

Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* sent four adolescent girls to the edge, returning two. Roger Ebert described Peter Weir's 1975 adaptation of the novel as 'a film of haunting mystery and buried sexual hysteria'ⁱ. The call is heard on Saint Valentines day, summoning a group of adolescent girls, hearts throbbing beneath white lace, towards a peak from which there is no return. The pull of the edge is unspoken, unexplained. No one was ever certain what happened out there but it was strange.

Street Machine Magazine's glib headline pun on the classic mystery - Picnic at Fanging Rock – is an easy joke that veneers a deeper similarity. Change those girls to boys, replace the lace with a sleek cage of metal, paint and grease, hurtle them towards another climactic oblivion and watch them disappear into a cloud of smoke. Re-positioning the headline, Casey Ayres unites it once again with a landscape rich with secrets and strangeness. He moves machismo into nebulous territory.

Glen Fuller, in his examination of 'hoon' culture and its mass reception, traces the etymology of the Australianism to Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* of 1938. Herbet describes a hoon as being "that sort of flash person who fangs their car around for amusement."ⁱⁱ The origins of 'fang' as a verb, as it is used here, are harder to trace. One weaker suggestion is that the word is a modification of racing car champion Juan Manuel Fangio's surname. In the tradition of strine, 'Fanging' has multiple meanings: it either refers to excessive speed, or excessive desire.

Fuller matches the casual hyperbole of the modified car magazine to its rival, what he describes as a 'moral panic' that reaches fever pitch in mass media and is usually followed by legislation. All Australian states and territories instigated 'anti-hoon' laws in the first decade of the new millennium. He describes the figure of the hoon in popular lore as a kind of 'folk devil'. Just as the Hanging Rock's actual effects are unspecified, the power of a 'folk devil' lies not in action, but in their representative encapsulation of a collective anxiety and fear. Weir casts the rock as the embodiment of a the schism between colonial morals and the old, unarticulated powers of the landscape they are transplanted onto. The 'hoon' represents a similar schism between generations and cultures - reportage of the Western Australian hoon 'problem' focused specifically on Asian gangs. Like the rock, the 'hoon' evokes an old fear of an edge that becomes visible once restraint is forgottenⁱⁱⁱ.

Behind the wheel, that edge is palpable. Its metaphors are obvious, its risks are common sense: the ignition of desire, the appreciation of smooth, well appointed bodies, their power and potential, the way they *handle*. Fuller refers nonchalantly to the other side of the coin: "every driver experiences the destructive potential of

the effortless surge of power available through the smallest of body movements^{iv} The car promises both the extension of self and its destruction, the modified car is the modified body, which can be transcended entirely with enough power and speed.^v

Richard Prince's *Car Bonnet* sculptures, displayed at the 2004 Whitney Biennale and on his upstate property/installation *Second House*, utilize the car sculpturally to hint at the dissolution of a landscape and dream. They represent 'horizons unburdened by the limitations of body and chassis' (Art Review), in a country in which as much time is spent "watching the world pass by the windscreen... as on television"^{vi}. While Prince soaks the automotive structure with this soluble landscape, Ayres' use of the car body is largely figurative, although it touches on a similar tradition to Prince's, an exploration of the creation of mythology and of masculinity and the subtle nuance of object and image fetishism. *Requiem (Iron Maiden)* sees Ayres clutching the gearbox of his 'deceased' Escort like a broken child, staggering bewildered and greasy through a darkened carpark as if returning from an unspeakable ordeal. The car and the body have become interchangeable systems.

Ayres' immersion in the culture of his subject allows him a unique critical-romantic perspective. Like its namesake, *Picnic at Fanging Rock* is underscored by a complex affection, both between its subjects and for them. It heads into territory somehow somehow simultaneously well-trodden and surprising, a universe where Matthew Barney and Fred McCubbin star in a *Bad Boys 2* homage set on the casualty curve that links Kalamunda to the 'Flat Lands' of Perth. It drifts sideways from a tradition of Australian outlaw culture set against the dust and the landscape, always the landscape, that perennial, primordial underscore to all record of Australian difference.

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ⁱEbert, 1998, <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/>

ⁱⁱ Fuller, 2007, eventmechanics.net.au/wp-content/uploads/.../fuller_2007_thehoon.pdf,

ⁱⁱⁱ The difference being, however, than one cannot marginalize or prosecute geology.

^{iv} Ibid. J G Ballard explores the human fever for mechanical cataclysm more thoroughly in the novels *Crash* (1973) and *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969)

^v This preoccupation can be traced backwards through modernism to the Italian Futurists, for whom the all-consuming dynamism of the industrial dawn symbolized the coming of a clean, new world, just a bushfire heralds a bright, fresh green.

^{vi} Wakefeild, N, 2004, *The drive through*, Art Review (March 04), p 56 -60.