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The ATCF Genre

Leonie Rutherford

The title of this paper, 'the ACTF Genre', is an allusion to a term coined by Australian film historians Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (Dermody and Jacka 1988a, 1988b). What other commentators have dubbed the 'period' or 'nostalgia' films of the 1970s and 1980s, Dermody and Jacka have conceptualized as constituting a 'genre' in their own right, a genre sustained by the ideological imperatives of the institution which funded them: the AFC (Australian Film Commission). The 'AFC Genre' included such films as *The Devil's Playground*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Caddie*, *My Brilliant Career* and *Breaker Morant*. Along with preference for historical and atmospheric settings, the 'AFC genre and period drama' foregrounded certain narrative and stylistic repertoires. As Tom O'Regan summarizes,

They were character not action-based narratives with a past setting. Stories were 'relatively unshaped' and more 'interested in "sensibility" in the tradition of the novel rather than the moral and action of the more plotted melodrama' [Dermody and Jacka 1988a:32] ... Acting was genteel and naturalistic ...
(O'Regan 1996, p.197)

Graeme Turner also notes the 'distinctive visual and narrative style' that characterised these films of the seventies,

foregrounding their Australianness through the recreation of history and representations of the landscape; lyrically and beautifully shot; and employing aesthetic mannerisms such as a fondness for long, atmospheric shots, and avoidance of action and sustained conflict, and the use of slow motion to infer significance
[Turner 1989, p.100]

AN 'ACTF' GENRE?

I am not suggesting that the cinematic codes employed by the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) are identical to those of the Australian Film Commission 'period drama', nor that there was a general 'infiltration' of AFC tropes into the Foundation's drama product. While some of the ACTF dramas 'foreground their

Australianness', make use of a historical backdrop and utilize the skills of writers and directors who have also worked on AFC genre films', there are very significant differences. Far from a tradition of lyricism, sensibility and aesthetic mannerisms, the Foundation's product, as I will argue below, is more interested in the 'moral and action of plotted melodrama'.

However, what does interest me about the thesis of the 'AFC genre' is the suggestion of the role of the commissioning/funding institution in delimiting the narrative subjects, issues and styles of filmed drama. Can similar generalizations be made about the drama product of the Australian Children's Television Foundation, another body with a clearly-defined public policy agenda and cultural role at the national level? Nearly all of the ACTF product could be thought of as 'drama', in the sense of 'scripted narrative' played by professional actors, and/or animated by professional animators (Moran 1993, p.xiv). The drama output of the Foundation is large and varied, incorporating the work of many writers and many formats.

To put my cards on the table at once, I believe that such generalizations can be made. One can discern common ideological positions informing the narratives of these dramas, while certain repertoires of filmic codes are also typical. In the discussion which follows I have deliberately chosen to focus on the ACTF's drama anthology series from the nineteen-eighties. These programs were produced in a climate in which Australian children's 'drama', with the impetus of regulatory mandate, sought to differentiate itself from imported North-American products, as well as from locally-produced, magazine-format programs, with their segmentation of narrative, eclectic sourcing and minimal scope for exploration of themes or character development. The anthology series for adults, as Elizabeth Jacka pointed out more than a decade ago, is the format of choice for the ABC when adapting from the stage, or for the presentation of 'quality drama' dealing with social issues, or profound, 'literary' expositions of character. (Examples include *Spring and Fall* (2 series), *Naked*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*). Derived from BBC models, the anthology is the vehicle for the 'ABC's "high-cultural" aim of bringing official Australian culture to the masses'

(Jacka 1991, p.48). The anthology, therefore, typically signals 'quality', high-cultural values - the antithesis of imported, American cartoons and family sitcoms.

Hence the ACTF format of choice in the early 1980s was a series of self-contained, live-action dramas focussing on social issues seen as relevant to the development of children (Moran 1993, p.491). Anthology series produced by the ACTF include *Winners* (1986) and *More Winners* (1986/7) and *Touch the Sun* (1988). Shot on film and videotape in colour, the 8 episodes of *Winners* and 6 episodes of *More Winners*, were short (under one-hour) plays, each dealing with an 'inspirational' theme. More substantial were the telemovies which comprised the *Touch the Sun Series* - six movie-length dramas of 120 minutes, shot on film in colour. *Touch the Sun* was the Foundation's showcase² contribution to Australia's Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988. Like the *Winners Series*, each 'episode' in the anthology was a separate production, with its own writer, director, cast and crew. Each story was set and shot in a different state of Australia, in keeping with the Bicentennial focus on 'nationhood'.

While the individual episodes of these anthology series were loosely connected by the inspirational/aspirational themes implied by their titles, they were differentiated by genre, as well as by their writers, subjects and cast. Genres represented include: historical fiction (*The Journey, Devil's Hill*); social (but not gritty) realism (*The Paper Boy, Boy Soldiers*); personal relations films (*Just Friends, Room to Move, Princess Kate*); and comedy, fantasy and fantasy-comedy (*Peter and Pompey, Top Kid*). The comic is a favoured modality, but the treatment of psychological states, personal relationships and social issues remain dominant concerns.

NARRATIVE AND CHILDHOOD: DISCOURSE AND THE ACTF 'CHILD'

The Children's Television Foundation was incorporated in 1982, at the culmination of an intense and sustained period of lobbying on the part of a group of 'pro-child' activists, the most significant being Dr Patricia Edgar, former school teacher and La Trobe University media literacy academic. These lobbyists were highly critical of the quality of television programming scheduled for children by the major networks; programming was usually

of US origin and designed for family viewing rather than for children and their 'special needs' (Edgar 1984).

In order to site the Foundation, and in particular its conception of the role of drama within the cultural environment which shaped its policy objectives, it is necessary to look briefly at the history of regulatory action with respect to children's television in Australia (ABT 1991b, ABA 2000).

As early as 1953 (prior to the beginning of television broadcasting in this country), the Royal Commission on Television 'received numerous submissions from parents and teachers concerned with the predicted preponderance of American programs on Australian television, the effects of these on children of violence ... and overt commercialism' (ABT 1991b). To monitor these concerns, the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB) was established, and formed, in 1956, the Children's Advisory Committee. The ABCB was replaced, in 1977, by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT). While the ABT's functions included overseeing the self-regulation of broadcasting, the standard of children's television programming remained an ongoing site of debate, particularly centred on the issues of violence and the lack of 'good quality, age-specific children's programs produced in Australia' (ABT 1991b, p. 282).

The ABT's Self Regulation Inquiry (1978) resulted in the introduction of the C classification for children's programs, together with the establishment of the Children's Program Committee (CPC), whose brief included formulation of standards relating to children's programs. These regulatory initiatives led, in 1984, to the introduction of the Children's Television Standards (CTS) and Preschool Children's Television Standards (PTS) which, along with the Australian Content Standards, regulate the broadcasting of children's television programs on commercial networks up to the present time.

The initial codification of the CTS in 1984 followed sustained public consultation, with input from, among others, child-professionals and lobbyists. The discourse in which the rationale was framed stressed issues of public interest, cognitive development and service to children:

It has been recognized and accepted that children

have particular and special needs in relation to television and that they are entitled to be provided with quality, age-specific and comprehensive programs geared to their special cognitive abilities and experiences. It is part of the public interest responsibility of commercial television licensees to provide such programs and it is also part of their statutory undertaking to provide an adequate and comprehensive service.
(ABT 1984. Report and Determination, cited in ABT 1991. ABA 2000).

In line with earlier anxieties about the Americanization of Australian children's culture, Australian content and perspective was among the earliest criteria for C programs, a C program being one which 'contributes to the social, emotional or intellectual development of children' and 'is appropriate for Australian children, not assuming too much of the culture, dialect or environment of some other country ...' (CTS 1984, CTS 2f, 2g in ABT 1991b, p.312).

The 1984 Report and Determination introduced the new category of Australian Children's Drama (CTS 13 and 14). The ACTF's production of the *Winners Series*, in 1986, responds to the regulatory push for this new genre, which was to be a

dramatic work (a fully-scripted play which has been produced for use on television, in which the dramatic elements of character, theme and plot are ...developed [and which would have a] significant Australian content [with] regard to ... its subject matter... the place where it was made [and] the nationalities and places of residence of the people who took part in the making of the program (including authors, composers, scriptwriters, producers, directors, actors, editors and technicians)
(CTS 1984, p.13, subsections 4 and 5).

Drama is clearly the privileged form of narrative, as it is seen to be more beneficial than other forms of television (ABA 1993, p.13) - for example, non-fiction, or the cheaper, magazine-style children's programs. Stories which further 'social', 'intellectual' development of children in an Australian national and cultural context are

specified within the regulatory discourse of the children's television standards. It should be emphasized, however, that as multiculturalism became a key Federal government policy during the terms of the Hawke and Keating Labor Governments, the understanding of 'Australian' people and subject matter, for the purpose of the CTS became more diverse (ABT 1991a, ABA 1993).

As of their last revision, in 1999, the Objective of the Children's Television Standards is summarized as follows:

Children should have access to a variety of quality programs made specifically for them, including Australian drama and non-drama programs.
(Australian Broadcasting Authority 2000)

The history of cultural policy formation in this area, and the rise and demise of institutions and legislation to regulate children's television in Australia would form a hefty monograph in its own right.³ However, it is important to realize that the formation of the Children's Television Standards and the formation of the ACTF (Australian Children's Television Foundation) were brought about by a single climate and era of public policy making in Australia. Key players such as Patricia Edgar, the Foundation Chair of the ABT's Children's Program Committee and the Foundation Director of the ACTF, have been influential in both the development of mechanisms to regulate children's television production in Australia and in the development of an institution to produce programs for Australian children (Hodge 1992, pp.74-75). The link between government 'theory' and institutional 'practice' has thus been very close.

It is my argument that the key frames of discourse implied by the Children's Television Standards and shared by the Children's Television Foundation include:

- the assumption of a cognitive paradigm of childhood—the needs of child viewers are defined in terms of the theories of developmental psychology;
- commitment to 'pro-social' models of personal relations and social interaction, including the cultural policy of 'multiculturalism';
- defence or at least scrutiny of 'Australian culture';
- pre-occupation with questions of identity and maturation.

ACTF FILMS: CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF NARRATIVE

So how does this discourse of childhood influence the kinds of stories these films choose to tell? In the analysis which follows I will map out some general narrative and filmic tropes commonly found in the ACTF product. These will be illustrated by means of a case study. The drama I have chosen to demonstrate these tropes is *On Loan* (directed by Geoff Bennett, script by Anne Brooksbank) from the first *Winners* series in 1986. While the anthology series of the late eighties are hardly recent products and in some respects now appear dated, they are seminal. As I have suggested above, these anthology episodes, developed in response to the regulatory stipulation for the Australian Children's Drama quota, reflect the Foundation's initial interpretation of 'quality' children's television drama. Anthologies constituted a viable choice prior to the changes in the 10BA tax concessions for drama production, which enshrined the primacy of the drama *series*, rather than the one-off telemovie. (To ensure high-production values under the current economic regime, drama series produced in co-production ventures have become the norm.) While I do not downplay the differences between the plays of the eighties and the series produced in the nineties - with their increased technological and graphic subtleties, pacier editing and more contemporary humour - I would argue that many of the tropes detailed here remain a standard. The foregrounding of dramas of maturation, downplaying of political realism and the use of filmic codes which foreground character remain dominant in later ACTF products.

What I have elsewhere dubbed the 'cognitive paradigm' (Rutherford 2000) privileges stories which focus on character development. Socio-political contexts are generally subservient to the effects on character. Settings are used primarily as a backdrop for stories foregrounding individual maturation and socialization, according to accepted representational codes of 'psychological realism'. While action is present in many of these dramas (several of which feature a quest or a journey), the dramas are not action adventures. Story events are most important in their impact on character development.

The key discursual frame for ACTF drama is developmental, privileging narratives of maturation and identity. Storylines emphasize character development. The overt theme of *On Loan* is 'finding identity': the story follows the process by which Lindy Baker learns about her family history, is forced to make a painful but self-enhancing choice and gains an enriched identity as a Vietnamese-Australian (see also McCallum 1998). The following plot synopsis is adapted from the 'Teacher's Notes', provided in the Classroom Resource Package, which contains the video, novelisation and classroom notes:

Lindy, thirteen, believes she is a Vietnamese orphan who was adopted by Marj and Geoff Baker when she was three years old. Lindy wonders occasionally about her background but lives happily with this ordinary Australian family as their much loved daughter and as a carefree teenager. This lifestyle comes to a sudden end when Lindy receives a letter from her father, Le, in Thailand. He has spent years searching for Lindy and, overjoyed at finding her at last, he is coming from Thailand to see her.

These events plunge Lindy and her adoptive family into emotional turmoil. Her Australian parents (primarily her mother), anxious and uneasy, attempt to stop Lindy from meeting her natural father. When Le arrives, everyone is very defensive. Lindy finds she is deeply moved by her father's presence.

Lindy learns from her father about Vietnam and being Vietnamese. She is introduced to relatives and their customs in the Australian Vietnamese community. At times, Lindy feels confused by the conflicting cultures and the customs of the two nationalities.

A tug of war over Lindy begins between both families. Her Vietnamese father wants to take her back to Thailand. Marj and Geoff want Lindy to remain in Australia. Lindy finds herself torn between her old and new parents.

Finally Lindy makes her choice. She decides she is an Australian and she will stay in Australia with the intention of going to Thailand to visit her

*father when she is older.
A letter from Lindy to her Vietnamese father
shows that his visit has changed her. Lindy now
has a sense of identity she did not have before.*

Developmental psychology produces a universalized discourse of childhood which tends to efface consideration of cultural difference. While the pro-social (social learning outcomes) goals of the ACTF ensure the inclusion of non-Anglo characters and stories, differences constructed by ethnicity or social class are normally harmonized in the stories, which focus more on questions of individual development. Children are portrayed as more alike by virtue of their 'childness' than different in terms of ethnicity, wealth or social and historical context.

The ACTF child lives in a multicultural Australia. The social learning agenda focusses on toleration of difference. However, multiculturalism as a public policy and as an ideology aims to efface ethnicity as a problem, focussing rather on the universal nature of emotional and subjective identity. A possible problem with this perspective is that it begs the question of whether identity can be understood apart from the specifics of an individual's cultural history. In the Australian context, the 'universal' tends to privilege Anglo-Celtic and liberal middle-class values. This may in turn narratively silence or downplay real conflicts of interest based on cultural difference, in favour of narratives of cross-cultural harmony, often symbolized by gestures such as sharing the ethnic lunchbox, or engaging in cross-cultural pastimes, such as kite flying, or, as in *On Loan*, Tai Chi.

One of the effects of a pro-social agenda, which aims at socialization is a focus on the power of the individual to bring about change, often by means of changing his/her own attitudes or committing to personal growth. Narratives are thus 'inspirational' as the titles *Winners*, *Touch the Sun*, witness. In other words, while narratives may commence in the genre of melodrama (focussing on intense feeling, or situations of repression), the closure is invariably primarily comic. There is an absence of 'gritty' or politicized realism in favour of a soft core 'social realism' in dramas of relationships (*The Paper Boy*, *Just Friends*). If the political or family environment were depicted as a determining force which could re-impose

repression, then the resulting story may not be empowering. Loose ends, or social problems which impose restraint or conflict are typically resolved in the films by means of closure which stresses the compensations of friendship.

The ACTF drama narratives feature a commitment to pro-social models of personal relationships and the ideology of multiculturalism (see also Stephens 1990). In *On Loan*, the ideal of multicultural tolerance is most clearly developed in the character of Geoff Baker, Lindy's Australian father. While Lindy has been encouraged to pursue cultural links with her Asian heritage - symbolized in the film's opening and concluding Tai Chi sequences - she is viewed by her family in terms of her 'childness', rather than her ethnicity. As her parents explain: 'We just wanted a baby ... any size, shape or ... colour'.

That the desire to love, nurture (and hopefully keep) one's children is universal is dramatized in two 'festival' scenes - the first at Lindy's 13th birthday celebrations where Geoff's speech eulogizes the primacy of family and his repeated and grateful embrace encloses Lindy within her Australian family. The second scene takes place in the home of Lindy's Vietnamese uncle, an extended family dinner eaten with chopsticks and accompanied by traditional music in the soundtrack. This emotion is presented to us in a more mediated manner, as Lindy's cousin, Minh, must translate the speech in which Le, Lindy's natural father, speaks of his love for his daughter and his hopes for family re-unification. The whole family combines to sing a song which has been haunting the soundtrack since the beginning of the film, which the dialogue now tells us is the 'song for the children'.

Toleration for cultural difference is part of the film's project, dramatized primarily in the character of the generous and empathic father, Geoff. However the touchstone for Lindy's understanding of her own situation and emotions is neither her cousin, Minh, or either father, but her Australian girl-friend, Julie. Lindy's conversations with her Australian school friend, who has also experienced parental 'tug-of-love' custody struggles, via divorce, help Lindy to contextualize her ambivalence towards her family.

The stark choice between Australia and Vietnam is mediated by the emigrant extended family, now living in Cabramatta. Now there is a middle way open for Lindy; identification as a Vietnamese-Australian. Lindy can have access to previously unknown aspects of her culture and family while still remaining 'an Australian'.

Lindy's cousin Minh narratively endorses this compromise in two scenes, the first in which she chooses Australian cultural values over Vietnamese, in rejecting an arranged marriage partner. In the second, more crucial scene, she recreates for Lindy the pain and loss of war, recounting the horrific death of her sister and the family's anguish. As Minh recounts it, Lindy's dilemma as a 'stolen child', torn between cultural identities, is actually 'lucky'. Lindy escaped the pain which Minh now empathically shares with her in a scene of primal melodrama.

Appreciating other cultures is seen as enhancing Australian life. But Lindy's desire for Vietnamese identification can only go so far. The ACTF genre evokes from its audience as much empathy for Vietnamese loss as it assumes that audience can tolerate, but too much transgression of comfortable Australian boundaries is not expected. Repatriation is clearly not a choice available to Lindy. The film's closure effects a compromise: a new relationship with her Vietnamese extended family in Australia - one in which her Australian family can now share.

ACTF FILMS: CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF FILMIC CODES

The developmental agenda influences not only the kinds of stories told in these films, but the aspects of narrative we might call 'film art'. Just as the stories are in some sense literary, in their focus on character and significant emotion, the cinema style used is overwhelmingly naturalist. As in the 'classic' Hollywood cinema, aspects of the film medium do not draw attention to themselves. While lighting and framing are used to affect perception of character, they are used in ways which are consistent to realist rather than expressive cinematic codes. Aesthetic mannerisms such as the lyric, or long atmospheric shots habitual to Dermody and Jacka's 'AFC genre' (Turner 1989, p.100) are not to be found in this children's drama product.

The films use classic continuity editing and simple cutting, to minimize the amount of narrative indeterminacy (and hence interpretation required by the viewer). Even in films in the fantasy genre, fantastic elements are habitually portrayed by means of *mise en scene* (with some special effects) rather than by means of experimental or expressive cinematography (for example, grotesque or unusual use of lighting, distorting filters or lenses, whimsical or disturbing framing, disorienting changes of focus, or montage). Non-diegetic sound is frequently used to evoke emotion or mood, but rarely used symbolically. *The Journey* has one scene in which sound is used to suggest an occult significance, but this is a momentary flirtation with the atmospheric tropes of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Melodrama rather than Fine Art aesthetics remains the dominant code. As a general rule, elements which draw attention to film as a medium, rather than as an invisible means of displaying character, are avoided.⁴

Settings are used as a backdrop for character, rather than as narrative or atmospheric elements in their own right. Where the period films of the AFC genre use landscape lyrically, to foreground a visual aesthetic of Australian sensibility, ACTF films with a past setting (*The Journey*, *Devil's Hill*, *The Paper Boy*, *Boy Soldiers*) render the landscape visible (*scriptible*) rather than *lisible*. The narratives remain psychological and moral dramas of character in costume, rather than explorations of an aesthetic vision.

The ACTF drama narrative foregrounds character over both 'setting' and 'history'. *On Loan* belongs to the genre of the family melodrama. Melodrama 'is the central cinematic form that creates empathy and identification' (Kolker 1999, p.107); its primary aim is to provoke emotion in its audience. The film is plotted as an 'adoption drama', focussing on the subjectivity of the (Westernized) child and the concerns of her middle-class Australian family. Clearly with a subject matter such as cross-cultural adoption the narrative choices might have been very different, as is the case in *Miss Saigon*, or more pertinently, *Madame Butterfly*, in which the giving-up of her child by a living, Asian mother is the focus of a maternal melodrama of self-sacrifice (Heung 1997). To view the story information in a different way, Lindy is

part of an Asian 'stolen generation', a victim of cultural expropriation based on an economic power-differential. While these themes are very much a part of Anne Brooksbank's novelisation of her script, such a perspective is never suggested in the screen text of *On Loan*, in which the history of post-colonial Vietnam serves merely as a backdrop for a psychologically-acute, character-based chamber-piece.

In keeping with the emphasis on character development, framing is used to focus on emotional responses. *On Loan* employs traditional melodramatic cinema codes. We see a preponderance of close and medium close shots: close-ups frame faces, especially Lindy's. The camera dwells on Lindy's isolation, her downcast eyes, wavering lips, while the classic 'point-of-view' cutting emphasizes the response of characters to the turmoil being enacted, in the process manipulating the viewer's response to the flow of anxiety, loss and suffering experienced by Lindy and her two families. We see the camera tracking in and onto Lindy in longish takes, editing which frames her in windows and the possessive gazes of her parents, to intensify the viewer's gaze on the child's emotions.

Both framing and editing emphasize surveillance: this is a charged space where characters, particularly the competing parents, are watchful of others' emotional responses. All eyes seem to be knitted to Lindy, anxious about which love she will choose. In one scene we see Lindy, shot from a high angle, then framed in the courtyard window, the object of her mother's jealous and almost hysterical surveillance. And in the penultimate scene at the airport, Le's pain and sacrifice is put on display for the viewer in a series of poignant shot/reverse shots. Lindy's response to his love, his desire for her reciprocal commitment, is still claimed, even as he is finally excised from the narrative.

Differences constructed by ethnicity or class are never considered fundamental in the ACTF drama genre. In *On Loan*, social setting never overwhelms the actors. The material world is presented as a container for the human events taking place - it is never a subject in its own right, nor is it used metaphorically or aesthetically. Historical or material conditions of life are not scrutinized.

Lindy's Vietnamese uncle and cousins live in Cabramatta

in what are clearly more deprived living conditions than Lindy enjoys with the Bakers in Bondi. Le's cheap tourist hotel room, in dingy browns and oranges, is soulless, and is used to underscore his pain and isolation in one brief scene. But this expressive use of *mise en scene* to create empathy with a character is a rare moment. Typically the markers of class difference are not visible. Parallels between the families - rather than differences - are emphasized by the film's visual language, no less than the dialogue and overt themes. In two bedroom scenes which take place the night Lindy sleeps over in Cabramatta, the complementary colour and lighting, the composition of the shot, the gestures of the actors, all link the pain and loss suffered by the two families, as well as celebrating the nurturing embrace offered by each. Both scenes use a blue-filtered lighting, which is not only a marker for 'night', but as artists well know, the colours blue-indigo-violet may be used to evoke nuances of melancholy and introspection.

A 'COMIC' RESOLUTION

The closure of *On Loan* is less upbeat than many of the telemovies in the *Winners* series: elements of sacrificial family melodrama lurk in the background here. 'Consolatory' rather than 'comic' might be an apter description of the ending, in which at least one mother and father must lose their child. Le and his wife (represented to us only by photographs in the film) as refugees in Thailand have already lost their country. With Lindy's choice of Australia and her adoptive family, they irrevocably lose their child. However the film's closure stresses gain rather than loss. In the penultimate scene, as Le goes through the departure gate, still looking over his shoulder towards his daughter, Lindy's gaze lingers a moment with a wistful expression. But almost at once, she smiles and turns to her Australian parents and brother. The camera then moves to frame the two Australian: families recognizing and greeting each other for the first time. The surrogate Vietnamese family and the adoptive Australian family join hands in a symbolic reunion. Lindy's conflict is, thus, narratively resolved in a multicultural extended family which can share a future together in the nation of Australia. The final scene over the closing credits enacts the compensatory friendship of the two Vietnamese-Australian cousins. As Lindy teaches

Minh the movements of the Tai Chi, we witness the sharing of a hybrid culture in multicultural Australia (McCallum 1998).

CONCLUSION

While this analysis is designed to be more descriptive than prescriptive, it does raise a number of issues which may challenge the prevailing tropes of the ACTF drama product. Recent work suggests that the film codes of classical realism may not be as necessary to young viewers, with high degrees of visual and screen literacy. Series such as *Round the Twist* utilize more playful and self-reflexive codes, which may be transferable to more serious drama for middle-school-aged viewers, rather than reserving them for comic genres.

While I agree that psychological realism may offer certain kinds of moral challenges to the viewer, the lack of politicized realism may deny certain, marginalized groups an equally valid kind of moral experience. The absence of specific political contexts may have its drawbacks. While these 'soft-core' realist dramas can be marketed more widely, since they do not risk confusing overseas viewers with culturally-specific references, nor offend the broad viewership excluded from politicized contexts, this choice does mean giving up the opportunity to offer more marginalized cultural groups a realism which mirrors their own, politically-constructed, experience. As I write this, I eagerly await the release of one of the ACTF's newest ventures, *Yolngu Boy*. By ceding creative and production power to indigenous film-makers, this project promises the potential to showcase a particular kind of childhood, inflected by a different cultural, epistemological and political reality, rather than a blandly universal, therefore non-specific, rendering of the psychological and moral experience of childhood.

NOTES

- 1 For example: *Room To Move* (Winners, written and directed by John Duigan), *The Paper Boy* (Winners, written by Bob Ellis and directed by Paul Cox), *The Gift* (Touch the Sun, co-written and directed by Paul Cox).
- 2 This series marks a cultural statement by the ACTF. It announces the institution as a stakeholder in national

cultural production. The series was aimed more widely than an audience of children, in keeping with its contribution to the nation's public celebration of its own culture - hence, one might argue, the telemovie format. It was screened by the ABC as family viewing in a Sunday evening timeslot (traditionally reserved for quality, 'family' drama). Being launched by Hazel Hawke, the production showcased the Foundation's now well-known links to government, and its association with prominent women in public life.

- 3 See De Chiera 1980; Gillard 1992; Keys 1999.
- 4 While 'keeping it simple' for a child audience may seem appropriate, studies of recent animation productions by 10 year old school children in Britain demonstrate that familiarity with and ability to use self-reflexive codes in film-making is not confined to adults. See the work by David Parker of the BFI and Andrew Burn (Parkside Community College, Cambridge) on 'Schoolchildren's animations of Little Red Riding Hood' (Burn and Parker 2000).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Leonie Rutherford is a lecturer in the School of English, Communication and Theatre at the University of New England, where she teaches in literature, media, gender and children's cultural studies.