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Cinema Papers #111 August 1996

Scott Murray

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Cinema Papers #111 August 1996

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Focus

China Watching
Uncovering the Gems of Chinatown
By Barrie Pattison
For many, the real gems of Chinese cinema appear not in Western arthouse cinemas, but downtown, in Chinatown. A dedicated fan for decades, Barrie Pattison reveals the history of the commercial Chinese cinema.

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Hong Kong Hybrid Australia
Time to Jump Ship?
By Michael Kitson
Just when Hong Kong cinema is at last receiving Western recognition, the Hong Kong film industry is jumping ship. Local filmmakers are moving offshore and into the global market. Will some (including Jackie Chan) settle Down Under?

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Box-Office Revolution
Do the Chinese Care About Indigenous Cinema?
By Chris Berry
After two recent visits to China, Chris Berry deciphers the current transformation of the Chinese Film Industry on the eve of the “takeover” of Hong Kong.

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Christopher Doyle
It’s All About Trust
By Tony Rayns
Australian Christopher Doyle is one of the stars of Chinese cinema, his cinematography winning raves around the world and countless offers from Hollywood, Europe and Australasia. But has Doyle found his true home with the likes of Chen Kaige, Wong Kar-Wai and Edward Yang?

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Love and Other Catastrophes
Snowballing Screwball
By Fincina Hopgood
Love and Other Catastrophes was made for half a million, and in secret, by a collective team headed by Emma-Kate Croghan and Stavros Efthymiou. It’s a fast-paced look at the lives, loves and lessons of university students.

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Contributors

Martha Ansara is a filmmaker and film historian; Chris Berry teaches in the Department of Cinema Studies at LaTrobe University; Dominic Case is a motion-picture technical consultant; Mary Colbert is a Sydney writer on film; John Conomos teaches at the College of Fine Arts, Sydney; Jan Epstein is the film reviewer for The Melbourne; Fincina Hopgood is an Arts-Law student at Melbourne University; Michael Kitson is a freelance writer on film; Marg O’Shea is a Sydney writer on film; Barrie Pattison is a film director and writer on film; Noel Purdon teaches Screen Studies at Flinders University, and is the author of several studies on Italian cinema; Tony Rayns is one of the world’s leading authorities on, and supporters of, Chinese cinema; Claire Roth is a psychology student; Richard Siverton is a principal in the law firm of Hart & Spira; Nina Stevenson is a solicitor at Hart & Spira; Ian Stocks is a documentary filmmaker; Archie Weller is a novelist whose Day of the Dog, was made into Blackfellas,; Raymond Younis is a lecturer at the University of Sydney.
AMERICAN PROJECT INVESTMENTS

The Australian Multimedia Enterprise has approved funding of:

- $50,000 for Mainstream Marketing of Melbourne to complete a double CD-ROM music instruction course costing $420,000;
- $190,000 to Micro Forte of Canberra to complete an interactive CD-ROM strategy game costing $650,000;
- $600,000 to Pacific Sales and Marketing of Sydney to develop a series of CD-ROMs on management training for small businesses;
- $37,000 for David Lourie and Associates to develop the concept for a CD-ROM entertainment title based on the theme of enlightenment; and
- $45,000 for Libby Hathorn to develop a children’s CD-ROM fantasy title.

A $16 million, three-year agreement between the AEM and the Victoria 21 Multimedia Fund to finance concept development by Victorian multimedia practitioners has also been formalised. The scholarship-programme will support travel by nine talented Australians to major symposia, such as Siggraph, each year.

FESTIVALS

The Melbourne and Brisbane International Film Festivals will take place from 25 July-11 August and 1-11 August respectively. This year’s festival will be held in early-to-mid June, overlapping with the Sydney Film Festival and principal venue, from St Kilda’s Astor Theatre to the city centre. This year’s Festival will also be the last under Festival Director Tait Brady who, after nine years at the helm, moves on to the position of General Manager, Palace Entertainment. The Festival director’s position has been advertised.

The Brisbane Festival’s opening night premiere will be Nadia Tass’ ‘Reliable’ (formerly ‘My Entire Life’). The world cinema section will include ‘Cooking for Richard’ (Han Pacino), ‘The White Ballroom’ (Latar Parnah), ‘Small Face’ (Gillesys MackInnon) and ‘Stage Door’ (Hu-Du-Men, Shu Kei), which will close the Festival.

Brisbane will this year stage a retrospective of the early films of Stanley Kubrick, featuring new prints of several key films and a presentation by author John Baxter, whose biography of Kubrick is due for publication in 1997.

ANIMATORS AND VIDEO ARTISTS SOUGHT

The operators of Melbourne’s Vahalla Cinema drew the curtain for the last time during June, when their nine-year lease on the popular Northcote venue expired. The building’s owner is currently operating the cinema.

The Vahalla, which opened in Richmond in 1976, served as one of the city’s few alternative and independent venues, with seasons of retrospectives, science-fiction, animation, special premiers, and regular screenings of The Blues Brothers. Its closure coincided with its 20th anniversary as well as a record-breaking season of Wallace and Gromit animations, ‘Aardman Collection II’.

Melbourne’s Capital Cinema, one of the few remaining art deco cinemas famed for its Walter Burley Griffin designed ceiling, has been given a new lease of life as a repertory and first-release venue. Until February 1996, the Capitol specialised in Chinese films; it is now under the management of Paul Coulter (who also operates the Lumiere Cinema). Still in Melbourne, the George Cinema launched its Celluloid Bits Back programme. The programme is dedicated to screening Australian documentaries and shorts, and included ‘The Good Looker’ (Dianne Jager), ‘The Needy and the Greedy’ (Liz Burke), ‘Miss Taurus’ (Graham Wood) and ‘The Search for the Shell Encrusted Toilet Seat’ (Leone Dickinson).

AFI EXHIBITION SEASONS

During August and September, the Australian Film Institute will tour ‘Northern Lights’, a programme of contemporary Canadian cinema, and ‘Travel In Mind’, a collection of highlights of the Oberhausen Short Film Festival.

The Oberhausen Collection screens as part of the Brisbane International Film Festival between 2-6 August, at Sydney’s Chauvel Cinemas on 8 and 11 August; as part of the Jumptop Festival in Perth between 12-17 August, at the Melbourne Cinematheque on 2 and 9 September, and at Hobart’s State Cinema on 7 and 8 September.

CORRIGENDA

In the previous issue of Cinema Papers, a mistake in the “Insurance” column drastically altered the meaning of a key paragraph (“minimum” wrongly replacing “maximum”). The para should read:

(B) All Risks Negative/Video-tape excluding Faulty Camera, Stock and Processing provides cover for physical loss or damage to the negative/video-tape and here again a First Loss limit is not adequate as the value at risk grows as each day’s takes are processed and stored in the vaults at the laboratory with a maximum value at risk being reached immediately prior to the making of a colour reversal internegative. This section of the policy basically covers storage and transit risks and a major catastrophe at the laboratory could lead to a substantial or total loss. A full value policy is essential.

In the credits listing for Love and Other Catastrophes on p. 24, the Christian name of associate producer Fred Bergman was misspelt. Bergman fears that he will always be known as “Freg”.

In several issues of “Introduction”, Helen Watts has been credited as co-producer of Dead Heart, with Bryan Brown as producer. Cinema Papers has now been informed that Watts and Brown are, in fact, joint producers. In the “Eidetic Eight”, p. 80, Adrian Martin’s correct mark for Indian in the Cupboard was 2, not 5. And, to avoid any misunderstandings: Brian de Palma’s Mission Impossible, unlike the television show, does not have a colon.

SONGS

Some portions of the songs in this issue have incorrect rests. The author would like to correct them as follows:

Example 1: The correct note durations are shown in parentheses.

Example 2: The correct note durations are shown in parentheses.

In the previous issue of Cinema Papers, a mistake in the “Insurance” column drastically altered the meaning of a key paragraph (“minimum” wrongly replacing “maximum”). The para should read:

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Actor Nina Liu tells Scott Murray how she got started in film:

NINA LIU

I’ve always loved the performing arts, especially ballet. So, when a casting agent came around to our school to find a young girl for a half-hour film, The Long Ride, I went to the casting call.

It was something I thought I could do for the experience, but what I really wanted was to dance. By the end of it, though, I was totally hooked [laughs].

Was having done ballet on stage a help?

No. Ballet is very poised, which actually made it hard for me to move and be really natural. Everything was a little more exaggerated because of my stage view. I found it really difficult to bring it all down.

How was working with Richard Lowenstein on Naked: Stories of Men?

Fantastic; absolutely the most unreal experience I’ve ever had, I think.

I came to the set quite worried about the whole thing. It was a very big role, very demanding and quite emotional, but Richard and the crew made me feel really comfortable. I don’t think I could have done it without their support.

What specifically worried you?

I have very high standards that I set for myself. I hate to be not perfect. I’ve always loved the performing arts, especially ballet. So, when a casting agent came around to our school to find a young girl for a half-hour film, The Long Ride, I went to the casting call.

I didn’t do anything that they asked for. I thought, “This is it. I don’t want to act”, but Andrea just kept at it. I ended up in tears, absolutely unable to stop. I was so frustrated, but my frustration then did the shoot. It was a really different way of working to Naked. Half of the crew didn’t speak English, and I felt a bit separated. The communication was more difficult.

Do you speak Chinese?

No. I had to learn it for the role, along with how to speak English with a Canadian accent.

And then came Heartbreak High?

Yes. I have a most fantastic part, a girl called May, who is totally different from all the other characters.

Is May an ethnic character?

She is Asian, but they haven’t made her very precise. A certain degree of perfection is required, and I really like things to be perfect.

What benefit does rehearsal give you?

On Naked, it was to get familiar with the character, and with Ben and Richard.

There was one point where I just felt like it came to a dead-end. I couldn’t do anything that they asked for. I thought, “This is it. I don’t want to act”, but Andrea just kept at it. I ended up in tears, absolutely unable to stop. I was so frustrated, but my frustration really difficult to bring it all down.

How has television been different to film?

Faster shooting [laughs].

And less rehearsals?

No. When we are not shooting, we are rehearsing. I’ve worked more on my character than ever before. You have to, with different directors and writers coming in all the time. You really need to be sure about who your character is.

Has your knowledge of the character ever set you at odds with the directors and writers? You presumably know your character better than anybody else.

Well, yeah, you’d hope so. [Laughs] People will always have different ideas about what a character might do or say, and, if you can justify why you think a character would not do that, they always say, “Okay, we understand that.” I don’t want May to be suddenly very opinionated over animal rights and then turn around and eat meat [laughs].

Do they use multi-camera set-ups?

We have two cameras sometimes, which I’m not used to, but it means you can shoot faster and catch two performances at once. That is good, because sometimes you are so tired after doing someone else’s shot that yours becomes pushed and a little bit fake.

What are your dreams and plans?

To become a famous actor, in any sense at all. I’d really like to stay within the industry, or at least in performing arts. I still really love dancing. I don’t think I’d so much like to direct, but choreography I really enjoy, along with sound editing, and editing in general. There is something about it which has to be very precise. A certain degree of perfection is required, and I really like things to be perfect.
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NSW FILM AND TV OFFICE
Director Scott Hicks

Interviewed by Paul Kal...
A writer
Jan Sardi

Jonna
Funnel

End of Life

All the

L. N.
erseverance, integrity and steadfast faith in the director’s vision are keywords to the collaboration between producer Jane Scott, writer Jan Sardi and director Scott Hicks, who has spent the past 10 years realizing this film inspired by the life of David Helfgott. In the late 1950s, David Helfgott was a brilliant child prodigy whose virtuosity at the piano won him local and international fame. David’s father, Peter, was a Polish refugee, who came to Australia in 1934 and married Rachel in 1943. Both had lost their families in the Holocaust. Peter ruled the family with an iron will, driving David’s music education far beyond the emotional and psychological levels a child of his age could withstand.

After David won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London, Peter disowned his son for abandoning his family. David suffered a nervous breakdown, languishing in complete anonymity in psychiatric institutions for years. His identity was eventually uncovered, and David began his recovery, marrying his wife, Gillian, and re-establishing his career at the piano.

Shine, which took this year’s Sundance Film Festival by storm, eschews the traditions of the biopic and the constraints that beset many productions of this scale. Hicks, Sardi and Scott, together with an impressive array of local and international actors, have proficiently realized a searingly emotional biographical story about life at the end of the tunnel. Scott Hicks, whose previous theatrical features are Freedom (1982) and Sebastian and the Sparrow (1989), and Jan Sardi talk about the making of Shine. The interviews were conducted separately and then intercut.

Can you recall your first encounter with David Helfgott?

HICKS: I first saw David playing here in Adelaide ten years ago. David came into the concert hall and looked a little lost, a little out of place. He headed towards the piano, his hands out and searching. But as soon as he started to play, he was totally in command. His performance reached out and touched people. It wasn’t a dry and clinical experience to watch him perform. Immediately after the performance, I went to talk to him and his wife, Gillian. It took me about a year to engender a relationship of trust with them and their friends to enable me to pursue the research. I spent much of that year going back and forwards to Perth, sourcing information, talking to members of the family. It was the start of what I hadn’t realized was going to be such an extraordinarily long process.

I wrote the first draft of the screenplay, which was then called “Flight of the Bumble Bee.” In the meantime, I was busy directing other projects, and it was a process of trying to keep this project alive. In 1990, I decided that I wanted to bring another writer in to get a fresh take on the material. I was very, very embedded in the biographical details of David’s life and I wanted to lift the film out of being simply a biopic, and make it something which I hoped would transcend that. I asked Jan Sardi to join me on the project as the screenwriter, which he did from 1990 through to the film’s completion.

There was a very, very long period of development to arrive at the next draft, which was honed out of a vast mass of biographical material. Jan’s enormous contribution was to lift the story into a wonderful plane of storytelling which was very direct and very emotive. The screenplay became the calling-card both for cast, and ultimately for money.

Why does the film follow a non-linear structure?

HICKS: I had always wanted to start the story with the adult David at his lowest ebb, before returning the audience to his childhood. We had to get the audience into a position where they realize they are going to be confronted with this extraordinary character whom they know they are going to see again later, because that’s the grammar of film. SARDI: The challenge to work out a way to tell the story in 100 minutes was threefold: first, there was the forward and very emotive. The screenplay became the calling-card both for cast, and ultimately for money.

How would you describe your collaboration on the screenplay?

HICKS: Jan wrote the screenplay; that is the fact of the matter. That said, he was very aware of my vision for this film and, consequently, we would meet and discuss detail and work over dialogue together. Jan would then go away and write, as a writer does and must. I had a very strong sense of what I wanted to come out of the collaboration, and, at the same time, I wanted Jan to bring it to everything that he could as a writer, which of course he did.
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that, because it really does force you to get rid of all the way of telling the story. But I actually like never quite sure whether you are doing too much or not enough. The process keeps on being refined so to speak; that way, you let the audience 'into' the story, and participate in it by filling it in for themselves.

A story like this has to move quite rapidly. The greatest asset in moving the story forward is what the audience brings to it, because people tend to fill in things from their own experiences. The thing has to be underwritten, in terms of dialogue, and you have to move the story forward between the cuts, so to speak; that way, you let the audience 'into' the story, and participate in it by filling it in for themselves.

I think the best films are the ones where audiences are invited to work in that way, to fill in what has happened. This walks a really fine line: you are never quite sure whether you are doing too much or not enough. The process keeps on being refined over numerous drafts, and then in the editing.

The demands of production also make you refine the way of telling the story. But I actually like that, because it really does force you to get rid of all the fat, so to speak. For instance, when someone says, "We can't do this scene like this", for one reason or another, you have to ask yourself, "What is important about the scene? Is it important at all?" If it is, you come down to that crystal point of what the scene is saying, and find the simplest way of telling it.

Shine is very much a film for the cinema, whereas at face value a lot of the material would suggest a tele-feature. Were you under pressure to make a tele-feature rather than a cinema feature?

HICKS: The project had the nine lives of the cat. It went in and out of numerous hands. Yes, there was at one stage an attempt to make it a glorified tele-movie, and another to make it a television mini-series. But I believed that it was inherently cinematic, that there was potential for the whole film to hinge on a monumental central performance that, if executed properly, would simply light up the big screen. It always felt too big for me as a television story, though pragmatism and the climate of the late '80s would have made it a great deal easier and simpler to have made it as a tele-movie. Of course, I'm extremely glad I didn't.

What in the story interested you and led you to believe it was ripe for cinematic storytelling?

HICKS: From day one, I saw it as a story about light at the end of the tunnel. It was to me a marvellous thing to contemplate that someone could journey through such a difficult and fragmented life and emerge the other side, eccentric, with some damage to his personality, but alive, in love, playing music, and reaching an audience and accepting who he is.

When I first spoke to Geoffrey Rush about doing the film, I said it is about redemption. That sparked something for Geoffrey, I think. He felt that there was a bigger story that was being told through this amazing life. The film attempts to find an emotional truth rather than getting completely bogged down in day-to-day biographical detail.

What are the challenges of making a biographical film?

HICKS: It was always central to our agreement that Gillian and David be consulted, but that, finally, the choice and decisions were mine.

The rest of the family were somewhat more sensitive. David's siblings were not keen on the idea of the film being made. For my part, I was at pains to point out that sooner or later somebody was going to make a film about David's life, and maybe it was better that it was done with consultation, care and sensitivity to the situation rather than with somebody making it from a series of newspaper clippings.

It was tricky. You are dealing with deep-seated sensitivities in people's lives. You have to tell the story, you can't bowdlerize it, truncate it. Yet David has travelled into some very dark corners in his life, and you have to show that, otherwise what is the point of the journey.

SARDI: The first responsibility is that they are still alive and you can't just cut to a car chase to make their lives interesting or do something for dramatic convenience. You have to try to be absolutely true to the essence of their life experience, and sometimes you have to find dramatic short-cuts to get them to a point at which they arrived in their life.

The creative side comes in taking real-life touchstones and coming up with creative interpretations of scenes which may have happened. You have to work back from an experience, an attitude, or some weird saying of David, and ask yourself, "Why on earth does he keep coming back to this?"

You have to find emblems, like the scene in the bath, that psychological assault on him, when he dirtied in the bath. It was the whole thing of someone's system, their internal being, their psyche, breaking down. That scene becomes emblematic of David's breakdown, based on things David had said to us.

Did you find, nonetheless, that there were elements of the story you had to change in the interests of dramatic and thematic coherence?

HICKS: If anything, we have simplified the story. For example, David stumbled into more than one restaurant on more than one rainy night to play and astonish people. So, I chose to combine those events, take elements from each and put them together as an emblematic dramatic rendering of that experience, rather than opting for the repetitive notion. That said, every incident depicted has its touchstone in reality, and much of David's dialogue and behaviour has been crystallized from real life.

In chronological terms, Peter was long dead when David got his job at the wine bar. But I felt it was vital there be a final attempt by Peter to reconcile; a swansong, if you like. Interestingly enough, in a very first draft of the treatment which I worked...
on with writer John MacGregor. John invented Peter's ghost to appear at the end of the film. Much of David's babbling dialogue was conducted with this unseen figure. What you see in that scene, when the old Peter comes to see David before his death, is in a sense the residue of Peter's ghost. Apparently David's father, Peter, was far more authoritarian than what is shown in the film. Yet, the film might have been dramatically inert if you had portrayed him to be a total monster.

SARDI: It is only in bad films that characters are either really good or really bad. There is that wonderful bit of grey that happens in the middle, where some oscillate towards the good and some oscillate towards the bad. One of the things that we tried to show was that his father loved him. His father wasn't there doing these things deliberately; it was out of a misguided sense of love. Once you get the audience to understand that, he becomes sympathetic, which doesn't stop you getting frustrated by what he's doing, because the truth is, he can't help himself. That's what makes him such a tragic figure.

Peter gave David an incredible love of music. He said to him that music will be your only friend. As extreme and as insidious as some of those things were, it is a really important point about his characterization.

It is David's story, but, if you look at it as Peter's story, it is about life's potential; it is the tragedy of a man who realizes too late in life that you only get one shot at it. He tries to control and determine everything that is going to happen in his life, and in the end it is tragic.

HICKS: One of things which I was very, very clear in delining to Jan was Peter Helfgott must not be simply a monster, because that to me cheapened and lessened the impact of the whole story. It makes less of David, if you like, and it was vital that we feel for Peter, even though he did harsh and brutal things. It was still important that we feel for his dilemma. Peter is a victim, too, possessed by his own demons and a past he cannot escape. His crime is to love David too much, and be unable to let him go.

Jan created a wonderful picture of Peter, I think, but people would read the script and say, "He is so black, so dark, so tyrannical." Even Armin [Mueller-Stahl], when we first met, said, "He is a dreadful character."

In dealing with the migrant experience, many films try to deny its full effects by insisting that the next generation, usually through their rebellion against their parents, are free of it. 

HICKS: I was absolutely fascinated by that part and, I have to say, somewhat trepidant about tackling it, because the film's experience is so remote from my own: the story of a Polish Jew who comes to Australia to avoid the worst excesses of the Nazi régime, loses much of his and his wife's family, and yet has this abiding love of Stalin and those ideals.

It seemed to me that Peter — the character, not the real person — had lost one family and, by hell, was not going to lose another. His whole outlook is predicated on a desire to keep his family together at all costs. Ironically, in doing that, he creates the very environment that he fought to escape.

SARDI: Everything that happened to David has some aspect of the past in it, and some aspect of the future as well.

In the scene where Peter goes back to David after so many years of estrangement, all he can do is tell the story about something horrible his father did to him when he was a kid. It's an attempt to turn back the clock, in a sense, but it is too late. He is a victim, and we see in that not only his father but the whole tragedy of the Holocaust in Europe.

If there is a message, if there is an objective at all costs. The screen-elements of the piano playing and the realization were extremely difficult. Geoffrey performed all his own stunts at the piano; Noah [Taylor] to a lesser extent, but Noah has that monumental scene to enact. It was a daunting prospect to figure out how to make this look like climbing a mountain, while holding fast to the audience's belief that the actor is actually playing.

The obvious ending for the film would have been the playing of the Rachmaninoff Concerto.

SARDI: It is the most obvious ending, but it wouldn't have been as good a film had we had that done. The conclusion to the story is not about triumph in the sense of performance: it is a triumph in terms of a much bigger journey, which is his life. It is a life story, so that is where you look for your climax, that is where you get your satisfaction at the end. It is not because someone holds up the premiership cup, in football terms ...

Hollywood is renowned for films which are pretty empty and then, in the last 20 minutes, it is all music and fireworks and telling the audience this is where you should be feeling. One of the good things about Shine is how restrained it is and the way in which Scott handled what could have been overly sentimental or emotional in the wrong hands.

At what stage did Geoffrey Rush become involved in the film?

HICKS: In 1992, Liz Mullinar suggested I meet Geoffrey, whom she considered the actor best suited for this extraordinarily-demanding rôle.

Ultimately, Geoffrey was the only person that I ever considered for the adult David, and the audition took the form of a meeting; his body of work was his audition.

Once I decided Geoffrey was it, I was presented with a new technical problem. The screenplay was structured so that there would only be two Davids: the child, and the adolescent...
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The Three Chinas

This special Cinema Papers supplement examines the cinemas of the three Chinas: Taiwan, Hong Kong and the mainland. They are among the most vibrant in the world, and their films are finding increasing audiences and appreciation in the West (even if faced with problems at home).

The 1997 reunification of Hong Kong with China will have a dramatic effect on the Chinese industry — and other industries around the world, including Australia's. Already Australia is handling post-production on major Chinese-language films.¹

Chinese filmmakers, too, are making a home here, such as Clara Law, whose Floating Life will soon go into release.²

Other directors and stars, such as Jackie Chan, are shooting films here, leading to much speculation about more Chinese filmmakers setting up location bases in Australia.

Chinese cinema, in all its myriad forms, is not only exciting for what it is, and from where it has come, but for a future which may have a major impact on Australia's film culture.

Barrie Pattison goes searching for the best in mainstream Chinese cinema — not on the arthouse circuit, but down in Chinatown.

Recently in the U.S., for four weeks out of six, the biggest-grossing films were made by Hong Kong directors: John Woo (Broken Arrow) and Stanley Tong (Rumble in the Bronx), with Taiwanese Ang Lee not far behind with Sense and Sensibility. Time magazine had a Gong Li cover story on film from the three Chinas, following one in New Yorker. Hong Kong has just passed India as the world’s second largest exporter of movies, and the most ambitious film currently being shot in Australia is Sammo Hung’s Jackie Chan actioner, A Nice Guy.

Sophisticated and Europeanized centre in China. Though our knowledge is still patchy and dependent on fragments filtering out from mainland archives under recent liberalizations, Shanghai appears to have been the Chinese movie capital. A pattern can be detected in their best films. Shot silent, like much of the Asian and Soviet production in the 1930s, Wu Yonggan’s The Goddess (1934), with the dignified Ruan Lingyu, mixes German street films with Madame X weepies. Yuan Muhzi’s Street Angel (1937) re-works the same-named the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square. Liberalization like the “Hundred flowers” period of the 1950s or the restoration after a near-complete shutdown in the ’70s show stirrings rapidly suppressed. Ideologue critics surface to champion then-current work like The White-haired Girl, The East is Red or Tunnel Warfare, but reputations fail to survive the brief shelf life of their message content. During this period, the mainland fails to generate a filmmaker of world standard, though master survivor Xie Jin is occasionally touted on the strength of simple-minded morale boosters like Garlands at the Foot of the Mountain (1985). The Cultural Revolution ban on his feeble Two Stage Sisters (1964) fuelled its reputation to the point where it became the best-known mainland film of this period.

Many of the old Shanghai filmmakers had fled to Hong Kong, taking their stars, equipment and staff.

If all this sounds like a sudden burst of activity, the impression is misleading. For a quarter of a century, Hong Kong has been the number three movie producer on the planet, an extraordinary situation for a population of that size. Some 1.3 billion people see a Jackie Chan movie, dwarfing audiences for a Hollywood success. As in most major cities, Chinatown cinemas have made it easier to see these films in Australian capitals than to see films from Europe, the UK or Australia.

The reason this has happened, and the lack of recognition it has received, tells us a lot about the way taste and opinion are formed in societies like our own.

To understand the story, it is necessary to go back, at least to the 1930s and Shanghai, then the most
non-English-speaking art cinema.

Post-World War II, the Shaw brothers were at work in Singapore with the oldest, an artistic producer, in charge. Though the costume adventure films were not common among their product, they had one of their greatest successes with a pre-war version of the much re-made 1920s "Burning of the Red Lotus Temple" story. Sixth brother Run Run Shaw, then working on documentaries, took a copy of the film around open-air village screenings, running up a bankroll that the company turned into a hundred movie-house circuit, along with amusement parks, in Malaysia, Borneo and Singapore.

Setting up their base in Hong Kong, they built a Clearwater Bay studio, training school and dormitory-barracks for their talent, creating a film factory which rapidly obliterated the local filmmaking, whose output presented

Cantonese-speaking units might roll up with heavy, blimped Mitchell cameras to shoot a scene with sync sound and then go home because they didn't like the weather. Shaws would field a Japanese-trained crew (the co-production on Kenji Mizoguchi's The Princess Yang Kuei-fei in 1955 was a failure and one of their last appearances on the film festival circuit) working rapidly with portable Arriflexes and adding a Mandarin track later.

A 1961 press release proudly announced five colossal Eastmancolor and Shawscope productions, an ambitious schedule. It would soon be thirty. Lack of competition from the mainland and the death of the executive controlling their chief competitor, Cathay, delivered the immense overseas Chinese market into their hands.

As happened in Australia around 1970, when the opportunity presented itself, talented individuals appeared to take advantage. Li Han-hsiang was a Chinese culture specialist and journalist. Characters in his films might spend a reel arguing about semantics, driving the sub-titles to desperation. His interests were expressed in opera films like the Love Etern (1963), a subject also filmed as the mainland's first colour film, Butterfly Lovers, and more recently as Tsai Hark's The Lovers. Li made the remarkable Emperor Chien Lung series and a succession of films about the Empress Dowager and Last Emperor, Pu Yi. After a spell as an independent, he returned to Shaw Brothers to find himself doing kung fu and skin flicks. Still active, he recently filmed The Lower's Lover (1993) in California, with Eat Drink Man Woman's Siuhung Lung playing Charlie Chan's grandson! (Hong Kong crews frequently shoot overseas with Thailand and the U.S. favoured as destinations.) The art direction of Li's work is particularly notable, whether for his own productions, his 1980s work on the mainland, or in the Shaw Brothers' house style.

Ex-assistant to Li Han-hsiang and Voice of America producer King Hu stirred controversy when he directed and acted in the Sino-Japanese war subject, Sons of the Good Earth, in 1965. The opera cycle was fading and, surprisingly outside the Shaw Brothers' ambit, the

Hong Kong Communist producers had launched a series of wu zia pian (swashbucklers) to replace them. It was from them that the style with which Shaws will forever be associated came, but it was in the hands of King Hu that it found full expression, first in Come Drink With Me (1966), where those pillars of the wu zia pian, the drunken swordsman and the heroine in boy clothes, are played by the chameleon Yue Hwa and soon-to-be-queen-of-the-swashbucklers Cheng Pei'pei.

Come Drink with Me mixes the elegance of the opera film with the ferocity of the Samurai movie. The wigs and weapons are more convincing than those that had become familiar. On-screen injuries are plausible. The film broke Asian box-office records but was eclipsed by King Hu's Dragon Gate Inn (1967), where its opera plot is brilliantly transposed

into comedy and action spectacle, establishing the dominance of the Hong Kong studios even more firmly. With this success behind him, King Hu set up the Taiwanese production house that enabled him to use the time and resources not available in factory filming, and to make A Touch of Zen, shown in 1971 after three years' work. It carried off the Cannes Palme d'Or, which momentarily looked like flowing on to his national industry. However, legal disputes, cut versions and inadequate distribution destroyed the impact of what may be considered the great work of the cycle.

King Hu continued making superior costume adventure films like The Fate of Lee Khan (1973) and The Valiant Ones (1975) before the two Korean-based productions which again allowed his perfectionist handling, Raining in the Mountain (1977) and Legend of the Mountain (1978), containing his regular leading lady, Hsu Feng, and Sylvia Chang as rival phantom musicians. These are two of the most beautiful films ever made. Their failure to return a sum reflecting the effort poured into them condemned King Hu to imperfect, minor but still intriguing later work, often financed by younger generation filmmakers who revered his talent.

The third architect of the Shaw Brothers' monument was Chang Che, a young film critic launched by Shaws, who diverted the weepy-influenced tradition into more macho territory. In his Golden Swallow (1968), a sequel to Come Drink With Me, Cheng Pei'pei again plays the name character, but attention shifts to co-star Jimmy Wang Yu, a swimming champion who was soon to dominate the action film as star and director, until a brush with the law cut short his career. Chang Che would also create other stars: dynamic duo Ti Lung and David Chang; all-body-actor Fu Sheng, who died James Dean-like in his twenties; Chen Kwan- tai; and

EuFung and Hoy Chiap in King Hu's The Fate of Lee Khan (1973).

Gong Li is the tragic concubine in The Great Conqueror's Concubine.

a squad of pretenders to their throne. Sometimes film—irresistibly rousing.

and, at its best, as in the studio field demarcated by artificial flowers, the House of 72 Tenants (1972), a boarding-house com-

edy in the style of Crossroads. Liu Chia-liang developed the martial arts film to its purest form, with a presence that still catches attention, the films mounted around him were shoddy. Circulated abroad in khaki-colour copies with dubbed English tracks and canned music, they and their imitators reached an international public that had no idea that the masterpieces of King Hu and the Shaw Brothers existed, and established an expectation for simple-minded action entertainment in Chinese filmmaking which has yet to dissipate. And, at the point where the ambition of his output was about to rise, Bruce Lee died.

The combined impact of Bruce Lee’s death and the non-circulation of A Touch of Zen wiped off the international prospects of Hong Kong cinema for twenty years.

However, at this point the story takes a path without precedent. The successes of Shaw Brothers and Bruce Lee combined with the emigration caused by

Asian wars created a demand for Chinese (languages) movies which produced the Chinatown circuit. This is not unfamiliar in itself. Toho had run a chain of cinemas in the U.S., and Jewish, Indian, Mexican, Italian and Greek films had had sporadic overseas showings to native speakers. However, only the Japanese films had been subtitled. Producing in the more universal, more culturally-esteemed Man-

darin meant that the Hong Kong prints needed sub-titles in calligraphy for the Cantonese speakers, and it was comparatively easy to add a second set in English, making the product attractive in overseas markets. Even in their Hong Kong first runs, their films are English titled. An occasional crafty director will use this fact to provide information not accessi-

ble in the normal manner: conversation drowned in noise, misunderstood comment, etc.

Hong Kong sub-titles did take a bit of adjusting to — “hero” for “champion”, “sinus” for “synapse” and intrasitive verbs used with objects, as in “I progressed the monk” — but, while iliterate captions do still occur, the art has advanced to the point where the English titles on the two-language print of Ronny Yu’s The Bride With White Hair (1993) are better than the special English-language version.

Intriguingly, the martial arts films attracted the body builders in a way that previous ethnic cinema had never penetrated the English-language commu-

nity. They would take parties into the cinemas, review the productions in their magazines and sell videos through their shops. Why they should be more enter-

prising than the movie specialists of the 1960s and ‘70s is worth considering.

Video, which would decimate the Chinatown family- theatre movie-going audience, kept the kung fu titles circulating and, particularly in the U.S., a fringe public homes in on these, using fanzines like Martial Arts Movies Associates — “Don’t forget your M.A.M.A.”

When the rest of the world turned its back on the Chinese cinema, it did not wither on the vine like the Japanese. Waves of new talents and traditions were fostered by a thriving export industry sustained by the Hong Kong majors’ refusal to sell their product to television, in order to protect the thousand-seat cinemas in their home base.
Killer Meteories (1976) – these films benefit from Jackie Chan’s ingenious fight choreography and were conspicuous in Chinatown showings, which made it a surprise to find that it was not until he went independent on the cheapo Snake in Eagle’s Shadow (1978) that Jackie Chan caught the attention of the home audience.

Parallel, there are the comedians, the Hui brothers, whose Private Eyes (1976) broke comedy film records. They went on to make brilliant, original comedies and even a passable rip-off of Some Like it Hot called Happy Ding Dong (1985). The ingenious Richard Ng, from the Johnnie Walker commercial, gets to participate in the all-star vehicles as well as his own, like Super Food (1981), and Karl Mak had a blockbuster in the Aces Go Places series, where he co-stars with Sylvia Chang and a fugitive Hui brother.

A younger generation of filmmakers, English-speaking and film-school trained, were familiar with Hollywood and the European art film and dissatisfied with a cinema of opera, ghosts and kung fu. First out of the gate was Po Chi’leung’s Jumping Ash (1976), significantly a contemporary, non-Scope production. It was written by a Hong Kong cop named Philip Chan, who also appears along with Chen Wai-man and Chen Sing (as “the Grimming Tiger”), with a young Young Yu brought in as production manager.

Conventional enough, it was followed by the films of Ann Hui (Boat People, 1982), Tsui Hark (We’re Going to Eat You, 1980), Ringo Lam (the On Fire series) and finally the most cerebral of the bunch, Stanley Kwan (Rouge, 1987). The name most closely associated with this cycle, however, is that of an actor, Jackie Chan, who also appears along with Chen Wai-man and even a plumed horse-drawn hearse. This and parasol-waving mourners in white and a black, mean streets of Vancouver.

For a decade, Jackie Chan’s operation has outgrown its Hong Kong base, where basic elements to their formula — chases through the streets and explosions — are illegal and now only figure in films where the law has been bent or blurred. After Los Angeles, theirs is the most filmed city on the planet, and audiences are quick to respond to something unfamiliar.

The Jackie Chan crews have set up shop in Spain, Yugoslavia, the mainland, Japan and Canada, looking for a spot to perform their eye-boggling set pieces: cars careening downhill demolishing a shantytown as they go, a helicopter landing on a moving train, a battle with Queen Elizabeth’s hovercraft charging through the mean streets of Vancouver.

Facilities are not an issue. Jackie Chan owns all the high-tech gear they use — with the exception of the sound recording equipment, shooting sync being a recent development for them. The set went quiet the first time the sound recordist asked Jackie to do a wild line. I queried designer Oliver Wong whether they’d use Movie World while in Queensland and he grinned, “No way. We want to shoot in a studio, we stay in Hong Kong!”

The way it all works was demonstrated by the elaborate set piece the First Strike unit was shooting in Brisbane’s Fortitude Valley Chinatown. The streets were filled with a 40-foot Chinese dragon, stilt walkers and parasol-waving mourners in white and a black, plumed horse-drawn hearse. This struck me as an odd mixture of imagery — not the colour scheme I associated with the funeral scenes of Chinatown movies. Writer-director Stanley Tong explained that what they were doing was springboarded off his

Right: Jackie (note spelling on poster) Chan in Lo Wei’s Dragon Fist (1978).

Jackie Chan in Australia

Jackie Chan is the central figure of Hong Kong’s extraordinary film industry. First Strike’s associate producer, Jonnie Lee, pointed out that the 1.3 billion people who watch his films dwarf the turnout for a Hollywood blockbuster, making Jackie the most famous actor in history. Now he’s shot two films in Australia and even The Sydney Morning Herald and The Australian have picked up on him, after ignoring for 20 years the movies that filled downtown cinemas in Australian Chinatowns, a few blocks from their offices.

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Right: Jackie (note spelling on poster) Chan in Lo Wei’s Dragon Fist (1978).
his films where previous slackers would show up for the opening and closing, and leave the juvenile to do all the work. He only once, as a gag, appears in opera costume — the very successful comedy, *The Eighth Happiness* (1988) — marking himself off from his predecessors as a contemporary figure, but, despite the profusion and excellence of his output, it was not until *A Better Tomorrow* in 1986, produced by Tsui Hark and directed by John Woo, that he became a superstar. After the splendidly trashy *God of Gamblers* (Wong Jing, 1990), where he co-starred with chief pretender to his throne, Andy Lau, Chow became hyper-selective about projects, some saying he is afraid to lose his extraordinary drawing power.

The new shape of the Hong Kong industry proved too much for Shaw Brothers, which switched to television with Sir Run Run turning the key on a vault where one of the richest single collections of film in the world, mostly on unstable Eastmancolor, now resides inaccessible, in questionable storage conditions, as its admirers seethe in frustration and its reputation fades.

Taiwanese producers had contributed kung fu movies and teenager romances to the mix, but gradually they waned, leaving only the elfin Lin Chin'hsia, the one enduring off-shore actress to remain a star from the 1970s. Catch the intake of breath when Evil Asia's mask slips to reveal that elegant Lin is playing the transsexual heavy in Ching Sui'tung's 1993 *Swordsman* sequel.

In place of the Taiwanese popular cinema came the intermittent production of family entertainment, often starring Chinese Ghost Story's singing Taoist Wu Ma, and the ponderous films of Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-Hsien. It is revealing that festival and art cinema screenings have made the second group more familiar to the Euro-audience than the successes of the Hong Kong industry.

We should remember that there are four, not three, movie Chinas, with the American Chinese contributing the films of Peter Wang (*A Great Wall*, 1987) and Wayne Wang, whose best work, *Life is Cheap but Toilet Paper is Expensive* (1984), returns to Hong Kong both physically and in spirit, and uses significant local talents, including Cora Miao (*In a Fallen City*, 1984) and Shaw Brothers heavy Lo Lieh. Ang Lee (*Eat Drink Man Woman*) situates somewhere in this area.


Together with the works of similarly-motivated players and filmmakers, these provided a plausible, involving picture of contemporary life. The critics and festival advocates of such material barely stirred and the handful of Chintown watchers were ambivalent. This material was terrific, but it had lost the unique, unfamiliar impact of the traditional Chinese film, or almost.

Ann Hui did make *The Spooky Bunch* (1980), about an opera company attacked by ghosts, and a revivifying *The Legend of Book and Sword* (1987). *Rouge* plays the 1930s of opera and brothels against a present of motorways and ghosts, launching about an opera company attacked by ghosts, and a nese film, or almost. unique, unfamiliar impact of the traditional Chinese way of contemporary life. The critics Au's Paris-filmed *Autobiographical* with Sylvia Chang in Stanley Kwan's *The Eighth Happiness* (1991), a peak achievement of the wu zia pian.

Why all this activity, which would have been instantly approachable by the wider public, should be ignored, and the mainland's *Yellow Earth* (Zang Yimou, 1984) be a triumph, takes some explaining. This film and its "Fifties Generation" compatriots were that most cherished film critic fantasy: the art cinema from the socialist country. No matter that Chen Kaige's simple statement was, like the body of his work, fiercely critical of the Maoists, something which would cause him to shelter in impenetrable allegory for much of his output. His cameraman, Zhang Yimou, starring lady friend Gong Li in a succession of erotic costume melodramas, would have an easier passage, with his message about the abuse of women in pre-revolutionary, feudal times more marketable in items like *Red Sorghum* (1988) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). But even he had to film the anti-protest statement, *Ja Dow* (1993), to stay in business.

Their work appears to have had little impact on mainland audiences and is non-representative of the standard message-minded mainland production, though there is a string of more personal concerns in recent features like *An Unexpected Passion* (1991), and an unprecedented independent sector has thrown up curiosities like *Mona* (1992). However, the picture of disaffected youth in Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastards* (1993) is no more convincing than that of the life-wasting émigré in Xie Jin's *The Herdsman* (1983) in the world of cinema of content.

Received wisdom is that Hong Kong produces mindless entertainment for the undemanding, while the mainland is a hotbed of serious activity. It's a view held by the snifty visiting mainland-Chinese delegation shown Liu Chia'liang shooting a kung fu feature using trampolines and non-gymnasts, Chen Kaige dismissing Hong Kong as "part of the West" or even *Eight Taels of Gold's* "What's the biggest Chinatown in the world? Hong Kong." No one appears to feel that this fusion of East and West has produced a vigour both can admire.

In fact, the Hong Kong industry has also flirted with issues. Ann Hui's breakthrough with *Boat People* (1982) confused Cannes audiences unable to deal with a movie in which the Vietnamese were the heavies, and was banned in Taiwan for its mainland connection, wiping off its profitability. It was already one of the biggest hits on the Australian Chinatown circuit. Similarly purposeful films followed: *At Home in Hong Kong* (1982) had Honkers residents training to pass as boat people learning Saigon street maps, followed by Choi Kai'kwan's gritty *Hong Kong*, *Hong Kong* (1983) and Po Chi Leung's *Hong Kong 1941* (1983), with Chow Yun'fat. A group of films critical of the mainland, reflecting Taiwanese attitudes, surfaced, of which Pai Jin'ju's *Dr Zhivago* influenced *Coldest Winter in Peking* was a spectacular best, with its depiction of factionalism and Red Book-waving mobs, accompanied by Wan Chu'xin's *On the Society File of Shanghai and Wang Toon's* *If I Were For Real*, all 1982.

In Chen Kaige's ferocious *Farewell, My Concubine* (1993), with Gong Li and Leslie Cheung, we have the grim, plausible indictment of traditional entertainment with the ritual humiliation of the costumed opera troupe by the Red Guards, recalling the family's outrage at finding Leslie applying opera make-up in *Rouge*, also (like Clara Law's *The Temptation of a Monk*, 1995) from the work of writer Lillian Li. The tension at the heart of these films is also basic to the Western response to Chinese cinema.
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just when Hong Kong cinema is at last receiving western recognition, the Hong Kong film industry is jumping ship. Local box-office sales have slumped and local filmmakers are moving offshore and into the global market, ahead of the Communist China takeover next year when Britain’s 99-year lease on the island expires.

Canada was initially the most favoured destination for this diaspora. Now it is Australia. In Melbourne, Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung and Golden Harvest are currently shooting the location-based A Nice Guy. John Woo has just conducted a location “recon” in Queensland for a Hollywood feature, Tears of the Sun, while expatriate Hong Kong filmmakers like Clara Law, Eddie Fong and Ronny Yu have chosen to make Australia, rather than Canada, their second home.

On 30 June 1997, the People’s Liberation Army, representing the People’s Republic of China, will “return Hong Kong to the motherland”. In 1989, the PLA murdered pro-democracy students in Tiananmen Square; in March 1996, the PLA was conducting military and naval exercises aimed at intimidating Taiwan on the eve of its first democratic elections. It is bad publicity and Hong Kong capital has been fleeing offshore to investment opportunities in stable free-market economies like Australia. Along with Hong Kong’s filmmakers, its leading production house, Golden Harvest, is continuing to expand its offshore exhibition and distribution deals with international companies, including Australia’s Village Roadshow.

The deal has an interesting background. In 1995, Hong Kong, with a population of roughly six million, produced more than 200 feature films. This is huge by anyone’s standards, even those of the United States, which produces around 200 films a year. The entertainment in Hong Kong movies is propelled by action: violence for John Woo, martial arts for Jackie Chan and slapstick for Michael Hui. Action is a visual entertainment, avoiding lengthy dialogue and crossing barriers of language and culture. Hong Kong films have found a wide and enthusiastic audience in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South-East Asia, along with what is known as the “Chinese diaspora”, or Chinese communities in overseas cities. They vary in how much they maintain their language and customs, but most centres have a cinema screening Hong Kong movies.

In 1994 and 1995, three Hong Kong action movies, Drunken Master 2 (Lau Kar Yung, 1994), Hard boiled (John Woo, 1992), and Once Upon a Time in China (Tsui Hark, 1991), made transitions from Chinatown cinemas onto independent and cult screens throughout the western world. Subsequently, Jackie Chan’s Rambo in the Bronx (Stanley Tong, 1994) went American mainstream, opening on 1500 screens across the U.S. in February 1996. Rambo in the Bronx was mixed at Soundfirm in Melbourne.

Since the end of the 1980s, there has been ever-mounting world interest in Hong Kong cinema, both in pop culture and politics. Politically, there has been the countdown to the end of Britain’s 99-year lease on the island of Hong Kong. Another short-fuse has been Quentin Tarantino’s rapid rise to fame, which has seen him cast as the western ambassador of Hong Kong cinema.

Aside from the sensationalized “debt” to director Ringo Lam (whose City on Fire is often cited as the storyline of Reservoir Dogs, 1993), Tarantino has been motor-mouthing his deepfelt appreciation for filmmakers like John Woo, Jackie Chan and Tsui Hark. At Cannes in 1993, Tarantino entertained journalists with plans to write dialogue for John Woo’s Hollywood movies and it is certain that, as with Get Shorty (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1995), he counselled Travolta to take the role in Woo’s Broken Arrow (1996).

In the West, Tarantino has effectively turned Hong Kong’s directors into share-household names. In the East, Tarantino’s Pulp Fiction (1994) is cited by Raymond Chow, the head of Golden Harvest, as having burst the island’s insularity and ended the Hong Kong industry’s monopoly over the island’s moviegoing public.

Golden Harvest had its beginnings 25 years ago when filmmaker Raymond Chow left Shaw Brothers to start his own company, Shaw Brothers made action films, but Raymond Chow knew how to make them more entertaining. Two of Golden Harvest’s earliest investments were legendary kung fu king Bruce Lee, and stunt comedian Jackie Chan, famed for hav-
them and the film industry. Early last year they were reported as saying they didn’t make political films, so the event would probably just pass them by. Perhaps they are right; however, they have also sought alternative citizenship and Chow Yun-Fat moved to Hollywood late last year.

John Woo cites artistic reasons for his decisive move to the U.S. Woo was responsible for a string of Hong Kong hits which include Hard Boiled, A Better Tomorrow (1986), The Killer (1989), and Bullet in the Head (1990). He moved to the U.S. to direct Jean-Claude Van Damme in Hard Target (1993). That led to the US$60-million Broken Arrow, starring John Travolta and Christian Slater.

Even amongst the gunplay and explosions, John Woo has always produced stylistically beautiful films, but Hong Kong doesn’t reward arthouse or even grungy films. Apart from action, told either from a police or a Triad angle, low-brow comedy, swordplay or kung fu epics, there are no other genres. (The mainland does arthouse, but, as its directors have consistently found, at great personal expense. Among the “fifth generation” filmmakers, two examples are Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang. Zhang, director of Ju Dou (1990) and Raise the Red Lantern (1991), was for a time not allowed to travel with his films, and Tian was barred from making a film in 1995, after The Blue Kite was considered seditious by the authorities.)

Hong Kong’s ad infinitum rehearsing of these limiting genres has largely been blamed on the involvement in the film industry of the Triads, the Chinese equivalent of the Mafia, an involvement not without its benefits. The Triads are often more willing to assist the filmmakers than the Hong Kong government. In a recent interview, Ringo Lam says that every Hong Kong filmmaker has had to make a film to the authorities.

For some Hong Kong filmmakers, the exchange in 1997 might seem to herald a new era of expansion. As an example, James Cameron’s Terminator 2: Judgment Day was set in New York but shot entirely in Vancouver. Ronny Yu’s The Bride with White Hair, a sword-play piece, was also shot very cheaply in studios in British Columbia.

The other pressure on Hong Kong filmmakers is the changing tastes of the Hong Kong audience. In the past, natives of Hong Kong watched only homegrown product. Whereas Hong Kong film directors, being massive consumers of American, European, Japanese and even Australian product, were as cine-literate as any film geeks, their audience was not. The controversy over Tarantino’s “plagiarism” offers itself as an interesting tool for examining an aspect of Hong Kong filmmaking which is known amongst film theorists as “hybridity”. The theories of hybridity deal in the post-colonial arena of cross-culture, plagiarism, homage and intertextuality.

Hybridizing has long been Hong Kong’s rôle, acting both as a buffer to China, bearing the brunt of Western fads and sensations, and, as the gateway to China, transforming or Easternizing what is potentially threatening or Western into something with Chinese aspects, and therefore halfway palatable for traditionalist or mainland China.

It is all ebb and flow. Hong Kong’s directors have always remade the year’s Hollywood hits. With more than 150 films produced in Hong Kong every year, writers and directors have few pauses for reflection. As an example, James Cameron’s Terminator (1984) exists in myriad reworkings as well as short referential sketches in Hong Kong comedies. The famous baby carriage on the stairs scene that began life in Sergei Eisenstein’s Battleship Potemkin (1925), and which was re-invigorated in The Untouchables (Brian De Palma, 1987), is now considered public domain. As a gangster classic, The Untouchables was seen and championed by all the Hong Kong directors. The baby carriage rolling down the stairs saw countless varia-

by Michael Kitson
Golden Harvest Private Australia is looking better and better. Indeed, Golden business with, it is possible that Golden Harvest could facilities. If China continues to be impossible to do distribution. Australia and Canada stand to benefit investments in the twin spheres of exhibition and dis­ overwhelmingly as locations and post-production nations out of Hong Kong if things get too hairy. Nations in Hong Kong gangster films (e.g., A Tomorrow pros and cons. Many believe Raymond Chow will shortly relin­ quish the reins of Golden Harvest's production arm in 1992. In February, Golden Village announced it had bought 9.99 percent (at $27.5 million) of Golden Harvest and that John Kirby, chairman of Village Roadshow, had accepted an invita­ tion to join the Golden Harvest Board of Directors. Golden International and Golden Village are hoping to ride Golden Harvest, Trojan­horse style, into the People's Republic of China. In the past, the mainland restricted the number of foreign imports. Come 1997 and the exchange of sovereignity, Golden Harvest will be a Chinese busi­ ness situated in PRC. The Chinese government also appears to be aware of this. Representatives of China's state film body have been travelling in South-East Asia looking at Golden Village's multiplexes and Golden International's distribution outlets. For these two partially-western investors, the potential returns are huge. Golden Harvest Limited is also protecting itself. China is proving very difficult to do business with. Golden Harvest can use its foreign integration and its network of relationships to the majority of its operations out of Hong Kong if things get too hairy. Many believe Raymond Chow will shortly relin­ quish the reins of Golden Harvest's production arm to Jackie Chan. Chow could continue to oversee his investments in the twin spheres of exhibition and dis­ tribution. Australia and Canada stand to benefit overwhelmingly as locations and post-production facilities. If China continues to be impossible to do business with, it is possible that Golden Harvest could set up on Australian, rather than British Columbian, soil. As the U.S. independents flay the expense of film­ making in their own country, their invasion of Canada is raising location fees and freelance rates, and Aus­ tralia is looking better and better. Indeed, Golden Harvest's production arm, Golden Harvest Private Group, has already been seeking new locations, cheaper equipment hire and post-production facili­ ties here. Jackie Chan announced at a March press conference that there were already plans for another Melbourne-based feature beyond A Nice Guy. Melbourne and Sydney are increasingly supplying post-production facilities for Hong Kong product. Soundfirm in Melbourne mixed Clara Law's Kuro­sawa homage, Temptation of a Monk, Eddie Fong's Private Eye Blues, David Ho's Goodbye Hong Kong, as well as Chan's Ramble in the Bronx and First Strike (formerly The Story of CIA, Stanley Tang, 1996). Soundfirm has been and continues to be a world leader in digital stereo. Soundfirm head Roger Sav­ age believes it was Temptation of a Monk (1994) which drew the initial Hong Kong and now mainland Chinese interest to Australia. Soundfirm has recently finished mixing three mainland features, Foreign Moon, Sun Valley and The Emperor's Song, des­ tined for the world's arthouse circuits. Soundfirm has also seen an increase of work from Korea and Tai­ wan. Sun Valley had its negative flown to Cinevex, so that total lab and sound-post was completed in Melbourne, while Movie Lab in Sydney is supply­ ing itself as the film processor to three Korean features. The construction of Rupert Murdoch's Fox stu­ dios at the Sydney Showground site will also see interest from Golden Harvest Productions. Intended as a prime producer of programmes for Murdoch's Foxtel, the Showground complex will also supply itself as studios to both local industry and to low-bud­ get international industry. Initially, this was expected to be mainly American but there has been increas­ ing interest from Asian cinema producers. In February, Murdoch's News Corporation bought exclusive rights to Golden Harvest's "back catalogue" for screening on its pay-movie channel. Queensland's Pacific Film and Television Com­ mission (PFTC) had been wooing Golden Harvest to Australia for six years. First Strike was shot in tropi­ cal Queensland, on Victoria's snowfields, in Melbourne (where the "Paris end" of Collins Street with a little additional signage duplicated as Paris), and featured a 50-car pileup in Brisbane's Chinatown. (Melbourne's Chinatown was dropped when the PFTC offered better shooting incentives). PFTC, like the state film bodies in Victoria and N.S.W., is set up to liaise with international film­ makers. Robin James, the executive officer at PFTC, pointed out how the state film offices have changed since the 1970s, when their role was to entice inter­ national funding for Australian co-productions. In the 1990s, the film offices offer themselves as go­ betweens and ambassadors for their local industries. They keep detailed location folders, can commission footage for overseas production companies, and pro­ mote local crews. First Strike, according to Robin James, had a very successful shoot, coming in under-time and under­ budget. Stanley Tang, the stunt-director of First Strike, told David Pratt of the Melbourne Film Office that the Australian crews had been the best he had worked with in the world. Jackie Chan was so impressed he and his director Sammo Hung exchanged the setting of their next collaboration, A Nice Guy, from New York City to Melbourne's Chinatown. In 1995, Quentin Tarantino, a longtime champion of Hong Kong cinema, turned distributor under the guiding influence of Miramax Distributors. Until recently a small independent company whose uncanny ability to pick-up the independent winners, including Pulp Fiction and The Piano (Jane Campion, 1993), has made it the giant amongst the indepen­ dent distributors, Miramax is now aligned with Disney (Buena Vista). Quentin Tarantino is distrib­ uting Wong Kar-Wai's Chungking Express, a Hong Kong police-gangster-romance. The subtitled Chinese version was seen at Melbourne's Lumière cinema during Christmas 1995, but Taran­ tino's dubbed version currently does not have an Australian dis­ tributor. Perhaps it will be picked up by Village Roadshow for screening in its 15-screen multiplex cinemas in Melbourne's soon-to-be-completed Crown Casino, expected to run twenty-four hours a day, with sev­ eral screens expected to be devoted to Hong Kong action movies. Chungking Express, Woo's Broken Arrow, Tong's First Strike or a sim­ilar combination may well be the note on which to open the Casino multiplex. As the Casino clientele are said to be predominantly Chinese or South-East Asian, this makes sense, although, according to Mr Malochino of Village Roadshow, it is still "just a rumour". The growth in megaplexes could increase demand from mainstream or gueilo ("white devil") cinemas for Hong Kong product. U.S. exhibitor Reading Cor­ poration recently announced plans to capture 10 to 15 percent of the Australian market, building up to "megaplexes", each holding between 30 and 40 screens. This is coincidently timed for mid-1997. Reading is looking at New Zealand and intends to use Australia as its launching pad into Asia. In Sep­ tember 1995, Village Roadshow announced that, as the Australian cinema market seemed to be at satu­ ration point, it would not be building any more multiplexes. In February, Village Roadshow changed its tune to announce plans to meet Reading's chal­ lenge with $350 million in multiplex developments. Hong Kong action films are making other inroads into Australian cinema. In the low-budget and no-bud­ get Australian scene, there has been Matthew George's Ironfist (formerly Under the Gun)*, from the V.C.A. film school, Brent Houghton's short film, The Hunts­ man (1994), an admirable action film paying homage to John Woo; and, in 1995, Deep Shit (Morgan Evans), a comic Jackie Chan-homage set at the Victoria Mar­ kets. (Among other things, the University, Kirsten Bowers is writing her Masters on hybridity and gen­ der roles in Hong Kong action movies, while Seekam Tan and Audrey Yue are doing PhDs at Melbourne and LaTrobe Universities respectively.) Some critics complain that Hong Kong hybrids mis­ represent Australian cultural identity, presenting Falls
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Creek as the Ukraine, Collins Street as the Left Bank, Brisbane’s Chinatown as Hong Kong. To those critics I say: Don’t be so precious. Surely this sort of exchange can only enrich our cultural identity. In economic terms as well as in terms of clout, it adds buoyancy to the Australian film industry. For those young filmmakers like Brent Houghton, it offers them the magical experience and training on the real thing, a Jackie Chan feature in their own hometown. 

**CINEMA PAPERS • AUGUST 1996**

**BRIAN TRENCHEARD SMITH**

*The Man from Hong Kong*

BRIAN TRENCHEARD SMITH

(No opening production credits)

**THE MAN FROM HONG KONG** [ID not given; act 1974] A Golden Harvest & The Movie Company co-production. Made with the financial assistance of Australian Film Development Corporation. Locations: Sydney; Hong Kong. 

**Australian distributor: Greater Union, Video Roadshow. Rating:** R. 35mm. Panavision. 101 mins.

**Producers:** Raymond Chow, John Fraser. **Executive producers:** David Hannay, André Morgan. **Assistant producer:** Michael Fallon. 

**Scriptwriters:** Brian Trenchard Smith. **Director of photography:** Russel Boyd. **Camera operator:** David Gribble. **Production designers:** David Copping, Chien Shum. **Wardrobe supervisors:** Bruce Finlayson, Chu Shing-Hey. **Editor:** Ron Williams. **Composer:** Noel Quinlan. 

**Sound recordists:** Cliff Curt, Tim Lloyd, Sherman Chow. **Sound editors:** Lindsay Fraser, Tomash Pokorny, Chou Shai-Lung. **Mixers:** Peter Fenton, Julian Ellingsworth, Chou Shai-Lung. 

**Cast:** Jimmy Wang Yu (Fang), George Lazenby (Wilton), Hugh Keays-Byrne (Morrie Grossie), Roger Ward (Bob Taylor), Frank Thring (Willard), Roy Spiers (Caroline Thorne), Rebecca Gilling (Angelina), Grant Page (Assassin), Deryck Barnes (Veterinary Doctor); Hung Kam Po (Wan Chan), Bill Hunter (Peterson), Ian Jameson (Drug Courier), Elaine Wong (Chinese Girl), John Gracch (Charles), Geoff Brown (Martial Arts Scb); Kevin Brodbrit, Brian Trenchard Smith (Announcer); Peter Armstrong, Rangi Nicholas, Bob Hicks, Max Aspin (Wilton’s Bodyguards).

I n 1974, Jimmy Wang Yu and George Lazenby co-starred in the Australian-Hong Kong co-production, *The Man from Hong Kong* following closely on the foot-steps of Bruce Lee’s Enter the Dragon (Robert Clouse, 1973). The Man from Hong Kong is a video-store cult classic. (Watch for the familiar faces amongst the stunt teams.) The film includes some nifty plot tricks with hang gliders, an endearing performance from Jimmy Wang Yu, and one of those cinematic, smash-up derby car chases that Australia is so good at. 

The association which led to The Man from Hong Kong began at Channel 9 in the early 1970s. David Hannay was working as a producer on a tele-series. Godfrey and Brian Trenchard Smith were cutting its trailer. During his time at Greater Union, Trenchard Smith found himself cutting more and more kung fu from Hong Kong. The international trend was obvious to him and he set to scripting The Man from Hong Kong. 

To prove his directorial skills, Trenchard Smith produced two documentaries, *The World of Kung Fu* (on Bruce Lee) and *Kung Fu Killers*. These two films ingratiated him with Raymond Chow, the head of Golden Harvest. A deal was struck between Golden Harvest, Greater Union (Golden Harvest’s distributors in Australia) and the Australian Film Development Corporation, a forerunner of the Australian Film Commission. 

Executive producer David Hannay dealt mainly with Andre Morgan, Golden Harvest’s head of international production. Aged 24 at the time and a very smooth one. Trenchard Smith found himself cutting more and more kung fu from Hong Kong. The international trend was obvious to him and he set to scripting The Man from Hong Kong. 

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The film is steeped in the conventions of the Hong Kong kung fu genre. Though the direction is competent, it is sometimes unsure of whether to play for laughs or dramatic tension. For example, the arrest of a Hong Kong drug courier (Sammo Hung) on Ayers Rock (Uluru) is followed, after a short drive, by a cuppa at the Sydney Opera House. 

Australian audiences would appreciate the humour here. The principal players are Jimmy Wang Yu, George Lazenby, Roger Ward and Frank Thring, with Rebecca Gilling and Hugh Keays-Byrne fresh from Sandy Harbut’s *Stone* (1974), also produced by David Hannay. Worth of merit are the performances of Roy Spiers (as Caroline Thorne), and Keays-Byrne (Morrie Grossie). Caroline, an early sex-interest for Fang (Yu), develops into a forthright, no-nonsense, matron figure, while Keays-Byrne turns in a comic and often extemporized performance as a suspiciously-suspect narcotics agent. 

The Man from Hong Kong has flaws, time hasn’t been kind to its editing style and the narrative isn’t always tight, but, like Enter the Dragon, it is spectacular chop-socky entertainment. 

Thanks: David Hannay for his input in compiling this brief.

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1. Keays-Byrne’s *hypen* is hyphenated on the end credits but not on the opening.
2. The first nine credits are in the order of the opening credits; the rest are per the end credits.
3. Usually spell “Dracul”.
4. Editor: The unsuspecting should be warned. The commercially-available video is not letter-boxed and is an appalling mish-mash of cropped images, choppy pan-and-scan and ugly, distortions. Given that a *20th Anniversary edition* was released in 1994, it is a pity Roadshow did not opt for a new letter-box edition, especially since Roadshow has done much elsewhere to promote letter-box videos (e.g., *Tombstone*).
5. Although it is not credited as such. But the keen-eyed viewer is Sammo Hung!
In 1995, a new player with Hong Kong origins caused a sensation in the Chinese film industry. Ocean Films (Dayang) released a movie called Blush (Hongfen, Li Shaohong), about the fate of former prostitutes in the wake of the 1949 Communist takeover of the mainland. Although the theme was certainly interesting, it was not the cause of all the fuss. Rather, it was the way it was distributed and marketed. Ocean Films undertook an extensive pre-publicity campaign, something rarely if ever attempted before in China. It also negotiated a split of box-office revenue, rather than simply selling the rights to exhibitors and leaving the rest up to them. As a result, Ocean Films made twenty times more on the film than had been offered for the rights alone (and double what Ocean Films paid for it). Later the same year, it had a similar success with Zhou Xiaowen's Ermo, which was released this year in Australia.

This is just the latest episode in the ongoing transformation of the Chinese film industry and the growing role of Hong Kong in it. Twenty years ago, China's film industry was entirely state-owned and closed to foreign participation. When Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1979, he laid down two broad policy directions which have been followed ever since. One was the gradual rollback of the state-owned command economy and the development of the market economy. The second was opening up to foreign investment. In fact, any foreign companies could have taken advantage of these opportunities, but it was Hong Kong that has moved fastest, and taken the biggest stake.

Partly, no doubt, they were helped by cultural links. But they were also more motivated than most. In 1984, following negotiations between the UK and China, in which they had no say, the people of Hong Kong discovered that they would be "returning to the motherland" in 1997. The Hong Kong film industry responded in two ways. One, widely known and reported in the West, is increased international dispersal, using locations such as Melbourne for Jackie Chan movies and seeing talent such as John Woo move to Hollywood and Clara Law move to Australia. Also widely-known but less well-understood is the decision to get into the mainland before it was forced to. The Chinese government did not just throw the doors wide open, so how exactly has the Hong Kong film industry negotiated the changing terrain of Deng's China to become an integrated part of the mainland?

Ocean Films is the same company that has also moved from distribution and exhibition into production with The Emperor's Shadow (Qingsong), also by Zhou Xiaowen. As reported in the June issue of Cinema Papers, the film's US$2 million budget was one of the largest ever in China, and Ocean Films brought it to Australia for post-production.

According to Wang Dawei, Vice-General Manager of Ocean Films in Beijing, Ocean Films was established as a branch company of a Hong Kong conglomerate with interests in fields ranging from property to high-technology, and which began to explore involvement in the mainland film scene in 1994. As such, it is a relatively recent arrival.

Wang tells the story of his company's recent breakthroughs in distribution and exhibition with all the oratorical skills befitting someone who started out as an actor. For him, the struggle to persuade one local branch company of the massive state distribution and exhibition monopoly after another to go down this new road is a David and Goliath story he clearly relishes.

I told them that the Chinese film market is not bad, but we haven't been doing our work properly, we haven't changed our ideas. Whoever changes their ideas first will get a handle on the market. Certainly, there is no doubt that the foresight of Wang and his colleagues has enabled them to do well. But to understand the full situation one needs to know the terrain in which they are operating. This back-story to Ocean Films' recent success consists of the "reform" (gadiao) process without which it would not have been able to operate in China at all. This story begins in the production sector.

Prior to Deng Xiaoping's elevation to power in 1979, Chinese film studios, which are all state-owned, were owned by China Film Corporation. This was a monopoly company, China Film Corporation. This flat fee applied regardless of how much they had spent making the film, and regardless of whether or not anyone went to see the film.

However, there was a downside. The Chinese government maintained China Film Corporation's monopoly on distribution and exhibition, on the grounds that the "spiritual" (meaning ideological) importance of cinema made it inappropriate to let go of central control. As a result, the studios could not play off distribution and exhibition chains to get the best deal possible for their product, and soon ran into economic trouble. Renting out their equipment, facilities and personnel to Hong Kong companies looking to use China as an exotic location became one way to increase revenue in the late 1980s. After the Tiananmen events of 1989, increased political censorship added extra pressure. Furthermore, increased availability of other recreational options, especially television, was killing the mass film audience. This had particularly worse effects on the studios than on China Film Corporation. Between 1979 and 1991, admissions fell by fifty percent, radically reducing the number of prints of each film needed and, therefore, also reducing income returned to the studios under the regulations introduced in 1980. During the same time, however, box-office income doubled, more than cushioning the state distribution and exhibition monopoly.

Less and less able to generate the budgets for new productions by themselves, the studios turned more and more to private investment. That investment included Hong Kong and other foreign investment. Now, China's studios function largely as facilities,
and are ever more rarely the initiators of new productions. However, Chinese government regulations still maintain that only films with studio involvement can be sent up for the censorship and classification required prior to release in China itself. Neither mainland Chinese private producers nor Hong Kong producers can operate without a studio. As a result, although we know that Hong Kong producers have become ever more deeply involved in Chinese filmmaking, it has also become harder and harder to determine which films can be said to be Hong Kong films and which are mainland films.

Take, for example, The Emperor's Shadow. The film is a co-production between Ocean Films and Xi'an Film Studio in north-west China. The director, Zhou Xiaowen, and most of the crew are from Xi'an, but all the money comes from Ocean Films. Even Wang Dawei started out as an actor at Xi'an, and then became Zhou Xiaowen's assistant director before moving over to Ocean Films. From this example of the relationship between Ocean Films and Xi'an Film Studio, it can be seen that under the mask of co-production the private sector is gradually "eating up" the public sector, as the Chinese put it.

However, throughout this period of increasing Hong Kong involvement in production, distribution and exhibition remained under state control. The fall of the major film corporation and allowed them to deal with whatever they liked. As all the local-level distribution and exhibition corporations under the leadership of China Film Corporation are autonomous entities, this opened up the opportunities for new initiatives such as those undertaken by Ocean Films with Blush and later Ermo. Furthermore, it is also possible for Chinese private investors to set up rival distribution and exhibition companies of their own to challenge the existing local-level corporations, although continued concerns about who controls what the Chinese seem mean that foreigners are still excluded from direct participation in this sector.

The massive increases in returns to producers promised by the example of Blush and Ermo indicate that a rapid increase in Chinese film budgets is likely, and indeed many major productions mounted since late 1995 are budgeted far higher than the old norm. Furthermore, it should also mean that more modestly budgeted niche-market films can return a profit within China. The market forces that drove filmmakers like Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige to dependence on foreign producers and foreign box office are now things of the past. However, various factors continue to cast some doubts over whether or not a new Golden Age of Chinese cinema is upon us.

First, the major joker in the pack is continued government censorship. All of China's reforms have been introduced on the "two steps forward, one step back" model. The transformation of the distribution and exhibition sector in 1995 was at least four steps forward. So, perhaps we should not be surprised that 1996 has seen the advent of a particularly vicious new period of cultural restriction. This may be the result of jockeying for power in the political succession struggle that is currently intensifying in Beijing as Deng Xiaoping's health continues to decline. The old head of the Film Bureau, Tian Congming, has stood down, and the film industry finds itself under more or less direct control from Ding Guan'gen, Head of the Central Propaganda Ministry. Unsurprisingly, six films from Beijing Film Studio alone have yet to make it through censorship this year, an unprecedented number since the reforms began in 1979.

These problems have in turn produced a chilling effect in the film industry as a whole. With only the most anodyne local product approved for release, the public is staying away from Chinese films in droves again, and 1996's box-office figures cannot compare with 1995's. This in turn is affecting production, with fewer investors willing to get into the business with the prospect of the resulting product being banned.

Second, although China Film Corporation has lost its domestic monopoly, it remains the sole importer of foreign films. With greatly-reduced ability to profit from domestic production, it has turned to imports to recover its income. In the past, although China Film Corporation has always brought in considerable numbers of foreign films every year, it has always done so on the basis of buying rights and not entering into box-office splits with foreign producers. This has effectively excluded the top product, which it could not afford the rights on.

However, in 1995, for the first time China Film Corporation was allowed to bring in ten films on a box-office split arrangement. These included Forest Gump (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), Ramble in the Bronx (Stanley Tong, 1995) and various others. Together, they cleaned up at the Chinese box-office. If this practice is widened, it may constitute a new threat to domestic production.
It's All About Trust
Born in the post-war mundanity of Sydney, Christopher Doyle has spent much of his life at large. He has been a sailor with the Norwegian Merchant Marine at the age of 18, a Thai-based Chinese quack-medicine ‘doctor’, a ‘cowboy-nic’ on an Israeli kibbutz, even a well-digger in the Indian desert ... and almost everything in between.

Doyle was ‘reincarnated’ in the late 1970s by his poet/language teacher at the University of Hong Kong, who gave him the evocative name 杜可风 (Du Kefeng). He has never been the same.

Since 1978, Doyle has been a founding member of Lanling Theatre Workshop (Taiwan’s first professional modern theatre group), he has shot still photographs, film and video for such modern dance groups as Cloud Gate Dance Ensemble and Zuni Iceoshedron, and he created Taiwan TV’s ground-breaking non-fiction series, Travelling Images.

Since Edward Yang (Yang Te-ch’ang) invited him to do his first feature, That Day, On the Beach, in 1981, Doyle has devoted most of his time and energy to photographing Chinese films. His work as director of photography includes Wong Kar-Wai’s Days of Being Wild and Chungking Express, Stan Lai’s Peach Blossom Land and Chen Kaige’s Temptress Moon, seen at Cannes this year.

Doyle has also made music videos for such artists as Air Supply, Leslie Cheung, Leon Lai, Cui Jian and Tony Leung. He first exhibited his photo-collages in Taipei in 1993, and has since had several more exhibitions of his collages and photographs in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tokyo and Rotterdam. Two Chinese-language books and one Japanese edition of his photos and text have appeared to date; an English edition is anticipated for December 1996.

How did you become involved in cinematography?

By mistake obviously, and everyone has lived to regret it. [laughs]

I was studying Chinese at the University of Hong Kong, but it became too expensive. As I was with someone who wanted to go to Taiwan to study martial arts, I went with her.

In the coffee shops of Taipei, I ran into the decadent likes of Stan Lai (Lai Shengchuan), who was just finishing university. He was playing jazz piano at the Idea Coffee House, which he co-owned with other affluent members of the future cultural elite of Taiwan. In another coffee shop called Mingxing, which is famous for its White Russian cuisine, I meet Hou Hsiao-Hsien [Hou Xioajian], who was writing scripts for Li Hang [Li Xing] at that time. I also ran into people later like Lin Huaiming, founder of Cloud Gate Dance Ensemble, the most famous dance group.

Basically, I started in a medium that was beyond my cultural capacities and they were not forced on me. [laughs] I was forced to do it all; you can’t do it, because everything was happening in Chinese. I was then asked to take my own camera – I was the only one who had one – to the south of Taiwan to do an etnomusical documentary about my friend’s work. I had no conception about the correspondence between sound and image, so the sync sound was fucked. I also had no idea of the difference between what the eye perceives and what a 64 ASA Kodachrome 8 mm film can record. We came back with something totally useless, which opened my eyes to the differences between the way the human eye and the camera perceive, brightness, tonal range, etc. All my ‘atmospheric’ interiors were ‘black holes’ on such an insensitive stock, and yet I’d never even noticed the saturation and variations of green in which the film registered the sub-tropical countryside!

I was sucked in. I bought equipment. I read incomprehensible Chinese translations of incomprehensible technical books. We formed other ‘experimental’ theatres, which were based basically on sexual interests at the time. I explored the film medium as insistently and as excitedly as a child explores its sex.

Taiwan was very much in its pre-Five Dragons period. It was very much a backwater of Asia, but it was emerging socially. People started to regard me as part of what was happening, and offered me things like TV. I started doing ‘documentary’ programmes, which were totally intuitive because I had no knowledge whatsoever of what a documentary should be like.

I was fortunate that the other members of the team were highly-regarded still photographers, like Zhang Zhaotang. He and Ruan Yichong are regarded as the fathers of post-war documentary social-realist photography, which parallelled what was happening to the changes in Taiwanese society at that time. We were making stuff based on that, based on the people. It was very affirmative of the importance of the little man in the cultural and social fabric of Taiwanese society.

Another programme was called Travelling Images, which was extremely well received. I would sit on the top of a moving car all the time. It was a precursor of what I’m doing now in Temprompt Moon, or in the films of Wong Kar-Wai. Because we had no time to stop, and we wanted to get as much on film as possible, we moved in any way possible. That became a very important foundation in the visual and audio-visual history of Taiwan.

Edward Yang was always the one who watched the show. He said, ‘Well don’t you do my first feature film?’, which was That Day, On the Beach.

There was great interest in Central Motion Picture Corporation, because there were 32 camera- men on salary, let alone all the lighting people and other directors. They were furious about the idea that the two upstairs should be doing anything like this, and went on strike. But Edward prevailed for me, with a great deal of compromise. There was a so-called supervising photographer on the set, but after five days he realized there wasn’t much to do and stopped coming.

Lance, I was rather shocked by the positive response. I quickly became afraid that I would become a big fish in a small pond. I’d been out of contact with the rest of the world and it all seemed too easy.

So, I went to France. But I soon found the French pond was just as ridiculously constrained as ours was.

As I’d spent six years with these Taiwan people, and with their concerns, I did feel part of an evolving social and cultural history. So, I said, “Fuck it. Why should I spend 20 years just proving to Claude Lelouch that I can make a remake of an American film on the beach of Le Touquet?" Besides, the French don’t work with the same intimacy and familiarity that we do. They tend to regard film as conflict rather than as the intimate undertaking with a group of people with the same common end.

Nonetheless, you did shoot one French film?

No, and it was a total catastrophe. It was called Noir et Blanc. “Energetic” is the word for Claire Devers, the director. She speaks about 75 times faster than I do. And, as I didn’t understand French, it was a bit difficult to communicate [laughs].

I also hadn’t shot anything in black and white before, and I didn’t know shit about the techniques or technical aspects of cinematography. That was one of the reasons I was there, but I wasn’t ready for it.

So, you came back to this part of the world, to Hong Kong?

Shu Kei got me back to do his second feature, Soul. He always complains, when I receive an award and don’t mention his name, “You know it is my fault you are here, don’t forget” [laughs]. And it is true; he invited me back.

On the basis of his friendship, and his interest in what was happening in Taiwan, there was an incredible interaction, a sense of mutual aspiration between the younger Hong Kong filmmakers and the Taiwanese filmmakers of the same generation.

Soul is obviously a very good example of that because Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Ke Yizheng, leading Taiwan directors, appear in it as actors. It was set up as a riff on John Cassavetes’ Gloria (1980), but also has New Wave elements in it.

Of course, the Taiwan makers and the Taiwanese filmmakers, the rest of the world and it all seemed too easy.

While not totally satisfactory, it is an interesting melting pot.

I agree, and I don’t think Shu Kei would disagree. He obviously tried to go in too many directions at the same time. But that was exciting for me because I got to try different things.

We worked very hard on trying to co-ordinate it all. For whatever reason, I prefer to integrate everything well. My interest in literature, and perhaps my experiences in theatre, have led me to consider coherence of style and tone and things like that to be very important. But sometimes I now think, “Hell, you should break out of it.” That is why I’d like to make the next film with Stanley Kwan with a difference, a change. Because sometimes you need to challenge your instincts and inclinations have to be used wisely and/or applicable to you. You may never break out of it, but you should never know when and if you should. Style should be a choice, not a habit.

With Soul, some people paid attention to the cinematography and it put me on the map here. I have no idea why. When I look at it now, I don’t see why people regard the cinematography as unusual or interesting. But I’m too much inside it.

While one primarily thinks of you as a cinematographer, you also make photo-collages and take photographs. Do they complement or intersect with your cinematography?

It is the same as the dancing and the women: they are...
We never say, "Have you seen such and such?" And, when we do talk about a film we are doing, it is in quasi-technical terms. "I want to have white light" is the way he described the colour scheme and the visual point of departure of Days of Being Wild. We also discussed how we were going to approach the sense of its happening in the '60s, as seen looking back from the '90s. We discussed things like, "Let's stay away from things like sepia tones. But how do we express nostalgia? How do we express a sense of nostalgia in terms of colours and ambience?"

One thing I have learnt from Wong Kar-Wai is how intuitive, the more on-the-spot I am, the better I work. If I know, the better I am. I make a collage and then rethink it, I usually fuck my brains out. I'm the only person who has worked with Patrick Tam more than once! (laughs.)

These directors are all based in the Far East. What kind of experiences, feelings or instincts led you towards those particular directors and the sustained collaborations over a number of films? Friendship. No question.

On Wong Kar-Wai

We started Days of Being Wild with a portion of the script. From there, we moved into less and less knowledge of what the hell we were doing (laughs).

Wong Kar-Wai gave me 30 pages of the script of Days of Being Wild. On Ashes of Time, I saw some hand-written scenes occasionally, when the big actors or the big guns came to town. Then Wong Kar-Wai got progressively more abstract and on Chang Icreas said, "Well, you know it is probably about this." On his latest film, Fallen Angels, he said, "I don't even want to tell you what it is about."" On the next film, he says he won't even tell me when, what or where we are going to shoot it (laughs).

So, it is very much based on trust. I don't know where an intimacy comes from, though in Wong Kar-Wai's case it comes from our mutual interests in literature, particularly Latin American, and in popular or alternative music.
Kar-Wai said, “Let’s go further.” So, we went to 6.5mm. [Actor] Michelle Reis turned her head and her nose became like Pinnochio; it just extended through the whole frame [laughs], I said, “What are we going to do?” and Wong Kar-Wai said, “We don’t show her the rushes, do we?” Once we were committed to that approach, we couldn’t go back. We stayed true to the visual style.

We could have said, “This is how we are going to work because the sets are so small.” Or we could have intellectualized it and said, “We want to get closer and closer to the people. We want to force an intimacy on them. We want to force a confrontation between the camera and the characters. We want to create a new way, or a different way, or a slightly unusual way, of interacting between the camera and the person perceived on the screen.”

Once you go into that, all hell breaks loose. Given the trust we create between ourselves, we can throw away half the shoot — we usually do — to get there. I don’t give a shit.

A lot of actors were hesitant with that process. They were not used to working this way. They were only used to giving a certain amount of energy and time to a given project, because they were doing five at the same time.

When we did Days of Being Wild, [actor] Maggie Cheung hated my guts. She wasn’t used to it. She wasn’t sure what was coming out of it, and why there were technical problems. I was working on very open apertures and there were a lot of problems, but I stuck with the style I had chosen and we pushed it through.

I had the support of the director, because he knew that what we were getting visually was exciting enough to warrant what we were doing. But Maggie, who was in that transitional period of becoming a real actress, instead of just being an ex-Miss Hong Kong, was aghast. She thought this is really wasting her time and energy. Now she doesn’t see it that way.

There is no question that it is all about the rapport you set up between people, no matter who they are: the night porter/non-actor who plays Takeshi’s father so wonderfully in Days of Being Wild, you set up between people, no matter who they are. This is that trust. Because of the films I have done in the past with Wong Kar-Wai, I’m so schizophrenic in that way. I’m the best whore in town. I want to make people happy, to give them what they paid and ask for, to give them the best they’ve ever had, no strings attached. It is this need for reassertion, it is this need for love, it is this need for people to say, “Yes, you are taking us there. You are doing it.” I need to give and be encouraged to give good (cinematic) head!

I have in part, but not as totally as he does [laughs]. And I’m not as removed from things as Wong Kar-Wai is.

I regard all the people I work with, especially the directors and William, as different aspects of my personality as Stanley is. Chen Kaige, on the other hand, has this incredible discipline and perception of where he wants to take things, which I have in part, but not as totally as he does [laughs]. And I’m not as tuned into the feminine aspect of my personality as Stanley is.

There was no question that it is all about the rapport you set up between people, no matter who they are: the night porter/non-actor who plays Takeshi’s father so wonderfully in Days of Being Wild, you set up between people, no matter who they are. This is that trust. Because of the films I have done in the past with Wong Kar-Wai, I’m so schizophrenic in that way.

I’m the best whore in town. I want to make people happy, to give them what they paid and ask for, to give them the best they’ve ever had, no strings attached. It is this need for reassertion, it is this need for love, it is this need for people to say, “Yes, you are taking us there. You are doing it.” I need to give and be encouraged to give good (cinematic) head!

I don’t have any great aspiration to be a writer-director, because I know what I’m doing now is probably the best I’ll ever do. The only thing that could happen is that it gets better, because I have these people who are making demands on me to be better. I’m very happy.

The case and crew’s tea cups: A “Teen Lady” occupies herself much keeping them full of (usually very mediocre) tea. She also prepares her or cold towels (like you get on Asian airlines and in Chinese restaurants) to refresh you during the shoot. There’s no refreshment wagon, though.

Select Filmography

1986 Noir et Blanc (Claire Devers) — Doyle was co-DOP with Daniel Desbois
1987 Soul Lao Nang Gao Sao, Shu Kei) — Best Cinematography, 1987 Hong Kong Film Awards
1987 Burning Snow (Xue Zai Shao; Patrick Tam)
1990 Days of Being Wild (A-Fei Zhengchuarr, Wong Kar-Wai) — Best Cinematography, Asia-Pacific Film Festival; Best Cinematography, 1991 Hong Kong Film Awards
1992 Peach Blossom Land (Anlian Taohuyuan, Stan Lai) — Silver Sakura, 1992 Tokyo Film Festival; Caligari Prize, 1993 Berlin Film Festival
1993 The Red Lotus Society (Feixia A-Do; Stan Lai)
1994 Ashes of Time (Dong Xie Xi Du; Wong Kar-Wai) — Special Jury Award, 1994 Venice Film Festival; Best Cinematography, Golden Horse Awards (Taiwan); Best Cinematography, 1995 Hong Kong Film Awards
1994 Chungking Express (Ghangsing Sanlin, Wong Kar-Wai)
1994 Red Rose, White Rose (Hong Meigui, Bai Meigui; Stanley Kwan)
1995 Fallen Angels (Duoluo Tianshi; Wong Kar-Wai)
1995 Out of the Blue (Tiankong Xiaoshu, Jan Lamb)
1996 Temptress Moon (Fengyue; Chen Kaige)
1996 Four Faces of Eve (Sze Mian Xia Wu, Kam Kwokleung, Jan Lamb, Eric Kot)

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Stanley Kwan’s *Red Rose, White Rose*, which you shot in Shanghai, was your first studio film, other than *Peach Blossom Land*, which is theatre. To work in totally-controlled conditions must be somewhat different from shooting on location, as Wong Kar-Wai does all the time?

Yes [laughs]. Next question [laughs].

I have done lighting for theatre. Although I wasn’t very good at the time, I did have a perception of things. Hopefully, you expect different things of yourself each time out, although I don’t think you should expect that each film is different. As they say, everyone only has one story written for themself, only different ways of telling it. I think it is the same for a cinematographer; it is variations on your potential.

I am extremely interested in the dynamics of space. Don’t talk to me about content. Of course I can understand the structure of a story, but I am much more interested in atmosphere and dynamics. That is why I should never direct. I should leave that to people who want to tell a story logically. I’m not very logical.

**Have you ever had any complaints from editors who found your material difficult to cut?**

Patrick Tam, when he cut *Ashes of Time*, said, “How come you are moving all the time?” I said, “There was several hundred thousand feet to look through. Maybe you just didn’t look closely enough.” [Laughs.]

The dynamics of editing have changed so much in the past few films. I stay away from it, of course, like most cameramen. It is rather traumatic for some people to see the best shots thrown on the floor. But the best shots are still there, in a sense. If I perceive, or agree to, an image at a particular time, then it is part of my visual experience. So, I don’t worry if it happens to hit the editing-room floor. If you made it once, next time you can make it even better. It won’t be the same image, of course; it will be an evolution of that image.

It is just an accumulation of experience to me. So, I don’t worry any more, especially since Wong Kar-Wai uses only a very small percentage of what he shot in the release prints of our films! I felt very sad about that. [laughs.]

During a recent seminar on my work with Wong Kar-Wai, the HKSC suggested drafting me a contract to oblige Wong to use a specific percentage of what I shot in the release prints of our films! I felt very saddened and alone to realize how very differently we regarded a cinematographer’s input, collaboration and even the creative process itself.

**On Chen Kaige**

How did you become involved with Chen Kaige, your first mainland Chinese director?

I was shooting *Red Rose, White Rose* in China and word got around: “What is this mad man doing in our part of the world?”

Hsu Feng and Sunday Sun, producer and executive producer of *Temptress Moon*, came on to the set to check me out. They said to me, “You are so totally off-the-wall and Chen Kaige is usually a bit more reserved. What would happen if we put the two of you together?” It was a kind of Yin-and-Yang concept.

Chen Kaige had certain working procedures, which were difficult at the beginning for me to adjust to. It is a much more structured working environment than we have in Hong Kong, or ever existed in Taiwan. He is much more meticulous. The time used to pursue an idea, and the energies devoted to it, are quite different, as is the way the hierarchy is structured.

Because you move the camera a lot, and you are close to the characters, Chen Kaige said he could tell when watching the rushes that the camera loved the characters. That in turn makes it easy for him and for the audience to love the characters. Maybe what is missing from most of the earlier Chen Kaige films is that intimacy with the characters, a real engagement at a warm level. Obviously, he made masterful films before, particularly *King of the Children*, but you couldn’t say you feel emotionally close to the characters. The films retain a sense of an intellectual structure, an argument, a grand metaphor, but they aren’t much to do with the day-to-day minutiae of human feelings, whereas *Temptress Moon* appears to be. It is odd that it should come to him so late in life.

**“I want to be part of all this. I have a real intimacy with this region, with these people. […] I’m going to stick with the sticky rice!”**

He is the same age as I am. We are both children of the ‘60s.

He was a child of the ‘60s in China, which is rather different from your ‘60s and my ‘60s.

How come the results are so similar, then? Chen Kaige said that he had for the first time begun to understand how much you can understand about people by looking at their sexuality. [Laughs.]

Which is something that had been singularly missing from his earlier work, even including *Farewell, My Concubine*, which is ostensibly about the sexuality of the central characters. He said that after working on *Temptress Moon* he felt he had become more broad-minded.

That’s good. That’s why he told me he loved me the other day [laughs].

While you worked on *Temptress Moon*, were you conscious of Chen Kaige changing?

They told me that if I didn’t stop bringing whisky to the set, his father was going to come down and beat me up. [Laughs.] But that never happened. Chen’s father died half-way through the shoot. [Doesn’t laugh.]

To answer your question, yes, I think Kaige changed a lot. A real love developed between us. It is a cliché, but making a film is being part of a family. You get to know people more intimately than their own families do. And since this film took six or seven months to shoot, you either got to
Love and Other Catav trap her is an exercise m fast-paced, low-budget, collective filmmaking: fast-paced because it was shot over 17 days following pre-production of only six weeks; low-budget ($545,000) in that the film only got shot due to the generosity and enthusiasm of all who read the script; and collective in the sense that Emma-Kate Croghan wrote the script with Yael Bergman, based on a story from Stavros Efthymiou, with additional scenes and script editing by Helen Bandis. Efthymiou also acted as producer, while Justin Brickie was director of photography.

The film, which Croghan describes as "romantic comedy; a day in the life of five uni students", is influenced by a passion for screwball comedy of the 1930s and '40s. Consequently, the film is dialogue-based, quite a change from Croghan's short films, Desire and Sexy Girls, Sexy Appliances, which feature no dialogue and a strong emphasis on art direction. Her most recent short, Come as You Are (co-directed with Brad McCann), is a quasi-documentary about three people's alter-egos — a drag queen, a sexual deviant and a gay cowboy — which was highly commended in the Australian Short Film Competition at this year's Melbourne Queer Film and Video Festival.

The five students in Love and Other Catastrophes are played by Frances O'Connor, Matthew Dyktynski, Matt Day, Radha Mitchell and Alice Garner. Kim Gyngell and Suzanne Dowling make cameo appearances as lecturers, "both having been very encouraging from the beginning", according to Croghan. Encouragement and support also came from "Film Buffs' Paul Harris, The Age film reviewer Adrian Martin, casting agent Greg Apps and editor Ken Sallows. "We were very, very lucky to get Ken because, with his experience, when we didn't have a lot of coverage, he was able to get everything he possibly could out of the rushes", Croghan says.

Interviewing Croghan was also a collective enterprise, with Helen Bandis and Yael Bergman frequently interjecting and adding comments to Croghan's thoughts. It wasn't hard to picture the frenzied pace and excitement of their creative process:

CROGHAN: We were writing very fast.

BANDIS: Things would be faxed to and fro. We didn't even have time for meetings.

CROGHAN: We wrote it in two weeks, although, of course, we were changing stuff all the time. That process continued right into shooting, where we would constantly change things on set.

Was it a deliberate change on your part to go from "silent" shorts to a dialogue-based film? Did you feel the need to do something different?

CROGHAN: I don't know that it was that calculated. I suppose, in a way ... maybe subconsciously.

BANDIS: I think also the fact that it was set in a university. It's something everyone involved in the project has been through and connects with the experience.

Universities really are about dialogue.

CROGHAN: The film's not so much about university as about life ... and the energy that comes out of the
you had no funding?

BANDIS: You work things out, take direction. That's where the comedy comes in. There are people with time to be concerned about love and romance and stuff like that.

So the production was fast-paced?

CROGHAN: We shot in 17 days. As the film is close to 80 minutes, we were doing approximately eight minutes of screen time a day. Pre-production was also really short. From Stavros coming to us with the story to shooting was six weeks. Stavros is currently starring on another feature as director [True Love and Chaos1], so this was in the period when he was waiting for funding. He wanted to do something fast and he had this idea. He felt it was a "young" story.

How did you get it all together when you had no funding?

CROGHAN: It just happened. If you want something, it will happen. That's the thing about a film like this: it had an energy, the script had an energy and it just snowballed from there. People were generally supportive. It amazed me. It was a deliberate choice to go this kind of low-budget route, but the story demanded that anyway. If we'd gone another route, and got funding and done all that, it would have been a different film — it might be a better film, it might be a worse film — but it would be different and definitely that's come all the way through.

BANDIS: We may have had budgetary restraints, but on the other hand it allowed us a degree of freedom.

It sounds like the product's really sold itself, in terms of getting people to contribute and help out.

CROGHAN: Everyone's been incredibly generous. When we finally had a rough-cut of the film, we approached the AFC saying, "Ah, look, we've made this film and we don't have any money to finish it."

They just said, "Yes, here's the money!" So here we are.

How would you describe the look of the film?

CROGHAN: The film was shot on super 16. Every time I see it, I cannot believe how good it looks. Justin had times when he had only an hour or even half an hour to light.

Justin and I talked a lot beforehand about the fact that on set I'd have to spend most of my time with the actors, because we were working so fast, and we'd have to do things like change scenes and improve them. It's a simple style, but it has a lot more of a style than I thought it would. I thought it would be a lot rougher than it is. Again, it's still simple. There are no crane shots. It's all shot on sticks, but it's amazing how well it's come together, especially with such a small crew: basically Justin and a camera assistant and a clapper loader, who helped with lights and stuff.

"It just happened. If you want something, it will happen. That's the thing about a film like this: it had an energy, the script had an energy and it just snowballed from there. People were generally so supportive. It amazed me."

One of the things which I thought might be difficult for me is such a production design fascist, as you might have seen from my other films. I thought, "Oh my god, I'm going to have no control over anything." We didn't have a designated designer, although Helen was getting props together and we had a girl working on costumes — Lisa Collins, whom I'd worked with at the VCA — so what we said was we'll have no bright colours, we just go for earth tones. Amazingly enough, it's developed into a look of its own.

BANDIS: It has a definite palette.

How did you find the transition from directing short films to making a feature?

CROGHAN: Because this was a small group of people, it wasn't such a big thing. The pressure was there a little bit, but it wasn't like we had producers coming out to the set every day. I was in a position where I could have a really good dialogue with the producer. It wasn't like you had, you know, money people coming and fretting at your dailies. And because we shot over 17 days, it just felt like an extended short — till we got into editing. That's when it changed.

Artistically, how did you find the difference between a short and a long film?

CROGHAN: Artistically the difference? Um, you gotta sustain yourself a bit longer. One is just one format. It's like asking a writer the difference between a short story and a long story. It's like, "Well, I had to sit in the chair for an extra month." ... Do you know what I mean? Because there wasn't that pressure of "This is the feature", we were able to be fairly free and just do it. I'm sure we made mistakes, but we got a lot of stuff done as well.

Can you explain the influence of screwball comedy on Love and Other Catastrophes.

CROGHAN: I like the work of Leo McCarey in The Awful Truth, which is a story of re-marriage, and there's an aspect of that in this film. There's a couple who love each other but can't get it together; they break up and then try to get back together but spend half the time miscommunicating.

Basically, Love and Other Catastrophes draws upon the Hollywood tradition of that factory thing, where things had to happen really fast and turn over. You got the script, you got the cast, the crew went out and shot it and you cut it. A lot of screwball comedies came out of that environment. The films I watched a few times in the process of filming, and I kept coming back to, were Holiday, The Awful Truth and Shop Around The Corner. There are little homages to those throughout, some quite obvious, actually.

BANDIS: And some things happened by accident.

CROGHAN: Yeah, it was pointed out to me the other day that in Holiday the party moves upstairs and our party moves upstairs, too. But that was completely by accident, osmosis, or whatever!

At the close of the interview, Croghan rushed off to Fox Searchlight (the company which had success with the 'no-budget' U.S. feature, The Brothers McMullen). Distribution in Australia is through NewVision. "From little things, big things grow", and this homage to screwball has become a snowball. 

1 The filmmakers had raised the $45,000 to get the film to double-head. On viewing that cut, the Australian Film Commission then put in $500,000 to finish the film on 35mm and pay out the many deferrals.

2 Now in post-production.
49ème Festival International du Film, Cannes 1996

Mary Colbert reports on the world’s premier festival

Mike Leigh’s Secrets and Lies is a poignant and wry insight into dysfunctional family relations [...] of the rules, limiting the number of categories for which the winning film can be eligible, taking out Best Director (Joel Coen) and rave reviews for — especially — Frances McDormand’s pregnant sheriff in the offbeat kidnap thriller, Fargo.

A precedent was set this year for an audacity award for the film that most galvanized audiences: David Cronenberg’s daring study of technology and sexuality, Crash. It is a futuristic love story set in the present about the attempts of a couple, who have found themselves very disconnected, to reconnect through the medium of car crashes, and to seek out other people with similar connections. With a hip cast including James Spader, Holly Hunter, Elias Koteas, Rosanna Arquette and Deborah Unger, it is a sickly-seductive and sensually-disturbing film.

Un Certain Regard

One of the delights of this section is the stylistic (as well as thematic) diversity of distinctive original voices (thus the name), ranging from ground-breaking efforts of first-time filmmakers to the avant garde experimentation of established talents, like Peter Greenaway. This year they were joined by actors Al Pacino (Looking for Richard) and Angelica Huston (Bastard Out of Carolina) making their directorial feature debuts.

Kicking off the selection, Mary Harron’s bold first feature, I Shot Andy Warhol, immediately set the ‘alternative’ independent audacious tone. The multi-awarded documentary-maker originally intended to tackle the portrait of Valerie Solanas, the radical feminist who claimed her 15 minutes of fame (to which Warhol felt we were all entitled) by wounding the icon in 1968. The difficulty of obtaining original material allowed producers Tom Kalin and the BBC’s Alan Wall to persuade her to opt...
It's a crisp and intelligent script but what charges I Shot Andy Warhol with life are dynamic, brilliant performances from Taylor, and Jared Harris (son of Richard), whose body language and delivery, blond wig and dark glasses captures Warhol's monosyllabic, deadpan voice to perfection as Warhol floats around his decadent, drug-induced world. The support cast — Stephen Dorff as Candy Darling, Reg Rogers as Paul Morrissey, Martha Plimpton as Stevie and Lorhaire Blateau as Maurice Girodias — are superb.

On the subject of cult following, it seems that everybody is hooked on Richard III these days, especially Shakespeare's interpretation of the monarch. Al Pacino spent two decades on Looking for Richard, British veteran thespian Ian McKellen, having found him on stage, performed the role for three years and then refused to let it go, determined to extend the term longer by turning it into a feature film. Macbeth, Hamlet and Lear used to be the choice Shakespeare roles. Evidently, Richard has come into tres chic vogue with the thespian heavies.

Pacino arrived in town with Richard in tow and, with a dearth of Hollywood stars, caused a frenzied stir amongst press and paparazzi, in the process eclipsing Australian Shirley Barrett's press conference for Love Serenade. (Producer Jan Chapman and Barratt accepted their casuistry status with stoic good grace.) Amid the media circus, Pacino enlightened the gathered throngs about his goal in deconstructing and demystifying the Bard's regal villain for mass consumption.

Pacino's inspiration for the play and character drives this docu-drama and keeps it rolling at a lively pace through interpersed re-enactments: the director is brilliant as Richard; Winona Ryder (Lady Anne), Kevin Spacey (Bucking-ham), Aidan Quinn (Richmond) and Alec Baldwin (Clarence) lend a hand; there are visits to Stratford-on-Avon and the Globe Theatre, performances in New York, and interviews with experts, producers, directors, critics, academics and randomly-selected audiences.

In the vein of Francois Truffaut's La Nuit Americaine (Day for Night, 1973) and Fellini's 8½ (1963), Pacino integrates the process with response and re-enactment; practical and artistic battles are juxtaposed with performance and response, with visits to the Bard's roots intended to illuminate stage and screen versions.

The subsequent mosaic breaks down barriers between audience and actors, with Pacino — star, producer, director — in the role of guide the entire journey. Anjelica Huston has evidently decided it's time to follow in her father's footsteps, with an accomplished, compelling, emotional drama set in the poor South, a tale of child abuse and rape, torn loyalties and family relations in the somnambulant 1950s in Greenville County, South Carolina.

Originally commissioned by Turner Television/Broadcasting, but later found too risqué for family entertainment, the theatrical feature (Turner may have done Huston a favour by its rejection) was adapted for screen by Anne Meredith from Dorothy Allison's best-seller. It features Jennifer Jason Leigh as Anney Boatright, a mother torn between her daughter, Bone (a knockout performance by young Jena Malone), who is reminiscent of Scout from Harper Lee's To Kill A Mockingbird, and her second husband, the child's abuser.

Huston adroitly creates the ambiance of the languorous south, delving beneath regional clichés to expose a complex web of family rivalries, hardship and tradition in post-World War II days. She elicits compelling performances from her case, with the possible exception of Ron Eldard as Glen, the abusive stepfather, whose role lacks conviction or malice. The abuse and rape scene are handled superbly, with sensitivity and dramatic poignancy that Turner needn't have worried about: the unexploitative realism may have scored him more good ratings.

The mother-child relationship is the focus for the politically-slanted Some Mother's Son, Terry George's (co-scripted by Jim Sheridan) companion piece to In the Name of the Father (Jim Sheridan, 1994), dramatizing the contentious issues in the Anglo-Irish conflict through a political nexus.

The film revisits the H-block hunger strike by Republican prisoners in the early 1980s with a widowed school teacher (Helen Mirren) politicized as her eldest son is sentenced to 12 years for his part in an IRA ambush. The human price for political conflict is conveyed in a wrenching performance by Mirren, twice winner of Best Actress honours here.

Post-teen infatuation is handled in different ways by Shirley Barrett's Love Serenade (winner of the Caméra d'Or) and Matt Reeves' The Pallbearer, both expertly handled by their helmsmen.
Quinzaine des Réalisateurs

The Quinzaine, as always, presented some choice pickings with John Sayles' *Lone Star*, Michael Winterbottom's *Thomas Hardy adaptation, Jude*, and Sergei Bodrov's *Prisoner of the Caucasus*, awarded the FIPRESCI prize for non-Competition sections. (*"for its courage in vividly portraying the conflict in the Caucasus in a personal and even-handed way"*) the highlights.

Indie director Steve Buscemi's first writing-directing outing in *Trees Lounge* and Hattie McDonald's *Beautiful Thing*, a poignant gay love story set in South London, also impressed.

Indie veteran Sayles, in his most commercially-accessible film yet, turns his focus to a particular socio-cultural landscape: the Tex-Mex border using a who-dunit murder mystery as a narrative lode. The device enables him to open a Pandora's box of characters from surrounding cultural groups - Mexicans, Anglo and Afro-Americans resident in this area of the Rio Grande - and to explore the metaphor of borders (spawning delinquency in enforcement agencies with his compassionate, compelling portrait of teenage delinquency in *Freedom is Paradise* (1992), and co-scripter Atif Aliev.

Years ago, Giller was inspired by Lev Tolstoy's classic story about a captured Russian POW who falls in love with one of the enemy's daughters; the trio decided to update the story and make it an anti-war film. Somewhat prophetically, the script was finished six months before the war in Chechnya broke out, and, though the filmmakers deliberately avoid direct references to the current conflict, the obvious situation injects the film with a poignant and obvious immediacy. Bodrov insists the story could happen in any war in any territory, but the fact that the film was shot during the climax of the Chechen struggle personalizes the universal.

The story revolves around two wounded Russian soldiers taken prisoner during the Caucasian War by Chechen enemies who hope to trade/exchange them for the son of their gaoler (taken hostage by the Russians). If the exchange fails, the old Chechen man from the mountain village of Abdul-Murad, where they have been imprisoned, will have to kill them. When one of the soldiers and the old man's son are killed in escape attempts, the validity of the negotiations has been undermined. But, in the meantime, the surviving soldier has found solace in the arms of the old Chechen's daughter, who has fallen for him but knows that her father, egged on by the village, is planning to kill him.

The story becomes a compelling conflict of love and divided loyalties starkly told by a confident filmmaker, with outstanding performances by one of Russia's best actors, Oleg Menshikov (*Burnt by the Sun*), and a strong cast that includes Sergei Bodrov, Jr as one of the soldiers.

While Eccleston and Cunningham deliver compelling performances, as in *Butterfly Kiss*, the women steal a number of the scenes with brilliant performances, Winslet confirming she has an extraordinary career ahead of her.

Like other tragic love stories (*Hardy's speciality*), the lovers are ultimately doomed but, in their defeat, Winterbottom's film celebrates the courage and idealism of the human spirit.

After several years of doldrums from Russia and former C.I.S. republics, Sergei Bodrov's *Kavkazski Plenlik (Prisoner of the Caucasus)* is a welcome offering from the now U.S.-based director, breaking the dry spell of quality films (Nikita Mikhalkov's 1995 *Burnt by the Sun* and a couple of others excepted) from a once-revered industry.

The film is a tri-collaboration between Kazakh producer Boris Giller (American Daughter 1995, a rather oversentimental father-daughter buddy movie of American-Russian relations), Bodrov, who ran foul of Russian law enforcement agencies with his compassionate, compelling portrait of teenage delinquency in *Freedom is Paradise* (1992), and co-scripter Atif Aliev.

Richard III (Al Pacino).

Al Pacino's Looking for Richard

the intense love story between Jude and his cousin Sue, a modern young woman (a teacher), complicated by their respective relationships with his first wife, farmer's daughter Arabella (Rachel Griffiths), and his role model, and later Sue's husband, the schoolmaster Phillotson (Liam Cunningham). But just as they are liberated from these connections, it is ultimately society which dooms their prospects (a frequent Hardy theme) of happiness (together). Their passionate and tragic relationship is echoed impressionistically in strokes at times deliberately reminiscent of Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (1961), with Winslet charging up the screen with her vibrant looks and intelligent charisma.

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Documentary: Dead or Alive?

During the 100th year of cinema and the second year of the European Union, filmmaker Ian Stocks visits documentary festivals in Europe

The documentary film form has survived in Europe despite a catastrophic war and the ensuing division between socialist and capitalist blocs. Now, it must face up to the more subtle threats posed by cable television and multimedia. And, by all outward signs, it appears to be showing remarkable resilience. Documentary has not been so diverse and adventurous since before World War II, and shows itself ready to tackle a range of themes and styles. This is perhaps not so surprising. The European documentary tradition gave us not only Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique* (1946) but also Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*, 1933).

Documentary is still part of a living tradition, albeit with special links and relevance to European culture. In the course of the visit, I was to see not only contemporary film, but some of the hidden masterpieces of the pre-World War II period. European documentary, based since its early days on notions of design aesthetics and experimentation as much as a desire for 'realism', appears to be continuing on its own path, undistracted by the demands of tabloid television. A growth in commitment to documentary culture has been evident over the past few years, with the inception of numerous organizations supporting or representing the documentary aesthetic: Dox in Amsterdam, the filmmakers' trade union Ag Dok in Frankfurt, and the Haus der Dokumentarfilm in Stuttgart, to name a few. E.U. bodies, such as the Media Programme for the Creative Documentary based in Copenhagen, form part of a pan-European support mechanism for film product, and makes substantial investment in documentary projects. Although cable television and deregulation of commercial broadcasting have made great inroads to the perceived authority of state-run broadcasters, there remains a substantial commitment to running documentaries in prime time on the first and second national channels in Germany, and the regional third channel.

Generally, these programming priorities are reflected in other national environments, with the result that large numbers of documentary films can be seen on television year round. Dutch documentary filmmakers are particularly active, helped by the interest generated by the annual Documentary Festival and market in Amsterdam. In these disseminations, the "document" component is as highly valued as aesthetic form. Films are presented, not so much for their ratings value, but because they record some event of note or present a particular point of view. The channels and the broadcasters seem to have so far resisted attempts to commercialize the form. One way of reinforcing documentary ideologies is through regional film festivals.

The programme of the ABC. It was a relief to escape to another theatre and see Boris Kustov's *The Marshal and the Red Horse*, which records the efforts of the inhabitants of Ekaterinburg in the Urals to raise a statue to Marshal Zhukov, the commander who took Berlin in the final days of the Great Patriotic War, but whom Stalin saw as a threat to his own pre-eminence. *BD Women*, by British director Inge Blackman, is an affectionate depiction of the struggle of black lesbian women to create their own social milieu, and effectively uses dramatization and evocations of long-lost social events to create the mood of the film. Blackman attended the Festival and revealed that the film's broadcast on Channel 4 evoked complaints that public money was being used to publicize "deviant behaviour". Over its six days, Leipzig proved to be tough going. Four cinemas ran documentaries and animation continuously from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m., with another two cinemas running special sessions in locations out of the city centre. A range of films was showing at any one time, but the multiple venues meant that if a film was missed there was little hope of catching it again. Not only was there an enormous range of current documentary films, but also the chance to witness some of the great "lost" films of the past, of which I had read much but never actually seen. These films were shown in a special retrospective.

These special screenings included long-neglected documentaries from the between-wars period. *Germany Between Yesterday and Today* (*Deutschland Zwischen Gestern und Heute*, Wilfried Basse, 1932-3) takes a holistic view of Germany just before the Nazis seized power, and is constructed along the lines of Vertov's *One Sixth of the World* (*Shestaya chast' mira*, 1926). The warmth of its images and its plea for tolerance and harmony make it an interesting counterweight to...
the much more famous (or notorious) _Triumph of the Will_ from the same era. Willy Zielke’s dramatized documentary _The Steel Beast_ (Das Stahlstier, 1935) about the German railway system was criticized by Dr. Goebbels for paying too much attention to the British invention of the railroad, although Zielke’s lagubrious _The Truth_ (Die Wahrheit, 1933), with unintentionally humorous, staged shots of workers marching to Soviet-style meetings, showed that the left-wing was way behind in the propaganda stakes. Zielke also designed and shot the opening scenes of Leni Riefenstahl’s _Olympia_ (Olympische Spiele, 1938.) Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s cinéma vérité masterpiece, _The Gypsy City_ (Grossstadt Zigeuner, 1932), uses formalized documentary observation that compares favourably with many contemporary films.

Another bonus was well-attended information sessions, including a series of archival interviews with key German documentarists like Koeppe and Wildenhahn, commissioned by the three German television channels, WDR, ARD and 3 Sat. My most enduring image, however, is that of American documentarist Les Blank discussing his work with a rapt audience. Blank arrived with his own store of personalized merchandizing items — posters, buttons and tee-shirts — in which he did a brisk trade after the seminar. Now there’s a documentarist!

In Europe, documentary finds much of its relevance and importance through identification with the generic forms of the short film. That’s the opinion of Angela Haardt, director of the Oberhausen Short Film Festival:

“We don’t discriminate against or for documentaries. They are part of our film screening and evaluation environment, and they are judged on the success or otherwise of their artistic vision. So, for us, it’s not really an issue whether documentary needs special attention. We show short films, that’s all, and we are looking at innovations and development in that form. For the last few years, Oberhausen has screened videos on an equal footing with film prints, so there is no discrimination there either. Klaus Wildenhahn, one of Germany’s foremost documentarists, switched to Betacam some years ago and has produced three feature-length documentaries on video. The Duisburger Filmwoche, a few kilometres from Oberhausen, operates mainly on grants from the city and maintains a German-language focus which helps clarify its concerns. Director Werner Ružicka feels that documentary is a form that invites personal commitment, and that the best documentaries can be a type of artistic testament. Debates about realism and manipulation by the filmmakers are subordinated to home village, but the relentless videotaping of nightlife in Sao Paulo (population 25 million) showed real skill. _Orignal Wolfen_ (Nils Bolbrinker, Kerstin Stutterberg) details the demise of the East German state-run film manufacturing and processing plant, ORWO. The film in microcosm shows the immense changes occurring in the old East Germany as developers move in to snap up cheap real estate and close down unprofitable state enterprises.

The competition winner at the Duisburger Filmwoche was Munich Film School graduate Thomas Cuiel’s sombre _Gratian_, which showed the atavistic life of a Romanian peasant, rejected by other villagers because he was rumoured to be a werewolf. Shades of Nosferatu; some old traditions die hard.

German festival audiences accept that documentary relates most effectively to the lives of everyday people. Documentarists, like their subject matter, live and work in the everyday world.

The mood surrounding the production of documentaries in Europe is one of cautious optimism, and the fact that so many European cities host thematic Festivals plays a large part in keeping alive diversity and enthusiasm. Many people travelled from Berlin to the Leipzig Festival, and at Duisburg there was a mix of German, Dutch and expatriate filmmakers working in German, which gave the Festival a broader relevance. The practice of focusing the concerns of each Festival seems to advantage the documentary, which is too often lost in the generalist programming policies of Australian festivals, which inevitably foreground the feature film.

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new media

Language and Æsthetics

Less silicone rapture and more informed analysis, argues John Conomos after a tour of recent conferences and exhibitions devoted to new media

... digital Æsthetics-One" and "The Language of Interactivity" were significant conferences held in Sydney during April. Still running at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, "Burning the Interface", a fairly comprehensive survey show of CD-ROM art, and "Phantasmagoria", a smaller and engaging exhibition of interactive art installations that are indebted to Méliès' fantasy tradition in cinema and electronic media.

Together, these events represent a useful and vivid roadmap of the more significant concerns, directions and issues central to the ever-growing, dynamic world of electronic art.

True, it seems that everywhere we turn nowadays there is yet another reminder of the spiralling vortex of digital media, a new exhibition, a new magazine and a new television commercial. It is no secret by now, as we are frequently reminded by the rapidly-increasing number of commentators on digital/virtual culture, that the 21st-century capitalist culture's aspirations are heavily anchored in the "computer revolution". But what is needed now, more than ever, is less silicon rapture and more informed analytical thinking that looks at cyberculture in the context of its socio-cultural formations and histories.

Mark Dery's scorching, sharp-eyed critique of our information age, *Escape Velocity* (1996), is a welcomed historical analysis, and is highly recommended. Dery, who was one of the invited overseas speakers at the Digital Æsthetics-One symposium, gave an informative, ironic, well-researched and playful reading of the graphic design philosophy of the post-McLuhanite, new technology magazine, *Wired*. Dery's book is arguably the first of its kind: an archaeology of the present moment that explores the many high-tech subcultures that constitute the more romantic and dystopian aspects of our wired era: techno-pagans, cyber-hippies, maverick technologists, and evangelical utopians. Dery, who looks and talks like Phil Spector on speed, digs deep into the less-known cultural and technological subcultures of the digital epoch, and is the kind of exhilarating popular archaeologist of computer culture we need.

**Digital Æsthetics-One**

The first of the two conferences, Digital Æsthetics-One, organized by the indefatigable Werner Hammerstingl and Carolyn Deutscher, was a much smaller, spontaneous event compared to The Language of Interactivity. Nevertheless, it featured many different local and overseas academics, artists, curators and technologists who, in various panel and seminar contexts, spoke about a myriad of different themes, issues and artists' works concerned with contemporary media culture.

Owing to brevity of space, I shall only refer to a number of the speakers' presentations. Professor Nicholas Zurbrugg, the symposium's keynote speaker, gave an incisive, expansive and highly-suggestive paper on how the digital technologies are informing representations of the body in contemporary art practice (Laurie Anderson, Henri Chopin, Stelarc, Nick Zedd and Peter Callas). He fittingly reminded his audience (in terms of the historical avant-garde and Virilio's work on techno-corporeal aesthetics) of the pressing necessity to value old and new media forms on the same plane of audiovisual creativity.

Professor Allucquere Roseanne Stone (aka Sandy Stone), who was one of the key guests of last year's "Biennale Symposium of Ideas", gave a highly-entertaining performance around the key notion of how today's technology is challenging orthodox concepts of gender identity and relations. Characteristically, Stone's performance incorporated interdisciplinary ideas concerning how the communications technologies are allowing people to experiment with emerging alternative personas.

The inventive British interactive artist Grahan Harwood was also one of the symposium's key invited guests. He gave a vivid account of how he became involved in making politically-motivated computer art in the context of British mainstream culture. He spoke in some detail concerning his recent major work (one of the CD-ROM exhibits at the symposium's exhibition, "Rehearsal of Memory", held at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery) which dealt with the lives of patients held at the Ashworth Maximum Security Hospital in the UK.

Jane Goodall's informative, stimulating presentation focused on how techno-aesthetics should be engaged in the renegotiation of human senses other than the main ones of sight-vision and hearing-sound. Her paper was motivated by a multifaceted objective to critique electronic media's emphasis on its main audiovisual axis in attempting to account for the possibility of a digitally-mediated synesthesia. McKenzie Wark gave a characteristically thoughtful, provocative presentation relating to the need to rethink the conceptual basics of the aesthetic object and judgement. He argued for an approach that highlights the specifics of the abstract relations produced by contemporary media culture, instead of the more conventional one of seeing the aesthetic solely in terms of the formal elements of the aesthetic object.

Significant local artists like Patricia Piccinini, Lynne Roberts-Goodwin, Phil George, James Verdon and David Cubby also spoke about their work as artists working with technology and/or as art educators working in this rapidly-expanding field. Internet artists/curators,
such as Graham Crawford and Shiralee Saul, also spoke about their more recent experiences in setting up Internet galleries, like Crawford's collaboration with Gavyn Lister in Urban Exile and, in the case of Saul, creating New Media Network, Australia's first major new media gallery. Digital designers, such as Peter Hennessey, Christopher Waller and Andrew Garton, also gave presentations concerning new concepts and trends in new media design and their own desktop publishing and Internet work.

The French multimedia artist Orlan spoke in a phone link about her recent body art/surgical experiments which have challenged the more orthodox ideas of beauty and the prevailing concepts of Western identity. Orlan's cyborg/plastic surgical body art is controversial because it suggests the body is becoming obsolete in the context of cyberculture. The body-art performances of Stelarc, who was also one of the symposium's key guests, utilize prosthetic technologies and his more recent performance on the Internet. As the British medical theorist Rachel Armstrong reminded us, what needs to be remembered with artists like Orlan and Stelarc, controversy aside, is that both artists are using digital technologies to create new horizons of defining the post-human in society.

All in all, Digital Æsthetics-One was an open-ended, highly-flexible and engaging event that aimed to stimulate debate in the dynamic area of the new media arts — a worthwhile objective given the hyperbolic still evident in academic and popular discourses surrounding computer culture. Thankfully, the symposium was not designed to be a definitive statement of sorts: on the contrary, it offered no answers as such, but more questions leading to other questions.

The Language of Interactivity
The Language of Interactivity (organized by the Australian Film Commission) was a much larger, more tightly-organized event. It focused on the diverse concepts, issues and techniques of storytelling and computer design central to the development of interactive media like CD-ROMs, the Internet, hypertext, video games and interactive installations, etc. The audience attending this mammoth (but nevertheless stimulating and well-organized) multimedia conference was a broad one with (arguably) a stronger representation from the multimedia industry.

The keynote speaker, Gloria Davenport, from Massachusetts Institute of Technology's fabled Media Laboratory, spoke in entertaining and experiential terms about the central role of cognitive psychology in shaping the emerging digital/cultural realities, metaphors and narrative structures in interactive media forms of storytelling like CD-ROM art. Davenport's current "evolving" documentary concerning the life of Jerome Weiner, the scientist-educator responsible with Marvin Minsky and Nicholas Negroponte for founding the Media Laboratory, is an experimental example of her prototypical digital storytelling ideas and forms. It is welcomed because, amongst other reasons, it (ironically) accentuates the important role of historical thinking (critics as diverse as Jonathan Crary, Mark Dery and Andreas Huyssen stress in their writings this significant point) in the emerging new media arts.

Davenport's presentation indicated the time-intensive, but necessary, exploration of new interactive modes of cinematic storytelling, aside from the more problematic, complex issues of over-emphasizing cognitive rationalism in the design and production of interactive media — something that was graphically underlined, later on, with the more experimentally-intuitive and candidly-humble artists' presentations by Derek Kreckler and Michael Buckley, whose CD-ROM, The Swear Club, is, in my opinion, one of the more creative instances of what is possible with CD-ROMs.

Of the 30-odd speakers (too many to allude to in this brief overview), I mention in passing a few who contributed to the many different critical perspectives of the conference. Producer Peter Harvey-Wright and filmmaker Kathy...
Mueller spoke of their collaborative CD-ROM work, *Strange Fruit*, and the complex design, interactive and writing issues it raised. Both Wright and Mueller's presentations attested to the 'stab in the dark' nature of interactive media creativity. The American multi-media artist-producer Hal Josephson examined the complexities of defining the right kind of metaphor for creating mood and point of view in interactive media. Paul Brown made a comparative examination of how, with CD-ROM media, the emphasis is placed on guiding the spectator through an unknown audiovisual landscape, in contrast to the Internet, where the spectator is encouraged to navigate that landscape in a flexible, underdetermined manner.

One of the highlights of the conference was the session devoted to the emerging collaboration between electronic artists and computer programmers. This trend will become one of the more critical aspects of electronic art in the years to come. Digital artists are starting to critique the role of software determination in their work. Recent debates between Peter Weibel and Friedrich Kittler underline the emerging necessity (since the advent of the personal computer) for artists to go below the user-friendly graphic devices and surface of an electronic art work in order to customize the systems codes below for their own expressive purposes. Thus, computer animator Jon McCormack, software developer Colin Grimmer, digital media artist Heidi Riederer and the Dutch media artist-programmer Gideon May spoke about this important aspect of the new media arts.

New media producer Gary Warner spoke about the emerging critical design, technique and methodological issues relating to museum digital and analogue audiovisual media exhibits (Warner's recent curatorial and producing work at the Museum of Sydney is a benchmark effort in commissioning artists to create site-specific museum exhibits and installations). Warner, with curator-writer Kevin Murray and computer consultant Justine Humphry, examined in a panel context: the rôle of navigation in an interactive work; questions dealing with how best to assist an interactor through a work; and the more preferable creative models of interactivity for the objective of navigating through a virtual space. On the latter point, Tim Gruchy's synaesthetic approach across the media proved to be a stimulating, informative perspective on the non-point-and-click modes of interface.

Finally, the English interactive film artist Chris Hales spoke of the aesthetic necessity to question artists' over-reliance in their deployment of the latest digital gadget for their work. Hales' stress on the importance of using the ethereal and moody textual qualities of film in the development of a new, hybrid interactive genre is an interesting counterpoint to more predictable high-tech driven features of interactive media. Relatedly, Jonathan Delacour in a lucid talk examined the creative potential of looking at modernist cinema and the Internet for designing computer game languages.

The conference's main underlying theme of probing the intricacies of the language of interactivity was a timely one. However, speaking in a more utopian sense, the local multimedia industry needs to become more aware of the untapped creativity and knowledge that can be obtained from looking at the relatively unknown narrative of electronic art (from the historical avant-garde onwards), and contextualizing the new media arts (as Delacour did in his presentation) in terms of the more-established art forms.

**Burning the Interface and Phantasmagoria**

The two shows at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, complement each other in many related ways. The CD-ROM art exhibition *Burning the Interface*, curated by Michael Leggett and Linda Michaels, individualizes how artists are using the CD-ROM genre of interactive multimedia for the purpose of personal expression. As such, the various issues raised by the two conferences take an experiential form as we encounter the exhibits of both shows. Local artists such as Troy Innocent, Michael Buckley, Linda Dement, John Collete, Brad Miller and Phil George, and Ralph Wayment contributed to *Burning the Interface*. Their exhibits, like the examples by such overseas artists as SASS, Luc Courchesne, Eric Lanz, Dorian Dowse, to name a few, are concerned with a wide range of individual themes: cyberfeminism, autobiography, cultural displacement, gender, language, sexuality and the body.

Certain CD-ROMs, more than others, manifest a playful reflexivity about the prevailing limitations and techno-utopian myths of artifice, control and rationality; works like Dement's *Cyberflesh Girmonster*, Buckley's *The Sweat Club*, and SASS' *Anti-ROM*. All of the CD-ROMs, like Luc Courchesne's *Portrait One*, the multilayered Jean-Louis Boissier's *Petrinsularis* (based on Rousseau's Conessions), or Graham Ellard and Stephen Johnstone's *Passages* (inspired by Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Arcades Project*), in contrast to the more linear 'down-loading' style of commercial CD-ROMs, incorporate ambient open-ended links, textures and forms of digital narrative interactivity.

*Burning the Interface*, it should be remembered, is a fairly comprehensive survey of the more creative uses of the CD-ROM medium which is (like most other forms of contemporary electronic media) in a state of conceptual and technological transition.

**Phantasmagoria**, curated by Peter Callas, is an exhibition that traces the legacy of Georges Méliès' cinema of fantasy in cinema and electronic art. As such, its modest curatorial orbit — which could have been much larger but the budget would not permit it — conveys a vivid, stylish and informative manner how certain media and visual artists have been fascinated by Méliès' cinema. A significant feature of the exhibition were the programmes of Méliès' films (curated by Jonathan Dennis and Paolo Cherchi Usai) which have left their indelible mark on narrative or independent cinema as much as on computer and video art.

The three installations on show are, individually, engaging works: Tony Oursler's low-tech psychodramatic dismemberment of the human form in 5 *Worlds* (*for Georges*) (1996) is fairly representative of the artist's overall interests in popular culture, bizarre narratives and post-punk Expressionism. Toshio Iwai's installations, *Time Stratum 11* (*1995*) and *Music Insects* (*1992-4*), represent (in terms of the artist's œuvre) his gifted, flexible and poetic interactive interests in joining together old and new media (from the early flip-books, phenakistiscopes and other related pre-cinema optical devices, to computer and video games). Agnes Hegedüs' suggestive *Handisight* (*1992*), featuring a clever eye-ball sensor interface, allows the spectator to create a 3-D computer graphic world modelled on the interior of a Hungarian 'passion-bottle'. Hegedüs' piece operates like a metaphor for our increasing urge to create and immerse ourselves in virtual worlds.

To conclude, the two conferences and the two MCA shows clearly express that with electronic art no one knows where it's heading: we are located in a world of aesthetic, cultural and geopolitical turbulence where old and new media are connecting each other in complex non-binary ways we have yet to understand. The art comes first, our critical and theoretical explanations follow.®
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An Air of Gracefulness

Stealing Beauty is an important film in at least two respects. It marks Bertolucci's return to Italy — that is, to the place where many believe he fashioned his finest films — and it marks a return to a more modest and intimate cinema.

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Lucy Harmon (Liv Tyler). Bernardo Bertolucci's Stealing Beauty.
inreview

Films

continued

misogynist version, Disclosure1 for rôle-reversal), and potentially at least an effective catalyst for debate about sexual politics.

Katy, 'despite' her lesbian-feminist sensibilities, has serious misgivings about corroboration Susy's claims, and so on. And because the incident and its aftermath are revealed in fragments, from various points of view — Susy, Gary's, Vince's, Marion's, Katy's — in flashback and linear mode, just as we're ready to pass judgment a shift in perspective holds us back. It's not until Susy's final testimony in court that we know the truth, and even then there's room for doubt.

Susy and Katy's conflicts with their father and brother are similarly treated. The themes aren't ground-breaking, but the story's shades of grey are competently layered and the film invites a sympathetic, humanistic reading of the issues.

Performances are also strengths, the ensemble cast delivering credible and frequently-powerful work. Gia Carides and La Falaga spark well and engender the more demanding moments of their roles with palpable vigour; Zoë Carides, Wilkin and Melville are equally effective in more understated approaches.

(Unfortunately, Veitch is wasted as Paul, reduced to caricature and painful comic relief, and Barnett's rôle is outright hum.)

However, the level of analysis and debate is pretty simplistic and several other aspects of structure and style defeat these strengths; there's an underlying conservatism which undermines the film's apparent objectivity and undervalues the attempted humanism. For example, while the characters (or at least the character types) and circumstances of the harassment case offer much scope for exciting discussion about sexual politics, the script provides only outdated fundamentals. Can a promiscuous woman legitimately claim to have been harassed? Where does flirtation and harassment begin? How can men develop social relationships within the workplace without unwisely transgressing fluctuating moral and political codes? The characters articulate only timeworn rhetoric about the issue, and there's scant attention to the policies and structures which deal with it, all of which ironically makes for something like an early 1980s instructional text. Most discussion has progressed well beyond this — certainly within the feminist movement — and neither Susy's deep-lyingly impassioned courtroom outburst nor Katy's and Marion's wisdoms can compensate for the weakness. To be fair, Franklin has said that sexual politics is not his main concern; like Williamson, he is more interested in the questions such cases raise about wider issues.

Fair enough, but any writer who enters current political territory needs to keep the material contemporary and well-informed.

Other structural and stylistic problems begin with the writing process. Again, like the play (and much of Williamson's work), the film appears to have begun with a theme around which the writers constructed a storyline and various characters, who between them encompass every possible angle on that theme, thus effecting a manufactured objectivity. The

Stealing Beauty


In recent times, Bernardo Bertolucci has been preoccupied with the East. In his last three films, The Last Emperor (1987), The Sheltering Sky (1990) and Little Buddha (1994), he has explored grand themes in grand, though in the latter two films some-what variable style. Stealing Beauty is an important film in at least two respects. It marks Bertolucci's return to Italy — that is, to the place where many believe he fashioned his finest films — and it marks a return to a more modest and intimate cinema. One has to add, however, that the new film is no less effective for being mounted on a self-consciously smaller scale.

The film deals with Lucy (Liv Tyler), an American virgin, who travels to Tuscany ostensibly to have her portrait painted. But she has other goals in mind: she is curious about her mother's experiences in Tuscany, in the very guest house, and with some of the same people, some two decades ago; and she seeks a young man who

once wrote love letters to her. In Italy, she encounters a motley crew of Europeans: Diana (Sinead Cusack), the keeper of the house, and Ian (Donal McCann), her husband and artist; Alex (Jeremy Irons), who is terminally ill; Noemi (Stefania Sandrelli); M. Guillaume (Jean Marais), a somewhat disenchanted old man; and others. Each of these characters, the viewer learns, has great problems: Diana and her a rival for Christopher Fox's (Joseph Fiennes) affections.

Indeed, there is an air of gracefulness in the style which undercuts and ultimately dominates the darker elements coursing beneath the beautiful, natural and elegant surfaces. It is striking that much of the film is set in fields of green and brown under clear blue skies. The light in the film is brilliant; the cinematic palette is dominated by vivid and occasionally-heightened colours. And one of Mozart's most sublime works, the adagio of the Clarinet Concerto in A, is employed as a leitmotif at the beginning and end; this poignant and eloquent work reinforces the sense of something "stolen" or lost in the processes of transformation and growth which the film's rhythm otherwise evokes so insistently and, for the most part, effectively. Bertolucci's casting deserves comment. He chose to cast two icons of the Italian and French cinema, Stefania Sandrelli and Jean Marais, in secondary roles. Initially, the viewer is shocked at the effect that the passage of the years has had on their faces. One feels especially shocked initially at seeing Marais so aged and so fragile. One cannot but think of the

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components merge gradually, aligning ever so neatly at the end and leaving us with the impression that we should be satisfied. But it's all too pat. Franklin and Fitzpatrick ostensibly embrace the chaos inherent in the elements of the story, navigating energetically through conflicts which have no clear way out. The authorial hands are too obvious, however. Only elements which suit their purposes are included and, ironically, any semblance of the chaos or even disorder manifest in real life is rejected. All writers consciously construct narratives to suit their intentions, and manufactured objectivity is fine, but here the process is something like colour-by-numbers as opposed to a detailed freehand drawing.

By way of illustration, the harassment case conveniently arises in a small business in which there are no subsidiary characters who can comment on it. When Marion questions Susy about other possible witnesses, the other women in the office (of whom we're barely aware), Susy says they didn't like her, were probably jealous of her. She's a tertiary qualifications, and she has no subsidiary characters who comment on it. When Marion questions Susy about other possible witnesses, the other women in the office (of whom we're barely aware), Susy says they didn't like her, were probably jealous of her. She's a tertiary qualifications, and she has no subsidiary characters who comment on it.

Dialogue is another problem. Like most stage-to-screen adaptations, the film's wordier than average, but this is not as deleterious as the nature of the script. The dialogue is relentlessly purposeful, with many, drawn out too long and the optimism of the ending will strike some viewers as rather contrived.

But Bertolucci's intention is clearly to fashion a summery film without ignoring darker currents, somewhat in the manner of Malle's and Rivette's recent variations on the theme of pastoral satire or comedy. In this context, Stealing Beauty is a significant exten­sion of Bertolucci's oeuvre. Many of his earlier European films explored characters whose lives are uprooted, compromised (for example, by their complicity with fascism), or frag­mented in a style that is loosely woven, allusive and almost baroque — some might say overwritten — and with Borgesian labyrinths or Godardian montages in mind. Certainly, his earlier explorations of nascent sexuality in films like The Conformist and The Heiress almost certainly have given birth to this film. Its complex characters are as much a cipher on numerous occasions. Certain scenes, though not

office, Marion's glass and metal monolith of a building, Katy's warm and colourful flat.

However, the biggest problem is that the two narratives compete too strongly for the same thematic territory and for audience attention, neither ever quite establishing primacy. Initially, the family story is an enlightening complement to the light drama preceding it, changing pace and scene, adding revelations and suspense. But, by the second half of the film, it has become equally consuming.

Finally, the last scene betrays the film's surprising and disappointing conservatism, implying, whatever your trauma, "Give it a rest. Be an Aussie. Have a drink." Much as the dénouement might have been intended to emphasize the film's themes and to convey ironies about the lackadaisical tendencies within Australian culture, in the context of the high drama preceding it, it comes across as a disturbing nega­tion of Susy's trauma and everything the film has taken seriously until then. The final question mark over her integrity serves not so much to underline points about the ephemeral nature of truth as to destroy the faith we've just invested in her. The ultimate point, really, is "Well, shit happens. We all screw up, but you can always count on family, eh?" And the quite real agnosticism evident in this particular family — as in the case — are suddenly brushed aside as so many petty squabbles. It's a frustratingly complacent end.

The film's value lies in Franklin's willingness to enter seriously into complex issues, when so much Australian cinema aims to cash in on a reputation for the quirky, and in the spirited and assured work of the cast. It's a pity these attributes are somewhat overwhelmed by flaws which could have been addressed at development stage.

Claire Rohl

Alex Paton

Sandretti is perhaps most often associated with two of Bertolucci's most prized films, Il conformista (The Conformist, 1970) and Novecento (1980, 1989). In both, Bertolucci celebrated her youthful beauty, her revolutionary sentiments and her vitality. To see her playing a rather disillusioned woman adds much resonance to the film.

It should be said that the cast is almost uniformly excellent, a crucial aspect since this is essentially a chamber piece in pastoral mode for some eight or nine key characters. The relation­ship that develops between Alex, expertly and subtly played by Irons, and Lucy forms the emotional core of the film and is often poignant. There are some flaws and it is possible from every possible witness.

great years of Cocteau and Marais in films such as La Belle et la Bête (1946) and Orphee (1950) — films which, one ought to remember, were written with Marais in mind. The fact that Marais, so often the dashing young hero in these films, should now be the dis­charged and somewhat cantankerous old man lends extra resonance and paths to Bertolucci's film. Stefania

...
T

This is the fourth film in director Gillian Armstrong's documentary series spanning 20 years in three women's lives. It rescues footage and feelings from the series' earlier films. 1 Cut fresh, these crisp ingredients for historical Aussie stock enhance the flavour of this fourth film right until its end. We meet Diana, Josie and Kerry again, two decades on from our first acquaintance when they were fourteen or fifteen. It's a bold invocation, in expert hands, of the present life. With each of these women, we dip back to the women they were, but Armstrong teases tension from our interest in who they are now. At various times, Armstrong's muses are momentarily named by their natures, but she doesn't dwell on it.

She moves us along either in this rhythm, back for forward momentum, or with drive-bys of suburban streets where most of us used to live. This drive-by link sees houses from inside of the car. It's a personal, backseat kind of history that recalls these streets, these rows of houses. It might be Josie's, or Diana's, or Kerry's. Big picture political history gave us the houses in which we lived, though we swear, save and swear we've chosen well. And it might have an American feel, this cruising, this Sunday afternoon drive — as indeed it should. The importance of American cinema to us is legend. These common experiences unify us nationally through what feels like a very subversive social history.

Diana, the teenage firestarter, admits that she's bored with her present life. She'd like to go back to work, having stopped work at a café four years ago to give birth to wildboy Beau. She's still married to the same guy she married all those years ago, and he's been home, unemployed, for most of the time. Perhaps that's because Diana collected his paypacket when he did work. No sentimental heroes here. Diana disagrees and surprises by turn. Like all of us, she needs Josie. Josie mothered herself as a girl, cooked tea for her dad, and had a baby, a flat and a pension by 15. The whole town knew Josie but she had to send herself the only flowers she'd receive on the birth of her baby girl. This pragmatic angel leads the trio of women, in present time. She's already back studying. Diana needs Josie to encourage her to do the same. But Kerry's quick to agree that schooling is what they need now. They all let it go way too early.

A voracious four-year-old and baby girl in arms, Kerry says she got what she wanted: one of each, a suburban house, and a stable marriage. Her self-employed husband has done his back in. Business is in decline. Armstrong treats herself as filmmaker to an eminent woman director and talent alike is clear-sighted, muscular and, no doubt, hard won. 1 Marg O'Shea

There is also a shorter version of 14's Good, 18's Better (1981), Bingo Bridesmaids & Babies (1988). There is also a shorter version of 14's Good, 18's Better known as More Smokes, More Lollies.

RICHARD III


The problem with filming Shakespeare and making him accessible to global audiences has always been what to do with the dense, poetic language and the inherent staginess and theatricality of the plays. A common approach, which worked well for Mel Gibson's Hamlet (Franco Zeffirelli, 1989) and Oliver Parker's recent Othello, is to cut the play heavily and link the main species with action. This stripping the drama to the bare bones to expose motive and psychology can produce riveting drama, but it can also distort meaning, as it does in Othello, simply by making the Moor jealous and vengeful.

There have been other memorable attempts to film Shakespeare, including Joseph Mankiewicz's Julius Caesar (1953), and Franco Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet (1968). Orson Welles' Othello (1951) and Chimes at Midnight (aka Falstaff, 1966) are both masterpieces in their way, as is Roman Polanski's Macbeth (1971), and Grigori Kozintsev's Hamlet (1964) and King Lear (1970).

Laurence Olivier's classic quartet of Shakespeare films, Henry V (1945), Hamlet (1948), Richard III (1955) and Othello (1965), have dominated the screen for decades. His stylized Henry V is as innovative today as it ever was, and his complex Hamlet is still unrivaled. His hamminess has been forgiven for the brilliance of his charismatic performances. But now Kenneth Branagh, with Henry V (1989) and Much Ado About Nothing (1993), has challenged Olivier's hegemony by taking his own intelligent productions out-of-doors, and giving them a robust,stashwobucking style and pace. And he further energized Much Ado
Richard III (Ian McKellen) Richard III McColl on Shakespeare, and have developed traditions and institutions devoted almost solely to the performance of his plays, Olivier and Branagh came out of this tradition and so does Ian McKellen, who is the executive producer, co-writer and star of Richard Loncraine’s Richard III, one of the most enthralling Shakespeare films ever made.

Based on the Royal National Theatre production of Richard III directed by Richard Eyre, Loncraine and McKellen have probably changed the way we think about Richard forever. Their solution to making the play widely accessible is to locate it in England in the 1930s and liken Richard’s rise to power with that of Hitler. This works brilliantly.

Loncraine has assembled a magnificent cast which includes: McKellen as Richard III; the ever-reliable John Wood as Edward IV; an inspired Annette Bening as Queen Elizabeth; Robert Downey Jr, equally good as her brother, Earl Rivers; Nigel Hawthorne, who plays Clarence as touchingly fusty and affectionate; Maggie Smith as Richard’s coldly-rejecting mother, the Duchess of York; Adrian Dunbar as Richard’s evil hitman, James Tyrell; and Kristen Scott-Thomas as the fire-and-water Lady Anne. McKellen plays Richard with a manic glee. He may be the devil incarnate, but he is human, too. When he takes us into his confidence with a smirk, or jerks his head and orthodox. The classic form of the drama adopted by Loncraine and McKellen is traditional and orthodox. The contemporary parallels seem obvious: Goebbels’ clubfoot, and Hitler’s rage that he was not born tall and blond. And it could well be Stalin’s face we see reflected in the evil hitman, Clarence is interwoven with the fire-and-water Lady Anne. The scene in the mortuary where Anne spits in Richard’s face for having murdered her husband and father, and is then corrupted and seduced by him, is one of the film’s great psychological moments.

It makes great sense in this England of the 1930s to make the Queen and her brother Americans. Much of the film’s plausibility derives from our historical awareness of Nazi sympathizers on both sides of the Atlantic; chiefly, the Duke of Windsor and his American wife Mrs Simpson; JFK’s father, Joseph P. Kennedy, who was U.S. Ambassador to England in the early 40s; and Sir Oswald Mosley and his supporters, many of whom were members of the British Union of Fascists.

To equate Richard with Hitler is original and accurate. No playwright before or since Shakespeare has written with such understanding about the psychopathology of tyrants, and the fear and danger they represent. Well before Freud, Dr Johnson observed that, in the case of Richard III, his urge to destroy stemmed from an envy nourished by his own deformity. The contemporary parallels seem obvious: Goebbels’ clubfoot, and Hitler’s rage that he was not born tall and blond. And it could well be Stalin’s face we see reflected in the evil hitman, Clarence is interwoven with the fire-and-water Lady Anne. The scene in the mortuary where Anne spits in Richard’s face for having murdered her husband and father, and is then corrupted and seduced by him, is one of the film’s great psychological moments.

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Bernardo Bertolucci: The Cinema of Ambiguity

Claretta Michele Tonetti, Twayne Publishers, 1995, 281 pp, $26.95

In retrospect, it seems miraculous that he was able to hold it together at all. The secret was his open-mindedness, his trust that his own unconscious would mesh with the spectator’s desire.

After working with him on Acatone (1961) and La Commare Seca (The Grim Reaper, 1962; script: Pasolini, director: Bertolucci), the older artist quickly recognized that his apprentice shared a neurosis as formidable as his own, and wrote one of the earliest and most perceptive critiques of his style, contrasting in painterly immobility with the formal experiments of Godard and Antonioni. Bertolucci was to reward him later with a split and a hostile silence that lasted years.

The split in his own work came to a head in 1968. As Europe exploded into ultra-leftist student demonstrations, the hero he played, Giacobbe, gained more radicalism, his hero, Giacobbe, played by French cult-actor Pierre Clementi, literally lives a surreal double-life with his opposite self in Partner. Just as he used literary sources for his other films of this period (Stendhal, Borges, Moravia), Bertolucci adapted this one from Dostoevsky. Already his visual style was transforming them into the work of a distinctive auteur, a mannerist who, like the Parmigianino of his native city, dismembered, elongated, gestured, froze. In II Conformista (The Conformist, 1970), he played with fascist space and dislocated time to the point where he was able to subordinate an overpowering cinematic subjectivity for one based on words and conventional narrative.

Aided by his impeccable taste in painting and music, he picked exactly the right tones from Ligabue and De Chirico, set them to powerful operatic scores by Verdi, and created a style which mirrored his own poetic neuroses.

In Paris scandalized everyone, and for every critic like Pauline Kael who hailed it as a liberating portrait of its era there were dozens who saw it as the solidifying of a brilliant career into style without substance. Even Tonetti is cautious despite her celebration of Novocento (1900) and defence of the concentration on surface and lack of depth in La Luna (1979). With La Tragedia di un Uomo Ridicolo (Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man, 1981), the cold star had reached the remoteness of a black hole, what the director himself called “full emptiness.”

Is this the point at which Bertolucci lost it for those of his spectators who were captivated by virtuosity precisely because it was driven by intelligence and not commercial sensation? The turning-point remains a problem. Certainly, the nine Oscars awarded his next spectacle, The Last Emperor, created a general delight in its sumptuous splendour and exotic locations. His new producer, Jeremy Thomas, was the genius at the door of the Forbidden City, just as he opened Morocco and Niger for The Sheltering Sky, and the royal palaces of Bhutan and Nepal for Little Buddha. But is there any heart at the centre of these extravaganzas? Is there a brain? I must admit to finding Siddhartha in Seattle not only embarrassing but laughable. One critic dubbed it “Get ready for another gorgeous room.”

Tonetti is more charitable, seeing in psychoanalysis the thread which has guided Bertolucci’s exploration of the unconscious through many states, religions and realms, bringing Pu Yi, Marcella and the earlier heroes from atrocious conflict to serenity. She draws on a wide range of reference from Metzian theory to location details. The quality of the stills is what you would expect from a low-priced print. 1900 is the worst hit, with Vittorio Storaro’s palette reduced to a diagram.

Otherwise, the book serves its subject with unpretentious erudition. Acute pointers to other key contexts, and boxed-in plots and critical summaries frame each chapter.

Several times in her career, Tonetti has feared the Italian artists’ curse, “Traduttore, Traditore” (“Translator, Traitor”). Unlike Bertolucci’s ambiguous figures, she has nothing to worry about.

Note: Books received held over to next issue.

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The State Government has established a fund for the encouragement of young filmmakers. The Fund will be administered by the New South Wales Film & Television Office. Eligible projects will be mainly short fiction films, documentaries or experimental films.

- The Fund will be open to individuals or teams of individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are NSW residents.
- The Fund will make direct grants towards production and post production costs only.
- Projects must demonstrate cultural and economic benefit to NSW and be entirely produced in NSW using NSW-based service providers.
- Each project's principal photography must begin within six months of approval and the project must be completed within twelve months of approval.
- There will be no restriction on the format (film or tape), subject matter or type of film.
- The maximum grant will be in the range of $20,000 to $25,000, but the assessment committee may recommend a larger grant for a proposal of exceptional merit.
- There will be three funding rounds in a full year closing on: 9 August, 8 November and 28 March.

Guidelines and applications for the Young Filmmakers Fund must be used and are now available from:
Level 6, 1 Francis Street, East Sydney NSW 2010
Tel: (02) 9380 5599, Fax: (02) 9360 1095.
Living in a Storm

Archie Weller examines the recent programme of short films by Aboriginal filmmakers, From Sand to Celluloid

In this, the one-hundredth year of Australian Cinema, I think it most appropriate that we have this series of short films by or about Indigenous Australians. The film history of Aborigines portrayed on screen is not the best, especially in the early years. Even in the 1970s, when Australian film really began to take off, it was always white people directing and producing, and thus it was a white perspective. Film, as I have washed by our usurpers. Both our histories have been white people, camera people, producers or there were very few Aboriginal sound pieces of work and yet, in all of them, not only because I was meeting a lot of to review the following films, and it was that the ordinary viewer would perhaps more than once, of course, gives an impression of these films though some of them are harsh, rowing, they are not violent and so are accessible to the wider public. After all, that is another reason for films – to teach us about each other – and all of our diverse experiences most successfully.

I thank all involved in From Sand To Celluloid for allowing Australians of every culture to share some of our deep and resonating voice has a haunting quality that is true to the heart. As this film is based heavily on fact, it is interesting to note that the central character – and, hence, the audience – is only an observer of the atrocities witnessed. There is nothing much Shane Francis (David Ngoombujarra) can do, although he tries so hard, and this is the crux of the problem.

This is a film that relies on voice and thoughts, not so much actions. It is also a very subtle film. All the films are subtle in various ways, an important component in the short film; what is understated is often the most powerful rather than the obvious. But this film employs this skill more than the other four. Shane’s failure to tie the knot on the towel rail could be a subtle hint that the youth in the photo (Caine Muir) did not commit suicide, as is the subtlety little scene involving the cutlery knife and the disturbed girl (Rachelle Burke) who has already attempted suicide by slashing herself. It is stated – and yet not stated – that the Prison Warder (John Bishop) wants her dead. There is the hint that the girl who was raped by the police (Kyle Belling) is found dead (murdered by them?) This is a confronting film and not one that will settle easily on one’s conscience.

The editing in this film is what makes it so special in my opinion. The cuts with the closed eye, the hand reaching out to the nephew (Geoff Tye), and his mouthing “No money” keep the story rolling and make Shane become a part of his victim’s story – as he states so beautifully later on in the film. He is touched by death. The editing is the best of all the films. The music also is good as is the format: a drive in one night from Swan Hill to Melbourne. Nice and tight and succinct.

Payback (Warwick Thornton) is filmed in black and white, ironic since it deals with the issues of black and white attitudes towards law. It is also the only film that uses traditional language extensively and traditional values. Incidentally, all the actors (George Djiyanga, Charlie Martjwi, Peter Datjing and Larry Yapuma) are related and are from Elcho Island; this is a nice touch given the nature of the film. Although not a professional actor, Djiyanga is the lead singer of Warumpi Band, so has experience of performing before big crowds. The acting is not expert, but it is not really a film that needs much acting, since it is a film about values.

The cameras that photograph Paddy (George Djiyanga) after he is released from prison represent media, or European, values as opposed to Aboriginal law. But, as there was no reason given for the media to be there, although a 26-year sentence would have been for a horrendous crime, I found this concept confusing and hard to grasp. It was no surprise to learn the writer-director-DOP Warwick Thornton is an experienced cameraman. But, in this scene, I found that too much was happening at once, and I lost the character of Paddy, who is the main thread of the story.

It was well done that, even though Paddy is free at last of the prison (whose scene are excellently shot to show darkness and confinement), he is not free from the media. The little scene when he signs his release is almost unobserved it happens so fast, and yet it says so much. He has done 26 years gaol for a crime he would
only have been spared in the leg for. Also, he couldn’t write when he went in and now he can, which to my mind represents so-called progress. Yet, he remained stagnant for all that time. Nothing changes in his people’s way of looking at things, which is the oldest way. The prison is shown as a dark and cramped place governed by foreigners who, although kind, are still in charge of Aborigines’ destiny.

The punishment or payback, although thought to be cruel, is seen to be the kinder of the two laws and the punishers are actually very gentle. It is to be congratulated on her sensitive portrayal of a difficult subject.

There are some graceful underwater shots. Also, the contrast between the fun in the river and the synchronized, almost regimented, swimming in the town’s aquatic centre is well filmed. As this is a story about colour, I loved the touches like the chlorinated blue water (washing all our sins away?) that turns every one the same blue colour, and the sheets on the line that make mother (Tessa Leathy) and daughter Koorne (Carrie Prosser) the same until they come out from behind the billowing whiteness. Shadows against the tent turns every one the same blue colour, and the sheets on the line that make mother (Tessa Leathy) and daughter Koorne (Carrie Prosser) the same until they come out from behind the billowing whiteness. Shadows against the tent.
Black Man Down (Bill McCrow) is written by Sam Watson. It also deals with assimilation and alienation in a big city. It is the only film [with Round Up] to use images of a capital city. It is the most 'arty' of all the films that use images to prod the psyche. The image of police and priest, harsh and humanitarian ... but do they really understand the Aboriginal mentality? The image of the earth beneath the concrete of the city is a strong one, as are all the spirits of Waxy’s (David Hudson) past. Indeed, this film is similar to No Way To Forget it in that it is a very spiritual film. But the spirits here are visible and take human form, whereas in the other it is all images of wind, moon, thoughts and other unseen things. This film also touches on the issue of black deaths and the reasons behind them. But in Black Man Down he survives.

Again, this is a subtle film. Waxy wears no Aboriginal clothing or colours, as if he is ashamed of being Aboriginal. Waxy is only at the protest meeting to look for a fight. Before the fight, he seems disillusioned – as he expresses in gaol. Yet, when he awakens from his dream, he is lying on an Aboriginal flag. His people are there for him as are the spirits of his Dreaming and his family – proud to be Aboriginal again. Alcohol is shown to destroy family and culture, but in an unusual and moving way, not in the stereotype way so many European directors and writers portray Aborigines. This is a theme that moves throughout all these films and is important to realize. Issues are explained in an Aboriginal way, often understated, but always there and extremely powerful.

The last film I watched was Fly Pee-see, Fly! which is the gentlest film of all seen, about a family sorting out their identity and lives. It is about loneliness and survival. Once again, the effects of alcohol is quietly explored (as it is on similar lines in Two Bob Mermaid). Was it because of drink that the mother left Billy (Stan Dryden)?

This film is also rich in images. The bird making a nest, whose death brings all the family together, is, of course, the most graphic one. But there is the song that both father and son sing about rejection and racism. Both grandma May (Faye Montgomery) and Billy say the same thing, “Good spot for a nest”, and the cryptic ‘Shame the seats say the same thing, “Good spot for a nest”.

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reflecting on the fact that Robbie (Duane Johnston) has a hard, truthful view of life.

And so it is with these short films. They give a straight view of aspects of Aboriginal Australia and, although they were made in all parts of the country, it is interesting to note similarities in each film. There are birds involved in most of them. As well as the obvious imagery in Fly Peewee, Fly! (the bird by the way is black and white), there is the call of a mopoke to bring Billy back on the path of his loving son. There is the frightening death bird call in Black Man Down. In Two Bob Mermaid, as well as the image of kids flying through the air like birds, there is the kookaburra on the newsreel, which brings the two girls closer together as they share the humour and yet alienate the Aboriginal boyfriend. All the films except Payback use photos (another type of still film) to describe part of the story. Family is important in all of them. Given the way Aboriginal families have been treated in the past half-century, with children being taken away and the core of family life disintegrating, this is not surprising. The family, therefore, is described here in an Aboriginal way.

People calling out from behind closed barriers, and yet no one taking any notice, plays a part as well. There is the nephew behind bars in Payback and the kids in Two Bob Mermaid behind the fence around the aquatic centre. People are calling out in No Way To Forget but no one listens. And, in all the films, spirits and spirituality is important. It is, indeed, the very centre of Aboriginal psyche and is well portrayed in these short works.

The skill of making a short film is a highly honed art as you only have a short time to say all you want and show what you want seen. Scenes tend to be shorter and sharper and tell a lot in quick, even spare, imagery. But there is no less work for the camera and writer, sound, director and, especially, the editor. Perhaps there is more than in a longer film. In all these works, this is shown as a huge success, and it is great to read through the publicity notes and see how many Aborigines are working in and around the cinema now.

Because ten minutes is time enough to take in the whole story and digest it while fresh in our mind, the story must be taut and, above all, gripping and even unusual in its outline. There is no time for the audience to ponder after the film as everything is racing along. It is a brave medium for anyone to get into.

So, for this I thank all involved in From Sand To Celluloid. For allowing Australians of every culture to share some of our diverse experiences most successfully. I hope we see more of their work. ☺

Note: All the above films are available on VHS for purchase from the Australian Film Institute.
Financing Your Low-budget Film with Government Funds

Richard Silverton and Nina Stevenson look at legal issues to do with AFC- and FFC-funded low-budget films

The federal and state governments (other than those of the Northern Territory and Tasmania) each have film agencies or bodies which are responsible for administering and allocating funds to assist in the financing of Australian films.

The sources of government funding for low-budget films are the Australian Film Commission (AFC), the Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC) and/or the various state agencies. We will refer in this article principally to the AFC and FFC.

The AFC’s limit for production investment in a film is around $1.5 million. The FFC’s Film Fund is an initiative which has fully funded three features with budgets each around $2.5 million for the past two years.

We will assume for the purpose of this article that you have a script which is capable of being made into a film on a low budget. In other words, you do not require a cast of thousands and several overseas locations to bring your script to life on the big screen.

What is a “low-budget” film? It can mean anything from “no budget” to $2.5 million. Some films start out as having no budget, but then require substantial funds in order to enable a commercial release to satisfy union requirements, or to make technical changes to meet the requirements of festivals or distributors.

On Everynight, Everynight, director-producer Alkinos Tsimidou accumulated $27,000 of his own money to fund the shoot. He continued to work part-time throughout the filming to maintain some cashflow. At double-head stage, Film Victoria provided some post-production funds. And, following the film’s completion, to enable the film to be released commercially, the AFC invested approximately $100,000.

The AFC funds were principally to pay award rates to cast and crew who had previously agreed to work outside the Award system on deferrals and percentage points of net profits of the film. Once a commercial release was secured, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (“MEAA”) insisted that cast and crew be paid according to the Award. The final budget of the film was $260,000.

Gregor Jordan’s short film Swinger, which was originally made for entry in last year’s Tropicana Film Festival, had an initial budget of $500. However, in order to be considered for the Cannes Film Festival, Jordan needed to redo the titles, make a Dolby sound mix and blow up the film to 35mm. The AFC provided enhancement funds of $15,000. As you are probably aware, Swinger was selected for the competition (Shorts) at Cannes in 1995 and went on to win the Palme d’Or.

A more recent example is the feature Love and Other Catastrophes which was shot and post-produced to rough cut with $45,000 of the filmmakers’ own funds. The AFC then provided $500,000 post-production funding. Fox Searchlight recently acquired the distribution rights for the United Kingdom, France and the United States for $1 million, so the film is already in profit.

All the above films would have required the filmmaker at the outset to determine which items in the standard AFC A-Z Budget could be minimized or eliminated. If you are undergoing a similar exercise, you should consider whether you anticipate government funding at some later stage, and, if so, what budget cost cutting will be acceptable to you, the AFC or the FFC. You should also give consideration to what distributors and film festivals will require to ensure your film is able to be promoted and exhibited.

So, what budget items will you need to allow for if you are intending to apply for AFC or FFC production finance?

Cast Rates
The AFC and the FFC generally require you to budget at market rates for crew, not merely the Award rate. However, if you can show them that your crew will agree to work for less this may be acceptable.

Note that deferrals are generally not encouraged. Moreover, a deferral system in lieu of the Award rates of pay for cast and crew is not acceptable.

Music and Footage Clearances
Again, world-wide rights are required. This can dramatically increase the budget cost of your film. If you are not obtaining finance from a government organization such as the AFC or FFC, you may only wish to clear these rights for Australia, or Australia and international film festivals.

Shooting on Video as Opposed to Film
Whether this is acceptable to the AFC and FFC will depend on the nature of
the project and its potential market; that is, whether the film is being made for the festival market only or whether a commercial release is anticipated.

Insurances
All usual insurance coverage (including Workers’ Compensation, Public Liability, FPI, Negative Film Risk, Faulty Stock, Camera and Processing, Multi-Risk) is required. The most controversial insurance is Errors and Omissions (E & O) insurance which essentially covers defects in the chain of title on the script actions for defamation, defects in music clearances, etc. However, it does not cover errors in the producer’s clearance procedures! The FFC does not usually require E & O insurance on its documentaries, but it does on its feature films. And most distributors require E & O insurance. The AFC has generally required E & O insurance; however, the E & O and FPI requirements are being reviewed for short films. For AFC films in which the budgeted cost does not exceed $500,000, E & O insurance premiums are approximately $1,800, plus the cost of a U.S. title clearance, if it is a feature. Otherwise, the E & O costs will be at standard market rates, in the vicinity of $5,000.

Completion Guarantee
The FFC requires all its films (including “Accord documentaries”) to be bonded. The AFC only requires its feature films to be bonded. The premium is roughly 3% of the budgeted cost. So, on a $250,000 Accord documentary, the fee is approximately $7,500; on a $1.5 million feature film, the fee is approximately $42,000.

Legal Fees
Both the AFC and FFC require the producer’s solicitor to review and confirm (in writing) that the chain of title for the film is clear. So, at the very least, some allowance for legal fees is necessary.

Audit
All FFC films and most AFC films (for investments greater than $50,000) require an audit to be conducted at completion of the film.

Delivery Items
Both the AFC and the FFC have certain delivery items and required completion materials which will need to be included in your budget.

Aside from normal AFC production funding of shorts, documentaries and features, there have been some specific low-budget initiatives. For example, the AFC proposes to fund five features with budgets of less than $950,000. These films will screen on SBS, which will provide a pre-sale for each film.

For documentary-makers, the AFC has recently developed the “Gorilla Docs” for documentaries with maximum budgets of $100,000. The AFC has so far funded two documentaries under this initiative.

As the AFC usually funds 100% of the budget, no marketplace attachment is required. However, the FFC requires marketplace attachment on all projects. Marketplace attachment includes a television licence, a distribution guarantee or a pre-sale against a particular territory or territories.

Note that the FFC also requires a minimum level of “private sector participation”. The required level of private sector participation will vary according to the budget, the project category (e.g., television programme, documentary, feature), and marketplace attachment. The FFC will accept lower-level private-sector participation with low-budget projects.

The FFC has Accords with both the ABC and SBS for the financing of documentaries. Under these Accords, the FFC invests funds in the film, and the broadcaster cashflows a pre-sale, which is applied against the budgeted cost of the film, in exchange for the right to broadcast the film.

Under the ABC Accord, the FFC will invest in up to 20 one-hour documentaries where the budgeted cost of the film does not exceed $300,000. The ABC pre-sale is a standard 27.5% of the total budgeted cost of the film, rising to 30% in 1996-7.

Under the SBS Accord, the budget ceiling is $250,000 and the SBS pre-sale is a standard 27.5% of the budget.

While it may be difficult and, at times, frustrating, the rewards of low-budget filmmaking can be significant. The success of Love and Other Catastrophes is an example of this – a film made for $350,000 bought for $1 million in three major territories. The results would not have been so great if the budget were $2 million. The breakaway success of low-budget films is no longer a rarity. Overseas low-budget movies have included successes such as Clerks and The Brothers McMullen.

Note that the AFC will shortly publish its papers from last year’s Low Budget Feature Seminar under the title Low Means Low – the Collected Papers From the Low Budget Feature Seminar.
Life at the End of the Tunnel

who became the adult. Suddenly, here we were with Geoffrey, who was way beyond playing an adolescent, but was absolutely perfect for the adult David. That is when the role became split into three: the child, the adolescent and the adult David.

We solved one major casting dilemma to give ourselves another. Liz was very perturbed over who on earth would look anything like Geoffrey Rush. I said, “Maybe it is not looks that matter as much as manner.” I thought of Noah because he has such a curious charm. I felt it was just one step for him to play this role as a transition into David’s breakdown.

We brought Geoffrey and Noah together. Of course, physically they are very different, but nonetheless it actually worked to confirm in my mind that it could work if we restructured the script.

Geoffrey had a monumental task in conveying this incredibly-maniac holy fool, which was a key we hit on about David. He was like the Shakespearean fool: he can say the things that others can’t say. But Noah equally had a very difficult task because he had to carry David as an early teenager, who is half Noah’s actual age. He had to chart the disintegration and I think he is superb.

I did come under considerable pressure from some sources of potential financing overseas to get rid of Geoffrey from the package because nobody had heard of him, a 40-year-old actor who had never been in film! The arrogance was mind-boggling; the sort of names they wanted in the film, whom I knew, would not be capable of this role.

I had people here in Australia say, “Geoffrey is a brilliant theatre actor, but how will the camera record him?” I thought this is a lack of understanding of what performance is and of the power of an actor to communicate. What you become as a director is really just the eyes and ears of the audience. You can give the actor the nuances and the feedback, you fine tune and finesse. But this thing of “Will it work on film?” As long as the director has got his head screwed on, I think it will work.

To what extent was David’s dialogue, that wonderful, rhyming, yet lucid gibberish, scripted?

HICKS: Every word was scripted. It is a kind of word salad that David communicates in all the time, a monologue of free association of words. I had to impress on the cast to forget about conventional cues. Here is a character who never stops talking. You have to inject yourself into that monologue, like throwing a stick into a river, and sooner or later, generally sooner, that stick gets picked up by David and worked into his consciousness and spun out again.

How did Armin Mueller-Stahl get involved?

HICKS: The role of Peter was very difficult, initially. L.A. casting agent Sharon Howard Field came up with a list of suggestions and Armin’s name was on it. I went to L.A. and met with him. His concern was that the character was too dark, and that is where I said to him, “But not the way you are going to read it. It is what we don’t read here that tells us about Peter’s pain.” I think he responded to that well. His eyes are so eloquent and he has this tremendous suppressed passion in him as an actor. You feel the lid rattling on the saucepan, he is a time-bomb, and of course there are those key moments in the story where he could unleash it and you tremble.

There was the scene with a scrapbook, very simple and descriptive. In the script it is one line: Peter leafs through the scrapbook of memories of David’s career. Armin took that moment and he sucked every bit of nuance out of it that you could possibly wish for. You see him hungrily devouring the pages of this scrapbook. Then suddenly the sun goes behind a cloud on his face as the thought catches him that he is losing his creative control. He closes the book and, in a little masterstroke, he sees the torn arm of the armchair and covers it up with the blanket to make it respectable. A gem. He created a great moment, and that’s one of the pleasures working with great actors.

He said to me when we met, “Promise me one thing, that you won’t say cut too soon because sometimes it doesn’t happen until after you have finished speaking.” I was very mindful of that because he would suddenly, at the end of a scene, invent something else! Armin did have to be coaxed into some of the more explosive moments. I think that his Hollywood pictures have tended to suppress the darker side of his acting.

The scene where he has a tussle with David and slaps him around before David decides he’s leaving for London: it’s the most psychologically overpowering moment in the film, I think. When Peter says to him in a whisper, “You will be punished for the rest of your life”, it is spine-chilling for its power, and far more than if he’d thumped it out, as a lesser actor might have. And then he unleashes, at the last second, “Don’t make me do it!” The choreography was fabulous. Often he would do it once, and I knew I was not going to get it that way again.

From what I have read, you were genuinely taken by surprise at the overwhelming response to the film at Sundance.

HICKS: We knew that by going to Sundance we were choosing to bypass Cannes. That was a nerve-racking decision: Do we join the queue of a number of fine films on the slipway, or do we set this moment and take another direction? The print that went to Sundance was straight out of the lab; it was vast.

I had this terrible nightmare a couple of nights before leaving that nobody was going to turn up, that we were going to end up screening this film in an empty theatre. But it was so far from that as to be funny, really. Once the film started to roll, you could feel the audience move into its thrall.

From your point of view, is the adoration for Australian films in the U.S. less a pat on the back and more an opportunity for studio heads to try to turn around their often ailing fortunes?

SARDI: They see the lifeblood out there in the big ocean, and swim for it. Can you take me somewhere?

Most of these guys aren’t storytellers, most of them aren’t producers, most of them aren’t directors, and so they don’t know... They’ve never had to work out a dramatic problem before, and it is a mystery. They want to buy whatever it is that they think you have that no one else has.

Everyone is making movies and when they stop to applaud Australian films, even the films that we are very proud of, they have these 15 seconds of fame; they have standing ovations. But if you mention those films to someone, vaguely they say, “I remember that.” Over there, we are very small fish and a long way away.

So it is sobering in the sense that it sharpens our own perspectives of what is important, rather than assuming just because somebody overseas...

SARDI: Yes, I think it is sobering in the sense that the only stories we can really tell are our own, and the ones that do make people sit up and take notice are the ones that are pretty much unique to the Australian experience. There was a period where the FFC wanted us to test-market Shine in America. I just can’t see the value of that (eventually it was nipped in the bud because it got accepted into Sundance). You’ve got to stick by the story you are trying to tell. Scott and Jane and I knew the story. Had this film been tested in America, they probably would have said something like, “Well, geez, we really don’t like the father.” So, the report would have come back, “Don’t like the father. Cut out scenes with the father.”

I think it is a shame that the FFC looks towards this thing, at the same time acknowledging that there has to be a market out there and the movies have to sell and they are big investors, and so on. But don’t go the Hollywood route. Talk to Ronin and people like Andrew Pike. I mean, the script of Strictly Ballroom was knocked back by everyone. There is a way to sell movies, and to see that some element of the budget, if not all of it, is recouped. Although I think they make the best movies of their type, don’t let the Americans tell us how to make Australian movies.

What went to Sundance was a groty little VHS videotape of the workprint, which looked horrible, and had no soundtrack music. And they made up their minds to put it in the world premiere section. They saw the story there. It reached out, yet there was an enormous bawl here about testing this film. What do you do?

HICKS: In the wake of the Sundance screening, people would come up to me in restaurants and introduce themselves as head of production at a major studio. They would say, “After the film, I had to sit in my car for 20 minutes to compose myself before I could put the key in.”

So far, it has been an extraordinary experience to see the way it has wrought emotion on to a blokey sort of audience. It gives me a lot of hope in terms of how the film might speak to people on a broad scale.

What I wanted to happen with the film, and it seems to have worked, is to create a dam of emotion. There are different points at which people find a release, but it is not simply a case of turning on the music at the end. It builds through this incredible story, the power of the performances and the music. It somehow gets into the core of people, and that is the thrill. It seems to live with people long after the event. ©

1 Scott Hicks also directed the tele-feature, Call Me Mr. Brown (1986).
2 Where David and Gillian Helfgott were then living.
3 After the piece David Helfgott regularly played in the piano bar.
China Watching

The case of Clara Law shows how the facts are re-shaped to meet expectations. Her first two Hong Kong films treat the mainland savagely. In Reincarnation of Golden Lotus (1989), Joey Wang runs foul of the mainland’s four modernizations, while in the 1990 Farewell China bureacrats tell Maggie Cheung she’s too beautiful to be given a visa for the U.S., where she’ll marry and abandon them, and Tony Leung follows her to an unyieldingly hostile New York, where she has been totally corrupted.

Film critics, even the ones who think they are anti-Communist, are, as a group, Marxists, campaigning against mindless entertainment. (This was one of the things that Stalin and Trotsky split over.) Body builders, whatever else they may be, are not Marxists, and had no problem with the Hong Kong film, but critics have drawn a line between the trivial off-shore product and the serious mainland material, and the festival circuit screen/academic network has no room for any contradiction.

Once offered a local journal a piece suggesting that the fact superior material had been on show in the Chinatown screenings for a quarter of a century, but got less attention than Peking potboilers, indicated that the film-assessment industry was Marxist and racist, and was told indignantly that the board rejected the notion that they were Marxist. The criticism is also intriguing here. Ask someone from the Hispanic countries (the other major area that film studies has neglected) and they’ll mention people like Hugo Freygu, Raul Ruiz or Léopold Torre Nilsson, names we know, if imperfectly. Ask Asians and they’ll come up with unfamiliar talents like the Korean Chen Cheng’hiwa or Hong Kong’s Li Chenfeng. Language can no longer stand as an excuse with a quarter of a century of half-baked prints to draw on.

The Hong Kong film has had its greatest crossover successes in black communities. They were so popular in New Guinea that the government considered banning them and they do best in the black neighbourhoods of the U.S. Samuel L. Jackson had to explain Chow Yun-fat to David Letterman (“He’s Major!”). In Farewell China, the owner of the earlier Chinese food shop tells Tony Leung, “When you get to know them, black people are better than white people.” Mix the issue of politics with the gangster and Triad drama, but, when they surface again in Days of Being Wild (1990), confusion sets in. It’s a relief to find his co-workers have difficulty understanding these, too. However, serious critics love them, pouring out more printer’s ink than Shaw Brothers, Jackie Chan and the New Wave ever generated. His Changk­ ing Express (1994), with Lin Ch’n’isa in a blonde wig and a striking two-part structure, and Ashes of Time (1995), an all-star wu zia piana, alternates brilliant material with footage that demands freeze frame and footnote.

When A Better Tomorrow wound down the Hong Kong New Wave’s brief flirtation with would-be serious subject matter, Triad gangsters moved centre stage. They say that the Italians got Mafia and pasta from the Chinese, with Marco Polo, and the Clans or Triads appear so glamorous in these films, but are funded by them. During the 1980s, Triad involvement in film production increased with murders and intimidation, climaxxed by the theft of a camera negative on one production where co-operation had been withheld. The 1992 film, All’s Well That Ends Well, a so-so, all-star comedy, was shown anyway. It was claimed the ban­ dits got the wrong cans, but the film industry finally drew the line in the sand and, headed by Jackie Chan, Andy Lau and blockbuster comedian Stephen Chiau, three hundred workers demon­ strated for action in front of police headquarters.

Hong Kong filmmakers have noticed the irony of the fact that Triad produc­ ers proved remarkably sympathetic, providing minimal interference in con­ trast with accountant producers. The question has become irrelevant as Triads have been among those to abandon the Hong Kong film business over the past four years as profits evaporated, along with thirty percent of the audience. A number of factors have con­ tributed to this. As 1997 approaches, producers have gone into get-rich-quick mode trying to squeeze the last dollars out of a structure that may not be there under the mainland’s Marxists. A poster with a couple of popular half-naked leads in front of an explosion is more important than content and, just at the point where the product became less marketable, there has been this surge of interest in the off-shore Chinese film. Exactly why is a speculation. As 1997 looms, more Hong Kong filmmakers are looking to Hollywood for their future, bringing the newest of their achievements with them. Gong Li, who appears in films from all three centres, has attracted attention, but the most probable answer is the Quinten Tarant­ ino factor.

Super-styred movie guru Taranta­ rino is a fan of the Hong Kong action movie, modelling his Reservoir Dogs (1992) on Ringo Lam’s Chow Yun-fat movie, City on Fire (1987). As Sammo Hung observes philosophically, “We steal from them. They steal from us.”

Tarantino introduced John Travolta to John Woo and his support has sur­ faced as a video label which will issue Wong Kar-Wai’s debut, As Tears Go By (1989), Joey Wang runs foul of Asia to research the movies he could have seen a bus ride away from the office during the past 20 years. Earlier material, no longer acces­ sible, doesn’t figure in these 1990s studies.

The heavy hitters have taken a step back. Chow Yun-fat now films sequels and star-featurings vehicles at widely- spaced intervals, each claimed as the film to precede his retirement. He looks at Hollywood and has announced a movie version of The King and I story.

John Woo, with Chow’s most con­ spicuous films, The Killer (1989) and Hard Boiled (1992) on a resumé that already includes key films in most cycles, has been the first Hong Kong director to film for Hollywood, encoun­ tering studio interference unthinkable on his home turf with Hard Target (1994), the Van Damme vehicle.

Jackie Chan had already made four so-so U.S. movies (in two of which his character is Japanese!), costing him frustra­tion and the massive effort to master English. His Rambo in the Bronx (1994) is a different strategy, set in the U.S. (and filmed in Vancouver), it is made to his own requirements and has been his great success in the U.S. mar­ ket. It is claimed to be the last of his films to be shown in the world’s Chi­ natowns. Thunderbolt (1995), his two filmed-in-Australia pieces, First Strike and A Nice Guy, directed by Sammo Hung, are slated for U.S. circuit distri­ bution, and he is getting back faxes about the quality of his English voic­ ing and the number of Asian faces in his work. There’s a $15 million offer on the table to make a studio movie, with his Chinese producers muttering that they are paying him near to that already.

Ringo Lam, Stanley Tang and most of the quality Hong Kong talent are con­ sidering offers from Hollywood that dwarf the sums they usually handle, but, along with the trade-off in authority and identity, there’s the thought that these big budgets don’t necessarily translate into greater production values, with higher salaries involved all round upping the difference. Tsui Hark’s harks and smoke flying scenes are as convincing and more elegant than the megabucks Superman True Lies special effects.

On the other hand, the mainland stu­ dios, with their outmoded camera gear and bureaucrat control, are in a slump and selling off their quotas to Hong Kong producers. The enormous Chi­ nese mainland audience, which their own producers have failed to involve for half a century, is a glittering prize.

This leaves the Chinatowns (Australia, with four screens in Sydney and three in Melbourne, has been rated as its most important element of the international Chinatown circuit), one of the most successful movie entrepre­ neurial ventures in history, in limbo. Their great drawcards have almost deserted them. Theirs are down. Venues have closed in London and San Francisco.

We have been hearing about the need for alternative cinema for three decades. Those loud in their demands have been among the ones to ignore its existence. Those of us who have used Chinatown cinemas as an appeal against the sentence of conformity on our access to world cinema have as little to say in the matter as we did when the National Film Theatre “disappeared” on us a couple of decades back.

How much less rewarding going to the movies have been with Jackie Chan battling a hovcrscape in the streets of fantasy New York or buffeted about in the hangar-size wind tunnel; Maggie Cheung discovering that her mair-jong-addict mum was once a heroic figure in World War II China; Yue Hwa Impaled by the detached hand of his former hermaphrodite lover where the naked nuns bathe with rose petals; Chow Yun-fat emptying the automatic weapons he’s hidden in the pot plants into hordes of Triad heavies; Alexander Fu Sheng coached in martial arts by the abbes who sits facing the wall of the Shaolin temple, her back to him; Michael Hui taking off his wig and being told, “Well, nobody’s perfect!” It’s like discovering a new Howard Hawks movie every week — or, at least, a new Joel Schumacher — and it could go on, after enslving our experience of cinema for 20 years, without a word of complaint.  

1 Editor: Due to the lack of press and research material in English, the Chinese titles of films and the actors’ character names are not always given.
It’s All About Trust

Chen Kaige and I spent a great deal of energy in pre-production and scouting locations. We then shot for four months with one actress, but it just wasn’t working. So, we searched for a substitute and found Gong Li, the most obvious choice and ultimately the only choice, for all sorts of reasons.

We were a bit scared about that. We were afraid that she would bring along the Gong Li baggage. When we did the first shot of her, I was lying on the ground holding the camera as close to the ground as possible. There was nothing special about the shot: she just walks in frame and that’s it. After she did it, I looked up at Chen Kaige standing above me, I looked down at me, and we both burst into laughter. We were just so happy to realize that we had not made a mistake. This was perfect, this was the woman we were looking for. It was wonderful.

From then, it was a new process. We had made all these preparations, we had envisaged the film in a certain style, we had worked within this theoretical and perceptual context for so long. But then Gong Li came on and we had to work overtime every night re-discussing how we were going to shoot the things. It became this wonderful interaction between the camera and the actress, the actress and her hero, the director and his aspirations for the actors, and his perception of the actors. It just grew. We used to say, “This team is like a wedding cake. We start at a certain level and then go, ‘Oh, we need a bit more.’ So you add a finishing touch. Then we say, ‘Oh, it is not finished at all.’” So, we kept moving up, tier by tier.

The second half of the shoot, when Gong Li was on the set, was such a joyous experience compared to the previous part, which was probably like they used to shoot before. The energy of the film definitely comes from her collaboration, her participation.

Have you used any of the material from the first part of the shoot?

Yes. In China, they count in shots, which we don’t do in Hong Kong. They say how many shots each scene takes, or how many shots a specific character has, or how many shots the whole film has.

The first actress was only in 47 shots, so in certain situations we could cut away from what we had. However, there were certain situations where there was a cut/counter-cut, and that was a problem. You need a certain amount of technical expertise to stay on top of that.

Of course, I’d have rather re-shot the whole thing, because then we would have had much more continuity, especially given we were mainly working in long tracking shots. The camera was moving all the time. It was a participatory camera, and very much a character in the film.

On Operating

You have said that the only way you know how to do cinematography is to operate yourself.

I don’t understand television monitors [laughs].

But on Temptress Moon, you acceded at times to a Steadicam operator.

Li Baochun is probably the greatest Steadicam operator in the world. I hope he has an agent, because he is going to be flooded with offers once Temptress Moon is released internationally.

It was a pleasure to see this guy getting into it. He had the technique down sufficiently that he could get into framing. He was good enough technically to have the freedom to start developing as a cinematographer. It was wonderful to be part of that, to watch that.

Usually, you talk about the beginning and the end of a shot. You just hope that an operator gets something reasonable in between. That is why I prefer to operate myself. You have to have the ability to react frame by frame, otherwise it is not yours. You can’t convey this verbally, but with this guy we would talk something through, rehearse a bit and then he would go so close to how I would want to do it. We were playing off the different energies of a hand-held camera and a Steadicam camera.

It was a great learning process for us. For example, there is a very important shot where Gong Li’s character sees something. It is the closest to my visual perception of that particular subject at that time. And that is totally due to this interaction between myself and the lab, specifically with my grader, Li Lihwa.

Now, they suggest things. They will say, “Why don’t we try this?” The point of departure is not what you can do, but what you want to do. I look more at music videos and things generated on video than at other films. You think, “If they can do that, why can’t we?”

At the moment, we are held back by the economics of Chinese filmmaking. We still have to consider how much money we have for film stock and for processing. On American filmmaking, it is a minimal part of their budget. You can shoot as many million feet as you want to. But we have to consider such things very carefully here.

On the Future

Despite invitations from around the world, you essentially shoot Chinese films. Is this as much a matter of preference as being located in this part of the world?

It’s because I grew up here. I left Australia very young. My wandering pretty much insulated me from the practical concerns of ‘the real world’, so my ‘formative years’ came ten years too late, in my twenties, in cinema, in Taiwan.

But do you see yourself spreading your wings and moving further afield?

I’ve seen what the rest of the world is like, thank you very much. We are very happy with where we are and what we have. Am I going to go back to Claude Lelouch or work for Roger Corman? I don’t think so. I don’t see the point.

It is not about money. If we were into money, we would have gone into real estate long ago.

At the same time, as a semi-technician, you have to expand your horizon. That is what your last question was about: How do you increase your technical capabilities because the industry itself is changing? Obviously, you have to try and keep abreast of certain experiences, certain working conditions and experiences which will enhance your ability to bring them back to your people, or to share them in a different way. Obviously I should.

So, there is an interest in doing things outside of the immediate sphere, of enhancing my experience and my exposure to things non-Chinese.

But, at the end of the day, it comes back to people. I don’t care how good the script is if it is going to be confrontational, if it is going to be about the producer standing behind me and saying, “You’ve only got 26 shots today instead of 29.” If it is not immediate, if it is not immediate interaction, if it is not an immediate and loving experience, then I don’t give a shit. I don’t think the Hollywood Hills are any more interesting to me than Happy Valley or mid-levels Hong Kong, all of which I am very happy with at the moment.

One of the heartening things in the past ten years has been the demystification of Chinese cinema. The rest of the world has at long last begun to understand that Chinese film is not necessarily a Zhang Yimou film about the oppressions of feudal China.

Not everyone has. They still think Shanghai Triad is a masterpiece [laughs].

True, but on the whole there is an increasingly widespread perception that the issues – human, sexual, political – in this part of the world are fundamentally the same as those that confront everybody else. It
makes absolutely no sense to exoticize Chinese cinema as some kind of alien object. Exactly. We can’t explain Chinese to the rest of the world, but you can experience people. Most of the scripts I get want to explain. For example, I received a script for a five-part mini-series which is going to explain the whole phenomenon of this wonderful, ecletic and very diverse group of people called the "Australian Chinese". I don’t see any point in explaining that. You can’t explain it, anyway. And, the people who are trying to explain it have no knowledge whatsoever about the reality. The only way you can enhance or enlarge or deepen your experience is by contact. That is what we are doing already. We don’t need the West to come along and say, "Now, thank you very much, we’ll take over here and finish the job, because you people don’t really understand." We understand people. The reason the Zhang Yimou films, and Kaige films and all the other films are receiving the attention they deserve is because they are speaking to people who will listen to them, because they are talking to people. One of the things that people are going to be able to relate to is the impending sense of crisis. The Hong Kong audience has deserted Chinese movies in a very big way. The Taiwan audience already did so a year ago, while the mainland audience is in the process of doing the same thing. Everybody you speak to in the film industry, in whichever sector of Chinese society, is worried about the future. They all think that the threat from Hollywood has suddenly become a much larger one and a very real one in terms of audience preferences. Nobody is quite sure what the future is. One arrives in Hong Kong to discover that yet another couple of filmmakers have emigrated to the States, trying to follow the John Woo trail, and that so and so is beginning to try visual styles that nobody would even consider if they weren’t from this kind of background. Because I think they trust me, and working again with William Chang, we have a collaborative base that we can work from. It was a great experience, and there is no question that we will work together as much as possible. Because the industry is in this wild free-fall, I would have expected, as in the rest of the world, that there would be a lot of people knocking on the door, trying to get in. But I don’t sense anyone there, except a few directors and writers and actors maybe. In terms of people in lighting, art direction, or camera, there is still this same group. There hasn’t been much change recently. That is a little bit disappointing because I think you need that energy of young, upcoming people to push you on, to say, “We can do better than you.” That is what is happening with the sixth generation in Japan, obviously.1 2

Yes. It was my great pleasure. There is a point of comparison, because one of his idols is Wong Kar-Wai.

There are four references to Wong Kar-Wai films in 30 minutes. It is like an Indian film without the songs! [laughs.]

Is there a side of you that is interested in nurturing new talents, finding new people to work with? Yes. I’m still a ‘60s person. I’m still idealistic. I’d have to end up being the grand old man of cinema whom every one regards with disdain.

I was extremely honoured to be invited by Jan and Eric [Kot] to make their film. They took me into the world of early and mid-teenage kids, which is the world of arcades and CD-ROM and comics. I knew of that world, but I would never have entered it without being taken by the hand by Jan and Eric. Now I know the places, I go there regularly. I hang out in my dirty-old-man status. I pursue it at a different level. [laughs.]

It is extremely stimulating that they weren’t afraid to work with me. They didn’t regard me as some pissy old fart who was going to impose a “Let me tell you how to do it” attitude on them.

We’ve gone on and done another film recently. They came in with this music-video energy that allowed me to try visual styles that nobody would ever consider if they weren’t from this kind of background. Because I think they trust me, and working again with William Chang, we have a collaborative base that we can work from. It was a great experience, and there is no question that we will work together as much as possible. Because the industry is in this wild free-fall, I would have expected, as in the rest of the world, that there would be a lot of people knocking on the door, trying to get in. But I don’t sense anyone there, except a few directors and writers and actors maybe. In terms of people in lighting, art direction, or camera, there is still this same group. There hasn’t been much change recently. That is a little bit disappointing because I think you need that energy of young, upcoming people to push you on, to say, “We can do better than you.” That is what is happening with the sixth generation in Japan, obviously.1

I want to be part of all this. I have a real intimacy with this region, with these people. We have been talking to this group of people, and hopefully taking them with us, hopefully participating in their social changes, in the growth and evolution of this society, which is Chinese society. They helped to bring us here and we have a sense of responsibility to these people. I’m going to stick with the sticky rice.

What projects are on the drawing board for you? Wong Kar-Wai’s new film, Chen Kaige’s new film, Wong Kar-Wai’s other new film. There may be a collaboration with Wayne Wang. He wants to come back and try something in Hong Kong, and he has considered me. But there may be schedule conflicts and he is a little worried that I’m going to be running around telling these American actors that they should be eating their lunch boxes like everyone else on the side­walk [laughs].

That is one situation where I think we can’t explain what we have here with the greater Hollywood establishment. It will be quite interesting, because it is very much on our terms in that case.

Then there’s Stanley’s film, if it ever gets off. And Jan and Eric’s new film. Somehow I think we will find a way. We have Korean friends. We are trying to re-integrate the community a bit more. We’re talking about collaborations, about crossing more borders than we have before.

For me, the big border we crossed before was the mainland Chinese border. All Asia is thinking that way. Maybe that is the real answer to your Pacific Century question. For example, I’m even doing photographs for the Japanese now. They have finally realized what Europe realized a long time ago, which is that if we are going to be big, as the Chinese economy goes, then obviously there has to be much more interaction between the members of the Pacific community and that means Japan, the four dragons and China, obviously.

I want to be part of all this. I have a real intimacy with this region, with these people. We have been talking to this group of people, and hopefully taking them with us, hopefully participating in their social changes, in the growth and evolution of this society, which is Chinese society. They helped to bring us here and we have a sense of responsibility to these people. I’m going to stick with the sticky rice.

1 Edward Yang had previously made a tele-feature and an episode for the port­maneutre film, In Our Time. That Day, On the Beach is his first full feature.

2 Editor: And Chris Doyle is easily the fastest speaker in 24 years of Cinema Papers! When Doyle read the transcript (and the preceding sentence) he remarked, “I was only talking so fast to keep Tony from going back to the card games he’d been playing all week on my computer.”
Past, Present and Future

Oral history, post-production crises and archiving: Domonic Case investigates

Martha Ansara's research is not from the written sources – film reviews, parliamentary reports – but from oral history – recorded interviews with the old film workers. She has discovered a different industry from the one peopled by the visionary directors and producers of the written histories.

The cameraman (until the fifth generation of Jan Kenny, it was always a cameraman) is identified as central to the whole task of filmmaking:

“I am speaking here of the sound era, although I suspect that the cult of the cameraman existed during the silent days, too. Although sound had well and truly arrived in Australia by the early 1930s, the majority of our filming was done without sync sound right up into the television era. Only a small number of features were produced in the best of times, and the mainstays of the industry were voice-over documentaries, newsreels – often shot mute – and commercials. A close-knit group of cinematographers were at the core of their production. These cameramen, employed by a small number of production houses, worked at their craft non-stop, and when American or English productions came in, a number of the cameramen along with the gaffers worked with the overseas experts. Thus, technical standards were maintained at a high level – and cherished – despite the underdevelopment of the industry in most other respects.

In those days the education of a film technician did not encourage theoretical speculation. You left school and entered the business in your mid-teens, starting as “the boy” in a hierarchy of seniors and juniors which emphasized practicality, discipline and respect. As the stories of cameramen reveal, you learned dedication to your work, pride in it, technical expertise, versatility, professionalism, stoicism, films, a group solidarity. Creativity was highly respected, but not something a man would talk about. The pub was an important meeting place. The technicians’ union was formed in the pub. And craft issues, too, were discussed there. As a consequence of Australian film’s impoverished resources, a high value was placed on problem solving and the inventiveness and technical ingenuity of these technicians has been a creative high point of the Australian industry.

Has this “cult of the cameraman” been responsible for the success of so many Australian DOPs internationally? How has Australia, with its tiny (by world standards) population, produced so many world-class technicians? Ansara believes that in the struggle to get a film up, to see it through, and then the often greater struggle to have it screened anywhere, many producers and directors would have spent years emboiled in one project. And then, with limited resources, production time would be very concentrated, and so technicians moved from one project to the next, developing skills, building experience at an intense rate.

The cult of the cameraman has shaped many of the continuing practices and perspectives of today’s Australian film industry, although its traditions and its influence are no longer with us as they were in the past. Young people today will never experience the rewards and humiliations of being “the boy”; and many a fledgling cinematographer now has a tertiary education. Australian society and along with it the industry are changing rapidly and decisively in ways we rarely think about or question. Yet, as the stories of cinematographers show us, the reflections of people who look back upon their past from within the changed circumstances of the present are inevitably provocative.

Moving Pictures

Tom Fisher and Ellen Baker are members of the School of Management at University of Technology, Sydney; Anne-Marie Chandler is head of the Department of Media and Text at UTS. Their joint research project is looking at ways in which new communication technologies impact on work practices in the making of feature films or tele-features in Australia. Baker notes that large corporations tend to be slow to adopt and to adapt to new ways of working, simply because of their entrenched structures. By contrast, the film industry tends to form structures on a project-by-project basis. This makes it particularly quick to adopt changes, and other, slower industries are watching film with interest as it leads the way.

In a recent paper (to be published shortly in the BKSTS journal Image Technology), they consider the broad effects of computerization on film production:
THEY HAD IT ALL....

THE TALENT,

THE EXPERTISE,

THE EQUIPMENT,

SOMEDAY, SOMEONE WAS BOUND TO GET JEALOUS...

Zero One Zero

WITH IAN STEVENS • ALAN FERGUSON • JASON CHAMBERS • CHARLIE ELLIS • PAUL NOVIS • MICHAEL WATSON
Three implications of [computerization] are discussed. First that there could be large shifts in the skills required, in work roles and in the workflow of film production processes. Second, that the current domination of the film industry by the U.S. could be weakened by these changes, providing more scope for non-U.S. film production and essentially achieving globalization of the industry. Third, that non-U.S. film producers could adopt certain strategies to maximize their chances of survival and further encourage globalization of the 21st-century film industry.

Basically, the entire film production process is being computerized, so effects typical of computerization can be observed. Thus, digitizing motion video permits the material to be manipulated more easily, bringing changes analogous to those seen in office and managerial tasks when spreadsheets and word processing were introduced.

Third, that non-U.S. film producers could adopt certain strategies to maximize their chances of survival and further encourage globalization of the 21st-century film industry. Basically, the entire film production process is being computerized, so effects typical of computerization can be observed. Thus, digitizing motion video permits the material to be manipulated more easily, bringing changes analogous to those seen in office and managerial tasks when spreadsheets and word processing were introduced.

Thus, some filmmaking roles are disappearing or merging with another, and some crafts are in demand. Producers and directors will be doing more of what had been part of a craft role before. The increased use of computer technologies means that employees in the industry are becoming more skilled in computer techniques. There will be some threat and save time lost in travelling or shipping materials. A number of computer networks exist that allow efficient transfer of motion video. In London, Sohonet links The Computer Film Company, Cinestile London, the Moving Picture Company and VTR. The network can carry several D1 video streams simultaneously in real time: higher-resolution images are equally possible at slower rates, and test transfers of full-motion-resolution Cineon files have already been carried out successfully. Several companies are planning to put their sound effects or video footage libraries on line.

Similar networks are running in the U.S. Pacific Bell’s Media Park links 35 post-production houses with the major Hollywood studios, and Sprint and Silicon Graphics’ Drum network linking New York with Los Angeles has been proved rough-cut graphics and audio mixes back and forth.

Australian connections so far have been less permanent, but none the less effective. Kennedy Miller’s innovative use of the Internet to ship effects images for Babe (Chris Noonan, 1995) between Sydney and the American digital effects company Rythm n’ Hues is now well documented. Soundtrack has used Dolbyfax to connect a composer in Los Angeles with its studio in Melbourne.

The UTS group sees this form of collaboration as a distinct advantage in Australia, and a key to an ongoing Australian production industry. Film production has been shifting from Hollywood to low-cost producers, such as the UK and Australia. This takes advantage of skills and talent available there, but generally involves the transfer of responsibility for a segment of the work, rather than integrated collaboration. More complete collaboration could come in the wake of developments such as Rupert Murdoch’s Fox Studios Australia.

So, there could be a weakening of the current U.S. domination of the industry and an increase in non-U.S. film production. This shift to lower-cost locations involving close and highly-intensive working should shorten the time from conception to release, to production approval, to a wide range of post-production operations. Over the course of this production, 16 separate videofaxes were sent, ranging from casting tapes and storyboard segments sent at low resolution to special effects segments sent at high resolution.

The UTS group notes that collaboration is one of the most distinctive features of the film and television production industries, and one that is receiving a lot of attention, as computer networks become part of the scene. Workers can collaborate in the same place or at a distance; and simultaneously, or at different times. Meetings, phone conversations, successive phases of work on one production, and videoconferencing are examples respectively of different modes.

As computer hardware and software become cheaper, more non-computer professionals will be trying their hand at production. However, when there was a similar spread of video production to non-professionals, it led mainly to new uses – such as corporate video, "furnished home video" shows, and special occasion capture – rather than to amateurs making full-length video productions.

Video productions are still largely carried out as five separate and sequential stages (acquisition, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution). However, computers are making it easier to work in parallel rather than sequentially. Lots of post-production processes can be done during production. This parallel working should shorten the time from acquisition to distribution and this in turn should reduce costs.

The ability to digitize film images means that networking and communication technologies can improve the utilization of high technology resources.

Second, be very selective about purchasing production technologies developed by the U.S. film industry. Later adopters gain relatively little benefit, so if prices haven’t dropped markedly, it may be better to outsource – using U.S. expertise and equipment – instead of purchasing your own. Avoid copying what the U.S. is already doing.

Third, find niches, unique production technologies or products that your local industry can develop and essentially monopolize. Once an innovation is established, its uniqueness is lost, and it isn’t worthwhile for others to enter the market. It isn’t easy to find such niches, but now is the time to be looking for a niche for film industry technologies.

It’s hard to find much in common between these two views of the film industry in Australia. True, Martha Ansara deals with production while the Productivity Research team is concerned with post-production; but this was a scarcely important distinction in the early days, and it is becoming less so once again. If the shape of the industry up to now has been marked out on the one hand in terms of class attitudes and of nationalization, and on the other hand in terms of strangled budgets and technical innovativeness, then society now has less regard for the former issues, and the industry is less constrained by the latter. Technological determinism is not a fashionable doctrine, but there seems to be a good case for concluding that it is the technology of the digital 21st century that will shape not only the methods of production, but the very social structure of our industry. Certainly, it has never been more important to examine the implications of technical innovation. Ansara once again: if we don’t scrutinize technology, we tie ourselves in to systems and we lose our independence. Just because something is invented, it doesn’t mean we can’t scrutinize it.1

2 Martha Ansara, "I Wouldn’t Have Changed My Life For Anything - the Cult of the Cameraman", to be published in Media Information Australia, AFTRS, Sydney.
5 Martha Ansara interviewed by the author in May 1996.
Film and television production units from India to Hollywood to Hong Kong use precision Memory Heads from Ultimatte. And for post production the Ultimatte Digital 7 for unmatched chroma keys, the TypeDeco character generator and the GPS 200... the ideal digital audio mixer for post and telecine applications.
Fade to Black

In a landmark day for the post-production industry, the Australian Screen Editors, Screen Directors, Screen Producers, Screen Composers and the Screen Sound guilds and associations came together at the Australian Film Television & Radio School on 1 June to find a solution to the crisis in post-production. It’s clearly a hot topic: the AFTRS theatre was packed out, and monitors were set up in adjacent rooms to cope with the overflow.

This is a short, selective, and therefore personal view of the conference. There’s a transcript of what was said on the Internet at http://www.aftrs.edu.au/post, if you want the detail.

Although producer Tony Buckley spoke movingly in the keynote speech accepting that the industry would become involved in technology that didn’t give an advantage. Lightworks, he said, was originally devised by Paul Bamborough to solve some of the frustrations he had as a picture editor. But discussion moved quickly from the old “sprocket versus digital” argument.

The pressure to complete quickly on the expensive computer systems is widely felt. Editor Henry Dangar argued that editors now are putting in as many hours in a six-week schedule as they used to for an eight-week schedule, simply by working longer hours per day. Session Chair Malcolm Smith spoke of the need to pace oneself: Bob Weis reckoned that editors have always gone home at 2 am, regardless of the technology. Dangar pointed out the subtle pressures:

Envy of production crew conditions (e.g., paid overtime) was deeply acknowledged by the audience, who applauded Judd’s argument against the “expected” free overtime worked in post-production:

Unless the production people come around and work for the sound people for free, doing their washing and shopping and other things, they don’t get time to do.

Nerida Tyson-Chew was the first of several composers through the day to present their perspectives, often paralleling other crafts’ concerns. She felt that composers should be brought on earlier than the writer, the producer and the whole production office must be theoretically on much less time because they have more time available.

Envy of production crew conditions (e.g., paid overtime) was deeply acknowledged by the audience, who applauded Judd’s argument against the “expected” free overtime worked in post-production:

As a composer, I think it is my role to write if he could write it himself.

“Martin Armiger was to point out the 18th or 19th century resulted in major dislocation in any industry. The reform of the textile industry in the 19th century resulted in major dislocation in any industry. The reform of the textile industry in the 18th or 19th century resulted in huge difficulties for many people, and it took many years of economic and industrial action to reconcile the workers and the expectation of the owners of the industries with the reality. If there is no crisis here in post-production, what are we doing here? There are more than 300 people come to discuss this very issue.

Denise Haslem drew the argument straight to the point:

Our top editors have been told they are taking too long: “If you can’t finish the job, we will get someone who can.” Meanwhile, directors are saying, “We are having fun with computers and having fun playing with them.” We are losing many editors through work-related illnesses because they can’t do these shifts. Some of you wonder why we think there is a crisis.
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It makes me wonder what you know about editing.

The digital revolution hit the film industry in the early 1990s, at the depth of the recession. The only way it could be sold was as a budget-saving device rather than a creative tool. That view has stuck. The truth is that, while non-linear editing as a technique may be better, it isn’t cheaper, and it isn’t quicker than the older systems. Sound engineer and mixer Steve Murphy pointed out that equipment had to be paid for, and, that by contrast with the Australian situation, overseas people were pouring vast amounts of capital into new technology.

It is arguable, then, whether the working conditions are indeed a result of the new technology. Steve Murphy suggested that the new systems actually made things easier: "If schedules are going to get shorter, at least the technology is allowing us to achieve a better result in the schedules". However, he pointed out that ‘digital! sometimes gets confused with ‘magic’. If you have noisy dialogue, it’s not going to go away because we are digital. Often the final product is so clear that the problems are more obvious.

There was little other discussion of the application of the technology, although, in a reversal from an earlier position, Richard Franklin spoke of the wear and tear on a negative in telecine, conceded that there was some value in a workprint, and said he’d probably have one next time. Budget savings in non-linear editing, of course, have been largely predicated on eliminating the workprint, although in his speech that it was going to be a “get the producer” day, and philosophically accepted the role of Aunt Sally. He described the environment in the film industry today:

One of the things historically is that [we] came from a cottage industry and a lot of us embraced this early cottage industry into what is truly an international industry and that is where the problems lie, from a producer’s point of view. It is a buck-driven, deal-driven industry and there is no getting away from it. Then you must divide the industry in two. There is a basic sector - the feature film industry - where there is a greater area for creativity and a greater flexibility. But I don’t think you can step away from the rest of it (being a deal-driven sector and the deals are getting tougher and there is less money. It is a manufacturing industry. In a way, you are creating sausages.

In this deal-driven industry, Carroll recommended a firm line with demanding producers: “You have to learn to say ‘No’, or, even better, ‘Fuck off, I am not going to do it.’”

In the current federal government’s philosophy, it seems this “workplace bargaining” is the recommended style.

Perhaps the other most-discussed topic was the collapse of the training path, as assistant editors are relegated to the back room and the nightshift, digitizing rather than learning the craft of editing. There was talk of apprenticeships, of a training levy on all films over a certain budget to hire an extra trainee editor, and of attachments. On-the-job training, however, the "good old way" of paying one’s dues, is attractive to around the world for the richness of its resources. The present government’s approach to training, Matt Carroll observed, was not encouraging: with current plans for apprentices to lose pay while at college, and the starvation of academic funds, he felt there was a real problem.

Following lunch was a session of light relief, when moderator Dennis Watkins hosted a "Hypotheticals" debate. Cast as key production players on a television pilot (Road Blues, set in the high pressure world of NRMA road service), industry personalities, including Robert Gibson and Bevan Lee, negotiated a series of crises and compromises brilliantly scripted by Paul Leadon. In a post-production managed on an unknown non-linear system that crashed when it rose above six degrees Celsius, with music scored, to meet the budget, for flute and accordion, and a laissez-faire three-camera style ("If Kylie and Jason can see each other, the cameras can see each other"), the players found no job stereotype too low to stoop to. Last-minute CGI treatment of every NRMA sign to RACV signs for release in Victoria secured the reputations of all concerned.

In break-out sessions, each craft guild discussed its own set of resolutions, and the final, general session discussed and adopted these.

Most of the ‘wish lists’ included a properly experienced post-production supervisor on larger-budget films. This may be the editor - kept on after picture lock-off - or a separate role - possibly part-time, but on right from the start. They also sought full and continuous consultation, steps towards investigating
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Kodak Backs Film

In a move that seems to place bets on every form of imaging technology, the division of Kodak that serves the motion picture and television markets has renamed itself the "Professional Motion Imaging Unit". But to reassure the film industry, the unit's president, Joerg Agin, says in a recent press release:

"We anticipate steady breakthroughs [sic] in film technology. For the foreseeable future we believe film will continue to be the dominant medium for producing high quality content for cinemas, television, and the new multimedia formats such as digital video disk. Film will also withstand the challenge of the electronic cinema. The quality gap between film and electronic media is large today — and expected to increase in the enormous respect we have for the people who work in the industry. We do feel we are all in one and we all have our own battles to fight and often they become compartmentalized, and I think that has happened in the case of post-production. We may very well have neglected the fact we have not been negotiating enough [in post-production]. The crisis that has come out of it has been lack of communication, lack of going over the budgets with you, and lack of having these sort of meetings where we discuss the size of pie.

The conference ended by appointing the operation engendered by the day. We are one industry and the proof of it is we are all here today. It is not an 'us and them' situation, and I was provocative today to try and draw things out. It is also about a respect for each other's crafts and skills, and the great strength of the industry here over other film industries [is that] we are very small. Certainly compared to them we are incredibly unified, and certainly I can speak for all the producers I know.

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THE DOMINO EFFECT

'GoldenEye is the first film title sequence that has the complexity of a pop video - and the Director Daniel Kleinman was able to see it all come together in front of his eyes in Domino.'

Tim Webber
Director of Special Effects, FrameStore, London

'GoldenEye' title sequence
Directed and designed by Daniel Kleinman
Produced by David Botrell, LimeLight for Eon Productions Ltd

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FFC Funding Decisions

Following a Board meeting on 5 May, the FCC has entered into contract negotiations with the producers of the following projects:

Features
PAWS (95 mins)
LATENT IMAGE PRODUCTIONS
D: Karl Zyczky
P: Andrea Finlay, Vicki Watson
EP: Rebekah Pentrou Russell
W: Harry Carps
DIST: POLYGRAM FILM INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF:

WENT

C, a computer literate dog, flees to Australia with his master, who has been sent there to develop a computer software. C is a smart and adorable dog, and he quickly makes friends with the people he meets along the way. They become a family, and together they face many challenges, including overcoming cultural differences and learning to live in a new environment.

THE BIG RED (105 mins)
OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN-UK CO-PRODUCTION
UNITED FILMS & SEA PRODUCTIONS
D: Stephen Elliott
P: Fiona Dwyer, Antoinette Barnard
EP: Steve Wollaston, Nick Powell
W: Michael Thomas
DIST: SAMUEL GOLDWYN COMPANY

Teddy, a street wise hawker from New York, sees a lot of money to couple a couple of heavies. He flees from his life in New York and jumps on a plane to freedom. He ends up in the hot dry centre of Australia and unexpectedly comes across Angki, a beautiful blonde sex kitten. Teddy can’t believe his luck as they set off together into the outback. Then Angie asks the fatal question: “Are you married?” Wham! Teddy wakes up whacked on the head, shut full of dough, tossed in a chicken stack and married.

THE HUMAN RACE (55 mins)
ELECTRIC PIANES
D: Peter du Cane, Damon Smith, Ulrich Krazig

P: Andrew Guilve
EP: Andrew Guilve
W: Andrew Burme
PRE-SALED: ABC-TV, ZDF, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
DIST: BEYOND DISTRIBUTION
DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF:
SCREEN WEST

An adventure documentary set in the Kimberley in North Western Australia, where three men are set against each other in a test of endurance, survival skills and tenacity as they walk 600 kilometres from the edge of the sun-scorched desert to the coastline. The film will show just how far civilized man has traveled from his roots.

FINAL INSULT (55 mins)
OPEN CHANNEL PRODUCTIONS & WITH DIRECTION
D: Ivan Hext
P: John More
W: Ivan Hext
PRE-SALED: ABC TV
DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF:

FILM VICTORIA

Final Insult will follow a group of six people suffering from mysterious illnesses who are isolated for four weeks in an environmental control unit. They have come to the unit to find out if anything, they can do about it. It’s a test of their endurance, survival skills and tenacity.

SUBURBAN STRIPPERS (55 mins)
PAPER FILMS
D: Mike Piper
P: Mike Piper
W: Daphne Ross
PRE-SAILED: ABC TV

This documentary will explore the lives of the male and female suburban strippers whose stages are the lounges, garages and backyards of Australian suburban homes.

Documentaries
THE HUMAN RACE (55 mins)
ELECTRIC PIANES
D: Peter du Cane, Damon Smith, Ulrich Krazig

P: Andrew Guilve
EP: Andrew Guilve
W: Andrew Burme
PRE-SALED: ABC-TV, ZDF, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
DIST: BEYOND DISTRIBUTION
DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF:
SCREEN WEST

A documentary that has been hidden. An adventure comedy about friendship and murder. The two set about unraveling the ultimate challenge of defeating PC’s evil nemesis.

DIANA & ME (100 mins)
MATT CARROLL FILMS
D: David Parker
P: Matt Carroll
W: Matt Ford
DIST: VILLAGE ROADSHOW
DEVELOPED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF:

AF
d

A romantic comedy about a young Australian woman who happens to share the same name and birthday as the Princess of Wales. Obsessed with her royal namesake, she wins a trip to London and comes close to shaking hands with the princess... but misses her chance at the last minute. She iselloved out of the way by a pushy paparazzi photographer who spends his time chasing the Princess for a scandalous shot that will bag him a fortune. Determined to meet her idol, she teams up with the photographer in search of the princess and strange things begin to happen.

NICKI (52 mins)
FAR SIGHTED FILMS
D: Rudi Ramarka
P: Naadi Mitchell, Rudi Ramarka
W: Rudi Ramarka
DIST: ROMAN YOUDALE
PRE-SALED: SBS

Nicky, 33, a successful make-up artist, has lived her life under the spectre of damaged heart and lungs due to the effects of Thalidomide. Nicki grew up expecting to die young. She has fought to try to lead the life she wants. In 1994, the first heart lung transplant was performed in Australia. Suddenly, there was new hope. Nicki has recently been told that her time has come. She must have a heart lung transplant or die. She must decide. Nicki wonders whether it will all be worth it. Perhaps this is her natural time to die.

COLOUR BARS (55 mins)
FRONTYARD FILMS
D: Maimoud Yekta
P: Farid Cavadoglu, Manoah King
W: Maimoud Yekta
PRE-SALED: SBS

The film will follow five youths of non-English speaking background showing the 'reality of being born into families with cultures different to that of the mainstream. Although different in many aspects, they share a strong sense of not belonging to any culture: their parents' culture or the mainstream Anglo-Saxon culture. They long for acceptance from the mainstream culture while feeling an obligation to respect their parents' culture. The film will explore the sharing of their identities.
features

black rock (50 mins)

palm beach pictures

D. STEVEN VOLIER P. ROY A. ANGEL W. ROY

pre-sale: SBS, NDR dist: beyond distribution p/l

Development with the assistance of:

nswfido

Jared is 17 and lives with his mother in Blackrock, a suburb in a large industrial city on the coast of NSW. Finishing strongly in his second last year at school, he is starting to get a handle on life. Then Flick, the young local hero and Jared’s idol, returns. Jared throws a welcome home for him, at the local surf club. Everyone is there. A 15-year-old girl is found dead on the beach. Jared is torn between loyalty and truth.

documentaries

a dying shame (52 mins)

IGUANA FILMS P/L

D. ROY P. ROY A. ANGEL W. ROY

pre-sale: SBS, NDR dist: Beyond Distribution P/L

Development with the assistance of:

nswfido

A Dying Shame is the story of Tracey and Simon’s encounter with Post Natal Depression. After the birth of their son, Tracey has her expectations of being a “good mum” shattered when PND’s symptoms take over their lives. The film explores how often the most caring, loving people often deny or minimize the experience of a mother with PND, and how the notion that a mother not coping is taboo in our society.

production survey

information is supplied as and adjudged as of 16 April 1996

favourites in pre-production

the big red

production: August 1996

dead letter office

production company: artist services

pre-production: 1/2/96

scriptwriter: deborah cox

buffalo legends (55 mins)

film and television institute (exclusive nominees p/l)

D. DESMOND KOSTKA, RAYMOND P. ROBERTS E. ROBERT DAWSON DESMOND KOSTKA, RAYMOND P. ROBERTS

pre-sale: SBS

BUFFALO LEGENDS is a fast-moving page of stories and images concerning the struggle of Darwin Aboriginals for social, and economic justice. The Buffaloes Football Club, the first sporting club with a non-racial membership, became the most popular and successful team in the Northern Territory in the 1930s, and a vehicle for changing the racist culture of Darwin.

at a special telephone link up on Thursday 16 May 1996 the FFC Board approved funding for the documentary. Showways.

STOWAWAYS (55 MINS)

MUSICARTDANCE FILMS

D. KEVIN LUCAS P. ALISON WATSON E. ROBERT DAWSON KEVIN LUCAS KEVIN LUCAS

pre-sale: SBS, NPS dist: MELSA FILMS DISTRIBUTION

A documentary about the work of puppeteer Philippe Genty in Australia. Structured around the countdown to curtain call at the world premiere of Genty’s Stowaways in Adelaide, the work is interspersed with workshop and rehearsal footage, and Genty himself discussing his work, his dreams, his childhood and his practice of self-analysis.

a nice guy

production company: golden manor (HK) P/L

production office: melbourne

principal credits

director: ROLF TODT

producer: JENNIFER ANGEL

executive producer: MANUEL TRINCHERI

scriptwriter: MARK LOWNZEY

director of photography: JEFF RUSSELL

director of photography: ANDREW LEE

production manager: MARK MULLENS

casting consultant: ROBERTA LLOYD

production designer: JERRY WHEATLEY

marketing consultant: JAMES MCKENNA

production manager: JAMES MCKENNA

production assistant: JAMES MCKENNA

technical advisor: JAMES MCKENNA

featuring in post-production

acbi

[see previous issue for details]

dust on the wings

production company: bimbleshell films, CHANDERKAM FILMS

pre-production company: A ANDRE Production: 13/4-29/4/96

principal credits

director: LEE ROGERS

producer: LEE ROGERS, WILLIAM STEVENS

line producer: EMMA BRUNTON

assistance producer: IAN FOWLER

scriptwriter: LEE ROGERS, WALTER STEVENS

director of photography: JEFF MALASPINA

sound recordist: ERIC NELSON

editor: PETER WATKINS

production designer: SAM COOK

costume designer: JACQUELINE EASTON

composer: PHIL CEBERNER

casting and development

casting consultant: GREG APPS

call centre: call production crew

production managers: CATHY CHAPPELL, EMMA BRUNTON

production assistants: ADAM BANDLER, FLEUR GOLDINCK, LISA WARD, ELIS LIDDE

camera crew

focus pullers: NICK WATT, TAKAYA, TONY BRITTIN, BRYAN HORNIE, LARA CONNOR, PETER HOLLAND

(FORMAT: STEVE FREDAN 2nd and D.P: NEL McDONALD, PETER COLEMAN)

sound recordist: ADAM SPENCER

key grip: ADAM GOOD

gaffer: FLOWERS

best light: STEVE WILKINSON

technical advisor: ASHLEY ROWAN

sound centre

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ASC AUDIO SOUND CENTRE
Wardrobe supervisor: JACQUIE 
Production manager: KEVIN WILSON (for GENNADY KENNEDY (FATHER JIM KELLY), LISA MCKEONE (FATHER JIM KELLY), DENISS RUMINSKI (FATHER JIM KELLY), SAMUEL JOHNSON (THE ANGEL), JAMES FELTON (ARMSHACKER CLARK), JEFF STRATTON (MISANDRO KISSAN), ADRNAM RAWLINS (DION)).

With his professional career at the crossroads, the last thing on Andrew Gordon’s mind is helping the city’s homeless. But when he’s dropped into the chaos of St. Cuthbert’s Church and Mission, Andrew enters the gray area between legally right and morally justified.

See previous issues for details on the following:

Red Herring
River Street
Road to Nilh

True Love and Chaos
Production company: WESTSIDE Film Productions
Budget: $2.4 million
Principal Credits
Director: STANSFORD EMMYNOYI
Producer: ANN DANIELO
Screenwriter: STANSFORD EMMYNOYI
Script editor: ARNETTE BLINDUS
Director of photography: LADISLAV KARAVANY
Production design: STEPHEN JAMES-EVANS
Costume design: JANET BROWN
Worldwide government investment: ARTIC, FFC, Film Victoria

Hugh Keating, Nadeen Andrews, Noah Taylor

Mimi and Hanfil begin a road trip from Melbourne to Perth. Mimi heading home to make peace with her mother, Hanfil running from the consequences of his involvement in a drug theft mastered him by his friend, Dean.

Awaiting Release
See previous issues for details on the following:

Children of the Revolution
DATING THE ENEMY FIRST STRIKE (FORMERLY THE STORY OF C.I.A.)
FLOATING LOVE SERENADE
LUST AND REVENGE
THE PHANTOM MR RELIABLE (FORMERLY MY ENTIRE LIFE)
THE QUIET ROOM
TO HAVE AND TO HOLD (FORMERLY THE SMALL MAN)

UNDER THE LIGHTHOUSE DANCING
ZONE 39

ChANGING HEART
Production company: Digital Arts Film & Television
Pre-production: January-February 1996
Production: March-August 1996

Principal Credits
Director: MARK SHARROCK
Executive producer: BILL BYRNE
Scriptwriter: MARK MCCREA
Director of photography: JASON ROBERTSON
Production design: RAY GROB
Costume design: DEBRA BILLINGS
Make-up: LUCIE ROBERTSON
Hair: LINDA MACDONALD
Production supervisor: ALAN CAMPBELL

Principle of photography: MARVIN GOLDBERGER
Continuity: JACQUELINE HAMILTON
Hairdresser: WILLIAM HARRISON
Make-up: KIMBERLY DANIEL
Costume designer: KIMBERLY DANIEL
Safety officer: ROBBEY WYNN
Runner: ERIC HARRISON

Art direction
Set decorator: BERNIE WYNNE
Standing prop: BRIAN LANE (LADY SIERRA)
Billy leaves his home in remote Western Tasmania and comes to the city. He is an alcoholic country singer on a downhill spiral. Although they never actually meet, their paths cross many times in a single day.

OTHERZONE
Production company: SERPENTINE FILMS
Budget: $265,000
Post-production: 13/3/96-31/3/97

PRINCIPAL CREDITS
Director: DAVID COX
Producer: SARAH ZADAN
Scriptwriter: DAVID COX
Director of photography: PAUL R. COX
Sound recordist: LYNNE DIERICKSON

Production coordinator: SEIGMUND CAMPBELL
Costume designer: LINDY GODFREY

Planning and Development
Script editor: AYREN MARTIN
Casting: PRESTON CASTING
Standard artist: DAVID COX, JOHN POWER

Budgeted by: SARAH ZADAN

PRODUCTION CREW
Production manager: LIBBY PATER
Production coordinator: LISSETA MOGLAOED
Assistant unit manager: BARBARA AIGAR
Production accountant: ALAN DREEM AND CO - GIANNI ROSSICA
Insurer: H. W. WOOD
Legal advisor: SHANA LEVRE - ROTH WASSER

CAMERA CREW
Focus puller: KEVIN DOLEN
Cameracrane: NICOLE SNOW
Camera type: ARRIFLEX 35
Key grip: FRED JIRK
Assistant: RUSSELL CRONE
Gaffer: JIM HUNT, ANDY MOORE

ON-SET CREW
1st assistant director: KAREN MAVHO
Continuity: TABA FERRELL
Make-up: LLOYD JAMES
Safety officer: PETER COULAN
Still photographer: RICO FASANO
Catering: EATING YOUR HEART OUT

ART DEPARTMENT
Art director: GEOFF CAMPBELL
Assistant art director: PAUL MACK
Artisan: JON FOG

WARDROBE
wardrobe supervisor: LINNIE GOOD
post-production
Ends: DAVID WAYNE
Sound recordist: EUGENE WILSON
Sound design: PHILIP BADGET
Animation: DAVID COX
Laboratory: CINEMAS
Color: 35mm

GOVERNMENT AGENCY INVESTMENT
Australian Film Commission
Production: FILM VICTORIA

Cast
MARK HAY (BILLY)
STELLAH (MELISSA)
MAX FAIRGROUND (CUTTS)
BRUCE NAYL (CHICKEN STICKS),
KAREN HADFIELD (NATALIE)
JACQUELINE MITELAN (KAREN)

Karen Nguyen, researcher, has developed the Ameth scent, a device which enables human souls to be down-loaded and stored. Her murder by Nam Maleque, head of the global telecommunications monopoly, Machines All Nations, propels Frances find they have a lot in common and through Frances' psychic powers and shared adventures, in an often cruel and indifferent world, an unbekindable bond is produced - a pact to 3-4-Ever.

ADRENALINE JUNKIES
(TELE-FEATURE)
Production company: LIBERTY/BEYOND DISTRIBUTION COMPANY
Producer: 14/6-12/11/96

PRINCIPAL CREDITS
Director: GEOFF BENTON
Producer: MICHAEL CAULFIELD
Scriptwriter: SIMON NICHOL

Executive producer: MARK BORLAND
Scriptwriter: TONY CAVANAUGH
Script editor: LOUISE MORE
Director of photography: JAY THOMAS
Production designer: PETE LAWSON
Producer: ROGER MASON

GOVERNMENT AGENCY INVESTMENT
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION FUND

Staff in the emergency department of a large hospital have become addicted to the adrenalin rush they experience while dealing with life-and-death emergencies.

GOOD GUYS, BAD GUYS
(TELE-FEATURE)
Production company: BEYOND DISTRIBUTION COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION FUND
Producer: 17/6/96 - 6/11/96

PRINCIPAL CREDITS
Director: FRANCO DI CHIARA

CAST
HEATHER MITCHELL
Children's fantasy adventure series.

THE TERRITORIANS
(TELE-FEATURE)
Production company: ROBERT BROWNING PRODUCTIONS
Network premiere: SEVEN
Production: 9/4/96 - 14/5/96

PRINCIPAL CREDITS
Director: MICHAEL O'FARRELL
Producer: ROBERT BROWNING
Scriptwriter: TED ROBERTS

GOVERNMENT AGENCY INVESTMENT
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION FUND

The story of a young Aboriginal policeman and the city detective is forced to work while investigating a series of murders in the outback.

WHIPPING BOY
(TELE-FEATURE)
Production company: JNP FILMS (NOMINEE)
Network: TEN
Production: 15/4/96 - 11/5/96

PRINCIPAL CREDITS
Director: DI WREV
Producer: RAY ALCHIN
Executive producer: DAVE WURST
Scriptwriter: PETER YELDHAM

GOVERNMENT AGENCY INVESTMENT
COMMERCIAL TELEVISION PRODUCTION FUND

Cast
REBECCA ABBAS

LOVE STORY BETWEEN FOUR PEOPLE AND TWO COUNTRIES

See previous issues for details on:

ACADEMY BEAST
BEVERLY HILLS FAMILY ROBINSON
BLINKY BILL'S EXTRAORDINARY EXCURSION
HALIFAX F.P.
HOUSE GANG
KLINE'S BOTTLE
NEIGHBOURS
PACIFIC DRIVE
PLACE OF THE DEAD
PLASMO
POLICE RESCUE
THE SILVER BRUMBY
TABALUGA: THE LITTLE GREEN DRAGON
US AND THEM
WATER RATS
WHITE LIES

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**tenebrious ten**

**HOW CAN YOU LIKE A FILM THAT FORGETS ITS OWN COLON? SOME, IT SEEMS, DO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie Description</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<td>La Cérémonie (A Judgement in Stone)</td>
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<td>Cry Hall</td>
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<td>The Crossing Guard</td>
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<td>Dead Man</td>
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<td>Il Decameron (re-issue)</td>
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<td>Les Enfants du Paradis (re-issue)</td>
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<td>Fargo</td>
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<td>Flipper</td>
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<td>Flirting with Disaster</td>
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<td>Gauzin Mandit (French Twist)</td>
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<td>How to Make an American Quilt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lillian's Story</td>
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<td>A Midwinter's Tale</td>
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<td>Les Misérables de Victor Hugo</td>
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<td>Mission Impossible</td>
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<td>Orthello</td>
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<td>Primal Fear</td>
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<td>Twister</td>
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<td>Video Fool for Love</td>
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<td>Vacant Possession</td>
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<tr>
<td>War Stories</td>
<td>7</td>
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*A panel of ten film reviewers ranked a selection of the latest releases on a scale of 0 to 10, the latter being the optimum rating (a dash means not seen). The critics are: Bill Collins (Evening); Barbara Creed (The Age); Sandra Hall (The Bulletin); Paul Harrre (SBS); "The Green Guide"; The Age); Stan James (The Adelaide Advertiser); Adrian Martin (The Age; "The Week in Film"; Radio National); Scott Murray; Tom Ryan (The Sunday Age); David Stratton (Variety SBS); and Evan Williams (The Australian).*
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