An Examination of Clara Law's *The Goddess of 1967* as a Representation of Australian Cultural Identities

Bio John Grech (John.M.Grech@uts.edu.au)

John Grech is an artist and writer who has been exhibited and published in Australia, Europe, Canada and the USA. His last project is a web installation called "Interempty Space - The Global City" [<www.cddc.vt.edu/host/interempty/index.html>] (August 2002), a site dealing examining the web as an extension of the global city. Previous web installations include "Sharkfeed," [<www.abc.net.au/sharkfeed>] (July 2000) and was produced for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in conjunction with assistance from the Australian Film Commission. John is presently living in Europe where he is completing research towards a Ph D from the University of Technology, Sydney.
An Examination of Clara Law's *The Goddess of 1967* as a Representation of Australian Cultural Identities

Abstract

Clara Law's *The Goddess of 1967* (2000) is a complex film that deals with a range of existential issues confronting Australian identities at the end of the 20th Century. The film's challenging and uncompromising perspective radically re-aligns macro and micro discourses of global, personal, and psychological relations in a contemporary Australian context.

Clara Law's *The Goddess of 1967* (2000) is a complex film that critically deals with a range of existential issues confronting Australian identities at the end of the 20th Century. This is one of the most interesting Australian movies made since *Bad Boy Bubby* (Rolf de Heer, 1993), *What I Have Written* (John Hughes, 1996), and *The Castle* (Rob Sitch, 1997). The film's unusual perspective radically re-aligns macro and micro discourses of global, personal, and psychological relations in a contemporary Australian context.

This essay deconstructs *The Goddess of 1967* by conducting an interdisciplinary 'reading' of the film's signifying system and the logical and ideological implications these generate. It considers how production values are essential in constructing what I call an overarching 'major' narrative which supersedes the 'minor' stories developed
through the spoken dialogues delivered by the various characters. My objective is to
explore the logics and implications of the film's emergent narrative. The subjectivity of
these readings may generate their own problems but if that leads to a wider discussion
around contemporary forms of identification rather than to wider agreement about the
film or my interpretations of it, then this essay will have made a worthwhile
contribution.

The key to *The Goddess of 1967* lies beyond notions of realism. The style of acting,
lighting and sound design, directing, and scripting, operate on a symbolic and surreal
level and the film creates a poetic effect very much in the tradition of European art
house cinema. This may explain the film's apparent popularity amongst some European
audiences. The visual and sonic experience of seeing this film is sometimes breath-
taking and it is difficult not to be seduced by its strange sense of beauty. Law's
sophisticated understanding of cinema succeeds in stitching together a text which
obviates the film's philosophical shortcomings through the generation of a performative
cinematic language. This totalised’ filmic discourse calls for an equally encompassing
reading in order to appreciate the film's full significances. But you have to be careful
not to take one aspect (such as the dialogues or character development, or, indeed the
production values themselves) out of proportion as this can be just as misleading. The
film's characters and dialogues in particular, are not to be taken literally.

**The Narratives**

The greatest problem in *The Goddess of 1967* lies in the film's stiffly spoken dialogues.
What is lacking is the graceful subtlety found in films like *Wings of Desire* (Wim
Wenders, 1987) where Peter Handke's redoubtable writerly contribution is both
unmistakable and essential in allowing Wenders to achieve a sense of mytho-poeic
resonance. Notwithstanding, one of the film's strengths is that it takes on an impressive
canvas of ideas. As J.M. (Rikiya Kurokawa) states, '[t]his is a long story.' Indeed there
are a number of stories one may follow and it finally falls upon individual viewers to
decide which journey they take through the film. Analysing the overall narrative of this
film is difficult not only because of this complexity, but also because that narrative is
never expressed directly or discretely. Rather it is sewn together using many elements
of the film's fabric. Taken as a whole, this adds up to a complex and sometimes
confusing interweaving of personal and communal stories that seems to defy rational
articulation. Nonetheless, the overall thrust of the film is optimistic, compassionate, and
forgiving. This is clear at the end when B.G. (Rose Byrne) decides against killing her
father-grandfather (Nicholas Hope), an act which relieves her from the legacy her
burdensome progenitor bestowed upon her, releasing her from performing the
conclusion his authorial story would have inscribed.

*The Goddess of 1967* disables conventional a narrative closure by constantly making
gestures that point towards something beyond and outside the predictable conclusions
of the 'minor' stories set up in the film. It achieves this by embedding signifying
narrative aspects outside what can be put discretely down as either a sentence, an
image, or a sound. The 'major' narrative of this film remains unreadable because the
film is not constructed to be simply 'read.' It alludes suggestively to things outside the
visual and verbal discourses it sets up and without engaging with those non visual and
non verbal cues, the phlegmatic dialogues between the characters become
unsophisticated oversimplifications if a viewer insists on taking them as they are uttered
in the film. With the dialogues (and the characters delivering them) associating freely,
they give rise to a poetic and mythical narrative which is only partially written by the
film and partly by the viewer's interpretive engagement. Realised through production
values, especially the use of bird and animal sounds and musical 'commentaries', as
much as lighting and other visual effects, this multi-faceted film text does not deploy
just one overt utterance stated by a master narrative in which all the elements of the
film co-incide into a unified meaning or conclusion at some point. Instead, *The
Goddess of 1967* mobilises multiple narrative tendencies realised through a profusion of
sometimes conflicting gestures. Cultural artifacts like this film produce *speech acts*
which are not easily reduced to a singular verbal explanation.
deconstructing such a film particularly difficult because it insists that readers interpretations remain contingent with other readings and ways of looking.13

While the characters dialogues in The Goddess of 1967 do not quite measure up to that mytho-poetic task, the film as a whole sketches out a sense of the struggles taking place between various ideologies and mythologies competing over Australia's spatio-temporal and cultural locations today. Taken above the level of its characters stories, the film becomes a critique of an Australian identity that has attempted to subsume all traces of European and non European cultures alike under the one Anglophonic voice. The film's critical thrust thus appears to be decidedly postcolonial, and, at its most sophisticated, depicts contemporary Australian culture struggling to come to terms with a sense of 'self' locked into an immovable structural binary; an Anglo (European) identity beckoned by a disorientating Asian other.14

This critical position is realised when viewers identify with, and adopt the position of an 'alien' outsider, J.M., a Japanese tourist sometimes referring to himself as a Japanese Man. Reading beyond the surface of the film, this position stands in front of a more thoroughgoing critical location (in terms of contemporary cultural articulations), namely that of a migrant, as Law herself is.15 This aspect of the 'major' narrative appears to articulate an affectionate disposition towards an Australia's 'self' while being situated outside, or beyond, perhaps even in conflict with, the establishment governing that 'self.' Read intertextually, this infers migrants' relationships with their adopted countries everywhere. At another level, it refers to art's relationship within society. Turning to art and society first, standing within the 'cultural establishment,' art is imbued with the authority to give significance, meaning, and power to that society's cultural utterances. Standing outside or beyond the apparatuses of a culture's ruling establishment, art remains marginal at best, or even becomes meaningless. Yet that is where art arguably plays its most critical and reflexive role.

The outsider position gains overt expression when J.M. appeals to B.G. not to kill her abusive father-grandfather. Recognising the futility of his exteriority in B.G.'s family
(of origins and of meaning) system, J.M. states 'What the fuck can I do to stop you from killing your life ... I love you ... means nothing.' The nuances of who is given the authority to utter (love) and how the self responds are strangely played out in this movie. If the film has failed to fully explore, articulate, and exploit this point with audiences has more to do with the incomplete project of migrating multiculturalism, even in countries like Australia, rather than a weaknesses in the film itself.\textsuperscript{16}

**Production Values**

One of the most striking features of this movie is the camera work. Right from the opening sequences in Tokyo, we experience a vision of a world made completely strange. Some interesting aspects of the production include;

- the surreal lighting used on much of the 'journey' of the two central characters which dislocates mundane everyday scenes into the estranged psychological spaces experienced by the characters;\textsuperscript{17}
- the photographing of the landscape that avoid the romantic dictions of conventional photography;
- the use of digital effects that disillusion audiences of any pretences to realism;
- and the highly sculpted soundtrack that counterpoints 'lyric' comments to what is happening on the screen or in the dialogues.

These point to a film situating itself on the margins of conventional cinematic discourse and perhaps on the margins of its audience too. This suggests one reason why Australian audiences have not been well disposed in adopting its critical perspective.

Yet in a film in which one of the central characters is blind, it is an astute move to make the soundtrack play such an important role. Iain Chambers has written about the power sound has to usurp the hegemony of vision in film. In an essay called "Maps, Musics, Movies, and Memory" he stated that;

> The immediate factuality of the image - the photograph, the cinematic sequence, the digital scan - apparently embodies and exhausts the presence of being. In freezing time, while paradoxically recording and replaying it, the image is linked to death where everything can
... be exchanged as relics of being in the flat circulation of signs and their ghostly afterlife. Returned to the realm of the senses, however, the image might be better considered to encapsulate the mechanisation of representation: the technological visualisation of writing. By exceeding such a writing, imaging and framing the world, the visual conclusion is relocated and the image is forced to reveal its logocentric impulses as a power and a limit, as a promise and a threat, as an extension and a closure. Between this and what continues to exist outside the frame lies a path along which the poesis of sound maintains the promise of the irrepressible.

A voice in the dark, a saxophone cadence on the street, saliva on the tongue, breath drawn between words, the suspension of silence: all this is music, ... To ask the meaning of music, the significance of sound, is perhaps to seek to distil from the depths of our senses the ungraspable beingness of being. ... music, being, and meaning are inextricable. ... the desire and deferral of musical meaning hums in internal counter-point in the pre-linguistic state of language, in the indeterminable semiosis of our bodies.

This extensive quote carries a number of important ideas. First it outlines how vision and spoken dialogues usually work together in conventional cinematic discourses to suture up a film's story into a stable and unified conclusion. Chambers suggests the sensuality of sound (and of the image when it is freed of the task of governing a narrative) may act as a fissure to open up a film's plot. This unhinges sound from being machined to death when it is tied to vision, restoring both, to re-state Chambers, to 'the indeterminable semiosis of our bodies.' In The Goddess of 1967, sound and surreal visual effects become important sources of the film's critical commentary and slip in from the sides to create a lethal alchemy that seeks not so much to destroy, but to overcome the authorial enclosures that are usually suggested by conventional understandings of visual and verbal 'speech acts' on the screen. The freeing of sound from vision in this film re-inforces an effect not of realism, but rather of the realities and orientations of the central characters' worlds. The original music composed for the film, the musical works cited, as well as the (often manipulated) sounds of the environment and wild life, simulates a heightened sensual awareness blind people apparently develop of the world around them. There is something supernatural in this film's treatment of blindness, as if hearing, feeling, and performing synaesthetically through the body more than make up for B.G.'s lack of physical sight. In the context of
The Goddess, this brings with it interpretative possibilities that carry the imprimatur of unexpected horizons. The visual horizon presents a flat and unsympathetic Australian landscape that harbours sinister undertoness but which is counterpointed by a sonic horizon full of defamiliarising twists and turns that finally sound out differences.

The Blinding of the Eye

At one stage B.G. implores J.M., who sometimes refers to himself as the 'Japanese Man', to close his eyes. Asked to do so while driving the car, he tells her he can't stop looking, he can't take his eyes off the road ahead. Being blind, the act of 'seeing' the road ahead is something B.G. performs mysteriously. Her utterance suggests that driving without looking is a metaphor for a step by step approach a (blind) person must adopt in life - relying on an 'inner vision' only a grounded chthonic wisdom provides. This, it could be argued, is the source of B.G.'s inner vision and her 'performing body' is really her spiritual guide. I'll return to the idea of the performing body shortly, but first I want to explore J.M.'s response to B.G.'s request.

In refusing to close his eyes, J.M. is also saying that he cannot stop looking at what is going on in front of him. At one level, the 'Japanese Man' (J.M.) is somewhat like an impotent companion to blind girl in her sound rich world,\(^{22}\) an echo, suggesting that his over-reliance on sight in apprehending the world around him diminishes some of his other perceptual skills. There are other positions implicated in J.M.'s voice, of someone foreign or something external, that can't stop 'looking' at what is happening in B.G.'s world, an undertone that sounds as much like the United Nations criticisms of Australia's policy on mandatory sentencing and its treatment of refugees as much as it does of Malaysian criticisms of Australian Foreign Policies towards South East Asia. Yet they are uttered in a way to signal J.M.'s lack of power to intervene.\(^{23}\)

The configuration of two positions, one turning inwards in an effort to bury itself beneath the Australian landscape, while another stands on the periphery of the outback's barb-wire fences trying to get a word in sideways, is made through variety of other
metaphors also. The spatial isolation of B.G.'s family home is accentuated when the father-grandfather retreats at the end of the film into his opal mine (Plato's cave?). His withdrawal from an everyday, above-ground life is filled with religious symbology when he declares that 'He'll not find me down here.' If the identity of the 'He' is left unstated, Hope's character nevertheless acknowledges that his is a descent into darkness, likening himself to a fugitive hiding underground (rejecting the harsher scrutiny of Australian natural light, social justice, and God's judgement?).

Reminiscent of Orpheus' descent into the Underworld in search of his lost bride Euridice, Hope's character opens the film to other readings. Brushing against the grain of the characters minor stories, the father-grandfather becomes a potential yet failed Hero whose fate is sealed when he enters the gates to his familial netherworld. The Orpheus myth transcends The Goddess of 1967' authors by transforming Hope's character into an oracle, the medium through which B.G.'s identity (the in-bred offspring of Anglo-Irish Australia) and her relationship with her Japanese mate (symbolising her (dis)Oriental other) may be better understood. It may be a coincidence that Orpheus was transformed into the oracle on the isle of Lesbos after death but as mythographers since Gianbattista Vico have argued, that is one of the strengths of mythological thinking.24

I will return to the Orphic connection later, but first I want to examine how the film establishes a binary opposition between an inner Australian identity situated in the outback (Hope's character) in relation to a watchful, sometimes critical outsider standing for the rest of the world (J.M.). The father-grandfather first signals this opposition when he tells a young Marie (Elise McCredie) that 'We're free to do anything here. Don't listen to that hypocritical world ever again.' The task facing B.G., if she is to follow her elders' invocation while avoiding the pitfalls her mother-sister fell into, is how to create an Eden rather than her progenitors Hell. Yet by the end of the film, the 'Japanese Man' accepts that there are limitations in his 'vision' and acknowledges his blind spot by closing his eyes while driving, thus mimicking B.G.'s way of moving through the world.
The film produces a range of signs and positions that suggest and overlap global, personal, mytho-religious, and psychological relationships. Coupled with an inversion of weakness and strength which then turns out to be a weakness again, this is presented through J.M., B.G., as well as Hope's characters. Echoing Levi Strauss' analogy of a butterfly flapping its wings to explain how myth reveals the underlying psychic structures in society, weakness and strength appear as the two sides of the same human face. The father-grandfather's hidden outback hole finally becomes a place where B.G.'s existential paradoxes (her sense of inherited guilt, debt, and identity) can be recited, rehearsed, and 'worked through.' Thus the stories borne of the past are performed by B.G.'s living 'being' (a body, actor, agent) searching for original, appropriate, and creative resolutions to the dilemmas of the past.

**The Performing Body**

There is a lot to said about the *performing body* but the problem with the body is that it resists language so effectively, something which, it should be added, we ought to be glad it does. Yet without some form of body language, the body may be lost in a world increasingly saturated by signs simulating its virtuality. Jean Luc Nancy provides one conceptual framework useful in writing about the performing body. In his 'Corpus', Nancy suggests that there is an irreducible sense of excess, a body beyond the reach of its own limits, which is to say both beyond and before the speaking self, whereupon sensation floods the body with the cognizance of its 'saturated totality.' This extended/distended/attenuated 'naked body' is where senses are exposed to senses, and nerves end up on nerves. Nancy's corpus is a glossary for a sensing body, available to all sorts of possibilities, as if a surgeon's knife has opened wounds that act like bioports. Far from sister-mother Marie's *ideal* Christian sky god, B.G. possesses an indigenous spirituality firmly located in her sensing body, from which her epistemic sensuality arises. This *spiritual* self is not just limited to her body, however, and cannot be spoken of as being discrete and bounded. Hers is a contagious open body that Nancy would recognise.
Films like *The Goddess of 1967* act like open bodies, even though they come riddled with the dis-ease of (mis)communication. This film acts like a water soaked sponge holed in every direction like a leaky vessel that just refuses to sink. Such a rich textural surface creates a sense of discomfort because it lacks the soothing seal of certainty. But art is never a rationally coherent body that edifies a passive humanity, at least not as a simplistic or didactic lesson.\(^{31}\)

**A Land of Lost People**

There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence ....

Haunted places are the only ones people can live in...\(^{32}\)

So, what is so significant about 1967? Isn't that the year the Aboriginal people got the vote, the year Australia's Prime Minister mysteriously went missing, a year before May '68, and about the time The Seekers released a song with the words 'There's a new world somewhere they call the promised land.' Nineteen sixty seven was also, coincidentally, the year my family migrated to Australia, who, like many others, went there to search for *that* promised land. For some, over the ensuing years, Australia has become a queer place inhabited by a 'weird mob' of migrants who keep insisting on (re)producing what they lost (or never had) in the Old Country, as much as what they came to escape from. Yet it altogether remains clearer that the places that all migrants came from really are a long long way away, and no matter how much people try to reproduce such places, they generally fail. The Parthenon-like milkbars in suburban Melbourne and Sydney\(^ {33}\) add colour but the shallow similitudes of their frescoes and architectural facades testifies to their lasting failure. Today, it should be added, so do the English terraces in suburbs like Paddington and the gold diggers shacks in colonial Hill End. What saved Australia's Anglo-Irish status quo, in days gone by, was its isolation and its distance from everywhere. Today the world crowds in.

In *The Country of Lost Children*,\(^ {34}\) Peter Pierce suggested that Australia is a land where the promise of a childhood paradise turned out to be a nightmare.\(^ {35}\) Such a dark thesis may not be strictly limited to Pierce's childhood garden however, as Clara Law also
describes Australia as a land "that evokes a kind of alienation ... which has total indifference to human suffering." The repeating images of loss brought through a history of missing people in Australia may have engendered a cultural imaginary of a land where mourning has never been completed. There is something haunted in Australia's culture, a sense of spiritual impoverishment that only a few have had the courage to face. The troubled figure of the father-grandfather in *The Goddess* is an honest, if confronting depiction of that loss, a sign of an Australian emptiness that can never be filled. Hope's character collapses, in his Australian wilderness, and becomes a black hole at the centre of the film who sucks in everything around him. There's even an historically inaccurate line in which he states 'One day the sky will be filled with black holes.' In Hope's dark sky, light - whether it be blue for sorrow or fear, red for anger or passion, or yellow for cowardice and revenge - can never escape. It is the sky of the unenlightened.

Well now, is Australia really a land of lost people with darkened souls, performing like monstrous bleeding bodies, spilling out their guts in spiritual emptiness? Might that hole be the font of incomplete mourning, the loss of love and homeland - whether we be recent migrants or not? The idea of a country of lost people deserves much more attention then it presently gets, and may fruitfully help to better understand Australia's cultural imaginary. There is a darker side to the image of a land all too comfortingly termed 'the sunburnt country.' The sense of re-appearing disappearance is embalmed all over these 'missing' people, from the Beaumont children to the 'Stolen Generations.' Like Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Law's film confronts the repercussions of our lost others.

**The Light of Night is in the Heart and in the Eye**

The light of the body is the eye
If, therefore, thine eye be clear,
thy whole body shall be full of light.
But if thine eye be evil,
thy whole body shall be full of darkness.
Fortunately, it is not quite the total blackness that threatens films like Wenders' *Wings of Desire*(1987) that lies at the centre of the symbolic system in *The Goddess of 1967*. It is a deeper shade of blue that fills Australia's night sky. That lights shines in this film, highlighting the cutting edge of a carving knife in Marie's frightened hands, just as it shines in her father-grandfather's malevolent eye as he contemplates unnamed deeds. Even a mandatory sex scene flickers with blue light, a light that reminded me of a Richard Clapton song called *Prussian Blue* (off an album with the same name).

Unlike the lovers in so many pop songs, *The Goddess of 1967* manages what many fail to do; in the blue light of night, these lovers find each other. B.G.'s growing relationship with the 'Japanese Man' can be read as part of a national- as well as personal-mythology, of a nation (and a person) finding where they are really situated in the world. I like B.G.'s distinctly hopeful casualness coupling with the inscrutable politeness of her lover. The sex scene is really something - neither raunchy, seductive, or sexy in a way that would cheapen it, nor is it ugly without at the same time trying to be too beautiful. Yet neither is it prudish! What? A love that is not romantic, nor sadomasochistic, nor fatalistic - how can that be? The sex scene strikes an odd kind of note that is difficult to pin down. Maybe there is an opening, a new way of speaking between men and women, but if there is, the film doesn't pursue it. What it does pursue is the very deep blue light of unimaginable sorrow buried in the eye of B.G.'s Anglo-Irish father-grandfather.

**Finding Mr Havisham**

The conclusion of the film takes place underground. With candles only dimly lighting the scene, we follow B.G. as she feels her way through the cave where her father-grandfather has retreated from the world. Her hands become the film's eyes as she gently gropes her way into his lair. After a while we realise that the objects she has been fondling are the remains of a half eaten meal. When B.G. picks up the body of a dead rat, an uninvited guest who feasted too long in this lingering excess, the film quotes Dickens' *Great Expectations* in which Pip enters Mrs Havisham's dining room to
find a rotten wedding cake with holes eaten throughout and the skeletal remains of rodents lying on a dusty, spiderweb covered table.\textsuperscript{38}

Hope's Irishman thus becomes the most interesting and challenging character in \textit{The Goddess of 1967}. Around him is portrayed the translocation of European metaphysics, culture, and identity onto an Australian landscape. Played out through his determination to (al)chemically re-create a bottle of \textit{Chateau Neuf de Pape}, his love of classical music, as much as through his accent, he signals what remains of Anglo-Irish colonial culture on the Australian landscape. He even delivers his daughter-wife Marie a fish (the body of Christ) through which she is induced into the Christian mythology that prefigures her destiny as an irredeemable female temptress, the incurable body of the impure Eve. Yet as a signifier, B.G.'s father-grandfather shimmers.

Foreshadowed as the molester of his daughter Marie (Esther's daughter and B.G.'s mother) as well as the young B.G. herself, the father-grandfather is a man who cannot acknowledge or apologise for his wrongs because he can not see (or admit), in the pits of his darkness, what there is to be sorry for. Arguably, one of the successes of this film is how it handles his character, a difficult task given the circumstances he is presented in. Painfully he is transformed from a monstrous abuser to the isolated figure of a man whose gradual loss of everything (including his sense of self) only becomes apparent after the story of his wife Esther's disappearance is completed in a final flashback at the end of the film. Thus Hope’s character is seen at last for what it truly is, the shadow of a man awaiting the impossible return (eternal home-coming) of his women; Esther his wife (note the similarity to Estella in \textit{Great Expectations}), daughter-wife Marie, and B.G., his ill begotten daughter-grand-daughter.

That \textit{Great Expectations} still occupies the minds of some of Australia's better known artists, such as Peter Carey, is perhaps indicative of a great Australian British Revival in recent years and has a lot in common with the populism politicians have garnered for themselves over the last decade. This has to do with a desire to return to something known and safe, a familiar homeland beyond the gates of contemporary globalisation,
that never really existed accept in people's imaginaries. In Law's case, the shadow of Dickens is not so far removed, not only because Hong Kong's colonial heritage is only a few years past. Yet many Australians feel somewhat estranged from Dickens' story even though there is something genuinely universal in the lives of Pip, Magwitch, Estella and Havisham. For the sake of those long suffering, ignored, and forgotten people, would it not be good to explore some other tales for a while, narratives left abandoned or unimagined. Or are such others stories just left hanging on the cultural back burner simply because, so we are told, they are not mainstream enough? 

Earlier I suggested a relationship between Hope's character and the mythical figure of Orpheus to which I will now return. According to Ralph Abraham, Orphism, which is also, significantly, an underground religion, is one of the oldest living legends in the European psyche. For the ancient Minoans and Greeks, it represented 'a true partnership of the genders, ... [was] associated with peace, ...[and] a successful society, living in harmony with its environment, whereas the patriarchal and matriarchal dominator societies are constantly at war with each other and with the environment' (Abraham, 1990, section 3). Abraham continues that the Orphic cult disappeared under Christianity, although not before all the elements of Orphism were injected into the early church ... The Christian suppression of Orphism is a key factor in the development of European culture. Orphism is pagan, and besides the general intolerance of the church, the trinitarian aspect was most unacceptable to the early fathers. The trinity, the heart of the long line of Orphism from earliest Palaeolithic times, stabilized the early history of human consciousness, The Palaeolithic Trivia - the triple headed goddess, the trinity of three female principles - transmigrated into the divine triads of Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, Crete, Mycenae, Greece, and Rome. Gradually the gender changed, and the male gods got older and more aggressive.

The stories surrounding Orphism give another slant and way of engaging with Hope's father-grandfather in the film. For example, Orpheus' wife Euridice, who dies while running away from Aristaeus' unwanted sexual advances, echoes the disappearance of Esther in The Goddess of 1967. Viewed more sympathetically, the father-grandfather becomes a tormented figure, tortured and twisted by unresolved sorrow and the loss of
Esther. Associating Hope's character with Orpheus enrichens interpretations of the film by providing alternative narrative discourses that retain the truth of B.G.'s reality while expanding the understanding of the father-grandfather's world. This doesn't lessen the seriousness of his actions against his daughter-wife Marie and grand-daughter B.G., but it does move closer towards grasping the impact the loss of loved ones has on people's psyche. Such narratives must be constantly re-told for the living to be reconciled with their dead. Re-telling such stories in works of art are important steps in healing the schisms that presently divide Australians, whether such divides are publically acknowledged or not. The film ignores references to indigenous and other misplaced Australians.

The critical thrust in the film pivots on the father-grandfather figure. From his links with the "love" revolution of the 1960s to his arrogant attempts to scientifically re-engineer wine (the blood of Jesus), to his stubborn retention of Eurocentric values, he assumes a tri-partied position of misanthropic God, Sacrificial Lamb, and Evil Spirit. Yet it is important to remember that his 'hippy' generation was also responsible for questioning the hypocritical values of the 1950s, and the stultifying roles society ascribed its citizens. Critiquing conventional family structures was both constructive and essential, and remains an incomplete project today. The relativisation of conventional family values should not be condemned because Hope's character insists he is free to make love to his daughters and his grand daughters. Inspite of the corruption of his 'love' generation, it is preferable to live in a society that rejects an idea that truth, right, and wrong are absolute. This does not mean, however, that contemporary cultures have no sense of right and wrong. Rather, adjudicating what is right and wrong is always dependant on history, subjectivity, and the relationships one has with/in the world. It thus remains essential to challenge the received wisdom of society, be they traditional or modern.

It is perplexing when elements like the Citroen and Roland Barthes become vehicles to contextualise and situate the father-grandfather in his Platonic cave. On the walls of
his dark hole are morbidly inscribed the European sensibilities ossified in the Australian outback, a barren grave devoid of truth and understanding. Marking this confusion is bush Boxer (Tim Richards) who suggests that The Goddess 'must be Japanese'. Thus the French Goddess, so diffused by some Australians (lack of) memory, is lost in her outback wanderings through a spiritless land where materialism reigns. This begs the question: Who is The Goddess anyway - is she really the car, or B.G.? Is she a metaphor for a perverse degradation of European culture in contemporary Australia generally, which can only be restored to her former purity by acknowledging the love and wisdom of her orientating mate?

The free-floating associations of The Goddess,'1967,' the Citroen, references to Charles De Gaulle, the quotes from Barthes, and a string of Occidental and Oriental signifiers, opens the film to being read as a semi-nostalgic critique of the impact of (post)modernity, new technology, and a 'working' irreverence towards class and cultural purity in Australian culture. Perversely, the film is in danger of reinforcing traditional cultural identities while obviating the critique that such cultural values and identities are themselves the result of acculturation and not naturally the innate properties of a higher level of sophistication, education, and global positioning.

The opposition of an inward looking Anglo-Irishman pitted against a 'Japanese Man' competing for B.G.'s emotional allegiances highlights the problems set up by the characters' stories. There needs to be a deeper consideration of these moves when questions of past and present Australian identifications are raised. Where do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fit in? What of identifications with Oceania and the Middle East. And what about non-Anglo, non Western Europas? Australia retains a wider set of alliances and identifications because they have always been part of Australia's cultural horizon. What is more, Australia is an island continent, a melting pot, and this constantly gives rise to novel experiences and unexplored resources in the body of the land. Hope's character's assertion that we need not (always) appeal outside to identify our frames of reference is quite correct. Discerning when to look-in and when to look-
out may only be achieved when the entire community reflects the full spectrum of what is available, not just those sectors socially, historically, economically, and culturally privileged in having access and accustomed to shaping the agendas of public discourse.

Dislocating the identifications of Occidental-Oriental binaries The Goddess of 1967 reproduces would allow the wider set of discursive matrices found in multicultural Australia to be articulated. But this would mean both refusing descriptions such as European, Asian, Pacific Islander, and even Aboriginal, while opting for a playful adoption of all identities. Such a constitutional admix becomes an ever changing totality, a democratic multiculturalism greater than the sum found in individual parts. This is Australia's "Tao" in spite of what mainstream media and cultural institutions insist on circulating. Films like The Goddess of 1967 do the service of raising such issues, even if they do not point in 'the right' direction.

Endnotes

1As Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin state, "To 'deconstruct' a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means exactly what it says or says what it means." C. Norris & A. Benjamin, What Is Deconstruction, Methuen, 1989, p7.

2In her "Introduction" to Narratology, Mieke Bal suggests that a text is a 'finite, structured whole composed of language signs. A narrative text [Bal's emphasis] is a text in which an agent relates a narrative' (Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative, University of Toronto Press, 1985, p 5). In contrast to Bal, I prefer a notion of an open text incorporating not only the signifying elements contained by the formal boundaries of conventional texts, but also the reader, the producer of the text, as well as the context of production and readership. In this sense, the fact that I saw the film at the Realto in Amsterdam where Law has a history of success is significant, as are other subjective and intersubjective factors that combine to make this interpretation of the film possible. See also Norris & Benjamin, What Is Deconstruction, Methuen, 1989.

3Bal adds that a story is a 'fabula that is presented in a certain manner. ... a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An event is the transition from one state to another state. Actors are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. To act is defined here as to cause or to experience an event." ibid Bal, 1985, p 5


5In "Boxing the Roo: Clara Law's Floating Life and Transnational Hong Kong-Australian Identities" (2000, p 106) Tony Mitchell notes that there may be "other, contrasting readings [of Law's earlier Floating Life] ... outside of Australia and the Anglophonic world." To this I would add that The Goddess
of 1967 does read differently in a non English speaking context away from an Australian cultural mileu and is one of the reasons for the film's greater success and popularity in mainland Europe.

A performative cinematic language indicates an act in which each screening of a film becomes a performance that relies on the audience to enter and enliven such a performance by interpreting the event as a text which generates meaning. Screening a film without an audience does not amount to a 'performance' by this definition because an act of communication through language requires the presence of an audience or receiver.

I borrow the term 'totalised' from Ronald Aronson's use of it in reference to "Sartre's unflinching purpose ... 'to establish the dialectic as the universal method and universal law of anthropology' (Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, vol I, 18). This entailed establishing 'the permanent necessity for man of totalising and being totalised, and for the world of being an ever broader, developing totalisation.' (Sartre, I, 21) See Ronald Aronson, "Sartre and the Dialectic: The Purpose of Critique, II" in Fredric Jameson (ed), Sartre after Sartre, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1985, p 92.

The word totalised is thus used to signify a process whereby a 'constitutive sovereign' individual seeks to unify and cohere an experience of a text such as a film.

William L. McBride states that Sartre used the notion of 'constitutive sovereignty' specifically to refer to individuals rather than "to provide some legitimising basis for sovereignty [as] 'neither God nor the totalised group has a real existence.' [Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, I, p 610] ... the free individual being alone is truly sovereign, and that, outside of institutions [McBride notes a resemblance between Sartre and Hobbes' thoughts on nature] ... the range of this sovereignty is limitless. ... ' See William L. McBride, Sartre's Political Theory, Bloomington and Indianapolis. Indiana University Press 1991, pp 153-154.

A 'totalised filmic discourse' thus refers to the narrative constituted by an individual looking at The Goddess of 1967 who is trying to cohere and unify his or her experience of the film into a narrative whole.


Signs can be anything that convey or confer a message between a transmitter and a receiver. As Terence Hawkes stated "Every speech-act includes the transmission of messages through the languages of gesture, posture, clothing, hairstyle, perfume, accent, social context etc., over and above, under and beneath, even at cross purposes with what words [or in this sense, what the film might] actually say. Even when we are not speaking or being spoken to, messages from other languages crowd in upon us: horns hoot, lights flash, laws restrain, hoardings proclaim, smells attract or repel, tastes delight or disgust, even the 'feel' of objects systematically communicates something meaningful to us." See Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics, Methuen, 1982, p 125.

Mark Currie argues that one of the challenges poststructuralism posed traditional narratology was to abandon the idea that narratives are 'discovered' by an analyst instead of being the 'invention' of a reader. See Mark Currie, Postmodern Narrative Theory, Macmillan 1998, pp 2-6. In the sense that Barthes (in S/Z) distinguishes "readers" and "reading" as being at the mercy of the author's controlling voice whereas "writers" and "writerly" allows the receivers of a text to form their reception in such a way that must "fill in gaps in narrative, thus, ... becoming part of the textual meaning." Stuart Sim, The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought, Icon Books, Cambridge (UK), 1998, p 382. In this essay I use the word reader to imply an act of 'active reading and writing.

Mieke Bal discusses this in terms of focalisation' in which all the elements of a fabula are seen through a particular vision ... 'A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, ascertain angle' (ibid Bal, 1985, p 100) although Bal is at pains to argue that her use of 'focalisation' distinguishes the positions of 'those who see and those who speak' (p101) so that their respective narratives are not taken to be necessarily the same.


One of the arguments Edward Said develops in Orientalism (Penguin, Harmondsworth UK, 1991) concerns not the use by Occidentals to orientate themselves by setting themselves up as opposed and different to the East, but also "Europe's deepest and most recurring image of the Other ... a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient", in Stuart Sim (ed), The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought, Cambridge, UK, Icon Books, 1998, pp 336-337.
17 See also Tony MitcHELL's (2000, p 107) account of Dion Beebe's contribution as Director of Photography to the visual aesthetics in Law's earlier film *Floating Life*.
19 In distinguishing the term plot I follow Viktor Shklovsky who argued that "the novel's [film's] commitment to narrative, to movement in and through time, makes it [narrative] an essentially dynamic and active entity ... 'Story' is simply the basic succession of events, the raw material which confronts the artist, Plot represents the distinctive way the 'story' is made strange, creatively deformed, and defamiliarized." Terence Hawkes citing Shklovsky, (1982, p 65). I have generally avoided using the word plot in preference to terms like major narrative because I am interested in the transformations and nuances of meaning the film establishes through time.
20 See also Derrida's critiques of John Searle's and J.L. Austin's notions of 'speech acts' in Christopher Norris' *Derrida*, Fontana 1987, pp 177 - 193. In *Limited Inc.*, Derrida was concerned with challenging the authority of speech over writing and became an important plank in Derrida's general critique of Western logocentrism. Derrida's critique of the speech act can be turned back on to speech in another way, for speech, even when backed by the immediate presence of the authority of a speaker, speech still retains the excess to be interpreted and heard in different ways by different listeners.
22 For other views on this see Fiona A. Villella who cites Stephen Teo as saying that both Goddess and Law's earlier Autumn Moon (1992) "centre on relationship between a young girl, isolated from her family, and a Japanese man, who is funny and amusing but ultimately important and solace." ibid Villella, 2001.
23 The location of a significant voice standing in exteriority to Anglo-Australian culture in Law's films has been noted by others including David Stratton who went to some length to dissociate this from a certain 'clannishness of Chinese migrants' (Stratton cited in Mitchell, 2000). Clara Law herself has stated that in order to 'plant new roots in a new soil' an immigrant must 'relate really internally with [their] new home. In order to be able to do that, you have to be able to find your own feet in the ground." Clara Law cited in Tony Mitchell, "Boxing the Roo: Clara Law's Floating Life and Transnational Hong Kong-Australian Identities" 2000, p 109.
24 In summing up Vico's *The New Science* (1725), Terence Hawke (1982, p 12) suggests that "The master key of the new science lay in Vico's decisive perception that so-called 'primitive' man, when properly assessed, reveals himself not as childishly ignorant and barbaric, but as instinctively and characteristically 'poetic' in response to the world, in that he possesses an inherent 'poetic wisdom' (sapienza poetica) which informs his responses to his environment and casts them in the form of a 'metaphysics' of metaphor, symbol and myth." Others who take up Vico line of thought include Claude Levi Strauss and Roland Barthes.
26 The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* defines narrative as a "recount, rehearse the facts of, relate in the form of a story, [a] written or spoken recital of connected events in order, of, in, by narration." See the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, (compiled by F.G. Fowler and H.W. Fowler), 1974, p 531.
27 Jürgen Habermas uses the term "work off" to refer to a deliberate process of coming to terms with the legacy of the past, in his case the legacy of the Holocaust as well as Nazi and Communist totalitarianism in Germany. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Berlin Republic*, Polity Press, Cambridge & Oxford, 1998, pp 17-40.
29 I borrow the word 'bioports' from David Cronenberg's eXistenZ, (1999) where people have computer ports inserted at the bottom of their spines so they can participate in a computer game that combines the participants reality with the simulated possibilities generated by the game's codes and rules. Nancy's formulation of a wounded corpus does not require computer generated stimulus in order to open it up to the possibilities available beyond authorial intent.
30 For more on the concept of the performing body and an exploration of Nancy's notion of the 'Corpus', see John Grech, "Empty Space and the City: The Re-Occupation of Berlin", in Ian C. Fletcher and Van Gosse (eds), *Radical History Review: Citizenship, National Identity, Race, and Diaspora in Contemporary Europe*, Duke University Press, no 83, forthcoming.
33The recently constructed *Forum* in Sydney's Norton Street, Leichhardt tries to reproduce the atmosphere of an Italian *piazza*, but in spite of the fact that there are a number of expatriot Italian waiters working in the restaurants who confer some linguistic authority on the place, the brutal harshness of the materials used to construct the plaza only amplify the noise of the Jumbo jets flying over head, reminding people that they are not much more than a stone's throw away from Sydney International Airport. The aircraft noise can be so loud and frequent that it drowns any possibility of a sustained conversation, making a mockery of the communal atmosphere that distinguishes Italian *piazze*. 
36ibid Honegger, pp 11-12.
37Matthew VI, 22 cited in Wim Wenders, *Faraway So Close!*, Roadmovies, 1993
39For one account of what and how a mainstream is imagined in contemporary Australian public discourse, see Catherine Simpson's "Turkish Delights: Reflections on the Promotion and Reception of the First Turkish Film Festival in Australia", *Metro*, no 124/125, 2000, pp 60-63.
43This may be a feature in Law's film making, as Tony Mitchell (2000, p108) noted a tendency of 'confounding audience expectations' in Law's earlier *Floating Life*. 

21