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Youth, Masculinity and Popular Film: Ben Mendelsohn as Spectacular Pedagogue?

In Australian films about youth since the 1980s, there has been a kind of quintessential 'stock' character that continues to haunt the screen, perhaps more heterogeneous by the late 1990s, but nonetheless remaining: young, masculine, roguish, destructive. Australian actor Ben Mendelsohn has become synonymous with this kind of iconic role, having played them for most of his career, from teen larrikin Trevor in *The Year My Voice Broke* (1987), to the charismatic Dazey in *Metal Skin* (1994), to slacker hero Kev in *Idiot Box* (1996). Analysing his films, interviews, promotional material and DVD extras, I consider the way 'Ben Mendelsohn' potentially enters the popular imaginary, spectacularly embodying ideals of young manhood. Reconceptualising ideas of film as pedagogy (Giroux, 2002; Ellsworth, 1997, 2005) through Foucauldian and Butlerian theories on subject-formation and (self) governmentality, I argue that Mendelsohn is more than just a contested 'object' or space employed by filmmakers and audiences in the practice of meaning-making. I argue that he is a spectacular pedagogue, blurring worlds on and off the screen, inciting us to revisit this kind of real/fictionalised/mythical youthful masculine subject, even in spite of all its inherent complexities and contradictions.