

Continuum:

The Australian Journal of Media & Culture
vol. 1 no 1 (1987)

Contents

Australian Film in the 1950s

Edited by Tom O'Regan

ON THE BACK OF BEYOND

Interview with Ross Gibson

This interview was conducted by Tom O'Regan, Brian Shoesmith and Albert Moran on 5th December 1986 in Sydney.

Ross Gibson is a Sydney based writer and filmmaker. His book *The Diminishing Paradise* (1) is an important study of literary perceptions of Australia and the Australian landscape which his film *Camera Natura* (2) (1986) subsequently takes up with regard to filmmaking. Not only did his film incorporate images from *The Back of Beyond* but it also accorded the film especial significance as an exemplary text. This fact drew us to interview Ross Gibson about this classic documentary - arguably one of the two or three important films made in Australia in the 1950s.

The Back of Beyond (1954), directed by John Heyer, was made by the Shell Film Unit. (3) The Shell Unit was set up in 1948 with Heyer in charge. Earlier Heyer had been a senior producer with the Federal Government's Film Division (later called the Commonwealth Film Unit, now Film Australia) - and indeed had been instrumental in its setting up in the last months of the second world war (see Albert Moran's article in this issue). Heyer was given a brief by Shell to make a "prestige" documentary that would capture the essence of Australia. He chose as his subject a weekly Birdsville Track mail run. The film follows the mailman Tom Kruse and his mail truck along the Track. He visits isolated stations and outposts and encounters natural obstacles - like floodwaters and sand dunes - which he deals with as a matter of course. The film also takes up stories of the Track - stories of its past, anecdotes about it. There are reenactments: two young girls set off for the track to find help after their mother has died but are never found; and an Aboriginal whilst inspecting the remains of a mission station recalls it as a going concern when he was a child. The film is marked not only by a lyrical quality in its sound track, but by a marked pictorialism in its image of the bush landscape which is alternately real and surreal, denotative and connotative.

The film was shown in theatres, town halls and from travelling vans throughout Australia. It is estimated that some 750,000 Australians saw it in the first two years of its release this way. Stuart Cunningham suggests Cecil Holmes was one filmmaker who was never given a chance to develop his talent in this period of straitened production circumstances; by any reckoning John Heyer is another. In a 1976 interview Heyer spoke

of his desire to make Xavier Herbert's Capricornia into a film (4) - it is surely one of the tragedies of Australian film production that this director who was, more than anyone else, responsible for both a new way of imaging landscape and for taking a documentary tradition to its limits should have never been given a chance in feature filmmaking. (Tom O'Regan)

O'Regan: First of all to you Albert Moran: how does *The Back of Beyond* relate to other films made in the late 1940s and 1950s?

Moran: The film is such a rich variety of things. It is quite hard to compare it to the documentaries being made at the Film Unit: none of them is as rich or as interesting. I am struck by the desolation and infertility found in the centre of Australia. Some years earlier Heyer and other documentary people at the Unit were making films that imagine the inland as the vibrant centre of Australia. It is the rich fertile centre that supports the coastal regions and other parts of the world. Even *The Overlanders* (1946) (5) is made in that kind of spirit opening up the centre and allowing the inland to reach its potential. Whereas in *The Back of Beyond* the images are of things that haven't come off whether it be the lost children, or the ruined mission station or the journey across the desert.

O'Regan: Wouldn't you say *The Back of Beyond* belongs more in the 1940s than in the 1950s in terms of both its style and its community emphasis?

Moran: In terms of its style I would want to tentatively agree. There is a rich mixture of different modes in it which recall the best of the 1940s documentaries: be it the little dramas, the voice-over narration which ranges from the lyrical to the matter of fact, the use of different speaking voices, and the music. Thus unlike other 1950s documentary film production which homogenised the different elements of film style via a voice of God, all embracing kind of commentary, *The Back of Beyond* is not homogeneous. In this film you go back to the more interesting and more varied sound track of the films in the forties.

Gibson: I can see it fitting into a fifties sensibility too, but a vanguard one. Patrick White published his novel *Voss* (6) in 1957, which he saw as getting away from the dry dun-coloured reportage prose that had been operating in Australian literature. If he was trying to get away from a naturalistic journalism, he was not necessarily trying to go the other way, into a full-blown romanticism. He was looking for a tone other than the dominant one. Something of this unorthodoxy of "dissent" operates in *The Back of Beyond* which is ostensibly a documentary. It is an attempt to bring in a more lyrical, more evocative approach to issues of documentation. As for the infertility and desolation that is portrayed there, I think that is the key to the film. I think it is in the tradition of a minimalist narrative that has operated in some of the explorers' journals, particularly those of Eyre and Sturt. Indeed Sturt is signalled very early in the film as a mentor or exemplary figure for it. (7)

The narrative drive in Sturt and Eyre's journals is different from that in Mitchell's journals or in any typical Anglo-Saxon narrative that might operate in a "foreign" environment. (8) To take the Mitchell orthodoxy first, what this explorer is setting out to do in his journals is to start at one point and *know where he is going*. What he wants to do is *go there* and dominate the terrain as he gets to where he wants to go. It's a surveying, road-building kind of progress. He wants to make sure his culture lays itself over that

land permanently and dominantly. By contrast, what happens in *Sturt and Eyre*, and what I think happens all the way through *The Back of Beyond*, is a much more humble narrative. There is a preparedness to admit the minimal effects that this story-telling has on the location in which the story is set, a preparedness to admit that no story here has an enduring effect unless you are willing to start the story again each time it ends. There is that quote on the sound track: "Every fortnight the story begins." So I see the film as even more in the vanguard than the Patrick White sensibility. Voss was a crucial document in Australian cultural history but I think it was propounding a tradition of heroic failure - a tradition that was required at the time but quickly became pernicious. *The Back of Beyond* is not buying into that instead it's contributing to a tradition that only in the eighties is becoming popular and widespread. It is what comes after the tradition of heroic failure. This kind of minimalist, humble narrative is something which I would argue you could find operating in the *Mad Max* (9) trilogy. It is an attempt to rewrite or redress the improprieties of aspects that are no longer useful to us in the heroic failure tradition. (Of course, there is logically another possible sequel to the moribund heroic failure tradition - i.e. Tory nationalism. There's no denying it's popular. But it's so obviously repressive. It derives from a bully's fear of failure.)

Moran: I am prompted to ask straight away about the script, because Douglas Stewart by then a prominent poet and playwright had a hand in it?

Gibson: The script is usually accredited to John Heyer and Douglas Stewart together - but I have seen other documentation where Janet Heyer also is said to have had a hand in the script. My understanding is that Douglas Stewart was brought in to render it poetic and coherent and to render it consonant with a certain "national cultural" sensibility. Douglas Stewart at the time was seen to be one of the people purveying that particular sensibility even though he was a New Zealander originally. He was actually in the "commissariat" of writing of the time as literary editor of *The Bulletin* (a position he occupied from 1940 1961).

Moran: A book edited by Eric Else was published on this film by the British Film Institute in 1968 as an early study guide. (10) This suggests that the film circulated as, and was also in part intended to be, an art film. This is not just a question of its circulation but also of its textuality.

Gibson: Even if it was not intended to be circulated in art-film venues and markets, it certainly ended up being shown in that way. The very fact that 14 years after the initial release the British Film Institute could see the need to do a study guide on it meant that it was still actively being put forward as some kind of exemplary product. I don't have any evidence for this, but I imagine it must have been very interesting to a British Documentary tradition. It must have been seen as the last possible film that could be made in the Night Mail tradition. It must have seemed a particularly strange mutant of the Night Mail tradition. It is about communications, it is about the delivery of messages. But it is also about adaptation. *The Back of Beyond* seems a very peculiar adaptation of *Night Mail*.

Shoesmith: Another Heyer documentary from the 1940s *Journey of the Nation* (1947) has lots of parallels with *The Back of Beyond* in that they are both about communication

and this *Night Mail* tradition. (11) But the personal observation I want to make concerns circulation. I had not been in Australia very long as a child when suddenly the school was closed down so we could all trot off to the local shire hall in Bunbury (WA) to see *The Back of Beyond*. Shell took the film right throughout the South-West of Western Australia showing it to schoolchildren. I imagine they did a similar project for the rest of Australia. So it was circulated as an exemplary text for children to see to understand something of this nation. It was a very strange experience for a 13 or 14-year-old English kid to be suddenly pulled out of school to partake of this national ritual.

Gibson: The figures say three quarters of a million people saw the film in that way from 1954-55. (12) What I would be interested to know is how Shell presented their involvement in the film? There was a Shell Unit in Britain which, I think it's fair to say, represented an environment which was there to be toured through, there to spend petrol-money in. The environment they represented in *The Back of Beyond* is not necessarily that, but it does seem to be a very early precursor of a particular advertising strategy that operates now: the selling to a unified buying-nation. I don't know whether every time it was set up in a shire or church hall it was presented as "Shell brings this film to you" but I expect it was.

Shoesmith: Patrick Wright in his *Living in an Old Country* (13) demonstrates how Shell in the UK from the 1920s, associated themselves with conservation, nature, the national trust and all of those sorts of things as a deliberate advertising strategy. Certainly their advertising emphasised how they don't destroy nature, but are always involved in reconstituting it. So it is interesting to speculate that Shell as a multi-national developed this strategy which it seems to have adapted for different nations. Maybe *The Back of Beyond* is its Australian adaptation.

Moran: In the 1940s John Heyer was obviously very influenced by Pare Lorentz. One of the things that turns up in several of his documentary films from that period is the conjuring up of an emotional affect by the rhythmic chant of names of places that are just spoken one after the other accompanied by a classic montage sequence of images. So in *Journey of a Nation* for example the chopping down of forests, the bulldozing through the mountains, to standardise the railways nationwide is incanted as if their listing would unify the nation. The tone in *The Back of Beyond*, on the other hand, is much more muted; you don't go into any of those sequences.

Gibson: Well I think this ties in with what I said earlier about a minimalist, more humble narrative. There is that incantation going on in the beginning - there is that continual repetition of "the Birdsville Track", and then in the Afghani section there is actually an Islamic incantation operating. But these are not bulldozer declarations. They are much more like little embroideries, and in fact that kind of embroidery imagery comes up later. There is the idea of "the ragged flower of a town called Maree." It is always this idea of subsistence which is undeniable, people are living there and making a go of things and living an entirely valid culture *but* it is not a predominant or dominant culture.

It is a culture that is aware of simply the necessity of the persistence of culture, and that is how the theme of communications makes sense in the film as well. Obviously at first it's a film about the communication along the road - Tom's the mail contractor delivering messages, taking them from here to there. But the narrative run of the film is very much

about anecdotes that criss-cross over the road. There are pauses quite regularly along the road. The most memorable one of course is the conceptual pause that happens when you literally don't even leave the road. The film just goes off onto this anecdote about the little girls getting lost. It is an engaging anecdote in itself but the question you ask when you are watching it is "how does this fit into the narrative of the film?" I think its fit has to do with the very idea of the criss-crossing of stories and how stories actually make a kind of net provisionally, for anybody to make their culture hold itself down in any particular location. The different figures in the film tell the story and the story lasts for as long as the people want to tell it. It stops when they stop telling it but they can start telling the story every fortnight.

David Thomson's book *Suspects* (14) has something interesting to say on this point. It is a book that is fictional but is also a documentary about the myths of Hollywood Cinema and how they bring themselves into the lives of a mythical American community.

At one point he is talking about Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place* (15) and he says that the interesting thing about that film for him is the whole idea of story telling and how itinerant people have to tell each other stories. He says that "it takes something like storying to criss-cross the emptiness. We have formed a taste for the lucky encounter, for intersection and unrecognised coincidence." I think there is a lot of that necessity for story telling, for criss-crossing, operating in *The Back of Beyond* and I think it is actually a quite explicit theme of communication.

Shoesmith: With respect to the two young girls, the *Golden Summers Exhibition Catalogue* makes the point that lost children is a recurring theme of representational art in the late 19th century. (16) Isn't *The Back of Beyond* picking up a reassuring thematic concern of white Australia in relationship to the bush here?

Gibson: Definitely, it's well established folklore by the end of the 19th century, and it fits into a cultural construct of the centre of Australia and what it has come to represent. Let's take a specific example in Sturt's journals. When he gets to the centre what he talks about is the fact that firstly he cannot make it to the exact centre. Secondly, in this area very close to the centre he actually cannot describe it to you; it's basically in the 19th century tradition of the sublime. All that he can say about it is that it is a kind of void area, and he actually uses the word void in his journals. It is the sort of area where cultural assurity disappears, evaporates, breaks down. Now, by the late 20th century, there is a long history setting up that incomprehensibility, that evaporation, that void at the structural centre of the continent, and I think that the lost child folklore story derives from that long-running cultural history.

Shoesmith: Is this why the Azaria Chamberlain case has been such a powerful modern variant of that? (17)

Gibson: Yes, it throws all sorts of folkloric switches. Similarly the mystery of Pine Gap fits very well too. Without getting into any unsubstantiable conspiracy theory, there are very good reasons for the Americans to locate Pine Gap where they do because it is located in an incomprehensible, inscrutable location where ideas of secrecy and incomprehension are quite logical and perfectly appropriate in folkloric terms. *Voss* is another exemplar of that folkloric tradition - *Voss* of the title disappears inscrutably, uncertainly, at the centre.

O'Regan: There is something to be said here about the difference between the lost girls story in *The Back of Beyond* and its earlier use as a motif by the Heidelberg School. Its depiction has changed over the period. What has changed by *The Back of Beyond* is that the tale of the Lost Girls has to be now located further out in "the back of beyond" whereas, in the McCubbin painting "Girl Lost in the Bush" it was bush around settlement, it was a metaphor which had to do with developmental priorities. By the time of *The Back of Beyond* you are also getting different representational modes. Gone is the "plain air" or impressionist representations of the Heidelberg School, gone too are the Hans Heysen middle period of visualisation of Australia. Instead *The Back of Beyond* has got a lot to do with Sydney Nolan's 1950s modernism - indeed Nolan is supposed to have accompanied Heyer on a trip into the outback. How would you describe it Ross, as modernist, as surrealist?

Gibson: It's a real amalgam of styles. It's modernist. It's also primitivist. It's also surrealist. And I think you are right, by the time the tale is located at that extreme central point of the continent it is much more purely folkloric, much more about the idea of national culture rather than about development and commerce on the fringes of settlement.

It needs to be emphasised that *The Back of Beyond* is interesting to someone in the eighties because it is not buying into the *Voss* tradition of the absolute inscrutability of environment or the unknowable essentialism of some "true" Australian ethos.

O'Regan: Heyer has made the point that a lot of filmmakers prior to *The Overlanders* (1946) were using the bush as a background and his idea was it needed to be foregrounded as an active ingredient. I was wondering how that fitted since Heyer was clearly talking about his own filmmaking practice? (18)

Gibson: It fits in as much as foregrounding the location presents something that is neither ineffable nor alienating in terms of the environment. It's trying to present something which is one component of a symbiotic relationship. There is a society operating on the Birdsville Track which puts some of its shape onto the environment but there is also the environment putting some of its shape onto the society. So there is, once again a blurring of that easy distinction of nature and culture that operates elsewhere.

Another way the Lost Girls story operates in *The Back of Beyond* is purely as a cautionary tale. One of the things it is saying is simply, you have to operate a little more cunningly in a new place like this and you cannot come to it with naiveté. So it is quite literally a cautionary tale in the context of the rest of the film where there are communities operating viably even though there is evidence of other communities that have passed and will never return. Once again it is that idea of minimal narrative operating there all the time. I see the message, if we have to talk about messages in *The Back of Beyond*, as being quite pragmatic. It's just saying there is a way of operating, if not necessarily the only *essential* Australian way of operating.

Shoesmith: How do you read the sequence in which the Aboriginal stockman stands in the ruins of a Christian Mission - and particularly its church - remembering his childhood there and his Christian upbringing with a liturgical ritual performed in an Aboriginal language on the sound track? Is this a similar cautionary tale?

Gibson: The film is so much concerned with adaptation and amalgamation and hybridisation, that the Aborigine feels the sense of loss. But not for what you would expect. His sense of loss is not about the passing of his pure tribal Aboriginality, it's about the loss of an Aboriginal Christianity that made sense to him at the time. The film is thus quite prepared to deal with complexities of acculturation. In not taking purist attitudes to questions of Aboriginality, race, or culture, it is prepared to understand the complexities of voluntary integration and involuntary assimilation as well. This is unusual even today but remember *The Back of Beyond* was made in the 1950s when official government policies espoused the assimilation of Aboriginal and migrant groups into some generalised Australian ethos, and when Aborigines did not even have the right to vote!

O'Regan: Some histories of the visual arts in Australia locate the re-emergence of an interest in picturing the Aboriginal when the more settled regions are foregone by painters in favour of the outback. Of course, when you get into the outback there are different representation systems operating that are certainly not the semi-domesticated Arcadian image represented by the Golden Summers Exhibition but a remake of the sublime as a surrealist thing. With this a whole set of other issues start to erupt - particularly the notion of an Aboriginal at-oneness with the land, of their being the land, and this becomes important to locating figures in the landscape. So the Aboriginal comes back strongly on the agenda of visual and verbal representation systems. How do you see *The Back of Beyond* fitting here?

Gibson: *The Back of Beyond*'s portrayal of the Aboriginal is not in synchrony with that new way of portraying them. Once again the text I think of to point out the comparison is the Aboriginal presence throughout Voss, a presence which is mystical and ineffable. This is very different from the Aborigines portrayed in later Patrick White novels like *A Fringe of Leaves* (19) where they are much more pragmatic, understandable, humanly forgivable, culpable and admirable. To return to *The Back of Beyond*, the christianised Aboriginal stockman is not dissimilar to Tom Kruse the mailman.

Shoesmith: This raises the important question of the place of Tom Kruse. How do you see the figure of Kruse, the ostensible centre of the film, fitting in?

Gibson: The figure of Tom Kruse buys into a whole bushman tradition. He is very much a modern bushman. Take the lovely scene quite early on when Tom and his helper are about to leave Maree for Birdsville having loaded up the mail-truck. As he is putting the truck into gear the postman runs out from the post-office with a couple of letters for Tom which he is loath to take. It seems to me that these letters are an insignia of his location in a permanent spot in society and that is why Tom is loathe to take them - he is about to become a nomad, to become a bushman again. He is presented as having a home, having a job, being a salaried employee, but he is also very knowledgeable about the bush and about ways of behaving and ways of surviving and adapting there. Something of the film's canniness can be seen here. Heyer knows that you have to start from the orthodox conservative mythologies that are predominant in a community to work your changes on that orthodoxy. In this he develops an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary aesthetic.

(20)

Shoesmith: We've talked about representations of masculinity and Aboriginality, but there are some interesting representations of women in *The Back of Beyond*. Behind the

counter of the "most isolated store in the world" is a woman serving. There are the women in the isolated cattle station who we see having conversations over the two way radio. There is the sick Mrs. Mack who is a disembodied voice over the two-way radio. And there is the lost children's mother and her two daughters. Could you comment?

Gibson: The film does endorse the bushman tradition rather unequivocally. The valid criticisms of the bushman tradition have always been that it is obviously a valorisation of traditional male qualities. The film is pretty obviously a document of its times in this respect. It's not that "avant-garde" as far as its sexual politics are concerned! This must be accounted for in one's enthusiasms for the film. If I remember Miriam Dixson (21) correctly, her point is that the role of the women in this process of acculturation of the outback} has never really ever been given due acknowledgment. In part this is also true of *The Back of Beyond*. Unless I am misreading it women seem to be quite ancillary to the true narrative. It is obviously a problem. When you try to think of the modes in which the women operate in the film they're either exclusively domestic or innocent. The girls, also, are portrayed simply as innocents who should have known better, who should have been better acculturated. And the rest of the women in the film are domestic ancillaries.

Moran: On another tack, I can see some connection between a developmentalism operating in 1950s documentaries and the presentation of the environment and people in *The Back of Beyond*. For this developmentalism what we Australians have to do is to make the outback productive, make it yield up its minerals or whatever is there to be taken by modern technological and scientific means. *The Back of Beyond's* agnosticism towards the environment stops the outback from being romanticised. One adapts to it so when the river is flooded Kruse has another truck on the other side. The film is not pro-development but it does reach an accommodation with this developmental ethos.

Gibson: That is probably true. It fits the history of communications policies throughout Australian governmental history. The reason that the Birdsville Track has always been important is because it linked two highly productive regions i.e. Queensland and South Australia. As a communications link there was no necessity to make any of the region around the Track productive in itself. All you had to do was accommodate the communications between two different productive areas. In that way a stoic mentality gets presented in as much as all that is needed is to carry out a holding operation on it. Interestingly enough, though, the film never actually presents the Track as simply a holding operation between two more fundamental regions. It doesn't because that particular central area is understood as being primary to any understanding of national identity, within Australian folklore and culture. So there are pressures working and pulling the film in different directions just around the image of the Track and what it means.

Shoesmith: This raises the issue of how distance is represented in the film. *The Back of Beyond* starts off emphasising how far the Track is from anywhere and how long it takes to traverse it and that point is re-emphasised several times later on. What kind of congruence is there between the film's treatment of distance and the classic explorer's accounts? How was distance dealt with in the writing of Sturt and Mitchell?

Gibson: Let's set up this typology of Mitchell representing one mentality and Sturt and Eyre representing another. Mitchell dealt with distance explicitly. He always said that it

was simply a problem to be overcome by energetic dominion. Sturt and particularly Eyre by the end of their sentimental education's in the landscape take a very different attitude. They see distance more as something to be persevered. You have to overcome the hubris of wandering to traverse anywhere quickly. What you have to do is take your lessons from the text-of the country and move whenever the country says: "go now." There is a passage at the end of Eyre's journals where he tips his hat to the Aboriginals whom he has met along the way. They have taught him to travel light, to move when the country says move. And Tom is obviously in that ilk. You get a sense all the way through the film that Tom is such a valuable character in this community because he's got that kind of nimble sensibility. It's not a bad way to be.

Shoesmith: If there is much that you would expect in a film about the Australian outback in *The Back of Beyond* there is also a lot that you would not expect. Two examples - the unexpected use of a record player to provide diegetic music and the image of Kruse, his helper and their passenger sitting in armchairs on the banks of Coopers Creek which recalls Buñuel?

Gibson: Some of the unexpected things that happen are the repeated set- ups of natural threat, like when a snake is slithering around near Kruse and his helper whilst they're getting themselves out of a bog on a sand dune and talking about adapting gear wheels unsuccessfully. You get this feeling of natural threat and imminent disaster which you'd expect from the folklore of the outback as an alienating, menacing environment - but it just comes to nothing. So too there's the continuing motif of the dingo throughout the film. It is an insignia of threat which comes to nothing.

O'Regan: This raises the question of the formal construction of the film. I am particularly struck by the way in which transitions between sequences are accomplished. A lot of the sequences are ended with a moving away, whether with a trace of what you have heard, or with the camera moving up to the top of the hill and looking down, or with it being at such a distance from the truck that it appears on the horizon. Would you say something about that?

Gibson: The road itself is the narrative trope which allows the film to move in a narrative line but also allows it to stop and digress whenever there is the need to. The idea of an ending which necessarily has to be the beginning of something else happens all the way through. This is explicitly stated in the voice-over commentary: "Every fortnight the story begins". So there is never a finished product of culture in this situation. The only way that culture can continue to exist as culture on the Track is as a process. Every time the process stops - like it does at Father Vogelsang's Mission, it ceases to endure as a cultural artifact or product. This is why the gramophone which appears often in the film is such an important metaphor for it. The idea of continual circular motion is very well summed up in that motif.

O'Regan: One of the things that I noted a couple of times was the striking way in which panning was used to situate activity. For example, there is a scene in which Tom Kruse is underneath the truck. The camera draws back and we see his offside putting the gramophone on, then as it moves around a bit further we see some other kind of activity going on. It is a very carefully contrived camera work. I think that example tells us something about how the film accomplishes its surprises as a documentary.

Gibson: on purely formal terms what it does is to create a powerful sense of off-screen space all the time which helps give the viewer a sense that anything s/he sees is just one spot on a continuum. This works to invalidate any idea of a contained spatial entity and by implication a contained cultural product. In a way too the Birdsville Track is not necessarily a road that goes from A to B but is instead one you have to bend around, because Tom's run goes A, B, A, B. Heyer finds all kinds of formal methods to develop this idea of an ongoing process. He really was a sophisticated director.

Notes

1. Ross Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise* (Sydney: Sirius, 1984).
2. *Camera Natura* (1986), director - Ross Gibson; producer - John Cruthers.
3. *Back of Beyond* (1954), Shell Film Unit. direction: John Heyer; script John and Janet Heyer; narration: Douglas Stewart, John Heyer; photography: Ross Wood; music: Sydney John Kay, narrator: Kevin Brennan; length 66 minutes. Cast Tom Kruse, William Butler, Jack the Dogger, Old Joe the Rainmaker, the Oldfields of Etadinna, Bejah, Malcolm Arkaringa, the people of the Birdsville Track. Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper note that it was televised extensively overseas, represented Australia at several film festivals, including Edinburgh and Venice, where it won the Grand Prix in 1954 (*Australian Film 1900-1977*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980).
4. "Interview with John Heyer" *Cinema Papers*, Sept. 1976, p. 121. Xavier Herbert's novel is an Australian classic. It is one of the first Australian novels to explicitly address racial injustice.
5. *The Overlanders* (1946), director: Harry Watt; Ealing Studios Production.
6. Patrick White, *Voss* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957).
7. Charles Sturt, *Narrative of an expedition into Central Australia: Performed under the authority of Her Majesty's Government, during the years 1844, 5 and 6 by Captain Charles Sturt* (original published in 1849 rept. Adelaide: Public Library of South Australia, 1963); and *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia, during the years 1828, 1829, 1830 and 1831* (original published in 1833 rept. Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1963); and Edward Eyre, *Journals of Expeditions of Discovery into Central Australia and Overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound in the years 1840-41 by Edward John Eyre* (original published 1854, rept. Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964).
8. Thomas Mitchell, *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia* (London: Boone, 1965).
9. See Ross Gibson, "Yondering: A Reading of 'Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome'", *Art & Text*, no. 19 (1985), pp.26-33.
10. Eric Else, *The Back of Beyond* (London: British Film Institute, 1968)
11. *Night Mail* (1936), producer: John Grierson; director: Harry Watt and Basil Wright; script: Grierson, Wright, Watt; verse: W.H.Auden- GPO Film Unit.
12. *Interview with John Heyer*, p. 121.

13. Patrick Wright, *Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London Verso, 1985), pp. 56-8.
14. David Thomson, *Suspects* (London Picador, 1986), p.42.
15. *In a Lonely Place* (1950) director: Nicholas Ray, Cast Humphrey Bogart, Gloria Grahame.
16. Jane Clark and Bridget Whitelaw *Golden Summers - Heidelberg and Beyond* (Melbourne: the International Cultural Corporation of Australia" 1985). Exhibition organised by the Australian Gallery of Victoria.
17. Azaria Chamberlain case: in 1982 a baby girl disappeared supposedly taken by a dingo. Her mother was accused of murder, was sentenced for life and released from prison in 1986. In mid 1987 a judicial enquiry found that her mother should not have been found guilty and indeed that the case should have been dismissed.
18. John Heyer, "Geography and Documentary Film: Australia", *The Geographical Magazine*, v. XXX, no.5 (Sept.1957), pp. 234-243.
19. Patrick White *A Fringe of Leaves* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).
20. Gibson noted that this same aesthetic could be seen operating in the *Mad Max* trilogy.
21. Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 188-1975* (Ringwood: Penguin 1976).

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Put up: 5 January 1996

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