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# Breaking the Frame: The Representation of Aborigines in Australian Film

## **Abstract**

It is hard to deny that Australia has a racist past, and is only now coming to terms with a racist present. Even the bicentennial celebrations in January 1988 failed to confront the guilt of the past, attempting to observe a tactful silence on the Aboriginal's role in Australia's achievements as a nation. This silence is bound to be broken, however. The Bicentennial year will see the reenactment of the arrival of the First Fleet, but it will also see the continuation of Justice Muirhead's royal commission into the alarming number of black Australians who have died in police custody in the last few years, and the completion of Justice Einfeld's report on the 1987 race riots on the Queens-land/N.S.W. border. In at least one capital city, stencilled messages saying, 'Celebrate 88, kill an Abo', have appeared on pavements and walls. Given such events, and given the relationship between the ideologies of a culture and its representations of itself in film, it is hardly surprising that racism still structures the representation of Aborigines in Australian film.

## Breaking the Frame: The Representation of Aborigines in Australian Film

It is hard to deny that Australia has a racist past, and is only now coming to terms with a racist present. Even the bicentennial celebrations in January 1988 failed to confront the guilt of the past, attempting to observe a tactful silence on the Aboriginal's role in Australia's achievements as a nation. This silence is bound to be broken, however. The Bicentennial year will see the re-enactment of the arrival of the First Fleet, but it will also see the continuation of Justice Muirhead's royal commission into the alarming number of black Australians who have died in police custody in the last few years, and the completion of Justice Einfeld's report on the 1987 race riots on the Queensland/N.S.W. border. In at least one capital city, stencilled messages saying, 'Celebrate 88, kill an Abo', have appeared on pavements and walls. Given such events, and given the relationship between the ideologies of a culture and its representations of itself in film, it is hardly surprising that racism still structures the representation of Aborigines in Australian film.

As Eric Michaels has pointed out, 'the dominant filmic and documentary conventions (not to mention the ethics) applied to imaging Aborigines [in Australian films] are rarely more recent than the 1950s'.<sup>1</sup> There is a small academic industry dealing with this, suggesting typologies, outlining the functions served by the categories which define the representations of Aborigines, and proposing a history of the ideologies and institutions which produce the categories.<sup>2</sup> Many of these articles have been useful and I will rehearse some of their arguments later in this discussion. But there are a number of problems inherent in white Australian academics attempting to step outside their ideological frame and interrogate white Australia's construction of the Aboriginal. These problems are theoretical – that is, one has to explain what one is doing – and political – that is, it can be seen as an act of intellectual tourism, inspecting the very set of relations which provides white academics with their privilege and power.

In practice, the political contradiction tends to be accepted and borne; it is the theoretical issue which is seen as the simple one. Most discussions of the

representation of Aborigines in Australian films argue that they patronize the Aboriginal as a confused primitive; or represent them as limited and constrained by their race (or their 'blood') in ways not experienced by whites; or see them as a disappearing, anachronistic species for whom we should accept responsibility and feel sympathy. Criticisms of such constructions usually make the very proper point that such a body of images or understandings of the Aboriginal proposes a white view of the Aboriginal as definitive. Since the culture's idea of reality is produced by and reproduced in its representations, such definitions become the way in which Aboriginality is understood. If the definitions are racist, they will naturalize racist assumptions.

There is little that is contentious about this. However, the next step is. Customarily, critiques of the representation of Aborigines metamorphose into programmes of intervention in the representational and ideological process, aimed at interrogating and overturning the dominant constructions. They move into a corrective mode, proposing alternative constructions in place of the racist ones. Behind such a programme there is a degree of theoretical slippage in the understanding of representation; in the search for a less racist set of images, representation is effectively defined as the work of accurately capturing, rather than ideologically constituting, the real. This means that the questions asked of the racist versions are not asked of their revision: whose version is being proposed, and in whose interests will it work? In the new version, it is implied, representation has been divorced from ideology.

Those of us who find existing conventions unacceptable would, of course, like Aborigines to be represented in ways that were more 'accurate' – that is, more closely accorded with a non-racist construction of their culture. Even if this can be achieved, however, it is worth asking if white Australians are the ones who should be responsible; there is an implicit paternalism in the call for a white reconstruction of a black reality. What whites recognize as a non-racist image of the Aboriginal may not be recognized as such by Aborigines. Whites falsely assume that because they can detect the racist agenda underlying so many of their films they are also in possession of the knowledge of what would be a more acceptable agenda to the Aborigine.

The intractability and the importance of such issues was brought home to me by an article on Australian film by the Aboriginal author, Colin Johnson.<sup>3</sup> Johnson begins his discussion with Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955), and although he initially describes it as a 'sort of Tarzan in black face' he goes on to explain that there is an Aboriginal way of viewing this film which contradicts conventional white assumptions of its inherent, if inevitable, racism. Johnson suggests the film has an Aboriginal reading, focussing on 'the stealing of women, the social problem of wrongway relationships, and ... the fear/attraction of Mission-educated Aboriginal women when confronted by their Aboriginality in the form of an Aboriginal male ... in full control of his

being'.<sup>4</sup> Johnson sees Tudawali's Marbuk (the male lead in *Jedda*) as 'the only dignified Aboriginal male lead that has been allowed to exist in films made by white directors in Australia'. He supports this judgement in the following remarks: 'I followed up [my interest in *Jedda*] by asking other Aboriginal people whether they found the film more attractive than recent films. Those who viewed the film said that they did, and it was precisely the depiction of the Aboriginal male on which they commented.'<sup>5</sup> Johnson goes on to compare the treatment of Marbuk in *Jedda* with that of Jimmie in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, and the Aboriginal community generally in Beresford's *The Fringe Dwellers*. The result of the comparison is to challenge the accepted wisdom of white film critics who see both films as sensitive and accurate portrayals of Aboriginality.

Whatever one may think of, say, Beresford's achievement in *The Fringe Dwellers*, one can see Johnson's point. Robert Tudawali's Marbuk is tremendously powerful in *Jedda*. Tudawali is a star, and carries immense conviction on the screen; it is hard to think of any Australian actor, white or black, who signifies sexual power as comprehensively. It is significant that the challenge Marbuk issues to white society is never actually met. Marbuk dies, as Johnson puts it, 'because he has offended tribal law rather than because of anything the white man has shot at him'.<sup>6</sup> However, my point in reviewing this argument is not to propose a new Aboriginal reading of *Jedda* but rather to emphasize how easily (even inevitably) white critics can reproduce paternalistic assumptions about just what is a favourable, acceptable, or accurate representation of Aboriginal culture. As Johnson's argument makes abundantly clear, it is not a matter of simply inverting conventional narrative structures and centring the Aboriginal as the hero.

One practical point emerges from this. If we are interested in films which challenge rather than simply reproduce existing racist ideologies, we must realize how important it is for black Australians to have access to the media of representation, and to the means of distributing their own representations. But a second point also demands attention. Attacking the conventions of representation is only attacking the very last link in a chain of cultural production. Most interest in the representation of Aborigines in film has focussed on the film texts, to the exclusion of the material connections between texts and their determinants in institutions, government policy and discourse. Such connections require examinations if we are to address the problem of changing the products of our cultural system. The genuine usefulness of Moore and Muecke's article is of this kind, and I want to use it as the means of moving this discussion forward.

Moore and Muecke connect racist representations of Aborigines with orientations in Australian cultural policy, or, as they put it, 'the way in which representations emerge from the use of filmic codes and techniques as they are articulated within social institutions and policies'. 'What sorts of

film-making techniques,' they ask, were 'deployed in the service of the government policy of assimilation, or multi-culturalisms?'"<sup>7</sup> They argue that a set of specific categories organized and structured all discursive formations of Aboriginality:

The first [of these categories] ... is the paternalistic *assimilationist* formation; a number of films were made during the fifties and sixties which were part of this formation. This was followed by a liberal *multi-cultural* formation, and this is with us to the present day. The third formation relates to a linking of Aboriginal groups and individuals with leftist *independent* film-making groups. The films resulting are significantly seen as being produced within an ideology of 'self-determination' (the government's phrase) or 'community control' (the Aborigines' phrase).<sup>8</sup>

They outline an agenda for Australian cultural policy in the 1950s which frames the Aboriginal 'problem' largely in terms of Aboriginals' potential for integration into the white community. *Jedda* is specifically about integration, but offers little hope for its achievement. Moore and Muecke also list a number of government films, such as those made by the W.A. Department of Native Welfare, which were aimed at inculcating white middle-class values into their black charges. Australia's first Aboriginal university graduate and the current head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Charles Perkins, was a particular favourite of film-makers in the sixties, being the subject of two films which depicted him as a model for his people, to whom 'the course of his life' was presumed to be 'as miraculous as a tribal myth'.<sup>9</sup> Australian-produced feature films, of course, were rare in this period but in those which were produced the Aboriginal was used in much the same way Tarzan films used the African.

The advent of the cultural pluralism of the early 1970s might appear to have opened up new opportunities for blacks, but Moore and Muecke argue that multi-culturalism also provided an alibi for later governments who preferred to leave the Aborigines to their own devices; the transfer of responsibility to Aboriginal communities often meant a cut in funding, and a reluctance to take on the Aboriginals' cause in states-rights disputes such as that at Noonkanbah in W.A. in 1979. Nevertheless, the representations of Aborigines in the first decade of the film industry revival, from 1971-1980, were markedly more positive, more knowledgeable, and more tolerant. The value of Aboriginal culture had certainly become more widely accepted but it was also more marketable as Australiana. With recognition came incorporation as such films as *The Last Wave* exploited Aboriginality as a cinematic exotic. Moore and Muecke also make the point that 'multi-cultural' films such as *Storm Boy*, *The Last Wave*, *Manganinnie* or *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, still offered a Romantic, patronizing view of the Aboriginal, constructing them as 'unitary in relation to some essential (and unknowable) principle such as the "spirituality of the dreaming" or "the closeness to na-

ture" which ultimately engenders all action'.<sup>10</sup> This may seem a churlish rejection of a considerable liberalization of white attitudes, but Moore and Muecke's final criticisms of multi-culturalism are telling:

...with multi-culturalism a certain 'positivisation' of Aboriginal culture occurs. This positive process of recognition allows for the acceptance of Aboriginal art, dance, language, etc. whilst simultaneously screening out aspects like extended family forms, aspects of Aboriginal law, 'undesirable' social habits, 'unhealthy' environments and economic independence, within a rigid social harmony. In this sense, the notion of 'common humanity' should be seen as a ruse. Multi-culturalism, an admirable doctrine on paper, in effect allows for specific frameworks of recognition and acceptance. It, in effect, makes for new constructions of Aboriginal culture which should not be uncritically accepted as the result of progress or humanitarian leanings.<sup>11</sup>

One should not underestimate the recuperative powers of ideology.

Indeed, as Moore and Muecke move on to more contemporary developments they, too, reveal their comprehensive implication in the ideological system - albeit as proponents of resistance to dominant structures and meanings. In the last section of their study, they are no longer able to maintain the lofty objectivity of the historical survey. Their discussion of contemporary independent films is severely doctrinaire, with the film-makers' good intentions all too predictably juxtaposed against their unforeseen but reactionary consequences. Moore and Muecke's search for a value-free representation or, rather, for a seamless union between a film and their own ideological formations, dominates their last few pages and leads them to criticize films which, while never entirely breaking out of their ideological frame, seem to me to have negotiated significant modifications in dominant views of the Aboriginal. *Lousy Little Sixpence*, for one, retrieved a hitherto submerged history of Aboriginals' treatment (that of welfare agencies' systematic abduction of Aboriginals' children between the 1930s and 1950s) and situated it within a demonology of white racism for black and white Australians.

What Moore and Muecke's piece lacks is a degree of generosity in their assessment of the efforts of white and black film-makers to break out of an ideologically regulated representational system. It is supremely difficult to interrogate the system of meaning one uses, as one uses it, and still be understood by an audience. The 'failure' Moore and Muecke attribute to the makers of *Lousy Little Sixpence* should not be seen as a personal failure. It simply demonstrates the pervasiveness of ideology, infiltrating films made with the most impeccable of political intentions. As we shall see, the problem is not an isolated one; the history of Australian films is full of productions which have had good intentions but which are inevitably and hopelessly trapped within the very discourses they use.

*Jedda*, made in 1955, was itself a particularly daring and liberal film for its time. From a contemporary perspective, however, its naivety and Romanticism are only too clear (we tend not to see the assumptions underlying our

own period's films so clearly). The characters are defined through their race, and unapologetically so. Any confusion Jedda feels as she is torn between white society and 'her own kind', is depicted as a riot in the blood, a triumph of nature over culture. In one scene, Jedda is playing some western classical music on the homestead piano. Outside, the tribal, sexually threatening, black male - Marbuk - is singing a song which completes deep emotional connections in the young girl. The camera portrays her confusion by cross-cutting between her increasingly exercised face and a painted bark shield hanging on the wall immediately in her view. As her agitation increases, the shield visibly vibrates, the manipulation of focus mimicking the dilation of her vision as she fights to retain her hold on white rationality. This is comic for audiences now; the scene's assumptions are so dated and the filmic techniques used to represent them so melodramatic. But it is representative of the definition of racial difference in our films - then and now - as genetic rather than cultural.

There are standard strategies for differentiating between white and black in Australian cinema.<sup>12</sup> There is, for instance, the invocation of a kind of biological imperative which links 'black' blood and 'black' behaviour. Within such discourses the black is animal-like, helpless before the call of the wild - as is Jedda - and is thus seen to be in some way finally biologically determined. This is related to the next discursive strategy: that of collapsing distinctions between the Aboriginal and nature. Aborigines have been, and continue to be seen as metonyms for an Australian landscape; like kangaroos and Ayers Rock, they are among the natural attributes of the continent. This is dehumanizing, and has served to legitimate white settlers' treatment of the Aborigines as pests well into the twentieth century. It is also a way of displacing the social, cultural and political problems. To see the Aboriginal as a dying species rather than a subordinated culture is to explain their condition as the result of the inevitable operation of natural forces rather than as the product of a specific history. Finally, the most obvious sign of difference is the deployment of blackness itself. A sign of evil, of the primitive and the unknown for western cultures, blackness is mobilized in Chauvel's depiction of Marbuk as a symbol for the instinctive and unconscious recesses of Jedda's personality. Similar symbolic deployments of blackness occur in more recent and (one would have thought) more enlightened Australian films in the service of similar thematic and ideological ends.

The development of white understandings of the particular character of Aboriginal spirituality (that is, we know more than Chauvel did when he made *Jedda*) has not produced the radical reconsiderations one might have expected. Indeed, to be seen as the possessors of an ancient but passé mysticism is not necessarily to the Aborigines' advantage since it renders them even more unfit for white society, places them at an even greater remove from white rationality. The sense of a culture lost, of an irretrievable epis-

temology, is all too often invoked as an alibi for restricting white interest in the Aboriginal to the sentimental regret for the passing of their tribal culture. So Eric Michaels' remark, quoted at the beginning of this discussion, that little has changed in Australian film since the 1950s, is perhaps not surprising; it does deserve some extension and demonstration, however, by a survey of some of the 'enlightened' films of the revival.

*Walkabout*, for instance, was made in 1971 by the English director, Nicholas Roeg. While it was in many respects both intelligent and perceptive, Roeg's film effortlessly recycled conventional views of the Australian landscape and of Aboriginality. The two were intertwined, as frill-necked lizards competed with David Gulipilil in the signification of strangeness, otherness, the Antipodes. Gulipilil's Aborigine acts as the guide for two lost children, mediating between them and the harsh landscape. He also attempts to construct a closer relationship than this with the girl, who (understandably, in the film's eyes) responds with fear and alarm. The rejected Aboriginal hangs himself but the children survive to later indulge in nostalgic daydreams of the lost opportunity of a Romantic idyll in Nature with the noble savage. As in so many films depicting the clash of cultures, the whites survive the ordeal but the black does not.

While Fred Schepisi's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978) is far more conscious of its assumptions than either *Jedda* or *Walkabout*, there are similarities between the films which do not flatter the more recent production. Jimmie has moments of confusion and frustration produced by the racial cocktail brewing in his veins. When Jimmie, Mort, and the captive schoolteacher reach the desecrated sacred site in the mountains, Jimmie is confused and weakened by his conflicting loyalties and responsibilities. Like *Jedda*, he is rendered immobile by his biology. As is the case with *Walkabout*, the merging of the black man with nature is a deliberate effect of the film's cinematography,<sup>13</sup> let alone the ideology of the narrative. Schepisi has talked about his deliberate blending of the Aborigine with the landscape, making him indistinguishable from it in order to establish the difference between the Aboriginal submersion in the land and the whites' occupation of the land. Well-meaning though this is, its consequence is the naturalization of the Aboriginal's marginal and subordinated place within white culture, the recycling of racist alibis for their failure to assimilate, and the sentimentalization of their culture. More importantly, for the film as a whole, it obscures the fact that there is nothing 'natural' about Jimmie's condition or the lack of any 'natural' place for him in the social contexts the film provides. In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Jimmie is composed entirely contradictorily, as both social problem and biological battleground; as a product of white history and of the social relations of his race; as a victim of white prejudice and of his own confused blood.

It should be noted that Schepisi's film does genuinely try to renovate racist constructions of Aboriginality, and his intentions deserve respect. Nevertheless, he made no contact with Aboriginal groups to advise him on the project, and accepted a sensationalist advertising campaign that trivialized the main thrust of his film. (The bloody axe-head logo for the film was possibly responsible for what Colin Johnson said was his lingering impression, that of 'berserk boongs hacking to death white ladies').<sup>14</sup>

No such alibi could be offered for Peter Weir's *The Last Wave* (1977), which unashamedly exploits a white mythology of blackness. In a film which continually infers rather than depicts the supernatural, the uncanny, and the mystical, the lingering close-up on the black face is a central strategy for sustaining the threat of disruption. Here all the old assumptions about the difference of the black race are mobilized as motivational agents for a supernatural thriller. Weir's detribalized Aborigines may be living in the city, but they retain a race memory from centuries ago. Their memories are, as it were, in their blood - even the diluted blood of the white lawyer, David, who shares a fraction of their ancestry. Biological determinism at its most uncomplicated provides the narrative justification for the Aborigines' premonition of a tidal wave destroying Sydney; for David's sharing of that premonition; and even for the capacity to register and recognize such a premonition. The whole farrago of supernatural goings-on is given a specific material location: a lost underworld of darkness, ritual, and contagion in the sewers emptying onto Bondi beach. Admittedly, the film has a limited interest in or need for realistic plot-lines or a liberal politics, but its unthinking recycling of Darwinian racial myths is implicitly reactionary.

In many Australian films, the structure of the plot holds the clue to the apportionment of power to Aboriginal culture and its representatives. As Johnson points out, Marbuk is not a victim of the white man, but of his own law, and thus retains a degree of independence not found in (say) Jimmie Blacksmith. One structural factor which Kevin Brown has noted<sup>15</sup> is the number of films depicting a conflict between the black and white worlds which employ a go-between. The rigidity of the racial opposition is established in the need for a character to mediate it. In many cases, the go-between is white: David in *The Last Wave*, the reporter in *Tudawali*, young Mike in *Storm Boy*. In most cases where the go-between is black - *Walkabout*, *Jimmie Blacksmith*, *Jedda* - the result of their attempt to cross the opposition is death. Even a film as aware of its constituent politics as Steve Jodrell's recent *Tudawali* still implied that while whites can cross the divide between the cultures, the Aborigines can't. There are important exceptions to this - *Backroads*, *Wrong Side of the Road* - but the place of the Aboriginal within the structure of the narrative is all too often an index of the limits of his or her personal and social power.

As Jodrell's *Tudawali* reminds us, it is difficult for commercially distributed films to break out of the frame, to resist the simple reproduction of stereotyped characters and existing power relations. Brown's paper on this topic<sup>16</sup> juxtaposed two revealing pieces of research on the practices of casting Aboriginals for Australian films. He recounted the problems the Chauvels experienced in casting Marbuk; they wanted a tribal Aboriginal, deeply black in colour, a perfect icon of the race but one which even then had almost disappeared. The result of the Chauvels' search for the 'right' look inevitably reproduced the existing stereotype rather than suggested some need for its modification. Brown also recounted a description of Schepisi's search for Jimmie Blacksmith – where the same discourse of finding the 'right' look was used. Far from criticizing these two producers, the point was made that the industry authorized such searches as necessities; the film-makers could admit no alternative to the attempt to find the 'right look' – that is, one that entirely meshed with the expectations, even the prejudices, of the projected audience. One is forced to conclude that film's structural relation to its culture, its ability to both produce and reproduce its ideologies but not to substantially change them, makes it unlikely that large-scale renovations in Australian constructions of Aboriginality will originate in a feature film.

The system of racial difference the culture has set up is one which sees white and black as mutually exclusive categories; one is what the other is not. Unless this determining structural relation is exploded it reproduces itself endlessly, no matter how often we shift it onto new terrain. If we *are* to find a way of reconstructing the representation of the Aboriginal race in film, it will be through supporting the efforts of Aboriginals to make their *own* films and to present them to white audiences. Ned Landers' *Wrong Side of the Road* offers an example of what such a film might be like, as it sets out to dissolve differences, to largely dispense with white signifiers of Aboriginality, while still dealing with the subordination of Aboriginal culture.

It is likely that white Australians will have to become more familiar with Aboriginal representations of their world. As Tracey Moffatt has protested in *Filmnews*, Aboriginal film-makers are more active and successful than the white film community may be prepared to admit:

I'm sick of being told I'm part of a race of people who are continually on the verge of emerging.

For christsakes we're here baby! To mention a few: CAAMA, Murri Image, Madalaine McGrady, Byron Syron, Michael Riley and myself. I've made one film and two videos this year, successful both here and internationally. With my phone ringing hot; SBS, ABC, Film Australia as well as numerous Aboriginal organizations and communities.<sup>17</sup>

Tracey Moffatt's *Nice Coloured Girls* is only one recent example of a well respected if not yet widely screened film about Aboriginals which subverts conventional white coding of Aboriginality. The granting of a television li-

cence to an Aboriginal collective in the Northern Territory also offers hope of an alternative set of meanings and practices emanating from the Aboriginal community. However, this collective, *Imparja*, is also a sobering reminder of how difficult this reorientation will be: how asymmetrical the power relations are at all levels and in all locations. As a result of pressure from the Northern Territory government (ostensibly worried about discrimination in favour of Aborigines, and the possibility their TV programming would not allow enough for white interests!) *Imparja* has had to accept a greater degree of commercial sponsorship than originally intended. It is now an informal member of the Nine network, buying its programmes and syndicating much of its advertising through this network. As a result of this and other compromises forced upon them, *Imparja* still only employs two Aboriginal workers, and programmes only an hour a week of specialist Aboriginal programmes. Its first day of broadcasting offered a chilling reminder of the major media owners' facility for incorporation: opening with a specialist Aboriginal programme, *Imparja* soon settled down into a diet of sitcoms and cricket.

Nevertheless, the key question is no longer how do whites represent Aborigines in Australian film, but how are Aborigines going to do it. Aboriginal film-makers now face the dilemma of constituting an image of themselves - virtually from whole cloth - that will renovate existing images and still be comprehensible. It is still too early to tell just what Aboriginal film-makers will do with the medium, exactly what kinds of intervention will emerge over the next five years, and how these will be incorporated into white iconographies of race. The past has shown how impossible it is for whites to make a film which is independent of the ideological frame; the future will see if the Aborigines can break free in their use of the medium.

Perhaps the fact that such a question can now urgently be posed indicates that things have changed. As Eric Michaels puts it:

Aborigines and Aboriginality have always been subject to appropriation by European Australians, so that we consider the production of Aboriginal images for mass consumption as a right, if not a responsibility, of a nation consumed with the manufacture of its own mythology. None of this should prove to be novel considerations for Australian film scholars, engaged as we are in a self-conscious exploration of the received post-modernist debate and its application to the national situation. In that discourse we learn of the power of inscription, the disappearance of the signified, as it collapses into the signifier. What may be news is who Australia now regards as having the rights to make this appropriation.<sup>18</sup>

Less hopefully, Michaels goes on to suggest that whoever ends up dominating the discourses of Aboriginality in film, television, and in the media generally - the 'exotic' avant-garde film producers, the local Aboriginal television communities, or the Aboriginal 'experts' (politically or academically authorized) - 'they will write the new Aboriginal history'.<sup>149</sup> This worries Michaels - and should also worry others - as an entirely new set of possi-

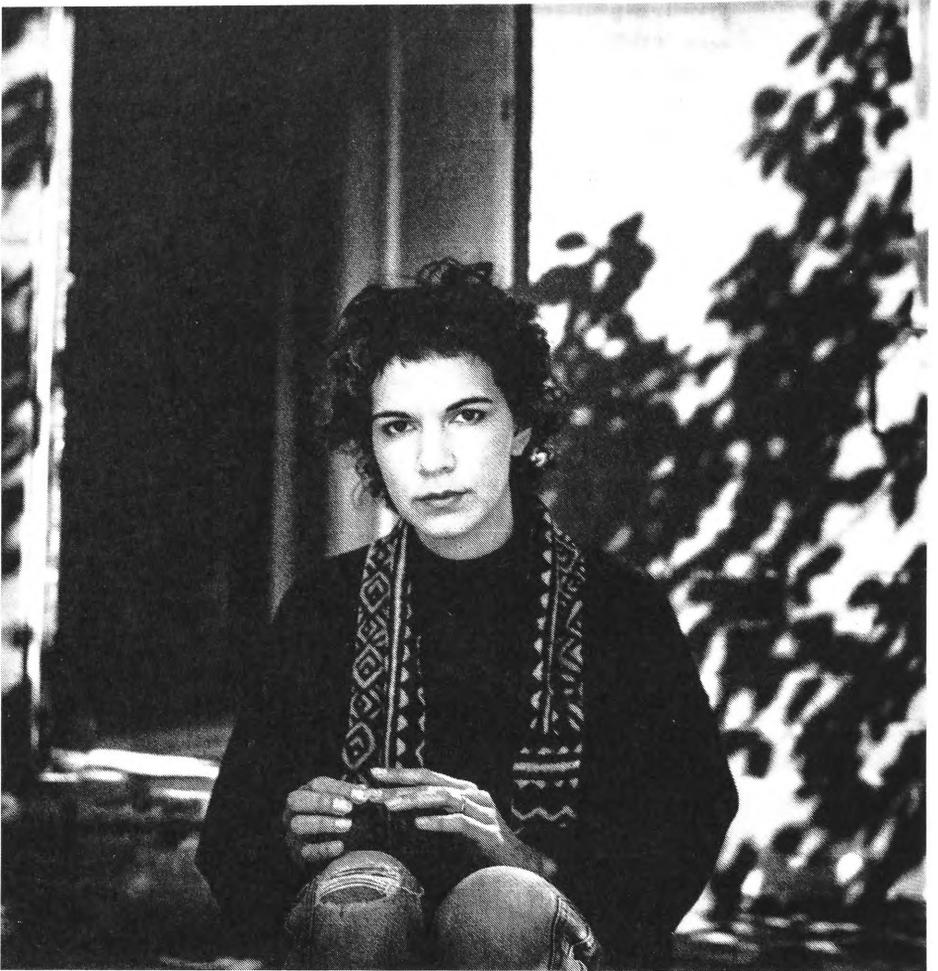
bilities are ushered in, all far removed from, and potentially destructive of, the traditional basis of Aboriginal life. Paradoxically, now that Aboriginals are gaining some control over the production, and perhaps soon the dissemination, of their own images they face even greater risks, because there is more at stake than when whites had appropriated this responsibility for themselves.

#### NOTES

1. Eric Michaels, 'Aboriginal Content: Who's Got It - Who Needs It?', *Art and Text*, 24, 1986, p. 74.
2. See Catriona Moore and Stephen Muecke, 'Racism and the Representation of Aborigines in Film', *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2:1, 1984, pp. 36-53.
3. Colin Johnson, 'Chauvel and the Aboriginal Male in Australian Film', *Continuum*, 1:1, 1987, pp. 47-57.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
7. Moore and Muecke, p. 36.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
12. Kevin Brown, 'Fiction, Documentary and the Aboriginal Look: *The Last Wave* and the Representation of Aborigines in Australian Feature Films', paper presented to the History and Film Conference, Brisbane, December 1987.
13. See the interview with Schepisi in Sue Matthews' *35 MM Dreams* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1984), pp. 23-66.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
15. 'Fiction, Documentary and the Aboriginal Look'.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Filmnews*, 17:11, 1987, p. 2.
18. Eric Michaels, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
19. *Ibid.*

#### FILMS REFERRED TO:

*Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith, The* (1978) dir. Fred Schepisi  
*Fringe Dwellers, The* (1986) dir. Bruce Beresford  
*Jedda* (1955) dir. Charles Chauvel  
*Last Wave, The* (1977) dir. Peter Weir  
*Lousy Little Sixpence*, dir. Gerry Bostock and Alex Morgan  
*Manganinnie* (1981) dir. John Honey  
*Nice Coloured Girls* (1987) dir. Tracey Moffatt  
*Storm Boy* (1976) dir. Henri Safran  
*Tudawali* (1987) dir. Stephen Jodrell  
*Walkabout* (1971) dir. Nicholas Roeg  
*Wrong Side of the Road* (1985) dir. Ned Landers



Tracey Moffatt

Photo: Reece Scannell