BLOKES AND CARS:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES
IN AUSTRALIAN FILM

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Amendments

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Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of masculinities in the genre of Australian film known as 'car crash' films. My gaze is directed at how representations of masculinity are created on the screen, and I employ a fictocritical approach to make my argument. I use a number of film texts to discuss how representations of vehicular masculinity are validated, and how heroism is often associated with mastery of a motor vehicle. Given that gender is a construction, I contend that the gender-technology relation constructs technology as masculine culture. The automobile is often pivotal in rites of passage and manifestations of masculinity, for working-class men in particular, because other means to perform adulthood and gender are frequently unattainable. Membership of the masculine hegemony can appear within reach when behind the wheel of a 'hot' automobile that signifies power, freedom, escape, conspicuous consumption and control. Moreover, resistance is also performed in motor vehicles and is manifested in behaviours such as speeding, doing chirpies or burnouts, and playing chicken. These automotive exhibitions are performances of a form of protest masculinity or hypermasculinity. The male characters in car crash films look to the streets and to the screen to enact blatant constructions of an overt mechanical masculinity, and I map their performative journey.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

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INTRODUCTION

'As if a Wheel had been in the Midst of a Wheel'

In the constitution of identity through complex, shifting, identifications, the popular cinema forms one space in which identities can be affirmed, dissolved and redefined within a fantasy space. This space affirms a range of identities at the same time as it mobilises identifications and desires which undermine the stability of such categories. It would be a negation of the operation of power either to argue that all audiences are free to make any identifications they wish, or to ignore the significance of political affiliations constituted out of such identifications as 'sex', 'object choice', or 'race' (Tasker 1993, 165-166).

First things first, cars are phallic symbols. Now, with that cliché out of the way, shall we begin? Let's get this show on the road. Kick it in the guts, Barry![1]

Australian cinema has always told stories about mythical manhood—about bushrangers, and battlers, larrikins and soldiers—blokes dominate the cinematic landscape. These representations of Australian masculinity cast a shadow over those in the audience; and, somewhere in between the screen and the street, working class men grapple with what it means to be a 'man' in Australia. From the confused assortment of ockers, bushmen, and unlikely sex symbols in the early revival films in the 1970s, two 'average' blokes take a detour to a town called Paris, and change the course of Australian cinema. They discover that there is something disturbing brewing in the countryside—it is the struggle to manifest masculinity from behind the wheel of a car. This thesis will follow their journey, and map their celluloid performances of vehicular hypermasculinity in the car crash genre in Australian cinema.

The images that appeared on Australian screens in the 1970s are now being examined in light of the gender-technology relation and car culture more generally—the cultural landscape and streetscape are shifting. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the discourses surrounding science, technology, and gender are now being read as indicative that technology is a masculine culture. Whether the focus is gender, technology studies, art, or class, vehicular culture continues to fascinate and is the subject of increasingly diverse and sophisticated analysis. In 1998 the Guggenheim Museum launched a lavish exhibition celebrating the motorcycle (and published a comprehensive volume to commemorate the exhibition). In March 2002 the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney opened an exhibition entitled 'Harleys: Two Wheeled Warriors' which examines the history and culture of Harley-Davidsons in Australia (Albert 2002). The Australian car culture is engaging attention with exhibitions such as the 'Cars and Culture: Our Driving Passions' installation at the Powerhouse Museum in 1998, and the 'On the Road' exhibition at the Heide Museum of Modern Art in Melbourne in 1999/2000. The National Motor Museum (in Birdwood, South Australia)

has also helped to raise the cultural profile of the automobile. Its recent 'Living in the 70s' exhibition was extremely successful, and, given the 2002 re-launch of the iconic Monaro, the new 'Monaro Mania' exhibition promises to be equally popular. Moreover, as part of the 2002 Adelaide Festival of Arts an event called 'Shishka-car' was held at Murray Bridge, which claimed to be a ritual slaughter of a car as sacred object to signify the fetishised violence and dominance of Australian car culture (Love 2002). However, life is stranger than art, and the real slaughter of cars that takes place at the Night Wars at Bathurst every year (and is documented in the *Go Hard or Go Home* (2000, 2001) documentaries) demonstrates the intense emotions that cars can evoke from Australian men. Odes to motor vehicles regularly infiltrate our airways with songs such as 'Jump in my Car', 'Drive', 'On the Prowl', 'In a Silver Top', 'Fast Car Driving', and 'What Rhymes with Cars and Girls'. Such rituals, performances, and exhibitions illustrate that car culture is an accepted part of Australia's artistic, theatrical and musical heritage.

A renaissance in the academic study of car culture is occurring as critical material emerges that does more than merely historicise the automobile, or confine itself to discussions of road narratives. Substantial studies are now emerging in America, France, and Australia, as we come to grips with a machine that has irrevocably changed the cultural and physical landscape of the western world. Unsurprisingly, French theorists such as Roland Barthes (1972, 1979), Jean Baudrillard (1988, 1996), and Michel De Certeau (1993) are providing inspiration for many scholars. Following their example, Kristen Ross (1995) provides an excellent insight into French automotive culture, and the effect of American automobility on film and the arts in France. In America, several publications have provided a platform for innovative approaches to the field (see Bayley 1986, Marsh and Collett 1986, Primeau 1996, Casey 1997, Lackey 1997, or Lewis and Goldstein 1983). Increasingly, studies are branching out from 'traditional' literary criticism of road narratives, histories, and biographies, and are examining car culture in film, media, art, advertising, and music.

In Australia, the renaissance is being led by women, as scholars such as Katherine Biber, Delia Falconer, Georgine Clarsen, and Meaghan Morris are publishing work based on road and vehicular texts. Unlike American literature, Australian literature is not teeming with car-centred tomes. However, texts such as *Holden's Performance, My Love had a Black Speed Stripe, Illywhacker, The Tax Collector, Hiam, Return to Coolami,* and 'Crabs' are exceptions, and they use automobiles in an imaginative fashion. The stage play *White With Wire Wheels,* and the radio play/short story *What's Rangoon to you is Grafton to Me* are also innovative additions to the car canon. Several recent documentary series (such as *Auto Stories, Bush Mechanics* and *Car Crash*) have grappled with vehicular culture and have helped contextualise the automobile in contemporary Australian life. However, it is in Australian film, and in the car crash genre in particular, that the car looms as a significant text in the national cultural landscape.

As most texts discussing Australian film (or 'national' cinema in general) contend, it is almost impossible to make a definitive decision about whether a film is 'Australian' or not (Falconer 1994, Biber 1999, Murray 1993, 1996). Judgements usually include questions about where the film is shot, copyright agreements, the origin of the financing, and the nationality of the director, the cast and crew, and the production company. Obviously, each of these categories is complex in itself and margins blur; however each of the principal films discussed in this thesis complies with most of the standard signifiers, and hence has been categorised as 'Australian'. As the local film industry expands, and Australia becomes an increasingly popular location to shoot international blockbusters (such as the *Matrix* trilogy and episodes of the *Star Wars* series), the arguments about whether a film is 'Australian' or not will continue, but will become increasingly difficult to define, and perhaps ultimately irrelevant.

Just as the category 'Australian film' can be problematised, what I will call the 'car crash' genre is (of course) a classification that does not have fixed parameters. The car crash genre (also sometimes loosely called 'car movies') is closely aligned with road movies, bikie films, westerns, and Australian Gothic films. Moreover, the car crash

genre also shares many characteristics with genres such as the thriller, melodrama, bildungsroman, backblock comedy, vigilante/revenge flick, apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic movie, buddy/male ensemble film, science fiction, and action-adventure. As Turner (1999) notes, there is often a structuralist tendency in textual approaches to films, and I will be drawing the reader's attention to the similarities between the films in the car crash genre. However, as many of the films to be discussed revel in the pastiche of genres and in blatant intertextuality, I too will attempt to look at more than just the mosaic that the films present, and to remain mindful of the portions that do not 'fit', and to pause occasionally and ponder the cracks between the pieces.

The car crash genre probes the tense relationship between Australians, the landscape, and the paradox of the car as both a comforting carapace, a threat, and a weapon. Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka identify *The Cars That Ate Paris* as 'the first car crash movie, a genre that became recognisably Australian and intensely popular in the wake of the first *Mad Max*' (1988, 94). In a discussion of Australian Gothic cinema, they label *Running on Empty* and *Midnite Spares* as 'car crash successors' to the *Mad Max* films (1988, 50). They contend that the genre is 'commenting on something deeply embedded in the Australian ethos: that we would die without our cars, and to prove the point we daily risk dying in them' (1988, 95). Meaghan Morris states that *The Cars That Ate Paris* is the first of what she also terms the 'car-crash genre' and she also cites *Midnite Spares*, *Running on Empty*, and the *Mad Max* trilogy as other examples of the genre (1989, 123). Delia Falconer describes *The Cars That Ate Paris*, *Backroads*, *Running on Empty*, the *Mad Max* trilogy, and *Midnite Spares* as a sub-genre of the 'postwar Australian road film', and she states that they are 'Oil Crisis' films (1995, 270). Christopher Sharrett asserts that *Mad Max* and *Mad Max 2* are the 'best representative[s]' of the 'crash-and-burn genre' (1985, 83), and David Chute also labels the first two *Mad Max* films as 'crash-and-burn genre films' (1982, 27). In a summary of *Midnite Spares*, Adrian Martin describes it as:

> [C]learly in the wake of the first two Mad Max films. More broadly, it reworks many elements from a rich cross-genre in Australian cinema: the 'car movie'.

From *The Cars that Ate Paris* (Peter Weir, 1974) and *The FJ Holden* (Michael Thornhill, 1977) to *Dead-End Drive-In* (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986) and *Running On Empty* (John Clark, 1982), to cite only a few, Australian car movies have delved deeply into the collective 'phantasms' of contemporary, urban, industrialised Australia (1993, 132).

Despite Jim Schembri's opinion that 'in spite of its symptomatic fast vehicles, high-speed chases, beautiful women and excellent stuntwork *Freedom* does not subscribe to the car-film syndrome' (Schembri 1993, 99), I believe the film shares many characteristics with the car crash genre, even though it may not 'subscribe' to the 'syndrome'.

As my central concern in this thesis is the gender-technology relation as evinced in Australian films about blokes and cars, the car crash films that I believe best illustrate this relationship are: *The Cars That Ate Paris*, the *Mad Max* trilogy, *Running on Empty*, *Dead End Drive-In*, *Midnite Spares*, and *Freedom*.[2] Although *The Big Steal* is more of a 'car movie' than a car crash film, I have included it (instead of *FJ Holden*) as my principal example of the car as rite of passage. Although *FJ Holden* is a significant film about class, suburban life, and interpersonal relationships, it has very little of any note to say about the gender-technology relation (despite the promising nature of the film's title). Therefore, I refer to *FJ Holden* only fleetingly in this thesis, but other critics have written extensively about the film (see Dermody and Jacka 1988, Morris 1989, McFarlane 1987, Biber 1999, or Rayner 2000). *Metal Skin* is a disjointed film, and despite its obvious relevance to the genre, it is less interested in the relationship between men and cars than the title would suggest. Hence, it receives limited attention in this thesis, but again critical material exists elsewhere (see Goldsmith 2000, 2001, or Biber 1999). *Backroads* is often included in discussions about car crash films, but I consider it a road movie more concerned with the relationships occurring within the car than a relationship with the car itself. Thus, it is not discussed at any length in this thesis but there is an abundance of critical material available elsewhere (see Dermody and Jacka 1988, Rayner 2000, Morris 1989, Biber 1999, or Muecke 2001). *Long*

Weekend is also often linked to car crash films but it clearly does not revolve around the protagonist's relationship with his car, and instead focuses on the relationship between humans and nature, and the relationship between husband and wife (see McFarlane 1987, Morris 1989, or Biber 1999). There are dozens of road movies, such as *Kiss or Kill*; *The Road to Nhill*; *Doing Time with Patsy Cline Heaven's Burning*; *Roadgames*; *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *True Love and Chaos*, which are innovative additions to the Australian road genre but are patently not films preoccupied with blokes and cars. Other films such as *Return Home*, *The Crossing*, *Malcolm*, *Rikky and Pete*, and *Proof* are not car crash films but they include conventions, innovations, or comic scenes that are noteworthy and so will be referred to in passing. *Shame* and *Stone* are bikie movies but they are extremely relevant to *Mad Max* and *Mad Max 2* and so I will discuss them at some length. In Chapter Five, I include a short discussion of *Idiot Box* which (although obviously not a car crash film) provides a valuable counterpoint to the other films discussed. I stress that this is just one way to look at this particular group of films, and I am aware that they can be (and indeed have been) examined from many other angles. However, I will try not to engage in dogmatism arguing where lines are 'crossed', but I will luxuriate in the excitement that transgressions can offer to viewers.

Although Australia has one of the highest rates of car ownership per capita in the world, for most Australians in the first decades of the twentieth century, car ownership was initially only the stuff of American dreams (Clune 1953, Pickett 1998, Davison 1996). Given that it was not until post World War II that large numbers of 'average' Australians became car owners (Poynton 1979, Webber 1998), cinematic images of cars propagated many people's attitudes about motor vehicles. Before the advent of Henry Ford's 'democratic' Model T Ford, many Americans (as well as Australians and other consumers of American films) were also introduced to the automobile via cinema screens. Julian Smith's analysis of automobility in American films made between 1900-1920 provides a useful starting point for an analysis of the genesis of the car-film relationship. Smith examined 20,000 pre-1920 films and was surprised to find a high number of 'auto-intensive' images in the films (1983, 180).[3]

Initially, films featuring cars were either documentary in style or used the car as a comic trick device, however the novelty of such images soon wore off, and the automobile then became a central plot device in narrative films. Filmmakers at companies such as Biograph, Edison, Vitagraph and Bluebird capitalised on the fact that cars were serviceable workhorses off screen and extremely useful subjects on screen. Innovators such as DW Griffith and Mack Sennett experimented with the use of cars in romantic rescue scenes, and chase and crash sequences (Smith 1983, Jackson 1979). Sennett (of Keystone Kops fame) is credited with recognising the potential of combining cars and film, and he explained their synchronicity with a quotation (used in the title of this chapter) from Exekiel, 10:10, 'As if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel' (Jackson 1979, 86). Eric Mottram (1981) surveys how the car is utilised in American films from the 1920s to the mid 1970s, and it is patently obvious that filmmakers and audiences are still fascinated with automotive plots and images. He identifies sub-genres such as the city gangster, taxi, road, race, and car chase movies, and provides a useful overview of the material. *The wheels are still turning.*

As Smith observes, the relationship between cars and films was mutually beneficial from the inception of both industries:

> Not only did the automobile supply filmmakers with a natural subject for romance, comedy, and adventure, but the narrative conventions that soon sprang up around movie automobiles helped intensify popular interest in the automobile itself. It was more than a simple runaway match—it was a lush triangle of love affairs: America fell in love with both movies and cars, while Hollywood and Detroit fell in love with each other. The star-in-the-car soon became a staple of publicity within both industries; movies popularized specific cars; and car dealers were called upon to help advertise movies that featured their models (1983, 181-182).

Kenneth Hey makes a similar observation and cites Cecil B De Mille who thought that both industries demonstrated 'the love of motion and speed, the restless urge toward improvement and expansion, the kinetic energy of a young, vigorous nation' (Hey 1983, 193).

Film audiences became accustomed to the sight of cars on screen, and to visions of cars speeding, skidding, and crashing in spectacular fashion. Smith notes that despite the appalling mortality and injury rates off screen, car chases and crashes on screen rarely resulted in death or injury, unless a convenient crash was used to dispatch a villain (1983, 189). On screen, cars were far more likely to bring 'happiness, success, excitement, and fulfilment,' rather than broken limbs or financial ruin (1983, 190-191). In fact, Smith describes automobiles as 'benevolent *deus ex machina*' in films with plots revolving around 'the happy incident, the race for life, the car of chance, and auto elopement' (1983, 190). The disparity between the real rewards of car ownership and driving, and the projected benefits suggested by filmmakers, automobile manufacturers, and advertisers was apparent from the very early days of the twentieth century.

Hey's research follows on where Smith left off and he notes the attachment Americans had to their cars and to the movies even during the tough years of the Depression (*The Grapes of Wrath* is an oft cited example). As Webber notes, Australians proved equally reluctant to give up their cars during the Depression, and registrations dipped only marginally (1998, 97). After World War II, and the ensuing boom in production and consumption, Hey notes that:

> • No matter what the car actually did on the screen, what part it played in the plot, its ubiquitous presence as an instrument of raw overwhelming force made the essential point. The car *belonged* to the landscape, as once the horse had dominated it. In the genre of *film noir*, in romantic dramas, in the first attempts at defining the youth culture, in sagas of truckers or cops and robbers—all of these promoted the car, subliminally when not overtly, as the objectified realization of the American self (original emphasis, 1983, 198).

This then begs the question, 'what do car crash films demonstrate about the Australian self'? How do they represent Australian masculinities?

Australia has always had a confused and sometimes fraught relationship with cars, and our national automotive manufacturing industries are a case in point. Between 1901 and 1907 there were approximately 3,560 cars imported into Australia from the United States, Britain, France and Germany. By 1914, there were approximately 25,000 registered cars in Australia, and Ford dominated the market (Poynton 1979, 63). Europe's immersion in World War I enabled the United States to corner the global automobile and film manufacturing markets. The Depression and World War II provided further opportunities for American manufacturers and reinforced their global hegemony. Local Australian car manufacturers and filmmakers suffered because of America's success and have yet to overturn this ascendancy. In 1917 a ban on the importation of luxury goods provided a temporary hiatus for local industry, and meant that car bodies had to be manufactured in Australia. The Greene Tariffs of 1920 ensured that some local automotive manufacturing would continue after the war, and led to a boom in the local body-building industry, with Adelaide's Holden company leading the way. After the end of World War I, car numbers grew dramatically, from 48,000 in 1917 to 87,071 in 1920/1 (Poynton 1979, 66). Holden was thriving by the 1920s, and in 1923 General Motors (GM) contracted them to produce automotive bodies. As Ford had been keen to establish a similar arrangement with Holden, they had to look elsewhere in Australia, and in March 1925 they set up operations in Geelong (Pickett 1998, 12).

The Depression provided large American companies with an opportunity to establish businesses in Australia, and by 1927 body-builders such as JB Waring in Melbourne, Garretts and Steenbohms in Sydney and Duncan & Fraser in Adelaide had folded (Poynton 1979, 74). In 1930, both Smith & Waddingtons in Sydney, and Melbourne's Motor Body Works had collapsed (Poynton 1979, 85). During this period, Holden suffered a downturn in profits and a loss of confidence, GM exploited Holden's

temporary vulnerability, and in 1930 negotiations commenced for a buy out, and by 1931 the deal was formalised that led to the formation of General Motors Holden (GMH) (Poynton 1979, Clune 1953). Such deals were short-sighted and led to the downfall of the Australian car-making industry, as despite the continued presence throughout the century of car plants and parts manufacturers in Australia, profits were largely siphoned overseas (Rummery 1988). *'Australia's Own' is really someone else's.*

As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the colonisation of national industries in the first half of the twentieth century, and the oil crisis years in the early 1970s, affected the stories that Australian filmmakers tell about cars, and some very dark and disturbing narratives have emerged. Falconer (1995) and Rummery (1988) suggest that these stories are based on Australia's landscape as a colonised space that is more aligned with technology than with nature. Gibson (1992), Morris (1989, 1998), Sharrett (1985, 1999), Broderick (1993), Biber (1999) and others make other contentions. There is conjecture about crises in masculinities, about backlash, nuclear wars, unemployment, immigration, and racism, and theories about how all of these concerns are played out on the screen. In this thesis there will be many detours and digressions where I investigate theories such as these, but I will keep returning to my contention that there is a holy trinity between blokes, cars, and vehicular masculinity in the Australian car crash genre.

Although I believe that the car/film nexus is stronger than the links between cinema and other modes of transport, cases have been made emphasising the importance of motorcycles and trains in the cinema. Art Simon (1998) provides an excellent overview of the union between motorbikes and the movie camera throughout the twentieth century. Lynne Kirby provides a similarly impressive survey of the link between railways and early cinema and 'the annihilation of space and time' (1988, 114). An observation she makes about the relationship between trains and cinema could be applied to the car/cinema nexus. She states:

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Both are a means of transporting a passenger to a totally different place, both are highly charged vehicles of narrative events, stories, intersections of strangers, both are based on a fundamental paradox: simultaneous motion and stillness. These are two great machines of vision that give rise to similar modes of perception, and are geared to shaping the leisure time of a mass society (1988, 113).

Falconer also notes the semblance of 'simultaneous motion and stillness' in relation to television watching and driving, and goes on to state that:

The dialogic relationship between cinema and driving must be central to any analysis of road texts, since it not only accounts for their expression of a growing sense of exciting and yet unstoppable immersion in a machinic realm, but also focuses our attention on the road's fusion of structure and infrastructure (1995, 16-17).

Indeed Margaret Morse (1990) makes the same point, as does Zygmunt Bauman (1994) in relation to flânerie and television watching. This thesis will look at how characters manifest a vehicular masculinity and attempt to transport themselves (and the audience) to another place—to the Oz of hegemonic masculinity. This journey takes place from cinema seats and lounge room couches and bean-bags across Australia—it is speeding, sedentary, visual, and visceral all at the same time.

The aim of this thesis is to discuss, in a critical and creative manner, the construction of masculinities in a specific genre of Australian film. Of course, it follows that (in the convention of film studies) I will be interrogating *representations* of masculinities that characters enact on the screen. At times, it is intriguing to try to second-guess what filmmakers' motivations may have been, but (of course) the author or auteur is dead, and what matters is what appears on the screen. It is also tempting to look to the 'real world' for 'explanations' (examples, parallels, causes, effects) of the behaviour enacted on the screen (Tasker 1993). This thesis will contain some historical material, and it

will refer to cultural studies and sociology, however I have endeavoured to contextualise the representations on the screen, rather than condescend to 'explain' the behaviour of the protagonists. Again, I will attempt to keep an open mind about borders and detours, and will welcome transgressions and eccentricities.

In the introduction of an anthology entitled *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media*, Christopher Sharrett remarks:

> It seems the tendency of much postmodern media criticism to remove itself from the activity of society, the 'real world', to focus on lived experience solely as 'text' and 'discourse'. ... For many doing otherwise almost necessitates becoming involved in empirical data, usually for the purpose of 'proving' how media violence affects social behaviour, always with a distinct ideological agenda hiding behind the façade of empirical observation, statistics, and 'objectivity'... [however] it would be disingenuous for a book of this type not to avail itself of some hard data and take notice of the world 'out there', ... art and life are frequently commingled as social scientists and media pundits use catch phrases from pop criticism and even motion pictures to explain complex social phenomena (Sharrett 1999, 9-10).

As Sharrett notes, finding an appropriate balance between writing about an artistic text while grounding it with an empirical foundation is a challenge, and one that scholars writing about films encounter—what Turner calls the 'formalism/realism debate' (1999, 3). Although I am ever mindful of the fact that I am writing about cinematic representations of gender, I do not apologise for looking beyond the screen. Much of the joy and fascination that I have experienced in writing and researching this thesis has stemmed from looking at performances that are played out on the streets as well as the screens. I adhere to Turner's mantra that 'film is a social practice' (1999, 3), and in writing about an artistic text I am creating an artistic text of my own (*a work in progress, a thesis in transit*).

In looking in and around car crash films, I try to make sense of car culture, but I am mindful that:

> Film does not reflect or even record reality; like any other medium of representation it constructs and 're-presents' its pictures of reality by way of the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of its culture as well as by way of the specific signifying practices of the medium. Just as film works *on* the meaning systems of culture—to renew, reproduce, or review them—it is also produced *by* those meaning systems (original emphasis, Turner 1999, 152).

Presumably, all theorists grapple with the challenges of the 'on's and the 'by's in film and popular culture, but like many of life's most interesting riddles it can be a 'chicken or egg' conundrum. *(Why did the chicken cross the road? To escape to the movies. Why did the chicken go to the movies? To see where she came from and where she is going. Why don't roosters ever cross the road?)*

My theoretical approach to gender is based on (but does not solely adhere to) RW Connell's sociological model, and contends that masculinities are constructions that must be continually performed (1987, 1995, 2000). Representations of vehicular performances of protest masculinity or hypermasculinity by working class men will be my focus. I believe that at the core of these performances lies the gender-technology relation, which nurtures and reinforces a belief that technology is masculine culture. The breadth and complexity of the theoretical material that discusses gender and technology studies is such that I have devoted a whole chapter to a summary and interrogation of the field. That theoretical material informs the rest of my thesis, and it clarifies why the bond between blokes and cars has such resonance on the screen. Although the gender-technology relation and ideas about performative constructions of masculinity will underpin my theoretical approach to this thesis, I also use a range of theories from other sources, and I do not confine myself to one particular model.

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I am interested in the conceptual gaps between the real and the imaginary in mechanical manifestations of masculinity on the screen, and as Turner states: 'This blurring of the boundaries between the imaginary and the real is at the heart of the cinema experience' (1999, 128). Another example of 'blurring of boundaries' occurs in this thesis, because, although most of the text is written in a 'sober' academic manner, I am guilty of 'drunken' creative transgressions. As this thesis progressed I became increasingly aware of the falseness of my 'objective' stance, and wanted and welcomed a subjective and creative outlet. Hence, the following text slips (*falls, leaps?*) into creative sections which will be flagged by the use of italics. The discourse (language, grammar, coherence) will fracture in these creative sections, and I will regularly slip in and out of the two discourses (*academic and poetic*). Call it madness, pretension, 'feminine', or ficto-criticism, I believe that it adds a creative and critical edge to the material. In a literary and literal fashion, I am taking up the challenge that film is a social practice.

This is a thesis about blokes, it's a bloke's world, but female voices keep whispering in my ear, ricocheting in my head, and insinuating themselves into the text. My voice, my feminine tones—suggestions, interruptions, the passions and stories of women. Why won't women know their place? Their place (my place, our place) is not meant to be in the academy or on the road.

In my first chapter I review and discuss the gender-technology relation which informs the representations of the masculinities performed in this thesis. *The Big Steal* and *Midnite Spares* are examined and offered as examples of filmmakers using a young man's relationship with a motor vehicle as a rite of passage. This chapter contains many detours but each transgression should be read as a deliberate exploration of unfamiliar territory. My second chapter interrogates *The Cars That Ate Paris*, and suggests that Weir pioneers the car crash genre and uses it to explore the hatch, match, and dispatch lifecycle. The human and mechanical debris from 'accidents' is used in Paris as both cargo cult and currency, and cars are responsible for all births, deaths, and the marriage between men and technology. Consumption, salvage, and hybridity are introduced as major tropes in the genre. Chapter Three looks at *Dead End Drive-In* and the lure of

cinematic representations of vehicular masculinity which is highlighted in the drive-in (a site which unites blokes, cars, and films). There is a tendency in *Dead End Drive-In, The Cars That Ate Paris*, and *Running on Empty* for characters to pontificate about the future but look back with nostalgia to the 1950s, and this is discussed in relation to the way that the car has been coded. The challenge for the male characters to keep their bodies and their cars' bodies in one piece is discussed as a synonym for the quest for men to project an image of unitary hegemonic masculinity. This fracturing of the characters' masculinity is reflected in the somewhat indeterminate structure of the chapter which occasionally splits and cracks, and struggles to remain unitary. Chapter Four examines the first two *Mad Max* films and discusses how Max's masculinity is manifested when his opponents are gay bikies. A discussion of films such as *Shame, Stone, Scorpio Rising, Easy Rider*, and *The Wild One* contextualises the *Mad Max* films and the 'queering' of Max as cinema hero (or anti-hero). Chapter Five discusses *Mad Max 3: Beyond Thunderdome* and how Max's masculinity is stolen from him when he is deprived of a motor vehicle. *Freedom* and *Idiot Box* are used as counterpoints, and I examine film characters willing to steal cars to perform their masculinity. The Conclusion will summarise the tropes that have appeared in the car crash genre, and how the gender-technology relation has underpinned all of the representations of masculinities performed in the films.

Australian screens have been devoted to projecting images of mythic masculinity and the car crash genre reinforces the contention that cinemas are shrines to the Australian male.[4] Australian women are still secondary to men in these filmic landscapes, and indeed in the car crash genre they are largely absent, missing in action, disappeared. The dearth of romantic or positive representations of heterosexual relationships on Australian screens has often been commented upon, and it appears that women are not the ideal matches for Aussie blokes (Morris 1980, Spence and McGirr 2001). The car emerges, (indeed it rumbles and zooms across the screen) and presents itself as a more suitable 'mate' for Australian males. An antipodean community of lovers of automotive vehicles (cars or cinematic texts) is wooed and nurtured by car crash films.

Our journey commences. Kick it in the guts, Barry!

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[1] In one scene in *Mad Max*, Goose tells Barry the mechanic to 'kick it in the guts' ie to start the car.

[2] As Philippa Hawker notes (1993, 189), there is some ambiguity in regard to the use of hyphens in the title of *Dead End Drive-In*, and so for the sake of consistency I will use a hyphen between 'Drive' and 'In', but not between 'Dead' and 'End'.

[3] Unfortunately, due to the extremely small number of Australian films that have survived from the same period, I cannot provide comparable Australian data.

[4] Almost all major texts on Australian film discuss the dominance of representations of mythic manhood on Australian screens (see McFarlane 1987, Biber 1999, or Rattigan 1991).

CHAPTER ONE

'Little Boys in Big Cars': Technology as Masculine Culture

To say that control over technology is a core element of masculinity is not to imply that there is one masculinity or one technology. There are diverse cultural expressions of masculinity just as there are diverse technologies. Masculinity, like femininity, takes historically and culturally specific forms. One need not presume that there is a single uniform behaviour pattern in all men to argue that the culture of technology is masculine. These disparate versions of masculinity reflect class divisions, as well as ethnic and generational differences (Wajcman 1991, 143).

Since the 1950s, Australia has sustained one of the highest rates of motor vehicle ownership in the world, and this has had a huge impact on social and geographical mobility (Davison 1996). Due to the social construction of the gender-technology relation, cars have become a very important signifier of masculinity for many men. Behaviour which, in the nineteenth-century, was described as larrikinism is now often associated with displays such as street racing, burnouts, and playing chicken. This chapter will begin with a lengthy interrogation of gender and technology studies, and it will then shift focus and examine vehicular larrikinism, and the car as a rite of passage in Australian films. Theoretical and sociological material dominates this chapter, unlike the other chapters, which will be anchored around specific film texts. This chapter is a palimpsest *pièce de résistance* because the core of it (the hypotext) began as a conference paper, then a seminar paper, then a draft journal article, then a redrafted journal article, and now the foundation of this section. *Thus, this chapter is interplay between hypotext and hypertext—text and intertext—essentially a dialogue between one person. A confused dramatic monologue perhaps? A flawed but colourful mosaic? This will not be a linear journey.*

In recent years, Judy Wajcman has emerged as the person who has made the most sophisticated and coherent argument about the gender-technology relation and how it evinces technology as masculine culture. Her work builds on the accomplishments of other feminists working in the area, of whom Sherry Turkle and Cynthia Cockburn are the most prominent. Wajcman's stance on technology as masculine culture will provide a foundation for the arguments about blokes and cars made in this thesis. As the work of Connell (1987, 1995, 2000) has demonstrated, young men are socialised to display their masculinities in many different ways. Studies, such as those conducted on masculinity and sports (Gruneau and Whitson 1993, Messner 1992, Klein 1993, Wiltshire 1996, Hornby 1996, Faludi 1999, Morissey 1996), have provided useful insights into some ways that masculinities can be negotiated. A relationship with machines generally, and a car specifically, is another means for men to effect their masculinity. Men are socialised to manifest their masculinity by publicly mastering a

machine, and as my research will demonstrate, many working class young men perform their gender behind the wheel of a car. There are many masculinities, and this examination of the gender-technology relation recognises the multiplicity of masculinities, but will investigate just one of them.

In an attempt to provide an appropriate academic discourse about the relationship between gender and technology, feminist scholars such as Wajcman (1991, 1993), Cockburn and Fürst-Dilic (1994), Cowan (1983), Turkle (1984, 1998) and Sofia (1993), have established their academic credentials in technology studies. Thanks to their work, eco-feminist and liberal feminist approaches have now largely been superseded by the 'technology as masculine culture' theory. This approach argues that:

> [W]omen's alienation from technology is a product of the historical and cultural construction of technology as masculine ... [and that] Masculinity and technology are conceived of as being symbolically intertwined, such that technical competence has come to constitute an integral part of masculine gender identity, and, conversely, a particular idea of masculinity has become central to our very definition of technology (Grint and Gill 1995, 8).

Thus, technology and masculinity could be said to define each other.

How did this happen?

Since the early 1980s, many academics, particularly feminists and sociologists, have begun to investigate the nexus of 'technology studies' and 'feminist critiques of science' in a new discipline which sets out to explore what is now often termed the 'gender-technology relation' (Gill and Grint 1995, 1). This relatively new field of scholarship has proved to be an exciting and challenging intellectual arena, with most commentators agreeing that the ideal theoretical approach to the gender-technology relation has yet to be established, but (as already noted) it is widely recognised that Wajcman has provided the most sophisticated attempt.

Wajcman (1991, 1993) notes that the impetus for much of the work on the gender-technology relation stems from the 1970s and 1980s when the politics governing both gender and work, and reproduction technologies were scrutinised and debated. (A discussion of male production and reproduction, and how it may relate to masculinity, technology, and cars, will occur in the next chapter). Most arguments about gender and technology are based on, or at least begin their enquiries with, theories relating to gender and science. When feminists commenced investigating why men dominate science, the first phase of their project, like so much other feminist revisionism, began by unearthing the 'hidden' women in the field. Stellar examples of women who had 'triumphed against the odds' and achieved scientific excellence were proffered as evidence that there had always been women in science but that their success had been ignored, hidden, or conveniently 'forgotten'. Part of this cycle of research was an investigation and subsequent debunking of the long-held theory that men were naturally superior at rational scientific thought, and that women were inherently better suited to pursuits in areas involving language, nurturing, nature and so on. Dot Griffiths (1985) provides a fine summary of both evolutionary and proximate arguments which attempt to explain how and why men supposedly have superior mathematical and spatial skills. Recent research has consistently shown that there are no significant differences in abilities between genders, and that there is more difference within genders than between them (Weedon 1999, Segal 1990, Faludi 1992, Wajcman 1991, Reskin and Padavic 1994).

The second phase of this investigation involved looking at broader trends that could be observed in relation to women and science, and this research examines access issues (structural barriers that impede women from flourishing in science). Such obstacles may include employment practices that either block or discourage women from entering certain fields, and education practices that dissuade girls and young women from studying science and mathematics, and more insidious socialisation practices that normalise science as masculine and so unsuitable for women (Wajcman 1991).

Research in this area explains women's under representation and criticises the manner in which femininity has been constructed in opposition to the scientific and rational.

The third phase proceeded from the liberal feminist approach that hoped that once the impediments to women entering science had been identified women would then be able to negotiate the hurdles. When women failed to enter science immediately, and in large numbers, there was a tendency for women to be blamed for their 'failure'. It became apparent that many of the barriers preventing women from entering science were informal (social) rather than formal (institutional) (Arnold and Faulkner 1985). It was then recognised that it was not so much that women needed to modify their attitudes and behaviour, but that, more importantly, men needed to change theirs, and the whole culture associated with education and employment in science needed to change. This led to an understanding that science is more than 'just' knowledge, but that it incorporates a combination of knowledge, 'practices' and 'institutions' (Wajcman 1991, 13). Given that men have traditionally controlled the knowledge, practices, and institutions of science, not to mention broader manifestations of commercial and political power, it is hardly surprising that women have felt intimidated and alienated by science (Arnold and Faulkner 1985, Wajcman 1991).

Much in the way that feminist scholars began their research into women and science by uncovering the 'hidden' women in science, recent research has unearthed the 'hidden' women in technology. Anthologies such as *Smothered by Invention: Technology in Women's Lives* (1985) and *Technology and Women's Voices: Keeping in Touch* (1988) are part of the larger project of locating women within technology studies, and this material provides the impetus for further research in the area. As scholars such as Oldenziel (1999), Scharff (1988, 1991, 1998), Wajcman (1991, 1993), Cowan (1983), Clarsen (1999), Cockburn (1993, 1994) and Sofia (1993) have noted, women have always been innovative designers and users of technology, but their influence has been nullified—in part by the very definition of technology.

For many years, technology was defined as applied science, but given that the concept of 'technology' is far more complex and dynamic, this early view has been debunked. Although research on gender and science provides a useful foundation and catalyst for studies of gender and technology, one should be careful not to confuse the two. Wajcman describes science and technology as 'distinguishable sub-cultures in an interactive symmetrical relationship', and this is a useful distinction (1991, 14). As the meaning of the term 'technology' is often confused or contested, Oldenziel (1999) traces the history of the term 'technology', and provides an extended discussion of its shifting definitions. She also examines related terms such as 'industry', 'production' and 'manufacturing' and explains how all four words once related to any form of production, including agricultural and domestic production. After the Industrial Revolution, however, the terms all began to be associated with machines and industrial capitalism, and increasingly excluded any technologies associated with women or domestic or agricultural production.

Most commentators also identify the Industrial Revolution as the primary cause of the schism between men's and women's work because until that time families commonly worked together in the home, and women were involved in most aspects of domestic and agricultural production. With the advent of factories, paid work (situated out of the home) and unpaid work (based in and around the home) were separated, and women became associated with the latter (Seidler 1991, Bittman and Pixley 1997). Greater status was generated by work that was rewarded with a wage, and so paid work outside of the home became more highly valued, and domestic work was devalued (Reskin and Padavic 1994). With the move towards concentrating production in separate spheres, expertise that women had once held in areas such as textile production, bleaching, brewing and a whole range of cottage industries was soon transferred to specialist factories and chiefly into the hands of men (Oakley 1976, Arnold and Faulkner 1985).[1]

Opportunities to benefit financially from the Industrial Revolution were limited to those who had expertise with the new machines or access to enough money to finance new ventures. Even after the 1882 Married Women's Property Act, it was rare for women to

have financial independence, and those who did were often discouraged from entering businesses associated with new technologies (Wajcman 1991, Arnold and Faulkner 1985). By 1882, women had been progressively socialised away from science and technological fields. A familiarity with mathematics, physics, mechanics, technical drawing, drafting, and economics were some of the skills needed to exploit the production of new technologies. Women were denied the opportunity to gain knowledge in these areas either through formal education or from practical 'hands-on' experience. Ruling-class women were increasingly steered into the attainment of 'accomplishments' such as needlework and singing rather than gaining a scientific education (Wajcman 1991). At the same time, working-class women were increasingly constrained to the home or into domestic service, and those who did not work in the domestic sphere worked in dangerous, repetitive, and poorly paid jobs in factories. Hence, over a period of 150 years ruling-class women were isolated from scientific knowledge and working-class women were denied practical experience with machinery and new technologies, and the gender-technology relation became increasingly evident (Griffiths 1985). The qualities mapped onto technology (in all its shifting shapes and manifestations) present it as 'exciting, progressive and of high value' whereas domesticity is represented as the opposite, thus reinforcing the masculine/feminine binary (Cockburn and Dilic 1994, 15).

By the 1930s, 'technology' was understood to signify 'the useful application of scientific knowledge for the benefit of humankind', thus continuing to situate it in the masculine realm (Oldenziel 1999, 14). Technological knowledge was assumed to be possessed by engineers alone because they were seen as the epitome of *'Homo Faber'* ('Man the Maker'), and it was 'understood' that engineers were white middle-class men (Oldenziel 1999, 15). After World War II, the term 'technology' gained wider currency and by the latter decades of the century it became increasingly linked with 'high technology', that is, machines involved in male-dominated areas such as the military, space exploration, computing, and electronics.

Oldenziel's work on historicising and contextualising technology demonstrates that technology has multiple and dynamic definitions. Although the term 'technology' can refer to physical objects or artefacts; it is much more than just applied science. Technology incorporates 'knowledge, beliefs, desires, and practices' and it is defined by, and defines itself in relation to, factors such as gender, race, class and sexuality (Wajcman 1991, 149). It is a culture and one that 'expresses and consolidates relations amongst men' and excludes women (Wajcman 1991, 22), and this will be my primary focus in relation to blokes and cars in this dissertation. Given that technology is a socially constructed culture, and masculinities are socially constructed, my focus is on representations of an ever-changing masculine culture of technology that shifts and mutates in response to both new technologies and changing gender relations.

As Wajcman observes, any study of gender and technology should not only consider the 'historical and cultural construction of technology as masculine', but it should also recognise that 'technology is a culture that expresses and consolidates relations amongst men' (1991, 22). Thus, men and women's attitude to technology and to each other incorporates a belief that technology is masculine culture, and performances of masculinities are expressions of power relations. Hence, as Wajcman states:

> Gender is not just about difference but about power: this technical expertise is a source of men's actual or potential power over women. It is also an important part of women's experience of being less than, and dependent on, men. However, it should be remembered that the construction of masculinity is a complex process. There is not one monolithic masculinity and not all men are competent with technology. Rather, technical competence is central to the dominant cultural ideal of masculinity, and its absence a key feature of stereotyped femininity. The correspondence between men and machines is thus neither essential nor immutable, and therefore the potential exists for its transformation (1991, 158-159).

Such 'transformations' are evident if one examines how women (and less powerful men) have responded to technology. Cockburn and Dilic (1994) note that men remain the principal designers of technology (including 'appliances'), even if women are the primary market for a product. They describe the relationship between a designer and a user/consumer as a 'dialogue'. The designer speaks through the product and, in choosing to make one product rather than another, informs consumers what they 'need' or 'should' desire, and the designer dictates how, when and where to use the product. Although there is an unequal power balance which cannot be completely overcome between the designer and the user, the user speaks back to the designer via their 'use–response' (1994, 79). Cockburn and Dilic observe that users can utilise the product as has been prescribed by the designers and manufacturers; or (as a means of resistance or subversion) users can employ the product in an unintended manner. Therefore, if one sees technology as a process or culture, rather than just a physical object, then the user becomes an agent in how the artefact is shaped. That is, users can negotiate, resist, subvert, and thus the user is 'an agent in the construction of technology' (1994, 96). This reading of technology feeds back into theories of subversion and resistance, which I will discuss later in this chapter and elsewhere in this dissertation.

How does technology as masculine culture affect social relations?

Sherry Turkle (1984, 1998) has studied young men (such as computer hackers) who have intimate ties with machines, and has observed that many felt that they were social 'misfits' as children and young adolescents. These youths are ostracised and often bullied by other children and so they withdraw from contact with other young people and instead become passionate about technology. They turn to a machine because it appears to offer a 'safe' environment and a 'relationship' with a machine is one where social skills and physical appearances are not relevant. When interacting with technology, it is possible to feel skilful and in control, and to shield oneself from hurt and rejection. Turkle observes that some men's initial relationship with machinery as a tool, a 'means-ends relationship', had evolved into a situation where the relationship was with 'the machine itself' (1984, 201). This type of intense, almost intimate

relationship with a machine is largely, but not exclusively, a male activity. Women may be extremely technologically literate, but they are more likely to see technology as a tool and maintain a means-ends relationship.

A brief cinematic detour may be useful.

Australian director Nadia Tass has recognised the cinematic potential of technologically gifted 'nerds', and her films *Malcolm* (1986) and *Rikky and Pete* (1988) showcase the face-saving effect that technological skill can offer young men. Both films feature protagonists who use their technological skills to help them negotiate their environments and avoid contact with people. This works particularly well in *Malcolm* where his devices to collect the milk from the deli and the mail from the letterbox enable him to avoid potentially embarrassing interaction with humans. Malcolm's facility with machines is then exploited by his new housemates, an entertaining crime spree ensues, and Malcolm not only benefits from his technological talents but also learns to negotiate friendships. The ploy is less successful in *Rikky and Pete* because Pete's gadgets are not well integrated into the plot or his character development (although he does triumph in the finale when he launches a fleet of newspaper delivery vehicles). Nevertheless, Tass skilfully and lovingly captures on film the lure that a 'safe' relationship with a machine can offer many men.

Many scholars employ object relations theory to explain why some men (such as Malcolm and Pete) have difficulty forming close interpersonal relationships, and many other theorists dispute this hypothesis. (For a range of opinions, see Webb 1998, Segal 1990, Wajcman 1991, Turkle 1984, or Sofia 1993). Object relations theory is a useful tool—regardless of whether one accepts it and the associated psychoanalytic theories. Of course, a difficulty in forming interpersonal relationships can not only be explained by the trauma associated with a double separation from the mother, an Oedipus complex, and similar psychoanalytically based theories. I concur with Sofia's suggestion that young men's passionate attachment to technologies such as computers (and I would add cars) challenges the premise of object-relations theories which posit

that, due to their alienation from the mother, young men are anxious to reinforce boundaries between subject and object (1993, 108-109). Furthermore, their love affair with machines often transgresses boundaries between self and other, as can be seen in literature about computer enthusiasts and hackers (see Turkle 1984, 1998, or Rasmussen and Hapnes 1998) and in frequent representations of cyborgs (see Springer 1998, Gray and Mentor 1995, Haraway 1991, or Shoemaker 1997). Turkle attempts to skirt this issue and retain her psychoanalytic stance, by positing that some machines are 'marginal objects' that challenge boundaries between animate and inanimate objects (1984, 30-31). Although Turkle purportedly rejects the concept of technological determinism and suggests that technology does not determine action but rather evokes different responses from different people, I believe that she is drifting into technological determinism in her discussion of marginal objects (1984, 21). The artefacts themselves are not animate but are part of a culture, and the manner in which people respond to technologies is determined by the masculine culture of technology. If men are socialised to experience technology as masculine culture, this illustrates how some men believe that a relationship with a machine is a safer alternative to one with a human.

Rather than rigidly attempting to make one's findings fit the object relation theories, a broader and more encompassing approach is required to interrogate how the gender-technology relation is manifested. As already noted, part of the attraction of interacting with machines is the illusion of control, power, and an avoidance of more complicated and confusing social interactions. Wajcman comments on the work of Turkle and others who have examined computer 'nerds' and hackers and she questions:

> [W]hether for these men technical expertise is about the realization of power or their lack of it. That in different ways both things are true points to the complex relationship between knowledge, power and technology (1991, 144).

Wajcman stresses that many investigations of individuals' relationships with technology (especially those reliant on object relations theory) fail to address broader

social dimensions of adolescent behaviour. She suggests that young working-class women are expected to use their spare time productively, and are often expected to help with childcare and domestic duties; whereas young men have been socialised to believe that it is their right to relax in the home and to monopolise technologies such as television, computers, and video games. She also observes that young girls are less likely to have unrestricted access to video parlours, computer clubs, amusement parks and other public spaces gendered male (1991, 154-155). I favour this more inclusive approach to how and why people relate to technology, as it incorporates a selection of theoretical models and reflects the experiences of the characters seen in the films I examine.

So how does this theory translate into practice, and how are these practices reflected on our screens?

When males grow up in an environment where it is accepted that technology and machines are part of the masculine domain, mastery of a machine can facilitate entry into the patriarchal hegemony. Technological familiarisation occurs from a young age when boys most are encouraged to play with modelling sets (often with an engineering or military focus), toy cars and guns, and (usually violent) electronic games. Technology is socialised and normalised as masculine from the time children are given their first toys. As well as receiving toys with a militaristic, automotive, or sporting bias, boys often receive toys that encourage them to construct, solve problems, and experiment, and increasingly, interact with computers and electronic or video games. Thus, the boys become competent, confident, and competitive in areas socialised as masculine.

From an early age, boys see technology as their terrain, and girls (who are far more likely to receive dolls and toys that encourage quiet, passive, and nurturing play) are usually socialised away from technology. Even girls who are technologically confident and competent are actively dissuaded from following their interest as the 'boys club' mentality surrounding technology escalates to open aggression and harassment if girls

or young women transgress the technology boundaries (Wajcman 1991, 152-153). Sofia links the abandonment of most initiation rites in western culture, with the popularity of 'techno-fetishistic boys' clubs' such as those associated with 'secret' science projects, computer clubs and so on. She suggests that the deliberate exclusion of girls and young women from such clubs enhances an aura of 'mythic masculine power' associated with technology (1993, 80).

Practices that normalise technology as masculine from the time children are infants, often result in adolescent women either rejecting or feigning a lack of interest in technology. Just as is the case with young girls, if a woman shows 'too much' interest or aptitude in technology this is seen to undermine her femininity (Gill and Grint 1995, 11). Moreover, rather than being a skill that young women cherish and flaunt, because technological competence can diminish women's perceived femininity, some women often mask or ignore their aptitude or interest in technology. As Wajcman notes, 'If technological competence is an integral part of masculine gender identity, why should women be expected to aspire to it' (Wajcman 1991, 22)? There are exceptions (see Forrester 1999, Scharff 1988, 1991, 1998, or Clarsen 1999), of course, but given the weight of the evidence cited, it is understandable why women do not define their femininity in relation to technology and cars.

The socialisation of women away from technology has implications for the cultural significance of motoring rites of passage because, for a young woman, driving or owning a car is a signifier of adulthood and increased freedom, but not a signifier of femininity. However, the right to drive is especially poignant for young men, as by the time they can access 'wheels' they have already assimilated almost two decades of socialisation regarding their supposed facility with machines. In Australia, youths can obtain their (learners or probationary) driver's licence between the ages of 16-18, and thus gain legitimate access to the car—the ultimate signifier of masculinity and adulthood. Along with the right to vote and consume alcohol, the licence to drive is one of the few rites of passage which now exist in most western communities (see Butterss 2001, Faludi 1999, Segal 1990, Hoch 1979, Mulvey 1996, Gilmore 1990, or Donaldson

1991). The young men gain access to larger more powerful machines than ever before, and they are then able to extend their claims to public space. The keys to the family car appear to unlock both the car door and a world of anticipated sex, escape (especially from the feminised home), freedom and autonomy.

Motoring rites of passage scenarios have been a popular theme in western 'coming of age' movies since the 1950s, and filmmakers have been quick to seize on the fascination that such moments hold for many viewers. American films such as *Christine*, *American Graffiti*, and *Rebel Without a Cause* are obvious examples of this trend. As will become apparent, many of the films examined in this thesis are explorations of the use of the car as a rite of passage into adulthood and manhood—a type of mechanised bildungsroman on the big screen. Behaviours such as speeding, doing burnouts, playing chicken, street racing, and car theft are all commonly used by filmmakers to entertain audiences and comment on the importance of the gender-technology relation in male adolescence. The car crash genre explicitly depicts the car as an integral part of rites of passage for young Australian men, and as a way to consolidate masculinity in adult men. Of course, making use of the car as a rite of passage is not confined to this genre, and it is a particularly fruitful source of laughs in comedies and tragedy in dramas. Films such as *Return Home*, *The Year My Voice Broke*, *Metal Skin*, *The Crossing*, *The Big Steal*, *FJ Holden*, *Puberty Blues*, *Proof*, *Rikky and Pete*, and *Fast Talking* all make use of the relationship that adolescent males have with motor vehicles. The car provides a space for sexual initiation and for experimentation with the illicit thrills of drugs and alcohol, and hence it is a very useful 'vehicle' for filmmakers.

Another cinematic detour could be useful here.

The issue of a vehicular rites of passage is treated affectionately and with irony in *The Big Steal* (Nadia Tass, 1990) which is a film about a young teenager called Danny Clark (Ben Mendelsohn) being 'taken for a ride' by a second-hand car dealer. Danny's inexperience and passion for Jaguar motorcars (*big steels*?) allow Gordon Farkas (Steve

Bisley) to exploit his vulnerability. This premise enables Tass to trace Danny's coming of age, the gender-technology relation, teenage romance, and the shady dealings of the used car market—all fertile sources for a successful comedy. Indeed, as Butterss notes:

> From an early shot which shows Danny stroking a model Jaguar strategically placed on his lap, *The Big Steal* signals its awareness of the connection between cars and adolescent male sexuality, concurrently showing that it is prepared to laugh at that connection (2001, 83-84).

Again, Tass demonstrates that she is familiar with the gender-technology relation, and she expects the audience to make the same associations, and enjoy the humour.

The Big Steal opens with a 'man to man' talk between Desmond Clark and his son Danny. Danny is ensconced in his childhood bedroom, which is adorned with the typical paraphernalia found in teenagers' rooms (such as posters of bands, stars, and surfing or motoring iconography). Danny's room is a shrine to Jaguar, and hence his 'man to man' talk is not about sex, but instead pertains to the appropriateness of the Jaguar as an icon for a young working-class lad. As Desmond Clark intones:

> Son, there's no doubt that a Jaguar is a beautiful motor; it's beautifully designed—British craftsmanship at its very best. In fact, your mother's brother, your Uncle Donald, worked at the plant in Coventry during the war. But these cars, they're not for us. We're working class. We always will be. So stop all this nonsense about the Jaguar. What would Grant Bickley say if he saw Desmond Clark's son driving a Jaguar—probably throw me out of the union!

With his eighteenth birthday approaching, it is time for Danny to learn the 'facts of life,' and these facts include the admonition that Danny is not a member of the Jaguar-driving class. Nevertheless, this does not stop him from dreaming, but as the narrator informs the audience:

There are only two things Danny Clark wants in this life—a Jaguar motor car and the beautiful, intelligent, vivacious Joanna Johnson. Neither seems very likely at this stage.

As the film unfolds, it transpires that Danny, as hero, gets exactly what he yearns for. However, he decides that Joanna is worth keeping, but that the Jaguar is not. This is the lesson he learns as part of his rite of passage, but only after going through an emotionally and financially challenging masculine initiation.

The Clarks decide that in deference to Danny's accession to manhood; he will inherit their beloved car, the Nissan Cedric.[2] Mrs Clark prepares a cake, dons a party hat, blindfolds Danny, and leads him out to the Cedric to celebrate the event. Danny is informed of the great honour that ownership of the Cedric entails and he is told that the Clarks had made elaborate provisions for the occasion. We learn that Mr and Mrs Clark held a ceremony, complete with singing and chanting at the local Lutheran church parking lot, to prepare themselves (and Cedric) for a parting of ways. Danny's parents believe that it is an immense privilege for Cedric to be passed on from one generation to another, and they are naively unaware that the Cedric (with its gay overtones) does not reflect the type of masculinity Danny is endeavouring to construct.

For all of their comic appeal, the Clarks are aware that, for young men in particular, car ownership is a serious matter in Australia in 1990—unfortunately, the Cedric is not a gift that Danny expects or welcomes. Mrs Clarke misinterprets the coding that is implicit in car culture, and the implication is that as an older woman she does not understand the discourse surrounding technology. This is demonstrated again later in the film when she good-naturedly frets that their new Pintara may be an 'Aboriginal car', and hence reinforces that gender, race, and age impact on one's reading of cars as a text. Danny makes the biggest blunder of his young life when he rejects the Cedric and says 'yes to Jaguar', and much of the film deals with Danny's acceptance that he has made a mistake, and his attempts to atone for his errors. Moreover, at the end of the

film viewers are informed that he will soon join the ranks of 'respectable' married heterosexual society, and will trade the Jaguar in for a more suitable 'Australian car'.

Tass informs viewers that she is aware of the coding implicit in car culture (even if Mrs Clark is not), and she pokes fun at the seriousness that car chases receive in most films that address men's relationships with cars. The vehicles in car chases are usually driven by young men who consider themselves to be hot drivers piloting red-hot machines; and part of the formulaic thrill of the chase is seeing young men put their lives and their cars at risk on the road. In *The Big Steal*'s final chase scene, Tass neatly deflates the usual phallic pretensions by having Vangeli's Monaro chased by a Volvo. The Volvo is a vehicle drenched in signifiers of doddery middle-class drivers who value safety over speed and style. Vangeli is horrified at his predicament and exclaims, 'My first car chase and it's a bloody Volvo. I hope none of my cousins sees it!' His first car chase is an important rite of passage, and he is disappointed that it has not lived up to his giddy expectations.[3] Meanwhile, Danny and Joanna have entered the fray driving the Clarks' Nissan Pintara, complete with family caravan towed behind. Danny is unable to drive the Pintara at more than a snail's pace, and even while being chased, he follows the road rules on a quiet night in deserted streets, and he even stops at traffic lights. Again, safety and sober sensible behaviour take precedence over the usual heady recklessness associated with such scenes. This respect for road safety rules enables one of Farkas' sidekicks to jump on the caravan before it ambles off again when the traffic lights turn green. The audience is then treated to the sight of an antiquated caravan being driven sedately down the street with a nervous second hand car-dealer dangling from the roof. Even Farkas, the villain in the piece, can appreciate the humour in the scene and he is overcome with mirth. The roads and the car chase conventions have been colonised by the middle-aged and the domestic. Tass deliberately flouts convention by featuring two family sedans and a caravan rather than the expected 'hot rods'.

Australian cinema has traditionally delighted in overturning Hollywood clichés, and the action genre (which often features car chases) has been a particularly rich source of fun. Tass displays similar good-humoured invention towards car chase scenes and the

gender and technology discourse in several of her other films. In *Malcolm*, Tass has fun with remote control cars, and audiences are treated to a scene where several motorised bins rob a bank—Ned Kelly style. Malcolm's nocturnal privatisation of the Melbourne tram network, and his use of a yellow getaway car that splits into two, are iconic scenes in Australian cinema. As both an Australian and a woman, Tass may take an especially humorous approach to the gender and technology relation.

Tass also highlights that she understands vehicular rites of passage when she contrasts the significance of cars as gendered gifts. Danny is not the only one to receive a car as a birthday gift, as Joanna receives a similar present when she inherits her mother's car. The teenagers share stories about driving without 'L' or 'P' plates and surreptitiously borrowing their parents' cars for unauthorised drives. These 'coming of age' anecdotes are confidences traded on their first date, and such scenes are common in Australian cinema. The boys in *FJ Holden* similarly take off their 'P' plates as soon as they are out of their parents' eyesight, because they are embarrassed that the 'P' signals their youth and inexperience.[4] Filmmakers (such as Tass and Thornbill), exploit the significance of the motoring milestones in the lives of their characters, because they feel confident that audiences share similar experiences.

These driving landmarks are important signifiers of adulthood but (as already stated) a young woman's femininity is not reliant on 'mastery' of a car. Young women are less likely to place as much importance on cars, because motor vehicles do not define their sense of womanhood. Tass understands this and highlights the relative indifference many women feel towards cars (hence Joanna accepts her car with little fanfare). When it comes to understanding (what Van calls) 'the female mind,' Danny is slow to comprehend Joanna's attitude to both men and cars, and this is evident when he tries to persuade Joanna to go out with him:

> Danny: Well, I'll pick you up in my new car.
> Joanna: I'm not into cars.
> Danny: You'll love this one.

Joanna: I doubt it.

Danny: It's a Jaguar.

Joanna: That really isn't a draw-card, but I'll still go out with you.

Danny ignores Joanna's repeated insistence that she is not interested in cars, and he buys the defective Jaguar and his troubles begin. Joanna's lack of interest in cars, and Jaguars in particular, is complicated by the fact that her father drives a Jaguar. (Mr Johnson displays an 'unhealthy' interest in his daughter, particularly in relation to ownership of her body.) In dismissing the Jaguar, Joanna is rejecting patriarchal control and asserting her independence, and she is (vainly) attempting to convince Danny of her disengagement with technology.

Inevitably, Danny's much-anticipated first date with Joanna comes to a disastrous end when he trades insults with a car full of 'hoons' who insist that she 'will get there faster in a real car'. Danny ignores Joanna's advice not to respond to the youths' taunts, and he burns out his motor, which results in the young couple being stranded in a back street in the middle of the night.[5] Covered in oil, and furious at Danny's antics, Joanna storms off saying 'Little boys in big cars—you're all the bloody same.'[6] Danny is slow to comprehend that Joanna likes him in spite of, not because of, his car.

So if women (especially Joanna) appear to be unimpressed by vehicular displays, to whom are these performances directed? As Terry Colling has noted:

> Petrol heads are the modern gladiators, competing to see who burns [the] most rubber at the lights, showing off, challenging, getting high on adrenaline, drawing attention to themselves. And just like the ancient knights, they compete for the favours of women (1992, 138).

Superficially, this appears to be true, the performance of masculinity is part of 'mating rituals' and a 'hot' car is commonly believed to be a 'chick magnet',[7] but the evidence contradicts this belief. Moreover on closer examination, it appears that rather than the

admiring gaze of women; the desired gaze is primarily the gaze of other men. Linzi Murrie (1998) convincingly argues that such performances of masculinity are directed at other men and are subject to 'the authorising male gaze' (1998, 74). Research by Connell (1987, 1995, 2000), Kimmel (1996), Wearing (1998), Easthope (1990) and others supports the hypothesis that men are required to perform for other blokes in order to confirm their masculinity, but that such demonstrations need to be accomplished over and over again. Hence, regardless of how much importance women place on cars, approval of vehicular performances is only genuinely meaningful when more powerful others, that is other men, validate their feats. This practice of mutual validation and surveillance polices the boundaries of what is appropriate masculine behaviour, and the gatekeepers to peer acceptance decide who has access to the comfort and power of the hegemonic masculine group. Despite the fact that it is now acknowledged that hegemonic masculinity not only disadvantages all women, but also some men, it is overwhelmingly in most men's interests to retain the status quo.

Indeed, this whole thesis is about such performances. I sit in my lounge room and watch their exploits on video (stop, pause, rewind). Visit after visit to the cinema to watch their antics on the big screen. The roads around my house are scarred by their acts, the young men themselves are disfigured by their exhibitions. My safety on the streets is conditional on their benevolence, their tacit agreement to allow me to live another day, but only if they have right of way. But I write about their play, their serious games, their melodramatic display. Is this dissertation a form of acclamation, applause, a bravo yelled from the stalls, or is it a denial of the spectacle, a refusal to acknowledge, a disavowal, a feminist shrug?

Given the established link between masculinity and technology, if one factors in leisure, space, and the history of working-class masculinity in Australia, young men's relationships with motor vehicles provide an opportunity to interrogate representations of resistance and rebellion in Australian film. As Wearing notes, 'Working-class culture, which emphasizes solidarity, collective action, mass consumption and mass culture is seen as a subordinate culture' (1998, 62). Young working-class men are fully

aware of their marginal status in relation to the capitalist patriarchal hegemony with its links to power and privilege. One way of resisting their subordination is to form subcultures that are immediately identifiable and often have a carnivalesque nature. If political or economic power is unavailable to many segments of the population, then leisure activities and leisure spaces are arenas for acknowledgement and rebellion. Wearing, who cites Foucault as an influence, suggests that:

> [B]oth physical and metaphorical leisure spaces can act as heterotopias for struggle against and resistance to domination of the self and inferiorized subjectivities. They also provide a space for reconstituting the self and rewriting the script of identity (1998, 146)

Hence, if there is little chance to subvert authority and domination in the workplace, then leisure time and leisure space can provide opportunities for insurrection and self-expression.

The nineteenth-century Australian juveniles, known as larrikins, were a group who used their leisure time to forge a distinct group identity. They refused to remain subdued and anonymous or to accept quietly their subordinate class position and manifested the type of resistance Wearing describes. They were working-class lads who reconstituted themselves by cultivating a distinctive attitude and dress-style, and their image was that of harmless, but mischievous, street-wise pranksters. John Rickard (1998) and Lynette Finch (1993) both observe that larrikins were offensive to bourgeois society because of their brazen and highly visible presence in public spaces and on the streets. They performed their youth, class, and masculinity in public places and challenged authority. In his book *The Young Ones*, Jon Stratton (1992) links the nineteenth-century larrikin with the bodgie or widgie (widgies are bodgies' female counterparts) of the 1950s and 1960s. These young urban rebels were also characterised by their distinctive dress-style, and they were extremely innovative in using consumer goods to flaunt authority. Stratton suggests that working-class larrikins, bodgies, and widgies were seen as a

threat to middle-class morals and property because they challenged the status quo and refused to know their 'place'.

Working-class youths became even more threatening when they had access, first to bicycles, and then to motorcycles and automobiles. Not only were they highly visible on the streets, but they now had access to public space which older middle-class citizens, in particular, may have considered their own domain. Graeme Davison's (1996) research, pertaining to leisure in post-war Melbourne, identifies similar concerns about young people and cars.[8] He notes that the traditionally powerful and more conservative segments of society felt threatened by the new mobility (both social and spatial) that automobiles provided for the 'lower' classes. Rather than using automobiles as a functional mode of transport, working-class young men appropriated cars for their own purposes (what Cockburn (1994) would call a 'use-response'), and used them to effect their masculinity in street races, burnouts, games of chicken, and as mobile bedrooms. Young men who indulged in speeding, joy-riding and other dangerous road behaviour, demonstrated resistance but it came at a cost, and resulted in high accident and mortality rates. The media at the time equated the youths' behaviour with juvenile delinquency and blamed the social changes on a (now familiar) breakdown in family values and a 'general lessening of respect for authority in its various forms' (Davison 1996, 138).

Such blatant flaunting of previous codes of 'civilised' behaviour, transgressions into forbidden spaces, and a refusal to know one's 'proper place' stamps the larrikins and bodgies as the ancestors of modern-day petrol-heads. Like their predecessors, petrol-heads resist containment, challenge authority, and delight in subversion. Connell (1987, 1995, 2000) in his extensive studies of gender, power, and masculinities has observed that when access to power via political and/or economic means is limited some men seek to display exaggerated 'protest masculinity' or 'hypermasculinity'. The adoption of this style of automotive masculine bravado is a form of protest, just as resistance is seen to be a reaction against, or a type of challenge to, unequal divisions of power. As Walker states:

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For these young men [rev-heads she interviews in western Sydney], working-class men, car culture is a form of protest masculinity; it is a resistance to a society that has marginalised them in the labour market, deprived them of a considerable amount of material resources for consumption, failed them educationally and denied them dignity and the traditional means of achieving manhood by becoming the breadwinner for their families. Few have full-time jobs, but even if employed, generally, the wages are not sufficient to provide for a family. Their solution is found in the love of motor vehicles upon which they build their dreams for a better life. Car culture is a way of doing masculinity and making one's mark as a man in the world (1999, 178).

Hence, rev-head heroics incorporate facets of resistance and protest masculinity, and this form of performative rebellion is one interpretation of how gender and class can be manifested. Like their predecessors, petrol-heads parade their presence on the streets and demand recognition, and the automobile is their means of transgressing 'acceptable' standards of conduct and of showing their style. As Forrester (1999) notes, the cars are designed, modified, and driven to attract attention on the streets.

Leisure is rarely divorced from consumption and hence the tendency to use one's car to rebel or advertise one's masculinity was recognised and then encouraged by motor vehicle manufacturers in the 1950s. The 1960s and early 1970s saw this trend escalate with the introduction of the 'muscle car' which proved to be a huge seller amongst young men. De Lorean built the ultimate muscle car, the GTO, in the 1960s and it was suggested that what you were really buying when purchasing such a vehicle was 'two inches added to your cock' (Marsh and Collett 1986, 186). Phallic symbols and muscle metaphors abound in car culture, as evidenced by the aggressively masculine names cars are given such as Chargers, Jaguars, Firebirds, Challengers, Probes, Thunderbirds, and Mustangs. Engineers, designers, advertisers and salespeople all invest cars with multiple signs of (overtly heterosexual) sex and aggression. As Walker confirms:

there is a strong cultural nexus—widely inculcated by vehicle manufacturers, oil companies, the advertising industry, and the mass media more generally—between hegemonic masculinity (incorporating the discourse of the male sex drive) and motor vehicles (1999, 178).

It is hardly surprising that many men are captivated by cars if one considers the weight of the evidence, and the force of the rhetoric that sells the vehicular/masculinity nexus. Hence, the larrikin legacy lives on in Australia and ownership of a 'hot' car and an aggressive or flamboyant driving style is one means for young men to demonstrate their muscularity to other road-users.

In recent years, Australian working-class youths' cars of choice have been Fords or Holdens, and buying or endorsing one of these vehicles has provided a sense of community, and (generally) friendly rivalry among fans. The passion generated by the competition between aficionados of Holden or Ford is encouraged and exploited by manufacturers, and regardless of who the 'winner' is deemed to be on the day, big business is the real victor. The intense passion and loyalty of Holden fans is highlighted in a newspaper article written by Paul Toohey and Peter Krupka. The authors reflect on the iconic status of Holden in Australia's cultural landscape and muse that:

> [D]riving a Holden was a blood thing, a statement of allegiance passed from father to son. Unlike politics, where voters increasingly swing between each amorphous offering, allegiance is everything. And it is the drivers who matter; it's their skill that makes their cars go faster. Which is why Craig Lowndes, until late last year the golden boy of the Holden Racing Team and still the best V8 driver in the country, is to Holden fans a dirty traitor ... This is a world where prejudice is allowed, hate must be vocalised and grown men are known to indelibly imprint their fidelity with Holden or Ford tattoos and sometimes riot with the enemy at Bathurst ... Lowndes agrees the man he met at Bathurst with his and Brock's signatures tattooed across his back will be disappointed. He understands the passion. 'A couple of years ago a gentleman brought his Holden

to Bathurst, poured petrol on it and wanted Peter (Brock) to light a match to it. It was a car he loved, but if anyone was going to destroy it, it had to be Peter. I couldn't believe it, really. It was something I'd never seen before. But it's this passion that keeps the sport going (2001, 1-2).

In a segment on the news at the time that he defected, Lowndes persisted in describing himself, and his motives, in the third person. Was this a deliberate distancing of himself from his traitorous actions, or does he think that he is omniscient, a godly third person narrator commentating on the quaint goings on of mere mortals?

I imagine a short film entitled Craig Lowndes Must Die *that beams from the projector inside my head, and flickers onto (and inside of) my forehead. I cannot imagine adequately the dismay (indeed devastation) that must have been felt by the bloke with the tatts, and the guy with the incinerated car. Lowndes' defection must have been a kick in the guts. Has the bloke had his tattoos removed, and how would his actions be interpreted by Butler, his body as gender, his body as fan, his body as a mark of betrayal? Noun or verb? Is he feeling murderous rage, a sense of betrayal so intense that he could kill Lowndes? Perhaps run him down with his Holden or run Lowndes' new Ford off the road (Duel-style), over an abyss? And what of the guy with the penchant for petrol and matches? Does he fantasise about making a fiery sacrifice of Lowndes? A rev-head version of an Indian suttee, with Lowndes a human sacrifice tied to a metal bonfire? From burnings to burnouts...*

A mixture of masculine camaraderie and performative flamboyance is extremely cinematic, and filmmakers have a number of 'regulation' vehicular stunts that are requirements in almost every car-crash film. The burnout is one such stunt that is a favourite for young men desperate to convince their peers of their manhood, and hence it is a regular sight on our screens. The practice of the burnout is an example of performing masculinity and marking one's territory, and it is a means of using the car to communicate with others. A burnout occurs when a driver deliberately spins the back wheels of their car as they take off, and it is a more spectacular practice than a 'chirpie'

which merely squeaks the tyres (Forrester 1999). The damage that burnouts inflict on tyres means that bald tyres are sometimes purchased specifically for burnout use. This is a significant investment in time and money if one is prepared to use different tyres for leisure performances than for everyday driving. The cost of impressing your friends is damaging to expensive tyres if one is not prepared to purchase a burnout-specific set. Enthusiasts will even put old engine oil on the road to encourage extra spinning and more smoke, the idea being to 'smoke up' as much as possible. Some young men have their brakes illegally altered to achieve burnouts that are more spectacular—a valve is put in the brake system so that the front brakes are the only ones operating, which leaves the back tyres free of restrictions.[9] Indeed, a finely executed burnout can also be read as art, as vehicle choreographer Ben Morieson states 'It's a gesture that is not normally recognised as a work of art, but I consider it a legitimate mode of expression' (2001, 16).

The aim of the burnout is to produce as much noise and smoke as possible and to leave a distinct black tyre mark or 'blackie' on the road. The true enthusiasts then turn off their cars, go back, and pace out the length of the blackie to gauge its length against previous efforts. Not surprisingly, as in other tests of manhood, size is all-important. By leaving a blackie the youth has left a physical marker of territory (like a graffiti 'tag'), and as has been evidenced by gang wars over 'turf' in some western urban centres, territory is all-important to youths who have very little power in society and restricted access to private or public space. Roads and car-parks, which are communal spaces, perhaps invoke a challenge to stake youths' claims to public property and negotiate a place for themselves.

The choice of location for the performance of burnouts is also illuminating, and an impressive burnout is an appropriate and memorable way to capture a friend's attention. Hence, the segment of road outside an enthusiast's home is often criss-crossed with burnt rubber. Hotel car-parks are also popular arenas, and for the younger crowd a fast food car-park, where one is assured an appreciative audience, is a magnet for rev-heads. Forrester (1999) describes an old Fury Ford car lot on Parramatta Road, Sydney as a

popular hangout for youths admiring each other's cars, doing burnouts, and organising races. Burnouts at traffic lights are also very popular, and such displays are often offered as an invitation to race against other rev-heads. A captive audience is guaranteed at traffic lights and this provides an opportunity to invite a duel, attract the attention of (if not always the admiration of) women, and offend the elderly and conservative—it is an opportunity to be noticed.

Another favourite venue for burnouts is at street races (sometimes known as 'drags' or 'runs') where the pressure to impress is immense. *Running on Empty* commences with such a scene, where two drivers are seen revving their engines and about to start an illegal street race. As the drivers wait to start, they both do burnouts, with both cars producing billows of smoke as oil is poured onto the road beneath their wheels, and the onlookers scream their appreciation. A similar scene appears midway through *Metal Skin*, where a street drag has been set up under the cover of darkness at what appears to be a deserted wharf. Burnouts upon take off appear to be mandatory, as drivers compare vehicles, exchange taunts, and then pair up to race (in cars that sport number-plates with maxims such as 'Death' and 'Sex'). The troubled misfit Joe attempts to show style by doing a burnout but instead blows his tyre, loses the race, the bet, and cements his 'loser' status, and narrowly avoids being arrested. Illegal street races also provide filmmakers with the opportunity for a showdown between the cops and the street racers, and the ensuing noise (screams, sirens, shouts, smashes, revs, and of course more burnouts) and movement and mayhem make spectacular action viewing.

The practice of executing burnouts is not confined to suburban back streets and shopping centres, and it has now emerged on a more public (and legal) stage, and is a crowd-pleaser at race events and car shows across Australia. An event such as the annual Summernats (chiefly for V8 vehicles) draws huge crowds of car enthusiasts and provides a forum for very public burnout exhibitions. In January 1998 an estimated 100,000 devotees attended the weekend event in Canberra and a further 6,000 attended a similar event for the aptly named smaller 'performance' cars that September (Gable

1999, 8). The Summernats is essentially a car show where everyday enthusiasts are able to display their vehicles, socialise, and share their interest with thousands of others.

Events such as the Summernats confirm that tens of thousands of Australian men are sufficiently engaged in car culture leisure activities to flock to forums where they can share their enthusiasm with other men. A glance at the packed grandstands full of thousands of screaming young white male enthusiasts confirms that the men are in rev-head heaven. Despite the fact that consumerism is an integral part of the event, this is not to deny the euphoria that such gatherings can generate. As Gruneau and Whitson observe: 'Opportunities to gather in arenas and theatres and to be part of large and heterogeneous crowds in which our own excitement is amplified by the passions of those around us are among the quintessential stimulations of contemporary popular cultures' (1993, 219-220). This is a celebration of machines and manhood and, just as other studies on leisure and sports have noted (Kidd 1990, McKay 1991), women's status at such large public events is peripheral. The gender lines are sharply drawn at the car shows and women are marginalised and constructed as binary 'others' who serve to emphasise their difference from men. Displays of aggressively misogynist slogans on stickers and t-shirts remind women that their presence will only be tolerated if they remain passive and decorative. Such displays, and the continued existence of scopophilic spectacles such as a Miss Summernats beauty contest where women are subjected to the merciless male gaze, are worthy of further research, but are clearly not the focus of this chapter.

Although a voice keeps chirping in my ear, insisting that women's stories deserve to be told too. The voice says 'Tell my story or at least let it be known that there is another side to the coin.' What about the fat chicks?

One of the most popular slogans on t-shirts and cars at the Summernats and similar Australian motor shows and races is 'No Fat Chicks'. This appals and haunts me. Would women wear t-shirts saying 'Fuck off if you have a beer gut', or 'No ugly men with small dicks', or 'Don't even think about talking to me if you are losing your hair'?

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In my mind I keep seeing a plump teenager called Carla licking an ice-cream and tagging along with her stereotypically attractive friend Kimberley to the Summernats one hot Canberran day. A young hoon coming up to her and knocking the ice-cream out of her hand and saying:

Hoon: 'Don't you care about your appearance you ugly mole? Don't you have any pride? God, if my sister looked like you I'd shoot her and put her out of her misery.'

Carla: Lip trembling and eyes filling with tears.

Hoon (pointing to his t-shirt): 'Can't you read you fat bitch?'

Carla: 'Huh?'

Hoon: 'No fucken fat chicks—you slag!'

Carla: Incomprehension, then fear.

Hoon: 'Know what we do with slags like you?'

Carla: Fearful look

Hoon: 'Well do you? Answer me you fat bitch. Answer me! ANSWER ME OR I'LL FUCKEN KILL YOU.'

Carla: 'No...'

Hoon: 'NO WHAT?'

Carla: 'No, I ... I don't know.'

Hoon: 'Well you're about to fucken find out you ugly cow.'

I can never decide what happens next. Does he lock her in her car and starve her to make her learn her lesson? A sort of vehicular oubliette? Does the shot pan out to expose a whole field of cars containing trapped young women all wasting away. A stretch of screaming women, their cries muffled, but a wailing moaning kind of sound drifting away from the paddock. Or does he torture her with some kind of liposuction machine rigged up to his Holden? My nightmares fluctuate. Some days I imagine that the women all starve to death, and on other days it seems almost worse when I imagine a skeletal Carla being let out of the car a month later and thanking her captors for slimming her down.

The language used in motor magazines, such as *Street Machine* and *Fast Fours and Rotaries*, to describe events such as the Summernats is illuminating: 'The crowds flocked to the altar, and the smoke gods delivered BURNT OFFERINGS' (Gable 1999, 18-19). The 1998 winner Matt Abood was eulogised: 'the guy has the skills to control two tonnes of rampaging GM metal, and, at the end of the day, that's pretty much what separated Matt from the rest of the pack' (Gable 1999, 19). Abood had reached the pinnacle of amateur competition but a later burnout display, put on by three professionals, left lesser mortals in their smoky wake: 'STAR TURNS – The Brock, Bray and Bates Supershow – Superstars aren't like the rest of us. Apart from their other-worldly skills, they've got guts galore. Guts enough, in fact, to claw their way to the top' (Gable 1999, 64-65). Margaret Henderson has studied the language used in magazines aimed at young Australian men (she examines *Tracks* and *Two Wheels* specifically). She notes that the magazines' tendency to employ 'alliteration, aggression, puns, double-entendres, and hyperbole', both creates and reinforces 'appropriate' masculine identities for the intended readers (1999, 72). Gable and Krause certainly appear to be following this style manual.

Power and control are the desired driving attributes and Abood is praised for his courage and skill in being able to control a wild metallic beast. Heroic deeds enacted by the likes of Abood, Brock, Bray and Bates are offered up to the crowd for their approval, and if validated, they then become skills that others feel they should emulate. So the desired 'masculine' traits of control, power, bravery, and an almost mystical relationship with a machine are all valorised. It is also significant that these feats must be performed in front of a 'carnage-hungry crowd' who revere the men for pushing themselves and their machines to the limit (Krause 1998, 56). Of course, these magazines have a vested interest in selling cars and automotive accessories, and so excessive consumption and excessive behaviour is encouraged. If cars are used as a means of utilitarian transport, they do not need explosive power, but marketers play to

class and gender divisions to emphasise difference, and to sell consumers feelings of control, power, and machismo. Conversely, machines targeted at women consumers take on monstrous dimensions if they are 'too' powerful (Watkins 1991).

Although motoring magazines are full of stories about events such as the Summernats, there are no examples of Australian films that capture this type of huge motoring event, or indeed popular racing events such as the Bathhurst 1000, the Grand Prix, or the ill-fated Le Mans.[10] The logistics of orchestrating the races, assembling, and filming large numbers of extras are phenomenal. The massive budget required to put such a film together would appear to be why this type of car-action film is usually filmed by American filmmakers (for example, *Days of Thunder*, *Driven*) rather than by Australian ones. Instead, Australian filmmakers tend to rely on small street races to convey some of the elements of the adrenaline, scopophilia, and masculine camaraderie present at such races.

The only Australian car crash film that attempts to portray the atmosphere of an event such as the Summernats is the little known *Midnite Spares* (Quentin Masters, 1982). *Midnite Spares* tells of a young man's vehicular rite of passage when he avenges the death of his father, and establishes himself in his father's place as sprint-car racer and garage owner. The film contains two sprint-car race scenes where the protagonist Steve impresses all and wins the heart of Ruth (Gia Carides) who declares; 'Look, when Steve's on the track it's the other people that are behind—it's not the other way around.' The camera pans the stands packed with cheering working class men and women, and indeed Steve is heroic in this world—he is the blonde romantic lead, who gets the girl, wins the admiration of the crowd and his peers, and brings the villains to justice. At the poor man's racing track, a working class man can perform motorised heroics and make a mark for himself there when he has little chance of making a mark elsewhere. Although these scenes are modest in scale, they do capture the ambience, the working class camaraderie, and the enthusiasm and adrenaline that motor-sports generate.

Midnite Spares is also the only Australian car crash film that features a track-side beauty contest, with the bikini-clad contestants preening on a flatbed truck and waving at the ecstatic crowd. Janelle, the reigning Miss Speedway Queen (who also doubles as a stripper later in the film) is decked out in a chequered flag print bikini, which reinforces her coding as both winner and trophy. Deborah Conway plays a similar vehicular trophy in *Running on Empty*, indeed she is literally passed on as a prize from one winner to another, but the film features small street races, rather than large track-side scenarios. These cinematic scenes very accurately reflect the types of gatherings that are eulogised in motoring magazines, and celebrated and imitated on the streets.

So is there really something to cheer about regarding the culture that car crash films celebrate?

The work of Paul Willis (1978, 1990) and researchers such as Wearing, Walker and Stratton cited earlier, have emphasised the importance of clubs and subcultures in confirming working-class solidarity and a sense of community. In this light, car shows could be read as celebrations of working-class masculinity, but they could also be perceived as just another opportunity for big business to cash in on spectators whose primary function is to be good consumers. The investment some men place in cars is not 'just' an emotional one—maintaining a 'hot' car keeps many working-class men impoverished as they struggle to pay for the car itself, endless tinkering and remodelling, petrol, registration fees, insurance, maintenance costs, speeding fines, and the list goes on. This huge investment of time and money is comprehensible in the context of the evidence already presented in this chapter. However, it also prevents these men from consolidating their wealth in a more conservative, but ultimately more profitable, investment such as real estate or an education. Thus, these men's acts of resistance and rebellion also play into the hands of the capitalists who benefit from the labour and spending habits of working-class consumers. Walker arrives at the same conclusion and states:

Motor vehicles are not an equaliser, and they are not, in the main, a form of successful opposition to the tyranny of the factory floor. The costs of car culture are high, not least in death and injury on the roads. For these young men, car culture may lead to criminalisation, financial hardship and alienation from women. The structures of race, class and gender remain entrenched. Car culture reifies par excellence the competitive individualism of capitalist society and divides the working class: men from women, people of the dominant Anglo group from non-English-speaking background and Aboriginal Australians, young working-class people from the older generation (1999, 186).

Clearly, using cars as a feat of resistance is an act—a performance of ritualised rebellion—rather than a genuine threat to the white ruling-class patriarchal hegemony.

Research into the types of relationships people may have with machines, and how men and women have been socialised to relate to technology, can help explain the significance that cars have in many blokes' lives. It is now generally acknowledged that women's so-called 'innate' nurturing instincts and caring natures, and men's claims to congenital superiority in matters 'scientific' or technical, are socially constructed myths. As outlined in this chapter, the way that individuals are socialised to react to technology begins when a child is born, and becomes especially significant when young people are attempting to define and establish a public performance of their gender. As I have demonstrated, the automobile is an integral part of Australian culture and is implicated in many men's relationship with technology. Given that both gender and technology are dynamic social constructs, the films that I examine will provide snapshots of how the gender-technology relation was interpreted at one time, by car crash filmmakers. These frozen celluloid fragments provide fractured insights into the bloke and car romance in Australian cinema.

[1] Of course, at the same time, profits and expertise were increasingly being channelled into the hands of capitalists and away from workers. See Arnold and Faulkner (1985) for more about this issue. As Game and Pringle (1983) and others (Wajcman 1991, Griffiths 1985, Bradley 1998, Probert and Wilson 1993, Philips and Taylor 1980, O'Donnell and Hall 1988) have observed, the differences between men's and women's work are socially constructed, and men's work is inevitably better paid and garners higher status. Skilled work is therefore highly subjective and inevitably means men's work, and as soon as women encroach on an area defined as 'men's work' then the work is devalued and men gradually move away from this area (this is known as tipping) (Probert and Wilson 1993, 11).

[2] Anthropomorphism will be discussed in later chapters, but it is worth noting that the Cedric is named, and is treated like 'a member of the family'.

[3] As Butterss notes, Vangeli is also similarly 'deflated' when his sexual prowess (in the back of his Monaro) is ridiculed (2001, 85).

[4] Conversely, the 'P' was said to signify 'pussy' (as in a chick magnet) by some of the rev-heads interviewed by Walker (1999).

[5] Women's advice to slow down and drive cautiously is often ignored by men in Australian film. Another example occurs in *Metal Skin* where Ros is twice injured and endangered by Dazey's driving.

[6] This quotation is used as the title of this chapter.

[7] The rev-heads whom Walker (1999) interviews all chant versions of this mantra.

[8] Bailey (1988) has researched courtship in America in the 20th century and, although her study is not centred around class, she notes that the automobile offered mobility and privacy and hence had a huge impact on courtship and dating rituals post World War II.

[9] Thanks to Farley Wright, fellow postgraduate, friend, and former mechanic, for his insights into the mechanics of performing spectacular burnouts.

[10] The *Welcome to Wherever You Are*, and the two *Go Hard or Go Home* documentaries which document the 'Night Wars' at Bathurst are exceptions, but they are documentaries rather than films.

CHAPTER TWO

Hatch, Match, Crash, and Dispatch: 'That's the world we live in; that's the world of the motorcar.'

We have progressed by error and injustice – 'there's no success like failure/and ... failure's no success at all'—accidents are already more interesting than the machines that were not supposed to have them. Now that the car is more or less perfected as a technology for road travel, all we ever hear about is accidents. The production of a new technology always carries with it a whole detritus of waste, error or side effects, and the engineers try not to think about this part of the invention. But this loss returns to take its vengeance... (Muecke 1997, 60-61).

The following chapter will discuss the masculine car culture in *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Peter Weir, 1974) and include parallel scenarios from several other car crash films. I intend to focus on the integration of the car into all phases of men's lives—from conception and birth to death and marriage (the hatch, match, crash and dispatch cycle). It will be argued that in car crash films automobiles are so integral to establishing masculinity that it is often difficult to discern where muscles and metal part company. Cars are at the centre of all social relations in Paris and they are pivotal to the economy, law enforcement, and the medical establishment. Automobiles confer masculinity; they can take it away; and the whole process is a bloody and violent one, but as the Mayor states: 'that's the world we live in; that's the world of the motorcar.'[1]

Weir's film establishes the terrain that was explored in similar films for at least the next decade: fears about technology, the environment, consumption, salvage, hybridity, and the future. The biggest fear was how to negotiate these changes, and to meet these challenges in a manly fashion. If blokes have been socialised to consider technology as masculine culture, is it okay to be frightened by the spectre of a machine-driven future? Who is steering? Dad? I don't want to be a passenger or a pedestrian but I'm afraid to take the wheel. Are you there Dad? How do I work out how to negotiate the road to manhood if you're not there? I'm lost Dad. Is this the road home?

The Cars That Ate Paris (hereafter referred to as *Cars*) was Peter Weir's first full-length feature film available for international release and, as discussed in the Introduction, it spawned an Australian film genre.[2] The inspiration for the movie surfaced when Weir was forced to take a mysterious detour while driving through the French countryside in the early 1970s. He then mused on the merits of using a car crash to hide a murder, and about the deviousness of Cornish villagers who once lured travellers to their deaths in order to salvage their cargo (Rayner 2000, Bliss 2000, Matthews 1984, Stratton 1980). As became the norm in the car crash genre, there is an atmosphere of unease, confusion and desperation surrounding 'ordinary' Australians in the film, especially working-class men. Radio reports and newspaper headlines

emphasise the grim state of affairs, with high levels of unemployment, civil unrest, petrol rationing, and car carnage out of control.

Cars can be read as an allegory about Australian car culture and about the gender-technology relation because it probes the tense relationship between Australians, the landscape, and the paradox of the car as a comforting carapace, a threat, and a weapon. Travelling by car through the landscape is one way for people to feel comparatively safe traversing the hostile Australian terrain (Baxter 1986). The landscape (with all the usual tropes of nature being womanly) presents a challenge that many Australian men feel they must meet and conquer. Genres, plots, and fashion dictate whether the landscape is portrayed as benevolent or malevolent, and much has been written about the portrayal of the Australian landscape on screen (see Haynes 1998, Gibson 1992, 1994, Falconer 1995, or McFarlane 1987).

Cars is set in a quiet little country town, inhabited by apparently conservative and Christian families, but it is the setting for appalling violence. This depiction of the ordinary as grotesque and terrifying is a characteristic of Australian Gothic and the car crash genre:

> 'Normality'—of the Australian suburbia and small town strain—is the hunting-ground for Gothic/comic hyperboles and motifs...the car, and the car-crash, and the other things that litter the landscape of contained insanity. The normal is revealed as having a suburban bias towards the perverse, the grotesque, the malevolent (Dermody and Jacka 1988, 51).

Thus, small rural towns are often coded as violent, insular, racist, and misogynist in the car crash genre (Rayner 2000, Rattigan 1991, McFarlane 1987). Weir not only exposes the grotesque nature of humanity's relationship with cars, but he also uncovers the bizarre underside of the domestic. He makes the ordinary seem sinister and this has implications in the representation of masculinities in the film.

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A preoccupation with the future, especially in relation to technology and the environment, is a central trope in many car-centred texts. Wajcman suggests that, 'In our culture, to be in command of the very latest technology signifies being involved in directing the future and so it is a highly valued and mythologized activity' (1991, 144). As the automobile is a familiar object, and an easily understood metaphor for film audiences, the manner in which the characters interact with cars provides an insight into humanity's complicated response to technology. The older Parisians appear to be overwhelmed by a fear of the inevitability of technology as represented by the car. There is a suggestion that cars are eating away at the old way of life in Paris. As Stephen Hill puts it 'The *experience* of technology is the experience of apparent inevitability. It is the experience of being 'framed' by an immutable and 'tragic' power … In daily social, economic and political life, technologically-determined 'progress' is so strongly legitimated that resistance is therefore seen to be 'immoral'' (1988, 23-24). The manner in which the Parisians grapple with motor vehicles underlies their muddled comprehension that in order to survive in modern society they need to come to grips with technology. Being part of the car culture is both a means for the townspeople to be part of the future, and a confused attack on the new ways of the world. Michael Bliss summarises this dilemma:

> The only time that the residents of Paris become demonstrative is when they act out their hostility against cars by destroying them, not just ripping them apart when they're brought into town but also igniting them … In fact, unbeknownst to themselves, the townspeople not only seem to hate cars but progressive civilization as well; Paris's citizens appear to be intentional anachronisms judging by their archaic manner of dress and housing and their repeated emphasis on small-town values. As a symbol of industrialization and mechanization, then, cars come to signify the present, which the Parisians loathe and fear' (Bliss 2000, 43).

The same fears about technological determinism surface (and result in violent attacks) in many of the other car crash films examined in this thesis. However, as discussed in

the previous chapter, technology is a (masculine) culture and the machines do not determine their use, humans do. There is nothing inevitable or inherently diabolical about the machines themselves. It is the cult of the car, the cult of consumption, and the cult of masculinity that can be dangerous or frightening. The manner in which the characters interact with cars informs viewers about the gender-technology relation, technological determinism, and the fears that Australians had about their place in the world in the 1970s. Filmmakers in the car crash genre depict blokes and cars and the masculine culture of technology in Australia, and their films can be read as an ironic and knowing reflection of the horrors of the gender-technology relation, or as a homage to masculine car culture. Weir's film is patently an example of the former.

All of the characters in the film are in some way defined or categorised by their brush with the car culture in Paris, and a summary of the male cast members demonstrates how Weir uses their relationship with cars to define their masculinities. The affluent successful male seen in the opening 'stand alone' sequence uses his sports car to flaunt his wealth, desirability, and ability to escape for weekends in the countryside, but the car and the countryside conquer him. Arthur and George use their car as a means to search for work and scrounge an existence on the road (as do the other men seen on the roads). However, their car and caravan are wrecked when they approach Paris, and George is killed. Arthur is a tortured individual, mentally maimed from his encounters with motor vehicles and left impotent, passive, and unable to drive. His road to 'recovery' starts when he is made Paris' parking superintendent, charged with 'Cleaning up this town and making it a decent place for people to park'. His return to the wheel transpires in a cathartic duel with Darryl, and when he emerges, alive and victorious, he ecstatically exclaims 'I can drive'. Arthur is the only passer-by who is able to drive away from Paris—the local cemetery is expanding, and the hospital is full of motorists who have been transformed into 'zombies', and who will never drive again. The doctor who reigns over them defines his masculinity through the physical and psychological control he has over them. The young men of Paris are so closely identified with cars that they *become* cars; they mutate into hybrid monsters that radiate aggression and frustration. Finally, the Mayor and his colleagues define their

masculinity by controlling the car currency in Paris; they decide who lives and dies, who drives or walks, and who works or languishes.

A fascination with cars is reflected in an endless cycle of pulling cars apart and putting them back together again, and this is also apparent in films such as *Dead End Drive-In*, *Return Home*, *FJ Holden*, *Midnite Spares*, *Running on Empty*, and *Metal Skin*. All of the young men in these films are enamoured with the nuts and bolts of technology, and the performance of their masculinity is dependent on being seen very publicly behind the wheel of a car. They decorate their cars to draw attention to themselves and to the fact that they are young, virile, and dangerous—their cars are metallic plumage. Their vehicles are mobile pieces of metallic performance art, but there is never a finished object because the cars are always in the process of becoming. Thus, as will be discussed in the next chapter, both the cars and their owners' masculinity are continually under construction—never quite complete.

All of the men in Paris are patching together a brittle vehicular shell over vulnerable male bodies, attempting to delineate boundaries in troubled uncertain times when there is an aura of male hysteria and a resistance to change. The men also appear to be mimicking male heroes from the past or from the screen, from Hollywood Westerns, American politics, Australian bush ballads, and adventurous tales from radio serials or black and white movies. The heroes that they have chosen to emulate from the screen are conservative, dated, and decidedly unromantic; they are figures who personify power and authority rather than passion. The costume party scene at the end of the film highlights that the Parisians are awkward players who do not seem to know how to read the script, or how to act out male and female roles. This underscores the performative nature of their constructions—their salvaged and hybrid bricolage of what it is to be a man, and in these uncertain times the car appears to be a familiar if unreliable prop.

Weir also uses the automobile as a means to comment on greed and consumerism, as well as the gender-technology relation. The car is frequently associated with notions of a utopian future for Paris but the future turns out to be unexpectedly bleak, violent and

decidedly masculine. The car does not provide a path to a better way of life, but instead exacerbates the stagnant dead-end nature of their lives. As Michael Bliss neatly summarises:

> One might question why there is such a great stress in *Cars* on automobiles when they almost never go anywhere (even the town's youths seem to only drive around in circles), yet the answer seems obvious: in *Cars* automobiles represent stasis, not movement, especially stasis as an analogue for ethical and spiritual inertia (thus the significance of Arthur's being designated parking superintendent: in his job he is only responsible for cars that don't move, an appropriate position for a man afraid of driving). The town is clearly trapped within a moral realm that seems frozen beyond change (2000, 43).

In *Cars* the automobiles are fetishised to the extent that their value as transportation becomes secondary—motor vehicles are used for many purposes in Paris, but rarely as a simple means of transport. A cargo cult economy has burgeoned around ill-fated automobiles and motorists, and cars and automotive parts are used, both figuratively and literally, as currency in Paris, but by the end of the film the audience must question whether the price of performing prosperity and masculinity is worth paying.

So let us begin by examining births, in the births, deaths and marriages triad—no let us commence by looking at hatching, one must hatch, before one can match, crash, and dispatch. If Crash *(David Cronenberg, 1996) examines auto-erotica, and* This Woman is Not a Car *(Margaret Dodd, 1978) suggests that victims and agents of violent desire and domination are not always sure about the boundaries between humans and machines, where does that leave us? If* This Woman is Not a Car, *then can a car be a woman; can a man be a woman, and can a man be mummy and daddy, stork and midwife?[3]*

A fascination with mechanical birth is prevalent in car crash films and this illustrates another aspect of the gender-technology relation. Much of the research discussed in the

previous chapter can precede investigations of male reproduction and production, and provides hypotheses about why many male doctors and scientists specialise in reproduction technologies, and why birth metaphors are so common in science and technology literature. For example, Sofia discusses the prevalence of the masculine use of birth metaphors (such as 'Jupiter Space' and 'Athena figures'), and she suggests that men are not content to give birth only metaphorically but in recent times in western society men have aggressively encroached on traditionally feminine creativity—'both biological and critical' (1993, 117). Much of the research in this area suggests that many men have felt locked out of the reproductive process, their uncertain status as 'father' always a potentially questionable one (Rowland 1985). An offshoot of this research is Janice Raymond's influential text *The Transsexual Empire* in which she cites womb envy as motivation for many male-female transsexuals (1994). Other research claims that the desire for men to match feminine biological reproduction with masculine technological reproduction has led to an army of male scientists specialising in reproductive technologies. This research provides the fodder for the dreams of technophiles and science-fiction fans, and nightmares for feminists. The implications of biotechnology and research in areas such as genetic engineering, eugenics, male pregnancy, and ectogenesis have disturbing implications for women. Ectogenesis, for example, would provide men with the opportunity to dispense with women altogether, and dozens of articles and books have been written about the possible ramifications of such research (see for example Huxley 1994, Dick 1969, Murphy 1998, Rowland 1985, Hanmer 1985, Callahan 1998, Munson 1998, Bequaert Holmes 1998, Warren 1998, Teresi and McAuliffe 1998, Overall 1998, and Andrews 1998). Regardless of the position one takes on this issue, there is a real need for academic and public debate to keep up with technological 'advances' in the field.

It has also been suggested by many gender and technology commentators, that men's womb envy has led to their obsession with production, especially mechanical, technological, and military production (Wajcman 1991). Brian Easlea bases his text, *Fathering the Unthinkable* (1983), on the premise that many scientists, and in particular physicists, are enacting Frankenstein-like fantasies. He has written extensively on the

destructive nature of men's attempt to overcome their womb envy or pregnant phallus obsessions. His research reviews the behaviour of the atomic scientists, led by Robert Oppenheimer, at Los Alamos in the 1940s. Easlea bases his conclusions on the abundance of sexual and birth metaphors employed by the men involved in the atomic project. He notes that the thrill of creative power outstripped sober reflection on the implications of their research. Although Easlea's work raises some pertinent and constructive points, his argument suffers because he does not sufficiently implicate the cultural and historical context of his subject. Moreover, he should have acknowledged more explicitly men's domination of all powerful public processes and institutions. I concur with both Wajcman and Cohn who advocate a closer examination of 'technostrategic discourse', which may act as a legitimating smokescreen rather than a literal articulation of motives (Wajcman 1991, 140).

As noted above, much of the work done in this area places women's ability to give birth as the key factor in both men's and women's attitudes to science and this approach has subsequently failed to withstand sustained critical analysis. Although much of the research has been extremely sophisticated and valuable work, it could be said to place too much importance on women as reproducers, and it has a tendency to generalise about women's values. If women could be said to have any common traits or values, it is because such attitudes have been socially constructed. Another flaw in much of the research in this area is that it assumes that men's and women's values are static, and fails to acknowledge that society's attitudes are varied and dynamic (Wajcman 1991, Grint and Gill 1995). Nevertheless, there is still much value in this research and it does pose some interesting questions in relation to gender and technology and the types of images that appear on Australian screens in car crash films.

Australian literature and film demonstrate that, whether the theory is flawed or not, mechanical masculine birth fantasies have an appeal for male writers and filmmakers. Consider the following excerpt from *Land of Australia—Roaming in a Holden* where Frank Clune waxes lyrical about overseeing the birth of his dream 'girl' Miss Icy Blue:

She was just a nut when I saw her first. Just a nut being threaded on to a bolt at one end of the Holden Assembly Line. In a few hours I saw her grow startlingly, and in the end she was mine, all mine, ready for the road. If this sounds like a Robot's Romance, let me explain that Miss Icy Blue, whose registered name is also GAG 173, is a prim and proper person, stylish and fast, but reliable, and she knows how to keep out of trouble (1953, 42)

Clune sees himself as a benevolent father, the man who controls the birth process and although he admits that he is conducting a 'romance' with his creation, he seeks to assure his readers that it is an 'appropriate' relationship and that she really is a 'nice' girl.

Twenty years later, and just a year before *Cars* was released, a similar fantasy appears in Henry Williams' *My Love Had a Black Speed Stripe*, where a father/lover creates his dream 'girl':

[A]nd when she finally rolled out of the factory into the bright sunlight she not only looked a dream, she was a dream, my dream come true: something I had watched over through all the stages of creation.

They say that this world was made in six days. Well it takes about six days for a car to be turned out in GMH from the first spot welding in the body shop to the time she gets the final touch-up and chrome badge stuck on her front guard and rolls out, the finished job, and I sometimes think if this world had been put together with the same care and precision and workmanship that went into my Monaro it would be in better shape and we'd all be able to sleep easier of nights than we do (1973, 11-12).

Again the male narrator sees himself as a god-like figure overseeing the creation of his dream lover/child and again his creation is female but because this second example is a work of fiction, rather than a travelogue, the narrator is less coy about his real passion

for the car. In Williams' book, the protagonist's love affair with his Monaro escalates until he shuns his wife and sleeps in the garage with his car, and he eventually commits murder because of an incident that damages his beloved Monaro. These examples expose the passion generated by the gender-technology relation and hint that there is a thrill associated with the control that men have over feminised machines (particularly ones that they have created)—a control that they cannot have over their female human counterparts.[4]

The image of males overseeing the birth of life-like cars also occurs in several films in the car crash genre. In *Mad Max*, the heart of the Halls of Justice is the gothic technological nursery of the basement garage, where mechanics salvage pieces of machinery to keep the police cars operational, and ensure that the police fleet is at least competitive with the villains' vehicles. It is in this subterranean nursery that Barry, the eccentric head mechanic, tempts Max to stay on the road by creating a brand new mechanical baby—the V8 Interceptor. Barry is a troubled genius, and it is easy to imagine that he only leaves the garage to go on scavenging sorties for body parts. When questioned about how he managed to put the car together he shrugs modestly and replies 'It just happened—a piece from here and a piece from there'. His offspring is a type of technological Frankenstein's monster, which, when set loose in society, creates havoc.

Max and Goose are mesmerised by the cry of the Interceptor as new-born mechanical baby, and the turbo supercharger is so virile that it cannot be contained and protrudes from the front of the bonnet. Max is enamoured when he gazes into the shiny duco and sees his reflection, and if he needed a pretext to stay on the road, this new Interceptor is just that excuse. The manner in which the scene is shot insinuates narcissism, a technological obsession, and gay desire, and the scene ends with Max staring transfixed at the supercharger as his gaze disappears into its dark, welcoming orifice. The margin between car and cop is indistinct in these shots, and Max is literally enveloped and drawn into the Interceptor. So although Barry is the father/creator of the 'baby', it is conceived as a gift for Max who takes ownership of the 'child'; however, unlike Ron

and Frank's creations described earlier, Max's 'baby' is decidedly masculine, not feminine. He is increasingly enamoured with his new baby boy (indeed it is all he has when his 'real' son Sprog dies), and with the homosocial environment on the road, and this informs my reading of the first two *Mad Max* films in Chapter Four.

There is a preoccupation in car crash texts (and in texts focused on cyborgs) with men both giving birth (as producers, inventors, creators, doctors, salvagers), and with men reinventing themselves—that is giving birth to themselves. Technology and machinery provide a means for men to make these transformations. The future, with its promise (or threat) of increasingly ubiquitous technology, provides an opportunity for men to commandeer the mechanical midwifery market. This may also suggest that the men are losing their potency, or that sexual reproduction between men and women is distasteful, and that men are unable or unwilling to impregnate women the 'old fashioned' way. Perhaps the men's technological mastery masks their biological impotency or gay desire? Certainly, in *Cars* Arthur is coded as impotent, and his brother George a bachelor, and the other men on the road appear to be without female companionship. The Mayor and his wife are unable to have children, the priest is (supposedly) celibate, the doctor appears to be consumed by lust for his experiments rather than 'his' nurses, and Darryl and his mates roam in bachelor packs. Paris is certainly not the centre of romance, sex, and glamour that viewers may have expected, and the absence of sexual desire on the screen is striking.[5] Hence, the men's collective failure to engage in heterosexual romantic lovemaking and impregnate the town's women may be yet another means to signal that Paris is in decline. Despite the speech making and the posturing, the town's patriarchs are unable to stimulate the population or the economy, and family life is barren. Thus the hatch and match dyad is a fragile coupling and a more creative approach to romance and baby-making is evident.

It would appear then that performances of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity are extremely tenuous in Paris, and Weir provides a novel contribution to the debate about reproduction and technology because in his film the cars also act as technological storks. Despite the fact that they act as motorised nurseries, the cars are distinctly

masculine, not feminine, and this stamps the process as a masculine one. The cars are so bountiful that they nurture the community, not only economically, but also in a more direct fashion. This becomes evident when the Mayor's wife informs Arthur that she is unable to have children, and that Hilary and Jeanette are 'orphans' whom she and the Mayor have 'adopted'. Indeed, Arthur himself becomes another of their surrogate 'children', and the fact that he is unable to drive only reinforces the impression that he is a child being taxied about by a parental figure. Although it is never made explicit, the 'accidents' are perhaps similarly beneficial for other childless families in the town. As Meaghan Morris notes:

> Parisian women do not bear enough children for the town to survive: so, like the mutant cars that terrorize the streets, Parisian patriarchy reproduces by making over the remnants of the car-crashes caused by the men (1998, 246).

This automotive benevolence renders women superfluous, and as the feminist researchers quoted earlier fear, perhaps provides the temptation for the men to marginalise women from the reproductive process. It is disturbing to note that Paris is a town almost empty of women: apart from the 'orphans' Hilary and Jeanette, and two nurses, there do not appear to be any women under the age of forty. There are certainly no teenage girlfriends, young mothers, or pregnant women visible. Apart from an anxiety about heterosexual romance, and gender and reproduction, these scenes also display a dread of incest and isolation.

The sequence where the Mayor's wife (Beth) and Arthur sit at the kitchen table and have tea is especially memorable in that it radiates sexual frustration and oedipal desires. Arthur sits gloomily fondling a small paper bag that contains all that remains of his possessions, and despite her best efforts, Beth is unable to rouse Arthur from his apathy. Forced to take desperate measures to cheer him up, his hostess incongruously brandishes a mink coat, and she states that, although it is 'second-hand,' she is not allowed to wear the garment outside of the house as it makes her look 'too posh.' The notion that her coat could cheer up a man who has just lost his only brother, and all of

his possessions, is both hilarious and shocking. Weir does not let the audience forget that she owns the mink coat because she tacitly involves herself in the routine murder and abduction of passing motorists. Her 'kooky' kindness is underscored by her callousness and greed, and perhaps by the suggestion that she is trying to comfort *and* seduce. As Arthur is coded as her adopted son, this has decidedly oedipal overtones, and the transgression of such taboos as incest and cannibalism underscore the town's parochial insularity that is, gradually and inevitably, causing it to implode. Arthur, as outsider, represents both a threat and new blood (on a number of levels) and he is the catalyst for the bloody implosion that occurs at the end of the film. Moreover, as Morris notes:

> A fear of 'in-breeding' invests the invasion scenario with intense ambivalence, with desires as well as hostility; the fearsome power of alterity is always needed to save us from ourselves (1998, 246)

Indeed, when Arthur motors into town he is playing a role in engineering a change in the genetic makeup of the region. As Davison (1996) and Bailey (1988) have observed, the automobile revolutionised courtship rituals and practices, and resulted in a widening of the gene pool. As Julian Smith notes:

> The chief utility of the automobile suggested by the early American film is its role in the greatest adventure of all: the Darwinian struggle to create the best possible gene pool ... In countless other films, tourists motor into strange love-encounters which lead to unexpected genetic mixtures between regions and classes (Smith 1989, 184).

Like his cinematic predecessors, Arthur certainly succeeds in shaking things up in the Parisian countryside.

As an outsider figure, Arthur has precipitated change and action, but it would be too optimistic to state that he has changed the townspeople's values or that he even wishes

to do so. Whatever Arthur offers the Parisians, it is not salvation because he is not a protagonist in the clichéd heroic mould, and as Rayner notes:

> Far from cleansing and saving the town, he aids in its disintegration, and the final exodus of Paris' inhabitants suggests the spread rather than the containment of anarchy (2000, 31).

Arthur, the Reverend Mulray, and other unfortunate motorists—all outsiders—represent the present, and Paris' response is to attempt to wipe them out. Despite the Mayor's empty phrases and nonsensical statements about the future, he appears to be struggling to cope with the present, let alone what lies ahead. Whatever the troubles are in Paris—a 'crisis' of masculinity, xenophobia, a fear of technological determinism, incest, cannibalism—they are now on the road.

So where does this place us in relation to the work of Rowland, Easlea, Sophia and others? Reproduction and the traditional roles of mother and father are thrown into question in Cars *and other films in the genre, and the status of reproduction and production is hazy. Car crash films question what a father is, and if viewers are not even sure who is giving birth (and to what), this presents questions about hybridity, gender, fear and worship of technology, and a raft of similar concerns which we will see emerging time and time again as this thesis progresses. There is a palpable aura of hysteria about the gender-technology relation, and about masculinity in general, and I will question what is seen on screen and how it may be read by both critical and non-critical audiences. If the concept of a womb is no longer tied to a woman's body, and if men and machines appear to be giving birth, how does this affect the concept of womb envy if a womb becomes redundant and hence not a cause for envy? Should the emphasis be on reproduction or are we missing the point and essentialising femininity? Have pregnancy and reproduction become just another area of patriarchal control in Paris, like every other aspect of town life (civic life, medical, legal and police roles)? Would it be more pertinent to think in terms of car envy rather than womb envy (after all the car is commonly called a phallic symbol), and if so, perhaps what emerges is a*

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tale not only of marginalised women but of men using the car to enact masculinities—the old my car is better and bigger than yours scenario. Does the gender-technology relation naturalise reproduction as masculine in a town where the automobile rules? If employment and production are stagnant in Paris, does this place unusual emphasis on reproduction as a means of production? But when the going gets tough, the tough go shopping.

Cars begins with a spoof of a 1970s television advertisement where a young blonde 'man about town' picks up his attractive blonde girlfriend and her boutique dog in his white sports car, and they set off for a drive in the country. They are young, white, attractive, affluent, and a composite of their possessions and glossy veneers. In a parody of cheesy commercials and transparent product placement in films, they conspicuously consume brand-name cigarettes and soft drinks, and go antique shopping as they motor through picture-postcard vistas. The locals they encounter are 'salt of the earth' types who welcome their presence in the countryside. However, it all suddenly goes wrong when the wheels literally fall off the sports car and the driver desperately clutches at the steering wheel as he grapples to control the vehicle. He is hampered by the pack of cigarettes in his hand, and hence is unable to master the car, and it veers out of control and crashes. A darker melody accompanied by the sounds of the young couple's screams and the yelp of the dog then replaces the jaunty up-beat mood music. As the cries fade, the camera pans the idyllic hillsides surrounding Paris, the credits roll, and the main narrative commences.

Machines are signifiers of the future and of 'the rise from barbarism to civilisation' (Adas 1989, 404). But are they? What if we think in terms of planned obsolescence? The state as factory boss, telling its citizens, its customers, no its clients, *that their way of life is now obsolete, that it has reached its used by date? Who is the barbarian here? Or do we cheer the end of a 1950s-style society based on white male privilege and await the next model? But one that has been designed, carefully planned to be obsolete, to break down or appear appallingly passé in a few short months or years. Produce, consume, throw away. Produce, consume, throw away. You can't hold back progress!*

Look to the future! As modern as tomorrow! Last year's model is ripped, torn, and swallowed up whole by the feral cars, but does that make them this year's model, and is it any better? Produce, consume, throw away. You are what you eat. Consumption implies that self and other become one. Produce, consume, throw away. But when is it going to be chic to reject such macho bullshit and excessive consumption? Madam, that 4-wheel-drive is you! Just what you need to drive Miranda and Tristan around the corner to play group. Does my bum look big in this chassis? Does this tail fin go with my skirt? Is blood red my colour?

As Meaghan Morris notes, 'One of the organizing metaphors of *The Cars That Ate Paris* is consumption' (1989, 123), and, as demonstrated, Weir makes this immediately apparent with his choice of the stand-alone opening sequence. Bliss also makes the consumption connection and notes:

> Even for the audience, cars assume a significance quite out of proportion to their real importance. Contemporary Western culture is filled with advertisements that attempt to transform cars into romantic devices that promise to unlock a world of sexual adventure and delirious acceleration. The film's opening sequence, which features a young couple going for a supposedly idyllic drive in the country, emphasizes advertising's emphasis on glamour, sex, consumption … and romance, qualities associated with what is, after all, little more than a simple excursion in a moving piece of metal (2000, 44).

Thus, viewers are alerted to the fact that consumption, cars, some men's inability to control their destinies, and the vulnerability of consumers, will be important factors in the film. Despite appearing to 'have it all', the male character loses control, and is responsible for his own death and those of his partner and their dog. Weir is already hinting that excessive consumption is dangerous and that hegemonic masculinity is fragile, not to be trusted, and under threat in this environment.

Of course, consumption also implies eating, and the narrative is punctuated with references to food, hunger, and cannibalism. The townspeople feed off their victims, automobiles provide sustenance, and car parts are exchanged for groceries in the town's stores. The manner in which both cars and drivers are hunted and then ripped apart and devoured is underlined (as will be discussed later) by the insertion of teeth and animal-like qualities in the cars. Viewers are reminded that times are tough, that it is a challenge to put food on the table in Paris, and hence a creative approach to cuisine is a requirement for survival.

To consume, to eat, to gobble up and masticate, they ate.
The cars ate Paris, they devoured the people, drivers and pedestrians,
They swallowed them, and spat them out.

Oh Peter have you read Harry Crews?
Who heard about a mad Australian,
Who ate cars, piece by bit,
He swallowed them, and shat them out.

Just as viewers are alerted to the importance of consumption in the film, we are also informed that salvage is an economic necessity in Paris. Salvage is a dominant leitmotif in *Cars*, and all of the other films in this genre, as we are reminded that a crash is one means to patch up, match up or dispatch. There is an endless cycle of salvaging and recycling in these texts, and this trend has been recognised by critics such as Rayner (2000), Falconer (1995), Morris (1989), and Stratton (1983). Falconer notes a tendency for both cars and human bodies to be treated similarly in the car crash genre, and she points out that they are often demolished, rearranged, or recycled. She attributes this trend to the position that Australian manufacturers play in the global car market. Australia tends to be a small player at the mercy of more powerful trading nations such as the United States, Germany, and Japan. Australia predominantly provides the spare parts—not unitary bodies. She suggests that this tenuous and marginal status has been masked by 'a celebration of our canniness in *consuming* global technologies, rather

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than manufacturing them' (1995, 274). Falconer recognises what she calls a 'preoccupation with cars as hybrid entities' in Australian car crash films, and she attributes this trope to an uncertainty about nationality—she states that in Australia cars signify both 'Australianness' and 'Americanness' (1995, 272). Moreover, there is a further complication because Japanese and Korean cars now constitute a large share of the domestic car market and this exacerbates the ambiguous status of the car as a signifier of nationality.

Jon Stratton also recognises that within the genre there is a consistent emphasis on cars being constructed out of salvaged bits and pieces. He notes that: 'As the society degenerates so the idiosyncratic car construction gets more extreme' (1983, 55). He goes on to speculate that this attitude is distinctly Australian, and is not shared by America with its similar high car ownership rates and wide open spaces. He suggests that Australia's unique form of customising may be a way of balancing 'a repression of the car as commodity', while simultaneously being seen to drive a status symbol and 'commodity fetish' (1983, 56). He also notes that there is an irony that the car is seen as a safe haven in a harsh environment, when the car is both dangerous and alien in films such as *Cars* and the *Mad Max* cycle. Stratton recognises that in these films the scariest outcast characters drive the most terrifying salvaged cars. He also acknowledges that car enthusiasts are likely to recognise the original model of the car beneath the alien carapace, thus making it both alien and familiar (a match) (1983, 56).

In this light, Australia is read as a harsh environment, populated by people who demonstrate an instability about identity and their place in both the local landscape and the global setting. There is a suggestion that, just like the average Parisian, Australians are 'battlers' who only survive by scavenging and salvaging, and there is no suggestion that such underdogs could control production or generate stable unitary bodies. As discussed in the Introduction, and as commentators such as Poynton (1979) have demonstrated, the Australian car industry has historically been at the mercy of larger more powerful nations and has held a subservient and powerless position on the margins. Just as motor manufacturing industries (technological or industrial production)

are in a vulnerable position, Ferrier (2001) identifies a similar fragility that is displayed by both film characters and filmmakers in relation to Australian national cultural production, and she suggests that this is manifested in the construction of vulnerable bodies. Regardless of the commodity produced, Australians (and men in particular) appear to be coded as battlers who are forced to be creative salvagers to survive, and their vulnerability is signified by their preoccupation with constructing piecemeal bodies.

In the car crash genre, the importance of salvaging differs with characters' age, gender, and class, but car parts are a life and death matter in this film and the preferred currency in Paris (Rayner 2000, 30). The older less affluent characters in Paris scavenge and recycle in order to survive, and the parts that they manage to obtain are traded for necessities such as food (already discussed in relation to consumption). There is never a suggestion that they could afford to be drivers or car owners themselves. The Mayor, however, is one of the few characters who owns a car that is in good condition, and has not been created by patching together other people's cast-offs. The Mayor's cut of the salvage (radios, fur-coats, children) allows him to acquire even more power and status; he does not rely on it for subsistence or transportation. As a powerful white male, he can afford to have a body and car that are both healthy and unitary.

The young men in the town have a different attitude to automotive salvage from that of their elders, and they use any parts that they can acquire to put together hybrid killer cars. They cannot afford to buy cars in one piece, and so they scavenge to construct their own, and this type of compromise is mirrored by other working-class young men in films such as *Metal Skin* and *Running on Empty*, where both Joe and Mike are forced to be ingenious scavengers and canny adapters because of their economic status. There is a similar air of confusion, frustration, and anger in Paris where salvaging and making do is a way of life. The young Parisians are emulating their elders in that they covet technological commodities and are willing to hunt and cannibalise to get them. However the social and economic environment has changed and it is increasingly difficult for the young men to perform in the manner expected by the town patriarchs.

Thus, this form of salvage could be read as a patching together of old and new facets of masculinity in a clumsy attempt to manufacture gender in a manner that sanctions the gender-technology relation—a quest for the perfect match.

Salvaging also contributes to the blurring of boundaries and confusion about identities and this is apparent in the three-way hybridity between the town's young men, animals, and cars. The camera zooms in on these images in every crucial car scene and highlights their metallic menace. The cars resemble wild animals that literally consume Paris, and Weir reinforces this image by the insertion of teeth, eyes, fins, spikes and spines on the cars (Bliss 2000). Several critics have noted that the Mayor's car with its fins and sinister presence resembles a predatory shark—a mythic 'monster' with a surfeit of power and aggression (Dermody and Jacka 1988, 95).

The creator of the finned car was Harley Earl, a designer at General Motors for 32 years, who became enamoured with Lockheed P-38 fighter planes during World War II. The fins and lines of the P-38 inspired his design of the 1949 Cadillac, and by 1959 enormous tail-fins were *de rigueur* on cars as varied as Buicks, Studebakers, Hudsons, Dodges, Chevrolets, Chryslers, Plymouths, Valiants and Holdens. Earl became the most influential shaper of motor vehicular design in the twentieth century, and he was such a successful 'car man' because he understood the dreams and fantasies associated with car ownership (Marsh and Collett 1986, Bayley 1986). William Mitchell worked with Earl at General Motors at the peak of the fin's popularity and he proudly touted that he had 'gasoline in his blood'. His two favourite sayings were 'Seeing is Selling' and 'The Shape of Things Shapes Man', and, as Ralph Nader points out, this has a sad irony given that finned cars did indeed shape man (1972, 222-223). The fins acted as blades and pedestrians as accident fodder, and Nader lists a gruesome litany of victims who were impaled and sometimes killed by the fins (1972). The finned vehicles were a triumph of style over substance and, as Vance Packard observes, claims that fins performed any practical functions, such as stabilising cars in windy conditions, were farcical (1970). Packard consults an academic who refutes the claim that fins were a necessary feature on a car (rather than mere adornment). The scientist compares the

finned cars with women clinched at the waists with a constricting girdle, and states that rather than being functional, the fins act in a fashion similar to a train or bustle on a skirt (1970).[6] Whether one compares them with a bustle, a blade, a rocket, or a missile, the fins are patently useless and dangerous accessories.[7]

Let me tell you a story about fins, let me give a voice to nine-year-old Peggy Swan who, while riding her bike near her home in Kensington, Maryland on September 29, 1963, bumped into a 1962 Cadillac tail fin and died of thoracic haemorrhages. Or would you like to hear about a thirteen-year-old boy from Chicago who, while chasing a baseball, ran into a 1961 Cadillac tail fin and was skewered through the heart. Or the old woman in New York who was killed when a Cadillac tail fin ripped her in half (Nader 1972, 224-225)? More? But hey they look good, they look neat, just like a rocket, a plane, a shark. They don't look so good when you're wearing one, when you are the hood ornament or the roadkill smeared on the bumper-bar. Earl, Mitchell—you butchers—tell me about reducing people to shredded meat.

Fins were not the only animalistic accessories of the Parisian cars. The spiked Volkswagen is commonly compared with a dinosaur (Dermody and Jacka (1988), Morris (1989), and Nader (1972) compares a finned Cadillac with a stegosaurus) but to my mind, it resembles a rabid echidna. The Jaguar is the other animal most often associated with the cars: the prestigious British car is a symbol of Empire, and perhaps the town's fathers, and significantly it is Charlie's favourite target. He collects Jaguar crests as an icon of automobilia, and delights in mimicking the roar of a wild cat, and hence a car-animal-human triad is created. Charlie does not confine himself to hunting Jaguar however, and he shoots the Reverend Mulray who is driving to Paris in another popular British export—the Mini. When Charlie returns with his prey, he poses next to it in the manner of a big game hunter and states, 'I got this one. This one's mine' (Rayner, 1998). The Mayor is quick to mount a cover-up operation and explains 'An accident has occurred … A shooting accident has occurred.' The sense that one is witnessing a type of gothic antipodean safari is underlined by Weir's use of the sounds of roaring animals and screaming engines when the cars' presence is noted or implied.

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These non-diegetic sound effects are used to reinforce the animality of the machines, and the wildness and ferociousness of the young men.

Humans are the other animals that the cars resemble, and the similarity, and in fact interchangeability, between the cars and humans is reinforced throughout the film. When Arthur shuffles out of hospital to attend George's funeral, he is met at the entrance to the hospital by a group of Parisians who appear to be catatonic androids. This strange procession walks behind the hearse, which seems to glide along silently almost of its own accord. This reversal of human and mechanical qualities has been noted (in relation to other texts) by Donna Haraway, who famously writes, 'Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert' (1991, 152). The sense of the car being alive is augmented by the point of view of the camera coming from the back of the hearse itself. The even more unsettling alternative is that viewers are sharing the gaze of the dead man witnessing his own funeral and this has disturbing implications in a film about the carnage and destruction wrought by the car culture.

Soon after the funeral, another car, a white Jaguar, has an 'accident' during the night. Viewers hear the scream of an animal in pain, and then see the body of the vehicle being stripped. As Rayner notes evocatively, 'The car is dismantled under the gaze of headscarved women who resemble the *tricoteuses* of revolutionary France, evoking another period of institutionalized violence' (1998, 41-42). Weir accentuates the parity between cars and humans during this segment when the automobile is being dismantled and the women hand the most prized vehicular pieces to the town's patriarchs. The camera cuts back and forth from the street scene to a parallel scenario in the hospital, and this editing underlines the ruthlessness of the townspeople and the nature of their economy. Weir uses a similar technique in an episode set the next day where the camera cuts rapidly between the hospital, which is full of human wrecks, a hillside covered in car wrecks, and the town graveyard. All three sites show signs of heavy traffic. Rayner suggests, 'Paris' solution to rural stagnation evinces a ruthless pragmatism, but on a different level the town's murderous economy equates Western consumerism with cannibalism' (2000, 30-31). The overlap between consumerism and

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cannibalism, and the subsequent Parisian hybrids, is underlined by the construction of the shots and the editing process.

In the first of these 'inter-cut' scenes, the unfortunate driver of the Jaguar is being 'stripped' (of his shoes, watch and wallet) and, like the car, is about to be used as spare parts. The luckless fellow is last seen strapped to the operating table with the doctor unnecessarily but enthusiastically drilling into his head. The use of a mechanical power-tool, most commonly associated with builders and wreckers rather than surgeons, reinforces the impression that the patient is just another piece of salvage. Hapless motorists who have been salvaged from car wrecks constitute a whole community of patients who inhabit the Bellevue Ward of Paris hospital. As Darryl helpfully explains to Arthur, there are 'full vegies, half vegies, and quarter vegies.' He goes on to add, 'You were lucky mate ... the other bloke though! Cor! Well to put it nicely, he was one worse than a full vegie. Well, have you ever seen a bloke with a foot up his nose?'

The patients are used as both transplant fodder and as guinea pigs for the doctor's 'experimental' work. There is a suggestion that similar innovative medical techniques are being used in the hospitals in *Mad Max*. The Toecutter taunts Jessie and draws attention to her 'pretty face' and calls her 'the little mother'. His insults both belittle Jessie and reduce her to the status of an attractive breeder but as we have seen, even this traditionally feminine role is under threat. The male medical officer, who treats Jessie in the hospital, describes her as 'history'; and if mechanical birth flourishes, then this is just what women will be. He states that her injuries 'read like a grocery list', and thus even her wounds are constructed as domestic, as her body is equated with household produce—groceries. It is suggested that one way to make her useful, somehow 'productive' now that her child-rearing days are over, would be as fodder for transplants. In an environment reliant on salvage, this equates Jessie with a used car bound for the wreckers. The feminine is presented as both mundane and outdated. Jessie is finished—a part of 'history'—not the future. Roslyn in *Metal Skin* is another car crash victim who is torn apart and only just put back together again by painful and

invasive medical procedures. In these films, a person's gender, status and power are the primary factors in determining whether they will be a donor or a beneficiary of human spare parts. As most of these films are extremely hostile towards women, it is not surprising that many of the female characters end up as transplant fodder. Powerful men such as the Mayor and the doctor are able to choose who lives and dies, and they do not hesitate to commandeer either body parts or whole people such as Arthur, Hilary, and Jeanette. Hence, it is not only the injured, but also the perfectly healthy, who are salvaged if it suits the patriarch's purposes. Women and weak (feminised) men are soft targets—victims who require metal skin as protective armour to stand any chance of survival against the masculine culture of technology.

There is also a suggestion that in a wild grab for consumer products, and technological commodities in particular, people are becoming more like wild beasts than civilised human beings. The brutal competition for salvaged goods makes the characters seem like animals or soulless machines. The manner in which the men are aligned with cars, of course, relates to the gender-technology relation discussed in Chapter One. The machines define their masculinity and their masculinity is seen as mechanical. (Paris appears to be caught in a time warp and stuck in the 1950s when finned vehicles were at the height of their popularity, and the consistency of this yearning for the past will be discussed in the next chapter.) By aligning themselves with sharks and dinosaurs, men were comparing themselves with ferocious beasts in contrast to characters like the Mayor's wife who resembles a domestic cat in her sad fur coat. There is both an hysterical note to the performances of masculinity and a frenzied feeling about the whole film, and the events it narrates, especially in relation to the construction of masculinities. There is a suggestion that the men not only hurt the women around them but they hurt themselves with their intimate gender-technology relation—why else would there be so many bloodied corpses and male 'vegies'?

Similar instances in other films in this genre demonstrate the hybrid nature of men and cars. This trend is picked up by George Miller in the *Mad Max* trilogy, where Max is repeatedly injured and put back together again. Max is so closely identified with his

skill as the best driver, and with the car itself, that the separation of man and machine is often obscured. As noted above, the matter-of-fact manner in which human beings are used as spare parts reinforces the parity between humans and machines. As Christopher Sharrett notes:

> *Mad Max* is clear in its equation of the destruction of technology (the auto) with the destruction of people. The two become interchangeable; as broken bodies are saved or scrapped by a process of triage, parts of salvaged autos are reassembled into new vehicles in an attempt to keep the self-defeating cycle operating (1985, 83).

This cycle encourages an unstable hybridity where many characters take on a cyborg existence. In a masculine environment obsessed with muscles, hardness and technology, there is often a slippage between conceptions of men and machines. Some men appear to think of themselves in terms of being a motor vehicle—they are wired, out of gas, or firing on all cylinders (Connell 1995, 48). There is an attraction to mechanical self-images of power, speed, logic and invulnerability.

It has been demonstrated that the links between salvage and hybridity manifest themselves in an obfuscation of the boundaries between men, machines and animals. Automobiles dominate all the Parisians' lives, but the young men are obsessed with cars, and how machines can be utilised to demonstrate masculinity. There is a resultant blurring of boundaries and a questioning of what is absolute, bounded, and contained. The cars become a prosthesis that bolsters and protects, but also signals vulnerability, and thus, metal armour both signifies strength and suggests an internal weakness. In having the men become cars, Weir not only pioneers the car crash genre, but he foreshadows the international cinematic obsession with cyborg man/machines in the 1980s and early 1990s. Films such as *The Terminator*, *Terminator 2*, *Total Recall*, and the *Robocop* series have been phenomenally successful, and their popularity suggests a very real anxiety about masculinity and identity (Jeffords 1993, 1994, Tasker 1993).

This preoccupation with cyborg hybridity and with violence directed at the male body will be discussed in each of the following chapters.

When men become brutish machines who are willing to dehumanise themselves and others, and kill and cannibalise to survive, the cars on screen radiate testosterone. If Paris is a community that has taken to bloody guerrilla tactics in order to survive, it is not surprising that the town's inhabitants eventually turn on each other. When it is time to crash and dispatch, the Mayor rouses the older townspeople with 'the old school war cry' and asks 'Have you forgotten the meaning of those words?' The irony, of course, is that the war cry is just a string of meaningless words—a list of jingoistic Australiana such as 'boomerang, wombat, kangaroo, rah, rah, rah'. What is much more disturbing is that he is rallying his contemporaries, his fellow 'pioneers', with a war cry, and signalling that it is time to crash and dispatch. This foreshadows the battle that is about to be waged between the town fathers and the district's youths—between rustic pioneers and macho petrol-heads—a pitched battle over masculine dominance.

As resources are so scarce, and cars so highly valued, the torching of Les' car provokes rebellion, and as the Mayor's henchman observes, 'It's the cars—they're upset over the burning'. In fact, the cars are so 'upset' that they devour whatever gets in their way— they literally rip the town apart. Individual homes are battered and destroyed and the civic buildings are torn down. The attacks on individual homes suggest that the nuclear family is both redundant and a site of conflict. The destruction of the civic buildings represents an open challenge for the town elders to retain control as the new generation attempts to erase all traces of the previous hegemony.

What makes *Cars* so novel, and prevents it from falling into a clichéd 'teenage rebellion' film, is that the young men are so confused, frustrated, angry and marginalised that they have mutated into metal monsters. The most memorable factor about these battle scenes is that cars are the weapon of choice. The cars engage in 'hand to hand' combat with the townspeople. The town's elders guard their territory on foot, chiefly armed with makeshift weapons such as pitchforks. In one scene the faceless

driver of one of the cars is prodded and poked to death with a pitchfork and dies a horrible death at the wheel. The pitched battle resembles both a gladiatorial contest (Stratton 1983, 55) and a rape scene. The masculine body is penetrated and made vulnerable as once again a metal carapace proves an inadequate shell. The Mayor instructs Arthur to use his car to crush Darryl, and the prominent rear fins reduce the young man to bloodied 'road kill'. Arthur complies, at first reluctantly, but then with ghoulish satisfaction when he joyously discovers his mechanical potency.[8]

Arthur's status as outsider places him in a quandary when the battle commences, and the Mayor uses him as a robotic pawn against the young townspeople. Weir often uses the figure of the outsider in his films, not only in *Cars*, but also in films such as *Witness* (1985) and *The Truman Show* (1999) (Bliss 2000, 26). The outsider character is also a familiar one both in the Gothic genre and in the Western, and as Horrocks muses, 'it is interesting to speculate whether this image of loneliness says something about masculinity as a whole. It is a powerful image of male alienation' (1995, 67). Arthur is an ideal subject to examine the cinematic representation of a fragile, lonely, and alienated Australian male because he is very much the outsider—a stranger who disrupts the way of life of the Paris community (Rayner 1998, Dermody and Jacka 1980). The clever use of 'Paris' as the name of the town contributes to the perception that Arthur is a foreigner in a strange land, a man who is shut out of the masculine hegemony. The joke is that, unlike its counterpart in France, Australia's Paris is hardly a cosmopolitan centre of glamour, sophistication and romance, and Arthur is not a routine screen hero.

As already discussed, the cars in Paris have been customised, anthropomorphised and honed into flamboyant weapons, however Weir portrays the cars not only as tangible artillery, but also as psychological battering rams. There is more than one way to crash and dispatch and this is illustrated when Arthur awakens in hospital and finds himself at the mercy of the Parisian medical establishment. In *Cars*, the audience witnesses the power of the medical profession, and the waning status of the church. The hospital vies with the Town Hall as the most important institution in the town, and the church is

displayed as a bunker for senior citizens. The decline in the omnipotence of the church is mirrored by the burgeoning might of the medical profession. The fact that the hospital is the busiest and most populous centre in town is testament to its importance, and the fact that the war memorial (a cannon) points at the hospital is an ominous sign. The hospital and the cannon also act as a threat—a reminder of the fate of any Parisians tempted to buck the system or speak to outsiders.

Before Arthur is permitted to leave hospital, he is subjected to a series of tests administered by the sinister local doctor with a penchant for 'experimental' work. The doctor administers a psychological test, which involves a series of flash cards that Arthur is obliged to identify. The exercise starts benignly enough, with a tentative Arthur identifying items such as a tree, chair, dog, house, and television. The mood changes dramatically when a gruesome photograph of a car crash is offered. After recoiling in horror, Arthur says 'smash', only to be corrected firmly by the doctor who says 'accident'. The test then continues with further photographs of car crashes intercut with banal images of a pen, horse, ball, scissors and so on. Suitably chastised and confused, Arthur has absorbed the message that when car crashes occur they should be identified as 'accidents'—regardless of the circumstances.

A similar scene is described in the autobiographical text *Cry of the Damaged Man*. In his book Tony Moore toys with definitions of 'accidents' once his life is irreversibly changed after his having been crushed by a semi-trailer, and subsequently enduring months of operations and rehabilitation. He conducts a similar, interior, flash card game with himself:

> Before the accident I had never really thought about my relationship with roads. In a variety of ways, large proportions of our lives are involved with streets, routes, freeways, highways, crossings, junctions and intersections. When I do a free association with the word 'road', my immediate responses include 'car', 'pollution', 'laws', 'danger', 'accident', 'toll', and 'deaths'. We even call some of them 'arterials' or 'bypasses'. In earlier more sedate times this word

association might have produced 'travel', 'coach', 'adventure', 'journey', 'trip', or 'holiday'. Our present-day involvement with roads is one of increasing concern, decreasing utility and vanishing pleasure (Moore 1997, 139).

When I play the same game I see cards stating 'accident', 'crash', 'murder', 'trap', 'blood', 'carnage', 'destruction', 'devastation', 'playing god', 'technological determinism', 'bricolage', and 'Paris'.

Of course the predictability of hundreds of Australian men being killed on the roads every year belies the fact that Arthur's plight is unusual—an accident. The cries of damaged men reverberate in our vehicular culture and on our screens but the strength of the gender-technology relation naturalises these sacrifices to the cult of masculinity. Placing oneself in danger, and indeed partaking in risk-taking behaviours (speeding, drink driving, etc) invites an 'accident', and death on the roads is normalised and often lionised within the vehicular culture (see Willis 1978, Webb 1998, Mitchell 1997, Baudrillard 1996, or Miles 1991). Biber also notes the inevitability of 'accidents' on the road, and notes:

> Australian highways are punctuated by the percussive and fatal clash of car 'accidents'. But these crashes are not accidental; they are natural, organic, and in the deafening slowness of the impacted moment, they are breathlessly anticipated. In an instant the freakish horror of highway carnage becomes generic, statistic. And in that infinite, narrow juncture legendary masculinity is exposed and confirmed. Men kill, and are killed on the vast and limitless lanes that traverse the Australian continent, and the steady rhythm of these 'accidents' becomes the regular beat of Australian masculinity (1999, 21).

The horror of car crashes is dulled by their quantity and predictability; just as the violence of the lifestyle in Paris is taken for granted. It is no 'accident' that men are willing to repress or ignore the autocide that is an integral part of western society;

instead, it demonstrates the strength of the gender-technology relation. *Never stand between a bloke and his car.*

The crash/accident binary has also been noted by car culture commentators such as Marsh and Collett, who state:

> We have a special way of describing the lethal consequences of cars. We refer to the deaths they cause as *accidents*—a suitably dispassionate term which largely removes any sense of blame from both cars and their drivers. The killings are taken for granted and seen as inevitable. They are the price we pay, and seem quite happy to pay, for our automobile culture ... This 'conspiracy' by car owners allows the automobile to be used with relative impunity. We can behave recklessly, aggressively and with criminal irresponsibility, and yet we are unlikely to be imprisoned even when we are caught (1986, 155-156).

Arthur's story parallels these observations because his history, self-identity, and masculinity are so closely tied to the automobile. After dinner one night, Arthur confesses to the Mayor that he feels guilty about the crash because he should have been driving and taking some of the pressure off George. He admits that he has a phobia about cars and driving, stemming from an earlier accident in which he knocked over and killed an old man. Just as Marsh and Collett's research would suggest, Arthur is charged with manslaughter but is acquitted. Arthur confesses that the incident had left him too traumatised to drive, and this suggests that the wounds he carries from the accident are primarily psychological. The assiduous reminders about Arthur's inability to drive are, of course, a means to make him appear impotent, passive, and childlike. The Mayor makes light of Arthur's problems but is quick to exploit them. Instead of the consolatory platitude expected of him, the Mayor responds to Arthur's confession, with: 'Yes. These old pedestrians are a *real* problem, aren't they?' Thus, Weir exposes the carnage and mental torture caused by the car culture, but lightens the moment with the Mayor's pragmatic and unexpected response.

The flash card scene described earlier is also memorable for the macabre pleasure the doctor takes in torturing Arthur. The doctor wields terrifying authority and control, as evidenced by the ruthless manner with which he wields scalpel, power tool, and flash cards. The doctor and the Mayor work in tandem to break Arthur's spirit and keep him under their control, and Arthur's sensitivity and mental trauma are used ruthlessly against him. When Arthur shows signs of recovery and attempts to leave Paris, he is reminded of his vulnerability by the Mayor, who quotes the doctor, and states:

> Arthur you're a very very sick man ... basically normal but this might not stay this way unless you can face your problem. Let's be blunt, Arthur, you've got two dead men on your conscience. You've also got this fear of driving—this fear of cars. You know, here in the Paris hospital, in the Bellevue ward, we have people who don't even know their own names. No, this is true. It happens in hospitals all over the country, all over the world—accidents, brain damage, and sometimes they haven't even got a mark on their bodies. People who can't handle the suffering and the shock, people like you. Not very pleasant, is it? But that's the world we live in; that's the world of the motorcar.

Patients receive both a physical and mental bludgeoning in Paris hospital, and, as discussed earlier, many patients are reduced to the status of spare parts or 'vegetables'. Similar psychological scars from close encounters with cars are evident in most films in the genre. Significantly, Arthur is deemed 'cured' after he has smashed Darryl into a bloody pulp and is able to drive away. These scenes underscore the strength of the gender-technology relation—a car and a fatality take away Arthur's masculinity and conquering a car and another driver are the means for him to regain it.

Cars is the story of one man's endeavour to find a place for himself and to construct a masculinity from behind the wheel of a car, but Arthur's story is also an allegory for a town's search for identity—a place on the map. Moreover, Arthur's pilgrimage could be read as a whole nation's muddled attempt to construct an awkward and ill-fitting masculine identity around technology, when previously it had attempted to construct

identity around an imagined and mythologised bush culture. As the characters discover, the motor vehicle confers masculinity but it can also take it away, and identity is a fleeting construct, vulnerable to changing values and conditions. Just as Parisians venerate cars and rely on them for their survival, they also dread them, and they have a similarly fraught relationship with the future. Fears about technology and the future equate to an anxiety about enacting masculinities in a changing environment, and what transpires is an hysterical battle for supremacy amongst the town's male population.

The construction of masculinities in *Cars* is bound to automobiles and is manifested via the gender-technology relation from the cradle to the grave (the hatch, match, crash and dispatch circuit). Even childbirth centres around automobiles, and in a town where production and reproduction have stalled, the car provides impetus, and creates an industry and a population for the town. When linked to the masculine culture of technology, reproduction becomes a male process, and although this could be linked to womb envy, it could also be said to transcend the womb and become another means for men to exert control and to shore up hegemonic borders. There appears to be far more envy and emotion felt about access to cars than about access to or domination of women (already a given)—automobiles engender passion but women do not. (In fact, the only desire on screen is directed at the rewards and thrills associated with *cars*, and not *car*nal pleasures.) Moreover, the figure of father is even more powerful than usual, given that it can infer matriarchal *and* patriarchal status. The old perimeters leak, just as the distinctions between animal and human, and human and machine also evince seepage and slippage. It is when the citizens of Paris don costumes (leatherman cop, bushranger, cowboy, sheriff, pioneer, feral car) that the performative nature of gender construction is clear for all to see. Playing dress-ups is a favourite pastime for blokes smitten with cars.

Finding enough food and essentials to stay alive, let alone produce or prosper, is a struggle in Paris, and consumption dominates Parisian's lives. Inevitably, the townspeople attack outsiders, and then each other, in a cannibalistic battle for survival and supremacy. As time passes, they discover that they have contracted a type of food

poisoning, because they are sickened by their ravenous consumption, and they find themselves turning into the objects they devour. Paris is a place suffused with xenophobia, claustrophobia, and unspoken oedipal desires evident in the violent desperation of vehicular consumption and salvage. In a town where unemployment is rife, the population is dwindling, and there seems no way forward, the car appears to offer a way out. However, as the narrative progresses it transpires that the automobile does not offer an answer or an escape, and instead it merely drives them in circles before crashing and dispatching with the town's infrastructure and citizens. Motor vehicles act as both physical and psychological weapons, and it is never an 'accident' when automotive destruction occurs. At the end of the film, the Mayor is seen imploring the townspeople to stay put:

> Stop! Nobody can drive. There are traps laid in and out of the town. Nobody can go in or out. There is no safe road. Paris will survive. No one will drive until further notice.

However, Arthur demonstrates that people can 'go in or out' of Paris, and instead of obeying the Mayor, the townspeople loot, plunder, and then take to the roads. After all, the Parisians know better than anyone else does that when masculinity is linked to technology, there is 'no safe road'.

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[1] This quotation is used in the title of this chapter.
[2] The film was shot in October 1973 in Wattle Flat and Sofala near Bathurst in New South Wales, and was produced by Hal and Jim McElroy. It earned very positive reviews, in Australia and overseas, and was well received at both Cannes and the Chicago Film Festival. The film did good business in London and Paris, but bombed at the box office in Australia. The inexperience of Weir and the McElroys, and their difficulty marketing the film, contributed to its commercial failure (Stratton 1980).
[3] Morris (1989) includes a discussion of *This Woman is not a Car*.

[4] See King 1983, Marsh and Collett 1986, Springer 1998, Hopkins 1998, or Hacker 1989 regarding the feminisation and eroticisation of machines.

[5] Although an absence of heterosexual desire and romance in Australian films has been noted by many other commentators (for example see Morris 1980).

[6] I am unable to check the original quotation, as Packard (1970, 87) refers to the academic as 'Professor Robinson' but does not provide a complete reference.

[7] Jean Baudrillard has also written about tail fins, and he suggests that their utility is as signs rather than functional objects (1996).

[8] Similarly, in the final showdown scenes between Max and the Toecutter's gang in *Mad Max*, the men all rely on their machines as their weapons of choice. The occasional shot is fired, usually from the appropriately phallic shotgun, but the cars account for most of the deaths. This is Miller's version of art imitating life—what he calls 'the ritual of death' (Matthews 1984, 237). There are many examples of the automobile as weapon and Max kills several bikies by using the Interceptor to run them off the road. Rather than shooting or stabbing Max, Bubba Zanetti attempts to run him over. Max survives, but his wife Jess and son Sprog are mowed down by the bikies and mortally wounded. The Toecutter experiences a fate similar to his friend the Nightrider, as he is forced to drive head on into a truck. Johnny the Boy suffers the most gruesome fate because Max shackles him to a car wreck and offers him the choice of hacking off his own foot or being incinerated with the car.

The manner in which the 1959 Chevy Impala (which is hacked to pieces by the Toecutter's gang) is treated as human technology, somehow alive and emblematic of society, is typical of the treatment of cars in the films. The Chevy has been heavily modified and despite the motifs of flame and fire on the duco, the interior has been made into a womb-like home. The interior has been lined with sheep's wool and (along with the other modifications and paraphernalia) this offers the owners a domestic sanctuary from the road. When run off the road by the Toecutter's gang, the young couple cower inside as the bikies launch a savage attack, first on the car, and then on them. The car is impaled with spikes and crowbars, and is comprehensively torn apart and 'raped' in a mad frenzy of violence. Once the Chevy has been destroyed (on screen), the bikies then start on the occupants and both youths are sodomised (off screen). The young girl is then bound and tethered to Johnny the Boy with a chain around her neck like a dog, and this is perhaps the most disturbing scene in the first film. The hatred the gang feels towards, not only the feminine and domestic, but also towards the society in general is terrifying. This is a familiar trope in car crash films, as the assault on human beings cannot be distinguished from the assault on technology (Sharrett 1985), and hence the film manifests technological fears similar to those expressed in Paris, and discussed in the previous chapter. These fears of technological determinism and the spectre of cars as weapons surface consistently in car crash films.

Similar scenes occur in *Running on Empty* when Mick, Julie and Tony take to the countryside in an attempt to rip off the locals in drag races. Their plan soon backfires, however, when a group of disgruntled locals traps the three city-dwellers in Mick's car. The locals pour petrol over the car and then climb all over it and assault it with sledgehammers and planks of wood. To attack the car with such ferocity, and then set it alight with three occupants inside, highlights the fact that more than a few dollars are at stake. The whole premise of this film is that young men use cars to prove their manhood by engaging in dangerous races, and the fact that these races are a form of combat, with the loser usually losing his life, underlines the deadly intent with which the vehicles are wielded.

CHAPTER THREE

As Modern as Tomorrow: Future, Past, and Present Imperfect.

On their journey inward, men are likely to make the shattering discovery that the power associated with their masculine role is only promised, and never fulfilled. Masculinity is a value whose arrival is always being heralded but never quite arrives; a wished-for state always delayed. It is a perpetual future, a vision of inheritance, an emptiness waiting to be fulfilled. For masculinity can never be completely and finally fulfilled. It is always about to be proved by the next deal, the next car, the next house at a better address, and so on (Webb 1998, 16).

This chapter is the bastard child of a journal article entitled 'Misogyny, Muscles and Machines: Cars and Masculinity in Australian Literature' *that I was invited to write for the British journal* Australian Studies. *As the edition featured Australian literature (and not films), I wrote about* 'Crabs' *and thus focused on the cyborg hybridity of a hero who was so obsessed with cars that he became one. When writing this chapter some time afterwards, I became fascinated (and waylaid) by the fertile material that* Dead End Drive-In *offers regarding race relations in Australia. Hence, another Crabs clone arose in the form of a seminar paper entitled* 'Masculinity, Rape and Racism in *Dead End Drive-In.* ' *In re-writing this chapter for the umpteenth time, yet more possibilities arose, and continue to arise, and one that I may return to is a discussion of the similarities between Carey's dystopia, Trenchard-Smith's dead-end, John Howard's fortress Australia, and the life of convicts in colonial Tasmania (perhaps incorporating Richard Flanagan's* Gould's Book of Fish?*). But that is another kettle of fish and can wait until another day and another forum. This chapter could be described as a multiple (almost schizophrenic) reading of* Dead End Drive-In, *but the characters in this film enact their multiple masculinities in a schizophrenic manner. We witness Crabs' confused reading of gender performances (from graffiti, the screen, the media, and the road), and a fractured and insecure construction of masculinity results. As Webb (1998) notes, a unitary, neat, or permanent construction of masculinity is never possible—that is why these characters look to the past and to the future. Tomorrow beckons—or did that happen yesterday...?*

Dead End Drive-In (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986) is an obscure but important text in the car crash genre, and it has been described as a 'political allegory' about the confused youth of the 1980s (Dermody and Jacka 1988, 107). It could also be described as an allegory of Australia's convict past, where the state locked up any 'undesirables' and subjected prisoners to the male gaze of the governors. The film uses the Australian car culture to comment on technology as masculine culture, unemployment, racism, colonialism, and industrialisation. Trenchard-Smith is not a high profile figure in the Australian film industry, but since the mid 1970s he has worked as a director, producer, writer and actor, and in recent years, he has chiefly worked in television, both in

Australia and overseas. In my discussion of *Dead End Drive-In*, I intend to incorporate comparisons with *Cars*, the *Mad Max* trilogy, and *Running on Empty* (John Clark, 1982), and to demonstrate how Trenchard-Smith constructs Crabs' masculinity in relation to the automobile. I will contend that because the era depicted in the films is so bleak (*the present imperfect*), the male characters talk of the future but retreat into an imagined fantasy of the past. Even the past and the future fail to satisfy, and ultimately Crabs constructs his masculinity around an imagined heroic cinematic identity.

Dead End Drive-In (hereafter *Drive-In*) is based on Peter Carey's short story 'Crabs', which was first published in *Overland*, and then in *The Fat Man in History* (1974), and *Collected Stories* (1994).[1] The screenplay for *Drive-In* (adapted by Peter Smalley) is a close reading of the short story, and only differs in two significant ways. In 'Crabs', the eponymous protagonist escapes the Star Drive-in by turning himself into a Ford V8 Tow Truck, whereas in the film he merely utilises a Tow Truck in his escape bid. Carey's story focuses on corporeal transformation and cyborg hybridity that are only hinted at in the film.[2] The second significant difference is that the film ends on a positive note with Crabs driving away from the drive-in after his escape. However, the short story concludes with the image of Crabs idling at the locked gates of the drive-in, trying to get back in after discovering that life on the outside is even worse than the situation that he has fled.

Drive-In is a fruitful text on masculinity partly because its protagonist Crabs (Ned Manning) is an unlikely and quirky male lead (like his predecessor Arthur). As Crabs has grown up in a society where freedom, agency, and power are associated with masculinity and motor vehicles, he is dismayed when driving the right car has not proven to be the cure-all that he imagined. Even his nickname, Crabs (an ironic reference to a sexually transmitted disease), represents a brittle and awkward carapace, and reflects a pathetic desperation to be accepted by his peers as sexually potent and reckless. Crabs' initial mistake is that he tries to embody a masculinity that does not suit him—it is a bad fit—just like his motorcycle boots. When he borrows other men's masculine trappings (the boots, the Chevy) he is unable to keep things together.[3] The

Chevy is under threat and will not remain unitary because it is outdated and represents a masculinity that does not suit Crabs, Australia, or the modern times. The borrowed Chevy and the thrill of the drive-in are dangerous but irresistible lures for Crabs and his girlfriend Carmen, but it transpires that the rites of passage of driving, dating, and the drive-in are delusive. Upon entering the drive-in, it proves almost impossible to leave, and Crabs has to break out of the stasis that it represents. In order to complete his coming of age and move on to manhood, Crabs eventually abandons the Chevy (and Carmen). He begins to move forward and shrugs off the inertia affecting all of the others at the camp. Despite a few false starts (*and some minor body work*), it transpires that he is far more 'heroic' (*wily, resourceful, a man of action*) than the men around him, and he is the only person at the drive-in to challenge the system successfully and escape.

Much in the manner that *Mad Max 2* begins, *Drive-In* commences by informing the audience of the bleak state of the world. Trenchard-Smith uses telex style headlines to inform viewers of the following:

Sydney, January 26th, 1988
Bicentennial celebrations spark 'The Rocks Riot'
51 die.

Tahiti, December 3rd, 1988
Mururoa [sic] Atoll destroyed by Nuclear accident.
Pacific fishing grounds polluted.

Capetown, April 1st, 1989
The great white massacre,
103,000 die.
Gold and diamond exports cease.

New York, June 10th, 1990

The second Wall St crash

World economic crisis spreads.

Inflation, shortages, unemployment, crime wave.

Government invokes emergency powers.

The film is constantly intercut with news reports on the radio or television, reciting the grim details of riots, unemployment, and warfare. The movies, which play late into the night at the drive-in, add to the aura of chaos and media saturation; and *Drive-In* resembles *Idiot Box* in that it uses the bombardment of noise and media images to create an atmosphere of upheaval and unrest.[4] The world is in a state of crisis in which it appears that industrialisation, racism, and the effects of colonialism have led to widespread chaos, economic collapse, and general mayhem. Notably, one news report singles out Detroit, the birthplace of the car industry, as the centre of rioting in the United States, and this suggests that car culture is at the core of the mayhem that afflicts the community. In this bleak and apocalyptic environment, survivors pick at the carcass of the car culture and wonder how it all went so horribly wrong. Similar scenes are depicted in the *Mad Max* trilogy, and in *Cars*, and hence fans of the car crash genre are immediately able to locate themselves, and anticipate the vehicular action on screen.

Many of the scenes are filmed at night, in driving rain, with thunder rumbling ominously in the background (the usual Gothic trappings). The scenes shot during the day depict a hot, polluted and smoky landscape, defiled by graffiti and strewn with rubbish and industrial waste. Fires burn day and night adding to the hellish nature of the setting. This is an industrial and spiritual wasteland—a godless wilderness. There appears to be an absence of community fellowship or goodwill, and no signs of spirituality or organised religion. In one early scene, it is possible to discern spray-painted on a wall a message that states 'Jesus the Lord is Coming—Wear a Raincoat'. The camera cuts repeatedly to a nearby poster advertising the latest Rambo movie, and Stallone is pictured bare-chested and with rippling muscles—suggesting that Rambo is

a more appropriate or relevant Messiah in the current environment. Human life is cheap in this purgatory, and this is evident from the beginning of the film when the dead and injured victims of a multiple car crash are ignored by most of the characters at the scene. Only Crabs notes the human toll, and later an ambulance crew arrives to remove the carnage; the important business is transacted over the car wrecks, not the human wrecks. This is a post-apocalyptic Australia.

The effects of the car culture are obvious, as automotive debris litters the streets, and oil refineries and trashed petrol stations are common landmarks. Trenchard-Smith makes a deliberate point of showing frequent shots of the paraphernalia and infrastructure of the car culture, and the automobile is an important signifier in the film. He recognises the centrality of the car in Australian society, and (it would appear) the significance of motor vehicles in Carey's body of work. In Trenchard-Smith's bleak world, the Chevy, human relationships, and Australian society are all beyond repairs. Crabs has reached a dead end, and the drive-in serves as a microcosm of all that is contaminated in Australian society. As already stated, Trenchard-Smith has signalled to viewers that the government has invoked emergency powers, and it appears that the police are losing the battle on the streets, and finding it increasingly difficult to maintain control of scavengers and bullies like the Karboys. Trenchard-Smith employs the Karboys as figures comparable with the feral cars in *Cars*, and the gender-technology relation again makes it difficult to separate the 'Kars' from the 'boys'. The Karboys also resemble the outlaw bikies in the first two *Mad Max* films (discussed in Chapter Four), and much of the film appears to mirror, and perhaps attempt to cash in on, the success of the *Mad Max* formula.

In Crabs' world, society can no longer rely on its police force and the state, as both are exposed as being violent and corrupt, and anarchists (like the Karboys) are free to ransack the streets. The police, as agents of the government, have a greater chance of reigning in the chaos (and benefiting from the human misery), if 'undesirables' are caged in camps like the Star Drive-in. Corralled into the drive-in, the prisoners feel powerless to challenge the authorities, or to control their destinies. When Crabs

questions his jailers, he is told 'You're here until the government decides what to do with you,' and, repeatedly, 'It's up to the government'. He is told to calm down and accept that 'this is your home'. The government appears to have betrayed its constituents and Crabs is the only one who refuses to accept platitudes and lies. As is often the case for powerless men in 'real life', the police force, as part of the machinery of the state, proves to be a force that it is sensible to avoid rather than confront (Connell 1995). This is illustrated when Crabs is unable to protest or seek redress when he discovers that the police stole his tyres. In fact, the police are seen taking bribes from Frank at a crash scene, stealing car parts, demanding sexual favours, and peddling drugs at the drive-in. It transpires that the drive-in is just one of a whole network of such camps across the country, and that the government is intent on filling them, and keeping the population passive behind electrified fences. Crabs learns that there is a capacity of 700 at his local drive-in, and that Thompson (with the assistance of the police) is required to meet that target.[5] The machinery of the state is ruthless in its quest to retain patriarchal control of society, and as has been noted by scholars such as Segal (1990) and Connell (1987, 1995), the state is a violent institution where gender is inextricably linked to power. Australia's father figures will decide who has access to Australian soil, and who will be locked away behind fences to avoid contaminating the wider populace.

Crabs' masculinity (as represented by the Chevy) is also an allegory for Australian masculinity in the 1980s, and it appears to be under threat from all sides (from women, racism, unemployment, the state and technological mayhem). As Murrie notes:

> The social and cultural changes of the last thirty years ... have produced an unparalleled troubling of dominant masculinity. Conventional certainties of gender have been dislocated by technological changes, economic restructuring, gay culture, the AIDS epidemic, and most importantly, by a generation of feminists, who have challenged the cultural and political hegemony of men and established that gender, like class, is a social construction. Whatever their response to gender dislocation, men are having to confront the issue of their

gender ... The instability of contemporary gender relations contains both possibilities for radically rethinking masculinity, as well as profound male anxieties about change (1998, 169).

Nothing is the same as it once was, the times are a-changing, and the sands are shifting. STOP. The lights are all RED. Will everyone stay put and turn off your engines. Do not proceed past GO. The roads are all closed. I repeat—the roads are all closed.

Crabs' attempted bodily transformation is just one of several shifts that occur in the film, and the Star Drive-in Theatre is a dynamic environment that refuses any single reading as it mutates into a refugee camp, and then into a prison. The 1956 Chevy, at first a symbol of sexual liberation and escape, turns into a menacing and disintegrating cage. In Crabs' eyes, Carmen changes from being a desirable date into an unattractive burden. Thompson (Peter Whitford) the drive-in manager and father figure becomes a prison warden, and the police no longer represent justice, but corruption.[6] The same could be said for the model of masculinity that Crabs thinks he wants because it becomes a straightjacket rather than the liberating costume he had anticipated. If the triumvirate of Crabs, the Chevy and a 1950s model of masculinity are threatened and need to be readdressed, it is appropriate to examine what it is that challenges them and threatens to upset the status quo.

As is the case in many films focusing on masculinity, women provide both a means to establish men's masculinity and to present a challenge to the old order, and Carmen both reinforces and threatens Crabs' masculinity. She functions as a passive witness to Crabs' active performance of a masculinity, and predictably, Crabs propels the narrative and Carmen provides the half-time entertainment (as Mulvey (1975) has famously suggested in relation to other films). It is tempting to suggest that Carmen is a composite of her name—she is initially interested in 'cars' and 'men,' and she is a signifier of the allure of car culture. Carmen is denied subjectivity and hence is typical

of her 'type', and because Crabs' conception of his masculinity is automotive, she functions as an attractive hood ornament.

Unsurprisingly, given the strength of the gender-technology relation, Carmen displays both ignorance and an ironic distance to Crabs' obsession with the Chevy; she finds his incessant mechanical tinkering both annoying and amusing. At first, Carmen is happy to play along with the pretence that Crabs is a 'tough guy' protecting her from the dangers of the drive-in. However, as time goes by she tires of this role-playing and she downplays her show of helpless femininity and adapts to life in the camp. Callahan situates Carmen in the bush tradition of the stoic Australian woman who suffers, 'endures', and 'negotiates' (1995, 46). Her attitude is an antithesis to Crabs' stance, and she emasculates him when she complains that he is not settling in to the camp or performing his sexual duties. Her friend Beth replies: 'He hasn't gone moody on you has he? ... God they're stubborn buggers, guys. They won't accept things!' It is precisely because Crabs 'won't accept things', and has ambitions that extend beyond his next sexual encounter, that he is courageous. However, the other characters do not appreciate his differences and Crabs becomes a target for snide remarks about his masculinity, and the Chevy is sprayed with the message that Crabs 'can't make it'. In linking the Chevy with Crabs' virility, the gender-technology relation is amplified and Crabs is coded as impotent and vulnerable. The car that he had hoped would confer his masculinity has been implicated in taking his masculinity away, and he 'can't make it', move, or even maintain its status. At best, Crabs and the Chevy appear to be going nowhere.

Even if Crabs is not performing to Carmen's satisfaction, the images of bobbing cars attest to the fact that there is an abundance of sexual activity occurring in the other vehicles at the camp. With so many young, sexually active heterosexual couples at the drive-in (with nothing much to do but have sex) it is odd that viewers see no evidence of their couplings being fertile. Given that many of the couples have been residents for months or years, there is an eerie lack of children or pregnant women, and this is reminiscent of the situation in Paris. Beth informs Carmen that there is a ready supply

of 'the pill' and that the management encourages the young women to take it. This could account for the childless status of the young people, but it also raises the possibility that the government does not want these 'non-desirables' to breed. It could also be possible that the entire region has been affected by the accident at Muroroa (and perhaps other undocumented breaches), and that widespread infertility has resulted. If the white men and women are sterile or encouraged not to reproduce, then the spectre of fertile Asian immigrants with young children takes on a more sinister aspect. Perhaps, just as was the case in *Cars*, motor vehicles (in this case laden with Asian immigrants) are required to provide children and revitalise a flagging population. The gender-technology relation and the car crash genre return repeatedly to the themes of production and reproduction, and it appears that the men at the drive-in require assistance on both fronts. The 1950s slogan 'populate or perish' takes on a whole new significance in the car crash genre, where (in Paris and the Star Drive-In) fertility is managed by patriarchal forces.[7]

Whatever the grand plan, the new Asian inmates are believed to be a threat to the women at the drive-in—more specifically, they are seen as potential rapists. Soon after the arrival of the Asian prisoners, Carmen barricades herself in the Ezy-Eatin diner and tells Crabs that she is frightened of being raped, and that 'if you were a man, you'd do something about it.' Thus, both regular sex with Carmen, and protecting her from other men (especially Asians) is seen as integral to Crabs' masculinity. He is not a 'man' if he does not (publicly) perform these duties.[8] Carmen's fears are fuelled by the other white men, such as Hazza (Wilbur Wilde), who rallies the other whites by saying, 'What about *our* women? How long before one of those zipper-heads decides to rape one of *our* women?' It is taken for granted that the women are possessions of the men (hence the use of the pronoun 'our women'), and that they are incapable of fending for themselves. Realistically, the threat of rape from one of the 'zipper-heads' is extremely low because women are far more likely to be raped (bashed or killed) by men whom they know and who are of the same 'race'. Indeed, most rape victims are attacked by men who are friends, colleagues, or family members, rather than by a stranger (Segal 1990).[9]

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In Australia, there has been a history of attempting to 'save' white women from men of Asian descent, and it is clear that Australian men take sexual access to white women extremely seriously.[10] Frankenberg states that protecting white women 'and their supposedly civilised sexuality from men of colour and their 'primitive' sexuality has been the alibi for a range of atrocities from genocide and lynching to segregation and immigration control' (1993, 76). The associated fixation with racial 'purity' is not only related to notions of eugenics and keeping women under control, but it may also be another means of protecting white men's financial interests. Thus, the motivation to 'protect' women may be less altruistic than playing at being saviours and protectors—in keeping the bloodline 'pure', white men retain control of the economy. As resources (and opportunities to perform heroic masculinities) are rare in the drive-in, the white men feel that they must protect their territory and possessions (including the women).[11]

Most of the men (and women) in the camp are terrified of the Asian inmates and treat them with hostility. The new arrivals are coded as less than human because they arrive in a motor vehicle traditionally used to transport animals, and they are denied humanity and agency by being driven rather than driving themselves and controlling their own destinies.[12] The original camp inhabitants' immediate response to the arrival of a cattle-truck full of human cargo is to close ranks and chant the mantras 'Asians Out', and (later) 'Leave Us Alone'. Crabs is informed by Dave that 'us whites have got to stick together,' as there are 'fucken slopes everywhere'. Crabs is reminded that, as 'a member of the white community', he has 'responsibilities', and presumably, these 'responsibilities' include protecting the 'integrity' of the white race. To his credit, Crabs is initially bemused by such racist and reactionary attitudes, and he taunts the others with a 'Mein Führer' salute. Soon after, he takes the racism more seriously, and protests: 'Listen, they're not the enemy. They're prisoners just like us'. His rational and friendly attitude falls on deaf ears, and a crisis meeting is soon held at the Ezy-Eatin diner. The white male inmates then proceed to incite the crowd with phrases such as:

Rice gobblers ... there is just too many of them ... they don't belong in this country ... we were here first ... we don't want fried dog or horse piss soup thank you very much ... not acceptable to ordinary decent folk ... all we want is for them to leave us alone.

Despite their increasingly hysterical claims of superiority, the white prisoners feel frightened and threatened, and as Dyer (1997) suggests, whiteness can manifest an anxiety related to mortality and absence. The presence of an enemy, whether real or imagined, provides the men with the opportunity to play hero and to reinforce their performance of a masculinity. A 'White Australia' with a fortress mentality, as demonstrated at the Star Drive-in and in Paris, proves to be a restrictive and claustrophobic place where hysteria bubbles under a thin patina of patriarchal control.[13]

Trenchard-Smith has already informed viewers that there had been riots on Australia Day and that 51 people had died. He has also provided the information that a staggering 103,000 white people had recently been massacred in South Africa in race-related riots. In light of this information, the threats that the white people face may not be purely imaginary. The film implies that the characters fear that the discrimination and abuse will eventually become too much, and that eventually the oppressed people will rebel (just as they did in Paris). Frankenberg suspects that white people may also be frightened of people of colour because they fear that they may strike back at their oppressors (1993). It is only Crabs, however, who is courageous enough to treat the Asian immigrants with respect, rather than to retreat to tactics based on fear and racism. Of course, the masculine hegemony operates by 'othering' men who do not conform to normative standards. Crabs alienates himself from the hegemony when he behaves differently from the other white men, and he rejects the (tentative) friendly overtures of Dave and his mates. As Linzi Murrie notes, one of the functions of 'mateship' is to discourage deviance from the norm and to celebrate masculinities that legitimate the status quo (1998, 74). Crabs now realises that the masculine hegemony (that he had so desperately wanted to join) stifles difference, and that normative masculinity requires sacrifices and compromises that he may be unwilling to make.

In light of these changes and challenges to the white masculine hegemony, displays of physical power are especially important if one does not possess power in other ways (Segal 1990). When the audience is introduced to Crabs, one of the first things viewers learn about him is that he is 'building up'. He wants to be a 'hard man' like his brother Frank and so he is eating and training in order to change his body shape and image. Crabs is determined to bulk up, but his body-type makes this an extremely difficult task. Frank tries to make Crabs face reality, and says: 'It won't do you any good mate. I'm not taking you on the truck and that's it. You're not big enough.' His mother also tries to caution him, and says: 'You small Jimmy [his real name]. You small like your papa. Why you not realise you're never going to be like Frank. He big. He strong. You run, you lift, you eat, but you small.' Crabs believes that he needs a 'big', 'strong' body so that he can work with Frank (a substitute for yet another absent father). Moreover, he also needs to be physically tough in order to defend himself because, just like the Chevy, Crabs comes under consistent attack. He is threatened by the Karboys, the authorities, and other men, but he is able to protect himself, adapt, and survive. Despite his size, Crabs is able to earn respect at the drive-in because he defeats Hazza in a brutal and very public fight initiated by Crabs' defence of an Asian man. Although Crabs does not have an intimidating physique, he proves that he is tough and wily, and that he is capable of using his body well.

Crabs needs muscles because when he first surfaces on screen, it appears that he is an uncharismatic skinny bloke with little to recommend him. He is trapped in an economy and a social milieu where hard bodies are paramount (see Jeffords 1994). Crabs has no apparent skills or connections that could facilitate an escape into an environment where he could manifest his masculinity in a less physical manner. As a working-class man, he *needs* to display a muscular masculinity. As his nickname suggests, Crabs requires a protective shell. A hard, tight body with cut muscles acts as protective armour and signifies both strength and vulnerability. Hardness and tightness are seen as the antithesis of softness and slackness—the latter being vulnerable to attack and penetration. Connell states that men's power is 'naturalised' by a combination of

'muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body' (1987, 85). A taut body also signals that one is ready for action—to spring into attack or defence (Dyer 1992). As the presence of the Rambo poster suggests, muscular men continue to be pin-ups in Western society, and young men turn to these figures to learn how to enact or embody masculinity (see Tasker 1993, Klein 1993, or Fussell 1992, 1994). The bodybuilding culture plays on men's phobias, and Crabs—a short, puny, and unpopular working-class underdog—is full of insecurities. A culture where men use their bodies to speak for them is manufactured in gyms and cinemas (Tasker 1993, Jeffords 1994, Craig 1992, Tompkins 1992). If a man's body articulates his masculinity, this releases him from having to verbalise it—to engage in a debate in which he may be found wanting (see Chapter Four for more on cinematic silences).

Another threat to the prisoners' masculine agency is the paucity of paid work, and the audience of *Drive-In* is regularly reminded that unemployment is rife. As is the case throughout this thesis, filmmakers in the car crash genre suggest that one of the chief threats to masculinity is unemployment. Dermody and Jacka note that the film is 'clearly a symbol of the dead-end society that faces unemployed youth in the eighties and nineties (1998, 107). Many of the drive-in inhabitants are there because they are unemployed, and it is well documented that it is difficult for working-class men to perform their masculinity in a positive manner if they are out of paid work (see Donaldson 1991, Segal 1990, Wajcman 1991, Webb 1998, Faludi 1999, Connell 1995, or McGregor 1997). Television and radio news headlines trumpet economic gloom, soaring unemployment, and civil disturbances.[14] Dave recounts that he had been unemployed for four years, broke, hungry, and in such a desperate state that he had stolen a car and driven to 'the Star' in the hope that he would be detained there. He had given up trying to fend for himself and sought the security of the prison/welfare system where he could at least be assured of three meals a day. Ostensibly, Dave is 'happier' at the camp, or at least more secure than he was outside, but his reliance on drugs is a sign that all is not well. Heavy drug consumption is encouraged by the state (through their agents Thompson and the police) as a means to pacify the masses. For Dave and his

mates, drugs help them to forget that they are unemployed, powerless and locked in a prison camp, and hence have forfeited their 'manhood.'[15]

The manner in which Crabs is positioned in relation to automobiles and work allows viewers further insight into the construction of his masculinity. In this highly mechanised era, those working-class men who are not physically labouring or working with machines in a workshop or factory are often driving vehicles such as taxis, trucks, vans, forklifts, and cranes (Webb 1998). Both Crabs and Frank are drivers, but Crabs' dainty body prevents him from obtaining a job exactly like Frank's position. Crabs is constrained to a day job as a courier and drives an emasculating Mini Minor—a small 'gutless' car which he punishes for his humiliation. Moreover, Crabs' rejection of the Mini could be interpreted as a rebuff to the British Empire—now signified as diminutive, lacking in power and generally unimpressive. This contrasts with the allure of the American Chevy and Ford V8 Tow Truck—the flashy power and grunt of the new colonisers. Meanwhile, Frank revels in the heroics of being the night driver for Allied Panel and Towing. Part of Frank's role at a crash scene is to fend off the scavenging Karboys, and simultaneously fight the competitors for the right to tow the wrecked vehicle. The fact that Frank is feted by the media to provide grisly crash details only serves to enhance his status and underlines the very public nature of performances of masculinities. It is now recognised that the media reinforces 'appropriate' manifestations of masculinity (in this case one intimately linked to technology as masculine culture). Moreover, audiences digest (and then try to regurgitate or emulate) what is manifested as an approved enactment of gender (Connell 1987, 1995, 2000, Faludi 1999, Craig 1992). Frank is intimately linked with a powerful machine. His work entails physical toughness, aggression and intimidation, and the media ensure that his masculinity is performed on a very public stage. Initially, Crabs can only fantasise about being in such a publicly recognised position, and (as will be discussed later in this chapter in relation to celluloid masculinities) Crabs constructs a performance of gender that incorporates the media's template for hegemonic masculinity.

With the number of adversities and adversaries that threaten the male characters' masculinity in *Drive-In*, it is no wonder that the present is seen as imperfect and that the men look to another (whiter) era for solace and inspiration. There is much empty talk about the future but much yearning for the past—to go back to the future.[16] It seems that the characters cannot decide whether the past or the future is the preferred temporal space, but it appears that no one is satisfied with the present (imperfect). A survey of the preferred cars driven in *Drive-In*, *FJ Holden*, *Cars*, and *Running on Empty* (hereafter *Running*) demonstrates a nostalgia that the male characters have for the 1950s (and for Americana).[17] In an article discussing automobile maintenance, Watkins (1991) states that nostalgia about some technological artefacts (automobiles in particular) is very clearly linked to gender and class. Casey (1997) notes a similar nostalgia for 1950s cars in American literature (where the cars are feted as representative of optimism and prosperity) but that increasingly this romanticism proves to be misplaced.

In Wernick's examination of the car as a 'shifting image', he identifies 1950s American cars as icons rich in embedded symbolism. He suggests:

> The 1950s-style American car, today an object of veneration, is an instantly recognizable type ... it became an internationally recognizable symbol of the post-war boom, indeed of free enterprising America itself. Soaked in Buck Rogers images of space and the future, it signified, above all, that new romance with technology which gave Cold War ideology its heady, expansive edge (1989, 208).

Hence, it becomes more apparent why the male characters may look to 1950s American cars to shore up their masculinity, if, as Wernick suggests, they are a symbol of 'a better past' where the future appeared bright (1989, 215). Richard Wood (1998) arrives at a similar conclusion about the connection between cars and the future (in America and in Australia), and he provides a very thorough survey of trends in automotive design and advertising. He notes that: 'The popularisation of the future and its

inextricable connection with the car was perpetuated for a wider audience in films and on television' (1998, 44). Richardson (2002) also hypothesises that the appeal of the drive-in was inextricably linked to images of consumption and Modernity. It would appear that Modernity and the glittering technological future that was promised in the 1950s are a fantasy that still appeals, years after that 'future' has been and gone.

Did you hear that Harley Earl? Your schemes and dreams about dragging customers into the jet-age helped sell the future with wrap-around windows, fins, and a chrome patina. See how those machines shimmer on the screen. Roll up! Roll up! Come one, come all to the 1952 General Motors Motorama or the 1953 Futurama. This vehicle may look like it comes from Mars but it is made in the USA. This is the genUine article. Spend, consume, buy, buy, buy, like there is no tomorrow because the future is today.[18]

Or what if Barthes is right and dream cars like the Citroën DS 19 have no past, no origin, but are objects from the heavens, devoid of ancestors? Is this the future?[19]

A brief examination of how this tension between the past and the future is represented in other films in the car crash genre may be enlightening. In a film that focuses on human interaction with technology, it is not surprising that there is also such a strong emphasis on 'the future' in *Cars*. The Mayor, the Prime Minister and Roosevelt all talk in very vague terms about 'the future', and in a hostile manner about young people. The term 'the future' brings to mind equally ill-defined notions of 'progress' and 'modernity' which were such buzz words in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. Politicians and salespeople alike proffered an Australia that was 'as modern as tomorrow' where a harmonious union between society and technology would lead to a utopian existence (Allon 1994). The Mayor's obsession with the future is unveiled in an early scene set in the Town Hall, where he is seen presiding over a Council meeting. He intones: 'We must look to the future and that is a very great responsibility ... As to our youth. They are idle. They are lazy. They need to work.' His statement is applauded with a warm cheer of 'Hear, Hear.' Heartened by this support, the Mayor continues: 'As that American President says ... what was his name? ... Roosevelt? The New Deal.

Build. They have got to work.' Given that Roosevelt was President from 1933-45, and the New Deal reforms were implemented in the 1930s, the Mayor is embracing policies that would have been 'new' when he was a child.

A speech by the Prime Minister is heard later in the film and it bears many similarities with the sentiments voiced earlier by the Mayor. (In keeping with the anachronistic sensibility of Paris, it is heard on radio rather than broadcast on television.) It appears that the nation's leader is similarly preoccupied with the future, and predictably, his pronouncements are as empty and useless as the Mayor's advice. He intones: 'The future promises great things for us and our country. The light is at the end of the tunnel, but have you the strength to travel the short distance that remains?' This speech obviously impresses the Mayor because he repeats it almost verbatim at the Pioneer Victory Ball. He adds just a few Parisian embellishments:

> Ladies and gentlemen, fellow pioneers, a happy night and yet a sad one ... The early pioneers suffered adversity and they overcame it. It was a tough life. Only the strong survived and the weak perished. The future promises great things— for *us* for *our* town. The light is at the end of the tunnel, but have you the strength to travel the short distance that remains? I think most of you have. I thank you.

There is no mention that the 'pioneers' (the 'strong') were 'victorious' over Australia's indigenous population (the 'weak') who 'perished'. Although I do not wish to align Aboriginal people with the environment, it is worth noting that the environment was another victim of the pioneers' evangelical mission to conquer. In writing of dominant myths of national identity in Australian cinema, Rattigan identifies the figure of the pioneer as central to filmic mythmaking. He notes that the 'pioneer mythos emphasizes the individual, despite the fact that it lumps together a diverse body of people' (1991, 28). Further, he recognises that mastering the environment, or attempting to subdue it for the good of future generations is also central to the pioneer myth (1991, 28). Hence, the confused but desperate battle that the Parisians engage in with cars, outsiders, and

their own young people. In Paris, there exists a tension about the old days (in America pre-World War II) and the new ways (in post-war Australia). Paris is preoccupied with the future, terrified of the present, and stuck in the past.

A similar romanticism about 1950s America occurs in *Running* where the blind visionary Rebel (Max Cullen) acts as both a father figure and a vehicular benefactor to Mike (Terry Serio). Rebel drives a 1957 Chevy, slicks back his hair, wears a black leather jacket, and talks in a beat-style peppered with 'man', 'cool', and 'dig it', and he indulges in much finger snapping and toe tapping to 1950s rock and roll. Notably, the 1950s he seems unable to transcend appear to be a Hollywood-style American fantasy (the imagined) rather than a (real) Australian past. In her thesis examining road narratives, Falconer problematises *Running* as another text about nationalism and the struggle for Australia to disentangle itself from American cultural and industrial imperialism. She states:

> Whereas Mike and his mechanic mate Tony have to push their car along the outback roads because petrol rationing has limited their mobility, Rebel is linked fantasmatically with the glory days of the American road in the fifties (1995, 271).

Rebel speaks nostalgically of his youth, of the days when cars were big and petrol was cheap, and he is coded as both a figure of rebellion (as his name would suggest) and a technological guru. Like Crabs and Arthur, Mike needs a father-figure and Rebel fits the bill, all the more so because Rebel is a self-confessed 'car freak' whose own sons have let him down by becoming conservative 'pen-pushers' instead of petrol-heads. Like Crabs, Mike is confused, yearns 'to be free', and does not want to be 'pushed around and told what to do', and he sees cars as his means both to escape and to make a name for himself. Rebel, with his compliant blonde wife, 1957 Chevy, and his skills as a transcendental driver and mechanic, further romanticises the 1950s and the type of environment where Mike imagines he may have garnered respect. It is significant that Mike repeatedly fails to win races and obtain street credibility when he drives his own

inadequate Australian car from the 1980s. That car always requires something extra (more horsepower or a better gear box) and it demands incessant attention in order to perform adequately enough to engender respect from the other racers. It is only when he commandeers Rebel's American 1957 Chevy that Mike is victorious. In borrowing Rebel's car, Mike temporarily dons Rebel's masculine mantle and emerges as heroic victor in the final street race that completes the narrative.

It appears that, just like Crabs, the characters in *Cars* and in *Running* are caught in a time warp. Callahan makes an astute observation when he suggests:

> Crabs, the male, has constructed his identity, its presences and its absences, in terms of American automobile culture. The '56 Dodge assumes the status of an identity marker which takes much of its power from its exclusion of a linked series, in which Australia itself comes to be aligned with the feminine, the inadequate, the weak, the insufficient ... He buys [sic] a car which refers to a period of American cultural hegemony in which that hegemony was more-or-less accepted enthusiastically by much of the rest of the world, in which the pleasures of consumption and material development were celebrated less complicatedly. (1995, 45-46).

This fascination with American consumer goods was also evident in the consumption of American cars and clothing by the bodgies (and widgies) post-World War II (Rickard 1998). As Stratton (1992) notes, in post-war Australia the car loomed as the most desirable object on the screen in American films, and these images may have helped fashion the styling of working-class masculinities.

Crabs is uncertain how to articulate his masculinity in the post post-war and postmodern era. He is nostalgic for the times when he thinks 'men were men', and he is reluctant to abandon the ostensible certainties of the past. In borrowing the 1956 Chevy, he is only appropriating or performing a masculinity that is out of date, and one that he does not embody. He is trying to shore up a masculinity that was appropriate in 1956

when Charles Atlas was a pin-up and the Chevy was the car of choice; he finds it difficult to abandon that era when, in retrospect, gender construction *appeared* more straight forward and secure.[20] This romanticism about the post-war years speaks of the success of the concerted efforts of filmmakers, advertisers, politicians, and employers in constructing a patriarchal fantasy of a happy nuclear family, after the turbulent war years.

As this short survey (and detour) suggests, the car crash genre appears fixated with America (or at the very least American style), and 1950s America looms as a futuristic talisman and a mirror to Australians in these films.[21] America with its muscle, music, big cars and big dreams proffers a masculinity that both fascinates and repels.[22] Moreover, there is a sense of loss and disillusionment that relates directly to a society that has been commercially colonised, and hence lost a sense of itself. (*Whose dreams are they dreaming and what is it that they are trying to forget about Australia's past?*) The fantasy of American masculinity in the 1950s appears preferable to the confusing reality of life in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s; the young men in these films turn to cars and to outdated and unrealistic cinematic images of masculinity in order to perform their masculinity.

Close your eyes and breathe deeply, and when I count to three you will tell me the truth, you will tell me about your real feelings about automobiles. Now we have spoken about this before. Remember my experiment with the flash cards? Can you tell me how you really feel about cars? Picture yourself behind the wheel of a 1956 Chevy—now what can you see Crabs?

I'm cruising. It's a warm night. I have the windows open and everyone can see my arm (which is roped with muscles and covered in thick hair), and a warm breeze ruffles my hair, and I look just like a bloke from a movie. I'm Joe Cool, Mr America, Steve Reeves, Charles Atlas. I'm built. I'm buff. I'm just cruising along—the master of my domain. I've got the radio on and the sound roars out of the dash and people can hear

me coming for miles. They can't ignore me. I'm not invisible anymore. I'm there. I'm on the street. People stop and stare and I feel like I'm somebody. I am somebody.

The engine throbs, and the grunt of the horsepower hums and vibrates from the engine and into my body, and I feel like a spirit has entered me. I am the car. I am free. I am something. I am a 1956 Chevy.

Crabs, its Dr Stephen Black here. Crabs, now when I snap my fingers you will be back in reality and sitting in my office in London and its 1962 and you will remember that you are helping me conduct an experiment about cars and fantasy. You will be back in your own body.

Snap!
Vroom, vroom, beep, beep, brrmmmm.
Crabs! Come back Crabs! YOU ARE NOT A CAR. I REPEAT—YOU ARE NOT A CAR![23]

Despite the glamour and the security of these 'American Dreams' (as Carey calls them in his short story of the same name), it transpires that there is no substance to these fantasies. The Chevy is only ever a borrowed commodity, and within hours of arriving at the drive-in its wheels are stolen—thus denying Crabs his liberty. Before long the Chevy runs out of fuel, then another part goes missing, and finally the whole engine disappears. Once in possession of the Chevy, he is unable to keep it in one piece, as despite his vigilance and dogged determination, it refuses to remain unitary. The Chevy is under constant attack from outside forces that signal the changes in societal attitudes, and all of these factors reflect the impossibility of realising a normative, singular masculinity in an increasingly irresolute and diverse world. Masculinity must be constantly reinforced and publicly enacted, and unbeknown to him, the status Crabs craves is dynamic, and thus not possible to attain on a permanent basis (Webb 1998, Marchetti 1989).

When it becomes apparent that the Chevy will never retain its former glory, Crabs recognises that he will have to relinquish it and obtain his freedom in another way. In abandoning the Chevy, and all that it stands for, he attempts to liberate himself from the societal constraints that entrap him. He needs to escape, not only from the drive-in, but also from the bondage of a normative hegemonic masculinity. This proves to be a difficult task, but not an impossible one, as he is able to escape the mental and physical confines that the gatekeepers have constructed. This is what makes Crabs unique and heroic. His infatuation with the Chevy is a rite of passage, and (like Danny from *The Big Steal*) he is astute enough to know when it is time to leave the baggage of his youth behind and proceed to manhood. He is the only person at the drive-in who recognises that the past must be forsaken and a new mode of gender construction must be searched for and embraced.

Crabs' status as a particularly active spectator of the car crash genre is exaggerated in an environment where cars and films are married, and this warrants a brief comment. However, before I commence that discussion, I would like to acknowledge an observation by Meaghan Morris about the car/bloke nexus. She posits that the blurring that occurs between cars and men (in what she calls 'road movies') encourages the audiences' acceptance of national narratives of heroic filmic masculinity. She states:

> Now in road movies the car can represent both the subject (male-hero-human) and the female-boundary-obstacle-space of his trajectory. Perhaps, then, the peculiar pleasure of road movies from 'one's own' national cinema derives from the way that cars offer us the third possibility of a rapid, two-way *transit* between the position of hero and that greater Australian 'space' of visual as well as narrative identification, the Landscape (Environment, 'Nature'). This might help to explain our consent (mine, anyway) to the 'homogenizing' use of iconic masculinity in these films to organize 'Australian-ness,' as Dermody and Jacka describe it: Man + Car + Outback = spectatorial bliss (Morris 1989, 123-124).

I am interested in the 'peculiar pleasure' derived by observing Crabs' 'transit' from 'loser' to hero, and the 'spectatorial bliss' engendered by Crabs' escape *from* the drive-in, *onto* the screen, and then *into* the landscape.

As discussed in the Introduction, the parallels between cars and films became apparent from the conception of both industries, and I have also situated the car crash genre and discussed the genre in relation to male viewers' consumption of action films. The following short history of the drive-in underlines how it is an ideal place to investigate transcendence and the intersection between cars, films, and masculinity. Richard M Hollingshead was quick to recognise the importance of films and cars to Americans, and he invented the drive-in as a means for consumers to combine these two great passions. In 1932, he filed a patent for his invention, which was based on viewing ramps for cars facing a large outdoors screen (Sanders 1997, 17). On June 6 1933 in Camden, New Jersey, the first drive-in opened and was an immediate success that spawned dozens of copycat ventures, and between 1930 and 1960 thousands of drive-ins were operational in the United States (Lewis 1983, 130). Due to the fact that 'middle' Australia did not have the means for private car ownership until the 1950s, the drive-in boom did not occur in Australia until the 1950s, with Perth's first drive-in opening in late 1955 (Richardson 2002). Both Australia and America have the conditions that best suit drive-ins as they are affluent, have high rates of car ownership, suitable weather, and an abundance of space. Drive-ins were originally marketed as a family venue, and they proved to be extremely popular because they were a place to watch movies in informal comfort, where it was possible to talk, smoke, eat, sleep, and bring young children along and save on the expense of hiring a baby-sitter. The snack bars became an integral part of business and provided another place to socialise, and they became a focus for family groups as there were often such amenities as play-grounds, mini-golf, and pony-rides. The popularity of the drive-ins (with their emphasis on consumption, Modernity, and Americana) spelled the end for most garden cinemas and many suburban cinemas in Australia (Richardson 2002).

As Marsh and Collett (1986) note, the attraction of attending the drive-in is more complex than making a pragmatic decision about film watching. Viewing movies from cars provides a secure and familiar environment where one can feel safe, and it also affords the opportunity for the car-proud to display their wheels and bask in the reflected glory of their vehicle. Richardson concurs and suggests that: 'The preoccupation of all Australians with the sanctity of the car and its unique delineation of personal space complemented the drive-ins' appeal to instincts of modernity' (2002). Moreover, if some men construct their self identities around their automobiles (given that the gender-technology relation is paramount to performances of masculinity), then any opportunity to be seen and socialise while in a car is a valuable one. Unsurprisingly, in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s the drive-in proved very popular with young men who were eager to assert their masculinity and virility (without having to leave the security of one's car). After the first wave of popularity, when a trip to the drive-in was a family affair, 'the drives' (known as 'passion pits' or 'ozoners' in America) were largely the provinces of young adults (Sanders 1997, Richardson 2002). In an era when it was difficult for young people to find a private place for sexual encounters, the drive-in became a legendary site for carnal antics. Australian filmmakers have recognised this cultural convention, and (in addition to *Drive-In*) films such as *Puberty Blues* and *Proof* exploit the cinematic possibilities of sex at 'the drives'. However, with the advent of television (black and white and then colour), videos, multiplexes, and bucket seats, the drive-in became decreasingly popular from the 1970s onwards (Baxter 1986, Richardson 2002). Hence, many filmmakers (such as David Caesar) have turned their cameras away from 'the drives' and onto lounge room couches.[24]

One of the most significant factors about the early popularity of the drive-in experience is that it changed the social dynamic of going out to see a film. Despite isolating people in their cars, the drive-in was seen as a very social place where patrons could talk to those in their car or beep and flash their lights to communicate with other viewers. As Hey notes:

Both the automobile and the film experience put barriers between their users and the social world which existed outside. Both experiences involved movement, and both permitted the consumer to select desirable settings or themes, offering an ecstatic experience potentially devoid of depressing connections to reality ... This paradox is what makes these two cultural icons so ambiguous: they were equally serviceable for antisocial behaviour (fantasy indulgence, impulsive desires, extended solitude) and for traditional social rituals (dating, acquiring 'discipline') (1983, 199).

Attending the drive-in is a more social film-watching activity than television or video viewing, it requires leaving the home (which encourages a separation from reality), and it serves as a social outing (as a 'social integrator') (Turner 1999, 127). To escape to the movies is to leave one's body behind and enter the realm of fantasy, and part of the allure of cars has always been the associations of fantasy, freedom, power and escape. The combination of such heady emotions is an irresistible enticement for many people and as Smith observes:

Although the automobile has usually been perceived as a mode of *transportation* in the primary and ordinary sense of the word (physical movement of objects through space), and although most political and legal accommodations to the car have been justified on the basis of the utilitarian sense of 'transportation,' automobility has been consciously marketed and both consciously and subconsciously embraced by the American public as a form of emotional *transport*, the state or condition of being transported by ecstasy, of being enraptured. As Hollywood and Detroit came of age, they both learned how to supply dream vehicles that would carry us away from danger or boredom, transport us to better times and bigger adventures (original emphasis, 1983, 182).

Thus, as noted in the Introduction, fantasy and escape loom as integral to both driving and film watching, and such mobile adventures can be had while sitting down.

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Accordingly, the movies shown every night at the camp function on a number of levels in *Drive-In*. As I have already noted, the films add to the effect of chaos and media saturation, and suggest that Australia is being commercially and culturally colonised by America. The movies are obviously also meant to act as a panacea to the masses (male and female), to help them take their mind off their hopeless situation. Carmen typifies this type of (feminised) viewer, as she soon adapts to her force-fed diet of junk food and escapist filmic fodder; she becomes increasingly passive and unwilling to take part in the drama of her own life, and reluctant to miss any action that occurs *on the screen*. So for the most part the drive-in occupants have been situated as passive, impressionable viewers in the mode of old-school film criticism that privileges the film critic over genre film audiences.

Crabs is a different type of audience member altogether, and he is so active that he could be termed an 'über-viewer' who goes on to star in his own movie. Screen scholars have long talked about how going to the movies engenders a 'sense of separation from reality' and how spectatorship encourages a blurring of the imaginary and the real (Turner 1999, 128). Audiences are often described as being in a dreamscape which privileges 'the pleasure principle over the reality principle' (Turner 1999, 129). It is not my intention to provide a comprehensive survey of that material here, however Crabs could be said to transcend many of the barriers which typify passive viewers (like Carmen and the others in the camp). David Callahan has observed that in 'Crabs':

> Life and identity are seen by Crabs through his vehicle and the imagined scenarios in which he can express that mythic identity, scenarios derived from American television and movies, of car chases, of out speeding cops, of heroic power. Derived from the movies, he is undone by them, by that combination of movie and car which is the drive-in, and rendered distinctly powerless. ... he dreams in terms of the moving image, a dream which leads not to movement but to stasis at the drive-in (1995, 44-45).

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This is particularly relevant in the film, where, paradoxically, Crabs' temporary stasis at the drive-in proves to be the making of him. When viewers are introduced to Crabs he is a figure who engenders pity, but by the end of the film, he transforms himself into a heroic character. When he breaks out of the drive-in, he has become a macho action-man in the manner of Hollywood heroes. As Dermody and Jacka note, 'the only moment where the film jumps off the screen is the final exhilarating escape' (1998, 107). In fact during the escape scenes, it is often difficult to separate the action on the drive-in screen from the action in the drive-in lot. This is wish fulfilment writ large on the screen when Crabs actually realises the 'mythic identity' Callahan identifies, and enters the film, and disrupts the boundaries between the imaginary and the real. Not only is Crabs an expert viewer knowledgeable about cars and films, but he also realises his dreams and becomes a man whose body reflects (and indeed projects) an image of heroic masculinity. In some shots Crabs almost leaps *off* the screen, and in other shots the cinematic images appear to be screened *on* his body. As is so often the case in the car crash genre, it transpires that masculinity is a performance, and Crabs has spent his whole life rehearsing for this role. He is initially coded as an unlikely understudy who is never liable to reach centre stage, but Crabs knows his material, and when the opportunity arises, he is ready for the spotlight.

Crabs is initially frustrated, confused, and trapped in a nightmarish existence where reality is subjective. His quest to perform and embody a normative hegemonic masculinity appropriate to his age, class, 'race', ethnicity, and intrinsically tied to technology, is all consuming but ultimately unsatisfying. Viewers observe Crabs attempting to bulk up and get fit, but his training runs often end in a sticky and unsatisfying ride home on the train. His attempt to impress his peers by confessing to a non-existent sexually transmitted disease only results in their branding him with a humiliating nickname. His macho clothes are not a comfortable fit, and the second-hand bloodstained boots he wears should have foreshadowed the dangers of the 'petrol-head' lifestyle to which he aspires.

In borrowing the Chevy (which becomes a character in itself), Crabs is again only appropriating or performing a masculinity that he does not embody. Once in possession of the Chevy, he is unable to keep it in one piece, as despite his vigilance and dogged determination it refuses to remain unitary. The Chevy is under constant attack from forces as diverse as the police, women, and migrants and refugees who introduce different lifestyles. All of these factors reflect the impossibility of realising a normative masculinity in an increasingly postmodern world. The status Crabs craves is dynamic, and thus not possible to attain on a permanent basis, but must be constantly reinforced and publicly enacted. He is trying to enact a masculinity that was appropriate in the 1950s when Charles Atlas was a pin-up and the Chevy was the car of choice. He finds it difficult to abandon that era when gender construction has since been romanticised as having been more stable and it appeared easier to be a 'man's man'. The old certainties no longer exist (of course they never did) and men have been left grappling for an appropriate masculinity to articulate (*leather-man, sensitive new age guy, bikie, petrol-head*). Crabs is typical of the male characters in the car crash genre, in that he reflects confusion about projecting a masculinity, and a reluctance to abandon the ostensible certainties of the past. When it becomes apparent that the Chevy will never regain its former glory, he recognises that he will have to abandon it and obtain his freedom in another way. In turning to technology and to the screen, Crabs attempts to free himself from the societal constraints that entrap him, and he at last finds a leading role (*as screen hero or is he a car?*) that fits him like a shiny metallic carapace.

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[1] 'Crabs' is not the only work by Carey that has been adapted for the screen, as *Bliss* (Ray Lawrence, 1985) and *Oscar and Lucinda* (Gillian Armstrong, 1997) have also been made into films. Carey also collaborated with Wim Wenders on *Until the End of the World* in 1991.

[2] In 1982 in Australia, Trenchard-Smith may not have had the budget and the technology to have morphed Crabs into a car on screen, and so may have had to improvise.

[3] In 'Crabs' the vehicle is not a Chevy it is a 1956 Dodge.

[4] A note of trivia: according to the film notes at http://us.imdb.com, two of the films shown at the drive-in are *The Man from Hong Kong* (1975) and *Turkey Shoot* (1981) both directed by Trenchard-Smith.

[5] The links with Australia's convict past are evident in these scenes, and there are disturbing similarities with the spread of concentration camps which have sprung up across Australia and the Pacific region in recent months.

[6] Carey's fascination with transformation has been discussed by other critics, as has his scrutiny of capitalism, and commercial and cultural imperialism (see Huggan 1996, Lamb 1992, Callahan 1995, and Woodcock 1996). As Huggan and others have observed, Carey's so-called escapes or transformations often result in stasis or imprisonment (1996).

[7] In my *Australian Studies* article I discuss the production/reproduction issue in relation to Crabs' obsession with the makeover. At first he tries to reinvent/transform/transcend himself by bulking up, but he then turns himself into a machine, and thus gives birth to himself.

[8] As Murrie notes in relation to another Australian text, 'sexual conquest is both authorised and performed for the approval of the male homosocial group' (1998, 172).

[9] The figure of the black or Asian rapist has been a constant in European history and has been traced over many centuries by scholars such as Paul Hoch (1979). It has been contended that demonising non-white men assists white men to construct a more heroic status for themselves. Fuelling fear and hysteria in the population provides a convenient opportunity for white men to perform the role of heroic protectors or saviours. Again, the figure of the white hero disintegrates under closer examination as the so-called white heroes (in the guise of the police and the judiciary) are most often seen as 'second assailants'. That is, women expect to be treated without sympathy if they report their attack and it has been many women's experience that the attackers have received far more sympathy and understanding than the rape victims (Segal 1990, 235). The dual assumption is that women are incapable of protecting themselves, and that they are unable to control their womanly sexual urges. The figure of the 'white goddess' who relies on the 'white hero' to protect her from the 'black beast' has been well-documented (Hoch 1979, 47-54). Such constructions remain pivotal in race and gender politics in countries such as Australia and the United States. These imagined threats to female bodies (and white men's egos) help to justify the disproportionate numbers of black and non-white men in custody. Frankenberg traces the history of the mythical figure of the black rapist in American history and cites Angela Davis' work in this area. It is clear that the threat of rape was a convenient justification to retain control of black men after their release from slavery (61). She contends that: 'Similarly, it was in tandem with white, 'nativist' movements for immigration control and economic protectionism that, from the late nineteenth century into the first decades of the twentieth century, first Chinese, then Japanese, then Filipino male immigrants were represented in the white-owned press as sexually lascivious and physically violent' (Frankenberg 1993, 61). Representations of the 'unbridled' sexuality of black men and the 'sinister' sexuality of Asian men differ, but there is a consistent trope of both groups being 'other' and hence a menace to white women.

[10] Jan Ryan has conducted research on court cases relating to sexual relationships between white women and Chinese men in Western Australia (specifically Perth and Fremantle) between 1890 and 1914. During the gold-rush days of the 1890s the male population outnumbered the female population two to one. Women were scarce and valuable commodities, and given the wide selection of white men to choose from, it was a stinging insult when many women preferred the company of Chinese men. Sexual access to white women was a highly fraught issue, and one that was frequently discussed in hysterical and racist terms in parliament and in the media. To reinforce her hypothesis, Ryan cites Catherine MacKinnon's work on rape, the law and women. MacKinnon states that 'rape, prostitution and obscenity laws have little to do with the physical security of women and everything to do with preserving men's rights over female sexuality' (Ryan 1999, 157). This statement is supported by the rape cases Ryan discusses. Moreover, in 1910, 22 white women were convicted (under the Vagrancy Act) for 'consorting with Asiatics', and sentences of 3-6 months hard labour were imposed (Ryan 1999, 151).

[11] Meaghan Morris' (1998) article on 'white panic' provides another interesting avenue of exploration.

[12] There are painful similarities with the 2001 Tampa incident.

[13] Richard Dyer (1997) has written extensively on the issue of whiteness, and his insights help to unravel the men's racist stance. Dyer states that: 'Though the power value of whiteness resides above all in its instabilities and apparent neutrality, the colour does carry the more explicit symbolic sense of moral and also aesthetic superiority ... with its emphasis on purity, cleanliness, virginity, in short, absence, inflects whiteness once again towards non-particularity, only this time in the sense of non-existence' (70). Trapped at the drive-in, in limbo and isolated from the outside world, the men could be said to be facing

their own 'non-existence'. Thus, whiteness could be said to connote uncertainty, superiority *and* an absence. This can be an absence of being, of sexuality, sin, faults or dirt. Dyer cites Joel Kovel (the author of *White Racism: A Psychohistory*) regarding the absence of filth or dirt as it relates to the corporeal: 'It is in this context that Kovel makes his most vivid argument about race. Non-white people are associated in various ways with the dirt that comes out of the body, notably in the repeated racist perception that they smell (but also, notably in a British context, that their food smells, that they eat dirty foods—offal, dogs, snakes—and that they slaughter it in direct and bloody forms). Obsessive control of faeces and identification of them as the nadir of human dirt both characterise Western culture: to be white is to be well potty-trained' (75-76). The men at the drive-in express an anxiety about the Asians cooking in 'horse piss' and frying 'dogs'—displaying exactly the type of anxiety that Kovel and Dyer describe. The men see themselves in terms of being 'white' (clean, pure, superior), 'ordinary' (thus creating a hegemony of normality), and 'decent' (Christian, law-abiding, moral).

[14] Both Arnold (2001) and Jeffords (1994) discuss the links between representations of masculinity, technology, and unemployment in American films.

[15] Again, comparisons with Australia's convict past, and how convicts manifested masculinity while in detention could be very profitable (see for example Evans and Thorpe 1998).

[16] In her 1988 'Panorama' article, Morris muses about Baudrillard's hyperreality and the threat of the immediate future and the lure of suspended time.

[17] It is well recognised that many of Carey's texts are loaded with American products and images (see Callahan 1995 or Woodcock 1996). Carey also illustrates that what is good for General Motors is not necessarily good for Australia, and he employs cars as an effective and malleable sign in *The Tax Inspector* (1991), *Illywhacker* (1985), and several of his other texts.

[18] Harley Earl's influence on automotive design is discussed in many texts that examine car culture, see for example Marsh and Collett (1986) or Bayley (1986).

[19] Barthes ode to 'The New Citroën' is in the *Mythologies* collection (1973).

[20] The work of Wells (1993) and Janovich (1996) demonstrates that representations of masculinity in some 1950s American films (especially science fiction and horror films) are just as fraught as representations of masculinity in the Australian car crash genre. Bailey's research also suggests that the 1950s were not the oasis of calm and gender certainty that some have suggested (1988).

[21] Kristin Ross (1995) identifies a similar fetishisation of 1950s American cars in French literature (Sagan, de Beauvoir) and in French film (Dhery, Demy, Tati, Lelouch, Godard).

[22] An excerpt from a 1971 Australian motoring book is typical of this sentiment: 'In America the motor car has come to symbolise some of the worst aspects of the American character. In design and speed it has pandered to that American need for violence, power and ostentatious success. What implications are there in all this for Australia where there is such a strong American influence and where the per-capita car ownership is one of the highest in the world? Well, we can certainly say that we share with the Americans some of the more unfortunate characteristics associated with the speed and mobility provided by the car' (Powell et al, 1971, 9).

[23] Dr Stephen Black (1966) conducted research using hypnosis to investigate whether people's professed attitudes to automobiles differed from their unconscious or never-articulated feelings. His tests showed that when questioned about their attitudes to motor vehicles in their 'natural' state people spoke very soberly about safety and economy issues, but under hypnosis their answers concentrated on issues related to sex, adventure, escape, and other hedonistic pleasures.

[24] In *Idiot Box*, Kev and Betty's extremely brief sexual encounter during an ad break is extremely funny.

CHAPTER FOUR

Manifestations of Masculinities:
Mad Max and the Lure of the Forbidden Zone

Fusing the vehicular with the corporal, Bubba identifies with breathtaking clarity the masculine imperative at work on the roads. He suggests, 'Perhaps it's the result of an anxiety'. The car is the victim of masculine anxiety, but it is also its agent, its tool and, ultimately, its monument. The crashed car *is* modern masculinity. The wreck is compelling evidence of performance, danger, trouble and defeat (emphasis in original, Biber 1999, 35).

The hypotext of this chapter, was written in early 2000 and was published in the Journal of Australian Studies *in early 2001. It is not finished. It will never be completed or complete. But I'm not dead yet Roland, do you hear me? I'm not done yet Roland. Every time someone reads this chapter (either the original published version of the article or perhaps as a later publication or possibly in my thesis) it will change. A reader may take something I have written and use it as an avenue of investigation previously unexplored. As I write these asides and additions this chapter changes. I'll read more books. I'll talk to Rikki in the Gallery and then think of something else. Perhaps I will detect an awkward phrase, a split infinitive, a missing reference, and I'll come back to this piece and paint another layer. The draft chapter as a flaky palimpsest. A Derridian deferral, a refusal to say uncle—enough? A sycophantic half-arsed tribute, to what, infinity? A stubborn denial or an obsessive academic version of picking at a scab? This text will not heel, and it cannot heal.*

Max Rockatansky is a straight cop and the villains in both *Mad Max* and *Mad Max 2* are gay motorcyclists; this presents a tension about masculinity, sexuality, and technology which has not been present in the other films examined in this thesis thus far. The cops and the bikies are fighting a turf war over masculinity and sexuality, and the winner claims hegemonic status for their reading and performance of masculinity. After the deaths of his best friend, wife and son, Max is drawn repeatedly into the unknown and unlawful world of the bikies. Max triumphs by 'outmanning' the bikies, and his exalted status as the best driver on the roads is an element essential to his masculinity and his heroic status. George Miller pits Max, the heroic heterosexual cop against the homosexual 'baddies' in the Toecutter's gang and Lord Humungus' tribe.[1] As agents of death heralding the coming of the apocalypse, the bikies are exiled to the badlands and are manifested as both queer and dangerous. The demonisation of bikies and gay men in the two films is an interesting trope—all the more so because it has been noted by several academics (Biber 1999, Sharrett 1985, Matthews 1984, Stratton 1983, and Falconer 1995) but not widely debated. I contend that Max finds the bikies worthy and proficient rivals who ooze a tough and extremely muscular masculinity.

Further, I will examine Max's quest to exterminate the rogue bikies, and how Max's body becomes a contested site which both propels the narrative and offers itself up to mutilation and the gaze. Moreover, Max's heterosexual mission to defend the car-driving patriarchy from the threat of menacing gay scoot-jockeys places him in the Forbidden Zone of homoerotic desire.

Initial reviews of *Mad Max* patronised the film by describing it as 'just' a genre movie—the inference being that it was an inferior B-grade product that pandered to an 'American style' of filmmaking. Most critics condemned the film and appeared to want Miller to apologise for making a self-funded low budget movie that went on to be a huge financial success.[2] *Mad Max* challenged perceptions about Australian culture in an era when films such as *My Brilliant Career* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock* were being heralded as the renaissance of Australian cinema.[3] The violence and inferred violence in the movie caused a furore, and during May 1979 most of the national newspapers featured outraged protests about the film. Phillip Adams called for censors to ban the film, which he described as a 'dangerous pornography of death' (McFarlane and Mayer 1992, 53); and Tom O'Regan remembers saying, to no one in particular, at an early screening of the movie 'this film is evil' (O'Regan 1999). After the film won the Special Jury Prize at Avoriaz, and Miller produced two successful sequels, the cycle received belated recognition and began to attract more 'serious' investigation. Critics now almost universally praise Miller for successfully exploiting the genre convention, and for making a successful product that has attained a cult-status internationally.

The *Mad Max* films have often been categorised as genre cinema with links to the Western, horror, science fiction, road movies, vigilante tales, and bikie films; and these genres are noted for their fondness for homosocial environments tinged with suggestions of homoeroticism (Wood 1986, Tompkins 1992). Miller 'simplifies' Max's brand of heterosexual masculinity by placing him in what appears to be an 'uncomplicated' homosocial wasteland where 'men could be men'. The characters respond to the post-apocalyptic environment by constructing an appropriate model of atavistic masculinity for these extreme conditions. In this hyper-masculine 'golden

age,' Max's traits of cool aggression, control, authority, power, potency, and technological mastery are pertinent, and indeed laudable, characteristics. The Bronze and the bikies dice with death on the streets every day, and the roads are a potentially fatal arena for the performance of masculinity.

Miller very methodically provides the building blocks that make Max a heroic male in the Australian cinematic tradition—Max is laconic, tough, gnomic, and 'one of the boys'. However, the protagonist of this low-budget car-action flick has a cross-cultural resonance that no-one had anticipated, and in a recent interview Miller commented on the qualities that made Max such a popular hero:

> My first movie, *Mad Max* (1979) was purely and simply a piece of visual rock and roll. What I didn't know at the time was that there were larger impulses at work. As the *Mad Max* films made their way around the planet, they seemed to resonate somehow, culture to culture. For the French, these were postmodern, post apocalyptic westerns and Max was a gunslinger. In Japan he was an outlaw Samurai. In Scandinavia, a lone Viking warrior. The movies had tapped into the universal hero myth and I was given a taste of what Carl Jung was on about when he described the collective unconscious (Miller 1999, 30-31).

What Miller came to understand and capitalise upon, was that Max is recognisably a heroic figure based on the composite hero of the monomyth as outlined by Joseph Campbell (Campbell and Moyers 1988, Campbell 1993). Much of the research examining the trilogy explores the mythical tropes in the cycle or attempts to place the films in a genre category (see Sharrett 1985, Broderick 1993, Gibson 1992, Stratton 1983, Falconer 1995, or Tasker 1993).

When the trilogy commences, Max is a member of a police force known as 'The Bronze.' Max is a law abider and a law enforcer, a part of the hegemonic masculine power structure, which retains a tentative hold on a crumbling and chaotic society. Max is an embodiment of authority because he represents patriarchal law. In a society where

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commodities are becoming scarce, as a police officer, he has legitimate access to phallic signifiers such as firearms and powerful cars; and in a world devastated by the effects of a global oil war, cars are particularly potent symbols of power and masculinity. Max's relationship with technology, and with his V8 Interceptor in particular, underlines his heroic status as the number one driver on the roads.

Miller establishes Max as the hero of the films by contrasting him with both the female and male characters around him. Max's standing as the dominant male is never seriously challenged by the other male characters, and his masculinity is reinforced by the macho accessories of black leather, his weaponry, and his privileged access to the most powerful machine on the road. Max's superiority to his fellow police officers is demonstrated in the opening sequence of the first film where the camera shots emphasise his intimate relationship with cars. The audience is teased by being shown only fragments of Max's body—his face masked behind reflector sunglasses. Miller's choice of shots, and the subsequent editing of the scene, underline a fetishism of both Max's body and the car. The camera utilises metonymy to speak of desire and technological fetishism and it would appear that Miller is mirroring this technique from films such as *Stone* and *Scorpio Rising* (discussed later in the chapter). As his colleagues fall by the wayside (or roadside) in a frenzied chase after the Nightrider, the camera repeatedly returns to the lone figure of Max who slowly and methodically dresses himself and calmly prepares to join the chase. It is his calmness and his deliberate methodical manner that distinguish him from the other characters, and as O'Regan notes, 'The film had, by marking the absence of action on Max's part, created Max as a figure of powerful action' (1999). As O'Regan (1999) also notes, the episode mirrors a scene in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a time in the West* (1969) and is one of many moments of cine-literate intertextuality in the trilogy.

Two police units, identified as Big Bopper and March Hare, are unable to apprehend the Nightrider and his girlfriend. Max's best friend, the motorcycle cop, Jim Goose, also fails to stop the fugitives. Although Goose appears to be a brave and competent cop, one senses that he is accustomed to relying on his friend Max to act as the last line

of defence on the aptly named Anarchie Road. It is Max's willingness to sacrifice his life in the contest commonly called 'chicken', which ensures that he will always come out 'on top'. Chicken, in its various incarnations, has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, and it is a well-known cinematic test of manhood (Mottram 1981, Sargeant and Watson 1999). Movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), *Idiot Box* (David Caesar, 1996), *The Crossing* (George Ogilvie, 1990) and many others, have established chicken as a test of highway heroism. Within seconds of joining the chase, Max has established himself as cock of the walk and reduced the Nightrider to an hysterical, gibbering mess—a chicken.

Max's calm prototypic heroism acts as a foil to the hysterical behaviour of those around him. Lynne Kirby's excellent article entitled 'Male Hysteria and Early Cinema' links the first diagnoses of male hysteria with the advent of the railway age. She traces the appearance of the terms 'railway spine', 'railway brain' and 'traumatic neurosis' in the nineteenth century, and reviews early medical and psychological literature on male hysteria (1988, 116). She contends that male hysteria was first identified in relation to railway transport's pleasures of speed and power and its corresponding terrors of loss of control, fear of collision, and so on. The shocks encountered with railway travel supposedly demonstrated an hysterical nervous reaction to technological change. Kirby notes that early cases were diagnosed as more prevalent in proletarian men and such observations threw into question the nature of class and nervous disposition. Of course, any diagnosis of male hysteria also challenges the nature of female hysteria, and whether one's approach should highlight male and female 'characteristics' or ignore them.

The car crash genre plays on hysterical fears about masculinity and technology and there is a frenzied and overwrought note to violent displays of cinematic masculinity. Biber also recognises the hysterical pitch of the performances of masculinity in films such as *Mad Max*, and comments:

Male hysteria—the 'standard site'—is located in the troubling core which must be coated in layers of unambiguous 'masculinity' to deflect attention from the underlying and ever-present threat of emasculation. Hysteria is not at odds with the heroic archetype; it is vital to the delineation of archetypal heroism and hegemonic masculinity. Australian film narratives can be read, therefore, not as relentless displays of hegemonic masculinity, but as representations of male hysteria and counter-hysteria (1999, 15).

If Max's counterparts are emasculated by their hysteria, this serves to enhance Max's cool manifestation of masculinity (what Biber calls 'counter-hysteria'). If mechanised transportation and male hysteria are linked, then the cars, motorbikes, and the nature of the characters' lives on the road, could be said to exaggerate their turmoil, and perhaps make them more vulnerable to 'fits' of hysteria. After all, most of Max's foes will experience first hand, not just vicariously through cinema spectatorship, the horror of a 'head to head collision' with a character who personifies road rage. To add insult to injury, Max rams his car into the rear of the Nightrider's vehicle and thus proves that he is the dominant male, and this act of vehicular sodomy proves to be the Nightrider's undoing.

Significantly, Max rarely speaks in the trilogy and his controlled silence is another means of contrasting his behaviour favourably with the hysteria of the other characters. Indeed, Jonathan Rayner notes that Max's 'negation of emotion and masculinity enmeshed with machinery' are central to his character and to the film's 'themes' (2000, 38). Max is likened with a machine in that he is unable to voice his emotions, whether they are positive (love) or negative (grief and pain), and he uses his car to enact revenge. Max is also typical of mythic Australian males, and most heroes of the action genres, in that his actions are expected to speak louder than words (Murrie 1998, Chute 1982, Tasker 1993, Horrocks 1995, Tompkins 1992). In fact in the entire 91 minutes of the second film, Max utters approximately 20 lines of dialogue. In their most intimate moments, Jess and Max use sign language to convey the message 'I'm crazy about you'. Steve Neale has commented on cinematic silences, and links what he describes as

'emotional reticence' and a 'reticence with language' with Lacan's concepts of narcissism and the construction of an ideal ego (1992, 280). Moreover, Paul Smith notes that Clint Eastwood's trademark silences are a 'sign par excellence of empowered masculinity' (1995, 78). *Imagine Dirty Harry and Max Rockatansky stuck on a desert island together ... Tom Hanks was lucky to be marooned with Wilson the volleyball.*

In *Mad Max 2*, Max is no longer a police officer but a lone road warrior. Jessie has been replaced in Max's affections by a man's best friend, a dog (imaginatively named Dog).[4] While roaming the highways and searching for fuel, Max meets another male, a gangly gyrocopter pilot. Thus, women have effectively been dispensed with and the film becomes yet another 'buddy movie', where, as Mulvey states, 'the central male figures can carry the story without distraction' (1975, 11). This section of the film is overloaded with phallic signifiers of masculinity (*one would hope that this is a deliberate humorous ploy*), and Miller has the Gyro Captain soon surrendering his weapons, snakes, and telescope to Max. The aviator is reduced to competing with Max's dog, and both man and beast serve as comic trickster figures pandering (sometimes reluctantly) to their master. With the pilot and Dog in tow, Max attempts to save one of Pappagallo's tribe and soon acquires another follower in the form of the Feral Kid. Now accompanied by a group of disciples, Max aligns himself with Pappagallo's group of settlers whose status as 'goodies' is conspicuous because they are white, heterosexual, and wear flowing, light-coloured robes (Stratton 1983). Despite their initial suspicion of Max—he is labelled a 'maggot'—he soon wins their admiration. Max again establishes himself as a hero by his courage, fighting skills, and monosyllabic savoir-faire. His habit of appearing, as if a Messiah surfacing from the desert, also reinforces his status as a heroic Fisher King or Christ-like figure. As already noted, several commentators have recognised this symbolism and have written about Max's status in the Joseph Campbell canon (see Sharrett 1985, Broderick 1992, Matthews 1984, or Chute 1982).

The movie industry abounds with producers and directors strutting about with annotated copies of The Hero with a Thousand Faces *and* The Writer's Journey:

Mythic Structure for Writers, *and we literary types and film buffs shuffle after them and furtively pore over our copies too. We grandstand, protest and profess but many of us are also suckers for a hero. Like Tina, we declare that 'We Don't Need Another Hero,' but, if we are honest, most of us occasionally fall victim to their histrionic lure. And Hero, packaged as a young Mel Gibson in black leather, has fans, male and females alike, swooning and reaching for the smelling salts, popcorn, and chips. Of course, Richard Dyer (1996, 1998) and Jackie Stacey (1994) are the critics to read about STARS.*

Although on first examination Max appears as a pin-up boy for heterosexuality, a homoerotic undertow threatens to drag him into dangerously transgressive territory. As Wilson (1985) and others have noted, there is an element of narcissism and homosocial, if not homoerotic, solidarity in all-male groups. In the first film, Max's commander Fifi Macaffe, with his shaved head, butch moustache and leather attire, is a decidedly camp character. Fifi's status is undermined by his unlikely name and by the fact that he is feminised by being located chiefly inside the office—where he is memorably seen bare-chested and tending his indoor plants. As Fifi is linked to his role indoors, this diffuses his masculine credibility, as in a working-class milieu like The Bronze, the 'real' men, like Max, work out on the roads. Thus, Fifi is coded as a paternal (*or worse still maternal*) nurturer rather than a man of action. Fifi both threatens and reinforces Max's masculinity; he bolsters it by providing Max with paternal support and admiration. Fifi implores Max not to resign after Goose's death, and pleads:

> Do you want me on my knees? Do you want me to beg? ... They say people don't believe in heroes any more. Well damn them! You and me, Max, we're gonna give them back their heroes.

Significantly, the camp commander offers to go down on his knees before Max. Although most commentators note Fifi's plea to Max's heroics, critics often ignore Max's humorous response: 'you don't expect me to fall for that crap'. The manner in which Miller toys playfully with the notion of Max as hero (or indeed anti-hero) often

goes unnoticed, or in rare cases is labelled as postmodern (Sharrett 1985). In her typically astute fashion, Biber notes the irony and playfulness of such scenes in the film. She states that, 'It's [sic] high-camp aesthetic refuses to take seriously the political gestures it flaunts, teasing the viewer with a crowd of attractive-yet-contradictory referents' (1999, 29). The scenes between Max and Fifi are loaded with such ambiguous referents.

Despite Max's protests, Fifi is confident Max will return to the force, 'You'll be back Rockatansky! You're hooked and you know it!' So it appears that Max is not only 'hooked' on the adrenaline of life and death heroics on the roads, but he is also addicted to the power his position confers, and to the masculine camaraderie of The Bronze. There is also the possibility that Fifi presents Max with a temptation of another kind. If civilisation is crumbling and under threat, one wonders whether Fifi's presence in the Halls of Justice is another symptom of endemic corruption. Delia Falconer notes that Fifi's camp demeanour and his attempt to 'seduce' Max to stay with the force generate a highly charged tension between them (1995, 286). Perhaps Max is afraid of being 'hooked' on more than just the obvious benefits of working in such a high-octane homosocial environment. Max appears apprehensive that he will weaken and accept Fifi's inducements, and he confides to Jessie: 'I'm beginning to enjoy it. Any longer out there and I'm one of them—you know—a terminal crazy. I need a bronze badge to say I'm one of the good guys.' Falconer notes that 'the contamination is catching' (1995, 287), and it appears that Max cannot make up his mind whether he wants to be caught.

In the second film, Miller remains anxious to demonstrate that Max is still straight, even after his entanglement with the Toecutter, Bubba Zanetti, and Johnny the Boy. To this end, Miller has the Gyro Captain make nostalgic comments about women's lingerie and spend much of the time in libidinous pursuit of the Lusty Girl. Thus, viewers are meant to be reassured that there is nothing 'unnatural' about the two men's relationship. The Gyro Captain proves his bravery and resourcefulness as the film progresses, and by the final scenes he is worthy of the status he craves—to be Max's 'partner'. When the

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bloodied and battle-weary Max leans against the tanker at the end of the film, he favours the Gyro Captain with a flirtatious and sardonic smirk. The two men exchange a highly charged 'look' which signals that their relationship has moved onto new ground. *(Miller explains the look away and describes it as a moment of irony (Matthews 1984, 251). Fair comment, but that silent exchange lights up the screen. Bogart and Bacall shared looks like that.)* However, their alliance is terminated before it can develop any further as the two men soon go their own ways. The Gyro Captain joins Pappagallo's group on their trek to Queensland, and Max (as dictated by mythic conventions) chooses to remain alone on the road.

As Miller takes such pains to establish Max as an icon of heterosexual masculinity, the fact that Max's chief opponents in the first two films are homosexual bikies is worthy of further interrogation. The practice of portraying bikies as icons of the counter-culture or as villains has a long history. Classic bikie films such as *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1954), *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), *Stone* (Sandy Harbutt, 1974), and a host of others, are familiar to audiences of genre films.[5] Presumably, viewers would also associate bikies with organised crime and the bikie 'wars' that are such popular fodder for the media. Hence, demonising bikies, while interesting in its own right, is not unusual; what is unconventional is that Miller has portrayed the bikies as even more 'bent' than the usual reactionary and stereotypical representations. It has been well documented that images of gay and lesbian characters in film and television are chiefly absent or aberrant. When not being ignored or sexually sanitised, homosexual characters are inevitably depicted as deviants, often 'murderers, molesters, psychotics, or exaggerated stereotypes' (Hantiz and Lehr 1994, 118). This appears to be how Miller has exhibited the bikies—as larger than life psychotics in S & M gear.[6]

As Willis (1978), Polhemus (1998), Simon (1998) and others have noted, bikie 'gangs' emerged after World War II, and blossomed again after Vietnam, when groups of disaffected veterans found it difficult to fit into mainstream society upon returning home after their tours of duty. The rejection of family and stasis is symbolised by the bikie who is both mobile, and either rides alone or with only one passenger. The event

that brought bikie gangs to the American public's attention, and was mythologised in the film *The Wild One* (and hence gained international recognition), was a motorbike rally and subsequent 'riot' that occurred in July 1947 in a small town in California called Hollister. Polhemus locates the Hollister incident as central to bikie mythology and he notes that the hysteria generated by bikies originated with their unkempt wild appearance, their mobility, and non-conformity (1998). America's best, its heroic vets, had turned feral and snarled and snapped at their fellow citizens. Media-savvy and acutely aware of the mythology that was being generated, groups such as the Hells Angels[7] revelled in the 'outlaw' and 'one-percenters' tags.

What becomes apparent from an examination of bikie 'riots' is that they are highly ritualised and rely on the police, the media, and the bikies to play their predetermined parts. Presumably, filmmakers are aware of the conventions involved, and what is noteworthy is their interpretation of the rituals and roles manifested in the disturbances. Miller appears to know the conventions and enjoys following them. The audience understands that this will be the case, and this is part of the enjoyment of genre viewing. Viewers know that there will be a series of spectacular car crashes, and they expect and welcome every crash, and every explosion, as one after another each bikie is eliminated. The audience and Miller are complicit in a relationship in which he delivers what is expected and he does so with relish and lashings of irony. As Biber notes, '*Mad Max* is a film about the collective compulsion to engage in, and applaud, murderous vehicular conduct on the roads' (1999, 32). Familiarity with the conventions increases rather than decreases the enjoyment factor because the audience (an active audience in reception theory parlance) recognises that they are expert viewers; that they are part of a relationship with set conventions and rituals.

Australia's equivalent of the Hollister incident are the Bathurst bikie 'riots' that occurred over a fifty year period every Easter at the Bathurst motorbike races. Cunneen and Lynch's (1993) excellent study of the riots illustrates how the disturbances became part of Australian folklore. The study went back to the 1930s and involved an examination of news articles, police and court records, and the collection of oral

histories, and it pays particular attention to the last fifteen years of the race (which was eventually cancelled in 1987). The disturbances occurred at Mount Panorama (an area alongside the track), and related to public drunkenness, fights, and vehicular displays of masculinity such as donuts, and ritualised burnings of vehicles. (A ritualised burning is discussed in Chapter One, and other examples can be seen in *Mad Max*, *Running on Empty*, *Metal Skin*, and *Cars*). As Cunneen and Lynch point out, such performances involved no threat to the general population and if the youths had been left undisturbed their activities would have been largely harmless, and would not have reached the mythologised status that they did. The participants were predominantly young working class men who rode motorbikes (*age, class, subculture*) and 'the riots were historically shaped, rule-bound affairs with relatively clear meanings and purpose for those involved' (1993, 92). The bikies, the police and the media all knew their roles and hence enacted their performances with predictable panache. Just as was demonstrated in Chapter One, such disturbances are a means for young working class men who identify technology as masculine culture to enact ritualised protest during their leisure activities. There is no serious attempt to overthrow power structures or to change society in any permanent way—the protests are symbolic—but these riots acted as a way to express anti-police sentiments, to vent feelings of powerlessness, and they were a struggle over public spaces. As demonstrated in this thesis, these sentiments are enacted on Australian streets and screens again and again as young working-class men use the gender-technology relation to garner the recognition and respect they crave. What emerges is a predictable but violent series of games or rituals enacted on motorbikes or in cars and, despite the seriousness of some of the crimes enacted, there is a sense of the carnivalesque about them.

The bikies versus cops antipathy has a long tradition in Australia, and it was first seen on Australian screens in *Stone*. The eponymous hero is a cop who works undercover with a gang called the Grave Diggers who consist of Korean and Vietnam veterans and other disaffected men who construct their identities as part of a motorcycle gang. The gang all talk of honour, style, loyalty, mateship, and a 'no compromise' attitude to life and the law. Accordingly, Stone respects the bikies, and when he is seriously bashed by

the gang at the end of the film, he insists that his girlfriend does not report the incident to his superiors. Stone exhibits a reluctance to separate himself from the role he has been playing as bikie renegade because he is attracted to the lifestyle, and the bikies' professed beliefs, and he enjoys the tension of being both law and outlaw. The ritualised nature of the cop/bikie antipathy includes a mutual level of respect (or at least an understanding of the rules), and highlights the intimate relationship between the heroes and villains in such narratives. Indeed, in *Mad Max* the closeness of the male characters (and a mirroring of their traits) could be said to be a doppelgänger effect (Biber 1999, Rayner 2000). The male characters appear to cherish the homosocial ritualised nature of the games they play out on screen, and the popularity of such films would appear to validate the appeal such narratives have for audiences.

Stone mythologises Australian bikies and it has a cult following nearly thirty years after its release. As documented in *Stone Forever* (1999), Harbutt treats his subjects with a grave reverence and situates himself within the Australian bikie culture. The film implies that the bikies are tough rebels, 'real' men in a time when the counterculture was challenging conventions, and the men all speak reverently about their relationships with the bikes (*power, escape, transcendence*) and suggest that once one has driven a large motorbike at speed, everything else in life pales into insignificance. Their relationship is with their machine, and with their bikie brothers, and their assorted girlfriends (defined as 'molls') are decorative accessories who are useful for public displays of virility (there is very little privacy among the gang). Harbutt is almost reverent in his depiction of the gang and the lifestyle, and their tough brand of vehicular masculinity is treated without irony and their fetish-wielding is unproblematised. However, one scene foreshadows the future treatment of the bikies in the *Mad Max* trilogy, and it involves Toad (Hugh Keays-Byrne who went on to play Toecutter in *Mad Max*). Toad and Captain Midnight (the only Aboriginal bikie in the gang) playfully 'kiss' and tongue wrestle in a bar scene where Toad confronts two 'suits' and asks one for a kiss. Toad's confrontational behaviour is, of course, aimed primarily at shocking the suit (and the audience) and causes the terrified man to flee from the pub (which would appear to be Toad's chief motive). However, it is noteworthy that Toad

chooses to offend by propositioning one male, and then playfully kisses another. (Although I have not read that Miller was influenced by this scene (or Keays-Byrne's role in the incident), it may well have influenced his portrayal of Toecutter and the bikie gangs in the *Max* films.) The gang all display an extremely tough and butch hypermasculinity, but scenes such as this one hint at the contrived nature of their performances of masculine bravado. Such scenes also demonstrate the pleasure that can be had by challenging stereotypes.

Shame is a noteworthy addition to the bikie film and the car crash genre because its motorbike-riding, black leather-wearing hero is a woman, and an embodiment of the law (a barrister). Asta Cadell (Deborra-Lee Furness) is an unusual figure because she transgresses so many of the traditional cinematic and social conventions associated with the gender-technology relation: physical toughness, bravery, and a powerful position within the patriarchal establishment. Although the subject matter of the film (the endemic rape of a town's women) is grimmer than that of *Stone* or *Mad Max*, there are many parallels between Asta, Stone, and Max. Asta's long blonde hair and stated heterosexuality are her only 'traditional' feminine traits and she makes no concessions to a prissy, hysterical, or nurturing femininity. The camera does not fetishise or sexualise her body (she wears leathers with loose t-shirts or 'mannish' shirts) or that of her motorbike (the camera never lingers or caresses) and both are treated as tough and serviceable machines. At first, the male townspeople try to seduce her and call her 'sweetheart' but when she does not respond, they are quick to label her 'butch' (and then attempt to rape her). Despite being coded as a figure representing justice and the law, Asta is unsuccessful when she attempts to obtain justice via legitimate (legal) channels, and instead she repeatedly resorts to violence to protect herself and others. Although she is a powerful figure of self-determination and independence, and an inspiration for the town's women, the film does not pretend that Asta can 'save' anyone, and indeed the film ends with the death of a rape victim Asta has befriended and attempts to protect. Like the traditional cinematic outsider figure, she is not looking for trouble or justice but she is placed in a position where she is forced to intervene on behalf of a community she never wishes to *join*. The film is reminiscent of *Cars* in that

it offers up a very grim representation of mateship, heterosexual relationships, violence, and small town life (Rayner 2000). *Shame* turns the whole bikie genre on its head, and it offers a counterpoint to the more romantic or mythic enactments of the gender-technology relation in the car crash genre.

Returning to my discussion of the performance of Max's masculinity, I remain mindful of this historical material and contrasting cinematic depictions of bikies. While Max is manifested as a masculine icon, the bikies are presented as savage deviants, and Miller has the other characters articulate their scorn of the bikies. The Gyro Captain describes them as 'trash' and 'angry ants' and Pappagallo is more vehement when he calls them 'savages' and 'vermin on machines'. Critics seem equally keen to denigrate the bikies, with Peter Malone's comment typical of most descriptions; he describes them as 'a scavenger society, a vermin group of sub-humans' (1982, 27). It is significant that the bikies are denied their humanity in these descriptions, and this ties in with the film's repeated illation that they are closer to animals than human beings. The bikies are chiefly dressed in leather, with feather and fur adornments, most notably their fur tails. I am mindful that Max also wears leather (albeit of a 'tamer' style), eats dog food, and that his preferred companion is a dog. The Feral Kid is also distinctly barbarous and is aligned not only with wild beasts but also with Australia's indigenous population. Perhaps the bikies serve as a warning to the others that, should they completely sever their ties with 'civilisation,' they too could 'degenerate' in a similar fashion. (Similarly in *Cars*, the link between humans, animals, and machines serves as a caution about straying too far away from conventional practices.) The bikies are also aligned with 'wild Indians', as they paint their faces, perform rain dances, and circle the 'cowboys' in their base camp. Miller has not only 'othered' the bikies for being gay but has cast them as 'primitive' as well, and this perception is reinforced by the images of some of the 'goodies' as martyrs being burnt and tortured on crosses and stakes. Thus, the pious settlers are contrasted with the bikies who are cast as heathens and savages. (This is reminiscent of a scene in *Cars* where Arthur is silhouetted against a background of crosses (power pylons), signalling to the audience that he is a righteous figure and a potential sacrifice to Paris' vehicular rites.)

Although Miller has defended the 'othering' of the bikies as merely a playful depiction of a subculture, it is surely far more than that. He explains the casting in the following way:

> We wanted to avoid the cliché of the modern bikie gang that you saw in Roger Corman movies of the sixties, with the biker and his old lady. To have homosexuality amongst some of the members of the gang played off that cliché (Matthews 1984, 242).

Admittedly, on one level this device works well, in that it does offer a fresh approach to the genre, and the third film certainly suffers because of the absence of creatively 'deviant' villains. However, the fact that Max and the other 'goodies' (ie Goose, Gyro Captain, Pappagallo, and Curmudgeon) are heterosexual, and almost to the man the 'baddies' are homosexual, must say something about value judgements based on sexuality. In fact when Matthews presses Miller about the homosexual dimension of the villains he wryly admits: 'Yes. Now that we've done that twice I have to admit there might be an unconscious response there' (Matthews 1984, 245). Of course, Miller's intentions and motivations are ultimately irrelevant, and what appears on the screen is my primary concern. However, whether one reads the portrayal of the villains as negative (as opposites to Max as hero) or as neutral or celebratory (as worthy rivals or brothers) will have implications for a reading of cinematic performances of masculinity in the two films.

When Sue Matthews interviews Miller, she states that the trope of the deviant bikies 'plays off against the wholesomeness of Max's family' (1984, 243). Saussure would have a field day with that—the opposite of wholesome being, what, dirty, depraved, unnatural? And Miller's response to Matthew's statement? He describes Max as a 'relatively normal man' who 'no matter how he tries to escape the barbarism, and preserve a wife and family, once the decay has begun even those things can't survive ... Mad Max *is to do with much deeper, darker things than a naturalistic commentary on*

everyday life' (Matthews 1984, 243). Decay, barbarism, deeper, darker things ... a rejection of the white-bread nuclear family equates with savagery and contamination? Of course, such debates inevitably veer back to the relationship between class, gender, sexuality, and power. One wonders whether Miller is familiar with the work of Larry Gross, who states:

> *Those who are at the bottom of the various power hierarchies will be kept in their place in part through their relative invisibility; this is a form of symbolic annihilation. When groups or perspectives do attain visibility, the manner of that representation will itself reflect the biases and interests of those elites who define the public agenda. And these elites are mostly white, mostly middle-aged, mostly male, mostly middle-and-upper-middle class, and (at least in public) entirely heterosexual (1994, 143).*

Them's fighting words George...

Of course, Miller was not the first filmmaker to portray gay bikies, but *Mad Max* may have been the first to transmit such a representation to a broad, and presumably largely heterosexual, audience. Perhaps the best-known filmic manifestation of the gay bikie subculture is Kenneth Anger's 28 minute film entitled *Scorpio Rising* (1963). Anger describes his film in the following way:

> A death mirror held up to American culture—Brando, bikes and black leather; Christ, chains and cocaine. A 'high' view of the myth of the American motorcyclist. The machines as totem from toy to terror. Thanatos in chrome and black leather and bursting jeans (Anger 1986).

This reference to 'thanatos', and hence to bikies as agents of death, is reinforced by a comparison between the bikies and The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Dermody 1980, Sharrett 1985). Willis (1978), Pierson (1998), Simon (1998), Henderson (1999) and others have commented on the thrill and dangers (eros and thanatos) associated

with motorcycles, and their links with death. Both Pierson and Simon note that Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1950) uses bikies as agents or emissaries of death, and that the symbol has since been repeated many times. Sharrett also makes a similar observation and suggests that 'the metaphor is succinct since they suggest merely the evil that has been internalized by mankind [sic]'(1985, 86). Hence, the association between sex, death, evil, homosexuality and bikies is reinforced, and this link between gay men, sex and death has intensified with the advent of the HIV/AIDS virus. The prohibited space, the Forbidden Zone that is associated with the gay bikies, may be a metaphor for a dangerous and hellish homosocial environment.

In a discussion of action-adventure films as ideology, Gina Marchetti makes the following pertinent comment about cinematic villains:

> villains in popular fantasies occupy a site of contradiction within those [action-adventure] texts since they embody a secret desire for the forbidden while at the same time acting as the embodiment of 'otherness', as that which must be eradicated from existence and denied (1989, 192).

Hence, the titillation of the forbidden, unknown and unlawful lures Max into unsafe new territory, and such menacing portents combine with the ever-present threat to mortality on the roads. As discussed in relation to *Cars* in Chapter Two, the mortal consequences of automotive technology are a significant leitmotif in the genre, and will be noted again later in this chapter.

Juan A Suarez has noted that photographs of bikies first started appearing in homoerotic physique magazines, such as 'Physique Pictorial', in the 1950s. Suarez suggests that violence and eroticism have been fused in *Scorpio Rising* and the film abounds with fetishism of both bodies and the machines (1996, 156). Anger's film was not unique in this sense as many modernist works, in particular, eroticised technology. K C Alessandro notes that:

For technophiliacs, technology provides an erotic thrill—control over massive power, which can itself be used to control others ... The physical manifestations of these machines—size, heft, shape, motions that thrust, pause, and press again—represent human sexual responses on a grand scale (Springer 1998, 485).

Simon (1998), Henderson (1999), and Dyer (1990) have discussed the links between sex, technology, and unbridled sexuality that are associated with motorbikes. Even more so than the car, the motorbike is often seen as an extension of the male body—Harley Davidson as phallic prosthetic.[8] Thus, as Joan Mellen notes, the camera is often 'worshipping' and often caresses and lingers over the motorised phallus in films such as *Scorpio Rising* and *Easy Rider* (1978, 281).

Suarez proposes that the connection between homosexuality and bikies may have been a deliberate ploy to counteract representations of gay men as effeminate victims. He suggests that:

> Along with the emphasis on group style and the displacement of subjection, the hyper-masculine images of bikers implied an ironic detachment characteristic of camp. Anger's bikers, for example, represent masculinity as stylised drag or cosmetic facade, and therefore as far from natural or organic. The overabundance of phallic symbols in *Scorpio Rising* suggests that the masculinity of the bikers cannot be taken for granted, but had to be produced by insistent fetish-wielding (1996, 160).

Again, a deliberate and sometimes ironic performance of masculinity is conspicuous. Like the larrikins and other sub-cultures discussed in Chapter One, groups such as the Teds, Beats, Mods, hippies, skinheads, and punks, and bikies, have always been aware of the importance of clothing and affecting a distinct visual style (Willis 1978, Wilson 1985, Polhemus 1998, Rickard 1998, Wearing 1998). Wilson, in her study of fashion, supports such a proposition when she claims that gay men have used fashion to reassert

their masculinity and to have their clothes proclaim that 'manliness has no necessary connection with sexual orientation', and that many men used their attire as a performance—what she calls a 'caricature of masculinity' (1985, 202). Segal (1990) and Faludi (1999) also note that in America in the mid 1970s, machismo became fashionable for gay men (the butch leatherman or bikie look was particularly popular). The emphasis on overtly performing masculinity could be read as an affirmation of masculinity as divorced from sexuality or a negative reaction to being labelled effeminate. Whether this look is a caricature or a homage to hypermasculinity (or both) is debatable, but what is pertinent to these films is that it is a costume that characters wear—a motorbike or a car are the ultimate accessory.

The difference between Anger's bike boys and Miller's bikies is that the latter not only wield fetishes and perform masculinity in a carnivalesque manner, but they live their performances, and their bikes are not only technological fetishes, but transport, weapons, and a 'fuck you' to families and The Bronze. Hunter S Thompson, in his 1966 study of the Hells Angels, makes some piquant observations about the gay cult surrounding the bikie gang:

> Anger's creation had no journalistic or documentary intent. It was an art film with a rock-'n'-roll score, a bizarre little comment on twentieth-century America, using motorcycles, swastikas and aggressive homosexuality as a new culture trilogy ... the Angels provided the realism that *Scorpio* lacked. The secret-queer factor gave the Press an element of strange whimsy to mix in with the rape reports, and the outlaws themselves were relegated to new nadirs of sordid fascination. More than ever before, they were wreathed in aura of violent and erotic mystery ... brawling satyrs, ready to attempt congress with any living thing, and in any orifice (1966, 95).

Miller artfully treads the line somewhere between Anger's stylish preening and the reality of the outlaw lifestyle, and in doing so creates resonant bad boys to both defy and tempt Max.

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In this environment, the manner in which the other characters and the camera (which personifies their gaze) regard Max's body speaks volumes. In the 1980s action genre, the male body is under constant threat, and indeed most plots revolve around this threat (Tasker 1993). The bodies not only propel the narratives—they are the narratives. As noted by critics such as O'Regan, there is an 'almost hysterical anxiety' about the vulnerability of the male body in the trilogy (1996, 104). The characters dread losing control of themselves and of their machines, and have an extravagant fear of bodily mutilation, castration or penetration. If Max is accepted as an heroic model of white heterosexual masculinity, and one who is identified with in a narcissistic manner, this does not preclude the possibility that he may simultaneously be subject to an erotic gaze (Neale 1992). The 1980s offered cinema-goers the spectacle of commodified and highly desirable male bodies for their consumption (Tasker 1993). As Tasker has noted, in the homoerotic 1980s muscular action genre, the male characters' bodies perform multiple functions—in that they drive the narrative *and* offer themselves up to the gaze. This may present a challenge for male viewers, as men have been socialised to be the lookers rather than the looked at.

If male bodies have been positioned on the screen as objects of desire—presumably (in the case of male viewers) usually unspoken desire—this desire could be linked to the insistent mutilation of male bodies in action films. As Biber notes, the film appears knowingly to exploit the discomfort that some male viewers may experience watching the male characters on the screen. She states:

> The innocence of the spectator is 'conferred' but never authenticated; the repeated defence—'only watching'—reveals the underlying anxiety. Nevertheless *Mad Max* is a film in which these anxieties about male display are as much the subject of the film as the hero's highway vendetta (1999, 34).

Both Neale and Willemen have examined the denial of homosexual desire in a largely heterosexual and patriarchal society, and they suggest that violent mutilation and

sadism involving a male actor's body may result from a repression of erotic desire. Mutilation may be a violent wish to destroy the object of forbidden desire and thereby eliminate temptation (Neale 1992). (That which threatens hegemonic heterosexual masculinity must be destroyed.) In manufacturing Max's foes as gay men, Miller has constructed Max's body as a contested site, and a target for destruction. By the end of both the first and second films—notably the ones featuring the gay bikies—Max's body is bloodied and damaged. In removing from the third film the gay bikies and the emphasis on cars, Miller has removed much of the motivation to attack Max's body.[9]

In an article entitled 'Mutilating Mel' William Luhr examines Gibson's choices as director, and he reads *Braveheart* and *The Man without a Face* as reflections of Gibson's conservative Christian heterosexual worldview. Gibson's choices display a stubborn and nostalgic defence of white paternalism and 'family values', where—in film alone—he can turn back the clock and erase the emerging presence of women, blacks, Asians, gays and lesbians. Luhr notes that in 1992 Gibson was awarded that year's 'Sissy Award' because the actor was terrified of being considered gay (1999, 234).[10] He observes that the characters that Gibson portrays in both films suffer severe injuries that reach the level of spectacular mutilation (all filmed in lascivious detail). Significantly, Gibson appears to revel in an exquisite triumph in the acquisition of these injuries, which glorify the 'conservative if not reactionary' stance that the characters take, and positions them as martyrs (1999, 228). Luhr draws on the work of Freud, Reik and Silverman when he contemplates the motivation for such cinematic masochism. He makes some astute observations about Gibson's directorial choices and, quite rightly, places importance on the fact that Gibson produced, directed, and starred in the films. It is a pity, however, that he did not at least make a passing mention of Gibson's penchant for starring in films where he is similarly gloriously mutilated, such as the *Mad Max* trilogy and the *Lethal Weapon* films. In fact, as one critic has observed, Gibson's body has itself been coded as a 'lethal weapon' (Jeffords 1994, 147).

In her essay 'The Pleasure of the Interface', Claudia Springer (1998) discusses the mutilation of the male body. When examining films such as the *Robocop* and

Terminator series, she notes that cyborgs, part human - part machine, are inextricably linked with violence. Springer equates the erotic appeal of the muscle-bound cyborgs with an admiration for their embodied power. She suggests that 'their heightened physicality culminates not in sexual climax but in acts of violence' (493). The release engendered by orgiastic acts of violence replaces that of the sexual act. She suggests that the objectification of the male body on screen can be justified, if it is the target for, or perpetrator of, violence. Significantly, Max could quite easily be categorised as a cyborg—an antipodean robocop. His body has been injured and repaired so often, that by midway through the second film, one of the settlers oils Max's knee to silence the squeak and increase his mobility.[11] The manner in which Max is persistently linked to the Interceptor also reinforces his cyborg status, and his 'being and role are concretised inside the varied vehicles he acquires' (Rayner 2000, 43).

The motif of venerating the male body, desperately trying to protect it, but also seeming to invite its mutilation, can also be linked to Australian car culture, and was noted in Chapter Two in relation to the accident/crash binary in *Cars*. Many drivers purport to be concerned with safety but expose themselves to harm by indulging in risk-taking behaviours such as not wearing a seat belt, speeding and drink driving. Miller consciously draws on the fear that many Australians have about the road toll.[12] Drivers know that on country roads—if their attention wavers or they veer onto the 'wrong side'—death awaits them (O'Regan 1999). In talking about his motivation to make *Mad Max*, Miller tells Sue Matthews:

> Byron [Kennedy] had grown up in the western suburbs of Melbourne and was very interested in cars and the culture of cars and I had some of that from growing up in a country town. Working in the hospital I had developed a morbid fascination with the autocide we practise in our society: every weekend I'd see so many young people who'd been killed, or maimed for life, on the roads. You'd see the road toll in the paper on Monday morning and it was accepted with a shrug. It was almost like a weekly ritual, with people being

randomly selected out as victims, as sacrifices to the car and the road (Matthews 1984, 236).

Much has been said about Miller's experiences tending to car crash victims as a medical doctor and of his vision of Australian roads as killing fields (Chute 1982, Maksay 1982). Tens of thousands of Australians have been killed, in what we try to tell ourselves are car 'accidents,' but are in fact, car 'crashes'. As Biber notes:

> A man's death-by-car is never simply a motor 'accident'; the manner of his death is always *selected*, *deliberate*, making it an appropriate commentary upon his mode of masculine conduct. Dying in a car 'accident' confers a specific meaning upon one's mode of masculinity, validating it whilst it is problematised. It is read as a *death in action*, but it is also a *waste* (emphasis in original, 1999, 47).

Max's nightmare is that of every road user and every Australian who has been affected by Australia's road carnage, but it is also specific to the gender-technology relation. O'Regan notes that the atmosphere of a familiar but very real fear lends the films an Australian Gothic feel, characterised by deceptively empty roads where death could await just around the next corner (1999). This hyper-realism associated with death and the roads intersects with how viewers define the relationship between sexuality and space.

We are informed that anarchy reigns on Anarchie Road and the fact that the Forbidden Zone (the territory outside city limits) is a queer space, provides another layer to the narrative. Nancy Duncan (1996) notes that sexuality is assumed to be confined to private spaces (ie the home or gay 'ghettos') but that public space is clearly both a masculine and heterosexual space. The distinction between private domestic space and public masculine space is extremely conspicuous in the *Mad Max* films. Max retreats to the domestic haven to cleanse himself of the filth and chaos of the streets, but despite his repeated protests that he wants to retire from the police force, appears addicted to

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the adrenaline and the male camaraderie. Like many heroes from Westerns or Police Dramas, Max prefers to spend most of his time in the masculine realm, with only occasional 'civilising' visits home. When Max's family appears on screen it is as a signifier of the feminised domestic home, whether this is in their house or in their mobile home—the Panel Van.[13] When Jessie and Sprog stray from the home and onto the highways, they encounter the Toecutter's gang. Soon after taking to the streets, mother and son are literally run off the road by men. Clearly, families are one group targeted for extermination, and as Meaghan Morris notes, the 'family as target for annihilation' leitmotif is a consistent one in Australian cinema—so much so that it is made to appear 'natural' or 'inevitable' (1989, 116). Women, children and gay and lesbian characters risk physical violence if they venture onto the streets.

How then, does this private/public binary affect the films and can this be related to the queer *frisson*? Most heterosexuals assume, falsely, that public space, especially city streets, shopping centres, hotels and the like, are gender and sexuality neutral. However, public space is not asexual but is gendered male and patently heterosexual. Moreover, this state of affairs has been naturalised to the extent that it is largely unrecognised or unacknowledged (Duncan 1996). The status quo exists only until 'appropriate' sexual behaviour conventions are transgressed. Gill Valentine notes that when any public displays of queer desire are displayed, public order laws can be enforced to eliminate these transgressions. Moreover, it is usually not left to the law to enforce compulsory heterosexuality, as private citizens often take the law into their own hands and threaten or attack any transgressors (1996, 148). Wayne Myslik (1996) notes that areas where high concentrations of homosexuals congregate are recognised as 'queer spaces.' Moreover, this is supposedly 'safe space' where gay men and lesbians can socialise without fear or constraint. However, these 'safe' spaces are often irresistible to gay bashers, and homosexuals can become easy targets for violent and aggressive homophobic behaviour (1996, 157). If all of these observations are applied to *Mad Max* and *Mad Max 2*, the behaviour of The Bronze, and Max in particular, takes on a new light.

I don't want to get side-tracked into the whole road movie genre in this chapter, but the Dorothy, Oz, Priscilla triad warrants a brief aside. Such policing of public space is of course a familiar part of life for Priscilla's passengers and their lives are mediated by finding safe space, and hence for them 'home' has added connotations of safety. As Aitken and Lukinbeal (1997, 350) note, the bus itself shelters the trio from the hostile environment outside. The threat of being bashed (or worse) is ever present even in comedies such as 'Priscilla' and its pallid American counterpart To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar. *Like Dorothy, Max finds himself in a strange environment, and at a pinch may have muttered to his canine companion, 'Dog, I have a feeling we're not in the Halls of Justice anymore'. Max, unlike Dorothy, Mitzie and Felicia, can never go home, and perhaps, like Bernadette, he may have opted to stay rather than return? However, unlike Stamp or Garland, Gibson has definitely not been adopted as a gay icon. Could Bubba Zanetti, Lord Humungus and Wez be read as the butch antecedents of Mitzie, Bernadette and Felicia? Atavistic bikers in leather with just a hint of fur, as the trail blazers for lamé, lycra and glitter? Pamela Robertson's (1997) excellent article entitled 'Home and Away' provides some tasty material for rumination , as does Robert Lang (1997) who makes some astute observations about the links between* The Wizard of Oz *and the 1990s phenomenon of queer road movies such as* My Own Private Idaho, The Living End, Postcards from America, Boys on the Side *and* Total Eclipse. *Has the dust and the sand cleared from the Forbidden Zone and exposed the yellow brick road? My imagination now flirts with the idea of lumping all of the characters from the three films (*Priscilla, Max 1 *and* 2) *and letting them loose together for a week in the outback, or a weekend in Broken Hill. Now where was I?*

After the deaths of his best friend, wife and son, Max is lured outside of his domestic and vocational confines and into the unknown and unlawful world of the bikies. With their civilisation under obvious threat, The Bronze are prepared, and perhaps welcome, taking the battle for 'good' away from the courts and onto the roads. The failure of the system provides the police with the moral high ground to change tactics. The Bronze believe they are now justified to dispense their brand of 'justice' in any way they see fit. Vengeance supplants justice, and Goose warns Johnny the Boy that the rules have

changed when he threatens, 'We'll see you on the roads, scag. We'll see you on the road.' Fifi then gives his charges *carte blanche* to dispense their form of masculine retribution in any manner they can. He declares that 'as long as the paperwork is clean—you boys can do what you like out there.' This mandate effectively frees the men from any 'civilising' restrictions, and enables the police to become vigilantes but perhaps it also releases them from other social conventions they have observed in the city. Fifi is, after all, an ambiguous figure because he is both a defender of patriarchal values, and a camp polluter of the Halls of Justice. Max becomes a vigilante who believes that justice entails punishment rather than rehabilitation, and much in the style of the heroes in the *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* films, he decides to clean up the streets by removing any sources of contamination. In this tradition, Max's behaviour is supposedly justified, validated, and even valorised.

Despite the vulnerability of the justice system, it is only when the Toecutter's gang begins to transgress city limits that chaos erupts. However, in leaving the 'normality' of the city Max is lured into the world of the Forbidden Zone—a queer space. Interestingly, the usual urban/rural trope seen in many Australian movies in the 1970s and early 1980s is reversed (as it was in *Cars*). That is, the cities are seen as the last bastion of civilisation and any space outside of the cities reverts to wasteland (Stratton 1983, Rayner 2000). Max, with the weight of the law behind him, takes on a role as defender of civilisation and attempts to rid the streets of the transgressive 'scum'. Thus, as Myslik (1996) has observed, a queer space can provide almost a happy hunting ground for those who feel that they should restore the streets to their 'natural' state. Max takes on a similar role in the second film when he protects Pappagallo's group from Lord Humungus' gang.

Max succeeds in this quest as vigilante determined to defend heterosexual patriarchal society and rid the roads of the bikies (for the time being). He emerges from his battles with the bikies, bloodied and battered but triumphant, with his status intact as the number one driver on the roads. He has proven himself superior to all around him, and he has out driven every other scoot-jockey on the road. His links to law enforcement,

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and the heterosexual white Anglo-Saxon patriarchy, reinforce his heroic status and code him as both target and martyr. As the focus of this chapter has been how Miller manifests Max's masculinity in relation to technology and in comparison with the gay bikies, I have commented only briefly about how women are portrayed in the films. (In my next chapter I will look at all three films in the trilogy and will move my focus away from the bikies and onto women and pedestrians.) Max's authority as cinematic anti-hero relies on his relationship with technology as masculine culture and he is at his most potent when at the wheel and surrounded by men. One cannot help but wonder whether his forays into the Forbidden Zone have skewed Max's orientation, and whether he will choose to remain in Miller's homosocial and motorised queer domain, rather than return to a domestic or pedestrian space.

Max's only genuine rivals in both films prove to be the gay bikies, and he is determined to exterminate them from the (increasingly queer) landscape. Battles over gendered and sexualised technology and territory dominate the narratives, as drivers fight for dominance and the right to maintain or challenge the patriarchal hegemony. In the tradition of this genre, there is a hard-fought professional rivalry between the police in their cars, and the outlaws on their motorbikes (Sharrett 1985). What is most significant about these gym-pumped flamboyant bikies is that despite being demonised, discriminated against for their sexuality, and made to resemble animals and 'wild Indians,' they prove to be very worthy opponents. These bikies are not the effeminate, sensitive, or 'sad young men' often stereotypically associated on the screen with gay men. Nor are these men playing at being butch bikers, as is the case in homoerotic iconography and films such as *Scorpio Rising*. The bikes are not toys to be wielded merely as 'come hither' technological fetishes: the bikies use the 'motorcycle as an instrument of anarchy, a tool of defiance and even a weapon' (Thompson 1966, 96). These men are warriors who ooze tough masculinity, and perform muscular masculinity far more effectively than most of the straight male characters in the *Mad Max* films. Their sexuality is disassociated from their gender and sex, and they are not weakened or effeminised by any comparisons with women. The bikies may have been cast as the villains but their *masculinity* is never questioned.

Just as was demonstrated in the previous chapters, technology and technological determinism prove to be both feted and feared in the first two *Mad Max* films. In this genre, cars are able to either make or break men and their fragile masculinities. As machines encroach into the countryside, filmmakers have suggested that male hysteria is increasingly evident, with the result that men become obsessed with the vulnerability of their bodies. In an era when what it means to be a man is increasingly subjective, it is hardly surprising that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain where the line can be drawn between bloke and car. Such confused slippage between vehicle and man is endemic in car crash films, which focus on the gender-technology relation and uncertainties about the status of masculinities that require repeated violent performances. As is the case in each of the films examined in this thesis, the vulnerability of masculine bodies and the hysterical fear of mutilation, penetration, and castration saturate the narratives. The characters turn to motorcars (and motorbikes) to manifest their masculinity and to mask their fragility, but there is a confusion about how this technological buffer should be treated on the screen. As Rayner observes, 'Throughout the saga the car, like the hero is deified and travestied, customised and caricatured, elevated and undermined as a generic and national icon' (2000, 43). Hence both blokes and cars are held up for cinematic worship but there is sometimes a snigger or a wry smile from the pulpit and the pews.

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[1] For simplicity's sake, I will refer to Miller as the auteur of the *Mad Max* films. I acknowledge, however, Byron Kennedy's role as producer of the first two films (he died in a helicopter crash in 1983), and the input of Terry Hayes and George Ogilvie in the second and third films.
[2] The financial success was relative to the cost of making the film, and although Miller did not receive direct government funding, he probably received substantial tax breaks for the films. Tax incentives, due to the 10BA Tax Act of 1980, were available to the film industry in the 1980s.
[3] So-called 'ocker' films released in the early 1970s were a stain that many commentators were attempting to remove from the cultural consciousness, and replace with more 'cultured' aesthetic films.
[4] In an interview with Matthews, Miller goes on at some length about the dog's balls, and how he believed it would have been almost sacrilegious to have the dog de-sexed (Matthews 1984, 249).

[5] See Sargeant and Watson (1999) or Krens (1998) for essays on bikie films, and for an extended discussion about *Easy Rider*, see Falconer (1995).

[6] Bob Villard (1982) notes that the wardrobe manager, Norma Moriceau, used sex-shops and gay magazines as creative sources for her work in the film.

[7] There is no apostrophe in 'Hells Angels'.

[8] Although images of pneumatic female bodies draped over motorbikes are staples of so-called 'men's magazines', and provide some fascinating material for research, my interest in this chapter obviously lies in male bodies, masculinity, and gay desire.

[9] Another thoughtful approach to male mutilation is offered by Paul Smith in his article, cleverly entitled 'Eastwood Bound' (1995), where he disagrees with Neale's thesis, but has some valid points to make about the significance of the links between erotically filmed male mutilation and anti-gay sentiments in many action films.

[10] Indeed, Gibson's values appear to dovetail with the values held by many biker characters in bikie films and by many real bikies. Despite their rebellious image, Hunter S Thompson notes (1966) that bikies do not want to change the status quo, and Simon notes that in *Easy Rider*, Captain America defines so-called 'American' values of sexism, capitalism and nationalism (1998, 74).

[11] In *Cry of the Damaged Man*, Tony Moore describes his own body before his accident as a 'silent machine' that now 'creaks', 'rubs', and 'rings'. He interprets these noises as reminders that his body is 'not tuned perfectly' and as outward physical signs of not just corporeal but emotional scars (1997, 103).

[12] In a case of life imitating art, six days into shooting *Mad Max*, the head stunt co-ordinator Grant Page and the leading female actor were hit by a truck whilst driving to location. Both sustained serious injuries and a replacement for the role of Jessie was hastily found.

[13] A note about the Rockatansky's Panel Van—a Holden HJ Sandman. The Sandman is an iconic Australian vehicle and is emblematic of Australia in the 1970s. The most desirable of the Sandmans were adorned with mythological murals, often portraying a pneumatic Xena-style princess enthralled by a Hercules-style hero. Max's vehicle comes with just this type of tattoo. The Panel Van is often associated with a youth/beach culture and its interior is made into a bed on wheels. Panel Vans are often adorned with stickers which proclaim 'Sin Bin', 'Do It in a Van', 'If it's arockin, Don't come a knockin', and 'Don't Laugh, Your Daughter may be in Here' (Lewis 1983, 131-132). The link between sex and Panel Vans is transparent, and such stickers take pleasure in articulating the obvious, and the Panel Van is one of the most sex-orientated vehicles ever produced. Paradoxically, for young families, the vehicle is a modish mobile home-away-from-home, and Stratton links the Panel Van with safety and domesticity, and as a signifier of the car as a buffer to shield passengers from the vastness and harshness of the Australian environment (1983, 55). Interestingly, the other mobile homes in the first film, a small Mazda Bongo van, and a caravan (which appear during the Nightrider chase scene), are both completely demolished. Thus, the dangers of the road and the environment shatter this illusion of safety, and the domestic is reminded emphatically to get off the road (Morris 1989).

CHAPTER FIVE

Stolen Masculinities

The main cause of death among youth, according to a comprehensive Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report released this year, is still the road ... Road fatalities account for a large proportion of deaths among young men, and the number of deaths increases drastically at about the age of 15, when boys are likely to have a go in a stolen car or have older mates learning to drive (Konkes 2000, 1).

Psst, Roland, I'm still here, and the tyre tracks and printer's ink still traverse this thesis, from my Corona, to my keyboard, and out into the world. Part of this chapter appears in a forthcoming article about Idiot Box *and yobbo flânerie in the* Journal of Australian Studies. *Who's walking? Is that you talking? There's no balking now. What are you doing in my thesis anyway Roland? You of all people should know that automobiles are dangerous, indeed, deadly. Hey, watch out for that laundry truck...*

When Arthur arrives in Paris, the audience witnesses the fragility of his vehicular construction of masculinity, which is vulnerable due to an earlier car incident that has rendered him a pedestrian. By the end of *Cars*, Arthur reconciles his violent relationship with automobiles and speeds off to a future where his masculinity can be manifested by driving. Crabs is a character whose masculinity is initially similarly fragile, but when he steals wheels at the end of the film and breaks out of the drive-in, he seems destined for a more 'heroic' future. Both men go through a trying time when their wheels have been stolen, before both characters reclaim their vehicular masculinity and drive off triumphantly into the sunset. Clearly, when they are forced to construct their masculinities as pedestrians, they do not garner respect, and they endure immense pressure to take up the vehicular challenge and perform as drivers.

It appears that enacting masculinity is a fraught process, and that one's vehicular identity can be a flamboyant sports car that appears to be locked up and secure one moment but can be hot-wired and disappear the next. I want to look at the issue of stolen masculinities and car theft in this chapter, and I will concentrate on the depiction of Max's 'missing' masculinity in *Mad Max 3: Beyond Thunderdome* (hereafter *Beyond Thunderdome*). Like Arthur and Crabs, Max falters without a car and it is almost as if his masculinity has been stolen from him in the third film of the cycle. Indeed, as a discussion of Max's car (the Interceptor) will demonstrate, it appears almost as if his absent car encapsulates his cinematic charisma and heroic masculinity. Miller resorts to propping up Max's masculinity by contrasting him with women, children, and relatively powerless men. *Freedom* (Scott Hicks, 1982) and *Idiot Box* (David Caesar,

1997) will be discussed as counterpoints to *Beyond Thunderdome*. Unlike Max, the films' protagonists Kev, Mick, and Ron begin with no power or agency and their failure to perform their masculinity as owner-drivers underlines their marginal status. I will examine what transpires when such characters do not have wheels and have to steal them to manifest their masculinity.[1] Thus, Max, the legendary driver, is a character who is struggling to perform his masculinity when separated from a car; and Ron, Mick and Kev (consumers of the legendary driver mythology) attempt to emulate figures such as Max, by stealing automobiles. *Proud pedestrian or glory rider—which is it to be?*

In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Miller tells a very different story about masculinity (and technology as masculine culture) from the one he spins in the first two films in the trilogy. The third film represents what Morris describes as 'the gradual *un*making of Max' (1989, 131), as despite being cleverly positioned as the hero, he does not brilliantly radiate heroism away from the roads, and his star wanes. At his best with the Interceptor, still capable when driving a rig, barely credible when leading a camel-driven metal wagon, he loses most of his charisma in *Beyond Thunderdome* when his vehicle is stolen in the first scene. The first two instalments of the cycle link Max and technology so successfully that he emerges as a type of antipodean cyborg and he is not suited to his car-less status in the new technology-free environment.

In the opening scene of *Beyond Thunderdome*, Max is enfeebled and impoverished by the loss of his family, friends, vehicle, and possessions (even Jessie's replacement, the Dog, has been replaced by a nameless monkey). Max's cross-terrain vehicle is stolen by Jedediah (Bruce Spence), a trickster pilot who functions in both the second and third films as *deus ex machina* (Maksay 1982). The loss of Max's vehicle immediately signals to the audience that this is going to be a very different narrative from the car-centred previous films. His ingenuity with a whistle and a fly swat are impressive and display an ability to salvage and to adapt technology (Falconer 1994, Gibson 1992), but this does not compensate for the loss of his 'wheels' because Max's heroism is inextricably tied to his driving skills.

Max's alliance with his car is the most enduring relationship that he has in the cycle, so much so that he and his vehicle seem to form a union. Max almost becomes his car, and the cars in the cycle are so lifelike they become characters (just as has been the case in the other films discussed in this thesis). Max has many of the heroic masculine traits of the 1980s action hero but he also has many traits shared by cyborg heroes from the same era (see Jeffords 1989, 1993, 1994 and Tasker 1993). Max's technical prop is internalised and his black leather 'skin' mirrors the black duco of his car—like the hero of another Australian car film, he has 'metal skin'. Rayner also notes the close relationship that Max has with motor vehicles, and he states:

> Max's being and role are concretised inside the varied vehicles he acquires, and his greatest battles are wordless performances of skilful, aggressive driving in which the man and the manipulated mechanism become inextricably interwoven. At the same time, the cars become deadly traps ... At a symbolic level, Max is trapped in his policing job and revenger's role by the V8 interceptor. Its destruction is a necessary precursor to his redefinition as a hero in driving the tanker as a selfless decoy. Throughout the saga the car, like the hero is deified and travestied, customised and caricatured, elevated and undermined as a generic national icon (2000, 43).

I would like to expand on what Rayner describes as Max's 'redefinition' as a heroic driver, and to ponder the consequences of such a man losing his vehicular agency. (I will discuss the status of the Interceptor in a lengthy detour later in this chapter). It is significant that after he loses his vehicle, Max also loses his identity, and Gibson notes that he is known variously as 'Nobody', 'Raggedy Man', 'Captain Walker', and 'The Man with No Name' (1992, 166). (Several commentators also note the number of masks that Max wears in the trilogy (for example Gibson 1992, Broderick 1993), and this could be linked to the performative nature of masculinity and to Max's loss of agency and identity.) Soon after his arrival in Bartertown, Max is taunted and called a 'pedestrian' by Master-Blaster, and for a man who has made his name as a driver, this is the ultimate humiliation. This is demonstrated when Auntie Entity asks:

Auntie Entity: So what did you do before?

Max: I was a cop. A driver.

Auntie Entity: Well, how the world turns. One day cock of the walk—the next a feather duster.

This exchange underlines how much status Max has lost, and as an interesting aside this 'throw away' line may have deeper implications in relation to the traumas that Max has endured. In his study of gender and war, Pugliese notes that the same 'feather duster' adage was applied in regard to studies of male hysteria, castration, and 'dysfunctional' Australian servicemen (1995, 169). Indeed, to state the obvious, Max is emasculated when he loses his car and his status as pedestrian leaves him (very publicly) vulnerable. Everyone seems to want to remind Max that he is no longer a driver, and the limping hero mythos that Sharrett (1985) observes, and which Hays (1971) has written about extensively, has even more significance if one sees his wound as a signifier of his pedestrian status. The children also label Max as a pedestrian, and they remain convinced that he is Captain Walker (an ambulatory pilot), and that he can fly.

Of course, Max's skills as a driver are redundant unless he has access to a vehicle *and* fuel, and even the vehicle that he has stolen from him in the first scene is reliant on camels for propulsion. As Max witnesses his camel team being auctioned off, Miller has Dr Dealgood joke: 'Remember this is the vehicle that sent Detroit broke— independent suspension, power steering, no emission control ... Ride 'em away now! Make me an offer!' The citizens need to be creative about transportation because they now live in a world where petrol is a precious commodity and cars are rare hybrid vehicles. If petrol is so scarce (and acts as liquid testosterone), then it is hardly surprising that filmmakers place such emphasis on men fighting to ensure access to a petrol-bowser. Fuel shortages are also evident in *Cars*, *Drive-In*, and *Running*, and have been noted elsewhere in this thesis as having an effect on commercial and social relations.[2] The residents of Bartertown have not learnt from the mistakes of the

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capitalist machine-mad past. Fuel is the elixir that is most desired, and society's appetite for, and reliance on, technology remains paramount (Hall and Erlich 1987). Bartertown is a violent and strictly commercial enterprise with a dark underbelly of slaves and workers who generate the power supply for the community.

Despite espousing an ethos that civilisation is now 'beyond Thunderdome', access to cars, roads, and fuel drives the action in all three films, and characters continue to demonstrate their masculinity in relation to technology. As Rayner notes, access to fuel provides the motivation for much of the vehicular action in *Mad Max 2* in scenes where Max offers his skills as a driver in exchange for petrol (2000). However, because of the scarcity of fuel, by the third film, the emphasis is less on Max's skill as a driver and instead shifts to those who are able to produce energy. Master is the only person who knows how to make the methane that is Bartertown's only source of energy, and this makes him potentially more powerful than both Auntie Entity and Max. The occasions when Max can leap behind the wheel of a vehicle and impress all and sundry with his driving talents are now so limited as to be almost non-existent. Relying on technology as the primary means to perform masculinity is now a risky business, and as Corrigan notes:

> If the road movie traditionally subsisted on gasoline as a metaphor for restless energy, when that gasoline begins to dry up in the seventies the vehicles it propelled become scrap by the road. One reason the road movie has remained a culturally central genre today may be because the oil and energy crisis in the world reflects the much larger historical and cultural crisis in which traditional images of male identity and significance have also become generic debris (1991, 153).

The challenge for Miller is to have Max heroically manifest his masculinity in this environment.

Despite his diminished automotive charisma, Rockatansky remains the star of the film and Miller constructs (or rebuilds) Max's masculinity in a calculated fashion. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Max is again made superior to the other male characters, but this is only possible due to the absence of any credible opponents or allies. Blaster, despite being hailed as 'death on foot' (coded as a lethal pedestrian), is an exploited intellectually-challenged man who is outwitted by Max in their fight in the Thunderdome and subsequently shot. Auntie Entity's ineffectual guards are led by Ironbar (Angry Anderson), who is diminutive and annoying, rather than threatening. Max's allies are a slave called Pig Killer (an allusion to Australia's convict past), a dwarf (Master), and children (signifying the future). This does not make it difficult for Max literally to stand head and shoulders over both his friends and foes. Master (the other half of the Master-Blaster duo) is weak when deprived of Blaster's muscle but because of his knowledge about fuel production he is the only male character remotely to challenge Max's authority in the film. This makes Master a potentially powerful character but his masculinity is weakened when he loses the phallic Blaster, and his power is further undermined by his inexplicable manner of speech. In what could be an excerpt of dialogue from a Tarzan movie, he states:

> Master-Blaster: Me order .. me Master ... me run Bartertown ... me King Abraham.
> Max: Sure you are and me fairy princess.

Master is the most resourceful person in Bartertown, and there are hints that he led a more genteel and intellectually satisfying life before the holocaust (the suit and fob watch he reclaims at the end of the film). There is no logical reason why Master should speak in Neanderthal-like sentences, particularly as none of the other residents of Bartertown speaks in this primitive manner. (The lost children speak a 'pidgin English', but they have been isolated and deprived of an education and contact with adults, and so their idiosyncratic use of language is explicable. They are also aligned with Aboriginal Australians and so their use of English is presumably meant to be 'tribal'.) By having Master speak in an atavistic manner, Miller has aligned Master with the

children, in speech and in size. This removes much of the threat to Max's status, as despite the skills that make him the most valuable citizen in Tomorrow-morrow-land, Master is never an overtly masculine or heroic figure.

The absence of any real threats to Max's masculinity from these characters not only lionises Max, but paradoxically it undermines the tough 'edgy' masculinity he performed in the first two films. Miller is obviously imparting a very different message in the third film, which is preoccupied with telling a story about story telling (Gibson 1992, Falconer 1994). Slapstick comedy replaces the wry irony of the first two films, and the villains are dispatched by being hit in the head with a frying pan, instead of getting a saucepan imbedded in the neck (as happens to Charlie in the first film). There are certainly no further live incinerations, or characters contemplating sawing off their own limbs. The audience would be appalled if Max killed women, children, slaves, dwarfs, or intellectually disabled characters, and Max just does not seem as 'mad' as he once was. After setting Max up as a vigilante driver and road warrior, and then removing cars and credible villains, the film falls flat. There is no menace or sexual *frisson* on the screen, and the movie cries out for a return of the gay scoot jockeys. In the first two films, Miller employs the road narrative convention of using the road as a physical marker that points the way forward and drives the story. As I will discuss in more detail later, Max loses his way in the desert sands when the road disappears in the third film. *The motor stalls. The vehicle is bogged. Flat tyres abound.*

The emerging status of women in *Beyond Thunderdome* differentiates it from the earlier films and points to a future where the feminine may obtain more power and respect. A brief survey of the status of women in the first two films highlights how their position has changed by the third film. From the outset, the earlier films are characterised by the absence of women and a loathing of femininity.[3] The presence of female characters serves to emphasise their 'lack', their difference relative to Max's manliness, and binaries are amplified and emphasised (as Mulvey (1975) and many others have identified in relation to women on the screen). In the opening minutes of *Mad Max* the first woman who appears on screen is the Nightrider's girlfriend, and her

only function is as a passenger—she exists as a witness to her partner's actions. The next woman presented is a young mother who, with her child, is almost mowed down by the Nightrider in the opening car chase. This intimates that women and children are not safe on the roads, and functions to foreshadow Jessie's and Sprog's fate (discussed in the previous chapter). After Jessie's death, Max is freed from the constraints of 'civilising' feminine domesticity (Stratton 1983, 51). The feminine now functions primarily to highlight Max's masculine prowess but is also occasionally useful as a plot device. Jessie's and Sprog's deaths are a convenient ruse in the narrative because Max's grief gives him a justifiable reason, a motivation, to go 'mad'.[4] A sympathetic protagonist could not be presented to the audience as inherently psychotic—he must be driven insane. The rape of the young woman (and perhaps her partner) in the Chevy Impala also serves as a similar plot device. Enacting revenge on her behalf apparently justifies the deterioration of The Bronze, from upholders of the law, to vigilantes.[5]

The other female characters in the first film are also feminine stereotypes, and as Stratton explains, they are either portrayed as 'sexual objects or as assimilated into male society' (1983, 52). The night-club singer, who assists the gang to eliminate the Goose, is portrayed as an amoral sexual predator who 'entertains' the amorous cop long enough for Johnny the Boy to sabotage the Goose's motorbike. One of the most significant female characters in the trilogy is the bikie-moll mannequin who is an adjunct to the Toecutter's gang (Stratton 1983, Crockett 1999). A mannequin functions as a totem of all things feminine, as she is literally a 'dummy' whose chief function is to remain silent, look attractive, and display clothes.[6] The mannequin (*whose lack of animation does not significantly separate her from the other female cast members*) is primarily a sexual object available to the bikies. Later, 'she' is labelled a spy who is 'full of treachery' and is subsequently executed. Despite her inability to speak (*not to mention the fact that she is a doll*), as 'woman' the mannequin is still coded as untrustworthy, a potential gossip, and devious. The last woman to appear in the first film is May (the old woman who attempts to help the Rockatansky family), but in her hands both a car and a shotgun are ineffectual. As an elderly woman with a physical disability, May is unable to wield the phallus with potency.

In *Mad Max 2*, the women are portrayed as either victims to be raped and tortured, or as cowardly shrills such as Big Rebecca. The exception is Warrior Woman who appears to be respected as an equal by the men in Pappagallo's group, however her good looks and long hair, and the manner in which Wes kills her, mark her as at least partially 'other'. As Wes drags her body off the tanker, he appears to take particular pleasure in killing 'woman' (Sharrett 1985, 89), and he makes a point of gendering her even as he throws her under the wheels of a truck. With Warrior Woman eliminated, the role of the surviving female characters is more mundane. Curmudgeon informs Max that the survivors' chief function will be performed in Queensland, where they will be required to 'breeeeeed' (Falconer 1995, 289). This scenario again places women in the domestic sphere and inscribes them as sexual objects or mothers.

Beyond Thunderdome features two significant female characters—Auntie Entity and Savannah Nix, and to a limited extent they steal some of Max's thunder. Tina Turner's character, Auntie Entity, is the leader of Bartertown, where she is supposedly 'Helping to Build a Better Tomorrow'. She emerges triumphant from the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust and declares:

> Do you know who I was? Nobody! Except on the day after I was still alive and finally had a chance to be somebody—but anyway—so much for history...Look around Mister. All this I've built. Up to my armpits in blood and shit. Where there was desert now there's a town. Where there was robbery now there is trade. Where there was despair now there is hope—civilisation—and I'll do anything to protect it.

As Morris notes, the name 'Entity' denotes 'somebody' and 'Nix' means 'nobody' (1998, 252), thus signifying that Entity has made something of herself (and perhaps that Savannah may not), and that she is attempting to re-write 'history' to 'herstory'. However, she is also a protective 'aunt' and aligned with signifiers of childbirth and child rearing (blood and shit) and thus she is surrogate mother and a decorative, but not

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functional, warrior woman. The feminine is again linked with the abject (birth and in this case rebirth) and is only given an opportunity to wade out of the morass after the apocalypse.

Auntie Entity emerges as a benevolent dictator rather than a legitimate challenge to Max, and her power is made secondary to the masculine. She plots to use Max to defeat Master-Blaster rather than openly attacking him/them herself. Her power is also seen to be incomplete as she is forced to bow publicly to Master-Blaster and admit that he is the one who really runs Bartertown:

> Master-Blaster: Who run Bartertown?
>
> Auntie Entity: Dammit, I've told you no more embargoes!
>
> MB: Who run Bartertown? WHO RUN BARTERTOWN?
>
> AE: You know who.
>
> MB: Say!
>
> AE: Master-Blaster.
>
> MB: Say LOUD!
>
> AE: Master-Blaster.
>
> MB: What?
>
> AE: Master-Blaster runs Bartertown.
>
> MB: LOUDER!
>
> AE: MASTER-BLASTER RUNS BARTERTOWN.

This disclosure effectively makes Auntie Entity a figurehead, whom Hall and Erlich describe as 'Artemis in chain mail' (1987, 321).

The characters of both Auntie Entity and Savannah Nix are aligned with Aboriginal Australians and this may reinforce their status as 'other' and hence diminish their threat to Max's power base. As noted in the previous chapter, Miller uses a similar device in *Mad Max 2*, when he aligns the bikies with 'wild Indians.' The fact that Auntie Entity does not appear to tempt Max sexually (as Broderick 1993 notes, he refuses her offer of

fruit) may also be linked to her blackness, which is reinforced by the prefix 'Auntie'.[7] In fact, as both Morris (1998) and Falconer (1994) note, there is a disturbing erasure of Aboriginal Australians in the film, and a convenient re-writing of history occurs. Despite the potential for an effective and forceful feminine future led by a black woman, it is doubtful that Auntie Entity will be able to regroup and remain in power long enough to build a better future. Like Jessie, Auntie Entity may be relegated to part of 'history.'

Savannah Nix, the leader of the lost tribe of children, is perhaps the most powerful female character in the trilogy, and she is linked to the hope of rebirth and a better future (Tomorrow-morrow-land). Savannah lives in the fecund Crack in the Earth, a place with obvious connotations of feminine fertility and regeneration. While on a trek, Savannah finds an unconscious Max, and triumphantly flourishes him as the ultimate cargo-cult booty. Savannah then emerges from the gorge, and assumes the heroic mantle as leader of the children, overshadowing Slake (her male counterpart) who takes an increasingly passive role in the narrative. Like Slake, Max is tempted to remain in the gorge and to ignore the outside world. Savannah disregards their passivity, and leads a band of believers out of the gorge in search of their past, their perceived 'home', and a better future. *Now, all together, in French or in English—'Where are you going?' 'I am going home'.*

Savannah displays the traditional 'masculine' traits of courage and leadership, not only among the lost children, but also in Tomorrow-morrow-land. She is the only female character who actively drives the narrative rather than acting as a passive witness to the male characters' heroics. Miller tempers her power by reinstating Max as her rescuer, however Max is forced to punch her in the face to subdue her (she escapes anyway). Despite Savannah's bravery, her group soon encounters trouble and only survives because Max reluctantly sets off to rescue them. Max also 'saves the day' in a brief but spectacular action scene at the end of the film when he uses a buggy to force the villains off the road, allowing the plane to take off for Sydney. It appears that in the

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final scenes Miller needs to remind viewers why Max is the hero of the trilogy and so he temporarily provides Max with a (stolen) vehicle to demonstrate his skills.

Max aligns himself with Savannah and Master, but then delays his own reintegration into society by allowing them to escape at his expense. Thus in order to help save the future, Max, as *pharmakos*, sacrifices his chance of escaping the wasteland but he still assists society's renewal (Hall and Erlich 1987, 323). In the final scene, we are presented with Savannah doing 'the tell' with a baby in her arms, and as Hall and Erlich note she is 'not a goddess or even a matriarch but culture-bearer and mother' (1987, 321). However, despite Miller's obvious attempt to re-write the hero myth and incorporate the feminine into the future, in having Savannah mythologise Max in 'the tell', this reinforces his role as hero and leaves the door open for his triumphant return.

It is extremely significant that the female characters in this car-centred cycle rarely drive.[8] When motoring with Jessie, Max takes the wheel as a matter of course, and when Jessie gets behind the wheel, on two occasions, both episodes end in disaster. When she drives to the shop to get an ice cream, she is targeted by the Toecutter's gang as 'woman' and only narrowly escapes. Later, when the gang seek to avenge her earlier escape, she is not so lucky. She attempts to drive away but the vehicle refuses to respond with a woman behind the wheel and she is forced to leave the car and run down the road on foot. This is not the domain of pedestrians and both she and Sprog then add to the road toll on Anarchie Road. In the whole cycle, Jessie is the only woman who even attempts to drive and the message is clear—women drivers are not welcome in the masculine realm of the roads. It is only when the roads disappear in the third film that women command more screen space, and even then the message that is conveyed about the status of women is a mixed one.

Falconer (1994, 1995) and Gibson (1992, 1994) have written at some length about the disappearance of roads in the film, and Gibson suggests that:

Having abandoned his adversarial attitude to the environment—having left the road—Max has begun to trace the contours of the continent, reading it a little more cannily, moving according to its dictates, and growing from it ... the successful characters are now the ones who are incorporated in the environment (1992, 175).

While I acknowledge his point, I believe that an argument could also be made to suggest just the opposite. To my mind, the landscape is extremely threatening in the third film and the only 'havens' from the desert all have distinctly abject qualities—the gorge, Bartertown (with its 'shitty' underworld which the children enter via the sewer), and Jedediah's cave dwelling (entered via the boot of a car).[9] When characters attempt to walk, drive, or ride across the desert, they meet with disaster, and more often than not they are swallowed up by the sand. I would argue that this reinforces the Australian cultural proclivity of portraying the landscape as hostile, threatening, and as distinctly feminine (with repeated allusions to the abject and the landscape as *vagina dentata*). Given that the film is saturated with sly references to cultural clichés and intertextual nods to other films, it would appear that this is a deliberate ploy on behalf of the filmmakers. As part of her extensive study of the Australian desert as a text, Haynes reads the film in the following way:

In George Miller's Mad Max films ... the desert functions not realistically but strategically and parodically. In providing such a setting, as well as a locus for the enactment of fantastic narratives with a universal hero/antihero who transcends culture and time, the desert has both Australian and international significance. By exaggerating the stereotypical attributes ascribed to the Australian desert through clichés, intertextual quotations and a 'comic book aesthetic', the Mad Max films self-consciously parody such a cultural construction. The immensity of the desert is invoked to justify the national obsession with the car and hence with a fuel economy in which gangs murder for petrol... (1998, 193-194)

Hence, the landscape can be rejected and conveniently 'blamed' for the men's attitudes and behaviour. Rather than thriving in the increasingly sandy desert environment, by the third film Max flounders because everything seems to happen above or below the earth, but not at ground level where he has traditionally been most successful as a driver. As Rummery notes, 'The questor for the landscape in recent Australian cinema has changed from the 'intrepid bushman' to the 'fast driver' (1988, 46). As both Rummery (1988) and Falconer (1994) note, in many of these Australian narratives there appears to be a validation of the use of technology at the expense of the environment, and as a means of marking the landscape as *terra nullia* or *tabula rasa*.

This is where I think Gibson's important point about the emphasis on flying in *Beyond Thunderdome* has particular significance (1992, 170-171). I would argue that this signifies a rejection of the feminine landscape, but (of course) it also relates to the film's title, which alludes to a future that transcends the exercise of patriarchal power games. Thus, the narrative is sending mixed messages about the appropriateness of the validation and valorisation of technology as a masculine culture that erases Aboriginal Australia, and threatens the environment and the feminine.

What transpires if there are no roads? How does a sauntering driver respond when he is mistaken for a pilot and urged to 'Fly, Walker, Fly'? In No Road, *Muecke retells a story that Gloria Brennan once told him about a man in the Top End who, when reassuring her that the route to his community was roadworthy, dismissed the existence of a 'road' but reassured her that there was 'bitumen all the way' (Muecke 1997, 18). The story obviously charmed Brennan, then Muecke, and now myself. A roadless reverberation echoing and ricocheting from person to person, text to text. Muecke goes on to say that, 'Reality, however, tends to be bitumenised', and then ponders whether the bitumen, cars and other colonising artefacts will withstand nature, and reflects that indigenous Australians must dream of a time when nature will wipe the slate clean (1997, 19).*

Muecke writes of the 'White Male endeavour to ensure that the country is 'opened up'' (*Muecke 1997, 28*). *(Shut up and spread your legs you bitch!)* In Beyond Thunderdome, *the blackfellas' dreams of nature reclaiming the land and of the earth closing itself up have become a reality (on film in a fantasy). A scab forming over a wound and then sloughing off. A scar sometimes visible, sometimes not, but the memory of the wound intact and permanent. If reality is a bitumenised road (as Muecke has claimed), has Max wandered into a netherworld? Is it a place where reality has been re-established or erased, or even banished? What is reality? Should we look for it on the screen? And what and where is the place for Henry Parkes and 'his' motel? Muecke reminds us with a quote from* Back to the Future, *that where the adventurers of that film are going, they 'won't need any roads'. What is the time Mr Wolf? Is it time yet? Are we there yet? Hey Doc, is this the future? However, Max needs roads to establish who he is, what time it is, and what he stands for. The house of cards disintegrates without bitumen as a foundation and a V8 as a launching pad. Is this the New Deal the Mayor talked about in Paris?*

Despite an absence of roads and the loss of his wheels, it is significant that the arena where Max has to prove his heroism is the Thunderdome, which most Australians (and certainly car crash devotees) would link to car racing. Thunderdome, as Davison explains, has traditionally been a Mecca for working-class petrol-heads:

> On the fringes of metropolis, there had emerged a fantasy world in which the young driver's dreams of speed, sexual conquest and mastery came true. Calder Raceway, on the city's north-west fringe, and Sandown Park, to the south east, opened within a few months of each other in 1962. Calder [with its] tighter curves and better visibility for spectators, and its proximity to the working-class suburbs of the north-west, it became the favourite venue for production car and drag racing. Bob Jane later purchased the circuit and added a new track, 'Thunderdome', as a circuit for Amcar racing (1996, 137).

A leitmotif of car-related mythologies emerge in this film, enduring despite the scarcity of fuel, cars, and roads. Hence, the Thunderdome (although it is now a caged fighting venue rather than a racetrack), is the ideal place for Max to re-establish his heroic masculinity. Max needs this victory to regain his status after his protestation, 'I've got skills—I can trade them,' is dismissed with the reply, 'Sorry the brothel is full'. It is only in the Thunderdome scene that Max realises his former magnetic masculinity, because as an action hero Max needs to perform thrilling deeds with either his fists or technological prosthetics.

The resonance of the spectre of Max as the mythic motorist transcends the 'death' of his car ('the last of the V-8 Interceptors, a piece of history'), which outlives the trilogy and has developed its own mythology. Although it is a detour, I would like to examine how the Inteceptor has taken on a life of its own, and in a most postmodern fashion refuses closure. In the plethora of *Mad Max* webpages, the Interceptor has its own fan base. Peter Barton's webpage (1999) has the most comprehensive information on every vehicle used in the trilogy and he includes a three-part history of the Interceptor. It appears that Miller sought a 'high performance, evil looking Australian car' and so purchased a 1973 XB GT Ford Falcon Coupe (Barton 1999). Modifications were made, the most noticeable one being the addition of the distinctive, but purely decorative, supercharger that protrudes from the front bonnet. The same car was used in *Mad Max 2* and after extensive restoration work it has changed hands several times and now resides in the 'Cars of the Stars' motor museum in Keswick, England. A duplicate Interceptor was made for the second film, however the replica was destroyed in the scene where Lord Humungus' gang forces Max off the road and the vehicle is incinerated. Despite rumours to the contrary, only two 'authentic' Interceptors were built, however, there are several 'counterfeit' cars in circulation—one of them is now on display in a Planet Hollywood restaurant.

Barton's website is one of many which feature the Interceptor, and many webpages and references are dedicated to a replica Interceptor owned by Gordon Hayes. Hayes' car was built in the same panel shop as the prototype, and was made using the same moulds

as the original, and he insists that it is a 'REAL second Interceptor' (Hayes 1999). Details of the specifications of almost every part are available on his website, which reveals an extravagant passion for the vehicle and the films. Hayes' replica Interceptor has developed a fanatical following and is (extraordinarily) the subject of several poems and prose works (accompanied by a musical score) by Cal (California) the creator of the *Road Warrior Forever* webpage (California 1999). It appears that the Interceptor (and even a replica Interceptor) has taken on the heroic qualities of Max's character. There is a slippage between the qualities of a film character, and the qualities of a car, and a replica of that car. When Cal writes romantic poetry dedicated to a replica of a stunt car, is she transferring her adoration of the character Max, or the film star Mel Gibson, onto the car? This highlights just how fused Max has become with his vehicle—the boundaries remain blurred.

At this rate Australia's roads, virtual highways, and screens will be full of simulacras ricocheting from coast to coast. Baudrillard would have a field day. Hey Roland, the car's not dead yet either! Again, there is this blurring of the imaginary and the real, is this hyperreality, a simulacra, a clone, transference, the car as star? The dead are living, but they weren't alive in the first place, so are we witnessing a tribe of simulacra ghosts? Or are we dreaming? With Mad Max 4 *reportedly on the drawing-board, the Interceptor may live to see another day.*

Another chapter in the Interceptor mythology has just been written, with the release of the 98 minute documentary entitled *Welcome to Wherever You Are* (Aaron Stevenson, 2001) which has had recent screenings in 'art-house' cinemas in Melbourne and Sydney. It documents the journey of the five filmmakers (four nurses and a butcher) who are on a pilgrimage to unearth and recreate the Interceptor and then re-live the filming of the trilogy.[10] The pilgrimage commences with an interview with Scott Smith, yet another bloke who is enamoured of the Interceptor and hence has built another clone. Like Hayes, he used the services of several of the mechanics and workshops involved in making the vehicles for the trilogy. Smith's vehicle is named The Last V8 (its number-plate is LASTV-8), and according to him it is an 'exact replica'.[11] This

prompts the filmmakers to make a replica of his replica and drive it on a journey to unearth the *Mad Max* mythology from Melbourne to Bendigo, Broken Hill (and the 'Crack in the Earth' gorge), Sydney, Bathurst and home again to Bendigo. They profess to be looking for the 'holy grail', and when they track down what appears to be the wreck of the Interceptor on the back of a truck (shrouded, and protected behind an electric fence) they genuflect and protest that the wreck should be in a museum. These men are part of an international band of devotees who seek to protect and preserve the *Mad Max* mythology, and in doing so, they could be said to be entering the film. Like Crabs, these screen fans are not content to stay in their seats and consume (*popcorn and pop-culture?*) and as expert viewers they transcend their roles as passive consumers and step off onto the set and into the screen (*voyeur or auteur?*).

And who am I kidding? I'm right up there with the rest of them, jostling for a peek at the metal gods, gazing rapt at the technological icons of a culture that I'm part of but don't believe I'll ever really understand. But isn't that what faith is all about? Identification? Representation? Perception? The Interceptor as imaginary signifier. But signifying what? If the reality which Turner (1999) says is always absent in filmed images but present in our imaginations is absent, or a mechanical clone, am I awake or am I dreaming? 'Where am I', she asked? 'Welcome to Wherever You Are', they replied. The Interceptor as social integrator, or a mechanical mechanism, or the medium. Hold on, what is the medium, which is the message? Or is this about visual pleasure? Why is the Interceptor so pleasing to the eye, or is the pleasure located further south? Is the visual also visceral? Am I part of a cult, an extra-textual factor, a lard-arsed extra, or an up-myself academic playing at being a rev-head? The ivory tower as a side show touring Bathurst and Broken Hill in a battered 1973 Corona ...And what is a chick doing behind the wheel anyway?[12] Now get back on track!

In summary, *Beyond Thunderdome* places Max in unfamiliar territory, and although he is prodded and prompted by Miller, he struggles to find his way. Without his vehicle and without roads, Max is forced to propel the story on foot and with women, children and assorted misfits to assist him. His star is waning, but the celebrity status of his

absent vehicle is ascending and multiplying. Despite using spectacles such as the Thunderdome fight scene and the brief automotive skirmish at the end of the film, without the Interceptor Max's masculinity becomes a strained performance that merely limps along rather than zooming across the screen.

If *Beyond Thunderdome* is an example of how a hero can lose his potency if his vehicle is stolen from him, then *Freedom* and *Idiot Box* demonstrate how men are willing to steal wheels if they do not have the means to acquire them legitimately. Car theft is a familiar trope in road movies and the car crash genre (*Backroads, Midnite Spares, Metal Skin*), and in films exploring adolescent males' rites of passage (*The Year My Voice Broke*), however the two films that I have chosen should serve to illustrate the central preoccupations of the genre. The reason car theft is so common in the road movie and car crash genres hinges on the fact that it is such exciting action cinema because it provides spectacular visual and visceral chase scenes on screen. Car chase scenes are distilled action and, as discussed in the Introduction, they have been popular since the birth of cinema. The recent highly successful American films *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (Dominic Sena, 2000) and *The Fast and the Furious* (Rob Cohen, 2001), cobble together thin plots as an excuse to glory in the spectacle and the adrenaline rush that expensive automobiles and explosive car stunts provide for audiences. These two American films, and the Australian film *Midnite Spares*, focus on professional car theft organised by 'gangs' who are involved in car theft for commercial purposes (the thrills are an occupational perk). *Freedom* and *Idiot Box*, however, feature car thefts that are incidental and impulsive acts carried out by individuals who want to use the cars themselves and have no intention of selling them. The latter is the most common form of car theft (joy-riding) where young people (usually males) steal a vehicle and drive it for a short period of time before abandoning it. It is a dangerous form of thrill-seeking that accounts for a large proportion of deaths of young Australian men (see Mitchell 1997, Konkes 2000, Davison 1996, Hunt 2002, Fisher 1989, or Lynch and Veal 1996).

Freedom tells the story of Ron (Jon Blake), a working-class bloke from the Western suburbs of Adelaide, who dreams of freedom in the form of a silver Porsche.[13] Again,

the familiar car crash tropes are present—Ron is single, father-less, perpetually unemployed, broke, and has no agency; and so he escapes into a dream world of fast cars and fast women. His bedroom walls display a desperation about his fate that is reminiscent of the protagonist in Peter Carey's 'War Crimes', who remembers:

> In the sleep-out behind the house I pinned pictures of motor cars to the walls and masturbated. The yellow walls were decorated with dull brown ageing cellotape and the breasts of impossible girls even less attainable than the motor cars. It was here that I waited to be sent to the factory (1994, 323).

Ron's fantasies of fast cars and fast women are shared by Carey's character and legions of other men, and they are nurtured and reinforced by motoring magazines and car crash films.[14] As discussed in Chapter One, 'impossible girls' draped over impossible cars are the focus of motoring magazines such as *Street Machine* and *Fast Fours and Rotaries*, and scholars such as Margaret Henderson (1999) have provided some fascinating insights into the genre. In stealing the Porsche, Ron rejects his position as merely a witness to other people's fantasies, and he attempts to realise this celluloid and tabloid construction of masculinity, and in doing so he tries to erase the reality of his status as factory-fodder.

Freedom has been largely ignored by critics, but John Baxter (1986) situates it alongside the other films discussed in this thesis, and in an interview with Matt Carroll, the producer of the film, Carroll describes the film as being about:

> The appeal of our obsession with cars, and their relation to landscape and mythology. How this thing fits into the landscape; that they're quite alien, a cocoon that people move through the landscape in, and how people react to it. I suppose it was brought about by the trips I did between Sydney and Adelaide in cars, and how you relate to the gas stations and those things. It's a fantasy world. I tried to capture that thing of garages and long night hauling and cars

going across that very barren landscape at tremendously high speeds (1986, 114).

For Ron (and characters like him), life on the road behind the wheel of a Porsche is a 'fantasy world' where his obsession with cars is played out in spectacular fashion. The relationship between the bloke, the car, and the landscape is central to the spectacle. Baxter notes that Australian cinema displays an anxiety about the landscape that is temporarily ameliorated when characters are cocooned in a car (1986). As discussed elsewhere in this thesis in relation to the car crash genre, technology provides men with a buffer from nature and from women.

The filmmakers demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the gender-technology relation when the film opens with a shot of Ron playing a car race game in a video parlour populated by the rigid bodies of young men who gaze transfixed at the screens. This is the type of technology-related activity that takes place in a masculine space (as discussed in Chapter One), and encourages young men to believe that technology is a masculine culture (see Wajcman 1991, or Turkle 1984). Hicks foreshadows the trouble to come when Ron fails to post the highest score on his machine when his car crashes into a barrier and explodes. (Ron is later involved in several real car chases, which end in spectacular crashes, and several lives are lost.) The film then cuts to a shot of heavy machinery in a factory, and we see Ron (and other working-class men) labouring over huge machines, which again situates him in the world of technology as masculine culture. Immediately, the audience discerns the environment Ron lives in, and it is no surprise when he is seen stealing a manifold from his employer (in an effort to repair his decrepit and embarrassing car), and is then promptly sacked. Ron's house is littered with car wrecks (which in a now familiar fashion, refuse to remain unitary), none of which really amounts to anything worth having, and they are eventually sold off for scrap.

Ron's friend Phil (Chris Haywood) drives a slick red panel van complete with a futuristic scene painted on the side, and the word 'Machismo' proudly scrolled

alongside. Phil informs Ron that if he wants to get ahead (and buy a van like his) he should know his place, knuckle down, and work hard (in his words, to 'eat shit' and smile while doing so). Phil understands his position in the class structure but he is willing to play the game to get ahead, and he reassures Ron that Australia is a nation built on its ability to smile and 'eat shit'. This is an attitude already discussed in this thesis, and the validation of manual work has been discussed by many scholars in relation to gender, technology, and class (see Wajcman 1991, Willis 1978, 1990, or Segal 1990). Phil is nervous about immigrants being willing to work around the clock and take the jobs of 'real' Australians (reminiscent of the fears expressed in *Drive-In*, and discussed in Morris' 1998 article), and he cautions Ron to heed his advice and to work hard. However, Ron rejects his subordinate position in 'the system', and he is continually punished for his rebellion and earns a reputation for being 'difficult'. He complains that as a working-class man he is merely muscle for hire and is never permitted to undertake more intellectually challenging work (work that requires 'skills').

Hicks underscores Ron's plight by saturating the *mise-en-scène* with a barrage of advertisements for consumer goods, and sly shots of graffiti, which proclaim slogans such as 'The economy is the secret police of your desires'. Just as is the case in the *Mad Max* trilogy, *Cars*, *Idiot Box*, and *Drive-In*, the film is set amongst a backdrop of urban decay, unemployment, economic unrest, and constant reminders (radio, television, billboards, newspaper headlines) that, even if one is unable to produce, one must consume, and that consumption of a car is a masculine imperative. Again, this is all 'textbook' material in the car crash genre, which reflects exactly the type of tropes discussed in connection with the gender-technology relation earlier in this thesis.

After Ron's 'heap' breaks down for the last time and is towed off as scrap, he cadges lifts with Phil, and then steals a modest Holden. Inevitably, the old Holden does not match the image that Ron seeks to portray about his masculinity, and when his pride is hurt by the female Porsche driver, he succumbs to a whim and his crime spree escalates. When Ron steals a slick white suit (the theft of the clothes is suggested but

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not explicit) and the silver Porsche, he is assuming the costume of the man he wishes he could be—the John Travolta of the racetrack. The bleak realism of Ron's existence cannot compete with the images he has seen on the pages of magazines, and on the screen; and he swaps identities, and temporarily becomes a hero in the manner of a Hollywood leading-man (just as Crabs does). He is variously 'James Bond', 'eccentric millionaire', 'secret agent', 'Clyde' (an iconic road movie character), 'Prince Charming', and 'film star'. In one scene, he even trades clothes with Sally (his jacket for her jumper) but this transvestism is only temporary. His predilection for wearing costumes is reminiscent of Max's regular donning of masks, and again it underlines the performative nature of gender construction. Of course, these are all transitory roles and by the end of the film he is back to being Ron (broke, unemployed, car-less, and on the run). Even when Ron steals a car, it only serves his purpose and enhances his performance of masculinity for a short time before the technology fails and he abandons it and returns to cadging lifts or walking. The lads in the next film have a similar problem keeping control of their stolen vehicle and they too have to relinquish it and proceed on foot.

Idiot Box is a bleak version of a 'coming of age' narrative that presents audiences with a stark but humorous dose of social realism in the 1990s. It pumps crude frustrated energy, via sharp editing and a frenetic sound track that combines both urban cacophonic noise and raw Australian music to enhance its high-octane feel (Goldsmith 2001). There are no positive masculine role models or fatherly bedside chats in this film, which examines the fate of two troubled youths attempting to make the transition to manhood in the outer suburbs of Sydney. Although, it is not a 'classic' car crash text, I am interested in its unique representation of young men denied the agency to be car-owners and drivers, and the way that Caesar experiments with cars, roads, and flânerie. *Idiot Box* is set in a (now familiar) desolate and father-less realm and the film investigates the world of young working class men who are grappling with the challenge of manifesting an 'honourable' code of ambulatory masculinity. Kev and Mick are unemployed, marginalised, frustrated, and looking for some direction (or at least something to do) to overcome their feelings of suffocation and boredom.

David Caesar is passionate about telling stories about working class Australians (*Mullet*), and he has made documentaries about shopping malls (*Shoppingtown*), funeral homes (*Bodywork*), and notably about cars and their place in Australian culture (*Car Crash*). He is acutely conscious of class politics and the role that capitalism and consumerism play in Australia, and he has been vocal about the challenges facing working-class men in contemporary Australian society. He is now recognised as somewhat of a spokesperson for working class blokes, and he is a favourite with the media who can rely on him for a memorable 'ten second grab' about Australian masculinity (see Biber 1999, Greenwood 1997, Mordue 1997, or Hurrell 1999).

As Kev and Mick reside in the outer suburbs (isolated from the centre), their geographic position on the margins mirrors their economic and cultural isolation. The audience sees them walking around a flat, dry and culturally desolate setting, and they appear to be trapped in a bland and sterile environment, with no means of escape. The depiction of suburbia as both an architectural and intellectual wasteland has been noted by academics such as Robin Boyd (1968) and McKenzie Wark (1999). Wark argues that Australian films from the 1990s, such as *Idiot Box*, *Metal Skin* and *The Boys*, paint the suburbs as a place where 'evil' is located (153). He states that this is endemic of a culture in which information and education are increasingly denied to working-class suburbanites who reflect a suspicion that the great Australian dream peddled in the 1950s and 1960s was a sham. The heterosexual nuclear family with 2.5 kids and a Labrador no longer exists (if it ever did), and the suburbs on the screen ache with an excess of space but an absence of life. If Kev and Mick gauge their self-worth by their ability to purchase 'the missus' a wide-screen television, house, and car, is it any wonder that they radiate anger and confusion? Like Mark Davis (1997), Caesar deliberately engages in the debate about how society vilifies the young, and he exposes the deceit of an Australian culture that deifies consumption and hegemonic masculinity but then blames working class men for their attempts to negotiate that culture (Ferres 2001). As Butterss notes, in such circumstances Kev has little choice but to self-

destruct, thus removing the threat of his 'excessive masculinity' (1998, 45), and allowing society to kid itself that Kev is entirely culpable for his predicament.

Accordingly, *Idiot Box* also investigates theories of screen violence and 'vulnerable' audiences, and as Ferres states:

> The narrative turns on, and interrogates, the claim that the representation of violence on television and in movies is directly linked to an increasing incidence of violence in the community. This claim rests on an assumption that the difference between the real and the imaginary is all but erased by the vividness of the representations themselves, and that viewing is a passive but utterly absorbing practice (2001, 176).

I agree with Ferres and concur that Caesar is deliberately exploring these issues, and Ferres provides an excellent survey of television as a sign in the film, and about viewing practices in general. What is crucial here is that despite their sophistication as viewers, and their 'routine' performances of resistance, Kev and Mick make the same mistakes as the crooks they pilloried from the couch. The lure of consumption, media approval, cinematic action, and the gender-technology relation, make a mockery of the concept that the boys have any real choices in life. Kev is defeated by his status as pedestrian, but Mick is more adaptable and creative, in that he defiantly reinvents himself from car-less 'loser' to yobbo flâneur.[15] In fact, Mick's adoption of the role as yobbo flâneur is 'heroic' given the force of hegemonic masculinity's pressure to conform, and given his status as a powerless pedestrian.

Kev and Mick are exposed to the pressures of a capitalist society and hegemonic masculinity, and creatively perform a protest masculinity from the pavements. In this context, the roads and cars become significant texts, and in the car-dependant outer suburbs depicted in *Idiot Box*, the streets and pavements are eerily empty. The way that the lads promenade in the streets informs the audience about their status and their self-image—about how they feel as men. Mick and Kev strut, head up, chest out—there is

both a laconic air about them and an aura of bubbling aggression in their stance. The more demeaning and hopeless the aim of the outing (for instance a trip to social security), the more the strut is affected—a performance of masculinity and bravado is paramount. Not only are the suburbs not designed for walkers (some streets do not appear to have footpaths) but the lads refuse the status of pedestrians and defiantly claim the roads. They usually parade in the middle of the street, rather than on footpaths; they claim the territory of cars even when they do not drive, and in one scene Kev literally walks right over a car. Indeed, to emphasise the point that Kev and Mick should not be on the roads (but are anyway), the film opens with the scene where the lads play chicken at night on the freeway. As Goldsmith notes:

> Tracking through long grass the camera picks out car headlights travelling straight towards us, as effortlessly we stand and follow a young man, Mick, nonchalantly crossing the busy road. As he reaches the other side Mick turns to wait for his mate, Kev, who slowly and defiantly walks towards him. Cars surge past, horns blare, a driver yells 'Get off the road', but Kev does not hurry or lengthen his gait. A car fills the screen, Kev barely steals a glance out of the corner of his eye. The camera swoops around, before Mick pulls Kev out of the line of fire of the car's blinding headlights, both of them falling into a ditch as the car screams past (2001, 126).

The lads know that they are transgressing into motorists' territory, and this is what makes the game meaningful as well as thrilling. They understand that society wants them off the roads and streets, and out of sight.

Like the parade of car crash characters before them, Kev and Mick resolve to commandeer respect by stealing a motor vehicle. In the scene where they are rehearsing the bank robbery, they case the bank on their dragster bikes, which of course makes them appear juvenile and pathetic rather than hardened criminals (indeed the police label them 'dickheads of the week'). Even when they manage to steal a car, it is an ancient mustard-coloured station wagon, and the owner reclaims it easily, and treats

them like naughty boys, rather than dangerous armed robbers. Goldsmith notes the 'indignity' that the boys suffer, forced to proceed on foot when the owner of the car reclaims it just as they are on the way to the bank (2001, 125). This is a story about 'the young and the bloody useless', and despite their posturing, the lads do not have the agency to be on the roads and this reduces them to the status of perpetual boys.

Significantly, the lads' envy and frustration manifest in behaviour such as playing chicken, deliberately setting off car alarms, or stealing a car and spending a few blissful minutes spinning in circles on an unpaved road or in a field. Manipulation of the automobile as a sign, is the principal means for Caesar to convey sensations of blissful release, transcendence and rebellion, and the pleasure derived from such behaviour is underlined by the use of slow motion sequences. As Butterss notes in relation to protest masculinity:

> The importance of bodily pleasures to this kind of masculinity is underlined in the slow motion moments of ecstasy which Kev experiences after his most excessively wild or violent behaviour. These brief snatches of release are the only times when he experiences peace (1998, 40).

The success of such filmmaking techniques has been well recognised by directors of road movies and car action films. As this thesis has demonstrated, the car provides filmmakers with an easily identifiable metaphor—an effective means of conveying messages to cine-literate audiences.

It is poignant that one of Mick's favourite diversions is to stand on an overpass over a busy highway and fantasise about the people who drive by below, and because Mick is a pedestrian, the people he watches drive away take on a mythic dimension. The drivers are going places but the lads are going nowhere, and they know it. When Mick asks Lani on a date, their choices for entertainment (until they are well acquainted enough to have sex) are either watching television or going for a walk. Before embarking on their stroll, Mick warns that there is nothing to see and, inevitably, they end up at the

overpass where they are caged behind safety fences—an image that reinforces their isolation, entrapment and inertia. As they gaze down at the passing cars, Mick admits that he did not think that Lani would be interested in him because he does not have a job or a car.

Mick would prefer to be in a car rather than on foot on the streets, and he would like to be at a workplace rather than constrained to the domestic, but he has no choice. In fact, the whole film could be said to reflect Mick's point of view as flâneur because the suburbs are usually not contemplated, reflected upon, indeed even seen, if city dwellers and filmmakers can help it. Despite Australia's cinematic predilection for larrikins, ockers, and odes to mateship, this is not the type of neighbourhood or the calibre of characters that usually graces our screens. Without cars and wheels, the locus shifts. Caesar makes us slow down, directs our gaze at the western suburbs, and refuses to allow us to avert our eyes from the incessant ugliness, but occasional beauty, of the physical and cultural environment. Mick acts as our tour guide and interpreter in this alien setting, and Caesar presents viewers with a bleak but humorous working-class bildungsroman that offers a different take on the gender-technology relation.

As I have argued, access to a car is especially significant for working-class young men if they are denied other means to demonstrate their masculinity (such as a job, money, higher education, political power and so on). When membership of a motoring brotherhood is withheld from young men, and the gender-technology relation denied or ignored, it can have a devastating effect on their sense of self-worth. Thus, the car, as a signifier of freedom, escape, masculinity and adulthood, is one of the most potent symbols in the films. Like the 'idiot box', the car has become a signifier of much more than a collection of nuts and bolts—and its place in Australian society, and in Australian film, is iconic. All three films discussed in this chapter demonstrate an anxiety about 'skills', and they explore whether it is possible for men to advertise their talents if they are on foot and divorced from technology. Max's skills as a driver are largely redundant in a world with very few vehicles and with very little fuel to propel them. He protests that he has other skills that he is willing to trade as an entrée into

Bartertown and the chance to regain his vehicle. To his dismay, his competence is ridiculed at first (the brothel joke), and then translated into fighting prowess when he is required to act as an assassin. It is Master who has the skills that are needed in Tomorrow-morrow-land, and Savannah's talents as leader, culture-bearer, and mother are also valuable skills needed to construct a better future. Ron never gets the chance to acquire or demonstrate many skills because he is regularly out of work and perpetually at the CES pleading for the opportunity to prove himself in a challenging arena. Kev and Mick are in a similar employment position, but in 1997 the situation remains grim for the unemployed, and there is not even a pretence that the lads could obtain paid work. At every meaningless interview, Kev states that his 'special skill' is as a 'fashion photographer', and Mick declares that he is a 'poet'. However, Ron, Kev, and Mick all possess another skill, and that is as expert viewers and consumers of car crash culture.

If there are very few opportunities for some men to demonstrate their gender without a machine close to hand, is it any wonder that blokes will steal to get behind the wheel of a vehicle? All three men are bombarded with media images of 'impossible' cars and women, and the gender-technology relation has influenced them from childhood, and the media reminds them everyday (via video parlours, television, cinema, magazines, newspapers, radio) that technology is a masculine culture. They understand that they need to be producers *and* consumers to manifest hegemonic masculinity. As Connell (1987, 1995, 2000) has noted, Australian men absorb media images, and they understand cultural hegemony (whether consciously or not), and so they construct their masculinities accordingly. Many characters in the car crash genre (Crabs, Kev, Mick, Ron) choose to discard their passive positions as media consumers and take a more active, cinematic role in constructing their masculinities in and around the media. The behaviour of the characters often conforms to clichéd performances of protest masculinity that they mimic from the media (and copy from figures like Max). This mimicry does not mean, however, that they are unaware of their class position, the performative nature of their masculinities, or the fragility of their constructions. All three directors demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of cinema, Australian culture, and the gender-technology relation, and Miller and Caesar in particular demonstrate

black humour and a playful attitude towards intertextuality, resistance theories, and gender. The filmmakers, the characters, and the audience all know that cars are 'phallic symbols', and yet there is no requirement for masculinity to be subtle (indeed protest masculinity embraces hyperbole). Moreover, when wielded with enough bravado and testosterone, a fuel-injected cliché with mag-wheels can be a very potent tool—some people are willing to steal to get their hands on one.

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[1] *Backroads* (Phillip Noyce, 1977) is another Australian film which examines masculinity and car theft (and, of course, race), but as my primary concern in this chapter is *Beyond Thunderdome*, and because *Backroads* has been very thoroughly discussed by scholars such as Biber (1999), Rayner (2000), Muecke (2001), Morris (1989) and others, I will refer to it only in passing.

[2] Many texts examining road movies or apocalyptic films provide thorough analyses of the fuel crisis motif, see for example Sharrett 1985, Broderick 1993, and Falconer 1994, 1995.

[3] My discussion is cursory, however Morris provides an excellent analysis of the female characters in her 1989 and 1998 articles.

[4] Jessie's and Sprog's fate is foreshadowed when a mechanic says of the panel van (which signifies the family): 'Don't see many of these anymore, 'cept to scrape 'em off the highway' (Crockett 1999).

[5] See Tasker 1993, Wright 1975, or Tompkins 1992 re the vengeance motive in cinema.

[6] Clearly, a discussion of fetishism would be an interesting detour (for example, see Mulvey 1996), and Chapter Eight of Faludi's *Backlash* (1992) commences with an interesting anecdote about mannequins.

[7] Gibson (1992), Broderick (1993), and Morris (1998), all provide insightful comments about Auntie Entity and the other female characters, however a detailed discussion would be inappropriate here.

[8] After spending most of the film in the backseat, Anna drives off and leaves the men stranded in *Backroads*, and she is one of the few women with the agency to drive in 1970s Australian cinema.

[9] Auntie Entity is also linked to the abject (the shit, childbirth, and blood references), and an interesting study could be made of the other references to the abject in the trilogy (Goose as a bloodied 'thing', Jessie as a 'vegetable', Sprog smeared on the road, the basement garage).

[10] The same filmmakers (Fatal Impact Productions) filmed the two documentaries entitled *Go Hard or Go Home*, which document the Bathurst Night Wars in 1999 and 2000, and were noted in Chapter One.

[11] A last minute (April 2002) trawl through the internet has unearthed a whole new generation of Interceptor replicas, in Australia and overseas, and confirms my belief that there is some fertile research material here for future projects.

[12] Clearly, a fascinating thesis could be written about the Interceptor(s), but any further musings (detours) would take me too far away from my destination. A dazzling article entitled 'Autotopographies' by Jennifer González (1995) leaves me salivating with the possibilities that the Interceptor(s) may offer.

[13] In a tragic example of how life mirrors art, Blake was critically injured in a car accident several years after this film was shot, and has been severely physically and mentally disabled for the last 15 years.

[14] Indeed, Bayley (1986) begins his text, which examines the creation and consumption of the car as an image, with the following anecdote: "I had breakfast with a friend the morning after he had celebrated his fortieth birthday ... He said to me ... 'You know, Stephen, as I get older I've had to reconsider the priorities in life.' I struck a resigned pose of a credulous martyr, but inside I was resigned to a homily about the virtues of pastoral poetry, family life, experimental communion with the Godhead and 'philosophy'. Instead, my friend said to me: 'And I'm more than ever certain that they are sex, drink and

fast cars.' The fantasies and aspirations and appetites of most of the world are summarized in that one bathetic sentence..."

[15] See '*Idiot Box*: Mick Cameron as Yobbo Flâneur' in a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of Australian Studies*, for more about my theory about Mick's status as pedestrian poet.

CONCLUSION

Virilitate Age: Act Manfully

Cyborg imagery ... represents more than just a recognition that humanity has already become integrated with technology to the point of indistinguishability; it also reveals an intense crisis in the construction of masculinity. Shoring up the masculine subject against the onslaught of a femininity feared by patriarchy now involves transforming the male body into something only minimally human. Whereas traditional constructions of masculinity in film often relied on external technological props (guns, armoured costumes, motorcycles, fast cars, cameras, and so on) to defend against disintegration, the cinematic cyborg heralds the fusion of body with the technological prop (Claudia Springer 1998, 494).

Just one more time around the block, Barry.

Australian film, and the car crash genre in particular, reinforces the assertion that 'A wrecked or flaming car raises desire' (Mottram 1981, 231). A parade of spectacular crashes and vehicular infernos is imprinted on our collective cinematic memories—from the spinning wreckage of Foley's Holden in *Sunday Too Far Away*, to Gary in *Backroads* igniting his 'marital' car, to Max handcuffing Johnny the Boy to a wreck and giving him the option of hacking off his own foot or being incinerated. These are unforgettable images. Vehicles rarely remain in one piece in car crash films—they crash, burn, disintegrate, and refuse to remain unitary despite the best efforts of the men behind the wheel. *Things Fall Apart*. In films where the automobile is often mobilised as a metaphor for the masculine body, there are implications regarding the anxieties (often bordering on hysteria) abounding about gender performances and the vulnerability of constructions of masculinity. The weapon that is employed as a defence of masculinity and an attack on others (both pedestrians and other motorists) more often proves to be a self-destructive and dangerous device.

Originating in the 1970s, and affecting 1980s and (to a lesser extent) 1990s narratives, the films reflect the political and economic preoccupations and gender issues of the times (oil crises, immigration, unemployment, the Cold War, nuclear power generation and warfare, second wave feminism). Nevertheless, these films still resonate in Australian culture, and several of the movies (*Cars*, *Stone*, and the *Max* trilogy in particular) have earned a cult status, and they continue to be played and replayed in cinemas and lounge-rooms, and discussed on the internet. I believe that it is the strength of the gender-technology relation and the fraught representation of (mechanical) masculinity that continues to make these films relevant to audiences today.

A summary of the repeated tropes that are pivotal to manifestations of masculinity in the genre should help clarify why the characters look to automobiles as vehicular props. However, a brief review of the material in Chapter One, should precede that summary and contextualise the films. It is my contention that the gender-technology relation,

which constructs technology as masculine culture, underpins the behaviour of many working-class young men who have an intense relationship with motor vehicles. The work of scholars such as Wajcman, Grant and Gill, Cockburn, Turkle, Sofia, and Griffiths in areas such as gender and science or gender and technology studies provides a foundation for my interrogation of representations of blokes and cars in Australian film. Sociologists, historians, and feminists (such as Connell, Walker, and Segal), and those combining similar fields of research with film studies (such as Morris, Turner, Tasker, Jeffords, Butterss, Biber, and Falconer) have all contributed scholarship which has been invaluable to my research. I have looked to both the streets and the screen to construct an argument about vehicular masculinity.

So what did I see on the roads?

I believe that cars tell a story about each of us, and for working-class young men the act of getting behind the wheel of the latest Holden and doing burnouts is one way they can make a blatant statement about themselves, their class position, and their masculinity. This one act is utilised to proclaim their heterosexuality, class, virility and their sexual availability. Blokes doing burnouts, chirpies, speeding, or playing chicken can be read as a celebration of working-class masculinity and men's intimate relationship with technology. The in-your-face bravado and posturing in public spaces advertises and lionises a hyper-masculine interpretation of masculinity that defies convention and challenges authority.

This form of resistance fails to contest hegemonic divisions of power, however, and does nothing to change class or gender divisions in Australian society. In fact, in many ways these blokes offer only a token resistance to authority, and their (literally) all-consuming passion for cars is ultimately self-destructive, and only serves to cement their class position.[1] Australia's road statistics continue to chart mortality and injury rates for men that are (at least) double that of women, and adolescent working-class blokes, who are essentially larrikins on wheels, are particularly vulnerable (Davison 1996, Walker 1999). Until young men embrace masculinities that celebrate working-

class culture, but offer less technologically-centred hyper-masculine modes of masculinity, blokes will still look to a Commodore or a Monaro to confirm their gender identity. It is unlikely that these men can 'choose' another option in a society where they have very little power, and lack the agency to exercise any meaningful choices about their position relative to hegemonic masculinity. However, they need to ask themselves whether cars actually take them anywhere or whether they are merely spinning their wheels and driving in circles.

Roland? Barry? Someone remind me where I am? Look to the left, look to the right, and look to the left again! Follow the dotted white line. Ok! So if this behaviour on the streets demonstrated an intimate relationship with automotive machines, was this reflected in representations of petrol-heads and speeding larrikins on our screens? What patterns emerged, and did they all relate in some way to the gender-technology relation?

Firstly, a look at some broader issues, such as unemployment, that emerged as critical to the genre. The characters that are held up as heroic in the car crash genre are not only employed, but the most respected characters are employed as drivers (Max, Crabs' brother Frank).[2] If a career as a driver is unattainable, then working with machines is also coded as an 'honourable' profession (driving then becomes an important leisure activity). Weir, Trenchard-Smith, Caesar and Hicks, in particular, recognise that un-waged Australians are locked out of participating in many activities that assist men to construct their masculinity (particularly constructions based around technology). Unemployment looms in the films as a threat to the community and as an obstacle for young men to achieve adulthood and manhood.[3] Masculinity has traditionally entailed being able to 'protect and provide' (Gilmore 1990, 223), and many of the young men in the car crash genre are unable to do this because they are unemployed and reliant on the goodwill of relatives. Many of the positions in manufacturing or trades—jobs that Arthur, George, Kev, Mick, Joe, Dazey, and Ron would traditionally perform—have disappeared or are perhaps being performed by machines. As scholars such as Arnold (2001) have noted, and as discussed in relation to *Drive-In*, with changes to the

employment practices and technologies in manufacturing, it is hardly surprising that on screen there is a confused aura of both optimism and suspicion about the future. As Connell (1995), Webb (1998), Game and Pringle (1983), Leach (1993) and others note, paid work is an important means for working-class men to perform their masculinity in a positive manner. Hence, characters such as Arthur, Mick, and Kev suffer from arrested development, destined to be perpetual 'boys'—one a dependent son playing at the feet of his adopted father, and the others constrained to riding dragster bikes. The 'boys' are denied access to hegemonic masculinity and so resort to outdated displays of hypermasculinity or protest masculinity in an attempt to mask their impotency in society (Connell 1995, Donaldson 1991). Brutal salvage, car theft, or physical violence is often seen as the only way out of the predicaments that many of the unemployed characters face (and one way to get their hands on a motor vehicle).

In addition to unemployment, the spectre of the absent father looms repeatedly in the texts examined in this thesis. In *Drive-In*, Crabs treats his brother Frank as a father figure. In *Cars* Arthur similarly looks to his older brother as a father figure, and after George's death he then turns to the Mayor. Max talks nostalgically about his father and how he was never able to communicate openly with him. Kev and Mick in *Idiot Box* live with their mother and brother respectively and there is no mention of fathers. Ron's father is dead or absent in *Freedom*. Mick's father in *Running* is an ineffectual drug-addled figure, and a mother is never mentioned. The absence of fathers, and the subsequent search for father figures is crucial in relation to discourses of masculinity, and in situations where the strength and potency of the family unit is threatened. The search for father figures is a popular theme in men's movement literature (Bly 1999, Biddulph 1994, Webb 1998, Kewley and Lewis 1993), gender studies (Segal 1990, Webb 1998, Connell 1995), and film criticism (Jeffords 1994). In the absence of fathers, de facto masculine 'families' are formed, and the bonds that keep these men together are automotive and based on a love of cars (*Return Home, Midnite Spares, Metal Skin*). Car culture becomes a social practice.

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In the car crash genre it is the fathers who are usually absent but in the films that Biber (1999) examines in her thesis on Australian cinematic masculinity it is the women and mothers whom she regards as missing in action. I have noted the vulnerability and invisibility of female characters in the car crash genre, and many other critics have also observed this trope (Morris 1989). Perhaps what is crucial here is that, as scholars such as Morris (1980) have noted, it is the paucity of happy nuclear families and positive heterosexual romantic relationships that is striking about Australian films. Australian film audiences anticipate doomed or pessimistic representations of heterosexual love, and recent examples such as *The Boys*; *Blackrock*; *Romper Stomper*; *Praise*; *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*; *Muriel's Wedding*; *Lantana* and *Moulin Rouge* confirm viewer expectations. The car crash genre does nothing to overturn this negative tradition where we witness absent fathers, mutilated, shadowy or invisible female characters, and the annihilation of the (mythical) happy nuclear family.

As discussed at some length in Chapters Two and Three, and by Morris in her 1998 article on *Mad Max*, there is a xenophobic hysteria that bubbles just beneath the surface of many of these films. Strangers of any ilk, especially Asian immigrants, are treated with fear and suspicion. Any deviance from white heterosexual 'normality' is attacked and cars are often used as the preferred weapon (especially against bike-riding 'queers'). In Paris, at the Star Drive-In, and in the white settlers camp in *Mad Max 2*, fences are erected to keep 'deviants' and 'foreigners' out, but they also cage the inhabitants inside in a claustrophobic and incestuous environment. Police and other agents of patriarchal authority are used as gatekeepers restricting access to and from these ghettos. Moreover, there appears to be an anxiety about whether to throw open the gates to American colonisers or close them off and isolate Australia from cultural and economic imperialism.

When the battlements are erected it is often the case that women are also othered and subsequently ejected or rejected from the patriarchal hegemony. As has been discussed, this is common in Australian film, and it could also be linked to backlash politics (Jeffords 1989, Faludi 1992, 1999, Sawer 1999, Tasker 1993). There is a certain irony

to the fact that although women are usually invisible in car narratives (until very recent times), in fact study after study demonstrates that women are better (safer) drivers than men (Casey 1997, Mitchell 1997). Sadly, indigenous Australians are even more invisible than women in vehicular narratives, and one of the only black figures present is 'the Mayor's Aboriginal', a garden ornament that is destroyed by the feral cars in Paris. Gary, the black protagonist in *Backroads*, is shot and his blackness is erased from our screens. Moreover, in *Beyond Thunderdome* Miller provides audiences with indigenous substitutes in the form of Tina Turner and the lost children. Difference is obscured or erased.

So where is this behaviour being manifested and what type of mise-en-scène do the films provide?

The films discussed in this thesis all display an anxiety about the landscape (which is often coded in a Gothic manner) and cars provide a brittle metallic buffer from the countryside. In 'Fate and Family Sedan' Meaghan Morris sees 'the car as an agent of action ... as mobile, encapsulating vehicles of critical thinking about the family and familial space—articulating a conflict between a 'society' and an 'environment' which are nonetheless mutually, and historically, entailed' (1989, 116). In car crash films, however, the car (and the motorbike) is mobilised as a masculine space—families are not welcome or required. As Morris notes, there is vehicular agency and an abundance of action, but I would argue that families are not part of that activity.

Families are excess baggage in a sedan. A sedan as a means to forget one's fate? A sedan as a cipher? A sedan to shield oneself from a viper or sniper? A sedan in a screen filled with blood red dirt and sand. A sedan. A sedan.

Australia's hostile environment has been the subject of much academic discussion, particularly in film studies, and in relation to road narratives (Baxter 1986, Gibson 1992, 1994, Falconer 1995, Haynes 1998, Rummery 1988). According to John Baxter:

If the art of the Australian cinematographer is controlling the light, then what is the art of the Australian director? Perhaps it's controlling the landscape. One way of controlling the landscape is to deal with people who are not part of it but who traverse it easily, fearlessly, who 'hug the road in all its length' as Bachmann said, 'suck in the dust of all those miles.' Drivers (1986, 114).

Only heroic drivers are capable of handling this harsh and inauspicious landscape, and fending off the threatening inhabitants of this wild terrain.

The landscape in the car crash genre, however, is frequently more than just ominous—it is often a wasteland. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic *mise-en-scène* dominate the screen, with the settings in the *Mad Max* trilogy and *Drive-In* the most obviously devastated environments. Miller and Trenchard Smith explicitly link the devastation to the car culture and related oil crises, and (to a lesser extent) the other films all make references to petrol shortages, and environmental destruction. Critics such as Falconer (1995), Rummery (1988), and Broderick (1988, 1993) have all discussed the dominance of oil crisis or nuclear Armageddon tropes in the films.[4] As noted in Chapter Three, scholars such as Bayley (1986), Ross (1995), and Casey (1997) have recognised that, increasingly, the car is used less to represent emancipation, and instead has become a complex signifier which now more often represents pollution, decay, greed, violence, death, corruption, and lost innocence. This dark rendering of automobiles is echoed in contemporary British, French, and American literature and films. Such themes have been examined by authors as diverse as JG Ballard, Ben Elton, John Steinbeck, Harry Crews, Joy Williams, Henry Williams, Stephen King, and Francoise Sagan. International filmmakers have also interrogated this rendering of car culture—as seen in the work of directors such as David Cronenberg, Ridley Scott, Steven Spielberg, John Ford, and John Carpenter.

The consequences of this environmental devastation and cultural colonisation are a celluloid environment where lives and livings must be scraped together by salvaging whatever tools and materials are at hand. The characters are encouraged to produce and

consume but (as noted in relation to unemployment) times are hard and canny improvisation is required in order for characters to survive. Cyborg hybridity is one means to adapt and sometimes thrive, and stage-managed 'accidents' are often the only way to garner parts. It has been said that 'the mutant machine begins to connect with its assembler in a new supra-subject of desire and action. Old distinctions between parts (man/machine, user/tool, driver/vehicle) become obscure, archaic, *ancien regime*' (Morris 1989, 123). Indeed, the cars are often so central to the cultural and commercial economy that they are responsible for births, deaths, and mechanical 'marriages' (usually between male buddies, or blokes and their cars). In this milieu cars often act as a currency, and those with access to motor vehicles and fuel are privileged and frequently cast as heroic.

So what can be learned from the representation of the male characters in the car crash genre? How does this affect the construction of their masculinities?

In these films, fuel-injected performances of hypermasculinity consistently emerge as a response to the perceived threats to masculinity listed above. Characters need to don vehicular armour to protect themselves from women, immigrants, imperialism, unemployment, gay sexuality, more powerful men, the landscape, the economy, and the list goes on. Here lies the hysterical element to the performances—performances that are so extravagant that they suggest an underlying vulnerability and anxiety about gender. Even a cyborg existence fails to guarantee immunity from hurt, betrayal, and corrosion. A metallic carapace is employed to fend off attacks (or temptation) and try to keep things together but in film after film the men (and their cars) fall apart. These films are not just road narratives, they are films that are reliant on cars crashing, smashing, exploding, and igniting. The narratives hinge on the use of the car as a weapon, and heroes (often as representatives not just of their gender but their country) are required to dispense automotive destruction or become part of the salvage.

Is there any chance of escape?

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Automobiles and films have been coded as means of escape—a means to transport oneself to another, better, more heroic time or place. Exhaust fumes are often thick with nostalgia. In 'real life' cars promise transformation, transportation, and (perhaps) transcendentalism, but they rarely deliver more than (expensive and dangerous) routine conveyance. Instead, drivers find that they are often on a road going nowhere, or at a dead-end, or bogged up to their axle in mud. Through the lens of the camera, cars and drivers take on a more glamorous heroic existence, and the imaginary transcends the real. On the big screen, the gaze is directed at men and machines as a fetish of mechanised power—narcissism, voyeurism, and fetishism abound. Scopophilic pleasures are there for the taking. Given the strength of the gender-technology relation, the fantasy of metallic masculinity, where escape, power, and phallocentric and potent agency dominate, these films become irresistible. Pay for your ticket at the door and enter the realm of technological and cinematic nirvana—you do not even need your driver's licence to partake in the pleasures of the celluloid Thunderdome.

Who is watching? Where is the gaze directed?

Fans of these genre films, which often become cult films, return again and again to have their fantasies renewed and reinvigorated, to experience the visual and visceral pleasures of fast cars and fast women performing cinematic stunts. There is pleasure in the familiar, in indulging in wish fulfilment, and ritualised social integration. There is a satisfying indulgence in watching action where the narrative is propelled by the grunt and roar of V8s and Harleys (and not by dialogue). The machines speak a universal masculine language—they offer identification (automotive or linguistic)—a university degree is not a requirement for viewing pleasure. This is not to say that these are 'dumb movies for dumb people' (Tasker 1993, 5), quite the contrary, these films offer enjoyment (not just grist for the intellectual mill) for many viewers. The audiences are usually expert active viewers who are often members of the car culture on the streets, or part of social clubs, or an internet fraternity who have inserted themselves into the action on the screen by becoming part of the discourse surrounding the films. Just like characters such as Crabs and Ron, these blokes are not content merely to watch the

action on the screen—they want to enter the film, to become part of the text. In drawing on a collective love of technology, and of the films (and the cars and stars), they collectively construct a vehicular masculinity. There is a community of blokes who interact with each other (either directly or indirectly) by using the car as a cipher.

Films about cars tap into this collective of male consumers—it is a marriage that has been exploited by both filmmakers and car-makers. As Falconer notes:

> Cinema (and other cultural productions) are ... not simply 'representations' of automation. Instead, the two industries have influenced and supported one another materially and conceptually, marketing their products to those who have learned to consume the road as spectacle. Cars provided the mobility and leisure time to go to see films, and films could be used to sell cars (1995, 14)

Consumption of car culture is a cash cow for capitalists. Filmmakers in the car crash genre understand the nexus between cars, blokes and film, and they combine the three cinematic elements to spectacular and profitable effect.

Margaret Mitchell (1997) highlights yet another interesting facet of car culture. Would we continue to use microwave ovens or other technologies if, decade after decade, they caused the deaths of thousands of our citizens? We would if the western world's economy was dependent on microwave consumption or if blokes used microwaves to construct their masculinity.

I have been arguing that male characters in the car crash genre construct their masculinities in relation to the automotive culture, but, of course, the films examined in this thesis depict just one representation of filmic manifestations of masculinities in Australian cinema. In recent years, in particular, representations of masculinities in Australian film have branched out from performances of mechanical hypermasculinity, and petrol-heads, ockers, soldiers, and larrikins are now not the only blokes who inhabit celluloid space (Biber 1999, Butterss 2000). Films such as *Praise, Head On, The Sum*

of Us, The Year My Voice Broke, Bad Boy Bubby, Strictly Ballroom, and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* signal that there are multiple masculinities in Australian culture and hence on our screens. Gender construction and the cinematic portrayal of masculinities is by nature dynamic, and although certain 'trends' can be identified there will always be transgression and change.

The gender-technology relation underpins Australian car culture and representations of cinematic masculinities in the car crash genre. Working-class male characters understand that they must 'act manfully'—that they must perform their masculinity again and again. These characters construct their masculinity from behind the carapace of the car, and they cling to the automotive chassis when all else around them seems to be in transit or disarray. They react to change by driving cars, salvaging cars, consuming cars, or wielding cars as weapons. The car acts as a signifier of their gender, class, and sexuality—a crashed wreck—a hard but vulnerable body. When all else fails or fades into the distant past, representations of vehicular masculinity retain their potency. As a speeding motor vehicle, piloted by a heroic driver, shoots across the screen, the audience gazes rapt as it takes them to a better, manlier place. But are they going backward or forward?

Ok, Barry, back it up. Put the car in the garage. Are you listening to me, Barry? That's enough. Now turn that engine off and go inside.

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[1] Patrick Durkee (1995) makes a similar observation (but he uses it to make a different argument) in his examination of 'slackers'. He notes that the obsessive behaviour of two 'motorheads' consumes their time and money but does little to produce knowledge or objects for exchange, or to change their status in the community or to rebel in a manner that is likely to upset the status quo.

[2] Of course, Max is no longer officially employed as a cop in the later films, but he retains the status.

[3] Globalisation and mechanisation have combined to cause a smaller workforce working longer (usually unpaid) hours. In this environment, a significant proportion of the population may never gain full-time employment (McGregor 1997, Donaldson 1991, Fiske et al 1987). However, society as a whole blames the unemployed for their perceived failure and is blinded to the wider socio-political forces at work.

[4] The pall of nuclear destruction has been a popular cinematic theme and Mick Broderick's filmography *Nuclear Movies* (1988) lists over 500 films dealing with the theme, dating from 1914.

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