Of Rocks and Stones That Speak: Animated Landscapes in Australian Film

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Abstract:
Australia claims a monolithic red rock at its centre as a national icon. Uluru is marketed and memorialised as the geographical and cultural heart of Australia, but for the settler-coloniser, it is really a "dead heart" (Hirst et al.). To the colonising eye, rocks and stones do not sway in the breeze or grow grander or smell. They remain the most unsuspecting, inanimate and inert of objects in the landscape. In iconic, nation-building Australian films of the 1970s and 1980s, rocks and stones are as unreadable as the vast and ineffable landscape they lie in. So much so, they become imbued with mystery and macabre power. But this filmic portrayal of rocks and stones assumes the landscape is empty of people, that none are there for whom stones mean something, have cultural value, can speak. This essay traces shifts in the way rocks and stones have been seen, emotionalised and read in the landscapes of Australian cinema. Particular reference is made to the films *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Tracker* (2002) and *Stone Bros.* (2009). In short, the depiction of the awestruck spectator of vast and incomprehensible rock-scapes in earlier Australian films has given way, more recently, to a focus on stones that evoke meaning, that emote, that perform, that animate and socialise lives in cinematic landscapes.

Keywords: Australian film; rocks; stones; landscape; *Picnic at Hanging Rock*; *The Tracker*; *Stone Bros*.

> Ngangatja apu wiya, ngayuku tjamu –
> This is not a rock, it is my grandfather.
> This is a place where the dreaming
> comes up, right up from inside the ground.
>
> George Tinamin

One hot, sticky day in 1989, near Darwin in Australia's tropical north, the anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli gathered with members of the Belyuen Aboriginal community to listen to Betty Billawag give evidence in a land rights claim. Povinelli reports that Billawag spent the day describing to lawyers and government officials the importance of a Dreaming site nearby. Billawag called this particular site Old Man Rock. It was a rock that "listened to and smelled the sweat of Aboriginal people as they passed by hunting, gathering, camping, or just mucking about" (Povinelli, 505). At one point, another Belyuen woman turned to Povinelli as they were listening and said of the land commissioner: "He can't believe, eh, Beth?" Povinelli reports she answered: "No, I don't think so, not him, not really. He doesn't think [Betty] is lying. He just can't believe himself that that Old Man Rock listens" (Povinelli, 505).

This story about a rock that listens and smells and is talked to invites a reconsideration of the meanings and the importance attached to stones and rocks in the land. Stones that can smell or listen have generally been of no concern to the coloniser. J.M. Coetzee has written of white

South African poets through to the twentieth century for whom rocks and stones in the landscape remain noiseless. Coetzee writes: "The poet scans the landscape with his hermeneutic gaze, but it remains trackless, refuses to emerge into meaningfulness as a landscape of signs. He speaks, but the stones are silent, will not come to life" (9). Coetzee interprets this silence, this lifelessness, as standing in for "a failure to imagine a peopled landscape" (9). Indeed, this is how Australian space has been imagined for most of its settler-colonising history: rocks and stones, seen in the land by the white explorer and then the settler-invader, have signalled lifelessness, emptiness, an unpeopled wilderness.

This does not mean that rocks are insignificant in Australia, geologically, culturally or politically. Rocks and stones are finding voice. Thanks to their wide availability and durability, rocks that were once fashioned into axes, spearpoints, scrapers and other tools are providing new information about both the longevity and the nature of Indigenous habitation of the land. The world's oldest ground-edge, stone axes have now been located in northern Australia. They were made between 44,000 and 49,000 years ago (Hiscock et al., 2). Discoveries of the production of expensive, long-lived, carefully curated, polished stone axes from so long ago, serve to counter still-prevailing models "of a 'simple' and unvarying technology" among First Australians (Hiscock et al., 2). However, stones speak not only to functionality. Stone tools, found at sites in Arnhem Land, can be considered "the oldest surviving forms of art made by modern humans" (Taçon, 192). Blades and stone flakes, artistically crafted, were (and still are) used in exchange to transmit important knowledge about social mores, ownership rights, and creation lore. Robert Paton argues that communities of Indigenous people clearly speak through stones: "The real value of these artefacts lies in the socially indispensable messages they help communicate" (181). Rocks and stones have always had practical as well as "aesthetic and symbolic value" for humans on the Australian continent (Taçon, 194). Today, a monolithic red rock in the middle of the country has been adopted as a national icon, although Uluru's "significance as natural and national 'heart' of the Australian nation" is a relatively recent development that began with the opening of the site for tourism in the 1950s and 1960s (Paschen, 64). For the Anangu, the official custodians of Uluru, as well as other Indigenous peoples in central Australia, Uluru has always been a significant place, materially, culturally and spiritually. Anangu traditional law forbids climbing "the Rock," but it was only in 2019 that climbing was banned ("Anangu"). Uluru is still marketed and memorialised as the geographical and cultural heart of Australia, a singular rock that continues to hold deep "aesthetic and symbolic value," but for non-Indigenous Australians, Uluru and its surrounds, "turned into a readily consumable … commodified … tourist 'landscape'" (Paschen, 64), remain little more than a "dead heart" (Hirst et al.).

Taking a cue from Coetzee's interest in stones and poetry as well as the symbolic power attached to rocks, this essay examines shifting representations of stones in Australian film. Stones and rocks emerge as tropes, when humans interact with them in panoramic landscape scenes, signalling a particular relationship to the land. In iconic, nation-building films of the 1970s and 1980s, rocks and stones are as unreadable as the vast and ineffable landscape they lie in, so much so that they permeate mystery and macabre power. This portrayal of rocks and stones is part of a white Australian filmic imaginary that assumes the land is empty of people, that no one is there for whom stones mean something, have cultural value, can speak. However, a change can be seen in the way stones have come to be viewed, read and handled by characters in Australian films produced since the latter part of the 1990s. This change can be attributed to what Felicity Collins and Therese Davis call the "paradigm shift in Australian historical

consciousness" resulting from the landmark 1992 High Court decision on Mabo (3). In short, rocks and stones in more recent films have abandoned their silence. In Coetzee's terms, they have come to life, and I will trace this shift with reference to three Australian films: *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Tracker* (2002), and *Stone Bros*. (2009).

Reading rocks and stones in Australian film is inevitably bound up with a reading of filmic landscapes. Denis E. Cosgrove reminds us that landscape is a construction, representing the way certain classes of people "have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature" and the way they have "underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to external nature" (15). W.J.T. Mitchell invites us to think of landscape as a verb rather than as a noun, as an instrument or agent of cultural power; in other words, that we think of landscape "not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed" (1). Further, Mitchell contends that "landscaping" is very much associated with European imperialism, that it is "the 'dreamwork' of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance" (10). Since the seventeenth century, then, European explorers and settlers have been trained to landscape the world around them. They have seen the world as a set of material objects up for grabs. For colonising newcomers to Australia, says Roslynn Haynes, "the visual sense was fundamental and the gaze (or way of looking at things) was a means not only of locating themselves within the land but of claiming possession" (23). Such landscaping has remained an Australian *forte* through various formats of cultural expression, culminating, with regard to film, in the Australian film revival of the 1970s.

Australia has a long tradition of film-making stretching back to the production of the world's first full-length narrative feature film, *The Story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906 ("The Story"). But it was not until the 1970s that Australia developed a national film-making industry. In 1969/70, the government decided to invest in Australian film production. It set up a Film Development Corporation and a Film and Television School (opened in 1973), among other institutions, and a revival or renaissance of film-making followed. Whereas only 15 feature films were made in Australia throughout the 1960s, between 1970 and 1972, thirty features were made (Crofts, 722). Throughout the 1970s, 167 films were produced in Australia (Wimmer, 28). This film-making boom coincided with and contributed to a new Australian nationalism in the 1970s, promoted by the Labor prime minister, Gough Whitlam. On being elected to power in December 1972, Whitlam immediately expanded support for the arts and "encouraged a cultural renaissance that made it possible to see life" in Australia "as possessing a depth of meaning and richness of possibility" (Macintyre, 236). The cinema screen became a premier venue for artistic expressions of this new Australian nationalism, and it was to landscapes of the bush that a new generation of film-makers turned for inspiration. As Stephen Crofts notes, camera movement and the mise-en-scene of this period "languorously exposed Australian light, land, flora and fauna, and period costume and décor. Aestheticizing the uncanny desolation of the Australian landscape … the cinematography presented within Australia a sense of national cultural definition, of homeland" (724). The film that most typified this style of film-making was Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975).

Based on a 1967 novel by Joan Lindsay, *Picnic* tells the story of the mysterious disappearance and subsequent search for three girls and a teacher from a boarding school during a picnic to Hanging Rock in the Australian bush on Valentine's Day in the year 1900. The film became the first of the revival or so-called period films produced over the next ten years, which featured stories set geographically in the Australian bush and in the time period of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. The main characters in Weir's landmark film view the bush and the outcrop of stone at Hanging Rock as an alluring mystery, as something vast, monumental, and overwhelming. Hanging Rock is forever towering above the picnickers; they become stunted and stunned before its grandeur. In one scene near the beginning of the film, four girls head off after a picnic lunch to explore the bush and climb higher up a grassy slope towards Hanging Rock. They are dwarfed by tall grass on the lower slopes before they stop, front on to the camera, to gaze in wonder, up at the precipice of rock above them. At this moment the viewer is invited to share in the girls' confounding view of the Australian landscape. "Look!" says Miranda, the leader of the group, to the other girls, gesturing up towards the rock. Then she turns to doddering Edith, to her left, who is looking down. "Not down at the ground, Edith. Way up there in the sky!" (Weir).[1] The camera then scans the grandiose summit of brown-red rock from the characters' (and our) viewpoint: it hangs threateningly above them, an evocation of the unfathomable, the inscrutable, the sublime in the Australian landscape. In the next shot, the girls continue on their walk, up through the long grass, towards the base of the rock. At this point, Weir orchestrates a most unusual shot in film-making: the camera spins, slowly, to make a 360-degree turn. Titled slightly upwards, this shot takes in the surrounding trees and bushland, returning full circle to re-plot the figures disappearing further up the slope. The Australian bush devours, and is to be viewed by the audience in this uncut rotation shot as dizzyingly incomprehensible, utterly puzzling, and unreadable.

The mystery of what happens to the girls after they disappear at Hanging Rock is not solved in the film. For Adrian Mitchell, this invokes the mysteriousness, the unreadability of the Australian landscape (16). *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, according to Mitchell, is "a sensitive and intelligent encounter with, and acceptance of, that aspect of 'vagary' inherent in the Australian scene" (13). Peter Weir has managed to capture the "ineffable" of the Australian bush: "That alone is something, to establish the ineffable in Australia" (A. Mitchell, 14). Such an assessment of *Picnic* is similar to other interpretations of Australian landscape in films of the 1970s and 1980s.[2] This accounts, in most cases, for a view of landscape in Australian film in which *Terra Australis* is not seen as the home of Indigenous Australians and their cultures. Rather, the country is depicted as "an alien continent, an alternative, other worldly existence in which … the alterity of the landscape [emphasizes] the impossibility of creating a normal relationship with it" (Harper, 247).

[1] Dialogue quoted from the films referenced in this essay has not been taken from screenplays but transcribed directly from each film.

[2] For earlier assessments of Australian cinema, see Graeme Turner, *National Fictions: Literature, Film, and the Construction of Australian Narrative* (Allen and Unwin, 1986), and Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (Routledge, 1996). For more recent interpretations of landscape in Australian film, see Jonathan Rayner, *Contemporary Australian Cinema: an Introduction* (Manchester University Press, 2000); Ben Goldsmith and Geoff Lealand, eds. *Directory of World Cinema: Australia and New Zealand* (Intellect Books, 2010); and Richard Leonard, *The Mystical Gaze of the Cinema: The Films of Peter Weir* (Melbourne University Press, 2009).

In short, the projections of Hanging Rock and the readings of landscape in *Picnic* are very much reflective of a white Australian nationalism. For Ross Gibson, such a reading is characteristic of much Australian cinema, in which the country is depicted as "baffling and empty, as a place for alienation rather than definition" (255). Gibson takes issue with the portrayal of the "uncanny landscape and the transcendent human ordeal that it causes," where dealing with bush landscapes and objects within them involves nothing more than surrendering to the mystique of the country (256):

> The cameras scan and focus to find something special in the country; but the majority of characters fail to demonstrate that they are competent, at ease or at home there. As for the indigenous people who might be able to show how to identify with the country, they are overwhelmingly absent, except as insignia of adventure and moribund mysticism. (Gibson, 255)

This invocation to Australians to accept the mystique of the bush, to accept that no one can or is able to 'read' the bush, that rocks and stones in the continent's landscapes are so mysterious as to be culturally inaccessible, only functions as a hegemonic discourse for as long as the notion that there are Australians who *can* read the bush, who do *not* look upon it as a mystery, people for whom the landscape is not ineffable, remains suppressed. But this cultural suppression order has been lifted as a result of the High Court of Australia's landmark decision in *Mabo and Others v. Queensland (No. 2)*, more commonly known as the Mabo judgment, of 1992. In this decision, Australia's highest court ruled in favour of Eddie Koiki Mabo (and his Torres Strait Islander co-plaintiffs) who had argued that the British annexation of their islands in the nineteenth century had not extinguished their customary title to land. The Court found that these Indigenous Australians were entitled to the "possession, occupation, use and enjoyment" of those portions of the islands they had always considered their traditional home (*Mabo,* 2). Australia's highest court thereby recognised, in the common law, a new form of land title for Indigenous Australians, which it called "native title" (*Mabo,* 2). Further, the Court held that native title rights to land might still exist across the Australian continent where those rights had not been expressly extinguished by the Crown and where Indigenous people could still prove an attachment to land. The Mabo decision altered the foundation of land law in Australia and amounted to a rejection of the discourse of *terra nullius*, the idea that Australia legally belonged to no one before British occupation in 1788. Mabo shook the foundations of the majority, non-Indigenous population's belief in the legitimate settlement of the continent by the British, confronting them with a new narrative of nationhood: no, the country was not a *terra nullius*, an empty land settled peacefully by Europeans from 1788; rather, the land, already occupied, was taken from the original inhabitants.

Mabo has also challenged film-makers (among other cultural actors) to think about the way they film the land. Collins and Davis argue that since the Mabo decision, Australian cinema has "begun to revise and retract its established … tropes of national self-recognition" (7). They maintain that

> landscape films of the 1990s provoke shocks of recognition of a continent which has been anything but the sublime void of European projections. Rather, there is now a popular awareness that the continent has been written over by Indigenous languages, songlines, dreaming stories and Law for 40 000 years or more. Since the Mabo decision at least, the image of the outback landscape in cinema provokes

> recognition of historical amnesia (rather than an unknowable, sublime, interior void) as the founding structure of settler Australia's myths of belonging. (76)

One film that exemplifies what Collins and Davis describe as a "post-Mabo social imaginary" is Rolf de Heer's 2002 film *The Tracker* (9). The way that rocks and stones are read in this film differs markedly from the way rocks are read by Miranda and her friends in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The story of *The Tracker* is set in 1922. Four men—three of them on horseback—are wandering through a remote and rugged part of Australia in search of a fugitive, an Indigenous man who is accused of the murder of a non-Indigenous woman. The four pursuers are only given archetypal names. The Fanatic is the senior police officer, the leader of the expedition; the Follower is the younger, junior police officer, who is new to the frontier; the Veteran has been drafted in as extra help; finally, there is the Tracker, an Indigenous police tracker, who is always out front on foot. Throughout the film, the viewer is never quite sure whether the Tracker is leading the three "white" men towards the fugitive or leading them astray. *The Tracker* is centrally concerned with a history of violence against Indigenous people on the Australian frontier. For Adi Wimmer, it establishes "a generally valid pattern of violent, racist behaviour" in remote areas "that lasted well into the 20th century" (188). But in order to focus on how rocks and stones are viewed in this film, I would like to consider one particular scene.

Around a third of the way into the film the Fanatic asks the Tracker how far ahead of them the Fugitive might be. He is pleased to hear from the Tracker that the group might now be catching up to the Fugitive. "About friggin time," says the Fanatic (De Heer). The young Follower, riding just behind the Fanatic, scoffs loudly, in cynical disbelief at the suggestion that they are getting any closer. This causes the Fanatic to pull up suddenly and turn to his junior companion. "What's your problem?" he asks, to which the Follower responds that in his opinion the Tracker cannot be believed or trusted to lead them anywhere: "Anyone can see he's not really tracking. He's just following his nose, hoping for the best." The Fanatic then asks the Tracker to show the doubtful Follower exactly how he tracks in the dry, stony landscape. The Follower is told to get off his horse and join the Tracker out front, on foot. The Tracker then moves forward with the Follower. There is a mid-shot of the two men, standing, looking closely at the ground: "There boss," says the Tracker, pointing towards the ground in front of them. "There where? I don't see anything," says the Follower. "That stone been missing," says the Tracker.

The camera shot then switches. From behind the two men, the viewer sees the back of the Follower's head and shoulder as he looks out across a landscape covered with stones. To him, it is simply confounding. "There's *millions* of stones," he says to the Tracker. The next shot is of the Tracker squatting to point closer to the ground. The Follower remains standing. "There," says the Tracker, while the camera shot follows his extended arm and hand as he points to a single stone among the many, and at what appears to be an indentation in the ground near it. "That stone belong there, boss. Been kicked away, about two hours ago." Then, an extreme close up reveals only the Tracker's finger sweeping across an indentation next to the stone. "Nearly dry now," says the Tracker. At this moment, the Follower is seen staring down at the ground, mouth slightly agape. Then he looks up to again take in a wider view. The shot switches once more. This time it is a point-of-view shot, the viewer is seeing through the eyes of the Follower, from his standing perspective, as he looks out at the stony landscape once again. "Is that all you need?" he asks. "Yes boss. It's enough," says the Tracker, who then stands up again, and says: "Plenty signs like this." In a return to a mid-shot of the two men standing next to each

other, the Follower then leans in close to the Tracker and says, "Sorry," and walks back to his horse.

In this one scene from *The Tracker* the cinema audience is presented with a stark contrast between viewing the landscape as a mysterious, unknowable void and reading or relating to signs in the land. The Follower is instructed to get off his horse as he will see nothing from his imperial position aloft. Crucially, he has to step *into* the landscape to be invited to see it differently, to relate to stones lying in it. The long shots from behind the Follower reveal his blindness before a baffling sameness. The Follower sees in the tradition of European explorers who have gone before him: this is Australia as barren "wilderness," which Paul Carter describes as "places where space failed to congregate into picturesque forms, where nature failed to speak" (290). Then, the one for whom the stones are not silent, the one who—to retain Carter's definition—sees "place" rather than "space," invites the Follower to abandon his expansive gaze, a gaze directed at the vast and the general, and to focus on the particular, on a single stone, nearer to hand. The Tracker invites the Follower to *read* stones, to try to identify with them, to allow them to speak.

Across the two scenes I have described, from *Picnic at Hanging Rock* to *The Tracker*, the viewer has been invited to make a visual journey from being compelled to gaze up in wonder, from a distance, at a grandiose rock veiled in ineffability, to being asked to consider a small stone, much closer to hand, that might have something to say. If the Follower (or the viewer) is still unable to hear stones speak, he or she might at least concede the possibility that others are capable of reading stones and listening to what they have to say. Specifically, de Heer's film invites a post-Mabo cinema audience to acknowledge Indigenous Australians' relationship to country, a relationship that "eschews notions of ownership in favour of custodial obligation and belonging" (Collins and Davis, 16).

Rolf de Heer is a non-Indigenous film-maker whose Indigenous protagonist is able to read stones in situ in the land. The stones that feature in Gunditjmara film-maker Richard J. Frankland's stoner comedy and road movie, *Stone Bros.* (2009), have been removed from the land but retain significance as material objects. Frankland uses stones as central props in his film in order to parody stereotypical ways of viewing Indigenous culture and, as Pauline Marsh puts it, to contest "ideas about primitive spirituality and the sacred in contemporary Aboriginal culture" (30). On the one hand, the "stone" of the film's title refers to the state of being stoned, given the 187 joints the two protagonist-cousins, Eddie and Charlie, proceed to smoke their way through on a road journey from the city of Perth back to their homelands. On the other hand, "stone" also refers to two, special, hand-sized stones (or rocks) the cousins have each been tasked with looking after, and bringing back home. Neither Eddie nor Charlie know the spiritual or cultural significance of the rocks they are given custody of, only that they are important.

At the start of the film, we learn that Eddie kept his special rock in a blue jacket, which Charlie has since given away to another cousin, Paul. On a detour to retrieve it, Charlie asks Eddie what the rock was for. Eddie confesses he does not know its value or significance, only that his uncle put the rock in his hand and said: "You'll know when this needs to come back home" (Frankland). Charlie responds by saying: "Must be pretty special, hey?" When they reach Paul, Eddie learns that his cousin has sold the rock to a woman "working for some uni as an anthropologist." Eddie then discovers the woman has placed his rock in what is called a

Travelling Geological Display. It is locked in a vitrine in a small-town museum. His "special" stone, a part of living Aboriginal culture with contemporary significance, has now been seconded by science, commodified, denuded of cultural meaning, and consigned to be gazed at in public as an antiquated artefact. After Charlie reveals that he too was given a rock by Uncle Walter, the two cousins—with the help of two accomplices—hatch a plan to recuperate Eddie's rock from the museum. Posing as an Indigenous dance troupe that has come to perform at the opening of the geological exhibition, Eddie and Charlie's accomplices distract the museum's attendant while the two cousins race upstairs to smash the glass case with clapsticks and retrieve Eddie's special stone. Kerstin Knopf reads this climactic moment in the film as "a cinematic analogy to decolonizing acts of repatriating Indigenous artefacts from museums and scientific and private collections" (194).

This act of repatriation is moreover framed as the returning of stolen property to its rightful owners via the soundtrack: Indigenous artist and singer Kev Carmody's song "Thou Shalt Not Steal" is heard in the background. The song's opening lines ("In 1788 down Sydney Cove / The first boat-people land / Said sorry boys our gain's your loss / We gonna steal your land") are sung, before a part of the chorus is heard: "They taught us / Oh Oh Black woman thou shalt not steal / Oh Oh Black man thou shalt not steal … We say to you yes whiteman thou shalt not steal / Oh ya our land you'd better heal" (Carmody). The use of Carmody's iconic 1988 protest song at this moment serves to link Frankland's film, as it moves towards its denouement, to a legacy of Indigenous political protest over stolen land. The audience is left with a strong message: Indigenous people are taking back what has been stolen from them, not only their cultural property but, perhaps soon, their land.

With the song still ringing in the background, the cousins finally return to their extended family in Kalgoorlie, rocks in hand. They are welcomed home by Eddie's mum before Uncle Walter arrives to give them both a hug. They finally return the rocks safely to their uncle. "We got 'em home, unc[le]," says Eddie, handing them over. Uncle is extremely pleased. "I've been waiting for these," he says. Then Eddie asks his uncle: "What's so special about 'em?" Uncle Walter draws breath to explain but is interrupted by two younger cousins of Eddie and Charlie, who ask Eddie if they can borrow the keys to his car. Uncle follows the younger boys to the car, explaining to Eddie and Charlie: "I'll tell you fellas about that business afterwards, hey?" The next shot shows the younger boys trying to start Eddie's car. Uncle then leans in the window and gives the rocks he's just received from Eddie and Charlie to their younger cousins. "Look after this here rock for me, will yous?" he instructs the boys. "They're real important cultural business. And I'll give yous a word when I need 'em, OK?" The boys shrug and say, "Sure unc." The movie then ends with the boys speeding off in the car, presumably to begin their own adventure just as Eddie and Charlie had done some years before. In this way, Frankland's comedy would appear to parody the mysterious, spiritual power sometimes associated with rocks and stones in Aboriginal cultures. What Eddie and Charlie think are inherently sacred objects function instead, more fundamentally, as important connectors to family, mob, and Country. These rocks bring the cousins back home, and their uncle uses them to keep the next generation in contact with family and culture. In their mystery lies their power, but it is not a mystery the cousins or the audience have likely guessed at.

The construction of landscape and the interaction of characters with the land in Australian films of the 1970s and 1980s, harking back as they did to a nineteenth-century celebration of colonialist progress and achievement, in which Indigenous connections to land were ignored, maintained white Australian claims to possession and occupation of the land and rejected the possibility of any other reading of the land. But as the Tracker says, "Plenty signs like this." He invites viewers of the newer filmic landscapes of Australia not to stare speechless and in awe at big hanging rocks but to acknowledge that it is possible to focus on the meanings of little ones instead. Meanwhile, Indigenous film-makers like Richard J. Frankland are throwing stones into these works, so to speak, devaluing meanings popularly assigned to stones and rocks on the one hand, imbuing them with new meanings for contemporary Indigenous cultures on the other.

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