Sydney College of the Arts

The University of Sydney

Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours)

2018

BACHELOR OF VISUAL ARTS

RESEARCH PAPER

Wild Country: Australian masculinity from the frontier to the social front

by

Jacob Benjamin Hirsh

Printmedia Studio

October 2018

Table of contents

List of illustrations

Foreword

As a young Australian man I have experienced that my comrades in this demographic group have a certain sense of Australian identity. A sense that the identity is based most of all on drinking, drug taking, gambling and an irreverent sense of humour. Obviously this is a simplistic assessment, identity is a complex beast, and Australia certainly isn't a hegemonic society. However, national identities necessitate a level of simplicity and hegemony as they boil down the characteristics of millions into a single archetype. Everyone in Australia feels this tension between their personal identity and the national identity. For me it is a tension between having grown up in a Jewish community of Sydney that has an identity unto itself, and outside of this community being conscious of my performance of Australianness. This self-consciousness of identity has informed my desire to map out how Australian identity came to be what it is today.

A growing suspicion of mine has been that the idea of quintessential Australian wildness is at least in part due to our relatively simplistic and hegemonic historical narratives. The fact that Colonial Australia has a relatively short and recent history means that is possible to track the intentional construction of its identity. Accordingly, in investigating this link I have found a breadth of historical and sociological accounts of Australian masculine identity that support my theory. In the following research paper I will build on the pre-existing body of knowledge in this area of research by including how Australian masculine identity is performed today. This research forms the basis of the development of a body of work that visually represents both the historical and contemporary Aussie bloke, as well as the link between the two.

Perhaps the rationale for the following research is best described by a fictional figure of the American frontier:

"But that man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is only by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate."

- The Judge in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985)

Introduction

The running joke of Australian culture is that it in fact has no culture. Of course, this is an exaggeration. Reductively Australia has two cultures: the Indigenous culture which has existed here for tens of thousands of years, and the dominant colonial culture. It is the latter to which that joke refers, and it is the latter which this paper will predominately address. The colonial culture is based largely on a thread of types and tropes which I will argue originated in the nation's formative years when Australia was made up of colonies proper. In the colonies 'the bushman' came to define the typical Australian as this man was transformed by the Australian frontier from a man of the old world to a man of the new. Later the 'larrikin' and the Anzacs came to evolve and solidify characteristics of frontier masculinity as the basis for Australian identity. Significantly, the identity is centred almost exclusively on men, Australian nationalism and masculinity being entwined since the nations earliest days.

The most obvious reason for describing our national myth as such is because it is full of paradox and contradiction. In his now legendary book *The Australian Legend* (1958) Russel Ward outlines the 'typical' Australian being an unpretentious, laid-back, egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, hard-drinking and gambling man.[1] However the demography that this configuration of the Australian man emerged out of – rural, working-class, uneducated, white (Anglo-Celtic in particular), cis-straight – does not go towards accounting for the plurality of people and cultures that existed when the myth was formed let alone the increasingly diverse Australia that exists today. The first chapter of this paper will briefly track the historical and sociological accounts of this misnomer in order to provide a framework from which to look at contemporary masculine identity in Australia. It will also look at examples of prose, film and art that variously emerged out of, contributed to and undermined the founding myth of frontier masculinity.

Australian identity has shifted over time but many of the elements of frontier masculinity remain to this day a core part of national identity in variously mutated forms. According to Feminist writer Tania Modelski there is a long history of reformation of patriarchy in the face of social change. Modelski sees the process as "cycles of crisis and resolution, where

---

[1] Linzi Murrie, "The Australian Legend: Writing Australian masculinity/writing 'Australian' masculine," in *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, ed. Richard Nile et al. (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 68.*

the ultimate goal is to reinforce hegemonic masculinity".[2] According to this logic a crisis of masculinity is the impetus for a new form of masculinity to be cultivated. In Australia's own history this was seen in the 'first wave' of feminism with the response from the intelligentsia of the time being a spruiking of the virtues of frontier masculinity. In the current day this is mirrored by reactionary forms of masculinity typified by Canadian psychology professor Jordan Peterson, considered by some "the West's most influential public intellectual."[3] Peterson sees the historical archetypes of masculinity as essential to maintaining social order, he advocates for a return to the "great myths and religious stories of the past."[4] Australia has not been immune from the re-emergence of right wing populism in Western nations. Here, populist political forces such as Pauline Hanson's *One Nation Party*, Clive Palmer's *United Australia Party*, and Bob Katter's *Katter's Australian Party* among others, seek to mobilise xenophobia by pandering to an outdated identity of cultural hegemony. It is therefore as pressing a task as ever to continue to dismantle the Australian masculine myth.

The white-male-centricity of Australian history was first meaningfully called into question in the 1960s and 70s with the rise of feminist, post-colonial and post-modern criticism. Film would come to play an especially pivotal role in that period of national self-reflection, used as a means of "exploration of our own unique cultural identity."[5] Chapter 2 of this paper will consider the role of film and contemporary art in providing a context from which we can better understand, and shape, our national identity. Chapter 3 will look at the performance of masculinity in the contemporary, using the theories of social performance outlined by Erving Goffman, Judith Butler and others as a framework to analyse this phenomena. Looking at social performance as a tool that proliferated early Australian identity, it is also useful to analyse the increasingly fraught parodying and overt performativity of masculinity across pop-culture, politics and contemporary art. My own artwork deals with the representation of masculine mythology across time, making an understanding of the evolution of Australian masculinity from the frontier to the social front key to creating an informed body of work in this zone of inquiry.

---

[2] Donna Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 32, DOI 10.1057/9780230308701.
[3] Pankaj Mishra, "Jordan Peterson & Fascist Mysticism," *New York Review Daily*, March 19, 2018, https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/19/jordan-peterson-and-fascist-mysticism/?utm_source=fbia.

[4] Mishra, "Jordan Peterson."
[5] Jessica Balanzategui, "*The Babadook* and the haunted space between high and low genres in the Australian horror tradition," *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 11, no. 1 (2017): 18-32, https://doi-org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/10.1080/17503175.2017.1308907.

Chapter 1

Frontier masculinity and the creation of the Australian masculine myth

The image of the bushman as a national type emerged out of the distinctiveness of the nascent colonial culture in rural Australia. Simply put, it was an identity that had not been seen before and therefore was a point of differentiation from European identity. Away from the European-like cosmopolitan centres of the colonies, frontier workers were establishing peculiar habits in response to the harsh life of the interior. This goes some way to account for the 'somehow' when David Coad, writing on queer perspectives of Australian history, proffers that the myth of Australian identity is based on the idea that "The heart of the country is somehow felt to be more real, more authentic than the cosmopolitan,"[6]. The question then becomes what are the characteristics that emerged in rural colonial Australia that would come to embody an 'authentic' national identity?

One such characteristic is 'mateship'. According to sociologist Robert Bell the severe physical environment of the interior necessitated the cooperation of frontier pastoral workers.[7] Bell asserts that the adversity of the landscape, the homosocial nature of early colonial society, along with an increasing scepticism of the puritanical doctrines of Christianity, combined to create an environment where mateship and the associated sense of loyalty and brotherhood emerged as the basis for a new morality.[8] The comparison of this early incarnation of mateship with the loftiness of spirituality certainly seems dramatic but an anonymously written 'bush song' published by Banjo Patterson in *the Bulletin* in 1905 seems to confirm that mateship had at least for some, as Ward offers, become "a consciously-held substitute for religion"[9]. One lyric of the song reads as follows:

"But let man unto man like brethren act,

My doctrine that suits to a T.

The heart that can feel for the woes of another,

Oh, that's the religion for me."[10]

---

[6] David Coad, *Gender trouble Down Under: Australian masculinities* (Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002), 83.

[7] Robert R. Bell, *Mateship in Australia: some implications for female-male relationships* (Bundoora: La Trobe University, 1973), 2.

[8] Bell, *Mateship in Australia*, 2-3.

[9] Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), 220.

[10] *Old Bush Songs*, Sydney 1905, 1930 In Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 220.

The humanist ideology of this idea of man helping man seems a righteous enough ideal. That is until we consider who that brotherhood excluded. First and foremost the idea of mateship excluded women, but as gender studies writer Linzi Murrie notes this exclusion extended to children, Indigenous Australians and people of colour;[11] mateship was between white men. Culturally speaking it provided a platform for putting men ahead of all others, a forerunner for the attitude of (speaking in the colloquial lexicon) 'for the boys' and 'don't dog mates' that to this day makes men apprehensive of supporting criticism of other men from 'outsiders'.

To appreciate the legacy of colonial Australia it is helpful to consider other frontier masculine mythologies that were developed at the time. Elsewhere the American West similarly spawned a mythos of its own with the legendary 'cowboy' emerging as a national icon in much the same way as the bushman.[12] The American frontier produced the tradition of rugged individualism, the fertile interior of North America providing opportunity for pastoral workers to accumulate individual wealth.[13] In Australia, where the land didn't afford the same opportunities and the 'squatters'[14] owned the land and means of production, the necessity of co-operation and the associated culture of mateship spawned a tendency towards collectivism. Ward describes the legacy of the difference of economic outlook between the two frontier cultures:

"the Australian labour movement has been, and continues to be, much more collectivist in outlook as well as much stronger, relatively, than the American. And collectivist and socialist ideas are much more widely tolerated, if not accepted, in Australian society generally, than they are in America."[15]

Ward's statement affirms the idea that the cultural mythologies of new nations such as America and Australia have a long-lasting impact on that national culture, an idea that this paper will go on to investigate further. In terms of the egalitarianism that lies at the centre of our bush mythology, Ward notes that the organisation of pastoral workers into unions was exceptional considering the tendency in Western countries for pastoral workers to lean towards conservatism, and certainly not to unionise in the way that was seen in Australia.[16][17] It was the sheep shearers that led the charge of the unionisation of the bush.

---

[11] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 73.
[12] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 71.
[13] Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 292-293.
[14] Owners of pastoral land in colonial Australia, often with no legal right to the land.
[15] Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 293-296.
[16] Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 258.
[17] It is worth noting that rural/regional politics in Australia has shifted over time towards conservatism, perhaps in part because nationalism has proven to be a stronger political force than collectivism.

The president of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union, William Guthrie Spence, wrote of the rapid rise of the rural union movement:

"Unionism came to the Australian bushman as a religion. It came bringing salvation from years of tyranny. It had in it that feeling of mateship which he understood already, and which always characterised the action of one 'white man' to another."[18]

Besides explicitly referring to the racial exclusiveness of mateship, Guthrie's words provide an insight into the sense of anti-authoritarianism of bush workers. The "tyranny" of the aristocracy, the squatters and British culture was in part what the emerging national identity defined itself in opposition to. The influence of this anti-British sentiment should not be overstated, after all Australia has chosen to remain in the commonwealth until today. However, the rebelliousness of the bushman identity does still hold a unique place in our collective imagination. The definitive example of anti-authoritarianism in Australian culture of course lies in the mythology of the bush rangers. Coad notes on this national fixation that:

"Since the days of the first Wild Colonial Boys at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Australia has celebrated youthful delinquents, larrikins and violent criminals. There would seem to be something in the Australian psyche which finds hypermasculine heroes like John Donohoe, Ned Kelly and Chopper Read irresistible."[19]

None have seized on the national folk-memory quite as much as the Kelly gang and their now iconic armoured leader Ned. The Kelly gang have been the subject of much documentation and literature but perhaps most significant is their place in Australian film history. The first feature film to be made in Australia, and one of the first in the world, was *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), six more films chronicling the narrative of the Kelly gang would be made before World War II, a further two since,[20] and another is currently in production.[21] The legacy of this filmic history figures in the Outback period thriller *Sweet Country* (2017) directed by Indigenous filmmaker Warwick Thornton. In the film, Thornton included a scene where *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (Fig. 1) is being projected in a sort of makeshift outdoor cinema for the people of a small rural town. In the context of a story about an Indigenous man on the run from the law, Thornton made this reference as a

---

[18] Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 260. 1
[19] Coad, *Gender trouble Down Under*, 62.
[20] Coad, *Gender trouble Down Under*, 56.
[21] Luke Buckmaster, "From Mick Jagger to Heath Ledger: Australia's bungled quest to make a great Ned Kelly film," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/nov/15/from-mick-jagger-to-heath-ledger-australias-bungled-quest-to-make-a-great-ned-kelly-film.

reckoning with the idea that "this murderer who wore a silly hat" is "a pillar of our national identity" and a point of moral guidance, whereas Indigenous freedom fighters remain largely unheralded in our history and public discourse.[22] The persistent preoccupation with retelling the story of the Kelly gang is a symptom of the culture of romanticizing bush criminals, but could also be understood as a cause. It serves to maintain Kelly's status as a symbol of quintessentially Australian anti-authoritarianism.

Fig. 1: Warwick Thornton, *Sweet Country,* 2018 (video still)
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9_r9puLEi4

Fig. 2: Frederick McCubbin, *Down on his luck,* 1889
Source: http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/collections/AGWA-Historical.asp

The works of Australian Modernist painter Sidney Nolan recognize, and contribute to, this process of iconizing Kelly, reducing the man to the silhouette of his armour. Nolan's paintings follow on from a tradition of Australian painting typified by the Heidelberg

---

22 "Warwick Thornton talks Sweet Country – Part 2," YouTube video, 6:45. Posted by FlicksNZ, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9_r9puLEi4.

school that depicted rural landscapes and the bushman types that populated the interior (Fig. 2). Contemporary artist Anne Zahalka appropriates the works of these heavyweights of Australian painting in her photomontages and restaged photographs. Zahalka is the daughter of central European immigrants of Catholic and Jewish descent[23] and accordingly she seeks to undermine the "the stereotype of the pioneer bushman as depicted by [Heidelberg School painters] Fredrick McCubbin and Tom Roberts"[24]. She does so by reinserting into the landscape those who were excluded from this version of Australian identity; women, Indigenous Australians, immigrants and people of colour. One such work is *Outlawed!* (2017) (fig. 3), an appropriation of Nolan's *Ned Kelly (1946)* (fig. 4). In the work Zahalka replaces the bush bandit with a woman wearing a burka, the two black silhouettes similar visually but strikingly disparate in terms of their acceptance in mainstream Australian culture. This dissonance in cultural acceptance is highlighted by the artist with a red 'banned' symbol across the reimagined outlaw's torso. For curator Jacqui Durant, Zahalka's work "restores to Australian identity its true humanity and complexity,"[25] it does so by its presentation of an alternate, but essentially truer, history. It is this historiographical tradition of re-imagining our past in contemporary art and film which this paper will go on to explore.

(Left) Fig. 3: Anne Zahalka, *Outlawed!,* 2017
Source: https://arcone.com.au/zahalka-landscape-revisited-2017/
(Right) Fig 4: Sidney Nolan, *Ned Kelly,* 1946
Source: http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/sidney-nolans-ned-kelly.asp

---

[23] Rita Lazaukas, "Anne Zahalka: Landscape Revisited," Anne Zahalka World, Accessed August 22, http://zahalkaworld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Zahalka-exhibition-catalogue-essay-AZ-final-edit.pdf.

[24] Lazauskas, "Anne Zahalka."

[25] Jacqui Durant. "Revisiting landscape and identity with Anne Zahalka," *Art Monthly Australia* 301, (2017): 30, https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=053953842799210;res=IELLCC.

Besides film and art, the written word played a key role in the dominance of the bushman and bushranger in Australian identity, most of all the writings published in *The Bulletin* in the late 19th century. Ward refers to the publication as "easily the most important single medium by which the 'bush' ethos was popularized,".[26] The writers were by and large city dwelling 'bohemian' men.[27] Professor of history Marilyn Lake argues they had an interest in solidifying Australian masculinism in the "battle for fundamental 'control of the national culture'"[28] that was being waged against the emergent first wave of feminism. Lake describes the M.O. of turning the bushman into the national archetype during this turn of the century crisis in masculinity as follows:

"In the defence of men's interests, the bushman masculinity was a powerful image. A man existing among men and without broader social ties, the bushman's freedom – his drinking, his gambling, his 'independence', and his sexual indulgence – could be celebrated in a spirit of nationalism as an 'Australian' freedom, thereby legitimising men's social practices, and masking the gender politics of the conflict."[29]

The motivation is clear, but how then did the prose of *Bulletin* writers such as Banjo Patterson and Henry Lawson come to prop up the bushman as an archetype of such mythical proportions? For Ward, the shrinking gap between regional and cosmopolitan Australia meant the frontier was fading away, and accordingly was ripe for the creation of an Australian legend. As Ward states "A myth, after all, related to past events, real or imaginary." [30] In a time of federalisation this myth provided the city dwelling population of Australia a national identity to hold onto. So much so that Ward proffers most Australians quickly came to believe they "naturally" possessed the characteristics of the bushman type.[31]

The myth of the bushman combined with the appetite for national identity made city folk think of themselves as inhabiting that type. However, the city itself was not without an emerging national type, it possessed one that has also come to morph into a powerful symbol of national identity; the 'larrikin'. The larrikin was at the time an inner-city man who gathered with others to from a 'push'. Professor of history John Rickard describes them as working-class gangs that would loiter on footpaths and drink heavily, spit, swear

---

[26] Ward, *The Australian Legend*, 267.
[27] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 40.
[28] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 69.*9/10
[29] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 70.*16
[30] Ward, *The Australian Legend,* 253.
[31] Ward, *The Australian Legend,* 252.

and smoke with no mind to passers-by, especially to police who "they had no respect for"[32]. Rickard characterises their showy public displays as a form of performance of masculinity.[33] Originally a derogatory term, the term shifted from describing the hard street gangs to a 'harmless' ideation of "cheeky pranksters".[34] As with the bushman type it became mythologised; "With the disappearance of the historical larrikin, the metaphorical larrikin could complete his takeover."[35] Larrikin would be a descriptor that would come to be given to characters such as former Labour Prime Minister Bob Hawke whose classically larrikin behaviours such as "the muscular drinking of countless beers,"[36] endeared him to many. While Hawke doesn't necessarily have a modern equivalent, larrikinism has mutated to a more sinister quality in politics, an example of which is Clive Palmer, whose attempt at popular appeal has bizarrely hinged heavily on engaging with internet meme culture, online content posted by one of his official social media pages even straying into anti-Semitism. (Fig. 5) Other forms of larrikinism can be found in sport and youth culture, the latter will be explored later in the paper as it is central to contemporary Australian identity.

Fig. 5: Clive Palmer's meme
Source: https://junkee.com/clive-palmer-anti-semitic-memes/157722

---

[32] John Rickard, "Loveable Larrikins and Awful Ockers," In *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, ed. Richard Nile et al. (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 79.

[33] Rickard, "Loveable Larrikins," 79.
[34] Melissa Bellanta, "The Leary Larrikin," *Ozwords* 22, no. 1 (2013): 1, http://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/andc/Ozwords%20Apr.%202013.pdf.

[35] Rickard, "Loveable Larrikins and Awful Ockers," 80.
[36] Graeme Blundell, "Bob Hawke: the Larrikin and the Leader," *The Australian*, February 9, 2018, www.theaustralian.com.au%2Farts%2Freview%2Fbob-hawke-the-larrikin-and-the-leader%2Fnews-story%2F62d1b55b35efbfabd94f39011a7470e3&memtype=anonymous&v21suffix=hoaf-b.

Larrikinism's widespread acceptance as a national characteristic was sealed by its association with the ANZAC forces of World War I. For Historian Melissa Bellanta this link arose because "diggers from the Australian Imperial Forces began to lay claim to a 'larrikin streak'."[37] After the bushman type that formed the foundation of national identity in the late 19th century, the 'digger' came to be the 20th century image of Australian masculinity. Coad proffers that "The idea of virile diggers and larrikins reprises a colonial stereotype, the Australian bushman,"[38]. The digger did not completely supplant the bushman, rather it evolved the ideas of mateship, virility and egalitarianism already embedded in the identity. For War Historian C.E.W. Bean this evolution was quite literal, Bean believing that the Anzac's laudable display of manhood was "the product of the race of men and the democratic culture bred in the Australian bush."[39] As with the glorification of the bushman, war provided an opportunity for men to reassert their masculinity in a 'feminising' society.[40] Accordingly, the veneration of digger masculinity continued long after the end of the war, professor of history Stephen Garton asserts that "the interwar years in Australia were marked by a conservative, anti-modernist aesthetic in which the 'heroic' virtues of Anzac manhood stood supreme."[41] This view of warrior masculinity was impacted by later events such as the Vietnam war[42], but even to this day the sacredness of the Anzacs persists to a large extent. The 'blokey' characteristics associated with the diggers enjoy a level of protection from public scrutiny.

As mentioned the myth of Australian masculinity has emerged largely out of certain types that didn't actually account for the majority of the population. The characteristics of these types were spread to affirm nationalism and reaffirm masculinity, and through the spread of the myth others took upon themselves the so called characteristics of the 'Australian Man' by performing them.

---

[37] Bellanta, "The Leary Larrikin," 3.
[38] Coad, *Gender Trouble,* 13.
[39] Stephen Garton, "War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia," In *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, ed. Richard Nile et al. (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998), 87.

[40] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 75.
[41] Garton, "War and Masculinity," 89.
[42] Garton, "War and Masculinity," 93. Garton points out that in the Vietnam war era the image of the alienated veteran problematised the glorification of returning soldier's masculinity. This image was in large part spread to Australia by American film and media that depicted "'troubled' male characters … scarred by their experiences of Vietnam".

Chapter 2

Undermining the myth: historiographical film and art in Australia

With an overview of the establishment of Australia's masculine mythology it is now possible to consider how these myths have left a legacy on the performance of masculinity in the contemporary. In recent years, thanks primarily to the work of Feminist and LGBTQI+ writers, gender has come to be understood as a social construct that is transferred from generation to generation. Murrie succinctly explains the implications of this in the Australian context:

"[masculinity] is always temporally and culturally contingent. To read the Australian legend as masculinity then is to read it as dynamic construction: a complex set of strategies and negotiations, of inclusions and exclusions, which enable and legitimate gendered power relations."[43]

Murrie's statement intimates that the masculine nature of our national mythology was intentionally constructed in order to sustain the patriarchal system. In light of this there has been an effort to correct the prejudiced historical basis for Australian culture by re-examining our history from a more pluralistic perspective. As Ward mentions the mimicking of frontier masculinity was never a matter a complete reproduction, rather elements of the types have lived on as much in our collective "fantasies" as they have in the reality of Australian masculinity.[44] In other words where certain characteristics have for the most part been abandoned in the day to day performance of masculinity in Australia, they live on in the manifestations of our cultural imagination. Film has played a central role in the reproduction of these fantasies, as with the many Ned Kelly films. Conversely, some films sought to uncover the more sinister side of the legacy of Australian masculinity. Coad states that "Artists and film-directors began to re-evaluate the legend in the mid-1970s, something which has continued for the last twenty-five years due to the efforts of straight, gay and feminist historiography."[45] By looking at the efforts of those who sought to undermine the myth we can set up how it is treated today.

In 1971, albeit slightly before Coad's timeline, *Wake in Fright* was released. The film is considered a "classic" of the Australian Gothic genre,[46] a spin-off of the literary Gothic genre and American Gothic films of the early 20th century. Australian Gothic is seen as a

---

[43] Murrie, "The Australian Legend," 68.
[44] Coad, *Gender Trouble*, 13.
[45] Coad, *Gender Trouble*, 13.
[46] Balanzategui, "*The Babadook*."

manifestation of the anxiety of colonialism, for film reviewer Lisa Thatcher it emphasizes "the terror of the familiar and the ordinary,"[47] as opposed to the supernatural elements of 'traditional' Gothic. *Wake in Fright* is testament to this idea as the horror of the film lies in the unhinged masculinity of the films protagonists. Based on Kenneth Cook's book of the same name (1961) and directed by Canadian Ted Kotcheff, the film follows English schoolteacher John Grant as he negotiates the rough and tumble rural Australian town known to its residents as 'the Yabba'. Film critic Mark Kemode describes the film as "a portrait of somebody falling apart, somebody wandering through a great big open, you know, wasteland that becomes this inhuman abyss like void".[48] The dark experience to which Kemode refers is the internal struggle Grant goes through when partaking in the hard drinking, gambling and violence of the world to which he is introduced to by the residents of Bundanyabba. Seemingly the greatest crime in the Yabba is to refuse to have a beer with one of its hypermasculine residents, something which Ward believes has historical precedence in the times of the bushman; "By the 1880s mateship had become such a powerful institution that often one could refuse an invitation to drink only at one's peril."[49] Throughout the film drinking is shown as a ritual of enforced and aggressive masculine bonding, so much so that at the end of the film John explodes into a rage at being pressured once again to have a beer with a local:

"What's the matter with you people, huh? You sponge on you, you burn your house down, murder your wife, rape your child, that's alright. But don't have a drink with you, don't have a flaming bloody drink with you that's a criminal offense, that's the end of the bloody world."

To which John receives the incredulous response, "You're mad ya bastard."[50]

In her reading of *Wake in Fright* (both the book and film), writer in literature studies Monique Rooney rejects the idea that the text simply "exemplifies a contemporary demystification of a national type in the late twentieth century culture"[51]. Rooney argues

---

[47] Lisa Thatcher, "The Monster Within: Australian Gothic emphasises the terror of the familiar," The Essential, accessed September 19, 2018, http://theessential.com.au/features/essential-down-under/the-monster-within-australian-gothic-emphasises-the-terror-of-the-familiar.
[48] Mark Kemode, "Wake in Fright reviewed by Mark Kermode," BBC, March 7, 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01th4sv.

[49] Ward, *The Australian Legend,* 217.
[50] "You're Mad Ya Bastard." YouTube video, 0:20, Posted by Ulbre De Folie, September 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zOZna4ULvE.

[51] Monique Roney, "'A heart that could be strong and true': Kenneth Cook's Wake in Fright as queer interior," *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1, Accessed July 5 2018, http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/pqdweb?did=0000002752538001&Fmt=3&clientId=43168&RQT=309&VName=PQD.

Wake in Fright more so describes the complex reaction on the part of the outsider (characterised by John) to the uninhibited masculinity of the interior.[52] It's a reaction that changes between "hatred" and "hatred's counterpart, that is an intense sexual pleasure."[53] The homo-erotic subtext of the narrative is insinuated in several scenes in the film where John quite literally wakes in fright sleeping next to Doc (Fig. 6). The hedonism of the alcohol fuelled interactions bleeding over into homoeroticism is indicative of the outsider's almost fetishistic perception of rural hypermasculinity.

Critically, Cook himself was an outsider, a city-dwelling journalist that could be understood to be a contemporary of the writers of *the Bulletin*, bringing tales of the bush to the city. Kotcheff (as a Canadian) even more so. Kotcheff has stated of his time in Broken Hill in preparation for the film that he had an interaction with a resident who "didn't want to hit me, he wanted me to hit him," and even though he has skirted the term 'homoerotic' for what he saw, he did witness a desire for "human contact".[54] All in all this gives us a sense of the outsiders perception of the interior as a place of torment where performance of the hypermasculine tropes of the bushman creates an environment of stifled desire and precarious emotional repression. The film was so confronting to the Australian sense of self that, according to Kotcheff, "at one of the first screenings of the film, a man jumped out his chair and yelled 'That's not us' at the screen."[55] This culture of radical self-reflection through the medium of film has continued until today.

Fig. 6: Ted Kotcheff, *Wake in Fright,* 1971 (video still)
Source: https://mobile.fandango.com/wake-in-fright-115482/movie-overview

[52] Rooney, "Wake in Fright," 1.
[53] Rooney, "Wake in Fright," 9.
[54] Rooney, "Wake in Fright," 8.
[55] Rooney, "Wake in Fright," 1.

Video art collective Soda_Jerk, made up of sisters Dominque and Dan Angeloro, similarly found themselves at the centre of a controversy over the confronting nature of their work *Terror Nullius* (2018). The pair describe the almost hour long video work as "a political revenge fable which offers an unwriting of Australian national mythology".[56] In their signature remix style the work overlays iconic scenes from the Australian film canon, pop-culture and politics to present a reimagined cultural landscape (Fig. 7). Ben Juers provides a colourful recount of this process in his review of the work:

"Mel Gibson's bilious phone rant at Oksana Grigoriev gets Mad Max mangled and his car eviscerated by an all-woman bike gang comprising Furiosa, Nicole Kidman, Olivia Newton-John and characters from *Wolf Creek* (2005) and *Murial's Wedding* (1994);"[57]

Fig 7: Soda_Jerk, *Terror Nullius,* 2018 (video still)
Source: http://www.sodajerk.com.au/video_work.php?v=20180223211319

The depiction of the women of Australian film having this fantastical revenge on the all too real misogynist Gibson is what Soda_Jerk variously describe as "a form of rogue historiography"[58] and a 'counter-mythology'[59]. The work essentially levels the playing field of Australian cultural history, giving those who were pacified on the margins in fiction, and in reality alike, the power to strike back. However, the funding body that bestowed

---

[56] Luke Buckmaster, "Terror Nullius: 'controversial' Australian film loses funders' support," *The Guardian*, March 19, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/19/terror-nullius-controversial-australian-film-loses-funders-support.*

[57] Ben Jeurs, "Some big fatalism: a review of "Terror Nullius" by Soda_Jerk," *The Lifted Brow,* April 4, 2018, https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/4/4/terror-nullius-a-review-by-ben-juers.

[58] Luke Buckmaster, "Terror Nullius review – dazzling, kinetic, mishmashed beast of an Australian film," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/20/terror-nullius-review-dazzling-kinetic-mishmashed-beast-of-an-australian-film.

[59] "Weaponizing frustration and despair – an interview with Soda_Jerk," *The Lifted Brow,* March 26, 2018, https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/3/25/weaponising-frustration-and-despair-an-interview-with-sodajerk.

$100, 000 for the project, the Ian Potter Cultural Trust, retracted their association with the film the day before its premiere for fear of the films political bite.[60] In their statement regarding the decision, the trust described Soda_Jerk's work as "a very controversial piece of art",[61] and according to the artists, representatives of the trust labelled the film "un-Australian"[62]. What is significant about this controversy is an art-funding body being unwilling to support the re-examination of our history, it's a deigning of the sacredness of our cultural foundation, and a stark reminder that the refusal to come to terms with our troubled past is not yet the purview of the political fringe. As the title's play off the term 'Terra Nullius' suggests Australia has a dark colonial history that needs to be addressed.

Another testament to the myopic nature of our national identity is the prevalence of figures of colonial and military history in our public art and memorials. Recently there has been debate as to the dominance of the narratives of the ANZACs in WWI in our public sphere,[63] as well as continued celebration and memorialisation of Captain Cook, a figure who represents for indigenous Australians "narratives of dispossession"[64] (as opposed to the Terra Nullius narrative of possession) in our colonial history. Indigenous writer Stan Grant describes the implications of statues of Cook in prominent public places such as Sydney's Hyde Park, and the inscription of Cook as having "discovered this territory 1770", as maintaining "a damaging myth, a belief in the superiority of white Christendom that devastated Indigenous peoples everywhere."[65] The significant role both the ANZACs and Captain Cook played in modern Australian history is unquestionable, but their ubiquity in the public discourse takes up space (quite literally) which might otherwise be occupied by the long history of our nation's first people. Accordingly, contemporary Indigenous artists have worked to undermine the dominant narrative of Australian history by subverting the conventions of public art.

The conventional Anzac monument is questioned in Tony Albert's public art work *YININMADYEMI Thou didst let fall* (2014) (Fig. 8). The work was commissioned by the City of Sydney and curated by Indigenous artist and curator Hetti Perkins, it stands in Hyde Park in view of the Anzac memorial. Made to "acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres

---

[60] Buckmaster, "Terror Nullius review."
[61] Buckmaster, "Terror Nullius review."
[62] Buckmaster, "Terror Nullius: 'controversial'."
[63] Tracy Ireland, "Captain Cook is a contested national symbol, so why spend more money on him?" *ABC News,* May 11, 2018, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-11/captain-james-cook-who-discovered-australia-indigenous-ownership/9750772.

[64] Ireland, "Captain Cook."
[65] Stan Grant, "Stan Grant: It is a 'damaging myth' that Captain Cook discovered Australia," *ABC News*, August 23, 2017, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536.

Strait Islander men and women who served in the nation's military"[66] the work memorialises a group that has been absent from the digger identity. Forgoing the usual display of heroism that Anzac monuments usually portray the work is made up of oversized bullets and spent bullet shells. It is an unflinching reminder of the violence and human cost of war, a cost that indigenous Australians bore in service of a colonial nation that saw them as second class citizens. YINNIMADYEMI not only looks at the cost of war, but the cost of its aftermath which Indigenous Australians felt more acutely; "They were treated differently from their white Australian comrades who were given land for their service while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were still having their land taken away."[67] Albert's work especially punctures the associated myth of the inscrutable mateship and egalitarian spirit of the Anzac narrative, a myth that has ignored the role of Indigenous Australians in our national narrative.

This chapter has presented just a fraction of the works of the post-modern and contemporary eras that have sought to undermine the prevailing myths associated with Australian identity and its roots in colonial and military history. In doing so these works have contributed to the arduous task of dismantling the monolithic myth, allowing for a reconstruction of Australian identity that better reflects the reality of our pluralistic society and problematic history.

Fig. 8: Tony Albert, *YININMADYEMI Thou didst let fall,* 2014
Source: http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/yininmadyemi-thou-didst-let-fall/

---

[66] "YINNIMADYEMI, Thou didst let fall," City Art Sydney, Accessed July 21, 2018, http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/yininmadyemi-thou-didst-let-fall/.

[67] "YINNIMADYEMI."

Chapter 3

Performance of Australian masculinity in the Contemporary

After outlining the history of our national mythology, as well as some of the responses to the myth in art and film of recent times, we can now turn to the contemporary manifestations of Australian masculinity. Australia has not been immune to change, our sense of gender politics has transformed somewhat in accordance with the wider shifts in the social, political and cultural landscape of the nation and the Western world at large. However, there are certain elements of the old masculine types which have remained in one way or another. To understand how these characteristics have survived it is useful to consider Erving Goffman's theory of social performance as outlined in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). The premise of Goffman's theory is that social interaction is guided by performance in a dramaturgical sense. The performer presents a "front" which is to say they present a self-consciously constructed image of themselves in order to achieve a specific aim.[68] That aim is often to reflect the social expectations of how that person should present themselves. Goffman states that "a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs … [the performance] is an expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community."[69] The idea is simple enough, basically a dramaturgical understanding of socialisation, that we mimic the qualities expected of us. This understanding does however go some way to explaining why the myth of Australian masculinity has such deep roots in the national psyche.

Australian Sociologist Karina J. Butera points out that Goffman saw only a "Loose Coupling" between people's everyday social interactions and change in economic and political orders.[70] Butera furthers this idea, asserting that the performance of masculinity is especially stubborn to social change.[71] In an Australian context this perhaps accounts for the confounding ongoing dominance of the masculine in our national culture. One approach to disrupt the norms of performing masculinity in Australia has been to overtly and satirically represent such a performance. Social fronts may seem absolute in the social

---

[68] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in everyday life,* New York: Anchor Books for Doubleday, 1959, 22.
[69] Goffman, *The Presentation of Self,* 35.
[70] Erving Goffman, "The Interaction Order", *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 1 (1983): 11, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2095141 in Karina J. Butera, "'Neo-mateship' in the 21st century: Changes in the performance of Australian masculinity," *Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (2008): 268, DOI:10.1177/1440783308092884.

[71] Butera, "'Neo-mateship'," 279.

context, but as writer Donna Peberdy notes, overt performances such as film acting demonstrate that fronts "are not fixed or wholly stable."[72] The hyperbole of satirical performances are an especially good example of the front being revealed as fallible. However, satirically representing the problematic types of Australia's history might also serve to needlessly represent them in a time when new models of Australian masculinity are needed. This is a key consideration for my work as it operates in the zone of representation of type.

A key realm where masculinity is performed, often in parody and humour, is the internet. Within this context 'looseness' and larrikinism is often represented as being typical of the Australian identity. To give my own definition, looseness (as in 'getting loose', 'he's a loose unit') is the casual attitude towards, and a propensity for, unencumbered drinking, gambling and generally reckless behaviour. The idea of looseness as an Australian characteristic is not new, it is seen in the previously mentioned accounts of pre-federation Australia. However, in the context of the internet where satire and memes reign supreme the image of the Victoria Bitter drinking, MDMA taking 'wild boy' is represented over and above other characteristics of Australian masculinity.

Fig. 9: Party Possum Graphic (2018), Brown Cardigan X Mambo
Source: https://manofmany.com/fashion/mens-fashion-trends/the-brown-cardigan-x-mambo-collaboration-is-here-and-its-fckin-lit-brah

Social media plays a pivotal role in this contemporary representation of performed masculinity. 'Brown Cardigan' is a popular social media page that typifies the representation of the 'loose Aussie bloke'. The page is by and large satirical, a certain ironic

[72] Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film,* 24.

appreciation accompanying videos of young men viscerally affected by drugs. The ultimate point though is this is typically Australian humour, the modern larrikin is someone who partakes in heavy drinking and drug taking and does so with a light hearted, if perhaps self-aware, attitude. Brown Cardigan's status as a defining player in modern Australian satire earned them a collaboration with the surf wear brand Mambo. A part of the collaborative 2018 release is the 'Party Possum' graphic which shows a possum holding a nitrous-oxide (happy gas) dispenser. (Fig. 9) Of course Mambo has a long history of representing Australian satire with their 1990s heyday collaborations with artists such as Reg Mombassa coming to be an indelible part of Australiana imagery. The contemporary iteration of this entry into iconic Australiana is imagery of looseness and the modern wild boy.

Fig. 10: Michael Cusack, *Bushworld Adventures,* 2018 (video still)
Source: https://www.inverse.com/article/43123-rick-and-morty-season-4-april-fool-s-bushworld-adventures

Returning to the moving image, Michael Cusack's animations are a parody of the tweaked-out ocker stereotype. In his work *Bushworld Adventures* (2018) Cusack adapts the titular characters from the American animation show *Rick and Morty* into 'Reek' and 'Mordi'. Cusack's adaptation focuses on the relatively crude premise of the pair travelling to the Rural town of Bendigo to find a 'green cube' (presumably a case of Victoria Bitter beer). *Bushworld Adventures* ratchets up the problematic relationship dynamic between Rick and Morty to the point where for no apparent reason Rick holds a gun to Morty's head, threatening to shoot him (Fig. 10). All in all the intense, fast shifting and often violent emotions of the characters depicted fits in with the trope of unstable hypermasculinity in Australia. Cusack himself has expressed that his motivation was primarily to confront

American audiences "with actual Australian stuff."[73] To that extent the work certainly succeeded, the International media "describing it alternately as "confounding" (*Vanity Fair*), "strange" (*Complex*), "bizarre" (*Vice*) and as a "gross out" (*CNET*)."[74] Cusack's deranged vision of blokey-ness could be understood to be a contemporary equivalent to *Wake in Fright*, the portrait of Australian masculinity baser in its meme-like depiction of ockerness.

In the body of work I have developed in conjunction with this paper I parody performed masculinity. One such work is *Cheers, always* (2018) (Fig. 11), the screen-print on aluminium backed retroreflective vinyl and mounted onto a steel pole is effectively a road sign. The text is a satire of the contemporary identity of 'looseness' in Australia. Alongside other more sinister references to Australian masculinity it is intended to link the uninhibited hedonism of today's wild boys with the place this tradition holds in Australian mythology. In *Old Mate 2.0* (2018) (Fig. 12) the language of internet imagery is used to bring my anti-muse, *Wake in Fright's* Doc, into the contemporary lexicon. A nightmarish scene of Doc is given the gif treatment and looped continuously. The now almost 50 year old image and its grating repetition is meant to show something of the continuity of the unhinged Australian male type.

(Left) Fig. 11: Jacob Hirsh, *Cheers, always,* 2018

(Right) Fig. 12: Jacob Hirsh, *Old Mate 2.0,* 2018 (video still)

---

[73] Claire Bracken, "Aussie Rick and Morty: How the Internet got April Fooled," *Triple J*, April 3, 2018, http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/triplej-breakfast/rick-and-morty/9614616.

[74] Bracken, "Aussie Rick and Morty."

My previous work has played off language and film reference in service of probing our mythology. In particular I have looked at the profanity of Australian vernacular as an embodiment of the irreverent nature of the masculine type, as well as the filmic trope of the deranged Aussie bloke. In my work *What a Legend* (2017) (Fig. 13 & 14) I brought these two elements together in the form of a series of enamel screen-prints of Australian film characters on lumbering black rubber and a neon sign that reads 'HARD CUNT'. The work presented an armoured John Jarratt playing Ned Kelly, alongside more contemporary iterations of the bushman such as Doc and the serial killer from *Wolf Creek* (2005), again played by Jarratt[75]. Rendered in glossy enamel ink on the heavy but malleable rubber substrate, the work sought to plasticise the trope, to reveal the myth as manufactured. The text component of the work was a descriptor of the type, all the characters depicted could aptly be described as 'hard cunts'[76] in the sense the phrase is used, but in its slickness and saturation the neon also hinted at the aestheticization of the national masculine type.

(Left) Fig. 13: Jacob Hirsh, *What a Legend,* 2017

(Right) Fig. 14: Jacob Hirsh, *What a Legend.* 2017

In developing my current body of work I delved into the representation of frontier masculinity and its central place in the masculine myth. In order to account for Australian masculinity's mythical spirit we can look to Contemporary American artist Cady Noland's handling of American Frontier mythology. Art critic Lane Relyea characterises Noland's works as alluding "to the search for American identity,"[77]. In her imaging of American

---

[75] Ironically, but perhaps not shockingly, Jarratt has since been accused of a historical rape charge.

[76] Hard cunts as in being rough and tough.

[77] Lane Relyea, "Hi-yo silver: Cady Noland's America," *Artforum International* 31, no. 5 (1993), Accessed May 25, 2018, http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T003&resultListType=RESULT_L

identity one thing that stands out is the presence of the cowboy figure printed onto metal. The substrate of these representations often shaped to the silhouette of this legendary figure of the bygone American frontier (Fig. 15), with figures of American celebrity and infamy also populating Noland's America. Her work seems to account for the collective subconscious of the American psyche, depicting its protagonists and antagonists who have shaped the narrative on which the idea of America is built. In that same sense, Noland presents the detritus of capitalism and nationalism, and America's unique brand of nationalistic capitalism; its ubiquitous flag, chromed aluminium and Budweiser beer cans to name a few. Relyea proffers the arrangement of these objects into geological forms is a rendering of the vast landscapes of America's West.[78] All that is to say that Noland's allusions to the American frontier point to an understanding of the idea of a nation as stubbornly tied to its origins. The cowboy remaining a significant part of the spirit of America's identity as the freedom loving nation of rugged individualism that in turn underpins its free market capitalism, obsession with celebrity and libertarian leanings.

Fig. 15: Cady Noland, *Chainsaw Cut Cowboy Head,* 1990
Source: https://theartstack.com/artist/cady-noland/chainsaw-cut-cowboy-bak

IST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7C
A13929234&docType=Article&sort=RELEVANCE&contentSegment=&prodId=EAIM&contentSet=GALE%7CA1
3929234&searchId=R1&userGroupName=usyd&inPS=true.

[78] Relyea, "Cady Noland's America."

Fig. 16: Barnaby Joyce in an Akubra
Source: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-20/barnaby-joyce-not-picking-up-mathias-cormanns-calls/9464928

Similarly, we find those threads of history in our own contemporary imagery of nationalism. The political figure as a cogent example of the front (in Goffman's terms) provides us that insight. Specifically politicians such as Bob Katter, Malcom Turnbull and Barnaby Joyce who frequently adorn themselves with Akubras and beige work pants, cutting a figure of the modern Australian frontiersman (Fig. 16). Whilst this accoutrement is donned without cynicism in rural Australia, within this political sample group there is undoubtedly varying degrees of sincerity. It is an image of performativity in itself, but perhaps in that, lies some of its strength, as it presents itself as a symbol. It is not simply a wardrobe choice, it's a staking of claim to that 'glorious' past of authentic national character. As such this front is not only aimed at the audience of rural Australia, it is also aimed at us city dwelling folk who have been taught that the heart of Australia is in this faded frontier authenticity, even if, front of mind we ourselves are cynical. A perfect play in the 'hearts and minds' politics of a deeper kind. For, the crux of frontier imagery exists more in the collective imagination than elsewhere.

Fig. 17: Jacob Hirsh, *Mad Katter, 2018*

Frontier imagery and its reproduction through the social front is central to my work *Mad Katter* (2018) (Fig. 17). The work obscures an image of Bob Katter to the point of unrecognition, leaving behind a ghostly face helmed by the signifier of frontier masculinity; the Akubra. This silhouette is in the vain of Noland's cowboys but in a decidedly more Australian context. The counter-part to this work is *Old Mate* (2018) (Fig. 18), a skull like edit of my old mate Doc. These faces are icons of the narrative of Australian masculinity, but equally important to that symbolic imagery is the print substrate and sculptural form to which they are attached. The retroreflective vinyl these faces are printed on points to the part of our masculine myth that prizes egalitarianism and working class identity. It's that part of our identity tied in with fairness, as in 'fair dinkum' and 'fair go', and the associated legacy of mateship and bushman collectivism. As with the Akubra, the hi-vis vest has come to be a clunky prop used by politicians in service of performing a 'man of the people' identity (Fig. 19). The hi-vis print surface is also forceful in its shining, it is not a passive picture plane. This forcefulness accentuates the status of the conventional road sign as an authoritative object, one that enforces order, as with the order of our homosocial cultural history. The road sign can also signal the danger of the environment or the animals that inhabit it, so too, my work could be understood as a warning of the unhinged Aussie bloke.

(Left) Fig. 18: Jacob Hirsh, *Old Mate,* 2018

(Right) Fig. 19: Malcom Turnbull and Michelia Cash in Hi-Vis vests

Source: http://theconversation.com/in-search-of-authority-turnbull-cant-afford-to-lose-the-industrial-relations-bills-64681

Similar to the use of props in the performance of an identity, the body itself is used in social performance. In her theory of gender performance Judith Butler purports that gender is "manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive

means."[79] The most significant of corporeal signs as it relates to masculine identity is the phallus, phallic objects operating as a sign of one's masculinity. In my work one such example is the sculpture *Wizard [staff] of Aus* (2018) (Fig. 20), a chrome painted polyurethane cast of a 'wizard staff'. The 'wizard staff' is an object created in a drinking game of the same name where the competitors stack and tape cans of beer on top of each other as they are drunk, the object being to make the tallest staff (Fig. 21). The game is not an exclusively Australian tradition, yet the implication of building the biggest staff being a kind of 'dick contest' is something which speaks to the conflation of drinking and virility in Australian culture. The flexible polyurethane makes the created object a floppy embodiment of impotence rather than virility. The wizard staff is a means of brining the corporeal signs of sex into the realm of culturally manufactured gender – the penis is no longer just a genital, it is a measure of man's successful performance of their gender.

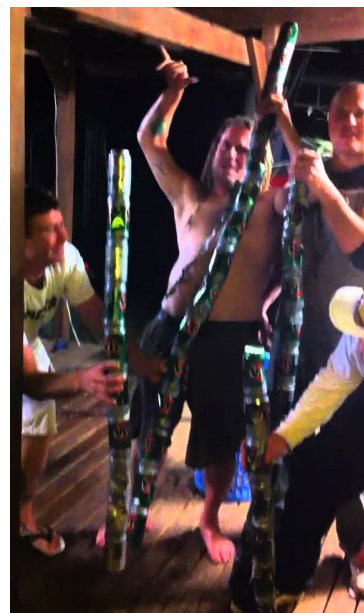Fig 20: Jacob Hirsh, *Wizard [staff] of Aus,* 2018

Fig 21: Aussie blokes with VB wizard staffs
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6VyCDkIOng

Another phallic component of the work is the pair of high-vis yellow arms polyurethane arms titled *Strap-On Shaka* (2018) (Fig. 22). In Australian surf culture, and youth culture more widely, the Shaka has come to be associated with masculine 'looseness'. The Shaka as a corporeal sign could be understood as a sign used to proclaim one's masculinity. The use of polyurethane, a plastic material used to make sex toys, as well as the object's attachment to a strap make the Shaka a sort of prosthesis of masculinity. Strapped to the poles that hold aloft imagery of frontier masculinity in *Old Mate* and *Mad Katter* these prosthesis take on a wider meaning. To use an apt, if not cliché, analogy, the bodily forms as a whole

---

[79] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 173-176 in Peberdy, *Masculinity and Film*, 27.

are Frankenstein's monsters of Australian masculinity. Reduced to faces and phallic features on a steel and concrete armature they are signs of the myth of masculinity both in history and in the contemporary. However, they are not just Frankenstein's monsters because of the slapdash nature of their assembly, they are a part of the Australian Gothic tradition that emerged from the likes of Mary Shelley's literature. They are Gothic in the sense that they express an ongoing anxiety in our masculine and nationalist identities, and in the Australian Gothic tradition they express this through reference to something closer to reality than the supernatural. Effectively, my work as a whole is an expression of the anxiety of performing a hegemonic national identity. It is an expression of unease that our contemporary identity is built on shaky foundations.

Fig. 22: Jacob Hirsh, *Strap-On Shaka,* 2018

Conclusion

Colonial identities such as Australia's are built on relatively short and problematic histories. In the rush to establish a sense of national identity our cultural foundation was constructed from the image of frontier masculinity. Historiography and forces of culture such as film and contemporary art have gone some way to establishing a more pluralistic and truthful identity for modern Australia. However, as thread bare as our national narrative may be the mythology that underpins it is stubbornly resistant to transformation. This makes a continued revaluation of our cultural foundations worthwhile. As Ward posited over half a century ago "Today's task might well be to develop those features of the Australian legend which still seem valid in modern conditions."[80] As social mores continually evolve that process must be ongoing.

The body of work I have created is intended to represent some of the features of Australian masculinity, both historical and contemporary, and by doing so display the link between frontier masculinity, political performance and the wild boy characteristics of modern Australian identity. The objects and imagery taken individually are relatively rudimentary components, but in their joining they show the construction of identity. It is a microcosm of the process of manufacturing, and ongoing mutation of, colonial identity that has taken place in the performance of masculinity in Australia.

I will qualify that despite sharing common ground, I don't see my own work as being as significant and urgent as that of Indigenous, Feminist and POC artists who face pressing issues when it comes to equality in this country. My work seeks only to chip away at the misnomers of identity which I myself have experienced. Imagery of unhinged masculinity and an impotent stack of beer cans are by no means revolutionary. They are a small swing of the pick axe to the metaphorical monument that is the Australian Legend. A worthwhile swing of the axe nevertheless.

---

[80] Ward, *The Australian Legend,* 309.

Bibliography

Balanzategui, Jessica. "*The Babadook* and the haunted space between high and low genres in the Australian horror tradition." *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 11, no. 1 (2017): 18-32. Accessed June 30, 2018. https://doi-org.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/10.1080/17503175.2017.1308907.

Bell, Robert R. *Mateship in Australia: some implications for female-male relationships*. Bundoora: La Trobe University, 1973.

Bellanta, Melissa. "The Leary Larrikin." *Ozwords* 22, no. 1 (2013): 1-3. Accessed June 15, 2018. http://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/andc/Ozwords%20Apr.%202013.pdf.

Blundell, Graeme. "Bob Hawke: the Larrikin and the Leader." *The Australian*, February 9, 2018. www.theaustralian.com.au%2Farts%2Freview%2Fbob-hawke-the-larrikin-and-the-leader%2Fnews-story%2F62d1b55b35efbfabd94f39011a7470e3&memtype=anonymous&v21suffix=hoaf-b.

Bracken, Claire. "Aussie Rick and Morty: How the Internet got April Fooled." *Triple J*, April 3, 2018. http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/triplej-breakfast/rick-and-morty/9614616.

Buckmaster, Luke. "From Mick Jagger to Heath Ledger: Australia's bungled quest to make a great Ned Kelly film." *The Guardian*, November 15, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/nov/15/from-mick-jagger-to-heath-ledger-australias-bungled-quest-to-make-a-great-ned-kelly-film.

Buckmaster, Luke. "Terror Nullius: 'controversial' Australian film loses funders' support." *The Guardian*, March 19, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/19/terror-nullius-controversial-australian-film-loses-funders-support.

Buckmaster, Luke. "Terror Nullius review – dazzling, kinetic, mishmashed beast of an Australian film." *The Guardian*, March 20, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/mar/20/terror-nullius-review-dazzling-kinetic-mishmashed-beast-of-an-australian-film.

Butera, Karina J. "'Neo-mateship' in the 21st century: Changes in the performance of Australian masculinity." *Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (2008): 265-281. Accessed July 17, 2018. DOI:10.1177/1440783308092884.

Coad, David. *Gender trouble Down Under: Australian masculinities.* Valenciennes: Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 2002.

City Art Sydney. "YINNIMADYEMI, Thou didst let fall." City Art Sydney. Accessed July 21, 2018. http://www.cityartsydney.com.au/artwork/yininmadyemi-thou-didst-let-fall/.

Durrant, Jacqui. "Revisiting landscape and identity with Anne Zahalka." *Art Monthly Australia* 301, (2017): 30-31. Accessed August 10, 2018. https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=053953842799210;res=IELLCC.

Flicks NZ. "Warwick Thornton talks Sweet Country – Part 2." YouTube video, 6:45. Posted by FlicksNZ, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9_r9puLEi4.

Garton, Stephen. "War and Masculinity in Twentieth Century Australia." In *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, edited by Richard Nile, Clive Moore and Kay Saunders, 86-94. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998.

Goffman, Erving. *The presentation of self in everyday life.* New York: Anchor Books for Doubleday, 1959.

Grant, Stan. "Stan Grant: It is a 'damaging myth' that Captain Cook discovered Australia." *ABC News*, August 23, 2017. http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536.

Ireland, Tracy. "Captain Cook is a contested national symbol, so why spend more money on him?" *ABC News,* May 11, 2018. http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-11/captain-james-cook-who-discovered-australia-indigenous-ownership/9750772.

Juers, Ben. "Some big fatalism: a review of "Terror Nullius" by Soda_Jerk." *The Lifted Brow,* April 4, 2018. https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/4/4/terror-nullius-a-review-by-ben-juers.

Kemode, Mark. "Wake in Fright reviewed by Mark Kermode." BBC*,* March 7, 2014. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01th4sv.

Lazauskas, Rita. "Anne Zahalka: Landscape Revisited." Anne Zahalka World. Accessed August 22. http://zahalkaworld.com.au/wp-content/uploads/Zahalka-exhibition-catalogue-essay-AZ-final-edit.pdf.

Mishra, Pankaj. "Jordan Peterson & Fascist Mysticism." *New York Review Daily*, March 19, 2018. https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/19/jordan-peterson-and-fascist-mysticism/?utm_source=fbia.

Murrie, Linzi. "The Australian Legend: Writing Australian masculinity/writing 'Australian' masculine." In *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, edited by Richard Nile, Clive Moore and Kay Saunders, 68-75. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998.

Peberdy, Donna. *Masculinity and Film Performance: Male Angst in Contemporary American Cinema.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. DOI 10.1057/9780230308701.

Relyea, Lane. "Hi-yo silver: Cady Noland's America." *Artforum International* 31, no. 5 (1993). Accessed May 25, 2018. http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T003&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CA13929234&docType=Article&sort=RELEVANCE&contentSegment=&prodId=EAIM&contentSet=GALE%7CA13929234&searchId=R1&userGroupName=usyd&inPS=true.

Rickard, John. "Loveable Larrikins and Awful Ockers." In *Australian Masculinities: men and their histories*, edited by Richard Nile, Clive Moore and Kay Saunders, 79-84. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1998.

Rooney, Monique. "'A heart that could be strong and true': Kenneth Cook's Wake in Fright as queer interior." *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1-15. Accessed July 5, 2018. http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy1.library.usyd.edu.au/pqdweb?did=0000002752538001&Fmt=3&cI ientId=43168&RQT=309&VName=PQD.

Thatcher, Lisa. "The Monster Within: Australian Gothic emphasises the terror of the familiar." *The Essential*. Accessed September 19, 2018. http://theessential.com.au/features/essential-down-under/the-monster-within-australian-gothic-emphasises-the-terror-of-the-familiar.

The Lifted Brow. "Weaponizing frustration and despair – an interview with Soda_Jerk." *The Lifted Brow,* March 26, 2018. https://www.theliftedbrow.com/liftedbrow/2018/3/25/weaponising-frustration-and-despair-an-interview-with-sodajerk.

Ulbre De Folie. "You're Mad Ya Bastard." YouTube video, 0:20. Posted by Ulbre De Folie, September 22, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zOZna4ULvE.

Ward, Russel. *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Appendix
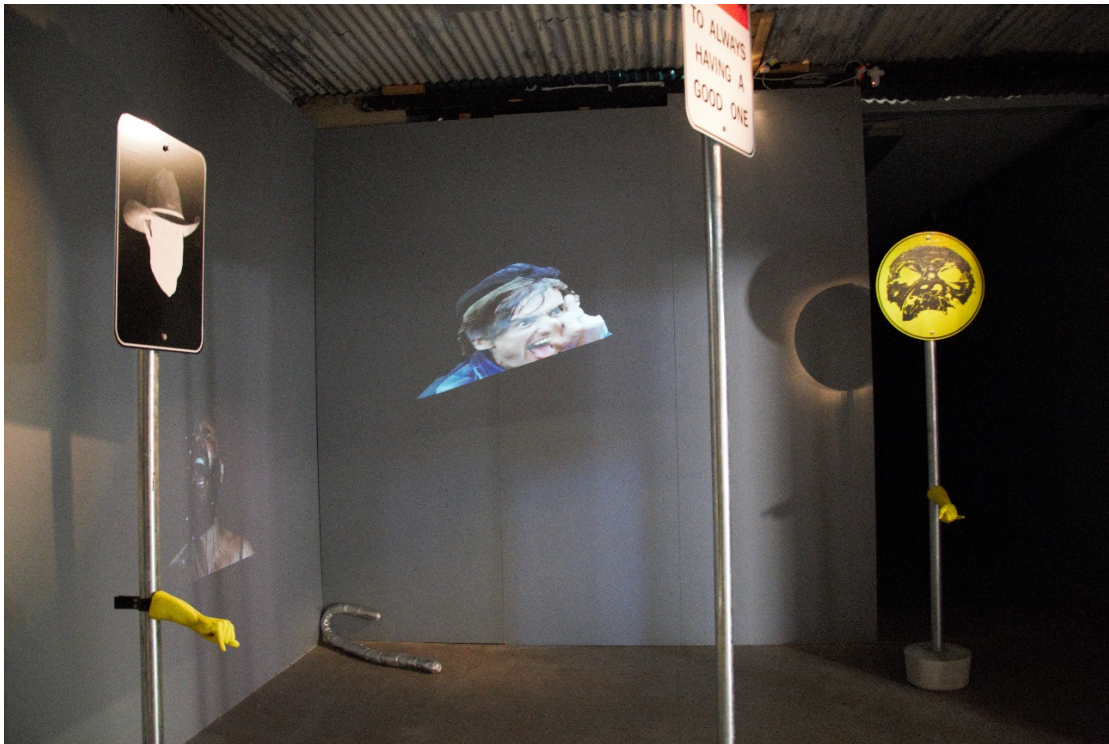
Appx 1: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 2: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 3: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 4: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 5: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 6: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view

Appx 7: Jacob Hirsh, *Wild Country (the Agony and the Eccies),* 2018, installation view