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## Threatened by the Outback: Landscape and Ecology in the Australian New Wave

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Threatened by the Outback: Landscape and Ecology in the Australian New Wave

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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with a concentration in Film Studies  
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
LINEAR PERSPECTIVE AND VULNERABILITY .....	9
LONG TAKES AND EXPANDED TEMPORALITIES .....	19
THE WESTERN'S ENDURING RELATIONSHIP TO LAND .....	29
CONCLUSION .....	33
REFERENCES .....	35

## ABSTRACT

Scholarship discussing the Australian outback as a cinematic setting often conceives of this space as sharing a “frontier iconography” with the American west. A significant element of this conception is attributed to the natural features of these setting’s respective landscapes, which are said to share an arid climate, rugged geologic formations, and vast open spaces. In this project I instead strive to challenge the associations frequently conjured between these natural spaces by identifying an ecological stance within the Australian “new wave” outback film that is at odds with the presentation of the landscape in both classical Hollywood westerns and the subsequent “revisionist” westerns that sought to challenge the tropes of the genre.

Through an investigation of the Australian films *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971) and *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1980), I contend that these films implicitly reveal the natural world’s profound capacity to shape our lives as humans while the western represses this capacity. I argue that *Wake in Fright*’s mobilization of linear perspective emphasizes human vulnerability in relation to the outback landscape, and *Gallipoli*’s long takes visualize subversions of linear human progress that are attributable to the outback landscape. This is in contrast to the use of these techniques in the American western, where they instead help instill and affirm notions of an inevitable settler colonial progress toward dominion over the natural world. Scholarship that conflates the cinematic visualization or function of these two settings risks imprinting the western’s anthropocentric relationship to the natural world onto the outback landscape and consequently perpetuating the myths that have helped instigate the environmental crises we continue to face.

## INTRODUCTION

“Indeed there has been a long history of parallels between the American West and the Australian outback; of bushrangers and outlaws, violent assertions of masculinity, the dominance of whiteness over indigenous populations, the taming of the land.”

-Dr. Neil Campbell, Emeritus Professor of American Studies, University of Derby

“The entire movie moved through the Nullarbor Plain...It was like a John Ford movie because we were this guerilla, desert crew.”

- Actor Jamie Lee Curtis on shooting *Roadgames* in the Australian outback

The above quotes are examples of how many scholars and makers of cinema conceive of the Australian outback. John Ford, an American director of dozens of westerns, was known for taking his actors and crew on location into the deserts of Utah and Arizona, allowing these settings to become major contributors to the overall atmosphere and themes of his films. The outback, with its arid climate, rugged geologic formations, vast open spaces, and disputed colonial settlement, is often described in terms of its similarities to the now iconic images and myths of the American west. In this project, however, I strive to challenge this “long history of parallels” and its implications that the two locations have similar ideological and spectatorial relationships with their respective cultures. These implications effectively overlook the comparatively apprehensive, and what I read as ecological, relationship that many Australian films have with the outback.

*Roadgames* (Richard Franklin, 1981) is not generally considered a “western,” nor are the other Australian films I investigate more closely. However, there is distinct overlap in the mythos surrounding the outback and American west as “frontier” spaces. The connections made

between the spaces often extend to the identification of visual similarities in the landscape itself. Accordingly, in order to better understand these Australian new wave outback films, I am interested in analyzing the visualization of what is so often perceived as the “shared frontier iconography” between the outback and west as cinematic settings. Analyzing the settings through the lens of their apparent comparability, I contend that the Australian films *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971) and *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1980), as examples of trends within the larger Australian new wave outback film, conversely create a sense of vulnerability and dread via the landscape that, while still problematically positioning the natural world as a direct threat to humans, nonetheless implicitly reveals the natural world’s profound capacity to shape our experiences. This acknowledgment of a reciprocal shaping between humans and our environments in turn implies or accepts the notion that humans are within an ecosystem that, due to its constant cycle of influence, is perpetually in flux and thus, impossible to literally “tame.” This reciprocal shaping reveals the limits to our perceived capability to tame the land, and effectively undermines the narratives of an inevitable settler colonial dominion over the natural world that are valorized within classical Hollywood westerns and are either perpetuated or unaddressed by the subsequent American “revisionist” westerns that sought to challenge the tropes of their generic predecessors.

After being saturated by imported Hollywood films for upwards of fifty years, Australian film audiences in the early 1970s were eager to see themselves on screen. A growing sense of white national identity combined with government interest in the cinematic perpetuation of nationalism to produce films that aimed to both spread and create Australian myths and ideals. The country’s iconic outback quickly became one of the images that helped define it, and interactions with or survival within this often harsh environment were presented in multiple films

as the factor that formed a “true” Australian in this new wave era of films. In this way, this setting has much in common with the American west and its function in the western genre as the place where a distinctly settler colonial idea of progress and civilization “won” through a mythic taming of the landscape and its indigenous inhabitants. Films from both countries utilized their respective natural landscapes on screen to help form and perpetuate national identities. This is why it is critical, however, to analyze the differences present in the ways that the two countries cinematically render their apparently similar and similarly identity-forming landscapes.

Scholarship analyzing films set in the outback often focuses on their potential comparability to the American west in terms of how the two settings function ideologically. Film scholars such as Peter Limbrick and Emma Hamilton argue that what draws comparison between the American west and the Australian outback is a national identity formation via the land. Limbrick asserts that any film is a western if it explores “the negotiation of the tensions and contradictions of building ‘home’ in a disputed space [or] the demarcation of territory between European settlers and indigenous inhabitants” (73). Hamilton similarly asserts that in the outback and western cinematic settings “the landscape assumes a similar function”, viewing the narratives that explore settlement of “new” territory as a means of creating an identity apart from European roots as a major factor that allows many outback films to be classified as westerns (40). While these articles draw attention to significant and problematic reinforcements of European settler colonial hegemony via film, they do not address the alternatively intimidating portrayal of the outback that has often been presented in the Australian new wave. This overlooks the conversely ecological perspective these Australian new wave outback films present and instead assumes an interchangeable ideology of settler colonial hegemony onto both the west and the outback.

Even when scholarship looks toward the concrete visual details of the landscapes, the focus remains on the similarities. While addressing a variety of valuable topics including some of the ways the western's genre tropes have been repurposed to address Australia's history of racial violence, scholars such as Brian McFarlane, D. Bruno Starrs, Olivia Khoo and Peter Kirkpatrick still describe the two landscapes comparably. These articles help instill the aforementioned notions of a "shared frontier iconography" between the west and the outback through their pointing out of apparently similar visual details such as wide vistas, vast skies, harsh conditions, desert climate, and remote natural spaces not visibly populated with people and architecture. Consistently, these descriptions are glances at or evocations of the landscape with assumptions of similarity that leave unaddressed any exploration of the potentially different ways these landscapes have been presented cinematically. Even when more directly addressing the visual presentation of the outback landscape for his argument, J. Emmett Winn still does so through a focus on its apparent interchangeability with the west. Attributing the financial success of *Mad Max II* (George Miller, 1981) in the United States to the film's adoption of western genre conventions and images, Winn asserts "the mythic west portrayed here [in the outback town of Broken Hill] passes remarkably well for Hollywood's badlands" (3). While I am not analyzing *Mad Max II*, Broken Hill is a popular shooting location and where *Wake in Fright* was filmed. For Winn, the achievement of a western atmosphere through the on location outback shooting resonated with American male audience members who affirmed a tough hero in the era of Reagan. Although deftly critiquing the problematic nationalism that supported the positive reception of *Mad Max II* in the United States, by claiming its outback setting is interchangeable with those of the Hollywood westerns, Winn perpetuates the imprinting of American western

genre ideology toward the natural environment onto the outback landscape, leaving no room to identify alternative relationships to land.

These evocations of comparability even extend to studies not focusing on genre. Warwick Frost, for example, in an article studying film's impact on outback tourism, does not escape comparison when he states "The arid, sparsely populated Outback prompts comparisons with the similar landscapes of the American West. The Outback may appeal to Americans as a reminder of their vanished frontier" (719). This highlights how, regardless of a film's intentions in terms of genre, an outback setting will likely conjure various frontier associations. In an attempt to cleave the outback from these associations, I investigate the sense of vulnerability generated through an interaction with the outback landscape that is not present within the classical Hollywood or revisionist western's visualizations of the west.

To help analyze the vulnerability and dread that these Australian new wave outback films conjure through the landscape, I look to scholars of horror, slow cinema, and ecology and ecocinema. I investigate the differing cinematic presentations of the natural world in the Australian new wave outback films and American westerns spatially, through a focus on linear perspective, and temporally, through long takes and wide shots. Linear perspective, sometimes referred to as Renaissance perspective due to its ardent adoption by Italian Renaissance painters who strove to present space mathematically and therefore "accurately," contains a stable horizon line where parallel lines converge into one or more vanishing points. Composing an image this way is generally meant to position the viewing subject as an idealized master holding dominion over the world within that image. The vanishing points of the classic western help instill an inevitable progress toward a settler colonial dominion over the natural world. This can be contrasted with the vanishing points in *Wake in Fright*, which instead create a feeling of dread

more akin to Caetlin Benson-Allott's notion of "depthlessness" often found in horror films. Depthlessness creates a sense of dread that results from spectators having to confront their own triviality in the face of a void so vast that its end cannot be perceived by any human sense. The vanishing points in *Wake in Fright* exist in large part to similarly position the outback as a visually infinite threat that evokes stasis and vulnerability rather than any sense of human progress or mastery. Temporally, human movement presented in long takes and wide shots result in opposing presentations of this movement within outback and western spaces. Elena Gorfinkel claims that movement can highlight vulnerability, futility, and disorientation in slow cinema instead of a triumph over space as it often does in the western. I deploy Gorfinkel's analysis of human movement to read the impeded advancement and disorientation instigated by the natural world in *Gallipoli* as a visualization of temporalities that challenge linearity and concurrent notions of linear progress. This mobilization of long takes and wide shots is at odds with these techniques in the classic Hollywood western where, I argue, they strive to present the unfolding of linear progress amidst the natural world and the consequently inevitable arrival of settler colonial notions of civilization. Finally, I look to various scholars including Amitav Ghosh, Christophe Bonneuil & Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, Rob Nixon, and Daniel Belgrad to read these Australian films ecologically. These scholars have, through a focus on the fundamental interconnectedness and consequent constraints of a given ecosystem, helped me arrive at my conclusion of what I call the reciprocal shaping between humans and our ecosystems that is revealed in the Australian new wave outback film and repressed in the classic Hollywood and revisionist western.

To conceive of my selected Australian new wave outback films as subversions of human mastery among a shared "frontier" space is to read them as ecological texts that affirm an

acknowledgment of the natural world's participation in shaping our reality. By conflating the function and presentation of the two settings, scholars overlook this ecological approach and instead imprint the western's mythic and ideological taming of the land onto the outback landscape. My project alternatively emphasizes that these Australian films, through their presentation of the landscape as formidable challenges to human mastery and linear progress, can be read as reminders that it is not possible to behave and live above the influence of the natural world. In this way, I argue that these Australian new wave outback films implicitly affirm an interdependent relationship with the natural world as a viable alternative to the entrenched myths of a conquerable and perpetually abundant space there for the taming and taking. This distinction matters because, as various ecocinema scholars including Paula Willoquet-Maricondi, Salma Monani, Stephen Rust, and Deborah Carmichael emphasize, film impacts the way we think about the natural world and thus how we view ourselves in relation to it and, ultimately, how we treat it.

In what follows, I look to spatial and temporal relationships to landscape in the aforementioned Australian new wave outback films and compare these relationships to those in the American western in order to investigate what the films are affirming in terms of humans and our relationships with the natural world. In the first section I read the presentation of space via linear perspective in *Wake in Fright*, arguing that the technique's conventional usage is repurposed in this film in order to emphasize vulnerability in the face of a vast landscape. I then set *Wake in Fright* against linear perspective's more common use in westerns, analyzing *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946) and *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939) as examples of larger trends within the genre. In the second section I read temporal relationships to landscape through long takes and wide shots in *Gallipoli*, arguing that the film visualizes the outback landscape's

capacity to undermine linear progress. I then compare *Gallipoli*'s long takes and wide shots with the use of these techniques in *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953) in order to highlight the western's affirmation of linear notions of progress. In the third section, I analyze the American revisionist western's relationship to the natural world, arguing that despite its reputation as a challenge to the tropes of the western, it maintains the genre's anthropocentric use of the landscape as an iconic backdrop. This backdrop provides a coherent cinematic space where *other* elements of the western can be effectively commented upon and revised. This section ultimately highlights the endurance of the western's problematic relationship to landscape, and how the Australian new wave outback film's presentation of reciprocal shaping visualizes alternative relationships to the natural world.

## LINEAR PERSPECTIVE AND VULNERABILITY

On its surface, *Wake in Fright* creates an atmosphere of dread and human vulnerability through its presentation of the outback as, above all else, a threat. In this section I argue that *Wake in Fright* effectively reimagines the use of linear perspective and vanishing points in order to accomplish its goal of visualizing the outback's vastness as a static, austere, and infinite space that threatens a literal progress of movement and, with that, larger notions of human agency. Beyond the film's intentions, however, I also argue that this mobilization of vanishing points is ecological as it implies, through the intended purpose of creating via landscape a distinct sense of vulnerability and dread for the spectator, how profoundly the natural world is capable of shaping our experiences. While vanishing points help reveal this reciprocal shaping in *Wake in Fright*, this composition's use in classic westerns conversely represses this reciprocity in accordance with the overarching myths of the west as a space the taming of which was manageable, inevitable, and emblematic of the nation's overall linear progress toward modernity.

As mentioned in the introduction, linear perspective traditionally positions the viewing subject as holding dominion over an image. This is accomplished in the image through "the whole paradigm converg[ing] in one of the viewer's eyes, [making the viewer] central to the worldview established by [linear perspective]" (Steyerl 4-5). Hito Steyerl asserts that a space "defined by linear perspective is calculable, navigable, and predictable," and this overall visual stability and resolution provide impressions of linear time and, with that, a clear view of past and future and thus, progress (4). This mobilization of linear perspective is often found in the classic Hollywood western and is problematic through its instilling of visual notions of spatial mastery

for the film's characters and spectators and by leaning into a "constant" in American culture, where "Americans inherently believe things are better over the horizon" (Sickels 70). Films shape our cultural attitudes, and various ecocinema scholars agree that this includes our perceptions of the natural world. As Willoquet-Maricondi puts it, cinematic representations of the natural world "shape our perceptions of nature, perceptions that in turn inform and pattern our actions in relation to nature; our actions, in turn, shape nature by preserving ecosystems or by despoiling them" (7). Accordingly, when classic westerns naturalize an inevitable linear progress that culminates with and affirms the taming of the natural world, they are perpetuating anthropocentric perspectives where humanity is conceived as naturally holding dominion over the world and thus within its right to exploit seemingly abundant resources for the purpose of human utility. Conversely, I contend that the Australian new wave outback film's rather apprehensive relationship with its "shared frontier" space of the outback, while still problematic through its potential to inspire fear in relation to natural spaces, nonetheless reflects a hesitancy to stake anthropocentric claims of mastery over the natural world.

*Wake in Fright* strives to present the outback in a visually threatening manner. The selection of a particular natural landscape in which to shoot a film renders that space a mediated element through, among other factors, what is included in the frame and what is left out. The outback is informally defined as the arid interior regions of Australia, and it comprises the bulk of the country with "all five mainland states, plus the Northern Territory, contain[ing] tourism regions claiming the outback in their destination branding" (Frost 709). The outback is thus an incredibly diverse space in terms of its visual topographic detail, so it is important to consider which part of it is chosen for the setting of a particular film and how this setting is presented. For instance, it is clear that when *Wake in Fright* emphasizes the most arid, vast, and austere tracts of

outback, that it is positioning this setting as the threatening antithesis to the developed, bustling, coastal city of Sydney where the main character and emblem of middle-class civility, John, is ultimately hoping to arrive.

While *Wake in Fright*'s isolated, desert landscapes may prompt comparison with the west's "violent frontier", the film attributes the ultimate threat to the landscape rather than, as the western is wont to do, those existing within it (Rofe 263). While classic Hollywood westerns mobilize linear perspective to present the natural world as inevitably conquerable yet perpetually abundant in films like *Stagecoach* or *My Darling Clementine*, *Wake in Fright* reimagines this composition's conventional usage to instead emphasize human vulnerability in the face of a landscape. While analyzing the way a space can create a sense of dread, Caetlin Benson-Allott asserts that vanishing points are capable of creating "a sensation of inevitable submersion and submission...draw[ing] its spectators into horror as a spatial experience" (272). *Wake in Fright*'s opening shot strives, in large part through vanishing points, to create this spatial horror, or what Benson-Allott terms "depthlessness." For Benson-Allott, "physical voids and corresponding impressions on depthlessness horrify [the spectator confronting them] with his or her human triviality and threaten[ing] human subjectivity" (269). *Wake in Fright*'s tension relies on the audience's spatial understanding of the vast and isolated nature of its outback setting and perceiving it as threatening and, as John sees it, worthy of a desire to escape from or avoid altogether.

The film begins with a stationary shot of a stark desert landscape, devoid of human presence beyond a shack, power lines, and a train track that cuts precariously through the rugged terrain. Moments later, the camera begins to pan and eventually completes a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree-rotation. The natural landscape in every direction along this axis is almost entirely

featureless beyond sand and scrub that tops out at roughly knee or waist-height. This, combined with the high angle of the shot, provides an unimpeded view of the horizon for miles, and all that appears in the far distance of this expanse is the occasional low hill and a languorous dust devil. During this pan, at roughly the opposite direction from where the shot began, the audience's gaze follows along the train track as it seems to cut infinitely into the horizon, and this is the first of two vanishing points established during the full rotation. The pan ultimately comes to rest where it began, effectively emphasizing this environment's apparent isolation and open exposure in every direction. The framing, having shifted slightly, places the camera so it is now perfectly balanced between two parallel lines. These lines, created by the train track and a temporary road, run alongside one another until eventually converging at the horizon, providing the illusion that this particular environment extends infinitely. This illusion especially has the capacity to threaten the viewer and their subjectivity, as the reach of this desert extends beyond our visual perception. It is also notable that the train track is where our eyeline is meant to follow, for its place in the "grand linear narrative of progress...the arrival of the railway marks the irresistible extension of rationalized and rationalizing modernity into the pathless wilderness" (Langford 28). In *Wake in Fright*'s opening shot, the train track cuts through this seemingly infinite landscape like a lifeline, providing the only visible ticket out of this otherwise empty, static space. In this way, *Wake in Fright* seems to, again on the surface, view the railway as civilization's necessary answer to a threatening natural world.

Although *Wake in Fright* is still problematically presenting a diverse natural space that was and remains capable of sustaining human populations (look to the longevity of indigenous populations leading up to colonization, for example) as a threat to be feared and avoided, I argue that the film is implicitly taking an ecological stance through its acknowledgment of a reciprocal

shaping between humans and the natural world. Visually, the train tracks cutting through an otherwise overwhelming and “pathless” wilderness expose an inherent vulnerability present in relying on this mode of transport. Again presented as something of a lifeline within an otherwise infinite desolation, if this train fails to arrive, what then? *Wake in Fright*’s expressed stance implies that the humans waiting for it would be stuck, immobilized by the sheer distance to the next stop. This again, however, concedes a significant lack of human control over the natural world that, where present at all, such as in the form of a railway, is precarious at best. In this way, *Wake in Fright* undermines the notions of human mastery found within the classic Hollywood western by presenting the natural world as a space capable of profoundly influencing human experience.

Where *Wake in Fright* utilizes vanishing points to imply human vulnerability in the presence of a vast landscape, John Ford mobilizes this composition in two canonical western texts, *Stagecoach* and *My Darling Clementine*, to very different ends. Deborah Carmichael notes, “Typically, John Ford’s westerns are discussed as optimistic celebrations of the ultimate triumph of American settlement conquering the natural world” and his use of linear perspective to present the natural world reflects this (14). Ford utilizes linear perspective in two near-identical frames in films released seven years apart: at the outset of the treacherous but thrilling adventure in *Stagecoach* and then in the final shot of *My Darling Clementine*. Both are extreme wide shots of Arizona’s Monument Valley that show human figures moving along with the audience’s eyeline toward the frame’s central vanishing point and, ideologically, progressing toward the clear future that Steyerl attributes to linear perspective. In his review of *My Darling Clementine*, film critic Roger Ebert states that by the film’s end “the law wins, and the last shot features the new schoolmarm – who represents the arrival of civilization” (304). As *Clementine* the schoolmarm

watches on, Wyatt and Morgan Earp, the aforementioned prevailing enforcers of the law in Tombstone, leave the town and continue their journey west. While Ebert attributes his observations of this “arrival” of civilization to the narrative level, the film’s affirmation of this arrival, as well as its ideological progression toward a clear future, are visually emphasized by the framing of the final shot. In Ford’s hands, Clementine-as-figure of civilization, as well as the audience, are positioned through linear perspective as the masters in this worldview, and the civilizing of the natural world is presented as a linear, inevitable force that progressed westward, town to town, until the America as we know it today was formed.

This sense of visible and consequently, ideological, progress among an as-yet-untamed landscape is at odds with the stasis of *Wake in Fright*’s opening shot as well as its larger narrative arc. In Ford’s westerns, where humans move clearly from here to there, past to future, along the parallel lines making up the frame’s linear perspective, in *Wake in Fright*’s opening shot there are no people to be found. The lack of human movement combines with the unused train track to give the space presented an utterly static atmosphere. It is significant on a narrative level as well that John, up against the vast landscape, ultimately never arrives at his intended destination of Sydney, even with the railway as a form of “rational modernity” at his disposal. John is figuratively stuck in the small, remote outback town of Tiboonda, as he has a contract to teach in the area’s one-room schoolhouse in return for the state paying his university tuition. Attempting to get to Sydney for the holidays, John ends up losing his money and stuck in another outback town, Bundanyabba, which is similarly surrounded by the vast desert. Throughout the film, John fantasizes about relaxing with his girlfriend on the beaches near Sydney, where the sunshine is welcome rather than oppressive. However, either by foot, automobile, or train, John is never able to come close to traversing the distance required to make his fantasy come to

fruition. Unable to cope with his inability to make significant progress away from what he and the film view as a threatening landscape and toward the idyllic coast, John ultimately attempts suicide. When he accidentally survives, John numbly returns to the exact spot from which he came: Tiboonda. The final shot visually emphasizes the stasis present in the narrative, as it is an exact replication of where the camera came to rest at the culmination of the opening pan. This bookending of the film with shots that, through vanishing points, emphasize the outback's austerity as infinite, effectively positions the natural world as the instigator of John's downfall through its capacity to undermine his agency and keep him in the last place he wants to be.

In another use of linear perspective in classic westerns that opposes *Wake in Fright's* visualization of an untamed space as infinitely static and empty, the identifiable and stable horizons of this composition are crucial in visualizing the myth of the west as a perpetual source of abundance and excitement. As Robert C. Sickels points out, John Ford's westerns "play off the belief in the collective American imagination that the west...is an agricultural cornucopia, an eternal land of milk and honey" (63). The linear perspective framing in *Stagecoach* that closely resembles the final shot of *My Darling Clementine* occurs after most of the assorted strangers are gathered onto the stagecoach and the adventure commences. As the stagecoach pulls away from town and into the vast, more sparsely populated "apache territory," the tone of the film is adventurous and light. Rather than the expanse of land visible in this wide shot being presented as threatening or static, a cheerful score combines with the forward progress of the stagecoach along the central parallel lines toward the horizon to instead render the land visually navigable and full of future possibility. The framing of human figures progressing toward a vanishing point far into the western landscape is used throughout *Stagecoach* and can be found in many classic Hollywood westerns in general. This consistently visualizes Sickel's view of something "better"

over the horizon, as the land leading up to the vanishing point is calculable and manageable, and whatever lies beyond this stable horizon adventurously beckons the western travelers due to the visual calculability of the land that has come before. Essentially, the linear perspective in these frames promises a clearly achievable and abundant future.

While it may seem paradoxical that a film where a main character has their agency challenged and is driven to attempt suicide in the face of an overwhelming landscape could be interpreted as ecological, I am arguing this point precisely. Whereas classic westerns, through techniques such as the aforementioned use of linear perspective, affirm the conquest of the natural world and imagine it as a catalyst in the creation of American national identity, *Wake in Fright* alternatively displays how the natural world is capable of directly, and sometimes harshly, shaping our reality as humans. Through its presentation of the land with such a threatening capacity, *Wake in Fright* denies the romanticized notions of an inevitable, and thus justified, conquest at the hands of white settlers presented in the classic western. Instead, its intimidating portrayal of the natural world emphasizes how a given environment can “waylay...its individual inhabitants at unpredictable intervals and in the most improbable ways” (Ghosh 20). In the above quote, Amitav Ghosh is describing the reality we on earth all face, particularly with regard to what some scientists and scholars advocate calling the “Anthropocene,” or the current geologic epoch. Following the relative climatic stability of the Holocene, the Anthropocene began, roughly, with the Industrial Revolution and is meant to signal the era when human activity began to have global implications, or when our “imprint...has now become so large and active that it rivals some of the great forces of nature in its impact on the functioning of the earth system” (Steffen 842). During the Anthropocene’s incredibly brief tenure, there has been, among many other disruptions, measurable climate change, transformations in water, nitrogen, and phosphate

cycles, and massive degradation in biodiversity. In summation, the Anthropocene “is our own model of development, our own industrial modernity, which, having claimed to free itself from the limits of the planet, is striking earth like a boomerang” (Bonneuil & Fressoz 18). Naming a geologic epoch after human-instigated disruptions reflects ecological thinking and its acknowledgment of the systemic interconnectedness of the planet’s various ecosystems. This interconnectedness implies a constant state of flux that necessarily renders the natural world impossible to tame. The classic Hollywood western, however, valorizes the taming of the west and presents it as a step in the inevitable progression of settler colonial notions of civilization. Conversely, *Wake in Fright*’s relationship with the natural world is ecological. Set in the present day, the film nonetheless acknowledges the way the vast outback is capable of “waylaying” the individuals within it, even after it has already been “tamed” through decades of European settlement. This ultimately serves as a reminder that, no matter how much we perceive ourselves as having tamed the natural world or how necessary or inevitable we are told this taming is through myths like those of the western, we are still within an interconnected ecosystem that is capable of shaping our experiences.

Although the presentation of landscape in westerns and Australian films may only seem significant to film scholars, it should interest anyone concerned with the perpetuation of problematic attitudes and, consequently, behavior toward our planetary home. As mentioned at the outset, films shape our cultural attitudes. So, when westerns consistently relegate the natural world to a stage where the land’s inevitable conquest is played out by the rugged individuals who would come to define the United States as a modern civilization, the genre is devaluing the worth of the natural world as it stood prior to the arrival of European settlement. This perception of the west has enduring consequences, as the word “frontier...continues to represent notions of

conquest, progress, and individual achievement. [Frontier] rhetoric resonates as the key definition of what it is to be an American *even today*” (Carmichael, 3, emphasis added). *My Darling Clementine*’s presentation of the arrival of European conceptions of civilization as inevitable implies to its audience that domination, in the form of the manipulation or exploitation of its natural resources or the genocide of its indigenous inhabitants and their relationships to the land, was the only way the settlement of the west could have proceeded. This aids in our culture’s difficulty adopting or imagining alternative relationships to the natural world that do not measure the land’s utility through its ability to maintain current levels of profit and comfort. *Stagecoach*’s presentation of western space as perpetually abundant implies to its audience that there is always “more” to be provided over the horizon, effectively sustaining our culture’s rather reckless utilization of resources. Looking back to extant scholarship, the conflating of the west and outback’s landscape as one of “shared frontier iconography”, then, risks imprinting all of these potentially negative consequences onto the outback landscape and simultaneously misses comparatively ecological relationships with the natural world such as the reciprocal shaping experienced in *Wake in Fright*.

## LONG TAKES AND EXPANDED TEMPORALITIES

Both *Wake in Fright* and *Gallipoli* emphasize a lack of progress in the midst of a vast landscape. While the outback's vastness is positioned through vanishing points as a seemingly infinite threat capable of hindering human agency in *Wake in Fright*, *Gallipoli*'s outback sequence utilizes long takes and wide shots to help visualize a temporal indeterminacy that subverts linear notions of progress. Through its emphasizing of the natural world's capacity to render literal human progress as static or cyclical, *Gallipoli* contributes to an entrenched tradition within the Australian new wave outback film (along with *Wake in Fright* and *Gallipoli* see *Walkabout*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Little Boy Lost*, *Long Weekend*, *Mad Max II*, *Razorback*, or *A Cry in the Dark*) where characters become stuck or lost in the outback. This is in contrast to classic Hollywood westerns where it is common for the natural space presented in a shot to be traversed within the duration of the take, often with characters arriving at an intended destination at the take's culmination. In this way, classic westerns again repress the reciprocal shaping between humans and their ecosystems while the Australian new wave outback film reveals it.

I argue that the indeterminacy of *Gallipoli*'s long takes and wide shots visualize "expanded temporal vista[s]" that challenge linearity and concurrent notions of linear progress (Irvine 168). When the outback's vastness is presented as directly impeding or complicating human progress in *Gallipoli*, the film visualizes an expanded or alternative temporality dictated by the landscape as opposed to one dictated by human behavior. This expanded temporality can be contrasted with long takes found in classic westerns, including *Shane* and *Stagecoach*, where human movement plays out, unimpeded by landscape, and culminates in "real time." The real

time of these long takes strives to present an unmediated duration that, I contend, affirms an inevitability of linear progress and effectively visualizes “America’s perception of itself as a young, forward-thrusting nation that claims to flourish by looking ahead rather than behind” (Rob Nixon, 35). As Nixon argues, it is this disjunction between our human-scale and thus, anthropocentric, conception of temporality and the “deep time” of environmental processes that keeps us from more proficiently facing and handling environmental crises. I argue that *Gallipoli*’s major outback sequence, through its emphasis on how the outback has the capacity to undermine clear notions of linear progress, presents an ecological, alternative temporal relationship to landscape more akin to the deep time of geology than the “real time” of human movement and progress found in the classic western.

The presentation of the land in classic westerns as unable to impede the literal progress of people and the ideological notions of a progressing civilization they brought with them is at odds with the presentation of the outback in *Gallipoli*. *Gallipoli* is generally analyzed in terms of the way it contributes to the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) legend, and the significance of this legend in broader Australian culture. As Neil Rattigan explains, “Despite the legal status of Australia as one nation since federation some fourteen years previously, Australia, in cultural perception, only gained nationhood through the actions of its soldiers in World War I” (30). So, while the film celebrates and mythologizes Australia’s entrance onto the world stage through the bravery of its soldiers, there remains an overlooked ecological stance once the film transitions into its outback setting.

*Gallipoli* is largely set away from the outback, with over half of it not even taking place in Australia, so it is notable that the film nonetheless makes an effort to acknowledge the outback’s vastness and its influence over its heroic characters and their capacity to make

progress. In the main outback sequence, Archy and Frank are on the way to Perth to join the war effort, but they hop the wrong train and, after trying to walk to another train station, get lost in the middle of a particularly dry and empty section of outback. After walking in circles, they miraculously come across a man on a camel that is able to point them in the right direction. Leading up to this scene, the film has adhered to a more classical style of framing and editing. Wide shots are used sparingly and the takes are of more standard length with editing that utilizes techniques like shot reverse shots and matches on action in order to maintain a coherent, continuous, linear spatiotemporal logic. With regards to shot length, for example, in the first of the two scenes set in the outback the average shot length is under five seconds, with the longest take lasting ten seconds. In this scene, Archy is running through familiar territory near his family's ranch, making this area not as isolated and overwhelming as what he and Frank encounter later. This framing and shot length is noticeably at odds with the second outback sequence.

In this second outback sequence, long takes are utilized to largely negate the men's movement and wide shots function to frame them as overwhelmed by the vast landscape and present their movement as cyclical if not futile. These alterations in visual style between *Gallipoli's* outback sequences are obviously deliberate on the part of the filmmakers, and I read the surface intentions of the film in accordance with Australian film historian Neil Rattigan. Rattigan asserts that "the prototype for the typical Australian was the bush worker... The bush conditions beyond the coast and the towns were harsh and inhospitable, lonely and remote. The ability merely to survive in these conditions led to the characteristics of the legendary bushman" (27). For Rattigan too, *Gallipoli* in particular is "unable to desert the proposition that the 'true' Australian is the bushman", and the film strives to teach this to its audience (135). So, again on

the surface, *Gallipoli* presents the outback as vast and intimidating, an encounter with which functions as a rite of passage that helps form the mythic “true” Australian. While undeniably a positive step away from the linear progress leading to the inevitable taming of the natural world presented in classic westerns, *Gallipoli*’s intended presentation of the natural world, as well as critical reflection upon this film and the larger Australian new wave outback film, remains anthropocentric through the landscape’s function being explored in relation to its place within a white national identity. Instead, I argue that *Gallipoli*’s presentation of the outback in this sequence visualizes expanded temporal vistas in relation to landscape and a shared reciprocity of influence between humans and the natural world. I also read *Gallipoli*’s expanded temporal vistas as ecological through their playing out beyond human perception and thus serving as an antithesis to the “real time” progress of human-dictated linearity found in the classic western.

There are multiple long takes in this sequence, but three function to emphatically give a sense of stasis to the men’s movement. The first two long takes are connected by a dissolve, lasting for a total duration of thirty seconds. In a technique that is often replicated in Australian films and as recently as *Sweet Country* (Warwick Thornton, 2017) to emphasize the vastness of the outback and the consequent disorientation for the European-descended Australians attempting to navigate it, human figures move away from a static camera and, via a dissolve, get further and further away. Once in the outback, Archy and Frank walk toward a horizon that, from their limited perspective, is blank apart from the fata morgana emanating from the desiccated landscape. As they walk, the camera lingers on them for twenty seconds before there is a dissolve to the exact same composition, but with the two men a few hundred yards further along. The dissolve effectively signals a passage of time, but that the human figures still remain within the frame shows they have not made it very far or how long, exactly, it has taken them to get

there. This renders a sense of progress inconclusive and, with no potential destination within their sight, rather futile. This indeterminacy establishes the tone for this sequence and is further visualized in another long take and a revealing wide shot.

In this long take, As Archy and Frank continue to trudge along within the vastness, Archy is at the left end of the frame while Frank is on the right. The camera pans along with them so they remain fixed in the same part of the frame for the duration of the twenty-four second take. The landscape surrounding them in this shot is featureless beyond a demarcation of ground and sky and thus provides no frame of reference for the men or the viewer of the distance the men have covered. The camera movement combines with the vacant landscape to again subvert a clear notion of linear progress. The men's inability to make any sense of progress within this landscape through the movement playing out during these long takes is at odds with the romanticized orientation to landscape Elena Gorfinkel identifies in many westerns, where "the representation of westward expansion [is] a magisterial exercise in a mastery of, and triumphalist claim to, space" (128). While Gorfinkel analyzes *Meek's Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2010) as a western that dispenses with these romantic uses of landscape and instead focuses on the drudgery and risk associated with westward travel, the human movement that she identifies as a way of undermining this romanticism is present thirty years earlier in *Gallipoli*, though less self-consciously so. Gorfinkel notes of *Meek's Cutoff*, "The expedition's transit seems like a maddening loop, without a capacity to progress... The protagonist's walks often highlight the temporality of blocked advancement [and] the futility of progress" (126 - 131). A sense of "movement without advancement" is accomplished in *Meek's Cutoff*, just like in *Gallipoli*, through detached wide shots, long takes, and camera movement that keeps the characters fixed in the same section of the frame even while moving. In these ways, both *Meek's Cutoff* and, I

argue, *Gallipoli*, subvert the romanticized notions that these vast landscapes serve the anthropocentric purpose of forming mythic, idealized national identities through a human's ability to overcome any difficulties presented by the natural world.

This “maddening loop” or cyclical nature of Archy and Frank's movement is similarly attributed to the natural world when it is more literally visualized in an extreme wide shot. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975), also directed by Peter Weir and released five years earlier, characters visit Hanging Rock which, having formed millions of years ago, one teacher remarks is still “quite young, geologically speaking.” Once at the rock's base, all of the characters' pocket watches stop working, and the previous remark about geologic time combines with the ceasing of anthropocentric and strictly linear “real time” to emphasize the fleeting nature of human life in comparison to the processes of the natural world. When one of the students says Hanging Rock has been “waiting a million years, just for us” and later becomes mesmerized by and disappears within the labyrinthine bowels of the rock, the film's discomfort with an exclusively “real time” understanding of the world is apparent. In what I read as a clear nod to *Picnic at Hanging Rock*'s recognition of a deep time outside of human perception, Archy's pocket watch fails him as he tries to use it to navigate the vastness of the outback which, again to these white descendants of European colonialists, becomes disorienting. Archy had been using his watch as something of a sundial, but when the weather becomes cloudy, he and Frank consequently become hopelessly lost. In one of the widest shots of the film, it becomes apparent that the men have unwittingly turned and are walking back the way they came as their footsteps in the sand visualize a horseshoe pattern. In this way, the landscape and its lack of identifiable markers is ultimately what causes the men to lose their bearings and thus inhibits their ability to progress linearly.

This wide shot and overall sequence visualizes both how the natural world has the capacity to shape our experiences and a static or cyclical temporality at odds with linear notions of progress. In these ways, *Gallipoli* highlights how, in interacting with the natural world, we experience the results and consequences of our past actions, again undermining linear notions of “real time” and revealing a reciprocal shaping between humans and our ecosystems. In both *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Gallipoli*, Weir is aware of and interested in our fleeting and necessarily vulnerable relationships to nature’s implacable processes. And although he often, like many Australian new wave filmmakers, visualizes a threatening natural world, I read these relationships with the natural world as much more open to social anthropologist Richard Irvine’s notions of deep time and the aforementioned reciprocal shaping between humans and the natural world. According to Irvine, “Environmental change, and the place of humanity in the story of that change, can only be understood as a long-term process; this means thinking not only about present appearances, but recognizing that what we see and experience in the present is the product of past processes, and that present day certainties cannot simply be projected into the future” (158). This conception of time and a reciprocal shaping, while frequently revealed in the Australian new wave outback film, is repressed in the classic western through long takes and the “forward-thrusting” notions of an inevitable, linear progress they visualize.

During the classic Hollywood era the average shot length was longer than it is today, but in *Shane* there are two long takes that stand out. The overall rhythm of the film is made up of takes somewhere between the seven and eleven second mark, with most scenes having just one or two takes lasting up to twenty or, more rarely, thirty seconds. So, *Shane* certainly does not have the rhythm of a Michael Bay film, but takes of eighty-two and fifty-four seconds caught my attention and prompted me to look deeper. I argue that both of these takes, during which a large

natural space is traversed, highlight an ease of linear movement that functions to present the west as a manageable, navigable space. As a consequence of this presentation, the west is rendered inevitably subject to a transformation that is concomitant with the arrival of settler colonial notions of civilization. Adam O'Brien highlights the western's anthropocentric mobilization of natural settings, asserting that, "For *Shane*, and to no small extent for the western as a genre, the land...is meaningful to the extent that it can be overcome" (88). While O'Brien attributes a noticeable sense of inevitability to this overcoming of the west to a scene where Shane and settler Joe Starrett work together to uproot a stubborn stump that represents a final vestige of wilderness on Joe's otherwise tamed homestead, I see this inevitability also visualized through the mastery of space that plays out within the duration of the aforementioned long takes.

Not only are both takes noticeably long, their composition and, more importantly, presentation of linear movement, are incredibly similar. The fifty-four second take emphasizes linear progress amidst the natural world again in what the film presents as "real time." In this take, Swede, another settler in the area, approaches the Starrett homestead from afar. There is a wide shot before the cut to the long take that shows Swede moving across an expanse of valley below a large mountain range. This first shot highlights the distance that Swede has already crossed. There is then a cut to the long take where, at first, Shane and Joe are occupying the immediate foreground. Once they realize that Swede is yelling to them that another settler has been murdered, they rush out of the frame. Once Shane and Joe have left the frame, the shot lingers for thirty-one seconds as two horses stand idly in the foreground while Swede approaches from far in the background. As O'Brien notes, *Shane* is a "meticulously framed film", so I contend the lack of action in the foreground functions to encourage the spectator to watch Swede complete his journey across the expansive field in "real time" (90).

Long takes composed this way are, as I have mentioned, not one-offs but can rather be found elsewhere in *Shane* as well as other classic Hollywood westerns. *Shane*'s eighty-two second take similarly highlights another settler, Ernie, and his linear progress toward and ultimate arrival at the Starret homestead amid a vast tract of western landscape. Similar linear progress through natural space occurs twice in *Stagecoach*, each when the stagecoach and its passengers arrive safely from what the film positions as "wilderness" and cross the threshold into a town. While these takes are not as long as those in *Shane*, they nonetheless stand out in length and purpose. In both takes, of twenty-eight and twenty-three seconds, the only action is the stagecoach pulling into a town again in "real time." Regardless of shot length, it is a common visual technique in classic westerns to have characters traverse all or a significant portion of the natural landscape visible within the frame during the duration of the take, often ultimately arriving to a deliberate destination. Unlike the Australian new wave outback film, where notions of linear progress are directly complicated by the natural world, the western's mobilization of a clear linear progress helps instill the genre's presentation of the west as a space the taming of which was affirmed as the inevitable and necessary conclusion once the capable and civilized settlers like Ernie, Swede, and the Starrett's brought their European notions of civilization to it.

The classic western's perceptions of time as rooted in a forward-thrusting present has helped create our culture's inability to look back and learn from the ways our past behavior has helped create the environmental crises we are currently living through and continuing to compound. To return to Deborah Carmichael from section one, the word "frontier...continues to represent notions of conquest, progress, and individual achievement. [Froniter] rhetoric resonates as the key definition of what it is to be an American *even today*" (3, emphasis added). This affirmation of an inevitable progress toward conquest and the repression of shared reciprocity

between humans and the natural world have resulted in the antithesis of the triumph of civilization. Instead, as Jennifer Fay points out, “In the attempts to master nature...we are now more than ever subject to a new nature we cannot master...Human progress...threaten[s] to deliver us not to a state of enlightened prosperity, but to a fragile earth order” (2 - 15). In contrast to this relationship that subordinates the natural world to our own eventual detriment, the Australian new wave outback films provide consistent reminders of the natural world’s ceaseless capability to participate in the shaping of our lived realities.

## THE WESTERN'S ENDURING RELATIONSHIP TO LAND

The previous two sections have highlighted how, through spatial and temporal relationships with the land, the Australian new wave outback film reveals a reciprocal shaping between humans and the ecosystems we inhabit while the classic Hollywood western represses it. In this section, I set the Australian new wave outback film's ecological perspectives against the "revisionist" westerns that were being released contemporaneously with the Australian new wave and are perceived as critical of the western genre. In Australian films as diverse as *Wake in Fright*, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and *Gallipoli*, the natural world consistently overwhelms, effectively shaping the trajectory of a sequence or an entire film and often putting into question a character's agency and effectively highlighting the limits to their mastery over the natural world. Conversely, in the revisionist western the landscape functions not as a site of critique itself but is instead relegated to an iconic backdrop that provides a coherent cinematic space where *other* elements of the western, such as the prominent characters, ideology, and narrative, could be effectively commented on and revised. In this way, I argue that these films, while accomplishing many significant critiques, do not "revise" the genre's anthropocentric relationship to the natural world.

The inherent myths of the western began to seem more outdated, romanticized, or problematic amidst the historic struggles in the United States during the 1960s. The struggle for civil and women's rights, the rise of the counterculture, and the Vietnam War elicited "a response in the shape of generic interventions that [sought] to interrogate and critically re-shape the western" (Langford 31). Out of this turbulent context arose the revisionist western, and

multiple critics note that a major difference in these westerns is the types of characters being portrayed on screen. The cowboy image and masculinity in general are reconstructed in films such as *Ride in the Whirlwind* (Monte Hellman, 1966) *The Wild Bunch* (Sam Peckinpah, 1969), *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1970) and *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970), where the leading men are, respectively, good guys turned bad, nihilistic, gentle and foolish, and naively unprepared for life out west. Mia Mask believes *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Robert Altman, 1971) “stands out as a classic example of generic revisionism, particularly with respect to gender roles [and] sexuality” and I would note that *Soldier Blue* and *The Hired Hand* (Peter Fonda, 1971) also have authoritative and complex female characters that revise women’s roles in classic westerns (54). Along with these representational revisions is the portrayal of indigenous Americans, where there is “an aggressive reversal of the genre’s traditional (white supremacist) narrative subject position, fostering an identification with Native American culture and damning white settler culture as genocidal” (Langford 32).

Along with revisions in characters, there are the “mud and rags” or “tell it as it was” westerns where daily life on the frontier is demanding or tedious and the conditions of towns or camps are filthy and unvarnished. In these films, “the notion of a western ‘code’ or value system is a bleak joke” and the violence is often random (33). While the significance of these revisions and the subsequent analysis of them are not in question, I go to these lengths to describe the established patterns of the revisionist western to point out the natural world’s continued relegation to the aforementioned representational and ideological revisions in both the films themselves and the academic analysis of this subgenre. While the “mud and rags” revisionist westerns begin to acknowledge the less romanticized realities of the western environment, there is no pattern of reciprocal shaping where the landscape has the capacity to overwhelm or directly

impact the character's agency. In these ways, the revisions fail to consistently transform the genre's problematic relationship to the natural world.

Even *Jeremiah Johnson* (Sydney Pollack, 1972), a revisionist western viewed by many scholars as a film with environmental themes maintains, I argue, an anthropocentric relationship to landscape. Ecocritical scholar Adam O'Brien, for example, views the film as "critical of the [western's] presumption of (or fascination with) environmental mastery by offering a profoundly sympathetic view of characters who concede the impossibility of such mastery" (89).

Conversely, I see a film that perpetuates the landscape's anthropocentric function as a proving ground or space of rejuvenation for rugged men like Jeremiah. The natural world impacts Jeremiah only insofar as each dangerous experience toughens him up and prepares him for the next challenge. And when the natural world is not dangerous, its sublime separateness from the populated civilizations down the mountain functions to rejuvenate Jeremiah and the others like him who light out for the west to, as the film's theme song whispers enticingly, "forget the troubles he knew." It is telling that near the film's end, Jeremiah, gazing upon a rugged, mountainous landscape, says he may ride on to Canada where he "hears there's land there that no man has ever seen." This romanticizing of the land presents it as passive, existing for the sake of being "seen" and, inevitably, consumed by those brave enough to "discover" it.

*Jeremiah Johnson's* visual presentation of movement as a magisterial exercise in freedom and expansion also remains in accordance with the classic western. In a visual motif that occurs three times, the camera lifts triumphantly upward on a crane as Jeremiah rides through a stunning landscape. This camera movement emphasizes his advancement within and toward a sublime landscape that majestically beckons its discovery and exploration. This is in contrast to the distance and stasis emphasized in *Wake in Fright* and the disorienting vastness in *Gallipoli* that

both films attribute to the overwhelming landscape. The overall vulnerability visualized in these Australian films is, again, ecological through its acknowledgment of the natural world's capacity to profoundly shape our experiences. This ecological stance is at odds with both *Jeremiah Johnson*'s romanticizing of the landscape as a sublime proving ground idly awaiting our taming of it and the larger revisionist western's relegating of it to an iconic backdrop while human behavior plays out center stage.

For these reasons, I argue that the revisionist western does not reflect a shift to the type of thinking that was driving the burgeoning environmental movement. As Lester D. Friedman notes, "the legacy of the seventies...was the necessity for Americans to come to terms with limits on a personal, communal, and global level" (7). Daniel Belgrad also notes this shift specifically for ecology, where "the 'new ecology' that emerged...envisioned nature as...an evolving, self-regulating system...that placed constraints on the behaviors of its various parts" (20). Films, again, influence our perspectives on the natural world. Therefore, it is significant, especially for those films set in what is taken as a sublime wilderness because many people will never experience these places in person, that the westerns that sought to directly revise the genre did not exhibit a more ecological stance. This relegating of the natural world reflects how entrenched these relationships of exploitation or renewal are within our culture as well as how we can look to the more ecological texts of the Australian new wave outback film as guides toward alternative relationships to the natural world that acknowledge the limits of our mastery and our consequent vulnerability with regard to the natural world's constraints.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has highlighted some of the ways the Australian new wave outback film reveals the natural world's capacity to profoundly shape our lived realities as humans. This shaping between humans and our ecosystems has always in some way been reciprocal, but only recently, and within a nearly imperceptible amount of time with regard to Earth's existence, has our behavior directly, and often negatively, shaped global processes. This desire to radically reconstruct the ecosystems in which we live is attributable to a perhaps innumerable number of factors, but in these pages I have strove to highlight one film genre's contribution to our capacity to avoid alternative ways of living or, just as often, to deny the necessity for these alternatives in the first place. I argue that the Australian new wave outback film can conversely serve to remind us of our capacity for vulnerability with regard to the natural world. The visualizations of vulnerability in films like *Wake in Fright* and *Gallipoli* are not signs of weakness, but humble and necessary recognitions of the limits of our control among a natural world that actively participates in the shaping of our reality. Scholarship surrounding the outback that instead draws comparison to the American west risks imprinting the myths of the western onto another landscape and thus perpetuating anthropocentric perceptions and utilizations of the natural world.

Someone struggling to grasp how the natural world or a natural phenomenon can radically alter their life, need only look to 2020 and 2021. While the COVID-19 pandemic is not a crisis of climate, it is a frighteningly appropriate example of how the natural world can, to return to a quote from Amitav Ghosh, "waylay...its individual inhabitants at unpredictable intervals and in the most improbable ways" (20). From Texas freezing over to consistent record-

breaking wildfires and floods in multiple countries, the list of what can qualify as improbable seems to shrink all the time. So, I see the Australian new wave outback film as an urge to acknowledge the myth of our capacity to tame the natural world, and to accordingly reconsider the value of any endeavor. Instead of striving to maintain the status quo while we are increasingly enveloped in the consequences of doing so, we must start deeply considering how our actions are directly shaping the boomerang that will inevitably return and shape us. A way to do this is to reevaluate or deny the myths, such as those that form the American western, that naturalize this status quo “even today” (Carmichael 3), and instead make room for the multitude of voices and perspectives on the natural world that have been historically and strategically repressed and erased for the sake of maintaining these myths.

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