

THEORISING THE DINGO HOWL

Jazz in Australian Film in the 1990s and Early 2000s

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Abstract

In discussing the films *Dingo* (1991), *The Boys* (1998), *Come in Spinner* (1990), and *The Tracker* (2002), I examine the meeting of jazz music as a “sonic indicator of authenticity” with the critical notion of settler-colonial Australia as an unreconciled, uncanny, and inauthentic space. These films tell uniquely Australian stories and diegetically or non-diegetically feature improvised music practices that fall under the category of jazz as a broad “coverall” term. In these films, the music unsettles us and portray an uneasy relationship between their Australian subjects and the Australian landscape. They are also unique films in how their music and musicians were respected and prioritised, sometimes with significant implications for how scenes were filmed and composed. I argue that these films are significant in reflecting the cultural tensions at the time they emerged, many which can still be felt today. These films connect with contemporary developments in jazz practice in Australia and offer a template for future practice-based research and cultural collaborations.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work. All versions of the submitted thesis are identical.

Versions of the first and second chapters of this thesis were submitted as assessment for ENGL4020: Thesis Writing Workshop.

This research complies with human ethics research approval (Ethics code: H/2024/0803).

Signature and date:

JT 7 November 2024

*Dedicated to my fiancée Sophia, my parents Queenie and Kelvin, and my Father in heaven
who makes all things beautiful.*

*With thanks to Dr. Monique Rooney for her supervision, and John Mackey for his external
consultation.*

Written on Ngunawal, Wangal, and Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Countries.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this work refers to people
who have passed away.*

Always was, always will be.

*Note on the use of pronouns: I have alternated between uses of 'I', 'we', and 'ours' as pronouns
throughout this text. This is in an effort to be inclusive for all audiences, who are invited to
follow and partake in my line of thinking. I acknowledge that I am coming from a settler-
colonial Australian standpoint, and that not all audiences may feel that they are accurately
reflected in the category of 'we' or 'ours', regarding some of the perspectives and reflections
I discuss. My intention is not to exclude these diverse audiences, but to open up, and hopefully
critique, the spaces that I am coming from.*

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Theorising the Dingo Howl: Jazz in Australian Film in the 1990s and Early 2000s

On December 10th, 1992, Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating delivered the Redfern Speech on Gadigal Land, recognising, in a “fundamental test of our social goals and our national will”¹ that it was “we [non-Indigenous Australia] who did the dispossessing.”² Coming months after the handing down of the *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* decision, which recognised the legal fiction of *terra nullius* and set the foundation of Native Title,³ and around one-and-a-half years after the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,⁴ the speech brought together a moment of national shame with a sense of national pride and hope. Notably absent in this speech was the word ‘sorry’ – something which would only be fulfilled over a decade later.⁵

Less than six months prior, then-Governor Bill Clinton played the saxophone live on *The Arsenio Hall Show*⁶ – an appearance “later seen as the definitive moment where Clinton captured the trust and support of young voters, and locked the election on charisma points”⁷ (Clinton would become President later that year). Reception from working saxophonists was less forgiving. Jimmy Heath admired Clinton’s concept but criticised his tone and choice to wear sunglasses in the middle of the night.⁸ David Sanborn (who would later play at Clinton’s inauguration) wryly commented that Clinton played like a Governor of Arkansas and not like a President, joking that he should “Keep [the] day job.”⁹ As ‘cool’ as Clinton’s appearance on television might have been for voters, for many musicians, especially jazz musicians, the image of Clinton, his saxophone, and his well-publicised love of Kenny G,¹⁰ was intertwined with notions of the deeply *uncool* – as something performative, merely superficial, or even hypocritical and offensive, as a member of an out-group forcibly asserting themselves as belonging to an in-group.¹¹

Drawing these two moments together enlivens us to the commonalities in the development of cultural narratives of Australian nationhood and jazz as practice and community in the ‘1990s period. Keating’s speech is an apology without an apology, and a promise of reconciliation, truth-telling, and republic still unfulfilled over three decades later. Clinton’s performance is a claim to hipness and coolness which has arguably lived on as anything but that – an attempted moment of cool unable to shake off a deep sense

of *un-cool*. Both are kinetic moments of constant revision – as onlookers, we are invited to read them in one way, only to be met imminently with counter-readings, and counter-readings of counter-readings. They characterise a remarkable instability which make both topics, Australia and jazz, particularly feature-rich when paired together. Both the events I have raised involve an abrupt ‘opening up’ into new territories and narratives, and prompt questions of memory, history, authenticity, and voice.

Jazz in Australia is an imported tradition, a world music¹² steeped in American (specifically, African-American¹³) traditions. It enlivens audiences to settler-colonial Australia’s own uneasy importation and recent worldliness: its improvised and temporary nature. This is not to say that the continent now known as Australia was not a transnational subject before colonisation,¹⁴ but instead to point to the recency of its contemporary status as a Commonwealth nation-state. Yet, as we see in the Clinton example, the proliferation of jazz is also a *dilution* – an introduction to new audiences and contexts which, rightly or not, bear the perception of just not getting it and missing the “realness”, the *edge*.¹⁵ As with any subculture, jazz is powered by its narratives:

Narratives by or about a subculture come into being and produce a set of effects (or, affects) and reactions: fascination, envy, anxiety, disdain, revulsion, legislation, social reform, etc. They are never neutral. Every narrative by or about a subculture is a matter of position-taking – both within that subculture and outside it.¹⁶

The intersection between jazz and Australian imaginaries is also a *complex and precarious* relationship where narratives of ‘authenticity’ are continually summoned, tested, and strained, and social imaginaries are constituted and shattered. Here, films, specifically, films wholly or partly produced in Australia and about Australians, are especially potent as they combine multidisciplinary collaboration with strong reflections on social imagination and identity. Summarised in a research question, our inquiry might be stated as: *what are the linkages between 1990s and early 2000s Australian films featuring jazz, and what can those linkages tell us about the condition of being on Australia?*

Defining Jazz

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, 'jazz' is defined as "American music developed especially from ragtime and blues and characterized by propulsive syncopated rhythms, polyphonic ensemble playing, varying degrees of improvisation, and often deliberate distortions of pitch and timbre."¹⁷ While this works to describe the surface features one might witness in a jazz concert or gig, it does seem to lack something of the spirit or soul of jazz as an art form – its history and connection with the American civil rights movement,¹⁸ its variability and adaptability and growth in places outside of America (e.g. the European ECM label), its willingness to break away from apparent fundamentals such as syncopated rhythms and ensemble playing (e.g. textural and solo performances), and the complexity of what the term "improvisation" can mean for musicians (is freely improvised music jazz...?). Indeed, the question of 'what is/n't jazz' has troubled commentators, reviewers, audiences, radio hosts, academia, and more¹⁹ since the early development of the style and first usage of the term 'jazz' somewhere in the early 20th century²⁰ – all of whom tend to, somehow or other, arrive at "the fact that jazz defies an easy definition."²¹ Perhaps the most reliable definition we have for 'jazz' really comes down to this famous quote commonly attributed to Louis Armstrong: "If you have to ask what jazz is, you'll never know."²²

But defining jazz does hold "very real and practical consequences" – typically, who gets the gig and who doesn't.²³ In the context of this thesis, this becomes the fundamental consideration of how and why the focus texts 'get the gig' of being discussed. I propose a loose working definition following Australian musicologist Bruce Johnson, who describes 'jazz' as a "coverall" term encompassing a broad church of regional influences, instruments, and personalities.²⁴ Was Bill Clinton's saxophone performance 'jazz'? Is Kenny G 'jazz'? Was Miles Davis' later pop-fusion material 'jazz'? Yes, *and* no. The answer vacillates as the idea of 'jazz' itself contracts and expands. Thinking of 'jazz' as creative and analytic practice allows us to examine a breadth of texts by finding the jazz in them – similarly to how a jazz musician might approach a broad range of gigs and styles without compromising their essence as players.

The four films selected for this thesis meet this loose working definition of jazz to varying degrees. In *Dingo*,²⁵ the soundtrack from Michel Legrand and Miles Davis self-reflexively backtracks over Davis' catalogue and oeuvre. Comments Davis: "I tried to rediscover the sound, the ambience of my cool period, the style of "Kind of Blue", "Sketches of Spain" and "Milestones"."²⁶ Meanwhile, the soundtrack of *Come in Spinner*²⁷ is comprised entirely of Great American Songbook jazz standards, including tunes composed by Cole Porter, the Gershwin brothers, and particularly Duke Ellington.²⁸ The Necks' soundtrack in *The Boys*²⁹ somewhat poses a problem due to their unique practice which they self-identify as "Not entirely avant-garde, nor minimalist, nor ambient, nor jazz."³⁰ Yet a band which is featured in the Australian Jazz Real Book website,³¹ regularly plays in jazz festivals worldwide,³² has been said to "extend the parameters of the 'jazz' piano trio" in academic commentary,³³ and engages earnestly in the "classic jazz situation [...] not to copy or emulate but distinguish yourself"³⁴ slots in quite naturally with 'jazz' as a 'coverall' term. As The Necks' pianist Chris Abrahams comments: "I have no problem with people categorising us however they see fit. Every listener has the right to interpret what we do however they feel, and it's a human need to categorise and to put a name to things. I don't mind being thought of as all of the above, or none of the above."³⁵ The soundtrack in *The Tracker*³⁶ (performed by Archie Roach and composed by Graham Tardiff, with original lyrics by director Rolf de Heer)³⁷ differs from the others, and might also be classified as folk, country, or even rock. However, as we find in my final chapter, the process of putting the soundtrack together – from conceptualisation to composition to recording – was full of improvisatory moments, and the finished result is very textural and significantly foregrounds instrumental performances. True to typical jazz practice, the instrumentalists 'share' the melody with each other and trade improvised solos.

To add substance to our working definition of jazz as a 'coverall' term, I additionally propose three themes evident to varying extents in all jazz music – engagement with *tradition*, techniques of *improvisation*, and displays of *discipline*. A big band score, for example, might feature little in the way of improvisation but will engage heavily with tradition. A modern dub fusion group may not sound traditional, but their techniques could be highly virtuosic and improvised. A classic jazz quartet would likely engage heavily with all three themes. The music in the four films I discuss, including the music

featured in *The Tracker*, quite comfortably displays all three of these aspects, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis.

Jazz and Film

Grounding my discussion of the use of jazz in film is Gretchen L. Carlson's 2022 critical text, *Improvising the Score: Rethinking Modern Film Music Through Jazz*.³⁸ Carlson is interested in the intersections between jazz and film as "active sites of creative experimentation and collaboration, shaped by intersecting social, cultural, political, ideological, and aesthetic values, beliefs, and motivations."³⁹ Through her analysis of films created by "independent auteur"⁴⁰ directors, she argues that jazz in these films acts "*as a sonic indicator of "authenticity":*"⁴¹

These filmmakers ideologically view jazz as representative of authenticity in and of itself, thus envisioning the music (and respectively, the jazz artist creating it) as an essential component of the film's message and meaning. [...] [T]hese filmmakers' employments of production risk and facilitation of "creative labor" stemmed from their perceptions of jazz as reflective of innate human authenticity – of genuine human expression – regardless of whether or not "authenticity" actually exists.⁴²

Carlson suggests that the quality of this "authenticity" can vary between collaborators and films, and can include ideas such as "liveness, emotion, Blackness, or personal nostalgia."⁴³

My approach is similar to Carlson's in identifying and discussing key texts, but with some fundamental divergences. Crucially, my thematic intervention is narrower. Rather than looking at a diverse array of films with jazz soundtracks and arguing for these collaborations as sharing a global signifier of authenticity, I argue for a *specific* authenticity in my Australian films from the '90s and early 2000s. That is, following Carlson's argument but applying it to a more concentrated group, we find an authentic sense of inauthenticity in colonial Australia, rather than a malleable indicator of authenticity which could be directed at an array of subjects including "liveness, emotion, Blackness, or personal nostalgia."

Kevin Whitehead's 2020 scholarship on jazz and film provides additional critical guidance. Whitehead observes that jazz and film are not easy companions due to their inherent production characteristics and ability to weave in improvisation: "Jazz champions improvisation, but the old studio system, with its massive support structure and complex production schedules, was inimical to improvisation as a concept (even as a few directors found ways to harness improvisational genius and energy."⁴⁴ Similarly, Carlson observes that it is jazz's characteristic of "not appear[ing] to "fit in" well with standard filmmaking practices" which makes it "particularly ripe for analysis" and, ultimately, "sites of disruption, experimentation, and creative expression that exceed and transform the films themselves."⁴⁵ Indeed, Miles Davis' propensity to improvise (instead of playing what he was meant to be playing) on the Meekatharra location shoot of *Dingo* resulted in "the most despairing hours of filming [Rolf de Heer had] ever done."⁴⁶

Counterbalancing this difficulty is Whitehead's suggestion that "[j]azz musicians would seem ideal movie heroes."⁴⁷ Carlson similarly notes:

[J]azz (or more specifically, jazz musicians) make for good drama. [...] These larger-than-life figures have been mythologized in jazz history, presented as enigmatic yet brilliant artists embroiled in drugs, tumultuous relationships, violence, mystery, and tragedy [...] They are recognized as rebels, seeming to challenge conventions and institutions at every turn.⁴⁸

Jazz and film share something of an alluring yet precarious relationship. For the film world, jazz presents a maverick quality of authenticity – speaking to the filmmaker's desire to catch 'lightning in a bottle' and preserve the unrepeatable moment. Yet this dynamism is difficult to stage, rehearse, perform consistently between takes, and change in the editing in the room, making jazz difficult to transport to the world of film while retaining its authentic essence. It is worth noting here that for the scope of this research, I will be focussing on a 1990s and early 2000s Australian context and will not be exploring important international films that blend jazz and film such as *'Round Midnight*,⁴⁹ *Mo' Better Blues*,⁵⁰ or *Birdman*.⁵¹

Australia Uncanny

Critical literature on Australian nationhood describes a sense of inauthenticity: a feeling of floating, transience, and dislocation on an unreconciled country. This is something a jazz lick, evoking the blues wail from American slavery and developed through decades of civil rights struggles,⁵² has the capacity to echo so well. Writes Germaine Greer:

For a gubba in Australia there can be no belonging. Ours is the trauma of never having belonged. [...] In all our interactions with country we are reminded, not that it is not ours, which could be fixed, but that to other people, which can't. [...] White Australians are tourists in their own birthplace, dashing from funny-shaped rock to funny-shaped rock, with only the vaguest idea of what might lie between.⁵³

Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs compare the Australian state with Freud's concept of the uncanny and the merging of the familiar with the unfamiliar. For them, this results in Australia being revealed as an unsettling yet generative site: "It is not simply that Australians will either be reconciled with each other or they will not; rather, these two possibilities [...] coexist and flow through each other in what is often [...] a productively unstable dynamic."⁵⁴ Although not explicitly writing from a postcolonial angle, Ronald McKie describes a similar bind:

Perhaps that is why, in my search to find the apt word to describe Australia, I decided on 'temporary' for Australia still [sic.] gives the impression that littler here is permanent, that little or nothing is designed to stay. Regard the average small country town. [...] They seem to be perched there, waiting for some semblance of maturity, and if they were swept away in the night nobody would notice in the morning.⁵⁵

As an imported technology, could jazz enliven settler-colonial Australia to its own 'imported' state? Could it articulate colonial binds and feelings of disenfranchisement and unsettlement from the landscape for those who have only arrived in the past two-hundred-or-so years? Partially, my affirmative reflections on this come from my standpoint and what I feel comfortable with writing as a non-Indigenous jazz musician. This also derives from the relative lack of uptake of jazz music by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to other musical genres such as country, R&B, and hip

hop. Whether due to choice or unconscious privilege (e.g. access to institutions and tuition), it is a reality that the Australian jazz scene is comprised chiefly of non-Indigenous voices. This is not to deny the contributions of significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jazz musicians, improvisers, and collaborators such as William Barton, Marlene Cummins, Alan Dargin, Yulugi, and Guwanbal Gurruwiwi (to name a few), but to acknowledge both their minority position within the Australian jazz community and that their process of making music, what ‘jazz’ means to them, and what ‘Country’ means to them, is not for me to tell. Go listen to them if you haven’t already.

Methodology

My research will focus on four key texts: *Dingo*, *The Boys*, *Come in Spinner*, and *The Tracker*. In examining these, I employ a mix of ethnographic and close reading methods, grounded in primary and secondary research. My close reading explores the themes discussed above and the concept of the *authentic inauthentic* cry at the heart of Australia – the confluence of jazz and improvised music’s ability to ‘speak from the heart’, with the unsettling realisation of settler Australia’s recent and temporary status and uneasy claim to belonging, as these themes emerge in the films. The ethnographic content will primarily derive from interviews I conducted during this project with Rolf de Heer (director of *Dingo* and *The Tracker*), Lloyd Swanton (bassist of The Necks and session bassist for *Come in Spinner*), and Vince Jones (vocalist on *Come in Spinner*). All three interviews provided material that cannot readily be accessed anywhere else. As a result, some of the ethnographic content may be less directly involved with my close reading approach. I believe this data is worth capturing for archival purposes and to respect the perspectives of the creatives who have generously given their time and memories to the development of this project. In a thesis deeply concerned with the notion of authenticity, there is no better place to begin, I think, than with the artists themselves.

Antipodean Cries

The meeting of jazz as a sonic indicator of “authenticity” and Australia’s “trauma of having never belonged” creates a generative nexus of the *authentic inauthentic* – a dingo cry from an unstable and unreconciled landscape insisting to be heard and seen. Each of the films I discuss deal with feelings of unsettlement and estrangement. With *Dingo*, I closely analyse the soundscape of the opening scene, including its connections to jazz legends such as Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins and its rendering of the Kimberley as an echoic and uncanny space. With *The Boys*, I discuss The Necks’ minimalist soundtrack, the band’s goal to “scare the crap out of the viewer”,⁵⁶ and the trauma of the Anita Cobby and Janine Balding homicides. With *Come in Spinner*, I discuss the use of American Songbook jazz standards as songs that “needed to be heard by the Australian public”⁵⁷ and the use of imported languages and motifs to articulate a “temporary” Australia. Finally, with *The Tracker*, we examine the collaborative and highly improvised process behind Archie Roach’s soundtrack and the possibility of moving forward through the uncanny bind in a renewed ethic of friendship. The sounds of these films offer unique perspectives on Australian place and identity which should continue to be explored in future practice-based research.

Chapter 1. *Dingo* and the Australian Voice



Figure 1. Still from *Dingo*.¹

What does it mean to have an Australian voice? How does one engage in dialogue with a landscape that was, and remains, profoundly scarred by violent colonisation, especially if they are a non-Indigenous settler? What spaces do we yearn for; which languages and memories do we inherit? And in speaking out – in exercising what voice we do find – do we reinscribe settlement, do we find ourselves deeply unsettled, or both?

These questions of voice and identity are keenly felt as *Dingo*² begins: a circling camera around protagonist John ‘Dingo’ Anderson (Colin Friels) slowly revealing the Kimberley landscape before him as he blows his trumpet – a perfect fourth, a major second, a tritone below, and back to the root: suspended tonality that refuses to inform us whether the harmonic frame is major, minor, or neither (Figure 2). Taking place either at sunrise or sunset, it is a gentle, transient, and introspective beginning; the harmonic freedom in Dingo’s note choices a pathetic fallacy for the freedom he is experiencing now, at this moment, in what is both “a cry from the heart and a celebration”.³ The landscape echoes back to him, but there is something about its resonances which prevents it from being a mutually fulfilling exchange. Despite the freedom in this moment, there remains a contrast between his body and the landscape, which Dingo’s searching, yearning phrases seem to do more to accentuate rather than overcome. Between the critical elements of this scene – body, landscape, music – something remains unintegrated or unfulfilled; the

he gets top billing”,¹² the film seems to suffer something of a mismatch or an identity crisis. Contemporary reviews for the film were generally positive,¹³ but the film remains lesser known among de Heer’s films and Davis’ overall artistic work, and (for various reasons) failed to be the box office and award hit the producers hoped it would be.¹⁴ Among those reviews and contemporary retrospectives, writers often reflect on the film as being “notable for, among other things, featuring jazz legend Miles Davis”,¹⁵ yet in the film itself Davis, even via the guise of Billy Cross, is remarkably ghostlike and mostly absent, like a vanishing phantom who needs to be coaxed out of hiding. In a key scene towards the middle of the film, he literally appears as an apparition as Dingo stares out into the wilderness. For all its reputation as the ‘Miles Davis film’, there is much less of Davis than one would expect in *Dingo*, either at the inception stage, or in the soundtrack we hear, or in the film itself.

It’s fitting, then, that de Heer himself describes the film as one about “the fulfilment of dreams and avoidance of regret”,¹⁶ as much of the film’s identity seems to be located in an unstable, perhaps even ambivalent, dream-like register. This nascent quality is central to the film’s suggestion of an Australian voice and the sound of what I have so far referred to as the *authentic inauthentic*. Like Dingo’s tones in the opening scene, inspired by “the sounds of the Australian outback, particularly the Dingo howl”,¹⁷ there is an unrealised quality to the film and its subjects, which is precisely what makes it so tantalising and dreamlike. De Heer further describes the film’s narrative traits in the following terms:

I’m personally lucky enough to be doing what I want to do, but I see the ‘Dingo’ character in lawyers and accountants who have dreams they are unable to fulfill because they’re imprisoned in some psychological cell where they can’t change the nature of their lives.¹⁸

The film’s concept of an Australian voice lies in this unrealised state, where the lines between aspiration and reality are blurred like a desert mirage. De Heer’s image of the “psychological cell” evokes colonial Australia’s memory and origin as a penal colony, and how “[t]he fact that we were a settler colony – anxious to put aside, but never bury, the confusing factor of our early penal-settler status – also blurs the political identity for White Australians.”¹⁹ Within the landscape, we externalise our dreams of escape, of finding, keeping, and using that freedom, of realising the “lucky country”²⁰ from the penal

colony. But it is an uneasy, uncanny dream, because, at this point in Australian history especially, the colonial dreamer has become irrevocably aware that deep down the landscape does not speak back in these terms, that “for Aboriginal Australia, the other side of the frontier presents a history of invasion, near genocide and cultural obliteration.”²¹ As Ambelin Kwaymullina writes:

The story of settler-colonialism
Is the story of many apocalypses
Storms of cataclysmic violence
Erupting across
Indigenous homelands
Relationships
Families
Lives²²

The authentic inauthentic, then, stems from an authentic desire for freedom and advancement – our real dreams, among the conditions of being stranded or marooned on an inhospitable penal environment. As Judith Wright describes, it is the twisting of “two strands, which have become part of the land we have invaded, and the guilt of the invasion.”²³ Yet these dreams take place not on an impressionable landscape of *terra nullius* but on a blistered landscape which has, for many of its original occupants, become a “real dystopia.”²⁴ These are dreams without a root – which is why Dingo’s horn phrases, with their ambiguous harmony, are such a potent analogue. They are a “a cry from the heart and a celebration” which seem to eschew “[m]ajor-minor tonality [...] the most familiar system of structure pitch in Western tonal music.”²⁵ There is no definite root note, although the harmonic frame which is implied from the intervals is suspended. In music theory, this type of harmony “doesn’t create much tension on its own. In fact, it’s rather consonant sounding. But at the same time, it’s not resolved either. It “floats” out there as if needing to be grounded.”²⁶ Consonant, yet unresolved; the interstices between settled and unsettled; suspended, floating, rootless; lonely, yet hopeful; speaking earnestly, yet not entirely to this place: these are the sounds of settler Australia which we hear in Dingo’s cries.

Dingo's opening scene is the focus of much of my analysis, particularly because of how richly it employs every aspect of filmmaking in its suggestion of Australia as a liminal and uncanny space. Previously, I mentioned that the scene occurs either at sunrise or sunset, and there is a technical reason for this uncertainty. De Heer recalls how the French director of photography, Denis Lenoir, was more comfortable shooting the Parisian scenes than exterior outback shots: "He had a lot of problems handling the Australian sunlight, though you wouldn't know it from the final product."²⁷ While the finished scene does look good, it is also one in which the look of the sunlight is particularly dependent on how the image is colour-graded – likely due to difficulties in accurately exposing the scene during shooting. Some versions of the film (particularly standard definition versions which might have aired on television) emphasise a cooler colour palette and seem to take place in the morning, while others (particularly the 2022 high-definition remaster) have a warmer palette and seem to take place in the evening. The result is something of a nether space where the notion of time gives way to a floating transience or slippage *between* times. Additionally to this, every element of this scene suggests the unrealised, the gestational, the nascent: the named credits appearing on the screen, Dingo's neither casual nor formal outfit, the placement of this scene at the very beginning of the film, and of course the harmony we hear. This evokes Freud's theory of dreams in painting the between space between "the trigger of the dreamwork [...] and its fulfillment".²⁸ In keeping with the musical focus of my thesis, however, I focus on one aural aspect of this scene, in the echoes we hear from the Kimberley landscape. Then, we turn to the ending of the film and Cross' advice to Dingo to return home after reaching Paris and having the opportunity to jam with his idol – "It's not gonna sound the same here. What you bought with you, was the dingo sounds – outback sounds. Not gon' be like that [here]." While the return to ground and origin is a common trope within the hero's journey, this is a complicating feature in our efforts to locate the nascent Australian voice.

Echo and Reverb: Call and Response

In such open, solitary settings such as that of *Dingo's* opening, jazz musicians often find the freedom to explore and refine their sound. Perhaps the most famous historical instance of a jazz musician embarking on such a literal mountaintop meditation is Sonny

Rollins' second sabbatical, which saw the saxophonist stepping away from the New York jazz scene to practice on the Williamsburg Bridge for up to sixteen hours at a time between 1959-61. Recounts Rollins:

I just happened to be out walking and I saw some steps and I thought: let's see what's up there. And when I got up to the top, I just saw all this fantastic open space. [...] There were a lot of pillars and abutments back then, where I could find spaces where people couldn't see me, though they could hear me. The only people who could see me were the few who were walking across the bridge. And not many of them would stop to talk. I guess they mostly thought: who's that crazy guy? [...] It was so wonderful to be so close to the sky up there, any time of year. Maybe this might sound a little bit corny to people, but it was a spiritual feeling to me.²⁹

Rollins' observation of the "pillars and abutments" is interesting here, as these would have not only had a visual impact for passersby, but also an acoustic effect. In these lone but naturalistic settings, there isn't the 'messiness' of crowds and ambience and room sound that comes with live recordings, nor the tight control and precise engineering of a studio environment. Instead, what we hear is typically a strong tone, subtly coloured by the space it emerges from and attempts to fill, before the sound waves are inevitably dissipated in the limitless open air – that is, if we can hear back on it at all, as outdoor sounds are notoriously difficult to capture.³⁰

A particular sonority is associated with this concept of the lone improviser, involving something of a *transient purity in imperfection*, which is integral to its spatiality and its spiritual and meditative power. Typically, this type of sonority is something you have to witness firsthand to truly notice and appreciate – as de Heer writes of the location they found: "when [the crew] heard the trumpet cries echoing through the valley, it became an experience none of us would have missed."³¹ When we witness Dingo improvising in the Kimberley, these are the soundscapes we need to hear as an audience to believe what see on screen, and to connect to that lineage in jazz history and tradition, stumbling as we do upon Dingo's session as a film viewer in the same way a pedestrian might happen to walk across the Williamsburg bridge during Rollins' sabbatical. As with the pedestrian who wonders, "who's that crazy guy?" there is an operative link between these settings and the concept of madness, as de Heer reflects: "on the way up the crew thought I was

completely mad.”³² This brush with madness seems to be a prerequisite for the transcendence afforded in these spaces; a visionary beckoning of sorts to the unperceived, unknown, and heretofore unimaginable.

Of course, what we hear in *Dingo* is not the natural sounds of Dingo playing trumpet in the open air, but a studio session from Chuck Findley with synthetic echo and reverb – a pre-recorded track used to inform the shoot and not the other way around.³³ This was mixed with ambient sounds (bird calls, etc.) that were mostly recorded on location in the Kimberley, which are also audible on the album version. This composite or artificial aspect of the soundscape (which is certainly not anomalous within the film medium which often relies on artifice) points to the challenge the sound engineers faced in constructing the scene, but also to the ‘responsibility’ of these studio tools. That is, when we hear these studio effects, it is not just that they make the instrument sound bigger or prettier, but that they also carry narrative and thematic significance. They stand in for the sounds of the outback speaking back and conversing, which contrast with and contour the sounds of the man-made technology of the trumpet; they are the space reflecting back to the dingo howl. Interesting, then, that in the film these sounds come from the standpoint of artificiality, or their own inauthentic basis.

In his analysis of echo and reverb, musician and researcher Peter Doyle writes about music as “territory-making”, wherein sonic “processes of repetition and reiteration further mark and out and make familiar the territory, just as they erase the residual traces of earlier territorializing processes.”³⁴ Within this spatial process, synthetic echo and reverb use is connotated with an added “hyper-spatiality” as they are “overt spatial traces and tropes of spatiality” within the already spatial discipline of music.³⁵ Doyle argues that these effects are essential to consider as they might allow producers to “signa[l] the territorialization work of the musical text” or itself be “a powerful (if secondary) reference to “inner space,” to zones of the psyche, to spaces within spaces.”³⁶ Doyle’s general contention on territory-making and spatiality is suggestive regarding our current text and scene, where we might consider Dingo’s horn playing as a mapping process of the space he occupies, as well as an implicit erasure or overlaying of residual (Aboriginal) territorialising processes in its assumption of the landscape as a neutral sounding board or previously undiscovered space upon which Dingo can project and express his self.

However, I want to focus on Doyle's research on the echo, concerning the uncanny echo we hear in *Dingo's* opening scene. Following Doyle, it is these aspects of "hyper-spatiality" which afford us the deepest insight into the "spaces within spaces" of the psyche which comes alive in the film.

Doyle describes humanity's longstanding fascination with echo in the following terms:

To hear one's own voice "emanating" from the chasm, cliff or mountain, or even to hear one's footsteps bouncing off distant wall – such phenomena have long been found intriguing, in the ancient and modern worlds, in both pre- and postindustrial cultures. That which is not the self seems to talk to us with our own voice, using our own sounds. The obvious atavistic suggestion posed by the phenomenon is animist: that the nonhuman world "talks," that it possesses human characteristics. But other questions then arise: Does the world resemble the self or is the self simply a much lesser, relatively inconsequential emanation of the world? [...] The phenomenon of the echo is profoundly ambiguous: it suggests on the one hand an irreconcilable dualism, while simultaneously hinting at a transcendent monism, that all in fact may at base be one.³⁷

In *Dingo*, we hear the landscape talking back at us with our own sounds and are confronted with the "profoundly ambiguous." The film also hints at its answer to the bind between "irreconcilable dualism" and "transcendent monism" in the clarity of its echoes – one distinct echo, followed by at least another repetition at significantly lower volume. In studio terms, this might be described as emphasis of a long delay with low feedback, over a more 'washy' or spacious reverb. The synthetic echo we hear in *Dingo* is more dialogic, as if we were conversing with a singular, identifiable other rather than collapsing into an infinite multiplicity. In this opening, we hear more of the echo's suggestion of an irreconcilable dualism, rather than transcendent monism – the human actor, Dingo, is one conversant in a negotiated interplay with the landscape, rather than the first in a series of repetitions that eventually diffuse into the landscape. There is an uncanny element to the echoes which we do hear – the familiar coming from that which is not the self. The element of the profoundly ambiguous is sustained as the echoes beg the question of whom – or what – we are conversing with.

The Kimberley as Uncanny Space

Doyle refers to an “atavistic suggestion” in the echo, which could link to Deleuze-Guattarian notions of the Refrain, which in its three stages involves “[a] child in the dark, gripped with fear, comfort[ing] himself by singing under his breath” (I), the child “draw[ing] a circle around that uncertain and fragile center” to establish a home (II), and then finally “open[ing] the circle a crack” to launch forth into improvisation (III).³⁸ That is, this notion of territory-making is a child-like process, where the atavism of the echo comes in the discovery that the non-human world we encounter speaks back to us, blending the familiar songs we sing under our breath with the suggestion of “forces of chaos [...] kept outside.”³⁹ This is an effect that can be experienced in the fairytale witch who speaks in the simplistic cadence of nursery rhymes (“Mirror, mirror, on the wall / Who in this land is fairest of all?”⁴⁰) and, following Freud, is profoundly uncanny. The atavistic echo corresponds with Freud’s description of the uncanny as arising from a deep-seated suspicion of the non-human world as capable of animalistically speaking back to us:

Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old animalistic conception of the universe, which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings, and by the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes. [...] It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive man, and that everything which now strikes us as ‘uncanny’ fulfils the condition of stirring these vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.⁴¹

Applying Freud’s concept of the uncanny to an Australian context, Gelder and Jacobs describe Uluru as a “promiscuous” site due to “the excessive nature of [its] significance – the fact that Uluru can radiate out so far, that it can attract so many people from so many places – that in this case breaks through socialisation (‘sharing’) to prevent it from realising itself.”⁴² In their writing, the struggle over Uluru and its significance is one (significant) instance of the emergent procedures for determining rights over land, wherein an uncanny effect occurs as the familiar becomes the strange.⁴³ We could

rephrase this, perhaps, as Uluru rapidly becoming unfamiliar as it echoes with the resonances of thousands of different and contested meanings.

In *Dingo*, we witness the Kimberley, another national site, animalistically ‘speak back’, as the Uluru does in Gelder and Jacobs’ analysis. Dingo’s improvised trumpet cries – childlike and themselves even animalistic – participate in an act of territory-making which draws a circle around what is home and not-home. The atavistic echoes these sounds encounter, however, resurrect a deep suspicion that the non-human world was and is peopled by other spirits and other meanings. These echoes are simultaneously *transparent* and *opaque* – *transparent*, as they speak back with an exact replication of what has been played (they contain no new sonic information), but *opaque* because they mask the essence and psyche of the non-human utterer. Here, a colonial-territoriser audience is, along with Dingo, vaguely aware of, and suspecting, a previous history and relationship to the landscape, which is continually affirmed through contemporary expressions of Aboriginal culture. In *Dingo*’s opening scene and its ambiguous improvisations across the landscape, we see in real-time how “a certain amount of unfamiliarity can arise when the sacred is so unbounded, where ‘modern Australia’ itself becomes an ambivalent thing, required ceaselessly to engage with structures it may have imagined as, at best, anachronistic.”⁴⁴

Returning Home

In the film’s ending, Cross tells Dingo to return home, telling him that it’s “not gonna sound the same”⁴⁵ in Paris – but not before promising to record one of his songs. In this dreamlike film, it is perhaps the closest thing to a wake-up call – a fulfilment of the hero’s journey trope but also a pointed invocation of what happens next when the dream ends. In this suggestion, Dingo, who has rapidly been slingshotted to Paris and back over the course of the film, becomes himself a sort of an echo, who has been animated by the external world prior to returning to his home setting of Australia. But in this return home there is also a hope of achieving the transcendent monism that Doyle refers to, rather than the dualism we witness at the start of the film. In the film’s ending, Dingo returns home to a surprise birthday party, resolved romantic subplots, and the revelation that his

bandmates – once hopeless pub rockers – have taken it upon themselves to learn (and become fluent in) some jazz repertoire: “Aren’t you gonna join in? We spent a week learnin’ this thing!”⁴⁶ In this optimistic ending – a fairytale return home after a fairytale away from home – Dingo seems not only to suffuse himself into the landscape and people of his hometown, Poona Flats, but transformatively activates them in a unitary and arguably national moment. Dingo and his music function here as an echo which travels abroad but rebounds home, hopefully to overcome the uncanny within in an exuberant and optimistic unification – a birthday and a moment of maturation in the achievement and realisation of a uniquely Australian voice.

Cross’ offer to record one of Dingo’s songs is also significant. This suggests that it is not enough that this Australian voice exists in Australia, but also that – now that it has been found and to an extent realised – it must be recorded and packaged for a presumably international audience and integrated into a global archive. Australia, then, is the realisation but potentially not the end point – there are more echoes to be had, more surfaces to reflect from. Perhaps this too is task of the film, a French co-production marketed to the world, claiming to provide a glimpse of the Australian voice through the language of jazz.

Chapter 2. *The Boys* and the Texture of the Terrifying



Figure 3. Promotional still for *The Boys*¹

Unlike *Dingo*, *The Boys*² is not a film about jazz but one which features a jazz soundtrack (or at least one that fits the broad definition of jazz so far identified). Paralleling real-life crimes, the film follows the Sprague brothers in the days leading up to their assault and murder of a unsuspecting woman. The soundtrack features textures and soundscapes from the improvised trio The Necks, who, according to bassist Lloyd Swanton, had minimal experience in conventional film scoring but came at the film with the following approach: “We basically saw our role as to help scare the crap out of the viewer from the word ‘go’, and then kind of get out of there.”³

This ‘texture of the terrifying’ created by the band forms the focus of this chapter and what this film’s music does to ‘unsettle’ the viewer. While *The Boys* tells a fictional story and is not a direct analogue for any specific events, it is a narrative which deals with the traumatic memory of the real-life homicides of Anita Cobby and Janine Balding, both of whom were randomly kidnapped by gangs of (predominantly) young men before being raped and killed in the late 80s (approximately five years before the source play by Gordon Graham⁴ and ten years before the film). Similarly, this film, which is set

ambiguously in the recent past circa the time of its release, ends with the three brothers observing a woman at a bus stop and a chilling declaration from oldest brother and ringleader, Brett (David Wenham): “We’re all gods [...] And these are the worlds that we’ve made. [...] *Let’s get her.*”⁵

In its usage of documentary-style archival footage and backwards/forwards structure which takes the viewer to the sentencing after the crime (and, of course, its sparse but effective use of original music) the film activates several filmic and narrative discourses to deal with the terror of memory, namely the ghost story and the backtracking narrative. At stake in this, and in the capacity of the music to “scare the crap out of the viewer” as Swanton describes, is the merging of unfamiliar with familiar, with suburban environments and ideas of mateship and brotherhood morphing into uncanny figures. This evokes Freud’s example of the uncanny in a war-time short story involving a furnished flat, where “the presence of the table causes ghostly crocodiles to haunt the place, or [...] monsters come to life in the dark.”⁶

Indeed, as the film progresses it relies on increasingly childlike imagery, culminating in a later scene in which the brothers consume LSD and discuss their women problems in a bedroom decorated with action figures, sports trophies, and baby-blue aeroplane wallpaper. This regression toward the womb takes viewers to Freud’s locus of the uncanny, “when repressed infantile complexes have been revived by some impression, or when the primitive beliefs we have surmounted seem once more to be confirmed”⁷ – the space of “the old animistic conception of the universe” where narcissistic beliefs and practices reign unbounded⁸ to permit utterances such as “We’re all gods” to be spoken, believed, and acted upon. The film reminds us that in colonial Australia, violence and the possibility of violence are always uncannily proximal in both time and space – through memory or in the familiar spaces we are routinely immersed in.

The link between proximal violence and recent colonial history is established through the character of George (Pete Smith), the mother’s (Lynette Curan) most recent romantic partner. The character is in fact played by a Maori man – not that it matters to the Sprague brothers, who only perceive him as ‘Abo’ (a reduction reflected in the film’s end credits). George continually frustrates the brothers’ Oedipal project in his promise of a better, more

respectful lifestyle for their mother, and is notable for his maturity in contrast to the boys' immaturity, which implicates their violent way of life to a more recent, nascent history. Just as the brothers and their actions activate the 'ghosts' of Anita Cobby and Janine Balding, George represents a generalised Indigenous witness who observes violent structures forcibly imposed upon their land.⁹ As the film progresses, the brothers' comments ("Now don't you tell me to piss off, Abo!"¹⁰) begin to resemble the "swing to resentment" against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which emerged from the reactionary right-wing in the '90s, and the paranoia of entering into a competition for sovereignty and having colonial illusions and fictions laid bare.¹¹ The boys and their mentality represent an unapologetic 'white-armband' view of history¹² which "actively resist[s] public discussion of shame,"¹³ whether against women, immigrants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or any other marginalised group. In contrast, the film's exposure of these attitudes, memories, and histories is, following Collins and Davis' analysis of post-*Mabo* films which deal with the politics of shame, a mobilisation of "something cinema is good at – the creation of an intimate sphere in which it is possible to expose the vicissitudes of pain and shame, a place where such pleas for empathy can be recognised as demands for reparation of historical trauma."¹⁴

The Music of the Film: A Relinquished Ownership?

The Necks' lack of experience in film scoring was likely one of the key reasons for director Rowan Woods' – who according to Swanton "had actually gone on record saying he hated music in films"¹⁵ – decision to collaborate with them. This led to an expectedly unconventional film scoring process that was both more and less involved for the musicians compared to how films are usually scored. Woods reached out to the band to create original music for the film as the production crew had been playing their album *Silent Night*¹⁶ while the actors were rehearsing scenes. This already gives us an insight into music's effect in the film, as listening to *Silent Night* – which shares a name with a Christmas carol and features various ambient household sounds – is already an uncanny experience combining domesticity with menace. This is also an early example of the unconventionality of this film's approach to music. Typically, films will use pre-existing 'temp music' in the editing stage to provide a feel for how the final product will look and

sound once assembled.¹⁷ But the use of what was in effect ‘temp music’ in *The Boys* came at a much earlier stage in the process – arguably, when it was still being treated as more of a stage play as the filmic elements of cameras, microphones, and post-production hadn’t yet been introduced.

Swanton reflects how, when the band was brought into the project, they were likely “a little more involved than a conventional score composer might [be].” The trio sat in on shoots, watched rushes,¹⁸ and spent time with Woods in the Maroubra house where most of the film’s interior scenes were shot, which was marked for demolition. These enabled the band members to “immerse” themselves in the process and get directly involved with the moods and spatiality to be conveyed.¹⁹ In other aspects, however, the band was arguably further removed from the process. In a typical process, scoring will usually be guided by a “spotting” process. This will involve a session in which:

a composer and director will sit and watch a rough cut of the film in order to decide which scenes will require music and which will not. The spotting session is crucial, as it lets the composer see and feel the mood of the film in person for the first time, so they begin to compose music that matches the tone of the film. During this process, the composer will take precise timing notes so that they know how long each cue is, where it begins, where it ends, and particular moments during a scene with which music may need to coincide.²⁰

The actual making of the music for *The Boys* came from a very different process, as – apart from the main theme, which was explicitly composed²¹ – what we hear in the film came from a free-form improvised studio session in which the band crafted various atmospheric textures in five-to-ten minute chunks. These were then sent as essentially unedited multitracks to the film’s production crew, who were then free to manipulate them with studio tools such as ProTools. Unlike the typical process described above, these textures were not designed to fit in with specific scenes or cues, but rather to capture the narrative’s general atmosphere. The production team then mixed and mastered the provided stems and combined them with various ambient sounds (such as electricity crackles) before editing the results into the film, which led to some subtle mistakes and variations that the band wouldn’t have opted for appearing in the final film.²² Indeed, The Necks’ later release, through Abrahams and Swanton’s own label Fish of Milk, is titled *The*

*Boys (Music for the Feature Film)*²³ to reflect their product's entirely different mixing process. When I asked Swanton about who in effect 'owned' the result in the film, he reflected:

I think we relinquished ownership to a greater degree than some film composers would, but that was how we were more comfortable working [...] Essentially, the deal is, "we've paid money, now make music" [...] So that was something we knew we could deliver, and then just the actual choices about placement and foregrounding and backgrounding, we left to others. I think it was mutually agreeable.²⁴

This process was itself highly improvised and unconventional, and might even be described as uncanny, given its similarities to familiar scoring elements of temp tracking and spotting, but significantly modified and almost unrecognisable applications of them. Compared to typical film scorers, the band was significantly *more* involved in the conceptual stages including rehearsals, shooting, and being on location, but significantly *less* involved with the film and the production team in the production and post-production stages of composition, processing, and editing. To play to their creative strengths and align with Woods' concept, the band opted to develop raw material alongside the film, rather than slotting in at a later stage of production to enhance specifically determined visual or audio cues. The music was intended to provide conceptually relevant textures and spaces which the filmmakers could harness as the film took shape, with the band working in their typical environment by creating a reservoir of, in the words of *The Washington Post* describing their music generally, "umpteen metric tons of bouncing-clinking stuff being discarded into an abyss of stairs."²⁵

In the finished film, the music's usage is much like the music itself: sparse but effective, a sustained building of tension with carefully meted pockets of release: "Not only is the music minimalist, but it is also minimalist in relation to the placement of music in the film."²⁶ Intruding sporadically through the film, the trio's music acts almost like an additional character or participant – a voice of dread and dramatic inevitability perhaps analogous to a Greek chorus. The music tends to be most prominent when time is elongated or compressed, for example in its flashback scenes and during a montage at the midpoint of the film. Transporting us to flash-forward scenes taking place after the crime

has been committed and the brothers have been arrested, the music features the capacity to ‘violently arrest’ and transport the viewer through time. Yet it is also a faculty only the audience has access to, and the ability to ‘face the music’ and comprehend the events on screen with their later consequences is a crucial ethical differentiator between the viewing audience and the characters on screen. Just before the aforementioned montage, Brett demands “Yeah put on some music. [...] Put the radio on, for fuck’s sake,” only to be met with continual denials – they have no records, the radio is broken, et cetera.²⁷ And even when the brothers finally do get some music playing in a following scene, the film’s sound design mixes it more as indecipherable white noise than anything else. The Necks’ music in the film not only arrests us forwards and backwards through time but is suggestive of something which the brothers aren’t privy to – a higher order timescale of horror, retribution, and the possibility of justice, suggestive of the transcendent capability of music described by jazz musician Ronald Shannon Jackson as “a feeling of being able to communicate with all living things.”²⁸ This “lingering intensely hypnotic effect”²⁹ is contrasted with the Spragues’ nihilistic, id-driven and moment-to-moment lifestyle, which continually seeks catastrophe, but is unable to perceive or comprehend it as such.

In *The Boys*, the music’s chilling and terrifying effect is intimately connected to how it was conceived and created alongside the film from early conceptual spaces. Brooding and atmospheric, the music actively probes at, and responds to, the spaces and narratives conveyed in the film and, tacitly, the band’s own experiences regarding the Cobby and Balding murders and the fictionalised scenario depicted in the film.³⁰ This meditative effect activates the viewer’s own capacity to reflect and recoil from a place of unsettlement and horror. In the next section, I follow Jane Galbraith’s research dissertation on The Necks to explore the “defining characteristics” of their improvisatory process of space and repetition³¹ to further connect this ‘texture of terrifying’ with my overall concept of jazz and the idea of an authentically inauthentic relationship to the land. The use of space effectively captures the setting of the house the band spent time in and suggests elements of the Australian ghost story. Meanwhile, repetition repeatedly takes us back in time to build the film as a backtracking narrative, following Collins and Davis’ analysis of the post-Mabo film.

The Boys as Ghost Story and Backtracking Film

In describing The Necks' concept of space in their improvisations, Galbraith contrasts 'tangible' and 'abstract' scales:

[S]pace can be created, and recreated, in a number of ways. Tangible, defining aspects include the use of silence, the use of sparse instrumentation, sparse harmonic aspects and using minimal pitch and rhythmic sets (often motif-based). On a more abstract scale, the way in which the improvised paradigm of The Necks' music evolves, rather than overtly states, suggests a connection with location and identity and parallels a connection with the geographic landscape. The art of observation – that is incorporating not just the immediate environment and its surrounds but more abstract elements as well – impacts on the art of free improvisation in their music.³²

Galbraith further explains the band's utilisation of tangible space as implicated in a continual feedback loop with abstract space: "The duality in the way The Necks use texture – both in terms of an independent layer and in a cohesive, holistic sense – directly links to this idea of an open landscape which in turn evokes a sparseness and emptiness."³³ Indeed, a large part of my discussion with Swanton involved talking about the practice of creating textures on the double bass, and the band's highly spatial approach is a large contributor to why "[t]hey never rehearse [...] There are no set lists. No expectations. And definitely no requests. [...] [T]he three will quite literally make it up as they go along."³⁴ This process of 'making it up as they go along' is predicated on where the band find themselves and when; a negotiation in the interstices where 'here' turns to 'there', and 'now' turns to 'then'. For the band, this gradually generates "a direct link with place, location and identity."³⁵

In the first chapter, we explored the "animist" echo which uncannily suggests "that the nonhuman world "talks," that it possesses human characteristics."³⁶ With this film, I suggest a slightly narrowed line of thinking (perhaps located internally as opposed to *Dingo's* external landscapes) through the lens of the phantasm or ghost, and the concept of the haunted house. For *The Boys*, one of the critical spaces the trio turned their "art of observation" toward was the house where interior scenes for the film were shot, which

the band had a chance to visit and immerse themselves in with the director.³⁷ This was a building marked for demolition that “just felt crappy, [but] that’s what [Woods] wanted to convey.”³⁸ In one ‘tangible’ way in which the house emerges, Swanton discusses how he used a plectrum to play harmonics on his bass to emulate something of a “cuckoo sound”: signalling an eerie trope of a house environment insistently churning on even in the apparent absence of inhabitants. Another example of this ‘tangible’ aspect might be the sounds added in post-production – crackles and whirs from the everyday, domestic sphere.

In the ‘abstract’ scale, The Necks’ music dwells and permeates to transform and delineate a space – precisely as a ghost haunts. Enfolding the memories of the real-life Cobby and Balding murders and the shape of the events to come, the music summons the terror of a ghostly “echoic space”. That is, not only does the music evoke a meditative timescale as discussed previously, but in fashioning the space of the haunted house, brings such into contact with the possibility of the “acausal, unstable, nonlinear, nonrational”³⁹ (indeed, it is possibly our access to the ethical timescale that allows us to discern chaos as *chaos*). Here, “[t]he horror effects are achieved by obscuring the visual and allowing the aural mise en scene to expand nightmarishly.”⁴⁰ The crappy, dilapidated feel of the house which Swanton describes is itself a haunting, or a ghostly rejection – a sense that one needs to get out, and quickly. David Crouch argues that in Australian fiction, the ghost story is capable of a paradigmatic effect: “In this country the presence of ghosts can be read as traces of historical traumas, fears which are often exposed in expressions of apprehensive (un)settlement [...] Australian ghosts might return the violence of colonialism as an ever-present displacement.”⁴¹ In particular, Crouch contends that sites of fear are “essentially architectural”, and raises the spatiality of the haunted house:

The house has long been used as a metaphor for the western psyche, and thus the spaces of a haunted house provide the ideal site for the uncanny return of the repressed. The *unfamiliar* or ghostly simultaneously inhabits the *familiar* and comforting. And in Australia it seems possible to extend the spatial metaphor to imagine the house as analogous with the nation; here the haunted house becomes a metonym for Australia, its ghosts are the collective anxieties of white settlement.⁴²

The image and sounds of haunting are particularly powerful regarding our discussion of the authentic inauthentic. It is the realisation of a fundamental and proximal violence in the heart of Australia's familiar spaces which, even for settlers privileged enough to be able to turn away from the wake of violence every day, has the capacity to unseat and unsettle. This is a haunting which gradually spreads and suffocates, per Gelder and Jacobs:

The Australian ghost story [...] produces a site-based impression which spirals out of itself to affect others elsewhere, perhaps influencing even a nation's sense of its own wellbeing. So a supposedly 'marginal' thing can account for far more than its marginality would suggest.⁴³

Another key aspect of The Necks' process is repetition: "The Necks exploit and explore repetition ad infinitum. They have been quoted as stating that change occurs as a result of not being able to stand hearing it (a particular musical idea) anymore and having to move on to the next phase of the performance."⁴⁴ In *The Boys*, the main theme is notable for its repeated piano figure, contrasted with strong open strings from the bass, which are further accompanied by a synthesised overlay and electric guitar wails. Abrahams pedals in a slow diminuendo after the phrase starts, creating various undulations as his notes clash, resolve, and then gradually reduce as they encounter other textures in the sonic space.

The Boys I

♩ = 130

pno.

Figure 4. Repetition in "The Boys I".⁴⁵

The 'abstract' scale to this use of repetition, I suggest, induces a form of backtracking – an insistent process of reinscribing the past into the present and searching for change only when it becomes necessary. In their analysis on post-*Mabo* film, Collins and Davis raise “backtracking” as a key conceptual term:

For Australia national cinema, thinking beyond the founding myth [of *terra nullius*] is a perplexing task, one which requires backtracking over familiar ground, whether that be the desert, the bush, the suburbs or the beach, in order to reconcile current knowledge about the past with present experience of the history wars, and to imagine a more accommodating sense of national identity for the future.⁴⁶

While *The Boys* may not be as expressly concerned with *terra nullius* and the wake of its dismantling (outside of the George/'Abo' character), the film participates in a likeminded “cultural [...] paradigm shift in Australian historical consciousness”⁴⁷ where the familiar becomes strange and uncanny, and post-contact concepts and rituals such as suburbia, mateship, and ‘hanging out with the boys’ become unsettled and dangerous. Here, the music parallels the script, which itself is a speculative backtracking, a repeat and reconstruction of the recent past conjuring familiar beats, patterns, ghosts.

As Collins and Davis write, what is at stake in the post-*Mabo* film is “the return of unreconciled national issues, at the very moment when a cinema of national identity seems most redundant.”⁴⁸ Like the 1992 annulment of *terra nullius*, the Cobby and Balding murders were cultural pauses that forced Australians to look to the past as a place of violence and struggle rather than gradually manifesting destiny. Regarding these events, repetition becomes a painful exercise because it unearths and uncovers; it lays vicissitudes bare and suggests the past as a site of increasing tension the more we revisit it. It is a forceful return, with the capability of confirming deeply held psychic suspicions:

Where the uncanny comes from infantile complexes the question of external reality is quite irrelevant; its place is taken by psychical reality. *What is concerned is an actual repression of some definite material and a return of this repressed material, not a removal of the belief in its objective reality.*⁴⁹

In the film, we see less concern with “external reality”, as characters, names, and events do not (and were not intended to) line up precisely with either the Cobby or Balding murders. What it does get at, however, is the “psychical reality” – the desperate and misogynistic conditions, narratives, and traumas that made these murders possible. Within this frame, the music is not only itself a powerful motivator for the script’s backtracking process as it arrests the viewer forwards and backwards in time, but it also sonically embodies and even exemplifies this practice through its own insistent repetition. The music’s sustained building of tension summons the same psychic uncanniness or unease the film drives at as a whole.

Dreams and Nightmares

In our first chapter, we explored a scene from *Dingo*, a film about “the fulfilment of dreams and avoidance of regret,” and how animated open spaces create a sense of unease and unsettlement for the lone improviser. *The Boys* might conversely be described as a film about ‘the realisation of nightmares and the exploration of regret’, but commonly, music still has the powerful capacity to stir unease and displacement. Where *Dingo* is external, *The Boys* is internal, activating an uncanny animus in familiar suburban spaces and ornaments. While used sparingly and minimally, the Necks’ music is particularly potent for its improvisatory elements of space and repetition, which together bring viewers into contact with the traumatic past through its delineation of the haunted house and practice of insistent return. This ‘texture of the terrifying’ created for the film leverages an uncanny sense of disembodiment and vivid arrest which emerges potently in improvised music practices, including jazz. As Mandy-Suzanne Wong and Nina Sun Eidsham describe:

To play music, especially to improvise, is in part to bring oneself under the influence of other bodies from the past. We perform memories, our own and those of others. My body and my bodily practices are partly molded by memories personal and cultural – which means that my body, my practices, are not wholly mine.⁵⁰

The bodies and echoes of traumatic murders and violence, and their personal and cultural enablers, reside in this film. Mediated through improvised music, they permeate and

intrude into the familiar spaces around us, reminding us that they are not, and likely never were, wholly 'ours'.

Chapter 3. The Songs We Needed to Hear: *Come in Spinner*

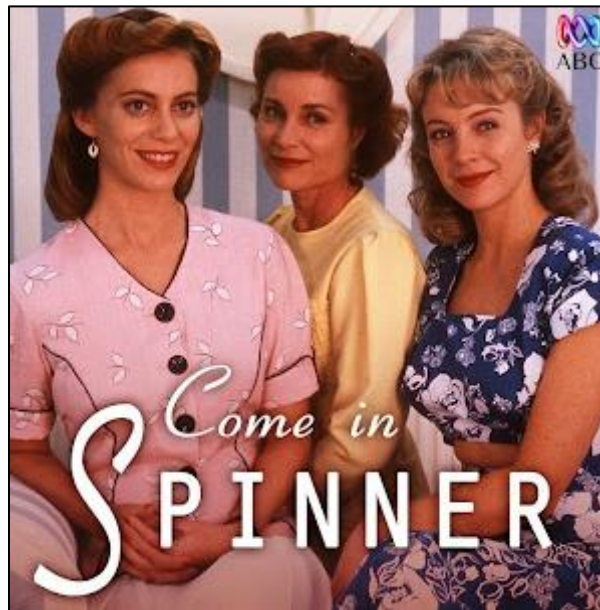


Figure 5. Promotional still for *Come in Spinner*.¹

Released in 1990 on Australian Broadcasting Channel (ABC) television,² *Come in Spinner*³ is the earliest of my texts and the only television show. Adapted from Dymphna Cusack and Florence James' novel,⁴ the four-episode miniseries follows four women, all employees in the same beauty parlour, as they navigate love and loss, British and American influences, and the place of women amidst a morally and socially fluctuating wartime Australia. Notably, while Cusack and James' manuscript won *The Daily Telegraph's* £1,000 novel competition in 1946, it was only published as an expurgated version in 1951 due to its controversial topics, including abortion, adultery, prostitution, and rape. A more complete version was developed and published by James in 1987.⁵

The miniseries' soundtrack, comprised of American Songbook jazz standards composed by the likes of Duke Ellington and George and Ira Gershwin, and newly arranged and recorded with vocalists Vince Jones and Grace Knight, attracted significant critical and mainstream attention, winning the ARIA Award for Best Adult Contemporary Album in 1991⁶ and achieving two times platinum sales awards.⁷ While certified sales are recorded at 140,000,⁸ Jones recalls hearing from the head of the ABC that the actual sales were closer to half a million.⁹ As session bassist Lloyd Swanton (also of The Necks fame)

reflects: “There was a period for several years where I couldn’t really walk into a café and not hear myself playing bass. [...] [F]or a few years, it was really everywhere. It was the go-to CD.”¹⁰ For Jones, who, unlike Knight, did not come from a pop/rock background and until this project had been focussed on making original jazz music, the success was a double-edged sword: “It took over my life. Everything I did, there was a queue half a mile long, all shouting, “*Come in Spinner*, don’t play that stuff!” So it changed my whole career. But then it died – two years later it was dead. And we could get back to making our own records.”¹¹

The use of American Songbook standards departs from the source novel and was not only key to the success of the miniseries and album, but a critical condition for Jones’ decision to participate in the project.¹² Recalls Jones:

I thought it was an opportunity to expose that beautiful music which was of that generation. [...] A lot of these songs, [such as] “You Go To My Head”, they needed to be heard by the Australian public. They were actually the songs of that era. They were in the US, and even here.¹³

On one level, the music of *Come in Spinner* does evoke the show’s period and nostalgically transports the audience to the wartime swing era. But there is more to why Australians “needed to hear” the music, which (in Jones’ words) has to do with the “power of the audiovisual.”¹⁴ In the miniseries, I suggest the music goes beyond a functional or merely decorative role and instead plays an additive and elevated part which builds the thematic texture of the show – something we will see as we closely read the miniseries against the source novel.

The music’s prominence also links to McKie’s commentary on “temporary” Australia. Recalling McKie’s decision to use the word “temporary” in his “search to find the apt word to describe Australia” (as quoted in the introduction to this thesis) an aspect of his analysis is the anticipatory yearning for “some semblance of maturity” – a lack of our own culture and heritage as settler-colonisers which might be prosthetically supplemented by cultural traditions such as the American Songbook. Indeed, McKie discusses the influence

of the so-called 'jazz age' in wartime Australia, particularly for women contending with their new place in society (i.e. the protagonists of *Come in Spinner*):

But it was jazz that seemed to act as a catalyst then to an entire generation of young post-war women who lifted their hemlines above their knees, held up their rolled stockings with jazz garters, painted their faces, [...] and openly defied many of the rules and taboos which their bewildered parents and grandparents had laid down and imagined were inviolable.¹⁵

Following McKie, the music in *Come in Spinner* speaks to the "void inside us which we fill with beer and things. [...] Deep inside us all is an emptiness, a loneliness, because we have never come to terms with our transplanted rejection at the bottom of the earth."¹⁶ Like the image of a suspended coin in a game of two-up (the origin of the phrase "Come in spinner!"¹⁷) the show and its music present a nation in indeterminacy; insisting on its presence but only finding voice through foreign compositions and sounds and traditions.

Adaptation and Reharmonisation

In the first episode, the wealthy grazier Angus MacFarland (Rhys McConnochie) invites Deb Forrest (Kerry Armstrong) to a high-class dinner to commemorate six months since their first meeting and to propose marriage – which would require Deb to divorce her husband, who is currently serving abroad. The song playing in the background is "Body and Soul", originally composed by Johnny Green in 1930, with lyrics by Edward Heyman, Robert Sour, and Frank Eyton, and now being performed by Vince Jones. A few minutes into the scene, a saxophonist takes a solo, and the camera moves to centre him in the frame, before showing the whole orchestra in front of the dance floor. The orchestra has captivated the characters' attention, as well as the viewer's.

This inclusion of the orchestra had impacted how the scene was blocked, filmed, and composited. Jones, who at this point had signed onto the project and read the novel, was asked to appear on screen, but he stipulated a condition that he and the orchestra would only play live:

We were in the backing band, the orchestra. I said, "alright I'll do it, but I'll only do it if I'm singing live." [...] And they said, "oh okay." [And I replied,] "but it'd be good if you could get your takes organised, [...] because we can do it all quick, because they're all good players, those guys. [...] And [actor] Rebecca Gibney was there, and she said, "good on ya, Vince" and they got their bits down, and it was done [...] two or three takes we had the whole thing down.¹⁸

Due to these requirements, the film crew had limited takes and options for restaging scenes to accommodate for different blocking and camera placement. This also affected the actors' performance choices and what was later available in the editing room. Here, the music's priority was agreed upon and other creative elements were conformed around that – something we will find was quite a departure from the novel.

In the novel's equivalent scene, a jazz orchestra is also featured, but instead of a standard, they are playing a fictitious song which doesn't exist outside the novel. Cusack and James describe the singer's voice as "melt[ing] away in a dying cadence",¹⁹ and I think this aptly captures the novel's reduced place for music. Unlike the show's distinct profiling of Jones and then the soloist, the musicians here seem interchangeable, melding into each other (the saxophonist pulls double duties as the vocalist in the book, while the show does little to profile Jones' real-life multi-instrumentalism to render him more distinctly as vocalist) and as anonymous and made-up as the songs they are singing. The novel uses music more as thematic punctuation or simple pathetic fallacy rather than a strong description and an engagement with the thriving jazz scene of the wartime period. As musician and historian Bill Boldiston reflects: "These days we tend to forget just how popular (and crowded) these concerts were. They were held quite often and every time the Sydney Town Hall was full, and I mean FULL!"²⁰ In contrast to this lively recollection, the novel depicts sobbing sentimental refrains, dying cadences, and a general sense of disinterest even when the "best orchestra in Sydney"²¹ is playing. Rather than using specific techniques to profile the music as occurs in the miniseries, the novel seems to have more pressing matters to attend to.

The contrast is made clearer in how the lyrics are dramatically connected. In the novel, the lyrics have a relatively straightforward role as they externalise what Deb is

experiencing in the restaurant. The lyrics “*Your lips are warm and soft*” lead into “She felt his lips against her hair”,²² and “*Your touch is music – all delight*” precedes “Angus really was wonderful [...] There was absolutely nothing he couldn’t get.”²³ Meanwhile in the show, the interaction between the plot and the music is more complex and moves between consonance and dissonance – not dissimilarly to how in jazz practice, more ‘diatonic’ tunes are often taken up and complexified through the process of reharmonisation.²⁴ As the show returns to Deb and Angus in the restaurant, the pair are now on the dance floor and the song has changed to “I Get Along Without You Very Well” (Hoagy Carmichael, 1939), and Angus ironically points out that it’s “Not the most appropriate song.”²⁵

Unlike the music in the book, the music in the show is able to transform and voice characters’ feelings into different affects including earnestness and irony. Where the novel’s music operates as a simple pathetic fallacy, the show’s characters diegetically pick up and respond to the music to inform the tenor and mood of their conversations, actions, and – as implied by the editing of the miniseries and the cuts between the actors’ gazes and the band – even their mind spaces. The miniseries also pays particular attention to instrumental soloists and shout choruses, with many of the featured solos reiterating the ‘head’ or melody to suggest strong thematic continuity, and insistence on established signifiers and meanings. In the restaurant, music atmospherically suffuses the room and has an almost uncanny and penetrating access to feeling and mind. The song choice of “Body and Soul” seems entirely apt, as the music takes on an embodied presence as it participates and intervenes in the characters’ acts of soul-searching.

In the miniseries, music is prominently featured within a responsive and dialogic soundscape, which significantly affected how the scenes were composed and how the viewer receives them. The show’s music has primary significance, compared to the secondary significance of the novel’s music. It is part of the texture and fabric of the world. This is a significant transformative aspect of *Come in Spinner* as an adaptation – a unique audiovisual bridge between the book and the soundtrack, which maximises what is minimised in those other mediums. That is, where music has at best a functional role in the book, and the album’s association with the show and book is relegated to a minimal,

half-vanishing font, the miniseries places both music and narrative together to simultaneously elevate and richly build one another.

Singing from the American Songbook

Ann Ommen der Merwe describes the American Songbook tradition as one in which “the song has a life of its own, apart from any specific performer or performance.”²⁶ Van der Merwe traces the emergence of the American Songbook to a cultural search for identity around the First World War, along with the “coming together in new ways” of black and white cultures and music practices.²⁷ Of the standards that comprise it, she contends:

Their timeless characteristics have enabled these songs to endure not just as historical artifacts but as relevant musical templates for contemporary interpreters and listeners alike. They were forged by cultural developments at a particular point in history, but they have remained a part of American popular culture because those developments created music with the ability to last.²⁸

Van der Merwe notes that “[w]hile there is no definitive list of selections in the songbook, there is general consensus about its contents and the important musical traits these songs have.”²⁹ One of these traits is their fundamental intertwinement with jazz:

As jazz artists performed these songs and contributed their own compositions, the American Songbook came to be as familiar to jazz fans as anyone else [...] The interpretive freedom of jazz became germane to the popular standard as well, resulting in an unusually wide range of performance styles by both singers and instrumentalists. Without a connection to jazz, the American Songbook would probably be more dated stylistically. [...] Instead, though, jazz musicians have offered far more varied versions of the repertoire – and even performers based in these disciplines have had the opportunity to be shaped by jazz.

In *Come in Spinner*, these American compositions, performed by Australians in a publically-produced ABC production, had a layered role, dramatising not only the wartime “American invasion”³⁰ we see unfolding in the plot, but also contemporary

tensions in broadcasting content. In the contemporary moment of the late '80s and '90s when *Come in Spinner* was produced and released, the effects of globalisation (specifically Americanisation) were keenly felt:

The mixed feelings Australians often have for the United States came through in arguments about the best future direction for Australian television. The increasing international tendency towards integration around the American market alarmed some critics. John O'Hara, a humanities lecturer in Swinburne College [...] argued that new satellite-based Australian TV services to be launched would lead to a world where TV would be controlled by a few individual media companies without the balancing effect of a strong public service broadcasting sector.³¹

In the first episode, Australian officer Kim Scott (Jay Hackett) struggles to ward over his girlfriend's younger sister Monnie (Justine Clarke) as she is solicited (and later drugged and assaulted) by American GIs in the Coconut Grove bar. At the same time, Grace Knight sings "Loose Lips" (Martin Armiger, Fletcher Henderson) from the stage.³² At risk seems to be an idea of Australian innocence, liable to be swept away by determined and duplicitous foreign influences. That the music – an up-tempo jazz blues written and arranged in the American style but likely an original composition for the show³³ – is performed by Australians, then, might be read as an insistence on a fixed identity and presence, despite the tension of an increasingly alien and predatory context. Knight's presence also acts as a witness in this scene, with the scene's audio design maintaining her presence even when the visual *mise-en-scène* does not. The music not only adds to the chaos of the scene but offers an ironic narration – "Watch those loose lips!" – as the wartime narrative of America as Australia's big brother and saviour is gradually undone.

Another way to read this might be to concentrate on the porousness and open-endedness of the American Songbook. It is part of the artform that standards are taken up and transformed by various artists and interpretations – there is no 'one' version of "You Go to My Head" (J. Fred Coots, 1938), for example. Unlike classical music, where there is significant scope for personal interpretation and expression in performance but the prevailing norm is that "[u]nconventional performances are often perceived as erroneous",³⁴ unconventional performances of American Songbook standards are often highly acclaimed and encouraged in the jazz world (for example, Esperanza Spalding's

“Cuerpo Y Alma” (2008) reworks the time signature, form, harmony, *and* sung language of the aforementioned “Body and Soul”³⁵). Van der Merwe describes this dynamic, living aspect of the American Songbook tradition as follows: “it continues to be music with broad applicability and enduring appeal – a collection of songs that is thriving even in an industry far different than the one that gave it birth. Many performers are part of this, and they come from the full range of musical spheres [...]”³⁶

This is where this form of music is inherently improvisatory – while the particular arrangements might be relatively conventional, American Songbook standards are always receptive to new interpretations and directions. The *canon* is constantly being iterated, improvised upon, and added to. So, while these Australian arrangements and performances might, on the one hand, be going ‘against the grain’ and insisting on an Australian identity against an encroaching American standard, on the other hand they are also utilising extant aspects of that tradition which are receptive to, and indeed encourage, novel and disruptive interpretations.

Spinning Out

When I asked Jones further about why he considered the music in *Come in Spinner* was what Australians “needed to hear”, he replied:

Not many people were introduced that bevy of American Songbook. [...] But I knew that if I could – because I understood the [...] power of the audiovisual. If people could hear that music with that visual landscape, and music creating this beautiful climate, it could make the series really classy too.³⁷

The music’s audiovisual effectiveness and ability to create a general sense of classiness or standing follows Carlson’s analysis, where “filmmakers ideologically view jazz as representative of authenticity in and of itself, thus envisioning the music [...] as an essential component of the film’s message and meaning.”³⁸ Yet the flip side is that jazz and film are not just stable signifiers, but also “sites of disruption”³⁹ which can expose creative and thematic ruptures. The “need” for authenticity Jones refers to gestures at a lack of such in the first instance: an in-built propensity for cheesiness (in Jones’ words) or falsity.

In its search for voice and identity, the music in *Come in Spinner* is a prosthesis which conversely suggests a phantom limb, gesturing to the fact that we have no original, no stable referent, only that, per the American Songbook tradition, we keep insisting on our presence, singing the same songs differently, tossing the coin again and again: *we only have others' quotes to speak from*. There is a deep suspicion that ours is an appropriative and appropriated language; we ultimately have no dreaming, and we cannot backtrack to some originary source and belonging.

What *does* an American Songbook standard refer to? Is it the story of the lyrics? The Broadway show the song originally came from? The original recording? The Real Book chart? Or the immense canon of subsequent interpretations and revisions? Likely, the answer is all of these – and at the same time none, as no one performance could capture all the above. The ironic aspect about these standards is that there is *no* standard – or rather that the standard is entirely abstract and materially inaccessible, like a Platonic form. These songs have melodies, chord, structures, and feels (medium swing, ballad, etc.), but these vary subtly and dramatically across interpretations, and once you have heard *that* melody over *those* chords you have only heard one interpretation out of uncountably many variations. It is virtually impossible to comprehend the breadth of a standard's lives and afterlives⁴⁰ – this is why performers (and often audiences too!) will often select their favourite versions, and particular interpretive goals for when they play over certain standards.⁴¹

Come in Spinner (the miniseries) insists on this music in significant and transformative ways. Among this insistence, there is a statement of identity – of a dynamic element coming from Australian musicians and from an Australian recording session. But, voiced through a tradition which itself struggles to pin down a stable referent, what is that referring to? Like the show adapting a novel, adapting a historical period, only to come to something fictitious which could barely be received at the time due to controversy, there seems to be no real point of origin, only the insistence for something to be voiced out again and again, like Kim Scott's coin flipping at the end of the miniseries – heads and Guinea Malone (Rebecca Gibney) will marry him – “Better keep tossing ‘til it comes right, eh?”⁴² These adaptive traces eat into each other in a continuously deferred referent, echoing McKie's observation that “[w]e have no dreaming, no profound blood attachment

to our earth, so that, unlike the first Australians whose myths and rocks and life were indivisible and formed a majestic trinity, we and our earth are not one.”⁴³

Chapter 4. *The Tracker*: A New Ethic of Friendship?

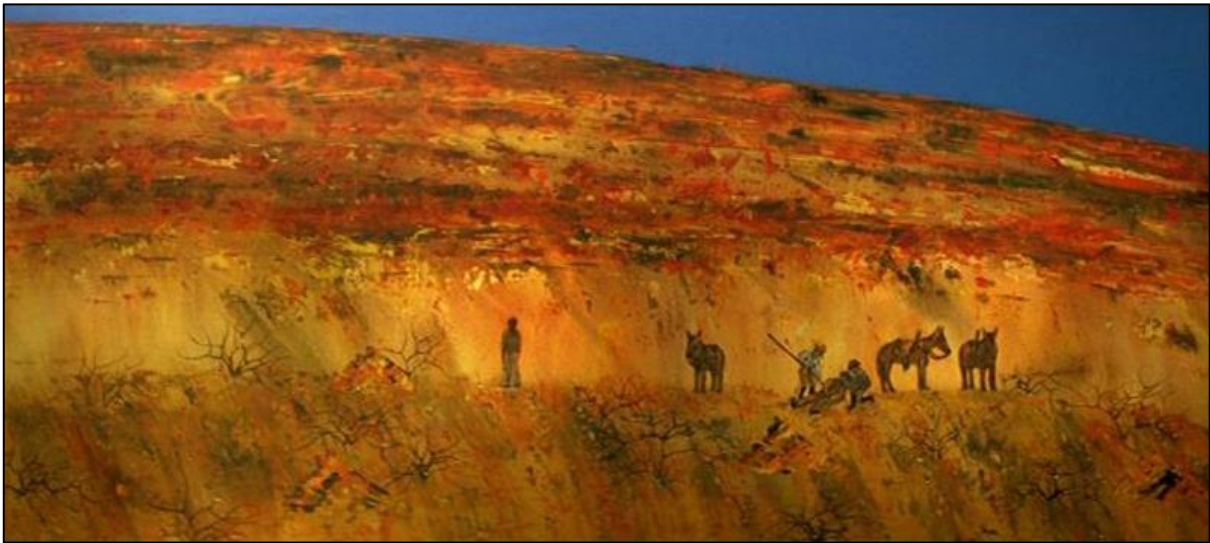


Figure 6. Still from *The Tracker*.¹

*“Some men are prone to misadventure
Questions of guilt aren’t always clear
Some men run from a fate they can’t avoid
All men choose the path they walk.”²*

So sings Archie Roach in “All Men Choose The Path They Walk,” one of the songs appearing in *The Tracker*.³ Like others in this film’s soundtrack, this song features a contemporary instrumental section including drums, fretless bass, guitar, and Leslie organ, and also strongly profiles Roach’s vocal delivery of lyrics written by director Rolf de Heer (who also directed our first text, *Dingo*). Unlike the nostalgic sounds of *Come in Spinner*, this modern soundtrack, credited to Roach and Graham Tardiff (composer and longtime de Heer collaborator), contrasts with the early-1920s period setting of the film – a frontier Western following four men (The Follower (Damon Gameau), The Fanatic (Gary Sweet), The Veteran (Grant Page), and The Tracker (David Gulpilil)) as they venture into the wilderness to bring an Aboriginal man (The Fugitive, Noel Wilton) into custody for allegedly murdering a white woman. “All Men Choose The Path They Walk” plays at a critical turn in the film, after the party massacres a group of Aboriginal people over a trooper’s uniform, and its key lyric and title also featured in many of the film’s

promotional posters. The soundtrack is notable for winning best soundtrack at the 2002 Film Critics Circle of Australia⁴ and was nominated for an ARIA Award for Best Original Soundtrack, Cast or Show Album.⁵

My inclusion of this film may seem puzzling at first, given Roach's reputation as more of a folk or country artist. Indeed, *The Tracker's* soundtrack is listed as a "Folk, World, & Country" album,⁶ and might sound very different to the other soundtracks discussed so far on a first listen (and likely in subsequent listens too!). However, Archie Roach had a strong affiliation with musicians from the Australian jazz scene, and there was significant improvisation involved in both the conceptual stages of the soundtrack's production, as well as its actual recording – likely more improvisation than *Come in Spinner's* soundtrack, for example. While I don't propose to curtail *The Tracker's* soundtrack to only the 'jazz' moniker, I do suggest employing jazz as a "coverall" term and thinking of jazz as practice to generatively align this text with those discussed thus far to focus on its jazz elements – particularly its entanglement with techniques of texture and improvisation. This analysis will not only contribute to the themes we have discussed so far, but also expand them into new directions.

In this chapter, we focus on jazz culture's emphasis on "individual, creative autonomy and experimentation"⁷ and striving to explore "new sounds, rhythms, and harmonies or unexpected collaborations, processes and experiences,"⁸ and the practice of musical improvisation which "allows for, even encourages, differential encounters – with sound, with other humans, with the spirit, with the cosmos – that gesture toward their aftermath."⁹ This is a conscious departure from the institutionalisation of jazz as "a clearly defined rigid music, self-consciously insisting on a set of values and judgements by which it can assess not only itself but everything around it."¹⁰ We undertake our own improvisation to bring related but different sounds and voices together to explore new textures and harmonies.

Specifically, *The Tracker* is a powerful text for our questions regarding whether there is, or can be, an Australian voice, and what it means to create sounds on a landscape itself that resonates with the pained memories of unreconciled and repressed injustices and traumas. Further, I suggest that Roach's music offers a possibility beyond the

‘improvisational bind’ we have so far discussed of unbelonging and unsettlement, or the authentic cry from the standpoint of inauthenticity. If my analysis thus far has centred on the sounds emanating from a ‘black hole’ in Australian culture – on untethered gestures of improvisation in the wake of profound loss and absence caused by colonisation and the artificiality of its foundations, an inward-facing redirection of *terra nullius* as we (as continually improvising non-Indigenous Australians) realise the Lacanian lack at the heart of our claim to ownership – then surely Roach’s voice represents the solution to that absence, pointing to the possibility of authenticity and belonging, and a new ‘future state’ of reconciliation, lore, and justice.

Recalling Carlson’s argument that jazz in film is “a sonic signifier of authenticity” capable of signalling lived experience, Black creativity, and freedom”,¹¹ Roach’s soundtrack is particularly potent and expansive for its introduction and foregrounding of an Aboriginal voice steeped in authenticity. At once, Roach’s voice seems to vocalise the Tracker’s inner thoughts during the film’s events, Roach’s own background and experiences as a singer-songwriter and storyteller, and the land as it weeps with painful memory and cries against ongoing injustice. Like Gulpilil’s character, Roach himself has been violently uprooted from Country and culture and witnessed genocide firsthand, yet remains to remember, observe, recount, and build new relationships. His standpoint enfolds multiple positionalities, including witness, victim, survivor, agent, and storyteller. In their analysis of the Tracker character over the film’s progression, Collins and Davis pose an arc that ultimately “takes us beyond the struggle to the death inherent in Hegel’s struggle for recognition” which occurs through an extension of “willingness to share cultural knowledge, opening the eyes of The Follower and the spectator.” Following their argument but extending it to the musical sphere, I suggest that Roach’s voice similarly gestures towards an “ethic of friendship and new forms of recognition”.¹² In the film, Roach’s voice is as powerful as Gulpilil’s stare – he remembers and he knows, but he also challenges and welcomes the spectator to themselves remember and know; to recognise and become recognised by the Indigenous participant who has always been, and will always be, present. But this is a film about history, backtracking, and the horrors inhering in each¹³ – and, like the Tracker we need to get our truth-telling and history attended to first before we step into the sunrise at the end of the film.¹⁴

Archie Roach as Jazz Man

As I have alluded to above, Archie Roach was involved with jazz musicians throughout his career, and the music in *The Tracker* features textural and improvisation techniques in a small combo setting with modern instruments, similarly to standard jazz practice. Roach and his wife Ruby Hunter collaborated with the Australian Art Orchestra and Paul Grabowsky for the 2005 release *Ruby*¹⁵ (the score for the semi-autobiographical musical production *Ruby's Story*),¹⁶ and continued to collaborate with Grabowsky for his ARIA-winning 2019 album *Tell Me Why*.¹⁷ Roach's artistry profoundly affected many Australian jazz musicians, such as saxophonist Sandy Evans and bassist Sam Anning, and inspired several compositions and releases dedicated to him after his recent passing. Regarding his latest release, *Earthen*,¹⁸ Anning recounts his time as Roach's bassist, and how he and jazz guitarist Stephen Magnusson, also from Roach's band, kept him company during his time in hospital and created music together as he greeted and farewelled family. According to Anning, Roach gestured towards his bass and Magnusson's guitar and commented, "This is earthenware [...] music comes from the earth and these instruments carry it, and it goes back to the earth," inspiring the title of the bassist's release.¹⁹

My point is not to triumphantly conclude that, contrary to popular understanding, Archie Roach was secretly a jazz musician. And we could go into a semantic rabbit hole about how someone who is 'with' someone else is, necessarily, someone distinct – 'an-other'. But that would hardly be very productive in the scope and purpose of this discussion. Instead, I would simply like to observe that Roach surrounded himself with jazz musicians, inspired and continues to inspire jazz musicians in their practice, and, most importantly, *made music with jazz musicians*. And surely this proximity and co-mingling qualifies Roach as, at the very least, a jazz musician by association, and certainly provides enough common ground for us to commence a generative and valuable discussion in the scope of this thesis. Roach was an inimitable creative and artistic force and voice of authenticity who touched on many worlds. One of those was the jazz world. This dimension of his artistic practice – a part, but certainly not the whole – foregrounds our discussion of *The Tracker's* music here.

The Improvised Music of *The Tracker*

Much improvisation was involved in *The Tracker's* music, from initial conceptual stages to the recording session, the music itself, and how its lyrics were later received. De Heer recalls how the film's script initially had "no sense of songs", but a contractual obligation arose when the film was pitched to the Adelaide Festival of Arts as a film which would feature a soundtrack, which could then possibly be performed live during the Festival. Early concepts varied, and de Heer initially tested the idea that "we could have these Irish ditties playing against the violence" to maximise contrast.²⁰ He and Tardif quickly found that the initial idea of the Irish jig accomplished too much and trivialised vital scenes, and struggled to find something that would suit the film's vision while meeting what was now a contractual obligation: "Nothing worked. Everything was bad, and we were really at wit's end."²¹ Reaching a point of exasperation, de Heer and Tardif experimented with using songs featured on the compilation album *Buried Country* as a temporary soundtrack – an album which features recordings from notable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists singing in a combination of English and traditional language to tell the "story of Aboriginal country music".²² Upon hearing traditional language over the filmed scenes, de Heer recalls how the production team felt their hair stand on end, as the music was no longer only creating a sense of juxtaposition but now taking the audience into the mind-space of the Tracker: "Which was not the intention – but that's what happened."²³

Eventually, Roach was attached to the project, but the improvisation didn't end there. In the recording studio, de Heer, who had played in some bands earlier in his life, noticed an organ with a Leslie speaker.²⁴ Pointing the organ out to the studio engineers, de Heer suggested that they had to get it out of storage and in working condition for the session, resulting in the lush analogue sound featured in the film. In recounting this episode, de Heer observed how he "was more involved in *The Tracker* musically than just about any other film I'd ever done."²⁵ Experiment, revision, flirting with crisis, and the open possibility of spontaneous revelation as creative pathways are suggested, substituted, and committed to on the fly – these of course are the tenets of improvisation and improvisatory practice which "involves the readiness to remake things out of a paucity of materials, limitations, the crisis of having to risk in the here and now the immediacy of a decision".²⁶ Indeed, that point of desperation de Heer initially described reaching in light

of the completed film emphasises how “[t]he regenerative potential in improvisation thrives in opportunity, turning dissolution and degeneration into the potential for refiguration.”²⁷

This ethic is woven into the film’s music itself, which features long textural sections and frequent instrumental interplay. These aspects in particular align closely with jazz as practice, or, as Roach’s collaborator Paul Grabowksy describes, jazz as “an application of musical knowledge, a way of doing things, adverb rather than noun.”²⁸ In the song with which I opened this chapter, for example, Roach’s vocals don’t enter for almost two minutes, during which the melody is shared between the slide guitar, keyboard, electric guitar, and organ, comparably to how jazz musicians improvise over the ‘head’ and trade parts of the melody when playing tunes. Further into the song, the guitarist improvises in response to Roach’s vocal delivery, employing pentatonic-based vocabulary to fill in the sparse melody and build the song’s texture. Here, we can observe key structural similarities to the jazz process where: “The head gets a tune started by suggesting a particular rhythm, harmony and melody. The tune is then built from this starting point via improvisation within which different interpretations of the initial idea are offered and new ideas and further interpretations can be explored.”²⁹ Arguably, the improvisation we hear in *The Tracker* – which is oriented strongly around the established melody (the ‘head’), uses a defined set of harmonic and rhythmic frameworks such as pentatonic scales and a strong 4/4 backbeat, and takes place according to the 8/16-measure structure of the melody – has more in common with the jazz jam sessions typical of the 1930s and ‘40s, which for some critics “underlies all claims for the legitimacy of bebop – not simply as a jazz idiom but as the decisive step toward jazz as art”,³⁰ than the more free-form improvisations of The Necks, or even the highly arranged compositions featured in *Come in Spinner’s* soundtrack.

This is to say little of the possible genealogical link between the “vocal timbres, slides, and groans”,³¹ and “blues-inflected [...] bends, scoops, and dramatic registral sweeps”³² typically heard in jazz and originating from the fusion of Afro-modernism and the sounds of historical emancipation in the civil rights journey³³ and Roach’s raspy vocal delivery which narrates Gulpilil’s performance as a Black character who is literally in chains. As Baraka writes, “Negroes played jazz as they had sung blues or, even earlier, as they had

shouted and hollered in those anonymous fields, because it was one of the few areas of human expression available to them”.³⁴ In Gulpilil’s character, whose body is chained but who partakes in human expression through the freedom of what he sees and hears and thinks, we see a convincing Australian analogue. This locates the music of *The Tracker* as extremely proximal to the ‘heart’ of jazz, including where it came from and why.³⁵

As noted above, the English lyrics sung by Roach in the film were written by the non-Indigenous de Heer. Their performance, reception, and interpretation represent another layer of improvisation. De Heer recalls discussing the lyrics with Roach during a smoking break. After confirming that de Heer had in fact written the lyrics, Roach remarked: “We’ve travelled very different roads, but we’ve arrived at the same place.”³⁶ Later, in an interview with the ABC, a radio presenter asked Roach about the experience of performing de Heer’s lyrics. Roach adamantly banged his fist on the table before him and exclaimed: “They are my words. They are my words!”³⁷ Even after the film’s music had been conceptualised and recorded, issues of its interpretation and ownership were mediated through improvised moments which yielded new meanings and configurations. These live issues – of how we listen to the music, whom it belongs to, and how we respond to it – are continuing opportunities for us to improvise: to consider the past and reframe it through the present moment.³⁸

On-Screen Improvisations

We turn now from the music to the film, where improvisation is explicitly dramatised through the character of the Follower. We are introduced to the Follower as he strums a ukulele while riding his horse, with the subtitle “This man is new to the frontier”. Throughout the first act of the film, the Follower keeps trying to pick out a song, only to be frustrated by the leader of the group, the Fanatic: “Sounds like some dead animal being strangled!”³⁹ The object of the ukulele operates within a negotiation of power between the characters as they navigate the frontier. Responding to the Fanatic and echoing the film’s first and immediately preceding dialogue scene, the Veteran remarks “Dead animals don’t make sound.” The Follower picks up on this to counter the Fanatic, saying “No, they don’t”, forcing the senior ranking officer to invoke his authority and his ability to have the

final say (even if takes a non-sequitur to get there): “Yeah, you know what I mean”⁴⁰ – and the Follower dutifully stows his instrument. This dynamic persists until the massacre and the group’s subsequent decision to push on, guns at the ready, despite losing their supplies. There is no turning back, in what looks increasingly like a one-way mission, and the Follower burns his instrument in the campfire. The song that plays over this part of the film is “All Men Choose the Path They Walk.”

Here, the Follower models the viewer’s sudden immersion in an unfamiliar landscape and history of Australia, and the uncanny birth trauma of suddenly being reborn in a familiar place rendered strange and unfamiliar. Following Collins and Davis, *The Tracker* is a key text in the post-*Mabo* cinema of backtracking, which specifically “uses the past to refer to the present” and “attempts post-*Mabo* politics of recognition (with its discourse of guilt and shame) onto a set of archetypal figures and a self-consciously mythic narrative form.”⁴¹ The film – especially in its use of contemporary paintings and a modern soundtrack – fuses past and present, history with memory with imagination, and aesthetics of romantic mythology with politics of revisiting and reappraisal to suddenly ‘re-birth’ the viewer at a location specified as no more than “Somewhere in Australia.”⁴² This phrase points towards the film’s uncanny project – we can be certain that this *is* Australia, but we (the presumably Australian viewer, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewers as neither the Tracker and the Fugitive are on home Country) are lost in the collision of myth, history, and recollection and cannot pinpoint exactly where we are, only that we are *somewhere*. As Roach sings in his opening lyric, we are “Far away, in another land [...] Faraway home.”⁴³ In this nebulous, unstable moment, wherein the film has activated live discussions and apprehensions about a repressed history to “effac[e] the distinction between imagination and reality, such [that] something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality,”⁴⁴ the Follower, like the viewer, is confronted with “the uncanny implications of being in place and ‘out of place’ at precisely the same time.”⁴⁵

In this re-birth, the Follower – played by baby-faced Gameau, mouth agape for much of the film’s runtime – and the audience identifying with that character are both continually experiencing and re-experiencing a sense of birth trauma, an “affect of anxiety [as] a consequence of the event of birth”,⁴⁶ which, according to Rank, may continue to haunt the

child “again and again for the abreaction of the undisposed-of affect [...] *every infantile utterance of anxiety or fear is really a partial disposal of the birth anxiety.*”⁴⁷ Putting aside psychological debates about this scope of this effect,⁴⁸ the point is that we are suddenly transported into unfamiliar territory, which looks familiar but is not. Viewers empathetic to the Follower lack the power of comprehension: the Follower is stunned by the massacre and rendered nonverbal, and the viewer can only witness the violence as it is mediated through still paintings. Newly arrived but inundated in a flood of repressed history, we are commonly afflicted by a blindness in the first instance, but the shock remains in the undulating reverberations of the unforgotten. This is the dissonance between our blank, unaware minds, and a landscape and its original inhabitants who remember, and *know* – a powerfully ironic inversion of the doctrine of *terra nullius* to now apply to the settler’s mind space. As Collins and Davis write:

For us, the landscape films of the 1990s provoke shocks of recognition of a continent which has been anything but the sublime void of European projections. [...] Since the *Mabo* decision at least, the image of the outback landscape in cinema provokes recognition of historical amnesia (rather than an unknowable, sublime, interior void) as the founding structure of settler Australia’s myths of belonging.⁴⁹

In this state of primordial shock, *improvisation* becomes a necessary act of navigation as we can no longer fall back on learned patterns and vocabulary. The Follower’s attempts to put together a song on his ukulele – and in some scenes to even get it in tune – can thus be read as an attempt to gesture towards some semblance of cogence and coherency. This is the ‘improvisational bind’ I have so far referred to. His burning of the ukulele can be read as a choice, or determination – initially, to suspend his improvisational agency in following the choices and orders of the Fanatic, but, as we will discuss, the film and the character do not end there. As Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter write, the act of improvising in the moment carries with it an ethical imperative in its inhabiting of the “knife’s edge” of the here and now. Will the encounter be ethical and responsible for all the participants at a given moment, or will it be another lost opportunity to voice that which is/was unsaid?

Musical improvisation is a form of witnessing, holding on to the moment as it occurs. The reality of the witness, as any improviser will tell you, is being present in the fragility of the time passing. Vulnerability is an aspect of the urgency that music brings to that which always disappears. We are in this moment but once, and what we do in that moment always has the potential to transform – or not. Improvisation cocreation resonates with the potential ethics of listening, of acting, of engaging in any given moment that addresses the knife’s edge of being here and now. How we embody impermanence is a question every improvisation asks.⁵⁰

In improvising, we seek out and open ourselves to other bodies and memories. Like the Follower, these gestures may at first sound like a “dead animal being strangled” (or perhaps a newborn’s first cries as they are confronted with the suffocating need to breathe outside the womb). What suffuses them with life is the encounter with the other – with past and memory in the insistence of the present. Recalling Wong and Eidersham (quoted in my chapter on *The Boys*), improvising music “is in part to bring oneself under the influence of other bodies from the past” in a creative nexus “which means that my body, my practices, are not wholly mine.”⁵¹

Towards this encounter with the other, Gulpilil’s stare and Roach’s voice are particularly powerful. We, along with the Follower, may have set out on this journey to capture a criminal – the Follower on orders, and the audience through the expectations of genre for this neo-Western film. However, in being birthed in this unfamiliar and uncanny landscape, we increasingly find that we are the ones ‘under arrest’ – held captive by the landscape, its memories and songlines, and the people who first knew it, flourished on it and cultivated it, and called it home.

An Ethic of Friendship?

How, then, to escape this improvisational bind, and how can Roach’s music help us? Collins and Davis argue that *The Tracker* presents the viewer with an ultimately positive message with an “ethic of friendship”, but in their analysis note that it comes too soon in Australia’s cultural moment:

The ethic of friendship and new forms of recognition we have read into the film is ahead of its time. Ongoing support for the Howard government's policies on national security indicates that an overwhelming majority of Australians accept friendship as a basic principle of democracy only if it is based on a notion of the friend 'as another self, as what is most similar'.⁵²

Nonetheless, I would like to return to this idea, and specifically explore how Roach's music helps us understand it and the film and offers us with a vision of reconciliation beyond the improvisational bind and the trauma of uncanny birth.

Towards the end of the film, the Follower betrays the Fanatic and assists the Tracker in putting him in chains. While the Follower sleeps, the Tracker executes the Fanatic for his crimes. The Follower persists in following Tracker to the film's climax, when the Fugitive is finally found and brought to justice – not under settler law but Aboriginal lore/law for sleeping with the wrong woman. The film ends as the pair go their separate ways – the Tracker back to his Country and the Follower as the viewpoint and witness to the film's final still painting of a peaceful and possibly hopeful landscape. Collins and Davis describe this relationship as:

enabling a form of social recognition that takes us beyond the struggle of death inherent in Hegel's struggle for recognition. The friendship between The Follower and The Tracker is premised on a recognition of difference but one that allows for an ethics of hospitality. The Tracker is now recognised as the one who is 'at home', welcoming The Follower to another's country where they are both strangers, or guests.⁵³

Roach's music, I argue, plays a direct role in this dynamic and enhances Collins and Davis' analysis. As discussed above, the film's composition directly links the music to the Tracker's mind space – indeed, this effect was one of the primary reasons for why the filmmakers chose this music and this performance. One of the first lyrics that Roach sings, then, is particularly important, as he sings: "They don't know what I see."⁵⁴ And indeed, the other characters do *not* see what the Tracker sees (metaphorically and literally, as it's the familiarity with the land and the small disturbances that the white policemen can't see which is why the party has brought along a black tracker). Gulpilil's performance

accomplishes a lot here in tandem with Roach's delivery, as the character says little but conveys a lot in his looks, gestures, and subtle responses.

As the film progresses and as this "ethic of friendship" expands, we get the sense that the Follower is beginning to hear something like what the Tracker hears – or at least is more open to the possibility of other voices he may not be immediately privy to. We see this as the character witnesses the cultural rite of payback – negating his role as lawman in the conducting of Aboriginal lore.⁵⁵ And, of course, there is the clever play and open-ended inversion of the character's designation as the film progresses. No longer is he the 'follower' of the senior-ranking Fanatic or even the Veteran with whom he seemed to identify at the beginning of the film, but now he is open and receptive to other cultural authorities inhering in the landscape. Roach's lyrics and music – emanating as they do from the land and passing through the bodies of the characters who hear and receive it – becomes a powerful signifier of what the audience is called to listen, receive, and respond to in their growth. The film presents the possibility that "They don't see what I see" might evolve into 'But they can listen when I speak'. And as Roach sings in traditional language, we as the audience are not called to understand or fully receive everything we hear, but only to be aware and respectful and to respond appropriately to what is presented to us via the ethic of hospitality.

Although the ukulele is burnt earlier in the film, what we gradually witness as the film and the characters progress is a new improvisation, a *bodily* improvisation. Per Fischlin, Heble, and Liptzitz: "In its most fully realized forms, improvisation is the creation and development of new, unexpected, and productive cocreative relations among people."⁵⁶ And as the film progresses, bodies are contorted and negotiated as participant signifiers in authority, law, and lore – but this occurs towards a vision of justice and reconciliation. As I have explained above, the music in *The Tracker* integrates multiple forms of improvisation, from conception to production to reception. And it is in the actual substance of the music itself that this structural incorporation and use of improvisation is at its most 'jazz-like' (such that, I would argue, there is little meaningful distinction). This successful integration of improvisation in Roach's music presents us with perhaps the most potent analogue for finding a solution to the improvisational bind which I have articulated above. If we, like the Follower, are struggling to pick out a tune yet nonetheless

cannot help but gesture and to improvise, then Roach's music acts as a framework for finding a voice and achieving harmony and structure. By engaging with this locus of authenticity through an ethic of hospitality and friendship, we too can go from picking out individual notes and ditties to finally approach partaking and communing in song.

Conclusion: The Shape of Jazz and Film to Come?

In our interview, Vince Jones discussed the difference between entertainment and art:

If a musician isn't aspiring to make art, then the best they can do is be an entertainer. And for me, entertainment is designed to distract you from your daily crunch, your daily workload. Whereas [...] art has the ability to unite people, to bring people together. Lyrically, and emotionally through the music.¹

All the film music I have discussed not only represents diverse interpretations of what the jazz realm has to offer but also, I contend, falls into the category of art. They have the ability to unite in their exposure of inauthenticities lying at the heart of settler Australia's claim to being – our relationship with the landscape, our internal memories, our histories, our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – and, through improvisatory and exploratory practices, turn such into interesting and pleasing soundscapes which pique the ear. These are powerful linkages which explore the unsettled condition of 'being out of place' in Australia. In the films I have discussed, jazz operates as a flirtation with the unknown, the unpredictable. Like Barthes' *punctum*, this activates "what I add to the [work] and *what is nonetheless already there*."² That is, the music we hear challenges us to improvise our own meanings and interpretations, but also stirs in us what we already know and suspect to be true. These create active and disruptive sites invite us to participate in common exploration of the uncanny and work through them in further collaborative gestures.

Where are the Australian jazz films now? Another area where I diverge from Carlson's analysis is in how she observes: "Within the last decade, there has been a noticeable uptick in jazz-related films. [...] [F]ilmmakers have only recently (re)recognized [that jazz makes for good drama]."³ Conversely, the films I have discussed emerged in a similar '90s to early 2000s period (over two decades before the time of writing), and there has not been as significant a crossover in jazz and Australian film since. In these films, the filmmakers took risks in working with the musicians they chose (many of whom had not worked on films before and have not since), and conformed their filming process to suit because they respected the artists and what they could bring – which resulted in stories

such as the “almost immediate complete catastrophe” of filming with Miles Davis in Meekatharra for *Dingo*,⁴ and the limited opportunities for repeat takes with Jones’ live band for *Come in Spinner*. This landscape and sharing of artistic respect is very different to how films are typically produced now, where film scorers typically find themselves at the bottom of the food chain.⁵

Future research must be practice-based. My research and analysis are intended to align with contemporary developments in jazz research and practice, including Ellen Kirkwood’s *Underwards* project and PhD research on her positionality as a non-Indigenous composer working on-Country and informed by respectful Indigenous-led environmental learning;⁶ Sam Anning’s latest album, *Earthen*,⁷ which as previously discussed homages and reflects upon the bassist’s experience working with Archie Roach and creating Indigenous-led music which “comes from the earth [...] and goes back to the earth;”⁸ and William Barton’s recent performance with Nduduzo Makhathini in the 2023 Melbourne International Jazz Festival which explored music-making practices and connection to culture, identity and Country.⁹ Jazz practitioners must keep making music and reflecting upon it if we are to make the case to filmmakers of its utility and power to convey uniquely Australian stories. Throughout this thesis, I hope to have shown that jazz is a cinematic practice that communicates globally but can also explore regional narratives and affects. While risky, its treatment of musical concepts such as rhythm, harmony, consonance, and dissonance can be immensely rewarding and effective when brought to film to tell our stories.

I purposefully opened this thesis with political anecdotes to set the scene and storytelling climate. Now, just over a year from the failed Voice to Parliament referendum,¹⁰ questions regarding Australian voice – who has it, whom it represents, where it comes from, and who listens – are just as keenly felt. Now, as in the ‘90s shortly after the *Mabo* decision, we are improvising a nation and identity in the wake of unreconciled demands for justice and truth-telling. Non-Indigenous Australia’s relationship to this landscape is still uncanny and thrums with a deep sense of unsettlement and fraud. As the original bebop musicians took the chaotic sounds of the city and demands for civil rights and reflected it back into musical forms, the opportunity is rife for improvisers to listen to the unsettled

vibrations of this land now called Australia and turn them into music. These are the aspects of our nationhood which demand to be seen and heard.

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Chapter 4: *The Tracker*: A New Ethic of Friendship?

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Conclusion: The Shape of Jazz and Film to Come?

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