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Christine Jeffs' *Rain* (2001) as an Allegory of Settlement

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Abstract: This article proposes a new reading of Christine Jeffs' 2001 film *Rain* as an allegory of settlement. To do so it uses Stephen Turner's essay 'Settlement as Forgetting' and makes reference to the work of Lorenzo Veracini and Patrick Wolfe in settlement studies. It takes Turner's claim that settlement requires a forgetting in order to patch over the trauma of dislocation from the mother country and explores how structures of nostalgia, fetishism and trauma construct an image of a failed and broken nation, a settler society seeking to forget its own history, afflicted with the trauma of its primal separation from Britain, and under the surface expressing anxiety about the indigenous presence that prevents settler claim over the land and (settler) cultural identity. Jeffs' film, it is proposed, critiques the fantasmatic elements of settlement, in and through which settlers untiringly strive to envisage themselves as whole, and which sanctions the narrative of that striving to appear to be continuous.

Keywords: Settler colonialism, fetishism, forgetting, trauma, coming-of-age film.

'Islands of Innocence'

Recent interpretations of Christine Jeffs' *Rain* (2001) have focussed on the film's genre – coming-of-age film – and its adaptation (successful or not) from Kirsty Gunn's 1994 eponymous novel (see Fox 2001; Message 2003; and Wright 2020). The theme of childhood and adolescence in New Zealand literature and film has long been a prevalent one. In 1964 Monte Holcroft in *Islands of Innocence: The childhood theme in New Zealand literature* argued 'that New Zealanders write of childhood more often than writers elsewhere.' Katherine Mansfield is cited by Holcroft as being 'responsible for the extensive and profound influence of the childhood theme in New Zealand writing' (1964, 7, 12). The attraction of Mansfield's work is twofold: one, it presents a memory of childhood from the position of the adult, a perspective founded on nostalgic remembrance; two, it instils this nostalgia into a background which for Holcroft is identifiably New Zealand. The setting and some of the themes of Gunn's novella derive from one of the founding works of New Zealand literature, Katherine Mansfield's long short story *At the Bay* (1922).[1]

The film attempts to capture the atmosphere of a New Zealand beach holiday and in doing so it encompasses something iconic and archetypal about New Zealand. But in *Rain* there is a tension between the idyllic setting and the irresponsible, even menacing behaviour of the characters. This is a tension also between childhood innocence and adult boredom, decadence, despondence and dissolute behaviour. *Rain*, too, unpicks a cultural myth of New Zealand, the myth that it is 'a great place to bring up kids' and the ideal location for the functional family – including the fantasy that we all live a kind of rural utopia, part of the image of New Zealand as a pastoral paradise.[2] In the 1950s this sentiment was once part of a formally approved popular rhetoric of nationalism: 'Godzone' – New Zealand as utopia.[3] But, as *Rain* intimates, the family unit in New Zealand cinema is more often than not portrayed as dysfunctional, weakened or threatened from

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within — that is, as a dystopia. Think of Vincent Ward's *Vigil* or Jane Campion's *Sweetie* which is a portrait of a psychologically dysfunctional modern suburban Australian family, and even closer to us today, think of the Wests, the superbly immoderate family in the popular television series *Outrageous Fortune* (2005-2010).

So, it might seem natural to respond to *Rain* through a psychoanalytical analysis of these thematics of the dysfunctional family (sexual dysfunction, lack of communication, abandonment of children by parents, emotional imprisonment in domesticity, the generation gap — the family that is full of fissures). This would certainly be one productive way of reading the film, but I want to suggest something different which, at the same time, builds upon this psychoanalytical reading: that we might also read this film as an allegory of settlement. To do this I am going to draw upon the now extensive literature on settlement and, in particular, an essay by Stephen Turner titled 'Settlement as Forgetting' (1999).[4] Turner's claim is that settlement requires a forgetting in order to patch over the trauma of dislocation from the mother country. The possibility of this forgetting, he argues, depends upon a radical break with the old country: a rejection by that country (say the expulsion of convicts from Britain to Australia); a war, like a war of independence (in the United States); a distancing, a great trek into the interior (like that of South Africa). But, says Turner, New Zealand settler culture lacks a break of this kind. Its first settlers enticed by the New Zealand Company came voluntarily with the offer of land to new migrants. In terms of the dynamic of colonisation and settlement, a return to childhood offers a return to a timeless past where everything was 'new'. There also exists a concurrent parallel between the settler colony in its infancy and the state of childhood. Literature and films that deal with childhood obviously also deal with the sometimes consuming, totalising relationship between mother and child. Again it is clear that the mother-infant relationship operates metaphorically as a meditation on New Zealand's relationship with Britain, the so-called 'mother country'. But it might be objected that in New Zealand we have the Treaty of Waitangi as our founding document. However, the Treaty does not represent a break, it does not wipe the slate clean as such, it does not register the distinctiveness of settler culture, because it acknowledges Māori who already inhabit the new country (even if Pākehā and the Treaty did not live up to that acknowledgement). Or, to put this another way, in New Zealand the task of construction of the new country is counterposed with an ongoing need to forget the historical anxiety of settlement.

The condition is one of double-bind, where there are two conflicting messages: on the one hand the settler needs to break with, to forget the old country and, on the other, he or she needs to resist the indigenous presence and ignore the people who already inhabit the new country. So, the new country becomes a site of loss and self-distancing, Turner describes it as 'a place where the self is made void, where cultural identity must be reconstructed' (1999, 21).[5] New Zealand is, as Turner says, a land of failed separation in which it is hard to grow up. This condition results in three things:

A national melancholy: Pākehā/settler New Zealanders tend to exhibit a sort of grief without an object, a feeling of non-connection that has no obvious cause. In New Zealand as a settler you are in a sort of limbo where you cannot remember the past properly nor can you project a future, you don't feel at home. This is the unease that Sam Neill in his celebrated documentary talked about with regard to a number of New Zealand films ('Cinema of Unease,' 1995). The sense of loss is non-recoverable, it

cannot be fixed down as such: it is a feeling, an emotion, something missing and some lack of connection or belonging.

Romanticism: Pākehā/settler New Zealanders exhibit a natural turn to the Romantic. This involves a process of idealisation and the image of New Zealand as prelapsarian (an idyllic world before the Fall [*lapsus*] of Adam and Eve). The producer of the film, Philippa Campbell, on the *Rain* Presskit describes it as 'that perfect summer holiday that we all like to think back to.' The lives of the settler pioneers are romanticised with the suggestion that the new country is the product of a new romance: the ending of Jane Campion's *The Piano* projects this romance and in this story Māori are often presented as the third party that facilitates the romance of the first New Zealand settler woman and man: see, for example, *The Seekers*, the 1954 film directed by Ken Annakin where the sole colonist survivor of a protracted battle, a young Pākehā baby, is adopted by a Māori chief.

Trauma: Pākehā/settler New Zealanders suffer trauma. Trauma comes from the Greek word 'to wound'. It is the primordial cut, New Zealand's separation from a motherland Britain, that allows her to be constituted as a nation, but the price paid for that is a traumatic loss of primal contact (with the mother), the creation of an internal void and anxiety in each settler subject. How does trauma as a missed encounter involve time or history? How does it make us ask by what means can we confront a loss that perhaps was never experienced in the first place (if we are the children of first settlers)? Cathy Caruth emphasises the essential belatedness of trauma, how trauma is by definition not experienced at the moment of the traumatic event, when it happens, but always haunts us later. She writes that 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on' (1996, 4). By virtue of this structure of repetition (repeated loss), trauma poses a challenge to historical knowledge, since it is always the symptom of trauma that one confronts and never the event itself, much as it is always the lack of knowledge that perpetuates the traumatic effect. As an excess or afterlife of the event, trauma refers to an act not yet encountered – as it were, to a sort of spectre of the past.

Figure 1: Title card opening credits

Figure 2: hand lawnmower

How does *Rain* reflect this double structure of forgetting and trauma? I want to start with the opening credits of the film: a black and white shot of Janey floating in water seen from a bird's-eye perspective (Figure 1). Interestingly, it is the same image (although this time in colour) that opens Jeffs' earlier short film *Stroke*, a lone woman floating in a swimming pool, arms and legs outstretched. With *Rain*, first of all, I want to suggest that the original state of complete fulfilment before the break or the trauma is suggested in the

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opening image of the film. The black and white image of Janey in the water suggests a state of former fulfilment and then its subsequent loss or a void. The use of black and white is a sign for the past, a prior state. In terms of composition: it is an overhead shot that pushes Janey into the bottom right-hand corner of the frame, so she is a sort of small contorted lump surrounded by shimmering specks of light which is enveloped by a sea of black into which she finally dissolves. I think that there is an uncanny way that the image also recalls literally that of a foetus as seen through an ultrasound scan and so it also hints at a literal stage of early primal incompleteness, the state of still being joined with the mother. As we will see, Janey in the film will imitate her mother in a way that underlines the parallels between them. But this image also makes reference to the anxiety of trauma: notice the acute angle of the composition; the unsettling expanse of black; the fact that Janey does not move implies the presence or at least the threat of death, and if we take up the allusion I have just made a dead foetus or a child that will be stillborn (of course, a child dies in this film), it might prefigure the image of the body of a drowned child floating. The ambiguity in this opening shot is between complete fulfilment (in the past) and the intractable void of loss in the present that contains within it the structure of trauma. It is a structure that is intensified on the soundtrack with the surcharge of Neil Finn's lyrics: 'You don't know what I want, you don't know what's going on, you can't see what I got.' And it is this irreducible void of loss that the construction of national identity seeks to fill up or recover. I want to come back to this opening when I discuss the end of the film. But let us now return to the question of settlement.

'A Little Floating Life Raft'

How do you settle somewhere? You nest, you fill up your space with objects, and the task of positive construction (of settlement) is to fill up the void of loss with objects. In the film these objects first take the form of mementos before the state of separation (that is, in the film's nostalgic memories of the 1970s). This film is bursting with kiwiana kitsch — objects that reviewer Philip Matthews described as 'raw kiwiana' (2001, 50) — and the viewer is invited to recognise aspects of their own childhood within the film, to create a subjective connection to the past. If you are of a certain generation you will recognise a lot of these objects from your own childhood: the old-fashioned coffee grinder with a handle on the wall, the aluminium ice tray with a big lever that sprayed ice everywhere when you pulled it, the whirling, more or less ineffective lawnmower you pushed by hand (Figure 2). Another way to explain this is that these objects have a fetishistic status: they stand for or cover over something else, they cover over the unease of settlement. Again, this is literalised in the film: the way that objects have a fetishistic status is embodied in the page ripped from a magazine illustrating the penis: Janey and Jim are locked in the outhouse going through soft-porn magazines and Jim cuts out a naked male torso with a large penis. Now brother and sister move outside and Jim runs down the hill with Janey with the magazine picture of a penis held over his shorts which implies that he is caught in a pre-adolescent stage and that he needs the image of the phallic object to confer his sexuality (Figure 3). The scene, of course, only highlights Janey's emerging interest in an aggressive sexual curiosity.

As I said, the magazine image is what Freud would call a fetishistic object. For Freud often sexual excitement is dependent on fixation on an object such as a shoe or a piece of underwear. Freud argues that fetishism originates in the child's horror of female castration

(and note the large pair of scissors wielded by Jim in this scene). Confronted with the mother's lack of a penis the fetishist disavows this lack and finds an object that is a symbolic substitute. So, the fetish object is an object that at once blocks out the lack of the maternal penis but points to it at the same time.[6] And the penis reproduced from the magazine is also a reminder for Janey, who is on the cusp of adulthood, of sexual difference and thus it ultimately fails to return her as subject to the state before loss but sends her forward into a sexual future of adulthood.

Figure 2: Jim and the magazine picture

Figure 4: 'a little floating life raft'

The idea of the fetish also has a particular presence in the writings of Marx where, like Freud, it implies a precise form of social and semiotic relation between human beings and objects. In the work of both Freud and Marx the idea of the fetish involves attributing properties to objects that they do not 'really' have and that should correctly be recognised as human. For Marx, the term commodity fetishism describes the economic relationships of production and exchange as social relationships that exist among things and not as relationships that exist among people. The fetish is no longer an unreal object believed to have properties it does not really have, but is a means of mediating social value through material culture.[7] *Rain* as a film is full of repeated fetishistic images like this. It literally plays out a theory of fetishism and is full of images of things that stand in or 'cover over' for relations, or the lack of them, between characters: smoking, making coffee, mowing the lawn, and above all alcohol and drinking. The objects of these activities (packets of cigarettes, hand-operated coffee grinder, lawn mower, old-fashioned icetray with handle, lemons in the sink, old-fashioned fridge, pink rubber gloves, whiskey bottles, martini glasses) each provide in the first instance pleasure (the pleasure of nostalgic recognition on the part of us as viewers) and so they provide a semblance of filling up the historical void for us. The film in this way is a sort of screen memory.

A certain nostalgia lies at the level of the visuals, a timelessness (they recall the 1970s but…), and the camera often lingers on these objects and repeats the images of them. However, as the dysfunction of the family shows, these objects (such as the alcohol the parents drink) can never fill the gap, and their repetition, their addictive nature with regard to alcohol, eventually results in a blocking of pleasure, even the creation of a displeasure. Indeed, rather than relieving trauma these objects continually remind the subject of his or her 'anxiety'. Look at the scene where the mother Kate takes her drink into the sea while swimming and floats it in the water (Figure 4). Janey says: 'It's like a little floating life-raft' – and this is how objects function for the characters, as life-rafts propping them up, alcohol is the mother's life raft, but then the glass of alcohol sinks with its ice cube caught mysteriously inside and, while Janey dives to retrieve it, Kate, ever a poor swimmer, commences to struggle in the water, swallowing water and bobbing helplessly.

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Figure 3: Brenda L stuck in the mud

Or take, for instance, Cady's boat, the *Brenda L.*, which is a reminder of settler arrival (all the first settlers of course came here by boat), reminding us of the pain of separation involved in the settler project. It is significant that Cady's boat spends much of its time stuck in the mud, being fixed, and its stuckness articulates the cultural predicament of the settler in constructing a New Zealand identity (early settlers were stuck here, they couldn't go back if they didn't like it) (Figure 5). As Jeffs comments of her film: 'There's a sense of things coming unstuck — feet stuck in the sand, the boat beached like a whale. There's a sense that things are not as they should be, that there's a longing there, like when the water has run out and the land longs for it to come back in. Things are *unsettled*, on the move, just out of reach' (Foundas 2002, my italics). Cady plays a figure common to many New Zealand films, the stranger or outsider figure (we might think of Ethan in Vincent Ward's *Vigil* or Lane in Alison Maclean's *Crush*); he is introduced by Janey as 'someone dad met out fishing.' He remains an interloper, mysterious and barely knowable, but he is at the same time the familiar, almost archetypal, Kiwi 'bloke.' Cady, it should be noted, also refuses to get off his boat, that is, he refuses to 'settle.' He also functions as a displaced expression of the internal fears and desires hidden within the family unit and each of its individual members. He brings out Kate's restlessness and her boredom with her marriage; he exposes the fragility of the father Ed's protective feelings towards his family; he draws out Janey's healthy sexual curiosity in an unhealthy way. Perhaps he even causes Jim to realise his fear of holding his breath under water and drowning.

The appearance of Cady within the family brings about a complex web of events that connects family, sex, and by extension incest. For *Rain*, like many other New Zealand films, is full of Oedipal structures: at the centre is the 'normal' family triangle of Ed, Kate, Janey and Jim. We can understand Cady as a displacement of the natural father Ed (this follows a similar pattern of how Ethan replaces Toss's father in *Vigil*). This process operates on two levels: as his (Ed's) wife's lover (thus becoming the symbolic husband) and as a potential father figure to Janey (with its hints of incest in the final seduction). Janey herself also becomes a 'mother figure': first in her competition and rivalry with her mother for Cady, and second through her surrogate mothering of Jim. Thus, Janey becomes a classic Electra character, as both a daughter and a lover to Cady (the Father), and as someone who must depose her mother to achieve this status.[8] Read at the level of settler allegory: Britain is the motherland which Janey must reject for a relationship with New Zealand (the new father/lover Cady).

'A Little Bit of Paradise'

In *Rain* the line between childhood innocence and adult behaviour is marked by the beach. It is a liminal zone that is important in many New Zealand films: think of *The Piano* but also *Whale Rider*. As Stephen Turner insists:

> The beach constitutes the first place of white settlement; for the settlers, gaining the beach (which did not have to be a violent affair) was a precondition of Māori acceptance of their presence … For Pākehā, the beach quite literally marks the horizon of acculturation (1999, 31).

In *Rain* childhood innocence is marked by being in the water and adulthood is marked by the space of the bach which the adults in the film don't often leave. The beach on which Janey regularly sits is the dividing line between childhood and adulthood and she spends equal amounts of time in the bach and in the water. Also important for the relationship between water and land is the fact that this beach is tidal and Christine Jeffs has stated that she sees the way the tides work in the film as a metaphor for the ways in which emotion shifts in and out between characters: 'I looked for a landscape that was very changeable. The way the tides work as a metaphor for emotion in the film is incredible… I think there's a sense of danger in the landscape and that plays a whole role in the movie' (Murray, n.d.). The bach is also an embodied form of the myth of the settler's dream (it is like the rudimentary huts that settlers first built when they arrived) and thus it also becomes fetishised: when the husband Ed confronts Kate over her infidelity, he declares 'I built this place for us … as something we couldn't have anywhere else.' He refers to it as 'a little bit of paradise' and later we see the cover of a book he is reading: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*. But the bach becomes less a sign of paradisaical sanctuary and more one of entrapment. The interior becomes increasingly darkened and devoid of light. At one point, Kate the mother becomes enraged at Ed the husband as he tries to pull back the curtains to let the light in. She prefers to remain inside in the dark. Ed finds himself more on the outside of the family, sitting alone in the dark night after night. 'The home is not homely,' declares Andrea Wright, 'it is dark, full of shadows, repressed desires and secrets' (2020, 265). The fact is that the bach is *not* paradise, although it seems to be, and it can't compensate for a permanent sense of inadequacy, and this inadequacy and lack is acknowledged in the opening voiceover of the film by Janey:

> It was sunny, mostly. And our bach was on the water, well nearly with the lawn in between the house and the water. We spent our summers here. Dad built our place for mum. A little bit of paradise he said, but he was mostly out the back of the house. He had a chair and well he didn't do much really. Mum found it boring I guess, except for when we had a party. I was teaching Jim to swim but well he was only learning.

Notice how the repeated use of qualification (a form of the rhetorical figure of metanoia[9]) undercuts the promise offered: 'it was sunny … *mostly*,' 'our bach was on the water …. *nearly*,' 'I was teaching Jim to swim but he was *only learning*.' The last qualification (that Jim is inadequate because he is still learning), of course, will have tragic implications at the end of the film. Again, we have here the double structure of avowal and disavowal of fetishism. As the narrative of the film progresses and the family begins to fall apart, the

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bach is exposed as an imaginary object that seeks to cover over some form of primal loss rather than enabling the family to confront its trauma. This is again articulated in the sandcastle that Jim builds just prior to his drowning which might be read as a metaphor for the foundation of New Zealand national identity, a metaphor for the home or bach. As tourism and travel theorist Pau Obrador-Pons suggests:

> Building sandcastles is … about making things present and tangible … a place in which it is literally possible to make virtual worlds actual and touchable. On the beach inert masses of sand are transformed into solid material configurations that evoke a wide range of aspects generally related with childhood play experiences, ideas and fantasies' (2012, 13).

But sandcastles, of course, get washed away. The settler creates things which, only too quickly, are washed away by time and someone else has to come along to do the hard work, all over again. Which raises the question are the settlers less unified by what they collectively create and remember than by what they have collectively participated in forgetting? This conjecture is, not surprisingly, yet another metanoia. As Turner argues, the failure to cover over the void of loss expresses itself in the confrontation with the indigenous other and in turn the need to avoid this confrontation 'to forget the process of settlement' (1999, 26). *Rain* adopts a nostalgic mode in which the indigenous other does not figure at all. There are no Māori in this film, as if it were only a Pākehā history that had to be preserved, or in which Pākehā objects and ways of living somehow have to be made 'native' to New Zealand. This, as Stephen Turner notes, is the strategy of settlement which requires the inhabitants to 'forget the old country and ignore people who already inhabit the country' in order to construct a sense of their settler history and nationhood; to construct only what Turner calls a 'short history': '"Long history," which refers to the local inhabitation of first peoples, encompasses but extends beyond the 'short history' of non-Māori settlement, hence producing a deficit,' (2011, 120).

In *Rain* this task is managed by or through alcohol as a signifier. Kate, the children's mother, is an alcoholic. The literal effects of alcohol are important here: it both un-inhibits your desire and it inhibits your memory (we regularly use the phrase 'drinking to forget'). Thus, alcohol allows its consumers to exist in a perpetual state of the present (because they forget the past and hold no memory through their drinking). Indeed, the infidelity between the mother Kate and Cady (on his boat, and at parties) is fuelled by alcohol, and before her 'transgression' with Cady, Janey takes a swig of his rum as if to steel herself. This infidelity of Kate against her husband Ed, or transgression, may be understood as a metaphor for settler transgressions against the indigenous presence. These acts in the film are performed under the influence of alcohol and this allows them to be immediately forgotten. Nostalgia, as Linda Hutcheon has suggested, may be physically internalised, and is not merely a desire to return home but a desire '"memoralised" as past, crystallised into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganisations' (1998).

Despite the employment of settler logic throughout the narrative, forgetting is made impossible in *Rain* through the use of past tense in the voiceover (at both the film's beginning and ending); the evocation of nostalgic mode through the use of familiar objects from the past; and, as I have mentioned, the use of black and white photography.

The film in this way takes on the structure of memory. In this structure the character of Janey assumes the position of the subject (and by association 'New Zealand' as subject) while Kate represents the space of the un-acculturated body and the missed encounter of the settler descendants (the unassimilated settler): the adults in this film are the settlers who can't fit in and thus suffer trauma. While Ed, as Andrea Wright suggests, on the one hand 'seems to fulfil the requirement of the Pākehā male to tame and own the land through labor and cultivation, on the other he is settled and softened by his domestication' (2020, 268). The traumatic separation is experienced as a missed encounter and I am suggesting that this missed encounter can be related to Turner's argument that New Zealand lacks a foundational myth; it has no constitutional basis; there is no battle that signifies the birth of the nation; there is no document of origin (like a constitution). The Treaty of Waitangi denies the narrative of the nation that the Pākehā settler seeks because it acknowledges the first peoples: the Treaty makes Pākehā feel uneasy, as it still does for many of them today.

Figure 4: Two-shot of Kate and Janey

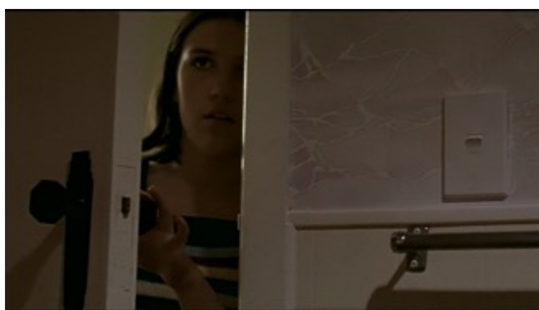

Figure 7: Janey's Primal Scene

The character of Janey seeks to confront this lack of a foundational myth. Notice how she tries to copy or assimilate Kate from the outset by adopting her behaviour (drinking, smoking, literally wearing her clothes). Notice, too, the scene where mother and daughter are framed together in a two-shot as Kate sews her dress and how these two-shot frames with Kate and Janey are repeated throughout the film whereas the other characters are mostly framed in single shots (Figure 6). But while Kate, the mother, enacts the impossibility of identity (her drinking is a type of self-erasure), Janey, as a subject, attempts to hold onto herself, to witness history, to form an identity. Kate says to her: 'Everything is in front of you now, not for me,' where it is clear that Kate believes that she herself does not have a future. This explains the role Janey has in Kate's initial sexual encounter with Cady at the party. In a replay of the 'primal scene,' Janey observes her mother and Cady through the bathroom door ajar and this act is viewed by Janey as if she were recording it – which of course she is *for us* (Figure 7). Kate is so drunk that she throws up in the hand-basin directly after the event (this signifies an act of forgetting – a sort of voiding of her memory). The 'primal scene,' which usually refers to the child's experience of sexual intercourse between parents, now acquires a metaphorical quality beyond that of mother-daughter relations. Ayse Temiz unpacks its relevance for the settler colonial disposition:

> The primal scene is the moment of inception of the subject's memory, which coincides with the moment when the illusion of a perfect origin, as a state of plenitude without conflicts, is disturbed for the first time by the acknowledgement of the other's

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> presence. This painful acknowledgement of the other that undermines the sovereignty of the subject, however, often takes place alongside a disavowal, a split consciousness and denial of the other's presence on the blank slate of the self's memory. Thus simultaneously recognized and negated, the other becomes a fetish for the self… (quoted in Veracini 2010, 87).

Rain is full of such moments of voyeurism. Upon arrival, Cady is immediately framed by the look of the female characters, especially Kate, who watches him ever attentively as he fishes off the small boat. 'Don't stare,' Janey chastises her, but she, too, intensely observes this interloper, whose presence she succumbs to. But the empowerment of the gaze is revealed to be deceptive and inconsequential. Janey is unsatisfied with living in the present as merely an object of pleasure and she refuses Kate's attempt to turn her into an object of desire. She also recognises that a return to a state of the past, to a state of idyllic fulfilment, is impossible. So, what she does is to admit the transgressions, to acknowledge the loss and to historicise it, and this is literalised in the film in her desire for photographs of herself, for images of herself that she controls, for the creation of what she calls her 'portfolio'.

'Mirroring The Soul'

There is an important conversation between Cady and Janey in his boat about photographs, when she swims out and intrudes to ask if he will take photographs for her 'portfolio':

> JANEY: Well photos, they can capture people differently. They mirror the soul and I want to see my soul.
> CADY: They don't always mirror the soul. Sometimes they just show what is.
> JANEY: What is what?
> CADY: Exactly![10]

Notice that the discussion is about whether photographs penetrate the soul or whether they merely record something. The notion of 'penetrating the soul' implies photographs (and by implication film since this is one of those metacinematic moments when film comments on itself as film) can be thought of as a pathway to getting at an essence or truth, to uncovering something that may be hidden in the experience of reality, to recover a past. Notice, too, that the photographs are black and white so they are to be read on the same level as the black and white sequences in the film: as mementoes of a history that cannot be forgotten. As media theorist Vilém Flusser once suggested, black-and-white images are truer because they are more conceptual (2000, 42).[11] So now I want to come back to those black and white sequences in the film. There are three of them:

—the opening image of Janey on the credits (Figure 1);
—Kate in the shower after she has slept with Cady (Figure 8);
—Janey's seduction of Cady, if that is what it is (Figure 9).

As well as indicating moments of narrative intensity, and structuring the film into three acts, these black and white sequences also organise the forms of repetition in the film by producing a sort of framing structure of repetition. In sequence 1: following the opening image we are given a montage sequence in colour overlaid with Janey's voiceover: the

pouring of whiskey; squeezing of lemons; the ice-bucket; Kate in a deckchair drinking; the rotating blades of the lawnmower pushed by husband Ed. As I have suggested, this film deals with the affective life of objects, how we pool or invest our feelings in the objects we use because our relations with each other are blocked. I have also suggested how these objects are nostalgic, how they are projected onto the landscape, how *Rain* fetishizes objects. In sequence 2: after the second black and white sequence of Kate in the shower, the exact same images from the first montage are repeated but now they are in the correct chronological order in the plot and they take on stronger and more evocative meanings: the rotating blades of the lawnmower now convey the sadness and melancholy of a family falling apart, or threatened with being cut apart. Observe, too, how the position of Kate in the frame forces her close to her husband Ed but also indicates her unease at this proximity.

Figure 5: Kate in the shower

Figure 6: Bird's eye view of the naked Janey

Rain seeks a form of catharsis through the acknowledgement of New Zealand's broken history of settler trauma. How does it do this? Let's go back and look at the third black and white image of Janey's seduction and follow it through: this seemingly is Janey's coming-of-age, her entry into the world of sexual relations after the kiss shared with Cady. But notice the framing here, the overhead composition of a bird's-eye view that pushes Janey into the bottom right again and so recalls the framing of the film's opening sequence. This third moment thus serves as a repetition of the missed sexual encounter: indeed, one of the unspoken, unseen, mysteries of the film is whether Janey has sex with Cady. As the earlier Neil Finn lyrics in the first black and white sequence intimate, 'Do we as spectators know what is going on?' 'Do we now know what Janey has got?' We never witness the actual sex scene between Janey and Cady, all we are left with is a black and white image of Janey lying naked on her back in the pine forest from a great distance. Is this sequence a reality — Janey in control as she seems so resolutely to be before this moment — or is it simply a projection, Janey's fantasy? It is curious that so far there has been no actual rain in this film despite the title — although there is a strong sense of rain building up as an impending threat and characters repeat the phrase 'Looks like it might rain today.' The colour palette, too, keeps up the sense of a foreboding downpour with long low grey clouds.[12] The shower, which in some way is the only sustained 'rain,' Christine Jeffs has stated in an interview, is 'a metaphor for cleansing and renewal for mother and daughter' (Read 2002, 8). But now as the film transitions to black and white, and Janey leans back, we see fine droplets of rain (a cleansing?) on Janey's upturned face. The words of Lisa Germano's song 'Cry Wolf' on the soundtrack as Janey now alone walks out of the forest sustain the ambiguity of the scene:

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Love is weird, love
She's overdone it
Can't go on
She caused it all
Cry, cry wolf
She didn't know
She didn't want it
She does a lot of things, and regrets it
Love can hurt, love
Love is weird, love
A girl who wants it
But has no clue
She says she'll give in
Cry, cry wolf
A change of mind
In that back seat, or that dirty room
They say she got just what she wanted
Love can be bad
Love is weird, love
You should've known better
You should've known
It's all your fault
You should've known better
You should know better
Didn't they tell you
Didn't they tell you
Cry, cry wolf [repeats].[13]

'Make Him Breathe'

It is from here that we are immediately taken to the cathartic scene of loss that is Jim's drowning. Coming out of the forest, Janey sees Jim in the distance as a limp figure lying on the beach; he is lying in the archetypal settler liminal space, that is between sea and land. As we cut to a mid-shot of Janey running towards Jim's body notice too how the film itself begins to fragment formally at this point; the sequence begins by jump cutting with a sort of desperate excruciating urgency. The jump cuts formally are an example of repetition (they cut to the same shot if at a later moment) and we have seen how important the structure of repetition is for the argument of trauma, and for configuring the film as a whole. But the jump cuts also tear the continuity of the film narrative apart. They are a formal indication of the trauma that is beyond the meanings denoted by the conventional grammar of film, as are the extreme close-ups and the use of a hand-held camera in the next sequence.

When Janey finally reaches Jim's body she collapses on him performing CPR repeating '12345 breathe.' Ed arrives and takes over and Janey is left to helplessly repeat over and over 'make him breathe, make him breathe.' It is as if the structure of repetition that the film has constantly employed is here transferred to the number of chest compressions applied during CPR. It is also as if there is a way in which the editing of the film is also

trying to make Jim breathe, trying to achieve a different outcome for the film.[14] Notice, too, how with its arhythmical jump-cutting the sequence shifts out and in from wide to close, wide to close shot — a sort of 'in and out,' like breathing itself, with the final shot a bird's eye view straight down from high above.

On one level, Jim's death might be read as a cause and effect: his drowning is a punishment for Janey's transgression, for her having sex (if she does) with Cady. Cady and Janey's imaginable sexual act is the ultimate displacement of the natural mother and father. But in the wider context it might be read as the sacrifice of the youngest family member for the sins of settlement; so the film ultimately deals, as I have been arguing, with the core trauma of settlement.[15] In this reading, the traumatic act of loss in Jim's death is necessary, and his death allows a catharsis as it is made into a memory, it becomes a memento. At this moment after Jim's death the second black and white shot of Kate in the shower is now repeated but this time it is in colour with Janey under the shower accompanied by Kate, and with Janey weeping uncontrollably. In the repetition I'm suggesting that the trauma of the missed encounter is given meaning (whereas in the initial opening sequence we are struggling for meaning, to work out what is happening). After seeing the second black and white sequence, we re-evaluate the first instance of the image sequence because of its repetition. That is, retrospectively we read back but this second reading is also informed by our memory of the first, and in the final car ride where Janey's voiceover describes Jim we remember that earlier metanoia of *almost* … *nearly* … of the first voiceover:

> Well, he was on the beach and I went down and tried to make him breathe. But he didn't. And then Dad tried to make him breathe. But… um… he was already dead. So then we just went on without him I guess. And Mum and Dad split up, and well it's strange because it's just me and Mum. No Jim and not much of Dad. When I think about it I remember how small he was, hardly anything. I remember what I told him when he asked me "What's endurance?" And now it's my turn 'holding on', it's 'holding on'.

So in this reading the New Zealand constructed in *Rain* is an image of a failed and broken nation; a settler society seeking to forget its own history, afflicted with the trauma of its primal separation from Britain, and under the surface expressing anxiety about the indigenous presence that prevents settler claim over the land and (settler) cultural identity of New Zealand as a nation. But the film also argues that once the trauma of separation, loss, the past, has been acknowledged the task of constructing a national identity can begin. This is perhaps what Janey means by 'endurance,' which is her word for holding her breath under water, but which she also describes as 'holding on' — a sort of survival — in the final voiceover. Where do we find that 'holding on' in the film? I think we find it in two moments: one, in the restorative shower at the end of the film and, two, there is one more moment of overcoming trauma in the final short black-and-white image of Jim swimming and looking up at us after the final credit of his actor's name (Figure 10). Again, the film signals the obsessive structure of repetition — here at the end of the story Jim comes back (we might say that he 'breathes' again), this is a film with a resurrection at the end — and this reverses settler anxiety. It is a disturbing image of loss — for we know that Jim dies, has died — but this image of his return is an image that acknowledges the grief

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and trauma of history rather than trying to forget it. It says that for the settler the act of forgetting is impossible, it will always haunt us, as it does here in the final image of Jim swimming.

Figure 10: The resurrection of Jim.

Figure 11: 'Holding on'

What I want to suggest is that *Rain* raises questions about the standard reading of settlement: the interpretation that reads and understands settler colonialism as a mode of domination and control. Jeffs critiques the fantasmatic elements of settlement, in and through which settlers untiringly strive to conceive of themselves as whole, and which allows the narrative of that striving to appear to be continuous. As anthropologist Patrick Wolfe has argued, settler colonialism is a structure and not an event, so it needs to be continually reasserted and legitimized, as the settler's position on the land is constantly challenged. The settler story must be recreated and retold because settlement is never fully accomplished (1999, 163). Jeffs' filming makes historical absence palpable. It works as an index of evident absence (the absence of responsible parents, of tangata whenua) by drawing attention to itself and the technology (the camera) that mediates the act of seeing and remembering. If settlers, by self-definition, cannot possibly grasp settlement as failure (there is no 'little piece of paradise'), then this is what Jeffs' camera can show. Jeffs' *Rain* suggests another story, not a critique of settlement nor a perverse enjoyment of settler guilt. Rather, we might call it the trauma of a futurelessness in which we necessarily have to 'hold on' to an image of what Turner calls 'a new "we," which is the New Zealander to-come, the person for whom the promise of settlement will have been fulfilled' (2015, 44). The film registers history as an absence and nostalgia — the melancholy of loss — and settlement as just such a form of 'holding-on.' As Turner writes with a tinge of grief:

> Settler culture may be constructed on the basis of a necessary forgetfulness. It is perhaps healthier to look forward rather than back, to accept and enjoy the fruits of a repressed cultural psyche. There is after all no single event to remember: the melancholy of settlement can have no historical object; the sense of loss is not recoverable (1999, 37).

In the final sequence the landscape outside the car window is estranged (Figure 11). For Janey, and the film viewer, looking out there can be no organic relation between the present, the past, and a place. No 'event to remember', but nevertheless the camera remains fixed on Janey's profile 'looking forward'. She is now the settler, the person whom Patrick Wolfe calls 'the stranger who stays.'

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[1] For Kirsty Gunn's 'attachment' to Katherine Mansfield see her *Thorndon: Wellington and Home: My Katherine Mansfield Project* (2014).

[2] The official government website of New Zealand Immigration states: 'New Zealand is the perfect place to bring up children. It's more stable, peaceful and safe than just about anywhere else in the world. Here, young people can grow up with easy access to sports and outdoors. They have space and freedom: to ride horses, to run along open beaches, to swim in clean water, to walk through native forests and to experience the beauty of nature.' https://www.live-work.immigration.govt.nz/choose-new-zealand/family-friendly

[3] The term can be traced back to the 1890 ode to New Zealand, 'God's Own Country', by New Zealand poet, journalist and politician Thomas Bracken (1843-1898).

[4] See also Lorenzo Veracini (2010) and (2015). For the recent interest in settlement and cinema see: Limbrick (2010), Columpar (2010) and Janne Lahti.

[5] Lorenzo Veracini also proposes a similar dynamic: 'Settler projects are inevitably premised on the traumatic, that is, *violent*, replacement and/or displacement of indigenous Others. However, … settler colonialism also needs to disavow any foundational violence' (2010, 75).

[6] Freud came to realize in his essay on 'Fetishism' that the fetishist is able *at one and the same time* to believe in his phantasy and to recognize that it is nothing but a phantasy. And yet, the fact of recognizing the phantasy *as phantasy* in no way reduces its power over the individual (Freud 1927).

[7] See *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse*, edited by Emily Apter and William Pietz (1993).

[8] The Electra complex was proposed by Carl Jung in his *Theory of Psychoanalysis* (1915) to explain an adolescent girl's psychosexual competition with her mother for possession of her father.
[9] 'Metanoia: Qualification of a statement by recalling it and expressing it in a better way, often by using a negative' (Lanham 1991, 100).
[10] In the sequence of taking the portfolio photographs towards the end of the film when Cady says to her 'Just look at the camera ... so I can see your eyes.' She quickly replies, 'My soul... .'
[11] '"Black" and "white" are concepts, e.g. theoretical concepts of objects. As black-and-white states of things are theoretical, they can never actually exist in the world. But black-and-white photographs do actually exist because they are images of concepts belonging to the theory of optics, i.e. they arise out of this theory' (2000, 42).
[12] The colour scheme for the film is described by Jeffs as 'period brown nylon,' which was created using an antique suede filter (Lindsay 2002, 15).
[13] 'Crying wolf' is, of course, what Janey has already accused Jim of doing as he paces the shore while she visits Cady on his boat and she ignores him.
[14] Jeffs atttended the Australian Film, Television and Radio School and obtained a diploma in film editing in 1990 after which she was assistant editor on *Ruby and Rata* (1990), *Crush* (1992) and *Absent Without Leave* (1992).
[15] See Veracini (2010, 77): 'In the case of settler colonial contexts, and in contradiction with other political entities, a Freudian type of ego-ideal formation is also at play, where the narcissistic idealisation of the ego and identification with the parents ('the motherland') come together in representations of the settler entity as both an ideal society *and* as truer and uncorrupted version of the original social body.' See also Patrick Wolfe (2006).

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