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Angry exchanges over future film policy

Wait-and-see budget leaves the industry hanging on September

As was widely anticipated, budget night (20 August) had little of direct importance to say to the Australian film and television industry. Reliable sources in Canberra have been saying for the past couple of weeks that any decision about the future of the 10BA tax breaks — whose demise was proposed in the Draft White Paper which preceded the ill-fated July tax summit — would be delayed until September, when the details of the government's revamped tax package was likely to be announced. To many, the future of the Australian film industry hangs on what is contained in that package.

One bright note on budget night, however, the Australian Film Commission did fairly well out of 20 August, with a 6.8% increase in its appropriation. And, according to Coopers & Lybrand W.D. Scott. Not only is that figure considerably inflated, according to the report, but the economic benefits emanating from the film industry outweigh to a considerable degree any such cost to revenue.

This document, which has been received with considerable interest in Canberra and is likely to become a major tax-taking point in future discussions, stems in part from dis-satisfaction with the AFC's role in representing the interests of the film industry to Treasury. Indeed, the report, some feel, should have been put together by the AFC itself, rather than by a private firm.

Industry dissatisfaction reached a peak at a meeting of the Film Industry Standing Committee on 25 July, when a number of speakers angrily attacked the AFC. One of the more vociferous of the AFC's critics, John Dingwall, went into print in The Age (5 August) with an article that declared, in anticipation of the axing of 10BA: "I have already cast the villain of the piece — Keating's own regulatory body, the Austral­ian Film Commission."

Accusing the AFC of being inefficient and of giving preference on its board to the service industries, rather than the film-makers themselves, Dingwall summed up the main objections as being two-fold: "[the AFC] looks to the money merchants who bleed the system. And it continues to give financial backing to poor film producers."

The AFC's Kim Williams totally rejects the notion that the AFC is "Keating's regulatory body." He says, "even if the majority of the criticisms seem to imply that our critics wish we were. But he points out that he is bound to confidentiality on certain aspects of the AFC's discussions with Treasury; details simply cannot be passed on to the industry as the FISC meeting called upon him to do. "We don't have that flexibility," he says. The AFC Policy Unit's 'Discussion Paper on Tax Reform and its Implications for the Film Industry,' issued in August, does however, give some idea of the lie of the land.

In it, five options are listed and discussed:

- the White Paper option of a return to the 1978 situation of a two-year write-off;
- direct outlays of government funding, either through an increased appropriation to the AFC, or by the establishment of a film bounty or fund;
- a prescribed government investment system, under which a film would have to have a set proportion of AFC or state film corporation investment in it before it would qualify for tax concessions;
- a licensing system, modelled on the 1984 Management and Investment Company Act, which would restrict tax con­cessions to films for which funds had been raised by an approved licensee;
- and 'claw back' options, possibly including a limit on eligible investments, a reduction of tax concessions, or budgetary limits for each category of eligible film.

 Implicit in all the options, and expressly recognized in the document's parameters, is the need for some kind of ceiling or 'lid' to be built into the scheme. Indeed, from the document, it is possible to read Coopers & Lybrand's indication that the government will insist on an upper limit being set on its concessions to the film industry, as against the open-endedness of the present system.

All those approached by Cinema Papers seemed reluctant to express a preference for any of the options, evidently preferring to keep all options open. Including, presumably, some not mentioned in the AFC docu­ment — open.

All options, however, have their opponents. According to Film Victoria Director Terence McMahon, the Film Vic Board has 'very reluctantly' reached the decision that, if it came down to a choice between the prescribed government investment option and the licensed fundraisers, they would have to support the former.

The Australian Writers' Guild has also come out strongly against the licensed fundraiser option, and there is some feeling that the strength of their opposition has removed this from its evident position as front-runner.

John Weiley, President of the Screen Production Association of Australia, who still believes that, following the Coopers & Lybrand report, 10BA deserves to be re­considered, rules out the direct subsidy option "because that takes the decisions out of the hands of those who have something at stake. We're violently opposed to the notion that decision-making should be centralized. No one can guarantee that the right decision will be taken, of course, but our best bet is to rely on a person's burning ambition to be rich and famous." He does seem to be that, in the next few weeks, a measure of agreement is reached within the industry — to the extent, of course, that this is possible. As Weiley points out, the industry has to overcome some fairly entrenched attitudes. "The real problem is that there are sensible things to be done that are politically impossible, and things that are politically possible but aren't really sensible. We're not dealing with very sophisticated arguments; we're dealing with prejudice."
Obituary: Miranda Downes

Producer David Elfick pays tribute to the Australian screenwriter

On the evening of 3 July, Miranda Downes was murdered on a beach just north of Cairns. This appalling crime cut short the career of one of our most promising screenwriters. In writing about her career, I cannot but think how this senseless act, which occurred on a public beach at the height of the tourist season, has deprived us of so much.

Miranda was an extremely talented writer. She had an honours degree in English, spoke five languages, played guitar and sang. She had travelled extensively, particularly in Asia, and had written on poetry before beginning her screenwriting career.

Her first screenplay was Undercover, which I produced as a feature film. While the film performed below our expectations, the process of seeing her first screenplay made into a film was a valuable one. In the next three years, she worked extremely hard. She wrote a screenplay for David Puttnam's First Love series, The House That Jack Built, and The Last Resort for New Zealand director Loyd Phillips. With the assistance of the AFC comedy fund she wrote Psychograph, a series of two plays which Bob Weis has just optioned.

Her work for me since Undercover has been the take-back of the ABC's feature film script. Adaptation was a new challenge. After three drafts, Miranda had produced a really hot screenplay, but we felt that it was a mini-series property rather than a feature. The One script served as the first two hours of a four-hour mini-series. Miranda and Robert Marchand then completed the script in just ten hours for the television production company. Zenith thought that it was a fantastic property and wanted to fund the production.

On Friday 2 July, Miranda delivered the final tidy-ups for the storyline before she took off for a well-earned two-week holiday. In her screenwriting career, she had quickly learned her craft and then, comfortable with the process, was able to use her intelligence and knowledge to develop characters with depth, dignity and understanding. All of her screenplays have this quality, and one is sad when one contemplates what more she would have achieved.

' Relevant' films to get a boost

Bicentennial Authority to endorse productions

Perhaps mindful of the recent rumbles about excessive first-class travel yielding negligible results, the Australian Bicentennial Authority has announced an endorsement policy for selected film and television projects. The aim is to encourage enterprises of special relevance to the 1988 celebrations.

The endorsement process will be available for features, mini-series, documentaries, televisions and specials. Successful applicants will be able to use the Bicentennial logo and will be provided with promotional support by the Authority.

Applications for endorsement must come from a producer or production company. Prior to consideration, projects must be fully scripted and casted, and details of key personnel — director, producer, major cast members — must be supplied.

The first production in the package, First Love, produced by Mark DeFriest and written by Vince Moran and Peter Schreck, has cleared the hurdle of being approved for endorsement. Further productions will be assessed as the Authority receives more applications and is on the look-out for other categories, applications must be lodged by late February.

Garden state blooms

Boost to Victorian film and television production from Crawford's package

Crawford Productions has announced a $16.1 million package of feature films and mini-series to be produced in Victoria over the next twelve months. Present at the announcement of the deal, Victorian Minister for the Arts Race Mathews declared that the four-hour mini-series and two features represented "the largest single package of film and television ever put together in Victoria". And, to illustrate the fact that the state government has designated film and television as "high priority development areas", it has backed the enterprise, through Film Victoria, with the $1.6 million up front — the largest single investment by the corporation to date.

Three years ago, the state's contribution to national production had dropped to 20%, a rate that had doubled by the 1984-85 financial year. However, with this package, the 1985-86 period should see a further climb in Victoria's percentage of the country's film and television production.

Mathews stressed that the government's involvement did not take the conventional form of a grant, but was, rather, a pump priming operation, designed to produce a "true revolving fund of investment", producing profits that can be ploughed back into further production.

The first production in the package, I Live With Me Dad, a $1-million feature with producer Ross Jennings and director Paul Moloney, started shooting on 1 July and is currently in post-production. The executive producers on this, as with all the other projects in the package, are Hector Crawford, Ian Crawford and Terry Stapleton.

The other feature in the group, One Perfect Day, has a budget of $4.2 million and will be produced by Alan Hardy and directed by George Miller. Miller devised the concept for the film, which will be written by John Reeves.

Chronologically, the next cab off the rank will be The Far Country, a four-hour mini-series with a budget of $2.8 million. A ten-week shoot will start on 3 September with Michael York and Sigrid Thornton in the lead roles. Based on the novel by Nevil Shute, the series will be produced by John Bannerman, directed by George Miller and written by Peter Yehohan.

Whose Baby? Alice to Nowhere and My Brother Tom, all four-hour mini-series with budgets of $2.7 million, $2.8 million and $2.6 million respectively, will be completed this year. Alice to Nowhere, based on the book by Evan Green, will be directed by David Stuttland and My Brother Tom, based on the novel by James Aldridge, will be written by Tony Morphet.
**High-level film visitors from the People's Republic**

**Chinese delegation scouting for suitable local product**

With the People's Republic of China fast becoming a major trading partner, its entertainment industry is now an important trading partner, a high-ranking Chinese delegation toured the country in July and early August.

Led by Shi Fang Yu, director of the China Film Bureau, the delegation was the guest of the Australian Film Institute, which extends the broadest representatives of China's film industry, under the title of 'Romance and Revolution'. The delegate was given a private showing of the film 'Red River and Gallipoli'. Since the delegation did not contain any representatives from the Ministry of Televison and Broadcasting or any specialists in documentary film, selection was tentative. However, viewings were also conducted with a broader representation of Chinese film in mind. The second series could take place in 1988, and would allow a wider selection of films aimed at audiences of film industry personnel in China.

The other area of interest for the visitors was the possibility of co-productions currently being actively pursued in the People's Republic. Despite considerable logistical difficulties, there have been some 60 international co-productions in recent years, with Japan as the main partner. As a result of a thaw in relationships between the two countries.

China is currently an attractive partner, and Shi Fang Yu was especially interested in the potential for joint ventures, which are made in Australia with an exploratory eye on the problems facing Chinese families living here.

As the preparatory members of the delegation were Sheng Songsheng, president of the Beijing Film Academy, Chen Jiajia, deputy director, Secretariat General of the China Cinema Art Research Centre and deputy chief of the China Film Archives (who will be back for the PAF meeting in Canberra next year), it is hoped that the scheme can raise $1.5 million per year.

**Briefly . . .**

- The AFI Awards will be telecast nationally on Saturday 14 September through the Ten Network. The two-hour telecast will cover the following, to be hosted by Andrew L. Urban (secretary general of the China Cinema Art Research Centre and deputy chief of the China Film Archives) at the China Film Architecs (who will be back for the PAF meeting in Canberra next year)
- The AFI Awards, the AFI, in conjunction with the Australian Film and Television School, will hold a series of seminars with AFI award winners. The seminars will be aimed at practitioners, with speakers including Andrew, Cinematographer, Script, Costume and Production Design, Original Music Score, Sound and Editing. Dates and times will be announced soon after the awards.
- While the issue of corporate sponsorship caused heated discussion when raised in connection with the ABC, the National Film and Sound Archive has begun a campaign to attract sponsors to help raise the hopes of the ABC and its great independent. The plan, conceived by special project officers Mike Linning and Sven Vinggaard, offers sponsors exclusive promotional rights to packages of material financed for promotion by the archive. It is hoped that the scheme can raise $1.5 million per year.

**Cultural values contrasted in satellite-link up**

The most interesting aspect of a live satellite-link up between Sydney and Tokyo on 25 July was the way in which it highlighted the cultural and life-style differences of Australian and Japanese children.

In a subtile but positive way, the medium proved to be outdated this time by the message, despite the context of a self-important event that threatened to drown its own purpose.

OTC and the Red Cross, with help from several other organizations, set up the link as a gesture of international goodwill and, especially, as an attempt to underline the present International Year of Youth.

Girls from the film studies class at Sydney Girls' High were asked to make a fifteen-minute documentary about aspects of their life at school. The Sydney girls, but one Japanese student, responded in person, responding in person, observed that they got virtually no help. Both groups of students complained about lack of time to make their films, but both also spoke to the world of the International Red Cross in helping to create a world-wide unity and peace.

The event was hoped to use the occasion as a demonstration of tele-conference facilities and capabilities. It was the divergence in social customs and educational methods between the two countries which really emerged.

- Australian children, as exemplified by Sydney Girls' High, are strong individualists, only casually controlled by the school as far as dress and hair are concerned, attend school only five days a week, do casual work on Saturdays and are quite outspoken.
- By contrast, the Japanese students are disciplined to a far greater extent, have six days a school week, conform more readily, are somewhat more reserved, disciplined and not permitted to do casual work.
- The function had no revelation to make technically, and invited guests had to watch the two large projection screens through the brightly-lit auditorium (to allow video cameras to record the event for internal and public viewing), which detracted from the event itself.

The live link ended with the Sydney and Tokyo girls singing 'We Are the World' more or less together, which would have made a good closer. However, more speeches and some presentations — all most worthy — had still to be made, which rather blurred the warm inner glow of youthful optimism.

**Andrew L. Urban**

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**November CINEMA PAPERS**

**John Baxter** is a film reviewer for **The Australian** and author of numerous books on the cinema.

**Rod Bishop** teaches film at the Phillip Institute of Technology.

**Susan Bredow** is a writer for the arts section of the Daily Telegraph.

**Pat H. Broeske** is a freelance journalist and writer on film and television based in Orange, California.

**Lorenzo Codelli** is a freelance journalist in Trieste, a contributor to *Variety*.

**Franco di Chiera** is a filmmaker, researcher and writer on film, currently working as a director at SBS TV.

**Dore Koesser** is a freelance writer currently based in Los Angeles.

**Peter Krien** is a freelance writer currently based in Los Angeles.

**Belinda Meares** is a freelance writer and reviewer for *Variety*.

**John Saunders** is a freelance writer for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

**Other television awards went to Leon Saunders for *Beyond All Reason*, an honourable mention for *Singles* by Paul Cox and Bob Ellis for their original screenplay of *My First Wife*. The major award went to Ray and Peter Carey for their adaptation of Carey's novel, *Bliss*.

**Screenwriting Awardees went to Paul Cox and Bob Ellis for their original screenplay of *My First Wife*. The major award went to Ray and Peter Carey for their adaptation of Carey's novel, *Bliss*.**

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Back on the rails again

Revised Melbourne Film Festival does well despite problems

After last year’s disaster, the 1985 Melbourne Film Festival could have been called a success just for happening. As it was, however, the Festival came up with an imaginative programme, good public response and a number of interesting related events.

The latter included an ‘Age Lecture’, with British director Alan Parker as the inaugural guest, a 20-year Oberhausen retrospective, attended by the short film festival’s retiring director, Wolfgang Rüt, who played to full houses, and a number of interesting seminars.

Then there was the Short Film competition, a FAAP-endorsed event with $12,000 in prizes. The top one was the $4,000 City of Melbourne Award for Best Film — went to Les Blank’s In Heaven There Is No Beer, about folkie fanatics. The event attracted little media attention, however — the Festival of movies was, a month after the Festival was over, a matter of history.

In common with Sydney, Melbourne tried to hit a balance between films with a commercial appeal which would soon be in release, and the ‘best of world cinema’ recipe common to most non-market-related festivals. Indeed, some sort of film market to look increasingly to be an area into which Melbourne should consider developing.

Among the soon-to-be-released films were Birdy, Blood Simple, Broken Mirrors, Dance With A Stranger, Les nuits de la pleine lune (Full Moon in Paris), Helmat, Significance, Red Matildas, Repo Man and Rok pokolnego sonca (The Year of the Quiet Sun). The two Australian features, The Boy Who Had Everything and Wrong World, are still looking for distributors, but got generally good responses.

In the international smorgasbord category, Melbourne showed Banbanrien (Ah Ying) by Allen Fong (Fong Yuk-Ping) which, like Fong’s earlier Fui Qin (Father and Son), gives a charming, beautifully modulated but hard-edged and accurate picture of life in Hong Kong. In it, the colony comes across not — as its commercial movies suggest — all martial arts, kia-kia bang-bang and car chases, but as a place of serious problems and pressures. The film, though, left me wanting a little more balance between the hero’s self-obsessed partner, the improbably named Troquet (Lou Castell), as by her female friends, who is initially supposed to be a princess, but subsequently is seen to have been previously involved in a relationship that has caused her to prefer to deal with her emotional traumas. “If it’s rape,” she complains, “a solid- ary response could be stirring.”

Tony Gatliff’s Les Princes (The Princes), a heartfelt story about semi-autobiographical contemporaries of the early 1970s, is undoubtedly an extraordinary first feature. Its hero, Nara (Gerard Darmon), a young boy by whom his father (Jean-Pierre Fargier) is reduced to his ageing mother and his young daughter, after he has kicked out his wife and his two little girls. The film, which ran from 7 to 23 June, somehow attracted a high walk-out rate. Far better was Director Rod Web’s The Trouble with Love, which ran from 7 to 23 June, some of which would have been due to the fact that, a month after the Festival was over, the Festival of festivals was, indeed, a matter of history.

The Festival’s two high spots came for me, however, from two very different films about the nuclear age. Geoff Murphy’s The Quiet Earth, a characteristically anarchic and subversive account of post-apocalyptic Australian society, and the magnificently exaggerated performance by Muse Dalbrey, the only professional in the cast, which tests the limits of human endurance. The film is not only a picture of Australia but of the Roman theory of the creation of god, but it is, instead, a picture of the dangers of the nuclear age.

The problem with The Princes is that its script, a mixture of the personal and the political, is so well-observed and so well-acted that it is hard to believe that it is a feature. The film is not only a picture of Australia but of the Roman theory of the creation of god, but it is, instead, a picture of the dangers of the nuclear age.

Ticket sales down at the Sydney Film Festival

Japanese films provide this year’s highlights

The five-to-six per cent decline in ticket sales for this year’s Sydney Film Festival, a fall-off given by Festival Administrator Patricia Watson was the trend towards home entertainment and the number of international films currently shown on SBS-TVs.

In Heaven There Is No Beer, about folkie fanatics. The event attracted little media attention, although the material must have made that difference.

Memories of a nuclear past: one of the two Japanese films at the Festival was, however, the kind of film that justifies the word ‘anarchist’, and a picture of life in Hong Kong. In it, the colony comes across not — as its commercial movies suggest — all martial arts, kia-kia bang-bang and car chases, but as a place of serious problems and pressures. The film, however, left me wanting a little more balance between the hero’s self-obsessed partner, the improbably named Troquet (Lou Castell), as by her female friends, who is initially supposed to be a princess, but subsequently is seen to have been previously involved in a relationship that has caused her to prefer to deal with her emotional traumas. “If it’s rape,” she complains, “a solid- ary response could be stirring.”

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Two other films, one indirectly Japanese, drew different pictures of the Japanese society. Tokyo Ga, directed by Ken Loach, is a study in cinema and in the weeping of thoughts and images. Gakufunusha Kazoku (Crazy Family), directed by Sogo O’Rourke’s magnificently exaggerated documentary, Half Life, about the effects of America’s Bikini Atoll nuclear tests on the inhabitants of the neighbouring Marshall Islands.

Stowly, methodically and to ironic steel- greets, the film presents a less unrelenting case for Bikini Atoll and its inhabitants having been used as guinea pigs. The film’s great strength is that fact that it is neither strident nor emotional, though the material must have made that difference.

But no one who has seen it is likely to forget the unspoken contrast between a nuclear family about to be wiped out by US medical research centre by a group of Marshall Islanders, and the quiet account, by a single woman, of the group, of his son’s subsequent death.

 mentor’s observations is that of being able to turn on one’s parents and successfully drive them out of their home and their minds, it is repeated that the generation gap was universal.

Aside from Japan, other fascinating examples of the diversity in documentary filmmaking were Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker’s Dance Black America, all about the hoop and the hoop, and its observance of the beauty of the human spirit and body; Which Side Are You On?, Ken Loach’s impassioned portrait of the British miners’ strike — passionate, gritty and unashamedly partisan; and Mike Leigh’s quasi-fictional account of two Ulster
Standing room only at Munich's third Filmfest

Two Australian shorts are among the highlights

The German films on show were generally reckoned to be disappointing. 1985 seems to be shaping up in Germany as conventional and unexciting on the film scene, producing the sorts of works that, with the exception of Maria Knittl's Lieber Karl (Dear Karl), could just as easily have been made for television.

Lieber Karl was on show in Cannes, and has recently been awarded the golden Filmband, for best adapted screenplay. A first feature by a young woman filmmaker, it is an impressive tale about a boy growing up in the protected environment of a small town in Austria.

Of the better-known films at Munich, most have already appeared at festivals or been on general release elsewhere: Jean-Luc Godard's Détective for instance, an inaccessible crime story that neither press nor public seemed disposed to tackle; and Ken Russell's Crimes of Passion, an amusing 'problem film' with a light touch, which, while remaining Russell's best work, Carlos Saura's Los Zancos (Stilts), on the other hand, turned out to be a boring, lightweight love story featuring an older man and a young woman. Using the folkloric moments of traveling theatre group as its monotonous background, it ranks among Saura's weakest films.

Among the American films on offer were Peter Bogdanovich's Mask, the moving story of a boy with a terribly deformed face who tries to live a normal life, and Michael Ritchie's Fletch, a high-speed crime comedy, in which a journalist (Chevy Chase) stumbles on a police drug ring. With Harrison Ford, Donald Sutherland, Claude LeLouch, Rod Steiger and Glenda Jackson (but excluding Kurosawa himself) — was in a fine state of anticipation when the film, thrillingly shown with English subtitles, began.

Their expectations were well rewarded, despite an alarming focus in the opening reel. Ran is based on King Lear, except that the three daughters have become three sons, Lord Blackmore. According to the synopsis, the eldest of the youngest sons, Saburo (Daiei Ryu), Soon enough, his elder sons, Taro (Satoshi Terao) and Kun (Takayuki Yamada) are not the evil, witch-like, Mieko Harada, invading their father's castle, providing the framework for its superlative staged central battle scene.

As the battle begins, Kurosawa elevates all manner of ghosts, the most poignant being Tani Takanami's mournful music, as arrows impale skeletons and the castle becomes suddenly treacherous. The gunshot kills Taro, and the din of battle is heard for the first time. The great sequence ends with a memorable, Shake- spearian moment, as the maddened Lord silently appears at the entrance to his ravaged home, and the soldiers melt away to let him pass.

Ran — the title means 'chaos' — is certainly one of Kurosawa's best achievements, a film with epic sweep and breathtaking drama becomes totally involving. Not since the days of El Cid has a medieval epic been handled with such style and scope.

The director's misogynistic streak is apparent once again, though, in the character of the scheming, evil Lady Kaede. Superbly played by Mieko Harada, she is first confusing the Lady Macbeth of Kurosawa's Throne of Blood, a role created by Isuzu Yamada in Kurosawa's only film, the world premiere of Akira Kurosawa's Ran, had started at an unaccus­ ced early in the evening. The film was completed only ten days earlier, and the formally-attired cast and crew were still in newspeak, various politicians, Bernardo Bertolucci, Harrison Ford, Donald Sutherland, Claude Lelouch, Rod Steiger and Glenda Jackson (but excluding Kurosawa himself) — was in a fine state of anticipation when the film, thrillingly shown with English subtitles, began.

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Animators play it safe to win the prizes

Annecy's anniversary lacks sparkle, but is strong on scatology

Given that the Annecy International Festival of Animation was celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, there was a disappointing lack ofazzazzmatazzabout the place. Pre-Festival excitement was such that an unprecedented 3,000 delegates turned up, many of whom soon began to feel less than welcome as accommodation ran out, and the Festival organization was stretched to its limits.

Far from dancing the night away, delegates waited forlornly in the early hours of every morning for shuttle buses to transport them back to hotels that were, in some cases miles away. A colour-coding system to separate delegates into the three daily competition screenings soon created a hierarchy and a division. The nights never met the blues, and the greens never met anybody.

The Market, opened by French Minister of Culture Jack Lang, was this year's success story. Animation generally has problems finding outlets, so the Market should provide a space for filmmakers to test their work and to hold up the last emotional infrastructure for the Festival.

In honour of its anniversary, Annecy presented a full program of retrospectives from a distinguished line-up of celebrities, including Jan Svankmajer, Raoul Servais and Bruno Bozzetto. Among the films, Disney's Oscar-winning shorts provided a pleasurable reviewing of classics such as The Three Little Pigs and The Tortoise and the Hare.

Other programmers failed to live up to expectations. Two 'little known' films by Hollywood animators turned out to be quite familiar to most of us, and the Chinese and Russian screenings bore the depressing imprimatur of official selections. In any case, delegates had to be quick off the mark to catch everything. It took much attention at Cannes it, too, would not attracted so much

The family in Juoz Iami’s The Funeral, clear winner of the first prize in competition at Taormina this year.

Taormina goes Hollywood

Top-rated Sicilian festival emerges as the ‘Italian Deauville’

It was a big risk, but the gamble paid off: the third American Film Week (aka the ‘Italian Deauville’) brought crowds to the spectacular Teatro Antico, and filled Taormina with stars like Tony Curtis, Esther Williams, Jacqueline Bisset, Gina Lollobrigida, Claudia Cardinale and Natascha Kinski. It did not, however, bankrupt the Festival’s cultural ambitions.

Now in its 31st edition, Taormina produced a strong challenge to Venice, both in terms of closer collaboration with the Americans, and in its competitive sections, which remain the raison d’être of Italy’s only other FIAPF-approved festival.

The MPA’s Jack Valenti headed the Hollywood contingent at Taormina, and declared — after visiting the village near Palermo where his grandparents came from — that he would make sure that, even if every other festival fell into the sea and disappeared, Taormina would stay afloat.

In the competition, first prize was attributed without the slightest polemic to Juoz Iami’s Ososchik The Funeral — featured in the last issue of Cinema Papers, but a no-show at the Melbourne Film Festival — thus confirming the arrival of the young Japanese cinema (Sogo Ishi’s Gyukusunsha kazoku The Crazy Family) as well as the producer’s promise: "They will pay $10,000 to boot at the other major film festivals, and are shown widely in Canada; and Rein Ramaat’s Een griekse Tragedie (A Greek Tragedy), a popular choice, also won the prize for Best Scenario. The first film by the Finnish animator Nicolas van Gaethem, it was the story of the struggle of three godfathers to hold up the last remnants of a Greek temple. An outstanding first film, it was nevertheless a bit slight to win the Grand Prix on such a prestigious occasion.

Two films shared the Prix Special du Jury: Isho Park’s discarding Paradise, a film of scatology and cultural difference by an Indian filmmaker who has found the best conditions for his kind of humour in the National Film Board of Canada; and Ren Ramdas’s Hell, based on the work of a nineteenth-century Estonian visualiser, visually impressive, but rather too long.

In a lighter vein (though perhaps ultimately more rewarding), Richard Condie’s truly hilarious Big Snit Canada won the Critics’ Prize. The “moody” entry — it is between a married couple who battle it out over a game of Scrabble, while the outbreak of a nuclear war goes unnoticed.

A film less worthy in its themed was Guido Manuli’s Incubus (Italy), which won the prize for Best Scenario. It featured the scatological nightmares of a little man. Bodily functions were a leitmotiv at Annecy this year — of a kind, especially, of course.

A refreshing oasis among the adolescent fantasies of middle-aged animators was provided by the student team. Alison Snowden’s Second Class Mail (Britain, National Film and Television School), about a vending machine with experience with an inflatible man, shared the prize for a First Film with John Minnis’s Charade (Canada, Sheridan College). And Susan Young, whose film was shown two years ago, goes from strength to strength, winning the prize for Best Animation with her Pecore Carnivale (Britain, Royal College of Art).

So, what has Annecy achieved in 25 years? Along with the many other animation festivals which have burgeoned in its wake, it has helped bring about the ‘festival film’, turning towards safe ‘artiness’ and cheap humour.

American independent animator Jane Alexander, of course, has played the game. Her experimental, non-narrative films are on the fringes of acceptability at Annecy.

Monaque Renault, a feminist animator, was at the Festival as a buyer for Dutch television, no longer even attempts to enter her own films there, though they do well at feminist and short film festivals, and are shown widely in Holland.

And the reality of industrial animation in countries such as Britain is commercial and titles, including some of the most stunning work being made at the moment. The few examples in competition this year, however, looked oddly out of place.

Annecy seems to have produced in the minds of its audience and its filmmakers a conception of films which speak to the selection committee and the jury. In the main, it excludes the wide range of possibilities necessary for the development of the medium.

The vast majority of the public meanwhile continues to think of animation as Mickey Mouse. Is Annecy any more likely to contribute to changing this perception over the next 25 years than it has in the first quarter century?

It can encourage films which either speak to real people about the real world — or else genuinely push forward the boundaries of animation through real experimentation, there doesn’t seem much chance.

David Stratton

Don Ravaud
Irene Kotlarz
‘STRANGE, HAUNTING’
- Time Out, London

‘A WORLD OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY’
- La Presse, Montreal

‘ASTONISHING’
‘POWERFUL’
- Cinema, Paris

‘COMPELLING’
- Le Matin, Paris

‘SUPERB’
- Los Angeles Times

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Rambo bumper stickers and a Spielberg summer

Since its strategic release on Memorial Day weekend, Rambo: First Blood Part II has been taking deadly aim at the U.S. box office. The third-largest grossing opening of all time (after Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and Return of the Jedi) has generated much critical scrutiny, intense media analysis, and domestic ticket sales in excess of $107 million.

On top of this, of course, is the film’s slick snowballing merchandising campaign. According to a representative of Overseas Posters, based in Monterey Park, California, “there hasn’t been anything this hot since Michael Jackson”.

The company is issuing bumper stickers with slogans like ‘Need an Army? Hire Rambo’ and ‘Beware! This Vehicle is Protected by Rambo’. “I expect to see that one on every pick-up in America,” says the man from Overseas.

There will also be Rambo action dolls (complete with pants, shirt, bow and arrows), and Rambo pinball machines. Rambo water pistols (including a two-foot-long automatic machine gun), Rambo watches, Rambo pinball games, Rambo bubble gum cards, and Rambo comic books.

Never mind that the Tri-Star film is rated R, and therefore supposedly not for kids. Rambo is being directed as the next John Wayne. In theatres in blue-collar neighbourhoods, audiences (some of them wearing khaki) are reportedly standing on their seats, applauding Rambo’s winning ways with warfare.

In rare reasons, Cambria has been attributed to everything from the re-emergence of the macho heterosexual man to a new pacifism. Rambo, the Tri-Star film starring Stallone, is described as “humbling” by the hero. “I sit there and I marvel at his death-rate ratio. I sit there and I wish I had that glorious place to die, he really is. He is a symbol of the men who died at Valley Forge and Normandy.”

For the (rather ironic) record, the 39-year-old Stallone did not pass his own draft physical. As the lines of straight-faced sincerity (though there are other versions), he once fell asleep after drinking too much at a named dead-nite combo, and woke up with his hearing impaired.

But the Stallone physique remains in which he always looked better. After completing the now-filming Rocky IV (in which the Philadelphia southpaw squares off against — a Russian MGM/United Artists, Stallone goes onto Over the Top, an arm-wrestling tale for Cannon Films and, according to recent reports, the inevitable Rambo sequel. Apparently, the character isn’t too anxious to die.

Elsewhere, it’s been a Steven Spielberg summer. In its first six weeks of release, the Richard Donner-directed The Goonies, for Warner Bros., based on a Spielberg story and ‘presented’ by Spielberg, grossed more than $24 million. With glowing reviews, Universal’s just-released Back to the Future, another Spielberg ‘presentation’ directed by Robert Zemeckis, also looks to be a summer winner. In fact, it may emerge as the season’s champ. The film, which simulates a 73-minute flight, has performed so well in preview engagements that Spielberg decided to extend the U.S. run from 44% in 1983 to an alarming 49%.

In the short term, the brief recent upsurge in British cinema refurbishment during the British Film Year, the trade press classic, to commit £12 million ($24 million) toward even the cast will not know whodunnit — ‘Clue’ stars Eileen Brennan, Tim Curry, Madeline Kahn, Christopher Lloyd, Michael McKean, Martin Mull, Lesley-Anne Warren and Colleen Camp. Karen Black and her real-life son, Hunter Carson, play mother and son in Cannon’s Invaders from Mars. The remake of the classic 1953 sci-fi tale is being directed by Tobe Hooper, and includes a cameo by Jim Hunt. Formerly known as Jimmy Hunt, he starred in the original. Little wonder that Hunt, who is shooting after interminable delays, while farce ‘by Alan Bleasdale, who wrote the TV serial, Boys from the Blackstuff, is screening more New Zealand films than ever.

Wrong, shown around the NZ festivals. Another Australian director is also filming in Scotland: Richard Franklin, whose film, Barry, is now being directed by Tobe Hooper, and includes a cameo by Alice Walker’s novel about Southern blacks.

In the short term, the brief recent upsurge in British cinema refurbishment is being directed by Gaylene Preston, plus five short films, Leave All Fair, a ‘deadpan farce’ by Alan Bleasdale, who wrote the TV serial, Boys from the Blackstuff, is screening more New Zealand films than ever.

New Zealand by Sue May

Lots on the screen, but little on the set

In a new spirit of industry-wide co-operation that would have astounded those who re-launched the New Zealand film industry eight years ago, this year’s festival season is screening more New Zealand films than ever.

Festivals in the four main centres are now nationally programmed by the Federation of Film Societies, and held in cinemas belonging to the major exhibitors, Kerridge Odeon and Amalgamated Theatres. Audiences have seen the world premiere of Barry Barclay’s feature-length documentary, The Neglected Miracle, and Australian premiere of features Leave All Fair, directed by John Reid, and Mr Wrong, directed by Gaylene Preston, plus five short films.

New Zealand films are also to feature in several American showcases in the next few months. The American Film Institute is running a month-long season of 30 films in the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington in October. Shortly before that, the New Zealand Film Archive will be presenting a season of archival and modern films at the Palace Film Archive, in September, to coincide with the acclaimed A View to a Kill, which opened on June 19.

Major production this year is in television series, mainly co-productions with overseas companies (like Britain’s Central and TVNZ). There have been two mini-series: The Searchers: Horses of the High Country, directed by Sam Pillsbury, and Flaxton Hill’s Terry and the Gunrunners, directed by Chris Bailey.

There is also a children’s series, Cuckoo Land, produced on video by the Gibson
Germany by Dieter Oswald

Re-issue of Wilder film worries them in Berlin

The main talking point on the German film scene this early summer is that there has been the announcement by the Hollywood-based Cannon Group of a plan to buy up 200 German cinemas, thereby consolidating Cannon’s recent purchases of the Classic chain in the UK and Holland’s Tuschiinov cinemas. In Germany, Cannon’s Magnusen Golan is working in close consultation with the Riech group, which owns the majority of the country’s cinemas.

The other big topic of discussion this year is a rather different nature: the huge and unexpected success of a re-release of Billy Wilder’s 1961 comedy, One, Two, Three, which has been playing to sell-out crowds in West Berlin’s biggest cinema, the Depeche, for several weeks. Critics and audiences have been bowled over by the film, which originally coincided with the building of the Berlin Wall and has had its release shelved in Germany because its parody of Cold War anti-communism seemed a little too acute.

Otherwise, distribution spin-offs seem to be what directors have considered the best bets of late. The successful TV show, Formel 1 — a collection of songs and videos — has spun off an identically-named film with stars like Limahl, Pia Zadora and Meat Loaf. Another top comic, Otto, has made his cinema debut, there is a Berlin New Wave film with Nena (of ’1989 Luxballots’ fame) and the music for the nonsense comedy group, Trio, has also made a movie.

Producer of the last-named is Bernd Eichinger of Neue Film, who was behind Das Boot (The Boat) and The Neverending Story. Eichinger is also currently producing a film version of Umberto Eco’s bestseller, The Name of the Rose, which is already directing in the monastery at Maulbronn.

Meanwhile, Margherite von Trotta is at work on a totally different project, Ich bin, ich werde sein: Die Geulde von Rosa Luxemburg, about the life and political struggles of the German revolutionary between 1910 and 1919, and taking place over what has been a rather uneven Werner Fassbinder’s next project.

Box office returns rather than art seem to be the key to Joey, the second film by Roland Emmerich, which has been shooting in the Arcachon. No-Prize (The Noah’s Ark Principle) caused some ripples at the 1984 Berlin Festival. Like Three, it’s been shot in summer.

The box office success of the last few weeks, however, has been osteoporotic. For June, top place went to Police Academy II, followed by Witness and, again, Amadeus. The other top Evergreen, The Purple Rose of Cairo, received a lukewarm reception from critics and audiences alike.

Mention should also be made of the new films by the enfant terrible of German cinema, Herbert Anton, whose Double Bond caused a stir two years ago with Gespenst (Ghost). He has two new films due out, both clearly highly interesting, about his trip to China, and Föhnsforscher, whose tagline is Das Leben ist so kurz wie eine Badehose (life is as short as a bathing costume). The box office front, the top three money-earners in May were Beverly Hills Cop, Amadeus and Beverly Hills Story (commonly known as Lemon Popsicle 6), while The Bounty and Purple Rain both performed below par. For June, top place went to Police Academy II, followed by Witness and, again, Amadeus. The other top

In Italy, summer is a traditional dead zone for new openings, but this summer is without even the remotest shadow of an Italian film. After some Christmas hits, the Italian film industry has quietly closed down, leaving the country’s cinemas to Woody Allen, Peter Weir, Blake Edwards and Hollywood.

In April, a new financial law promised incentives for investors (’Too late!’ cried several producers) and larger sums of money available from state television. Because it covers other sectors like theatre and television, this legislation has merely underlined the urgent need for a companion law covering film and connected media. That is promised for the autumn.

Before going to sleep for the summer, the state-owned RAI-TV offered two very recent live shows, which built up large followings.

Enzo Biaggi’s Linea diretta, a commentary on sport, has received much praise and also coincided with the building of the Berlin Wall, and had its release shelved in Germany.

The other hit was Renzo Arbore’s modacrylic, night clubber, Quelli della notte. Arbore, a well-established spotted of the Italian conventional entertainment business, came up with a few new comedians who threaten to invade the conventional season’s cheap comedies with a rush of cheap comedies.

RAI money was invested in most (if not all) of the ambiguous pictures now nearing completion, and announced for various premieres. Federico Fellini’s ‘Freddy a Ginger stars a bold, Manozullo Marco and Franco Zeffirelli’s Le Métier de l’Amour (which won the Oscar for Best Director) and a grannynish Giulietta Masina, as two performers trying to make a comeback during a stormy private TV show. It looks like part of the Master’s revenge against the wild treatment of his movies on the private channels, which he recently sued.

Etore Scola puts Mastroiani and Jack Lemmon into a kind of together, where they play two wartime companions who renew their friendship in present-day Naples. And Roberto Lambruschini’s Sbarazzarsi comes back to the movies with La spina nel cuore, from Piero Chierà’s popular series of TV shows, his first with that flavoured TV epic, Cristoforo Colombo.

And, before retiring, Luigi Comencini is directing two MOCK-TRAGEDIES, his latest flop: Mar Michielma, now shown at the Gherbi (of the Golden West), with sets by Ken Adam, but poor critical reactions.

The spaghetti western was studied in depth during an academic meeting in Turin. James Ivory had his first retrospective in the local Folk festival. In the US, Melodramas swarmed in Gabicce, screenwriters in Gorizia, children’s pictures in Giffon Valles, and in Florence, sea adventures in Ancona.

But why so many local events, important or otherwise? Are there no national co-ordination or larger cultural projects? Why more and more films shown just once at festivals, with no national distribution or exhibitors offer practically none of them? Why the anarcho-broadcasting of these various events, with no public information, planning or selection? How did we ever come to love this state of permanent disorder?

France by Belinda Meares

All-night film session attracts back the vanishing spectator

Despite the media fanfare of the Cannes Film Festival, French cinema attendances dropped by 15% in the first third of 1985. Despite the recent reawakening of a ‘longest night of the cinema’ was declared on Friday 14 June. For the price of a single ticket, film fans could spend from 2 pm to 6 am watching a succession of movies in any theatre or theatres of their choice. It is an experiment that will almost certainly be repeated, since door takings doubled.

On the production front, cinema and video producers have welcomed the government’s announcement of new tax shelter arrangements for the industry. Two Chabal-Poulet au vin, directed by Maurice Pialat, and Godard’s Détective, both of which have been largely passed over. Top of the list are the two Tom of Finland films, Fields, Passage to India and Brazil.

French films that have scored include the rock-video-like Subway, directed by Luc Besson, and starring Christopher Lambert (of Greystoke) and Isabelle Adjani. Les spéciatelles Marche l’ombre, and Claude Zidi’s Les ripoux (released in the USA as My New Partner).

French films at Cannes, Andre Techine’s Rendez-Vous (which won the Best Director prize), has come out way ahead of Chabrol’s Peuliar and Godard’s Détective, both of which have been largely passed over. Top of the list are the two Tom of Finlanl films, Fields, Passage to India and Brazil.

French films which have been making a modest impact include Mehrzad Charef’s Le harem d’archimede, René Victoria’s Le meilleur de la vie (starring Sandrine Bonnaire), Escalier C, directed by Jean-Claude Taillieu (of Cousin, Cousine fame), and Bérénice, directed by Jean-Pierre Poher.

The long-awaited pronouncements on the structuring of the new television system — which, for the first time in France, is to include private national and local channels — were made on 21 May. Two commercial national channels are envisaged, to complement Canal Plus, the private sub­scriber station that came into existence last year. Of the three public channels (TFI, Antenne 2 and FR3), one is to go private. In addition, 15 cities are to establish a Channel One, which will be transmitted throughout Europe via France’s new satellite. TFII, due to be launched in July 1986.

May and June box office figures reflect a certain loyalty to local production, although Amadeus and The Terminator have been in the forefront for many, a long week, which is the season’s key box office.

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deux, starring Gérard Depardieu and Sigourney Weaver, and José Pinheiro’s Parole de fil, in which Alain Delon gets to play a jury.

There are also a few exciting projects on the horizon: a film by Chabrol about Camille Claudel; a version of the play by Bernard Pivot, starring a new Claude Miller film with a cast of adolescents, among whom is Charlotte Gainsbourg, daughter of Serge Gainsbourg, and Isabelle Adjani; a new version of Michelle Langlais’ Le mérite de la peine (starring Francis Huster); a new version of Agnés Varda’s first film after an eight-year absence, a saisir, again with Sandrine Bonnaire (currently France’s busiest actress); Daniel Vigne’s Une femme, ou...
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Emir of Cannes

"You know," says Yugoslav filmmaker Emir Kusturica, "I'm not the sort of director who sits round in the cafes, biting my nails and waiting for the final decision of the Jury. So I left Cannes and went back to Sarajevo to help my mate fix his central heating and replace his floorboards. I'm an expert at that.

Kusturica, a 30-year-old graduate of Prague's famed FAMU film school, is as unassuming and modest as he sounds. He was sitting in a cafe when I found him, though, just round the corner from the Kozara cinema in Belgrade, where the Yugoslav premiere of this year's surprise winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes was already under way. Anywhere else in the world, the director of Father on a Business Trip (Otac na službenom putu) would have been mobbed by journalists and photographers. Not in Yugoslavia, though, where the press seems to have a healthy respect for the privacy of its stars.

The local press, however, had made something of a meal out of Kusturica not being on hand to accept the Cannes prize, and he is defensive about it. "As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter a bit whether or not I was in Cannes to accept the award. The press has got the whole thing out of proportion: they're more interested in that than in the award. It doesn't matter who actually received the thing: the point is that it is here in Yugoslavia, and that gives me more pleasure than anything else."

Father on a Business Trip is set in Sarajevo in 1945, the year of Tito's crucial split with the Kremlin. It tells the story of a young official (Miki Manojlovic) working at the Ministry of Labour, who one day lets drop his dissatisfaction with anti-Soviet sentiment to his discontented lover (Mira Furlan), who consequently has him arrested as a Cominform sympathizer. He is sent to the island labour camp of Goli Otok, a short period of time," she explains. "But I can tell you, I've used all that money since then to keep myself and to help develop projects.

Even with a Golden Lion already in the bag, however, making Father on a Business Trip was no easy matter. Kusturica had to set out on a two-year odyssey merely to find a producer willing to back him. "I was sick to death," he says, "that no one would give me a straight, yes/no answer."

One of the major reasons was that the subject has suffered from a kind of overkill in Yugoslavia in recent years, with Antone Katic's book about Goli Otok, and Dušan Kovacevich's film and theatre successes with The Balkan Spy (Balkanski spijun).

The new film had a false start in 1983, and at the outset the actors and crew worked for nothing. Finally, Forum Film of Sarajevo took over the project, marking an adventurous experiment for a small production distributor which had previously made only shorts and documentaries.

When it was finally in the can, however, Forum knew they were onto a winner. Gilles Jacob, in charge of the selection for Cannes, said in January and immediately gave a written assurance that it would be in competition, since it was already in demand for FEST, the Belgrade International Festival of Film, who wanted to open their programme with it.

Rumour also has it that Gian Luigi Rondi, the director's husband, Kevin Anderson, with a Colleen McCullough tie-in, with a portion of the book royalties accruing to the production company.

Books are familiar territory for Rosa: her business career started with the only Italian bookshop in the southern hemisphere. "That made me a fairly wealthy lady in a short period of time," she explains. "But I can tell you, I've used all that money since then to keep myself and to help develop projects.

On Moving Out, I worked as production consultant, because of the ethnic content. I was initially hired just to write the Italian dialogue, but they found out I was useful in other areas as well. The same thing happened on Waterfront. I was hired to write the Italian dialogue and I ended up getting them copies of the 1928 socialist novel.

He was not amused. The Belgrade newspaper, Vecernje Novosti, quoted him as saying at Cannes: "It's far from correct to compare this film to my story."

Father on a Business Trip, his first film, Do You Remember Dolly Bell? (Sjećaš li se Dolly Bell?), also scripted by the Bosnian poet, Abdalrahman Sidran, is set in the late fifties, when Western fashions, music, movies and hairstyles were slowly penetrating the country. For that film, Kusturica won the Golden Lion for Best Film at the 1981 Venice Festival, as well as the FIPRESCI award.

For deaf, read Italian

Rosa Colosimo has finally got a feature in the can. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has ever met her — Rosa is a remarkably determined lady — but it does occasionally seem to surprise her, if only because she has been knocked back on a couple of times on projects that looked pretty cast-iron. One even had a Colleen McCullough trim, with a portion of the book royalties accruing to the production company.

The feature is a simple, short, sharp, low-budget movie called The Still Point. And, apart from a minor character played by her son's mother, there's not an ethnic character in sight. For Italian, though, read deaf. The story concerns a teenage girl from a middle-class home (Sarah, played with surprising intensity by Vincenza Garoni, star of The Henderson Hawk), who has a hearing impairment.

Sensitively directed by Barbara Boyd-Anderson, making her feature debut, it is a number of documentaries, and shot by the director's husband, Kevin Anderson, with a fluency and grace that belies the limitations of time and money, it is more a study of adolescence than a problem picture.

"It's a whole combination of things," explains Rosa: "the fact that Sarah's an adolescent, that she's in a new school as a result of her parents' marriage breaking up, that she idealizes her father, that she sees her mother's new boyfriend as a threat."

The hearing problem aggravates all that. She adds: "The hearing I saw as a sort of metaphorical thing."

Rosa's explanation of the nature of the metaphor takes her back into the area of ethnicity, however. "My whole attitude has always been that a hearing impairment is yet another problem one has to cope with. You can be grossly overweight, you can have dreadful blood pressure, and you can be a migrant ... it's something you have to cope with." For deaf, in other words, read Italian.

The story of The Still Point is about Sarah breaking out of an isolation that is the result of her deafness, and is partly self-imposed. "I was originally inspired by a house that sits on the cliff overlooking Moreton Bay," says Rosa, "the most beautiful part of the bay. But it's got these little slit windows; it reminded me of a house with heavy Victorian furniture and heavy drapes. And I saw this girl walking through this beam of light, parting the curtains, looking down and seeing all the things."

The idea evolved into a script early last summer, after the prospectus for a much bigger feature, Blowing Hot and Cold, had failed. "I wanted a miniature nervous breakdown, in morale at any rate, so I started working on a different story: Between September and Christmas, what I did was a scene-by-scene breakdown of a story called Summer in Mount Martha."

"I put it in a drawer."

The money for the film suddenly started coming together earlier this year, and a first draft was written in three days, with two more drafts the following week. On the final draft, Barbara Boyd-Anderson also collaborated.

In Rosa's resume, however, The Still Point still stands out as an exception. Blowing Hot and Cold, for instance, is the story of an Australian fellow and an Italian fellow. They sort of start off as dreadful stereotypes, but, through understanding and having to work together, they shed their stereotypes and can race off and do things together.

The other project has an even stronger Italian connection, with Italian director Lina Wertmüller already signed to direct. This is the one with the Colleen McCullough screenplay, and its full title — of a length that could be guaranteed to appeal to Wertmüller — also gives a fair idea of the story: Daniel in the Lion's Den Discovers Among the Aboriginals in Terra

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Australias that Only Sons of Bitches Can Change the World
Explain Rosa: "It's the story of a young man whose parents are Italian, and who is thus faced with certain choices. The British institutions have nothing to offer someone of Italian origin. The American crap which is - to wipe the whole lot out. It isn't even a case of retaining those pretty dances from overseas and those wonderful ethnic foods. You've got to start anew.

"I see both of them as being potentially really important films," she says. "But I think that the way I see them in my development is that they're things that I have to get out of the way before I move on to other. . . not necessarily more universal topics, but certainly less ethnically-oriented ones."

Nick Roddick

Down among the dingo

Haydn Keenan is the son of a butcher who was named after a Welsh fly half. As a filmmaker, however, he has averaged only one film every seven years. He blames what he describes as his "slow-paced rise to mediocrity" on his outspoken acceptance speech when his first feature, 27A, won the AFI award in 1988: he told the audience that anyone who said a 22-year-old couldn't make movies could get stuffed.

After that, not surprisingly, he was considered something of a naughty boy, and says the Australian Film Commission was reluctant to assist him. Though he has had a little help with script and marketing, he has never received government production money, despite applying 37 times. Funding for his films has come from "straight" financiers — the sort of people, he says, who break your legs if you can't pay the interest. That he walks without a limp is a fair indication that, although he hasn't made a fortune out of filmmaking, he hasn't done too badly, either.

In 1983, after much trauma and drama, he produced Going Down, a dramatic and deferent tale of things a lot of people would rather not know about, like drugs, prostitution and the Kings Cross underworld. He likes making films about "grot", and believes there is a strong market for them among "kids who want a night out, and who would love to see themselves on screen": they pay $7, and there they are. They may not be junkies or manicures themselves, but they know what the film is talking about," he says.

Keenan prefers making low-budget films with quick shoots, and his latest, Pandemonium, will be no exception. Ideally, he says, when he starts the shoot in August, he would like to roll the cameras on Friday night and to have finished by Monday morning. At any rate, he hopes to have it completed for $600,000.

"There's nothing in it that we haven't pulled out of the newspapers, though," says Keenan. "You ask me, 'Why the subject matter?' I could ask you, 'Why all the column inches devoted to foetuses at the Repro factory in Paris, or found in the gutters of Bondi?' All we're doing is dishes back in a form that will be very cheap, racy and comic. It's going to have Fred Nile out in front, screaming for our blood, which is going to attract a crowd. But, in the end, it's the old Romulus and Remus story, the old Oedipus story: Overseas, they don't want to know where you're from: they just want to know if they can make some money out of you."

As a result, Keenan is after something light, intelligible and Australian, that can make a lot of money, and maybe change Australia's contribution to movies on an international level. The so-called "New Wave" of Australian film has hardly been a turning of the tide — a mere ripple, according to Keenan: "It's certainly nothing to rock the boat. "We have imitated the Americans very efficiently. That is not a new wave. What was called a new wave in France was a different thing: it was against the mainstream."

But the potential is there, Keenan believes, to come up with some one-off beauties. "With our strange, Anglo-Saxon mentality in our Dali landscapes, in the middle of Asia, in a timeless place which blows Europeans' minds, we have the basis for some explosively original art, if we could get a little bit of social dynamics going. But current funding is no incentive: how can you run a decent business making shoes for $1 when you only need a return of 10c?"

"I think the closest thing to 10BA is the Australian dairy industry: it would be cheaper to bring milk from New Zealand, but we want a dairy industry. If the government wants a film industry aimed at producing low-budget — say $1-2 million — features aimed at the US cable market, they've done it very well. They're turning out films that we can only call family movies, which are not going to offend anyone and are not going to attract anyone. Our movie is being made for those under 35" — Keenan himself is 37 — "and that's a market segment. They know what bad acting is, because they watch it on television every night of the week."

Travelling around Europe last year trying to sell Going Down taught Keenan a few lessons about what to put in a film," he said. 'Look, I've got a beautifully sensitive social film here with four young girls', and they'd say, 'Not very good looking girls, are they?' I'm trying to show 90 minutes of film, and other people have got some 10b$ stalls of a couple of blonde chics chained up under Notre Dame getting whipped, and there's people forming a queue to buy their stuff."

Paul Cox, doing his "idiosyncratic, angst-filled, Euro-Aust art films", and Kennedy-Miller of the Mad Max films are the only Australian filmmakers worth congratulating, reckons Keenan: the rest are in the middle of the road, fighting for ground. And where does Keenan see himself? "We're on the left-hand shoulder, getting into the gravel, and just keeping control of it."

Susan Bredow
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One of a handful of Australian actors with a real overseas reputation, Bryan Brown is still adamant about his Australian identity, as Dorre Koeser found out when she talked to him in Hollywood about his latest Australian picture, The Empty Beach.

"Acting is expression," says Bryan Brown, "and what I express is the fact that I'm very Australian. I'm conditioned by the Sydney western suburbs, the lifestyle, the country, and the fact that I've been fairly political and community-minded — those are the things that made it easy for me to express myself in Australia and as an Australian."

Brown's career in films now spans almost ten years, from his first role in Love Letters from Teralba Road (1977), to the wise-cracking, sardonic private detective, Cliff Hardy, in his latest Australian film, The Empty Beach. The latter is a project of some standing. "I've liked the idea of playing Cliff Hardy since I read the books," says Brown. "I liked the fact that here was a very identifiable Australian, written very well and with all the ingredients that I like in a male character: not trying to impress, a sense of humour, capable — a man who doesn't make excuses. That sort of detective has been presented in American movies before — in Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. But here was an Australian one that was just as identifiable, just as strong and good as what the Americans had written. And quite likeable, too!"

Brown was first approached about four years ago to do one of the Hardy books. At the time, Dick Mason was going to produce, Stephen Wallace direct, and Peter Corris — author of the Hardy books — was to adapt his own novel, White Meat. Like many
projects, it slipped away, however, to be resurrected two years later by John Edwards and Tim Read, who had acquired the rights to the Hardy books. As well as being invited to play the lead, Brown was also offered involvement in the creative side of the picture's production — something which he eagerly accepted.

Although several drafts were written by Peter Corris, the film's screenplay was eventually turned over to Keith Dewhurst. But it was Corris's wish that the project remain true to the character he had invented, regardless of any changes to the plotline; and Brown emphasizes that this was their central objective throughout the making of the picture. "My main concern," he says, "was not to deviate from the Cliff Hardy that Peter Corris wrote. You go back to the reason why you decided to make the movie. And the thing that originally caught our attention was this character, Cliff Hardy. It would have been pretty silly for us to spend two years making a movie that changed the character that Corris developed. The structure of a movie is always going to change, but we couldn't let it wander off somewhere where Hardy wouldn't let it wander. We set out to make a strong private detective yarn, and not muck up Peter Corris's Cliff Hardy. I think we were there in 90% of the cases."

One thing Brown is emphatic about is that Cliff Hardy is not an Australian superhero. "He's certainly not James Bond. It's true we are working on a sequel" — Corris is scripting White Meat — "and I'd like to do Hardy again, but I don't see the Cliff Hardy books as being world-beaters, or big epics. I would like to see us put out good, solid stories every few years that do averagely well at the box office. I want to present a man that different people will like, but who isn't necessarily everybody's cup of tea."

The Hardy character may be the core of the film, but his personal life is only hinted at in The Empty Beach. "He is not the type of bloke who wants to explain away too much," says Brown, who feels that is one of the things that identifies him as an Australian character. "It's like, 'hold it in, sit on it'. That's got a lot to do with us, with what makes us a bit different to the Americans or the English. I don't think Cliff would particularly like to sit down and talk to too many people about his private life." And of the possibility of a romance with Ann Winter (Anna Maria Monticelli) — something which seems to be on the cards but never materializes — Brown says that, after extensive talks about whether Corris's Hardy would have had "a number with this girl or not", they decided against it. "I prefer the reality where, for whatever reasons, they didn't. It's another point about the man, and you can draw your own conclusions from it."

Brown does not feel, however, that Cliff is without emotion. One scene he was adamant about saving — and one that director Chris Thomson originally wanted to lose — comes after Hardy has witnessed an innocent man being shot to death. He has been up all night, and in the morning graphically — and rather nastily — describes the gory scene to his flatmate. "I wanted him to be hard and harsh," says Brown, "and Chris gave way on that. For me, it was very important that you saw that, if he didn't hold himself together, this guy was liable to go under. It says in another book that Hardy could have wound up at the pub, playing pool with his mates all day, and having a whinge about how the world should be. In Corris's book, the guy is human. He doesn't get badly beaten in spirit, and he will keep coming back. But the reality of Hardy is that he also has a bloody heart, and he has to fight to keep on top of things. The scenes that showed how he could lose himself but instead got on with it — these were the ones that I thought were very necessary to the character, and I fought for them. Sometimes, I fought too hard!"

Brown's beginnings in the acting profession, for all the 'Australian content' of his movie roles, actually happened overseas, and in a fashion typical of the NIDA-trained generation of actors who dominate the Australian film industry. After spending four years in amateur theatre, beating the blahs of a boring insurance job, he decided to give professional acting "a bloody good run", his goal being to get a professional job within five years. It took a couple of months, but only after he decided to go to England: according to him, they were telling only English or American stories on the Australian stage at the time, and he decided to go there rather than learn its second-hand at home.

In Australia, Brown has worked with many of his directors at least twice: Stephen Wallace, Tom Jeffrey, Donald Crombie, John Duigan, Bruce Beresford. His major criterion for choosing a film or a director is a personal connection, and the consideration of the reasons those involved give for making a film, rather than their track record. "I'm not the sort of person who gets very impressed by what someone has done. I like working with people I get along with, and whose ideas and enthusiasm I like. I've liked every movie I've been involved with: I've never had a bad time on a movie. I've never found people jumping up and down and screaming, hating this or that person."

Brown is even generous in his opinion of The Thorn Birds, his first overseas project — more generous than were most Australian viewers. He cites "the obvious criticism: where are the Australians? What is Barbara Stanwyck doing in the outback?" And he understands that, when the country was just beginning to forge its identity in film, it was difficult to see another country telling one of its stories. But it was a question of economics. "It would have been terrific if Australia could have told the story, but the thing about it was that it was a big melodrama, and the people who told it knew how to deliver that kind of melodrama. And it pulled everybody in, just like the Dynasties and the Dallases do. The Americans owned it, and they were going to make it the way they wanted to. That makes sense, too." To prepare for the role of Luke O'Neill, though, Brown had to enrich his Australian experience by learning the art of sheep-shearing. "It took three weeks before I could shear a sheep without beads of sweat falling off me in the first five seconds — three weeks of the most physical, back-breaking work I've ever done, to be able to deliver something to make it easier for the director to photograph."

When choosing his roles nowadays, however, Brown has another consideration: that he and his wife, actress Rachel Ward, should travel together. He would have loved to take the opportunity of doing the Doll Trilogy on the Sydney stage last year, but turned it down because Rachel was working out of state. "I don't know how other people do it, but most of the time I see it all falling apart for them. It's up to you to find your own way. Things fall into line when you know what you're on about." And he has no regrets over any opportunities lost because of their arrangement. "People say a movie can change the course of events, and it does — in a certain way,
"To give up telling Australian stories because of money is bloody stupid: it'll leave nothing behind for Australia in a hundred years when they look back and say, 'Oh, they made that rubbish, did they?'"

But there is no one thing that is so important it has to be done. It all comes down to the opportunity to act: you get some and you don't get others. You dictate how your life is going to be in the choices you make."

Now in preparation for playing the title role in the $30-million Dino De Laurentis production of James Clavell's Tai-Pan, Brown is currently studying martial arts and working with an accent coach. After a sixteen-week shoot in China, he, his wife and their daughter, Rosie, will return to Sydney, where he will continue developing the next Cliff Hardy picture, as well as start work on a movie version of Backyard, a play he did four years ago at the Nimrod. In March, he and Rachel Ward will star in their first film together since The Thorn Birds: The Umbrella Woman, to be directed by Ken Cameron.

Like Cliff Hardy, Brown's attitude towards his future career is to get on with it. And his greatest concern for the Australian film industry in general is for it not to be influenced by the pressure to make money overseas as the primary impetus for the type of films that are produced. "We have to be careful that we don't stop telling Australian stories, because as soon as we do, we don't have an industry. Whatever we've got will last twelve or eighteen months, and after that it'll all be over, because B-grade American stories are uninteresting to us and also uninteresting to Americans. What we do need is expertise in the marketing of our movies, which will help us more than thinking we must make movies that Americans will like. We have to make movies that Australians like, and some of those will be transferable to another area. To give up telling Australian stories because of money is bloody stupid: it'll leave nothing behind for Australia in a hundred years when they look back and say, 'Oh, they made that rubbish, did they?' Instead, they'll look back at the movies made about Australia, and they'll find that interesting."

Brown is also unapologetic about the fact that much of his recent work has been abroad. There have been two features in England: Give My Regards to Broad Street, in which he played Paul McCartney's Aussie manager; and Parker, the story of a businessman who is kidnapped for no apparent reason and, after his release, becomes obsessed with finding his captors. Then there has been F/X, an action film recently completed in New York, which is the story of a movie special effects man who becomes involved with the underworld, and uses the skills of his profession to save his skin. Although not specifically written for an Australian actor, the latter part was...
Ten years ago, I was acting. I'm still acting. That's a bit surprising: I always thought I'd get found out!

In fact, Brown expresses a genuine fondness for all his characters, singling out Len from *Teralba Road* with the sort of sentimental affection reserved for a first screen role. But he also liked Joe Harman from *A Town Like Alice*, and even Tiger Kelly from the recent *Rebel* — a character who "would buy and sell anything: the absolute street con man of World War II". About Rob McGregor, his character from *Winter of Our Dreams*, Brown speaks at length, almost in Rob's defence.

"People have said to me, 'What a cold bastard, what a rotten way he treated the girl!' But I knew exactly what the character was on about. Here was a man who, in his early twenties, had been a passionate radical, then started to live a more middle-class, comfortable life. The death of someone he knew back then sparks off a sort of reappraisal. He would never have picked himself ten years later in this position. Then the character of Lou [Judy Davis] — a prostitute and drug addict, living on the raw edge of life — makes him feel this rawness coming out again, and that became stimulating to be around, but not because he was in love with the girl. He didn't want to lead her on. Everyone took advantage of her except him. He gave her respect."

As Rob McGregor never anticipated living the sort of life in which he found himself ten years later, how does Bryan Brown feel about his last ten years? "Ten years ago, I was acting. I'm still acting. That's a bit surprising: I always thought I'd get found out! I think most actors do. That's a bit surprising: I always thought I'd get found out! I think most actors do. You think they'll find out I'm no good. Later on, you think: 'I'm probably quite good at things, but why don't they use someone else anyway?' I've been acting for thirteen years now, but only in the last couple of years have I come to the conclusion that I'll probably be acting in another twenty!"

"Once you've got to the stage of being a well-known actor at home, the next barrier to break is the fact that, in stories set around the world, you don't see too many Australians. Getting people used to the fact that Australians exist in the world, and exist as capably as anyone else does, will help in marketing any product that comes out of Australia: it'll get them used to us."
The RULES of the GAME

The first point I always try to get over is that my stand on importing a limited number of overseas artists has nothing to do with Australian artists not being good enough: it is purely for box-office reasons. To have a drawcard, or a box-office name — or whatever you like to call it — has been a part of show business since time immemorial. There will always be drawcards in the theatre, in the concert hall, on the television screens and in the cinemas. But you can't build stars overnight: it's a long, long process. Sooner or later, those Australians who have the charisma will be the drawcards. We are doing it slowly, but there are still not enough of them: there's Mel Gibson, Jack Thompson, Bryan Brown, Tom Burlinson, Judy Davis, Sigrid Thornton . . . I don't know about others. Our people are starting to be recognized internationally: but it's a long, slow, laborious process, which we've got to work at.

In film and television, America is the major market: that's where the money is. And, in America, they must have faces that are known to the American public. With All The Rivers Run, which was all Australians, we just could not get press coverage in America, because there was not a face that anyone knew. They don't print your face to be nice to you, you know: they print it to sell magazines. And magazines sell on well-known faces. That's what it's all about.

By now, we should have been able to have those faces, but we're such a wretchedly backward country when it comes to television. We were about the last developed country in the world to have it, and what did we do? We introduced it in black and white, so help me God! We had black and white television in this country up until about 1975. If a country is in colour, they don't want to know you if you are in black and white. So, we were not able to get out and establish ourselves in the export markets that we already had in radio. We expected to move over, but the way into television exports has been slow.

We're still caught with a country that has vast distances and a small population, which is a big problem for manufacturing, no matter what you make. In feature films and television programmes, there is little or no protection against the imported product. Over 25 years ago, in 1959, I produced a little booklet about commercial television programmes in Australia. I wrote: "Australia as a nation cannot accept, in this powerful and persuasive medium, the present flood of another nation's culture, without danger to our national identity. This does not imply a criticism of the values of American television programmes. They may be eminently suitable for the American audience, but a programme structure which may be excellent from an American point of view may not be the best for Australia. What we need and must have is television which is distinctively Australian in programme character."

"Australians have proved many times in the field of entertainment that their talent compares with that of other countries. We have the singers, the writers, the actors, musicians and producers; but they, like the personnel of all other branches of the industry, cannot compete economically against the goods dumped in Australia and sold so far below their cost of production. In many instances, they have been compelled to journey overseas to obtain employment for their talents."

"The dominance of America in the Australian motion picture
Hector Crawford is one of Australia’s most senior producers: from radio drama in the fifties, to television, mini-series and feature films in the eighties, he has been active in the Australian production industry for over 30 years. Just recently he has, like a lot of producers, been coming into conflict with Australian Actors and Announcers Equity over the use of foreign stars in his productions, particularly on last year’s Fortress, a Crawfords Production that Equity objected to, was cancelled, then restarted. Here, in conversation with Cinema Papers Editor Nick Roddick, he argues that Australian film and television drama needs imported actors if it is to grow and prosper.

“We’ve got fifteen-and-a-half million people, and we speak English. If we spoke Arunta, we’d be ever so much better off, because at least they’d have to go to some costs and dub it. The small population and being English-speaking is what has knocked us.

Now, we’ve got to compensate for that somehow. 10BA has been a help — a considerable help, and we’ve got to stay with it. And we’ve got to use it to get into export markets. If we’ve got to have two Americans to get the picture into America, we should use two Americans. It’s as simple as that. But I would never have a foreign person play an Australian, because I don’t believe they can. Nor do I believe Australians can play Americans. I find nothing more embarrassing than to go to the theatre when the whole cast is speaking American, and they’re all Australians and their accents are terrible! By the same token, I don’t believe Americans can play Australians.

In the end, it’s all a question of budgets. The cost per hour of producing a mini-series in Australia can vary a great deal, depending mainly on quality, number of episodes and the subject matter of the story. The majority of mini-series currently produced would cost between $600,000 and $900,000 per hour. A sale to an Australian network of Australian rights would yield a gross return of the order of $200,000 to $250,000 per hour. This...
means that only about one third of the cost of quality drama production can be recouped within Australia. We must make sales to the vast American market to provide most of the other two thirds. Should the government's invaluable support under 10BA ever be withdrawn without our first firmly establishing ourselves in the American market, our industry would collapse.

With Fortress, when we sold the picture to Home Box Office for 50% of the budget, it was on the condition that they have a face that was known to the American public. But Equity refused to support the issue of a permit for one person to work, and there are about 85 speaking parts in the picture! That left us stranded; the deal with HBO was that it had to be a face that was known. There was to be no other condition: apart from that, we could cast anybody. So, when the Minister was not prepared to overturn the decision, that left us with no option but to cancel, at a cost of about $700,000, which had already been spent. As time wore on, of course, Rachel [Ward] married Bryan, was living in Australia and was available, so we went back. But the cancellation and the time costs and all that were a very, very solemn and bitter pill. I think Equity gambles to some degree that a producer won't cancel. But they take so long to give you an answer that you are left with a choice. Our choice was to cancel.

Generally, though, we get on very well with Equity: our objectives are almost identical. The only difference could be that they want more money for less work, and we want much more work for less money! That's an over-simplification, of course! Apart from that, they want things that are Australian: they want employment of Australian writers, actors and so forth. So do we.

What we're on about is to get a good return for our investors, and to get employment for Australians. Now, importing one or two actors is not going adversely to affect employment here: it is going to create it. It is going to mean you can go ahead and do things that, otherwise, you wouldn't be able to do. I think it helps the financial success of the project, and therefore it's good for the industry, it's good for programming, and it's good for feature films. It's not the thin end of the wedge or anything like that: if you let too many in, the whole business goes out of the window. I'm not suggesting for a minute that we should bring in cartloads of foreign actors. I would be quite happy to have an absolute maximum of three imported artists.

What I can't understand, though, is why Paul Cox is able to bring out an actress, and Crawford Productions aren't. Equity will say, "Paul couldn't cast it in Australia". I couldn't cast it in Australia, either. You are allowed to bring out an overseas star to make a commercial, and that's just to sell product to Australians! I ask you! Talk about discrimination in our industry! Equity last year let in seventeen theatrical companies, plus 409 overseas artists. So people were coming here by the cartload: they're allowed to be in the restaurants, in the clubs, opera, ballet, concerts, they're allowed to be making commercials on television and for plays, but not for film and television production...

It is ironic — and regrettable — that the opportunities for Australian actors and their fellow television workers should, in the long term, be limited by the restrictive policy of their union towards imported artists. Contrary to being a 'defence of employment', the union's policy is restrictive in that it inhibits the production of films that are more likely to sell internationally. This is a policy which has been drawn up without any consultation with producers who have experience of the overseas marketing of Australian programmes, and who have invested considerable effort and capital in the development of an export market for the Australian film and television industry. It is a policy which is holding back that development and, if allowed to operate as it has to date, will stifle and may well destroy the industry. ★
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With a population of just over three million, New Zealand is too small to sustain a film industry without government help and/or overseas sales. And, although the past few years have seen some pretty impressive films emerge from the Land of the Long White Cloud, the future is currently a little uncertain. This time last year, what is now hanging over the head of the Australian film and television industry — the withdrawal of tax concessions — happened in New Zealand. Nick Roddick looks at the state of the Kiwi movie industry in 1985 and finds that, although things have certainly changed, the islands are by no means shrouded in gloom.
Depending on how you look at it, filmmaking in New Zealand is either getting on for 90 years old, or else will be celebrating its eighth birthday in 1985. The discrepancy is not hard to account for: although films were made on a sporadic basis from 1898 through to the mid-seventies, there was nothing that could remotely be described as a film industry before an expatriate Australian called Roger Donaldson, who had gone to NZ to avoid the Vietnam draft, made Sleeping Dogs in 1976-7. 1977 also saw Geoff Murphy's Wild Man, Tony Williams's Solo and Michael Firth's Off the Edge.

Before that, says veteran producer John O'Shea, "it was all pretty much Grandma Moses stuff" (though the enterprising New Zealand Film Archive has been filling halls and cinemas all over the country with programmes of this rare historical footage). O'Shea himself provides a bridge between the very early films and the late seventies boom: with minimal means and boundless optimism, he made three features — Broken Barrier, co-directed with Roger Mirams in 1952; Runaway in 1964; and Don't Let It Get You in 1966. Before Murphy, Donaldson et al., the only other New Zealand filmmaker to deserve even passing mention is Rudall Hayward who — again against all the odds — managed to make seven feature films in a career spanning five decades, from My Lady of the Cave in 1922 to To Love a Maori in 1972. As the American film historian, Robert Sklar, has written, "few other figures in world cinema can match his half-century of active film production... and Rudall Hayward's films rank with the few good Hollywood films that depict contemporary society and the past with humour, compassion and insight" (Landfall, June 1971).

1977, however — and Sleeping Dogs in particular — was the start of the New Zealand film industry. It was a birth complicated by a number of factors. First, there was the campaign for a New Zealand Film Commission, along the lines of the AFC, but with a somewhat different charter and, at any rate initially, a form of funding (via the state lottery) that protected it against criticism of mispending the hard-earned Kiwi tax dollar. Secondly, there was the growth of television. Thirdly — and paradoxically — there was the shrinkage of that same strident and constantly restructured government television system (see Warren Mayne's article on page 36 of this issue), which forced a new generation of filmmakers to go it alone.

Pressure for a Commission had been building up since the early sixties, when a shot in the arm by an Arts Council report in 1970, and was finally established, after the kind of delay which only governments can manage, by an Act of Parliament in October 1978. In the years which have followed, the NZFC has become a vital part of the New Zealand film industry. The vast majority of the features made in the country have passed across its desks at some stage in their life, and a fair proportion have received either script development money or direct investments. As one might expect, the Commission has come in for a fair amount of criticism from filmmakers who have been turned down or who, in a familiar echo of the Australian situation, question its suitability as a representative of the industry in discussions with the government.

1981: Roger Donaldson
Director of Sleeping Dogs (1977), Smash Palace (1982) and The Bounty (1984), talking just before the New Zealand release of Smash Palace.

"You’re trying to release a movie in a market that is very competitive: people pay their three bucks to go to the movies, and they expect to see stuff that’s comparable to the best American, British — whatever — movies. If you can’t deliver Star Wars in terms of the special effects, you’ve at least got to deliver something that gets them going — something that’s controversial in some way or another. Sleeping Dogs did that, I think.

Criticism or no, the Commission has been extremely successful in representing the films that have been made in New Zealand on a world scale. Before the emergence of a couple of local film..."
“I was extraordinarily fortunate in the way I started. Nowadays, I would have to go to film school and start at the bottom and work my way up. As it was, I just moved in to produce and direct a feature, Broken Barrier. If you went to the Film Commission with one of these days, they’d laugh at you! And, if I’d been given much money, I wouldn’t have known what to do with it. Not that they have that much money these days: I don’t know any producer or director in this country who’s riding round in the sort of vehicle that directors of commercials in London have. Anyway, I believe in permanent insecurity: it’s a great stimulus.

“It’s not quite an industry yet, I don’t think. Well, it’s more of an industry than the English one; but, until it makes a marriage with television and until there’s another outlet for the crews, so people can keep in constant employment, there won’t really be an industry. Still, we can’t continue to be represented visually by documentaries which depopulate the place!”

“I think the start of the feature film industry was in the early seventies, when the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation decided to get into independent programming. We were in it: Pacific Films made about 20 television programmes with Geoff Steven and Roger Donalson. The second channel ended that. When the Labour government came in and ‘liberalised’ television, the first thing they did was to clobber the independents. So, that started it in a different way: that’s when Roger went and made Sleeping Dogs.”

Marketing companies in the past year — The Gibson Group and the Challenge Film Corporation (the latter fronted by ex-Goldcrest marketing director, Bill Gavin) — it has been the NZFC which has hawks the movies round the world, from festival to festival and from market to market. With remarkable success, too. Of the nine new films that were taken to Cannes this year, most of them came away with something, capped by the $2 million-plus worth of sales done by Shaker Run, the Larry Parr-produced, Bruce Morrison-directed action adventure movie. The fact that it was actually handled by Challenge should not detract from the NZFC’s long-term achievement. It has been remarkably successful in establishing a profile and a precedent, thanks to indefatigable publicity (year after year, there are more New Zealand posters in Cannes than there are from anywhere else) and the dedication of Marketing Director Lindsay Shelton and Distribution Manager Judy Russell. There is perhaps also a lesson to be learned in some areas from the fact that the whole operation is run by a staff of eight full-timers and one part-timer.

For the past couple of years, the NZFC has turned up at Cannes with an annual catalogue of nine new movies — the final flowering of a tax shelter deal which, much like 10BA, allowed investors to take their profit at the front end, rather than wait for the film to go into profit on the world film market. Tax write-offs could, by astute financial management, be geared up to two or even three times the actual investment. Like 10BA, the legislation which made this possible was adapted from other areas of high-risk investment. And, although it certainly had the effect it was designed to have — it created a film industry, jobs and an ancillary supply industry — it didn’t (like, say, a kiwi-fruit farm) leave much to show afterwards. As such, it became a burden in the treasury’s side: in New Zealand, as in Australia, cultural arguments cut comparatively little ice with fiscal planners. And, although the film industry’s overseas marketing record was impressive and its international image-building role invaluable, the (then) Muldoon government moved to end the tax shelter in its 1982 budget, giving it a two-year run-down period. 30 September 1984 was the deadline. After that date, the tax concessions would no longer apply.

The effect of that deadline has been immediate: whereas this time last year there were eleven feature films in various stages of production or post-production, since 1 October 1984, only one feature has been completed, with another due to go later this month and another possible, but by no means certain, in November. As Wellington producer Dave Gibson says, “I think there might be one or two pictures at Cannes next year, but that’ll be it.”

Things are not quite as bad as they look, however. This time last year, with the September deadline looming, there was a general air of pessimism in the industry. This spring, things look decidedly brighter. And, whereas no one — with the inevitable exception of Geoff Murphy — used to go on record attacking the tax concessions for fear that the government would take it all away, now the government has taken it (almost) all away, there is a kind of relief. “The only good thing about it all,” says Gibson, “is that you know what the date was and that, after that, you had to get your act together and do something else.”

There are also fairly frequent comments that some — though no one will say which — of the 1984 movies shouldn’t have been made: that their genesis lay in a tax deal rather than in a burning desire to make a film. Larry Parr, producer of Constance, Shaker Run and Came a Hot Friday (as well as Bridge to Nowhere, the only feature to have been made this year) hints at that in his equally positive reaction to the change. “As a result of that favourable investment climate,” he says, “of the 1984 movies, some of us got the opportunity to build up a track record. Money is not so easy to come by now, but I don’t think that’s necessarily a bad thing: it’ll sort out the players from the stayers.”

To judge by the films that were on show at Cannes this year, not too manyроxy ones slipped through. Apart from a couple of robust, no-investor, indifferent low-budget movies produced and marketed by Graeme MacLean, shot back-to-back and aggressively marketed on the home turf, the standard was well up to previous years. Indeed, one of the striking things about the New Zealand film industry is how few films that have been made under the tax shelter

Valerie Gogan in the lead role of Ceci in Heart of the High Country, a $5-million mini-series co-produced by Britain’s Zenith and New Zealand’s Phillips-Whitehouse.
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ORION CLASSICS
Came a Hot Friday

QUARTET
Mr Wrong

PAN-CANADIAN
Vigil

MEDIA HOME ENTERTAINMENT
The Lost Tribe

EMBASSY HOME ENTERTAINMENT
Shaker Run. Bridge to Nowhere

ATLANTIC RELEASING — Smash Palace.
SAMUEL GOLDWYN COMPANY — Goodbye Pork Pie. LORIMAR — Carry Me Back.
FRANK MORENO COMPANY — The Scarecrow. NU-IMAGE — Skundee.
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Two-thirds of the titles in the current New Zealand feature film catalogue have been sold for U.S. distribution.
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have simply vanished without trace. From an industry that, over the eight years of its existence, has produced just short of 50 films (including co-productions not handled by the NZFC), the total failure rate has been not much over 10%.

The nine new films shown in the market this year — there was no New Zealand film in either the competition or the Directors' Fortnight — all definitely looked like they ought to have been made. Best of them was The Quiet Earth, audience favourite at this year's Melbourne Film Festival and Geoff Murphy's valedictory New Zealand movie before taking off for Hollywood. It is a science fiction movie in which Bruno Lawrence wakes up to find himself alone in the world: everyone else has vanished as a result of a dimensional experiment that got out of hand. It is an interesting premise, but by no means a cast-iron one. In the film, though, Murphy has perfected his ability to combine moments of anarchic humour with an edge-of-the-seat adventure movie. Whereas in Goodbye Pork Pie, the jokes and the stunts co-existed uneasily, and in Utu the virtuoso juggling with history and the audience's expectations left many uncertain as to whether they were watching a New Zealand western or a serious slice of nineteenth-century history, in Quiet Earth the tone is unified. Lawrence's outrageous acts of self-liberation — dressing in female underwear, making himself president and blasting Christ from an altar crucifix — never hide his angst and never detract from the tension that underlies the first half of the movie. And, in the second half, where he meets up with two more survivors (Alison Routledge and Petr Smith), Murphy manages to develop character relationships far more successfully than he did in Pork Pie. Like Utu, The Quiet Earth is clearly the work of a major filmmaker — of someone who cares about his craft and cares what he does with it. But, unlike Utu, it melds all the elements into a whole to come up with a satisfying adventure film with a good deal of depth to it, and one whose quirks and oddities need no allowances to be made for them.

This year's other films need no apology, either. Came a Hot Friday, from the novel by Ronald Hugh Morrisr, is a comedy that fills the screen in almost every sense. The directorial debut of Ian Mune, actor and writer on Sleeping Dogs, writer of Smash Palace and several other films, it looks at a couple of con men running a racing scam in a small North Island town in the fifties. More than any film since Smash Palace, it captures the spirit of rural New Zealand, though not in a nostalgic or condescending way. Mune's style is definitely in the over-the-top category. But it is consistent, reaching its finest in the performance of Maori entertainer Billy T James as the Taimia Kid, a colourful lunatic who wears Mexican bandit clothes, uses comic-book Mexican dialect and brings a general south-of-the-border ambience to the rural backdrop.

The other five films are more horses for courses — an area which the New Zealand film industry has served fairly efficiently in the past. Michael Firth's Sylvia is the true if rather short-focus story of educator Sylvia Ashton-Warner (Eleanor David) and her struggle to change New Zealand education in the forties: Leave All Fair, directed by John Reid, is a leisurely study of the relationship between Katherine Mansfield (Jane Birkin) and John Middleton Murry (Simon Ward as a young man, John Gielgud as an old one); Kingpin, a grizzly realistic and exciting story about a youth detention centre; a loco-motory that travels well; Shaker Run is a sparse, neatly orchestrated stunt movie from the director of last year's Constance, Bruce Morrison, which had the market audience cheering; and Mr Wrong, a stylish feminist thriller about a woman who buys a haunted car, is directed by Gaylene Preston, with Heather Bolton giving an excellent performance in the main role.

But what of the future? Apart from Bridge to Nowhere, about a group of city kids at threat from Bruno Lawrence as what the synopsis calls "a volatile individual" (a role which Lawrence has all but made his own), and Queen City Rocker, described by its producer, Larry Parr, as "an urban youth picture", there is nothing much in the offering for the big screen. Parr has got those two off the ground by way of overseas pre-sales. For Bridge to Nowhere, he says, "the deal was with Embassy Home Entertainment, for all rights, worldwide. But the budget was very low — NZ$1.3 million, which at the time we did the deal was US$600,000. Queen City Rocker is a less contained picture, and the budget is going to be about NZ$2 million. That's US$1 million, and it's
According to Don Reynolds, producer of last year’s New Zealand film, the industry is growing but the finance is not yet finalized. And although Parr, with his track record, is one of the most successful producers in New Zealand, there is a note of caution about what he says that isn’t really discernible when I spoke to him pre-September 1984. “On all the previous films I’ve been involved with, I’ve been prepared to go on the line myself financially, but I’m going to make sure the money is in the bank before I start this one. I think I’ve taken enormous risks in the past and, although I’m not losing my gambling instinct, you can’t go on taking those risks and getting away with it all the time.”

Such caution is obviously a crucial part of any firmly based industry (as opposed to a bunch of dedicated people making films, come what may), and there is currently a sense of the New Zealand film industry growing up, after the experiments and enthusiasms of the early eighties. According to Don Reynolds, producer of last year’s Trial Run and Heart of the Stag and this year’s The Quiet Earth and Sylvia, “pre-sales are obviously going to be the crucial thing: writing scripts that can be sold offshore.” For Reynolds, last year’s crisis has proved quite salutary. “The scripts have got to be more polished now, and the film has to have a sales track to go down, because having a pre-sale is really determining that the film has potential outside New Zealand. I actually still believe that we can make some wholly New Zealand films, done entirely from New Zealand money, be it a mixture of television and Film Commission, or television and private funding. They should still be saleable offshore because of that, but it’s very difficult to fund them through a pre-sale.”

Reynolds has a couple of features that he hopes to get going in the next year or so: Dangerous Orphans, an urban thriller set in Wellington, with John Laing directing and a budget of NZ$2.5 million; and Melanie Read’s first 35mm feature, Mandarin Summer, with a NZ$1.5 million budget. Dangerous Orphans, which has got feature filmmaking going in the mid-seventies. But things are changing now. Last month, TVNZ ran a second season of New Zealand features, for which they paid double the price obtained for the last package, back in 1981. More importantly, the imminent arrival of a third channel — discussed in Warren Wayne’s article — has opened up a lot of possibilities.

The other direction in which New Zealand producers are moving since last September is television. This is somewhat ironical, since nearly everyone I spoke to last year was at pains to rubbish TVNZ for what producer John Barnett called "reneging on its responsibilities" (i.e. not doing enough). It’s even more ironical, since it was television’s withdrawal of an outlet from the independent production industry that got feature filmmaking going in the mid-seventies. But things are changing now. Last month, TVNZ ran a second season of New Zealand features, for which they paid double the price obtained for the last package, back in 1981. More importantly, the imminent arrival of a third channel — discussed in Warren Wayne’s article — has opened up a lot of possibilities.

1984: Melanie Read

One of the women film-makers to make films in 1983-4, talking during post-production on her feature, Trial Run (1984).

"It was a fluke that Metata [Maita director of Paint!], myself and Yvonne [Mackay, director of The Silent One] were all working on feature films at the same time. I think some people thought, ‘Wow! It must be the women’s filmmaking paradise of the world!’ If it is easier for women filmmakers in New Zealand, it’s simply because the industry is so small: we’re not incredibly producer-dominated yet, and we’re certainly not studio-dominated. For women — unfortunately we can’t say the same for any other minority groups yet — the climate of the New Zealand film industry probably makes it a little bit easier.

"In terms of the sexism, racism and classism of the industry, though, I think it’s the same as any other film industry in the world. And also its domination by Hollywood; that’s the same as anywhere else. I think the only thing that makes New Zealand different is the New Zealandiness of it.

"For myself, though, I’ll stay in the mainstream, because my aim is to make commercially viable political films. It’s very difficult: I’ve always been aware of the compromises that I have to make, but Trial Run has taken all of those compromises onto a much bigger level. And Trial Run is still little fish compared with a lot of the stuff that gets done here.

"I think what is important now is for the minority voices to be heard — anything to break the Hollywood monopoly, as far as I can see, whether you want to do it in nationalistic fields or smaller sub-groups. Which ever way you look at it, I think that’s an important thing that’s happening here now. So I’d call myself a New Zealand filmmaker and a feminist filmmaker.”
Don Reynolds, like many producers, sees the third channel as offering potential for the independent industry. "If we can get in the region of 5 or 10% of their advertising revenue, which would seem reasonable, it would seem enough," Rob Whitehouse, however, co-producer of The Scarecrow, Battleteuch and Savage Islands, is a lot more dubious. "You've only got to sit down and work out even some of the inflated figures they say they're going to get in advertising," he says, "to know that, by the time they've paid off the interest on their equipment — you know, $100 million plus capital costs and from there on down — they're not going to have much money to spend on outside drama. The third channel isn't going to be the saviour of the independent industry." Dave Gibson doesn't believe they will be getting much work directly from the third channel, but he does think that the competition it offers to TVNZ.

Almost all New Zealand producers have some form of television deal going. Finlayson-Hill, who were behind John Lating's Other Halves, which didn't make it to Cannes but which has been doing good business at the local box office, have Terry and the Gunrunners in production. Phillips-Whitehouse, the company Rob Whitehouse runs with Lloyd Phillips, has just completed an impressive six-hour mini-series, Heart of the High Country, made in association with Britain's Zenith and TVNZ. With a budget of just under NZ$2 million and a prime-time British network air date in November, it looks like being one of the more promising productions of 1985.

Don Reynolds is similarly looking at a number of TV projects, and John Maynard has just completed a low-budget series of Seven Tales for Television, keeping up his record of giving opportunities to first-time directors and first-time writers. "They've been pre-sold to TVNZ," he says, "but they have actually been made for an international television audience. They're really quite specific and quite local, though: urban, contemporary and set in Auckland. And they are a bit naughty, some of them are quite fun, and all of them are quite serious. I don't talk about budgets, but the budget for these ones was pretty small."

And the Gibson Group has also got a big television in post-production: Cuckoo Land, which is six 25-minute stories, shot on video, and making use of all sorts of advanced video techniques, which, to judge by the sections which have been completed, should have no difficulty in attracting buyers when it is on offer at the London Market in October.

Says Dave Gibson, "we're doing what I think a lot of people are doing, which is moving right away from features" — Gibson's produced last year's The Silent One — "and into television. And that's purely because of the risk factor. There might be only one or two features at Cannes next year, but there'll be a hell of a lot of television. Television is safer. You can actually look at it and be fairly sure that, if you make this sale to France and this sale to the UK and this sale to Germany and a few sales to the US and Australia, you'll end up with whatever the budget was."

The New Zealand film industry, then, looks like it will make it to its tenth and/or ninetieth birthday. The high-profile world of feature films may be temporarily in recession, but the past eight years has built up enough expertise, enough business sense and enough commitment to see it through the crisis. And, judging by economic indicators outside the immediate production industry, filmmaking in New Zealand in 1985 is cautious but healthy. "You see," says Reynolds, "I actually feel more optimistic than I did this time last year. In fact, we've just spent half a million dollars on a new sound studio in Wellington. (Reynolds is also behind Associated Sounds, and the new state-of-the-art studio is part of a multi-million dollar 'Production Village', an impressive facilities centre which is growing up around the burgeoning equipment hire and servicing company, Film Facilities.) "I think," concludes Reynolds, "that the industry is going to consolidate and move in a very positive direction and in a very commercial way. And then we will have a Mad Max or something like that: we're on the brink of it."

1985 Rob Whitehouse

"I've been something of a preacher of doom, in that I believe it's going to be very difficult to make films. Now, everybody's jumped around and said, 'Oh, we'll make low-budget films'. And my argument has been, 'It doesn't matter what the budget is: there's no reason for people to invest in films'. First of all, you can't say that New Zealand films have made money, and now there's no tax incentive, there's actually no reason for people to invest: there aren't any people out there wanting to put money into films for the sake of it."

"So then the argument that everyone has put up is, 'Oh, well, we'll pre-sell our films', which I think is a bit funny too, because there aren't large numbers of buyers sitting out there with big cheque books looking for New Zealand films! I think it's a shame that the situation got out of control, and that legislation was brought in to stop it, because it was a very necessary thing to get the industry going. But I think people were a little bit casual about the kinds of films they made. Having been on the other side of it as a lawyer, for people who, as clients, put money into films, I know their points of view. And what those people are saying now is, 'Movies? Forget it! I could have put my money in a kiwi-fruit farm, got the same deduction, and now at least I would have had an appreciating asset. You filmmakers can all go stuff it!'"
Thanks Lizzie Birdsworth, Dave Sullivan, "Skippy" and everyone else in Australia for entertaining us over the past 25 years.
Vincent Ward's Vigil, which opens in Australia this month, was the first New Zealand film to be invited to compete at Cannes — quite a tribute for the debut feature by a director still in his twenties, working in a country set well apart from the cinematic centre of things. But, as Tony Mitchell found out, he has turned this isolation firmly to his advantage.

"Vigil is the strongest, most personally inspired film to come out of New Zealand to date. It establishes in a single blow the place of its creator, 27-year-old Vincent Ward, as a unique film talent." So declared Variety in May 1984, on the eve of Vigil's appearance at Cannes, as the first New Zealand film to be accepted into competition.

"It will not be an overnight commercial blockbuster in cinemas throughout the world," Variety went on (with some accuracy) to prophesy, "but it seems destined to do strong business on the increasingly lucrative art film circuits." More than a year later, Vigil is finally being commercially released in Australia — by Ronin Films — having picked up an impressive list of eulogies throughout Europe, Canada and the UK. Audiences at the Prades Festival in France voted it most popular film, and, at last year's Sydney Film Festival, it came eighth in the audience poll — no mean achievement in view of the traditional Australian scepticism towards its supposedly underdeveloped neighbour.

Vincent Ward is an intense, cautious interviewee, who leaves strands of thought dangling in mid-air to pursue a contingent point, and is then prone to loop back to tie up the loose ends. His careful pursuance of the right way to express a particular idea is also a detectable feature of his films. Vigil is in fact his third. If you count the 52-minute State of Siege, based on a novel by Janet Frame, which he made when he was 21; and In Spring One Plants Alone, a 45-minute documentary about an old Maori woman's life with her mentally retarded son, made two years later.
Both films picked up awards in their rounds of the festivals (a circuit which NZ producers cultivate far more assiduously than their counterparts in other countries). State of Siege won a Golden Hugo at the 1978 Chicago Film Festival and a Special Jury Prize in Miami the same year, while In Spring One Plants Alone got a Silver Hugo and was joint winner of the Grand Prix at the Cinéma du Réel at the Beaubourg Centre in Paris in 1980.

The two early films deal with characters in situations of extreme isolation. "All the characters in my films are in isolation," says Ward. "For each film, there is a long search to find the right individuals to 'people' it. Inevitably, there are some New Zealand qualities there, but I don't find I easily identify with the style or tradition of other films made in NZ. A lot of films here come out of a realist tradition, tempered by American genre films. But my interest lies elsewhere: I'm looking for pockets of the outside world which match my own interior vision." In other words, Ward turns the camera on geographical, political and cultural — of New Zealand into a virtue, using its blank canvas as a positive texture. This, and Ward's subsequent work, comes out of a background in painting, as opposed to photorealism. "In painting," he explains, "you're always distanced from your subject matter. The more beautiful the surface of the picture, the more it operates like a window pane, and separates you from the content. In film, you have to break the lovely surface of things — smash your fist through the panel of glass and pull the people out from behind it."

The 45 minutes of In Spring One Plants Alone are, in fact, the result of a two-year period spent with the 82-year-old protagonist and her son. Ward would set up his camera and hope the old woman would walk across the frame, having reached the point of being able to predict her movements throughout the day. He worried at his subject, shooting take after take, and filming the surrounding landscape repeatedly, in an attempt to show how it reflected his subject's state of mind. At one point, as he tells it, he got the particular light he wanted just when he lost the subject — the isolation — of the people he was filming. Bolinger, who has worked on all his films to date — was taking a break, so Ward had to drive the van and film at the same time.

"The particular qualities I wanted were spiritual," he says, "and I didn't want the camerawork to intrude. I wanted it very still, but without losing the immediacy. Everything had to support the interior quality I was after. But that way of working is the quickest way to send yourself crazy!" The result — a highly-textured visual chronicle of a vanishing aspect of New Zealand civilization, embellished by a crystalline orchestration of vocal and natural sounds by composer Jack Body (who also provided the music for Vigil) — could easily be mistaken for a 'lost' documentary by Werner Herzog.

For Vigil, Ward was fortunate enough to find a producer, John Maynard, sympathetic enough to allow him to continue to indulge his quest for interior qualities. To find the right location, Ward drove more than 10,000 miles around the New Zealand countryside before finding a suitable valley in Taranaki. Then the farm settlement he wanted had to be specially built and aged. Ward also visited hundreds of schools and saw, he claims, 16,000 schoolgirls, looking for someone to play Toss, the film's twelve-year-old protagonist. Finally, he settled on an Aucklander, Fiona Kay.

The script, which he co-wrote with Graeme Tetley, "started off with clusters and constellations of images — there were two nightmares, for example — and the scripting was like detective work, deciphering those images and letting them build. It was like being in a mist or fog, through which you catch glimpses of things and try to grab hold of them and work out what they're about, rather than saying: 'This is my story'." In that sense, Vigil runs very much against the prevalent grain of Australasian cinema where, as Ward sees it, "the plot takes over from the characters, so the characters can't exist on their own: they must always bend to an inflexible line going through the film, rather than there being the sense of an experience lived or conquered by the character."

Ward used two Australian actors to play two of the key figures, Bill Kerr makes a comic, eccentric figure out of Birdie, the old man whose junk machine finally works. "He's not so much a visionary," says Ward, "as a man of vision. They live in a swampy environment, and the old man thinks he can save the place if he can blow a hole in the top of the valley — like pulling the plug out of a bath. So he fantasizes and dreams. The fragments of reality she perceives are put together according to her own logic." It is this subjective perspective which links Vigil with Ward's earlier films, where imagery and symbolism — like the dead dogs and the wires — take precedence over narrative. "My prime interest," says Ward, "is in the way my characters perceive things, and in what separates them out from other people, rather than the wider social fabric that holds people together."

If Vigil at times lacks a clearly focused plot impetus, this is partly because it aligns itself with a very European cinematic tradition. Various people have seen, quite justifiably, affinities in Ward's work with Bresson, Tarantinos, Herzog and even the Taviani brothers — August company for a first feature by a director working more than 12,000 miles away from those alleged influences. Currently, Ward is at work on another, as yet untitled, feature. Vigil certainly shows the promise which, combined with a surer grasp of the demands of a full-length commercial feature, should carry Ward beyond the art-house circuits. "I'm more interested in people on the perimeter, the circumference, than people in the middle," he has said, "I suppose I'm interested in people with some sort of vision, some view of the world which is not necessarily in the collective view. The isolation of rural New Zealand has, it seems, furnished him with the ideal location for this interest."
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The people who set up New Zealand television had one overriding priority in mind: coverage. What concerned them was not what the new medium showed, but how many people it reached. Viewers, after all, are also voters. And that, more than anything else, explains why New Zealand television, while boasting a reasonable tradition of home-produced programming, even in the field of drama, was essentially a late starter — especially in drama — and has been an erratic performer ever since.

Throughout its first 25 years, television has slavishly obeyed the politicians’ first priority: that the signal — first one channel, later two state-run networks — should reach every last rustic nook and cranny of a country that is a geographical nightmare for television transmission engineers. The result? 99.8% of the New Zealand population can receive TV1, with only 2% fewer in range of TV2. Even after 63 years, AM radio still reaches only 80% of the population.

For this to work, the television system requires some 450 transmitters, repeaters and translators for each network, with some of the translators serving no more than half a dozen farmhouses. They provide the kind of saturation coverage that the Australian outback counterparts of New Zealand’s remotest farmers will not finally get until next year, when the Aussat domestic satellite brings half a million of them within range of the ABC’s homestead community TV service.

Coverage, then, rather than choice has been the difference in priorities between the television systems on either side of the Tasman. Only now are the major metropolitan communities in New Zealand coming within sight of a third, privately-owned network — something their population numbers could probably have supported several years ago. But, when the warrants are handed out for that third private network, it will be required to go on air undertaking to reach 90% of the population within its first two years, once more enshrining the dictate that rural dwellers should not be left behind.

Such universal coverage is doubtless an admirable ambition. But the first quarter century of Kiwi television has continually demonstrated how attempts to reach programming midriff have been stunted by demands for coverage. And, whenever the political straitjacket has been temporarily overcome, state television has been hobbled by another one of the politicians’ foibles: the recurring compulsion to restructure the system.

First, from 1960 to 1962, it was the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, a government department; that was followed by the purportedly autonomous New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, with its single-channel monopoly. That structure lasted over a decade, ending with a 1973 decision (which took two years to implement) to split the NZBC into three separate organisations. The first two years, once more enshrining the traditional 50% of revenue, to a 1985 figure of 13%. So, in 1979, to redress the imbalance in commercial revenues between Television One and South Pacific Television, the hard-pressed BCNZ decided to amalgamate the two networks into the present Televisi lion New Zealand, which runs a co-ordinated commercial two-network system. This decision was probably the most resented of all the restructurings, since it forced back together broadcasters who, for five years, had competed against one another, and its repercussions can still be sensed at TVNZ, six years on.

Politics, in other words, took its toll right from the start. After setting up studios in the four main centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin between 1960 and 1962, the timorous NZBC took until the end of 1969 before it linked these separate stations into a network, and then only for a nightly newscast and a twice-weekly current affairs programme. Not until 1973, on the eve of the changeover to colour transmission, did the NZBC finally network the whole of its transmission, ending a system that allowed programmes to run in Wellington one night, a week later in Auckland, and a week later still in Christchurch and Dunedin.

Viewers in the far south thus saw an episode of Peyton Place or whatever two weeks after those in the capital. All the while, however, the transmitters got further...
This year, New Zealand celebrates 25 years of television — which, in effect, means 25 years of ‘Television New Zealand’, the state-run network which has been through a bewildering variety of organisational changes. Warren Mayne looks back over the first quarter-century of Kiwi TV, particularly at its drama output, which had its golden age in the late seventies, and looks at the imminent arrival of private broadcasting on the other side of the Tasman.
The faces of New Zealand television drama. Top row, Rawiri Paratene as Koro in Joe and Koro (left), The Children of Fire Mountain (centre), and Jim Monohey, Joanne Simpson and Philip Gordon in Inside Straight (right). Bottom, Terence Cooper (standing) in the title role of Mortimer's Patch (left), Larney Tupu as the Country G.P. (centre) and (right) David Gwillim in the title role of the new TVNZ series, Hanlon.

and further into the back country. Never mind the quality, feel the width.

The old NZBC was clearly the brainchild of a generation of top executives who had spent most of their lives in radio, as public servants in a government department whose local news up to 1961 consisted solely of one bulletin of government press statements nightly. Timid in current affairs and even more cautious with other programming, the NZBC's local output was a minuscule percentage of the total transmission time. And most of it, in the early sixties, consisted of amateurish musical shows — the products of boosting, studio-bound ingenuity. In 1965, however, came the first local drama, a stagey three-acter called The Evening Paper, originally penned for radio by stage dramatist Bruce Mason, author of The Pohutukawa Tree and End of The Golden Weather. Small and self-conscious beginnings indeed.

A few drama workshop one-offs followed in 1967 — a fleeting flurry of activity that barely stoned for the statistics: all up, the NZBC managed only ten hour-long plays in five years — an average of two hours of drama a year. But, while these fledgling efforts introduced to the medium some actors who would later do better across the Tasman, the real drain was from the production ranks: Brian Bell, Alan Martin, Alan Morris (though the two last-named returned in 1975 as Directors-General of Television One and South Pacific Television respectively) and, a little later, a talented young man called Chris Thomson, who has since directed Waterfront and The Empty Beach in Australia. But, before leaving, Thomson was to mastermind — wonder of wonders — the NZBC's first attempt at a continuing drama: a somewhat thin, six-episode spy serial called The Alpha Plan. Another humble start.

In 1971, the NZBC made another tentative advance with Pukemanu, the Corporation's first attempt at a continuing series in self-contained episodes, and the first to set out to capture the public imagination as a slice of genuine Kiwi life, rather than continue the sad tradition of affected, one-off exercises in 'meaningful' drama or badly disguised adaptations of BBC-style scenarios. Pukemanu's timber-town setting made a star, from episode one, of Pat Evson, and wove in other regulars who would become familiar talents of the seventies and eighties, notably the burly Ian Watkin, a comic second lead in many late seventies features, and Ian Mune as the local yob.

Ironically, however, it was not the stop-go drama department that debuted a hippy rock drummer destined to become the New Zealand movie actor. Bruno Lawrence got his acting break, playing a drummer, in a dramatized documentary about a runaway teenage girl, and collected a Feltex award for it. Meanwhile, the NZBC continued to experiment as timidly as ever in different genres. Spotlight was a repertory series of one-offs written to show the versatility of a chosen foursome — of whom, however, little has been seen in later years. And a second feature series, Section Seven, with a production-service setting, may be seen as a great breakthrough in that, for the first time, NZBC TV drama was trying to grapple with urban social issues. Essentially, however, the series was built around an expatriate New Zealander, Ewen Solon, who had co-starred in the BBC's Maigret series. Its long-term significance, though, was the second billing accorded to Ian Mune, who would rapidly emerge as the beaten-faced matinee idol of Kiwi TV drama.

Overall, however, the real measure of NZBC drama thinking was its falling back on Chekhov and Strindberg adaptations, as well as on a production of Pinter's The Dumb-Walter, built around Coronation Street's Len Fairclough, Peter Adamson. The area most neglected was comedy. The only NZBC foray into sitcom was a wan, laughless piece of gaucherie about mixed flatting called Buck House, memorable only for the TV debut of a young John Clarke, who had to turn to the current affairs programmes, Gallery and, later, Tonight at Nine, for his big chance to develop his real alter ego, Fred Dagg.

Then it all changed, near enough overnight, with the conversion, on April Fool's Day 1975, of NZBC-TV into Television One under newer, younger management. It was followed two months later by the Auckland/Christchurch debut of the new TV2, aka South Pacific Television. Born of a new optimism and a reaction against the caution and constraints of the old NZBC, Television One inherited the just-opened Avalon television production complex outside Wellington, which in its day was the most ambitious facility in the southern hemisphere, designed for two-network operation but ironically never used since, or even fully commissioned, for this full potential.

With pre-oil crisis expectations of advertising bonanzas, Television One set about rubbing the old NZBC's nose
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Prime Minister Robert Muldoon (who was waging an undeclared war on One because of its perceived anti-government bias) got a parliamentary inquiry into costs. The result was a disaster for One, eventually establishing The Governor’s costs as $21.4 million — three times the total budget that had been claimed.

Not until 1973 did the NZBC end a system that allowed programmes to run in Wellington one night, a week later in Auckland, and a week later still in Christchurch and Dunedin. Viewers in the far south thus saw an episode of Peyton Place or whatever two weeks after those in the capital.

Lots of wheels, but not enough legs? The truck from the Wellington-made series, Roche, didn’t get a repeat.
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American film director, producer, writer and actor Ron Howard is described as an affable and charming individual, comfortable with overlapping sentences that form a kind of hip conversation. His films are known for their intellectual, articulate treatment of the issues they explore. Howard was a child actor and then a director of music videos before making his feature film debut in 1980 with 'Cocoon'. He has directed a number of successful films, including 'Apollo 13', 'Willow', 'Oscar', and 'A Beautiful Mind'. Howard has won numerous awards for his work, including an Academy Award for Best Director for 'A Beautiful Mind'. He is known for his ability to construct elaborate narratives and his filmography is extensive, having directed over 20 films since 1980.
Facing page: Roeg's gallery — scenes from five of the director's films. Top, Gary Busey (left) as The Mongoose in The Passenger; and (right) Theresa Russell as Milena in Walkabout. Middle, Jeremy Irons as Duane in Damascus Cover and (left) Turner in the tab with Michele Breton and Ann Sidney in Performance (and right) Theresa Russell as Milena in Bad Timing. Bottom, David Bowie (left) as Gary Jagger (left) as Turner, in the tab with Flaherty in Bad Timing. Centre, David Bowie (left) in The Man Who Fell to Earth and (right) Theresa Russell as Milena in Walkabout. Despite saying "I'd rather not!" — but he takes a keen interest in the way things film, unless it's brought to me: "I saw the film, and found it being shown out of focus. He pointed this out to the manager, "Who are you?" "The director," said Roeg. "What's that to do with it?" said the cinema manager.

Roeg’s reluctance to become involved with the business side of Cannes does not, however, mark him off as an artist interested in the commercial side of filmmaking. He is keenly interested in what happened to Eureka! for instance, which ran for a week in London, then vanished. "Poor old Eureka! I don't know what happened: they didn't tell me, so I can only surmise — which is really incredible — that it was not allowed to be shown in cinemas that were part of the National Film Institute — 'tried to book it, and they were refused. They said they've never been refused by a company that had a film. When I asked the distributor, UIP, they said, 'We're re-thinking the release pattern'. There are only two copies in England, and I don't see how you can 're-think a release pattern' around two copies. Then the British Film Institute wanted to screen it. UIP said no. So I said, 'Look, this is a screening for me and my own wonderful baby'. They said, 'OK, you can show it, but only if you go with it and talk about it afterwards'. Well, you can do that just so many times, you think, fine. Then the Cambridge Arts Cinema asked for it, I said, 'Right! I'll go': but, on that occasion, I just couldn't! I was sick. And they said, 'We're surprised! We warned you about this! After that, when Nigel Andrews [film critic of the Financial Times] wanted to show it in his Critic's Choice at the National Film Theatre, they refused to let him have it.' This whole narrative — the sort of thing that drives other directors (Peter Bogdanovich, for the sake of argument) to legal action and press conferences, is delivered by Roeg in a tone of amused mystification. "I don't want that thing of bitterness, because that's what I've been through. And I like making them. What would I do if I didn't? I'm not equipped for any other profession. After all, this is all I can do. It's a low degree or anything like that. Anyway, I enjoy it: I love making movies." This story comes out strongly in "insignificance" which, for my money (see the review in this issue), is a film of both consummate skill and emotional truth. The work of a filmmaker who thinks out loud, but in images. As usual with Roeg, though, the project was brought to him. "I saw the play, then some months later, I was asked to direct the film. I don't read anything much with a view to filming it, unless it's brought to me. I'm not a producer. I have a life to live as well!" (an early interview with Roeg — Sight & Sound, Winter 1973/4 — gives exactly the same genesis for Don't Look Now.) In both cases, though, the important thing was that...
In Insignificance, each of the characters is readily identifiable with a major cultural figure of the postwar period — with Marilyn Monroe and Albert Einstein, Senator Joe McCarthy and Joe DiMaggio. But we don't know them, and they don't know each other. Only at the end of the film do they really know themselves. At first, each carries his or her identity like a mirror, reflecting something predetermined and 'known' back to the others and to us. Behind that, though, the real person is divided and totally alone — a ghost behind the mask of the public image, like K.D. Laing's 'Ghost in the Weed Garden'.

Being alone is a recurrent theme in Roeg's film, and the progress in them is either towards disaster or towards a self-knowledge that recognizes this aloneness. For, despite all the ideas, his films are basically about characters — about people. In Performance, Chas (James Fox), Turner (Mick Jagger) and Pherber (Anita Pallenberg) are islands of aloneness brought together with catastrophic results in the Notting Hill house; in Walkabout, the girl (Jenny Agutter), the boy (Lucien Brown) and the aborigine (David Gulpilil) are three lonely cultural identities — three willing slates on which race and gender have already gouged deep marks — in the neutral setting of the outback. Thomas Jerome Newton has fallen to earth on a strange planet. Above all, the sexual couplings which recur in Roeg's films simply take to the limit the notion of human aloneness at the point of most apparent togetherness. Nothing could make this clearer than the scene in Don't Look Now, in which John and Laura Baxter (Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie) are making love, and Roeg intercuts shots of them calmly dressing for dinner. Their bodies are performing but they — their minds — are elsewhere. In Roeg's films — and nowhere is this truer than in Bad Timing — the closer the contact, the more pervasive the aloneness.

In Insignificance, too, is about that, though it is not about sex. Roeg cites the discussions between The Actress (Theresa Russell) and The Ballplayer (Gary Busey) about ending their marriage, in which the need to preserve their identities conflicts with habit and security, and with a misguided desire to 'protect' the other. "Even if you're unhappy in a relationship," says Roeg, "it's a big thing to tear unhappiness apart. There's a point in their lives which probably begins with the shock of 'Do you want to end it? Shall we get a divorce?' And he says, 'Yes'. Although she's egged him on to it, it's like jumping into the unknown for her. He says, 'I called a lawyer. We gotta do something'. So, things are getting closer to her. And she says, 'I gotta go to the bathroom'. You know, our lives are mixtures of happiness and unhappiness. But they're ours, and we can't let go. To give up our own chance of happiness to support what you think is someone else's happiness is an insult to our own lives and to theirs. You wouldn't do it to their unhappiness.'

For all its passion and unhappiness, though, Insignificance has the structure of a farce: people come and go from the hotel bedroom like clockwork automata, narrowly missing one another, hiding in the bathroom, or coming in on each other at the wrong moment: after explaining relativity to The Professor (Michael Emil), The Actress reckons its only fair he should show her his legs; embarrassed, he does so. And in comes The Ballplayer. "For me," says Roeg, "the biggest of Insignificance is that it is farce. Tragedy contains farce, and farce contains tragedy. They are drama, at either end of the spectrum. In between comes light comedy and domestic drama and situation comedy. But at either end are farce and tragedy."

More than any other Roeg film, Insignificance is about cutting corners — not by compromise, but by accepting one's aloneness and one's real identity — by rejecting the easy compromises which shield one from knowledge. "In adolescence," he says, "a curious thing happens to almost every human being. There's a moment when, in a blinding flash, you have the answer to everything. You may be going upstairs in a bus or anything — but it comes. And, as it comes, it goes. I remember one of my boys coming to me and saying, 'I had the most extraordinary thing happen to me: suddenly, I seemed to know absolutely everything about school and ... and I can't remember what it was!' It goes. And that moment leaves you realising that you're alone — that, for the first time, you truly can't explain yourself. That's when you become an adult."★
The Australian Film Commission provides limited funds for special purpose grants, investments and loans to qualified practitioners in film and video in Australia. Preference will be given to those activities which are of significant benefit to the film and video community. The AFC also expects that, where appropriate, complementary funding support will be provided by state governments and the private sector.

The AFC now invites applications for activities in the following categories scheduled to commence during the period January 1-June 30, 1986.

The form of funding, whether by way of grant, loan or investment, will be at the AFC's discretion.

1. Publications
   a) The research and writing of critical works on subjects related to the cultural and aesthetic aspects of film and video. Publishing subsidies are not available in this category.
   b) Resource and reference publications contributing to the wider dissemination of information within the Australian film and video community. Periodicals associated with industrial or craft guild associations are not eligible in this category.

2. Special Events
   Festivals, awards, seminars, conferences etc., with the following objectives:
   a) The exploration of cultural, aesthetic and industrial matters.
   b) Recognition of achievements within the Australian film and video community.

3. Travel and Study
   a) Overseas travel for the purpose of obtaining information for dissemination to the Australian film community, or to undertake research and development (see category 4).
   b) Domestic travel to enable Australian film and video practitioners to attend appropriate events or organisations within Australia.
   c) Attachments to appropriate organisations in Australia and overseas.
   d) Visits to Australia by suitably qualified overseas personnel.

4. Research and Development of new technology and software intended to increase the technical or creative capacity of the Australian film and video community.

Deadline for applications: 30th September, 1985
Please note: the deadline for applications for activities commencing during the period 1 July to 31 December 1986 is 31 March, 1986.

For copies of application forms and further information please contact:
The Project Officer — Special purpose funding
(02) 922-6855 Toll free (008) 22-6615.

Applications must be made in writing on the appropriate application form and addressed to:
Cultural Activities Co-Ordinator
Australian Film Commission
GPO Box 3984
SYDNEY. NSW. 2001

N.B. Organisations in receipt of general purpose grants from the AFC are not eligible to apply for assistance under this scheme.

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On location

In a period that saw more film industry activity than has been evident for some months, directorial debuts were a notable feature. In Melbourne, Nadia Tass commenced a six-week shoot on Malcolm on 29 July. Malcolm is also characterized by double functions: Tass is co-producing with stills photographer David Parker, who is also the director of photography. The cast in this tale of an inventive Tramways Board employee includes Colin Friels in the title role, John Hargreaves and Lindy Davies.

In Sydney, production on the first Australian feature to boast a script by William Shakespeare began at the Balmain Bowls on 5 August. Twelfth Night, marking the feature debut for director Neil Armfield, who directed the stage production for the Light House Company (State Theatre of South Australia), stars a number of the original cast members, including Jacey Phillips (Olivia), Peter Cummins (Malvolio), John Wood (Sir Toby Belch) and Geoffrey Rush (Sir Andrew Aguecheek).

Two new additions to the cast are Ivar Kants as Orsino and Tracy Harvey as Maria. It is described by publicist Peter Kemp as "a deceptive carnival in which pleasure spirals and reality begins to blur, fun borders on cruelty and love becomes confusion". The production is aiming at a distinctive look, created by production designer Stephen Curtis, who did the design and costumes for the stage production, and is also making his first attempt at feature work.

In collaboration with cinematographer Louis Irving, Curtis has gone for a design reminiscent of a tatty — if slightly jaded — holiday resort, a travel brochure, or, as Kemp describes it, "a fantasy partyland."

Adaptations to make the film a little more contemporary include a bowls hat for Sir Toby, calypso music by Allan John, and a modification of Shakespearean English to distinctive Australian accents, which Cinema Papers is assured will stop short of straining.

In and around Melbourne, the first of the recently announced Crawfords package (see 'News Plus') got under way on 1 July and wrapped two weeks later, on 16 August. I Live with Me Dad is a feature with a budget of around $1 million, and is being produced by Ross Jennings; one-time Head of Drama at TVNZ, who recently turned the beleaguered Special Squad series into a critical (if not a ratings) success. It is being directed by Paul Molarney.

The film tells the story — written by Peter Pinney, from a concept by Gerry Moran — of a six-year-old (Haydon Samuel) who, as the title implies, lives with his father (Peter Hehir), a former crocodile hunter turned urban alcoholic. Most of the locations have been city-based, but the company went up to Mulwala, near Yarrawonga, in mid-August, to shoot the crocodile-hunting scenes. Plans to hire a live crocodile, however, had to be abandoned when the safety of the cast and crew could not be guaranteed. The T is played by an eight-year-old veteran of many a TV commercial, and the cast also includes Rebecca Gibney, currently in The Zoo Family, as a well-meaning social worker.

And the problem project of the 'News Plus' pages in our last issue, The Lancaster Miller Affair, finally got going on its fourteen-week schedule on 11 July. Nicholas Eadie and Wayne Cull play the male lead roles, with Kerry Mack as Chubbie Miller. Although producer Paul Davies is at pains to stress that it is not a flying story, a lot of interest is bound to be generated by the plane in which the couple flew their main exploits. The only flying Avro Avian left in the world, it was rebuilt by a 70-year-old enthusiast and is insured for $70,000. The "enormous problems" (Davies) of the dispute with Equity resulted in production being postponed, and the budget up from the original $4.7 million to something over $5 million. The Nine Network plans to air the first episode early in 1996.

Elsewhere on the feature production front, the intriguingly titled Dead-End Drive-In, promising much car-crunching action, is scheduled to start shooting on 9 September. Cactus, the latest Paul Cox feature, co-scripted by Cox and Bob Ellis, is scheduled to commence ten days later, while The Fringe Dwellers, written and directed by Bruce Beresford, is due to start a seven-week shoot on 16 September.

Further down the production track, Samson Productions' Going Sane started shooting, as did Filmsee's Australian Dream. The SAF's Playing Beatle Bow began post-production.

The television industry again proved a hive of activity, much of it generated from PBL Productions in Sydney. While Double Sculls and The Body Business moved into post-production, The Trailblazer is due to begin production on 23 September and The Great Bookie Robbery started rolling on 26 August.

Coinciding with this examination of the famous, unsolved heist, is the Indian Pacific Films production, Robbery, for Network Ten, produced and directed by Michael Thornhill. This telelomew, hypothesizing the highly organized forces behind the crime, started shooting on 22 July and completed...
production four weeks later. Meanwhile, Roadshow, Coote and Carroll's Archer moved into post-production and the company wrapped Roadshow, Coote and Carroll's production four weeks later. Meanwhile, Sydney, production started on the third series of Melbourne's drama department, the thriller Daze, in August.

Man, Michael Cove and Martin Armiger — and on locations around Sydney. It features Dancing Daze composed by Sharon O'Neill, Steven Cumchoreography by Chrissie Koltai and songs by the sisters, who depart the country life of the pig principal soloist with the Pina Bausch TanzClifton.

The 22 episodes are expected to be in production until Christmas. The complex years, anticipating further exploits at McElroy have leased the premises for five backlot from bygone days. Hal and Jim McElroy currently houses more than nine large sets, with Return to Eden which completed its production late completed production, while in Archer was shot in the ABC studios and on locations around Sydney. It features choreography by Christine Kolb and songs composed by Sharon O'Neill, Steven Cumings, Red Symons and former Beach Boy Ricky Fataar.

The cast promises some new faces for local television. Playing the two Green sisters, who depart the country life of the pig farm in Wagga for the bright lights of the Harbour City, are Meryl Tankard, a former principal soloist with the Pina Bausch Tanztheater, and Patty Stephen, an ex-student of the Sundance Institute. Other cast members include Lauranne Clifford, Norman Kaye, Paul Chubb and Jane Clifton.

In Sydney, the $8-million production of Return to Eden commenced shooting in mid-May, at the hurriedly converted premises of the Five Dock industrial estate. The 22-episode series started on the third day until Christmas. The complex houses more than nine large sets, production offices and construction areas, in a space reminiscent of a Hollywood backlot from bygone days. Hal and Jim McElroy have leased the premises for five years, anticipating further exploits at Eden — or, if that fails, facilities for other McElroy productions or space for hire to other producers.

Though executive producer Hal McElroy dislikes the comparison, stressing that Eden will be "uniquely Australian", thoughts of the soap operas spring quickly to mind. The plot lines, featuring the familiar ingredients of wealth, power, revenge, family conflict and surprise revelations from a dark past, coupled with Larry Eastwood's opulent production design, costumes by George Gross, Harry Who and Susan Hannaford, and a fleet of classy cars, consolidate the comparison.

And, while Kevin Dobson, who is directing a number of episodes, jokingly describes the style and content as 'Dynasty down under', McElroy sensitively points out that, from a production point of view, "we could never emulate them, because they spend $1 million an hour — four or five times more than we have to spend". He adds, however, that "we didn't set out to make Dynasty or Dallas per se. But it's prime time, adult-oriented melodrama, so, necessarily, it will have the same sort of qualities." McElroy speaks with great pace and enthusiasm about the project, which is due to premiere in the US in September. "No one else in Australia has done melodrama," he asserts. "They have done soap opera, with Eden we did, and are doing, melodrama." He emphasizes that the rules for melodrama in television series are different in character and format. Packed with plot twists, enormous courses of conflict, and emotions and plot pitched at the level of "heightened reality", the plot lines do not require detailed exposition of motivation. Emotional rationales, based on dramatic circumstance that can endure minimal time. Sound-proofing hitches are necessary in the creative sphere, outlining his most pressing choices for the day as "We need to shoot an episode in seven days, we must have very experienced people. We need a classy product, and you can't throw a beginner into that, no matter how talented they may be. We need six minutes of finished screen time a day, which is nearly three times as fast as it is a feature." Producer Tim Sanders adds that "we can't do things in feature-film style, though we strive, as far as we can, for a level of excellence in look and style. But, we find that if we drop a scene, change, rewrite or add one, it's part of the daily process. No one has a heart attack and runs screaming from the room. They say 'Oh well, that's what happens with series making'. You're never going to hit the mark 100%, every single minute of the day, for 32 weeks. On a feature, if you drop a shot, it can be catastrophic for the call sheets and schedules. Everyone runs around looking to kill someone.

In spite of some flexibility at this level, however, Dobson finds certain constraints necessary in the creative sphere, outlining his most pressing choices for the day as "Hunter sees himself as: assistant, acting talent, line producer, artist, designer, machinist, technician, etc. or consultant/supplier of props, vehicles, computer graphics, electronics, servo motors, locations, etc. If you think you have anything to contribute, or if you know of anyone who has, please send fullest information to Executive Producer, P.O. Box 333, Bondi Beach, N.S.W. 2026, Australia. We would prefer not to have to return anything; enclose s.a.e. if you want any information returned. Angel Holdings Pty Ltd. Tel. (02) 369 2221

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THE MAGIC OF CRICKET

Director: Marcus Breen
Producer: Marcus Breen
Scriptwriter: Paul Ozerski, Gabrielle Dalton
Sound recordist: Barbara Barker
Lighting assistant: Kerry Brown
Stunts: John Nimmo
Stunts co-ordinator: Dr David Nimmo

INSTRUCTION

Director: John Warr
Producer: Robert Barry
Scriptwriter: David Goldsmith
Music: John Hopkins

SOME BRADY BOYS

Producer: Coralie Clarke
Director: Mike Brady
Scriptwriter: David Goldsmith
Music: John Hopkins

McBride (Melbourne)

Sound recordists: Ralph Beech (Bathurst)

ARTISANS OF AUSTRALIA

Director: John Warr
Producer: Robert Barry
Scriptwriter: David Goldsmith
Music: John Hopkins

THE WHISTLER AND HIS DOG

Director: Ross Wilson
Producer: Current Wave
Scriptwriter: Michael Hughes
Music: John Hopkins

BETTER RICH THAN RED

Director: Mike Brady
Producer: Coralie Clarke
Scriptwriter: David Goldsmith
Music: John Hopkins

BLUEPRINT FOR FIELDCAST INCREATION

Director: Mike Brady
Producer: Film Australia
SYNOPSIS: A drama based on the extra "empire" and their own problems. The
_vecrease to curtain to reveal the intrigue
_color and poetry fitted together to make up a
_rnancially sound and new songs
Text: "Roadshow/Action Time"
_Director: Anthony Grey (George Ward)
_Exec. producer: Bruce Horsfield, Janine Horsfield
_Based on the original idea by
_Mother of the war in Vietnam was won militarily, but
x by
_Scriptwriter: Robert Caswell
_Prod. manager: Terri Vincent
_Financial controller: Kevin Wright
_Assoc. producer: Suzanne McKenzie
_Dist. company: Seven Network
_Director: John Power,
Production: Brendan Irish
_Standby manager: Tony O'Brien

SYNOPSIS: The theme challenges the
 требования, but not the underlying issues of the
tory of cyclone Tracy, which virtually
_1st asst director: Steve Andrews
_Administrative office: John Casey

SYNOPSIS: Based on Anthony Grey's novel
_Continuity: Julianne Mills, John Power
_Scriptwriters: Adrian Van Den Berg, Virginia Davis
_Editor: Reg Watson
_Author: John Power
_Executive producer: Andrew Horvath
_Casting: Peter Bills, Anne Godfrey

SYNOPSIS: The saga of an Irish-Catholic

SYNOPSIS: Based on the original idea by

SYNOPSIS: A mini-series based on story of cyclone Tracy, which virtually

SYNOPSIS: An out-of-town country town from both sides.

SYNOPSIS: The story takes an American's experience in Vietnam from
culture, society. It shows the pressures on them, the difficulties and
decisions they have to make as they are pushed into adulthood.

SYNOPSIS: A comedy starring two women on a

SYNOPSIS: Based on the original idea by

SYNOPSIS: A drama series of four episodes.

SYNOPSIS: A story of a young person

SYNOPSIS: Synopsis: The bookmakers present of over $2

SYNOPSIS: Synopsis: The theme challenges the

SYNOPSIS: An out-of-town country town from both sides.

SYNOPSIS: Synopsis: The theme challenges the

SYNOPSIS: Synopsis: The theme challenges the
May-June 1985

1. An Indecent Obsession

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Total: $111,881

2. Robbery Under Arms

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Total: $68,249

3. World Safari II

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Total: $23,821

Australia’s Top Three Grossers for May-June 1985

- Beverly Hills Cop
  - Total: $4,651,740
- Police Academy 2: Their First Assignment
  - Total: $3,541,080
- Witness
  - Total: $1,479,980

With Australian box office in general very much up and down over the past two months, the careers of the latest Australian-made features have been equally patchy. At least, however, there has been more than one film to talk about, as was the case in our last issue.

March-April’s lone Aussie film, Robbery Under Arms, is still on the books in May-June, continuing its reasonably successful runs in Adelaide — its home territory — and Perth. It also had a brief canter up north in Brisbane, where it netted a fairly dismal $9,660 — not a great deal more than the total: $23,821

Week 1: 28 April-4 May Total: $33,992

MELBOURNE

Week 2: 5-11 May Total: $24,650

MELBOURNE

Week 3: 12-18 May Total: $9,660

MELBOURNE

Week 4: 19-25 May Total: $125,650

MELBOURNE

Week 5: 25 May-8 June

Week 6: 2-8 June

Week 7: 9-15 June

Week 8: 16-22 June

Week 9: 23-29 June

MELBOURNE

For the first week in May, which was its fourth week out, the Eddie Murphy vehicle, which opened in the second week in April, also managed to keep ahead of its main rival, Police Academy 2: Their First Assignment, on a nationwide basis for all but one of the weeks in question. Its figures held strong throughout the period, only beginning to taper slowly off towards the end of June.

The other cop picture had three very strong weeks at the start of its escapade from 5 to 25 May — then dropped down to a national figure of $450,980 for its fourth week and, by week 8, was down below the $200,000 mark, with a total of $188,720.

Fortunately for national pride, the third highest-grossing foreign film had a distinctly Australian flavour: Peter Weir’s Witness, which opened with a fair $167,830, but spent the rest of May and June well over the $200,000 mark. Week 4 was its best, with $325,900 nationwide, but week 7 was still not only a few bucks below that figure, with $250,040.

Apart from those three, box-office business in May-June seems to have been dominated by four healthy survivors from the previous months: The Neverending Story, which Australia has taken to its heart, and which has been spinning its web since Christmas; Amadeus, whose worldwide success has been echoed downunder; and two flagships of the current ‘British revival’, A Passage to India and The Killing Fields, both of which continue to do well.

Other movies that have had strong openings — $50,000 or more in Melbourne and Sydney — are Starman, with a first week of $141,140, the Ewok caper, Caravan of Courage, with $77,720; Cannon’s Exterminator 2, with $75,530; The Falcon and the Snowman, which had a somewhat art-oriented release, but opened with $67,490; the Tom Selleck movie Runaway, with $56,970; and Ladyhawke ($53,380) and The Company of Wolves ($51,960). Neither of the last two, it is interesting to note, did anything like the business they did in the States and, in the case of the latter at least, in Britain.

Looking ahead to July and August, there can be no doubt which film will dominate the Australian figures for those months: Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome, which opened on 8 August. On the import front, the biggies look like being Desperately Seeking Susan and, above all, Rambo: First Blood Part II.
Film Australia

So many people came out of Film Australia — that it sounded like a prison! — but it nurtured so many careers. I was not conscious of the length of time I was there, because of the wide variety of work; and Film Australia seemed to be the only place that had the budget to make a good film that was a notch above the regular proposition. I did an enormous amount of work with people like Carl Schultz, Ken Cameron, Ken Hannam, Don Crofts, Arch Nicholson... it was a wonderful training ground. And there was a tribe of guys who were all very good, devoted cameramen — Mike Bourneham, Kerry Brown, Andy Fraser and Ross King; if they had been in the commercial world outside, doing features or commercials, they would have been successful.

Documentaries

I just recently did some documentary stuff which is the first time for a hell of a while. I found that it was like I had had my wings clipped for three or four years, and then grown feathered again. It was with Phil Coklin, and it's a documentary on his tour of Australia and Japan. To have a camera on my shoulder again and not to have to light anything because of high-speed stocks and super-speed lenses, and just follow this man and his band and fans around all over the country — dark, light, shade, inside, outside, upside down anywhere... It was just phenomenal. You record it, capture it and become part of it, but technically there is no style in it: there is something happening in front of you that is only going to happen once and you have to capture it.

I don't know that the documentaries I've done have been an influence on the way I've photographed the landscape as much as it has been a lack of doing it any other way. I didn't have the experience of being brought up doing commercials where all the tricks are pulled out. A lot of the camera people doing features are used to those techniques for making moments in a commercial a special one. In a documentary, you don't do that.

First meetings with Mad Max

While I was on Hoodwink, I got a call about doing Mad Max 2. I didn't know anything about the first Mad Max, so I went and saw it. I thought it was reasonable, so I met George [Miller] and Byron [Kennedy] at an office in the city. I thought, "Wow! These guys look pretty good!" George had a little bow-tie on, and Byron was all dressed up. So I said, "Yes, I'll do it."

With Mad Max 2, George was very specific with his shots, because he'd learned on Mad Max what cuts and what doesn't. I remember suggesting a wonderful shot to George of a car flying through the air: it would have looked great. But George said, "It won't cut!" I said, "What do you mean? It's a great shot! It'll cut!" And I remember him describing to me the left of the screen and the right of the screen, and how this shot was to be a second long, and the shot before was half-a-second long and, in the action, your eyes were on the left-hand side of the screen. By the time people had reacted to the change of shot and got their eyes across to the other side of the screen, the shot would be over. No matter how good the shot was, it was never going to work.

George's cuts are really quick, so every shot had to have good dynamics and good perspective. If you flatten stuff out in a chase picture, it slows it down. That means wide-angle work — in fairly close, with wide lenses mounted on the vehicles or on tracking vehicles to get visual pace and speed.

On Mad Max 2, George very much controlled the placement of the cameras, even in multi-camera set-ups. We would move a camera a dozen times to get it right. We'd put it in one place, line up the vehicles, then move it a bit to the left, a bit to the right, up a bit, down a bit, back a bit, in a bit... and maybe finish up back where we started. But it's that attention to detail that makes the film what it is.

Shooting Thunderdome in the desert

In Beyond Thunderdome, the desert landscapes are very stark. They were shot outside Coober Pedy — very awe-inspiring country. We were shooting there in temperatures of 40 and 50 degrees Celsius. It was difficult enough to look after the equipment in that heat: the temperature in the camera van was 25 degrees! Difficult for us but even more difficult for the performers — Tina in her chintz, for example.

We also shot at Kurnell, which is a beautiful area if shot correctly. On one of our first days shooting there, a howling wind storm came up. We couldn't stand up and the canteen was completely washed out with sand. We got half-a-dozen shots during the period, but they are in the film and they look fantastic.

Another phenomenon that appears in the film was a dust storm at Coober Pedy. It was three or four miles high and 30 miles wide. We saw it coming when we were shooting aerials with the helicopter of the little aeroplane we had for the picture. To get them safely back to base, we sent them off, and Richard Merryman took the camera and travelled back with Terry Lee, who is the best chopper pilot for filming. They got it safely back on base.

In 1960, when Australian television was four years old, Dean Semler was seventeen and just starting work as a props boy at the Channel 9 studios in Adelaide. 25 years later, he qualifies as a member of the Television Pioneers, a group of TV industry people with that length of service. He is also one of our top directors of photography. Since his first feature film, Let the Balloon Go (1975), made when he was at Film Australia, his big-screen work has included Hoodwink, Mad Max 2, Kitty and the Bagman, Undercover, Razorback, The Coca-Cola Kid and Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome. Fred Harden spoke with him in Sydney on the eve of the premiere of Thunderdome.

Lighting Thunderdome

Bartertown was a big job with power into all the buildings, including Tina's penthouse, which was 50 feet in the air. It was about two-thirds scale, and the interior was built in the Cattle Pavilion at the Sydney Showgrounds. The design was beautiful — a five-sided thing — and I fell into a bit of a trap because I'd ordered eight arcs to surround the penthouse. It was all surrounded with gauze, and I put scrims outside of that and lit them with arcs. Even with the eight lights, I was shooting almost wide-open on high-speed stock inside. It was a beautiful soft light, and I kept the colour very cool in there.

It was also great having so many faces to light. Tina is a beautiful lady with this very earthy quality, and Mel works under any light: you can put him under a flooro and he looks a million dollars.

The Crack in the Earth had a special look, because of that soft toplight that left a lot of dark shadows underneath the faces. There was the underground where the pigs were, which I wanted to keep low-key and sinister. It was lit with some very direct overhead narrow spots mounted thirty feet in the air, plus some practicals, and that was it, just touching up some of the close-ups.

Ironically, one of the biggest lighting set-ups was on the model stuff of devastated Sydney at the end of the picture. Again we had eight arcs and six of the big maxi-brutes lighting up the painted background, because we were shooting at 40 to 64 frames and stopping right down to f.16 or f.22 to make it look realistic.

We did a travelling sun, which I'm not sure has made it into the final cut. But the model buildings were about
fifteen to twenty feet deep and about five or six feet high. We started a track from one end, and directly across from us was an arc facing into the lens. It was dangled down by wires. We filled the place up with smoke and, as we started to track to simulate flying, I moved the arc across as well, which gives that many dimensions of the image. You could swivel them around or diffusion filter. Smoke gives you enormous energy to the scene. There were some of those shots that they even added more shudder to optically at the lab.

Some of those shots that they even added more shudder to optically at the lab.

When stunt people are getting them­selfs psyched up for a scene, they'd use that as a release for it. One thing that always worked was a simple thing like a newspaper kind of gaffer tape.— I closed the eye piece and just aimed it. I was strapped on tightly, but I said to Byron, "I'm not sure if you've got anything there, but we'd like to see it." He'd have to have some time to look into it. He'd have to come off if you wanted to adjust the aperture or the focus or the speed. It was normally with a fairly wide lens, and in close. In Mad Max films, we had what we called a "Ned Kelly" — a little, hard front Ariflex camera built into a quarter-inch steelplate housing, and we put this camera down close to impact in a stunt. We'd have a setting you had to rest it on sandbags, secure it and lock it off, because the lid had to come off if you wanted to adjust the aperture of the focus or the speed. It was normally with a fairly wide lens, and in close.

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Smoke

Undcover was a pretty smoky picture, considering there was no real motivation for, or smoke around. I like using smoke because it is a multi-layered filter, different to a fog or diffusion filter. Smoke gives you many dimensions of the image.

After Undcover, I said I wasn't going to use smoke on my next picture. This was Razorback and, there's no more smoke on that than you've ever seen! So, after Razorback, I resolved not to use smoke or backlight, and try for wind or sound or something different. Then Thunderdome ends up with heaps of smoke in it!!

In Thunderdome, we had a special travelling smoke machine on wheels that was designed by the guy who designed the trike — a bag. Brian Bosisto, who now designs cranes and tracking vehicles.

He designed this thing with two Helon engines on the back of this little truck, with two fans mounted on them. You could swivel them around with smoke coming out of them or feed dust into them — whatever you like. He filled a valley in South Aus­tralia for the filming of Robbery Under Arms. I asked him whether he could design something for it to clear! He's a brilliant engineer and one of Australia's true characters.

Undercover

I honestly don't remember talking to David Stevens about a style on Under­cover. But David was very specific about his shots: he works all of his coverage out at rehearsals with the artists. And they all fit into the sets once they're there.

The locations on that were beautifully designed. I worked with an assistant cameraman and a focus puller called Stephen Dobby, who was ready — absolutely ready to go and shoot stuff himself; he was a very keen, very talented young focus puller. He had some stockages that he used to pull out and pouring into the caves. It worked very well. It was just going an extra step off of convention, and Russell did that all the time.

When I was going to do this Highlander thing with him. It's a beautiful story set in two periods — the 1600s in the highlands of Scotland and contem­porary Manhattan. We negotiated and did deals with producers and agents and people over there. It was a big job — six months, with fairly big pre-production. So, we packed up home and my daughter was taken out of school and we arranged for corres­pondence lessons for that length of time.

But poor dumpy me hadn't signed a contract! We were in the middle of America somewhere and I got a call saying, "You can't bring your gaffer over because there is a union problem". That was very disappoint­ing, because Johnny Morton and I had worked closely together for five or six years.

Still, I was asked to go over and do a survey anyway, in the meantime hoping we might be able to get it. But while I was there, I met a guy, Miroslav Ondricek, the Czechoslovakian cameraman who shot Amadeus, who was trying to get in to do Hugh Hudson's latest film. That swept him off his perch, in either. The two of us went home with our tails between our legs.

Foreigners working here and Australians working there

With Highlander, the English people said, "We try to work in Australia and we can't"! So, I mean, what do you do? They're protecting theirs and we're protecting ours. I think it's a pity it can't be shared a bit — that we can't let a certain amount of people in, like writers or cameramen or special effects technicians — people that we could learn from.

We had an American special effects guy, Mike Wood, here for Thunder­screw, who was very close to. Just some of the tiny things he does every week over there that we haven't been exposed to... time-saving, money-sav­ing: very productive stuff. And then, how come you come up with materials that we hadn't used that are readily available here, but they're not being used for that specific purpose in film?

He did things like Poltergeist, which he got an Academy nomination for, and Field of Dreams, the American stuff on Indiana Jones. People like that you should let in. And it would be nice to see an American cameraman

"On Max, I would be wobbling the camera on the fluid head and George would come up and kick the tripod and whack the side of the camera. In days like that, which was beautiful. It gave us a long separation between foreground and background and, with the smoke, the backgrounds went like pastel paintings, which was a lovely approach. The light was very soft.

Russell Mulcahy and Razorback

I remember that McElroy was talking about Razorback when we were doing Return to Eden. I got a call from Hal, saying, "Are you interested?" So I met this young Russell, and saw his clips and show­ reel. He'd just seen some stuff I'd done, and he hit the word go. He is incredibly inventive — a little bit bold, of course. He taught me that a low-angle shot is not necessarily six inches above the ground: half-an-inch above the ground is really much better. There is an enor­mous difference. So you dig holes: you put a camera in a hole and it works.

If the thing looked good, you made it look better until it looked fantastic, and then Russell would happen. The classic example is when we were on a location survey at a cave at White­cliffs, because the two baddies in the film lived in a cave. There were some fantastic caves, which would have been nice — then I said well, then, I'm perfect!" And he said, "No, I want to build it!" It seemed an incredible waste of money, but they built this dam cave and, if you've seen Razor­back, it was a brilliant piece of set design. Had they lived in a conven­tional cave, which I think any other director might have let them, it's what would have worked perfectly. But Russell had a cave built that was 100 feet deep, and tracking vehicles through these holes like daylight
or an English cameraman work over here. It would be nice for the young guys — assistants, grips and everybody else — to experience that. The problem is, how many, and who decides?

I find a lot of the restrictions very negative. I just like to get on with it and get it done. I'd like to shoot the European system, where you start at 11 o'clock in the morning and have a really nice lunch and a glass of wine, and then you shoot through to eight o'clock at night. Poor Russell on Razorback would be sitting around waiting for the sun to come up or something to happen and, just as you were ready, someone would come out and call "Tea break!" and you'd miss out on the shot anyway: everybody would rush off to the table to get the bacon rolls. I can remember turning around and seeing Russell standing there thinking, "What the hell is going on, you know, when we're trying to make a picture?" He operates on a rock-clip system, where you shoot 30 hours straight and you get everything done. It's high energy, and everyone loves it.

The Americans work twelve hours straight. I've just done a picture in Singapore for Columbia Television called Passion Flower, with Bruce Boxleitner, and directed by Joe Sargent, who's got a track record a mile long. It was thirteen one-hour episodes and a budget of something like $40 million — enormous! We shot for five weeks in Singapore, and pulled out four days early; but they were six-day weeks with twelve-hour days, plus travel and rushes — the first ones I'd done. They were very draining, particularly in the Singapore heat.

When we first got over there, there was a very definite feeling from the Americans that they were the film-makers and we were something unknown. They've just rung back saying they want to do another one in Tahiti, but we're all booked up.

I think our top Australian crews are more relaxed. I did a shoot in England recently — a commercial for American television — and I wasn't quite sure what I had to say to whom, because you were always stepping on somebody's toes. Whereas over here you can say, "Listen, sport, I need that over here", and they'd say, "Oh, go bite your bum: that's his job!". But people sort of chip in here and help each other out. If you ask a grip to move a light a little for you, he will. But if I had a light moved in England by any other person but the person who was supposed to have moved it, I would have been in more strife than a virgin at a butchers' picnic!

**Future plans**

I've just bought the rights to a book that I'm going to turn into a feature. I'm writing a script at the moment, and I want to direct and shoot it myself. To me, it's the most important thing that's happened in my career, and it's happened at exactly the right time. I'd come back from what I thought was going to be a wonderful opportunity to shoot a picture overseas, which turned out to be a fairly bitter experience, and it hurt.

When I got back, there was a letter on my doorstep from my mother with a little clipping. My mother lives on the river Murray in South Australia. She sent me a clipping saying "Possum to be made into a film". My ears pricked up and I read a simple little story in the local paper saying that a local policeman had written a book about an old bush hermit in Renmark, the town where I was born. His book had sold thousands of copies and, as a result, he'd had offers from people to make a film of it. I thought I'd better give this guy a ring, because I remembered him from when I was a kid. He's now a man in his late sixties, and I rang up the police station and the post office to get his number. I said, "Max Jones? It's Dean Semler here. I used to live in 19th Street, just opposite the railway station, and I remember you." And he said, "Ah, yeah?" And I said, "I'm in the film business now and I've made a few films, and I've heard you've had a few offers for filming the Possum story". He said, "Yeah, yeah: there's about half-a-dozen. I really don't know what to do."

Next thing, Anne and I went over there, spent a day or two with Max on the river and bought the rights to his book to write the film. It's a beautiful story and I'm writing it at the moment. The little time I get between shooting, I put pen to paper — Sundays, normally. I put in ten to twelve hours on a Sunday; I'm in a third of the way through the draft, and it's looking pretty good at the moment, although I've never written anything before. I was going to get a writer in, but it's a bit too personal: I'm too close to it, because I know all the people in his book; I know the area, and I know the story of this old hermit. So I've got to do it. I'm writing in pictures — in cuts: I can't write it any other way.

I'm doing Carl Schultz's next picture, a thing called The Trailblazer, in late September, for PBL. It's a terrific script. I came home on Saturday night, having shot all week, and on Saturday nights you get home and normally drop. I thought, "I'll have a quick read of this, because I have to read it over the weekend". I picked it up and I'd read it before dinner. I felt about in the chair? It's as funny as hell. So, that's going to be nice. And then, next year, I'm doing George Ogilvie's picture — a thing called The Bee-Eater, in January or February.

We're looking at using SuperTechniscope for The Trailblazer — that's the format they shot Greystoke in. There will be a picture shot out here using that very soon, I'm sure. There are about a dozen features in the States that are being shot that way, which is the first time that there has been any real alternative to Panavision. A picture can be shot with spherical lenses, and the full-frame gate image is cropped to a 2.35:1 ratio and blown up to an anamorphic squeezed print and projected anamorphic. There are some advantages and some disadvantages. The Panavision gear is very good, but this is something new which it would be interesting for me to try.
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MAD MAX: BEYOND THUNDERDOME

If, as the theme song tells us, "we don't need another hero", it is probably because co-writers Terry Hayes and George Miller have gradually moulded their protagonist into a universal representation of heroism. Through what can now be seen as the 'Mad Max Trilogy', the title character (Mel Gibson) has evolved to incorporate bits and pieces from a host of literary, historical and cinematic sources. A quintessential loner, he carries his private moral code and turbulent past as his armour, battling through adversity with the same stoicism that characterized his ancestors, be they gladiators, gunslingers, adventurers, samurai, medieval knights, defenders of underdogs or dispensers of vigilante justice.

In Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome, the old attributes — courage, a sense of justice, a wry humour and an instinct for survival — remain. But new dimensions are added: Max is no longer quite so mad. His paternal role, bringing with it a compassion that died with his family in the original film, is revived. Added to it is an unabashed representation of Max as the biblical hero of the eighthies, standing through trial and salvation, acceptance and exile, loyalty and deception, worship and humiliation.

The film begins with a brief reintroduction of the character, then moves to Bartertown, a cavernous mecca for hawkers, which recalls the moneylenders whom Christ found conducting business in the temple. Following several high-spirited adventures in this bizarre bazaar, Max is driven into the desert, where he languishes until rescued by Savannah Nix (Helen Buday) and her tribe of children. The Max character then begins to take on a dash of Moses guiding the lost tribe to the Promised Land, a Christ-like figure of compassion, saviour and a pinch of the reluctant prophet. To complete the analogy, Max literally offers himself as a sacrifice to ensure the freedom of the children during the customary climactic chase at the end of the film.

And, if the biblical analogy seems appropriate for the hero, it is equally relevant to the role played by history and the significance that the film lends to storytelling. In the post-holocaust wasteland, an oral history — an unwritten bible — reigned by the children with the sort of reverence traditionally reserved for church and Sunday school, becomes the thread that distinguishes primitive barbarity from primitive civilization.

The children worship the remembered remnants of a lost culture, recite stories of heroes and savours, and see these tales as a guiding light to a brighter future. By contrast, the inhabitants of Bartertown, led by a superfly regal feudal founder, Aunty Entity (Tina Turner), have no time for history or stories, and are openly contemptuous of them.

The kids are characterized by optimism, a strong sense of community, compassion and faith. The adults, led by an elite who have few dreams beyond immediate personal gain, and no memories beyond chop-locking recollections of dog-eat-dog victories on The Day After.

While Max, Savannah and Aunty are linked by their determination to survive and achieve their personal goals, only Savannah, the custodian of history, can be a part of the future, by virtue of her understanding of the importance of the past. Max, like Moses, is destined not to enter the Promised Land. Like all myths, though, Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome is laced with humour, and, within the film's sophisticated Saturday-mattinee style of action, there are a number of pointed parodies that are highly entertaining.

The movie is littered with references to popular film and television. There may be biblical echoes in the first glimpse of Barter­town, but it is also comparable to the bar scene in Star Wars, in which Luke (Mark Hamill) first clapped eyes on the assortment of weird and wonderful types from worlds that were alien to him, but of which he would soon be a part.

There are tongue-in-cheek references to Indiana Jones and his "I don't believe this" brand of heroism, when Max duplicates the trademark Indiana gag, blasting his way into Bartertown. And, while the opening scene recalls the aeroplane attack in North by Northwest, a scratch beneath the surface reveals elements of films as diverse as Lord of the Flies, The Searchers and Lawrence of Arabia.

The Thunderdome itself resembles a playground of the worst, and the filming location of the futuristic society, a blind tribute to the culture, a reverence for the skills and scope of adventure filmmaking, and an intelligent awareness of the elements that have made legends endure.

Debi Enker

Sex and violence

BROKEN MIRRORS

Audiences who are aware of concluding that the films of Marleen Gorris are concerned solely with differences of gender. To do so would be to do her an injustice: it would be to refuse to engage in the questions she raises.

In A Question of Silence (De Stille Rond Christine M, 1982) she posed the theoretical question of what it was for women to commit the same senseless acts of aggression against men as men do against women. Through the story of three women, she analysed the treatment of women in general by a variety of institutions: prisons, psychiatry, political economy and the law.

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In doing so, she also looked at the feminist issues of language, voice and power.

**Broken Mirrors** (Gebroken Spiegels), on the other hand, is a more explicit thriller format, and she is clearly well aware that the brothel setting represents reality by two elements are not as disconnected as that produces them.

In both her films, Gorris has used the thriller format, and she is clearly well aware of the genre's potential as a story-telling device: the obvious advantage is that it immediately asks whodunnit and why, thereby implicitly raising questions about the psychology and motivations of the characters.

**Broken Mirrors** consists of two seemingly disconnected stories. The first is a stylized one about a faceless man who kidnaps women and gains pleasure from slowly torturing them. The other is a more natural story of two women who work in a brothel, which is known — rather cynically — as 'The Happy House'.

On closer examination, however, these two elements are not as disconnected as they initially appear. In fact, they can be seen as the converse of each other, both representing fiction and reality. It is believed that the brothel setting represents reality by virtue of its being an immediate and identifiable context, while the second story as a fiction, because it is removed to a stylized theatrical distance. One, however, prostitution is seen as the (metaphorical) fiction for the way people treat each other, then it is conversely possible to perceive the brothel as representing the recognizable but undeniable threat of potential violence experienced by women.

All women have known the fear of potential violence. Though thrillers and other narratives which play on the insecurities of women have turned it into a stereotyped

**Centro-Frame woman:** Diane (Lineke Rijxman) looks up to a Happy House client in Marleen Gorris's Broken Mirrors.

situation and a vehicle for entertainment, every woman will recall times when she has felt physically or psychologically abused, imprisoned or defeated by father, brother, friend, lover or male relation. For, outside the cinema, the reality is that violence is often closer to hand than the unknown bogey-man lurking around the laneways.

Gorris's actuity characterizes the faceless man as a well-to-do business executive, serving to remind us that violence is not restricted to any one class, and that both the aggressors and the receivers of violence come from all strata of society.

Violence is pervasive, and is equally ruthless when thinly veiled by the politeness of the middle classes — a point well directed at the art-house audiences who are likely to see Broken Mirrors in Australia, exposing the ease with which people can hide their personal responsibilities for such viciousness.

Like A Question of Silence, Broken Mirrors is a slick film. Throughout it, we are presented with ideas that are cinematically confident and assured, and the well-executed components of script, direction, acting, cinematography and music all work together to produce a good-looking piece of cinema.

But, unlike A Question of Silence, Broken Mirrors is undermined by its bleakness, leaving many women feeling already known, while many men may feel pushed away without having anywhere to go.

While the film may — with due allowance for dramatic exaggeration — represent the worst that prostitution does to our society, it fails to engage men in questioning this aspect of their social behaviour or in understanding what women have been through for a considerable period of time, then its success is hard to gauge. A Question of Silence did not present answers, but it did offer friendship, support and collaboration as a more viable place from which to begin. In that respect, Broken Mirrors offers nothing.

We have now seen two films by Marleen Gorris, one dealing with abstract theoretical questions about relationships between women and men, the other more directly with the violence of men against women. Unless it is just that I want a happy ending, however, it looks like we shall have to wait for a third before we see any integration of the themes, and an equal dialogue occurring between men and women.

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**Sally Semmens**

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**Where no culture flies**

**MORRIS WEST'S THE NAKED COUNTRY**

In *Suspects*, a metafictional exercise by film critic-cum-novelist David Thompson, the author slyly shuffles some well-loved movie characters and deals a few new relationships off the bottom of the deck.

Jojio Cairo and Sidney Gutman, for example, end up as bridge playing bores in some remote spa and, beyond Casa­blanca, the 'beautiful friendship' between Rick Blaine and Louis Renault blooms into a full-scale love affair. Richard Gere's Julian in *American Gigolo* becomes the

Flask-master: Irv Kants, opposite, as the drunken policeman, Neil Adams, in Morris West's The Naked Country.

product of a late-blooming relationship between Chris (Richard Dreyfuss, who plays John Huston) and Body Heat's Matty (Kathleen Turner). Or is it Jake Gittes and Miss Wonderly . . .?

Any number can play. Suggestions, then, on a postcard for the progenitors of John Stanton and his greedy, listening wife, Rebecca Gilling; of Irv Kants's cynical rural copper with a bottle; and of heavily-breasted Nancy and sturdy Tom Burstall.

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*Morris West's The Naked Country.*

Stanton's station owner is easy: with a build like the Face of the Eiger and a jaw straight off Mount Rushmore, he is clearly the elder brother of Anthony Steel in *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951). While Tony did the decent thing in Africa, Jack punches cattle and keeps the fuzzy-wuzzies in their place down under. And surely Kants is the remittance-man-grandson of Stewart Granger and Deborah Kerr, the lovers of *King Solomon's Mines* (1950). We always knew it would end in tears.

As for Ms Dey (aka Mrs Burstall), a Eurasian conquistador, she is playing an Australian aboriginal, she carries the blood line of Laya Raki's Maori princess in *The Seekers* (1954), who together with the Burstall's, rising dragon, flash back from some Elstree town, reduced Jack Hawkins to porridge back in 1954. And Rebecca Gilling is the Englishwoman from her triumph as an alligator's entrée in *Return to Eden* to a charming cad in the great tradition of Bette Davis and Joan Collins.

As the first product of Morris West's scheme to cash in on his backlist with film, stage and radio rights, *The Naked Country* is a canny choice: a middle-of-the-road action story with soundly established audience appeal.

To the critic, however, it is bound to appear a curious museum piece. In every respect, this is a film of the fifties (a preliminary title even establishes the setting as Northern Australia in 1955). West's novel, adapted here (I would guess) fairly faithfully by Burstall and producer Ross Dixon, deals in common currency of the time — the world of cattle and emu that lay behind all that colonial enterprise in Malaya, India, the islands, Australia . . .

**Sketched from servants' gossip by Somerset Maugham, it was a world he left behind all that colonial enterprise in Malaya, India, the islands, Australia . . .**

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*The Naked Country* is cut from the same tropical-weight nonsense. White planters and their Maori wives patronize the local riff-raff and the natives, who appear periodically to mutter 'boula-boula' in the background and engage in white-man-speak-with-forked-tongue dialogue on the subject of sacred sites and ancient prohibitions, all of which leads to death. Inevitably, their restlessness turns to violence, and the game's afoot.

Engaged to the beloved married off to a moth-eaten elder, Tommy Lewis spares first Stanton's prize Brahman bull, then his mate, then Stanton himself. Unfazed by a spear through his leg and assorted injuries, Stanton hobbles back towards his station home, passing to garotte or drown his pursuers, who are themselves tracked by those hired guns of the island, the 'unfeeling' Tongues.

Tongues. I suspect, firmly in cheek, Burstall, Dimsey, camaraderam David Eggby and composer Laya Raki's Maori princess in *The Seekers* (1954), who together with the Burstall's, rising dragon, flash back from some Elstree town, reduced Jack Hawkins to porridge back in 1954. And Rebecca Gilling is the Englishwoman from her triumph as an alligator's entrée in *Return to Eden* to a charming cad in the great tradition of Bette Davis and Joan Collins.

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product. The Naked Country appears to have been made for an audience rather than for the producers' friends and allies. It is not The Roots of Heaven or Hatari!, but for the moment it will do quite well. — John Baxter


Countries of the mind

INSIGNIFICANCE

"The past," a ponderous voice-over in the start of Joseph Losey's The Go-Between (1971), "is a foreign country. They do things differently there." A nice thought, but one that the film, with its rumblings of social change and general atmosphere of overheated nostalgia, did little to substantiate: everyone seemed to do things pretty much as before.

In Nicolas Roeg's films, on the other hand, they do indeed do things differently. And, in them, a parallel proposition has been demonstrated over and over: that the past — and, for that matter, the present, the future and dimensions in between — are countries of the mind.

Every one of Roeg's films, from Performance (1970) to his all but unreleased masterpiece, Eureka (1983), has been exercises in cinematic schizophrenia — films whose real 'meaning' is contained, not in some outer world with historical, geographical or interplanetary coordinates, but within the film itself, within a discrete system of rhyming images and emotional syntax. Like a computer's memory, Roeg's films are made up of systems that are huge and complex, but finite.

The psychedelic heads of the late sixties, who turned Performance into a cult hit, saw part of this. But they didn't see it all. The attraction of Roeg's films is hard to explain, but it is not psychedelic, or at any rate not in the shallowly vainglory sense recently plundered again by Prince. Nor is it intellectual: try as they may — and they have certainly tried — critics have been unable to pin Roeg down in intellectual terms. Unlike, say, Peter Greenaway, Roeg doesn't play mind games: he structures his films according to a visual and emotional pattern, but instinctively, like a poet.

In Insignificance, for virtually the first time since Performance, Roeg has come up with a film that works beautifully on two levels: in this case, as a strange and very funny take on some odd goings-on in a New York hotel room during a hot summer night in 1953, and as an intriguing, labyrinthine picture of the way that memory shapes personality, and personality shapes memory — not the 'thing remembered', as Marguerite Duras has said, but 'me remembering'.

Insignificance is a symphony of 'me rememberings', orchestrated by a master, shot in sharp and glowing colours by Peter Hannan, and lingering in the memory like something glimpsed in brilliant light from a train window or across a courtyard — a kind of psychic Rear Window, perhaps, but with the rare ability to let a visual memory from one sequence chime with the image currently on the screen.

As everyone must know by now, the film briefly links together the lives of The Actress (read Marilyn Monroe), played by Theresa Russell, The Professor (read Albert Einstein), played by Michael Emil, The Ballplayer (read Joe DiMaggio), played by Gary Busey, and The Senator (read Joe McCarthy), played by Tony Curtis. The plot, such as it is, has The Senator trying to pressure The Professor into naming names at a HUAC hearing. The Ballplayer trying to rescue his hopeless marriage to The Actress, and The Actress, crazed after shooting the famous wind-up-the-skirt scene from The Seven-Year Itch, explaining relativity to The Professor.

It is, in fact, not much of a plot; and the screenplay, by Terry Johnson, sticks pretty closely to his own original stage play. But, oh, what Roeg does with it. In the first place, the apparent trivia of the plot disguise some very basic human feelings — loss, betrayal, guilt, power-lust — each of which is imbued with multiple resonances by Roeg's emotional kaleidoscope of images and the constant shifts in point of view and tone, from sweet to bitter, from subjective to objective, from things remembered — Hiroshima, Nazi Germany, The Actress's first, humiliating auditions — to memories reshaped.

Time stands still: The Professor's watch remains set, Dali-like, at 8.15, the time the bomb exploded over Hiroshima and the time The Senator will come to collect him to testify. But time is also fluid — a question of relativity, in fact. liable to spring leaks and engulf the unsuspecting. The film as a whole, like real memory, is hard-edged and beautiful — as glittering, compulsive and threatening as a neon sign.

Insignificance, as a play, was a jeu d'esprit. Insignificance, the film, is a surrealist masterpiece — not the dime

Trains of thought: Michael Emil as The Professor and Theresa Russell as The Actress in Insignificance.
store, cigarette-ad surrealism of the seventies, but a true surrealism, in which the ordinary becomes threatening, the hideous a compulsive beauty, and the artwork's pace and development are determined by the rhythms of the mind.

Beware, though, the temptation to slot the characters into the Mickey Mouse jolly-moids of cultural memory. The Actress is not Saint Marilyn of the Silver Screen, the ultimate victim-as-heroine of Hollywood, the dumb broad with hidden depths, the brainy beauty of Hollywood surfaces concealed a true beauty beneath it, and so on and so forth — the sentimentalized composite figure of Arthur Miller’s *After the Fall*.

The Actress in *Insignificance* isn’t that at all. She is both more complex and more vulnerable. In a beautifully measured performance by Theresa Russell — neither Monroe mimicry nor separate from the rest of the film, hovering somewhere in between — she is a real rather than a manufactured icon. She is simultaneously self-aware but so self-awareness is no protection against the burdens of her body and the ‘uses’ to which it is put.

The same could be said of the rest of the cast: Michael Erin’s playful genius, Tony Curtis’s sly, arcing politician, and above all Gary Busby’s lumbering, violent and vulnerable giant — a walking wardrobe with feelings, ludicrously proud of the fact that he is the star of thirteen series of bubblegum cards, as against The Professor’s one appearance in *Julie’s Great Scientific Achievements*.

Like the film, the performances shift in tone. But as the best silent comedians, it all comes together in the end. The Actress leaves. The Professor sits on the bed and smiles/remembers/imagines a long, slow-motion, 8.15 explosion. In a moment of beauty and horror, recalling but surpassing the one in *Zabriskie Point* (1970), the hotel room explodes, burns, disintegrates. Then, like a scene from an early surrealist film, it reassembles, the glimmering ghost of the frame. “Bye-eel” she calls, it is a moment of grace and loss, beauty and bitter despair — the end of a great film, a work that at once is sad and beautiful, funny, intriguing and complete.

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**Insignificance**


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**M*S*U*S*H**

*AN INDECENT OBSESSION*

Committed one may be to the notion that there is no necessary correlation between the quality of a film and that of the novel from which it is based. Horror films have often been made from minor or second-rate novels — probably more often, in fact, than from major ones.

An *Indecent Obsession*, though, must give one pause. Directed by Lex Marinos, it plumbs new nasties of one’s most intransigent of the original author, Colleen McCullough.

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**American dream**

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

“Horror movies take people where their minds go only during sleep states or altered states. They deal with images and situations that mix the ordinary and the monstrous for which we have all of our culture. In that sense, they’re very important movies.”

We Craven

As its commercial success in America would suggest, Wes Craven’s most recent horror film works pretty effectively as a simple bogey-man story. The teenagers of Elm Street share a nightmare about a monster who, bearing a distinct resemblance to a disintegrated corpse and armed with a glove of ‘fingertipvs’, pursues them into the dark corners of their middle-class world. Before long, the nightmare turns lethal, and it is revealed that the bogey-man can kill his victims within the bizarre world of their sleep.

A doctor pontificates on the mystery of dreams — “we still don’t know what the hell they are or where they come from” and parents in the street refuse to acknowledge the monstrous presence in their midst.

Young Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) is thus forced to tackle the trauma alone.

What is most interesting about *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, however, is what it has to offer beyond its ‘scare the hell out of ‘em’ and ‘horror’ lexicon. As a genre-expanding study in the limits of the horror film, it reveals much more about the process of horror film production than about the traditional saleable properties. Indeed, one can imagine, run high, and Sis gets no support from ‘Colonel Christias’ (Bair Hunter) or Matron (Julia Blake). In fact, they, not unreasonably, get very tired of her.

Into this seething microcosm of lunatic fancies and unrequited passions comes handsome young Michael Wilson (Gary Sweet), who is apparently normal. What, then, is he doing in Ward X? Well, it transpires — via a feverish dream sequence — that the RSM whom he tried to kill had made some very indecent suggestions to him. The same thing happens again when Luce does something provocative to him under the showers.

This time, though, Mike finds refuge in Sister Langtry’s bed. And, while he’s making some love, something very nasty is happening to Luce. You can just imagine how Sis blames herself for this next day.

An Indecent Obsession

Something wicked their way comes:除去, Wendy Hughes as Sister Langtry, surrounded by wartime loonies in An Indecent Obsession; above, Heather Langenkamp as Nancy Thompson, stalked by a dead maniac in A Nightmare on Elm Street.

 joke — at our expense — about how we have been watching.

What, then, is the film’s real world? Is it all just a dream? The film, of course, allows no answers to such questions. Instead, it demonstrates that it need not be bound by such an ordered sense of things.

It can do anything it likes to us — until we turn our backs on it, that is. Then, like the monster in the dreams of the Balinese, which the film tells us about, it loses its power. The process by which the characters on the screen are confronted by their terror becomes a mirror for what is happening between the film and us.

Of course, if we do attempt to turn our backs, the film warns, we end up like the parents on Elm Street. The logey-man — a child molester whom they had executed years before — is their creation, the guilty secret which they had repressed and which has now returned to haunt their homes. The sins of the parents are upon the children. The evil that men (and women) do lives even in our subconscious.

As revelation, it is practically impossible to fault Don’t Call Me Girlie is a worthy film: it calls attention to the work of women in the Australian film industry from about 1911 to 1940 — or, in the terms the film sets for itself, from Lotus Lyell to Shirley Ann Richards. And who would deny that that is a good thing? The contributions of women to Australian films during this period were many, varied and valuable.

As revelation, it is practically impossible to fault Don’t Call Me Girlie. Simply by showing the activities of women behind the screen — even though, perforce, most of them are actresses rather than other film workers — an important step is taken towards remedying the confusion that exists between the image that people take as signifying ‘woman’ in films, and the real work involved in producing that image.

This therapeutic mission is extended by the interviews included in the film, where women speak of what they did and what was done to them. Much useful information about ‘the cinema machine’ is imparted here.

Don’t Call Me Girlie demythologizes the cinema as well as history, which is all to the good.

By now, however, I am running out of nice things to say. The film shows lots of clips, many, many of which are not identified, and lots of stills, even more of which are not identified (for instance, I didn’t see or hear any mention that the glorious photo used to promote the film was of Shirley Ann Richards, very much ‘out of character’).

The film also mucks about with the continuity of The Sentimental Bloke.

More of the past is glossed over — most of what the Chauvels did, for example — than seems justifiable in a film as padded as this one. Minor quibbles, which would not be worth mentioning if it weren’t that their high-handed selectivity was also manifest in the peculiar way in which Don’t Call Me Girlie argues its case (or cases).

Any documentary is, of course, first of all an argument. It claims to tell ‘the truth’, and its warrant for that claim is the correspondence of the truth it tells to ‘what really happened’. If a documentary suppresses information that might question its claims, it
is being dishonest. By these criteria, there are no two ways about it. Don't Call Me Girlie tells lies.

It does so about Iottie Lyell's contribution to the Longford Lyell partnership, it emphasizes her "decline" after her death, but omits to mention that she was too ill to be present during the shooting of On Our Selection, which is unfairly misleading; among Longford's "greatest" films, I. O. L., I believe that Lyell may have been the real talent in the Longford Lyell partnership, but the evidence is just not strong enough to warrant more than an assertion of belief.

The film is equally misleading when it reproduces without question Cinesound publicist Nancy Gurr's account of the re-editing of Come Up Stairs (aka Ants in His Pants). Pike and Cooper's account reverses what she says, claiming that the movie shifted as Come Up Stairs, improved and prospered as Ants in His Pants. Perhaps Gurr's story is "what really happened", but no evidence is offered except her own words.

It is also dishonest to omit the narrative reason for the new title — the very ants put into the pants — and let Gurr's statement stand that only a vaudeville number warranted the change. Gurr, who would deny that the change is vulgar, even typically male? But the film is making a point about male modification strong enough that the evidence may not actually support it.

The film also lies 'both more boldly and more subtly in the tacit comparison it draws between Charlotte Francis and Helen Twelvetrees. The publicity for Don't Call Me Girlie, Helen Twelvetrees's notorious flash of skill in a pre-release version of The Silence of Dean Maitland, even in 1934, it would have been hard to credit that Cinesound expected to show that bit of film publicly. The film, however, makes no mention of this explosive film.

Instead, it represents Charlotte Francis as an artiste, an actress of talent and tragedy who, after her one and only appearance in an Australian film, returned to Britain where, according to publicist Nancy Gurr's account of the re-editing of Come Up Stairs (aka Ants in His Pants), prospered as..."
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Short Reviews: An A-Z

Adrian Martin

Long the exclusive prerogative of Disney's 'True Life Adventures', dog movies have been making a comeback. In Cucu and White Dog, the canines were metaphors for hidden fears and repressed racism. In Antarctica, the man coming to modify his behaviour and lifestyle in a positive way. It almost comes off, but the humour is always a touch too cruel — grotesque, weird and spectacular merely for the sake of being so.

Though he has long since outgrown them, director Terry Gilliam's ten-second animated links in the Python programmes have left their mark on his films. Indeed, since Jabberwocky (1977), what they have arguably done is fill in all that background detail that lay behind the great squelching feet and slack-jawed monoliths of the Python montages.

The source material for the tortuous farce of Best Defence is a novel by Robert Grodecki. Easy and Hard Way Out, a comic satire about munitions manufacturers, optioned at one stage by Robert Altman.

The film's script, concocted by Willard Huycck (who also directs) and Gloria Katz, juggles two narratives. Eddie Murphy, in an extended cameo cynically billed as 'strategic guest actor', plays a jivey Army lieutenant who is testing a supertank in Kuwait. He is assisted in this task by two comic Arabs who make the Savak assassins in John Landis's Into the Night look subtle.

The other section involves Dudley Moore reprising his one-note role as a louche but lecherous bumbler suffering from fear of impotence and illogical envy. Employed as an engineer in a down-at-heel company, Moore is involved in a project to design a guided missile system for the supertank. Thanks to a convenient plot twist, he is lauded as an engineering genius, after a plan for the gyro is mysteriously slipped into his briefcase.

It probably seemed like a good idea at the time: a comedy that had proved its appeal over 50 years through several adaptations, this time in the hands of the writers of Trading Places, who could again extract humour from the premise of maniacal geniuses manipulating you for their less affluent lives.

And the producers of 48 HRS could again promote their popular salt-and-pepper duo, this time employing the recently celebrated John Candy and the under-used asthmatic Richard Pryor. Caspading off the exoneration of Brewer's Millions was director Walter Hill, who has shown himself to be capable of commercially viable, off-beat products and whose knack for comic timing glimmered in 48 HRS.

But the result of this apparently winning combination is a tired, protracted and vacuous saga, dealing with the attempts of a '50s San Francisco copper leagues of life' who has to spend $30 million in 30 days in order to inherit $300 million. The timing and interaction that create memorable comedy and the perception that can draw Meaningful Social Commentary from the cliché of the geriatric millionaire manipulating you for his less affluent lives is totally absent.

The performances are leaden and subdued: a sanitised version of sexually appears as constrained and uncomfortable; the effervescence that Candy displayed in Splash is sublimated by Moore's inability to find his tone. And 48 HRS offered all the ingredients for a frothy soufflé, flavoured with a dash of good of fashionable common sense, the result is a soggy pudding.

Wayne Wang's first film, Chan is Missing, shows once again that you don't need a big production house or a massive budget to make a great film. In Chinatown, it follows two Chinese-Americans (Marie France Pisier) vaguely resembles Jane Eyre; prim, strong, ambitious and destined to triumph over the tragedies of life. In its concern for milieu, however, the film relegates the characters — and all the supernatural fiction — to the backburner. Emily (Isabelle Adjani) is portrayed as a feathery Heathcliff — a beautiful, brooding recluse who roams the moors in a state of dishevelment, looking alternately tormented and menacing.

Anne (Isabelle Huppert) is gentle, patient but unexceptional; and poor Charlotte (Marie France Pisier) vaguely resembles Jane Eyre; prim, strong, ambitious and destined to triumph over the tragedies of life. In its concern for milieu, however, the film relegates the characters — and all the supernatural fiction — to the backburner. Emily (Isabelle Adjani) is portrayed as a feathery Heathcliff — a beautiful, brooding recluse who roams the moors in a state of dishevelment, looking alternately tormented and menacing.
street. Leads appear, but are generally easy to see how one can get paranoid," for instance, follows a quick montage of over-sleuths (Wood May) keeps the audience up. As the star-like creatures doff their human and the alien, and celebrating the life force that lies within the cocoon of the body. What Rocky did for boxing and The Karate Kid did for prepubescent martial arts devotées, Desperately Seeking Susan is doing for adolescent wreckers. Like his body-building brethren, Louden Swan (Matthew Modine) is determined to achieve glory in the sporting arena. To defeat the reigning champion from a rival school, he undertakes a punishing physical regimen, diets obsessively and seems to log everywhere.

In the climactic gladiatorial tussle, our hero takes on the grunting Goliath and wins, to the rousing cheers of his peers. Directed by Harold Becker, the film has considerable charm. Modine invests a character who could have seemed either too gung-ho or too coy with spirit and sensitivity. One does, however, begin to wonder about this particular breed of masculine heroes. Committed to their bodies with a fervour that would make Jenny Craig squirm, they seem to achieve self-confidence, status and maturity through competitive, aggressive sports. And, as they succeed in making their marks through the imposition of a pseudo-militaristic discipline, one wonders if the stories are suggesting that exercise really does make a man out of you.

Dance With a Stranger is a story of the British cinema needed: the story of Ruth Ellis (Miranda Richardson), the last woman to be hanged in Britain — a title with all its qualifications. But, for all its qualities, it ends up as yet another opportunity missed. This is what it could have been: a film about the injustices of the British legal system, aristocrats or expats or Alf Garnetts; a film about an issue, at a time when the British constitution is being held up to the scrutiny of hanging; a film about class, since Ellis's "love affair" with the man she murdered; a film about sex. Rupert Everett, was doomed by class difference far more than by the fact she was a 'hostress'. But what is it, a completely told, adequately acted, superbly shot love story. Richardson and Everett simply do not meet the viewers' expectations of the class difference; class is mentioned but not in the film. And, for all the loving art direction, the film does not have that crucial feeling of cultural emptiness that leaps out from the fifteen newsreels that are a part of the programme everywhere Dance With a Stranger is shown. Nor are Richardson and Everett fit together. She 'acts' well but, like her predecessor, is more a monotonous impersonator, with conviction or depth.

Worst of all, despite director Mike Newell's fussy camerawork, there is no sense of the amour fou that destroyed the couple. And that makes the script's muddled morality — that Ellis was more foolish than cruel — even more chilling. If Blakeley because he was such a prick — disastrously suspect.

The weakness of the film, though, is that its narrative structure occasionally veers on the too fantastical, stretching credulity a little. But director Susan Seidelman knows her craft, and the pacing is too well-timed to allow any major retreat from this elegant, witty film. The film is full of humour and street-wise observations, and is impressive in its attention to detail in the dialogue and mise-en-scène. Small things linger in the memory: the way in which the trusting Roberta (Madonna) comes to the aid of her broken-down taxi driver; the girlfriend's hopeless attempts to mime Italian style; the small but poignant scene of Phoebe's relationship with her friend; and finally, the suffocatingly hot Spanish beach, which is as much of a Hollywood image as the Hollywood image is of Spain.

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Although the two main actors do a fair job with their characters, the special effects and the other production values in production director Charles Band's low-budget thriller leave a lot to be desired. A shot of the 23rd-century city submerged in polluted water is particularly irane and unconvincing. Future Cop was originally released in the US as Trancers, i.e. the dreams of the future that Ellis was writing about, to terminate those who are trying to destroy the edics of the future via their 20th-century anachronisms.

A latter-day Humphrey Bogart, Death believes in dispensing his own form of justice, and refuses to submit to the laws of the land. Like his body-building brethren, Louden Swan (Matthew Modine) is determined to achieve glory in the sporting arena. To defeat the reigning champion from a rival school, he undertakes a punishing physical regimen, diets obsessively and seems to log everywhere.

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Worst of all, despite director Mike Newell's fussy camerawork, there is no sense of the amour fou that destroyed the couple. And that makes the script's muddled morality — that Ellis was more foolish than cruel — even more chilling. If Blakeley because he was such a prick — disastrously suspect.

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Despite some obvious comments about the nasty super-power games and the hero's refusal to play with either side, Gunga takes an unabashed shot from the right at the Soviet system of incarceration. Directed by Roger Young, who cut his teeth on American A-grade, and made his feature-film début with Last of the Mohicans, Gunga is the story of a high-profile American Olympic hero turned-broadcast executive who is newly fronged on espionage charges by the KGB. His 'confession' and subsequent deportation are intended as a warning to other Australian light and the Australian landscape might impose a "non-hynic quality". Nothing in Australia can be short- ened or abstracted," Bachmann went on, "and isn't the cinema the craft that con­dense, cuts corners, relies on essence, shortens and speeds up perceptions?"

In the local success of Reitz's observation exercise could lead to a more viable local film form than the 100-minute dramatized feature, an imported plant that has not always prospered here. The first farmers whose hands are trenched on Gundagai or Grabben Gullen may have a hit on his hands.

John Baxter

The MacGuffin here is a cache of emeralds owned by the former Shah of Iran. And, in the best Hitchcock tradition, the hero is an ordinary guy in the wrong place at the right time, and the heroine is a cool blonde. But, in spite of the similarities, In the Night is less a comedy-thriller than a quirky and unduly protracted tour of Los Angeles. Ed Oxen (Jeff Goldblum) is an insomniac who decides to gamble the night away in Las Vegas, rather than toss and turn beside his unhappy wife. But, before he can park his car at the airport, he encounters Diana (Michelle Pfeiffer), a femme nearly-fatale, who leads him into a nightmare. Deception, intrigue, murder and fast cars abound as the pair is pursued by an assortment of goons of various nationalities.

As the films swings between slapstick comedy and grisly violence, it takes in a venetian museum of Californian curiosities—reclusive millionaires, Elvis clones, suave crime lords, statists, smarmy producers and aff luent exiles. In the process, it deliberately reveals many of the cinematic cliches about the city, either directly, or by using filmmakers — Paul Mazursky, Roger

Present imperfect: Jamie Lee Curtis and John Travolta in Perfect.

Vadim, Paul Bartel, David Cronenberg and many others — in cameo roles. The ambivalence that director John Landis deployed towards Chicago in The Blues Brothers, he here transfers to Los Angeles. But, in spite of its playful evocation of the texture of the city, the film lacks cohesion, hovering uneasily between slapstick, violence, thriller and parodic.

As many of Landis's eight films, it has moments of inspiration, but they don't shine long or bright enough to provoke the substance for a feature. Debi Enker

Lifeforce is so stunningly bad that it should not, on any account, be missed. The film manages to escape its $22-million budget hanging from it like wattles, it struts proudly into the ranks of the top ten turkeys of all time.

An errant space shuttle picks up an intergalactic parasite in the form of a beautiful naked girl (Mathilda May), who gradually spreads her plague in geometric progressions, reducing the population of Britain to a bunch of marauding loonies. All that is, apart from Steve Railsback, as the shuttle's captain, who shares some form of pathetic link with her, and Peter Finch, as a British SAS man, who, I would imagine, was too wooden even for her tastes. It is hard to believe that filmmakers as talented as cinematographer Alan Hume, director Tom Hopper, who made Poltergeist, or writer Dan O'Bannon, responsible for Dark Star and Alien, could really have been party to this farrago.

But everything about Lifeforce is so uniformly bad that it is not possible to discern traces of its having been mauld during post-production. Apart from the odd crumbling body, even the special-effects look pretty end-of-the-pier.

Connoisseurs of the genre should plan to arrive twenty minutes before the end of the previous session, so as to get a chance to see the film's real highlight — badly made-up extras in torn clothing falling about on a studio set supposed to be the City of London — twice.

Debi Enker

Perfect, based on a real Rolling Stone cover story, takes a consumer who's going on in the health spas of Los Angeles (and with Rolling Stone editor/publisher Jann Wenner's help) has hot-shot reporter Adam Lawrence (John Travolta) digging for dirt on the Coast, and coming up with an aerobics teacher called Jesse James (Janet Lee Giddens), who has a strong resistance to muck-raking journalists, but less resistance to Mr Travolta. The result is a perfect piece of moviemaking as is possible with that kind of budget and that kind of cast. Adam does a great job of making fun of himself, and Adam rewrites the story in praise of the cult of fitness. Rolling Stone, however, puts out a mea­kicking story after another.

Meanwhile, Adam has been dicker-
A former nuclear scientist manically drives his 1964 Chevy Malibu into the heart of Los Angeles’ trash culture, finding only security spies, flying saucer aficionados, road accidents, speed freaks, SWAT Fat-squad, punks, TV evangelists and born-again hippies.

Meanwhile, two car repossessors, irresolutely played by Harry Dean Stanton and Emilio Estevez, are after a $20,000 reward for the recapture of the Chevy. Only later will they discover an alien in the boot of the Malibu — a convenient little device for a habit of zapping motorcycle cops.

Alex Cox, a recent graduate of the UCLA film school, claims full responsibility for Repo Man, an inspirational debut feature with a fearless lunacy well balanced by the director’s exacting control over his crazed and absorbing screenplay. The result is a tour-de-force — a bizarre black comedy that teeters on, but never falls off, the edge of its own satanic anarchism.

Cox is ably supported by Robby Muller’s gritty camera work, and a home-grown punk soundtrack from the likes of Iggy Pop, Jonathan Richman, The Circle Jerks and Black Flag. Best of all, this impressively calculated movie refuses to lapse into the petty-than-thou pretensions of some recent examples of low-budget American cinema.

Rod Bishop

Without being any kind of a Marxist tract, Alan Bridges’ The Shooting Party, based on Isabel Colgate’s subtle, elegant novel, offers a critical look at Britain’s pre—World War I aristocratic society in the discreetly competitive atmosphere of a country house weekend.

The aim of the men is directed at shooting as much of the specially prepared birdlife as possible, with unseemly rivalry developing between Lord Hartlip (Edward Fox), the ‘best shoot in England’, and Lionel Stephens (Rupert Frazer), who is making rather county play for the wife of another titled guest.

Hartlip, his tally trailing that of Stephens, fires wildly at a woodcock when the day’s shooting is officially finished, and kills Tom Hardy, Cheryl Campbell and Dorothy Tutin later will they discover an alien in the boot of the Malibu — a convenient little device for a habit of zapping motorcycle cops.

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The business of film

RKO — THE BIGGEST LITTLE MAJOR OF THEM ALL by Betty Langer (Prentice Hall, 1984, $27.95. ISBN 0 13 781451 8)

Until very recently, histories of Hollywood have been written from the position, figurative or actual, of a seat in the stalls. One 'History of American Film', after another has treated the dream factory as a matter of material and contextualize the business developments and leadership changes, in other terms of Hollywood, or in terms of the films that RKO made.

Indeed, where previous histories have ignored the business, Ms Lasky rather tends to ignore the films. In her book, they become items of policy rather than movies. Now, it may just be possible to discuss Detroit without reflecting on the role of the automobile in American society. But to talk about the business structure of a Hollywood studio without devoting at any rate some space to analysing the sort of films that resulted from this structure is to overlook a vital part of the business. Indeed, the history of RKO, more than that of any other studio, is proof that film cannot be run like any other business.

Ms Lasky's treatment of Orson Welles is a case in point. He figures in the photographs, and his meteoric rise is duly documented. But, when it comes to conflicts with the studio — something which could easily have been used to evaluate what the business and the film the art form combined — Ms Lasky slips away into generalities.

There are those of us who have long had reservations about some of Welles's work, and about The Magnificent Ambersons (1942), in particular. But to skate over the issue with a reference, albeit in a form of indirect speech, to an "arty evil" is scarcely adequate.

There are other, minor flaws in the book. The desire to bring the businessmen to life can hardly justify the suggestion that David Savoyt, a Russian Jew, and Joe Kennedy, a Boston Catholic, "shared similar backgrounds". And over-hasty use of a reference-card system probably accounts for our being told that the art director Max Reinhard had been brought to the coast by Max Reinhardt to design his magical production of A Midsummer Night's Dream at the Hollywood Bowl in 1925; Reinhardt's Hollywood Bowl Dream was, in fact, a decade later, in 1935.

One similarly wonders why the book stops so abruptly, in July 1955, with Hughes's departure. RKO continued sporadically for another couple of years, producing some memorable films as Run of the Arrow, While the City Sleeps, Beyond a Reasonable Doubt and The Naked and the Dead.

More significantly, in the context of Hollywood history, was the December 1955 sale — which falls outside the scope of the present book — of the RKO film library to television. It was the first crack in what had previously been a concerted front against the usurping medium, and it proved a real turning point for Hollywood.

RKO — The Biggest Little Major of Them All is, in the final analysis, an enormously useful book for the information it provides, and a somewhat disappointing one for the limitations it has set itself. The disappointments include the fact that, as a former film writer and the daughter of one of Hollywood's rear pioneers, Jesse L. Lasky — who most definitely lived long enough to hold the art and the industry of filmmaking in an effective, if weariness, embrace — would seem to have been well equipped to hold it all together.

The ape man cometh: King Kong (1933) was RKO's first major hit.

Britannia reels


LEARNING TO DREAM: THE NEW BRITISH CINEMA by James Park (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1984. ISBN 0 571 13401 7)

BRITISH CINEMA NOW edited by Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick (British Film Institute, 1985. ISBN 0 85170 131 0)

Running like a threnody through these slim volumes is a complex of lamentations one seems to have been hearing for decades. The impossibility of survival for the British cinema on returns from the domestic market, the banality of films and of cinema attendances falling before the onslaught of television, cable and video; the cinema has always been too literary, too closely tied to traditions of British theatrical acting and too pervasively wrong about British cinema. In British Cinema Now, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith asks: "Do we need a British cinema?" As a long-time devotee of this threatened species, I hope the answer proves to be Yes, but, on the evidence of these books, the answer is somewhat equivocal.

Those devoted to British cinema have been so in the face of daunting problems. It has always been too literary, too closely tied to traditions of British theatrical acting and too respectfully middle-class to command the kind of mass following for its product that is necessary both to its financial survival and to a spirit of robust inventive ness. The films that have been most praised (often deservedly, like Brief Encounter; Henry V and The Third Man) have mostly fitted snugly into the prevailing culture; those — such as Michael Powell's Peeping Tom and The Magnificent Ambersons (1942) — have been so in the face of daunting problems. It has always been too literary, too closely tied to traditions of British theatrical acting and too respectfully middle-class to command the kind of mass following for its product that is necessary both to its financial survival and to a spirit of robust inventive ness. The films that have been most praised (often deservedly, like Brief Encounter; Henry V and The Third Man) have mostly fitted snugly into the prevailing culture; those — such as Michael Powell's Peeping Tom and The Magnificent Ambersons (1942) — have been so in the face of daunting problems. It has always been too literary, too closely tied to traditions of British theatrical acting and too respectfully middle-class to command the kind of mass following for its product that is necessary both to its financial survival and to a spirit of robust inventive ness. The films that have been most praised (often deservedly, like Brief Encounter; Henry V and The Third Man) have mostly fitted snugly into the prevailing culture; those — such as Michael Powell's Peeping Tom and The Magnificent Ambersons (1942) — have been so in the face of daunting problems. It has always been too literary, too closely tied to traditions of British theatrical acting and too respectfully middle-class to command the kind of mass following for its product that is necessary both to its financial survival and to a spirit of robust inventive ness.
might have made competition for MGM or Warner Bros. The bogey of America seems, by all three accounts, to have haunted, and still to haunt, British film production. Gilbert Adair writes of the "inferiority complex [which] informs the way a fair proportion of British films have been conceived and perceived over the years". America seems, as it were, to have set the pace.

Not that this has been due to British technical incapacity: it is widely agreed that British facilities are of the highest quality and have, indeed, attracted the making of several American blockbusters (Star Wars, Superman) for that reason. But the very existence of a hugely popular English-speaking American film industry, marketed with very un-British flair, has meant, in Nick Roddick's words (British Cinema Now), "that, to put it bluntly, we do not have a serious study of anything to do with British cinema, from 1896 to 1985, set in aperspective of British films). But whether it will help restore a real vitality to British film production is another question. These books indicate the range of problems confronting the latter enterprise: essentially financial ones in setting up productions, but also linked to restrictive exhibition practices and inadequate cinema accommodation, as well as to the many institutional problems of a real lack of interest in British indigenous cinema and a lack of serious film culture. Steve Jenkins' British Cinema Now, in relation to the latter, arranges the major newspaper reviewers as simply working for the industry rather than maintaining and promoting a dialectical about film. Of these books, only British Cinema Now can be described as an important contribution to such a culture. Its range of interests ("we have approached the thing as both an art form and an industry", writes the editors) is reflected in a series of well-argued essays on matters like the cinema/television axis, independently production, and the state of criticism (a well-timed jab at Sight and Sound). Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's concluding essay is a model of balanced assessment and prognosis. While allowing that Britain's "is historically an extremely rich and critically under-rated cinema", he also acknowledges that it is not, and never has been, central to whatever film culture exists in Britain.

James Park's Learning to Dream, drably produced by Faber, has a journalistic readability, but too often slips into dogmatic, unsubstantiated generalization. Tied to the notion of the director as "the linchpin of the production process", Park believes that many of the new ones (e.g. the National Film School graduates) have "an understanding of the techniques of filmmaking and a perception of the capabilities of the medium far beyond television's grasp of such things.

Park berates television's feeding of the "anti-intellectual currents in British culture", elsewhere claiming that the feature filmmaker can "produce films of an intellectual and emotional complexity that work for the small screen cannot match". There is, however, no clear account of why such differences should exist, and one too often stumbles over phrases such as: "If television tends towards the prosaic, cinema aspires towards a poetic indeterminacy" (=7). Much of the book derives from interviews with new directors (Richard Eyre, Michael Radford, etc) whose views, inevitably partial, are given the weight of received wisdom.

Still, it is greatly superior to Night at the Pictures, which has an aggressive Foreword from David Puttnam (down with high-brow critics, up with commercial success), a predictable boost from Richard Attenborough as introduction, two long pieces from Gilbert Adair on 'The British Tradition' and Nick Roddick on 'The British Revival' and a year-by-year list of major events in British cinema, from 1896 to 1985, set in a context of snippets of social and political history (the rise of the mini-skirt and the death of kings). The whole enterprise, well-illustrated (bafflingly, the colour) has a slapped-together air about it.

Adair's survey of 70-odd years of British cinema in a genre which cannot achieve any depth of insight, given the approach adopted. All the famous names are there, occasionally with acute comments about them, but there is no discernible critical approach, no attitude to what film history might tell us. It is shapeless, at times vulgar (as in his sexual analogy for the death of kings). The whole enterprise, well-illustrated (bafflingly, the colour) has an slapped-together air about it.
The Third History and Film Conference will be held at the University of Western Australia from 2nd to 6th December, 1985.

The W.A. organising committee has announced that the theme of the Conference will be “Film of the Thirties”. The committee is inviting presentations that will explore the role of film in this period, the development of national cinemas of the time, and representations of the decade on film and T.V. in later years.

Equally, contributions are invited on topics relating to film archives, the development of regional film cultures, the use of film in the teaching of history and other subjects broadly in keeping with the aims of the Association.

Overseas speakers at the Conference include Kristin Thompson, co-author of The Classic Hollywood Text, John E. O’Connor, editor of Film and History and Peter Morris, Queens University, Canada.

Members of the Conference Committee may be contacted through the Conference office or by telephone. They would welcome suggestions about the content and organisation of the Conference. The address of the Conference office is:
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