

VICTORIA HERCHE

The Adolescent Nation

Re-Imagining Youth
and Coming of Age in
Contemporary Australian Film



Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg



ANGLISTISCHE FORSCHUNGEN

Band 465

Begründet von

Johannes Hoops

Herausgegeben von

Rüdiger Ahrens

Heinz Antor

Klaus Stierstorfer



VICTORIA HERCHE

The Adolescent Nation

Re-Imagining Youth and Coming of
Age in Contemporary Australian Film

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation
in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie;
detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Zugl.: Philosophische Fakultät der Universität zu Köln, Univ. Diss., 2018

UMSCHLAGBILD

“Advertising.” *The Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 1913, Sydney,
NSW: 12 October 1916, National Library of Australia,
nla.obj-662740998.

ISBN 978-3-8253-6918-7

Dieses Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede
Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne
Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt insbesondere für
Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung
und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

© 2021 Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH Heidelberg
Imprimé en Allemagne · Printed in Germany
Umschlaggestaltung: Klaus Brecht GmbH, Heidelberg
Druck: Memminger MedienCentrum, 87700 Memmingen
Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, chlorfrei gebleichtem
und alterungsbeständigem Papier

Den Verlag erreichen Sie im Internet unter:
www.winter-verlag.de

For my parents

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to several individuals and institutions:

I would firstly like to thank Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier, the first supervisor of my PhD thesis, for her professional support and for encouraging my interest in Australian Studies. Many thanks to Prof. Dr. Heinz Antor for his work and support as the co-supervisor.

For their sponsoring of my research fellowship in Melbourne in 2014, I would like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), as well as the International Association for Australian Studies for supporting a conference trip to Western Australia in 2016. To research and experience Australian (cinematic) culture, and to present my ideas on site, was of great importance for developing my ideas.

At Monash University, I particular thank Prof. Sue Kossew from the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics and Dr. Belinda Smaill, Dr. Therese Davis, and the 'Under Construction' team at the School of Media, Film and Journalism, who made me feel very welcome and gave me vital input for my project.

I thank my colleagues Dr. Laura-Marie Schnitzler, Dr. Sarah Youssef, David Kern, and the whole Centre for Australian Studies Cologne team for being wonderful colleagues and for all their help.

This project would not have been possible without the influences and encouragements by former chair holders of the Dr. R. Marika Chair for Australian Studies at the University of Cologne; I would therefore like to extend my gratitude to Prof. Kay Schaffer, Prof. Bill Ashcroft, Prof. Jacqueline Lo, Prof. Sue Kossew, and Prof. Paul Arthur.

Special thanks go to my friends and family. Friederike Danebrock for reading the manuscript, her insightful criticism, and moral support throughout this project. Sebastian Mews for his technical assistance and overall patience. My final thanks go to my parents and my grandmother for their immeasurable support and love.

Table of Contents

I	ADOLESCENCE – NATION – FILM: THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS	13
1	Introduction – Adolescence and the Nation	15
1.1	The Adolescent Nation: National Fictions of Becoming	16
1.2	The Adolescent Nation: Coming of Age in Film	23
2	Young Australia and the Potential of Adolescence	31
2.1	Concepts of the ‘Child’ in a Colonial and Postcolonial Context	31
2.2	The History of Young Australia	34
2.3	Colonial Cartoon Images: The Little Boy from Manly	36
2.4	Constructions of the ‘Poor Child’	44
2.5	Conceptualising the Liminal: Classical Theories of Coming of Age	48
2.6	Coming of Age in Australian Films	51
2.7	Coming of Age in <i>Toomelah</i>	53
3	The Coming of Age Narrative in Australian Film History	59
3.1	Australian National Cinema	60
3.2	Before the Australian New Wave	63
3.3	The 1970s: Australianness and History	65
	3.3.1 The Period Films	67
	3.3.2 The Ocker Films	72
3.4	The 1980s: Nationalism and Nostalgia	74
	3.4.1 The Male Ensemble Film and its Other	75
	3.4.2 The Nostalgic Teen Film	78
3.5	The 1990s: Eccentricity and Individuality	80
	3.5.1 The “quota quirky”	80
	3.5.2 Internationalising the Teen Film	82
	3.5.3 The Multicultural Moment	85
3.6	The 2000s: Cinema after Mabo	87
II	COMING OF AGE IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AUSTRALIA	95
1	A Journey In-Between: The Road Movie	99
1.1	The Road in Cinema	100
	1.1.1 The Role of the Landscape	104
	1.1.2 Children on the Road	105
1.2	The Indigenous ‘No Road’ Film	107

1.2.1	The Road to Sovereignty in <i>Beneath Clouds</i>	109
1.2.2	The Indigenous Buddy Road Comedy <i>Stone Bros.</i>	114
1.3	Stories of Migration in Asian Australian Film	118
1.3.1	The Role of Cars and Mobility in <i>Lucky Miles</i>	120
1.3.2	In-Between Lands: Boat People in <i>Mother Fish</i>	123
2	Disrupted Families and Delinquent Youth: Stories of Crime	129
2.1	Crime and Youth in Australian Cinema	130
2.2	Larrikins and the City in <i>Two Hands</i>	135
2.3	The Criminal Family in <i>Animal Kingdom</i>	138
2.4	Suburban Nightmares in <i>Snowtown</i>	144
3	Rewriting National Icons: Sports in Film	151
3.1	Sports and Australian National Identity	152
3.2	Racism and the Football Ground: <i>Australian Rules</i>	156
3.3	Australian Beach Culture and Masculinity	161
3.3.1	Sports and Masculinities	162
3.3.2	The Beach in the Australian Imaginary	164
3.3.3	Lifesavers and Homophobia in <i>Drown</i>	167
4	‘Messed-up’ Girls and Sexual Attraction: Romance	171
4.1	Becoming Girl: Female Desire and <i>Beautiful Kate</i>	175
4.2	Performing the Girl: <i>Somersault</i>	180
4.3	<i>Adoration</i> and Becoming Woman: The May-December Romance	184
5	Coming of Age and the ‘Mainstream’: The Musical Film	189
5.1	Musicals and Indigenous Australian ‘Mainstreaming’	189
5.2	Transnational Cinema: <i>The Sapphires</i>	195
5.3	Towards Reconciliation: <i>Bran Nue Dae</i>	202
6	Instead of a Conclusion	207
III	SOURCE MATERIAL	215
	Bibliography	217
	Filmography	235
	Appendix: Film List – Coming of Age in Australian Cinema	237
	Index	247

Illustrations

Figure 1: Jordan, Ben. “Young Australia introduces the Commonwealth’s Mammoth Store to Uncle Sam.” <i>Bulletin</i> 20 August 1908	38
Figure 2: Vincent, Alf. “The Relative Sizes of Chairs.” <i>Bulletin</i> 1913	39
Figure 3: Hopkins, Livingston. “The Yellow Trash Question.” <i>Bulletin</i> 1895	40
Figure 4: Hopkins, Livingston. “Anxious about his Bill.” <i>Bulletin</i> 25 August 1900	41
Figure 5: Anon. “Well Done.” <i>Bulletin</i> 13 May 1915	43

I ADOLESCENCE – NATION – FILM: THEORETICAL
AND HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTIONS

1 Introduction – Adolescence and the Nation

*Australians all let us rejoice,
for we are young and free.*

Australia is a nation so obsessed with images of youth that for many decades its national anthem by default regarded “all” members of its nation as “young”. On the 1st of January 2021, the Australian government announced to replace the word “young” by “one” in an attempt to acknowledge Australia’s Indigenous ancient history and unify “all Australians” (Hurst). By drawing on the enduring implications of Australia’s identification as a young nation – an image built on the exclusion of Australia’s pre-colonial past – the following discussion analyses youth and coming of age as a defining narrative of Australia’s national cinema. Both on a thematic level and in the film industry’s own development the notion of coming of age is deeply rooted within the fantasy of Australia’s national identity. Just as adolescence is characterised by its movement towards adulthood, Australia is characterised as existing in a state of perpetual ‘becoming’.

According to Sandra Hall, coming of age is considered “the national theme”, the “dilemma of a Peter Pan country committed in theory to all responsibilities of worldliness, even as it draws back for fear of being exploited by the larger and the more powerful” (*Critical Business* 1). To compare Australia’s national image with adolescence – a transitional stage of inner turmoil, vulnerability and instability – may therefore speak of an unstable and struggling society, one that has not come to terms with its colonial past, at times shameful history and lack of self-confidence in its own cultural productions. However, as I will argue in the following by challenging the view of adolescence as a limitation, it is precisely within the representation of adolescence as a transitional process that a new generation of filmmakers re-imagines possibilities of agency, multicultural and more fluid identities, and new potentials for reconciliation. The implication is that the desire and need to locate and assert a revised Australian national imaginary is mirrored in the experience of growing up; in each individual’s struggle to find their own place in the world. The discussion of diverse cinematic examples in this study will show in how far contemporary Australian cinema challenges and redefines a homogenous image of coming of age in Australia – individually and as a discourse of the nation at large – thereby re-imagining on a larger scale what is regarded as typical ‘Australian’.

1.1 The Adolescent Nation: National Fictions of Becoming

*This is the history of a national obsession.
Most new nations go through the formality of
inventing a national identity, but Australia
has long supported a whole industry of
image-makers to tell us who we are.*

The federal nation of Australia was the first in history to vote itself into existence. Yet in spite of this responsible democratic act, Australia's nation has ever since been compared to a "craven adolescent" (Hartcher 78). Media coverage of the 2014 G20-summit in Australia ("the shrimp of the schoolyard") referred to former Prime Minister Tony Abbott as "an awkward, pimply youth" (Dixon), as he had promised Australians "a grown-up government, yet seemed to offer only adolescent interest in pursuing Australia's global aims" (Hartcher 74). By focusing on Australia's underperforming role in foreign politics, Peter Hartcher, in *The Adolescent Country*, blames the "pathology of parochialism," the provincial reflex of the Australian nation as "still being in need for growing-up" (4) for the common representation of Australia as "premature" (93), having unserious, "adolescent interest[s]" (74), as being "dependent" on the outside world (40), and Australian politicians being "schoolyard bullies" (Editorial).

Another popular expression to emphasise the idea that Australia is yet in the process "to truly grow up" (Hartcher 95) is the phrase regularly deployed in association with tragic events: "the day Australia lost its innocence". From the tragedies of Gallipoli in World War I, the 2002 Bali bombings to the 2014 Sydney siege (now in the variant "the day *Sydney* lost its innocence"), Australia losing its innocence has been referred to as a "constantly repeated process, as if somehow we regain it between tragedies, only to be deprived of it next time" (Keane). The underlying assumption of such "loss-of-innocence" statements implies that Australia *is* innocent, despite its controversial history as a prison colony, its colonial politics of dispossession and racial discrimination of Indigenous peoples, and its participation in the wars of imperialism in the twentieth century. Tom Conley explains the prevailing image of Australia's innocence by its colonial dependence on Britain. In his study on Australia's reactions to world economy and globalisation he argues, "Australia was born vulnerable" (1). Due to its resource dependence and high household debt, Australia's outward focus was, and still is, relying on the "protective framework of British power and [...] on British 'men, money and markets'" (1). In the "history of a national obsession" with national identity (White viii, see full quote above), Australia has taken the path to invent itself as a *young* nation. "What the 'Australian' case was founded on was not national sentiment nor a sense of being distinctively Australian; rather it was based on the notion of a growing colony" (52), yet to become independent from its British 'parent'. The notion of the adolescent nation hence implies both, on the one hand Australia's (continued) dependence on Britain as the 'mother country', and on the other hand the image of the nation that politics and media seem to deliberately maintain and constantly repeat in order to describe what makes this nation distinctly (and independently) Australian.

Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (1966), whose title has since become a catchphrase, explains Australia's cultural cringe and parochialism as a product of the continent's historic isolation and vast distance from the colonial power, Britain, which in turn has shaped many of Australia's characteristics (172). By referring to Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Blainey argues that due to Australia's deficiency of natural resources and its distance from world trade routes, it was in particular Australia's distance to Europe that created a barrier for attracting enough migration for labour. This stood in contrast to the rapid growth of population in the United States in the nineteenth century (148). "Much of Australia's history had been shaped by the contradiction that it depended intimately and comprehensively on a country which was further away than almost any other in the world" (339). Recognising its vulnerability in the region, led Australia to "embrace an insular attitude towards the outside world and particularly towards Asia" (Conley 1). Australia was a self-governing country within the British Empire, but judging Australia by behaviour rather than by constitutional status, one was "entitled to think that she had no independence and was in fact a British colony" (Blainey 328).

Australia's role as "echo and image of Britain and an outpost of Europe" (328) began to change, according to Blainey, with the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbour in 1941 and a strengthening of Australia's position in the Pacific (329).¹ Gradually Britain's power as "the fountain of migrants, trade, capital, military security, foreign policy, popular and academic culture, and technology" (339) gave way to the influence of the United States of America (338). The antipodes were "drifting" (339), torn between links to the 'old' world and the development of distinct national identities and cultures. The 'new' world is the Asia Pacific, into which Australia has been increasingly drawn since the 1960s by the pull of trade and shifting patterns of immigration, which was intensified in the 1980s and 1990s by an economic restructuring within Australia and by the forces of globalisation (Higgott and Nossal 624). Australia "is – and will remain – 'odd man out' in Asia" for it is a politico-cultural oddity to be tagged as 'Western' in a region that is predominantly 'Eastern' (628).² It is Australia's in-between state that will be of interest in the following discussion.

Though having its roots in debates on Australia's geographical and economical role, the term "cultural cringe" has been of particular relevance for Australia's cultural production. The term was popularised by Melbourne critic A.A. Phillips in his 1950 essay "The Cultural Cringe", in which he explores the struggle of Australian intellectuals and artists against the ingrained feelings of inferiority, namely the public assumption that anything produced by local artists (dramatists, directors, musicians, and writers) is

¹ For Blainey, the bombings of Pearl Harbour, Honolulu, have changed the world's power relations, as Britain lost its world leader position and with the rise of the USA and Japan as two new powerful nations on the Pacific, Australia was put into closer proximity to the "seat of trouble in war" (329).

² Another reason for Australia's position as the 'odd man out' is its relationship to the United States, which, in the context of the region at least, is unique. At present – and for the foreseeable future – there is no other country in the Pacific that is as closely connected to the United States in such a multidimensional way, involving defence, economics, culture, and 'way of life'. The economic ties between Australia and the United States are seen as important for strengthening the political and defence links (Higgott and Nossal 629-630).

necessarily deficient in comparison to the works of their British and European counterparts. “The Australian writer is affected by the Cringe because it mists the responsiveness of his audience, and because its influence on the intellectual deprives the writer of a sympathetically critical atmosphere” (Phillips 54). Phillips criticises the conflation of quantitative (“limitations of size, youth and isolation”) and qualitative deficiency (52) and blames the “colonial situation” of Australia for the perception of Australian culture as derivative (54).³ Phillips therefore suggests the persistence of a cultural cringe as a legacy of Pax Britannica that operates on a holistic level: “In other words, products produced by one’s own society are seen as necessarily deficient *simply because* they are produced by one’s own society. On the reverse, individuals and products produced by a certain other society are seen as necessarily superior *simply because* they are produced by that society” (Mattar 180-181, original emphasis).

The continuing debates about Australia’s inferiority complex attest to the fact that this term remains valid until today. This is particularly evident in discussions on the constructions of national identity in film. Australian actor Hugo Weaving has commented on the cultural cringe in 2017:

I have no idea why we’re so pathetically immature about our own culture. We just don’t seem to be brave enough to embrace it in any way, and I think it’s getting worse. It feels like we’re that immature teenager at the party who thinks they’re not very important and that some other people are more important because they’re bigger, making more noise and wearing more colourful shirts. (Weaving quoted in Neutze, “Hugo Weaving”)

This comment not only refers back to the immature teenager metaphor, but restates Phillips’ initial call that the cultural cringe means more than Australia’s inherent lack of faith in a culture of its own. Instead, it takes a new self-consciousness to promote a national culture unmarred by an inferiority complex vis-à-vis Britain, a culture that is unabashedly Australian.

Phillips argues that a reason for the cringe is that Australia has “no long-established or interestingly different cultural tradition to give security and distinction to its interpreters” (52). Like many critics have done before and after him, Phillips fails to acknowledge the presence of Australia’s Indigenous cultures, the oldest continuous culture in the world.⁴ Paradoxically, in the attempt to distance Australia from the British colonial past, national fictions of Australia foreground a future-orientated idea of

³ Implications of Phillips’ insights have been applied to all former colonial nations and have been tightly connected with “cultural denigration” or cultural alienation, the self-inflicted conscious or unconscious oppression of the Indigenous culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model. This crisis in self-image is closely linked to the notion of displacement (Ashcroft et al. 9).

⁴ The term ‘Indigenous’ here and in the following includes all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. ‘Aboriginal’ is used to specifically identify those people belonging to communities on the mainland and Tasmania. The spelling of ‘Indigenous’ in this book follows the Australian Federal government Parliamentary Counsel Drafting Direction No. 2.1 on English usage (March 2016), ‘Part 4, Spelling of “Indigenous”’ 34: “Always capitalise ‘Indigenous’ when it refers to the original inhabitants of Australia – as in ‘Indigenous Australians’ and ‘Indigenous communities’” (Parliamentary Counsel 6).

Australia as a young nation, and deny the more than 65,000 years history of Indigenous Australia.⁵

Since the nineteenth century the phenomenon of an ever-evolving ‘Young Australia’ has been understood as part of a prevailing cultural “mentalité” and has influenced many debates in Australian politics, among them

the imperial relationship, demographic shifts and the rise to prominence of the native-born, the apparent precocity of Australian youth and the characteristics of the ‘Australian Girl’, juvenile crime and ‘larrikinism’, education, attitudes towards immigration and race, the depiction of the Australian colonies as a laboratory of social progress, the movement for federation, feminist reasoning and republican sentiment. (Sleight 36)

Hence, the concept of youth has played a defining role in the construction and development of Australia’s images and narrative concepts of national identity. Within Australian cultural production and criticism it has become customary to construct aspects of Australian life as distinctive – not of a class or of a subculture – but of the whole nation (Turner, “It Works” 644). Graeme Turner has described such myths as “national fictions”, as universal structures of making meaning of the Australian nation (*National Fictions* 1).⁶

The cultural specificity, the Australian-ness, of Australian texts lives in the recurring principles of organisation and selection as applied to the universal narrative structures. Australian texts employ a particular language in that they draw on those myths, connotations and symbols which have currency in the Australian culture; and they also reveal what formal preferences – the encouragement of certain genres, conventions, and models of production – are exercised in that culture. (19)

In the patterning of such influences, he concludes, one can recognise which meanings are preferred within a culture (19). ‘Culture’ itself is, if we choose to follow Stuart Hall, the production of meaning by the exchange between members of a culture through the use of language, signs, and images which stand for or represent things (Hall, *Representation* 17). Especially historiography is considered a constructive source of a nation that provides such meanings and a sense of belonging to the population of a nation (Dwivedi 501). Nevertheless, there is the inevitable linking of nation with imagination, as “a national

⁵ A condition that not all ‘young Australians’ seem to support: In September 2018, the refusal of a nine-year-old primary school student in Queensland, Harper Nielsen, to stand up for the Australian national anthem during school assembly, drew global media attention. Her explanation for her behaviour: “[...] when it says ‘we are young’ it means that it ignores the Indigenous Australians who were here before the English for over 50,000 years” (quoted in Wiedersehn). The word ‘young’ in the national anthem has since been changed in January 2021 in an attempt to better acknowledge Australia’s Indigenous heritage, a minor change that has been regarded as tokenistic by some.

⁶ The term ‘myth’ is understood in reference to Roland Barthes, who describes myth as a symbolic embodiment of a truth often buried too deep to be apprehended by the conscious or rational. Myths incarnate anxieties or urges which only rise to surface in the form of themes, symbols or images which recur in the works of writers, artists, filmmakers and the like (Barthes; Coe 129).

identity is an invention. [...] artificially imposed upon a diverse landscape and population" (White viii). Homi Bhabha defines the collective unconscious as inherently ambivalent; it automatically constitutes a nation in opposition to the 'other', in spite of the nation and its 'other' always being located in the same psychic structure. "The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (*Narration* 4). The rhetoric of a nation (in nationalism) constructs an inner common core, which can only be an "incomplete signification" as it excludes its constitutive 'other' from its own definition (4). The in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated stress the *international* dimension as defining feature of any understanding of the nation (4). Australia's national identity is most commonly defined in terms of its otherness to Britain, resulting in "a tug-of-war between Australianness and Britishness, between the impulse to be distinctively Australian and the lingering sense of a British heritage" (White 47). By defining its otherness with regard to Britain, Australian national identity however already implies the Western/European invention of 'Australia' and cannot be understood without its British 'other' as part of its national psyche (White ix).

Thus any given culture as well as the images representing this culture are constructions, imagined rather than given.⁷ Benedict Anderson's argument of a nation being an "imagined community" suggests that what connects the citizens of a nation is that they share a common imaginary – a common set of stories – "through education, popular culture, and political rhetoric – images and stories, sayings and histories that encourage a feeling of connection and shared values, where they might not actually exist" (Elder 25). This view regards national identity as a decentred construct of related meanings involving the wishes, fantasies, and self-images of the members of a culture as manifested in such cultural productions as history, literature, art, and film (Molloy 213).⁸

Constructions of national identity are usually based upon historical events or mythologies, a "recourse to formulas at once old and yet capable of new interpretations, with which audiences are generally familiar and can identify, leads to the tendency towards repetition in narrative structures and patterns which both satisfy and shape audience expectations" (214). Who decides what the dominant images of Australia are, whose interests are served by the various representations and how do these meanings function in everyday life (Schaffer, *Women* 2)? Russel Ward's description of the origins of the myth of the 'typical' Australian outlines the essential elements of what he calls variously the Australian mystique, ethos, legend, or character:

According to the myth the 'typical Australian' is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing 'to have a go' at anything, but willing, too, to be content with a task done in a way that is 'near enough'. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he

⁷ "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6).

⁸ Dermody and Jacka have advanced in reference to Australian film the idea of a "social imaginary" of Australian identity (*Vol.* 2 19).

normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion [...]. (Ward 1-2)

Although most Australians today would be dissatisfied with Ward's ironic description, many aspects of this description still circulate today "when generalisations are made about Australian-being" (Elder 4). The 'typical', or as Schaffer calls it, the 'real' Australian stands for certain identifiable values, attitudes and behaviours; as much in terms of what he is as of what he is not (*Women* 19, pronoun deliberate here).⁹ These dominant characteristics have helped to produce "a picture of Australian-ness as golden youth, larrikin nonchalance and unpretentious courage" (Elder 5).

The notion of national identity projects a set of ideas which coalesce into an ideal self – the 'real' Australian – one that never existed (Schaffer, *Women* 8). In accordance with Lacan's understanding of the 'real' and 'imaginary', similarly to what the child encounters during the mirror stage, (mis)recognising an ideal 'imaginary' mirror image of itself, the 'real' national Australian type is such an ideal image (9-11). "It represents a construction of the self arising out of fantasies, memory and desire, and is given value within a particular culture through the symbolic order of language" (11). What makes these national fantasies so enduring is that they are repeated so often through codes of meaning, embedded in language and cultural representations that they are gradually taken for granted (8; Hall, "Discourse" 291-292).

Similarly, Jennifer Rutherford, in her book *The Gauche Intruder. Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy*, offers a psychoanalytic reading of Australia's formation of a national identity and the moral code that supports it, addressing the importance of repetition. She identifies repeated "collectively held fantasies of nation and national character that regulate subjectivity" (12) and that are understood as the underbelly of (white) Australian culture. These repetitions even "occur in unexpected places, in fields that we might assume to be in competition with the dominant and traditional discourses of white Australia" (14). With reference to Michel Foucault's "system of dispersion", Stuart Hall argues similarly for the prevalence of a (national) discourse: "The statements within a discursive formation need not all be the same. But the relationships and differences between them must be regular and systematic, not random" ("Discourse" 292). Therefore, cultural content regarded in competition to mainstream notions of national identity can nevertheless sustain collective continuities of national fantasies.

The fantasy that according to Rutherford has the strongest regulatory weight in the Australian everyday life is that of Australia as the site of "a privileged and realised good" egalitarian and neighbourly nation (Rutherford 15). But how can such a dominant fantasy exist in Australia's "legacy" of xenophobia, racism, and misogyny. Rutherford here points specifically to the

dispossession of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, the White Australia policy, the assimilation policies of the twentieth century, a pronounced antipathy towards and intolerance

⁹ In her study on the role of women within the Australian national tradition, Schaffer recognises the masculine bias; the myth of the 'real' Australian representing a masculine, white, Anglo-Irish and heterosexual norm (12), as profiled in Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*.

of the feminine, and a continued cultural policing of traits that metonymically carry the stain of difference. (12-13)

The collective “fantasies of the good provide a camouflage for aggression at both a national and a local level: an aggression directed both towards an external and an internal Other” (10). In its drive towards “the good”, the nation purposefully masks positions of extreme right and turns to acts of aggression. Socially homogenising policies – whether by preserving a white Australia or dispossessing Aboriginal Australians – are ironically authorised by and further a manifestation of good intentions. Fantasies of solidarity and human decency are transformed into violence against those who are in any way different, marginal or foreign, and thus do not fit the paradigm of the prevalent image of social coherence. This paradox is visible in a continuing circulation of personal and collective anxieties about Australian identity, evident for example in the nineteenth century in the paranoia of the yellow peril (see I.2.3). Rutherford’s observations prove useful in understanding Australia’s cultural production within the context of national dominant fantasies that are regulated by repetition. In this way the fantasy of ‘Young Australia’ emerges as an ‘Australian fantasy’ with multiple expressions.

In Australia’s self-understanding as constantly growing and coming of age, the concept of a *becoming* nation is thus strictly correlative to the concept of repetition rather than something necessarily new. Slavoj Žižek argues that in the Deleuzian understanding of ‘becoming’, it is “far from being opposed to the emergence of the New” (*On Deleuze*). Rather, “the proper Deleuzian paradox is that something truly New can ONLY emerge through repetition. What repetition repeats is not the way the past ‘effectively was’, but the virtuality inherent to the past and betrayed by its past actualization” (Žižek, *On Deleuze*). Gilles Deleuze’s idea of ‘becoming’ is particularly concerned with individual and collective struggles to come to terms with events and intolerable conditions and to shake loose, to whatever degree possible, from determinants and definitions – “to grow both young and old [in them] at once” (Deleuze 170).¹⁰ Becoming, for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari is, “generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances” (258). The process is not productive in some utilitarian way (as in, ‘you become something’), but one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones.¹¹ In constant repetitions and re-imaginings of Australia being a growing young (and good) nation, Australian national identity has found its manifestation. If repetition, in the Lacanian sense, is the attempt to find a desired object (‘the real’) that is ultimately missed, then the desire of being a nation that has finally come

¹⁰ ‘Becoming’ for Deleuze and Guattari “is certainly not imitating or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own” (239). Hence it “is generative of a new way of being that is a function of influences rather than resemblances. The process is one of removing the element from its original functions and bringing about new ones” (258).

¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari identify a further figure of becoming in the concept of the rhizome. The rhizome is a constant flow or movement; it is not a point to be reached. The rhizome is an uncontainable dimension with “no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*” (25).

of age can therefore never be reached. I argue that precisely this transitional in-between phase expresses what constitutes Australian identity.

A Deleuzean reading of the ethics of ‘becoming’ assumes an excitement towards open-ended possibilities. In contrast, Anna Hickey-Moody and Mary Lou Rasmussen point out, “an ethics based on transformation cannot be conceived outside relationships with lack, melancholy, and mourning” (43). Australia as a nation in the transitional stage of becoming is hence shaped by (possibly violent) past experiences, histories, and memories. The ambiguous relation between the transitional as necessarily empowering/jubilant/chosen and as lacking/enforced is inevitably part of the discussion. Australia regards itself ‘post-colonial’ in the understanding that the ‘post’ commemorates the triumph over colonisation however thereby allows aspects of Australia’s past “to fade into the amnesia of history” (Young 60). According to Robert Young, the postcolonial “pays tribute to the great historical achievements of resistance against colonial power, while, paradoxically, it also describes the conditions of existence that have followed in which many basic power structures have yet to change in any substantive way” (60). Young doubts the ‘post’ in Australia’s post-colonialism since the end of colonialism has led to new forms of post-colonial domination over the country’s Indigenous peoples. This is a double standard that implies that on the one hand, former settler colonies such as Australia have freed themselves from the colonial rule of the mother country (although in Australia only constitutionally); yet on the other hand those who became independent from the British colonial dominance have been the ones who continuously oppress Indigenous peoples (19-20). Indigenous peoples of Australia have struggled for human rights, land rights, and self-determination ever since the beginnings of colonisation, therefore the decolonisation of the political links to, but not necessarily achieves, a cultural decolonisation, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s famous phrase suggests: it is a question of “decolonising the mind”. Since dominant fantasies of a (post-colonial) nation are usually built on the exclusion of other groups of and in that nation, it takes cultural productions – and I argue film in particular – to identify and correct these fantasies.

Cinema is an influential medium that, as a nationally funded product, is inevitably linked to national discourses and dominant fantasies. On the one hand, film promotes and reinforces prevailing images of Australia, thus takes part in the branding of the nation. On the other hand, film is a powerful means to re-open those stories hidden from dominant images of white Australia and takes part in working against the Australian ‘amnesia of history’.

1.2 The Adolescent Nation: Coming of Age in Film

The national fiction of youth and coming of age is used as a model and narrative preference to “catch Australia’s essence”, to not merely describe the continent, but “to give it individuality, a personality” (White viii). The abundance of Australian films focusing on a young person’s coming of age reinforces the continuous currency of the coming of age theme as a national fiction.

The term adolescence, deriving from Latin *adolēscere*, ‘to grow up’, reinforces the transitionality of human development between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence

understood as a “new life stage” is a comparatively young term, first coined by the American psychologist G. Stanley Hall in 1904 in his classic work *Adolescence: Its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education*. According to Hall, adolescence is an intensely vulnerable and transitional midpoint between the innocent state of childhood and the autonomous knowing state of adulthood, thus he regards adolescence as inherently problematic, agonistic, and difficult (G. Hall; Bessant 31).¹² The idea of a period of life between childhood and adulthood was quickly adopted in the United States in times of cultural and societal changes when public schooling became compulsory (Settersten et al. 3). Adolescence has ever since been defined as a process of inner turmoil, a preparatory life stage with a developmental goal: adulthood (Hilton and Nikolajeva 2). Catherine Driscoll states that “adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behaviour, or identity” (*Girls* 51), it hence may not be regarded as synonymous with the teenager. The term ‘teenager’ specifies no particular experience or process, but foregrounds questions of cultural conformity (describing a specific group’s trends and attitudes of a certain society and decade), whereas in contrast adolescence extends into an unspecific age category, representing experience, transition, and mobility (52). Adolescence is closely related to the notion ‘coming of age’. The term ‘coming of age’ signifies movement: “The development arc of the protagonist is motivated by the desire to become an adult, and this journey toward adulthood quite often entails struggle” (Baxter 3). Coming of age is experienced differently in each society by the fulfilment of certain markers, namely rites of passage. Initiation ceremonies and events such as graduation, marriage, getting a job, driving a car or the moment of attaining full legal status with the right to vote, mark in some societies possible endpoints of the process to come of age (Baxter 3-4). Coming of age is popular as a literary theme, too, commonly explored as a journey narrative of a (young) protagonist’s development into adulthood and maturity.¹³ In the eighteenth century, with the emergence of the German *Bildungsroman*, the theme developed into a specific genre.¹⁴ Elements of the *Bildungsroman* such as the “emotional development and moral education of its protagonist” (Kenneth Millard 2), “a troubled quest for identity” (Baldick 24), and a focus on “the processes by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life” (Cuddon 88) are however integral to a broader understanding of coming of age as a theme in different media.

Coming of age narratives are interested in the influences which shape a young person’s identity. These influences include (aspects of) ethnicity or gender, the home and family, the school and neighbourhood, and relations to friends, guardians or enemies (Daemmrich and Daemmrich 70). The coming of age narrative is structured along a series of encounters which confront the hero or heroine with diverse, possibly even contradictory values in society which he or she is increasingly able to assess. The maturing

¹² Hall reads adolescence therefore inherently as a time of delinquency, as this phase tests the “hurdle of adjustment” into orderly adult life (Bessant 31).

¹³ Traditionally, *The Telemachy*, the first four books of Homers epic poem the *Odyssey* about Odysseus’ son Telemachus and his journey in search for his missing father, is regarded as the first literary coming of age story.

¹⁴ *Bildungsroman* is a genre closely tied to the German concept of *Bildung*, a term related to, but not quite synonymous with education and formation (Kenneth Millard 3).

process is usually structured by the young person leaving home and travelling, initiating a cognitive and ethical maturing process towards his or her adult consciousness and presumably stable identity which enables “the individual’s ability to shape the future” (71).

In film studies, the coming of age narrative is quite often used synonymously with the ‘teen film’ or ‘teenpic’, a genre which emerged in Hollywood films of the 1950s in the wake of a growing teenage culture (Neale 111). In film, the coming of age narrative is frequently defined as “portraying aspects of the trajectory through adolescence, including high school years, peer pressure, first love, beach parties, and initial attempts at adulthood, along with strains in the relationship with family” (Shary, “Teen Films” 494).¹⁵ ‘Teen’, according to Catherine Driscoll, describes “an historical extension of, and limit on, a period of social dependence after puberty” (*Teen Film* 2), hence a concept focusing on the restrictions of a life stage that is inextricably linked to the biological development of a young person. “The contradiction between maturity and immaturity that “teen” thus describes is central to teen film” and culminate in the following narrative conventions:

the youthfulness of central characters; content usually centred on young heterosexuality, frequently with a romance plot; intense age-based peer relationships and conflict either within those relationships or with an older generation; the institutional management of adolescence by families, schools, and other institutions; and coming-of-age plots focused on motifs like virginity, graduation, and the makeover. (2)

Engaging with teen film as a genre means thinking about questions concerning adolescence represented in these conventions, including the role of teen film in producing and disseminating them. What is marketed as teen film depends on very particular historical vantage points and certain styles, understanding changes in the genre as reflecting changes to the lives of adolescents in the audience (65). Especially the emergence of a youth culture in US-America in the second half of the twentieth century is regarded as pivotal in the development of both, the conceptualisation of the teenager and the teen film genre: “the spread of American-style consumerism, the rise of sociology as an academic discipline and market research as a self-fulfilling prophecy, and sheer demographics turned adolescents into Teenagers [sic]” (Savage quoted in Driscoll, *Teen Film* 28). Teen film emerged as a mainstream product in an industry that embraces the adolescent (newly identified as ‘teenagers’) as both exciting film content and as a specific target audience (Lewis 2). Despite similar developments elsewhere, Hollywood as the major film industry in the world contributed to the close association between teen film and American-ness.

¹⁵ When reading coming of age as a genre (sometimes referred to as a rites of passage film), it has been argued to classify these films as a sub-genre of the teen film, together with other sub-genres focusing on particular aspects of teenage life, such as the high school film (for example in Moran and Vieth, *Film in Australia*). What films of this sub-genre have in common is the strong emphasis on movement towards maturation and the adolescent exploration of “issues of autonomy, identity, allegiance and difference in the context of the teenage peer group on the one hand and adult society on the other” (Neale 114). Examples of Hollywood films assigned to that genre are *The Breakfast Club* (1985), *Dead Poets Society* (1989), *Almost Famous* (2000) and, more recently, *Boyhood* (2014). However, as I treat the coming of age narrative as independent from the teen film or any other generic classification, this cannot be made fruitful for this study.