Cinema Papers #73 May 1989

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CINEMA Papers
MAY 1989 No. 73
COVER: NICOLE KIDMAN IN DEAD CALM

CANNES
SPECIAL ISSUE
australian films at cannes
ian pringle’s prisoner of st petersburg
new release boys in the island
who’s who at the festival
production barometer

PLUS
phil noyce on dead calm
franco nero interview
film finance: the ffc
pay tv: the inside story
fanzines: gore wars
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GORILLAS IN THE MIST: Location sound recorded on AGFA PER 368 audio tape.
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FLAVOUR OF THE DECADE

THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING TRIBUNAL is currently conducting an inquiry into Australian content on TV. The ABT is studying a proposal for a quota which would raise the amount of Australian programs to 60 per cent over the next five years. The tribunal believes TV viewers should be guaranteed quality production which have an Australian perspective.

Deirdre O'Connor, the chairperson of the ABT, has said the tribunal has no intention of limiting co-productions with other countries but does want to encourage them to have an Australian point of view. At present 50 per cent of what we view on television is Australian produced, but this includes sport, news, current affairs as well as drama.

Many commentators have welcomed the review but have been quick to point out the problems of defining an “Australian perspective” or “look”.

Care must be taken that the definition doesn’t exclude projects like The Dunera Boys which dealt with Jewish refugees coming to Australia aboard the Dunera, or the McElroys’ dramatic interpretation of recent events in the Philippines, A Dangerous Life.

At present overseas documentaries on Australian flora and fauna would qualify as Australian content while Australian films shot overseas, where the script is Australian, produced by Australians, starring Australians and directed by Australians but shot overseas would probably be knocked back. Perhaps we should aim for a “multicultural look” instead.

DAVID WILLIAMSON has been hired by Paramount Pictures to write the script for a major feature film. The movie is set around the controversial anti-communist witch-hunts conducted by the Republican senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s. Williamson says the movie will show what can happen when a society is gripped with paranoia. Williamson’s screenwriting credits include The Last Station, The Year of Living Dangerously, Phar Lap, Emerald City and Gallipoli.

RUTHLESS

WAS DEVASTATED. I was crushed, angry, and sweating. I was thinking of punching one of the directors.” Not the incoherent ravings of a psychopath, but the feelings Dale Launer experienced when he first saw the finished film made from his script for Ruthless People. Launer is a Hollywood screenwriter whose recent credits include Ruthless People, Blind Date and Dirty Rotten Scoundrels. Yet he is quick to voice his displeasure on the current state of moviemaking and talk about shortcomings in his own films.

He says that “98 per cent of Ruthless People” is his own script – so why should he contemplate violence against Zucker, Abrams and Zucker team who directed it? “I was unhappy because I thought the tone was too broad,” he explains. “I had written a more reality-based story. I had taken a pretty implausible story and had written it to make it as plausible as possible. They [the directors] condensed things a little bit and they told the actors to pour it on.”

“I had about 20 minutes that ended up being cut from the movie, stuff that would establish sympathy for the kidnappers and tell us more. As it is now, they are rather thin and undeveloped characters. Things that establish sympathy for the protagonists were cut, and I think that’s a mistake in movies, always,” he states emphatically.

Launer’s following project, Blind Date, is one he would rather erase from his memory. “That screenplay was changed 95 per cent,” he says angrily. “I had no control over it. Blake Edwards [the director] would not only refuse to take my calls, he wouldn’t return them, he wouldn’t leave a message. He just ignored me. To this day I have never met him.”

Launer tried to have his name removed from the credits, but to no avail. A Writers’ Guild rule states that if a writer is guaranteed $125,000 or more for a first draft, the studio has the final say on the writer’s request for anonymity. Launer’s name appears on the screen rather than his registered pseudonym, Vidal Grosswanker.

On his last project, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, Launer was also credited as executive producer. The title doesn’t mean much, he says. “Executive producers don’t have as much control as people think they do. The studios really have the control.” Although he says is “less unhappy with Dirty Rotten Scoundrels than anything else I’ve done,” Launer wants more control. He will direct and independently produce his next project, Love Potion No. 9.

“Studios won’t take a chance with a movie that has a good premise. If they had a good marketing department they could take more chances. But with the exception of Disney and Paramount, the studios really don’t know how to market movies. If they did, then you could make low-budget movies with low-budget directors, without stars and with interesting, entertaining premises, market them and make money off them.”

Wesley Stricke, who wrote the new courtroom thriller, True Believer, has a different story to tell. Stricke, rock ‘n’ roll critic turned screenwriter, was assigned by producers Walter Parke and Lawrence Lasker to flesh out a story based on the life of renegade San Francisco lawyer J. Tony Serra. The barrister, played by James Woods, is renowned for his unorthodox clothes and brilliant courtroom tactics. Stricke is far more positive about the treatment of his script. “The producers are writers [they wrote War Games] and so they understand and respect the screenwriter. They didn’t abuse me because they’ve been there themselves. Also the plot of the movie was so complicated, I was the only guy who understood it. So they couldn’t fire me even if they wanted to.”

The film is an intricate web of corruption, murder and the rekindling of lost ideals, with Woods as a burned-out lawyer whose beliefs are reawakened by an earnest young assistant, played by Robert Downey Jr.

There was a change of studio and several years delay before True Believer finally got off the ground. “It’s a crapshoot,” Stricke says, “there are so many different elements that have to come together at the same time for a movie to get greenlighted. Every time a movie gets made it’s some kind of miracle.”

“The first screenplay I sold I wrote six years ago. It’s still at Warner Brothers and every four months they talk about making it.” He has at least five scripts in circulation at the moment. “What you have to do is keep writing them. It’s best not to invest too much in each one.”

His next project, with the Lasker and Parke, is a thriller that he describes as “a Manchurian Candidate for the late Eighties”. It won’t have the plot complexity of True Believer, he says. “I have a kind of post-Vietnam syndrome. Just as America was reluctant to get involved in any foreign skirmishes after Vietnam, I don’t want to write a screenplay with more than three plot points.”

NICKI GOSTIN

NEW YORK TALK
For a detailed report of the FFC see page 21.

Many of the independent producers who, in most cases, don't have any money of their own to invest, have avoided the problem by investing in the FFC project themselves. This is well and good if you or/and has access to finance, but what about independent producers who, in most cases, don’t have any money of their own to invest?

David Pollard, the head of the FFC, admits that COR is keeping a low profile, while others such as NZI and BT Australia are keeping a low profile, which in BT Australia’s case means they haven’t invested in a film project for over eight months. For a detailed report of the FFC see page 21.

**1989 AUSTRALIAN LOGIES**

**PUBLIC VOTING CATEGORIES**

- **Most popular personality on Australian TV:** Daryl Somers
- **Most popular actor:** Craig McLachlan
- **Most popular actress:** Annie Jones
- **Most popular series:** Neighbours
- **Most popular telemovie or mini-series:** The Shiralee
- **Most popular actor in a telemovie or mini-series:** Bryan Brown
- **Most popular actress in a telemovie or miniseries:** Rebecca Smart
- **Most popular light entertainment/comedy program:** The Comedy Company
- **Most popular light entertainment comedy personality:** Maryanne Fahey
- **Most popular current affairs program:** A Current Affair
- **Most popular sports coverage:** Olympic Games
- **Most popular music video:** “Age of Reason”
- **Most popular new talent:** Nicole Dickson

**PANEL VOTING CATEGORIES**

- **Hall of Fame:** Bryan Brown
- **Most outstanding actor:** John Wood
- **Most outstanding actress:** Joan Sydney
- **Most outstanding achievement in public affairs:** Four Corners
- **Most outstanding achievement in TV news:** Michael Venus
- **Most outstanding single documentary or series:** Nature of Australia
- **Most outstanding achievement by regional television:** RTQ7 Rockhampton

**BEST ACTOR**

- Dustin Hoffman - Rain Man

**BEST ACTRESS**

- Jodie Foster - The Accused

**BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS**

- Geena Davis - The Accidental Tourist

**BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR**

- Kevin Kline - A Fish Called Wanda

**BEST DIRECTOR**

- Barry Levinson - Rain Man

**BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY**

- Ron Bass and Mary Morrow - Rain Man

**BEST SCREENPLAY**

- Christopher Hampton - A Fish Called Wanda

**BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM**

- Pelle the Conqueror

**BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY**

- Peter Biziou - Mississippi Burning

**BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE**

- Hotel Terminus: The life and Times of Klaus Barbie

**BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT**

- You Don’t Have to Die

**BEST EDITING**

- Arthur Schmidt - Who Framed Roger Rabbit

**MAKE-UP**

- Ve Neill, Steve LaPorte, Robert Short - Beetlejuice

**BEST ORIGINAL SCORE**

- Dave Grusin - The Milagro Beanfield War
THE END OF THE WORLD MOVIES #1

I FIND IT EXTREMELY ODD that my feature film, Sons of Steel, remains totally ignored in Australia and elsewhere. It was written and directed by me and produced by James Michael Vernon. Up until recently it was ignored by Australian film distributors; however, it will be released onto the theatrical circuit by Cinema 100 in September this year.

I'm not sure if this attitude toward my film has come from a lack of 'local awareness' or the great Australian apathy syndrome. The film has had great response overseas. It has been sold in 15 countries by our foreign rights distribution company, The Image Organization of Los Angeles. Out of those 15 countries, Japan is by far the most enthusiastic, therefore the world premiere will take place in Tokyo. What a crying shame - one would like to have some support in one's own backyard. Are the Japanese so smart that only they can see the potential of our country and its talents? One would have to be blind Freddy to think otherwise.

For the most part Australian distributors claim my film has a limited market in this country. I intend to prove them wrong. The film is a science fiction musical in the rock'n'roll. The latter is the area Australian distributors are nervous about. However, as the film is supported by an original record album performed by the star of the film, who is in fact a singer/actor, I believe they are wrong. There is indeed a large rock'n'roll market in Australia, as proved by the success of rock videos, MTV, the video rental market, radio and record sales. Do these people aged between 14 and 35 who buy rock records not go to see movies like Cocktail? I think it more likely that the distributors are apathetic toward Australian product, especially sci-fi or rock'n'roll, and they are reluctant to take part in the development of promoting original product, unless it appeals to their 'broad audience' criterion. Theatrical distributors make money for jam with their US major releases. Why can't they be forced, in the way Australian radio and television, to lose a few bucks by having an Australian content quota?

What is the difference between music and film, and when both mediums rely on exhibiting or playing product? Has television suffered from its Australian quota? No.

It is therefore my conclusion that the only way to alter these conditions is for supporters of the Australian film industry, and more particularly the scientific community, to rally and assist the propagation of indigenous product by promoting it to the public and creating a demand.

As to the critical assessment of the Australian science fiction films mentioned in the article, I agree in principle that for the most part these films had some problems: but all of these Australian films were made, like mine, on a shoestring budget, a condition that promotes problems. I know one can't offer that as an excuse to the audience, but how many of the films mentioned received a 'fully-fledged' (promoted) release, to allow them to be judged by the public? I think the answer speaks for itself: three films - Thunderdome, Razorback and The Last Wave, (possible Patrick). How can Incident at Raven's Gate compete with the likes of Alien Nation, without a 30-cinema release? Due to the nature of the financing mechanism here, Australian films suffer a lack of funds at the most vital stage, marketing. If this were not the case and funds were allocated for the publicity, we'd most certainly have a different story. But what Australian film can afford to set aside approximately a third of its budget for that purpose?

As you are well aware, science fiction has always received the wrath of the critics - even A Clockwork Orange suffered. I believe that the essence of science fiction as an art form, lies in the expression of the imagination. I also believe the public responds to such a work because of the rules vehemently adhered to by distributors.

The problems involved with the creation of a science fiction film occur in every facet of the Australian filmmaking machine. It took me four years to convince bankers to provide the financing machine. It took me four years to convince bankers and the like that a science fiction film is a viable concept, as opposed to a period film. At stated above, these problems continue.

You must forgive me if my letter reads like I have developed a megalithic chip on my shoulder. I assure you I haven't. I'm just a very angry man, who has an undying belief in my film, Australia, its indigenous talent and above all, the genres of science fiction, fantasy and rock'n'roll. Maybe we need the 'Utopia Awards', so that Australian science fiction has the opportunity to gain media acceptance through 'local awareness'. Who knows?

ABOVE: ROB HARTLEY, STAR OF SONS OF STEEL

J ohn Baxter's excellent summary of the brief history of Australia's science fiction cinema and its rather uncertain future draws attention to the work of a number of writers who are writing film criticism in Australia. He makes, however, a major omission: the works of Melbourne author George Turner, whose writing is highly respected both here and overseas. Turner's novels are amongst the finest writing we have produced in any genre and are beged to be made into films. Beloved Son, Vainglory, and Yesterday's Men, which make highly articulate projections into a complex and (for the genre) unusually human near future, form a unique trilogy. They mythologize their locations, generally Melbourne, to a remarkable degree. Indeed, after reading them it is difficult to look at the Shrine in quite the same way again.

They all feature particularly vibrant dialogue and considerable wit which distinguishes them from most contemporary science fiction writing. Most important, though, is Turner's recent novel The Sea and Summer. This, again set in Melbourne, proposes an alarmingly recognizable near future distorted by global weather changes, rising sea levels, higher temperatures, etc. Social and economic structures mutate to accommodate these problems and unemployment becomes endemic. Newport becomes one centre for huge towers of government housing which become vertical ghettos and develop complex social characteristics. The book is alarming because it is such a convincing and understanding portrait of us here and now, and not a depiction of some anonymous group of drones in Miami or Southampton.

Baxter is certainly correct when he says that many local producers misconceive science fiction as an adolescent interest. I would predict that the producer who is wise enough to see the potential in Turner's work will have a worthy successor to the Mad Max films and certainly a uniquely Australian vision worth at least 100 navel-gazing period dramas.

PAUL SCHUTZE COMPOSER

THE END OF THE WORLD MOVIES #2

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PHIL NOYCE

DEAD CALM

PHIL NOYCE is the director of *Newfront*, one of the most popular films of the new Australian cinema, and he has since made several other features as well as directing or co-directing such highly regarded mini-series as *The Dismissal* and *The Cowra Breakout*. From Hollywood he speaks about his new film, the thriller *Dead Calm*. Articulate and forthright, he was nevertheless anxious to stress the speculative nature of some of his answers to questions relating to what is now a very diverse career.

BRIAN McFARLANE: Dead Calm looks like a very considerable departure from your earlier films. How and when did you first get interested in the project that led to this film?

PHIL NOYCE: It's a departure from the earlier films, but I guess the genesis can be found in Episode 2 of *The Cowra Breakout*, when the Australian soldier Stan and the Japanese soldier Junji find themselves pitted against each other, one on one, in the middle of a clearing on the east coast of New Guinea during the Second World War. It was actually directing that led to this film. When we were sitting down and chatting in his studio in Venice, Los Angeles, someone who might be in a position to buy the rights and raise the production finance.

I was caught up with a lot of other papers in my briefcase. They were owned by Orson Welles, who was still alive at that time. He just said, "Have a look at this, it might be an interesting film to make down in Australia." I put it in my briefcase but unfortunately I didn't read it for about six months, probably because it was a photostat of the book and it got caught up with a lot of the elements which you see in *Dead Calm*. I immediately responded to the central idea in the book, which was the idea of denied reunification - the yearning of the husband and wife to be reunited. This carried me through the book in one reading and it seemed that there was the germ of a wonderful film there. I then went back to Tony, who revealed that he had in fact wanted to make the film for a long time and had commissioned the script many years earlier, although he had never actually owned the rights to the book itself. The rights were owned by Orson Welles, who was still alive at that time.

I told Tony I would be interested in making the film with him and he said the problem was getting the rights. Time went on and I told the story to George Miller and Terry Hayes back in Sydney. They were immediately enthusiastic. The problem was, of course, that Tony, having shown me the material, had an emotional lien on it - or a moral lien, I guess - so I went back to Tony and told him there was someone else interested. I said that if he ever decided he couldn't or didn't want to make the film to tell me, because I knew someone who might be in a position to buy the rights and raise the production finance.

Orson Welles died in late 1985 and in early 1986 Tony sent a telegram telling me to go ahead and make an approach for the rights; he said he was no longer interested in making the film and was happy for me to see what I could do with it. George Miller then approached Oja Kodar, who was Orson's widow* and one of the actresses in the original *Dead Calm* which Orson shot in the mid-Sixties off the coast of Yugoslavia, under the title of *The Deep* (no relation to the Peter Benchley novel, *The Deep*, which was made into a film much later). While Orson was alive he apparently still harboured the idea of completing the film, although stories about its completion vary. Jeanne Moreau, for example, who was one of the actors in the film along with Laurence Harvey and Welles himself, has claimed that the film was in fact completed - but who knows the real story?

In any case, while Orson was still alive he wanted to hold on to the rights. After his death, Oja revealed she was reluctant to sell the rights to anyone in Hollywood because she considered that the Hollywood establishment had persecuted Welles, personally and professionally. But she was intrigued by the idea of someone like Kennedy Miller making the film outside the Hollywood system. I suppose the irony is that on com-

*I GAINED INSPIRATION FROM WATCHING HITCHCOCK’S NOTORIOUS BY CONSIDERING THE TECHNIQUES HE USED TO GENERATE DISQUIET IN ME... IT SEEMED THE CLUE LAY IN THE THEORY OF ‘LESS IS MORE’... THAT IT IS HOW YOU REVEAL THE FEW ELEMENTS THAT YOU ARE MANIPULATING THAT COUNTS...*
pletion it was then sold back worldwide to Warner Brothers, but I suppose that's inevitable! So that is the long answer to your short question.

Were you setting out to make a genre film, a suspense thriller here? Not many Australian movies are as tense as this one, so I wondered to what extent this was your aim, remembering Hitchcock's words about "wanting to put the audience through it". How much of this sort of thinking governed your aim in making the film?

Obviously the ending owes something to what has now become known as a "Carrie" ending, but thinking about the book - which I did for almost a year while I was working on Shadows of the Peacock (which was eventually titled Echoes of Paradise in Australia) - I watched a large number of films in trying to work out how to approach the material. One that gave me the most inspiration, surprisingly, was a Hitchcock film, although I certainly wouldn't say Dead Calm was any sort of homage to Hitchcock. Nevertheless, I gained inspiration from watching Hitchcock's Notorious, not so much in the characterization but by considering the technique he employed to generate an enormous amount of disquiet in me, the audience (because there was only me watching a videotape at the time).

I felt that my stomach was starting to get knotted - which of course owes a lot to your allegiance to the characters and how involved you are with them - but I also noticed how he was able to manipulate the elements to produce this feeling of tension within me, and was able to do it without resorting to any of the tricks that have become so commonplace in the horror or suspense films of, say, the last 15 years. There was no spine-tickling music, no rapid cutting a la Psycho (which of course came much later than Notorious), no special visual effects, no extravagant use of sound effects to try to disorient the audience or shock them.

It was in fact the opposite: the cutting patterns were quite relaxed, and this gave me the biggest clue on how to treat the material in Dead Calm, because it seemed that with so few elements, if we tried to beat the film up (to try to get blood out of a stone) with three characters - or four, with the dog - and two sets, you were soon going to have to work up such a frenzy of filmic manipulation that you would have nowhere to go. It seemed that what Hitchcock used was the Mies van der Rohe theory of 'less is more'; that is, it is how you reveal the few elements that you are manipulating that counts.

I was recalling Hitchcock's distinction between suspense and surprise and his preference was for suspense. What are your views on that and which do you think matters more in Dead Calm?

Well, we did use both but the main one is suspense: for example, the suspense of the audience knowing - as Rae doesn't - that Hughie is most likely a mass-murderer. So you hope the audience feels extreme trepidation about every step she takes near him and every dealing she has with him: a much greater terror than she might be feeling, because she does not know as much as the audience does.

Obviously we use shock at various moments; sometimes we use shock merely to unnerve the audience, as a device to further the suspense. For example the spar (which is really just a rope with a hook on the end of it) falls down when Ingram boards the "Orpheus" for the first time. Of course this is apropos of nothing and doesn't really lead anywhere. Yet, allied to the graphic death of the child - which I think is the key suspense shot in the film - that particular sequence where the rope falls is a shock moment, but I hope suspense carries over from it well past that scene, because it is intended to unnerve the audience, making them unnaturally aware of the malevolent potential of even inanimate objects.

However, it all goes back, for me, to the graphic death of the child in the film's prologue because, at the beginning of the film, we see the loss that binds the couple together, and I hope the audience feels that both Ingram and Rae are totally emotionally dependent on each other. That is, the emotional equilibrium of each is dependent on the other partner because no one else in the world can really appreciate the loss that they both feel. If they
SAM NIELL AND NICOLE KIDMAN FACE THE FANS IN DEAD CALM

are separated, I hope the audience feels that either of them – but particularly Rae, as the one who is set up (at least on the surface) as being the more vulnerable – is liable to go to pieces until they are reunited.

But to get back to the baby, I know from attending screenings here in America that some people find it a very shocking image; some have even commented that they can’t see what it has to do with the rest of the story. I’ve just explained what I believe it has to do with the rest of the story, but its real importance to me is the way it heightens the suspense. I think it’s a startling image that the audience, having seen it at the beginning of the film and knowing in the back of their minds the rules of drama (that whatever you see at the beginning, you will probably see more of at the end, perhaps in increasing doses) experience a horror, a dread of what might be revealed at any moment, and what could happen to either of the two main characters. It is a disquiet that I hope services the accumulating suspense and tension throughout the rest of the film.

I’m very interested in what you say about your view of the relationship between John and Rae Ingram because one of the things that fascinated me was that I never felt absolutely certain about the nature of their relationship. It kept me very edgy and I wonder if you had any notion of the audience ever being in doubt about its nature. I think that, in the scene where they are trying to get in touch with each other through the boats’ communication systems, there is something fascinating and equivocal about the looks which pass between them, and I knew it was the interest in the nature of their relationship that kept me very interested in the potential props you could have in a scene, and the characters were almost stripped down naked, how because they had almost nothing else to watch but the people. So much relied on the performances and it was possible to suggest so much because of the bareness of the elements you were dealing with. When we came to do this film we set ourselves the task of stripping away as much extraneous material as possible. We hoped that in both the relationship and the individual characters, we would be able to reveal through the performances and the gestures as much as possible – as much as we could have if, for example, they were talking out loud – the things we were trying to imply. In the case of Hughie I hope we were able to suggest almost a whole life history in very few words, but mostly through his actions.

I think you succeeded in that and I think a lot of the real excitement of the film does come from the fact that the suspense is rooted in the characters and in the possible relationship between them. I kept being aware of other films as I was working on Dead Calm – as diverse as diverse as Knife in the Water, John Sturges’ Jeopardy, The Collector, Love from a Stranger, Carrie (which you mentioned before), and many others. I wonder if you felt you were working in some sort of film tradition, if you were aware of parallels with other films at all, though not in the sense of copying.

No, not specifically. I saw Knife in the Water and there are obvious parallels you can draw with it; there are three people in a boat, and so on. But apart from Notorious I didn’t find myself particularly influenced by specific movies, except that having George Miller as the producer probably made me very aware of his work, and its application to particular sequences. Certainly the sequence where the boat is rowing back towards the “Saracen”, I looked at the Mad Max films for inspiration in the manipulation of the elements, because it seemed to me we had a hurdle as high as Mt Everest trying to make a race between a rowboat and a sailboat give the audience much excitement as one between two high
powered cars or car bikes. I think that as a film director you are potentially influenced by everything you see. I think you should, like a painter, find inspiration in all the other work to which you are exposed if you consider it appropriate.

You seem to like setting yourself technical challenges, such as the blending of the newsreel and the stage in Newsfront, the virtuous New Year's Eve sequence of the crowded streets in Heatwave and so on. Would you say the comparable challenge in Dead Calm is the business of working with so small a cast for most of the film, and in such confinement? How does Dead Calm compare as a technical challenge with those other major features you have done?

Well, it's hard to remember the first two now, I was much younger then! I think Newsfront felt a lot harder, partly because we were working on a much smaller budget and so we had to be really inventive.

But the sheer technical dexterity involved?

I think if you're looking for a comparison of degree of difficulty, I would say that the manipulation of the sparse elements is the equivalent and certainly that was the problem that occupied most of my time and preparation. All of us gave most of our thoughts to that problem. It guided us in casting, in our selection of props; the whole sound track was built around that very problem because there are few elements you hear on a boat! They tend to get monotonous and it took a lot of time and hard work for everyone working on the sound track to overcome that problem—to make the sounds which are heard almost from the beginning to the end of the movie seem fresh. I guess that was the biggest problem. And with the cast there was the fear, without perfect actors, people were going to get sick of seeing these people on the screen, that they would long to cut away to the party scene or something, and of course we had no opportunity to cut away to anything.

I think you succeed very well with that. When you answered that last question you spoke about "we all did this"; now, you've worked with the Kennedy Miller organization several times, on The Dismissal, The Cowra Breakout. What are your impressions of them as a team to work with? How much scope are you left as director?

Basically much the same as for any other productions I've worked on. I guess the difference is that in the writer, Terry Hayes, you also have a very skilled producer; in your producer George Miller, you have the services and advice of a very skilled director to draw on; and to a degree that crossover of roles was different from most other projects I've worked on. As a director it means there is a real cross-fertilization of ideas. For example, the whole film was storyboarded (and some people may say it looks like that!). I spent five months with Ty Bosco (who also drew up a lot of the storyboards for The Cowra Breakout with Chris Noonan and me) and we drew all the sequences. George didn't participate in that process but Terry did. Sometimes I would actually draw ahead of his scripting because he would be revising one draft and I would be drawing a sequence as yet unrevised. Sometimes he would finish the scene in part based on the storyboard. It worked the other way too. As a writer who was also a producer, he was able to look at the drawings and see how I imagined the scene. He commented on a couple of occasions that he didn't agree with this or that, but this was too early in the movie to be revealing one draft and I would be drawing a sequence as yet unrevised.

Having worked closely with him for a long time, particularly on The Cowra Breakout, which was a long haul, I was in the position where I was able to trust his advice, and that is one of the problems directors often have with producers. I was also able to listen to him, which is another problem we directors sometimes have with our co-workers. And I think that happened conversely too. When it came to the casting, for example, all four of us, Doug Mitchell, George, Terry and I, spent hours going over all the possibilities and, indeed, fairly critical, all arrived at the same conclusions about the three actors. But I guess it's a case of leap-frogging off each other and that's a wonderful thing when it does happen; when you have a team of people who work together, who respect each other, who have a fair amount of proficiency in each of their areas, who are not afraid to speak up and are also not reluctant to compliment. In the end, I hope we achieved something that none of us could have aspired to.
of reading is that I really want to make life-affirming films, and I would hope that is something that runs through all of my work. I guess that having come up from the underground, as it were, having become interested in cinema through the work of the American so-called underground filmmakers like Stan Brakhage, as well as the Australian experimentalists of the late Sixties, I have been fascinated with the manipulation of filmic elements. 

The Cowra Breakout was an exception to that. The film was made under extraordinary circumstances that forced the abandonment of anything I had originally intended to do with the film. We were denied access to Indonesia, where the story was set and where we had been planning for five years to make the film. Finally the overwhelming preoccupation on that film became, “Will we ever be able to finish it? That film is different from any of my other projects because of the nightmarish circumstances of production. But I guess a fascination with the manipulation of filmic elements runs through the other and that is probably still true in Dead Calm.

I’m sure it is. You said before that Newsfront was a long time ago and you’d forgotten it. I was hoping to draw you out about it a bit. When I was publicizing a book of mine in 1987, several times I was asked if I had a favourite Australian film and I always said Newsfront. How do you feel about it, 10 years on?

Well, I saw the film quite recently at a retrospective at UCLA. I meant I had forgotten the experience of making it, how difficult it was. It’s hard to say how I feel about it because all the people working on the film were a little overwhelmed by the reception it received.

Why do you think people feel so affectionately about it? I’ve never known anyone who disliked it.

In Australia you mean? Possibly because it was able somehow to combine what turned out to be (although we didn’t realise it when we were making the film) a fair amount of innovation – at least within the context of Australian cinema – with a reasonable degree of commercial success. That’s been relatively unorthodox within our national cinema. I think a major reason people like it is because of Bob Ellis’s script, and I think that it may also be that while it describes an innocent age, it was made by innocent people as well. When the film was made it was aimed purely and simply at the audience that we knew so well and at no one else anywhere in the world. We were only thinking as far as Parramatta, not worrying about what New Yorkers or Londoners would think. So possibly for an Australia audience it touched a nerve because we were talking directly to them. I don’t know. You’re asking me to do the job of a critic.

I was wondering if you were going to go on to say anything about the interconnection of the public and private life. I’m very fond of the film and that is what probably fascinates me most.

There was something which I said in an interview before the film was made in 1977 and I think it probably still applies. So many period films place a veil over the past: in this film we sought to do that – to indulge the audience’s sentimentality or their nostalgic yearning for an irretrievable era – but at the same time we tried to lift the veil off the past and reveal what happened back then, under a new spotlight, and ask people to reconsider. We almost used to use nostalgia as a device for revelation, and maybe that appeals particularly to Australians. Something else which I think is very important is that one of us, the director of the film, was a Vietnamee, not a white Australian but a Vietnamese. It’s been an important thing for us that we were still having a love affair with our cinema, which was very much a narcissistic love affair because we were in love with ourselves, with the mirror image of ourselves projected up there on the silver screen, in a place where previously we only saw Americans or, less frequently, the English or, even less frequently, Europeans. In 1978, when the film came out, it was around the peak of that era when people were thrilled at the evacuation of their culture by their indigenous cinema, and it’s possible some people think of it with affection for that reason.

In the 1980s you went on to do work on television, particularly mini-series like The Cowra Breakout and The Dismal. I wanted to ask you about what sort of distinction you would see between working in television and working on a feature film. What are some of the differences you find? Do you have a preference? Are there advantages/disadvantages?

It all boils down to the story. Some stories are obviously better told – The Dismal is one example – through the medium of television than they would be through the cinema. We would not possibly have hoped to get people to leave their houses to see a dramatic representation of events that were like the sort of thing they could see on a current affairs program at home on television. And yet so many people tuned in to see it on television. It really depends on the project. For instance, for a long time I have wanted to make a mini-series of the novel Saigon, which tells the story of three families – an American, a French and a Vietnamese – during the war years 1925-1975. This was a project Matt Carroll was producing and I was going to direct it. There is no way you could tell that story in the cinema and you would never reach the audience you wanted to reach anyway, even if you could. You would have to truncate the story so much. But the mini-series format is perfect – the longer the better.

Obviously there are differences initially, and it can be a trap you fall into. I certainly found the adjustment from television back into cinema on Shadows of the Peacock a little difficult, in terms of the breadth of shots that were now suddenly available to you. Working in television was a very important transition for me in terms of the sorts of movies I went on to make afterwards.

In television you constantly have to face up to the problem that you must engage your audience. Some people would say this is a disadvantage because you might lose some of the esoteric preoccupations in your work, but I would see it as a distinct advantage. With television there is always the possibility that people will turn off, so you always have to reach out of the screen and grab hold of them, make them sit down and become fascinated by the story you are telling. Whereas in cinema, you can imagine that you are making the film for yourself because the audience are yours once they have come into the cinema. The real problem is to get them out of their homes and into the cinema. As you are making the story, however, you can sometimes forget that you have to keep them fixed into their seats just as much as you do in television, or that it can be advantageous to keep them as riveted. I guess working in television in that regard provided a transition through to the kind of film Dead Calm is, for better or for worse.

You have to create rhythms that will not let the audience off the hook, that will always keep them involved. And in television you are forced to constantly consider every moment, every scene, with that necessity as the basis of your approach to each scene of the story you are telling. I have found myself able to carry what I’ve learned in television into Dead Calm as film.

Well, I think that works. I think one of the great successes of Dead Calm is simply the narrative grip that you get on the viewer, and this is not something I would say about a great many contemporary films. Most of them seem to me to be a good half-hour too long. It seems to be quite grating to have made the film run an hour-and-a-half. That is short by comparison with a lot of films these days, but was that a decision of yours?

Yes, it was a decision we made while we were cutting it. We cut it to the length we imagined it would best play at. We didn’t jettison any substantial material, but the final process was arrived at by cutting a second here and a second there, 10 seconds somewhere else, until we felt that the rhythms would sustain the tensions that we were trying to set up.
There is a nice sense of nothing wasted in it, which I thought might have been partly a result of what you were talking about in television, the sense of having to grab your audience and hold them there, because I think Dead Calm works in this kind of way too. It does keep people glued to the screen wanting to know what will happen next, which is an old-fashioned gift but not all that common!

In 1985 you were planning to direct The Umbrella Woman, which was in the process of being made by another director. Why did you not go on with that plan? I actually decided to direct Saigon, the mini-series for Matt Carroll and Greg Coore, and it was a choice between the two projects. I had prepared The Umbrella Woman for many months back in 1982 or 1983, chosen the location and the actors, I had played the film over and over again with the writer, Peter Kenna, and the producer, at that time, Margaret Kelly. It almost felt like I had made the film - and I certainly had in my mind, many times! I could see it projected before me. But when the opportunity came to make Saigon the subject matter fascinated me; the task of making such a mammoth story about such epic events seized me, and so I embarked on that project, only to find that several months later it was cancelled by CBS which, along with Channel 9 in Sydney, was the network that had commissioned the project. We were never able to resubmit it. In the meantime the film changed producers and my friend and colleague Ken Cameron was appointed the director of The Umbrella Woman.

Finally, I wanted to ask you how you saw yourself as a director of actors. I ask this because Bill Hunter’s performance in Newfront still seems to me one of the very best in any Australian film I know. Would you describe yourself as a director of actors? How much and what sort of direction to you give them? You’d have to ask that the actors that one. I think the most important part of working with actors is the preparation. It’s obviously important what you do on the set but you can’t create a performance or assist an actor in his or her performance on the set. The performance is not created on the set, it is recorded on the set. The performance is created out of the characterization which is created by the actor - hopefully with the assistance of the director - well before shooting.

It varies from project to project, from relationship to relationship, but as a generalization I would say that my aim is to assist the actor to become the character before he or she steps onto the set: almost in the hope that, if the script had been written in invisible ink which had suddenly dried up and disappeared off the page, they could speak with voices, as if they were possessed (and obviously I’m exaggerating but only to make a point), because they knew everything there was to know about the person they were portraying – everything that was necessary within the context of the drama we were making. This involves workshops, research and a lot of seemingly peripheral preparation do to with characterization. Then I find that on the set so many of the choices that you make as director will be guided by the character the actor possessed by their character is able to offer you – what they do, where they stand, how they deliver a line and so on. On the set I see my principal role as encouraging rather than saying, “Do it like this” or “This is how it should be done.” Nudging an actor towards the performance that he or she has found from preparation and natural strength as a performer and, of course, from the text itself. Nudging is a good word for it, I think.

PHIL NOYCE: SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY


*Oja Kodar was Welles’ longtime associate, rather than his widow.
One of the most sought-after actors in film and television, Franco Nero describes himself as "a well-preserved veteran and world traveller", as evidenced by a diverse range of international screen credits. They extend from spaghetti westerns to the Hollywood musical Camelot, and include major roles for directors of the stature of Fassbinder and Buñuel. His career also includes an involvement in production that extends back to his formative years in Parma, when he was partner in a small company that produced low-budget documentaries. His excellent English has ensured him a steady work load in international co-productions and this year saw him in Australia to play the lead role in a new television mini-series, The Magistrate.

Paul Harris: What were your initial reactions on reading the script of The Magistrate?
Franco Nero: I accepted the offer because I enjoyed the script. It was not an easy decision to reach due to the fortunate fact that I am much in demand. So I was faced with the decision of moving away from my European home base. But I am a strange actor, maybe the only Italian who is constantly working abroad. I can speak different languages and have worked with people of many different nationalities. Most stories of the Mafia have focused on the crime connection between Italy and the USA. This is something new because of the Australian link.

You would seem to be in the privileged position of being able to carefully pick and choose roles rather than just accept any assignment. I like to change roles and take risks. If you are successful in one kind of role a danger exists of typecasting. As an actor you must make a choice in life — you can either be a good actor or a star. Sometimes it is possible to combine both. Personally I prefer the variety of changing all the time, making three or four films a year, working with various directors in different environments.

In the Sixties Clint Eastwood, with the Dollars trilogy, and myself with Django (1966) were the two most popular stars of westerns. When the Americans chose to buy the rights to a spaghetti western the choice was between A Fistful Of Dollars (1964) and Django. They went for Eastwood because he was an American. Subsequently I made three highly successful spaghetti westerns and accepted an offer to go to America to make Camelot (1967). While I was shooting that film Eastwood arrived on the set one day and jokingly ribbed me about my being an Italian making it big in Hollywood while he was still grinding out westerns. I told him not to worry, that I would go back to Italy and he would advance his career. After all, it was his home town. Ironically, Josh Logan and Lerner and Loewe later offered me the leading role in Paint Your Wagon, which I declined. It was Clint Eastwood who took my place!

In some of your earliest screen roles you were credited as Frank Nero.
John Huston, who directed The Bible, discovered me and taught me English. He also suggested to Josh Logan that I be cast in Camelot, so I owe that man a lot. The producer De Laurentiis wanted me to change my name, which is Francesco Spartanero, because he claimed that Americans would never be able to pronounce such a mouthful. He wanted to call me Castello Romano ("the Roman Castles"), which was based on the area outside of Rome where film studios were located. Finally, as a compromise, I merely shortened my name.
However, prior to *The Bible* (1966) I made a Western with Joseph Cotten and Jim Mitchum called *The Trampers* (d. Albert Band, 1966) which the producers wanted to promote as an American film, so thus I was billed as Frank Nero. There was another one called *The Hired Killer* (d. Franco Prosperi, 1966) with Robert Webber. Paramount picked up the world rights but following the success of *Django*, my name quickly reverted from Frank to Franco. During this period many Italians were Anglicizing their names behind English pseudonyms like E. B. Clucher (Enzo Barboni) and Terence Hill (Mario Girotti) but I refused to follow this trend.

Were you interested in an acting career from an early age?

I was born in Parma and my family comes from the south – a village called Puglia. As a boy I was an active sportsman, playing soccer and participating in decathlons. In my teenage years I began organizing and participating in student plays. Parma is a culturally rich and diverse area. Filmmakers like Bertolucci and Bellocchio came from this area, which also houses the oldest theatre in Europe, Teatro Famesi, and the oldest newspaper, *Gazzetta di Parma*. There is also a school, Corale Verdi, named after the composer who also comes from this area.

My fellow students teased me because of my ambitions and taunted me as a provincial dreamer. So I went off to enrol at Milan University and spent a short, unhappy time at a leading theatre school. I left after a month because I didn't like their teaching methods which threatened my sense of spontaneity. I also organized a singing group called the Hurricanes which was based in Parma and performed at weekends.

I finally arrived in Rome where I joined up with a group of friends, which included Vittorio Storaro and the Bazzoni brothers, to make documentaries. We managed to gain steady work despite our impoverished circumstances. At this point in time I was still unsure of my eventual vocation and worked various jobs on the crew including camera operator and lighting.

At the age of 22 I decided to become a director, so I wrote a story and offered the result to a producer who laughed in my face when I told him of my aspirations. Instead he offered me the lead role in a thriller called *The Third Eye* (d. Mino Guerrini, 1966).

At the time you began working in the Italian industry it was going through one of its periodic upheavals, especially with the influx of American dollars during the Sixties.

This is the reason I owe much of my success to Huston. When *The Bible* was released an international media blitz took place with the press talking about Huston's major acting discovery. I was working as a photographer's assistant in a painting studio when a photographer working for De Laurentiis visited one day and asked to take some photos of me.

How difficult was it to suddenly adapt to the working methods employed by bombastic crews and impossible stars?
Warner was keen to shoot a sequel concentrating on the Lancelot character, which lasted a year. Millions of dollars were wasted while we stayed in Spain waiting for the leaves to change colour. Several scenes were shot that were never used in the completed film. So much unused material remained that Warner was keen to shoot a sequel concentrating on the Lancelot character. I had a five-picture contract with Warner but I asked to be released after Camelot because I had become homesick.

How did you first become acquainted with Vanessa Redgrave?

When I started work on Camelot, I had not met my co-stars, Richard Harris or Vanessa Redgrave. They arrived a few weeks later. I was by myself in Los Angeles and working with a voice coach on my English. One day on the lot Logan introduced me to a tall English actor, very tall, wearing blue jeans and glasses. I greeted her in a cold manner because I was not impressed by her appearance. Later I was invited to her house for dinner and witnessed a transformation in her appearance. When I arrived at the door I thought that maybe I was at the wrong address. So that was our first meeting!

What was your first film collaboration with Vanessa Redgrave in the Italian cinema?

A Quiet Place In The Country (1968), directed by Elio Petri for United Artists. Following this we made two films with Tinto Brass (later to become infamous for Caligola, 1979) Dropout (1970) and La Vacanza (1971). Carlo Ponti had set up the production of Dropout but he disappeared on the eve of shooting. We later found out he had lost interest when he could not persuade the American backers to give him two million dollars. Our plan was to make the film cheaply for no more than half a million at most!

We decided to go ahead with the movie anyway, working in 16mm. Both films are very original and innovative. In Dropout I escape from a lunatic asylum, taking as a hostage a nice, bourgeois lady – a nurse. In La Vacanza, the plot is reversed with Vanessa playing the woman who takes a vacation from an asylum and meets a poacher in the forest.

When I made The Virgin And The Gypsy (1969) I suspected that only a few friends would ever get to see the film — and I was wrong. Lawrence's story was simply told on the screen and there was a chemistry between myself as the gypsy vagabond and Joanna Shimkus. In one London cinema the film ran for 13 days.

The Mercenary (d. Sergio Corbucci, 1968), a spaghetti western set during the Mexican Revolution, was originally set up to be directed by Gillo Pontecorvo (The Battle Of Algiers, 1965) and was written by one of the best Italian writers, Elio Petri. Pontecorvo, who is not the most prolific of directors, was fascinated by another Solinas screenplay, Quemida! (1968) (Burn!) and eventually decided to make that instead with Brando. The role was characteristic of him, which was financed by United Artists, the American mercenary and a Mexican. I had been signed to play the Mexican and James Coburn, at that time a box-office name through the Flint movies, was signed to play the American.

Eventually Coburn dropped out after a billing dispute and Corbucci asked me to play the American, suggesting that because of my accent that I should play the role as a Pole! But we still needed an actor to play the Mexican. One day I went to see a movie thriller set on the New York subway called The Incident (d. Larry Peerce, 1967) and was impressed by a supporting actor named Tony Musante. I suggested his name, he was hired and started a new career in Italian cinema working with the likes of Giuseppe Patroni Griffi and Dario Argento.

It seems that the question of billing was highly political and subject to all kinds of disputation? And there were some actors who would kill themselves about billing. This was not such an important consideration to me. What I decided to do was to share the billing, taking the top billing in the non-English markets. When I worked with Vanessa, William Holden, Anthony Quinn, etc. they would take top billing in English-speaking markets.

How did you become involved with Luis Bunuel on Tristana?

Bunuel is the greatest director that ever lived. He shot exactly what he needed and never over-covered. He was timing the movie as he was shooting. He refused to use music except in cases where it naturally occurred within the storyline. He refused to call me Franco and would only address me as Nero because he hated Generalissimo Franco. One morning on the set at Toledo he was very despondent because he had lost his bag. He spent hours searching for the lost article which seemed to have a great importance to him. When he finally retrieved it, his face lit up like a child. By now I was curious to see the contents of this mysterious bag, while the crew was setting up the next scene he retreated to a bench with the bag and I followed him out of curiosity. Inside the bag was a small Coke bottle full of wine and a bread roll with ham in it. He was sitting at the bench like a farmer quietly eating when I confronted him. “Luis, what are you doing?” I asked. “Please, don’t tell anyone, I’m hungry,” he replied, “don’t tell anyone I’m eating. We have to go on working but I don’t want to set a bad example to the others.”

He wrote a terrific script with Jean-Claude Carriere called The Monk (1972) based on Ado Kyrou’s erotic novel. He really wanted to make this movie in Spain but ran into censorship problems. He became so fed up that he gave the script as a present to Kyrou on the condition that he film the story with me in the lead role. I can remember that he always slept on the floor, never on a mattress, because he believed it was good for the body.

Bellocchio’s Victory March (1975) gave you ample opportunity to break away from your matinee-idol image with a basically unsympathetic portrayal of an authoritarian military captain.

I put that film together as an Italian-French-West German co-production after reading Bellocchio’s script which I liked immediately. I chose Michele Placido for the role of the young recruit whom I tried to mould. Miou-Miou played my wife and the late Patrick Dewaere played an army reservist. At the same time I made a deal with the producer Silvio Clementelli to play in a film called Scandalo (aka Submission, d. Salvatore Samperi 1977) in which I played a character who is hiding with a pharmacist (Lisa Gastoni) during the war in France. The film becomes a battle of wills between these two characters as they attempt to dominate each other. Initially, she has the upper hand and treats him as a slave. Eventually he turns the tables and becomes the dominant one.

Do you feel that the contributions to Italian cinema of middle-ranking directors like Damiani, Corbucci, Squillieri, Vancini and Lizzanni are critically under-rated?

If there is a real shame, ‘cause several years ago there were dozens of great directors, especially in the silent period when Italian films were widely shown around the world and were frequently copied by American directors. But now there are only a handful of names generally known to the film-going public.

I have worked with exciting, younger directors including Gianfranco Maingozi, Salvatore Nocita and Peppe Cino, formerly an assistant to Rossellini. I have recently worked with Nocita on a mini-series, The Betrothed (I Promessi Spiani, 1988), which was also made as a fondly remembered feature.
had featured in later Rosi called Petri and told him that he (Rosi) wanted to make this o f mine, Fernando Ghia, later to produce the script called designed the film's poster, as a frequent visitor on set. Every night Fassbinder he didn't say anything. As a person I thought he was a desperate man. He was finished product it is quite unbelievable. There were no rehearsals. All he told the directors he was a strange experience for me. I remember Andy Warhol, who "suggested" his good friend, James Garner... ■

What was your initial reaction to the script of Fassbinder's Querelle?

Querelle was a strange experience for me. I remember Andy Warhol, who designed the film's poster, as a frequent visitor on set. At this time he had started casting Querelle and told me about that film. When I read the script I was unsure and Fassbinder persisted in his shy manner. Eventually I was won over and he underestimated the man. He was a fan of my work and owned cassettes of many of my films. During the shooting of Querelle I signed a personal contract with him for two further projects — The Blue of Noon by Georges Bataille and Cocaine. Querelle was a strange experience for me. I remember Andy Warhol, who designed the film's poster, as a frequent visitor on set. At this time he had started casting Querelle... ■

Have you developed any properties yourself for the screen?

Ten years ago while Elio Petri was still alive we collaborated on a great script called The Hostage, set in America. This was a project I clearly wanted to direct. At this time Jessica Lange, who had recently completed King Kong (1976), agreed to be involved. However nobody wanted her. She was trying to break into television. I wanted to remake it and get it into a downscale and Bob Hosey gave her a part in All That Jazz (1979) to audition with 20 other actresses.

Another project dear to my heart was the story of three Italians in America, to be played by Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman and myself. All the major American companies expressed interest but the best offer was made by Alan Ladd Jr at Fox with whom we signed. As producer I employed a friend of mine who was a lawyer to produce The Mission (1986). Unfortunately a clause in the contract gave Fox final script approval. On Friday the film was green-lighted but by Monday had been scrapped due to the reaction of the executives' wives who read it over the weekend and pronounced it "against the American woman".

What happened to prevent your participation in Francesco Rosi's Uomo Conteso?

Originally I was intending to make this film with Petri. At the same time Francesco Rosi was involved in a car accident and his daughter died. A few days later Rosi called Petri and told him that he (Rosi) wanted to make this particular film. Rosi went ahead and made the film with Mark FRECHETTE, who had featured in Zabriskie Point (1969). The film bombed and the producer lost his investment.

In your CV do you have any favourites we have not mentioned?

In 1980 I made a film in Yugoslavia called The Falcon, directed by Vatroslav Mimica. Set in the 16th century, the story concerns a national hero of that country who fights the Turks who have abducted his wife. I became friends with Bondarchuk on the Nerestra film and he asked me to play John REDDINGTON (The Falcon) in his film. The film was shot in two parts, one in Mexico, Mexico In Flames (1982), and the other in Russia, Red Bells (1982). I worked for Claude Chabrol in Tunisia on a paranormal thriller, The Magician (1976), with Stefania Sandrelli and Jean Rochefort. Besides being a great director he is also a champion gourmet and chess player. You're a good chess player yourself, utilizing the world at your chessboard and working in various countries under differing circumstances.

I am not sure anyone anybody is a Spanish gypsy so I have a mind for easy adaptation. Because I have been involved in production myself I like to help out on sets and this is bad for actors who don't seem to want advice. I am actually very religious, very Catholic — my life is a mission because for 25 years I have supported a village of 50 children which I take care of. I like to see what can be done to save money and help make things better for the performers.

On Zefferelli's Young Toscanini (1988) you received an unusual billing... Zefferelli approached me about playing Toscanini's father in his younger days. The proposal was to film for three weeks in my home town of Parma so I accepted. Months went by and meanwhile I was involved in two other projects, The Betrothed and Pygmalion '88 (d. Flavio Mogherini). One day I receive a phone call asking if I am still interested in playing in the Toscanini film which I had been shown. So we decided to call it "a friendly appearance".
We'll go like the clappers for you.

MIDDAY: Phone rings.
"Morning...sorry, afternoon! You want what? And you've called all over town and nobody's got anything?"

12.15: A nuclear-powered courier roars into our foyer to collect a time-coded preview dub from our front desk.

The client phones to report we'd cured his incontinence.

Next morning, our lawyers having gained watertight copyright clearance, a one-inch master is ready for the edit.

Once again, we prove that nobody finds footage faster than Film World.

While 15 minutes might well be a fluke, we reckon if we can't find it within 48 hours, it probably hasn't been shot yet.

With access to millions of feet of computer-catalogued film and tape worldwide, Film World makes the impossible happen (budgetwise or creatively) time and time again.

In fact, we've often helped save a brilliant idea that just simply couldn't be produced otherwise...it's worth calling us at initial concept stage.

Ask to see our demo reel with spectacular examples of what can be done with stock footage from Film World.

At Film World, we really go like the clappers to find the footage you need, because we work at the speed of advertising!
The Agony and the FFC


A SAN INDUSTRY PUNDIT remarked recently, the new Film Finance Corporation looks more like a pension trust fund at first glance. Instead of executives, we have investment managers – and most of these managers are from the finance industry. The Board of the FFC comprises people who generally have little “hard-nosed” producing experience but a considerable legal and financial background. For the peak film body whose decisions will have considerable impact on the nature and viability of much of our insecure film and television industry, this may seem a surprising choice.

Looking back, however, it is not hard to see why the FFC has gone in this direction. A year ago the Australian film and television industry was in a panic. The 10BA taxation scheme that had overseen record production levels only a few years earlier had been weakened by the government to a level that made investment in other specialized tax shelters more attractive to the speculative investor.

This running down of 10BA was hardly accidental. The government had set up the scheme to provide a cashflow into a still fledgling industry. It had become an embarrassment and a nightmare. The amount of tax money seeking shelter was far beyond original government estimates, and there was no control over where the money was going and what films were being made. 10BA was basically a tax-shelter driven system. There was little need for concern about what would happen to 10BA films once the applause had died away at the “fine cut” screening. Under the initial scheme of 150-50, a film often only needed around 15 per cent of advances in either pre-sales or distribution guarantees to ensure that the investor would at least break even.

What grew out of that was an industry that did not reflect world market place realities or even domestic audience needs. As the government gradually tightened up10BA concessions the inevitable shake-out occurred and has continued to occur. So when consultation on an alternative to 10BA began, control of government money must have been uppermost in the minds of the planners.

And control is certainly what the FFC provides. Although most producers left in the industry are positive about the replacement for 10BA, some think that the system need not have been abandoned but just re-jigged. Ian Bradley, chief executive of Crawfords Australia, one of the big three television producers in Australia, believes that 10BA could have been re-worked. “The sort of safeguards the FFC are demanding for investment business from them could have been demanded under 10BA. And we wouldn’t have needed a new bureaucracy.”

Nevertheless, the FFC has arrived and is here for at least three more years. Under current plans the FFC will spend around $70 million by the end of this financial year, with $75 million in 1989-90, $61 million in 1990-91 and $63 million in 1991-92. The funding shortfalls are expected to be made up of returns from previous investments.

These returns explain why the FFC has been formulated along such commercial guidelines. It is required to generate returns from its investment in the order of 50 per cent, and the preliminary reaction from producers seeking FFC funds at this early stage is that they are having to look long and hard at the “back end” of deal-making to ensure that their films earn well, and do have a place in the market.

Under 10BA there were few incentives for the producer to retain a great deal of equity in the project. Most 10BA projects were made for the overhead recovery and the production turnover, whereas FFC-backed projects will certainly be working for market earnings.

Paul Barron of Barron Films, which is known for quality productions like Shaw and Tudawali, gained an FFC approval in March for Haydaze, a 12-part half-hour children’s series which has been pre-sold to the Ten Network. “We think it’s great,” he says of the FFC. “In our experience working with the FFC was complicated and time-consuming, and it would be easier if you had a checklist that you had to go through from day one. But if I walked through the door and was dealing with a major bank or investor we would have expected the same response. Nothing that was ever suggested or asked for was unreasonable.”

Don McLennan, director of Mullaway, which has just been released nationally (under the title Mulli), has also been a successful applicant to FFC. “We went to them in February with the film Breakaway but were rejected. We were asked to re-apply in March, went back, addressed the issues they were concerned about and approval followed in March. Basically those details were mechanical ones and we were delighted with the outcome.”

McLennan, who will co-produce with Jane Ballantyne as well as direct, agrees that there is a lot more pressure on producers now. “To get the level of pre-sales that you need to make it work you really have to look very hard at the back end of the deal. There’s probably more pressure than there was there under 10BA.”

Al Clark, head of production at the Beyond International Group, is producer of The Crossing, one of the first features to gain FFC approval. He is unable to talk much about the deal that he struck with the FFC, owing to further deal negotiations. “But the one indisputable thing is for a country to have a $70 million fund which is unknown elsewhere. This has to be acknowledged.”

The first recipient of FFC approval was Crawfords, with the mini-series All the Rivers Run II. The decision was received with scepticism in some parts of
the industry, because of concern that the FFC was going to favour the larger, more sophisticated players. These comments seem to have evaporated somewhat although one smaller independent producer commented recently that the FFC was really only for "big boys" and Glenys Rowe, producer of *Daisy in Space* as well as David Caesar's documentary *Body Work*, believes that the FFC was slightly high-handed and regarded itself as only dealing with the "real players" in the game.

But Crawfords chief executive Ian Bradley sees the FFC as being of only marginal use to the large Melbourne based producer. "Certainly it's useful for us, we're very happy that it's there. But quite clearly in our opinion the FFC-financed product has to be very much a minority of our production. It seems to me that it will be a lot more useful to the small independent producer. We have to keep a very large equity holding in our production, so we would always be looking at the FFC as a minority investor, and then because it has fairly stringent guidelines you're looking at 'Is it worth taking on a minority investor who has such stringent guidelines that it makes the mechanics of filmmaking much more complex?' We don't make money out of making shows; we make money out of selling shows. There's no point in us having a lot of shows we're selling all around the world if somebody else is getting the revenue from it."

When one talks to the FFC one certainly gets the impression that it is playing by the rules in making rigorously commercial judgements. These rules ask for certification, which means that, as with 10BA, a separate department of the government has to certify that the proposed production is Australian. Once that approval has been gained then the FFC's guidelines specify that generally projects must have levels of 30 per cent private participation to receive FFC assistance.

They do not demand that level of participation from all films however. Under the guidelines it is required to have an overall level of 30 per cent private investment across the whole production slate, which gives it the flexibility to fund things that might fall above or below that level. Every project is treated on an individual basis, and by late March some 57 applications had been received, not including those that have been re-presented. There are also other exceptions to the rules, particularly documentaries and children's series.

It all seems flexible and worthy, but when one looks down the list of approvals to date, one immediately notices that the productions are predominantly television-oriented. Out of 24 approvals to date, totalling an investment of more than $32 million, there are six fictional mini-series, four documentary series, six one-off documentaries, but only six feature films (including an animated feature from Yoram Gross, and an investment in a North American print and ad campaign for a McElroy and McElroy feature). Ross Dimsey, head of the Screen Production Association of Australia, comments, "Feature films are going to become the poorer cousins of television. Television is much favoured by the FFC arrangement which is probably as it should be. The television market in the world is growing enormously, the cinema market is not."

The FFC aims for 45-55 per cent of its annual production slate to be in the feature area. Why only six feature films out of 24 projects so far? The market itself provides one of the answers. Feature films are the high risk sector of the film and television industry, and basically the market for Australian films is limited. Getting feature films to the production stage is a very difficult task at present. But the FFC, by its own guidelines, has a crucial responsibility here and should be of most assistance. At the time of writing, its inroads into this area have been limited, but it is safe to say that by 30 June there will have been substantially more approvals of feature films, according to David Pollard, Chief Executive Officer of the FFC.

Pollard is pleased with the FFC's progress. "I am confident that the FFC will be 'on target' with its feature allocations of 50 per cent. Again, despite general industry concerns that the FFC will just not have time to make its complete allocation, he is also confident "that the general allocation of $70 million will be committed by the end of the financial year". He would not be led into a discussion of why the feature approvals were relatively low at this stage.

The explanation perhaps lies in the complexities of feature film funding. Producer and director Don McLennan says "To put a deal together that is really going to work you've got to be looking for an advance of around 50 per cent. On a small picture, say $3 million dollars, you are talking about $1.5 million and unless you have a very substantial name actor like Bryan Brown it would be very hard to find more than that. Under $3 million you're OK."

But unlike 10BA, it's not just a matter of getting the pre-sale which would then attract in investors who had no further interest in the film, as the pre-sale guaranteed them a break-even point in their tax deductible investment.

As the FFC is an investor, it wants to see some of its money back. So naturally it looks closely at what it will get from its investment. The first trap for players is this: if you sell off rights via pre-sales in many territories to get an advance of 50 per cent, then come to the FFC for the other 50%, it is then going to look very closely at what it can expect to recoup. If the product has already been pre-sold in most major territories and the FFC's 50 per cent is not going to get much return, then it is unlikely that it will enter into negotiations with a producer.

What it comes down to, says McLennan, is "How much of the picture can you pre-sell in foreign or local territories whilst leaving yourself enough territories to recoup whatever the FFC put up?" He believes that this will favour smaller budgeted features, and many producers agree. Pollard adds that along the lines of sensible commercial practice it is felt that the FFC should invest less the higher the budget is.

If the balance between pre-selling and leaving enough room for FFC returns is so critical, then the next point of contention becomes the way that returns are split between investors. That is, should private investors recoup their investment before the FFC recoups, or will the FFC insist on pro rata and pari passu (proportionally and simultaneously) rights of return. This has become a crucial issue, and even though the interim guidelines say that the recoupment position may be subordinated to private investors it is unclear to what extent this will be carried out.

David Pollard says, "Generally we have subordinated our interests to those of private investors." He would not be more specific than that, but what it indicates is that the so-called hard commercial guidelines are maybe not so hard after all, as the FFC may still be willing to let other investors receive their returns, or at least some of their returns, before it does.

How they will decide the extent of that subordination and the acceptable minimum level of private participation in each project is the $64,000 question. Pollard again will not be drawn on any discussion of aesthetic judgements, but sees three main areas as crucial in assessments. First, whether
the market itself has demonstrated substantial interest through pre-sales, advances, etc; secondly, the quality of the producer's track record; finally, the marketing plans of the producer. All these 'hard' guidelines sound fine in theory, but there is no doubt that within those latter two areas in particular there is plenty of room for subjective judgement. For example, when assessing 'track record' does one merely look at the commercial success of a producer's past projects or does one take less tangible factors into account such as the cultural value of a film producer's record? How does one assess marketing plans in a market that is unpredictable and volatile?

Pollard will not be drawn on this line of questioning. "We have rules and we follow them," is his answer to suggestions that more subjective assessments must come into play when exercising "commercial judgement". The problem then becomes, how does an institution with limited film experience make these judgements?

The FFC says that it will call in consultants if necessary. One prominent producer says that an investment advisor had rung her and asked her to make an off-the-cuff assessment of the marketability of another producer's proposal. She did not respond too kindly to what she regarded as an "amateurish" approach, and complained. She received an apology from the FFC the next day and a promise that it would not happen again. An isolated incident perhaps, but one that is not calculated to create confidence in the FFC's assessment procedure among producers.

In general, producers express a cautious gratitude for the existence of the FFC, but the overriding concern is that the FFC will play it too safe with its investment in so-called rigid commercial guidelines. "My great fear," says Ian Bradley, "is that the industry needs an incentive to take risks and whilst the FFC is putting up risk capital it is working on such narrow commercial lines that there is a tendency to go to it only with the safe commercial projects. It does force a lot of producers into the commercial reality of the world, and after 10BA a certain amount of that was very desirable. But one wonders now, where is the place for the experiment?"

Ben Lewin, director of such acclaimed series as *The Dunera Boys* and also of the forthcoming feature *Georgia*, starring Judy Davis, is tougher still with his criticism, although he prefaces it by saying nothing one knows a great deal about the FFC as yet. "No one wants the industry to go bust in the next two minutes, but one that is not calculated to create confidence in the FFC's assessment procedure among producers.

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At the moment, it is hard to say whether we will get our just deserts, and what role the FFC will play in the process. It has only been in operation for a matter of months, and producers tend to err on the side of caution when they discuss its pros and cons. Undoubtedly, some of the projects that receive FFC funding would have been made without its support, particularly in television. In the feature area, there is a feeling that its guidelines will foster the "commercial" films: it is still too early to tell exactly what the FFC means by that, and far too early to tell whether it was right.

AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION PTY LTD (FFC)

The board meets monthly to consider funding proposals. Projects are submitted after assessment by an investment manager, a process that takes approximately eight weeks. The following dates are scheduled Board Meetings for 1989.

1. All the Rivers Run II. Two x 2-hour mini-series. Crawfords Australia.
PAY TV - A USER-PAYS SYSTEM WHERE VIEWERS BECOME SUBSCRIBERS - IS ALREADY A REALITY IN THE US. THERE ARE MOVES TO INTRODUCE THE SERVICE HERE, BUT WHO IS REALLY GOING TO BENEFIT?

Australia has earned a dubious reputation as one of the most lucrative markets in the world for US product. In the last 12 to 18 months, the commercial network owners have signed program output deals with almost all the major studios on very attractive terms for Hollywood. Indeed, one estimate suggests that they effectively doubled their prices.

Some of these deals and alliances, no doubt, were designed to stave off pay competitors, since new sources of competition among Australian buyers could produce another sharp increase in prices. A pay operator, for instance, could trigger the networks into offering more to keep a movie away from pay TV.

In the US, a recent deal saw Murdoch's Fox network secure free TV rights to a program produced by an independent only 30 days after its exposure on pay TV. This makes a mockery of pay TV's major selling point - that subscribers pay for the right to watch exclusive programs or, at least, the right to watch programs well in advance of free-to-air viewers.

Hollywood is already realizing the benefits from new TV services in Europe, a fact made evident at the end of last year with the signing of several UK film deals worth more than $1 billion. The major purchasers were none other than Murdoch's Sky Television (in alliance with Disney) and British Satellite Broadcasting (BSB) in which Alan Bond has the largest stake. Later this year these two satellite operators plan to offer Britain's 20.6 million TV households another 11 channels. Their pay movie channels services are expected to be the major battleground.

Until recently, Britain's production industry has managed to maintain its editorial and cultural integrity through the imposition of foreign program quotas and the protection afforded to the BBC and independent TV stations. The Thatcher government has now announced plans for new terrestrial TV services which, combined with the entrance of satellite services, will eventually fragment the UK domestic market. More British producers will then be forced to join their Australian colleagues in the search for co-production finance.

The introduction of new services in New Zealand should prove an interesting lesson for Australia. Sky Network, the first pay operator, is promising subscribers a three-channel package for $10 a week. The channels will carry some advertising and will be delivered over the air via UHF in a scrambled (encoded) form. Only those who have leased a special Sky Network decoder will be able to receive them.

Sky News will draw heavily on the 24-hour US Cable News Network, Sky Sports will draw on the US Entertainment and Sports Network and Bond Media, and Sky Light will offer five movies a week from major overseas film studios. Not surprisingly, the publicly-owned TV New Zealand has moved to protect its rump by taking a 25 per cent share in the Sky Network, while TVS, a new free commercial service, has decided to protect its movie agreement with Disney by acquiring both the free-to-air and pay rights.

Should our elected representatives decide the time is ripe for a competitive, user-pays TV system, they will at least feel secure in the knowledge that they have not been hasty in taking the decision. It is 20 years since Packer group first presented a submission seeking permission to provide a pay TV service via cable to several thousand subscribers in Sydney. Kerry Packer must be watching the latest deliberations with a certain amount of disbelief. But then Australia's pay TV history is studded with reports and submissions.

In 1980, the Fraser government decided to proceed with the introduction of pay and cable TV and ordered a lengthy public inquiry on "how this might be done". The Hawke government took over before recommendations could
hopes of potential operators in 1984 by inviting "expressions of interest" for pay TV services. The Department of Communications received 24 expressions from television, radio, newspapers, film distribution/production, theatrical, hardware supply, and other business interests. Thousands of dollars were spent on sending executives, bureaucrats and politicians overseas to study the latest developments while hopeful operators conducted expensive surveys to assess costs and consumer demand.

This level of interest spurred the opposition into action in a way that is, by now, all too familiar. The Prime Minister and his cohorts were captured by the network owners, who were firmly opposed to any pay competition. The networks were backed up by film and TV producers who feared pay would open the floodgates to cheap foreign product. By 1986 the whole issue was just too politically volatile and troublesome. It was placed on the back burner until September 1990, and a further review was promised in the meantime.

This review is now under way. Departmental bureaucrats have produced another convoluted 'options report' in their Future Directions series which casts little light on the political machinations underlying the decision-making process. There is, however, one refreshing development. A bipartisan House of Representatives committee, chaired by Labor Party backbencher John Saunderson, is actually conducting a public inquiry, flushing out most of the interested parties and subjecting them to intensive questioning.

Saunderson's inquiry has produced some fascinating insights into the present state of play. The most powerful and identifiable pressure group eyeing off the revenue-making potential of pay TV is the public-owned carriers - Austat, Telecom and OTC. Network Nine's Len Mauger commented wryly to the committee, "I wonder whether pay TV is being driven by Austat or Telecom or the consumer?"

The public TV lobby has presented a strong case for community access and educational TV before viewers are asked to pay. The ABC has taken a middle-of-the-road position, arguing that the government must first address such issues as community demand and social impact; but, should it opt for pay TV, then the ABC would not want to be excluded from becoming either a fully-fledged pay operator or a program service provider. The SBS, perhaps wisely, has decided not to enter the fray, although a departmental discussion paper last year floated the idea that subscription revenue could be used to top up its paltry budget.

The three commercial network owners - through the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) - have adopted a public strategy of delay. Mindful of the inflated purchase prices paid for their stations and the cost of expanding their networks into country areas, the owners recommend that no pay TV services should be allowed for at least the next five years.

The network owners rightly see that the major threat on the horizon comes from the two major Australian cinema operators and film distributors, Hoyts and Village Roadshow/Greater Union, who have indicated interest in operating and/or supplying product to a pay movie service. Hoyts has been acquiring the full range of rights (theatrical, video and TV, including pay and satellite TV) since 1984. Meanwhile, Village Roadshow is strategically placed to produce movies through its joint ownership of a studio complex in Queensland with Warner Bros, or rather Time Warner, HBO's parent. It has also set up a wholly-owned production and distribution subsidiary in the US.

As the networks observe, these two vertically integrated companies have the most to gain from another outlet for their product. "Monopoly control of movie distribution through cinema/hotel-motel pay-per-view/video cassette rental/pay television windows is a far more real threat than domination of pay television by existing media, given that pay television will be largely a movie medium. Blanket restrictions on current media groups could virtually ensure that film distribution groups control pay television," proclaims the FACTS submission to the Saunderson committee. It calls for appropriate legislative restrictions to control the "potential horizontal integration of film distribution", arguing that the Trade Practices Act would be wholly inadequate to control such "unacceptably discriminatory consequences of unrestrained market power".

The cold wind currently swirling around Australia's new network owners may explain why so few potential pay TV operators have surfaced this time around. High program costs, a tough advertising market and intense competition have left each owner - Alan Bond, Frank Lowy and Chris Skase - in a bind. If they can't succeed, they may have to sell. But where are the buyers? The market has turned: trading stations for inflated prices is no longer an option. They must continue to operate in a cut-throat environment and search out new revenue sources in Australia or overseas.

Of course, the beleaguered proprietors are well aware that one solution is to operate these new pay TV channels themselves. The ABC network in the US, for example, is part-owner of three cable services - ESPN (sport), Lifetime (women), and Arts and Entertainment. In Australia, Network Nine's owner, Bond Media, has demonstrated that its Sky Channel sports satellite service, which is funded by advertising and an average weekly payment of $150 from 5,500 subscribers, can provide a new revenue source and spread program costs across two outlets.

Sky Channel has commenced 'tiersing' its service so subscribers pay an additional fee of $250 to view 'premium' events such as an exclusive Fenech fight. This 'pay-per-view' system is nourished by 'special' sporting events and new movies, and can produce huge one-off revenues. It is emerging as a new industry sector in the US and offers a taste of services to come when fibre optic cables carry TV and telephones into the home. Telecom planners say that by the year 2000 we should be able to press a button and select the movie of our choice from some distant video library - for a price, of course.

Meanwhile, although Sky Channel is not allowed to service home viewers at this stage (this would be defined as pay TV), it is able to sign up pubs, clubs, mining camps and racing studs as subscribers. The next step could be to establish be to establish a home/office subscriber category. It may then prove difficult to exclude Bond Media, should a decision be taken to introduce full pay TV services. Of course, Bond may not own Network Nine at this stage.

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THE AUSTRALIAN REPRESENTATION AT CANNES IS A LITTLE DIMINISHED IN SIZE THIS YEAR, INDICATING THE GAP IN PRODUCTION CAUSED BY THE VIRTUAL ELIMINATION OF 10BA AS A SOURCE OF PRODUCTION FUNDING, AND THE DELAY IN SETTING UP THE NEW AUSTRALIAN FILM FINANCE CORPORATION; HOWEVER, SOME INTERESTING FILMS WILL BE ON SHOW. IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES WE TALK TO JANE CAMPION, THE DIRECTOR OF SWEETIE, INVITED INTO COMPETITION ALONGSIDE EVIL ANGELS; WE INTERVIEW IAN PRINGLE, THE DIRECTOR OF THE PRISONER OF ST PETERSBURG WHICH WILL BE SHOWN IN THE 'UN CERTAIN REGARD' SECTION; AND WE HEAR ABOUT GEOFFREY BENNETT'S FIRST FEATURE THE BOYS IN THE ISLAND; LOOK AT THE AUSTRALIAN FEATURES AT CANNES, THE AUSTRALIANS WHO'LL BE GOING AND THE NEW ZEALAND PRESENCE...
AFRAID TO DANCE
Winner of an Australian Writers' Guild award for screenwriter Paul Cockburn, Afraid to Dance is the story of two young people whose quirky criminal career is changed forever by the theft of a mailbag.

BLOWING HOT AND COLD
Blowing Hot and Cold is the story of two men from different backgrounds who become friends. Jack Phillips is a service station attendant in a small country town, whose world is disrupted by a fast-talking Italian travelling salesman, Nino Patrovita. Their friendship culminates in their attempt to reclaim Jack’s wayward daughter, Sally, who has run away from home and is too inexperienced and naive to extract herself from the trouble she is in.

THE BOYS IN THE ISLAND

EMERALD CITY
The temptations of Sydney – fame, money, sex and harbour views – prove almost too much for a Melbourne writer. David Williamson has adapted his play of the same name, which takes an inside look at the Australian film industry.

GEORGIA
Nina Bailey is an investigative lawyer who is led, it seems innocently, to an exhibition of obscure photographs. But in the pictures there is a message for Nina, a secret concealed from her all her life about the violent death of Georgia, a woman she has never known. As she follows a long-buried trail through half-truths and ambiguous memories, someone seems to guide her – or to lie in wait.

HUNGRY HEART
In Luigi Acquisto’s feature debut as a director, Sal (Nick Carrafa) returns to his parents’ home after completing his internship as a doctor in the country. He meets Kate (Kimberley Davenport) and an unconventional relationship develops between them.
Director: Luigi Acquisto. Producers: Rosa Colosimo, Reg McLean. Screenplay: Josie

THE BOYS IN THE ISLAND

CELIA
Ann Turner’s feature debut, which tells the story of a girl growing up in the Melbourne suburbs in the late 1950s, made its debut in the Panorama section of the Berlin Film Festival.

CLOSER AND CLOSER APART
Closer and Closer Apart is inspired by Giovanni Verga’s short story, La Cavalleria Rusticana, on which the opera of the same name is based. It centres on the lives of four people, two couples whose relationship is changed dramatically by an affair.
ness connections worth millions of dollars, and a web of danger and conspiracy.

she tries to piece together the jigsaw of her husband's past, Virginia discovers political and business connections worth millions of dollars, and a web of danger and conspiracy.


ISLAND
Island is a film about women and their struggle with fate. Three women, an Australian, Sri Lankan and a Greek meet on a Greek Island. All are exiles of some kind, escaping from their own personal tragedies. Their lives become inextricably linked by their common desires and mutual fear of the outside world. Ultimately it is the island itself and the generosity and warmth of the islanders which lead all three women into revelations about themselves and their place in the world. The film explores a spectrum of emotions ranging from extreme passion to abject fear, leading to murder, from loneliness to wanton sensuality.


Mull Originally titled Mullaway, Mull won the AFI members' prize and Nadine Garner took out the best actress category at the 1988 AFI Awards. Mull, adapted from a novel by Nicki Nicholls, tells the story of a teenage girl who comes to terms with her family and herself when she learns that her mother is critically ill.


THE PRISONER OF ST PETERSBURG
Jack, a young man from Australia, is prisoner of St. Petersburg (that faded heart of Russian literature). On the run, forever escaping, trapped and penniless in Berlin, he establishes an odd, comic relationship with two girls. They invigorate each other with a new lease of life until he is freed from his prison.

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Sweetie is an account of a young bank clerk's efforts to find love then keep it in a world she can't control. It aims to give grace to the fleeting moments of clarity through which we direct our lives. It also makes efforts to describe the delusions and subterranean forces that most often possess us.

JANE CAMPION, GERARD LEE

When did the character of Sweetie come in?

The character was conceived at the beginning. I read one of those stories about how you put a script together, a manual really, and it said that you write out the storyline in three or four pages. I think I was about ready to do it then, so I ran downstairs and sat at the table and wrote it out. She turned up then. It was an experience that both Gerard [Lee] and I had with somebody, so it was fairly familiar. There was a dark side and a funny side to it, which I liked. And since I'd had such fun writing with Gerard before, and I really love his writing. It's a lot faster writing with somebody else. I was overseas at the time and I came back and rang up Gerard and asked him if he'd like to work with me, because I felt he knew a lot of the ideas, and because we'd lived together before and shared experiences - it would only be fair to offer it to him. When he came into it obviously it changed again and he was invaluable. You can't underestimate what it is to occupy another human being's mind with a project, you're renting space in their brain basically. He made endless contributions in terms of characters, scenes, dialogue, ideas about how to get round problems, encouragement...

Did you have particular strategies, or difficulties in the writing?

We felt that getting the right tone was the key so we wrote lots of scenes until we felt we had them speaking in the right way. There are so many other things that affect tone, of course: the way they speak, the dialogue, heaps of things help to create it and change it and mould it. Gerard and I kept on writing things that affect tone, of course: the way they speak, the dialogue, ideas about how to get round problems, encouragement...

Other people make that possible. I was very keen to work with cinematographer Sally Bongers on the film because we have a very complementary ways of seeing things and it's easy for us to understand each other. We talked quite a bit about how it would be write to shoot it. The art department contributed a lot, and Peter Long put together a lot of visual references for me and that was very stimulating.
I expected to push the material round and tell it what to do but I found that it was the other way round. The best way was simply to respond to what the material told you it wanted to do - I had a very small will in the matter. By far the best way to go was to be honest about what was there and feel out of that what could be there. If you tried to go against it, everything would go wrong.

You never knew what it was going to feel like next. You'd do all these cuts which seemed like the obvious thing to do and you'd screen it and you'd never have imagined what the result would be. I'd no idea how the relationships would come up and they came up a lot stronger than I thought they were going to: the dynamics of the characters was what led the story in the end, and the more you fixed up characters and made them stronger, every scene they were in started to sparkle or would start to really stand out. I never expected it to be that way, but it's a very character-led story, I suppose. I expected to be able to predict the feeling that came out, but I found that I couldn't.

*Where does that element of surprise fit in with the need for control?*

In the end you have to drop all your schemes and plans and respond to what, obviously I'm still the manipulator of tone, and if I think the tone is not clear I can try to clarify it. Or if I think something can be taken two ways and that's not a good thing, I can try to make the material make a stand one way or the other.

You can't recreate the tone, you have to go with what's there. But at the beginning of the film I felt there was an ambiguity, people could think we were very serious and we were actually quite tongue-in-cheek. The whole film perhaps has got a bit more gravity than the script, and because of that the early stuff looked like you could mistake it for us being serious, not knowing what we were doing. I was very clear that somehow I had to alter that tone. People had to know that the voice of the filmmakers was that we knew we were being ironic. In the end we chose to do it with music. There are lots of ways you can alter things, but you have to know you need to. In the editing room I could feel that it was ambiguous. But the music added humour and irony.

I had the idea that I would like to have accapella music in it, that everything had to be hand-made sound, and someone put me onto a group called the Cafe at Gates of Salvation. They sent us a demo tape, and we just loved it. They write their own stuff too and that was wonderful, because we couldn't afford copyrighted stuff. I love accapella because I feel very straightforwardly emotional - just human beings singing. It gave something that was what we were aspiring to with Sweetie, something very humble.
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Journeys are at the heart of Ian Pringle's films and, more recently, the making and financing of his work. His latest feature, *The Prisoner of St. Petersburg*, was made and co-financed in Germany. Shot in atmospheric black & white by Ray Argall, it tells the story of an anguished young man who is obsessed with 19th-century Russian literature. Noah Taylor plays the young man, and Solveig Dommartin and Katja Teichmann are the two women who share his journey to the end of a Berlin night...

HUNTERCORDAIY: Your films span the Australian film 'revival' of the last 10 years, so perhaps we should begin by talking about the state of cinema now. The recently-established Film Finance Corporation has been called "the last chance" for the local industry. Is "last chance" too pessimistic?

IAN PRINGLE: It's always a hard question because the nature of filmmaking is so unpredictable. I don't think it's a last chance at all. Certainly it's an important time because the funds available to make the sorts of films that have to be made in Australia (or what I feel should be made) are on a very limited basis, and a lot of that problem comes from the situation that developed under 10BA where, basically, films were made because of the deal and not because of the films themselves.

When you talk about the films that you feel need to be made in Australia, how would you, in broad terms, describe those films?

Well obviously I'm prejudiced because of my own predilections, but I think generally they need to be films that reflect the diversity of our culture, and subject matter that doesn't necessarily lend itself to a mainstream commercial cinema. A rationalization of their budgets is very important, but under a million dollars or even less is, ironically, just as difficult to get as $2 million. And also, the very nature of filmmaking requires one to learn the craft of telling a story in 90 or 120 minutes. You have to become familiar with the format, and that's why the notion of 60-minute films has always confounded me. I don't think there's a great deal to be said for them. On the other hand, it gives them the opportunity, certainly, to try their hand, but it's impossible to sell them those films.

You either make a short film, or you go the full way?

I think there's a substantial leap from a 12-minute short to a feature but I'd go from 30 minutes, and I think there can be good shorts of that length, with the rudiments of drama, choreography, the execution of theme, camera, lighting. Then the judgement has to be made if that person has the right project and they're showing the ability and deserve the investment.

When Plains of Heaven was released you made a statement with John Crusthers, the producer, about independent filmmaking and in particular the need for financially and culturally viable Australian films. Do you feel that cultural and financial viability are still compatible?

I still think it's a valid statement, and I would put great emphasis on financial viability because obviously with those films that are marginal, one has to be rational about their budgets. I am of the belief that you can make features for small amounts of money and I really defy anybody to contradict me on that.

Do you think structures like the AFC and FFC inevitably bring independent filmmakers closer to the mainstream? The role of these institutions is crucial, particularly for the funding of the avant-garde in Australia.

I think it depends a lot on the people in the job at the time, and it's important that there's a turnover of people in those jobs. I wouldn't say they necessarily put pressure on you to embrace the mainstream but a very curious formul has to be applied when the budget is examined and when the various...
advises are given. This can happen from the script office, and the other branches as well; it’s a complex question without a simple answer. I don’t see any adverse pressure from the AFC at the moment. In recent times we’ve had very good people at the AFC.

It is very easy to categorize independent film-makers as artists with low budgets. But the real interest of independent film-making is in the exploration of narrative form. Can we talk about the way you tell stories on the screen and where the stories came from?

It’s always been a very interesting process. Basically you come up with an idea and find an appropriate form to put it in. You fall back on your instincts and those instincts are therefore your hallmark. To analyze that is quite difficult. I don’t have a set pattern. I do enjoy the process of collaboration. It’s not always easy and I’ve had bitter experiences, but I’m still of the opinion that collaboration is vital and I’m lucky enough to have worked with good people.

Are you conscious of developing new ways to tell stories? Are you conscious of new forms, or is that also instinctive?

It’s a mixture of both, because I always try to not repeat myself or imitate other people and that’s part of the adventure and excitement of making films. I wouldn’t say that I’m consciously going out to find a new form on each occasion.

Do you rely heavily on the script. Is that a fixed or flexible document?

Well, I put a lot of work into my scripts, but I’ve found that when I start shooting, the script sometimes need to be changed. So much of what I go for is contained in the magic of the moment set up just before you shoot. During the shooting the film takes form and shape, and you work with what you’ve got and develop it accordingly.

In many of your films there is a clear relationship between the physical journeys of characters and their psychological or emotional growth... in Wrong World there is the journey 'home' to Australia and the drive to South Australia, and in Prisoner of St. Petersburg, a journey to the end of a Berlin night....

I suppose that in this format I find the way to deal with the characters. It is probably also something which is at the heart of what I’m saying about all of the characters, and that is that they’re in search of something. Certainly that’s the case in Wrong World and also Prisoner of St. Petersburg, and to some extent Wronsky. It’s very much the case with my next film, Isabelle Eberhardt.

So searching is a necessary human condition?

It’s part of the questioning process which always has to take place within you. The people I’m attracted to are always on the edge, there’s always something that makes them stand out from the mainstream of society, and to amplify their situation it is usually best for me to put them in the context of a journey or movement. That dovetails back into those images of searching and the need to find the heart of things.

Increasingly you are sending your characters underground, into the demi-monde, or what Gorky called 'the lower depths'.

Absolutely. It’s only in extremes that you find out what the substance is, you can’t find that out in the secure comfort of a day to day life. I find I have more to say about the bent, the unwanted, the slightly crazed characters of this world than normal people. I understand them.

Cinema always creates characters that are exaggerated from the norm because the nature of the medium is like that.

Yes, people want something that’s not part of their everyday life and it’s just a matter of finding a form that is different enough and for me its usually contained within a journey.

Prisoner of St. Petersburg is the story of a young man imprisoned by the literary demons of 19th century Russian novelists. Why did you chose those particular novelists?

I can remember when I read that books and was totally hypnotized and went through a very similar sort of feeling of obsession, feeling that I understood exactly what they were saying. They talk of a world and a time that I knew I’d never be able to experience. I was enthralled and I’ve never forgotten it.

And the character of the boy, played by Noah Taylor, grew out of that? That’s right.

In the film there are moments when the actors are visions of these novels, of previous imaginations, and at other times they are characters in the film Prisoner of St. Petersburg. You’ve made a film with overlapping worlds.

That was the idea. It was an attempt to show how the imagination can really take flight and you can be consumed by it. A large part of Wrong World is playing against the idea of time and memory. One of the key notions in that film is the sense of disorientation, of trying to piece together what had happened to the character and of giving the sense of not knowing where he was by mixing the landscape and the cultural signifiers of America and Australia.

And in Prisoner of St. Petersburg it was an opportunity to take it one enormous step forward, to play entirely with the imagination.
Part of the problem was that the script was, initially, logically too difficult and I had to condense many scenes to one or two locations. So I had to dovetail many things together and minimize the amount of movement. The crew. Our biggest problem was it was shot in the middle of summer and in the northern summer it gets dark around 10 o'clock and light about 4 o'clock in the morning, so I had to think about the structure of the scenes and leave many of the close-ups to the end which meant in some cases we had to build black-outs to get the shots done.

Though your films are increasingly more 'different' from other Australian films, much of current cinema has a sense of retardation, of being made before...

Yes, it's like watching TV. You can see the same thing on four stations, and even the ABC is trying to be a commercial station. The only gain from that is more homogenized television.

You create competition by making something the same; competition is not a choice between the same things.

Absolutely – and I don’t think the ABC is serving a pluralistic society. This goes to the heart of an even more profound problem in the film industry, which is compounded by the ABC. Low-budget features were one of the opportunities for the ABC to become involved, by screening these films, and if there had been support from the ABC, such as co-financing or whatever, there would have been an opportunity for a lot more low-budget features to be made.

Why do Australian films now tend to have the same appearance?

It’s something we touched on earlier, which is to do with markets, and because of the structure of 10BA our major market has been the commercial American market. Under 10BA the pre-requisites had to be made and they invariably were done through American companies. It was necessary to get the percentage up which would be attractive to financiers. Anybody could have seen through the rorts in that system from the beginning. I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with making films for the American market; it’s just that the way it happened left a number of avenues for anything else.

The new other way feature films, which are successfully happening in Tokyo, Berlin, and London, for example, and we could learn from these models.

It’s really inspiring. But there are problems with independent producers in Australia. Basically there are very few who have talent and enough courage to go out and search for those alternative means. That’s a real vacuum in Australia.

Why is that?

I think the luxury of 10BA spoiled people enormously, and gave them a false notion of what their abilities are. There are very few producers in Australia in the area we’re talking about, with the talent and determination to go out and try. Basically I gave up a year-and-a-half ago with 10BA.

And you then turned to overseas?

Well, I had to. I had to find other ways to finance the films and you have to take your life in your own hands, be responsible for yourself.

And overseas was always there.

It’s always been there and the opportunities have always been there.

Do you feel you’ve broken out of an isolation, imaginatively and financially?

Yes, I think of myself as being very lucky, and luck is a big part of it, not always insightful strategic thinking.

Is this going to be the future pattern as far as your films are concerned?

Indeed. Isabelle Eberhardt – The Oblivion Seeker will be done through three production companies. Les Films Armas in Paris who make, Seco Films in Melbourne, and Roadmovies, Berlin, and the financing and distribution link-up is being handled by August Entertainments based in London and Los Angeles. August Entertainments are the hub for putting the whole deal together.

In Australia I think we’re at a very interesting stage with the FFC. There is the opportunity to take advantage of what it’s offering, and it’s a matter of imagination on the part of producers and directors who want to get their films made. You can work out a formula, I’m sure, with what has been set up there, to make ‘difficult’ films. There will always be a negative comments because there’s a pervasive, cynical attitude in the industry about any Government body, but I really believe the chance is there if you take it. It’s a matter of coming up with that speculative part of the investment to access the funds. It’s how you put the components of the script together as a package, and those calculations have to be done very early in the project.

This is the material reality... you have to do your homework. You have to get out there and find people who are interested in the script. There are distributors and financiers who will give you money if you shake them up enough.

Do you see a lot of that work being done overseas or within Australia?

It’s not easy within Australia. You need funds to get out on the road, but if you’re prepared to live on the smell of an oil rag, you’ll find a way.

**FILMOGRAPHY**

**Films**

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We choose to fly Australian
**BOYS IN THE ISLAND**

There is a certain amount of daring attached to *The Boys in the Island*: a tenacious producer who convinces the film’s investors to ‘go on’ after the distributor pulls out; a director given a break on his first feature when the industry is in a lull; a highly-regarded novelist who, disillusioned with the screen interpretation of one of his books, won’t risk it again and begins work on his own script; a cast of young unknowns; and a highly experienced and worldly English actor brought in to keep this newly-discovered ‘brat pack’ cast in line.

The feature has been completed in time for Cannes. One of the more interested parties at the film’s premiere will be the Australian Film Commission, which has continued to back the film through its long and turbulent history.

*The Boys in the Island* began its life as a series of poems and was expanded into a novel and published in 1958. Its author, Christopher Koch, was 23 when it was completed – it was his first novel. Since then it has been trimmed and tightened and reissued by publishers Angus & Robertson. “The shape of *The Boys in the Island* should now finally be clear,” Koch wrote in 1986.

But there were others eager to see it emerge in another form. Gillian Armstrong, eager to develop the novel for the cinema, approached Koch, but, when an offer to direct *Mrs Soffel* in the US came, the idea was dropped. Koch hadn’t imagined *Boys* as a feature film, but the idea had been planted: he decided to try to develop it on his own. Bitterness about his experience with investors, however, decided at an extraordinary meeting in 1988 to continue the project through.

Collaborating with scriptwriter and friend Tony Morphett, the two writers convinced Carl Schultz (*Travelling North, Careful He Might Hear You*) and producer Jane Scott (*Crocodile Dundee* line producer, *Crocodile Dundee II* co-producer, *Goodbye Paradise, On Loan*) to join the team.

The prospectus, under 108A, came out in 1987. Antony I. Ginnane had become involved as executive producer and, through his company International Film Management Limited (IFML), the Anglo-American distribution company Hemdale was added to the credits.

“The short version,” says Jane Scott, “is that it floundered.” Hemdale pulled out of the deal, as it did with other films on the IFML slate. The investors, however, decided at an extraordinary meeting in 1988 to continue with the production of *Boys*, even though it didn’t have a distributor, and IFML was removed.

At this stage Koch and Morphett were on their sixth or seventh draft and it finally appeared that the production was coming together. But then Schultz was unavailable. “After two years, I think he had mentally shot the film,” says Scott. He was in the US shooting *The Seventh Sign*.

Four weeks before pre-production, director Geoffrey Bennett was called in. A film school graduate, his credits included a children’s telefeature, *On Loan* (one of the *Winners* series), a documentary for Channel 9 on the motorcycle hero Wayne Gardner, and numerous music videos.

The story he was given seemed more than appropriate. “It’s a rites of passage film,” says Bennett. “But it’s also about dreams and fantasies, and how dreams and reality get in the way of each other.”

*The Boys in the Island* is set in the 1950s, beginning in rural Tasmania and shifting to mainland Melbourne. It traces the life of one boy, Frank, who dreams not simply of the mainland, but of an ‘Otherland’, that “had no name and was no place that could be explained”.

Koch suggests that the theme of a provincial boy moving to the ‘big smoke’ is more a part of the American literary tradition than the Australian one, but admits that there are autobiographical elements in Frank’s story. “You write about your own experience. I grew up in Tasmania: I went to Melbourne: I was following dreams.

“But I didn’t want to write about an artist or a writer. Frank is an ordinary boy – he has no particular talent. My theory is that ordinary people have the most marvellous dreams, although this extraordinary dream life is not necessarily expressed.”

Inevitably the dreams of Frank (Yves Stening) and his mates (Joseph Clements, Daniel Pollock and Daniel Heath) become nightmares. They enter the world of Keeva (Jane Stephens) a siren who seduces and outwits them all, and George (James Fox), the streetwise crook.

Says Bennett: “It has elements of a film like *The Year My Voice Broke* because it is a film about growing up. It’s set in the country; it’s golden, romantic and beautiful. But it does a strange thing. It goes into film noir; it becomes a Fifties-style gangster film. That’s where it goes off the edge, which is what I loved about it.

“Even though it’s set in the Fifties it has a very modern feel. These kids are like young punks of the Fifties really. It seems very modern, and it was shot that way too. In a film noir way...” But, he is quick to add, “it doesn’t look like a film clip – the cuts are not that quick!” (He and DOP Andrew Lesnie have done several music videos together.)

The producer, director and writers agreed that *The Boys in the Island* should be “jam-packed with music” and feel it is integral to the telling of the story: it starts with country and western, picks up on jazz and rock ’n’ roll, drawn together by Sharon Calcraft’s musical score.
An initiative of the State Film Centre of Victoria to ensure a host of high quality videos reach a wider audience through the public library networks of Australia.

The Video In Libraries Project aims to make available from libraries socially and culturally important videos not normally on offer in commercial video outlets. The project is now operating in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, so this year more public libraries than ever before are purchasing videos for their collections.

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Two New Zealand projects now in production: Meet the Feebles, a comedy about a dog which may or may not hold the secret to everlasting life, is due to start shooting in May. Producer Robin Laing will be in Cannes to discuss presales.

Barry Barclay, director of Ngati, has a project in development, Te Rau, which is a political thriller about Maori terrorists in Berlin. Producers John O'Shea and Craig Walter will be at Cannes.

Hard Road, a drama about two World War I conscientious objectors, to be directed by Yvonne McKay, will be represented at the festival by producer Dave Gibson. Also in development is The Returns, a supernatural thriller. Producers Trisha Downie and John Day will be in Cannes to discuss presales.

While it is generally hard to satisfy a novelist, Koch appears to be pleased with the casting of the lead actors, particularly Yves Stening as Frank. Jane Scott laughs off the suggestion that she has a brat pack on her hands. "There were two New Zealand projects now in production: Meet the Feebles, which is Zilch's action comedy directed by Richard Riddiford. Michael Mizrahi plays a telephone operator with a penchant for listening to other people's conversations, and Lucy Sheehan is a woman with a bizarre other life.

There are two New Zealand projects now in production: Meet the Feebles, the second feature from Peter Jackson, is a behind the scenes expose of a splutter revue company. Producer Jim Booth will also be looking for interest in Jackson's forthcoming Brain Dead, in which a houseful of zombies wreak havoc on a happy home.

Martyn Sanderson's Flying Fox in a Freedom Tree, based on Albert Wendt's story about a young Samoan making a drastic adaptation to Western civilization, is also in production.

Gregor Nicholas's User Friendly, a comedy about a dog which may or may not hold the secret to everlasting life, is due to start shooting in May. Producer Robin Stark will be representing it at the festival.

International sales of those projects will be handled by the NZFC. New Zealand-born Jane Campion, whose first feature, Sweetie, is in competition this year, will start shooting To the Is-land in New Zealand in August. Based on Janet Frame's autobiographical trilogy, the project will be made as a mini-series and will also be available as 15-minute theatrical feature. Producer Bridget McCann will be at Cannes to discuss the project's theatrical potential, and the NZFC will handle international theatrical sales. Britain's Channel 4 will look after European TV sales, and TVNZ will handle TV sales in Asia (excluding Japan) and the Middle East.

Gaylene Preston's Ruby and Rata is now in pre-production and will start shooting in October. It tells the story of two women, one young and one old, who compete for the attention of nine-year-old Willie, who starts fires. Producer Robin Laing will be in Cannes to discuss presales.

Barry Barclay, director of Ngati, has a project in development, Te Rau, which is a political thriller about Maori terrorists in Berlin. Producers John O'Shea and Craig Walter will be at Cannes.

Hard Road, a drama about two World War I conscientious objectors, to be directed by Yvonne McKay, will be represented at the festival by producer Dave Gibson. Also in development is The Returns, a supernatural thriller. Producers Trisha Downie and John Day will be in Cannes to discuss presales.
Local Feature Film Production slumped dramatically (24 in the last calendar year compared with 44 in 1987). This trend is partly a reaction to the demise of the 10BA tax concessions as producers and investors awaited the opening of the newly formed Australian Film Finance Corporation. Telefeature production is down, with many projects serving as pilots for potential series (e.g. Raw Silk, Chances). The mini-series continues to be a growth area with a total of 16 produced in 1988 (12 in 1987) helped by a large injection of overseas investment in the form of pre-sales and/or co-production deals.

Paul Harris
Budget figures have been supplied to Cinema Papers by the producers. Where the producers did not want budgets published, those productions are marked N/A in the budget column. In most cases budgets were supplied 'off the record', enabling the accurate computing of overall figures and averages.

**Features**

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<th>BUDGET AND PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Against the Current (Film Art Doco; Richard Jones; Daryl Dellora, Jenny Hocking; Daryl Dellora)</td>
<td>$131,000 Nov.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blowing Hot and Cold (Colosimo Film Productions Pty Ltd; Rosa Colosimo; Rosa Colosimo, Reg Mc Lean; Marc Gracie)</td>
<td>N/A March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celia (Sean Film Productions (Australia); Timothy White, Gordon Glenn; Ann Turner; Ann Turner)</td>
<td>$1.4 million January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinderella's Secret (working title) (Yoram Gross Film Studios; Yoram Gross; Yoram Gross, Leonard Lee; Yoram Gross)</td>
<td>N/A March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close and Closer Apart (Colosimo Film Production Pty Ltd; Rosa Colosimo; Angelo Salvamona; Steve Middleton)</td>
<td>N/A August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dot in Space (working title) (Philip Emanuel Productions; David Douglas; Henry Tefey, Kee Young, Arch Nicholson)</td>
<td>N/A August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerald City (Limeight Productions; Joan Long; David Williamson; Michael Jenkins)</td>
<td>N/A June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia (Jehro Films; Bob Weis; Bob Weis, Ben Lewis, Joanna Murray-Smith; Ben Lewis)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island (Illumination Films; Paul Cox, Santhana Naidi; Paul Cox; Paul Cox)</td>
<td>$2 million N. Nov.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jigsaw (Colosimo Film Productions Pty Ltd; Rosa Colosimo; Marc Gracie, Chris Thompson; Marc Gracie)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koloko Crescent (Phillip Emanuel Productions Ltd; Phillip Emanuel; Patrick Cook; Ted Robinson)</td>
<td>$2 million March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luci's Ladders (Tea La La Films; Patrick Jullett; Jennifer Claire, Wendy Hughes, Judy Morris, Randal Allen; Judy Morris)</td>
<td>$2,825,000 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phobia (ID Productions; John Mandelson; John Dingwall; John Dingwall)</td>
<td>N/A February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Punisher (New World Pictures [Australia]; Robert Kamen; Robert Kamen; Mark Goldblatt)</td>
<td>$12 million August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salute of the Jugger (Handsom Investments Pty Ltd/Kamisha Corporation Ltd; Charles Raven; David Webb Peoples; David Webb Peoples)</td>
<td>$10 million August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Love of a Story (Channel Nine Network; Steve Krantz Prods [US]; Moya Iceton)</td>
<td>N/A September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Voyage (Spectator Films/Samson Productions; Tamara Asevev, Sue Milliken; Robert Collins; Robert Collins)</td>
<td>$425,000 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>Things and All That Stuff (Prodym Ltd; Michael Lynch; Anthony Wellington; Anthony Wellington)</td>
<td>N/A January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicious (David Hannay Productions Pty Ltd; David Hannay; Charles Hanham; Karl Zwicky, Paul Hogan; Karl Zwicky)</td>
<td>$3,350,000 August</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Prisoner of St Petersburg (Seon Film Productions/Panorama Films; David Scharf, Klaus Singer; Ian Pringle, Michael Wren; Ian Pringle)</td>
<td>$330,000 June</td>
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**Telefeatures**

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<tr>
<td>Bedlands 2005 (Hrots Productions/Columbia Pictures; Brian Rosen; Reuben Leder; George Miller)</td>
<td>N/A February</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barracuda (Amalgamated Barracuda; Barbara Gibbs; Philip Ryall; Keith Thompson; Pino Amenta)</td>
<td>N/A February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasers (Beyond International Group; Mark De Fries; David Phillips; Mike Smith)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Invader (Hrots Productions/Tri-Star International; John Ashby; Frank Lupo; Richard Colla)</td>
<td>N/A February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Voyage (Spector Films/Samson Productions; Tamara Asevev, Sue Milliken; Robert Collins; Robert Collins)</td>
<td>N/A September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice (Film Australia Pty Ltd; Pamela Williams; Pamela Williams; Ian Munro)</td>
<td>$400,000 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw Silk (Television House; John Young; Keith Aberdeen; Greg Dee)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue (ABC; John Edwards; Everett de Roche; Peter Fisk)</td>
<td>$100,000 October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senseret Street (Harvey Michaels Productions; Harvey Michaels; David Cummings; Brian Phillips)</td>
<td>$300,000 March</td>
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**Mini-series**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Act of Betrayal (ABC-Griffin Productions-TVS/Ray Alchin; Nick Evans; Nick Evans, Michael Chaplin; Laurence Gordon Clark)</td>
<td>$5 million February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Australian Bread (Mystihill Pty Ltd/Roadshow Coote &amp; Carroll/Amalgamated Portman Pros [UK]; Harley Manners; —)</td>
<td>$4 million February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barlow and Chauvelers — A Long Way from Home (Roadshow Coote and Carroll/Steve Krantz Pros [US] Moya Iceton; Bill Kerby; Jerry London)</td>
<td>N/A March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Surfer (John Sexton Productions [ABC]; Ross Mathews; Suzanne Hawley, Chris Lee, Denis Whibber; Ian Barry)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dangerous Life (Ayer Productions; Hal McEvoy; David Williamson; Robert Markowitz)</td>
<td>$5.5 million March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denizens of the Gods (Simpson Le Messurer/ABC/Eston Films; Roger Le Messurer, Roger Simpson; Graeme Farmer; Catherine Millar)</td>
<td>$3.9 million October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edens Last (Margaret Pink Films Pty Ltd/ABC Central Independent TV; Margaret Pink, Michael Gow; Neil Armitage)</td>
<td>N/A February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fields of Fire III (Palm Beach Pictures; David Ellick; Irene Korol; Patricia Johnson; David Ellick)</td>
<td>N/A September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four-Minute Mile (ABC/BBC/CB Seven Productions/Centre Films; Errol Sullivan, Pom Oliver; David Williamson; Jim Goddard)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four (TVS Films; Anthony Buckley; Peter Yeldham; Donald Cronin)</td>
<td>$4,180,000 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naked Under Capricorn (Resolution Films; Ray Alchin; Peter Yeldham; Rob Stewart)</td>
<td>N/A November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rainbow Warrior Conspiracy (Golden Dolphin Productions; Robert J. Loader; David Phillips; Chris Thomson)</td>
<td>N/A September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realms of Gold (Television [Cardiff] Kergeroff; Terry Oilsen; Howard Griffiths; Paul Turner)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow of the Cobra (View Films Pty Ltd; Ben Cannon; Michael Lawrence, Scott Robert; Mark Joffe)</td>
<td>$7,150,000 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannameran Lion of Singapore (Grundy Motion Pictures / Central Independent Television [UK]; Jon Bladier, David Lee; Peter Gibbs; John Power, Kevin Dobson)</td>
<td>N/A May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Man, This Woman (Crawford Australia ABC; Graham Moore; Terry Stapleton; Paul Moloney)</td>
<td>N/A October</td>
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SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL COMMENTARY, OR A PERVERSE WALLOW IN MINDLESS, SLEAZY SWILL?

A HISTORY AND GUIDE, FEATURING THE MOST NOTABLE OF THE FAN MAGAZINES THAT (SOMETIMES) COLLOUREDLY AND (ALWAYS) DEVOLODLY COVER EXPLOITATION CINEMA...
N 1971 I emerged from a primary school excursion to a newly opened suburban public library with three important objects. Besides one of these first tangible pieces of film and content, I also took home two books which proved to be very influential at this formative stage. They can be a similar aid to this guide and partial history of fan and underground writings on exploitation cinema.

"Contrary to the lies of the establishment media, the underground press didn't die like a fad at the close of the Sixties, in fact, it grew like a monster, covering a wider range of subject matter than ever before..."" JOHNS HOLMSTROM

Playpower was largely disowned by its author Richard Neville after he co-authored a biography in the late Seventies on multiple murderer Charles Sobhraj — the book actively encouraged young Westerners to travel the Asian byways and hilly trails of the East where Sobhraj operated. Despite this, it still retains great value because of its straightforward documentation and its descriptive insights into the mechanics of the underground press. In a chapter entitled "The Guerilla Press" Neville states, "The underground press is a goldmine (or gravel pit) of news and opinion that can never find its way into straight media because it transcends the self-imposed bounds of good taste or infringes covenants of libel, blasphemy, obscenity, sedition or veracity." 1

Almost two decades later this observation is still relevant to the present state of the underground, alternative, independent, fan or guerilla press — whatever term you prefer. In a recent article that chronicles this situation, journalist John Holmstrom writes, "Contrary to the lies of the establishment media, the underground press didn't die like a fad at the close of the Sixties, In fact, it grew like a monster, covering a wider range of subject matter than ever before. " 2 If anything Holmstrom is perhaps slightly understating the current size and diversity of the underground press. This becomes apparent if one compares the writings on film and, more importantly, video. Typically, Holmstrom keeps the focus of his article on music-based publications, but now even his music is more accessible than ever. In fact, it grew like a monster, covering a wider range of subject matter than ever before. Still retains great value because of its straight documentation and its description of the mechanics of the underground press. In a chapter entitled "The Guerilla Press" Neville states, "The underground press is a goldmine (or gravel pit) of news and opinion that can never find its way into straight media because it transcends the self-imposed bounds of good taste or infringes covenants of libel, blasphemy, obscenity, sedition or veracity." 1

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in the most graphic scenes of celluloid violence - immediately directions seemed unclear for the first few years. Only a strong editor-stylistic stance against censorship and the ability to print colour stills depicting magazine. Under the banner of "Monsters, Aliens and Bizarre Creatures" its differentiated it from any previous horror film publication. Slowly it came together to give coverage to the slew of films, produced by major Hollywood perpetually. Horror production under the same title. Prior to this its creator and publisher Frederick S. Clarke had been the editor for one issue of the even lesser known Garden Ghouls Gazette. When Cinefantastique, the offset-printed version, first saw the light of day in 1970 it appeared in a form similar to that of Photon but with a stated commitment and intent to cover the wider field of 'fantastic' cinema. Clarke included the then other popular generic area of science fiction. That flexible editorial policy allowed Cinefantastique to navigate the relatively barren horror era of the mid-1970s and to ride the wave of success and popularity created by Star Wars, which in turn led to its establishment as the completely professional (albeit soulless) magazine that it is today. Still, its earlier fan-produced editions did provide some passionate and articulate writings that included one particular freewheeling interview with the director of Night of the Living Dead, George A. Romero, when more mainstream film publications were still reeling from the film

The Monster Times, which was a professional bi-monthly tabloid newspaper from its inception in 1972, was perhaps a little ahead of its time. Its understanding and feeling for all areas of popular culture saw it mix comic art with film and TV coverage of all levels and generic types in a way that didn't parallel any particular common denominator except for that which could only be described as the general appreciation of trash culture. It took many people to the work of Herschell Gordon Lewis (in an article later re-hashed in Fangoria) and unfortunately only had a short life-span of four years.

As is usually the case, the volume of film culture items - and I'm including both professionally produced magazines and the more cheaply manufactured fanzines here - will only reflect the film product on the market at any given time. So with the commercial success of Star Wars in 1977, followed by Close Encounters of the Third Kind, the production of horror films on a large scale was temporarily displaced and suddenly the number of science fiction based publications aimed at a mass market increased dramatically. Magazines such as Starlog, Fantastic Films, Questor and the British production of the Marvel Comics Group's Starburst all came into being between 1976 and 1979. With the exception of The House of Hammer and the perennial Famous Monsters of Filmland (which gave a lot of space to science fiction during this time) only a few one-off and very dedicated fan publications remained devoted to the horror genre.

However, with the release of Halloween in 1978 and Friday the 13th in 1980 a new group of horror film fans emerged. Recent developments in quick reproduction technology (photocopiers) - at first utilized by a different yet unrelated sub-culture movement, the fans of punk - made available a form in which opinions, artwork and graphics could be presented and exchanged. Another development in technology - the video cassette recorder - was to have a great effect on certain areas of film culture from the early 1980s onwards, but not before the launch of yet another horror film magazine attempting to gain a wide audience.

Fangoria, or Fantasticus as it was originally titled, came into being late in 1979 as a sister publication to Starlog and the real science-based Future magazine. Under the banner of "Monsters, Aliens and Bizarre Creatures" its immediate directions seemed unclear for the first few years. Only a strong editor-stylistic stance against censorship and the ability to print colour stills depicting the most graphic scenes of celluloid violence - that it prided itself on - really differentiated it from any previous horror film publication. Slowly it came together to give coverage to the slew of films, produced by major Hollywood studios and selected independents, which employed protheses and other advances in make-up and special effects design. Its icons became special effects technicians and the handful of contemporary directors who found fame within the horror genre. Its nostalgia for older horror films never stretched beyond the 1950s movie monsters, with the exceptions of former film producer Alex Gordon's regular column. It did finally manage to raise the concerns of some parentale groups but only long after its original editor left it and then it became a relatively innocuous collection of recycled publicity material.

In marked contrast to Fangoria and to just about any film-based publications that had gone before it were these three fanzines that would each shape and influence the underbelly of film culture for years to come began production in 1980. Bill Landis's Sleazoid Express began as his single-page typed newsletter that documented the screenings in one of the world's seediest clusters of cinemas on New York's 42nd Street. In the beginning Landis was quite prepared to report on the myriad horror films that played around town and to utilize the newsletter approach to advertise and support the screening of films he organized in places like Club S at and the Mudd Club. But he quickly grew bored with horror and the films he screened such as Radley Metzger's The Lickerish Quartet and The Laughing Woman gave an indication of the direction Sleazoid Express would take. By the time it had increased the number of pages in 1983 Landis saw fit to eloquently denounce what were perceived by gore fans to be highwater marks in early Eighties cinema. Under the heading "Exploitation Cancer," Landis wrote: "Evil Dead is just the latest model in the invasion of exploitation by a nerd-brained, stamp collector mentality which has particularly involved itself in gore.

'Obsession with special effects, blockheadedly judging laughability without comprehending its aesthetic basis and praising gore for gore's sake are all examples of this. It's like these type of fans are now picking up cameras. Raimi and Frank Hennenlotter certainly fall in this category. Hennenlotter's Basket Case is an appallingly overpraised, self-consciously low budget, 16mm blow-up horror movie about a young man's freakish Siamese twin murdering the doctors that separated them. The amateurism of this production is as uninteresting as it is inauthentic throughout, from its unknown cast to its lumberingly calculated gore scenes to its cutesy monster movie concept of an 'original' plot.'

In an article about fanzines that was published in Film Comment in 1985 Jack Barth praised the work of Landis and placed Sleazoid Express on the top of his list of recommendations. Landis eventually teamed up with Jimmy McDonough to further document the porn industry and its patrons participants and creators. Later issues of Sleazoid Express were presented in an offset printed tabloid version. Combining some of the wildest and mostly unbelievable advertising materials available with lucid and always intelligent commentators Sleazoid Express was/is one of the most vital pieces of work to ever tackle the subject of pornography. Like many of the porn cinemas of 'The Deuce', however, Sleazoid Express also seems to have faded away.

Rick Sullivan's Gore Gazette immediately made a place for itself amongst a local and international network of sleaze film enthusiasts. Now, nearly 10 years later, this three page photostat production hasn't had to alter its look or style to keep those subscription cheques rolling in. Basically the Gore Gazette is, as it proclaims, a guide to Horror, Exploitation and Sleaze in the New York area. Writing deftly at a pace that matches many of the gore and action films he revels in, Sullivan is not beyond taking time out to lament the closure of local flea-pits - even exhorting his readers to only use their VCRs for rare stuff and to go out and attend the ageing and ever diminishing number of grindhouses of the inner city. Every Gore Gazette contains on average 12 brisk reviews of mainstream and less commercial fare. All are each
imbued with a feel for and encyclopedic knowledge of the genre that often makes them more entertaining than the films themselves.

Many fanzines exist to fill gaps in areas of film culture that are left untouched by mainstream critics and even some supposedly specialist film publications. Arguably, perhaps none does it more comprehensively than Michael Weldon’s Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film. It is not a fanzine, but a book that is very much the product of work on a fanzine and as such contains the credits and synopses for over 3,000 films that you are likely to encounter, but unlikely to find in Hallwell’s Film Guide or Leonard Maltin’s latest reference work. Originally Psychotronic was a hand-let-tered, 24-page photostat fanzine principally designed as a weekly guide to films of all types that were being dumped by New York TV stations. After 53 issues Weldon dropped the fanzine to work on the book. Just recently Weldon has refreshed with a new 48-page magazine that takes in many aspects of trash culture and is called Psychotronic Video.

There has been an explosion in the production of exploitation film fanzines over the past few years. So many have come into existence that it would be impossible to list them all at any length. What follows then is a rather biased but current listing of the more interesting, informative and/or important ones that I have actually sighted. There is also a secondary listing of contact addresses for the ones with small circulations that you aren’t likely to come across down at the local 7-11.

As its title suggests, Deep Red is single-minded about its cinematic tastes. Produced in Hollywood but published in New York by Fantaco Enterprises Inc., Deep Red has come a long way since its first issue in December 1987. Under its editor—author, artist and unabashed gorehound Chas. Balun—Deep Red has developed into a showcase for the writing and artistic talents of many horror film fans worldwide. With a keen interest in fostering an international ‘blood brotherhood’, good distribution, gory full-colour covers and an ability to report on films even Fangoria wouldn’t handle, Deep Red has become a powerful voice. Across the Atlantic, a 16-page magazine called Shock X-Press emerged from London in 1985 to announce, “If you want semiotic analyses of the latest big horror movies, look elsewhere.” and promptly began its investigation into exploitation cinema. It soon expanded to 36 pages and has managed to attract a stable of writers that includes some of the more established professionals alongside editors of some of the world’s better fanzines. This set has been joined by a number of writers unmatched by few other publications of its type. Its location has also allowed it to make interesting explorations into the work of more obscure European filmmakers. Recent issues have included features on Jorg Buttgerit (the maker of Nekromantik), Joey D’Amato, Anthony Balch, Ricardo Freda, Larry Buchanan and The Faces of Death series.

Samhain is another magazine from England. Launched in November 1986, Samhain offers news, reviews, a regular fanzine column, a free collectors’ market and features on some of the more well-known faces and makers of horror. Samhain has also demonstrated progress in its production standards, is published bi-monthly, and has recently included articles on Hammer films, Screaming Lord Sutch and a large checklist of Italian filmmakers’ pseudonyms. Subversion is the name of the game with two publications. The first, Film Threat, the magazine for the jaded moviegoer, doesn’t restrict itself to horror though it features a regular horror film review column. Instead, it presents a wider cultural perspective, fitting in everything from the Cinema of Transgression to Jello Biafra between its slick covers. Utilizing techniques like the reproduction of letters as they were written, turning letters into art, using punkine layouts, Film Threat’s editor Christian Gore assembles it all with an attitude that confronts perceptions of what a magazine could be. Film Threat is really out there on the cutting edge.

Much the same can be said for Pandemonium, which is put out by writer Jack Stevenson, also a regular contributor to Film Threat. Originally he put out a one-sheet newsletter called Psycho Splatter that besides including a few reviews of mainstream horror films seemed more like an excuse to print, in sequence, an interview he had conducted with John Waters. In 1985 he packaged that interview, along with one with Al Goldstein (editor of Screw) and correspondence from William Burroughs, Charles Bukowski and others, and published it all under the title of Pandemonium. This project, only intended as a one-shot, grew legs, and soon Pandemonium 2 (The Cult film, Killers and Attempted Assassins issue) appeared. Described by Stevenson as “an experiment in fanzine making that involved part punk, part public school, part carnival sideshow”, it included original correspondence with German filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim, as well as Charles Manson, John Wayne Gacy and John Hinkley Jr. It also has interviews with Divine, Mick Stolle and other members of the John Waters stock company.

Subhuman is a small, folded A4 photostat fanzine of 16 pages that is put together by the husband and wife team of Diana and David Doyle. It presents itself as a fanzine on video and video culture but perhaps ‘eclectic’ would be more fitting. Since 1986 Subhuman has unearthed some of the most interesting writings on trash culture that go a long way towards undoing the narrow implications of that term. Some notable articles have included ‘Films by Women’, which compares Diane Keaton’s Heaven to Shaking Asia, an in-depth interview with a porn cinematographer, a piece on the Mr Ed fan club, an article on James Bond-related porn films and many reviews of films and videos wrapped in some of the most eye-catching graphs. Small press fanzines rely heavily on video, especially the more obscure ones that tend to spend more of their time in the dust on video shop shelves. Two of the best examples of this type of fanzine are Eco and Hi-Tech Terror, Eco, produced by a team of two, provides a rundown on recent releases but also devotes its A3 zine to a central theme. The latest issue, in America of war propaganda documents gave much material for a string of issues in this particularly well-written and handsomely presented zine. Hi-Tech Terror is a small, folded A4 zine of two pages that echoes graphics but, like Subhuman, has collected a large coterie of writers as it continues its relentless search for obscure horror videos. Titles they have reviewed include A Polish Vampire in Burbank, Crazy Fat Ethel 2, The Freak Maker, Gore-Met: Zombie Chief from Hell, Horror Rises from the Tomb, Sometimes Aunt Martha Does Dreadful Things, and over 200 others in nearly 40 issues.

So far I have only spoken of American and English publications, but Australia has several fanzines in operation at the moment. Crimson Celluloid is Australia’s longest-running horror film fanzine. It began as a one-sheet giveaway newsletter in 1985 and since then has been through a number of incarnations. In May 1988 it appeared in a slick, offset-printed digest edition in order to increase its circulation beyond the handful of specialist bookstores and independent record shops willing to sell a fanzine. By the time you read this Crimson Celluloid will be on the streets again with its biggest edition yet, which will include interviews with Roberta Findlay and the maker of I Spit on Your Grave, Meiz Zarchi.

Mondo Gore comes from Queensland, and is a stapled A4 three-sheet photostat production. It is basically a review zine that devotes its space to all the cinema and video releases that actually make it past the Queensland Board of Review, which goes a long way towards explaining its size. Mondo Gore also incorporates a music component, and is available free of charge.

Fatal Visions is my idea of accurately and comprehensively documenting violent media and trash culture in Melbourne. It is 28 pages long and appears on a quarterly basis.

Lastly, there is SlimeTime from New York. This eight-page, A4 review zine is one of the most consistently entertaining and informative you could find. Its editor, Steve Pichucki, says that "unlike a lot of today’s fanzines, SlimeTime doesn’t try to appeal to only one specific group of moviegoers. We cover a wide cross-section from the past and present: from Herschell Gordon Lewis and Inishiro Honda to Nicolas Roeg and Russ Meyer. SlimeTime can be taken as a twisted sociological commentary on the underbelly of American entertainment, or a humorous li’l rag that wallows in mindless, sleazy swill. It all depends on the tastes of the reader.”

A LIST OF CONTACT ADDRESSES:

**A TASTE OF BILE** P.O. Box 7150, Waco, TX 76711-7150, USA.
**CRIMSON CELLOID** 113 Great North Rd, Fire Fox Enterprises, Australia 3046.
**DRAGUINULA** P.O. Box 115, More, IL 62067, U.S.A.
**ECO** P.O. Box 65742, Washington, D.C. 20035, U.S.A.
**FATAL VISIONS** P.O. Box 138, Northcote, Australia 3070.
**GORE GAZETTE** 469 Hazel St, Clifton NJ 07011, U.S.A.
**GRIND PORN** P.O. Box 32, Berkeley, CA 94707, U.S.A.
**H.T.H.E.C.** P.O. Box 13, Sydney, Australia 2003.
**I SPIT** P.O. Box 2396 Bermondre, Box Hill North, Australia.
**SLAMMAGNULARIA** 171 Auburn St., Melbourne, Australia 3001.
**SPLATTER** 296 Belmore Rd., Box Hill North, Australia.
**TV DISASTER** P.O. Box 36, Old Bridge, NJ 08857, U.S.A.
**UNHAPPY STREET** 20035, Washington, D.C. 20035, U.S.A.
**VIOLENT LEISURE** 220035, Washington, D.C. 20035, U.S.A.

NOTES

3. See also Douglas, Drake, Horror, Macmillan, New York, 1966. It is also interesting to note that the French with their rabid post WW II film culture were more on top of things and influential in the sphere of exploitation cinema culture than other peoples. See Braun, Mary C., ‘Pandemonium: Film Culture and art’ in Jane F. Campion, Sydney, 1985, pp. 121-130.
American screenwriter Frank Pierson, whose credits include CAT BALLOU, COOL HAND LUKE and DOG DAY AFTERNOON, is an endless source of anecdotes, opinions, advice and warnings on the subject of writing screenplays. DOG DAY AFTERNOON, which was directed by Sidney Lumet and starred Al Pacino, John Cazale and Chris Sarandon, is a script which clearly demonstrates his approach to the craft. Based on the story of John Wojtowicz, who held up a New York Chase Manhattan Bank to try to get the funds to give his lover a sex change, the film showed how a bungled bank job and a bungled life became a media spectacle attended by television cameras and thousands of onlookers. For Pierson the film meant headaches, research, rewrites, fast talking, fast writing, and an Academy Award.

GETTING THE PROJECT

PATRICK MAHER: How did you come to write Dog Day Afternoon?
FRANK PIERSON: Al Pacino's agents noticed that the guy who did it looked like Al Pacino. They went to John Wojtowicz in prison and made an agreement with him whereby Warner Brothers would pay him $7,500 plus a percentage of the film to be agreed upon later. $7,500 was the price of a sex change operation in New York City at that time. The money was paid to him and he instantly gave it to Leon, (Chris Sarandon in the movie) who became Liz Eadon, courtesy of Warner Brothers. Warner Brothers put up the money to hire a screenwriter. They came to me and asked me to write it. After Cool Hand Luke I guess I had a reputation as a writer of hard-nosed action, more than anything else. A criminal mind! I read the material and said, "Yes, there is a movie in this."

RESEARCH

How extensive was the research you had to do?
I had the benefit of literally weeks of tapes and research material that had already been done before. All I had to do was sit there and digest it. I went back and reinterviewed most of the key people. After that I could interpret what I...
I was hearing on the tapes, or seeing on the transcripts much more easily because whether they were kind of angry and threatening or whatever. Once I have got hold of the characters in my mind and I can understand the general shape of the story, that’s where I start.

I spent a lot of time with Leon, the homosexual wife in the story. He/she was one of the most hilariously obscene people I think I have ever met in my life. He was as a man, is now as a woman, the kind of person who cannot ask for a cigarette without putting some obscene spin on the question. In the original writing I used a lot of that material.

WRITING

By now, having all the interviews and re-interviews and all the research material, tapes and paper work in hand – which weighed 65 or 70 pounds altogether – I got seriously down to the business of writing the screenplay. I knew I was going to tell the story in the time span of the real event, so it would begin with the robbers coming into the bank, the robbing of the bank, and it would go right to the end at Kennedy Airport with Sal (John Cazale) being shot and Sonny being carted away, and going off to gool. So I wasn’t presented with what is usually my first writing decision, which is finding a first image, and finding my way to a final image that defines the difference between the two, which is the story.

GETTING TO KNOW THE CHARACTERS

Dog Day Afternoon is about a character, John Wojtowicz, who became the character we called Sonny in the picture. It became clear to me that I wanted to tell the story from his point of view, so I had to find some way of getting into it, so that we knew what it was that he was up to. It is important to understand what he is about and he is such a paradox it was very difficult to identify him as a character.

I never got to meet him, but all of his loved ones, especially those who were closest to him, gave an utterly different view of who Sonny was. They were all angry and irritated and disappointed with him in one way or another, but they all described him in different ways.

This confusion over the character began to freeze me up, I could not discover what drove the story or him. I didn’t know how to write him. I’ve got him in the bank and the policeman comes to the front door. How does he react to that situation? I need to know that before I can write the scene.

I resorted to the process which I have evolved for myself over the years for solving story problems, which is just simply to ask the simplest, most fundamental kinds of questions of the characters involved in the action. I literally make lists of questions to ask. Questions like, “What is going on here? Why? What is his mother that he is going to hold down a regular job. All these promises were made and all of them were violated.

I asked myself another simple question: “What is the nature of the promise or commitment that he makes to them?” In every case he was going to make a promise to people: to her that she wasn’t fat, to Leon that he was going to get a sex-change operation, the promise to his mother that he was going to hold down a regular job. All these promises were made and all of them were violated.

I then plotted out all of the action. I had already solved my principal character’s motivation problem, what he was going to be like, before I started writing the screenplay.

I eventually worked out about a 70-page outline for a screenplay that was going to be 115-120 pages. In that was contained every major scene that finally ended up in the picture, and an awful lot of stuff that did not.

I then plotted out all of the action. I had already solved my principal character’s motivation problem, what he was going to be like, before I started writing the screenplay.

I then decided that the path through his character was that he simply would refuse to recognize the reality of the situation. His way of following through on a wish of hers to be thin, was to simply deny she was fat, which was so unreal that she was unable to diet because that would be a violation of her insistence that she wasn’t fat in the first place, and so all that happened was she got fatter and fatter, and angrier and angrier. That’s where her sense of betrayal came from. I began to find that there was a similar strain in all of his other relationships. It was as though what was embodied in all of them was a promise. His form of loving was to make a promise to people: to her that she wasn’t fat, to Leon that he was going to get a sex-change operation, the promise to his mother that he was going to hold down a regular job. All these promises were made and all of them were violated.

I asked myself another simple question: “What is the nature of the promise or commitment that he makes to them?” In every case he was going to make a promise to people: to her that she wasn’t fat, to Leon that he was going to get a sex-change operation, the promise to his mother that he was going to hold down a regular job. All these promises were made and all of them were violated.

I realized finally it was the relationship they each had with him that was the common factor. In every case they loved John and he loved them. But that opened the way to perceive something else. Not only had all these people loved him at one time or another, but they all had a sense that they had been betrayed by him.

So now we are beginning to see what is in common amongst all those disparate statements, and I am beginning to ask myself, “Why? What happened in these relationships? Specifically, why does his heterosexual wife feel betrayed by him?”

I didn’t even have to go back and re-interview her, I found it in the interview that I conducted with her. She weighs about 300 lbs and somewhere buried in all this torrent of language she said, “He wouldn’t let me go on a diet because if I was going on a diet it was admitting that I was fat. And he said, ‘No you are not fat.’ And I said, ‘Johnny, I am fat. I am a fat, fat woman! Look at me, why can’t you accept that?’ He was saying, ‘You are not fat, it’s all right. I love you because you are really and truly a thin person, you are not fat. Don’t say you are fat.’”

For me to realize that the path through his character was that he simply would refuse to recognize the reality of the situation. His way of following through on a wish of hers to be thin, was to simply deny she was fat, which was so unreal that she was unable to diet because that would be a violation of her insistence that she wasn’t fat in the first place, and so all that happened was she got fatter and fatter, and angrier and angrier. That’s where her sense of betrayal came from. I began to find that there was a similar strain in all of his other relationships. It was as though what was embodied in all of them was a promise. His form of loving was to make a promise to people: to her that she wasn’t fat, to Leon that he was going to get a sex-change operation, the promise to his mother that he was going to hold down a regular job. All these promises were made and all of them were violated.

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What will he do? It is amazing how often even these kinds of aimless, arbitrary improvisations will evolve into something that goes straight into the script. Or, “What if he gets arrested for smoking grass at some friend’s apartment. Gradually that character will evolve his own story. He will tell his own story. It is management of time and information, because when we tell a story we know the ending but the audience must not, ever. You could look at the working out of a story or a screenplay as planning the leaking of information. You find out just a little bit more, and a little bit more all along the way.

FIRST DRAFT

When I start to write the first draft I forget about the outline. I try not to go back and look at it. In fact what I do is make an outline of the outline. What we call in the States, and maybe you have them here too, a ‘one-line’. It simply says, Scene 1, Sonny and Sal go into the bank. Scene 2, Sal goes to the bank manager. Scene 3 & 4 – just one line descriptions, the simplest things so that I don’t forget something and skip past it, because I like to write sequentially. Tom Rickman* and Alvin Sargent refuse to discuss screenwriting with me on this basis. They will go around and any day they feel funny or sad, look for a funny or sad thing to write that day. I can’t do that. I have to build it architecturally, however, if I go along. I like to ram through to the end of it as quickly as I can and not get hung up. Alvin and Tom will not walk away from a scene or a moment until they have got it as perfect as they can make it, until it is fully realized emotionally. I reach a point where I say, “I know something here has to happen, I know the crux of it is that ‘so-and-so’ says this to ‘so-and-so’, and that has to be done in this scene, but I can’t figure out how to do it now.” So I bypass that one and go onto the next scene. By the time I get to the end I have the information and feeling. I have learned so much more about my characters and my story and the world in which they are living is actually a man. So that is all mechanical plotting. That is what I do in the process of the whole outlining, getting those things in order. It is management of time and information, because when we tell a story we know the ending but the audience must not, ever.

WHEN WE TELL A STORY WE KNOW THE ENDING BUT THE AUDIENCE MUST NOT, EVER. YOU COULD LOOK AT THE WORKING OUT OF A STORY OR A SCREENPLAY AS PLANNING THE LEAKING OF INFORMATION. YOU LET OUT JUST A LITTLE BIT MORE, AND A LITTLE BIT MORE ALL THE WAY.

EXPERIENCE

While you are on that point of craft, do you find that experience takes forward your strategies from one project to the next project, so you are using similar strategies, or do you change from job to job?

Writing every screenplay is a different experience. In fact if there is anything that I have learned from a lifetime of experience is that somewhere along the line I will figure out how to write the screenplay. But the process of writing it is also finding the way to write it. Although I usually outline, sometimes I have worked without doing an outline first. None of these rules is absolutely hard and fast, but I do know one thing is constant and I have grown a little cleverer about executing it over the years, and that is to begin with knowing the character very well. Knowing just what he will do in every circumstance. Gradually that character will evolve his own story. He will tell his own story to me.

IMPROVISING CIRCUMSTANCES

Through these improvisations I put him into all kinds of circumstances he takes on definite form. If the worst comes to the worst, I can’t even think of what he is going to do in the bank that morning. I always write something. I put something in that computer. I will say, “How will this guy have a fight? What if he’s on a freeway and he honks his horn at somebody, and the guy runs him off the road and starts yelling at him. What would he do in that situation?” Or, “What if he gets arrested for smoking grass at some friend’s apartment. What will he do?” It is amazing how often even these kinds of aimless, arbitrary improvisations will evolve into something that goes straight into the script.

STANISLAVSKY APPLIED TO WRITING

If you have been involved in acting at all you will recognize that they are the equivalent of the Stanislavsky method, but it is simply applied to writing. This is what actors do, in exploring the ‘truth’ of the character, and finding a way. You improvise all kinds of scenes, in addition to the ones that are in the text that you are going to do. It is a way of getting in touch with the character and exploring the truth of it. In this instance you can go a step further and use it to actually let the story evolve out of that. All of a sudden some wonderful scene will happen in your mind.

Instead of trying think of the story as events, you can think of the character in improvised situations and you begin to see the character beginning to come to life and act out things that you just grab. It is not as though you are making it up, it is who the character is, acting it out for you. And the character is actually seeking his own resolution then? Exactly! Because the dramatic action is driven by the will of the character. The character has a will to do something, and he ‘does something’. We must always remember that these are texts to be performed. They are not a literary event that happens on the page. It is also significant that we call them ‘actors’. We don’t call them orators, or singers, or speakers, we call them ‘actors’. That’s what it is, acting. It is the action that we can photograph. It is the only thing you have to work with.

ALLOWING FOR SPONTANEITY

Do you find that after having written your outline, as you are writing your first draft that changes in some of your characters have taken place in your mind and that makes you write something quite different?

That’s why I write the one-line outline. So I can remind myself of the simple sequence of scenes and forget the detailed outline. The detailed outline is in my head somewhere, now I want to forget it and let the characters find their own way. All of a sudden they are in a scene and somebody says something that is totally unexpected. I didn’t know he was going to say that.

You suddenly realize that once that he said that back in the second act, it doesn’t work further on any more so you are going to have to take bits out and everything changes all the way through. You have to allow yourself to be free to make those changes and adjustments, that’s where the spontaneity of the story comes from. Otherwise you can plod through with one goddamn scene after another. Yeah, there are a lot of surprises along the way and you hope the audience is ready for that.

I finished the first draft which was much more than a first draft in the sense that it probably took me maybe three weeks to just ram through, skipping through things that I couldn’t think of, getting to the end of it, somehow.

AN ARTIST’S SKETCH – SELECTING AND REJECTING

Then you can breathe a sigh of relief and you look at it like an artist doing a sketch. It’s a little analogue to a painter’s first working of a canvas. Some parts of it are probably completely and some are not. The painter then works over it picking bits out here and there for attention. You go back over it and change things, change colours and so on.

By the time I get the first draft in a condition to show to anybody it is probably more like the fourth or fifth draft, or the fourth or fifth time I had put it through the computer starting with page one and going straight on through four or five times at the very least, and each time you get faster and faster, and more things are discovered. You tighten it and great gobs of dialogue come out.

Then the question is, when are you done with the first draft or any draft for that matter? And I don’t know. That is one of the hardest answers that I have to come to. Again I think it bears some resemblance to painting. It may have been Picasso who said that nothing is ever finished. There is a time to just walk away from it and that’s the best answer I can give. I reach a certain point and I can’t think of anything more to do with it and I know that there are some things in it that need fixing and things that make me unhappy, but I just can’t think of anything more to do. The rehearsals will find those things for me.

I also have a circle of friends, most of them writers, some directors, with whom I trade screenplays. I will give them to Sydney Pollack. He will give me something of his. We trade them around a lot amongst

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our friends and you get a lot of good feedback from those really professional people who understand the mechanics and the structure of a screenplay.

You can also use people who are not sophisticated in terms of storytelling or screenwriting, because one of the difficulties about using professionals is that they tend to come back to you with suggestions about how to rewrite your screenplay. Writers that do this to me don't get to see my stuff again because it just doesn't help. That is not what I want as a response.

What I want is somebody who would point to something and say that they loved this in the first part but somewhere about in here it seems to go flat, and they may throw out a couple of suggestions to me. I am not listening to the suggestions that they are making as something to do, but I'm saying to myself, "If that's what they think the solution is, what is the problem they are defining for me?" Then I go looking for specific things. You listen to them very carefully.

But you can't expect somebody to sit down and study it with the intensity that you are putting into the writing of it, so you really must take their ideas as nothing more than just that, 'ideas'. I try to get a couple of friends at least to read it before I do my final write-through on the first draft.

DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, ACTOR

Pacino was in New York. One of the producers was also in New York and one of the other producers and I were in California. Sidney Lumet was in London preparing Murder on the Orient Express. We all had to fly to London with the screenplay, so we left Friday night or Saturday morning. We got into the Dorchester Hotel on Saturday night and had a meeting with Lumet in his suite. He said, "What is the screenplay about?" He had read it at this point! I was never able to articulate it with any kind of succinctness until this moment. It was after I wrote the screenplay, which is what I mean by the screenplay being the means by which you discover what the story truly is, and what it is about. The writing of it is the process of finding that out.

I was astonished to hear what I heard myself saying to Sidney, which was, "It's a story about a magician who believes he has the magic power to fulfill people's goals and aspirations and dreams, but he does not have the power, so consequently he betrays and disappoints them and instead of getting back the love that he expects from them for having given them this great gift, he gets waves of anger and betrayal and one thing and another. So he is constantly bewildered." Sidney said, "Jesus, I'd better read the screenplay."

So Sunday, the next day, we met at breakfast and they were all sitting there with long, long faces and I said, "How did you like it?" One of the producers said, "Well, Al liked it so much that he just quit!" I said, "Is that true?" Pacino said "Look you have got to understand something, this is a wonderful screenplay, and I really want to do it and I am not bullshitting you about that but I've just finished The Godfather Part II. If you had seen that you would know how infinitely depressed I am."

Pacino is an actor who tends to carry a role around with him, and if you remember that last image at the end of Godfather II, where he is sitting there and he has had his own brother murdered, who was the last person on earth that he had any ties to, and his wife has left him and he has lost his children, and he has lost and destroyed everything in his life worth living for, and he is just sitting there, staring into space. That was who I saw sitting in the Dorchester Hotel. He said, "I can't work." I said, "Does it have anything to do with the homosexuality in the story?" He said, "No, it is not that, just I can't work." So we got on a plane and flew back to our various cities. I think we were in London altogether a little over 12 hours.

In any case, what we did then was send the screenplay to Dustin Hoffman, and when Pacino heard it had gone to Dustin he asked to read it again, and declared himself back in again, so Sidney was hired again. Hard work!

PRE-PRODUCTION

We all met in New York and I had a couple of script meetings with Lumet and the film editor, Dede Allen, who had already been hired. She was very helpful and I think she knew I was writing, so she was going to be used, because film editing is a form of writing. It is like the last stage of writing the movie. When you have got all those materials back you can still reorder the structure and change things. You can make it play when it didn't play.

WRITERS' INVOLVEMENT IN PRODUCTION

It is relatively rare in Hollywood for a writer to be so intimately involved in the production process as I was on Dog Day. I had been on most of my pictures, because I forced my way in. A more retiring or shy writer has a considerable amount of difficulty staying around. They don't really want you around, but you find out where they are meeting and just show up and walk in, and they don't have enough guts to tell you to leave. Once you are there they get comfortable that you are not going to be intrusive and so on, and that you are really listening to them, but it can be very difficult. Make it clear that you are only there to help.

BOTTOM OF FACING PAGE

John Cazale in Dog Day Afternoon. Right: Scene Outside the Bank, Dog Day Afternoon.

Is this principally a learning experience for you for future use — to be there? It is, because the whole process of making the film is one to me. The screenwriter's work shouldn't end after the writing of the screenplay. The learning experience is terribly important.

The majority of screen writers in America have never actually seen the process. They turn in the screenplay and do some re-writes. The next thing that happens is they get invited to the premiere or preview. Then they look up there and say, "Why did they do that?" They have no way of knowing. It is a terrible, terrible system. So in order to write better, yes, intrude, get yourself in there. But also do it because it ought to be at its best, a collaborative process.

CASTING

Does this collaboration also extend to casting? It is worth speaking about the impact of casting on writing. A writer can have an important impact on casting — there is a mutual interdependence between casting and writing. For instance, the character of Sal, Pacino's partner in the bank, was played by John Cazale who was then about 35 years old. I had written him to be played by a 14- or 15-year-old kid, which in real life he was. This was important to me for this reason. There was a moment when the Sonny character, at last fully realizes how morally corrupt, how horribly wrong his whole life, his whole existence has gone. Somewhere in the back of his mind he knows this is the end for him. There is a moment when he understands that this is the end of his life in a sense, and that this moment sums up the whole meaning of his life and it is meaningless — it's awful.

I wanted that moment where you saw a man fully confront the fact that his life has been a total mistake in a sense. One of the most important scenes in the film.

I felt it would come in that very quiet moment when this kid (imagine a 14-year-old kid) comes over to the Pacino character and sits down next to him and says "Sonny, you know back there when you told them about shooting the people and throwing the bodies out the front of the bank?"

And Sonny starts to say to him, "Sal, listen you don't have to worry about that, I'm not really going to do that," or something reassuring, because that's the nature of Sonny to be that way and he is doing it again. Now imagine Sal cuts right across him and this fresh-faced kid is saying, "No, no, you don't worry about it. I'll kill them and throw them out. You won't have to do that."

Then he realizes he has corrupted this innocent kid. That was an exceedingly important thing for me. That changed the whole complexion of the movie.

So when we came right down to the casting sessions, Pacino was the one who controlled that. Sidney had very little to do with the casting. Pacino staffs his movies with his friends. Most of them are very good but nonetheless he controls that. He says, "I want John Cazale to do this." I said, "Look, I think John is absolutely marvellous, but I am totally against it and I want for this reason that I will describe, the 14-year-old." He said, "John Cazale could do that." I said, "No, wait a minute Al, look at the difference. There is no way that John Cazale could be innocent." In this situation he is going to come across as a homicidal maniac, which is threatening. It pushes the plot along, it works for the story, but it undercuts a value which I think is important to me and the story.

He said, "I agree with you. Let's see if we can't find a 15-year-old kid to play this role."
II. screenwriter and get most of the stuff out. It turned out to be astonishingly easy try. "So I sat down and it took about 24 hours to go through the body o f the said, "You can't take away the fact that a man married a man because he loved funny - I had written him in exactly that way. I had used a lot o f his actual lines. Al said, "Look! Let me talk to you about something. You him why. He said, "Look, I have built my career to the point that a lot o f people the script to Dustin." Al said, "Look! Let me talk to you about something. You at his producer, because the producer simply was not understanding the depth at his producer, because the producer simply was not understanding the depth.

They had rehearsed for about a week when I came back to the set. When I arrived there was this collection o f all the producers and the director and Al, all with very long faces. I said, "What is going on?" and they said, "Well, Al has quit." One of the producers hastily said, "What Al is talking about is he just needs a dialogue rewrite. I think this could be done with changing dialogue and so on." Al's answer to that was to get down on all fours and run around the room, barking like a dog, and then he ran out of the room. I didn't have the presence of mind to ask if he needed a walk in the park, or what! You know it is very hard work to dig down inside yourself and find the truth of a role, or for the director to get inside the text. It's what is called the 'tyranny of the text'. It is a hell of a lot easier to change the screenplay, get rid of the writer, bring in a new writer to rewrite it and all those things. They tend to get very arrogant in dealing with writers in that respect, sort of rationalizes it for them. Al would never deal with another actor on the set in that way.

In an odd way of feeling I didn't feel that it was aimed at me. It was aimed at his producer, because the producer simply was not understanding the depth of the problem. By doing what he did Al got his attention. It developed that he had decided not to play a homosexual, and I asked him why. He said, "Look, I have built my career to the point that a lot of people are dependent on me and if I play this role they are going to laugh me out of the business and I am just not going to do it." The producer said to me, "What do you think we should do?" I said, "I don't see anything else to do except send the script to Dustin." Al said, "Look! Let me talk to you about something. You have to understand something."

I said earlier that Leon was this screaming drag queen and hilariously funny - I had written him in exactly that way. I had used a lot of his actual lines. I wrote as well as I could to get my stuff to be more like his kind of thing. I managed to get a lot of those elements of their life together on screen. We had a lot of writing to do, because we were trying to get some sort of character, "Why is it that you love this person but you can't live with him, why?" They just vomited all the good and all the bad. They just start talking and it all comes out, as though they are making a big long historical statement to their psychiatrist under the influence of a truth serum.

I set up a tape recorder and I gave each of them their monologues and they spent a few minutes just reading it through and I pressed the start button on the tape recorder and said "Go! Either one of you say anything you want to because I don't care."

One of them started talking and all of a sudden the other one interrupted and said "Wait a minute, every time you say that it makes me so mad, because ..." and up come some thoughts and they get into this terrible argument, using the materials of the monologue, improving some stuff of their own. It is wonderful, the stuff that is coming out. I let them run for about three-quarters of an hour. That is a hell of a lot of material.

So then I stopped the tape recorder and said, "You guys go and play with the rest of it." I took that away and we had a whole fleet of stenographers turn that into a transcript, and then I took that material and used it to write the scene on the telephone that eventually appears in the movie. That was the only piece of rewrite that was required. And again it was a perfect example of a creative collaboration between actor and writer. It was wonderful and I have been grateful to Pacino ever since.

They got the rehearsed and by the time they finished the rehearsals there was nothing for me to do. The screenplay was done, so I just went down the first day of shooting and kissed everybody goodbye and left.

AN $8,000,000 KISS

The writer's work is finished at this point. The next thing I know I get a furious call from the head of the studio who has seen the dailies of the telephone scene. He said, "What happened to the scene in the door of the bank?" So I told him what had happened. They had not told the studio that we were doing that rewrite and he was appalled and absolutely furious and was making mad noises about shutting down the film, which we knew damn well that he wouldn't do. He said, "Goddammit, they threw away an $8 million kiss!"

It was his estimate that the picture would gross $8 million more if the two men knock each other out in front of the door of the bank than if they didn't.

They flew me from Hollywood to New York to see a rough cut of the picture which Sidney Lumet was screening as part of a test screening for some film students. It was rough. It needed some work, but it was clearly recognizable as a winner, right from the word go. That is how Dog Day Afternoon got written.

CONCLUSION

Dog Day Afternoon was released in 1975, three years after the actual event. It cost $3.5 million to produce and has earned about $23 million since release.

It was nominated for the 1975 Oscars for Best Actor (Al Pacino), Best Supporting Actor (Chris Sarandon), Best Director (Sidney Lumet), and Best Screenplay (Frank Pierson). Wojoğuwicz got 20 years and was paroled in 1978. His percentage earnings from the film were handed over to the hostages. In 1975 Wojoğuwicz's wife Carmen flew me from Hollywood to New York to see a rough cut of the picture which Sidney Lumet was screening as part of a test screening for some film students. It was rough. It needed some work, but it was clearly recognizable as a winner, right from the word go. That is how Dog Day Afternoon got written.

The Australian film industry — lively, creative and astonishingly resilient — is conspicuous for its extraordinary individual talents pitted against the marketing invasions of the rest of the world. The Cinematic Collection is a series of books documenting the history of this industry. The books cover the early pioneering days of the silent era; the move into sound in the 30s; the constraints of American control; the clashes between film-makers and government; the patterns of subsidy and distribution; the revival of the feature film in the 70s and the aesthetic patterns in Australian cinema. Together they offer a comprehensive overview of the Australian film industry.

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TA  \ L K I N G  F I L M  S T O C K

ARE AUSTRALIANS CONSERVATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO USING THE
NEW FILM STOCKS? WE HEAR FROM LABS, MANUFACTURERS AND A USER,
ACADEMY AWARD NOMINEE JOHN SEALE, WHO HAS SOME POSITIVE AND
NEGATIVE REMARKS TO MAKE ABOUT AMERICAN LAB EXPERIENCES...

"CERTAINLY FROM MY EXPERIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN
MARKET, AND THE REPORTS FROM AMERICA SUGGEST THE
SAME. WHEN A NEW STOCK IS INTRODUCED EVERYBODY
WANTS TO KNOCK YOUR DOOR DOWN TO SEE WHAT
THEY CAN DO WITH IT. HERE IT'S QUITE THE OPPOSITE
REACTION, THE SHUTTERS GO UP AND THE RESPONSE IS 'I
KNOW WHAT I CAN GET FROM THIS PARTICULAR STOCK
SO I'LL STICK WITH IT'."
GRAHAM MONTEITH, MANAGER, MOTION PICTURE
PRODUCTS AGFA

HE BIG THREE international film
manufacturers, Eastman Kodak, Fuji
and Agfa Gevaert, face special prob­
lems with the Australian film industry,
and it's not just coping with the pro­
duction swings between boom and bust. It appears that Australians are
reactionary when it comes to changing film stocks and processes. Is it, as
Graham Monteith suggests, a conservatism born out of our experience for so
long with just one supplier, Eastman Kodak? Or does it go beyond that and
point to an inability, for whatever reason, to handle change?

Do we, as cinematographers and producers, cling to a formula approach to
filmmaking that is now outdated and is actually costing us production
money? And are we dabbling, using too many different stocks on the same
project and causing problems for ourselves, the labs and the final product?

With the recent arrival of even more new stocks from Kodak, and in
anticipation of another round of tests and discussions, I turned to the
laboratories and representatives of the filmstock manufacturers for some
answers. Then, hoping to disprove the evidence, I talked to Australian direc­
tor of photography John Seale about his approach to the subject.

MAKING A CHOICE: PART ONE
I've never heard it suggested that Fuji film has a Japanese look, or Kodak looks
American, yet we somehow can make sweeping generalizations such as "Agfa
has a European look." In tests, any of those stocks can reproduce a colour
chart with an accuracy that defies all but most critical evaluation. There are
obvious differences in colour dyes but with the correct exposure and filtration
in shooting and printing almost any colour variation can be introduced.

Graham Monteith finds it difficult to understand how the final choice of a
stock is made. "My attitude is that I can tell anybody what I like about the stock
but the bottom line is that he or she has got to be able to see it on the screen.
They have to test it the way that they shoot it, so I've always let it be known
that I'm happy to supply free test rolls. It's hard to believe when people don't
expect it to be graded overnight or even done at some printer light that
result from a stock that you dismissed?"

"It means that any lab has to be more on their toes because of the number of
stocks around. Years ago when I was in printing, there would have been only
three or four basic packs because there were only that many stocks around.
Now our information board that tells a printer what basic packs light to use is
probably five times the size that it was less than 10 years ago."

However, he continues, "More than occasionally we get stock in that is in­
correctly labelled, and while we can identify it by the edge number informa­
tion, if we checked every single roll while we are assembling everything for
printing, you'd never get your rushes the next morning. So we just go by the
order and if it comes off wrong it's very easy to check and we can do it again."

Is it on that result then, that how most of us base our impression of a new
stock? I asked Dominic Case from Colorfilm if the lab ever gets caught out in
those early introduction stages.

"It's happened," he says. "Even before the manufacturer has had a chance
to brief us and supply stock for testing, some enterprising DOP has brought
back a can of stock from overseas and it arrives on our dispatch bench one night
with a weird string of numbers and a request to do it at a standard workprint
light!"

"And there are so many stocks now; Kodak has just released a string of new
ones, Fuji has more than you can poke a stick at, and some of them we only
see in a blue moon. The more esoteric stocks are also the one that are used
under very different lighting situations so that the lab can't get a real feel for
them."

So, I asked, how does he feel the testing process should be handled? The
reply was a predictable plea for time. "You can't simply take a new stock and
send it into the lab and not discuss what the lab has got to do with it. By
expecting it to be graded overnight or even done at some printer light that
plus of the commercials market. There are probably only four or five major
companies but they shoot a lot of film and have traditionally used Agfa. Before
the introduction of the XT stocks, they all loved the previous negative 682
stock, and we had real acceptance problems with people saying, 'Why are you
getting rid of the old one?'"

It appears that often our judgements are subjective, conservative, and
rarely based on how we test the stock. Apparently only a few of the tests that
the laboratories see attempt to examine the innate capabilities of a new stock
before it is accepted or discarded as unsatisfactory. How often have you been
surprised when some other cinematographer's style seems to pull a startling
result from a stock that you dismissed?

THE ROLE OF THE LABORATORY
The process of introducing a new stock seems to prepare the industry for a full
and fair evaluation. The cameramen get their test rolls free for the asking and
the lab is always supplied with rolls to do their sensitiometric tests, and to
ascertain basic filter packs. As a part of a basic education process the manufac­
turers' representatives talk to staff about the stock, what it's called, and discuss
its strengths and limitations and technical data. It is not unusual, Peter Willard
from Atlas says, "for us to have technical information about the new stocks,
months in advance of the launch. Kodak are good that way, they sit down with
us and are very honest about what the stock can or cannot do, and because of
that we are ready. There's none of that 'My god, here's a new stock what are
we going to do about it?'

"It means that any lab has to be more on their toes because of the number of
stocks around. Years ago when I was in printing, there would have been only
three or four basic packs because there were only that many stocks around.
Now our information board that tells a printer what basic packs light to use is
probably five times the size that it was less than 10 years ago."

However, he continues, "More than occasionally we get stock in that is in­
correctly labelled, and while we can identify it by the edge number informa­
tion, if we checked every single roll while we are assembling everything for
printing, you'd never get your rushes the next morning. So we just go by the
order and if it comes off wrong it's very easy to check and we can do it again."

Is it on that result then, that how most of us base our impression of a new
stock? I asked Dominic Case from Colorfilm if the lab ever gets caught out in
those early introduction stages.

"It's happened," he says. "Even before the manufacturer has had a chance
to brief us and supply stock for testing, some enterprising DOP has brought
back a can of stock from overseas and it arrives on our dispatch bench one night
with a weird string of numbers and a request to do it at a standard workprint
light!"

"And there are so many stocks now; Kodak has just released a string of new
ones, Fuji has more than you can poke a stick at, and some of them we only
see in a blue moon. The more esoteric stocks are also the one that are used
under very different lighting situations so that the lab can't get a real feel for
them.

So, I asked, how does he feel the testing process should be handled? The
reply was a predictable plea for time. "You can't simply take a new stock and
send it into the lab and not discuss what the lab has got to do with it. By
expecting it to be graded overnight or even done at some printer light that

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belongs to some other stock, and the next morning saying whether or not they
like it, then they really aren’t being fair to the stock, or, I guess, the lab.

“We can put as much into it as they can in our range of exposures, so the
way we like it to be done is for the cinematographer to come to us and say,
‘I’m going to shoot a test on $248 tonight and can you do me a one-light and
then a graded print and I’ll come in and see you in a few days and we talk it
over.’ The usual situation is that we are not left enough time.”

Does he believe that we are conservative, and reluctant to change?

“I think that Australian cinematographers and labs are keen to try new stocks
out and we get lots of tests through when a new stock comes out. But I can’t
help noticing that very often even though the DOP is very happy with it, then
more of caution comes in and they say, ‘Well, we are not quite sure what will
happen when we dupe it, or if the latitude is the same, or maybe it will fall apart
with under-exposure and as we don’t know it so well...’ and people tend to
fall back on the workhorses they love, even though the test is good.”

Peter Willard from Adlab doesn’t believe that labs affect what stocks cam­
eramen buy, and discouraged the idea of even trying to. “We get asked for our
opinions, but we want to service the market and not get marked as a Kodak
lab or a Fuji lab. We must be able to handle all filmstocks. We try to give an
honest answer, for instance we don’t process enough Fuji for me to have an
opinion, or offer one. We do process a reasonable amount of Agfa, not as much
as Kodak, and what we see is good. It looks different and that’s good – it’s
pointless Agfa or Fuji trying to come up with a stock that looks like Kodak. There
is always interest in the new stocks and most cameramen then go with one or the
other because it’s pertinent to the job they are shooting.

THE LABORATORY MAKES A CHOICE

So if we are happy to test new stocks, are we
getting the best results possible from the lab, or are we holding back by insist­
ing, as we apparently do, on one-print stock? Peter Willard thinks so. “When we come to release print stocks, there I think Australians are
more conservative than they care to admit. Adlab has used millions of feet of Agfa
print film in the last five years and have had absolutely no problems. The Agfa is used for
multiple-copy release prints for overseas where they are happy to accept it. But as far as being able to use it for workprints for the
domestic market, then no! People want their rushes on Kodak.

“It’s pretty obvious that if you shoot on Fuji or Agfa neg that you’ll get
the best results printing onto their print stocks, and it seems ridiculous that
when cameramen choose the different stocks for a special look, the editors are
resisting having their rushes printed on anything but Kodak.

“Everyone has to really think about what stock they are shooting right
down the line. From the lab’s point of view, there is no real reason why people
aren’t keen to get their prints on another stock. They just say, We don’t want to,’ and the lab doesn’t press it.”

I asked Dominic Case if this was a common experience, or did he think that
the lab was being conservative by doing all their rushes on Eastman stock? He
disagreed, saying, “It is not so much conservatism, as a way to provide a
standard, because at least you know whether you are looking at neg differences
or lab differences. But apart from the workprint we sometimes suggest a
different look for the rushes. For example Die Hard, which we did last year,
was a picture that worked very well with rich saturated contrasty
look, with really blocked up blacks and strong warm tones. So Fuji was a natu­
ral for that.

“In Australia we’ve stood very strongly by the concept of one-light
workprints for as long as there have been film labs. It provides the yardstick
that the cinematographer can work by. It doesn’t mean that we are intransigent and
won’t change that one light. Everybody has got a slightly different style of
lighting but the best way is on a production to select the light that is going to
suit the style of the film on day one, or preferably day minus three. If grading
is then needed at least it is from a standard reference point.”

He concluded by saying, “I liken it to the cinematographer having a small­
bore rifle and taking shots at a target. As long as we hold the target still then there
is the chance of getting a bull’s-eye every time. But if he’s a bit off to the
left and we move the target and he moves the gun then we are never going to
get it right.”

TOO MANY STOCKS

So it is really up to the supplier to change the market, because the labs believe
that they can only go along with what their clients want, how do they convince
us that we really need all these stocks? I asked Kodak’s Russell Chapman if
introducing so many new stocks was innovation for the sake of it. Was it just
because they can push the boundaries a little more every time, or was it all
led by the market?

“I believe it’s a little of all of those. The world demand for images is
increasing and people are using more and more film to supply those images.
The consumption by television and video is certainly a key factor. To widen
the choice or the palette of the cinematographer so that he can supply that
market we produce a range of niche products.

“We can put as much into it as they can in our range of exposures, so the
way we like it to be done is for the cinematographer to come to us and say.
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should be able to go on location and use just one stock for low light through
to bright daylight conditions. Movies like Out of Africa, where all the exteriors
were shot on our high speed stock, showed that incredible latitude was possible
with the new stocks. The other manufacturers take the approach of making
different stocks for different occasions. I don’t believe that we will get into
that. Our approach is one of evolution, making the current stocks better.”

It is an approach that Dominic Case has a certain sympathy with. He is
worried that “we are getting to the point where there are so many stocks that
people are ‘dabbling’; often we get three or more different stocks used on one
production. This makes it hard to keep track of things and very often they are
not getting the exact differences between them that they would look for.”

This, he points out, is most obvious with the use of the new high-speed
stocks. He gives the example of a night shoot with a subject standing by a
shop window, “where you can see everything far down the street because of
the terrific latitude. This, of course, flattens out the nighttime look which
could be better achieved on normal stock with just a bit more light on the
subject, and so providing good blacks where it is meant to be black.”

Almost as an aside Peter Willard said that he believed that some areas of
the market seemed to be less conservative than others. Documentary produc­
ers, for example, are prepared try new stocks, because there are often real price
advantages and they are more conscious of budget. “Whereas,” Willard
continues, “on feature films you are not going to get Russell Boyd or a Dean
Semler changing from Kodak in an easy fashion. The exceptions are people like
Peter James, who seem to enjoy changing stocks for particular projects.”

And so, may I suggest, does John Seale.

Gorillas in the Mist had five Academy Award nominations, one of them for
the cinematography of John Seale. Seale had long been known as one of
Australia’s best camera operators and has become one of our best cinematog­
raphers. Chasing the work, and director friends such as Peter Weir, Seale has
been shooting almost continuously on American features for the last few years.

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To avoid being categorized, he has always tried to shoot 'different' pictures, and notes wryly that, despite that, "I've done two jungle pictures, two school pictures, and two cop pictures, but I try to spread them out a bit."

He has a lot to say about his craft and his enthusiastic conversation led us across much more than his willingness to continually experiment with the new film stocks.

"Sometimes the stock is suggested, some stocks are cheaper than others and the producer says, 'What about...?', but it's always a suggestion and they don't push you. I like to take a new stock and test it, analyzing it to see what's best for that film. Is it fast enough, is the grain OK, etc. Sometimes the grain is too fine, for example on Mosquito Coast we chose Fuji high-speed all the way through and that gave us just the right touch of grain. Nobody ever saw a release print of the original neg of that; in the US you usually strike eight or 10 prints of the original neg for viewing at Academy screenings and things like that. They all saw prints from the dupes (duplicate negatives) and so it was even grainier and picked up contrast and didn't have that pretty-Hollywood look about it, which is why we went for the Fuji negative.

"To be bold, I feel that the Fuji doesn't portray greens too well, it tends to muddy them. Peter Weir and I looked at it and said, 'Wow, it's terrific', because we felt that Ally Fox's (Harrison Ford's character) jungle shouldn't be pretty and the audience had to wonder why the hell he would go there. Whereas for the next jungle picture, Gorillas in the Mist, I looked at all the stocks again and we went for the Agfa, choosing the high-speed again because whenever you get in under the canopy there's no light. The Agfa seems to have a yellower basic colour to the stock and makes the greens a lot prettier, and Dan Passsey's jungle had to look pretty because it was her life, the reason she stayed there.

"On Rain Man I went back to Kodak, because they had released the blue screen projection stock 5295 and everybody grabbed it. Without being crass – and here Seale paused to put on a convincing American accent – "it was an American picture with an American director and an American writer and so I used an American stock. I found the combination of the Panavision Primo lenses and the '95 stock sensational!

"The blacks in the screen were as black as the surround; normally it's a grey and you are always trying to get them as black as you can. I used to sit there at night and go crazy about the blacks! I was amazed and it opened up a whole new feeling of composition because the blacks just fall away and you can then re-compose the highlights anywhere you want. Your composition becomes the whole theatre, it just happens that the highlights are in front of the audience.

"I didn't quite work, but after Rain Man I went to Delaware for Peter Weir's new picture Dead Poets' Society and I said 'Peter, look at this, Primo lenses and '95, the blacks are astonishing. Well, we used a New York lab instead of a Los Angeles one and I couldn't get the blacks and it was only later that I found out that the New York lab was running a standard-speed process and LA was running at high speed which increased the contrast a little bit. So now when I time the Dead Poets' Society I have to ask them to run the prints at high speed.

"Normally you are trying to knock that back because it is increasing the contrast, but I find the negatives today are so forgiving in the high and low exposure latitudes you are damn near shooting available light. As soon as you put a light on it it's overlit because it's handling such a contrast range. I find that I'm using black draped reflectors to stop bounce so that I can get the contrast. My crews learn to carry the black covers, I think they call them negative reflectors, to block out the fill light.

"Choosing a stock is a funny thing. I had lunch with a very well-known American cinematographer, Academy award winner, terrific guy, and I had just come back from Mosquito Coast. He asked what stock we were using and I said we were on Fuji high-speed and he just shook his head ever so slightly. I said hesitantly, 'You don't agree with that?' and he said exactly what I said earlier, 'I'm an American cameraman, I shoot American pictures and shoot American stock,' and I went, 'Ooops.'

"I thought, fair enough, you know your stock so well you know exactly what it's going to do all the time, and I must confess that when I change negative stocks, my heart's in my throat all the time. Even when you've done your tests you're not too sure of your contrast ratios.

"On Gorillas in the Mist I was working with a London lab and it was the first time I used Agfa high-speed. In the jungle I immediately re-rated it to overexpose it one stop, and that's a heck of a lot to give a lab. When you are using the spotmeter in the jungle and reading the greens and blacks and you find that the highlight ratio can hold easily a stop on fleshtones, I thought that would be heaps. I thought that would mean that the flesh tones would be bright but not burnt out, and the greens would not be muddy and dark.

"We had a week's turnaround on the rushes, and in the first few days' reports they said, 'You're printing 25s across the middle.' I thought that was terrific on a one-light print that you'd have in Australia, but they said 'You've got to give us another half a stop,' another four or six points or whatever, so in the end I was rating the stock down to about 70 to 80 ASA - high speed stock! I was then printing in the low to middle 30s and they were quite happy. I didn't get a chance to get to London to grade it but having seen the prints, it's all there.
"You bounce, you don't feel confident. Even on **Rain Man**, I was nervous going back with Eastman. It would be a lot easier if you could get a one-light print from the US labs, but it's always timed, and that's their system.

"I've had some terrible dramas because of that with the overseas labs and it makes me sure in my belief that the Australian technician is one of the best trained in the world. Even England doesn't go on a one-light print, they also have graded rushes — it's madness. On **Rain Man**, when it came to timing the release print the timer had to do two print runs for himself, just to find out where his work print was. He doesn't have the compute needed, so he looks at the workprint and says, 'I see there is a bit of golden light in there,' and grades for that, believing the whole time that the negative is going to be totally suspect.

"He did one run and didn't get too close on some scenes; then he did another run and then when I got to it I still had six pages of notes that I tried to read over the phone to him one lunch break on another film, and I know damn well that he never wrote it down. He thought, if it's close to the workprint then that's it. It's been nominated (for an Academy Award for cinematography), so I suppose there's no argument!

"What I do is build everything into the negative, if I want it to look late afternoon at two o'clock and it doesn't have the redness, then I stick an extra 81 EF in. I've taken my colour temperature reading and I add the right filters to get the look only to find that the lab has timed it out, looking at the analyzer they think it's day. I think you can't have that. I mean, they ring them up, they say, 'Well, I watched the negative closely and saw that this was a bit red, so I thought that's what you wanted and printed it straight off the neg.' I say, 'Thank you,' because that's where it at, but American cameramen don't do that.

"I'm used to having the temperature meter out and as the sun slowly sets and the colour temperature gets warmer, I read it and say, 'It won't match your black, you'll have to have a light rush.' It's because on an Australian feature that's what you've got to do. When the one-light rushes go up and it's still five o'clock in the afternoon, you've whacked extra red on your fill lights and the reflectors are bouncing in normal light and then you correct the whole lot in your lens, and it looks like midday. I've had American crews just stand there agast, as I've been reading the temp meter and calling for an 85C and stand by with an 81EF because it will drop before you get there. The best you can get is a light rush. In fact, the point is that after I decided that sort of positive. I went right off and I remember a little voice inside me said, 'Gee Seale, is this you, is this really you, shouting at a laboratory?' I'd always worked through Peter Willard, and with the lovely Bill Gooley when he was alive, and Richard Piekowski and Arthur Cambridge on timing and it's always been fantastic, real relationships. And there was standing in a phone box I abusing a New York laboratory.

"A lot of the other blokes who are going over there, and rightly so because they are good, fast and good, they ring occasionally and I try to help from my experience. They say it's OK, they've promised me a one-light workprint, and I say don't hold your breath, they'll promise you till the cows come home but you won't get it. And sure enough they didn't, because they don't believe what you are doing.

"Now I write a novel on the camera sheets and say, 'This is late afternoon, low key, late sun on faces, moody, some good blacks in the background.' A bloody novel, but I don't think they read it. They are running them through at high speed anyway, they are not looking at the film, not looking at the story and no matter how they fete you and take you to lunch, they still throw in some of the most ridiculously awful prints you have ever seen.

"And that's where the Australian training is so good. You know the negative is all right, you know the colours are in there, it's rich and it's all there.

"Playing devil's advocate, I asked whether he could have reached the same results with almost any of the new stocks, given the amount of control that he had.

"Yeah, to be really honest, I suppose you could get the same effect with any of the other stocks with some shifts in the printing light. Somehow it's fun to juggle the negatives, it keeps you nervous because you can get complacent with just using Eastmancolor. Eastman is sort of the Rolls Royce of stocks, the old '47 is still one of the loveliest of daylight stocks you can lay your hands on.

"I haven't had a chance to try the Kodak 50 ASA stock but it's great that they are not just trying to go faster, they're going slower — that's wonderful!

"As I said, working with new stocks makes you nervous and that's good because it keeps you right on your toes. It's fun because you are constantly finding new things about what's going on."

If the results push cinematography forward, as the work of John Seale does, then there's reason enough for more of us to develop a little anxiety.

**JOHN SEALE : FILMOGRAPHY**

In June 1964, at the beginning of what has come to be known as “Freedom Summer”, three young civil rights volunteers went missing in Neshoba County, Mississippi, last seen in the county seat of Philadelphia. The president, Lyndon Johnson, who by now had made the cause of Southern blacks his own, prompted his reluctant FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, into instituting the biggest manhunt in the Bureau’s history. Scores of agents and hundreds of US troops descended on Neshoba County. Eventually the Bureau was successful. Agents bribed a local Ku Klux Klan member into revealing both the location of the bodies of the slain men and the names of their killers. Five of these, including Philadelphia’s deputy sheriff, were brought to some sort of justice. Found innocent of all charges in state court, they were eventually convicted in federal court of civil rights offenses and sent to jail. It was the FBI’s most successful operation in the whole of the civil rights era, at a time when Bureau agents, notoriously, often seemed more interested in harrying civil rights workers than protecting them from the violence of Southern segregationists.

Alan Parker has used this incident around which to build a film about the violence of these years. Mississippi Burning is emphatically not the story of the hunt for the real-life killers. Rather, it is a work of fiction based on the Philadelphia incident and set in the imaginary town of Shiloh in Jessup County. Neither in the depiction of the search for the missing men and the way the FBI eventually broke the case, nor in the methods by which the murderers are at last literally unmasked, is any attempt made to follow the actual sequence of events. The focus is on the tension between the smart young agent in charge of the operation (Willem Dafoe) and his hard-boiled Mississippi-born assistant, Rupert Anderson (superbly played by Gene Hackman), and Anderson’s interaction with the wife of Shiloh’s deputy sheriff, all against a backdrop of Klan-inspired violence and terror. Shiloh’s blacks appear rarely, and always as victims. The film is not about them at all, and this is one of the reasons for the controversy that has surrounded its release.

In my view, to criticize Mississippi Burning for not being a documentary is beside the point. Parker never intended this. What he has done, and I believe, truly, is to recreate a time and a climate. I lived in the American South during the early 1960s, I knew towns like Shiloh. I spoke to men like the killers, I heard the public incitements of the Klansmen, and saw the violence that often resulted. Parker has got this climate of fear and hatred exactly right, as the rural South massed to meet the final challenge to its “traditional way of life”, the civil rights revolution of Martin Luther King, which the Federal government, and especially Lyndon Johnson, in the end joined. In 1964 Mississippi was, as historian James Silver wrote, a “closed society”, its institutions dominated by the White Citizens’ Council and the Klan. He had to leave the state for so saying, dismissed from the University of Mississippi at the insistence of its trustees, with scarcely a dissentient voice. Mississippi Burning explains why, and this is its importance, an importance which transcends its rather superficial final 20 minutes or so, as the case is comprehensively wrapped up in a manner reminiscent of Mission Impossible.

Mississippi Burning, then, gets a lot right. Frances McDormand’s sensitive portrayal of Deputy Sheriff Pell’s gentle wife beautifully illustrates another truth; what sympathy there was for blacks in the rural South more often than not came from lower-class white women, also the victims of oppression: victims of the “good-old-boy” husbands who were killing those who wished to change the South and terrorizing the powerless blacks. There is a scene in the film that makes this point superbly. Mrs Pell is chatting to her black washerwoman and cuddling the woman’s infant granddaughter, when Pell (Brad Dourif) comes to say goodbye. Almost nothing spoken, yet the gentle, intimate ambience is ruined and the washerwoman quickly leaves. The sympathy the black woman has for the white, however, is clear from the expression on her face. In understated touches such as these, Parker catches so well the complexities of race relations in the rural South.

I first saw Mississippi Burning in January, in a small Southern town. The audience was predominantly a young one – most of them would not have been born in 1964. Products of the desegregated South, they found the hatred and violence of the film not so much upsetting as unbelievable. Whether black or white, it had never been a part of the South they had known. Yet at the same time David Dukes, avowed Klansman and white supremacist, was busy getting himself elected to the Louisiana State Legislature, despite the opposition of everyone from Jesse Jackson to ex-president Reagan. Mississippi Burning reminds us forcefully that it was only 25 years ago that men such as he were in the mainstream of Southern politics, shows us graphically what they wrought, and why they had to be defeated. We all need such reminders, and especially so do Southerners, both black and white.
Between them the Federal agents also have four eyes: but the film at first seems to suggest they might be suffering from the same kind of blindness, certainly to the interests of justice, and increasingly to the chains of cause and effect which Anderson's remark seems to hold Southern segregationists guilty of.

The crox of the film rests neither with the attempts of the investigators to discover the whereabouts of the three missing students, nor with those who were responsible for their deaths (the very first scene of the film gives us most of the answer to both questions) but with the starkly contrasted methods of the two men to expose that truth. Ward (Willem Dafoe) is one of the best and the brightest: a Kennedy man, Harvard educated, an idealist at least as far as the fight for civil rights is concerned, a man who does the job by bureau procedure. He symbolizes the WASPish North, the combination of power, money and the American Way.

Anderson is from the South, an ex-sheriff like Stuckey, the product of a poor white farming family, a sceptic. He doesn't, at least at first, believe that the system can be changed. So sympathetic is he to the predicament of southern whites in the initial stages of the case that he seems constantly to be echoing Stuckey's white racist homilies: if you intervene in the delicate social balance there'll be bodies on the street. For him the case is civil, not political.

And the clever twist of Chris Gerolmo's script is that it's precisely because he sympathizes with local values and their cynicism about changing the system that Anderson sees further than his straitlaced partner; he understands that to discover the truth the system must be penetrated, seduced from within, the danger being that it will in turn infect the trespasser. The target of his seduction however is the decent wife of the sheriff's deputy (Trances McDormand).

If Anderson is successful in extracting information from her it's because he has closely observed her relationship with her husband (one which parallels his with his own ex-wife), has the ability to spot Pell's involvement with the Klan through an old wedding photograph, and because he identifies her as decent, a flaw in the racist wall. Only an insider, one corrupted by the same system, could understand what is going on.

It is one of the major weaknesses in this scenario that at a crucial moment - Pell has severely battered his wife and Anderson knows that his involvement with her is directly responsible for this - the agent metamorphoses before our eyes into a one-man vigilante of the Dirty Harry kind who declares: "These people crawled out of the sewers. Maybe we should get down in the gutter with them." The film encourages viewers to believe that, given the violence of the ambience Anderson has been moving in, this is legally and morally justified.

His victim isn't the guilty deputy and the Klan associates whom he bashes, threatens and deludes into revealing the truth. It's his idealistic partner Ward. For if Ward is extraordinarily naive about the violent nature of white supremacy - he insists on questioning a black worker in a segregated diner who then becomes the focus of white prejudice for the remainder of the film. It's a scenario nicely calculated to win gung ho support for his vigilante tactics with Ward wringing his hands on the sidelines to remind us that the system is benign, no matter how far from the straight and narrow its operatives digress.

The film's last shot confirms Anderson's methods and Ward's acquiescence: a desegregated group, both black and white, stands around a civil rights worker's grave singing the negro spiritual, "Walk on by faith." And that's how the film ends.

Something is dangerously wrong with all this. Let's put aside the Rambo responses which the script quite cynically exploits. (There are several references to scrutums and balls, the losing thereof and who squeezes whom as a kind of male performance test. "Balisy little bastard isn't he? Anderson declares approvingly of his boss.)

Where are the blacks in this struggle? Where are the fictional equivalents of Robert Moses, who in that terrible summer organized a community-based campaign to establish the rights of blacks to register for voting, or Stokely Carmichael, who was in the South orchestrating white and black students in civil disobedience? Not a sign. In fact the film shows us two kinds of blacks - victims and Christian activists. In one of its more blatantly exploitative tactics it casts a 14-year-old boy, Aaron (Darius McCary), as the only black activist in sight. An adherent of Martin Luther King's call to non-violent resistance, Anderson (and the political position he is made to symbolize) is quickly polished off by a Klansman as he kneels, ridiculously praying for divine intervention, by one swift kick to the groin.

This derogation of the civil rights movement is necessary in order to leave the way open for Parker's white supremacist argument - that the blacks are incapable of helping themselves and must be protected by well-meaning white policemen who know a thing or two about kicking back.

We've become accustomed to seeing the cinema tell lies about Vietnam. It's a new experience to have it fabricate lies about civil rights. The recent documentary from PBS shown on ABC, Eyes on the Prize, makes it quite clear that the political struggle in the South was won by an alliance of religious and political activists, the majority of whom were black, who adhered to Martin Luther King's brilliant tactic of protest through non-violence and that the break-through came not as Parker's reactionary argument - that the successful indictment of the killers (the irony being that a sentence of seven to 10 years in the South was considered successful), but through the historic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama of the following year when an entire nation was horrified by the spectacle of blacks being shot and bashed by policemen on the Pettus Bridge. Civil disobedience as media spectacle, as the locals derisively label it. At least Parker got that right. But his perversion of the civil rights strategy of non-violence is unforgivable.

Does any of this matter any more? The film is full of longeurs since with a bit of historical recall we already know the outcome. But it is the means by which that outcome is arrived at which is the central issue here. This is a study of America in the Eighties, not the Sixties. Recast its victimized local population of inert blacks and its Klansmen who don't play fair and you will easily find an analogy, at least in the American landscape of our time, in America. Parker's FBI agents are mired in the guilt associated with any kind of direct action, but their justification is both in Ward's comment on the suicide of the town's mayor, that to know evil is abroad and to do nothing is to be equally guilty, and in that last happy scene of a society restored to its democratic roots. Here again, however, the film lies about its political intertwining.

The logic of its vision of justice at work leads not to an open society but to an application of its violent means in solving other 'anti-democratic' problems in overseas adventures, like Vietnam. And that was a logic the civil rights leaders who advocated communal non-violence had already foreseen and firmly denounced.
THE DIRTY DOZEN IS YOUR CHANCE TO CATCH UP ON WHAT
FILM WRITERS AROUND AUSTRALIA ARE THINKING. A PANEL OF
LEADING FILM VIEWERS HAVE RATED TWELVE OF THE LATEST
RELEASES ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN – TEN BEING THE
OPTIMUM RATING. THE CRITICS ARE: BILL COLLINS (CHANNEL
10, DAILY MIRROR), KETH CONNOLLY (MELBOURNE HERALD),
JOHN FLAUS (3RRR MELBOURNE, AGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE),
SANDRA HALL (THE BULLETIN), PAUL HARRIS (3RR MELBOURNE,
AGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE) PHILIPPA HAWKER (CINEMA
PAPERS), JOHN HINDE (ABC RADIO/TV), IVAN HUTCHINSON
(HSV 7, TV WEEK), STAN JAMES (ADELAIDE ADVERTISER), NEIL
JILLET (MELBOURNE AGE), TINA KAUFMAN (FILMNEWS), DOU-
GAL MACDONALD (CANBERRA TIMES), ADRIAN MARTIN
(XPRESS, TENSION), MICHAEL VAN NIEKERK (THE WEST AU-
STRALIAN), TOM RYAN (3LO: RAMONA KOVAL SHOW), DAVID
STRATTON (SBS: THE MOVIE SHOW, VARIETY), AND EVAN WIL-
LIAMS (THE AUSTRALIAN).

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THE ACCUSED

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ALIEN NATION

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NIGHTMARE ON ELM ST. IV

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COLONEL BLIMP RETROSPECTIVE

Bill Collins 10
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WHO COULDN'T HELP BUT MAKE INSIDE A SERIOUS INTELLECTUAL

THE ALLEN NEUROSIS IS THAT

HE'S A FUNNY MAN CAUGHT

INSIDE A FUNNY MAN WHO

ABOVE: MARTHA PLIMPTON

LOOKING ALL SCREWED UP.

FILMS. OR IS HE A SERIOUS

AND GENA ROWLANDS.

INTELLECTUAL TRAPPED

INSET: WOODY ALLEN

FOUND FILMMAKING

BEYOND HIS CONTROL?

WOODY ALLEN From: On Being Funny: Woody Allen & Comedy, 1975, by Eric Lax

A lot of people want Woody Allen to be a funny guy as much as they might like Martin Scorsese to remain a raging bull or Clint Eastwood to stay a Dirty Harry. Fortunately, these directors share a common integrity in their work which, to my mind, springs from their potential to exercise and develop the range of their cinematic and directorial prose. It may happen that fame, wealth and reputation give them the freedom not to be who we, as an audience, would like them to be (for us). When it comes down to it, John Cassavetes was probably the most uncompromised filmmaker in America but, then again, from his earliest work, Cassavetes appears to have known exactly what the conditions of his filmmaking were and he never succumbed to fame or wealth. He got over the glamour before he ever really ran into it.

But it is rare to come across auteurism that knows its own destiny before it even hits the road. Woody Allen started out as a funny man, doing comedy in monologues. For me, Another Woman is a film that uses the bourgeois sensibility by depicting it earnestly through its own lens: muted browns, sepia greens, rusted reds — the aesthetics of a class rationalized in dreary taste and insensitive to their own passionless moments. Another Woman is framed around the story (delivered in the form of a monologue — one of Allen’s favourite devices) of a philosophy professor who slowly but emphatically discovers, admits to and takes the consequences of a life beleaguered with emotional deception. As Marion, Gena Rowlands gives a fascinating and inspired performance. For an actress who has played characters at the mercy of their emotions (eg. in Cassavetes’ A Woman Under the Influence, Gloria and Love Streams), Rowlands is brilliant as an intellectual who has never fully considered the consequences of her overly cerebral life.
Although I see a strong cynical slant in Another Woman, I feel it is worth defending, mainly because of the power of Rowlands’ final scene. Having realized the terrible gulf that sums up her existence, Rowlands discards her tasteful but neutral autumnal tones to wear a black dress. Consequently the stern and severe look on her face disappears, and is replaced by something softer. Here is a haunting cinematic moment. The softness seems to be an extension of Ann’s more theatrical/European films. Marion’s black dress reveals a mourning for a lost life, whereas, in Interior, Pearl’s red dress stands for life’s blood: pure passion. The great irony, and perhaps the deepest cut from the Woody Allen knife, is that Marion discovers what we’ve known all along: that life is not in books; that her imagination, in a manner of speaking, contains from numerous film and television roles and particularly her co-starring role with Bryan Brown in the television mini-series The Shiralee. Her long blonde plaits and cheeky freckled face could have been used to present the stereotypical mischievous girl, but this is a film about childhood rather than a children’s film, and the nostalgic memories it evokes are at best ambiguous, and at worst painfully disturbing. It deserves its “M” rating, and will need careful marketing to reach the adult audience that will really appreciate it.

First, the children are not innocent: naive, and often helpless against older people in authority over them, but neither unaware nor passive accepting. And they are not presented in black-and-white terms either. Rebecca Smart, at the ripe old age of 12, is a seasoned actress, familiar to audiences from numerous film and television roles and particularly her co-starring role with Bryan Brown in the television mini-series The Shiralee. Her long blonde plaits and cheeky freckled face could have been used to present the stereotypical mischievous girl, but this is a film about childhood rather than a children’s film, and the nostalgic memories it evokes are at best ambiguous, and at worst painfully disturbing. It deserves its “M” rating, and will need careful marketing to reach the adult audience that will really appreciate it.

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**DEAD CALM: USES LANDSCAPE WITHOUT Clichéd Connotations of ‘Australianness.’**

What is Australian... is its peculiar blend of friendliness, (dis)trust and xenophobia.

Above: Nicole Kidman and Shotgun.

Welles and renamed The Deep. He abandoned it in 1973, owing to the death of a lead actor and the necessary reshoots of inclement weather. The Hitcher - Aboard the ‘Orpheus’ John Ingram fixes the electrical supply, setting off maddening home conditions of the Americans that are an economical way to depict the highly-strung ‘Orpheus’ and ‘Saracen’ in Dead Calm is landscape painting at its best, contemplating open space as impenetrable powers of survival.

DEAD CALM was shot by Dean Semler, whose screen credits include Razorback, Mad Max II and Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome. In the Mad Max series, and here in Dead Calm, he establishes landscape as another player in the scenario. The expansive and apparently pacific waters of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef are shot with great tenderness. The wonderful aerial photography of the ‘Orpheus’ and ‘Saracen’ in Dead Calm is landscape painting at its best, contemplating open space as another sinister and transfixing.

Like the Mad Max films, Dead Calm also uses landscape without clichéd connotations of Australian-ness. What is Australian in this film is in its latent content: a peculiar blend of friendliness, (dis)trust and xenophobia. The ocean hitcher who wrings his home on the lives of the Australian couple is an American. The actor, Billy Zane, has some resemblance to Marlon Brando, and like Ray Liotta in Something Wild and Rutger Hauer in The Hitcher, he has the ability to play a bad guy and do it well. The charm of evil seduces us, and we are fascinated with the extremity of absolute malice.

Terry Hayes’ script is economical: its simplicity, however, does not stand up to the best films in the suspense genre. The John Ingram character is wasted for great parts of the film, although Sam Neill gives him a little more depth than the script may have allowed for. Perhaps he could have faced more horrors. This could have helped reinforce the obvious danger his wife is to encounter with Hughie and would have generally contributed to the build-up of tension created when Rae consistently fails to trap or destroy her pursuer. The film definitely suffers from her failure to perceive her danger and take decisive action. This flaw is redeemed, however, when she sets the boat on course in high seas to recover her husband. The power of the cinematography during these moments is breathtaking.

Abroad the ‘Orpheus’ John Ingram fixes the electrical supply, setting off madding home videos shot by Hughie. These video ‘flashbacks’ are an economical way to depict the highly-strung hysteria and sexual perversion of the Americans travelling on the ‘Orpheus’ with the psychotic Hughie. The American voices are monotonous and claustrophobic, which increases the maddening effect of the device. (For a few seconds you might empathize with Hughie’s need to rid himself of his cruising buddies.) The soundtrack uses some very good music scored by Graeme Revell from SPK, but it sometimes intrudes upon the film, undercutting the suspense rather than highlighting it.

Apart from these minor points, Dead Calm is an exceptionally entertaining film which I hope will follow the path of other commercial successes such as Gallipoli, Crocodile Dundee, Mad Max and Newsfront. A Dead Calm should do better than a High Tide at the box office.

**SHельLEY KAY**


**DISTANT VOICES, STILL LIVES**

Once in a blue moon a movie comes out which challenges the conventional ideas of cinema as an art form and, concomitantly, the prevailing aesthetic and cultural rationale of the national film culture from which it has emerged. When we consider what it is British cinema we are talking about, then such a work is all the more miraculous.

The movie in question is Terence Davies’ Distant Voices, Still Lives. If Truffaut were alive today to see Davies’ harrowing autobiographical narrative about a Liverpool working-class family in the Forties and Fifties, he would probably feel obliged to qualify his now-famous observation that the British cinema is a contradiction in terms.

Whether we agree with Truffaut’s extreme view is a matter for debate, but Davies’ splendid Proustian homage to his family, and to a bygone England where there was once a gentle sense of community at the centre of things, is a rare exception to the general truth of Truffaut’s statement that many British movies exhibit a poverty of passion and are nothing more than filmed theatricals.

Davies’ deft capacity to create a movie motivated by a strong cinemephile awareness of genre, mise-en-scene, performance and character is demonstrably evident when we contextualize Distant Voices, Still Lives in the present landscape of British mainstream cinema. Time and again the spectator encounters finely chiselled, evocative images and sounds that form a moving, appraised film of subtle gestures, rhythms and movements in tandem with vivid emotions that speak of universal significance. As a filmmaker critical of his British peers who valorize the spoken word as the chief concern of narrative cinema, Davies is not alone: directors like Powell and Pressburger, Petet, Greenaway, Roeg and Jarman share his oppositional stance towards the shortcomings of British feature films.

But what also operates throughout the conceptual and visual architecture of the movie is a profoundly sensitive understanding of its brutalized but not defeated characters in terms of memory, identity, violence, ritual and community. Davies’ expressive ability to construct a novel of enormous emotional impact and visual sophistication hinges on the director’s deep-seated need to listen to the distant voices of his characters’ memories and represent the stasis of their ‘still’ lives.

As a life-affirming, non-linear work, Distant Voices eschews sentimentality in its delineation of a working-class family by constructing a more schizophrenic emotional mixture of violence and affection.

What we have here is the director’s storm and drang approach to the thematic and stylistic complexities that shape the cultural, emotional and temporal topography of autobiographical cinema. In addition, the movie’s dreamlike realistic explicitness of visual techniques and ‘sink’ genre of British cinema by employing a specifically cinematic directorial style that intelligently affirms film as film. It is a realism that questions the overwhelmingly popular, theatrically-defined movies that simply record people talking.

Davies has given us a fluid narrative that is interested in generating an adventurous conception of film fiction and a diegetic space for the objects, customs, rituals and visual indexes of a practically vanished popular culture that was central to the English working class 30 years ago. The movie is particularly rich in detail concerning the intricate emotional landscape of a working-class family, country and society during a specific epoch.

Davies’ minimalist expression of experience has a rigour reminiscent of Bresson. His spare, family album memories of nightmares and traumas colour the movie’s dyptich structure. Another significant quality is Davies’ ability to write a script that resonates with sensitive textual significance on so many interrelated levels concerned with theme, character, style and tone. In Distant Voices, Still
Lives we meet characters who are propelled by pure, intense emotions, contradictory and dislocating feelings. There has been a tremendous effort made to sketch the inability of the child’s and adult’s mind to come to terms with the emotional scars and ambiguity of childhood. Davies is saying to us that life, particularly as it has been moulded by scars and ambiguity of childhood, is a mysterious mosaic of emotional, historical and cultural forces that always seems to be beyond the reach of logic and reason. Yet it is not as hopeless as it may seem: there is joy to be found in our darkness. The critical point to grasp here is the filmmaker’s insistence that our world is governed by a continual clash between despair and happiness.

The film’s range of gently brilliant ochres, tea-coloured browns and earth colours corresponds graphically to the emotional contours of the storyline; moreover, its generic hybridism – part comedy, part tragedy, part musical, part animated tableau vivant – are characteristic of its profound originality. The film’s range of gently brilliant ochres, tea-coloured browns and earth colours corresponds graphically to the emotional contours of the storyline; moreover, its generic hybridism – part comedy, part tragedy, part musical, part animated tableau vivant – are characteristic of its profound originality.

Distances, Still Lives

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EMERALD CITY

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John Gombrich

Distant Voices

Plays are notoriously difficult to adapt to the screen. The problem is that the cinema delivers its insights through means other than words – through its visuals, its montage, its recall of previous constructions. In contrast, plays are best at revealing the complexities of social relationships through dialogue. Unless honed to a sharp accuracy, words derail film’s visual syntheses.

For some time now David Williamson has attempted to overcome this problem by writing plays and seeing them produced as though they were screenplays. Abrupt, honed-down dialogue; narrative speed; the use of a narrating voiceover; abbreviated scenes which switch relentlessly from character to character – these are cinematic qualities. On stage, Emerald City performs like a screenplay. On film, its characters deliver lines at a speed to disprove its wordy origins. Yet there is, interestingly, a divided allegiance in its text which favours exactly the kind of film it is not. It’s in cinematic terms that this screen adaptation offers its most interesting statement.

At one level of interpretative density, Williamson’s theme is an Australian version of the Faust legend. Colin Rogers (John Hargreaves) and his wife Kate (Robyn Nevin) abandon Melbourne for Sydney. The boot of his car is full of screenplay awards but he finds the middle-class pretensions of Melbourne repressive, while Sydney abounds in his career potential and its physical energies. There is no mention of the main reason for the mass migration of Melbourne writers to Sydney in the late Seventies: the establishment of the Australian Council and Film Commission, with their attendant grants and perks, in Tinsel Town. This is to be a story about integrity and its temptations by the forces of free enterprise, not a study of the failings of government patronage. Colin is saying on his moral journey relatively naive about the more coercive procedures of our culture.

His Mortalities is Mike McCord (Chris Haywood), an ambitious, sleazy Operator working the fringes of the film industry, who is on the lookout for a way to crack the big overseas markets through a parasitic partnership with genuine talent. As with Marlowe’s Faust, his means of enticing Colin are a handy combination – encouraging his ambition to be a successful producer, and sex.

At the Sydney Film Festival Colin is first approached by Mike’s glamorous and intelligent mistress, Helen (Nicole Kidman). Bored with his marriage, fed up with playing househusband to his two children while his wife works at a publishing job to support them (surely they don’t need the money on his substantial royalties?) he sees in Helen the potential gratification of a soul mate/sweetheart.

Colin’s role as temptress is not only ambiguous, it is downright confused. As a focus of both temptation and self-esteem (she just loves Colin’s writing) her private motives and goals are continually obfuscated by Williamson’s script. She is well-read, highly intelligent, responds to and promotes quality films – she recommends to Colin the work of a visiting Polish director because of his sensitive handling of the theme of ‘manliness’ – yet she remains with McCord, an unredeemable male chauvinist, because his potential for success excites her sexually and holds out the promise of the little material dreams (a trip to Venice, a house with a harbour view) which she so greedily for.

It is impossible to resolve these contradictions since this film is about male manopause and she is simply everything to both men. The only figure who appears to balance the conflict in Colin’s mind – he confesses he is fed up with the pain of being an artist, longs for the security of commercial success to sustain him in his old age(1) – is his wife Kate. At first critical of his growing artistic involvement with the money-hungry McCord, she too is slowly seduced by the opportunities for career success (the successful promotion of an Aboriginal novel) and extra-marital gratification (while in Britain to secure the Booker Prize). In fact as Colin learns to renounce his demons, his wife just as spuriously invites him in.

Life in the Faust lane is, according to Williamson, full of fluctuating souls who continually surrender themselves to conflicting modes of selfishness and integrity. Even the vulgarian McCord suddenly declares himself willing to take a turn at writing and producing a quality film. His subsequent career is built on his reputation as the co-author of Colin’s integrity-haunted but commercially disastrous TV drama, Coast Watchers, a film “about our past, a film about heroes”. There is a little bit of redemption here in Colin’s most fiendishly opportunistic operators. But priority of place must go to the lonely, self-humiliating artist.

In a revealing scene between Colin and his agent, Elaine (Ruth Cracknell), McCord must be allowed no creative talent of his own: not only because, in the midst of his vanity and crassness can’t go together, but also because, as Colin admits with relief, McCord has no talent with words. The thrust of McCord’s filmmaking abilities throughout has been not on the text, but on the cinematic image. If you rely on body language, gestures and grunts, Colin says, face-
tiously deriding these alternative means, "then you may as well be making movies about chimpanzees," Colin's snobbish rejection of popular culture is part of his "suffering" writer baggage.

Everyone in the industry loves a good film and if you can find the golden seam that wedds commercial with artistic success, you're onto a winner. That at least is the implication of the film's last shot, a freeze frame of both couples walking, in friendly competition, out of the State Theatre. It's an ending which squeamishly sidesteps the resolution of the conflict I've been describing. Even a Williamson script needs commercial backers.

The centre of the battle for integrity is of course Colin. It is made clear that this is, in spite of his denials, a portrait of Williamson himself. He's a successful scriptwriter transferred to Sydney who has won awards for a film about the Anzacs and another very similar to a famous compilation about the Whitlam years to which Williamson was a prominent contributor. The struggle we are invited to watch is not one in which Faust loses out to the seductions of power and success. Not a tragedy or even a comedy, but the narcissistic reaffirmation of Williamson's own self-esteem. Of all the characters, including his agent, only Williamson's alter ego Colin comes through undescended as, rising to the heights of his moral lucidity, he declares McCord a harlot and rejects his offer of $150,000 to adapt the Aboriginal novel which is the central cause of Kate's seduction both commercially and physically.

There is in fact something mawkishly unsatisfactory in watching the author tell us the story of his own honesty. It's like watching him swim through the shark pool called Sydney and cling at last to the shallow end, boasting of how he almost got bitten. If there is any value in this thoroughly Melbourne text *"All my screenplays are about middle-class pricks"* it's the cinematic values that Owen Williams, the production designer, has managed to inject into it.

In the Venetian art of the Renaissance, paintings were often carefully colour-coded to communicate the passions experienced by the subjects of the paintings. By similar means a subliminal text is introduced by Williams into what is otherwise a confused account of its major themes.

The keys are the colours yellow and blue which, mixed in the correct proportions, produce emerald green. Their separation and distinctiveness in the over-luminous costume code the main themes, commercialism and integrity.

Ruth Cracknell's harbour-view office, for example, is a symphony of blue tones signifying the high-rise success Colin seeks. This coding, however, isn't a simplistic indicator. The agent is continually imploring Colin to write something that continues the success of his previous, integrally honest works. During Film Festival time the State Theatre foyer is garishly yellow, a crass world of pretended adherence to cinema and shady business deals in the corner. There, Colin's seduction by Helen is distinguished by her colour code, from her blue hair to a vest of emerald green decorated with yellow. If she graduates in the final scenes to a vivid red this can only signify that she has revealed herself as a more old-fashioned if sexist kind of harlot.

But if blue signifies the cinema of integrity while yellow marks out the commercial world, it doesn't end there. McCord's various apartments are appropriately marked out in yellow throughout. As he grows more successful, however, the colour is leached out, becomes white, while the yellow motif is reduced to the lampshades. Does this indicate that the international scene he has broken into is set up by a Satanic merchant banker in Los Angeles? McCord is more a question of black and white, a different story whose set he returns from to the local scene.

In perhaps the most witty colour reference, in a scene where McCord attempts to seduce Colin's agent, Elaine, into giving him the job of writing a high-class film script, he is wearing a brilliant blue bow tie, appropriated as a cynical entrance fee into this more integral world.

While Colin's surroundings begin as monotonously yellow, in this case signifying middle-class comfort and therefore a direct connection with the commercial world he hopes to break into, the patterns about him gradually change. His workroom is a dappled well of yellows and blues while the Rogers' bedroom where the couple have a habit of speaking the truth to each other is streaked with blue shadows. Thus the cinema of integrity, artistic success and adhesion to personal values are linked. But in the scene where Colin asserts his ethical code over McCord's temptation to commercialize the Aboriginal novel, Black Rage, he and his workroom are all in blue — affirmation of his return to a superior artistic world that can't coagulate with McCord's crass yellow. A last moment of wavering in his resolve is corrected by his son, dressed in blue school clothes. Innocence guarded by self-regard are the concomitants of his ethical position.

Colin/Williamson thus has travelled from public to private world, from harbour view desired to personal isolated integrity reaffirmed: home-grown Aussie values, in his stated opinion, which invest and strengthen his creativity. Buried in all of this is a debate about Australia's culture and its relationship not only to international market forces but also to the worldwide debate called 'culture', cultural cringe called 'nationalism' or cultural colonization in the form of America or Japan or the prevalent world power?

It's the implication of this wider conflict in the exchanges between McCord and Rogers which suggests important cultural values underlying the characters' protracted squabbings, a reading which the text significantly fails to clarify or conclude.

JOHN SLAVIN


MY GIRLFRIEND'S BOYFRIEND

There is a kind of auteurist criticism, all too familiar, in which the director-as-artist is awarded a god-like position in the scheme of things. In this system the critic studies long and hard to decipher the secret soul feelings and psychological configurations of the chosen being as though this had some absolute significance in itself. Eric Rohmer's position behind his work is so tantalizingly inaccessible, so inviting to the critic-as-detector, that it's very tempting to mystify his work in this way. There's also a ready-made mythology that has built up around this man who changed his name (so it goes) to protect his mother from knowledge of his part in the scandalous business of cinema: a faintly repellent myth, but nonetheless fascinating.

Yet the reflex damnation of all auteurist approaches is no better option. If we avoid the cult of personality there are undeniably generative possibilities in such an approach. In fact, in the case of Rohmer, some kind of auteurism is virtually demanded. Aside from his placement historically within the cultural moment that initially gave rise to auteurism, there is (more importantly) the work itself—stretching over 30 years, coming predominantly in cycles of six, and characterized by a modest, artisan's approach. So if on encountering his latest film, My Girl­friend's Boyfriend, there is the impulse to consider it as part of a body of work, it is because of the light the films shed on each other, and the part they play in an amazingly cohesive bigger picture.

Romance is the central obsession of Rohmer's characters in both the cycle of Moral Tales beginning in the 1960s and the Comedies and Proverbs of the 1980s. At the same time, it is his key dramatic metaphor, taking two distinct forms. When the protagonists' romanticism is imbued with cynicism or failing courage (as is common in the Moral Tales) a loss of life is signified. Conversely, the comic earnestness of the young lovers in My Girl­friend's Boyfriend, their endless conversations about the intricacies of their personal hopes and desires, and the little humiliations that form part of these daily rituals epitomize the youthful life force (undiminished by the absurdity) of the characters of the Comedies and Proverbs. Rohmer is less prescriptive about these things than we might expect and places both cynical and idealistic characters in a variety of positions from film to film ranging from lightly
comic to tragic. Within this system, My Girl-
friend’s Boyfriend is rather like a classic ro-
mantic comedy. The twists and turns, the deceptions and mis-
understandings, the conver-
sational games of Lea and Alexandre and their friends play with the matchings and mis-
matches of clothes, make the film plainly more entertaining than many of the others.

A variety of relations are also articulated be-
tween these distinguishing movements, individual desires and random influences on the lives of Rohmer’s characters. In Summer, Delphine's friends tell her she is foolish and impractical in her love aspirations, but there is magic at work which transends all such pragmatics to reward her idealism with breathless perfection. The tragedy of Full Moon in Paris is that a girl who wishes for something un-
abatingly inscrutable in this regard, transcending (it seems) the particular world of My Girl-
friend’s Boyfriend is a lot less grand in emotional scale, more concerned with ‘conformist’ responses. The characters are encloed in their physical sur-
roundings (as in Fabien’s tale, often bumping into each other or getting lost in a labyrinth) or they are enmeshed in their interlocking friendships and romances. Blanche’s friends tell her that she and Alexandre don’t match, which in this case turns out to be true. The determinations are solid but the protagonists are ultimately able to find ways to exist in their world with neither loss of soul nor total euphoria. Yet there is a dual tonality underscoring these films—a countering of the characters’ heroic searches with the absurd pettiness of their utopi-
anisms. Rohmer achieves an astounding balance between these two perspectives, both within each film and from one to the other. So accustomed to searching (in our own heroic way) for a moral ‘position’, we expect to see some indication of the ‘real’ standpoint of the films. But they remain se-
cretly insecure in this regard, transcending (it seems) the imperative of a fixed moral system to bear witness to the simply human.

'Humanity' is here intimately tied to the ebbs and flows of everyday life. In My Girlfriend’s Boy-
friend this is mostly expressed through a faithful-
ness to everyday rhythms, very noticeably in pat-
terns of speech but also apparent in the film’s other formal systems. The Plainness of the sound and image is, for example, and the subtle and regular pacing within and between shots are part of an attempt to construct a ‘common’ drama—a drama of the absurd and extraordinary amidst the ordinary—and a ‘realist’ aesthetic. Yet these formal strategies seek to indicate more than a simple ex-
pressivity. The titles Moral Tales, A Year in the Pro-
verbs cue us to rather more ‘timeless’ proper-
ties. In this sense, My Girlfriend’s Boyfriend seems actively engaged in a kind of stylization of the eve-
ryday—creating a tangible, material sense of local specificities (geographical, historical and sociological) organically linked with a highly abstract form, a system in which, as Andrew Preston has said, "life and reality have a paradoxical relation to drama and artifact, masking and veiling each other in complex and ultimately inextricable ways" (Film-
news, September 1988).

Thus the film can pay devoted attention to its settings as real places, even laping into (with what look like) real situations and streets in couples of occasions, whilst simultaneously making a display of its own artificiality. Every cut is systematically telegraphed with precision and clarity. Whilst the film gestures, for example, to a convention of 'continuity', the invisible flow of that continuity is regularly undermined by shooting and editing strategies in which dialogue exchanges are often incongruously presented flat and front on shot-
reverse-shot cutting, often peculiarly placing char-
acters in identical positions within the frame; and two-shots often following the most basic of stage-
arrangements, characters simply and unnaturally placed side by side.

Further emphasizing a sense of the tangible and the specific, the direct simplicity of the film’s visual system and its technically ‘primitive’ direct sound create a vivid impression of materiality. There’s a sense of textual integrity and plasticity that is found too in Bresson’s Lancelot Du Lacor, more recently to Melbourne audiences, Luc Moullet’s extraordinary Comedy of Work. Moullet’s film also shares with My Girlfriend’s Boyfriend an apparently related sense of the artificiality and contrivances of suburban French environments—a vision of modern alienation expressed in flat planes, smooth surfaces and bold, plain colours and peoples with a young bourgeoisie struggling gallantly to create for themselves some kind of meaningful existence.

Unlike Moullet, however (whose embrace of crud forms and techniques has more a po-methic than a formal or stylistic function), Rohmer has virtuoso con-
derations and the association of Alexandre, the dynamic young executive, with the “Power and Light” building. Whether clearly schematized as in this case, or open and free as was Summer, there is above all in this film an overall balance of philosophy and harmony; an idiosyncratic sense of transcen-
dent order refined over decades of diligent atten-
tion.

Perhaps the most suggestive and telling recur-
motif in Rohmer’s films is water—the beach, the swimming pool, the lake appears as a setting over and over. It’s a powerful metaphor because of its ambiguity in Rohmer’s system, being variously associated with hope, humiliation, repression or release. One particular meaning is never settled upon—the metaphor remains open, alive, richly resonant. These images are typical of Rohmer’s work as a whole. The flux of human existence is given form, the flows are contained, yet the poten-
tialities remain. There is little progression from film to film, only movement towards possibilities.

My Girlfriend’s Boyfriend

(WITH ETERNAL THANKS TO ADRIAN MARTIN)

My Girlfriend: directed by Eric Rohmer.
Director of photography: Bernard Lutic. Editor:
Maria Luisa Garcia. Music: Jean-Louis Valero. Cast:
Emmanuelle Chaulet (Blanche), Sophie Re-
noir (Lea), Eric Vellard (Fabien), Francois-Eric Gendron (Alexandre), Anne-Laure Meury (Adri-
ene). Production company: Les Film du Losange.

Talk Radio

We’ve all known for a long time that no film can be a ‘window on the world’, and most of us would prob-
ably admit that nobody down the tracks ever really thought it was. However, once one has given up crude, block notions of ‘reality’, there are still all sorts of tactics that can be employed to suggest that—
all sorts of hokey or elaborate moments and devices that manage to achieve a fleeting ‘reality-effect’, a brush with the real, an invocation of the world outside the theatre which seems chillingly ‘true’. It is as if a magic spell of some kind has suddenly materialized for a moment, a vague, past and often frightening realm of ‘reality’ from which fiction is usually comfortably distant. Great minds, from Roland Barthes to Philip Brophy, have dwelt on such seductive, spectacular reality-
effects.

Even, or especially, in the midst of the most pat-
tent artificial or theatrical conceits (the original To-
day will be Beautiful by Lubitsch is a good example) such moments of reality can leap out of a film —
only on the fine showbiz principle that only which is not seen, only heard, can really carry that special reality-wallop (ie, a myth of film not as a ‘window’, but as a receiver of transmitted signals).

The use of a radio can be, in this regard, a film’s ace in the hole, thinking that only if only some con-
clusions that interrupt their imaginary proceedings with a blast of ‘history’ announced from a nearby

Radio Days)

To radio, carefully faked to sound tinny and ancient:
the sinking of the Titanic, the beginning of a world
war, or (a brilliant gag in Radio Days) the Martian
invasion, courtesy of Orson Wells. ‘Reality’ im-
plies above all if only for a moment, for a scene proc-
ceeds to drag the rest of the fiction in its thrall.

Talk Radio began life as a theatrical monologue co-written by its star, Eric Bogosian (he’s abso-
olutely wonderful), playing a slick and angry talk host named Barry Champlain. On a stage, one can imagine how the piece would derive its own pow-
eful reality-effect from the extent of its paradox:
a completely artificial, static space, with—as it were—the whole real world on tap, flowing in through a
talk-back line. No matter that all the calls are written, performed, contrived: it’s more a matter of a showbiz dare, chutzpah. Helping out the audience in its exchange in this instance is a par-

ticularly intense and topical slice of radio talk single-
out: the American phenomenon of ‘shock radio’, in which compere and caller are given free rein to abuse each other violently (I can’t wait for Australia to catch up with this trend!). Beyond its social commentary on this particular media phe-

nomenon, Bogosian’s text/performance is a fasci-
nating metaphorical workout of a theme that has been returning recently to the fore of American cinema and culture (Good Morning Vietnam, Punchline): what Goffman once called the ‘presen-
tation of self in everyday life’, where the insistent

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TALK RADIO: WHAT CAN YOU SAY ABOUT A FILM THAT PRETENDS TO HAVE ITS EAR TO ‘REALITY’, AND THEN MATERIALIZES— IN ONE SHOCKINGLY EMBARRASSING AND OVER-REACHING SCENE— A CARICATURE OF A YOUNG, DOPED, HEAVY METAL HEAD THAT MAKES MOST TEEN MOVIE STEREOTYPES LOOK MODESTLY TRUE-TO-LIFE BY COMPARISON.
YUPPIEDOM, THE NEW AGE RAGE, ETC... BUT

To milk humour (and drama) from nothing is developed around these narratives. You deal with a film — a big, slick, exciting film — and we are all burning in hell together right now and there are a lot of troubled people 'out there' in the real world that we should diligently, urgently, try to understand what's going on. If you're going to make an other thing altogether to construct those invisible, teeming masses as (in their dark, pre-socialized hearts) sick, stupid and psychotic — a bunch of uncultivated hicks.

Yet what else is that heavy metal head materialized to 'prove', to witness (and wasted at all comic sense), and what are all those 'concerned', superior looks from Champlain, his ex-wife, his lover, his best friend, mobilized to evoke, but just this? Talk Radio, in its passing appropriation of Berg's description of the airwaves as the "last neighbourhood in town", raises the hope of a post modern populism in and for a post modernism, scarred world — but the film hates the 'people'. It constructs more profoundly and surely than it annihilates its own hero, its handy liberal Christ of free speech.

ADRIAN MARTIN


LUIGI'S LADIES

There is a heartbeat of humour buried inside Luigi's. During a send-up of a New York meeting, people hop and skip like animals around a hall, trying to find themselves. One man in the background is a koala. He's good. He's funny. He's the one laugh in the film. This alleged comedy, directed and co-written by actor Judy Morris, executive-produced by actor Wendy Hughes (who also co-wrote) is marked by scenes and wasted comic opportunities and wasted talents strewn across a story of three women trying to cope with some sort of post-feminist anxiety syndrome. Sara (Wendy Hughes) is a magazine editor; Cee (Sandy Gore) is the dumped wife of an academic; and Jane (Anne Tenney) is the wife of a unfaithful wine merchant. They meet regularly at Luigi's, a restaurant run by the diminutive Luigi (David Rappaport), to discuss life's problems.

In dealing with these multiple mid-life crises, the film has ample opportunity to milk humour (and drama) from Yuppieism, the new age rage, etc... But nothing is developed around these narrative nuclei to make them the least bit interesting or funny. Above: Wendy Hughes checks out the leadlights.

LUIGI'S LADIES: IN DEALING WITH MULTIPLE MID-LIFE CRISIS, THE FILM HAS AMPLE OPPORTUNITY TO MILK HUMOUR (AND DRAMA) FROM YUPPIEDOM, THE NEW AGE RAGE, ETC... BUT NOTHING IS DEVELOPED AROUND THESE NARRATIVE NUCLEI TO MAKE THEM THE LEAST BIT INTERESTING OR FUNNY. ABOVE: WENDY HUGHES CHECKS OUT THE LEADLIGHTS.

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DON'T SHOOT THE BEST BOY!
John Shand and Tony Wellington
(Currency Press, 1988,194 pp, rrp $17.95)

JUST WHEN WE THOUGHT it might have been a
swep for books on the post-1970 Australian fea-
ture film industry, up pops yet another one from
those champions of the local film scene, Currency
Press. Subtitled 'The Film Crew at at Work', Don't
Shoot the Best Boy! endeavours "to provide some
insight into how [Australian feature films and some
television dramas] are made, and what kind of
people make them". This, to my knowledge, is the
first major publication to explore in detail local
filmmaking practices—perhaps Sue Mathews' 35mm
Dreams is its nearest companion—and it should
prove a useful reference tool for film students in
dicular.

To make sense of what Bob Ellis refers to as
"that Parkinsonian agglutination of multiple hu-
bres that make up our film industry", this book
has been divided into 11 chapters, each focusing on
a specific film crew position and based on the interviews of 27
randomly chosen interviewees. This is quite an	array of information but, as always, one must consider the
worth of each other on award nights". If Don't Shoot the Best
Boy!2 bypasses the theoretical touch, then, it also
spurns the gossipy.

This is not to suggest that the anecdotal approach
fails to provide enjoyment or enlightenment.

The book also includes a glossary of terms, an
index and very brief biographies of the 27 inter-
viewees. This is quite an array of information but,
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viewees. This is quite an array of information but,
as always, one must consider the worth of each
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Boy!2 bypasses the theoretical touch, then, it also
spurns the gossipy.

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spurns the gossipy.

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fails to provide enjoyment or enlightenment.
Gaffer. A person experienced in film lighting who sets and adjusts lights under instruction from the Gaffer. (p. 164)

But what is a Gaffer? This hunt-and-peck method is akin to looking up a naughty word in a large dictionary, only to find a “See” reference to a not-so-naughty word. (The Gaffer definition, to be fair, is in the Appendix as well.)

KEN BERRYMAN

BOOKS RECEIVED

BRANDO: A BIOGRAPHY IN PHOTOGRAPHS
Christopher Nickens
(Columbus, 1988, 141 pp. rrp $23.95)
A short Brando biography, illustrated with a selection of snapshots, portraits and publicity stills.

THE COMPLETE FILM DICTIONARY
Ira Königsberg
(Bloomsbury, 1988, 420 pp. rrp. $49.95)
The one-stop shopping dictionary, from A and B printing to Zoptic system: 3,500 entries that cover technical, historical, production and critical terminology. If you want a brief definition, description or account of the Steadicam, the auteur theory, the Struss lens, ADR, the travelling matte, luminous flux and the Hays Office, it’s all here.

MOVIE TALK: WHO SAID WHAT ABOUT WHOM IN THE MOVIES
David Shipman
Bloomsbury, 1988, 244 pp. rrp $39.95
Four thousand-plus paragraphs: quotes, one-liners, gags or review extracts covering actors, directors, writers and filmmakers. A gossipy lucky-dip.

COLUMBUS FILMMAKERS SERIES

ALFRED HITCHCOCK
Gene D. Phillips
Columbus, 1984, 160 pp. rrp $19.95
A brief study of Hitchcock’s life and work which attempts, among other things, to give more focus to the director’s British films. Preface by Andrew Sarris.

CHAPLIN
Julian Smith
Columbus, 1984, 160 pp. rrp. $19.95
An account of Chaplin’s career which concentrates on The Great Dictator, Monsieur Verdoux and Limelight, rather than the earlier shorts, and which traces the influence of the music hall on his work.

PHOTO: MAKE UP SESSION, RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD PART 2, FROM DAVID STRICK OUR HOLLYWOOD.

NEW GERMAN CINEMA:
FROM OBERHAUSEN TO HAMBURG
James Franklin
Columbus, 1983, 160 pp. rrp $19.95
A look at German cinema after the Oberhausen manifesto, with chapters on Kluge, Straub-Huillet, Schlondorff, Fassbinder, Wenders and Syberberg.

FILMS OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY
Baard Searles
Abrams, 1988, 240 pp. rrp. $72
Well-illustrated in colour and black-and-white, this account of science fiction and fantasy films covers a wide range: Mary Poppins to The Terminator, Teenage Caveman to Carousel, Paris Qui Dort to Twilight Zone: the Movie.

OUR HOLLYWOOD
David Strick
Arrow Books, 1988, 101 pp. rrp $27.95
A collection of black-and-white photographs by David Strick, who takes a wry insider’s look at Hollywood: fight-scene rehearsals, barroom scuffles, audition for pantie commercials, make-up sessions on Return of the Living Dead II and fashion shows at the Polo Lounge, to give what Bret Easton Ellis in his introduction calls the closest thing to a visual representation of The Day of the Locust that any photographer has come up with.

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Camera assistant  Clapper/loader  Focus puller  Assoc, producers  Unit manager  Lighting director  Location manager  Prod, accountants  Lie and assistant  Continuity  Lighting cameraperson  Focus puller  Key grip  Gaffer  Boom operator  Art director  Make-up  Hairdresser  Aseo editor  Neg matching  Music performed by  Sound editor  Mizer  Still photography  Runner  Publicity  Catering  Mixed at  Laboratory  Lab.  Simon Wicks  Length  Gauge  Shooting stock  Kodak 7291/9 2 /9 7  Down From Darwin  Length 90 mins  Gauge 16mm  Shooting stock Eastman Kodak  Cast: Diane Craig (Diane Lane), Garry Day (Barry Robbins), Lynne Williams (Louise Parker), Edwin Hodgeman (Monroe), Don Barker (PM), John Noble (FM’s minder), Tony Mack (Michael Meadow), Bron Shean (Governor), Gordon Goulding (Wilson Sinclair), Patrick Edgeworth (Editor). Synopsis: Newly-elected Government MP Diane Lane is determined to become Australia’s first woman Prime Minister. Her best friend and confidant, Louise Parker, isMalcolm’s best friend and plans her married lover Barry Robbins, the Minister for Health, in her sights. The Prime Minister has a strange and mysterious past that is the key to the mystery of the current Prime Minister.

CUCUMO GUMBO
Prod. company  Ordinary Miracle Pictures Producers  Bruce Ready  Brenton Harris  Eddie Vermeer  Neville Jordan  Tony Armstrong  John Dineen  Geoff Hope  Jamie Egan  Peter Armstrong  Dan Connolly  Stephenia Cochrane  Soni Connolly  Reg McLean

Director  Eugene Schlesser  Patricia Edgeworth  Richard Gleadall  Nicholas Sherman  Michael Piper  Zwiepngo Friedrich  Ros Colombo  Allou Saider  Julie Wurm  Kim Biddle  Reg Mclean  Arthur Dwyer  Michael Collins  Bazele Tevse  Francie Lee  Reg McLean  Ray McWilliams

Production designer  Martin J. Andrews  Production decorator  Cliff Richey  Production manager  Edie Offen  Production supervisor  Michael Santoro  Make-up  Patrice McDowell  Hair  village  Old Town  50 mins  Gauge 16mm to 1” video

GARDEN OF FAMES
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

IN THE TRENCHES
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

MEN OF WAR
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

THE GREAT TAXI ADVENTURE
Prod. company  Michael Dillon Films Enterprise
Producer  Michael Dillon
Director  Michael Dillon
Screenwriter  Michael Dillon
Sound recordist  John Morgan
Editor  Edward Kelly

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

HANDMAIDENS AND BATTLEAXES
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

HANNAH  THE UNKNOWN PAINTINGS
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.

HANSEY  THE UNKNOWN PAINTINGS
Prod. company  Rainbow Warrior
Producer  Nicholas Sherman
Director  Richard Dyer
Screenwriter  John Bryson
Editor  Arthur Dwyer

SYNOPSIS: In the final days of World War II, a group of Allied POWs is stranded on a deserted island. Their only hope for survival is to build a message in a bottle and send it to the outside world. But as they struggle to stay alive, they must confront their own demons and the compete against each other for survival. Will they be able to escape the island and find their way back home, or will they be left to die on the island forever? Find out in this gripping war drama that will keep you on the edge of your seat.
IN THE MAINSTREAM

Prod. company Inma Productions Pty Ltd
Dist. company Kim Lewis Marketing
Producer Ned Lander
Directors John Whitteron
Scriptwriters John Whitteron
Photography John Whitteron
Sound recordist Chris Ballard
Editor Bill Aiers
Music post-production Les Karaki
Music performed by Yothu Yindi
Gauge 16mm
Length 55 mins

Synopsis: The documentary follows a group of tourists on a 10-day round tour of Australia. The tourists see the standard things: boomerang-throwing, Ayers Rock, sheep stations, koalas and kangaroos in the wild. However, as they all know, the country's ancient culture and lyrical beauty. Many of these 'glossy cliches. The result is both ugly and disturbing, especially when the film shows how Aboriginal culture is 'sold' by white tour operators. Even this does not escape the notice of our tourists.

THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH

Prod. company Clockwork Films/ Inma Productions Pty Ltd
Producer Andrew Hutchison
Directors Andrew Hutchison
Scriptwriter Andrew Hutchison
Photography Phil Baker
Sound recordist Jenny Suncliffe
Editor Frank Zapa
Exec. producer Robert Cock
Production manager Jo Bell
Prod. accountant Bob Sharp
Lighting cameraperson Phil Baker
Camera operator Phil Baker
Mixed at Soundstage Australia
Length 47.5 mins

Synopsis: A documentary which follows a group of tourists on a 10-day round tour of Australia. The tourists see the standard things: boomerang-throwing, Ayers Rock, sheep stations, koalas and kangaroos in the wild. However, as they all know, the country's ancient culture and lyrical beauty. Many of these 'glossy cliches. The result is both ugly and disturbing, especially when the film shows how Aboriginal culture is 'sold' by white tour operators. Even this does not escape the notice of our tourists.

INTO THE MAINSTREAM

Prod. company Inma Productions Pty Ltd
Dist. company Kim Lewis Marketing
Producer Ned Lander
Directors John Whitteron
Scriptwriters John Whitteron
Photography John Whitteron
Sound recordist Chris Ballard
Editor Bill Aiers
Music post-production Les Karaki
Music performed by Yothu Yindi
Gauge 16mm
Length 55 mins

Synopsis: This documentary follows Yothu Yindi, an Aboriginal band from Arnhem Land in the northern Australia, as it tours over 30 North American cities with Australian rock group Midnight Oil. Yothu Yindi performs traditional song and contemporary rock music. Into the Mainstream provides an entertaining and revealing insight into a people whose cultural heritage dates back some 40,000 years.

IN LANDS OF ESCAPE (working title)

Producers John Cruthers
Director Philip Tyndall
Scriptwriter Philip Tyndall
Prod. manager Jo Bell
Music performed by Gerald Murnane
Gauge 16mm
Length 56 mins

Synopsis: The real and imaginary world of Australian writer Gerald Murnane. This does not escape the notice of our tourists.

POSTCARDS FROM ROME

Prod. company Colosimo Film Productions Pty Ltd
Dist. company Colosimo Film Productions Pty Ltd
Producer Rosa Colosimo
Director Luigi Acquisto
Based on the original idea by Rosa Colosimo
Photography Sonia Leber
Editor Luigi Acquisto
Exec. producer Rosa Colosimo
Prod. manager Kellie Romain
Prod. assistant Diana Carvotto
Camera operator Vladimir Osherov
Camera assistant Sonia Leber
Publicity Kellie Romain
Length 56 mins

Synopsis: For decades Australian artists, tourists, writers, academics and adventurers have come to Italy, to spend a few weeks or months soaking up the country's ancient culture and lyrical beauty. Many of these 'glossy cliches. The result is both ugly and disturbing, especially when the film shows how Aboriginal culture is 'sold' by white tour operators. Even this does not escape the notice of our tourists.

STRANGEWAYS IN PARADISE

Prod. company Jet Productions
Producer Tom Zubrsky
Directors Tom Zubrsky
Photography Tom Zubrsky
Sound recordists Tom Zubrsky

Synopsis: This charming short film reveals a child-like world. It is a simple story of poverty and a little girl’s guilt. Annie takes something she has always wanted – 72 Dower pencils – but finds, as in Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, that they give her no pleasure because her conscience gives her no rest. She throws them into the creek... but they don't sink...
HAPPY BIRTHDAY MANKIND
Prod. company Mijit Productions
Producer Martin James Thorne
Director Martin James Thorne
Photography Richard Werkhoven
Editor Martin James Thorne
Assoc. producer John Laing
Camera assistant Julian Cole
Art director Ed Sanders
Special fx make-up David Sanders
Choreographer Fiona Stapleton
Wrangler John Paul
Laboratory The Video Film Company
Length 22 mins
Gauge 16mm
Shooting stock 7291
Cast: Duane Johnson (Max), Marcus Very (Dwarf), King (Himself), Nikk (3/4), Nicki (1/4), Nicki (Nik).
Synopsis: The last days in the life of the last man on Earth are filled with wonder, fear, loneliness and dreams. Who will inherit the garden of Eden?

I SEE, I SAID THE BLIND MAN
Prod. company D. Patrice & R. Monk
Producer Denise Patience
Director Roger Monk
Scriptwriter Roger Monk
Photography Peter Lang
Sound recorder Lucy Maclaren
Producer designer Jill Holt
Producer manager Lucy Maclaren
1st. asst. director Brendan Lavelle
Continuity Robyn Crawford
Focus puller Sonia Leber
Boom operator Steven King
Gaffer John Brennan
Asst. art directors Noel Hourigan
Make-up Simon Wain
Laboratory VFL
Budget $78,903
Length 20 mins
Gauge 16mm
Cast: Julian Branagan (Stewart), Robert Lyons (Greg), Judi (A Stadium), Nicki (Nikki), Nicki (Nik), Wendy (Lucinda), Mark Trevorrow (Bob Downe).
Synopsis: A group of disabled terrorists inadvertently find themselves the reluctant kidnappers of the newly-crowned Miss South-Eastern, Lucinda Fellows. The situation becomes more complicated, and a few home truths are revealed.

JOPET PISMO (ANOTHER TELEGRAM)
Prod. company AFTPS
Producer Ivo Burum
Director Ivo Burum
Scriptwriter Ivo Burum
Photography Reihma Hue
Sound recorder Rant
Editor Simon James
Sound editor Felicity Naide
Composer Maryellsr Hatfield
Production manager David Luke
Production assistant John Varquez
Asst. directors Stan Leman
Vladimir Burum
Katie Gore
Camera assistant David Richardson
Grip Stewart Green
Boom operator Tom Mackin
Art department Richard Clark
Stunt driving Anne O’Dee
Catering Dizhele Giblin
Make-up Mike Nikil
Anne Marie Hurley
Maria Furzante
Maria Burum
Jilspin Collins
Paul Newby
Rick Davis
Music arranger Alan Jelen
Musicians Peter Brown
Necisse Boyle
Rob Weaver
Denz Edgington
Graham Sharp
Matt Mawson
Consultants Ross McGregory
Marion Ord
Laboratory VFL
Length 16mm
Gauge 16mm
Shooting stock 7891
Cast: Vladimir Lenisty (Jaiko), Silvija Brooks (Franz), Anita Gerdes (Kate), Vladimir Burum (Pero), Mike Nikil (Owner), Maria Burum (Ana), Giga Constantinozis (Teacher), Ivan Burum (Jaiko’s Dad), Richard Leman (Franz’s Dad), Warren Rapiit (Young Kango), Cynthia Young Feene, Fantastic Tech. (Basketball Team).
Synopsis: A migrant family is faced with a dilemma when an elderly relative back home becomes ill. While the family considers whether to return, conflicting loyalties and aspirations become obvious. Tensions increase between the family members.

TAHLIA’S VOICE
Prod. company Lis Andrews & Deborah Copeland
Producer Deborah Copeland
Director Lis Andrews
Scriptwriter Lis Andrews
Based on the original idea by Lis Andrews
Photography Matthew Kelley
Editor Richard Ward
Producer Deborah Copeland
Prod. assistant Colette McKenna
Camera operator Carlo Stunzi
Art director Penne West
Budget $36,598
Length 12 minutes
Gauge 16mm
Synopsis: A story of sexual obsession: a man in Victorian times explores obsession through a complex mosaic of past and present, reality and fantasy, the focus of which is her endlessly repeated appearances.

TARGET AUDIENCE
Producers
Greg Woodland
Kathy Milk
Director Greg Woodland
Scriptwriter Greg Woodland
Photography Ken Wills
Sound Robert Lennott
Editor Nerida Cooper
Camera Assistant Leanne Thomas
Art Director Robert Moss
Prod. Manager Charles Arndt
Composer Kelvin Sandeman
Prod. staff Phillip Dodd, Shane Connor, Lisa Cameron, Greg O’Donovon, Belinda Charko
Synopsis: Mike is the producer of a TV current affairs program, badly in need of a good story. Geoff’s an amiable random killer who wants only to appear on TV singing a song by his hero, Tom Jones. Mike and Geoff need each other — does anyone else?

THE TENTH MAN
Prod. company Atmosphere Films
Producer Mark Osborn
Director Mark Osborn
Scriptwriter Mark Osborn
Based on the original idea by Photography Jack Eldredge
Editor Luke Blackburn
Prod. manager James Glasgow
Prod. accountant George Zaisis
Prod. assistant Kathleen Hurt
Camera assistant Vicente Anantoni
Key grip Nigel Hume
Art director Mark Hobbs
Wardrobe Ursula Jung
Neg. matching Brian Nankervis
Narrator Brian Nankervis
Still photography Elizabeth Coleman
Catering
Studios Mixed Business Studios
Laboratory VFL
Lab. liaison Steve Mitchell
Length 13 mins
Gauge Anamorphic 16mm
Shooting stock 7291
Cast: Brian Nankervis (The Voice), Mark Hobbs (The Image).
Synopsis: Ted Wilson is a poet with a Bolex and a head full of dreams. A rollercoaster ride through his modern consciousness as he confronts the possibilities of total television. A comedy/art film in anamorphic 16mm.

THE THIRD WAVE
Prod. company Elix Bryd
Producer Doug Hawkins
Director James Bogle
Scriptwriter Doug Hawkins
Based on the original idea by Jimmy Nightingale
Photography Richard Daniel
Sound recordist Jason Beks
Composer Tony Wellington
Art director John Paff
1st asst director Lee Mitchell
2nd asst director Richard Curtis
Boom operator Richard Curds
Camera assistant Graham McKinney
Make-up Margot Davis
Boom operator Rober Pickingan

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PERSPECTIVES ON INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY
Prod. company: Jason Olivier Productions Services Producer: Jason Olivier Director: Garry Sergeant Executive producer: Karen Myers Editors: Peter Brichia Lighting cameraperson: Stuart Binnenduijn Laboratory: Elliro Street Productions Length 25 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: This video shows that the integration of students with intellectual disabilities into regular school environments is becoming more practised in New South Wales and is working effectively for the benefit of all students within the system. We visit seven schools and see that children are enrolled in a regular class with additional support; in a support class in a regular school; and in a separate purpose school. Produced for the New South Wales Department of Education.

PORT OF BOTANY BAY
Prod. company: NewFilms Producer: Peter Anderson Director: Peter Wingate Scriptwriters: Robyne Michholz Editor: Michelle Manon Lighting cameraperson: Kevin Rigby Laboratory: NewFilms Length 10 mins; 10 mins; 15 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: Produced for the Port of Botany Bay (Maritime Services Board of New South Wales) these three videos are for differing audiences: the first is to promote trade with overseas countries; the second is to notify other Australian shipping organizations of the facilities available at the port; the third is for local community and school groups, highlighting the balance the MSB maintains between caring for the environment and the activities of the port.

SITTING NEXT TO NELLY
Prod. company: Silvergrass Communications Pty Ltd Director: Stadul Hail Producer: Michael Mundell Scriptwriter: Michael Mundell Producer: jo Malcolm Editors: Julie Hickson Jack Swart Laboratory: Visualise Productions Length 10 mins; 15 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: These two videos aim to demonstrate a whole school approach to child sexual abuse and AIDS: two projects to help teachers cope with the environment and the activities that the presenter (the Sheriff) how a person is called and what to expect through the case. It is an informative, awareness-raising video which is expected to be widely used by other groups.

ACROPOLIS NOW
Prod. company: Crawford Productions Producer: Peter Herbert Director: Simon Palamontes Scriptwriters: Nick Kepinariotis Executive producer: Joe Rosas Producer: John Derrinby Director: Gary Mori Scriptwriters: Lenie Symonds Technical directors: T.K. Beh Cinematographer: Malcolm O’Hare Sound editor: Darren White Off-line editor: Robbie Cosa Colorist: Francesca Carney Props: Russell Howard Stage manager: John Price Producer: Anthony J. Diferri Editor: Lindsay Pagh Line producer: Archie Arzak Producer: Sergio Adamiwan Director: Daniel Frem Producer: Ken Hardie Props: Miranda Finlay Video post-prod: Sue Hardie Audio post-prod: John Barber Sound: Sandy Wood Network publicist: Tony Rosas Scriptwriter: Richard Wood Editing: Kristin Voumard Length 15 mins 1” video Synopsis: Cast: Giannis Kiparisos (Jim), Simon Palamontes (Rick), George Kapiniaris (Mike), Trace McElenan (Liz), Simon Thorpe (Skip), George Vitalis (Simon). Synopsis: This story is set in 1950s Sydney. This is the story of the loves and hardships of the Acropolis Cafe, but you should see the Acropolis Now... It is a sequel to the highly successful All the Rivers Run II. This shows once again that the loves and hardships of the Acropolis Cafe will continue to take place as the story flows to the camera.

ALL THE RIVERS RUN II
Prod. company: McPhee Productions Pty Ltd Producer: Ian Addins Director: Karl McPhee Director: Cathe Stephen Editor: Denis Timake Lighting cameraperson: Alan Hean Lighting cameraperson: Andrew Fraser Editor: John Pinne Length 15 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: Produced for the Office of the Sheriff of New South Wales (Attorney General’s Department), this video is primarily for people who have been employed for jury service. It explains through dramatization of a re-enacted ‘case’, and through

CHILDREN’S COURT
Prod. company: Ann Darrouzet Producer: Matthew Bower Director: Kathy Armstrong Editor: Simon Palomares Editors: Ben Cheshire, Dan Burstall Lighting cameraperson: Peter Brichia Laboratory: Elliro Street Productions Length 25 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: This video for the Legal Aid Commission will be aimed at easing the apprehension of a young person who has appeared to the Children’s Court. It will show what the court looks like, what happens during a hearing, and what sort of powers the Court has.

TELEVISION PRODUCTION

NEW SOUTH WALES FILM AND TELEVISION OFFICE
GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN
Prod. company: 30 Seconds Producer: Mark Newman Director: Mark Waters Scriptwriter: Rodney Long Producer: Ann Bois Editor: Nick Landaus Lighting cameraperson: Malcolm Burrows Laboratory: Colorfilm/VT Studio: 15 minutes Gauges: 16mm to 1” tape Synopsis: To encourage better solid waste disposal, some film was produced for the New South Wales Metropolitan Waste Disposal Association. Its primary audience is young people in schools. The film dramatizes the film shows that landfilling of waste is a suitable and acceptable method; it is being used, and that it is environmentally sound. A broad-ranging audience would enjoy this film.

JURY DUTY - A REWARDING RESPONSIBILITY
Prod. company: McPhee Productions Pty Ltd Producer: Ian Addins Director: Karl McPhee Director: Cathe Stephen Editor: Denis Timake Lighting cameraperson: Alan Hean Lighting cameraperson: Andrew Fraser Editor: John Pinne Length 15 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: Produced for the Office of the Sheriff of New South Wales (Attorney General’s Department), this video is primarily for people who have been employed for jury service. It explains through dramatization of a re-enacted ‘case’, and through

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JURY DUTY - A REWARDING RESPONSIBILITY
Prod. company: McPhee Productions Pty Ltd Producer: Ian Addins Director: Karl McPhee Director: Cathe Stephen Editor: Denis Timake Lighting cameraperson: Alan Hean Lighting cameraperson: Andrew Fraser Editor: John Pinne Length 15 mins Gauges: Betacam to 1” Synopsis: Produced for the Office of the Sheriff of New South Wales (Attorney General’s Department), this video is primarily for people who have been employed for jury service. It explains through dramatization of a re-enacted ‘case’, and through
BEYOND TOMORROW
Prod. company Beyond Productions Pty Ltd
Dist. company Beyond International Group Inc.
Producer Ian Cross
Director Geoff Tanner
Exec. producer Peter Abbott
Assoc. producers Shayne Collier, Petra Newbold, Edelen Tooby, Geoff Fitzpatrick, Brigitte Zinsinger
Tim Warner, Ian Bremer
Correspondents Gary Cubberley, Jean Hill, Susan Hunt, Randy Meier, Richard Wine, Livia Hanisch
Prod. manager Vicki Agg
Prod. coordinator Chelsee Klein
Prod. accountant Barbara Browns
Post-prod. coordinator Amanda Hickey
Post-prod. assistant Martin Williams
Researchers Anna Cater, Victor Marsch, Francis Thompson, Marina Bennett
Studio producer Chris Hawkhaw, Leo White
Composer Twilight Productions
Computer graphics Matthew Urmenyhazi, Hans Heidrich, Michael Oates, Michael Collins
Lighting camera
Mixers Barry West, Mark Tanner, Julian Ellingsworth, Ray Neale, Nick Glover, Andrew Rumen, Peter Brichita, Cali Cerami
Original music performed by Twilight Productions
Sound editor Murray Burns
Colin Bayley, Kevin Bayley, Cate Cashil
Sound records Rowland McManus, Bisa Castro, Graham Wyse
CMX editor Martin Hartington
Studio lighting director Robert Harle
Studio make-up Richard Curtis
Publicity Cheryl Conway, Scott Pesina
Studio Soho
Post-prod. video VTC Los Angeles
Standards conversion 221 x hour
Gauge 1" Dolby A video
Synopsis: Five American reporters travel the world to monitor the latest developments in science and technology.

BEYOND 2000
Prod. company Beyond Productions Pty Ltd
Dist. company Beyond International Group Inc.
Producer Tim Clucas
Director Judith John-Story
Scriptwriter Tim Clucas
Based on the novel by Various
Photography Various
Sound recordist Various
Editors Various
Production designer Various
Composer Robert Davids
Exec. producer Mark Verkerk
Prod. secretary Theresa Hargery
Prod. accountant Ars Sahariage
Camera operator Various
Boom operator Various
Make-up Warren Hannah
Props Various

CASSIDY
Prod. company Archive Films Pty Ltd/ABC
Director Tony Kavanagh
Line producer Tony Wyble
Line director Carl Schulte
Scriptwriter Joanna Murray-Smith
Based on the novel by Various
Photography Various
Sound recordist Various
Editors Various
Production designer Various
Composer Various
Exec. producer Various
Assoc. producer Various
Prod. manager Various
Prod. co-ordinator Various
Unit manager Various
Location manager Various
Prod. secretary Various
1st assistant Various
2nd assistant Various
3rd assistant Various
Props Various

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CINEMA PAPERS 73
The page contains a list of films submitted to the Film Censorship Board, along with their classifications and notes. The classifications include age ratings, content advisories, and specific prohibitions. The text is organized into tables and listings, detailing the films by various criteria such as title, country of origin, and categories.

FILMS REFUSED REGISTRATION

FILMS REFERRED FOR REGISTRATION

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G (GENERAL EXHIBITION)

FILMS REFERRED FOR REGISTRATION

R (RESTRICTED EXHIBITION)

R (RESTRICTED EXHIBITION)

S (Sex)

F (Fornication)

V (Violence)

L (Language)

O (Other)

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Production of films in Australia has fundamentally changed. The problem is that nobody really knows what the new arrangements are or how they are going to work. Certainly, the outlines are known. The FFC has $70 million to underwrite a production slate of $100 million for qualifying Australian films—but what is it looking for and on what basis will it invest? It would be a mistake to think that either FFC staff or the board has any clearly worked out guidelines or simple answers. They are as much on the learning curve as the producers who are approaching them.

One thing that is emerging is that market realities (as opposed to market fantasies) will play a big part in decision-making. In the latter days of 10BA, the financing formula became X per cent presale = 100 per cent financing. Some (many) producers felt that as long as they had the revenue guarantees necessary to trigger the investment that their marketing responsibilities were finished. Investors were ahead, producers got their fees and brokers got their cut along the way. As governments fiddled with the rate of depreciation and marginal personal income-tax rates, X per cent went from 10 to 40 and finally to 80 per cent of a budget. Budgets were set (in many cases) to the formula rather than the potential market value of the property.

The FFC wants to change all that. Producers will need to argue the viability of their budgets based on likely returns and will need to present the argument with something more than rhetoric.

Presales are obviously a strong argument because they present evidence of market interest by end-users and they provide guaranteed returns, which at the end of a long board meeting always look better than a nod and a wink. Presales are problematic, however. End-users offering to pre-buy generally know the kind of price range that the production should be pitched in. Often films cost more than their potential revenues, but the FFC wants to understand market realities and will not finance films on the basis of some arbitrary idea of market interest by end-users. It would be more reasonable for investors to offer a guaranteed advertising budget, which at the end of a long board meeting always looks better than a nod and a wink. Presales are a strong demonstration of this kind.

One needs to distinguish here between theatrical films and television. Usually television presales are at a much higher level than sales made after completion. Having sales and/or a market plan helps to fix the kind of price range that the production should be pitched in. Often films cost more than their potential revenues and sometimes they are underbudgeted, to the detriment of their eventual returns. The FFC will be looking at this question closely.

Of course, this is terrific in theory, but the question that needs to be asked is, “Who does the assessment and what is their expertise?” In the obvious cases of silly budgeting and invented market demand the task should be reasonably simple. The problem gets knotted around whose assessment can be relied upon. For every right guess there is an example of a dreadful mistake. The studios that turned down Star Wars, Malcolm and Mad Max. The ones who made Heaven’s Gate, Ishtar and Coolangatta Gold.

Nobody has a lock on being wrong or on getting it right. The thing that keeps you humble here is that we have all made some whopping mistakes. Now the problem is that with the FFC being the only game in town, you wouldn’t want your picture to be one that you were right on and they got wrong. Clearly some factors will tell.

Track record hopefully will carry weight. Producers state their future on their judgement. If they’ve come up right a few times it should make a difference. Some recent anecdotes (that don’t bear repeating) indicate that some FFC staff don’t know who they are talking to when meeting filmmakers. This could be an example of Oz egalitarianism or just poor briefing, but things will have to change if these exchanges are to yield more light than heat. In the producer camp there seem to be two polarized views as to how to assess market demand. Many were worried that the FFC would favour a particular kind of filmmaking to the exclusion of all others: a house style, in much the way the AFC developed a profile to their investments pre-IOBA. They argued that the deal ought to be the only basis for funding.

The other argument is that the desirability of the project should be based on an assessment of the creative elements and only then should the deal be examined with a view to facilitating funding.

Both positions have their complications and the jury is out as to how the FFC will behave. It is easy to draw the extreme positions in which one factor or the other would be decisive; however, it is not so easy to see how the board will grapple with this problem as a matter of policy. It is impossible in this crazy mixture of art and commerce to make any meaningfully objective decisions. The bullet needs to be bitten.

A likely outcome will be that producers with track records will put a package of films to the FFC with other, less experienced producers in tow. This will give confidence to the FFC that some of the judgements have been adequately made and that the productions will be delivered with a known degree of finish. By providing producers with funding for a slate of production it will help to bring the industry into a more rational mode of operation, giving more marketing and distribution power to production companies and a more reliable cash flow for forward planning, staffing and future development. From the FFC point of view it will provide a greater spread of its risk.

The Screen Production Association of Australia argued during the planning stages of the FFC that the body should have both a Melbourne and a Sydney office of equal importance. With a one-door funding policy in place the dangers of over-centralization cannot be overstressed. I would hate to see a slide into a Sydney main office with a mere mail-room branch office in Melbourne. To further this aim I would recommend that the board meets at each office alternately and that each city has a different subset of members of the total board at them. Clearly two or three members would need to sit on both groups to provide continuity of policy. Further, there should be some confidentiality between the two offices. In theory it should be possible to get an approval from one office for a project that the other office didn’t like. From the relatively short experience so far of dealing with the FFC it is clear that the Corporation’s staff will need to quickly learn a lot about the film industry and who the players are. They are also going to have to decide whether they are behaving like a bank, i.e. with a commercial attitude to investment and their client base, or as a subsidy-distributing body akin to the Australia Council. The confusion in roles is evidenced by some head-shaking on both sides.

Some producers have been approaching the bank with the view that it is there to prop up the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed and now feel it is their right to have maintained at the tax-payers’ expense. On the other hand, some producers have felt that the lack of feedback from FFC staff on deal terms and board decisions has created a sense of a Film Bulgaria model that is frightening to contemplate.

It is still early days and a lot of yelling, talking, arguing, negotiating and crystal ball-gazing is yet to come. Mistakes will be made and policies will change and go. In the interest of a dynamic industry it is important for all the players to contribute to the ongoing debate.

CINEMA PAPERS 73

THE LAST WORD

PRODUCER BOB WEIS, WHO RECEIVED FFC FUNDING FOR THE MINI-SERIES CASSIDY (AFTER AN INITIAL KNOCKBACK) MAKES SOME PERTINENT COMMENTS ABOUT FILM FUNDING’S PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE...
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