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Spectrality in Indigenous Women's Cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole

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Introduction

This paper addresses a number of recent ghost stories produced by two Aboriginal filmmakers in Australia, mainly focussing on Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil*¹ and Beck Cole's *Plains Empty*,² in order to examine the relationship of these films to a type of spectral rewriting of both modes and values in the Australian nation state. This paper will sketch out an understanding of the role of spectrality in framing a revisionist process that seeks to exorcise, but also celebrate, the spectres that underpin and/or undermine narratives of belonging and place. The use of the term "spectral" throughout this paper refers both to the familiar catalogue of ghostly artifacts that haunt the literary (apparitions, revenants, haunted sites), but also to the mechanisms through which cultural instrumentalities produce and regulate the nation state by making its repressed narratives "insubstantial". As Jacques Derrida has shown, however, the repressed can never be obliterated: "a spectre is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back".³

That indigenous identity is imbricated in models of spectrality is hardly a new observation and it can be seen in the complex mechanisms of colonial regimes that have mapped Aboriginal erasure through policies as crude as *terra nullius*, child removal laws meant to eradicate the "Aboriginal problem", or even familiar discourses which circulated around widely held views about the "vanishing native" or the "spectre of the primitive". The undeniable reality of Indigenous peoples' survival, however, is as longstanding as the colonial insistence on their inevitable disappearance. What is surprising, perhaps, given this imperial legacy of spectralising indigeneity, is that contemporary indigenous filmmakers have turned to such metaphors in order to counter what Wal Saunders has called the "colonial camera".⁴ Another intriguing point of overlap, therefore, is what Faye Ginsburg has called the "process in which indigenous

and minority peoples have begun to take up a range of media in order to ‘talk back’ to structures of power that have erased or distorted their interests and realities” (p. 78).⁵

The danger of speaking of such works in these terms, of course, is that it politicises them in restrictive ways that potentially strip them of their agency, forcing them to make meaning in orchestrated ways. This is another type of spectral effect: the “haunting” of contemporary indigenous work by expectations, legacies and a new form of cultural anthropology.⁶ At the heart of this debate is the sense, as Ginsburg puts it, of “whether minority or dominated subjects can assimilate media to their own cultural and political concerns or are inevitably compromised by its presence”.⁷ The question, for example, of whether state-funded support for Indigenous arts produces a “breakthrough” or merely a “media reservation”,⁸ of the irony of anthropological films being used to contest land claims,⁹ or the potential of film as a new medium to provide access to agency despite its colonial origins, all haunt this technology of representation.

This paper acknowledges these debates, but is drawn to the dynamic potential of Indigenous film, not so much as a device that eradicates colonial encounters and their postcolonial legacy, but as texts that unsettle and contest, that empower and initiate debate, and, as Roy Miki has argued in a different but related context, that suggest “the potential for the emergence of new cultural performances—and by implication new “localisms”—that account for the “spectral” effects of global uncertainties” (p. 43).¹⁰

Film as Spectral Technology

Film, of course, has a special claim to spectrality. Terry Castle discusses what she calls the “so-called ghost-shows of the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Europe—illusionistic exhibitions and public entertainments in which ‘specters’ were produced through the use of a magic lantern” (p. 27),¹¹ what Ken Gelder calls “the ‘prehistory’ of cinema” and the “spectatorial technologies” that made the dead “appear to come to life again”.¹² Gelder also traces the similarly spectral quality of film that can throw “the usual polarity of the real and the illusory, belief and disbelief, into question”.¹³ Even the mechanics of film, which create the appearance of movement through persistence of vision, a process that involves the ghost of images surviving on the retina while others replace it, so that effectively we see the moment just as it has disappeared,¹⁴

literalises the notion of ghostliness, haunting and perception in productive ways. This, married to the sense of film as an always already haunted colonial device, textures the complexity of the mode as an activist instrument.

Indigenous filmmakers who choose to use film in order to reassert artistic and intellectual agency over their own cultural product must therefore negotiate a complex arrangement of codes and counter codes, and it is little wonder that pioneers have been so ambiguously embraced,¹⁵ or that the site of much of this negotiation is enacted through the vehicle of ghost stories, which are inherently liminal and contested forms.

The ghost story, as Gillian Beer reminds us, “*takes place* in the everyday: it takes space, and it is this usurpation of space by the immaterial which is one of the deepest terrors released by the ghost story”. They are, she says, “to do with the insurrection, not the resurrection of the dead”.¹⁶ In this sense, the ghost stories that Indigenous filmmakers give rise to are particularly apt, given that they often gesture towards spectres produced by a violent encounter with colonialism that “ghosted” Aboriginal peoples in real terms—either through exterminating practices, or in political processes such as *terra nullius* where it was argued that they had never quite existed. As Marcia Langton has pointed out, “The easiest and most ‘natural’ form of racism in representation is that act of making the other invisible”.¹⁷ Their return is thus particularly haunting in the contemporary Australian context, where acknowledgement of land rights has been misrepresented by conservative forces to signal the potential dispossession of White Australians from their property—and where, to rework Beers, the ghost is figured as *both* insurrection and resurrection. As Felicity Collins and Therese Davis have suggested, “To give up the consoling and enabling myth of *terra nullius* is to displace white settler Australia as the core of national identity and national history”.¹⁸

Ghost stories, as Rosemary Jackson has argued, are “a special category of the fantastic”;¹⁹ they are features of Gothic and fantasy fictions that have long been used to construct a eurocentric notion of Indigeneity, and to articulate the colonial and post-colonial condition.²⁰ The Gothic has been used simultaneously to paint “New World” environments as alien, as well as to naturalise the alien space—to render it in terms comprehensible to the old world sensibility—to refigure its alien dimensions in a more familiar discourse, albeit one of fear and loathing.²¹ Ironically, to make the unknown

familiarly monstrous, via a discursive rendering of the unrepresentable—of the ghostly—is to go some way towards taming the alien. To do this, many of the early writers of both nations monstrosized the “New World” and all that it contained. In one gesture, then, the new world was both a monstrous unknown space, as well as somehow familiar through the process of generification that at least provided a discursive instrument to speak the unspeakable.

Within this economy of monstrosity, the most feared and unknown features of that new world, coded as beyond representation and therefore particularly terrifying, were the indigenous inhabitants who represented a type of phantom presence. In Australia this was literalised, as noted above, by the policy of *terra nullius*—which figured Australia as, effectively, empty of inhabitants—and that therefore allowed Australia to be colonized without the need for treaties. Aboriginal people were made ghostly by such determinations, turned into insubstantial spectres haunting their own land, a process that was reinforced in wider government policy, in historical record keeping, in map-making, and of course in literary figurations. In view of this legacy of dispossession and eradication, it is perhaps surprising that indigenous writers and filmmakers should embrace such haunted generic structures. And yet this is exactly what has happened.

In the last 15 years, ghost stories of one kind or another have emerged as an important mode for Indigenous artists as a way of reversing majority constructions. Where once Aborigines were represented as monstrous or ghostly, as cannibalistic and vampiric, now it is the dominant culture which is refigured as the Gothic other—the rapacious, the bloodthirsty, and in some cases, the dispossessed. Indigenous writers and filmmakers increasingly represent European cultures as monstrously parasitical, talking about majority cultures via metaphors of ghostliness, vampirism, and spectrality, as mapped out in works as diverse as Sam Watson’s *The Kadaitcha Sung*, Rachel Perkins’ *Radiance*, or Alexis Wright’s *Plains of Promise*. What follows are readings of two important filmmakers, and two texts that illustrate the phenomenon in useful ways.

Tracey Moffatt: “Bizarre things happen”

In “Narrative and Intervention in Aboriginal Filmmaking and Policy”, a response to Langton’s groundbreaking *Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television*,

Stephen Muecke speculates on the advice Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari might give to prospective filmmakers seeking to cover Aboriginal content. They might, he says, in their “imperative mood”, instruct: “Don’t make films about Aborigines. Make Aboriginal films which are not films in the usual sense. Make films which are not Aboriginal in the usual sense” (p. 256).²²

Tracey Moffatt is arguably the first in what can be called a “new generation” of Australian Indigenous filmmakers who have redefined the way film, spectrality and cultural intervention come together. As has been argued elsewhere, her work “can be read as a type of resistance film-making” specifically invoking gothic tropes in order to re-vision dominant views of Indigenous peoples,²³ and is mapped out in a series of celebrated photographic works and challenging films that are arguably “not Aboriginal in the usual sense”. As she herself has suggested, in an early interview, “I’m interested in saying things about black Australia but I’m interested in saying them in a different way filmically” (p. 148).²⁴ That she has succeeded is suggested by what Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs have called the “perplexed way”²⁵ that her films were received (noted above), and is captured in David Stratton’s euphoric response to her first feature-length film *beDevil*: “There’s never been an Australian film like [it]. In fact, I can’t remember seeing any film like [it] before”. He goes on to say, quite correctly, that “Moffatt’s handling of this material is so unusual that the film runs the danger of being misunderstood, or (worse) ignored”.²⁶ Moffatt’s dense, elliptical style, is both complexly intertextual, visually extraordinary, and determinedly circumspect.

Her 1990 short work *Night Cries*²⁷ is a case in point. The film exorcises, by way of reanimating, the spectre of Charles Chauvel’s influential 1955 film *Jedda*, where the effects of assimilation were starkly debated in order to demonstrate “Aboriginal people’s tragic failure to integrate into modern life”.²⁸ *Jedda* was famous for being the first film to cast full blood Aboriginal actors in speaking roles, and for its time was considered a fair-minded, even progressive account of the dangers of assimilation, through the story of a white woman’s adoption of the titular Aboriginal girl and the attraction that develops between Jedda and the “half-caste” stockman Joe who works the property. But these plans are upset by the arrival of Marbuk, a mysterious figure from a different skin group, who bewitches, assaults and then kidnaps Jedda in what is a violation of both white and

Indigenous law. Having broken tradition by bringing a woman of a different skin group into his community, Marbuk is ostracised and driven to his death by the elders of his community.²⁹



[Still from *Night Cries*.
Image used with permission of Ronin Films.]

In *Night Cries* the viewer arguably witnesses the fruition of Jedda's adoption by the McMann family to the tune of haunting sound effects, whip cracks and grating metal scraped across metal. Now an infirm figure, Sarah McMann is wired and shrouded, both a visual pun on Mummies and a gothic parody of failed white technology.³⁰ Jedda, once vibrant and full of potential, is a trapped and exasperated figure, tending to the dying body of white culture. But in order for her to appear in this film at all, Moffatt needed to reanimate the ghost of Jedda, who of course dies in the original, dragged to her death by Marbuk in a spectacular cliff fall. Viewers of Moffatt's film are left to wonder if the life enslaved to her white keeper is really favourable to her original demise, but Moffatt is not one to editorialise. The significance of the story is left for viewers to determine.³¹

Moffatt's first feature film, *beDevil*, moves into a different register. In *beDevil* three putatively unrelated ghostly narratives articulate the story of postcolonial Australia and

the land upon which Indigenous people circulate. Moffatt herself argued that she “wanted to put down on celluloid the ghost stories which sent shivers down my spine as a child, and which over the years had become family myths”, noting that “Because they were ghost stories I didn’t feel compelled to make them in the conventional way. Bizarre things happen”.³²

As with all her work, *beDevil* is elusive, rendering its argument in dense, complex packages. But it is the ghost that facilitates the encounter: either the spectre of an American G.I. in “Mr Chuck” who hides in a swamp beneath a movie theatre, of a blind white girl who dies on the train tracks in “Choo Choo Choo Choo”, or the ghost of two young Torres Strait Islander lovers in “Lovin’ the Spin I’m In”. The second tale is particularly interesting because one of its stories specifically locates its narrative in the space of competing dreamings—the cinema complex of white imaginings—and in this sense foregrounds film as a potential site of communication.³³ But it is also resonant for the way it acknowledges a layered multicultural history of racialised identities and the shared ghosts that connect them all. In this way the ghost of the soldier is a memory for a disillusioned white woman trapped in suburbia, and the regret of violence against an Aboriginal child that she failed to help. Here her words—“We on the island all knew. We could’ve helped that child. We could’ve”—speak to the history of white silence in relation to the legacy of abuse visited upon Aboriginal children throughout the colonial period, one that haunts to the present day. This is perhaps most clearly expressed by the parallel narrative of the events of long ago delivered by the Aboriginal boy himself, now an old man in prison, who describes his encounter with the ghost in uncomfortably physical, arguably sexually explicit terms, inter-cut with a savage beating he receives from his stepfather which makes the water in the drains run red. That this is framed around the scopophilic gaze of blonde, blue-eyed children looking on from the outside of the house manifests the thin line between the spectral and the spectatorial.

In the middle story, “Choo, Choo, Choo, Choo”, an Aboriginal woman is haunted by the ghost of a girl who was killed by a train that continues to travel the landscape. But the ghosting is reinforced by the fact that the main character in this story is actually based on Moffatt’s mother, and played by Moffatt herself.³⁴ Moreover, the tale is located in the context of a regional haunting, where everyone in the town of Charlesville knows about

the ghost train, brilliantly conveyed by an opening series of shots of individuals and groups miming the motion of the train directly to the camera. Indeed, the story of the ghost train has well and truly been incorporated into the town's tourism framework, where "the local citizenry of its present-day 'old town' participate in cultivating its attractions to and for outsiders".³⁵



[Still from *beDevil*.
Image used with permission of Ronin Films.]

The closing story, "Lovin' the Spin I'm In", tells the tale of a migrant Greek family, greedy property developers, and a distraught mother, Imelda, who has followed her son and his lover into exile. How they died in a mysterious fire after their banishment is not discussed, but we are left with a sense of the power of displacement and unrest—of the ghosts of promise and regret moving in a fragile balance—very much a picture of the modern spectral nation. The film ends with Imelda forcibly evicted from the warehouse where she lives, but with the ghosts that she honoured resisting the greedy developers, who are shown in a closing scene in a car spinning endlessly over a white directional arrow, unable to escape. Indigenous peoples and modern capital, we are left to conjecture, are each deterritorialised by their encounter.

Gelder and Jacobs have argued that *beDevil* shows that "all the ghosts are modern and, far from being laid to rest [...] continue to flourish under modern conditions".³⁶ Moffatt's interest in confronting the wide spectrum of ghosts that haunt the stories of nation—

ancient *and* modern—can perhaps best be seen in the central tale, where Min Min lights compete with a haunted landscape that sees the husband, who is returning from a hunt, suddenly swept up in a frightening storm. As he struggles through the tempest, he comes across strange clothes-peg dolls that terrify him as the music reaches a frenetic pitch. The episode changes him briefly into a zombie of sorts, so that his wife and sister fear for his wellbeing.

But there are other ghosts as well. In a lovely scene that signals her interest in confronting the ghosts of colonial occupation, Moffatt tells another tale, this time narrated by a Chinese-Australian shopkeeper played by Cecil Parkee. The scene fittingly begins as a far shot that zooms in to reveal him standing in the doorway of Historic House, the local museum. Surrounded by old typewriters and telephones—“signs of nascent communications technologies and the advent of modernization”³⁷—he gestures to the camera and asks, “Do you want to hear a spooky story?” What unfolds is both an account of the blind girl and the ghost train, but also the suicide by the train driver who later hanged himself because of “something [...] in his past. Something [that] haunted him. Bedevilled he was. He couldn’t live with it anymore”. We are then prompted to attend to the story of an old alcoholic who sees other ghosts, especially when he is seized by the “horrors” of drink: “I have a friend who visits me here at night. She’s a ghost. I call her a spirit. Who is she? I don’t want to tell who it is. But it’s not the little [blind] girl. These spirits. Perhaps they do try to tell us something”. Again, Moffatt is content to leave the mystery intact, offering little by way of explanation, but we are left in no doubt over how crowded the haunted landscape is with ghosts of every kind.

What is also made clear through this complex mix of characters and stories, is the fact that Aboriginal place is always in negotiation: it is vibrant, contested and very much alive, rather than anchored in what Anne McClintock has called “anachronistic space”.³⁸ More importantly, the film makes clear the fragility of *non*-Indigenous peoples—the precarious and tentative foothold that migrant cultures have in modern day Australia. The ghost story allows this haunted history to circulate and percolate, perhaps the way the waters in the swamp bubble throughout the first segment. It reminds us that it is impossible to lay these ghosts to rest in a space where so many spectres remain

unacknowledged and unseen. To paraphrase the shopkeeper, we may hear them, but we don't see them. We know they're there, but not what to do about them.

Beck Cole—*Plains Empty*— “This place is dead!”

Cole's *Plains Empty*, a 2005 official entry in the Sundance Film Festival, is a half hour drama filmed around Coober Pedy. The film is visually intertextual, with much of the lighting and sets reminding us of Moffatt's hyperreal images in *Night Cries*. It tells the story of a young Aboriginal woman—Sam (played by Ngaire Pigram)—who has moved to a remote South Australian mining town. As the film opens her husband announces that he needs to move further afield because “This place is dead”. In classic ghost story fashion, the stage is set for the young woman to be left behind in a primitive one-roomed shack surrounded by predatory forces. As the husband tells her just before he drives away, “Don't go anywhere without the dog. [...] There are mad people around here.” That the dog runs off immediately in pursuit of the husband, leaving her completely alone, further builds the sense of vulnerability and suspense. This is added to after she travels into town to a bar and is leered over by the male patrons. On her return to the shack in the dead of night she sees an Aboriginal ghost girl holding a hurricane lamp and swerves to avoid her, damaging the car in the process so that she's forced to hitchhike home. Sam is given a lift by her spooky neighbour, played by Gerard Kennedy, an elderly minor who is himself shown to shadow box with invisible phantoms.



[The ghostly “lost girl” (Kerry Naylor).

Image used with permission of Film Depot. Photo by Mark Rogers]

As the film progresses, Sam discovers a locked shed near her shack, and then hears the sound of a dog howling, which seems to come from an abandoned mineshaft. After she investigates, she retraces her steps to find the locked door open. Inside she finds an old box filled with war memorabilia and photographs. Needless to say, one of these photos holds the key. One shows the shack's previous owner, Wilson, and his beloved dog; the young Aboriginal girl stands in the doorway in the background. Shortly afterwards the girl's ghost materialises, washing the floor of what is now Sam's cabin. Later still Sam sees her moving in a mineshaft. This prompts her to confront her neighbour for answers. The old man tells her:

Old fella:

Wilson owned this land. He owned her too. [...] Hated everyone, and everything, except that mongrel dog of his. And when he went missing she had to go out to find him. Never did. And then she went missing [...] we live with the heat, we live with the flies, we live with the dust.... And we put up with the ghosts.

Sam:

What does she want from me?

Old fella:

How the hell should I know. Perhaps you outta leave?

The old man's closing line, which reads both as a directive to her to leave his cabin, but also perhaps as an instruction to leave the area, prompts her to take action. She descends into the mineshaft for the first time and discovers the young girl's lamp, in a scene that takes place completely underground, away from the viewer's gaze. We hear her cries, but realise only once she resurfaces, lamp in hand, that she has found the girl. Shortly afterwards she returns with a crucifix and symbolically marks the spot. In a sideshot we see the ghost girl smile and acknowledge Sam, before fading from the image. Sam is then similarly shown to fade from the landscape before the film cuts to black.

Plains Empty has the classic structure of a ghost story, a genre that Cole has drawn on for this tale. As she herself puts it,

The ghost story genre is something that I find very interesting, it enables one to explore the concept of the past with characters and story existing in the present. The

melding together of past and present opens up many unique avenues for storytelling.

Plains Empty is a ghost story but it is also a film about the common experiences of Aboriginal women in the remote areas of outback Australia. On one level, it is a film that explores the psychological journey of a woman left to fend for herself in a [sic] isolated, male dominated environment. On another level, it is a story about two lost girls searching for freedom.³⁹

Cole's interest in the way past and present intersect over the issue of identity and place is cleverly located. Most dictionaries define "ghost towns" as abandoned mining fields, and there is a tradition of citing them as spaces of perverse, unsettled energy. By definition, mining towns are areas of disruption, where colonial forces excavate and cut into the Indigenous soil, unearthing, generating, but also burying, violent histories. In *Plains Empty* this haunted earth is mysteriously addressed.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* describes a ghost word as one "that has come into a dictionary, grammar, or other scholarly work as a result of a misreading or misinterpretation, as by mistaking a typographical error for an actual word".⁴⁰ It is tempting to conclude that *Plains Empty* is itself a reminder of the most haunting of ghost words in the Australian context, *Terra Nullius*, that violent misnomer that misrepresented the space of Aboriginal Australia. Cole's film acknowledges the conflicted, haunted and changed contemporary setting of present day Aboriginal existence. Sam paces before an American Indian spirit catcher and lays the ghost of the Aboriginal girl to rest beneath a Christian cross. The space she inhabits is crowded, rather than empty, land. Even the shack she lives in has the words of the petrol company *Mobiloil* ghosted on the corrugated iron. And on the cover image, Sam has replaced Wilson, with the ghost girl in the doorway, both staring out defiantly.⁴¹



[Sam (Ngairé Pigram) and “lost girl” (Kerry Naylor).
Image used with permission of Film Depot. Photo by Mark Rogers]

Conclusion—“come back to life”

As Gelder and Jacobs point out, “haunted sites of ghost stories may appear empty or uninhabited—but they are always more than what they appear to be. These are ‘excessive’ things, extending both downwards (you will sooner or later uncover a ghost), and outwards”.⁴² The story doesn’t follow where she goes. But it ends with the two Aboriginal women achieving a type of peace—a reconciliation of sorts—that sees them disappearing from conflicted land, whilst simultaneously marking it as always already theirs. If there is a healing that takes place here it is perhaps through the crucial gesture of bearing witness—of acknowledging and addressing the forgotten ghosts and their connection to the present.

In the films discussed above, the issue at stake is the eradication of subjugated, spectral histories. If ghost stories are accounts of possession, they are formulated, as Gelder and Jacobs have noted, in the context of prior dispossessions. Indigenous women filmmakers have used recent works to signal the return of repressed histories and the importance of self-reconciliation. These films speak about Indigenous peoples recognising and coming to terms with their own ghosts, not by way of giving up the ghosts, but rather by recovering and acknowledging them, in order, as Cole has put it, for this spectral “history” to “come back to life”.⁴³

¹ Tracey Moffatt, dir., *bedevil*, Ronin Films, 1994.

² Beck Cole, dir., *Plains Empty*, Film Depot, 2005.

³ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, NY: Routledge, 1994, p. 11.

⁴ Qtd. in Ben Holgate, 'Now for a Celluloid Dreaming', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 November (1994) 22.

⁵ Faye Ginsburg, 'Screen Memories and Entangled Technologies: Resignifying Indigenous Lives', in *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, eds. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2003, pp. 77–98.

⁶ See James Weiner, 'Televisualist Anthropology: Representation, Aesthetics, Politics', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (1997): pp. 197–236.

⁷ Ginsburg, 'Screen Memories', p. 79.

⁸ Roth qtd in Ginsburg, p. 79.

⁹ Holgate, p. 22.

¹⁰ Roy Miki, 'Altered States: Global Currents, the Spectral Nation, and the Production of "Asian Canadian"', *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 35.3 (2000), pp. 43–72.

¹¹ Terry Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphors of Modern Reverie', *Critical Inquiry*, 15.1, 1988: pp. 27–71.

¹² Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 87.

¹³ Ibid, p. 88.

¹⁴ See Gerry Turcotte, 'Persistence of Vision', Part 4, Chapter 18. "Persistence of Vision: Memory, Migration & Citizenship — Free Trade or the Failure of Cross-Culturality?", *From Subjects to Citizens: A Hundred Years of Citizenship in Australia and Canada*, eds. Pierre Boyer, Linda Cardinal and David Headon, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004: 295–99.

¹⁵ The reception of *beDevil* is a case in point. Russell Edwards found the film 'abrasive' ("Conflict, Conceit and Consensus," *Filmnews*, November, 1993: 11), John Wojdylo was left cold by the film's 'conflict between naturalism and anti-naturalism' ("BeDevil", Review, *Cinema Papers*, No. 96, December 1993: pp. 6–7), and Adrian Martin descried the work's 'bloodlessness' (28: "Tracey Moffatt: The Go-Between", *World Art: The Magazine of Contemporary Visual Arts*, Vol. 2, 1995: pp. 24–29). Needless to say, however, the film has also had its passionate supporters. See in particular David Stratton's review (discussed at more length below) where he asks why it was 'completely ignored by the AFI Award pre-selection panels' and so 'apparently actively disliked by the audience at the Sydney Film Festival' where it first screened ('Supernatural Vision,' *The Australian, Weekend Review*, 30–31 October, 1993: p. 11). For a more sustained reading of the film see Carol Laseur, "*beDevil*: Colonial Images, Aboriginal Memories," *SPAN*, No. 37 (December 1993): pp. 76–88.

¹⁶ Gillian Beer, 'Ghosts': *Essays in Criticism*, 28 (1978), pp. 259–64.

¹⁷ Marcia Langton, 'Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on the television...': *An essay for the Australian Film Commission on the politics and aesthetics of filmmaking by and about Aboriginal people and things*. North Sydney: AFI, 1993, p. 24.

¹⁸ Felicity Collins and Therese Davis, *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 172.

¹⁹ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, London: New Accents, 1986, p. 68.

²⁰ For an elaboration of this argument see Gerry Turcotte, "Footnotes to an Australian Gothic Script: the Gothic in Australia", *Antipodes* 7.2, December 1993: pp. 127–34; "How Dark Is My Valley? Canadian & Australian Gothic", *Scarp* 22, May 1993: pp. 26–32 and "The Gothic in Australia", 35-minute feature, ABC Radio: *Books & Writing*, 24 July 1992. See also Penny van Toorn, "The Terrors of *Terra Nullius*: Gothicising and De-Gothicising Aboriginality", *World Literature Written in English* 32.2 & 33.1: 1992–93.

²¹ Gerry Turcotte, 'Australian Gothic', *Handbook to Gothic Literature*, ed. M.M. Roberts, London: Macmillan, 1998, pp. 10–19.

²² Stephen Muecke, "Narrative and Intervention in Aboriginal Filmmaking and Policy", *Continuum*, 8.2, 1994: pp. 248–57.

²³ Turcotte, "Australian Gothic", p. 19.

²⁴ Anna Rutherford, 'Changing Images: An Interview with Tracey Moffatt', *Aboriginal Culture Today*, ed. Anna Rutherford, Sydney: Dangaroo, 1988, p. 148.

- ²⁵ Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness & Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Melbourne: MUP, 1998: p. 37.
- ²⁶ David Stratton, 'Supernatural Vision': p. 11.
- ²⁷ Tracey Moffatt, dir., *Night Cries*, Ronin Films, 1990.
- ²⁸ Collins and Davis, *Australian Cinema After Mabo*, p. 142.
- ²⁹ As Langton has argued, this conveniently 'rewrites Australian history so that the black rebel against white colonial rule is a rebel against the laws of his own society', p. 45.
- ³⁰ As Langton notes pointedly, 'None of the male characters have survived and the homestead is in ruins', p. 46. See also Moffatt's argument that '*Jedda* was an overblown melodramatic and I think racist Australian film made in the style of a Hollywood western', in Gerald Matt, "An Interview with Tracey Moffatt", *Tracey Moffatt*, ed./curator, Michael Snelling. Brisbane: IMA/Asialink: 1999: pp. 65–68.
- ³¹ E. Ann Kaplan, for example, describes the film as 'correcting [...] the constructions of *Jedda* from a generous perspective', p. 17. Langton sees it 'as an autobiographical exploration of Moffatt's relationship with her own foster mother', p. 46. For other readings of this work see Laleen Jayamane, "'Love me tender, love me true, never let me go...': A Sri Lankan Reading of Tracey Moffatt's *Night Cries—A Rural Tragedy*," *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, eds. Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993: pp. 73–84; Karen Jennings, *Sites of Difference: Cinematic Representations of Aboriginality and Gender*. South Melbourne, VIC: AFI; Bert Rebhandl, "The Haunting—The Films of Tracey Moffatt", *Tracey Moffatt*, eds. Martin Hentschel and Gerald Matt, Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1998: pp. 34–39; and Mary Zournazi, "'The Queen Victoria of Bush Cuisine': Foreign Incorporation and Oral Consumption within the Nation", *Communal/Plural*, Vol. 4 (1995): pp. 79–89.
- ³² Rachel Power, 'Moffatt's vivid original work', *The Canberra Times*, 17 March, 1994: p. 5
- ³³ See Gelder and Jacobs on this point: 'This cinematic story thus self-consciously puts cinema itself in the frame [...] Cinema and ghosts are entangled', *Uncanny Australia*: p.38. And yet, it is worth noting that the young Aboriginal boy must break into the site, and does not watch any films while he's there at night. Glen Masato Mimura notes that, to the young boy, the movie house is 'far more sinister than mere escapist entertainment'; rather, it is a 'key institution of representation introduced to the island', in 'Black Memories: Allegorizing the Colonial Encounter in Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993)', *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 20 (2003): p. 117.
- ³⁴ Catherine Summerhayes argues that 'In offering her own body as filmic actor, Moffatt explicitly claims the 'socially inscribed fraught space' of the performance artist', p. 17. Moffatt, in more playful mode, makes the point that it's far cheaper to cast oneself (see Matt, p. 68).
- ³⁵ Glen Masato Mimura, 'Black Memories: p. 119.
- ³⁶ Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia*, p. 38.
- ³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 119.
- ³⁸ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York & London: Routledge, 1995, p. 30.
- ³⁹ Beck Cole, 'Director's Statement', n.d. *Plains Empty Media Kit*. N.p. Available at <http://www.creative-spirits.de/resources/movies/plainsemtly.html>. Accessed 29/6/06.
- ⁴⁰ *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition. 2003. Houghton Mifflin Company.
- ⁴¹ And while it is perhaps merely an optical illusion, the shadows and reflected glare in the window beside the lost girl appears to resemble the Aboriginal flag.
- ⁴² Gelder and Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia*, p. 31.
- ⁴³ Cole, 'Director's Statement', n.p.