative. *Australia* also includes a strong presence of Aboriginal culture conveyed through sound effects, music and instrumentation, which as I come to explore in the case study suggest an aural depiction of Aboriginal Dreamtime.

**Shaping the Perceiver, Reinforcing Archetypes**

Although much of the popular music used in the Australian nostalgia landscape cinema provides a social flashback targeting a Baby Boomer and Generation X audience — for younger people who have no contact with the music outside of the movie, then the music (in their minds) can become the property of the film itself. That is to say, the use of ‘Classical Gas’ in *The Dish* or ‘Shouting Out Love’ in *The Sapphires* and ABBA in *Muriel’s Wedding* (P. J. Hogan 1994), and so on, can take on a meaning of its own — meaning that relates intrinsically to the film and is independent of its original historical context. Furthermore, if the music has a profound impact on the perceiver, then the filmmaker has provided a lasting connection to the music that the perceiver may keep for the rest of his or her life.

However, while some films such as Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge* (2001), *The Great Gatsby* (2013) and *Australia* (as I will explain) re-appropriate popular music in new and inventive ways, many Australian nostalgia films rely on clichéd usages, typically accompanying archetypal characters and settings. Thus, these recirculated and rehashed significations and identities result in the propelling of an ultimately conservative use of the sound track. Here, I want to return to *Red Dog* and

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82 *Muriel’s Wedding* features the songs of the Swedish pop group ABBA. The ABBA songs function as a significant plot device and assist in characterisation and performance. Nonetheless, because ABBA wrote and performed their music and received widespread popularity in Australia during the 1970s and ‘80s, the group is intrinsically tied to those decades. Perhaps the inclusion of the music in these films may relate to the notion that ABBA enjoyed a ‘nostalgia revival’ during the 1990s with the release of ABBA’s 1992 compilation album *Gold: Greatest Hits*, which was gaining traction around the same period. ABBA also features in *The Adventures Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, which was released in the same year as *Muriel’s Wedding*. 
consider two scenes to illustrate how these connections between pre-existing pop music and archetypal characters and landscapes reinforce nostalgic and familiar versions of Australian identity.

*Red Dog*’s soundtrack is comprised primarily of Australian pub rock — a genre that was developed in the white, working-class suburban Australian pubs of the 1970s through pioneering acts such as Billy Thorpe and The Aztecs, Stevie Wright and Daddy Cool. As Stratton notes, there are at least two traits that characterise Australian pub rock music:

One is its historical lack of an African-American aesthetic footprint…The other is the importance of the ballad tradition to the form that Australian rock music has taken most obviously in the 1970s and 1980s pub rock era; if you like, the important connection between Slim Dusty and Cold Chisel (2005, 81).

In combination with a specifically Australian vernacular dialogue, pub rock helps to reinforce aurally many of the subtexts that are central to the ‘bloke culture’ of the 1970s that the film represents — ‘mateship’, egalitarianism, anti-elitism. Performing this function in *Red Dog* is Rose Tattoo’s ‘Bound for Glory’ (1991). This track stirs up sentiment when the townsfolk rally in solidarity in support of Red, against the “hostile threats of the cantankerous, dog-hating couple The Cribbages” (Blagrove 2013, 21). The Cribbages (Paul Blackwell and Jacqy Phillips), who run the local caravan park, ‘deny an existence of a community in Dampier’ (21). ‘Bound for Glory’ with its working-class origins, fighting spirit and gravelly vocals combats such elitism. It also helps to consolidate the community and further emphasis the fundamental anti-authoritarian, anti-elitist values of the Australian male, which have also been the staples to which white Australia has built its myths of belonging and nostalgia for the landscape.

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83 As the 1970s progressed, pub rock became increasingly heavier in tone with acts such as AC/DC, Cold Chisel, The Angels and Rose Tattoo. Pub rock was further defined through highly successful ground-breaking acts such as, Icehouse, Australian Crawl, Men at Work, Midnight Oil and INXS. However, these last groups mark a shift into new stylistic and thematic territory such as the incorporation of synthesisers and electronic drums and the showcasing of environmental awareness, Aboriginal land rights and other political issues (see McFarlane 1999).
However, while pub rock in *Red Dog* responds to representations of the hypermasculine Australian male and a defiantly masculine pub culture where sexual prowess, larrikinism, willingness to fight, fondness for alcohol and heterosexuality (e.g. in the film, most of the mine workers find love, marriage and even children) reigns supreme, there is a revealing moment where this archetype and cliché is contradicted. As Blagrove explains:

…subversion of the tough, masculine working-class Australian stereotype is seen in Peeto [John Batchelor], the burly, bearded bloke from Melbourne. This plays out in a scene in which Peeto is exposed as having a penchant for relaxing in his donga (a portable housing unit, typically for rural workers) with some knitting while listening to jaunty jazz records (22).

Indeed, this idea is made explicit when Petto’s mates Vanno (Arthur Angel) and Jocko (Rohan Nichol) unexpectedly visit and the aural mood quickly changes. Petto switches the music from the jazz standard ‘Jeepers Creepers’ (music by Harry Warren, lyrics by Johnny Mercer, performed by Louis Armstrong in 1938) with its whimsical jovial tone and warm vinyl crackle to the heavily distorted angular riffs and falsetto vocals of the pub rock classic ‘Shadow Boxer’ (The Angels 1978). He hides his knitting needles, grabs a beer, lowers his voice, grunts and walks to the door. Here, jazz highlights the sensitive but also effeminate aspects of Petto’s personality, whereas the pub rock song emphasises the amplified version of masculinity that he boasts to his friends.84 As an interesting aside, the portrayal of Petto can, somewhat contradictorily, be thought of as the recycling of similar archetypes that arise in other Australian films and television series. Think of the television series *Sea Change* (1998-2000) where the otherwise totally straight, bordering on the prosaic, Sergeant Gray (Bruce Alexander) has a weakness for, and real insights into, jazz. Thus, nostalgia films often utilise period-specific pop songs and rock ‘n’ roll songs to reinforce stereotypical versions of Australian identity. And, if we are presented with audiovisual representations that fall stylistically outside of these archetypes, it is usually for comical or ironical effect. While these nostalgic encounters with the past

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84 While ‘Jeepers Creepers’ was written as a jovial romance piece it has developed a reputation for creepiness due to its use in Victor Salva’s 2001 horror film *Jeepers Creepers* in which the song plays each time a demon known as ‘The Creeper’ appears. Such an association might, therefore, suggest a creepiness in the way Petto subverts the masculine stereotype. Could the preference for staying at home and knitting rather than listening to pub rock, drinking and socialising with his mates render Petto as the ‘other’?
should be perceived as imaginary, they still wield influence, as suggested by the common box office success of Australian nostalgia films.

Having established some key musical traits in Australian nostalgia landscape cinema, I will now analyse the variety of musical and sonic strategies that promote nostalgia in *Australia*, but also consider the sound track’s treatment of the landscape and Australia’s colonial history — a treatment that in some ways runs counter to typical Australian nostalgia narratives and to the motif of colonial history explored in the chapter on *The Proposition*.

**Case Study: Australia (Synopsis and Background)**

Set in the period leading up to the bombing of Darwin by the Japanese in the Second World War, *Australia* follows the journey of Lady Ashley (Nicole Kidman), a wealthy British aristocrat who arrives in the Northern Territory to persuade her husband to sell the failing cattle station, Faraway Downs. To ensure the safety of Lady Ashley on her journey through the rugged and dangerous outback, her husband arranges for a drover (Hugh Jackman) to escort her. However, before Ashley and the Drover arrive at the cattle station, Ashley’s husband is murdered, and the authorities tell her (incorrectly) it is the work of King George (David Gulpilil), an Aboriginal shaman and elder. Meanwhile, a sinister stockman Neil Fletcher (David Wenham), employed by a ruthless cattle baron Carney (Bryan Brown), threatens the property and Ashley’s chance at a lucrative stock deal with the Australian army. To save the ranch Ashley decides to drive her herd of cattle hundreds of miles across the Never Never back to Darwin — with the help of the Drover (with whom she begins a love affair) and Nullah (Brandon Walters), an Aboriginal boy (with whom she develops a maternal bond). Ashley is devastated when attendants from an institution for so-called ‘half-caste’ children take Nullah away to Mission Island. Ashley pleads with the Northern Territory’s fictional Chief Protector Dr Barker to let her keep Nullah, saying he would be happier and more stable living with her on the cattle station than in the ‘half-castes’ home. Ironically, her argument is, in fact, consistent with what the real-life authorities of the time thought — and with what in many cases happened at the

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85 The Never Never is a name used in Australian literature and film to describe a remote and vast area of the Australian outback in, for instance, Jeannie Gunn’s *We of the Never Never* (1927).
time (Windschuttle 2010, 10). In the final credits of the film “Luhrmann links his story to the present period. A line of text informs the audience of the parliamentary apology to the stolen generations given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in February 2008” (11) — some ten years after the issue was brought to public attention through the Australian Government’s Bringing Them Home report.

On its release in 2008, Australia garnered criticism from all sides of the political spectrum. Reviews by prominent neo-conservatives such as Bolt (2008) and the former federal treasurer Peter Costello (2008) raised issues regarding the historical accuracy of the film’s events and depictions, including those relating to the stolen generation, and the Japanese bombing and invasion of Darwin. Some of this commentary also raised concerns regarding the sheer cost of Australia (which broke all previous records for Australian film production) and indeed the cost to the taxpayer who had been obliged to support the film. The controversial columnist Andrew Bolt stated that at an estimated budget of $130 million with $80 million funded by the taxpayer “never have Australian taxpayers wasted so much on a single work of art” (2008, par. 2). Bolt also drew attention to the support the film received from Tourism Australia, which produced a large-budget promotional campaign. The purpose of this campaign, which built upon the film’s characters, storyline and landscape imagery, was to “reveal to the world Australia’s romantic transformational and adventurous personality” and to make domestic viewers “excited, passionate and proud, motivating them to want to explore their country more” (cited in Mitchell and Stadler 2010, 27). The intention of the campaign, of course, also resonates with the notion that the rural is somehow more wholesome, pure and adventurous than the city, which as noted earlier in this chapter is a theme fundamental to the construction of Australian identity.

The film was also controversial among liberal-left commentators. Take, for instance, the heated correspondence between the Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton and influential feminist Germaine Greer. Langton, who acted as the film’s Aboriginal adviser, argued that Australia helps to address the typical problems regarding Aboriginal representations and narratives in Australian cinema. She commended the film, noting that Luhrmann brings a “fresh, bold approach to familiar
tales and presents a radical departure from conventional outback lore” (Langton 2008, par. 10). In another article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Langton applauds the optimism, romance, and humour of *Australia*, noting that such a representation of Aboriginal issues and culture is good for reconciliation (Langton 2008b). Langton goes on to say that *Australia* seeks to overcome “the guilt complex that poisons our national debate” (par. 2). Greer, on the other hand, who responded directly to Langton’s endorsement, pointed out the film’s various historical inconsistencies and faults and noted that many of its representations were kitsch, clichéd and overly sentimental. The film romanticised its Aboriginal characters and the northern frontier (Greer 2008). Other articles such as those by Buckmaster (2008) and Naglazas (2008) echoed these sentiments. Greer, it should be said, was criticising the film on grounds that Langton herself drew attention to in her influential work regarding the politics of representation, published during the 1990s, and complaining about the romanticisation of Australia’s colonial past and the racial codification of Aboriginal people (as discussed in Chapter Two).

In many ways *Australia*’s sound track can be interpreted as a litmus test of these conflicts. As the following sections suggest the sound effects contain elements of tokenism, but they also feature a sense of realism in the depiction of the natural environment. Moreover, the musical score, at times, even helps to convey the film’s liberal sentiments. This includes a musical acknowledgement of what Langton describes as “Aboriginal characters living side by side other Australians who are of British, Chinese and European descent in a complicated caste system during the period leading up to and amid World War II in the Top End of the Northern Territory” (Langton 2008). 86

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86 The characters also differ to twentieth century Australian films that depict Aboriginal people as condemned, alcoholics, fringe dwellers that are dependent on white society and policies (e.g. *The Fringe Dwellers*). *Australia* presents more dynamic and positive characters, with speaking roles, and who are empowered and in charge of their own destiny.
Artificial Visuals, Sonic Realism and Aural Dreaming

In terms of landscape representation, while Australia’s visual depiction of the outback is largely generated through CGI (Computer Generated Imagery), the sound effects track provides a seemingly realistic depiction of landscape. Indeed, Australia is one of the few Australian films to utilise audio recordings of the natural environment collected from the original film shooting locations (Candusso 2012, 132). While dialogue and foley are typically recorded on site, environmental sound effects, and atmospheres are added in post-production. According to Australia’s sound editor and sound designer, Damian Candusso, aside from the cattle and horse sounds (which were recorded in NSW), the recordings were retraced and gathered from many of the original locations in the film during the post-production phase, thus creating a soundscape that was “true to the landscape of Australia” (2012, 132). In quoting the film’s supervising sound editor and sound designer Wayne Pashley, Candusso notes:

So often in big productions like this, the sound design guys just reach for ‘Bush Atmosphere Number Three’ [library effect] or whatever, and everything comes out sounding the same. Also, what you hear is usually completely unrelated to the environment you see on the screen. We wanted this to be different. Australia is, I think, the first movie that sounds correct, that gives a true sense of how this country sounds (132).

Notably, in an Australian cinematic context, the environmental recordings were also the first to be captured on site in surround sound, thus providing a fresh sense of spatial realism. Candusso clarifies that Pashley used a Soundfield ST350 ambisonic microphone and was able to “record in surround sound an entire three-dimensional landscape on location” (130). He goes on to explain that this was unique because “until recently, creating film surround sound was only possible during the

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87 As noted by Jane Stadler, in Australia “the natural rock formations in the Bungle Bungles (Purnululu National Park, Western Australia) were augmented with computer generated images of a ravine to stage a cattle stampede and footage of Bowen, Queensland was made to resemble Darwin in the 1940s with the addition of a digital escarpment rising from the foreshore where historic buildings and purpose-built sets were filmed” (2014, 24).

88 The notion of authenticity and realism is, however, a questionable assertion regarding film sound. After all, for sound effects to achieve a ‘realistic’ quality they require processing, manipulation and placement. What I am emphasising is the fact that the sound effects recordings were gathered from the same locations where the filming took place. Therefore, the audio recordings correspond geographically with the visual imagery.
post-production process, but this particular technology allowed for a pristine, natural recording of the environment. These recordings in surround were then decoded, edited and used as beds for the atmosphere tracks of the film” (130).

Thus, while many of the film’s visual representations of the landscape were heavily treated through CGI, and while the film was criticised by commentators such as Greer (2008) for its allegedly inaccurate, kitsch and tokenistic representations of Australian characters and themes, the aural depiction of landscape achieves a degree of realism regarding geographical specificity. Indeed, the capturing of surround sound on location in itself presents a watershed moment in Australian sound track production.

This effort is also intriguing when one considers other elements of the sound track, which are decidedly excessive and move freely among the film’s temporal settings — past, present and future. Nonetheless, the perceived realism of the film’s environmental sound effects and the perceived lack of realism in many of the film’s visual depictions of landscape prompts an observation regarding longing and nostalgia for the outback. Both forms of representation engage in recreating a past setting/period for a present-day audience and in showcasing the outback to the world and luring domestic and foreign tourists (as per the wish of Tourism Australia), but do so in very different ways. The stylised visual panoramas of sunsets and desertsescapes, images of herds of cattle and so on are digitally rendered by animators in the studio, whereas the timeless sounds of nature recordings are allowed to remain relatively unaltered within the sound mix.

Importantly, however, the sound effects are heavily filtered and treated in the scenes featuring Aboriginal characters. Indeed as Candusso explains, in these scenes (which include the scene where Daisy drowns, the King George scenes and the sequences that are driven by Nullah’s memory narrative) the raw sound effects are manipulated through pitch shift and various reverberation and echoing techniques. In fact, it could be argued that it is the sound design and its continual fluid flow of environmental sounds — whereby one sound morphs into another — that most explicitly evokes the Dreaming associated with the Aboriginal characters (2012, 131).
Such re-appropriations and transformations of sounds are evident in the film’s opening scene. Here, we encounter an ambient rather than musical landscape. The atmosphere comprises the sounds of winds, animals, and insects that intertwine with an emotional journey across an environmental backdrop that transforms, as the audience witnesses the death of Lord Ashley via a spear in the back, from above ground and into the muffled and mysterious, murky underwater (131). While underwater we hear drones, whale song, Indigenous Australian tribal chants and a mouth organ, which acts as Nullah’s dreaming motif throughout the film (ibid.). Slow-motion images show King George telling Nullah “to ‘make yourself invisible’ as the white fellas are herding cattle across the river onto the Carney property” (ibid.).

This audiovisuality suggests the characters (i.e. Nullah and King George) are part of the land — a notion that contrasts with the concept of terra nullius over which white settlement (whom Carney is symbolic of) claimed ownership. More problematic instances of this ‘Dreaming’ are evident elsewhere within Australia’s sound track and specifically within its score which at times simultaneously ‘others’ the Aboriginal characters through well-established musical codes — many of which were discussed in Chapter Four in relation to Rabbit-Proof Fence. Consider, for instance, the scene where we hear the ethereal and mysterious clap sticks, didgeridoo and a synthesised string motif combined with the tribal and ceremonial chants of King George resonating across the vast outback plains from a hill top. As with countless prior cinematic examples of Aboriginal characters placed within the Australian landscape (e.g. Marbuck in Jedda) the atonal elements of the score combined with the reverberant and mysterious Aboriginal instrumentation renders King George as ancient, primaeval, as the ‘other’. Further emphasising this ‘othering’ are the nostalgic and idealised scenes that feature white characters within the landscape and melodious, rich and highly orchestrated musical accompaniment — a projection that as I now briefly consider reinforces the nostalgic musical codes outlined earlier in this chapter’s opening survey. Following this, I then examine other aspects of Australia’s eclectic and heavily produced score, its nostalgic qualities and how these qualities engage with the film’s historical and colonial dimensions.
Longing for the Landscape Through Orchestral Score

In highlighting the heroism of the Australian landscape, David Hirschfelder’s originally-composed romantic orchestral score utilises a musical vocabulary which first and foremost initiates mood and atmosphere, channels emotion and highlights the heroism of the Australian landscape. This score combines with cinematography showcasing endless and expansive vistas and craggy outcrops. The audiovisual synthesis invokes the scenic grandeur of John Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956) and *Rio Grande* (1950).

As with the previously mentioned films *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Man from Snowy River*, Australia’s lush orchestral pieces, which include ‘Faraway Downs’ and ‘England to Oz’, also help to establish the sense of longing for the landscape. An example of this imbrication of orchestral score, nostalgia and landscape features in the scene where Drover and Lady Ashley, after attending the ball, look out across the Darwin Bay to the incoming storm. Here, the Faraway Downs motif is introduced; first the single flute melodic line and then strings that provide a variety of timbre and enrich the lyrical melody and its irregular phrases. The sounds of thunder, the lapping of water, and summer rain, supplement the distant strains of strings. Ashley asks Drover about the property Faraway Downs and what it is like in the wet season. Drover responds saying “it is beautiful, creeks turn into rivers, dry plains turn into lakes”. The two then discuss their future; the possibility of moving back to the homestead and managing the property — the impression is given of a tremendous sense of longing the two characters share. Following this interaction, we are presented with a montage of images including a slow-motion dance sequence in the rain, an aggressive confrontation between Carney and Fletcher, a love scene between Ashley and Drover and then aerial bird’s-eye imagery that traverses the Australian landscape. Ravines, wet plains, wild flowers, migratory birds, waterfalls and so forth, are all suggestive of the arrival of the wet season and the characters’ return home to Faraway Downs — a place that by this time in the film has garnered an almost mythical quality. These aerial images correspond with full-bodied orchestral accompaniment,

89 These works draw from the Romantic idiom re-popularised by John Williams in the mid-1970s with his scores for the successful *Star Wars* Trilogy — a franchise that has also attracted substantial attention regarding nostalgia. See, for instance Jameson (1985).
including a choral element that rises in volume and climaxes on the imagery of Drover, Nullah and Ashley frolicking in a watering hole. At this point we also encounter the musical motif from “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” (taken from the film The Wizard of Oz [Victor Flemming 1939]), which as I will discuss features in multiple manifestations, conveying nostalgia for past cinematic texts, and following the line of Langton, engages positively with the film’s representations of Aboriginality.

**Homage and Eclecticism**

In his famous work *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson argues the nostalgia film can represent the past in immediate hyper-stylised ways; for example, the 1930s in Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974) or the 1960s in *American Graffiti* (George Lucas 1973). These works approach the past through connotation — the glossiness of the image, and cultural markers such as fashion, speech, pop images, sounds and music. Jameson describes this phenomenon as the “waning of historicity” whereby the history of aesthetics replaces actual history (19-20). The revival of the culture industry of certain styles, fashions and indeed music of a past era, as described by Jameson is a particularly relevant concept in a film such as *Australia*. Luhrmann’s film integrates narrative, theme and characterisation into the musical score, and features a pastiche of hyper-stylised performances, original compositions, covers and medleys and synchronises them to a story set during World War Two in the outback. As with his other films, Luhrmann uses nostalgic musical reference as a self-conscious, deliberate and built in feature, the film also enables the audience to engage with its intertextuality (Coyle 2013, 27) — intertextuality is of course fundamental to film music nostalgia. Such a hyperbolic approach to score is echoed in Luhrmann’s other productions such as *Moulin Rouge*, which is set in a turn-of-the-century Parisian cabaret and adopts a ‘mash-up’ of popular songs (funk, soul, hip-hop, electronica, dance, tango, rock, pop, Bollywood

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90 In this montage, we also encounter imagery of an aggressive dispute between Fletcher and Carney, as well as the motif from the cinematic song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’.
91 Strictly Ballroom also uses pre-existing disco, electro and rock music in relation to aspects of narrative, theme, characterisation and performance. Consider, for example, the Australian disco classic ‘Love is in The Air’ (John Paul Young), which accompanies the memorable dance sequence.
92 For further discussion on this term see Hayward (2012 and 2013).
music) from the 1950s to the 1990s. In its excessive referencing of different genres, styles, icons, films and so on, Luhrmann’s approach celebrates pop culture and often the fusion of international pop culture with local Australian popular culture. After all, what are we to make of Richard Roxburgh’s rendition of Madonna’s ‘Like a Virgin’? Similarly, The Great Gatsby is a film that deploys contemporary hip-hop and rap music as a way of providing modern audiences “a gateway into the electric atmosphere of the roaring 20s” (Dunks 2013, 101), drawing a connection between the hip-hop age and the jazz age. Luhrmann states in an interview that he wanted his viewers “to feel the impact of modern-day music the way Fitzgerald did for the readers of his novel at the time of its publication” (Luhrmann and Lohenfeld 2014). However, while Luhrmann may use such music as a contemporary gateway into past-set narratives, at times the past is represented so selectively through music there is a deliberate blurring of all contemporary or specific historical reference. Australia, for instance, features music that spans not only decades (as is the case with other contemporary landscape nostalgia films such as Red Dog, The Sapphires and The Dish) but more than a century. Indeed, while we can identify pieces of music that are relatively period-accurate93 such as the interpolated jazz standards ‘Begin the Beguine (Cole Porter 1938)’, ‘Sing Sing Sing (With a Swing)’ (Louis Prima 1936), and ‘Brazil’ (Ary Barroso 1939),94 and early popular music track ‘Whoa Babe’ by the African American group The Ink Spots,95 we can also locate pieces that both predate and postdate the film’s period. These musical anachronisms include classical pieces such as Elgar’s ‘Nimrod’ and John Tavener’s ‘Funeral Canticle’ (2005) and the many musical commissions by contemporary artists, which I now briefly discuss.

Undoubtedly the most high-profile of Australia’s commissions was that of the internationally-recognised pop star Elton John, who performed the track ‘The Drover’s Ballad’. As with Angela Little’s ‘By the Boab Tree’ (which celebrates the

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93 Other examples of period-accurate music include tracks such as ‘Lonesome Train’ (written by Larry Clinton and performed by Woodie Guthrie) and excerpts from well-known film scores such as Bernard Herrmann’s ‘Time Passage’ (From Robert Stevenson’s 1943 film Jane Eyre).
94 These jazz pieces were rearranged, reorchestrated and re-recorded specifically for the context of the film and performed by the Ralph Pyle Big Band with clarinet solos by Andy Firth.
95 The Ink Spots played a significant role in developing African American music and, in fact, were one of the first African American groups to gain widespread appreciation among white audiences while holding tightly to their identity and speaking out about racial discrimination. In fact, they pre-dated the American civil rights movement by two decades (Goldberg 1998). This is of course relevant because it draws a link between the racial oppression of African Americans and Aboriginal Australians in the twentieth century.
iconic tree that features prominently throughout the film),

Luhrmann wrote the lyrics for the ‘The Drover’s Ballad’ and assisted in its musical arrangement. This input demonstrates the director’s separate role as a producer of the film’s songs. ‘The Drover’s Ballad’ contains lyrics that directly comment on themes within the film. The song’s lyrics and title can also be interpreted as homage to the iconic figure of the drover featured in the much-loved literature of Henry Lawson (e.g. ‘The Ballad of the Drover’) and Banjo Patterson (e.g. ‘The Man from Snowy River’ and ‘Clancy of the Overflow’). The song, however, differs on a basic level from the film’s other musical cues (e.g. ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’), which feature directly within the narrative action. ‘The Drover’s Ballad’ does not link directly to the film’s mise en scène; rather it features in its full version in the final closing credits. The fact that this piece was performed by Elton John and functions as a stand-alone conventionally-structured pop song that can be enjoyed independently from the film on radio, and music and video airplay, suggests a partial economic imperative. Concerning record sales, Elton John ranks among the highest selling international pop stars of the 1970s and indeed of all time. Recognition by those who grew up with Elton John’s music, however, also helps to secure a bond between consumer and product while arousing a feeling of generational belonging. It must be noted, however, that this type of commissioned pop song is a dominant practice in contemporary cinema.

As with Luhrmann’s other films (e.g. Moulin Rouge and The Great Gatsby), Australia’s soundtrack album played an important role in the film’s promotion. A substantial financial return at the box office and through the extra promotional material such as the soundtrack album was of particular importance to Australia, considering the enormous investment of taxpayer money through government agencies such as Screen Australia and Tourism Australia. Concerning ‘The Drover’s Ballad’, however, the question remains of why Luhrmann commissioned a British pop singer to perform a song about an Australian icon in a film titled and supposedly about Australia? Were there no iconic Australian singers who could have made the film more appealing and more nostalgic and also contributed to record sales? As explored shortly, similar ties to British musical traditions are evident in the film’s use of pre-existing classical music.

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96 This song won an Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Award in 2009.
In using Elton John, Luhrmann might have been attempting to target the recognition of an older (international) audience. *Australia* also, however, includes commissions by contemporary local acts such as the alternative folk rock group The John Butler Trio, who received widespread airplay on commercial and independent radio during and leading up to 2008. The John Butler Trio’s music in *Australia*, which includes the bluegrass songs ‘All Night Long’ and ‘Never Know’, falls within the film’s marketing strategies (at least on a domestic level) while simultaneously seeking to entice younger audiences. Indeed, this is a salient example of how *Australia* differs to many other Australian nostalgia films (although is perhaps not so unique in an international context). That is to say, Luhrmann deploys a device identified by Kassabian, namely, using “today’s music in a yesterday-set film to connect today’s youth with yesterday’s youth” ([Kassabian 2001](#)), as it is being represented on screen.

Many of *Australia*’s other commissions can be interpreted as an homage to and nostalgia for Australian popular verse, bush ballads, popular music, musical icons and instrumentation. Consider, for instance, the use of Ted Egan’s Fosters carton tapping which is seamlessly mixed into the film — or Rolf Harris’ vocals, which combine with bluegrass fiddle and accompany the humorous scene where Ashley demonstrates her cattle mustering skills. Rolf Harris also contributes his iconic and distinctive wobbleboard to the film.

*Australia* features, as well, several nostalgic references (both in diegetic and non-diegetic forms) to popular verse and song of the colonial period — for example, the waltz version of the ballad ‘Wild Colonial Boy’ (the tune occurring briefly in the ball scene that takes place at government house). Also featured is a rendition of Banjo Patterson’s ‘Waltzing Matilda’ (a song often referred to as the unofficial Australian National Anthem) by Ophelia of The Spirits. The use of ‘Waltzing Matilda’, though

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97 As noted by Papson, *Australia* can also be interpreted as a homage to Australian cinema: “Luhrmann highlights the constructed nature of Australian history and mythology” and “re-assembles it out of fragments from past cinematic texts” (Papson 2011, par. 17). Examples of visual and narrative allusions include the crossing of the Never Never (*We of the Never Never* [Igor Auzins, 1982]); the idyllic family swimming in the waterhole (*Walkabout*); the dog’s name is Jedda (*Jedda*), and many others (Papson 2011, par. 18).
seemingly a cliché, is a strategic choice and cleverly handled. It stands out as one of Australia’s most widely known bush ballads and has also helped forge a sense of self-image and identity for Australians — for instance, its frequent use at sporting events and other important occasions. In Australia, however, ‘Waltzing Matilda’ takes on a very different, exotic mood and tone. The heavily orchestrated piece adopts an eclectic array of instruments. These include military-style snare drums that drive the rhythm, thumping timpani, Irish flutes, violins and bagpipe drones. In this adaption of the song we do not hear the lyrics (although it is hard not to think of them). Rather, we are presented with a Celtic-tinged vocal rendering of the melody, thus reinforcing the song’s folkloric, quasi-ancient and exotic atmosphere. The uplifting beat and tone of Little’s rendition, it should also be said, contrasts with the sobering tone of the song’s narrative, namely, a swagman committing suicide.

Much of the criticism relating to Australia focuses on the film’s tokenistic qualities. Whether this criticism is fair, is perhaps beside the point. Australia wholeheartedly embraces such an aesthetic to the point that the film does not so much convey nostalgia for a particular period — one’s youth, and so forth — but can be read as an homage to Australian cinema, music and popular culture more generally. Indeed, the film could simply be read as an exercise in referencing earlier forms. At times, however, elements of this homage take on more complex meanings and associations as is evident in the use of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ from The Wizard of Oz.

**Somewhere Over the Rainbow in a Far-Off Land Called Oz**

A non-Australian musical cinematic reference that features in multiple manifestations, conveying nostalgia for past cinematic texts and engaging directly with the film’s representations of Aboriginality, is that of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ from the film The Wizard of Oz. Like The Wizard of Oz, Australia also takes place in a land called Oz; Ashley correlates to Dorothy (Judy Garland); King George is symbolic of the Wizard; the tornado represents the Wet season; and the song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ invokes the quest of the film’s main protagonists Ashley, Drover and Nullah to find their ‘somewhere over the rainbow’; a
‘somewhere’ that ultimately resides in that ubiquitous character of Australian cinema, the landscape. The frequent emergence of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, The Wizard of Oz and other cinematic musical reference such as excerpts from Bernard Herrmann’s scores for Jane Eyre and Anna and the King of Siam (John Cromwell 1946) reinforces Luhrmann’s obvious passion and nostalgia for cinema history.98

The song features frequently throughout the film, arising in lyrical form and commenting on the film’s narrative action or as musical phrasing integrated into the broader motifs of Hirschfelder’s score. The song is simple, striking and easily identifiable, and the lyrics can be interpreted on a range of metaphorical and symbolic levels. At times, ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ features as incidental music and conveys nostalgia that a particular character feels about another character. We can see evidence of this unequivocal signalling of nostalgia in the scene where Magarri (David Ngoombujarra) whistles the first seven notes of the melody of the song while sitting with Drover around an outback campfire. Magarri’s rendition of the melody, combined with the crackle of the fire and the wind rustling through kangaroo grass remind Drover of the time he spent with his beloved Ashley at the homestead of Faraway Downs. He tells Magarri to stop as the sensorial experience proves too powerful. This example echoes other instances throughout the history of cinema — reminding us, for example, of Casablanca (Michael Curtiz 1942) where Rick (Humphrey Bogart) upbraids Sam (Dooley Wilson) for playing the song ‘As Time Goes By’, because it evokes sad memories of Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman).

Other examples where the song is directly integrated into the film’s mise en scène include the scene where Flynn (Jack Thompson) learns the piece on his harmonica at the campfire one night while serenading the cattle herd; and where Ashley soothes Nullah after the death of his mother. Importantly, in this second scene, after Ashley sings the first lines of the song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, Nullah associates the words with the dream songs and songlines of Aboriginal culture, lore — and specifically with the rainbow serpent. This rendition provides a cultural outlet for Nullah, a way in which his white heritage can be connected to his Indigenous

98 Here it is acknowledged that the initial release of The Wizard of Oz in 1939 correlates to the period in which Australia is set. Thus, ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ not only functions on a nostalgic level but also helps to establish the film’s narrative time.
Australian heritage while helping him deal with the grieving and the memory of his mother. These connections do, however, raise concerns regarding a long debate in academic circles about how the rainbow serpent has come to represent the Aboriginal Dreamtime as an instance of pan-Aboriginality. As some scholars have noted, this notion is anthropological fiction — largely constructed by non-Indigenous anthropologists (Sallie 2001). The presence of Aboriginal instrumentation and mythical chants in the scene seems to invoke, but in a more positive sense, a famous scene in *Jedda*. In this scene Jedda sits and plays the piano and we hear the two forms of music (i.e. European piano music — which suggests a civilised culture — and Aboriginal music, which suggests a primitive culture) begin to interfere with each other in her mind. However, while in *Australia* the two musical identities (i.e. the ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ song and the Aboriginal music) combine to help Nullah understand his mixed blood heritage, in *Jedda* the clashing of the music emphasises Jedda’s torment and split identity, which is suggested when Jedda becomes overwhelmed, stops playing and bangs her head on the piano (Morris 2004, 17).

We encounter ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ again in another significant moment in the film, namely, in the sequence following the bombing of Darwin. In this scene, Nullah plays the tune on a harmonica left to him by Kipling Flynn (another of the film’s generational and nostalgic — Empire-imbued — names). At first, the melody’s tone and ruptured phrasing lack conviction and convey the sadness and helplessness that Nullah feels; however, the mood and atmosphere changes with the introduction of reverberant and melodious schoolboy choir singing. This choral music signifies the Mission Island where many of the stolen generation were sent, educated and assimilated into white society. Gradually, a wash of violins is introduced into the mix and builds with intensity — indicating, in fact, the approaching of the film’s final romantic climax. The bridging from diegetic to extra-diegetic space also conveys the manner in which the music permeates through the town’s physical space and affects the various characters. When Lady Ashley eventually hears the music, she abandons her trip and traces the sound to Nullah. When the two characters unite, Nullah — who is overwhelmed with joy — says, “Missus Boss, I can say your name”, reflecting the Aboriginal protocol of not speaking the name of the deceased and the importance of
oral history to the Aboriginal people (Starrs 2012, 17).

Finally, and perhaps most refreshingly, the song features in its original (Judy Garland) rendition, during a racially segregated open air screening of The Wizard of Oz in Darwin. As Nugent notes, this scene not only signals Luhrmann’s trademark references to earlier films and film genres, it also “registers aspects of the social history of cinema, including audiences and exhibition sites” (Nugent 2011, 1). As was a common practice in attending film theatres during the 1930s and 1940s, this scene depicts Aboriginal people being herded towards the front of the movie theatre. Their necks are tilted looking straight up at the screen, whereas at the back of the cinema, whites sit more comfortably (8). Luhrmann’s ‘straight up angle’ depicts Dorothy (Judy Garland) on screen being viewed through the “shadows of a crisscrossed iron grate, which is possibly the iron fretwork of the outdoor stage” (8-9). For the Aboriginal people sitting at the front of the cinema this structure and angle might well have obscured their view (9). Thus, this onscreen rendition of the song ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’, shown at a segregated cinema in Darwin, presents a historically accurate visual and thematic perspective. The scene communicates the grave injustices and discrimination towards Aboriginal people in a pre-Second World War Australia. As McFarlane notes this scene “hints at the possibilities and longings that confer an emotional intimacy and a thematic potency that ring truer than the film’s bigger statements” (2008, 159). In some ways, the constant referencing of ‘Somewhere Over the Rainbow’ and The Wizard of Oz can be interpreted as merely another kitsch effect in Luhrmann’s broad repertoire of pastiche — a nostalgic celebration of pop culture and its material artefacts. However, as I have suggested, despite the hyperbole, there is an enormous amount of symbolism and metaphor within this pre-existing musical material. The music helps to blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy. In some ways, such an approach should be commended as it provides the potential for multiple oppositional readings and also demonstrates a level of confidence that is unique within the context of Australian landscape cinema.

The final element of Australia’s score I want to consider is that of Edward Elgar’s ‘Nimrod’ from the Enigma Variations, a pre-existing piece of classical music
that demonstrates just how strong, how deep, Australia’s ties to its colonisers remain.
I look at this piece of music within the context of other cinema (e.g. The Year My Voice Broke) that utilise pre-existing classical music to ideological and often nostalgic ends.

**Pre-existing European Classical Music: Longing for the Old Country**

As Flinn (1992) and others (e.g. Holbrook and Schindler 1991) have argued, musical nostalgia not only associates with the protagonists’, filmgoers’ or indeed director’s own personal history (early adulthood, adolescence or childhood); it can also be connected to experiences associated with people, or things that were common, in use and fashionable in periods well before the subject (either the perceiver or the film character) was even alive. Musical nostalgia even possibly relates to places histories and traditions that predate the European concept of Australia.

Often in Australian landscape cinema, pre-existing classical music functions as a marker of European culture, whereas pre-existing popular music functions as a more specific marker of a particular twentieth or twenty-first century era. Also, while classical music can manifest in a variety of different ways in Australian cinema, it frequently demonstrates a kind of longing for the ‘old country’ (i.e. Great Britain or more specifically England and Ireland). Consider, for instance, My Brilliant Career and Picnic at Hanging Rock (as discussed in Chapter Three). These films are both set in a mythical past and contain hallmarks of European nostalgia conveyed through the classical music of Mozart, Beethoven, Bach and Schumann, combined with sets and costumes representative of the Victorian era and layerings of bleached, impressionistic, pale lighting and soft-focused visual imagery. These films suggest

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99 While in an Australian cinematic context a longing for Britain typically manifests through pre-existing classical music, longing for Ireland or signifiers of Irish-ness are typically conveyed through folk and dance music (i.e. jigs and polkas) or then, as O’Shea notes, “the melancholy soprano wail that throughout the movie gives voice to emotions of pain, loss, heartbreak, longing and romantic love” (O’Shea 2005, 38-9).

100 Along with Caddie (Donald Crombie 1976) and Breaker Morant these nostalgia films can also be interpreted as a response to anxieties relating to how Australian identity was being depicted on screen at that time, namely, as a reaction to the suburban parochial depictions apparent in ‘ocker’ films such as The Adventures of Barry McKenzie and Alvin Purple. These films sought to move away from suburban Australia back to rural historical settings that reinforce a national identity Australia could proudly claim its own and showcase to the world on the festival circuit (O’Regan 1995).
a type of longing or nostalgia for the old country — while simultaneously highlighting the absurdity of British culture in the new world.

Perhaps a more revealing example of this longing for the old country is the use of ‘The Lark Ascending’ (composed by the famous British nationalist composer of the prewar and interwar period Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1921), which functions as the main musical theme in the coming-of-age nostalgic landscape film, *The Year My Voice Broke*. The instrumental composition features several cadenzas by the violin soloist which flutter up and down an evocative pentatonic scale in the manner of traditional English folk tunes, and are superimposed over the cinematography of the surrounding Merino sheep grazing land of the rural NSW town of Braidwood. Juxtaposed to a popular music score that generally corresponds to the film’s nostalgic 1960s narrative setting, ‘The Lark Ascending’, “embodies the eclectic reaching of Danny’s (Noah Taylor) imagination and memory” and “suggests an apparent disjunction between place and cultural aspiration” (Lucas 2012, 114). ‘The Lark Ascending’ is especially interesting in relation to a post-colonialist country such as Australia, which is of course absent from the historical grounding that such a nostalgic piece of orchestral music might usually evoke. That is to say, the composition evokes a whole tradition of British pastoral music, pastoral settings, green meadows, the rural idyll, and so on, which are far removed from landscapes that are historically unfamiliar, except of course from an Aboriginal perspective. Following the line of Flinn (1992), this piece of music conveys a sense of seeking entry to seemingly inaccessible times, places and emotions. The impression is given again of a yearning for the old country.

Such longing, however, is even further complicated in a contemporary landscape nostalgia film such as *Australia*. This complication arises because *Australia* is not only a contemporary [white] Australian film; it is also a film with a strong Aboriginal cultural presence. In such a situation, historical memory is a complex issue, but so too is the resonance of any sound track. This complexity is evident in *Australia*’s use of the renowned British composition ‘Nimrod’ from Edward Elgar’s *Enigma* Variations — a composition which has gained nationalistic connotations. The
inclusion of Elgar raises some significant questions in regards to the spatial anxieties and ties to colonialism that much of Australian cinema and indeed Australian nostalgic landscape cinema still projects, or perhaps amplifies. This composition encapsulates the simple rhythms, soaring violin melodies and the sweet poignant harmonies characteristic of much of Elgar’s music (Magee 2005, 93). It features in the film’s final and perhaps most emotionally-charged scene — the one following a prolonged kissing sequence between the Drover and Ashley, and where the Aboriginal boy Nullah runs after King George, his grandfather and spiritual guide. Thus, the question arises, why is one of the most emotive pieces of music of the British Empire — indeed, as some would say “the heart and soul of the empire” (Archer 2010, 2) — used in a scene that is essentially about the unification of an Aboriginal boy and his elder? Is this some subconscious longing for the old country? Is it deployed for ironic effect? As of yet, and to my knowledge no explanation regarding the music has been made public — but as opined by Robyn Archer, “nothing could be more culturally revealing of our own sense of nationhood” (2).

It must be noted, however, that the ‘Nimrod’ also evokes other narratives. For instance, as with Elgar’s other Enigma Variations ‘Nimrod’ was written for a close friend — thus, there is a friendship dimension to the music. We must also take into consideration that the ‘Nimrod’ piece has come to be associated with funeral music, but in a British context — frequently accompanying British funerals, memorial services, and other solemn occasions such as in London on Remembrance Sunday. In this sense, the music could perhaps be perceived not as a moment of celebration as implied by the unification of the boy and elder, but rather a marker of mourning and a premonition of further suffering of Aboriginal people.  For evidence of the suffering of Aboriginal people, one only needs to look at the statistics regarding the conditions of Aboriginal people since the Second World War, for instance, the low life expectancy rates, significant social, cultural and health problems, as well as the failed government policies, such as the assimilation policies of the twentieth century and more recent policies such as the 2006 intervention.

101 It should be acknowledged that filmmakers typically select music based on its ability to create an emotional effect, rather than its cultural origins or resonances.
102 While these observations are of course speculative, and must be flagged as such, I believe it is important to acknowledge the obvious cultural associations that such a significant piece of music has accumulated.
Here, it is also worth mentioning that Samuel Barber’s ‘Adagio for Strings’ holds a similar place for Americans as the ‘Nimrod’ for the British (see, for instance, the 2004 radio discussion by musicologist Bill McLaughlin who links both pieces to national funeral music). The ‘Adagio’ is used in Oliver Stone’s 1986 film *Platoon* to evoke a sense of national mourning, although in a different and more explicit manner, namely, accompanying the torching of a Vietnamese village. *Platoon* also deals with the perils of colonial and imperial ambition (but in an American context). Importantly, however, while the ‘Nimrod’ and the ‘Adagio’ can function as mood music, and while these pieces have a variety of associations that audiences might easily recognise, audiences outside of the country — who do not have the same historical grounding — might not necessarily make such an association.

Notably these ties to colonial roots seem in some ways to be gaining traction rather than losing traction in Australia. After all, many earlier films used similar music to highlight the differences between Australia and the old country. Returning to *The Squatter’s Daughter* one can locate an instrumental version of another famous Elgar work, namely, ‘Pomp and Circumstance March No 1’ (Hannan 2013, 63). As Hall himself has noted, however, the use of the Elgar piece accompanying ten thousand sheep in a parched Australian outback is ironic and completely out of place (Hall 1980, 60). One might also contend that this audiovisual dissonance emphasises a broad nationalist sentiment and distrust of the British at that particular time — the irony is especially evident if we imagine the associated lyrics (by Arthur C. Benson titled ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, and referring to the occasion of the coronation of King Edward VII), which were well known to audiences in the 1930s (Hannan 2013, 63). By contrast, Australia’s use of Elgar as well as Elton John and Rolf Harris (who has spent most of his career in England) perhaps complicates and even betrays the “anti-colonial spirit of the film’s ending” where “the Aboriginal boy is reluctantly

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103 By extension, the concept of loss and war trauma evoked through European classical music is evident in the iconic Australian film *Gallipoli*. The film begins with Albioni’s Adagio in G minor accompanying a depiction of an innocent Australia a time shortly after Federation, a time of excitement. In a later scene, however, the music is reappraised to convey how Australia lost that innocence on the battlefields of a failed campaign and indeed how a nation was born. The elegiac strains of organ and strings highlight the poignancy and futility of the young men about to lose their lives. This scene has helped consolidate, even elevate the ANZAC myth and its largely nameless heroes to a status that embodies the very essence of what it means to be Australian, as we are reminded year after year on Anzac Day.
freed by the English woman to follow his dream(ing)” (Archer 2010, 4). The question remains, is this music ironic or does it sing England?

**Conclusion**

Sound and music in *Australia* convey a familiar ‘Australiana’ — a pining for the simple life and a distinctive longing for past eras and the tropes and themes of the outback. In a similar fashion to the earlier blockbuster landscape epic, *Crocodile Dundee, Australia* “can easily be read as a cynical play on postmodern passion for the naïve and the nostalgic” (Morris 1989, 263). Importantly, *Australia* seeks to evoke nostalgia mediated through a range of different forms of music, sound and retro iconography. The musical and sonic forces function as a cultural bank that can arouse nostalgia for the landscape and highlight familiar colonial themes and archetypes, as well as foreground the film’s other conservative virtues. Similar to the Sydney Olympics opening and closing ceremonies (as mentioned in Chapter Two), and films such as *Red Dog*, this mode of sound track embodies an idea of Australia that is often sold to the outside world and with which many Australians identify.

One must ask, however, why do the sound tracks of many contemporary Australian landscape films demonstrate a favourable representation of a past era? And, why are these sound tracks still intrinsically tied to clichéd and stereotypical representations of Australian culture, identity and landscape? Many of the sound tracks accompanying films of the 1970s revival (e.g. landscape films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock, My Brilliant Career, Walkabout*, and films set in city locations such as *Caddie* and *The Devil’s Playground* [Fred Schepisi 1976], etc.) help to emphasise what Sam Rohdie describes as “distant and distancing vignettes of the past” (1982, 39). Such sound tracks also help to promote a sense of European society in the Antipodes (as described by Gibson). These films, however, were produced at an earlier stage of Australian film production, when the nation had a different self-understanding. In contemporary Australian landscape cinema, following landmark legal/social/political events — such as the Mabo Native Title Act, *Bringing Them Home*, and so forth — such nostalgic representations of the past are somewhat regressive and problematic. Nostalgic representations of Australian history are
especially complicated in a film such as Australia which expresses issues such as “colonial expansion, land ownership, pastoral cultivation, and the issue of where Aboriginal people belong in Australian land and culture and the narrative of nationhood” (Mitchell and Stadler 2010, 12).

Perhaps more so than any prior landscape film, Australia’s sound track reassembles musical references from popular culture to amplify the nostalgic and the kitsch and to highlight the musically and cinematically constructed nature of Australian history and mythology. The hyperbolical dimensions of the film’s sound and music function in a very different manner to several other landscape period films released immediately prior to Australia (e.g. The Tracker and The Proposition), which feature music, narratives and imagery that could hardly be called ‘nostalgic’ or indeed to return to the definition of nostalgia presented at the beginning of this chapter “as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past”. The location and period conveyed through score and sound design in these films are not that of heroism, prosperity and opportunity (as is evident in Australia) but instead, revisionist representations of a dark colonial period. Conversely, Australia’s sound track also presents a departure from other typical landscape nostalgia films such as The Dish or Red Dog which use rock ‘n’ roll to emphasise a white-Anglo-masculine version of Australian history absent of the views and perspectives of Aboriginal people. By contrast, Australia contains an important awareness of colonial racism in the outback and it also provides an Indigenous Australian presence and voice.

In her review of the film, Langton asserts “Luhrmann has leaped over the ruins of the history wars and given Australians a new past — a myth of national origin that is disturbing, thrilling, heartbreaking, hilarious and touching” (2008, 1). It seems however, that this ‘new past’ Langton speaks of is adamantly contested. Indeed, oppositional readings of the film from the neo-conservative and small-(l) liberal leftist sides of the history wars — readings from such a diverse group as Greer, Archer, Costello, Bolt, and so forth — suggest that Australia has not so much “leaped over the ruins of the history wars” but is deeply entrenched in them.
The following chapter provides a reading of the sound track to another important recent landscape film that deals with the aftermath of colonialism, namely, *Samson & Delilah*. This is a contemporary-set film directed by the Aboriginal filmmaker Warwick Thornton. *Samson & Delilah’s* sound track (both aesthetically and ideologically) provides a very different representation of the colonial landscape (both mental and physical) and the realities for many Indigenous Australian people living in such landscapes.
Chapter Seven: Sounding a New Indigenous Realist Approach in *Samson & Delilah*

*Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television* (Yothu Yindi 1991).

Through conducting a detailed analysis of *Samson & Delilah*’s sound track, we encounter a variety of perspectives on the conditions and realities for Aboriginal people living in the remote outback. More broadly, this chapter expands on the research provided in Chapter Three, Four, Five and Six, arguing that the arrival of an Indigenous Australian realist approach to filmmaking has provided Australian landscape cinema with a new level of complexity and depth. I suggest that this approach represents a kind of sonic as well as a social reality. I also suggest that the sound track is crucial to the film’s devastating impact. The sound track does not sugar-coat the narrative with, for example, non-diegetic orchestral music, pre-existing classical music, ethereal world music and exoticising sound effects. It should be noted that such an appreciation of *Samson & Delilah*’s sound track runs the risk of looking for a kind of documentary realism. Such an approach is positioned against a lot of sound ‘conventions’ especially if the landscape itself is to be understood (in some cases primarily) in symbolic terms.

This chapter begins by continuing the discussion introduced in Chapter Four regarding the representation of Aboriginality, politics of representation and the social, cultural and textual dimensions of colonialism in contemporary Australian landscape cinema. However, while the survey in Chapter Four identified instances of racial codification (as manifested through instrumentation, melodic and harmonic structure and sound effects) spanning across much of Australia’s landscape cinematic history, this chapter looks at a different canon of films. I focus primarily on films that demonstrate a progressive musical and sonic understanding of colonial conflict, Aboriginal representation and landscape. Notably, many of the films considered are directed by Aboriginal filmmakers (e.g. Rachel Perkins, Wayne Blair, Ivan Sen and Warwick Thornton).

The second part of the chapter features a case study of the film *Samson &
Delilah. Consideration is given to the film’s narrative and production circumstances, looking at the timing of its release, as well as political factors, such as the Australian Government’s 2006 intervention policy. Then, I investigate director Warwick Thornton’s holistic approach to filmmaking and how this approach contributes to the film’s poignancy. Following this, I argue the importance of sound and music in the context of the film’s narrative themes and representations, including the themes of love and monotony and the representation of landscape and Aboriginal people. I then provide a discussion surrounding the role of the sound track as a contextualising and orientating force within the film. I end the chapter by investigating the way popular music is used in Samson & Delilah — in particular the way the music interfaces with everyday life. As with the prior chapters, this chapter connects the socio-cultural and political issues circulating at the time of the film’s release to the broader interpretative framework focusing on the sonic and musical representations of the Australian landscape, identity and history. Furthermore, this chapter echoes previous chapters by challenging the film’s visual hegemony by interrogating the various aural structures of its sound track.

Recognising the Power of Sound. Contemporary Indigenous Approaches

As I reiterate throughout this thesis, scholars have recently begun to recognise the embedded meanings apparent in cinema sound tracks, challenging the notion that sound is subservient to the image, a purely emotional resonance or merely a device to help clarify filmic meaning. Academics and theorists such as Michel Chion (1994), Claudia Gorbman (1987), Anahid Kassabian (2001) and Philip Brophy (2004) argue that in many cases throughout cinematic history sound tracks have been central to the process of making meaning. This is certainly true in the case of Samson & Delilah, which contains auditory components that greatly contribute to the cohesion of the film’s narrative themes and representation of the Aboriginal people (as well as their landscapes and social and cultural conditions). In this sense, the sound track for Samson & Delilah (a film that embodies a new Aboriginal realist approach to landscape cinema) differs from that of many mainstream Australian landscape films. The Man from Snowy River, Crocodile Dundee, Ned Kelly and, more recently, Australia, for example, tend to rely upon tightly synched conventional scoring
approaches, and these typically manifest as grandiose orchestral pieces that foreground the beauty of the outback, archetypal characters and the themes common to typical landscape cinema. Importantly, at times, these scoring approaches reinforce versions of history and identity that fall on the neo-conservative side of the culture wars. These approaches also supplement and enhance narratives, themes, imagery that glorify British settlement of the land and the Australian story more broadly. *Samson & Delilah’s* sound track transcends these established forms; it functions on various socio/political, cultural, emotional, psychological, thematic, spatial, symbolic and temporal levels. In fact, one could argue that *Samson & Delilah* is the first internationally acclaimed landscape feature film by an Aboriginal director to explore the aftermath of colonialism in Aboriginal society through the use of sound; and it does so at a time of heightened tension and anxiety surrounding issues such as *Bringing Them Home* and the so-called intervention (otherwise known as the Northern Territory National Emergency Response), which I discuss later in this chapter.

Recent landscape films such as *One Night the Moon, The Sapphires, Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *The Proposition* certainly delve into current issues relating to the colonial oppression of Aboriginal people and the systemic problems in Aboriginal Australia, but they are somewhat limited in their sonic choices. For example, Peter Gabriel’s score for *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (as discussed in Chapter Four) seeks to evoke an Aboriginal oneness with the land but is ultimately compromised by the international, exotic and at times racially codified scoring approach. The heavily manipulated palette of sounds could neither be seen as authentic, nor as a poignant exploration of the issues discussed above. Although *One Night the Moon* places music at the forefront of its text and provides two musical perspectives (i.e. an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspective) of the landscape, the film’s form, style and structure fall somewhere between the Hollywood musical and the European opera. *The Sapphires*, also by an Indigenous Australian director, certainly addresses the inequity of colonisation, but is ultimately compromised by its status as a blockbuster landscape film and a feel-good romantic comedy. Its underlying message is also perhaps weakened by adherence to certain cinematic rules and Hollywood production values whose primary purpose is to elicit emotion (as explored in Chapter Four, this is an
argument that can be equally applied to Philip Noyce’s *Rabbit-Proof Fence*). Despite its reliance on well-established rules and productions values, *The Sapphires* provides some intriguing musical takes on issues such as colonisation, Aboriginal representation, representation of landscape, and so forth. Bruno Starrs, for instance, argues that the film’s Aboriginal protagonists “undergo a journey in which they learn the importance of choosing the protest songs of Black Soul over the white colonisers’ ‘whining’ Country and Western songs” (2014, 43). The choice of songs is a declaration of indigenous sovereignty. However, despite the notion that the soul protest music underscores the female characters’ sense of liberation of oppression, ultimately the Indigenous Australian singers are managed by a white man who teaches them how to sing and perform. Moreover, while the film foregrounds the girls’ distinctively Aboriginal voices, they do not sing and play music that they could reasonably attribute to their own Aboriginal culture (Walker 2015, 157).

An even greater socially and culturally progressive understanding and complexity in contemporary landscape cinema is apparent in the distinctive musical representations of Aboriginality and landscape in the films of Rolf de Heer — for instance, *The Tracker*, *Ten Canoes* and to a lesser extent the recent *Charlie’s Country*. Most striking of these is the sound track of *Ten Canoes*, which differs from other Australian landscape film sound tracks because it concerns itself with a sense of cultural authenticity. As Elise Walker argues, *Ten Canoes* presents a radical departure from typical Australian landscape cinema for it is the first feature film to showcase entirely Aboriginal languages (2015, 137). The didgeridoo-dominated non-diegetic cues in *Ten Canoes* seem to come from the same place as the characters, whether or not we see them emanate from within their bodies or physical performances. As Walker goes on to say, the music in *Ten Canoes* contrasts significantly with that of *Rabbit-Proof Fence* for it provides an insider view of Aboriginal representation: “the Aboriginal instruments as well as voices, reinforce a particular localised sense of place without the sweeping possibilities of transcendence and globalised outreach that are implied in Gabriel’s transnational and synthesised sounds of *Rabbit-Proof Fence*” (157). Moreover “much of the music is diegetically controlled by Aboriginal characters or non-diegetically associated with ancient Aboriginal history” and this notion “amplifies the film’s focus on the Indigenous from within rather than on
recreating an outsider’s point of view” (ibid.). Ten Canoes is also significant because it addresses the notion that only Aboriginal people can create films that deal with Aboriginal themes and representations; and only Aboriginal people can come up with culturally sensitive and adequate sound tracks. Rolf de Heer is, of course, not of Aboriginal descent, and nor is the Ten Canoes’ sound department, which consists of James Currie (sound designer/sound editor), Tom Heuzenroeder (sound designer/sound editor), Rory McGregor (sound re-recording mixer), Adrian Medhurst (sound re-recording mixer) and Tania Nehme as the narration editor (“Ten Canoes Credits” IMDb). As Ten Canoes sought extensive advice from Indigenous Australian consultants/communities to provide an insider’s account of an Aboriginal story, or in Starrs’ words an “authentic Aboriginal voice”, the question may be raised as to whether the film’s approach presents an acceptable balance? Tellingly, de Heer was criticised for being a “white director making an Indigenous story” (cited in Starrs 2007, 4). De Heer’s response to this criticism was that “They’re [Aboriginal people] telling the story, largely, and I’m the mechanism by which they can” (4).

Though in a very different way, the harrowing post-2000 films of Aboriginal director Ivan Sen also demonstrate an insider’s projection of Aboriginal stories through sonic and musical deployment. Importantly, Sen not only directs his films, he also composes or co-composes their scores. In the case of Toomelah, he shot, edited and created the sound design for the film.

Beneath Cloud’s narrative, for instance, “speaks of sparseness and strength of vision” (Walsh 2002, 13). As noted by one online reviewer:

The film follows the story of Lena (Dannielle Hall), a light-skinned daughter of an Aboriginal mother and Irish father, and Vaughn (Damian Pitt), a Murri boy doing time in a minimum-security prison in North West NSW. Dramatic events throw them together on a journey across the outback with no money and no transport” (“Beneath Clouds: 2002” IMDb website).

The film features a raw, still and unsettling score that negotiates key and familiar binaries such as nature/culture (as explored in the case study on Picnic at Hanging Rock and The Proposition) and Indigenous Australian identity. Evidence of such qualities is apparent in the film’s opening credits, where as one reviewer notes:
…the decreasing rhythm of a pendulum — reminds us how far removed contemporary Aboriginal Australia is from any kind of ‘natural’ existence. Natural sounds, rural atmospheres, country spaces and the sonic imprints of wildlife are periodically obliterated by the ‘unnatural’ — passing cars, thunderous trucks, thudding beats from a boom-box… Eventually the film settles on a rhythm of language, both spoken and unspoken, by the two lead actors. The force of a glance speaks volumes; looks are enough to communicate what’s going on in this story. The film’s stillness of style may be off-putting to some, but others will soak up its ambience and resulting sadness (Spencer 2002, par. 3).

In Sen’s later film Toomelah, we encounter a bleak depiction of an Aboriginal town in northern NSW. Toomelah draws stylistically from the austere humanity of the great Italian neorealist films, but also from Australian films that mix Aboriginal stories and themes with social realism — for instance, Backroads (Philip Noyce 1977) and Blackfellas (James Ricketson 1993). While Toomelah is a very political film, similar to Samson & Delilah, it does not explicitly mention or comment on the social policies and politics affecting contemporary Aboriginal Australia (namely, ‘the intervention’). As Sen explains in his director’s statement:

The movie explores the interweaving complexities of the issues facing the community. From incarceration, deaths in custody, the stolen generations, and substance abuse, to identity, cultural extinction and education. It’s all there, but these issues never dictate to the audience. They are just a part of the fragments of everyday life (2011, 11).

Sen’s distinctive and unconventional use of sound, music and dialogue help to convey the fragmented depiction of life in the remote town. Unlike typical sound tracks that are rigidly structured and tightly edited, synced and produced, Sen’s approach is fragmented and diffuse. Foley and location sound, diegetic rap music and dialogue are frequently captured off axis and outside of microphone configuration patterns. The sonic transitions and editing choices between scenes are loose and sometimes abrupt. The conversations between the characters are heavily improvised and often incoherent. The language is extremely explicit. Unlike in typical Australian landscape films that foreground the importance of score there is no aural hierarchy — or in other words, no part of the sound track dominates. While this approach — by the rules of conventional cinema — might be considered as casual or unprofessional, lacking
visual and sonic continuity, it certainly succeeds in heightening the film’s sense of uncompromising realism. In Toomelah, however, sound not only functions to heighten realism, it is also used on a symbolic level. Consider, for instance, the scene where Daniel (Daniel Connors) is sent to the library for misbehaving in the classroom. In this scene, we hear the sound of a clock ticking while Daniel reads a display board which outlines a chronological account of Toomelah’s history since white settlement, including events such as the Murri people massacre, the establishment of missionaries in the area, resistance to those missionaries and so forth. In this scene, the metronomic ticking sound underscores the passing of time and in particular Toomelah’s troubled history as perceived and realised by Daniel at that moment. The clock ticks feature elsewhere in the film and emphasise the notion that the characters are always in a rush but are in fact going nowhere (Williams 2011, par. 5). As I suggest in the following case study, this is an idea also explored in the sonic dimensions of Samson & Delilah.

The sound and music apparent in Toomelah help to impart on the perceiver the horrific conditions that Aboriginal people are subjected to in such remote communities. Though, as Sen explains in relation to his filmmaking practice in the following quote, there are significant challenges surrounding the projection of Indigenous Australian stories on screen because not all perceivers are ready or willing to watch films that depict the reality for many Aboriginal people living in rural and remote Australia:

Australians aren’t used to seeing what it’s like on the inside, from an indigenous perspective. Film is a recent thing for indigenous people to be empowered with, and in the last 10 to 20 years there has been a bit of a movement going on and the stories are starting to get out into Australian consciousness. In saying that, it’s not a pretty history here in Australia and a lot of people aren’t willing to face up to what’s gone on and what’s going on at the moment, so there’s plenty of challenges ahead in getting these stories to the public. When you create indigenous themed films which are a little lighter and more fluffy, the audiences are much keener to go on the journey, but when we show the darker side it’s a little more difficult (Sen 2014).

As with Sen’s other films, the landscape and environment are also depicted in a non-conventional way. As Lorraine Mortimer has commented, “We never feel the director
is telling us to look at this (i.e. the landscape’s) beauty and be astounded. It’s more like we’re made aware that natural gifts are there all the time — they just need to be noticed and appreciated” (2013, 18). While this statement is aimed towards the film’s visual aspects, I contend that the same could also be said about the film’s sonic workings — the sounds are at times beautiful but they are not typically enhanced, embellished or complemented through sentimental music (be it through pre-existing pop music or originally composed orchestral score) or large production aesthetics and rendering techniques such as equalisation and compression.

When considering Sen’s films that deal with contemporary stories about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dispossession, we should also acknowledge there is often a moment where the characters are forced to reflect on a specific place or location in relation to Australia’s painful colonial history. As Rebecca Harkins-Cross asserts:

Near the end of Beneath Clouds, and the end of Lena and Vaughn’s journey, they pass beneath an imposing cliff face. Its beauty is at odds with the story Vaughn recounts of the massacre that took place there, people herded to the edge of the cliff and shot at before falling to their deaths (2014, 3).

Notably, in this scene there is no music. All we hear is the dialogue of Vaughn recalling the horrific events that took place and the sounds of the natural environment — birds singing and the odd insect. These natural sounds (which are dry and un-manipulated through production) provide the required emotional balance for the sequence, perhaps more so than the prescriptive harmonies, textures, rhythms and instrumentation of any orchestra or indeed a reverberant world music didgeridoo. In this scene, the stillness and silence of the natural environment resonate with the discussion on the ‘Australian Gothic’ in the previous chapter, and in particular the silencing of Aboriginal people and culture and the notion that the Australian landscape is haunted country, filled with ghosts.

In Mystery Road, we encounter another (but stylistically different) moment of reflection, namely, the shootout finale at Slaughter Hill, an outcrop on the outskirts of the town where the film takes place. This stylised shootout is staged “on a site named
after a butchery that happened in the same place many years before” (Harkins-Cross, 2014, 3). In this scene, the Aboriginal detective Jay (Aaron Pedersen) and his colleague Johnno (Hugo Weaving) exchange fire with a gang of criminals, eventually killing them. However, unlike the moment of reflection in Beneath Clouds no animal sounds are present. The significance of the encounters between the various characters is emphasised by the “subduing background noise (including the sounds of the natural environment) to near silence, with the result that faces and voices take on an almost unnatural clarity” (Sakkas 2013, 18). In this scene, we experience a cacophony of rebounding and echoing gunfire which resonates across the vast outback plains. This includes rifle shot exchanges between Johnno perched on a ridge and a sniper in a faraway ute. The rifle shots take a few seconds to reach their destination. On the one hand they are realistic, for this is how gun shots sound across vast distances. On the other hand, they are stylised — an aesthetic that manifests through the saturated and painterly cinematography, but also the attenuation of other sounds. These delayed gunshots coupled with the absence of music and dialogue also contrast to typical Hollywood shootouts, which tend to enhance the action through fast-paced visual cuts and non-diegetic score be it newly composed orchestral music or pre-existing popular music. The audiovisuality in Mystery Road and its sequel Goldstone is however, familiar to Western films set in vast open spaces. Indeed, the films’ cinematography and sonic atmospheres seem to draw inspiration from post-2000 revisionist Westerns such as No Country for Old Men (Joel Coen and Ethan Coen 2007), and, more relevantly, the Australian Western The Proposition, which was not only filmed in the same location (i.e. Winton in Central West Queensland) but also investigates similar prevailing and complex themes of racial prejudice, identity, displacement and culture. One could also interpret the final shootout in Mystery Road (perhaps again similarly to the final showdown in The Proposition) as an act of retribution not only for the activities of the criminals but also for the events that took place in the same location many years before and for Aboriginal genocide more broadly. The significance of the location, as with the scene featuring Vaughn and Lena in Beneath Clouds, “suggests that these battles are not over yet” (Harkins-Cross 2014, par. 10).

Similar to the films of Ivan Sen, Warwick Thornton’s Samson & Delilah is largely devoid of typical Western cinematic sensibilities, musical clichés and
entrapments. Both directors challenge colonialist representation as well as the visual and sonic realms that conceal social and political conditions (Langton 1993). As I argue in the following case study, Samson & Delilah’s sound track helps to create a poignant and realist depiction of contemporary life in a remote Aboriginal community. The film more broadly crafts a complex web of spatio-temporal relationships to explore the divide in contemporary perceptions of Aboriginality and landscape.

**Case Study: Samson & Delilah (Synopsis and Background)**

Samson & Delilah has been heralded as one of Australia’s most important and incisive creative works. Critic Tim Robey called it “a triumph of independent production” (Robey 2010), and Margaret Pomeranz described it as “one of the most wonderful films this country has ever produced” (Pomeranz 2009). The film won the prestigious Cannes Film Festival’s Caméra d’Or in 2009, as well as a score of other accolades, including Best Film at the 2009 Australian Film Institute Awards (Samson & Delilah [website]). Highly praised for its visual and acting feats, Samson & Delilah was also recognised as containing a particularly interesting sound track, especially in relation to the connections between image and sound, sound and music, and how these elements relate to the film’s broad socio-cultural themes. The awards include Best Achievement in Sound Design at the Australian Screen Sound Guild Awards (2009), Best Sound at the Australian Film Institute Awards (2009) and Best Music at the IF (Inside Film) Awards 2009. Director Warwick Thornton, who built a reputation as a cinematographer for films such as Radiance, and as a director of short films (e.g. Green Bush 2005) and documentaries (e.g. From Sand to Celluloid: Payback 1996) has said that the musical and sonic components of the film were not simply an add-on; rather, they were crucial to the film, and chosen well before the production process so as to underpin the whole structure of the narrative (Buckmaster 2009). Before focusing on Samson & Delilah’s sonic and musical dimensions, however, we must first provide context regarding the film’s narrative and release.

Samson & Delilah takes place in an isolated community in the Central Australian Desert near Alice Springs. The story follows the day-to-day struggle and
boredom of two Aboriginal teenagers Samson (Rowan McNamara) and Delilah (Marissa Gibson). Samson is a lost soul who sniffs petrol and lives in a run-down shelter with his brother, whereas Delilah lives with and takes care of her adoring Nana (Mitjili Napanangka Gibson), who loves to paint. Samson shows an interest in Delilah, but Delilah rejects his advances, despite her Nana’s encouragement. Nana dies, and Delilah receives a severe beating from the community’s women elders. But is this because they hold her responsible for Nana’s death? In Thornton’s explanatory notes it is suggested that the beating — as with the cutting of hair in another sequence — is a traditional grieving custom among some Aboriginal cultures (“Samson and Delilah” [website]). Samson, who is also in trouble, comes to Delilah’s aid. They run away from the community and arrive in Alice Springs — a town that presents a whole new set of dangers. They find refuge under a highway bridge on the outskirts of the city and Samson continues to sniff petrol. Delilah is traumatised by a series of awful events, and their future looks grim. Eventually, Delilah takes Samson to a remote outpost and helps him to rehabilitate and recover from his addiction.

As is the case with many Australian landscape films, Aboriginal representation in *Samson & Delilah* reflects the politics and pertinent social issues of the time. The film explores themes such as poverty, homelessness, racism, substance abuse in Aboriginal communities, the exploitation of Aboriginal art, and so on. Importantly, *Samson & Delilah* could also be interpreted within the context of the intervention, which had gained traction around the time the film was released.

**The Intervention**

The intervention was a package of changes to welfare provision, law enforcement, land tenure and other measures introduced by the Australian Federal Government under the incumbent Prime Minister John Howard in 2007. The package was the Federal Government’s response to the Northern Territory Government’s publication of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report. This report sought to highlight and address allegations of child sexual abuse and neglect in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities (“Northern Territory National Emergency Response” *Wikipedia*). The intervention received bipartisan parliamentary support as well as
support by Aboriginal leaders such as Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton. However, the intervention was also criticised by the Northern Territory Labor Government, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and Aboriginal leaders and community spokespeople (ABC, Indigenous online). Criticisms related to issues such as lack of community consultation, the way the welfare payments were quarantined, the abrogating of civil rights and the suspension of the racial discrimination act as a means to accommodate the intervention recommendations.

Remarkably, the intervention is not explicitly referenced in Thornton’s film. As the director has said time and again, however, it was an issue that he considered carefully while making the film. Thornton speaks about the demeaning effect the intervention had on his sense of being, stating:

Suddenly we were told that there were Aboriginal paedophiles all over Central Australia and that signs and gates had to be put outside the town camps and communities and people’s rights taken away…. My response was one of total anger and a real emotional darkness. Here I am an Aboriginal man, and yet now when I walk down the street, I’m forced to think whether people are looking at me and wondering if I’m a paedophile (Thornton 2009a).

Thornton also lamented the continuation of the intervention through Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s Labor Government:

Labor is now trying to get around the human rights issues — the suspension of the racial discrimination act that came with the intervention. Labor is now working out how to get around that hurdle by rewriting the legislation and keeping all the intervention measures (Thornton and Phillips 2009, par. 32).

Thornton had considered including elements of the intervention into the script but eventually decided to leave them out to avoid anchoring the film to a specific period:

…when it [the intervention] happened, I was really angry and decided that I would rewrite it into the script. After a week of thinking about it, though, I came to the conclusion that this would be wrong. Although there’s a certain sadness about this decision, the reason I did it was because the intervention will come and go, and yet Aboriginal kids will still be in the same position. Not putting the intervention into the movie means that it will not date; it’ll
have a longer life (par, 25).

Nonetheless, the fact that the two main characters are affected by poverty, violence, malnutrition, sexual abuse, substance abuse and do not have parents, resonates strongly with the very issues that the intervention sought to address. The intervention also played a role in the film’s reception. While the intervention was drawing attention to the systemic problems and issues in remote Aboriginal Australia, *Samson & Delilah* was providing a new perspective and indeed informing the Australian public on the realities of many Aboriginal children in remote communities. In fact, while the intervention was criticised, especially early on, for its lack of community consultation (Pazzano 2012, 1) and for the notion that white public servants in Canberra were devising and implementing social policies regarding how Aboriginal people conduct their lives, *Samson & Delilah* was praised for providing what Davis has called a “profoundly local insider representation of the Aboriginal experience” in the outback (2009, par. 16). Considering its universal acclaim and widespread success, we must ask the question why *Samson & Delilah* has been so hard-hitting and so effective in calling to attention the deep-seated issues and realities of contemporary life in remote Aboriginal communities.

**A Holistic Approach**

One possible explanation for *Samson and Delilah*’s poignancy might lie in Thornton’s strong sense of veracity and his intimate, powerful and holistic approach to filmmaking: not only did he write the screenplay, but he also directed and shot the film, and compiled its score. Again, aside from Nick Cave’s role as scriptwriter and composer in *The Proposition* and the various production roles of Ivan Sen in his films, this is an achievement rarely seen in Australian feature film production. Due to financial and licensing restraints, Thornton also used his own musical talent on the soundtrack, playing guitar and performing a number of the compositions. His daughter Rona played violin on one track, and his other daughter, Luka May, is credited with the background sounds (“Samson and Delilah” [website]). Furthermore, Thornton’s brother Rob Thornton plays the character Gonzo, an alcoholic living under a bridge.
This personal approach is echoed elsewhere in the film, such as in the use of a handheld camera, which allowed the small production team of a cinematographer and a sound recordist (i.e. the Aboriginal sound recordist David Tranter) to interact personally and intimately with the performers. As Thornton reflected, this was particularly important since the key actors were untrained and had no experience on film sets, and he wanted to create a one-on-one engagement with them where he could maintain eye contact. In the same interview he also notes that the film’s story directly draws from his life experiences growing up as an Indigenous Australian in Alice Springs, and that he thoroughly considered every detail of the film for two years prior to shooting (Thornton 2009b).

Thornton’s rigorous and personal approach to filmmaking has resulted in a powerful and considered exploration of two narrative themes: love, which develops between Samson and Delilah, and monotony, which underscores the way the two protagonists deal with the hardships and boredom of growing up in Indigenous Australia and indeed the remote Australian outback. These narrative themes contribute to the far-reaching scope and intelligence of the film, and the sound track plays an integral role in bringing them to fruition.

**Silence and the Sound of True Love**

The first narrative theme of love is cinematically and sonically unique, in that it is explored in a non-verbal manner. Although small clusters of conversation take place, there is little in the way of sustained dialogue. Some scenes run for fifteen minutes or more without a word being spoken, and Samson himself only makes one utterance in the entire film. At no point do the characters explicitly display their emotions. This is a sharp contrast to the long monologues that have come to characterise many modern teen love stories (e.g. the hugely successful television series *Dawson’s Creek* [1998-2003]), and, for that matter, the soaring strings common in Classical Hollywood romances (e.g. *Casablanca*). Nonetheless, we must ask the

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104 Samson & Delilah’s lack of dialogue and carefully arranged visual narrative at times evokes the aesthetics of silent cinema. Other possible influences on the film are the aesthetics of the Western, with its silent heroes. While such an investigation is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that several post-2000 Australian landscape films (e.g. *The Proposition*, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* and *Tracks* [John Curran 2013]) also feature central characters with relatively little dialogue.
question: how and why does the film manage to maintain the audience’s engagement for over ninety-five minutes without substantial dialogue?

To recognise the sheer magnitude of such a task, one should first consider the roles that sound and music typically play in relation to the spoken word in cinema. Michel Chion points out that film sound is primarily ‘vococentric’; it almost always privileges the voice, highlighting it and setting it off from other sounds (Chion 1994, 4-5). One might go further and say that cinema itself is inherently ‘vococentric’ in that the written script and its dialogue are generally the first steps to a film’s creation and that all the other filmic elements tend to revolve and develop around this first point. In *Samson & Delilah*, however, this is not the case. In an interview with Tim Milfull, Thornton has noted that for two whole years the different scenes developed in his mind rather than with pen and paper, and many of the scenes were inspired by specific songs, such as ‘Sunshiny Day’ by Charley Pride (Thornton 2012). In another interview he expands on the importance of the songs within the film:

> When a song does come on, people are connecting to the lyrics a lot more because they haven’t heard the words. So the songs have a sort of potency and importance to do with the time and the place in the script, and how the characters are feeling (Thornton 2009b).

This lack of emphasis on spoken words is perhaps what gives greater importance to the other aspects of the film, and is the driving force behind the film’s carefully constructed visual and sonic narrative. Through clever cinematic craftsmanship the two main characters effectively speak through gestures and mannerisms rather than words. Their love is of a special type, free of sentimentality and extravagant musical and visual cues. Thornton paints an austere picture but notes that this is the reality for many Aboriginal kids who do not articulate their love for one another (Thornton, 2009b). Instead he establishes an evocative code of body language that the two can communicate with: Samson rubs his fingers and points to his mouth to indicate that he wants food and Delilah shrugs and walks on.

This non-verbal communication in the film is enhanced and strengthened through the other sonic elements; when Samson brings his foam mattress to Delilah’s
campsite, for example, Delilah quickly shuts the gate to prevent him from entering, and here the metallic noise of the gate aurally symbolises her protest. But it is the way that music, sound and image clash throughout that allows the film to cohesively express feelings. Music itself is used as part of the cinematic apparatus that fashions the basic love narrative between the two characters.

The romantic Mexican music that Delilah cathartically escapes to every night with the cassette player in the community’s shared four-wheel drive provides the first marker of Delilah’s curiosity about Samson. The narrative cue becomes explicit when Delilah’s nightly routine is disturbed by the abrasive music blaring from Samson’s boom box. Looking across the road, Delilah watches Samson’s half-naked body dance freely and fluidly to the rhythm of the music, which gradually rises in volume as Delilah’s interest in Samson increases. The different sounds clash but it is the romance of Mexican singer Ana Gabriel that ends up drowning out Samson’s rock and roll, while the sensual performance and image of Samson’s floodlit body mesmerise Delilah. The sonic dynamics of this scene are further complicated when Samson’s brother appears. Agitated by the loud rock music (which at this stage the viewer cannot actually hear), he slaps Samson across the head and pulls the microphone from the amplifier socket. The Mexican music is abruptly silenced amid a wall of feedback. This is followed by a close-up shot of Delilah’s face, which is complemented by the sound of a crackling fire. In this scene the sound track transcends typical uses of sound in film, as it does not merely provide mood or materialise specific actions, events or atmospheres. The logic to the sound track lies not only in realism but also in the way it aurally corresponds to the psychological and emotional states of the characters. It is the vehicle through which the love narrative becomes apparent.

The lack of spoken communication between the two teenagers might also, as Anwyn Crawford has noted, “have reasons beyond cultural strictures and teenage inarticulateness” (Crawford 2009, par, 7). Crawford explains how many Aboriginal children have ear infections that inhibit their hearing: “Ear infections in early childhood often go untreated in Aboriginal communities for lack of basic medical services” (7). She then connects this notion to the scene where Samson covers and
uncovers his ear, where he experiences the sounds of the outside world as muffled and incoherent. This is, of course, the scene where Samson is in a drug-induced state — thus, it also provides a kind of sonic awareness of the effects of petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities. Despite this sonic awareness, the film does not reference any of these issues explicitly in the dialogue or offer an explanation of the problems relating to cultural practices and etiquette in Aboriginal culture:

The film does not offer any commentary on the subtle, non-verbal communication prevalent among Aboriginal people, where eye contact is often considered rude, and where strong cultural taboos exist against the “shame job” of drawing attention to oneself in public: both practices deeply at odds with the self-promoting individualism of Western culture (7).

**Monotony, Repetition and Landscape**

The second narrative theme, monotony, at times overlaps with the theme of love insofar as the love that the two share develops out of their tedious and isolated existence in the community. Their bond is further strengthened through a general need to survive in this community. Every day the two characters go through the same motions: Samson lies about sniffing petrol in his brother’s derelict shack, finding ways to attract Delilah’s attention, and Delilah cares for her debilitated grandmother, providing her with daily medicine, preparing food, painting pictures and so on.

The theme of monotony permeates every aspect of the *mise-en-scène* and the sound track. This is especially evident in the landscape, which is precise, simple and restrained in its representation and presents nothing exciting or new for the two characters. Unlike typical perceptions that place Indigenous Australian people in harmony and at one with the land, the landscape here, especially in its sonic portrayal, takes on a more empty, isolated and oppressive quality. In one scene where Samson looks upon the town from a hill, a violin motif occurs. The violin, which is a very common musical device in Australian cinema because of its English and Irish descent, and more recently as a signifier of the colonial, plays some drawn-out, dissonant notes. The broken sound of the instrument symbolises the fractured and disconnected reality that many Aboriginal people feel with their surroundings. These sorts of musical motifs play on clichéd representations of the Australian outback that tend to
highlight the majestic beauty and vastness of the landscape; Baz Luhrmann’s epic *Australia* (as discussed in the previous chapter) is a recent example of this style. The dissonant violin is also a device that is occurring increasingly in recent Australian cinema — see, for example, *The Proposition* and the Tasmanian Gothic film *Van Diemen’s Land*.

The tedium of landscape in *Samson & Delilah*, on the other hand, is conveyed in the sound track’s rejection of such dramatic staples as bombastic orchestral strings, which characterise the landscape as vast, exotic, formidable, mystical and unconquerable. *Samson & Delilah* also contrasts with a film such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, which utilises world music, ethereal didgeridoos and so on, to portray an environment full of life, sound, culture and spirituality. In *Samson & Delilah*, life in the desert is characterised by sparse, dry, realistic and organic sounds — as Thornton notes “everything is kept to a minimum, nothing is wasted” (Redwood 2009, 31).

Silence is marked by the all-too-familiar Australian sounds of wind moving plangently through eucalyptus trees, screeching cockatoos, flies buzzing and so on. As explored in Chapter Three, Four and Five this is typical of much of Australian landscape cinema, namely, the use of such sounds balanced elsewhere by a prominent music track. The lack of dialogue and the long takes of stark remote landscapes intensify the desert sounds and bring them to the forefront of the narrative. Through the repetition of diegetic music (i.e. music occurring within the world of the film), the routines, realities and geographical entrapment for both Samson and Delilah are highlighted. The music of Ana Gabriel also serves this purpose because its exotic and dramatic qualities provide Delilah with an escape from the boredom of everyday life.

One cyclic motif that plays on this idea of boredom manifests in the day-in, day-out music that Samson’s brother plays with his bandmates on the porch. The three-chord off-beat reggae progression features in more than ten scenes throughout the film and sonically symbolises the cyclic and monotonous existence of the characters and the town and landscape in which they live. Samson longs to play in his brother’s band, but his style of free-form rock that seeks to break free from the
shackles of syncopated reggae minimalism is ultimately too rebellious.\footnote{Despite its oppressive quality in \textit{Samson \& Delilah}, reggae is, of course, a music of black consciousness and has functioned as an outlet to explore issues such as colonialism, black power, oppression and resistance.} The repetitive jamming of this music becomes so unbearable for Samson that sniffing petrol provides the only escape because it filters and dulls the noise. The idea is further explored in a later scene where, unlike on previous occasions, the petrol cure does not work. Instead, Samson ceases the music by walking out on to the porch and beating his brother in the head with a large stick. This action triggers intense high-frequency feedback. Samson walks back inside the shack, closes the door, takes off his shoes and sniffs the petrol. But still the noise cannot be escaped. Samson’s brother then enters and repeatedly beats him in the head with the same stick as an act of revenge. The continuous high-pitched frequencies, which are in essence the electrical remnants of the reggae music, symbolise Samson’s inability to break free from the repetition of everyday life. By contrast, in the last scene of the film, Samson’s father dedicates a recording of this same reggae music to him over the radio. This time the emotional role of the music has reversed and Samson appears overwhelmingly happy that his father has shown him this great sign of love; no longer does the music symbolise monotony, and no longer is the landscape monotonous.

A similar effect of emotional manipulation is achieved when the music of Ana Gabriel returns as Delilah nurses Samson towards the end of the film. At the beginning of this scene the music superimposes over Delilah as she appears on the verge of a breakdown. It functions as a device that heightens the despair, anger and anxiety that Delilah has experienced, but then amazingly, while accompanying inspiring images of Delilah pumping water and sweeping the floor, the music comes to evoke more positive meanings such as hope and productiveness. Here I note that this is also the scene where Delilah returns to her homeland — an issue that speaks to “the long-standing struggle between the government of the Northern Territory over government funding for Aboriginal people opting to live in smaller family groups on their homelands, rather than in larger government settlements or cities” (Davis 2010, 6). Recently, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett revisited this issue with plans to close down services to remote Aboriginal communities. Revealingly, the positive connotations of the music in this
scene suggest that returning to her homeland was the right course of action. In the above cases, the musical motifs, which are established in earlier sequences of the film, help to foreshadow ideas and set up expectations. But their true importance becomes clear when they are revisited and manipulated, taking on different meanings and thematic purposes.

**Sound Track as Contextualiser**

The sound track to *Samson & Delilah* not only succeeds in exploring the core narrative themes of the film, but also in geographically and contextually situating the story. This is demonstrated very clearly in the opening scene where in a matter of seconds we become aware of certain important and establishing factors. In the title sequence, for example, credits roll over black; there is nothing visually suggestive, representational or referential. The foregrounding of sound could not be more effective. After the text ‘Screen Australia’ fades in, we hear the sound of an off-axis magpie-lark; a buzzing blowfly then zips past, making use of the full spatial panorama; a dog barks, a phone rings, a diesel engine turns. Now a slower and more substantial flying insect manifests — possibly a dragonfly. These spot effects are laid over a combination of diffuse chattering in Warlpiri (the language of the community) as well as a cacophony of distant cicadas. The synthesis of off-screen sounds, be they spot effects or continuous atmospheres, renders a mood, as well as a setting, a location and a spatial understanding of the *mise en scène* — and we are just twenty seconds into the film. But it is not just the atmospheric sounds that are of importance in this scene. Suddenly someone is tuning a radio, settling on the country classic ‘Sunshiny Day’, an appropriate genre choice considering the popularity of country music in Aboriginal communities. While the song occurs, all of the diegetic sound effects and atmospheres fade out. There is a shift in the clarity and the proximity of the radio music. No longer crackled, muffled and low-fidelity, the music is now outside the world of the film. Although the music appears to have a source within the film (that is, diegetic sound), its clarity and presence make it function more like non-diegetic dramatic score. The apparent spatial shift from the real-world radio sound to the seemingly non-diegetic radio sound poignantly enables an emotional response and renders the image both stylised and timeless. The image fades into a dishevelled
Samson awakening; he ruffles his hair, puts on his shirt and reaches for a can of petrol to sniff. The lyrics ‘Every day is going to be a sunshiny day’ ironically contradict the dire but seemingly perpetual situation Samson finds himself in. Once high on fumes, Samson waves his hand up and down as though holding a drumstick, keeping rhythm with the song. This drumming gesture works insidiously as it sets up a web of rhythmic, temporal and cyclic patterns that recur throughout the film and directly relate to the themes of love and monotony. For example, the many town scenes contain different spatial perspectives on the same snare, bass and hi-hat drumming combination, giving emphasis to the boredom and monotonous existence of the characters that live in the remote outback community. According to Thornton, ‘Sunshiny Day’ was the initial inspiration for the scene. It was also used while the scene was being shot, allowing the entire production team to get a feeling for the mood and atmosphere (Thornton 2009a). As an aside, the use of ‘Sunshiny Day’ in Samson & Delilah contrasts with the previous comments and observations regarding the oppressive qualities of country music in the film The Sapphires. Indeed, as Thornton has noted, he relies heavily on country music in his films because of the notion that the genre is much loved by and very popular among Aboriginal people living in outback Australia. Evidence of such appreciation for country music can also be found in the success of many highly regarded Aboriginal country musicians such as Auriel Andrew, Troy Cassar-Daley, Issac Yamma, Dougie Young, Adam Jones and Roger Knox. Thornton also talks about how Aboriginal people connect to the themes, lyrics and melodies of country music because of their deep respect for land and love of country: “That’s realism to me. They’re singing about country and the love of country, ‘don’t fence me in’ and all that sort of stuff, so there are many connections” (Thornton 2009a). Moreover, the specific use of ‘Sunshiny Day’ also has a back story to consider. The song was written and performed by Charley Pride — the only African-American country singer to receive a membership to the Grand Ole Opry, and one of the few to receive widespread commercial success. Thus, this piece has symbolic significance.

When Samson rises from his bed the sound track cleverly shifts perspective. Instead of sounding out what the viewer ought to be hearing, it functions as Samson’s aurally subjective impression of the events taking place. Samson gets up and walks
outside, finding his brother’s band jamming on the porch. Although we can see the band members we cannot hear their music — ‘Sunshiny Day’ still reigns supreme. As Samson reaches for an electric guitar resting on an amplifier, a wall of feedback noise occurs and Samson screams ‘Yeah!’ and jumps up and strums the guitar, and ‘Sunshiny Day’ miraculously attenuates to near silence. Frustrated by the disturbance, his brother snatches the guitar from him; more feedback occurs and triggers the audibility of the band’s reggae music. These sounds do not realistically coincide with the events taking place, but are instead disorientated, symbolising Samson’s petrol-induced mental disarray.

This remarkable scene is followed by Delilah waking on the other side of town. We know that this happens simultaneously to the previous events as we can hear the same reggae music, though it is now distant and less cohesive. This distance gives the viewer a spatial understanding of the topographical features of the community. As we can already appreciate, this very complex sound design not only establishes the overall mood and tone but also speaks the voice of the story to come, initiating a series of ideas and issues that relate to the central themes of love, monotony and landscape — and it does all this before the powers of image and dialogue manifest.

Importantly, similar usages and deployments of music and sound are apparent elsewhere in Samson & Delilah’s narrative. Consider, for instance, the scene featuring the alcoholic Aboriginal Gonzo who lives beneath a highway overpass in the regional town of Alice Springs. After a series of unfortunate events and interactions Samson and Delilah stumble across this resting place. Gonzo attempts to lighten the load of his two new companions. He rambles a monologue of anecdotes, advice, and songs (Crawford 2009, par. 5). In one scene, with both humour and spirit, Gonzo’s defiance breaks into an old song, ‘We Have Survived’. This song is considered by many as an Aboriginal anthem (Cough 2003, 30) and an “anthem of cultural persistence” (Lawe-Davies 1993, 250). It was originally made famous by the Aboriginal rock reggae group No Fixed Address (1982) and later by the Aboriginal musical theatre group the Black Arm Band:
We have survived the white man’s world
and the hate and the torment of it all
We have survived the white man’s world
and you know you can’t change that

As explored by Nixon, although Gonzo’s humour provides release at this stage of the film (or even a refreshing moment for the perceiver), he offers no escape. Indeed, the intent is still clear: despite all the injustices bestowed on Aboriginal people since British settlement of the land, Aborigines have ‘survived’ (2016, par. 3). The lyrical content guides our response by directing our attention to Gonzo’s struggle under colonialism; the lyrics guide our attention to the character’s psychological state and philosophical position.

In another scene, Gonzo sings Tom Waits’ ‘Jesus Gonna Be Here’ (1992). Again, this song is heard by the audience and also the characters within the film. The song’s lyrics, “Well I’ve been faithful, and I’ve been so good, except for the drinking” suggest that Gonzo plans to admit himself to rehabilitation clinic. As explained by Thornton, the lyrics also speak to the notion that Christian organisations often run rehabilitation clinics in Australia:

…it becomes clear that Gonzo knows that going to rehab is going to be tough, and he’s wondering whether the Church is only doing this because they want a convert. Is this the reason they want me here? Is this a quick way to peoples’ souls by giving them a few decent meals? (Thornton 2009a).

Adding to the atmosphere of Gonzo’s various lyrical excerpts is the highly present and dense sound design that evokes the unusual but distinctive aural sensation of being under a highway bridge. Here, we encounter a spatially dense aural environment that comprises the cavernous thuds and rattles of cars and trucks overhead. These rattles and thuds engender a rhythmic and cyclic quality to the scenes but they also drown out the words uttered by Gonzo. As with the other rhythms in the film they emphasise the character’s inability to rise above his/her environmental and socially oppressive conditions.
Conclusion

Samson & Delilah sets a precedent, introducing a new kind of landscape filmmaking, an Indigenous Australian realist approach that seeks to explore a sonic as well as a social reality within Aboriginal Australia. As mentioned, Thornton’s film avoids sugar-coating its message through the use of a non-diegetic orchestral score or those familiar haunting didgeridoos and exotic instrumentation — filmic strategies outlined in Chapter Four. Instead, his approach looks to music that Aboriginal people listen to — music that is part of their everyday life such as country and reggae. Samson & Delilah’s sound track also undergoes various sonic mutations, variations and juxtapositions. The sound track is crucial in highlighting and exploring the primary narrative themes of the film, including drug abuse, boredom, monotony, unemployment and teenage love. In turn, the sonic elements contribute to locating Aboriginal Australia in a contemporary landscape cinematic context. They also develop an aural depiction of landscape unfamiliar in much of Australian landscape cinema. While Samson & Delilah aims for realism through its sonic and musical attributes, it does so in a different way from other landscape films (even realist Indigenous Australian films) of the period such as Ivan Sen’s Toomelah. Samson and Delilah’s sound design is meticulously arranged and orchestrated, whereas Toomelah’s sound track seeks to create a sense of chaos and spontaneity. While The Proposition’s revisionist sound track contains elements of realism, attempting to depict how life was during the ‘frontier wars’, it combines these aural renderings with elements of musical, verbal and visual stylisation. Samson & Delilah, by contrast, seeks to explore colonialism in the here and now from an Aboriginal perspective and through sound and music. Though Samson & Delilah’s sound track helps to provide the perceiver with a realistic point of view on contemporary issues facing Aboriginal people in remote Australia, it does so without explicitly mentioning issues such as the intervention or the government’s proposal to take remote communities off the grid. This exclusion of political reference in Samson & Delilah differs from a film such as Rabbit-Proof Fence where the theme of Bringing Them Home/the stolen generations is integrated directly into the narrative. Importantly, however, in all the landscape films mentioned in this section, music and dialogue do not subjugate other aural elements.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Much recent Australian film criticism has been concerned with the impact of colonialism and how that impact is represented on screen. To continue to address Australia’s past, it is argued, should help us Australians in a more general way to understand the present. It is the argument of this thesis that a focus on the sonic aspects of film can extend this analysis. In exploring identity issues this thesis has sought to identify the potential of the often-overlooked sound track not only as a fertile field for artistic analysis, but also as a way of attaining a new understanding of the links between identity and representation. I have addressed a contrast between pre and post-2000 identity discussions in Australia, and then argued that analysing film music and sound provides an opportunity to consider the aftershocks of landmark events such as Mabo and Bringing them Home in the context of film. I have also asked the further question: where are we now?

In examining the relation between film sound track, identity, and cultural representation I have employed specific case studies. In the following pages, I profile my results in more detail, and examine some of the broader societal and cultural implications of these findings. I also suggest potential directions for further studies.

This conclusion addresses the general questions outlined in the thesis introduction. These are:

1. In what ways can the cinematic sound track highlight the Australian landscape as a complex template of national identity in the post-2000 era?
2. What roles have recent cinematic sound tracks played in the national process of reviewing Australia’s colonial past?
3. Could an analysis of sound track reveal new, negotiated or oppositional readings of the selected films?

Chapters One, Two and Three established a framework for analysing the sound tracks of contemporary landscape cinema. These chapters defined the scope of the field and reviewed associated academic literature. They outlined the themes to be
developed in this thesis, the key Australian sound track trends and approaches and the technical problem of how to read the sound and music from the perspective of the film perceiver. These chapters stress that sensitivity to the connection — and at times the lack of connection — between sound, music, verbal and pictorial message is vital in how we examine the artistic and socio-cultural dimensions of contemporary landscape cinema. Chapter Two sought to build upon existing scholarship surrounding Australian landscape cinema such as Gibson (1992), O’Regan (1996) and Collins and Davis (2004) by refocussing our attention on the notion of the ‘sonic landscape’. This chapter — which provides the cultural context of the thesis — is permeated by references to a post-colonial turn, in relation to identity issues. Chapter Three extended the research of Coyle (1998 and 2005) by exploring the idea of whether or not there is a specifically local sound in Australian landscape cinema. This chapter examined the key elements that signify Australia, including particular sound effects, music, instrumentation and dialogue. It also outlined the primary approaches to designing sound track since the 1970s and profiled several significant composers. The final section of the chapter provided a case study of Picnic at Hanging Rock as a way of testing the framework initiated in the three opening chapters. This case study shows how sound track analysis can provide a new perspective on a film that has not only widely influenced contemporary Australian landscape cinema, but has also garnered much critical and scholarly attention. I found that the framework established in Chapter One, Two and Three was useful for exploring the formal, textual, cultural and thematic relationships between the sound track, the image track and the world that the film creates. I found that the framework was adaptable, having the potential to be used in other national cinema contexts. The framework and outcomes of the thesis, I would suggest, could also make a productive contribution to the more musicologically-orientated study of Australian cinematic sound tracks — including to their attempts to investigate the cultural meaning behind musical and sonic motifs.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven identify, introduce and examine a corpus of films which are representative of the current developments taking place in colonial and Aboriginal-themed Australian landscape cinema. In using textual and production analysis methods established in the first three chapters, I examined the aural elements of four films (i.e. Rabbit-Proof Fence, The Proposition, Australia and Samson &
Delilah) — isolating and demonstrating the characteristics that both unite and differentiate these film sound tracks.

Each case study recognises the added but distinctively active, affective and material role that sound and music play in conveying the actual landscape — a place where “nature and culture contend and combine in history” (Gibson 2002, 2). The films promote the landscape beyond the role of a setting to a ‘character’; their sound tracks add a further sonic dimension, effectively generating a ‘sonic character’ in the film. In other words, the films make the landscape not a setting but a protagonist, and the sound tracks make sonic character central to that definition. We know that the sound track is working beyond the level of mere ‘backdrop’ or an environmental setting for the action when we hear birds, lizards, insects and mammals materialised at higher than normal sound-effects volume. We know that the sound track has deeper cultural significance when we hear an earthquake rumble over a seemingly normal visual landscape panorama in Picnic at Hanging Rock (Chapter Three); or when we hear the haunting resonances of telephone wire recordings become ever more present as the protagonists venture further into the Australian outback in Wolf Creek (Chapter Five); or when we experience abstracted, digitally manipulated sounds of animals merge into the pitch and rhythm of a didgeridoo in Rabbit-Proof Fence (Chapter Four). Such sounds feature highly in terms of narrational hierarchy; they are vitally important in conveying meaning. The sounds are not subservient to the image; in fact, at times, they displace other film elements (i.e. image, dialogue or other sounds) as the principal locus of attention — a representational strategy we encounter in particular in Rabbit-Proof Fence, The Proposition and Samson & Delilah, films which are extremely limited in dialogue.

This thesis provides new and oppositional readings of the selected films partly by identifying ways that the sound track and landscape representations change over time. I examined aesthetic and ideological developments between the four case-study film sound tracks and their post-2000s period of focus. I also examined the time dimensions of the films’ central themes, for example, how the themes of ‘nostalgia’ or ‘the Gothic’ have developed across twentieth and twenty-first century Australian cinema. Chapter Four, for instance, investigated the changing role of sound and music
in the representation of Aboriginality and associated connections to landscape in Australian cinema, focusing specifically on *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, the first major feature film to respond to the *Bringing Them Home* report. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (as argued in Chapter Four) diverges from typical musical racial codification in Australian landscape cinema — with particular reference to Pisani’s concept of the ‘tool box of Exotica’ (i.e. dissonance, atonality and the misappropriation of indigenous instrumentation and music) — and conveys a new type of musical exoticism. Such exoticism manifests through the generically ethnic referents of world music and overly saturated and reverberant sound effects. This chapter extends international research — such as Gorbman (2000), who focuses on the sounding of the American Indian in Westerns, and Tulk (2009), who provides a reading of the world music in recent Disney productions — but refocuses the arguments towards sonic representations of Aboriginality in a wide canon of Australian landscape films.

On a different level, however, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*’s constant and ever present use of abstracted environmental sound effects (which move seemingly across the spatial panorama) and the use of specifically Aboriginal music and instrumentation may also be interpreted as providing an aural acknowledgement of a pre-settlement acoustic heritage. Such a sonically created awareness transcends prior typical representations that tended to silence Aboriginal culture and indeed the landscape. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* explores the issue of the stolen generation (an issue that also entailed a form of silencing) and fills its sound track with signifiers of Aboriginality and Aboriginal connections to landscape.

As I examined in Chapter Five, *The Proposition*’s sound track presents a new way of dealing with the trauma of the frontier wars and colonialism more generally speaking. The film’s sound and music are loud, confrontational and also at times dissonant, delicate and poetic. By contrast, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* — while partly international in design (e.g. its deployment of world music) — emphasises the ethereal and exotic, and through its use of specifically Australian-associated sounds signifies a pre-settlement culture.
The Proposition embraces the silencing trope, which as discussed in the review of the ‘Australian Gothic’ at the beginning of Chapter Five signifies not so much an absence of sound, but rather the presence of a silence coloured by unfamiliar sounds. Importantly, however, the film uses this approach as a means of providing a criticism of colonialism and as a poignant reminder of how Anglo-Celtic culture silenced Aboriginal culture. Also furthering the film’s revisionist thematic objectives are its adaptations of pre-existing songs, which contain associations that are complicated and deeply conflicted. One can locate such an approach in songs such as ‘Rule Britannia’, which is sung both out of tune and out of time by the vile drunken police officers shortly after they massacre a tribe of Aboriginal people. Rather than evoking the majesty of an Empire (as is the case with many prior versions of songs that evoke Britain), this particular rendition evokes the vile underside — the dregs — of colonialism.

A new form of criticism of society, values, colonialism and history is evident in other elements of the The Proposition’s sound track — elements which subvert or react to the consonant, essentialist and idealistic scores of mainstream classical styles and aesthetics (namely, the conventional scoring approaches adopted in many American Westerns and Australian bushranger films). This subversion is evident in the way the sound track highlights the overlap between the film’s diegetic sonic textures and elements of the score such as noise, distortion, and feedback. More broadly, this chapter addresses a dearth of research on the sonic dimensions of the Australian Gothic. Indeed, while several studies have examined the concept of the Gothic in Australian cinema (e.g. Turcotte 1998 and Rayner 2000) none of these studies explore the issue through film sound and music.

As I explored in Chapter Six, the sounding of nostalgia is also fertile (and changing) ground in an Australian landscape cinema context. Australia, for instance, echoes the nostalgic orchestral approaches found in many prior landscape films (e.g. The Man from Snowy River), but also demonstrates a new direction. Australia’s commissioning of pop stars and musical icons, and its inclusion of excerpts of pre-existing popular music, classical music and film music are all hyperbolic, post-modern, outward-looking and highly symbolic. This musical material engages with a
story that deals with Aboriginal-settler relations, including the stolen generations. While acknowledging such issues the sound track also provides an idealistic, heroic, nostalgic and essentialist depiction of the landscape and its characters. Released three years after The Proposition, Australia suggests a need at that time for more positive representations of Australian history. Importantly, while Australia’s sound track reacts against the critical and negative associations evident in sound tracks of films such as The Proposition, one might interpret The Proposition’s sonic elements as being, in turn, a reaction to the essentialist sonic workings of Australian nostalgia cinema. Australia’s use of Elgar invoking a nostalgic longing for Britain contrasts with The Proposition’s damaging deployment of the song ‘Rule Britannia’ in a way that encapsulates a binary opposition in their sonic approaches. As with all the analysis chapters, Chapter Six seeks to address a specific gap in Australian landscape cinema scholarship by shifting the focus from the image and narrative to sound and music.

Showcased as a case study in Chapter Seven is Samson & Delilah, a film that responds to recent developments in the history wars debate, such as the 2006 Northern Territory intervention. Samson & Delilah features a carefully constructed sonic and musical narrative and is representative of a new approach that explores the contemporary realities for Aboriginal people themselves living in remote outback communities. The sound track develops a range of complex sonic and musical patterns, cycles, and rhythms to create a unique interpretation of the landscape — depicting the characters’ existence with the landscape as monotonous, dull and repetitious. Director Warwick Thornton portrays an outback landscape that is simply there — which of course differs from the ethereal and numinous sonic landscapes in Rabbit-Proof Fence; the foreboding, Gothic and silent sonic landscapes in The Proposition and Picnic at Hanging Rock; and the nostalgic and essentialist sonic landscapes in Australia. Samson & Delilah’s sound track also features music that is actually popular in outback Aboriginal communities (e.g. country and reggae). These characteristics are all indicative of a new contemporary indigenous realist approach and a distinctive Aboriginal voice currently taking form in Australian landscape cinema production — an approach and voice that presents both a sonic as well as a social reality.
My research has expanded on the work by Collins and Davis in *Australian Cinema After Mabo* by examining through musical and sonic means how the political, cultural and social resonances of landscape representation have altered in twenty-first century cinema, thus providing a fresh relevance for modern audiences. I have suggested that each of the sound tracks engages with the social trauma and political aftershocks of events such as Mabo, *Bringing Them Home* and the 2006 intervention. The sound tracks do this in forceful and subtle ways. For instance, *The Proposition*’s revisionist sound track communicates an incredibly confrontational engagement with Australian history by experimenting with dissonance, distortion and volume and reconsidering audio production techniques such as layering, shaping, synchronicity and movement. Likewise, *Australia* seeks to challenge typical colonial narratives, but does so in an entirely different sonic and musical manner, drawing on musical material that contains symbolic associations that challenge the conventions of outback lore.

More generally, *Rabbit-Proof Fence, The Proposition, Samson & Delilah, Australia* and a spate of recent landscape films that reside on the liberal left side of the history wars sonically challenge the typical problems relating to landscape cinema. Such problems include a neglect of the country’s “Aboriginal population and its history, and a playing up of the Australian male’s engagement with a demanding natural environment” (McFarlane 1987, 48) — qualities that can be found in *The Man from Snowy River* and more recently *Red Dog* (as I explored in Chapter Six). As I have argued, the sound tracks focused on throughout the study also demonstrate a potentially powerful double strand of reception. This is evidenced in the way a perceiver may receive the films’ narrative and visual assessment of Australia’s colonial history, combined with a contemporary sounding sound track which signals a particular ideological position. Such a sound track has the ability to influence the perceiver’s position in reception/assessment of that historical period or setting.

The fact that the sound tracks do challenge traditional forms helps to address a necessity that has been identified by O’Regan — namely, “Australians need to be resituated within their own culture and history with new and more relevant symbols than that of the Australian legend, mateship [and] the Aussie battler” (2000, 4).
Returning to one of the key research questions we can surmise that contemporary Australian sonic landscapes not only play a role in reviewing Australia’s colonial past but are an arena for working through conflicted strands of national identity and history. However, while each film sound track demonstrates this reconciliation effort, they do so, as I have argued, in very different ways.

In concentrating on the time dimensions of landscape representation (and in fact the whole relationship between Australian identity and sound track) we must also consider how Australia has become more globalised and more urbanised (since the time of Picnic at Hanging Rock’s production). On the one hand, the shrinking of the globe at the level of communications has brought us closer and made us more connected to the outback; in this sense, the outback has become less remote. On the other hand, the increasing urbanisation of Australia, the amalgamation of shire councils and townships (which results in a loss of services), the shutting down of remote Aboriginal communities and so forth, means that Australians are in fact moving away from the outback. These issues, of course, impact the cinematic representation and reception of landscape. As I reiterate throughout the thesis (i.e. Chapters Three, Four and Six), the transnational flows of music and sound and the increasing influence from American film practice, whose pervasive cultural presence holds a hegemonic position in Australian society and culture, have in some ways compromised the notion of a distinctive voice in Australian sound track practice. Thus, this observation raises the question: what is the current state of Australian cinema sound track as the ‘national’ aligns against the transnational? What is the state of any national cinematic sound in such a context?

My research suggests that despite ‘international contamination’ (to revisit Gibson’s term), sonic landscapes still rely on a palette of sounds that are culturally synonymous with the term ‘Australia’ and are intrinsically tied to the landscape. This palette includes: music (e.g. Aboriginal music, distinctively Australian popular and classical music, or music of Irish and English descent which has come to signify Australia’s colonial roots); specific instrumentation (e.g. the didgeridoo); environmental sound effects (fauna and rural sounds that are unique to Australia); and distinctively Australian accents. These sonic forms also gain a degree of
distinctiveness when juxtaposed or treated with specific outside influences (which could mean other types of music or sound or indeed production rendering, structural, narrative and spatial techniques). They also can achieve a distinctive audiovisuality through their association with Australian landscape pictorial imagery. It is here we encounter the ‘fresh’ quality of the ‘synchresis’ (i.e. the mental image) or the disjunction between sound and image itself. When we are presented with a picture of the red outback or the Australian bush — accompanying, for instance, a motif from world music (maybe an Arabic wailing or even Romanian pan pipes) and the sound of a kookaburra or a didgeridoo — we are being helped artistically to accept the proposition that it is the Australian landscape.

An important aspect of my investigation has been whether or not the transnational sonic elements (e.g. world music, American popular music, European classical music) are ethically and representationally problematic within the context of landscape cinema and Australian identity. For instance, what are the moral/ethical limits of playing with (the music of) another culture as the world becomes more globalised, more transnational? My response to this issue is that it depends on the context. As I have discussed in Chapter Four, dissonance, atonality, tritones, parallel fourths, and so on, are troublesome when representing cultures from Asia on screen. Likewise, world music and indeed abstracted sound effects can raise cultural concerns when representing Aboriginality because while these forms may differ from prior forms, their racial coding suggests misappropriation, misrepresentation and ‘othering’. In a similar fashion, but with a different ethical and cultural outcome, effects such as reverb are not problematic (although are probably acoustically illogical) when applied to the sound of a horse’s hooves as the stockman rides off into the sunset across a flat landscape in a film such as The Proposition (Chapter Five) or Australia (Chapter Six). However, heavy doses of reverb become a problem when applied to representations of Aboriginality through voices, instrumentation and environmental sound effects in films such as Rabbit-Proof Fence (Chapter Four). This problem arises because the audiovisuality conveys — perhaps unconsciously — an essentialised Aboriginality. In fact, it may be that the reverberation effect evokes this quality more so than the instrumentation itself — it is the crucial link connecting the panpipes and the didgeridoo.
The associated problem is that these sonic representations are primarily credited to white directors, composers and sound designers who continue a culturally white reading, insisting on a single homogeneous Aboriginal culture. Such representations reinforce the skewed version that we, the film consumers, are all so familiar with, inviting us to believe in the myth of the Australian landscape. Just as Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli* managed to create a historical myth, the sound and music of contemporary Australian cinema can also help to create a mythical perception of landscape that is an intrinsic component in the construction/perception of Australian identity at the local and global level. In using these sounds and music, which are incorporated into the atmosphere track and signify a spiritual and mythical connection with the land, contemporary sonic landscapes contribute to a ‘national image’ that is reflective of our settler status.

What can be said is that we are now starting to see development and diversity in contemporary Australian landscape cinema sound tracks (mainly from Aboriginal filmmakers or films that follow the advice from Indigenous Australian consultants). This development is evident in the way the sound tracks avoid conjuring up the ‘exotic’. Such sound tracks instead explore how Aboriginal characters face everyday concerns, as well as the issues defined through their Aboriginality. Examples of such an approach can be found in *Samson & Delilah*, but also films such as *The Sapphires*, which uses the uplifting soul music of Motown to comment on issues such as racial discrimination. The empowering music in this latter film, for instance, travels across national and cultural borders and draws a connection between the social restrictions and struggles of African American people and Aboriginal Australians during the 1960s. The film’s transnational approach to sound track does not necessarily avoid the ‘exotic’ but it does develop a positive depiction of a racial and political minority, and in this sense brings the Aboriginal characters out from the ‘exotic’ and into the world as an active minority. Moreover, a parallel is also implied between the United States situation (i.e. the late 1960s), and an Australian situation now. The United States setting is about a decade into the civil rights, and the present Australian situation is some time on from Mabo, and is a period when Aboriginal artists (singers and filmmakers) are able to make an important statement.
Thus, *The Sapphires* presents a departure from examples such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence* — a film that deals with the theme of assimilation, relies on imported sounds and features a kind of ethnic-based sonic reduction. What these examples also suggest is that sound tracks can function at a representational level independently from, and in some cases contrary to, other narrative, thematic and visual aspects of a film.

Ultimately, there is no doubt music and sound are constitutive of Australian identity. All Australian cinematic landscape sound tracks are to a degree, however, sound tracks of imagined identity that signify ‘Australia’ as a geographic location and community, a set of sentiments, cultural imaginings and discourses. Like other artistic practices and industries, all sound tracks are constructed, cultivated, formulated and reformulated by individuals (i.e. composers, sound designers, directors, producers and other film personnel). The particular political, social issues and struggles of the day influence such individuals. They tend to be bounded by what has been called the “burden of representation”, which refers to the ongoing difficulty that arises when artists feel they have to stand in for their community and represent it in a certain way (Tagg 1988). Moreover, if there is such a thing as the sound of Australia, some would argue, in the words of Turner, that it is “grounded in the heterogeneity and hybridity of Australian culture” (1994 192).

While this study has focused on the sound tracks of films that review Australia’s colonial past and take place in the outback, bush and desert, there is still much uncharted terrain for future studies. For instance, an analysis of the sonic and musical dimensions of landscape films such as *Japanese Story* could provide a fruitful gender or migrant-based perspective. Cinematic sound tracks that foreground culturally and ethnically diverse urban/suburban-set landscapes also warrant investigation. After all, most of Australia’s population live in such urban/suburban landscapes. Moreover, as the history wars debate carries on and other socio-cultural and political events are manifested, sonic landscapes will continue to be evaluated and re-evaluated. Changes in sonic and musical approaches to Australian landscape cinema over the next few years may flow from such developments as the proposal to recognise Aboriginal people in the constitution, the republic debate, investment in renewable energy, climate change, immigration reforms, and so on. As I have
maintained throughout this thesis, while sound track identifications and signifiers are often less conspicuous than other aspects of a film’s assemblage, they can be more revealing of Australia’s cultural unconscious, psyche and sense of self-understanding. Thus, the potential of this area of research interest is extensive and multifaceted. In the project of analysing Australian film, and not only landscape film, the detailed investigation of sound track strategies — in all their variety — is likely to continue to be productive from a political-sociological as well as a filmic point of view.
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