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### Focus

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by Mary Colbert

With its epic love story, exotic locations, pedigree actors and acclaimed director, The English Patient was high on John Seale's wish-list

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**A House is a Castle**

TV's Frontline team makes the bold leap to the big screen.

**Peter Malone** finds *The Castle* a seriously funny little gem. Self-financed, low-budget and very now, the film is an ingenious addition to a great tradition.

PAGE 10
Dear Editor,

There is nothing like a bit of encouragement to create confidence. I wish someone told Film Queensland that before the October 1996 article in Cinema Papers about the state of the film industry in Queensland.

In this article, ironically called "Finding A Voice", employees of Film Queensland were quoted as saying that "our problem here is that we don't have any experienced producers, writers and directors.

Really?

I am not sure if this was a misquote; however, the impression from a body which is supposed to both promote and nurture film and television makers is that Queensland is full of inexperienced film and television makers.

I can't speak for the producers and directors, but, in regard to the writers, the Australian Writers' Guild's records tell a very different story.

They reveal that Queensland has quite a community of experienced writers, especially in television. It is always going to be harder outside the Sydney-Melbourne nexus to get credits and recognition, but that does not mean that the experience of those lying outside of Sydney or Melbourne should be belittled. These writers are busting a gut in trying to obtain credits, and attitudes such as the one quoted above do not help in this quest to build a stronger Queensland industry.

I hope that Film Queensland in its efforts to promote the industry remember that there is a swag of writers with hundreds of hours of television credits between them, living in the same time zone, in the same STD area and in the same state. The list is too long to go into in a letter like this, but is available for Film Queensland. A little read of the Encore directory would reveal the same story.

A bit more encouragement and recognition of the talent that is in Queensland would not go awry the next time the future of the Queensland industry is discussed.

Simon Lake
Executive Director, Australian Writers' Guild

CORRIGENDA

In Peter Galvin's review of Jerry McGuire (Tom Cruise) in Cameron Crowe's Jerry Mcguire.

Dear Editor,

In The Well is Samantha Lang, whose name was incorrectly listed in the "Introduction" of Cinema Papers, No. 114, February 1997. The Well, which is produced by Sandra Levy, marks Lang's feature début. In Peter Galvin's review of Idol Box in the same issue (p. 38), a transcription error has the police talking to Ken (Ben Mendelsohn) and Mick (Jeremy Sims), rather than stalking them. The sentence should read:

The boys' guilelessness is a stark contrast to the terror and efficiency of the Laughing Boy (Andrew S. Gilbert), a successful and prolific armed robber of suburban banks, who is stalked throughout the film by a pair of cops, Leanne (Deborah Kennedy) and Eric (Gaume Blundell), who are both ruthless and cynical (and amusingly self-aware).
Tom, Dick and Henry.

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Gore Vidal and Hollywood

MARGARET SMITH lists the major plot points of Gore Vidal's recent visit to the Sydney Writers' Festival

H e came, he saw, he conquered. At least that was how most of us saw him when he talked in Sydney's Town Hall. Here he was, the novelist, the screenwriter (who's almost credited with the screenplay for Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ†), man of letters, the polemicist, the candidate for America's presidency, the friend to the Kennedys and the Whitlams, and the man who wanted to direct features.

Gore Vidal, despite the aristocratic demeanour and the villa in Italy, is a self-made man who earned his living the hard way. He's written twenty-four novels (the most famous and notorious was Myra Breckinridge, about a Hollywood actor who undergoes a sex change), several screenplays, six plays, numerous works of non-fiction (including his autobiography, Palimpsest: A Memoir). Several of his novels have been made into films, and he spent ten years in Hollywood (1954-1964). His big regret was not directing his screenplay, "The Death of Billy the Kid", as a movie, which was made into The Left-Handed Gun, and, later and better, into a television movie starring Val Kilmer. Even his years in Hollywood (1954-) have to sell themselves to the public. I was the last contract writer in Hollywood. I worked for MGM and had an office in the Thalberg building. It was actually F. Scott Fitzgerald's old office. The building reminded me of something. Then I thought, "It's The White House."

What is your attitude to Hollywood? Washington and Hollywood have a symbiotic relationship. Politicians have to sell themselves to the public. I was the last contract writer in Hollywood. I worked for MGM and had an office in the Thalberg building. It was actually F. Scott Fitzgerald's old office. The building reminded me of something. Then I thought, "It's The White House."

There were all these long corridors with offices with names on the doors. There's a natural relationship between actors and politicians: they're both performers. During the First World War, even President Woodrow Wilson sent a rep to Hollywood to make sure we went into war on the side of the British. There was a lot of anti-British feeling at that time. Wilson saw films as great manipulators. Today, if an actress like Barbra Streisand likes you, she can raise a couple of million dollars in one night!

What did you think of Ronald Reagan as an actor? I auditioned Ronald Reagan for one of my plays. Reagan was like a boy dressed up as a man, and I turned him down for the part of the President in my play! When Reagan turned up at a party, he was so boring that we'd all leave.

What do you think of Bill Clinton? Clinton's the brightest man we've had as President for several years. But it'll be very hard for him in the next four years. The Clintons are scared to death of the power of American corporations. They've been neutered and don't be surprised what you will read in the press.

What did you learn about screenwriting? I learnt how to become a Hollywood hack you had to put a child in jeopardy on page three.

What's your advice to Australian feature film directors? You should stay home and do your movies. Don't go to Hollywood, otherwise you'll become part of the cartel.

Have you been doing any acting lately? I was just in a movie with New Zealand director Andrew Niccol. He's a friend of Peter Weir and he's very talented.

In America, we don't have any directors like Nicholson - only Tim Robbins. It was a pleasure acting in Bob Roberts (1992), where I sort of played myself.

Have you any theories on Kennedy's assassination? It was a mob killing. Kennedy's family was part of the mob, especially his grandfather, who was mayor of Boston. Oliver Stone's movie helped create more interest. There's a new book coming out by Seymour Hersh that's going to be very important.

When I met Jack Kennedy through Jackie, to whom I was related, he was very droll and about the best company I've ever had.

Postscript

A few days after the Town Hall lecture, Bob Ellis was lucky enough to have lunch with Vidal, and wasn't surprised to find him a charming, erudite and entertaining man. Vidal admitted that the Hollywood "Wise Hack" that he wrote about in the American press was not a "Deep Throat" but a "convenient fiction" that Vidal invented for himself, so he could say anything!

He still wants to write movies and, when Vidal heard Scorsese was doing The Age of Innocence (1993), he phoned and told him, "I will write the script for nothing. You're going to get it wrong, I know those people." Vidal says, "Scorsese was in his no script stage, so he wasn't interested."

Vidal had a little more success working with Fellini on Fellini's Roma (1972), though the shoot proved to be somewhat absurd. Ellis relates that Vidal called Fellini "Fred" to his face, and was always asking him on set for directions. Eventually, "Fred" said to him, "Take a deep breath before you speak!"

Ellis adds that when Vidal asked Fellini, "Where are my lines?", Fellini answered, "Say anything." Vidal tried to say something appropriate, but no one on set took any notes. Then, "A year later I got a call to do some post-synching. I had to do it in three languages and had to try and remember what I'd said!"

What an opportunity Hollywood missed by not letting Gore Vidal direct. He was friends with Orson Welles and the two lunched often. Now that would have been a wonderful thing, not letting Gore Vidal direct. He was with Orson Welles and the two lunched often. Now that would have been a wonderful thing, not letting Gore Vidal direct.


‡ See Palimpsest: A Memoir, p. 295.

Gore Vidal in 1964.
uring an interview several years ago, Australian director of photography John Seale was asked about the kind of films still on his wish-list. "I would love to have done an Indiana Jones, a big adventure like that in exotic locations, or a David Lean kind of movie where I had three days to light every shot", he said with the kind of boyish enthusiasm that, at 54, still pervades his work.

The English Patient - which has brought him global accolades, including the prestigious American Society of Cinematographers Award (rarely accorded to 'aliens') and a nomination for an Academy Award, his third after Witness (Peter Weir, 1985) and Rain Man (Barry Levinson, 1988) - perfectly fitted the bill.

A war and espionage story, adapted from Michael Ondaatje’s Booker Prize-winning novel, not only delivered the adventure tale Seale craved, but in the same package espionage, a love epic (actually two love stories), exotic locations of the African desert, Cairo and Tuscany in northern Italy, a brilliant screenplay and highly communicative director, a cast of pedigree actors and an extraordinarily committed, talented crew.

Seale: For a long time, people - audiences - have been hanging out for a good old-fashioned love story set in magnificent surroundings that take them on an emotional roller-coaster that makes them laugh and weep. It’s time for that sort of film to make a comeback.

Instinctively, Seale knew it from the moment he began reading the book that had been left for him at a Los Angeles hotel by independent producer Saul Zaentz. From the time he started reading, Seale was hooked: I tried to respond as an objective observer but, involuntarily almost, those images started leaping out at me: geographical, geological, meteorological, aesthetic.

So taken was he with the book and the fact that Zaentz was asking him to come on board so early - without a script, cast or director in place - that Seale even broke his own rule of selecting projects: on the strength of screenplay and performers.

Seale had worked with Zaentz on The Mosquito Coast (Peter Weir, 1986) and had enormous admiration for his films: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest (Milos Forman, 1975), The Unbearable Lightness of Being (Philip Kaufman, 1988), Amadeus (Milos Forman, 1988). He was prepared to take a risk; he knew it would be an interesting project.

Indirectly colouring his decision was a certain disillusionment with the status of DOP on several projects, where merely a technician was required to execute directorial demands from a monitor, lacking the creative contribution on which Seale thrives:
Once a director relied on his technicians and you all got together and discussed the pace, rhythm, continuity. Now, so often a Hollywood director will tell you how to frame a shot from looking at the monitor, working on a momentary whim, and, if you question it, there’s trouble. It’s interesting to note how many big American studio films are nominated this year. Maybe better pictures are coming from the independent sector because they haven’t abandoned the communication process.

The English Patient’s 33-week shoot would push his ingenuity and creative resourcefulness to the limits. Seale, an enormous admirer of David Lean’s Lawrence of Arabia (1962), which he saw six times, had encountered his own desert love epic.

The book’s convoluted narrative (“though I loved it for that as well”), with complex time (flashback) and geographical cross-overs, challenged the adaptation. A screenplay that distilled the book’s essence and geographical cross-overs, challenged the adaptation.

Part of the discussions with Anthony [Minghella] was how to make northern Italy look very different to Tunisia. We found out that Italy would be under the plough at the time, and we were concerned that crop-less it would look like the desert. Because of the convoluted nature of the story, there was a need in the visual sense to make the two places look different.

We talked about using desaturation in Italy. It’s a bad time for Hana: friends dying around her, the English patient is dying, Caravaggio [Willem Dafoe] puts hard word on her. So, we thought it’d be lovely if this was black and white. Then, as the memory of the English patient blossoms, colour starts to seep in. It would have been much holier to go black and white and a sensational way of doing it. I was going to desaturate 50 per cent, or take 50 percent of the colour out, but the studios don’t want to be as extreme, to be quite that bold.

We used corals [coral filters] to enhance the colour of the sand in Tunisia – some copper-toned, much of it dirty-coloured – and a little bit of warming filters, adding little touches – like a bright yellow plane – to make Tunisia a very bright place compared to the sombreness of Italy.

How did you resolve the convoluted nature of the book, the connections between the pre-war African sequences and the Italian late-war sequences?

In the initial script, Anthony did have a lot of complex cross-overs and I used to get twitchy, but as you can see we streamlined those. I believe the simpler the transition, the more profound. The alternating colour scheme played a key role in establishing the past/present narrative strands.

There were a lot of long slow dissolves which are very old-fashioned, but they worked remarkably well in this film. This is where the beauty of the editing came into it. We were passing from one scene to another, but so slowly, almost by osmosis, as Almásy slowly went back to the past with his mind lingering back into the desert. That came out of pre-production and post-production discussions. I was very nervous and felt the story should roll along with the people, but they found places where these long dissolves worked brilliantly.

The fragmented nature of the story, consisting of hundreds of short scenes, must have been one of your challenges?

It was a formidable task: the continuity of light, continuity of cutbacks, shooting scenes out of sequence in the desert in winter, with its short days.

How did shooting in the desert in winter affect your use of light?

That was an advantage because it allowed early morning scenes to be shot at midday. During winter in the desert, the sun is very low, which gives you a lovely crosslight. In summer, the toplight can produce awful shadows.

A lot of your work is set on exotic locations: Beyond Rangoon [John Boorman, 1994], The Mosquito Coast, Gorillas in the Mist [Michael Apted, 1988]. Do you prefer location work and was that one of this project’s drawbacks?

The two locations – and the juxtapositions – were extremely appealing, but I try to vary my films all the time. I love location work, but I’ll often follow...
it up with an interiors film to avoid being type-cast, and to keep the challenges going. I like that mixture of control/lack of control. It's important to go for those challenges to avoid complacency. It's too easy to fall into set patterns.

You often select films based solely on casting in order to work with good performers. You accepted *Children of a Lesser God* (Randa Haines, 1986) because you wanted to work with William Hurt, for instance. How important was this choice of actors: Kristin Scott Thomas, Juliette Binoche, Ralph Fiennes and Willem Dafoe?

It was superb casting; I was delighted that they were pedigree actors, not just big-name Hollywood stars. But the studio, Twentieth Century Fox, objected: they wanted major names. Anthony and Saul adamantly stuck to their guns and the studio dumped the project in pre-production. We went home from Italy but three days later they asked us to come back. Harvey Weinstein of Miramax read the script and was determined to save the project. But $US27 million is beyond the average Miramax budget, so he had to consult Joe Roth at parent company Disney, who gave the nod for the rescue package. I have to say, Miramax really gave us total creative freedom. And now, of course, they're smiling all the way to the Oscars.

Not only were they superb performers but, from a lighting point of view, it was a joy to work with beauties like Juliette, who has the most opalescent skin; you don't have to put a light on her and she glows. Kristin has that beautiful English skin, also easy to light, but we gave her a desert glow with a touch of make-up.

To what extent did the people-first philosophy influence your compositions?

Anthony and I discussed the fact that the desert, ultimately, is not a performer in this picture. It is the proper — and colourful — stage for the characters. We deliberately avoided the temptation to lapse into travelogue or picture-postcard photography. It's not my rôle to be overpowering with these visuals. I never panned the landscape unless it continued the storyline. Each image was always connected to the story. Compositions kept the people up front.

We didn't want to keep sign-posting: "Look where we are. This is Tunisia and isn't it beautiful"? It was to keep the audience running, too. I've always believed that the human eye can scan that frame very quickly. So why start on something distracting while the emotional threads are dying? I loved the way Anthony worked that in post-production with straight cuts, bold and lean, except for those long dissolves which suggest we're lingering on that moment.

There was also a logistical reason for minimizing indulgence in the landscape. The script was running so long that we knew we shouldn't waste any time panning across the desert, tilting from a sandhill or putting an aerial shot in for the sake of it. We slowly evolved the visual look that would always be part of the background; we put characters in the foreground and kept the story rolling along. There were times when it was tempting to weaken, but Anthony and I would rap each other's knuckles.

Weren't you tempted to use anamorphic lenses to exploit the desert landscape?

The desert with that beautiful flat horizon is perfectly suited to an anamorphic lens, but we opted for 1.85:1. It's better for final editing choices and you avoid some butchering of the film for television. This was a film about people in the desert, not the desert with people. Anamorphic would have attracted too much attention to the surroundings.

In your interview with Jean Oppenheimer for *American Cinematographer*, you commented on the fact that you don't like obvious camera movement. Is that a general trait of your work or particular to this film?

I love to work fast and I use the zoom as much as possible as a 'fixed' lens. I try to hide the movement of the zoom in a pan, dolly or track so that the audience is never aware of the movement. I prefer to think the camera is moving to enhance the physical positioning of actors within the scene or set, and is being used to heighten some movement by the actor or machinery, not just to track around somebody for the sake of creating visual energy because maybe the words aren't good enough. That worries me a lot: I'd rather the actors move.

I think they appreciate that freedom. Robert Duvall came up to me at the end of *The Paper* (Ron
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Howard, [1994] and said: “You’re not bad, you know. You never stopped me from walking anywhere I wanted to walk.” Actually, at the time I nearly died when he started to do it because he wasn’t lit at all. And then I realized he looked great in silhouette because the words he was saying at that moment – his daughter refuses to speak to him because of the way he treated his ex-wife – he’s isolating himself in the world of the past, old regrets. So I thought, “Let’s leave him in black-and-white silhouette.”

Little things like that I call lucky mistakes. It’s not our job to stop the actors’ doing what they feel they want to do; our job is to follow them through.

A lot of great cinematographers may disagree. Michael Ballhaus, as in *The Color of Money* [Martin Scorcese, 1986], loves doing 360° [shots] around actors because he feels it creates visual energy. It’s a matter of personal taste. I actually find it boring. If the words are right, and the editor wants cutting power, he’s got to cut into the tracking, which means you have to track on the person and the backgrounds are just blurring.

I honestly feel that sometimes it’s important to let the words drip off the screen. In a good script and performance, there’s energy in the words. And if you’re cutting it correctly in your mind, and the performance is right, the audience will be transfixed. Moving the camera can distract both audiences and actors.

**Did you take any Australian crew with you?**

For budgetary reasons I took only one American gaffer, with whom I’d worked on several pictures. Saul Zaents asked me whether it would be possible to use Italian crew. By the time you bring in Australians or Americans for hotel rooms, per diems, transport, etc., it’s a lot of money that’s not going on screen.

I had worked with Italians before and agreed, asking to bring just one gaffer. Because I was lighting and operating, you need somebody beside you with whom you have an understanding, a shorthand, especially in more difficult conditions of night shots and sandstorms.

The Italians were very good, but I tend to work fast and I’d tend to lose those guys very quickly, especially early in the shoot when they couldn’t understand my Australian accent or idioms. Having to stop and explain was frustrating at times, but, once they caught on, things were fine.

Some Americans are astounded at the results without using an English-speaking crew. They can’t go anywhere without their guys. I believe deep down there’s a lack of confidence if you can’t go and work with other technicians.

I understand your attempts at communicating in Italian led to some humorous situations.

After the first few days they came to me and said, “Mr John, English we can understand. American we can understand. But not Australian.” They asked me to speak slower and I tried to learn the Italians’ expressions for main marks, like “Walk forward, up, down, left, right”, etc.

On one occasion, I wanted an Italian actress to walk forward, and initially asked her in English. She obviously didn’t catch on, so I decided to try Italian. I remembered that the expression sounded like “calamari” – actually, it is “caminar li” – so, frustrated at being slowed down, I urgently yelled, “Francesca, calamari, calamari”, whereupon everyone just broke up. They thought I was giving them a lunchbreak signal.

You love to work fast. Does that sense of urgency come from your early training in Australia?

I love to shoot fast because the director and actors have their energy up, producers love it because of schedules. When we shot *Rain Man*, we finished a week ahead of schedule, and had an extra week to re-shoot, came in US$1.5 million under budget and got nominated. On *Witness*, we wrapped a day ahead of schedule. Our producer, Ed Feldman, just couldn’t believe it. When word got out it was, “Get those Australians!”

It’s part of our heritage of working on low budgets, short schedules. We had to move fast, otherwise we didn’t get it. And we had to shoot as much as possible in natural light.

I operated for Russell Boyd and Don McAlpine and learnt from them. Bruce Beresford would say, “I want to do the reverse [angle],” and, by the time I moved the camera, Don was over ready to shoot. I couldn’t even move my camera fast enough and he was still beating me on lighting.

Richard Dreyfuss said on *Stakeout* [John Badham, 1987]: “I can’t believe how fast you are: it’s only ten minutes in turn-around. On my last film, it was two hours. I’d go and have a sleep and couldn’t wake up when I came back. You’re so fast I’ve got to stay on set, and the buzz and energy of the crew working is adrenalin-pumping.”

But, generally, the trend now is to go slower. Cameras are taking their privilege, saying they need the full two hours. I don’t do that. Life’s too short. I’m not going to waste time deliberately trying to do the most perfect body shot, taking two-and-a-half hours to light it; you only do six shots per day maximum. Bugger that. On *Dead Poets Society* [Peter Weir, 1989], they had 21 sets-ups a day, a lot by American standards. But then Steve Mason on *Strictly Ballroom* [ Baz Luhrmann, 1992] averaged 30.

On *The English Patient*, we had short days but we didn’t need more time. Because of the communications and our storyboards, we knew exactly what we were going to shoot. A lot of directors nowadays cover themselves with so many angles, just diffusing energy.

Are you, like some other cinematographers, influenced much by painting?

I look at art books and when I go to art galleries, dragged along by my wife Louise, I do look at the lighting. Vermeer certainly was an influence on *Witness*. There’s a profile shot of Harrison Ford in bed with the bullet hole and the old men in black looking down at him. We designed that so, at his worst, the curtains are lowered and come up as he recovers to flood the room with light as a visual metaphor.

But, generally, if you’re going to combine work with reality of light, then you have to throw all that out the door. Some of the guys do that and it all looks soft and beautiful, but it’s got no drama, no evil in it somehow. It can’t just be lovely pictures. It’s like using smoke. I haven’t used it since *Witness*, when Peter suggested we didn’t because everybody else does – and it ends up looking like a Ridley Scott movie.

You directed *Till There Was You* and went back to photography. Are you still interested in directing?

Oh yeah, I’d be a liar if I said no. I get a lot of scripts, but unfortunately the ones I’ve received in the past 12 months are absolute crap.

Since Jan de Bont did *Speed* [1994] and *Twister* [1996], he opened the door for cameramen to direct action films, and the impression out there is that a cameraman as a director will inject visual energy into the film and make it a huge success. That may be true, but they’re not necessarily the kind of films I’d be interested in directing.

It’s very exciting to have control of a film.
Frontline forever changed the way we think of television current affairs. Now, the Melbourne-based team has turned its collective wit and energies into the low-budget feature, The Castle. This time around, the target is the sacred quarter-acre and its place within the Constitution.

Peter Malone reports.

The old, exclusive-language dictum states that "a man's home is his castle". Hal David also wrote the lyric that "a house is not a home", but was referring to a different kind of house from that of the Kerrigan family of The Castle. Their house is theirs; they have built it, extended it (with or without council permits), filled it with their stories and beloved kitsch knick-knacks, and have made it a home. A home is invaluable, priceless. Despite government or corporations making valuations of the Kerrigan house, they can't offer enough money in compensation or really appreciate what a home means to the ordinary Australian family.

It is not a new concept for a film, but the Frontline team have taken it and made it their own, an often hilarious comedy, a feel-good challenge of authorities by "little" Australians, "battlers", with a final appeal to the Australian Constitution that preserves our rights.

Team-work is important for Jane Kennedy, Tom Gleisner, Santo Cilauro and Rob Sitch, a "strange dynamic" where the four of them never write the same script. The process for The Castle ran something like this: discussion, sitting round a table, with a time limit of not more than two or three hours, throwing up various ideas and, finally, choosing the idea of a family living near an airport; two people putting up their hands to write it, going away and writing it for two weeks without consulting the other pair, so that they can listen with completely fresh ears and offer comment about directions, inclusions and omissions; the original pair go back and finish the screenplay; and fine-tuning after that. Everybody then takes certain roles: whoever feels closest to the performance side of it says, "I'll direct it"; someone else says, "I'll shoot it"; the others say, "I can cast it", or, "I can edit it".

Santo Cilauro did the shooting: You can call it the shooting. It was just basically holding the camera and getting the action. So, yes, if you call that doing the shooting. I don't know what style it was. It was a storytelling style. The only thing that was important was the story. Therefore, "What is the simplest way to tell a story?" I don't think there was a tracking shot. There wasn't anything; probably about two panning shots, a couple of tilts or something like that. That was about as much as the camera moved.

Rob Sitch was director. The team had taken it in turns to direct Frontline. In the time constraints for The
Castle, Rob Sitch was considered by the team as a good and fast communicator, with a good eye for the clock, a good overview and someone who knows what is important or not. He is not pedantic, or seems to be “the least pedantic of the group”, so “it was the perfect thing for him to direct”.

It seemed an obvious question: How long from initial idea to a rough cut? But the answer was not so obvious at all: five weeks, including two weeks writing, ten days shooting, five days for rough cut...

Cilauro: The fact that we were putting in our own money meant that we had to stick to that timetable. If we were going to do it on our own terms, then we had to do it with our own money. So, we worked backwards: How much money do we have? There are four of us, so we pooled as much money as we could. Basically, we were told by our fifth, silent and non-creative partner – who’s just as creative when it comes to money – “You can shoot for ten days, probably eleven, and that’s when the catering runs out!”

Frontline has been one of the great successes of Australian television comedy. The Castle raises questions about the Australian sense of humour and Australian jokes. The team have been writing and performing comedy for radio and television for so long they know they are not going to get all of their audience laughing at the same jokes. The difficulty with The Castle, according to Santo Cilauro, was pulling out jokes. Giving a sense of the story was important because, if the audience does not follow the story, they are not going to laugh at the jokes. The audience has to believe in the characters and in the situations they find themselves in in order to laugh at the jokes. If the writers put in too many jokes, then the audience will remove itself from the story. That becomes counterproductive to the jokes and the audience will stop laughing.

The Castle works well from the opening, with teenage Dale Kerrigan (Stephen Curry) beginning the narration as if he is in class telling the story of what he did over his summer holiday. The tone is Ocker deadpan – in fact, the whole screenplay revels in deadpan understatement – suitable for introducing the home and its inhabitants (except for the oldest brother, who is in Pentridge). Idiosyncrasies, speech patterns and accents, vocabulary (and, sometimes, its lack), class, work, family and relationship issues are all put before the audience quickly. Then, just as one fears that this style, funny as it is, might be the whole film, the plot begins with the arrival of the property valuer and the dramatic tensions are under way.

While there has been a movie tradition of period dramas and bush adventures (and “horse operas”), Australians live on the fringe of the continent, in the cities and, especially, in the suburbs. By the mid-'90s, there is a strong line-up of suburban comedies which would include Spotswood (Mark Joffe, 1992), Nirvana Street Murders (Aleksi Vellis, 1991), Strictly Ballroom (Baz Luhrmann, 1992), Muriel’s Wedding (Paul J. Hogan 1994), Malcolm (Nadia Tass, 1986), The Big Steal (Nadja Tass 1990), Mr Reliable (Nadia Tass, 1997), Idiot Box (David Caesar, 1997). If there has been a formula for box-office success at home in Australia, it seems to be to show, humorously, the ordinary character, “the little battler”, somewhat on the margin, who is a “lovable Ocker”, a rebel “again the government”, who gets the audience onside so that they can share the victory over the authorities. This is definitely the case for the Kerrigan family’s fighting for their castle against the corporations, the governments and the courts.

The filmmakers wanted the film to be simple (because of their resources), to be about home and family, which are the simplest things, “as basic as it gets”. They wondered how someone protects their home and their family. By setting the film next to the airport, it meant the suburbs and interactions with neighbours. The filmmakers are also conscious that family and friends in the audience remark that
characters remind them of the writers’ parents, or that the writers have included stories told them about next-door neighbours. This means The Castle is based on ordinary experiences, from a quite mundane, lower-to-middle-class background.

One of the difficulties with this kind of comedy is whether the audience is laughing at the characters or with them. Sitting at a preview in South Yarra and enjoying the comedy is a different experience from watching it at the multiplex at Airport West near where the Kerrigans live. The danger is that the film-makers and the audience are patronizing the battlers.

Cilauro:

It’s a difficult thing, a fine line. Sometimes I look at the film and think, “I hope people don’t think that we’re laughing at the family.” People say this, that and the other about the comedy in Frontline, but we like to think we’re all very mainstream in our senses of humour and our sensibilities.

It doesn’t concern me whether we are sitting in South Yarra watching the film and wondering whether we are a bit judgemental. I’m more concerned about what we do in the film and I think it’s not that at all. Even if, at the beginning, you think you are laughing at the Kerrigans “Look at this, look at the house...” — by the middle you are barbecuing for them. It doesn’t matter where they come from. They happen to be a family from the northern suburbs near the airport. But they are a family who have principles and who are judged in those terms.

Anybody tempted to be patronizing will be drawn into the film by Lawrence Hammill (Charles (Bud) Tingwell), the degree man who takes their cause and fights for them to the highest levels in the country.

There is a strong difference between the characters in Frontline and in The Castle. The Frontline characters are into self-deception, whereas the Kerrigan family is straightforward and sincere. The characters in Frontline “believe their own promos, they believe their own image, they’ve drunk too much of their own bathwater”. The Kerrigans have no image of themselves — even if they contribute strongly to the image Australians have of themselves and which many outsiders share.

A lot of the film’s detail came from the simple experience of asking a family who lived near Tullamarine whether they would like to live in a local motel while the film was shot in their house. As Rob Sitch, Santo Cilauro and the production designer Carrie Kennedy looked at the actual house, they got more and more ideas for the film, for particular sequences and set detail: the pool room, the backyard, the granny flat that looked like a kid’s cubbyhouse (which eventually becomes home to the Kerrigans’ greyhounds).

Cilauro:

My father is a lawyer in Sydney Road, Brunswick, so we used his office for Denis Dennis-to’s legal office. In fact, we used his office once, then the sun got in the way and it was too bright. I knew the chemist a couple of doors down, so I asked Rocky if we could move the sign on top of his window. So, if you watch, you’ll see it’s not the same place. When he crosses the road, it’s a different place. Depending where the sun was, we kept moving down the road.

While the plot might have a universality about it — and one remembers people fighting for their homes in many a movie; recently the cockroaches helped Joe against venal officials in Joe’s Apartment — it is the detail that makes The Castle distinctly Australian. The honeymoon couple telling stories about Thailand and the wonder of the meals and the movies on the plane (and the genuine $15 Rolex watch that the bloke at the beach sold them and is going to send the warranty by post), the meals at home, the bargains from The Trading Post (from ergonomic chairs to an overhead projector), and the raffia and pottery that mother makes.

The film also highlights aspects of what it is to be Australian, especially the optimism and niceness, the lovable ocker, the larrikin, the rebel individualist. It also takes shots at the greed of corporations and their disregard of the rights and feelings of individ-

Cilauro:

That’s a bit of an Achilles’ heel there. But we decided from the start to be unashamed. It was a test of nerve whether we kept that speech about the Aborigines in or not. We’re not concerned whether it works or not. We wanted to be unashamed about the emotion and what we think about a home. We didn’t want to pull back and say, “That’s a bit cute.” We knew we were going to come out of the film and say that we went a bit too far there. The Aboriginal speech is not the only place where we have gone too preachy. In retrospect, there are a few other places where we should have pulled back.

Apropos of remarks and prejudices, Santo Cilauro says that, although he can’t remember when he saw it, the biggest influence on the film was They’re a Weird Mob (Michael Powell, 1966):

It was so candid and straightforward, absolutely plain. I remember seeing plain shots of houses and people saying simple jokes, “Kings Bloody Cross” and that kind of thing. It felt like, “This is just a plain painting, not cubism; it’s nothing.”

And when I think of Australianism, I think of Ned Kelly, not because of his rebellion and becoming a hero, but because of the words, “Stand and deliver.” I like the fact that the film is simple: here it is, and there’s nothing more complicated than that. You either take it or you don’t take it — and, as an audience member, I appreciate having that choice.

Casting was done by Jane Kennedy. The team has a fascination for casting actors not seen much before, like the two sons, Dale and Steve (Anthony Simcoe), or for well-known actors doing something that they have not done before, like Michael Caton, Anne Tenney and Sophie Lee. Cilauro:

I think Michael was just sensational. It wasn’t just the performance; it was a very difficult task. He was in almost every single scene, a pressure shoot because we had to do it in such a short time. It was important that the person who was there all the time got on well with everybody and was patient. He was inspirational. It wasn’t as if it were a two-month shoot and he was really stretched. But he was stretched on the days, and they were long days. He was still chatting with people at the end of the day. If he had been one of those actors who kept saying, “I can’t do this” or “This is not what I want to do”, the film wouldn’t have been made.

With The Castle completed, the team is now in a venture with Roadshow for two more films, which is what we dearly love because this film was not one we were sitting on for seven years. We didn’t want to create the greatest film in the world with our first film. We want to build to it and, the best way to do it, is just to get it done and don’t look back.
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Ian Baker is one of many Australian DOPs to find success both at home and abroad. Baker has not only shot all of Fred Schepisi's features, but he has also found time to work with some significant American directors, most notably with James Foley on the adaptation of John Grisham's *The Chamber*.

While Grisham has publicly voiced a preference for *A Time To Kill* (Joel Schumacher, 1996), many readers consider *The Chamber* to be his finest, a sombre, unsettling account of how a young lawyer, Adam Hall, attempts to save his grandfather, Sam Cayhall, from the gas chamber. What makes the book, and the film, so confronting is that Sam Cayhall (Gene Hackman) is a redneck member of the KKK, and guilty of much.

How were you chosen for *The Chamber*?

Unlike most international DOPs, I don't have an agent. I just wait for that direct call. I was chosen to do *The Chamber*, I guess, because somebody saw my work and the phone rang. I flew over to the States and had a bit of a chat to the people. Things worked out and I was working on the project. I hadn't worked with the director, James Foley, before, but we talked a fair bit, he liked what I had done and we hit it off.

While James was interested in photography, he didn't take a large part in it. I designed the style and the sequences, while James looked after the actors. It is a challenge working with somebody when you are not only photographing the picture but you are designing it for them as well. I like to be that involved in a project. A lot of directors design and structure what they want, and all you do for them is light the shots. Ultimately, the way I like to work most is when it is a collaboration. The style of set-up should be a collaboration between the director of photography and the director. *The Chamber* was a very harmonious shoot and it really flowed along. Some shoots are not harmonious; there is a performer or a crew member who doesn't fit in. But this was very smooth-going all the way, which was just as well because it was a hard, long, difficult shoot, particularly working in a prison.

How was it working in such an environment, near prisoners on death row?

It was tough. When we first went there to survey, our part of the prison was occupied. It was rather scary walking down the aisle next to real prisoners in the maximum security unit [MSU]. Then you got to the end of this row of cells and there was the gas chamber and the lethal-injection table. The reality of that hitting you in the face was quite intense. When we went back to film, the place was cleared out and we had the MSU to ourselves. But still it was pretty stark. Those tiny concrete cubicles with a metal bed and a metal toilet bowl, which these guys are locked in for 23 hours a day, are pretty scary. Certainly you don't ever want to be in there yourself.

We worked at the actual prison for three or four weeks. It was pretty hard because there were all the
restrictions on what we could or couldn't do there. The security was tough on technicians, like grips, who need screw-drivers and knives and saws and that sort of thing to do their job. All of this stuff was confiscated and check-listed.

The prison is a constrained location, particularly the interview room. This has led to some interesting shot-making. In the first meeting between Adam Hall [Chris O'Donnell] and Sam Cayhall, you dramatically highlight the slightly out-of-focus mesh grill between them, and the camera stays on either side. At the next meeting, they move along to an open 'window'. In the third meeting, the camera turns through 90 degrees at times to actually look down each side of the interview room. In other words, the room becomes less claustrophobic and the colours match exactly the prison.

Yes, The Chamber is very much a talking-head movie. I calculated that we would spend 20-25 minutes of screen-time in this one square, bland, characterless, paint-chipped set and was aware of the potential of its becoming visually boring.

So, for each time we came back to the interview room, I designed a slightly different look. I used longer lenses and made it look more eerie, which helped you get more and more involved with the two players. But it is subtle. It couldn't be too much or it would dominate the actors.

There was quite a lot of discussion on removing the mesh grill so you got inside it, like you do with endless things that you photograph; you just cheat yourself inside of something. I had the set construction guys make the mesh 'wild' so we could shoot like that.

However, before we started shooting, I decided we couldn’t do that because the reality was that the lawyer was always on one side of the mesh and the prisoner was always on the other. You have to feel the other person through that mesh.

Because the mesh was 'wild', I could move it close to the camera or away from the camera to control its focal length. That way, you always sense it is there, but it doesn't take away from focusing on the person on the other side.

I'm very happy with the way that works in the film. You always know that you are looking at somebody through the mesh, but it never detracts from the eyes, particularly Gene Hackman's. You are always right inside his eyes, even though you are looking at him through mesh.

Apparent it was a bit tricky lighting Hackman's eyes, because they are so deep-set.

When we were shooting tests before we started filming, it became apparent that you had to see his eyes. Just about all of what Gene was doing was coming out of his eyes. He squints a lot deliberately in the film, and he always smokes prison-made cigarettes, which make him squint more.

I had to light his eyes, but I also always like to make actors feel comfortable. That is part of my job. For the first time ever, I had to constantly use a tiny high-powered light to get one pin-point of a glint coming out of his eyes. I asked him about it – he had obviously faced this thing before – and he was very good with this light. It must have been incredibly annoying having it in his face all the time, because it is a quite powerful little light.

You’d put it somewhere and you’d watch Gene feel his way into the light, which again is something I don’t like to have an actor do. You could tell if he was uncomfortable with it and you’d just move it a little bit. He’d just nod at you and you’d know it was right.

That is the great professionalism of somebody like Gene. They know what you are doing and they know why you are doing it, which is to make them look good.

I’m really happy with that in the film. Constantly you are inside Gene’s eyes, which is so important. It would have been terrible if you couldn’t see his eyes.

The colour scheme in the film is quite muted and stark.

The colours are real. About a quarter of the prison is the real prison in Mississippi, and about three-quarters is a set, filmed on stage at Universal, where the colours match exactly the prison.

But the colours are even muted when you go outside. Unlike a film like The Firm [Sydney Pollack, 1993], where the sumptuous lawyers’ offices have a wood-panelled sense of security and calm, there is not a second in The Chamber of retreat from the harshness. Even when you are in the city, or Adam’s aunt’s house, there is no escape from a very intense claustrophobic sense.

In the original script, there was quite a contrast between Chicago, where the young lawyer comes from, and Mississippi. He goes from a big, spacious, glass, high-rise city to the little towns of Mississippi, which is quite a different environment, and it is claustrophobic for him. But the Chicago part of the film got dissolved a little bit in the editing.

The film is also real because those places are real. None of those places are sets, except for some of the prison. The rest of it is really what it is like in Mississippi.

My aim was to make the movie real. In a sense, it is a documentary.

Did shooting on location present many more difficulties than shooting in sets?

Well, it is always easier to shoot on a set, because you get a full 12-hour day, you don’t have to worry about the weather, you don’t have to worry about wind, rain, changing light, clouds moving, continuity of anything, or noise. But there is a certain reality to shooting locations which I like. You can relate interiors to where the building is by seeing outside through windows and doors.

Whatever movie I’m working on, I try to get locations which have great looks outside.

When we filmed in Chicago, I fought to get buildings where you could see Chicago out of the windows. There is a restaurant sequence, and there is an office sequence. Whilst you are in an office which could have easily been a set, there is a very successful “feel” for what Chicago is about.

As for big locations, like the Capitol building in Jackson, you can’t build those things. They are too grand, too expensive, to build for a relatively small amount of screen-time.

Both studios and locations have their place. I love...
You said it was a happy shoot and you didn’t have a problem with any actors. How much does the personality of an actor affect what you do as a DOP?

The really great actors know and understand the technicalities of filmmaking. They are really great to work with. However, you do get a lot of people who just don’t know about light, or where a light is, or what you are doing for them. They are quite often really nice people, but some are a bit difficult to work with.

The real difficulty is when you are trying to make somebody look like they aren’t. There is always the inevitable brief from a director: “Oh, she has to look younger than she really is.” But that is what we do: we paint with light.

I have quite a reputation for making women look pretty on film. I’ve lit a lot of stars, but you can only perform so much magic.

It is the same with a lot of male actors. You are trying to make them different to how they are. It is difficult because it limits what you do and it limits what they can do on screen as well. Quite often you find yourself helping an actor with huge amounts of soft light, which inevitably slightly over-light the set.

The Chamber deals with controversial issues. How much does what a script is about affect whether you do it or not? Would you have shot The Chamber if you were ideologically opposed to the position it was taking?

No, I wouldn’t. I won’t work on violent movies, for instance. I’m very anti-violence and anti-violent movies. Seeing as how probably more than 50 percent of movies have inane violence in them, it cuts down my work choice quite considerably.

I wouldn’t work either on a television commercial that advertised smoking cigarettes, although I have done them in the past. I’m quite conscious of the fact that cigarette smoking is not good and I don’t work on it. I don’t work on movies to pay a mortgage, I work on movies to enjoy the experience.”

Some years ago, I felt I’d reached a point where I wanted to break that and let the world know that I’d love to do a movie here in Australia. So, if anybody wants to give me a call, they are welcome.

One unexpected project was the extra material Schepisi did for Fierce Creatures. It must have been challenging making the two-thirds of the movie which already existed.

It wasn’t that hard. We had a few little scenes that we had to match, but most of what we did were clean sequences. We had to keep up a style, but fortunately the style of the other part of the movie was similar to the way I work. I didn’t have to drastically change the way I would have done it.

Doing a re-shoot like that is not something I ever thought I would do. Fred was doing it for reasons known to himself, and he asked me if I would do it. Of course I said, “Yes.” It came at a nice time and it was fun working with all of those people.

We re-shot 40 percent of the movie, but we did it in some unbelievable amount of time. We shot at about twice the speed that we would normally shoot a feature film. But it all matched really well. The main problem there was make-up and making sure that hair was correct to match the shoot the year previously.

Looking back over your career as a DOP, do you have views on how you have evolved? Is that, in fact, something you ever think about?

Yes, though I’ve only really started to think about it recently.

Some years ago, I felt I’d reached a point where I knew it all, but you never know it all. Each project is different and you have a different way of thinking. Your mind tries to stay modernized. If styles change, your style naturally

**Actor Chris O’Donnell and director James Foley during the filming of The Chamber.**

[Image of Chris O’Donnell and James Foley]
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Robert Krasker was one of the world's finest directors of photography. Several film books and periodicals list him as the greatest of his era, his work lauded for its atmospheric lighting and expressionist techniques. He worked with Carol Reed, Joseph Losey, John Ford, Luchino Visconti, Robert Rossen, Anthony Mann and David Lean, among others. His credits include Henry V, Odd Man Out, The Third Man, Senso and Billy Budd. He won an Academy Award for cinematography in 1949. But in his home country he is hardly ever mentioned; there is no statue of him, no scholarship in his name, no wing of a film school dedicated to him.

**A Brief Career Sketch**

Robert Krasker was born on 21 August 1913 in Perth of French and Austrian parents. After being educated in Australia, he went overseas, first to Paris to study art. Krasker then travelled to Germany to explore optics at Photohandler Schüle, Dresden, where he became fascinated with the lighting of German expressionist cinema. He then returned to Paris and worked with Phil Tannura at Paramount Studios in Joinville. In 1932, Krasker went to England and worked under Georges Perinal at Korda’s London Films. There he was employed as assistant cameraman on many of the studio’s major films, including Things to Come (William Cameron, 1935), Joseph von Sternberg’s unfinished I, Claudius (1937) and The Thief of Bagdad (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell and Tim Whelan, 1940). He was then promoted to associate photographer on Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* (1942).

Krasker’s first films as director of photography were Maurice Elvey’s *The Lamp Still Burns*, Leslie Howard’s *The Gentle Sex* and Paul L. Stein’s *The Saint Meets the Tiger* (all 1943). The next year he shot Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V*, with its glorious colouring. This was followed by his highly-atmospheric black-and-white work on David Lean’s *Brief Encounter* (1944). By now, Krasker had established his mark as a highly-talented and individualistic lighting cameraman.

In 1947, Krasker teamed with Carol Reed to produce some of his most famous work: *Odd Man Out* (1947) and *The Third Man* (1949). According to Reed’s biographer, Nicholas Wapshott, Krasker’s most important contribution to the four films he made with Carol Reed was the power of the images he created by dramatic lighting, which came to be known as a Reed trademark. Reed enjoyed a reputation for versatility and competence, but he had established no identifiable style [...] In *Odd Man Out* Krasker created such a distinctive ‘look’ that the dark, expressionist-like scenes come to impose a style upon Reed, who denied any such personal intention. One aspect Krasker is known to have had a big input with was the unusual perspectives gained by using wide-angle lenses and a titled camera. On seeing *The Third Man*, Reed’s close friend William Wyler sent him a spirit-level and asked that it be used on the next picture.

Armand White in *Film Comment* writes:

Robert Krasker’s delineation of noir for British films [...] shows an identifiable vision, serving directors as unlike each other as David Lean and Carol Reed. After a continuing stream of excellent work in England, Krasker went in 1954 to Italy to shoot two films. The first was *Giulietta e Romeo* (Renato Castellani); the second was Luchino Visconti’s *Senso*, one of the most sumptuously photographed films in cinema, a brilliantly-controlled use of colour and light.

Krasker continued to work till 1980, the year before his death. One film was Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s *The Quiet American* (1958), which led Pauline Kael to crack that Krasker’s photography “may explain why this Mankiewicz film has some camera movement”.

Other major credits include Joseph Losey’s *The Criminal* (1960), Anthony Mann’s *El Cid* (1961), Peter Ustinov’s *Billy Budd* (1962) and William Wyler’s *The Collector* (1965; English photography only).

Australia has produced several DOPs of real note since Krasker, but none is arguably yet of his stature. That Krasker is rarely if ever mentioned in his home country is to this country’s shame. The inevitable justification, as with writer-director John Farrow, is that “he was only born here and worked exclusively overseas”. So what? Krasker was born Australian and always called himself such.

The definitive article on the degree to which Australian directors of photography take an Australian vision with them onto foreign productions is yet to be written (see interview with DOP Geoff Burton), but the dazzlingly atmospheric work of Robert Krasker might be an excellent place to start.

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3. Krasker left the film before the finish and was replaced by Giuseppe Rotunno.
1963  The Running Man (Carol Reed)
1964  The Fall of the Roman Empire (Anthony Mann)
1965  The Collector (William Wyler) – English photography only
1965  The Heroes of Telemark (Anthony Mann)
1966  The Trap (Sidney Hayers)
1976  /?et/ (Astrid Frank) – short
1980  Cry Wolf (Leszek Burzynski)

1934  Catherine the Great / The Rise of Catherine the Great (Paul Czinner) – asst cameraman
1934  The Private Life of Don Juan (Alexander Korda) – asst cameraman
1935  Things to Come (William Cameron Menzies) – asst cameraman
1936  Forget-Me-Not (U.S.: Forever Yours, Zoltan Korda) – asst cameraman
1936  Rembrandt (Alexander Korda) – camera operator
1936  Men are not Gods (Walter Reisch) – camera operator
1936  The Man Who Could Work Miracles (Lothar Mendes) – camera operator
1937  I, Claudius (unfinished, Josef von Sternberg) – camera operator
1937  The Squeaker (U.S.: Murder on Diamond Row, William K. Howard) – camera operator
1937  Over the Moon (Thornton Freeland) – uncredited exterior photography

1938  The Drum (U.S.: Drums, Zoltan Korda) – camera operator
1938  The Challenge (Milton Rosmer) – camera operator
1939  The Four Feathers (Zoltan Korda) – camera operator
1940  The Thief of Bagdad (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan) – camera operator
1941  Dangerous Moonlight (U.S.: Suicide Squadron, Brian Desmond Hurst) – camera operator
1942  Rose of Tralee (Germain Burger) – camera operator
1960  Insight (Anthony Asquith)
1962  Birdman of Alcatraz (John Frankenheimer) – began with original director Charles Crichton; replaced by Burnett Guffey; work uncredited

ROBERT KRASKER

As Other

1934  Catherine the Great / The Rise of Catherine the Great (Paul Czinner) – asst cameraman
1934  The Private Life of Don Juan (Alexander Korda) – asst cameraman

CINEMA PAPERS • APRIL 1997
The history of the development of Newsfront has been subject to much speculation, and there has been considerable debate as to whether the final credits for the writing adequately reflect the film's origins. The key collaborators include Philippe Mora, who claims authorship of the original idea, screenwriter Bob Ellis, whose credit was removed before the film's release, and producer David Elfick. All have their own version of the facts, and their accounts hint at creative conflict between producer, director and screenwriter.

The most detailed account of the claims for authorship of the original concept for the film is that provided by David Stratton, one of the most influential historians and opinion-makers of the Australian revival. Stratton spends many pages of his The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival (1980) establishing the genesis of the film idea and comparing these with the final credits which accompany the film. According to Stratton, the project emerged from discussions between David Elfick (then a publisher and surf film producer) and emigré Australian director Philippe Mora. Mora had commenced his feature career in London in the late 1960s with the low-budget film Trouble in Monopolis (1969) starring, amongst others, Germaine Greer and Richard Neville, and had made two compilation films for Goodtimes Enterprises: Swastika (1973), which had used newsreels and home movies of Hitler to make a portrait of the dictator's life, and Brother Can You Spare a Dime? (1975), which had combined Depression-era footage and scenes from Hollywood movies to portray the period. Mora returned to Australia in 1976 to make Mad Dog Morgan from his own script.

Elfick, still in his early thirties and immersed in both the beach and rock-music cultures, discussed with Mora his own planned move into feature production. Elfick had considerable experience in producing and distributing surf films, some of which had used material from diverse sources – notably Crystal Voyager (1974), a feature-length documentary incorporating material by legendary American surfing photographer George Greenough. Crystal Voyager was a highly-successful production, earning good returns in Australia and the UK. Elfick made a documentary about the production of Mad Dog Morgan, which was partly shot on location near Holbrook in New South Wales. This was Elfick's first encounter with major feature production, and he began discussing with Mora a project he was planning, based on rock bands of the 1950s and '60s. Stratton attributes the original concept of Newsfront to Mora, who claims his idea was based on the 1938 MGM film Too Hot to Handle (Jack Conway, 1938), a film in which rival newsreel men, Chris Hunter (Clark Gable) and Bill Dennis (Walter Pidgeon), try to woo Alma Harding (Myrna Loy).

Director Phillip Noyce gave his version of the script's development in a Cinema Papers interview while the film was in production:

The original idea was David's, largely I think as a response to the success of Philippe Mora's Brother Can You Spare a Dime and the American film Let the Good Times Roll [Sid Levin and Bob Abel, rockumentary, 1973]. In fact, David initially had discussions with Philippe.

Bob Ellis, whom Elfick eventually commissioned to write the screenplay, is certain that the original idea was Mora's:

Elfick was going to do a compilation documentary about rock groups of the 1950s and, as he went through the newsreels, he kept running into very interesting newsreel material [...] and he thought he might do it like Brother Can You Spare a Dime, a documentary about the '40s and the '50s – a portrait of an era. Mora said, 'Fine, but it would be much more interesting if you did it as a drama film. Maybe you could do it with newsreel camera men, and use the newsreel as inserts, but also have the private lives of the newsreel camera men.' Elfick thought this was a really terrific idea, and that was the one he gave to me.

Newsfront would deal with the everyday lives of newsreel cameramen, located in a fictional company called Cinesound, which is in direct competition with an American-owned company called Newscos. The situation reflects the real life competition between Cinesound and the American company Fox Movietone, which is well documented in the reminiscences of Cinesound producer Ken G. Hall.

In the last years before the introduction of tele-
vision, newsreel companies competed fiercely for scoops and the latest stories were rushed to special newsreel theatrettes.  

Elfick's account of the genesis of the film differs substantially from Stratton's, but includes Mora and noted DOP Mike Molloy in initial development. Elfick saw the possibility of combining spectacle and high production values, while keeping the cost of the film to a modest level:

There was a gathering at Palm Beach which had Philippe, Mike Molloy, Richard Neville and Andrew Fisher, and at that gathering we discussed the values that newsreel had. Perhaps newsreels in a movie might be good or something like that - you know - the fact that great events exist on film and that Australian budgets don't really allow you to stage great events.

So, from that, Andrew Fisher and I worked on an idea. I will maintain that I had the idea of creating fictional characters and putting them back into real events.

The aim in developing the screenplay was to create a narrative around the powerful newsreel images available from the Cinesound library. Some of the original Cinesound cameramen, notably Syd and Ross Wood, offered help in developing the film's content, and Elfick and Andrew Fisher engaged them in first-hand research. Elfick recalls these early meetings:

Syd Wood got a gathering together in Mike's house in Stewart Street, Paddington. One very long drunken night, we did tape recording after tape recording. Syd, from the early research, became the technical adviser for the film, and was on the set and was involved in the film right through to the end.

Mora, according to Stratton, returned to the U.S. and was later amazed to find that Elfick had proceeded with the project without further consultation or credit to him. Elfick insists he had offered Mora a rôle in the film's development, but Mora had not wanted to be identified with the project:

I said to Philippe, "Do you want to be involved in it?", and he said, "You must never associate my name with this film in any way. I am an extremely successful director. You make surfing movies. You must never associate me with this film in any way." 

Elfick commissioned the production of a chronological list of events for the period 1930-58, which was assembled by writer and lawyer Andrew Fisher. It is doubtful if any footage was viewed at this stage, and that the list was prepared from Cinesound's...
own Release Sheets, which Syd Wood may have accessed during the making of a compilation television series in the late 1960s. The potential of the era and the material was listed in a more than 40-page document prepared by Fisher and Elfick. Stylistic inspiration may have also been provided by a series of articles by Ruth Park for The National Times dealing with the Depression era in Sydney, which used documentary photographs of the period for illustration, and included working-class songs and traditions.

Elfick and Fisher’s outline sets up the main characters as two rival brothers, one of whom works in the newsreel industry, and the other who becomes a radio and television entrepreneur. The brothers were called James and Mackie Richards, and the very brief synopsis details their careers through the Depression, World War II and into the 1960s. James’ son, John, is killed in Vietnam, and Mackie sees this as a chance to destroy his rival, tormenting him with his son’s death until he has a heart attack (the exact methods are not explained). James’ other son, Michael, becomes an investigative journalist and exposes his uncle’s corruption.

The proposal document also contains one-page character biographies. Initial applications by Elfick to the Australian Film Development Corporation (AFDC) evoked negative responses from assessors, who found the material too undeveloped to warrant investment. At this stage, assessments issued from the AFDC were anonymous. One assessment dated 21 February 1975, which is almost illegible, states:

It is almost impossible to visualise how it might work – the information as given poses many questions and answers none. The storyline is neat, perhaps glib, even naive. I should have thought that a character who is a composite of Damien Parrar [sic], George Heath and Ross Wood deserves a better fate [...] Yet the idea has attractive possibilities if it can be made to work.16

This assessor found the storyline “weak, and trying to cram this in with 38 years of film clips would be mind boggling”. The other assessor (form dated 24 February 1975) undertook a far more detailed analysis, suggesting the “story was something Harold Robbins might dream up” but conceded:

Sometimes, you know, these plots actually work quite well on screen. What I’m sure doesn’t work is the inter-related use of what appears to be going to be the inordinate interrelated use [sic] of newsreel camera stuff. This is the musical with songs thrown in that don’t advance the plot [...] While the mind is being asked questions of fact, it is then being dragged away and asked questions of fiction [...] this won’t do at all.17

This assessor suggested two alternatives. The first was that the applicants concentrate on the documentary elements and make a The World at War type narrated documentary. The second was that the story of the two brothers be developed with “maybe one major factual event, which is, itself, some kind of turning wheel for the plot”. This assessor may well have been Bob Ellis, given the fact that the simile of the “musical with songs thrown in that don’t advance the plot” appears later in this chapter in interview with Ellis.

Elfick feels that the early rejections by the AFDC were due to his own limited track record in dramatic films: “The people who assess films couldn’t comprehend that somebody who had made surfing movies could make a film with this kind of content.” The Newsfront project did not appear to be very promising at first, and another Elfick project was offered support by the Australian Film Commission, as Ellis recalls:

Elfick had a package which included [an uncompleted project called] “Captain Good Vibes”, and it was going to star Reg Livermore in a pig mask prat-falling all around Calcutta. It was widely agreed among the AFC that this was far the better project and that Newsfront was the flip side and probably wouldn’t get made.20

The Australian Film Commission (AFC), which replaced the AFDC in 1975, insisted on a writer with established credits, and, after some initial investigation, a short-list of writers was proposed to the AFC, on the understanding that they would fund script development if a writer was found to be acceptable. Richard Neville and Andrew Fisher were not acceptable, since they lacked dramatic writing credits. Elfick had the choice of using an established film writer, or looking for new talent.

Bob Ellis, ultimately the principal writer of Newsfront, tells how he was approached by Elfick after some of his comedy material was performed by Graeme Blundell at the Australian Film Institute Awards in 1975:

Elfick approached me then to write Newsfront. He had initially approached the AFC to fund the script, with Richard Neville writing it. They said they would be satisfied only with a person with some experience with dialogue.21

Ellis saw himself competing with an “old guard” of film writers, including Maguire, which Ellis responded to very positively: Either from Philippe Mora or from me, there came the idea of two brothers, based on Ross Wood, who would go different ways, and we
quickly came upon the notion that one of them goes to America and does well, and the other one stays in Australia and sort of starves.24

However, it is clear that this concept existed before Ellis joined the project and that it was essentially contributed by Mora. In the draft versions of the script produced by Ellis, a variety of credits pages appear. In these, Bob Ellis is always credited with “script” or “screenplay”, but technical consultants are variously listed as Syd Wood and Howard Rubie, and Syd Wood alone. Concept and research appears as David Elfick and Philippe Mora, and David Elfick alone. Anne Brooksbank is credited with additional dialogue.25

Despite this abundance of participants, the writing of the first drafts proceeded with few problems, and David Elfick feels that Ellis was the right choice as writer for the film:

Bob wrote the first-draft screenplay based on the storyline that Andrew and I developed. Bob was hired, like you hire any writer to do a job. You have given them an idea that is the history of the project. I thought that Bob had a wonderful grasp of the Australian character and wrote it vitally, energetically and entertainingly.26

Ellis produced a new “selling” outline for the project, listing the range of talents who would be brought to the project. A draft copy states that Philippe Mora “has agreed to research and direct it” and the words “and direct” have been crossed out. A short draft promotional document announces the project as the

Fictionalised story of two brothers who are newsreel cameramen. Archive footage is integrated into the film which covers the golden era of Australian newsreels 1948 to 56. First draft written: Screenwriters Bob Ellis and Anne Brooksbank from an original idea by David Elfick and Philippe Mora.27

This document indicates the AFC had invested $4,000 in the screenplay, the Arts Council $2,500 for research (presumably for work done by Andrew Fisher) and that $4,750 will enable completion of the script.

An outline (which, in fact, is what is known as a scene breakdown) also exists from this time. This document, identified as Newsfront Outline (Parts 2, 3 and 4)28, summarizes the progress of the story in short synoptic paragraphs. Various exciting events involve Len Maguire and Chris Hewitt (the names used in the final screenplay), including a flight over the Mount Lamington volcano in Papua New Guinea. In Part 3, Len and Chris are filming the Maitland Floods but Chris is washed away and drowned, despite Len’s attempts to rescue him. In Part 4, television has arrived, Len is living with Amy McKenzie, and he is asked to film the Olympic Games. At the end of the outline, Amy goes off to work for television and Len wins an award for his Games film. But it is the end of an era. This document incorporates scenes which are basically similar to the script as it was filmed.29

The two brothers, Len (Bill Hunter) and Frank Maguire (Gerard Kennedy), both compete for the same woman, Amy McKenzie (Wendy Hughes). Len’s politics are solid working-class Labor and his strong political beliefs, as well as his Catholic background, provide an ongoing comment to the historical events contained in the newsreel material.

Brian McFarlane and Geoff Mayer comment on the desire in Australian films of the revival to “refurbish for local and overseas consumption certain notions/myths of Australianness”.30 Certainly, Bob Ellis wanted to make a political and a human statement about the cameramen who worked through to the 1960s in “Australia and its unique, brave, brotherly working class civilisation in the dying years of innocence after World War II.”31 Newsfront, from these early drafts, has a strong political voice, and sets out to present a revised view of Australian social history in the 1950s and ’60s:

I had called it “Buccaneers on Mortgages”32—something like that, or “Heroes on Mortgages”—with these very ordinary men who did these brave, unlikely and important things or covered these important things. What I planned was a movie a bit like Yanks [John Schlesinger, 1979], which was a portrait of an entire society at a moment in time.33

Like many Australian films which drew upon documentary sources for inspiration, Newsfront had some similarities with British working-class films of the 1950s and ’60s.34 But the documentary realism of British features did not provide a viable approach to the narrative of Newsfront. The key to the structure of the film was provided by Ellis, who describes his insight into the best way to use the newsreel material:

It was like constructing a musical, where you write the songs first. You know that you have got to get to the Maitland Floods, Redex trials—these things have to occur at more or less regular intervals. The image has got to go black and white surrounding it, so you work backwards from what is inevitably going to be in there to what the filler is. Various set-pieces have to occur at certain points and the story must suit this evolution.35

Newsfront uses a similar structure to Singin’ in the Rain (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1956), which required a storyline which would allow the use of a number of set-piece musical numbers owned by the producer. Betty Comden and Adolph Green describe this assignment in their introduction to the screenplay, which became one of the most successful films of all time:

Arthur was trying not to tell us something [...] he let it be known with a proud but sly chuckle that we had been assigned to write an original story and screenplay using songs from the extensive catalogue of lyrics of Arthur Freed [the same] and composer Nacio Herb Brown.36

In the case of Singin’ in the Rain, a personal drama was constructed which carried the narrative forward. The foreground story shows the efforts of the ingénue, Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds), to get hired as a straight dramatic actress, and it is helped by Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly) and Cosmo Brown (Donald O’Connor).

The back-story—that is, the setting—to the narrative of Singin’ in the Rain is a significant change in the film industry: the transition to sound. In Newsfront, the back-story is the transition to television, although the goals of the main characters cannot be so simply expressed as in the Hollywood model.

A key figure in Singin’ in the Rain is the kindly, if rather naive, producer figure, who tries to steer the characters and the studio through difficult times. In Newsfront, A. G. Marwood (Don Crosby) has often pulled his unruly workers back into line.

In Ellis’ early drafts, Newsfront takes on its more monumental historical dimensions, and includes many historical events of the post-war period, such as the Olympic Games and the Petrov affair of the late 1950s. Early scripts evoke the style employed by John Do Passos in his post-war novel, Mill Center, which uses “documentary” inserts to link personal stories which are functions of those historical events.

Elements of the film were predestined by certain newsreel events selected as being integral to the visual appeal of the film. The Maitland floods, one of Australia’s biggest natural disasters, causes the death of Chris Hewitt (Chris Haywood). Bob Ellis feels that the death of Chris was an essential element:

I think it was always going to happen [...] somebody was going to die, because of the subsequent scene which showed ‘one of our men died making this film’, with a queue of people handing over money.37

Ellis and Howard Rubie developed the script using their areas of complementary knowledge. Ellis knew the political and historical details, and Rubie knew the mode of operation at Cinesound. Ellis produced a number of drafts, culminating in the first complete draft, which appeared as a long draft of about three hundred pages. This was printed with an elaborate illustrated cover to show to potential investors. The size of this draft gave rise to the legend that the original script was at least four hours long, but the whole printing exercise was probably a calculated effort to build up the status of the project. Stratton refers to the original script as “an epic panorama spanning more than ten years of Australian history, with a screenplay of about 380 pages”38, but Ellis denies the script was excessively over-long:

It was quadruple spaced and it came out at 270 pages. It’s actually 140 pages and its probable length was 118-122 minutes. It is a myth about it being 4 hours long.39

At this stage, Howard Rubie expected to direct the film, but in the meantime Elfick had met recent Australian film and Television School Laborer and his strong political beliefs, as well. This Catholic background, provide an ongoing comment to the historical events contained in the newsreel material. In Ellis’ early drafts, Newsfront takes on its more monumental historical dimensions, and includes many historical events of the post-war period, such as the Olympic Games and the Petrov affair of the late 1950s. Early scripts evoke the style employed by John Do Passos in his post-war novel, Mill Center, which uses “documentary” inserts to link personal stories which are functions of those historical events.

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Bob Ellis saw the arrival of Noyce as director in a completely different light, since he had worked closely with Howard Rubie. It created major loyalty problems for him:

Howard was going to direct it and he would have directed it very well. But then Elfick met Noyce and Howard Rubie was out and Noyce was in directing it. I was pretty disgusted by this.41

The draft script had not been written or edited with an eye to possible budget or logistical considerations. The narrative included much of the exciting material which had been identified in the Cinesound Archives, including a trip to Papua New Guinea and a flight over the 1951 Mount Lamington volcano eruption.

In early versions of the script, the core of the film is clear, but the exposition is overlong and woolly. Some severe script editing was required, and Noyce brought his own approach to the project.42 Elfick and Noyce viewed all of the relevant footage in the Cinesound Archives and began to base their ideas for the film on actual newsreel material. Elfick feels that this was a major breakthrough in planning the production, although the archives themselves required a great deal of attention: "The archives were in a terrible mess and we were able to sort out a lot of the footage."43

In 1976, Elfick and Noyce went to visit Ken G. Hall, who records in his memoirs his first contact with these earnest young filmmakers:

I took an immense liking to these two young men, who had never made a feature film up to this point. Although they were frankly perhaps a little wide-eyed in their approach to their immense problems, I could see what they proposed to do, and their enthusiasm was contagious. I responded and I'm glad I did.44

Elfick and Noyce left behind a copy of Ellis' script, which Hall did not take to as kindly as he had to his two visitors:

I didn't like the script — or to be more exact I didn't like a good deal of it. A film should build to a climax. This script built to a climax [...] and anti-climax after anti-climax [...] there were a great many other weaknesses and the script, as written by Bob Ellis and Anne Brooksbank, would not have made a good film.45

Hall also objected to the use of four-letter words in the script, and says that many were removed at his suggestion. He did, however, give Elfick and Noyce some useful tips for the Maitland floods sequence, as Ellis recalls:

I think it was Hall's idea to actually rebuild [the town of] Maitland and sink it in Narrabeen Lakes. He gave good advice. Elfick said, "How do you do floodwaters?", and Ken Hall said, "Put an outboard motor just outside the range of the image; it will give a swirl past the frame — that's all you need." That kind of thing, very clever.46

Elfick, however, claims that the solution to creating the effect of swirling floodwaters was his own:

We had to build a cage for this jetboat, [which was] quite dangerous. We revved it up because what it did was suck the water in through the front of the boat and then spit it out the back. For wide shots it really looked like the whole river was flowing and that was very important for the water flowing down the main street, for example.47

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A third-draft screenplay was presented for possible production funding. The newly-constituted New South Wales Film Corporation (NSWFC), set up by the Wran Labor Government, was a potential source, although negotiations proceeded with the AFC as well. It was only in January 1977 that Elfick could write to Ellis that the screenplay had three excellent assessments from the AFC, but they deferred their decision till their next meeting on February 20 [...] Newsfront is also up before the New South Wales Film Corporation next week.48

Initially, Elfick felt that his control of the project was threatened by the directors and officials of the NSWFC:

They wanted to become the ledgering organization and wanted to become the major partner, so that they controlled the marketing of the film. I think they saw Newsfront was a good idea and were supportive of it, but they also wanted to control the film in some ways. I was under a lot of pressure because both Michael Thornhill and David Roe [at the NSWFC] were keen to tamper with the film, but Phil and I were a formidable team together.49

A decision had been made to make the film using a combination of black-and-white and colour photography, although this brought about the resignation of DOP Mike Molloy, who wanted to shoot the film entirely in black and white. Elfick knew that he could raise about $600,000 to make the film and that the budget would be very tight. Conflicts emerged between Elfick and Ellis about the need to reduce the film's scope:

The buck stops with the producer and the director, and it was up to us to make the film. Bob was difficult to work with and I don't think even Bob would deny that. He wrote a very good screenplay that was too long, and in some ways was perhaps in some of the scenes a little sentimental, because of his love of '50s Australia.50

Elfick was determined to complete Newsfront on the budget he had stipulated. Many Australian films had succumbed to pressure from directors and other collaborators, and gone disastrously over budget. Elfick was not going to allow it to happen to them:

We couldn't have made it a 140 minute film. A: it wouldn't have been distributed; and B: every scene would have been 30 percent less effective. Even as it was we stretched everything beyond the limits any other production had ever done. We virtually had no office staff: we had no location managers, no unit managers, scant catering, huge sets.51

Stresses and strains emerged between writer and director, as more and more cuts to the script were required. Elfick defends Noyce's increasing influence over the script in pragmatic terms:

It became clear that it couldn't work having Bob telling Phil and I what to do. The thing is that the script was too long. I think it was something like 198 foolscap pages. The funds were raised on a script which was unmakeable, and it was up to me as the producer and Phil as
The 1997 Sundance Film Festival was all about size: from the largest-ever number of submissions and record attendance to the smallest of budgets and the personal proportions of the (all-male) casts of The Full Monty (Peter Cattaneo) and Love! Valour! Compassion! (Joe Mantello).

The picturesque ski village of Park City, Utah, played host to 127 features and 60 shorts on 9 screens over 11 days, and braved the onslaught of filmmakers, press, publicists, prospective distributors and film fans that followed. The demand for improved facilities was all too obvious: as well as the need for larger screening venues, there were problems with both projection and sound quality, most critically in the press screening room.

This year, Festival organizers added a second screen in Salt Lake City and nearby Ogden. It is hoped that the 800-seat theatre currently under construction for next year will alleviate some of the congestion and enable the Festival to continue in the intimate atmosphere of Park City, which many agree is still the most desirable location. While on the surface Sundance is all about which films have been picked up and "What's the buzz?", Sundance is all about which films have been picked up and "What's the buzz?", it is a more accurate barometer of society than corporate-produced entertainment". Gilmore also stressed the importance of the awards as a means of increasing public visibility for all independent films, not just the winners.

This year's runaway success in the dramatic category was Morgan J. Freeman's début feature Hurricane, which claimed awards for direction and cinematography (by Enrique Chediak), as well as the Audience Award. Hurricane spearheaded a trend of films concerned with disaffected teens, confused about sexuality and morality in the urban 1990s. Hurricane evocatively portrays the lives of a group of teenage boys in lower Manhattan, whose poverty and preoccupation with shoplifting place them perilously close to descending into serious crime. The film focuses on Marcus (a powerful performance by Brendan Sexton III), his attempts to break the cycle of crime and violence, and his budding relationship across racial lines with Melena (newcomer Isidra Vega). Other features in the 'teen angst' sub-genre included Gregg Araki's Nocturnal, Alex Suchel's All Over Me, Hannah Weyer's Aresting Genya, Matthew Carnahan's Black Circle Boys and Vidler's Blackrock. Even before its sweep of the awards, Hurricane was picked up for international distribution by Mayfair International.

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The Sundance Film Festival is both an outstanding achievement. Past recipients include Fresh (Boaz Yakin) and Clerks (Kevin Smith). This year’s award went to In the Company of Men, “a black comedy examining the male ego run amok”.

Writer-director Neil LaBute fashioned an impressive debut from a limited budget and rich screenplay, interrogating the politics of corporate culture and their influence on personal relationships outside the office.

The award for Special Recognition in Latin American Cinema went to Jose Araujo’s film, Landscapes of Memory, with Arturo Ripstein’s Deep Crimson receiving an Honourable Mention. The dramatic jury awarded a Special Recognition for acting to Parker Posey for her performance in Mark Waters’ The House of Yes, a black comedy about a dysfunctional family adapted from Wendy MacLeod’s stageplay. Posey plays the daughter, Jackie-O, who is so obsessed with the former first lady that she dresses like her and re-enacts scenes from her life, including that day in Dallas, Texas. During the Festival, Miramax Films acquired North American, UK and Mexican rights to The House of Yes from Spelling Films.

The dramatic jury also recognized the work of production designer Therese DePerez in Going All the Way (Mark Pellington). DePerez’s previous work includes I Shot Andy Warhol and Tom DiCillo’s Living in Oblivion.

The awards ceremony capped off ten days of comedy, drama and politics, some of which took place off-screen. The Sundance Film Festival is both an exhausting and exhilarating experience, with several screenings of dramatic and documentary features up against press conferences, panel discussions and new technology demonstrations within any given hour. Everyone is forced onto a level playing-field as they trudge through slushy snow or board crowded buses, all wearing baseball caps and long coats as shelter from the effects of winter. Only cell phones and the coveted yellow-shoe-striped Festival passes distinguish the punter from the player. And, for once, it is easy to strike up conversation with a perfect stranger: “So, what’s your favourite film so far?”

**Shorts at Sundance**

The Shorts programme is traditionally one of the highlights at the Sundance Film Festival and the 1997 selection – 60 culled from 1,200 entries – did not disappoint. Whether screened before a feature or as one of six brought together in five different compilations, each short film demonstrated the diversity of styles and subject matter that can be explored through this medium.

Liberated from the conventional prerequisites of plot and structure, some directors engaged with ideas and images in a non-narrative, impressionistic fashion. Others tested the bounds of narrative by recounting in less than thirty minutes an event or some aspect of a character’s life. The consequent demands of both detail and economy alternately coincided and conflicted, often producing innovative cinema. In these ways, the short film simultaneously constrains and liberates, and the audience loves to watch.

This year’s Shorts programme included David Kaplan’s eroticized revision of Little Red Riding Hood, starring Christina Ricci, and several masterpieces of claymation (James Duesing’s Law of Averages, Mike Booth’s The Saint Inspector, and Sam Fell’s POP, from the Aardman team). Literature provided inspiration for Gus Van Sant’s Ballad of the Skeletons and Tina DiFeliciancio and Jane C. Wagner, who condensed Dorothy Allison’s life story, Two or Three Things but Nothing for Sure, into a haunting combination of Allison’s powerful narration and eerie black-and-white footage of rural poverty in the ’50s.

Hollywood celebrities also figured in the shorts scene. Sandra Bullock made her directorial debut with an off-beat, occasionally surreal, romantic comedy, Making Sandwiches, starring herself and Matthew McConaughey as a young couple whose idea of romantic bliss is running a sandwich shop together. Barbara Streisand’s son, Jason Gould, drew from life for his short, Inside Out, and cast himself as the son of an (unnamed) celebrity couple, who’s trying to deal with coming out of the closet and living in the celebrity spotlight.

One of the most popular shorts was American Road by Peter Shapiro, a seven-minute road movie set to a song by cult band Phish. Shapiro travelled across 48 states, or 13,264 miles (20,000km), in just 30 days, to create a kaleidoscope of images of American life: the cities, the stunning landscapes, the people, and, of course, the road. The short was picked up by IMAX theatres, which has commissioned Shapiro to produce a feature-length version of American Road for its giant screens at tourist attractions across the country.

The Special Recognition in Short Filmmaking Award went to Kris Isacson’s Man about Town, described as a humorous and frightening account of one man’s encounter with alcohol, pickup lines, and some ‘Jersey guys’. The jury for this year’s award included Australian film editor Kate Williams, who has worked on many independent films in the U.S., including Steve Buscemi’s Trees Lounge and Bart Freundlich’s The Myth of Fingerprints, which screened in this year’s dramatic competition at Sundance. Honourable Mentions for the Short Filmmaking Award went to Richard C. Zimmerman’s Birdhouse and K. C. Amos’ Syphon Gun.

For Australian director Christina Andreef and producer Helen Bowden, Shooting the Breeze may have been their third short shown at Sundance (Exorcist to The Bridge of Friendship screened in 1994, The Gap in 1995), but this year was their first visit to Park City. Based on their past experiences with Sundance and visits to other festivals, such as Cannes and the smaller, prestigious Telluride Festival in Colorado, Andreef observes: Sundance gives you an incredible profile; it goes wider than you ever anticipated. Sundance’s audiences are traditionally and currently much more excited about short films in general than any other festival I’ve been to. Every shorts programme has been sold out and lines of people turned away from every single screening.

Not only that, the people who programme them, John Cooper and Trevor Groth, are true aficionados. They love short film, and they manage to create a wonderfully respectful and solid atmosphere around the shorts here.

It feels like you’re really doing something, being here. It’s not just a jaunt. Whereas when we went to Cannes, we had to do lots of interviews and talk to a lot of people, but no one had seen the short and so it was all about commodity and, “When are you going to do your first feature?” Here, they really love short films and anyone who talks to you about it has seen it, and days after screening people have been stopping us in the street out of the blue, giving us their card and saying, “We loved your short.” Bowden adds:

And they comment in detail. They notice visual details like the colour of the wall, and psychological details like the mosquito ... things we put a lot of time and thought into.

In Shooting the Breeze, Andreef set out wanting to explore two points of inter-
est: the contagious nature of violence and the implicit support that lovers demand from AIDS as other. The result is a confronting and thought-provoking visualization of what occurs when these two issues collide. Andreef’s first short, *Excursion to the Bridge of Friendship*, was a popular comedy that screened at sixty festivals worldwide and collected numerous awards; in contrast, *The Gap* was a tragedy, which she describes as “experimental, and technically flawed.”

Andreef acknowledges that all three shorts are “entirely stylistically different” from each another:

That’s not been any kind of conscious thing, it’s just been about trying different things at different times. Except that after *Excursion* was so successful, I was very keen not to become the song-and-dance lady.

For me, short films have no business being safe. If you’re going to discover a formula and stick to it to be safe, and make little one-note anecdotes that have been myths or that you know are going to work, that’s not the filmmaking I’m interested in. I’m much more interested in making a flawed film that tries to do something with a different voice from what you’ve done before.

*Shooting the Breeze* was released nationally in theatres on 13 March, screening with Kathryn Millard’s *Parklands*, which Bowden also produced, and Richard Frankland’s *No Way To Forget*. Andreef and Bowden plan to shoot their first feature, *Soft Fruit*, scripted by Andreef, in 1997.

**Documentary at Sundance**

The Documentary Competition at the 1997 Sundance Film Festival was a showcase of cutting-edge independent cinema, and demonstrated the power and influence of non-fiction filmmaking. Documentaries have the capacity to influence attitudes and even change behaviour, effects that several non-fiction filmmakers attested to at a panel discussion during the Festival. In recent years, the combined efforts of these filmmakers have prompted viewers to volunteer their time as assistants for AIDS patients (Tina DiFeliciantonio and Jane C. Wagner’s *Emmy award-winning Living with AIDS*) and even changed the minds of legislative decision-makers (Gini Reticker’s *The Heart of the Matter*, dealing with women and AIDS).

At this year’s Festival, Judith Helfand’s autobiographical film, *A Healthy Baby Girl*, caught the attention of the local Utah press and became a vehicle for the local community’s concern about pesticides and other chemical pollution in the region. *A Healthy Baby Girl* documents Helfand’s past five years during which she battled cervical cancer. She developed the condition as a result of her mother having taken the diethylstilbestrol DES during pregnancy to prevent miscarriage. Helfand is one of millions of DES daughters across America and her just-released documentary has already prompted other DES daughters to ask their doctors for check-ups.

As well as its dramatic and immediate social impact, Helfand’s documentary shattered the objectivity and distance between filmmaker and subject. Painfully documenting her emotions and the tensions between herself and her mother, Helfand’s home-video footage drew attention to the voyeuristic, intrusive nature of personal documentary and made us mindful of the consequences of opening one’s life to the camera. Previously involved in many other non-fiction films, Helfand is now committed to using her documentary as the cornerstone for further grassroots awareness campaigns, concerning both DES and other issues dealing with health and environmental safety. After her experience on the other side of the camera, she feels that she would not be able to make another personal documentary, either about herself or anybody else.

This year’s Grand Jury prizewinner, *Girls Like Us*, was also a personal documentary, and filmmakers Tina DiFeliciantonio and Jane C. Wagner were acutely aware of the delicate nature of their material. *Girls Like Us* includes candid interviews with four teenage girls discussing sexuality and, at one stage, one of them — Anna, who is first-generation Vietnamese-American — admits to having had unsafe sex and afterwards regretting the decision. It is clear from other interviews that her parents do not know she is sexually active. DiFeliciantonio felt uncomfortable about including this “confession”, as she called it, in the film without first obtaining Anna’s consent. Anna’s response to this concern was that she felt it was important for other girls to learn from her experience, and that, as far as her parents were concerned, “they have to find out sometime.”

DiFeliciantonio says her motivation behind *Girls Like Us* was to make a film which would hopefully disturb the audience, provoke them to discuss the problems raised and encourage them to listen to teenage girls, to begin working in partnership with them on unsolved issues such as safe sex and sexuality.

Arthur Dong was motivated to make *Licensed to Kill* after his experience as the victim of a gay bashing twenty years ago. He wanted to ask these men who assaulted and killed homosexuals, “Why?”

In conducting interviews with several men imprisoned for these crimes, Dong says he learnt,

That killers are people my neighbours; they’re people like you, the audience.

And that was my approach in making this film: to dispel the myth of gay bashers, men who go out and hunt homosexual men, as psychotic, as homosexual men, as psychotic, as right-wing fanatics. I wanted my documentary to give the other side of the story.

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And that was my approach in making this film: to dispel the myth of gay bashers, men who go out and hunt homosexual men, as psychotic, as right-wing fanatics. I wanted my neighbours and you all to see that.

Licensed to Kill, which combines excerpts from Dong's interviews with police interviews and graphic footage of corpses and the crime scenes, was awarded the Filmmakers Trophy, voted by other documentary filmmakers, and won the Directing award, which was chosen by the documentary jury.

The most popular documentary, as voted by the Sundance audiences, was Monte Bramer’s Paul Monette: *The Brink of Summer’s End*, a touching portrait of the author of *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir and Becoming a Man: Half a Life Story*. The documentary captures footage of Monette during the last months of his life with home movies and photographs from his earlier years, and interviews with friends. The documentary jury also awarded a Special Recognition to Kirby Dick, for his graphic and yet humanizing portrait of sadomasochistic performance artist Bob Flanagan in the documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan, Supermasochist*.

The Freedom of Expression Award, sponsored by the Playboy Foundation, is bestowed each year on a documentary which informs and educates the public on an issue of social concern. Once again decided by the documentary jury, this year’s award was split between Macky Alston’s *Family Name*, about black-and-white interrelationships in the Alston family, and Laura Angelica Simón’s *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*. Simón is a fourth-grade teacher at Hoover and first-time documentary filmmaker who wanted to document the effects of California’s Proposition 187 upon her students and the teaching staff. Proposition 187, which is still caught up in legal challenges, would force state employees such as Simón to turn in her undocumented students to the authorities. Ninety percent of Hoover students are economic and political refugees from Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador.

The documentary engages the audience through Simón’s use of the charming nine-year-old Mayra, from El Salvador, who proudly acts as ‘tour guide’ through the school and provides invaluable insight into the living conditions of illegal immigrants.

Originally from Mexico, Simón bravely exposes the deep-seated prejudices of members of the Hoover teaching staff and shows that, whatever comes of the legal case against Proposition 187, much of the harm has already been done. During the filming, one teacher resigned after several years at Hoover; a close friendship between two staff members ended after one learnt that the other voted in favour of Proposition 187; and Mayra’s mother suddenly took her out of school, in fear of being handed over to the authorities. Mayra and her mother have now returned to El Salvador. Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary powerfully reveals the personal fall-out behind a political issue. As a result, it is a profoundly moving and thought-provoking film.
NAZA
TITLE: NAZA
PRODUCER: WONG
DIRECTOR: SIM LI CUM
STARRING: ANN MARIE, RUMTIEAN, WILSON LIE
DISTRIBUTED BY: MASTER FILM CORPORATION
Lead actor (Wilson Lie) rescues the actress (Rumtiean) from a sexual harassment and bring her to live with. They fall in love, but at the end he finds another woman.

MONOLISAA
TITLE: MONOLISAA
PRODUCER: WONG
DIRECTOR: SIM LI CUM
STARRING: ABILIE, JOHN ANN MARIE
DISTRIBUTED BY: MASTER FILM CORPORATION
Lead actor (Abilie) has his heart broken before he meets the actress (John Ann Marie) and falls in love again.

NINA
TITLE: NINA
PRODUCER: WONG
DIRECTOR: SIM LI CUM
STARRING: KORN, SIMLIE
DISTRIBUTED BY: MASTER FILM CORPORATION
Lead actress (Korn) is a living ghost who meets and falls in love with the actor (Simlie). Later, she is destroyed by a ghost buster.

A SECRET?
TITLE: A SECRET?
PRODUCER: WONG
DIRECTOR: SIM LI CUM
STARRING: LESLIE, JACQULINE
DISTRIBUTED BY: MASTER FILM CORPORATION
Lead actor (Leslie) hires lead actress (Jacqulline) to be a travel companion and later separates and, because of love, they rejoin at the end.
How Directors Contribute to the “Big Lie” of Filmmaking

Simon Lake and Ian David take on directors over the ubiquitous “A Film by” credit

About two months ago we embarked on a silly project. We tried to get the Australian Screen Directors Association to justify why Australian directors routinely get “A Film by” or, in North American parlance, a possessory credit. We invited them to the annual SPAFA conference to debate this point on 14 November 1996.

Despite numerous approaches, no director wanted to put up his or her hand to justify why directors are now getting as a matter of course. We called the session “Taking The Credit” and ran it anyway, with screenwriter Mac Gudgeon making a spirited speech explaining why the possessory credit is both offensive and misleading. It was noted, after the session, that there were no dissenting voices from those present.

One leading producer was heard to say, “It’s one of those issues where the more you think about it the more offensive it becomes.”

So, what are we to make of this? The venue was booked, the crowd was waiting, the chair dusted down and the microphone turned on ... and no takers. The country was scoured. The pick of our big-time directors (at least those who weren’t in LA) were asked and the answers were put on slides outside the movie hall, or on the marquee, if it was thought that they had pulling power. It was extremely rare for a possessory credit to be put on a film.

In 1963, the American Writers’ Guild had total control of the issuing of “A Film by” credit and only issued it to writers who were also producers and/or directors. In 1966, the Guild obtained control over the other permutations: “A John Huston Film” and “John Smith’s ______.”

The result was that very few possessory credits were ever granted. The directors objected to this control; they fought in the courts and in the industrial arena to get hold of the possessory credit. They maintained that filmmaking is exclusively a directors’ medium and that writers and other above-the-line contributors are not necessary; they’re just another carriage being pulled along by the director. There was no shortage of Hollywood screenwriters who had seen this logic in action. Hollywood is littered with loco directors stuck in the sand without a script. The acrimony increased. Old scores were settled. Those who could remember (and there were lots of them) reminded the directors they had no right to claim the high-moral grassy knoll. Back in the bad old 1950s, only ten members of the industry refused to testify before McCarthy’s House Un-American Committee and were sent to prison for their courage. Only one of them was a director and he hated it.

In 1970, the American Writers’ Guild was stuck in some very tough contractual negotiations with producers, when Lew Wasserman, the head of MCA, broke the contractual deadlock with the “Big Lie” (Patrick Duncan, Screen Writers Quarterly, 1995). Wasserman promised that, if the American Writers’ Guild gave up its control of the possessory credit, the studios would guarantee

1. The possessory credit would only be given in a limited number of instances and would not proliferate; and
2. Such credits would not be granted in any collective bargaining agreement, only in individual negotiations.

The possessory credit, like the prickly pear, got out of hand and the Big Lie was soon forgotten about. The Directors’ Guild of America, like its counterpart in Australia, showed no compunction or desire to stop or even justify the growth of the possessory credit, letting its unbending faith to auteurism do the talking.

It appears that it is not enough to get one credit like the other above-the-line participants, such as the writer, the producer, the actors or the cinematographer. The director must instead get what amounts to two credits: i.e., a director’s credit and “A Film by” credit. In effect, the director is saying to the audience: “Did you get it? It’s my movie. I made it happen. It’s all mine. All of it!”

This type of rationale reminds us of the famous scene in Spinal Tap when the rock star asks for an amplifier that goes up to the number 11, when it makes no difference to the power supplied by cranking the dial up to number 10. Well, we believe that it is time to crank up the debate about why should directors claim they are the sole author of the most collaborative of mediums? After all, did they do two jobs for their two credits?

ASDA has told us that directors did not seek the “A Film by” credit, but that it was the distributors and the marketing people who insist on it. Innocent victims? We think not. More like willing participants. After all, Woody Allen and Clint Eastwood feel compelled to refuse the possessory credit on the grounds that it is insulting to those they work with. In Australia, apparently top-line directors such as Baz Luhrmann have similarly knocked back the offer of a possessory credit out of respect for their fellow collaborators.

The fact that the possessory credit has not been seriously questioned in the Australian industry leads to the situation when numerous first-time directors get a possessory credit, and they are identified in the public eye as being the sole author of the film. Too bad for everyone else who made the film with them.

The possessory credit is so ingrained in film culture that it dictates the way in which we talk about film. Industry papers such as Encore and Cinema Papers will refer to a film and then put the director’s name in brackets as though that is all you need to know. Time Out’s well-respected Film Guide does the same trick. It’s lazy and it’s an inaccurate way to discuss film.

Even when a director does not get a possessory credit, the film is discussed and promoted as though he/she did. One of many possible examples is a first-time director such as Emma-Kate Croghan getting attribution from the press for “Emma-Kate Croghan’s Love and Other Catastrophes”. Croghan did not claim a possessory credit on the film, but that did not deter our film critics. I am not sure if Croghan would claim sole authorship of this film, and she has been the first to acknowledge that the film was based on a story by Stavros Adonis Efthymiou, it was co-written by Emma-Kate Croghan, Helen Bandis and Yael Bergman, and produced by Stavros Adonis Efthymiou. It appears to us that this is a project born of collaboration, so why should the director be singled out by the press as the author? Who is doing the attribution – the marketing people, the distribution company – or does it just happen because no one is questioning it?

The quest for simplicity – to attribute one person (the director) as being “the hero” of the film, which the public can automatically identify with – has a long and not so distinguished history. It appears that film critics, distributors and marketing whizzes are unwilling to counteract the collaborative nature of filmmaking and would rather swallow razor blades than attribute the contribution of anyone other than the director or the actors.

Whereas critics are almost comfort-
able with the concept of writer-directors, the lone writer is seen as a reject from literary ranks, hacks working for a tip on an iceberg deferral.

Writers are integral to the filmmaking process. The American Writers' Guild put together a series of famous scenes from classic movies which were shot exactly as they were written. One of the most famous is Lawrence of Arabia, where the burning match cuts to the burning sunset. Yes, the director and cinematographer had an important role in bringing this scene to the film, but it was shot as it was written.

This small example is one of the reasons why the possessory credit does not stand up to scrutiny. Writers do not just write text; they write scenes, sequences, characters! They describe the pictures, the images, because they've seen them. They fashion the dialogue because they've heard it. And the whole lot is carefully put together with the glue of an idea: a story.

There are numerous examples of the possessory credit with Australian directors, where in some cases the director has written the screenplay, and finally we have the case where the director has written and produced the film.

As yet, there are no figures on the possessory credit use in Australia. It appears from a rough glance that there are Australian directors who either refuse to take the possessory credit or who have been unable to secure it.

The general attitude in Australia is that directors get the possessory credit as a matter of right and this is recognized overseas. In fact, in the United States there is no automatic right to a possessory credit, and, according to the American Writers' Guild, the tide is swaying strongly against possessory credits, with major studios starting to restrict their use.

**Why does the Australian Writers' Guild object to the possessory credit?**

Understandably, in the present environment, with everyone from first-timers to established directors getting a possessory credit, the American Writers' Guild has changed its attitude towards the possessory credit with its current President, Brad Radinco, describing it as a "colossal, divisive deceit". The Australian Writers' Guild agrees that the possessory credit devalues others' contributions to the creative process.

In short, the possessory credit is an insult to other collaborators in the creative process.

Industrially in America, there has been an attempt to stem the flow of the possessory credit with a moratorium on it until industry-wide agreement can be reached on this issue. In the interim agreement, which took effect from 2 May 1995, there was agreement to "diminish the use of possessory credits". The studios agreed to review the incidence of possessory credits. There was also agreement that, if there was no meaningful progress in diminishing the use of possessory credits in four years, then the studios would have to find such measures as contributing for separate publicity for the writer, or for additional and special credit for the writer.

Can the possessory credit ever be justified?

Only if the one creative soul does everything. What's the problem in accepting film as a collective, collaborative medium, like opera, theatre and ballet? No one wants to see the proliferation of suspect credits, because, in the public's eye, credits should mean something and they should be accurate. The continual proliferation of credits devalues other people's contributions and confuses the public. After all, are there many people interested in film who do not know what the directors do, so why do they need the extra credit?

If there is a problem with understanding the director's role, this should be dealt with as a separate issue rather than adding a false and misleading additional credit. No one is denying the crucial role of the director and the many skills he/she can bring to a film. Our objection to the possessory credit is that it does not accurately reflect each individual's contribution. Without respect for fellow artists, collaboration is at risk of going out the window to fulfil directors' egos. It is not just writers who should be annoyed, but actors, cinematographers, composers, editors and producers – in fact, anyone who contributed substantially to the making of the film.

**Any film or television work is the sum-take credit for the writer will take credit for the script, the ideas, the dialogue, the story structure and flow, but he or she would have to take a step back when it comes to discussions on casting and performance, the choice of visual images, shots and angles, the power of editing, music and sound.**

It is interesting with the recently-released William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet (which is promoted as a Bazmark Production), there appears to be no reluctance from Baz Luhrmann to share the glory, and that in our view reflects well on him and well on the team that made the picture. There are numerous other examples of directors sharing the glory and highlighting the contribution of the team that made the film. The question must arise: Why is this always not the case?

The possessory credit is not essential for a film's success. The lack of a possessory credit did not hold back the success or accolades for our most successful films: Babe, Strictly Ballroom, Muriel's Wedding or Crocodile Dundee and “Crocodile" Dundee II. Nor does it appear to have held back the career of big name directors such as George Miller, who apparently never takes the "A Film by" credit.

Possessory credit denies others their due. Of course, directors will readily accept a possessory credit, but they will not justify it in public because it's impossible to sustain logically, ethically and professionally.

We would remind those who continue to propound their auteur theories, at least in private, that back at the dawn of the cinema age those who cranked the handle and squinted through the eyepiece were regarded as the true auteurs.

The task of the director, as the cameraman saw it, was to rehearse the actors for a scene until it was ready to be played; then the cameraman would take over and determine the camera position, the lighting, the length of the shot, and all other matters relevant to the finished film. (D. W. Griffith)

John Ford took great pride in announcing that he was first chosen to direct because he could yell loudly (from William Luhr and Peter Lehman's Authorship and Narrative in the Cinema: Issues in Contemporary Aesthetics and Criticism, Capricorn, 1977). Things have improved for directors since then, but that's not saying much for getting to the truth.

Australian directors, when confronted, will put themselves in the role of the victim and say that it is driven by the distribution and marketing people. It is time for this knee-jerk defence to be exposed for what it is: The original purpose of the possessory credit was a marketing tool and now it has been turned into an article of faith for Australian directors.
"Don't You Ever Listen?"

Lloyd Hart suggests ways of improving the crucial filmmaker-lawyer relationship

Lawyers and filmmakers are often in different worlds. An optimist would expect this to surface in their mutual professional relationships. In this article, I am suggesting some ways in which filmmakers and lawyers can communicate better with their lawyer, or extract better communication from their lawyer. This in no way implies that as lawyers we cannot improve our understanding, and ability to communicate with filmmaker clients. Lawyers have their own magazines and journals to ponder ways to lift their professional relationships. In this article, I am suggesting some ways in which film maker and lawyer can communicate better.

Before you see the lawyer

Get as clear an idea as you can of the facts, what you want the lawyer to do for you and the outcome you desire. Jotting it down may help. It can be changed when you understand more about the relevance of the facts, commercial practices and the laws applying. This can save you time and therefore costs. Sometimes people are unsure who to go to for help. They may not need a lawyer. You can clarify on the telephone what the lawyer proposes to charge you and whether you wish to expose the full horror of your sacrifice.

Present to the lawyer your jottings of fact and what you want. A lawyer friend of mine once asked his client, who was preparing to embark on some particularly bitter litigation, what he really wanted. The answer could have been justice, to save face, revenge, or any of the other things in Hollywood's panoply. But, no. This man wanted to restore the friendship which he once had with the defendant. They talked. The other man wanted the same. Exit litigation.

Ask your lawyer to repeat in summary what they can and will do for you, including the options, their pluses and minuses, and cost benefits. The lawyer may only guess at cost benefit, for philosophical and emotional issues impinge. It's down to pleasure and pain, Jeremy Bentham.

Examine your own priorities carefully and tell your lawyer. If you are a producer and are instructing the lawyer to do the legal work on a film project, you obviously want to secure the rights to make the film for the budgeted amount, have workable distribution, financing agreements and agreements for services. You may or may not want to retain creative control to the exclusion of your co-producer. You may want to retain a lot of points. You may be willing to share them around. You may be prepared to compromise with financiers or distributors to get the film up. Or you may believe selling yourself cheaply never works.

When you see your lawyer

In some jurisdictions, your lawyer must let you know how they charge and, after any negotiation on that, enter into a cost agreement with you containing an estimate of the number of hours the job will take. They must inform you if and when the estimate changes. Insist on a cost agreement. Provide for regular billing. You may negotiate a fixed fee for finite services.

In choosing your lawyer, ask around about the lawyer's reputation. Follow your gut feeling. Apart from the unrewarding aspects of spending a fair bit of time with someone you hate or don't like very much, there are the obvious practical benefits of having a lawyer you have confidence in; there may even be some fun if you get on okay. Look for someone who is in service rather than sacrifice. The latter's work is painful for them. Their focus is on giving up something they have, free time, to make money in order to survive. In service, the lawyer's motive is to meet the customer's needs, with excellence. The grudging nature of the sacrificer's actions result in both needless suffering for the lawyer (you care?) and poorer service than the lawyer can give. The client catches a whiff of the smoke but may be unable to distinguish which martyr is burning upwind.

The following procedures can help:

- Tell your lawyer where you're coming from; your philosophical approach to business and art; your attitude to compromise; and, if you wish to expose the full horror of them, your aspirations.
- Ensure if possible that there is a hard copy of any downside.

Understanding your lawyer

A significantly high proportion of lawyers doing 'film law' dream of doing something else, often in show business or the arts: acting, singing, dancing, writing, producing, anything. Never encourage them.

During the matter

Here are some procedures, you can follow:

- Ensure your lawyer has your agreement on all points, that you are aware of any downside.
- Request your lawyer to diarise and copy you all significant meetings and telephone conversations.
- Ask your lawyer for written status reports at propitious times.
- Ensure if possible that there is a hardcopy record of key conversations between yourselves and your lawyer, and with the other side. It may be asserted later that representations were made by one person or another.
- Require the keeping of safety copies of signed documents.

Conclusion

You may choose to modify a lot of the above to keep costs down. It really helps if both filmmaker and lawyer verify what the other is saying and intends to do each step of the way. Apart from what is contained in agreements, record in writing as much as possible of the information on which decisions are based and the reasons for decisions. Bad communication occurs at all levels, sometimes with dire consequences. As God said to the Pope, "Don't you ever listen? When they delivered those pizzas, I said, 'Scan the bill' not 'Can the pill.'"
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A Divine Judy
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Film

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY


Few recent films have been awaited more eagerly than, or have arrived trailing such diverse critical baggage as, Jane Campion's The Portrait of a Lady. It is Campion's first film since she was loaded with honors for The Piano in 1993, and it comes in the wake of a spate of literary adaptations which have found favour with critics and sometimes with filmgoers.

Campion is on record as finding The Portrait of a Lady the hardest thing she has ever done, and, if she had any intention of rendering in film terms the dark complexity of Henry James' masterpiece, that is not surprising. What it has in common with her earlier films is its interest in the representation of a woman under siege of various kinds — intellectual, social and sexual — and determining to maintain her own integrity, however idiosyncratic or perverse that may look to bystanders. James has created his heroine, Isabel Archer, in a good deal more detail than the mere heroine of The Piano or even than the Janet Frame character in Angel at My Table (1990), and some of this detail would have helped to give an ampler sense of the emotional and cultural webs in which James' and Campion's young lady is caught up. "I can't escape my fate", the film's Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman, in a fine, if uncommanding, performance) explains to her liberated reporter friend, Henrietta Stackpole (Mary Louise Parker, in a rôle reduced more or less to meaninglessness), as they linger

The Smell of Success

Cameron Crowe’s work [...] invites you to observe some of the peak experiences of young white bourgeois America from the 1970s on, through the eyes of one eager to analyze middle-class existence and articulate enough to render it meaningful.

p38
Jerry MaGuire


Tracking Cameron Crowe's work is something like looking through a cherished, annotated photograph album, the music which underscored the subjects' rites of passage Trumpeting from nearby speakers all the while. It invites you to observe some of the peak experiences of young white bourgeois America from the 1970s on, through the eyes of one eager to analyze middle-class existence and articulate enough to render it meaningful.

Crowe is neither cynical nor sentimental, but rather candid and optimistic, and therein lie two of the qualities which distinguish him from others who toil similar thematic terri- tory. Distinguishing him above all, though, are his craft skills and singular talent. Crowe's wonderfully gifted storyteller: a writer adept with structure, character and dialogue, and a director who balances style and content, performance and pace, with enviable smoothness. Most important, he actually has something to say.

In a Cinema Papers interview last year, Michael Toltkin spoke critically of the reluctance of American directors now to deal with various issues, including the middle and upper classes and the moral decay afflicting them. Toltkin's perspective and style are far removed from Crowe's, far more somber and sparse respectively. But like Toltkin's, part of Crowe's appeal lies in his knowing portraits of middle-class America: his latest film is mainstream cinema at its most intelligent and entertaining, redolent with character and dialogue and a director whose craft skills and singular talent are his/their daughter Pansy ...

There is a great deal of plot in this film and, as it is not an action movie where events are all, many to whom Henry James is no more important than P. D. or Jesse may intrigue, symbolized as a web by Osmo and Osmo's twirling umbrella, involve her/his daughter Pansy ...

It is as much about the individual's search for love and meaning as his earlier work, but Crowe examines the context more closely. He places his protagonist in a milieu where good intentions have been sub- sumed by ambition, in a country that's lost its grip on 'reality.' "There's such a thing as manner," Jerry MaGuire yells at his colleagues, "We are nothing, but an office, a place where people work." Jerry MaGuire encapsulates the vapidness of this and all such workplaces.

Jerry MaGuire's as ambitious as the next professional, and Crowe allows him this: the buzz of competition and the joy of success. He takes an obvious delight in the NFL, scaring and understands what it means to Jerry MaGuire to thrive in it. The issue he presses as Jerry MaGuire fails and then tries to rise again is the conflict between ambition and integrity. It's not so straightforward as it seems for Jerry MaGuire, because while there's a wealth of noble sentiment in his mis- sion statement, he falls short and again trying to put it into practice. He's big on 'heart,' but where is his 'heart'? He's capable of fervent enthusiasm, but not love.

Jerry MaGuire has highly effective foils in Tidwell and Dorothy. While they endorse his stand and act as solid comrades in adversity, Tidwell's constant and vicious derision of Jerry MaGuire's proclamations (which he gloats with "Shit! Me. The Money!"), and Dorothy's capability and self-awareness, consistently question Jerry MaGuire's earnest rhetoric. He's a long time on the hook, fallible and found wanting. They also

---

and this is why the film takes the questions seriously and comes up with affirmative answers. This is hardly surprising. What is surprising and immensely satisfying is the way in which Crowe handles the story. Crowe's quota of denning his ideas for Jerry MaGuire from sports agents such as Leigh Steinberg, and characters like Tony Curtis' press agent in Sweet Smell of Success (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957) and Jack Lemmon's ladder-climbing busi- nessman in The Apartment (Billy Wilder, 1960) — and Wilder's work is an obvious precursor. He refers to an obscurity of the soul which overtakes high achievers in the corporate era, and to the Gulf between love and.
well find themselves asking questions about motivation, and may especially be at a loss to understand why Isabel should find marrying Osmond to have a place in her fate.

That said, there is still a good deal to admire in the way the film has sought to keep the issue of Isabel’s fate at the centre of the film, and the intelligence with which it avoids clichés about Old World-New World conflict or even of soldier England and sun-drenched Italy. For a moment, in a sudden burst of brilliant light when the scene shifts to Florence, it looks as if the latter contrast is to be made with the same easy certainty of its being an analogue for inhibition vs emotional freedom as it was in Mike Newell’s Enchanted April (1991).

Instead, Campion moves us quickly indoors to show Madame Merle at work tempting Osmond to make a play for Isabel. Isabel is often glimpsed briefly as light in dark places, but there is little sense of light after she marries Osmond and her openness to life becomes constrained.

All this is rendered in a control of the mise-en-scène so exact that the film generates a serious power from here on. The darkening of the drama is created in this control: the film’s colour range seems to be mainly a matter of browns and blues, and the often claustrophobic insistence on interiors makes its own point about the nature of the film’s interests. That is, they are essentially internal and psychological, to do with pain and mistake and entrapment, and the film never makes the mistake of descending into the pictorialism of which the Ivory-Merchant team were so often guilty in their dealings with the great works of English literature. There is a powerful sense of time closing down as Isabel’s friends leave Italy and she turns to ask Madame Merle, “Who are you?” (Hershey, by the way, is wonderfully elegant and heartfelt), and an equally powerful sense at the end of Isabel, having turned down Goodwood again in a snowbound garden, committing herself to the rigours of her disastrous marriage. And the penultimate scene, in Ralph’s bedroom, when Isabel tells him before he dies that she loves him, joins him on his deathbed and kisses him passionately, is a triumph. It is not Jane Austen and it is not nineteenth-century, but its emotional truth could not be more piercing.

There are some downright silly, self-consciously cinematic touches, such as the use of a series of modern portraits of young women talking about romance behind the credits (I thought it was an ad for the ABC until the first credit appeared), or the home movie treatment of Isabel’s travels, or some artfully and pointlessly angled shots (of the Florentine duomo, for instance), and there is a ball scene which is almost a direct steal from Martin Scorsese’s magisterial The Age of Innocence (1993), when the camera moves from the rows of gentlemen’s top hats to dancers waltzing to Strauss, this followed by an overhead shot. The film is at its least impressive, which is often, when it accepts the fact that this is a dauntingly painful story more likely to be valued by those who responded to the austerities of Jade (Michael Winterbottom, 1996) than by those who are hoping for another exalting Sense and Sensibility (Ang Lee, 1995). It is a demanding film, and it’s not popular, but for those who stay the distance it has its rewards.

—Brian McFarlane

"Shut up. You had me at ‘Hello’":
Jerry McGuire and Dorothy Boyd (Renee Zellweger). Jerry McGuire.

KOLYA


Set in pre-Velvet Revolution Prague, Kolya is a warm and genuine film that brings a down-and-out cellist and a Russian-speaking five-year-old together for money, and keeps them together for love.

The film is the result of a collaboration between the father-and-son team of Zdenek Sverak (father, writer, lead actor) and Jan Sverak.

Casting is nigh on perfect. Cruise throws himself into Jerry McGuire with tangible glee, and who but Cruise for this role, for such an unstoppable achiever, irresistible charm? His presence and his timing are faultless. Cuba Gooding Jr. matches him for verve and intensity, rollicking through Twidell’s petulant tirades but also delivering subtlety when Cruise demands it, keeping caricature well at bay. Zellweger builds Dorothy thoughtfully, balancing wistfulness and maturity to make her a credible female hero who’s simply a self-assured young woman. The three display an effortless chemistry, as does the rest of the cast.

If there’s a flaw, or rather an irony here, it’s in the blending, obvious discrepancies between theme and medium — largely, that Crowe’s message reaches us through a cinema and indeed a genre long-since commandeered by corporate greed and rife with feigned sentiment. But don’t let that nurture your disdain; it’s hardly Crowe’s doing, and it’s a converse irony that he manages to use the medium to such ends. Take Jerry McGuire for what it is — a clever and reliably funny romantic comedy — and you’ll savour rare pleasures.

—Diame Cook

1 Crowe wrote Fast Times at Ridgemont High (Amy Heche, 1982) and The Wild Life (Art Linson, 1984), and wrote and directed Say Anything... (1989) and Singles (1992).

in review

Films

continued

Frantisek Sverak's charming comedy brought both nominations for an Academy Award and an Oscar, remarkable for its emotional truth.

Kolya begins as a portrait of young man from a single family. He is short of cash, is best friends with an alcoholic and is stranded with his new 'son', Kolya, who is on his way to deliver some casks of wine.

The performances from Zdenek Sverak and Andrej Chalimon are near flawless. Obviously, Zdenek Sverak has a unique understanding of the character that comes from being the writer, while clearly being able to take direction from his son on the finer points of bringing his character to life on the screen. Jan Sverak can also be credited for the consistent and touching performance of his five-year-old lead, Chalimon, who is not tightly woven into the structure of the film, but each clue or piece of information becomes a piece of the larger jigsaw puzzle, adding further to the strength of the characterizations.

The film is also beautifully paced. Enough time is spent on Louka's relationship with Kolya before Kolya is introduced, so that we see him as a whole, an individual, before we see him as the disgruntled half of an unwilling twosome. The relationship between Louka and Kolya develops at a gentle pace, neither so fast as to be unbelievable nor too slow as to be dull. Light, warm humour smooths over any bumps and adds to the film's flowing rhythm.

Jan Sverak is being heralded as the arrow'head of Czech cinema - the new Milos Forman. Sverak's next film will be his first in English, produced by Kolya producer Eric Abraham. If it has half the heart and warmth of Kolya, there will be a new voice in the English-speaking world, quietly but confidently demanding attention.

BLOOD & WINE


I've never seen a preview audience leave a cinema so fast. As soon as the first credits rolled, they were out the door and away. And what a strange Bob Rafelson film it is: a mixture of thriller, black comedy and melodrama. It certainly has its moments and some great acting, but it doesn't come anywhere near Rafelson's earlier classics, Five Easy Pieces (1970), The King of Marvin Gardens (1972) and The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981). Blood & Wine starts with twentysomething Jason (Stephen Dorff) doing an Ernest Hemingway and batting a giant fish with his friend on a deserted Florida beach. It's a scene of stark opposites with the violent fight set against the superb red sunrise, and we know we're in for an unusual ride. At home, Jason's mother, Suzanne (Judy Davis), has broken her ankle and is finding life tough. She's married to her second husband, Alex (Jack Nicholson), and they have a stressful relationship, fuelled by his violent temper. Jason can't stand his stepfather, and the exchange they have over breakfast is one loaded comment after another, with Suzanne trying to be the peacemaker. The scene is overlaid with Michel Lorenz's tense, mournful music, and moody images from DOP Newton Thomas Sigel.

The family's dependent on Alex's wine business that's going downhill, and a red BMW that's part of his stepson to deliver some cashes of wine to a rich man's estate, we quickly find out that he has another agenda. He wants to seduce the beautiful young nanny, Gabrielle (Jennifer Lopez), and make her an accomplice to his plan to steal the $1 million necklace in the family safe upstairs. So while Jason is unloading the crates, Alex is frantically searching through clothes racks so he can photograph the safe. This turning point is amplified even more when we meet Victor Spansky (Michael Caine), Alex's dubious partner in crime. They're the strangest odd couple, and almost completely out of their depth in planting this robbery. Victor is a chronically-ill, chain-smoking ex-convict who pulls his way through life. But he wants to end his days in some kind of poolside mansion with room service, instead of in some dreadful nursing home. He's coloured his grey hair into a creepy black and Alex reacts with, "You look like a janitor?" "Fine," replies Victor, "as long as I don't match my mug shot."

Nicholson and Caine play their scenes like some kind of black comedy nightmare. Every time they meet, the scenario just gets worse, with more and more things going wrong and both of them headed for a messy end. Victor's probably some kind of man on Victor Mature, and Alex is like all the roles Jack Nicholson's ever played rolled into one ghastly character: they're bad, sleazy and capable of mayhem.
Meanwhile, Jason has taken Gabrielle out on his mate’s boat, and she tells him about her desperate flight from Cuba. Gabrielle’s an illegal immigrant and warns Jason that she’ll do anything to gain a foothold in America, and to get some kind of financial independence. Of course, the audience knows that she means she will do anything with Jason’s stepfather, because he represents everything her family can’t have. So, Blood and Wine is set up for more twists and turns than you could possibly expect in one movie.

All the characters are now like odd angry couples: there’s Suzanne and Alex, Suzanne and Jason, Alex and Victor, Jason and Gabrielle, and Alex and Gabrielle. It’s like a modern version of Hamlet, and something is definitely rotten in the state of America.

It’s all lean and mean and fast-paced. Everyone is an opportunist, and even Suzanne will drive her car like some kind of manic to try and escape. Judy Davis says of her character:

All the characters in the film seem to be found and caught by their lives, by a combination of decisions they’ve made. Even when the most diabolical of actions occurred in the story, you couldn’t condemn the people because you saw that, in their own thinking, their backs were against the wall.

Certainly Davis is a treat to watch, and all the actors bring a sort of authenticity, despite the over-the-top script. Even when Nicholson and Caine ham it up and cause real bloody carnage, a sort of pathos creeps in.

Rafelson adds to the heat with a fast cutting style that’s always moving the action onwards. It’s all frenetic, and these five characters would have to be some of the most dysfunctional people you’ve ever seen on the screen. They’re way out of control, but all of them find that crime doesn’t pay. Rafelson says he chose Florida and Key Largo for his shoot because he wanted “an urban city where the main character could be a hustler”. Maybe Rafelson’s also into Chaos Theory: this might explain why his movie seems to be several films in one.

There’ll be some people who’ll hate Blood & Wine, some people who’ll love it, and I’m somewhere in between. —Margaret Smith

**THE JOURNEY OF AUGUST KING**


Unreleased theatrically in Australia, John Duigan’s most recent U.S. film is based on a novel by John Eble. Drafts of Eble’s screenplay have languished for more than 20 years (having been optioned at various times by George Roy Hill and Robert Mulligan) since the novel’s publication in 1971.

It would indeed be curious to speculate how different directors and their respective energies would have interpreted this post-Civil War story about a widow who selflessly rescues a slave on the run from her vindictive ‘master’ and an army of bounty hunters.

As rendered here, The Journey of August King shares with several other recent American films a predilection for the Buddhist dramas once solidly rendered (but now almost shunned) by filmmakers in Korea and elsewhere. August King (Jason Patric) wonders through the North Carolina mountains, a lonely and spiritually bereft soul since the death of his wife and the force major role of a wealthy land and slave owner, Olaf Singletary (Larry Drake).

When the escaped slave, Amna Harris (Thandie Newton), with whom August finds salvation (but not before being stripped of his every and last material possession, by nothing less than fire), first appears she emerges from the waters of a mountain creek.

This is not to suggest that this film can, or should, be reduced to generic schema, but to indicate the unique inflection Duigan and writer Eble have given the material (as well as to signal some of the obvious trappings, most notably slavery and race relations, they have chosen to downplay).

August King is a lyrical, and ultimately heart-rending, drama of sacrifice and spiritual redemption, which marks a much-awaited return to what is arguably Duigan’s forte: intimate, personal dramas in which troubled individuals emerge whole and healed from the inhospitable terrain they are forced to inhabit, in this life at least.

Particularly deserving a better fate than video is the cinematography of DOP Slawomir Idziaik, which renders the faces of Jason Patric and Thandie Newton with a glowingly sensual beauty, not to mention sweeping landscapes of pastoral scenery. —Paul Kalina

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**August King (Jason Patric) and Amnaeess Williamamburg (Thandie Newton), The Journey of August King.**
BFI CLASSICS SERIES

While they certainly have their use, the British Film Institute's two series of monographs based on the idea of "the classic" represent more of a canny marketing strategy than a significant contribution to '90s film criticism. The first deals with "Film Classics", which appear to be mostly films made before 1970, the second with "Modern Classics", those coming after (although it all gets a bit confusing when 1977's Annie Hall is included as a "film classic", but Don't Look Now, made four years earlier, is entered as a "modern classic").

Generally available locally for somewhere between $15 and $20, these slim volumes certainly look attractive: they're well laid out and make good use of the BFI's extensive stills collection. Both are virtues not to be underestimated. But as pocket-sized, 60-80 page editions devoted to analyses of specific films, they only amount to slightly-longer-than-usual magazine articles dressed to kill.

To judge from the dozen or so monographs I read for this review, the editorial brief to contributors appears to have gone something like this: cover the film's production history, its immediate critical reception and any major subsequent shifts in attitude towards it; examine its broad cultural significance and the ways in which a knowledge of the specific social/historical circumstances under which it was produced might enhance our appreciation of it; provide clear reasons why this particular film deserves the label of "classic"; incorporate your own textual reading of it; provide a bibliography where possible, don't get too academic in your approach, but don't compromise your essay.

All of which amounts to an entirely reasonable strategy, I would have thought, reflecting the editors' desire to remain critically respectable while not neglecting the kind of marketability required to find a niche in the film-publishing arena. Most of the contributors they've chosen write well from their various vantage points, which range from the journalistic to the academic, and from the defiantly old-fashioned to the psychoanalytically-inclined heresies, while the monographs as a whole are infused with a general sense of enthusiasm for the enterprise.

And even if the commentators they come up with only occasionally produce a fresh insight, the series' writers appear to have more or less obeyed the directives issued to them (although, irritatingly, despite some extensive quoting, there are no footnotes or bibliography in Sean French's contribution on The Terminator; and Peter Cowie's footnotes for his monograph on Annie Hall omit page references, while his vastly-prepared bibliography is limited only to books on the subject, despite the ready availability of an abundance of useful magazine articles).

The best of the recently-published batch of monographs is undoubtedly Jim Kitson's loving and extremely lucid account of Joseph H. Lewis's 1950 low-budget, couple-on-the-run thriller, Gun Crazy. Kitson, author of the seminal 1969 book on the Western, Horizon West, and now Professor of Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University, begins by observing that it is as a defining noir text, a landmark on the artistic map which film noir provides to the social and emotional topography of post-war America, capitalist and American populist ideology, that Gun Crazy is in my view most repay attention. [p. 13]

Kitson then goes on to join the dots between the film's production history (which includes the work done on the screenplay by the then-blacklisted Dalton Trumbo), the "roller-counter-trajectory" of its textual detail and its lively intersection with a range of generic motifs. And the fluidly-written monograph's post-script, an account of his 1995 meeting with the film's female lead, Peggy Cummins, is a delight.

Kitson is a scholar who knows how to communicate. Sean French, a novelist who writes a weekly column (not always on film) for the New Statesman, is a journalist who (the aforementioned missing bibliography aside) knows how to be scholarly. French's fine monograph on The Terminator is intelligent and illuminating and, what's more, its sparkling prose is fun to read. Aside from the chatter in which he rather pointlessly, and a little patronizingly, tries to emulate the response to the film of "a national first-time viewer" (whom he tries to distinguish from an "imaginary, middle-aged [female] Stanford English professor"), it has a straight-ahead drive that is critical equivalent to what could be described as the film's take-no-prisoners narrative momentum.

French is especially perceptive and precise on Arnold Schwarzenegger's contribution, comparing his place in Hollywood with the one earlier occupied by Boris Karloff, noting both his strengths and his limitations and ending the discussion of Big Arnies with a nicely cryptic under-statement: In The Terminator he did what he could do; his success in the role enabled him to devote himself to what he can't do. [p. 46]

French is also provocative on the "dark pleasures" to be had from the film, on the ways in which, like much exploitation cinema, it somehow manages to slip past the sentries to our morality, making us enjoy The Terminator's rampaging even more than we sympathize with those he's been assigned to terminate. And he argues persuasively that the original is better than the sequel because the latter shows what happens when [the film's director and co-writer] James Cameron [...] assumes a civic mantle and forges the dark pleasure of being an exploitation director. [p. 40]

Different in tone and style, but no less potent a critical work, is the monograph on Ingmar Bergman's 1957 melodrama, Wild Strawberries (Smultronstallet), in which French's parents, Philip (film critic for The Observer) and Kern (a teacher of modern languages), shed much light on the film, explaining its specifically Scandinavian resonances and discovering and detailing strong connections between it and Bergman's life and work. "Smultronstallet", they explain, not only actually translates into English as "The Wild Strawberry Place" but also carries a figurative reference to "a moment in the past to which someone looks back and which they would like to revisit or recapture" (p. 23), and thus to the circumstances of the film's protagonist (Victor Sjöström) and to the flashback style of its narrative. They also provide convincing hypotheses about the variety of creative currents which have flowed into the film: Bergman's relationship with his own father and with Sjöström, Sjöström's own work as a director (especially The Phantom Carriage), Charles Dickens (A Christmas Carol), playwrights August Strindberg, Henrik Ibsen, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Mollière (four of whose plays he was directing around the time he was working on Wild Strawberries), and Scandinavian artists Edward Munch and Carl Larsson.

None of the other recently-published monographs reach the high standard set by this trio, but most offer at least respectable accounts of their subjects. Frieda Grafe's playful feminist reading of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's The Ghost and Mr. Muir goes some way towards making sense of what, on face value, seems like a very bizarre choice for a series of "Classics", and in the process delivers some stimulating insights into the workings of "women's films" (especially on the function of "their excessive use of music").

Peter William Evans offers a thorough and eminently sensible reading of Pedro Almodóvar's Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, situating it in the context of post-Franco Spanish culture, noting the influence of Sirk in its use of color and its break with the conventional strategies of other-centred-female centred films, and including an excellent discussion of the screen persona of the film's star, Carmen Maura, astutely described as the quiescently Almodovarian 'comedienne': comic, tragic, warm, spirited, resilient and flawed, a hybrid heroine forever poised between comedy and melodrama] (p. 56).

Mark Sanderson's close study of Nicolas Roeg's intricately-detailed thriller, Don't Look Now, is impressive in its uncovering of themes and repetitions and includes a useful interview with Roeg. But its weakness is Sanderson's apparent inability to resist any opportunity to make a pun, most of them bad (discussion of Roeg's use of breaking glass as a motif, for example, leads to his conclusion that "in every sense the film is a shattering experience" [p. 43]), or to lay claim to what he describes as "spooky correspondences" (as when he breathlessly reveals to us that "the letters of 'Rog', looked at another way, spell out 'gore'" [p. 32]).

Christopher Frayling's monograph on William Cameron Menzies' H. G. Wells' Things to Come is not exactly a scintillating read in its documenting of the behind-the-scenes history of the film's production (especially concerning Wells' meddlesome, hands-on approach) is solid. And its sketching of the various influences on the film's visual style (from Wells' impregnable demands to the contributions made by Menzies, Fernand
Le ver, Lantlo Moholy-Nagy, Le Corbusier and official "settings designer" Vincent Korda, make it a valuable contribution to the "Classics" series, even if the actual flow of the finished film tends to get lost in the process.

Less rewarding is the monograph on Easy Rider, in which Terry Southern-biographer Lee Hill catches something of the flavor of the film’s doomed romanticism, but seems ill-equipped to deal with its stylistic mix. His attempt to link director Dennis Hopper’s methods with Kubrick’s for 2001: A Space Odyssey makes no sense at all, and his analysis of the film rarely rises far above the banal. For example, Hill on its visual style:

The travelling shots are wonderfully hypnotic, but they often go on too long. More scenes of Wyatt and Billy talking or meeting with people on the road would have been just as visually moving as long shots of sunsets and skylines.

[p. 54]

Even worse is Peter Cowie’s critically-inexpert collection of disconnected observations about Woody Allen’s Annie Hall, which takes us laboriously through the film scene-by-scene. This might have almost been acceptable had there been something approximating an insight gained in the process, but, basically, Cowie has nothing of interest to say about his subject and spends the entire monograph making this clear.

Fortunately, his work is untypical, although something of a shadow hangs over where the series is now headed. Last October saw the resignation from the BFI of the estimable Ed Buscombe, Head of Publishing, editor of the “Classics” series, and a critic and teacher whose contribution to film education in the UK reaches back almost 25 years. As a result, the future of the “Classics” seems uncertain. However, before Buscombe’s departure, further volumes had already been commissioned and scheduled for publication in 1997 – among them Blue Velvet by Michael Atkinson, The Crying Game by Jane Giles, The Piano by Lizzie Francke, The Exorcist by Mark Kermode and Once Upon A Time In America by The Age’s astute film critic, Adrian Martin.1

“Do you find my bottom lovely?” – in Le Mépris (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963), Martin writes:

She plunged back on the bed and pulled us onto her and into her, and made us slaves to her every desire. She was as deep as the sea and we could never get to the bottom of her. [pp. 118-9]

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1 Just published, but arriving too late for inclusion in this review, are: Les Enfants du Paradis, by Jill Forbes; Bride of Frankenstein, Alberto Manguel; The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, A.L. Kennedy; and The Big Sleep, David Thomson.

Waiting for Bardot

Andy Martin, Faber & Faber, London, pp. 182, illus., pb, £19.95

Some of the most notorious folies Féerique have been by authors volunteering their sexual interest in famous actresses. The most notorious is Norman Mailer’s suggestion that the best form of coffee for Marilyn Monroe would have been a sealed swimming-pool filled with jism (to use a term of the period). Andy Martin’s Waiting for Bardot is also a collection of fixations best left unspoken. It describes the author’s decades-long obsession with Brigitte Bardot – or, more specifically, her body – and his disenfranchisement over why others can have sex with it but not him. The “it” is deliberate as Martin’s “Bardot” is never more than a revered flesh capsule encasing the heart of a tramp.

On p. 6, for example, Martin writes about how he and friend Griffith reacted to news of Bardot’s ditching husband Gunter Sachs for director Mike Sarne:

Our first thoughts were of violation, blasphemy, sacrilege. ‘That prick Sarne, pronging BB!’ moaned Griffith. ‘That piece o’ piss!’ But when Sachs raged and fumed and spat in one of his Bavarian castles, it was clear that the impossible had indeed occurred. When logic possessed us once more, it was with the irrefragable [sic] force of syllogism that the understanding came upon us that we too were contenders: we too were in line for that crowning moment of ecstasy – a spell in bed with Brigitte Bardot. [p. 8]

The Madonna-prostitute complex runs riot here.

Of course, Martin could argue that the book deconstructs his desire while simultaneously describing it. But that is a hard cop, as the text is full of the kind of bad humour and lousy puns that kept the Carry On merchants in business for decades.

For example, after rewriting the first bed scene between Camille (Bardot) and Paul (Michel Piccoli) –
in review

Books

Sidney James would have been proud of those double entendres. In essence, Martin’s book is another in the very long list of disingenuous academic forays into the worlds of popular culture – from Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott’s hagiograph on James Bond to the innumerable feminist elevations of Madmen as the great modern sex symbol (a view now seemingly abandoned by all).

In his defence, Martin, who teaches French at Cambridge, brings to his book a singular passion for his subject that is absent in many ‘ac-pop’ works. But that is passion, for all his vociferation, real.

The reader is alerted to something amiss early on, when Martin writes about Et Dieu... Créa la Femme (Roger Vadim, 1956):

As Vadim said, ‘in the film she was undressed for no more than five minutes. Yet people insisted she was naked throughout.’ I was the one deceived. I remember her body in every cinematic detail; and yet seeing the film again, I realize she never once appears without a smoking device (clothes, a strategically positioned towel, a sheet, clothes line, force field). In other words, the film only ever alludes to a state of nakedness; it says without showing. [p. 36]

Try the fifth shot, Mr Martin, where a nude Bardot lies on the ground without a single ‘cloaking device’ within coo-ee. Like many of his ac-pop peers, Martin gets the simplest of facts wrong. A True Fan of Bardot wouldn’t, is Martin a True Fan?

Of course, Martin may have first seen a censored version, but he says he has since re-seen it. Regardless, a True Fan would get the original video from France, an overnight mail’s away, if no uncensored version was available at home. (A True Fan would also never omit the title’s ellipsis, as Martin does.)

On page 132, Martin also writes:

In 1958, shortly after seeing En cas de malheur [Claude Autant-Lara, 1958], in which BB persuades an ageing Jean Gabin, playing a Parisian lawyer, to take her case by lifting her dress to reveal she is wearing no underwear, Marguerite Duras wrote an idyllic essay [...]! A True Fan would know that the French censor removed the shot of Yvette Maudet (Bardot) lifting the dress, and that Marguerite Duras would have seen no such thing. (The six-second cut was later reinstated in the René Chateau video re-release.)

Then again, on p. 135, Martin claims that in La Vénité [Hérent-Georges Clouzot, 1960] ‘Bardot [...] accidentally bumps off her lover’. Has Martin seen this film? The True Fan knows that Dominique Marceau (Bardot) does not accidentally bump off her lover, but goes to his flat and shoots him several times.

Given Martin’s numerous goofs, one begins to doubt he is a fan of any description. The whole book seems driven by articulate, by false proclamation, an impression not helped by Martin’s sprinkling his text with quotes from hip (or once-hip) people. One chapter starts with a quote by Lacan, another from Derrida. Only Deluze and Guattari are missing, though ‘desire haunts every page.

Sometimes, too, these quotes are of the most dubious relevance. On page 33, for example, Martin applaudingly quotes Roland Barthes’ ‘pleasure resides in intermittence’ theory, but the rest of his book is nothing if not suggestive of a mind which gets more pleasure from a nude Bardot than from a slight gap between garments, thereby retarding the theory.

Martin does a good job of demolishing Simone de Beauvoir’s profusely silly Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita Syndrome, but he fails to note Françoise Saget’s book1 or indeed list in the bibliography Brigitte Bardot from Editions Vade Retro (Paris, 1994), surely the most sumptuous and treasured of all Bardot books.

Despite its promise and the odd amusing pa, Martin’s book is all too typical of an academic culture where ‘cool’ junk is preferred over serious thought. Scott Murray


3 The cut is actually three shots. The first is the second half of the one where Yvette lifts her skirt (it cuts once the hem passes the knee), the cut reaction of André Gobillet (Gabin) and a low-angle of Yvette’s leg from too-wait. The lack of underwear is only apparent in the first cut shot. Without that, there is no way for the viewer (or Duras) to know what Yvette is or is not wearing.


Books Received

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THE BIG SLEEP

BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN

CASINO
Nicholas Pplain & Martin Scorsese, Faber, London, 1996, 232 pp, illus, rpp $17.95

CLINT EASTWOOD

CRASH
David Cronenberg, Faber, London, 1996, 68 pp, illus, rrp £16.95

LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS

GET THE PICTURE (4TH EDITION)
Rosemary Curtis & Cathy Grey (editors), Australian Film Commission, Sydney, 1996, 310 pp, illus, index, rrp $25.95

HOWARD HAWKS AMERICAN ARTIST
Jim Hillier and Peter Wollen (editors), BFI Publishing, London, 1996, index, rrp £40.00 (hc), £15.99 (pb)

HIBAKUSHA CINEMA HIROSHIMA, NAGASAKI AND THE NUCLEAR IMAGE IN JAPANESE FILM
Brockenderick, Kegan Paul International, London, 250 pp, illus, rrp £99.95 (hc)

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INSIDE STORIES DIARIES OF BRITISH FILM-MAKERS AT WORK

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF COLONEL BLIMP

LIGHTING TECHNOLOGY A GUIDE FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
Brian Fitc & Joe Thornley, Focal, Oxford, 1997, 430 pp, illus, index, rrp £90.00

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! WORKING IN FILM, TELEVISION & VIDEO (SECOND EDITION)

MICHAEL COLLINS FILM DIARY AND SCREENPLAY

NOVEL TO FILM
An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation
Brian McFarlane, Oxford University Press, London, 1996, 279 pp, index

ONCE UPON A TIME... THE PROPRIETOR

PANAFLEX USERS’ MANUAL (SECOND EDITION)
David W. Samuelson, Focal Press, Boston, 1996, 300 pp, index, illus, rrp $60.00

THE PRACTICAL DIRECTOR (SECOND EDITION)
Mike Crisp, Focal Press, Oxford, 1996, 205 pp, illus, index, rrp $59.00

QUINLAN’S FILM STARS (FOURTH EDITION)
David Quinlan, B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1996, 510 pp, illus, rrp $49.95

SAVAGE ART
A BIOGRAPHY OF JIM THOMPSON
Robert Pollio, Sarment’s Tail, London, 1997, 543 pp, illus, rrp $29.95

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY
The DIARIES
Emma Thompson, Bloomsbury, London, 1996, 124 pp, index, rrp $16.95

SHINE
The SCREENPLAY

STAR TREK MEMORIES

TARANTINO A TO ZED THE FILMS OF QUENTIN TARANTINO
Alan Barnes & Marcus Hearn, B.T. Batsford Ltd, London, 1996, index, illus, rrp $34.95

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CINEMA PAPERS • APRIL 1997
Seale

Dean Semler's directing at the moment and I think that's fantastic. I had a go at it, but, just as if I lit my first film, I got such a fright that I went back to operating for three features. Similarly, I directed one film, got a bit of a fright and went back to lighting. I still love lighting and operating, but what I love is the contribution. If I can't have that, I find that films are very empty.

On some films you think, in all honesty, that you could have done the job better than the director, and then the next one you realize you couldn't because it's working with actors and it's so essential. I watched Anthony with our cast and realized that actors of that calibre are so demanding and there's something you have to have. I think my son Derin [currently in final year of writing-directing course at University of Technology, Sydney] will have it, but it's not sure I have. And I do prefer to work on films that are character-driven rather than action films. When I look back on my work, I seem to have chosen films that are emotion-driven.

Did you encourage your son to follow in your footsteps?

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Baker changes as well. Equipment changes, lighting equipment changes, film stocks change, and that creates an evolution of what you are doing.

I have reached a point that I think is a good point. I would love to do right now another big film, a really challenging film, like The Russia House [Fred Schepisi, 1990], which I could really give a great style and a great look to. I'm ready to do another big film. That is what I'm hoping this year brings.

Has your relationship to the technology changed over the years? Has there been an evolution in lights, stocks and lenses which has given you greater freedom to be the DOP you wish to be?

Well, it must be easier today because we have faster film stocks and faster lenses and bigger lights available to us. I don't know how we ever shot films like The Chast of Jimmie Blacksmith [Fred Schepisi, 1979], which we shot anamorphic with all those night sequences with 100 ASA film stock and tiny lights. We had 2kw and some 5kw lights, but no HMI's. Nowadays, you have these mega-powered HMI lights, which have countless times more output than the lights you used in those days. And we now have 500 ASA film stock.

All this makes your job easier, in that it enables you to do more and larger things more quickly. That is what the technology is doing for us.

One reason for the question is that not all technological advances have been arguably good for the cinema. For example, super-speed lenses meant DOPs could get scenes more easily onto film, with less light. But I believe it is, when we started out, we were doing movies in four or five weeks. We had to get it done, so we were brought up being fast and efficient.

The other important thing is that we didn't - well, I certainly didn't - have years of coming up through the ropes, working as an apprentice and then an assistant and so on.

I didn't set out to be a DOP. I didn't set out to do anything in particular. I went to fine art school and studied painting and sculpture. Then I sort of dabbled at the Swinburne film school when it first began, when it was in its heyday, when there was not much equipment and not much happened there.

Then I was lucky enough to get a job as a shit-kicker with Fred Schepisi, doing some big commercial at the end of my schooling. There weren't many freelance technicians around and I got a job carrying camera cases. I stuck around in his studio for a little while. That was when he started to shoot his films, and I was lucky enough, after only a couple of years in the business, and having shot quite a few television commercials for him, to do his first films.

Has he ever told you why he chose you to take you up those steps so quickly?

No. I was there and all of a sudden there was something to be done. The next thing I knew I was gorging around shooting something. I guess I never made mistakes, or not too many anyway, and the next thing I knew I was doing features.

Perhaps there wasn't a great deal of choice. You just worked for no money in those days. I guess that had a lot to do with it.

Do you have any desire to direct?

I directed television commercials for 20 years, but as for directing feature films, no, none whatsoever. I have been offered some, and I could do it, but I'm totally comfortable and confident with what I do now. There is no project that I step onto in the world that I don't feel totally at home doing. I wouldn't like to be waddling along as some second-rate director; I'd rather stick at what I feel very comfortable doing. 1

Newsfront

the director to make the film and not to make half a film. Ellis feels that the extra money could have been raised and the severe script cuts were unnecessary:

The AFC actually wanted to give them another hundred thousand dollars. Elfick, believing it could not make money if it cost more than five hundred thousand, refused the money, which was ridiculous.

Various versions of the Newsfront script survived in the Ellis archives at the National Defence Force Academy Library in Canberra. The dating of these scripts is problematical, since often an identical cover sheet and list of credits is used for each new version of the script, and the numbering of the new drafts was not systematic. Minor changes occur on these cover sheets, such as the inclusion of Phil Noyce as script editor. Name changes to the production entity—from Voyager Films to Palm Beach Pictures and finally to Palm Beach Pictures Pty Ltd—give some guide to the sequencing of drafts, since Elfick incorporated his production company before making the film. One screenplay even carries the credit “from an original idea by Philippe Mora”.

To shorten the film, and thus stay within the planned shooting schedule, on April 28th 1981, Elfick gave Noyce his material, with Elfick’s approval. Well-known script editor and television writer Moya Wood was hired to help with the editing. Wood, although she did not do any actual rewriting, produced a story analysis which was used to develop the shorter version. Noyce wrote a new version with Wood’s advice and assistance. The shortened version was given to Elfick for comment. Elfick’s comments to the rewrite are evident in a series of pencilled comments on almost every page of this draft, comments of which “shit” and “useless” are amongst the kinder epithets used. This script in many ways warrants Ellis’ bitter attack. The storyline is “boosted” to a heightened sense of action, with terse dialogue which is often clumsy and graceless. Many of the nuances of character and event are lost, and the action is forced along by brusque question and answer dialogue, mixed with gratuitous Americanisms. Ellis’ comment, “vintage Skippy,” appears on a number of scenes, although the handling of dialogue and character development (or lack of development) is also reminiscent of Australian television police drama of the time.

Noyce’s rewrite was undertaken for a number of reasons, including Elfick’s undoubted frustration with Ellis’ mode of work. Elfick defined the rewrite on the basis that Ellis was taking too long to complete a draft: “Bob took an enormous amount of time to write the film [...] because he is very slow at it and he would go on and do other things.” Ellis regularly took on more projects than he could complete in an attempt to cover his many financial commitments. Elfick may also have seen it as a way of bringing Ellis back into line and proving to him that he was not indispensable to the project. Another motivation could have been the need to work out story problems without Ellis’ interference, to restructure the project without having to deal with the writer’s already expressed intransigence towards changes to favourite scenes.

In the rewrite, the character interactions between the two brothers, Len and Frank MacGuire, and their contest for the affections of Amy McKenzie, often seems artificial and the emotional conflicts inconclusive. Scenes develop to near conflict or an emotional resolution of issues, and then cut abruptly. Perhaps some stylistic point about non-communication was being made, but it is also possible that these flaws emerged during the script editing process.

In an impassioned letter to Noyce and Elfick, Ellis lists the losses in the redraft, trying to point out that the essential humour and drama of the script has been destroyed. Many of the points raised by Ellis are valid criticisms of this rewrite, and were used by Ellis as a plea that he should be reinstated as the writer. For a time, Ellis was once again back on the project. None of the rewritten scenes was used in further drafts, although the structural changes were retained.

One major beneficial effect of this rewrite was that the depiction of the main events was tightened, and a clearer development of the dramatic line was achieved. The losses of this draft were a number of the more emotional and engaging scenes, and some of the script’s political fire and commitment. Ellis feels that the script changes made in the final run-up to production were crucial: Elfick and Noyce, by cutting probably only 15 minutes out of it, maybe a bit more, [...] pruned it back to its political backbone and lost a lot of its sociological flesh.

Elfick defends the director’s control over the final stages of script development: I had to let Phil shape the material in a way that would be able to be used in the film that he wanted to make. Phil was sticking to the story; he was not re-writing or adding new characters or anything. It is a 110-minute film; that is quite a long film in Australian terms. It’s a tight 110 minutes — it really zips along. It feels like a short film. Before the film went into production, with pressing problems of construction and financing, it was clear that more scenes would have to be cut. Ellis found that further versions were being typed up without his knowledge, and as was as upset as he had been when his casting suggestions were ignored. Open warfare developed and Ellis was banned from rehearsals. While the film was still in the early stages of production, Elfick drafted a letter to the AFC, suggesting that Elfick had mismanaged and/or diverted funds for script development, and that Noyce was not qualified to rewrite his material. Ellis suggested that the integrity of the film was being destroyed by the efforts of Elfick and Noyce, and threatened to have the film stopped. The exchange resulted in a total cessation of communication between the two parties and Ellis was banned from the set of the film.

The ending that Ellis had written was removed, and another substituted. Ellis feels that the film lost a great deal of its emotional and political strength through this change:

There were about three or four scenes to be included at the end: the main characters were sitting fishing, watching the Sputnik go over, realizing that it was a new era. Len had got an award and he gave a speech that was based on something Syd Wood had said: "In the 1930s, I was a storeman and packer. I think I had lost my job and I walked down the street a few hours later I got this job and I am still in it. When I think of the life we lead, and that the things we see, that we are part of, I’m glad I didn’t stay a storeman and packer." And that was to be the end of the movie. Elfick didn’t like that.

The finale of Newsfront instead concentrates on the effects of television on the newsreel industry, and the conflict between the two brothers is finally brought out into the open. Len, upset when he finds that his footage is being mixed with other material to help the newsreel compete with television news coverage, threatens to resign. His brother returns from America and offers him a job co-producing an American series to be shot in Australia. Len types up his resignation letter and walks into a meeting at Cinetone, only to find that the two competing newsreel companies are amalgamating. He is offered the job of shooting and directing the coverage of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. The Games coincide with the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and a water-polo match between Russians and Hungarians becomes a bloody brawl. Frank pursues Len and offers him $50,000 for a reel of the film to be used as anti-Soviet propaganda. Len refuses and walks down a tunnel with his camera on his shoulder.

It is an enigmatic ending, and the scene of Len driving past the newsreel cinema, which is being readied to show a Brigitte Bardot film, was intended to appear much earlier in the film. By the time the film was being readied for release, Ellis had long been excluded from any involvement, and was waiting to see what had happened to his script. After a preview screening, Elfick confronted Ellis and asked simply whether his name was to be on or off the film. Ellis feels that he was pushed into a hasty decision:

Elfick said, “Is your name on it or off?” I said, “Off.” Had he not said that, it never would have arisen. I stormed out and then I came back with a formula saying “based on the script by Bob Ellis”. But I hadn’t divined the crucial thing, which was that it was a success. I thought it was a failure. It was just one of the silly things that happens in 20 seconds that lasts a lifetime, and I got a whole reputation out of that which was only partly deserved.

Elfick was annoyed by Ellis’ behaviour at the preview, which he sees as an attempt by Ellis to humiliate him, despite his own efforts to make sure Ellis received due credit for his writing:

I had a head credit made up for him [Ellis]. We showed the film like that and we had investors there. It was the first time that we had shown the film, apart from from the production crew. The film finished and Bob got up and said in front of everybody else that it was the worst film that he had ever seen, and the only satisfaction he got was that I would never work in the film industry again [...] which was embarrassing for me, because people who had put money in the film were there.

Elfick nevertheless tried to work out an adequate formula for Ellis’ credit:

Phil and I never negated Bob’s contribution. I could have left him off so easily, but I wanted his name there, so I pleaded with his agent to leave his name on because he wrote the script and he deserved the credit for it.

Time may have mellowed perceptions of those heated confrontations, but it is still clear that Elfick regards Newsfront as the director’s film:

It doesn’t say “A film by Phil Noyce”, but, to this day, I would be quite happy if it did. It was his film and he made a very good film that I was very pleased to produce.

After it won a number of AFI awards, Ellis paid for advertisements in The National Times saying he would accept compliments for Newsfront. Ellis now attributes much of the success of the film to Noyce’s work on the casting and direction of actors, although he has scant regard for Noyce’s visualization, and feels the film would have been better directed by Howard Rubie. Ellis is particularly critical of the “look” of the film:
Noyce never had any visual flair at all, actually. He is very good with performances; he is very good at sort of creating a kind of muscular energy in the actors. He is good at casting but he is barely a B-grader as a visual director.79

With the passing of the years, Ellick shows himself to be more tolerant of Ellis than the latter is of him: I didn’t hire Bob because he was the wrong writer. He wrote a very good script and he won an AFI award for it. The bitterness that Bob poured out over the years came from the fact that, from the middle of pre-production to the time that he saw the finished film, he had nothing to do with it. I just didn’t want him near the thing.80

The innovative use of actual footage and the political sub-text won acclaim from contemporary analysts. Anne B. Hutton wrote in Newsfront:

Newsfront exists as the most complete cinematic allegory of the Australian nationalist dilemma [...] The film deals with actual political and historical events in the use of newsreel footage (and excellent recreations), and the reactions of Cinetone employees to the content of their newsreels becomes the comment upon these events.81

The film’s effectiveness must be attributed to the contribution made by Ellis and his advisers, paying due credit to the writer’s sense of history and knowledge of the Australian Labour movement. This was later to be expanded and given fuller treatment by Ellis in the television series The True Believers (1986). As in the case of many Australian feature productions, the critical and financial success of the film did not lead to further collaborations on other projects of equal interest. However, Ellick is still very proud of the film: I still think it is the best film I have been involved in and the angst was in many ways unnecessary. I think Phil and I always did the right thing, and I think we were given our just desserts by the product we produced. But there was unnecessary tension and pressure put on us.82

Events during the development of Newsfront demonstrate the basic factors underlying Australian feature film production at the time. A small group, working out of a cottage industry situation, developed the project to the point where it could be funded by government funding mechanisms. With script funding, a lengthy script development process followed, culminating in the offer of production finance. At this point, the producer assumed full control and began working with the director on final script changes as the project went forward into production. Power therefore lay in the hands of the director via the empowering strategies provided by the producer. The final result is the product of a sustained effort by the producer, using input provided by the writer and director. Such distinctions are largely ignored in the subsequent life of the film, as its successes and shortcomings are discussed in the context of the director’s contribution.

Seen with the perspective of ten years or so, Newsfront stands as a creditable effort by first-time producer, director and writer. In its historical settings and in its characterizations, Newsfront is incredibly good, even if the dramatic exposition is sometimes clumsy and halting. Stratton wrote of the film in 1979: [...] it recorded how Australia during that period gradually eased away from its traditional ties with Britain and started to fall more and more under the influence of the US [...] This makes Newsfront the most political film produced in Australia so far, and certainly it’s one of the best, with judicious inclusion of original newsreel excerpts and extremely skilful recreation of certain events [...] like the Maitland floods.83

The form chosen for Newsfront and the authenticity invested in it by a well-handled photographic style and attention to period detail enable it to stand as a major innovation in Australian filmmaking technique.

2. To Shoot a Mad Dog (David Ellick, Palm Beach Pictures, 1976).
10. The Last New Wave, p. 208.
13. A Year To Remember (Syd Wood, 1989). Footage in this series may come have come from the Movietone archive.
19. The World at War (documentary, Thames Television, 1974).
28. Ellis, 1992. See Morea’s reference to the Clark Gable-Walter Pidgeon film, Too Hot to Handle (Jack Conway, 1938).
36. This phrase appears on one of the title pages with the inscription: “It is also we hope, a true and loving picture of the newsreel men of the day, those buccaneers on mortgages of which we know so little and how they lived, worked and coped with their adventurous, wearing life.”
37. Ellis, 1992. It is worth noting that Schlesinger’s film was not released until 1979, whereas the sprawling narrative experiment Nashville (Robert Altman, 1975) had created intense interest in the Australian industry.
38. For example, This Sporting Life (Karel Reisz, 1967).
39. Eli to Handle (Jack Conway, 1938).
43. Ellis, 1992.
49. Australian Film: The Inside Story, op cit, p. 167.
52. Ellis, 1992.
59. Newsfront draft item. Ellis archives. No date.
62. Newsfront draft item. Ellis archives.
64. Ellick, 1994.
65. Bob Ellis: “My present mortgage payments of $1560 a week for fifteen years have brought in their train an ominous crumshing train of debt, that of work paid for and owed but not yet done, and perhaps forever owed, as in a bankruptcy declaration.” The Insurrectional Ellis, p. 199.
66. Late in the film Len comes back to his flat and gets into bed with Amy. He discusses his problems at work and kisses her on the lips, then asks, “Are you all right?” Amy, horizontal, does not answer and the scene continues in silence, then cuts to an editing machine showing Len’s footage of a bushfire.
70. Ellis, unpublished letter. Ellis archives. No date.
71. Ellis, letter to the AFC – possibly addressed to Peter Martin, who was a friend of Ellis’. Ellis archives. 6 September, 1977.
73. The lines in the end scene are: FRANK: He’s walking towards the edge of a precipice with his eyes closed. AMY (approvingly): He’s just old fashioned, that’s all. Len drives past the cinema where a poser is being passed up for And God Created Woman (Ex Dieu Crea ... la Femme, Roger Vadim, 1956). A montage of celebrated newsreel moments follows, with a shot of Len and his camera superimposed.
74. Ellis, 1992.
78. Ellis, draft advertisement. Ellis also sent a telegram to Newsweek about the film’s credits, which was not published. Ellis archives. No date.
WHEN INSPIRATION STRIKES

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The Interactive Movie is Dead . . .
Long Live the Interactive Movie

Fred Harden examines Adrian Carr’s interactive career

Interactivity is games – how hard is that to figure. Everybody said, “You’re going to have to have interactive movies.” You don’t have to have interactive movies. There’s games and there’s movies. Movies are storytelling; you tell somebody a story. A game is interactive; you participate in some kind of an event with a lot of other people or yourself, or with a machine. Those are two different things, and they’ve been around forever.

- George Lucas, Wired, 2 February 1997

When Australian editor-director Adrian Carr first flew into Salt Lake City in early 1995, the only interest he had in computer games was to hitch a ride on the still-hot trend of turning hit games into movies. Films like Super Mario Bros. (Rocky Morton, 1993) and Mortal Kombat (Paul Anderson, 1995), while hardly the success of their game cartridge namesakes, had a formula that Hollywood was interested in mining further.

In his briefcase, Carr had a script based on the Utah company Access Software’s Under a Killing Moon, at the time considered an innovative twist on the standard adventure game format. The latest in the series of games from Access, it again featured Tex Murphy, a classic hard-drinking gumshoe. The CD-ROM-based game had a great storyline and a clever user interface, but was uniformly panned for the acting in its live action sequences. When Carr sat down to talk to Chris Jones, the managing director of Access (who has played the part of and is the players’ guiding off-screen voice as Tex Murphy in all the games), he must have impressed him.

Three days later, Carr was directing the movie sequences for a new Tex Murphy adventure, The Pandora Directive, juggling an interactive movie script with a multiple plot lines, a cast of middleweight and cult B-movie actors, with a virtual set that only existed in a computer, in a small bluescreen studio on the airport flightpath. That he did it well you only need to look at the game and read the pages of awards that the game has received from PC games magazines, as rough and critical an audience as they come. In its first three months of release, it had sold 250,000 copies in the U.S. alone and has been nominated for two Codie Awards, the multimedia games equivalent of the Academy’s Oscars.

The Pandora Directive works as a challenging computer adventure game, with clues to find and puzzles to solve. The player’s persona is Tex Murphy, who begins searching for a missing person and becomes involved in a cover-up of the much-rumoured UFO crash at the Roswell military base. Along the way, there’s Mayan history, a few murders and romantic interests (Tex’s history of relationships with women hasn’t been good). It also has a lot of cleverly-staged movie scenes that work on the level of entertainment, adding to character development in a way that computer-generated characters, no matter how well animated, cannot do yet.

Adrian Carr came to his craft, as many good film directors do, from being a successful film editor. I worked with him briefly at Fred Schepisi’s The Film House in Melbourne. He worked on a string of Australian features such as the original The Man from Snowy River (George Miller, 1982), moved on to second-unit directing and finally into directing features. Originally from Melbourne, he now lives in Los Angeles with his wife Rosemary, and, although he loves working in Hollywood, says he pines sometimes for their house set in 29 acres of rainforest at Kuranda in Queensland. Adrian doesn’t see the move from editing to directing as one way. As I talked with him last, he was completing a promo, which he designed and edited, for Cinergi’s upcoming movie, An Alan Smithee Film, starring Sylvester Stallone, Whoopi Goldberg, Jackie Chan, Eric Idle, Ryan O’Neal, et al. As you read this, he will be heading back to Utah to direct the next Tex Murphy game for Access.

Along with the talent, there’s some lovely serendipity in much of Carr’s career. That his skills as an editor have helped him through times when other directors might have floundered is obvious. We started the following interview, which took place by phone, fax and e-mail, on just such a point. The other details have been filled in from Adrian’s CV and the supporting reviews that piled feet-deep under my fax machine.

Before we talk about Pandora, I noticed that you’d worked as a director on Mighty Morphin Power Rangers [television]. That’s a true case of something being so bad it’s good. It has become a pop classic. For the record, how did that happen?

My agent represented a writer who happened to be one of the writers on the show and knew they were looking for directors. He put my name forward and,
The pace of shooting which would be a gruelling pace for any crew, but one which my group coped with admirably. I only shot one cluster for Saban, as I was called away to scout a location in Chile for a film entitled The Cold Jungle, which I have been asked to direct by producer Robert Watts [Star Wars, Indiana Jones, Alive].

You've said that you weren't a computer game player. I'm not big on computer games, but I'm fascinated by a popular phenomenon that pushes along some of the best of multimedia. Preparing for this, I dutifully wasted days playing Pandora. I wanted to see how the interface worked and how the live-action was integrated. Compared to the awkwardness of the live-action in Under a Killing Moon, it seemed a big leap forward.

They got slammed for that by most of the reviewers of the game. They liked the game play but not the acting. I don't know how Chris Jones did it. I was run ragged. How did he do it, working as a director, and lead actor, and running a company of 120-plus-game developers as executive vice-president of Access Software, I don't know. Obviously, he was sensitive to the criticism and, when the time came to do The Pandora Directive with a budget that was up to $US 4 million, he called in some help.

Chris Jones sounds fascinating. He also wrote and developed the plot lines and puzzles, and you said he was a real film buff.

When I met him, Chris said that on weekends he'd get into the studio with friends and rehearse and shoot scenes on video. They'd make their own versions of film noir classics. The Tex character emerged from all that; these were the stories they all loved. In the next one, we'll go even further into that film noir area.

The suburb address of Access has a wonderful name, Bountiful, and of course Salt Lake City is the home of the Mormon Church. Are the people at Access Software Mormons?

About 96 percent of them. It made it very interesting when Tex had to drink coffee, toss down a bourbon and smoke. Chris would say, "We don't have to light the cigarette, we'll digitally put the smoke in" and I had to say, "Look, you can't animate smoke! If you do make it work, your elders will see it and think you're smoking anyway! So, why don't you, for the purposes of the game, as Tex Murphy, smoke a cigarette." By the end of it, Chris would say that after a few puffs in the morning he could see how people got used to it. I hope we haven't created a closet smoker! We were very conscious of it all the time.

Similarly, we paid a lot of attention to our material and our general audience rating system. [In Australia, the game is rated by the Ofice of Film and Literature Classification "Mature: for 15 years and over with Medium level violence and adult themes"].

Playing the Game

In many ways, The Pandora Directive is a modern-day morality play. Set in the near future of 2043, it's just futuristic enough for videophones and post-apocalyptic enough for them not to work. The strange unreality given to the staging that comes from all the sets' being computer-generated works to enhance this. Some are more realistic than others but, by using just the mouse, the player can move around quickly in totally fluid 3D environments. The live-action sequences, with actors matted into these 3D backgrounds, take over for short dramatic moments that you can precipitate, but not control. The rest of the time, in standard adventure gaming fashion, you choose from a menu of responses as to how you interact with the on-screen character, and what you do next.

There are three main paths to the story that lead to one of seven different endings. The first of the paths is described by the developers as "Mission Street", where, if you are thoughtful and kind and choose the high road, you'll get the girl and solve the mystery. Carr describes this as the "do-gooder path".

Then there's "Lombard Street", where you stay neutral and perhaps a little naïve. This was named after the twist and turns of the famous street in San Francisco. This path offers moral and ethical tests, such as when the totally-broke Tex finds an envelope with money in it. Should he keep it or return it? What he does will change the outcome later in the game.

The final path is the "Boulevard of Broken Dreams", where, if you choose to be antagonistic and selfish, you suffer the consequences, just as in real life. People and friends die and the game becomes much darker in mood.

To examine it all could take an accomplished game player 70 hours to explore, most of us much longer. It's a big game, packed into 6 CD-ROMs, which means that there's lots of swapping them during the game.

Building Paths

How do you feel interactivity changes storytelling?

When you sit down to write a feature film screenplay, you make a choice
about how you’ll take a character. You may try different ones but you have to decide on a linear path down which you direct the audience. In an interactive game, you can have all the paths, take the character down a dark side or try it as a lighter approach in the same story. If you’ve ever written drama, you know that half way through you can decide, “I’ll kill this character off.” Someone else reading the script will often say, “Why did you do that? I liked them!” Now if you had the freedom to make a movie that was a comedy, remake it with a dark side and do a version that was a mix of both, then you’d have something like what Access has come up with.

How did you keep track of the interactive branching sequences?

Was it hard for the actors, as well?

I think it was my editor’s skills that helped me get through; it’s not for every director. You need a mix of being a technical director and an actor’s director. It gets very, very complicated. Sometimes when you are going down a path with high emotions, you have to shoot those scenes out, let the actor unwind, then go back and shoot the alternatives. Otherwise, your actors would be up and down like yoyos.

As a director, did you think about the difference between the one-to-one experience of just me a foot away from the computer monitor. It is very different to the family watching the television, or to an audience in the cinema.

We tried always to engage you as a one-to-one player. We worked hard to involve you with the actor’s performance. There will be something in the next game that – and I can’t talk about it yet – will touch on just that experience. We were going to do it with this game but we decided to wait until DVD and then the new Access Interactive Video came out.

Okay, let’s talk about the technology. You were shooting on video?

Pandora was shot on Betacam SP. To shoot Pandora as a feature film would have cost probably $30 million. There’s not one set live in any of the game. Other than for a few action props, all the staging is computer-generated. The biggest limitation to quality I found was the reduced colour palette. The next game will be in thousands of colours, not in 35! We stayed at 10 frames a second and it’s not really evident other than on the high-speed action scenes.

The successful Wing Commander series are probably Access’ biggest competitor. They use a system that runs at a higher frame rate by dropping frame lines, like interlacing. The image is poorer but the action is good. In the next game, we are hoping for a real-time frame rate for dialogue and to still be full-frame. Access has a customized compression engine that allows almost full-motion video off a standard CD-ROM. This has kept them ahead and they’ve improved it even further for the next game. If they do the game in DVD, the market dictates that there will probably still be a dual release as a standard CD-ROM.

Your stage apparently left a bit to be desired?

I was surprised at first by the position of Access because it was near the airport. The studio wasn’t sound-proofed but it really was only a problem between 10am and 2pm if the wind carried the noise our way. However, they’ve just completed a new runway and it’s no more than a quarter of a mile away and in a direct path over the studio, so that will be interesting next time.

The blue-screen stage is only about 20 x 20ft by about the same height, and, when you look at the game and the expansive feel of it, even I’m amazed how it came off. Next time I’m going to be able to use a moving camera and I’ll have much more precision, so it will be even better.

Did you have a video-split that showed the composite image of actors and set?

We started out working with the computer backgrounds and keying the actors over the top. After about two hours, I said, “Forget this, guys. I’ll shoot it and you can match the sets to the action.” Once I understood how the 3D set worked I didn’t have to work with restricted angles. I had complete flexibility, just like on a real set. Once we gave them our lens width and heights, the computer artists could match it. We measured out the floor so that we had an idea of the right space, so that if the actors had to walk around a desk they wouldn’t walk through it. Once we got going, the amount of set-ups and pages we shot a day was amazing.

One of the interesting phenomena for me was having the set in a computer. It was better when I started to understand how the grid worked. They told me I had complete freedom where I put the camera, even 15 feet up in the air. They positioned a little icon on screen and, bingo, there was the set from that angle. That was still hard because you couldn’t see it while shooting where elements were.

Matching the lighting was difficult, as well. I brought some props in, like the blinds and physical lighting things that you see in the promotional shots. They then matched computer-generated lights to them later.

Not knowing how I worked as a filmmaker made it hard at first, because on a real set I’d be able to use a flyaway wall to film from a position that you normally couldn’t. They said, “You can’t do that in a computer. If the lens is positioned inside a wall, that’s all you see.” I asked if we could get around that just for the movie scenes by deleting a wall from the model, just while we filmed the scene, and then they could restore the computer model. It worked out just like a real set.

Did you do a conventional edit of the takes?

I sat home with a time-coded VHS tape and logged it all on a computer, faxed it through to Utah and they did a compile based on my code numbers. They sent me a rough edit that I revised and, after those changes, I sat down again with the editor. For not being able to be there all the time, we found that was pretty efficient.

We did a compile for each of the paths, dropping in some common shots, but little things that were different happened in each one, and that gave those scenes a whole new meaning to each path. It’s fun enough playing the one path, but those people who go through the game, and then choose another, discover new meanings.

What other changes can we expect on the nextTex Murphy?

The next game will be a revolution on what we did in Pandora. We’ve been working on it for around eight months. It takes about a year to turn around a game.

They play a lot of golf at Access, and the company’s big money-maker is a golf game. They were just ready to do the game in DVD, the market dictated that you see in the promotional shots. They told me I had complete freedom to still be full-frame. Access has a custom dual release as a standard CD-ROM. This has kept it up in the air. They positioned a little millimetre inside a wall, that’s all you can tell if it’s real or if it has come from a computer.

It must be a good feeling to be working on a cutting edge?

I fell into the cream company. When I came to Access, I had to do basic training to understand even what a CD-ROM could do. That was really only a day’s preparation before starting.

People have asked me would I do interactive movies for other people, and I have to say I don’t know. It would depend on the people and on the script. But I really enjoyed working with these guys. We only had a crew of 8 to 10 people on any major day, so it became very family-oriented.

They know my habits and I know theirs. I respect them and there’s no ego between us. Chris is the originator of the game and he handed the reins over to a total stranger.

Along with the new Tex Murphy adventure, Carr has another DVD interactive movie game to direct, scheduled for shooting in October with a “very big name cast” and he is working on a number of feature film projects. If you’d like to talk further with him about his work or interactive movie-making, e-mail him at Tallorders@AOL.com. Access Software has a web site with full details of its games at http://www.accesssoftware.com. There are screen shots, downloadable movie trailers and a nice short pop clip, “Tex’s Lament”, performed by Richie Havens.
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Rushes

Beautiful one day, two stops under the next: Barry Smith reports on serious grumblings from the camera department about the practice of rushes on VHS.

aah, those were the days: shoot one day, see rushes next morning, in the theatre, on 35mm. Yes, the theatre. Most film studios in Melbourne and Sydney, even Brisbane, had a theatre, with pretty good 16 and 35mm projection. And only the director, DOP and key crew were invited to see the previous day’s work.

Today, there are virtually no studios any more. Everybody’s gone freelance. So has the gear: hire it, don’t buy it. And rushes? The director, DOP and key crew still see rushes — now they arrive on set neatly transferred onto a VHS cassette. And, democratically, everybody gets to see them: the client, the caterer, talent, the whole gang.

So, aside from the totality of the viewing audience, what’s wrong with VHS rushes derived from a 35mm Eastmancolor negative?

According to quite a number of DOPs, “heaps”.

Hazards

Shooting in 35mm is not a matter to be taken lightly. Everything costs. Hire an Arri 535 and you reach $2,000-$3,000 a day, while DOPs now command nearly $2,000.

You might shoot 3,000 feet of 35mm in a day. Processing? About $800. Like a rushes print? $1,900. “Oooh, don’t know about the rush print. Let’s get a VHS transfer.”

So it goes. You shoot a big job, next day you see rushes — run from a $10 roll of 1/2 inch VHS tape, shown with a $400 VCR deck, on a $600 television.

That’s the way it is these days. And not only with commercials. Some documentary and even feature cameramen now suffer the indignity and hazards of seeing their carefully-shot footage evaluated on a small, phosphor-coated screen ... with an audience looking on.

Checking around with some DOPs, the mood is not good.

Your stop, their light

Gary Phillips has been around for long enough to realize there are only two lifelines when it comes to knowing where the hell you are on a shoot: the lab report and a good rushes screening. In the old days, Phillips wistfully recalls, you expected and got a one-light rush print from your previous day’s efforts:

There was actually no intervention between what you shot and what you saw. But what’s happening now is you get someone doing their job as well as they can at 5:30 in the morning in some post-house, whacking up a roll of neg and just sort of cranking up whatever they feel like they should have.

It’s generally too bright and generally not contrasty enough, I find. Sometimes you might be lucky enough to get an actual grader doing it, but I think it’s actually given to trainee people to do lots of the time.

What DOPs get on their VHS dub is mostly a one-light grade, but, as Phillips says, it’s “their” light. And often they work on the first frame they come across, which may not be how things develop during the day. So, you just get one “look” to the whole thing.

Phillips: They don’t tell you what they’re doing because they don’t really have any idea. There’s just those little wheels you spin around. As far as I can work out, there are no empirical numbers that they can write down to say that they’ve done this or this. It’s just basically how it looks.

The look can vary day to day, and from operator to operator. In a worst-case scenario, the DOP might be shooting the same set-up three days running and experience this variation. Phillips: And you’re looking at it on a [VCR/TV] machine on set which can be set up in any way as well. So, you sit there and play with it for a while and adjust it as best as you can.

Examples?

On one job, the first day’s rushes came back and they were very light. I thought I might stop down a bit more. So, I stopped down half a stop the next day. Then, when we went to the final grade, it was a little bit under, because the guy had cranked it up in the first thing. There’s no consistency; no base.

Why isn’t 35mm screening still practical?

I think it’s the cost of the workprint. We used to use the Moviola on set, which is perfect. That was generally a constant little beast. A little Moviola on wheels: I would prefer that. It’s a constant light.

You’d have the same machine for the whole job. So, you can judge from that.

There’s no changes or anything like that.

Plus, what I also don’t like about this new system is you often don’t get the day’s rushes until mid-morning or lunchtime the next day. Maybe you want to match something. You just don’t get it.

Phillips is also critical of the quality of neg reports ... when he gets them.

Blow-up

The situation is not a happy one, and Australian DOPs share it with their counterparts in the U.S. and the UK.

Phillips: I have heard stories where it is happening in feature films, too. People have been caught out where they keep getting bright rushes and stopping down. At the end, when they go for the film grade, there’s hardly anything left!

One grader finally admitted, “Sorry, I can’t bring this back any more, mate.”

Eye in Residence

Ross Wood Studios, probably the last of the old-time studios, founded by Ross Wood Sr., survived for more than 20 years, mostly because of the skills of its multi-talented, on-staff crew and (by today’s standards) complete equipment inventory. Wood could do almost everything in television commercials, and beat most of the opposition on price. And he had a 35mm theatrette, in which rushes screenings would be made.

The shoot would take place one day, while the rushes could be seen any time after 6am the next morning. Problems or touch-ups in the lighting plan, or even hasty re-shoots, would be triggered by the all-important 35mm rushes.

Graham Lind was, until the studio folded, the ‘eye in residence’ at the studio. Today, with bigger all-freelance crews and bigger budgets, low-cost VHS rushes remain as the only reference the DOP and his crew have to assess a day’s shoot. He recalled that VHS rushes have been around “at least a couple of years”, but adds:

Before the total demise of Ross Wood’s, we would always quote in to make a print. But, then, even that got down to agencies saying they weren’t prepared to pay for workprint and all that. So, it just goes straight from neg to tape.

Is cost a factor?

Cost? Oh, I wouldn’t think so. But it is more convenient for editors because, with their systems, they just strike off an SP tape and whack it straight into the machine. Many use off-line and online systems now.

Is it difficult to judge from VHS?

Well, thank God, I’ve had the experience. You end up knowing what you want. You see your VHS rushes and it really isn’t there, but you know deep that you have achieved it and you will be able to pull it back when you get to the grading session.

Misleading?

Yes, when I first was involved in it (seeing VHS), particularly away on location. They’d send down the tape rushes and you’d see it and you’d think, “Oh, God.” And you’d get so depressed, hit the bottle, and have a hangover the next day.

I just feel sorry for the young guys that are coming through.

We used to take the old Moviola on location. But it’s just not on today. I would doubt that the labs print that many rushes at all these days. Even a lot of the mini-features: they’re all neg-to-tape transfer.

Help from VAD?

A development from two Sydney technicians — Alan Hansen (formerly of Omnicon and now at Frame, Set & Match) and Peter Simpson (Frame, Set & Match) — may ease the situation. Video Aim Density or VAD, as Hansen explains, is a video standard similar to what a lab uses for processing film around the world — like China girl. We’ve been able to fit the entire contrast range of cinematography and film into the video system and lock it off so that, on a series, for example, Day One will look exactly like Day 25 or Day 100.

In other words, the cameramen actually shoot their own charts, kind of like...
leader that was shot originally with the grey chart test. This would be actually looped each day onto the head of the tape, so the camera crew can always know if they’re out of focus or if the telecine chain is out. This would be a great help when the shooting uses so Righted diffusion that would look soft on the screen anyway. These are things that make sense in the industry, but aren’t happening.

We’ve had this situation for about six years. We’ve actually used it a few times. One time was the Bryan Brown project for Channel Nine – Twisted Tales – and we got a letter of recommendation from James Bartel, who was the DOP on that. He thought it was fantastic and highly recommended it. In conjunction with Kodak and the ACS, what we want to do is establish with all the cameramen what system they would like to use. We think ours is the best because it’s simple. But whatever they’d like to do is fine.

The days of 35mm rushes projection may have already slipped away, but at least some heavy thinking is being applied to its replacement by the ‘unde­ niable’ VHS. Could the camera department ever hope for on-set Betacam SP replay, or even one of the new-cost digital formats?

NEWS
All Seven Academy Award Motion Picture Finalists Use Discreet Logic Technology to Create Champion Visual Effects

Discreet Logic, a leading developer of visual effects, editing and broadcasting production tools, has announced that its effects products were used by digital artists in all seven of the finalists selected for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Oscars® Best Achievement in Visual Effects category. The final three nominations in this category are Twister, DragonHeart and Independence Day.

Leading visual-effects artists used Discreet Logic’s FLAME™, FLINT™ and INFERNO™ digital-effects systems in each of the seven films selected as finalists, which also included Mars Attacks!, The Nutty Professor, Mission Impossible and Star Trek: First Contact.

Richard Szalwinski, President and CEO of Discreet Logic, said:

On behalf of Discreet Logic, we congratulate all of the visual artists and facilities whose work and talent is being recognized by the Academy. We constantly strive to provide the digital tools necessary for visual innovators to expand the realms of realism. It is a compliment to our efforts that Discreet Logic systems are consistently chosen to express such creativity and vision.

In Twister, an Amblin Entertainment production, the crew relied on digital illusions created by the team at Industrial Light & Magic. Jeff Doran used Discreet Logic’s FLINT extensively to “change the weather” and to create what is arguably the film’s most spectacular scene. As two “storm chasers”, played by Helen Hunt and Bill Paxton, attempt to get closer to one of the largest twisters, a full-size tanker emerges from the dervish and hurries toward the couple. To achieve this effect, a full-scale model of a tanker, weighing in excess of 15,000 pounds [6,800kg], was suspended from a crane and swung directly at the actors. The shot took place on a sunny day, so FLINT was used to take away the shadow of the tanker flying overhead, darken the sky and add all the flying debris.

In the Universal production, Dragon­ heart, Industrial Light & Magic used Discreet Logic technology to bring the 18-foot [5.5m] high, 43-foot [13m] long digitally-created dragon, Draco, to life. The creature was digitally compos­ ited into medieval scenery and sequences involving live actors.

In the Twentieth Century Fox feature film, Independence Day, Pacific Ocean Post’s team of visual effects wizards used Discreet Logic’s INFERNO to create unbridled mayhem, providing a staggering 350 visual-effects shots in 144 minutes.

In the “Wall of Destruction”, a 10-minute sequence where the aliens begin burning cities, INFERNO was used to attach flames to the destroyer, and make the fire look thick and dangerous in appearance. On top of that, 10 to 12 different layers of debris, model cars, trucks and blue-screen elements of people running, were used.

Pablo Helman, Pacific Ocean Post’s digital compositing supervisor on Independence Day, recalled:

“We did so much effects-intensive work on Independence Day that we simply could not have done without Discreet Logic technology. With INFERNO and FLAME, we had so many different ways to approach projects. We were always able to come up with something new.”

Helman has since joined Industrial Light & Magic. About The Discreet Logic Effects Line INFERNO is the pinnacle of Discreet Logic’s digital production environment. INFERNO supports high-resolution data handling for standard film and video formats, while remaining a valuable special-effects tool for commercials, music videos, broadcast, feature films and interactive media. INFERNO provides up to 12-bits colour depth per channel along with high-spatial image resolution. The system also features tools for grain and noise management, wire and scratch removal, colour calibration and enhanced I/O routines. Features, acces­ sible through an integrated, intuitive gestural interface, include a state-of-the– art Keyer, Warper, Action module, SoftClips™ Stabilizer, Tracker, Paint, Rotoscopying, On-Line 3D and digital audio capabilities.

FLAME is Discreet Logic’s award-winn­ing on-line system for high-end visual-effects creation for commercials, music videos, television programming, feature films and interactive media, including the World Wide Web. FLAME provides real-time interactiv­ ity enabling the immediate feedback required for true on-line experimentation and client-driven design.

FLINT is Discreet Logic’s visual and effects production system offering the core feature set of the well-known FLAME visual-effects system but on the desktop. FLINT runs on the Indigo2 IMPACT™ from Silicon Graphics, Inc.®. The system offers burst-mode input and output of non-compressed DI imagery and integrates easily into tape-based or non-linear, on-line or off-line suites. FLINT can also be used in conjunction with FLAME and INFERNO for offloading tasks such as colour correction, keying and complex effects creation.

About Discreet Logic
Discreet Logic, based in Montréal, Que­ bec, develops and supports non-linear, on-line, digital systems for creating, editing and compositing imagery, and special effects for film, video, audio and broadcast. The company’s systems are used by creative professionals for a vari­ ety of applications: feature films, television programmes, commercials, music videos, interactive game production and live broadcasting. Through direct contact with digital artists, edi­ tors, audio engineers, production and broadcasting specialists, Discreet Logic offers technology designed to meet the present and future needs of content cre­ ators.

Discreet Logic is publicly traded on Nasdaq under the symbol DSLGF. Media contact: Emma Shield, Discreet Logic. Tel: 514 948 7127. Fax: 514 272 8735. E-mail: emma_shield@dis­ creet.com

For more information, please contact Discreet Logic Corporate headquarters: 5505 Boulevard St-Laurent, Montréal, Quebec, Canada, H2T 1S6.
Tel: 514.272.0525. Fax: 514.272.0585. e-mail: info@dis­ creet.com. web: www.discreet.com

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email: negthink@ozemail.com.au

105/6 CLARKE STREET CROWS NEST NSW 2065
Virtual unreality available on Quantel Henry from Zero 1 Zero post production, design graphics and special effects. Phone (02) 9417 5700. Fax (02) 9417 5879.
Juliet finds a part in the production. The hard-working James works, the more he opens his heart to dancing — finally starting to realize just who he is. But James’ affair with Juliet ends in disaster. James finds a friend in his ex-girlfriend who wants to break up with her boyfriend and his bully son, and has just discovered that he has to spend Christmas with the lot of them down at their beach house by the Bay. All looks hopeless until Arthur’s ship is lost at sea and the family need to come together again. Arthur finds a friend in his ex-girlfriend who wants to break up with her boyfriend and his bully son, and has just discovered that she has to spend Christmas with the lot of them down at their beach house by the Bay. All looks hopeless until Albert, Joey’s friend and a partner in crime, decides to help unravel a series of mysteries that have plagued the town. Back in town, Bobby applies his unconventional courtroom style to get to the truth behind the murder and to uncover the real murderers and bring them to justice.

**Adul Televisio Drama**

*HALIFAX F.P. 3* (90 MINS)

*Beyond Simpson Le Mesurier Films*

D: TBA

P: ROGER LE MESURIER, ROGER SIMPSON, ROD TATAMIA

W: JUTTA GROTTI, KATHERINE THOMPSON, AUDREY NISSEL

PRE-S: NINE NETWORK, TELECAST, TVNZ

DIST: BEYOND DISTRIBUTION

**The Violent Earth**

Tales of violence follow the adventures of Jane Halifax, a forensic pathologist trained by police, solicitors, and the medical establishment. Using her specialized knowledge of criminal behaviour, she helps unravel a series of mysteries involving a disturbed rock star, a serial killer, and a brutal double murder.

**The Violent Earth**

*3 X 2 HOURS*

*CRAWFORD PRODUCTIONS*

D: MICHAEL OFFER

**Voice of the Violent Earth**

EP: CHRISTIAN CHARRET, DAVID ROUSE

W: PETER GAWLER, TONY AYERS

PRE-S: NINE NETWORK, ARTS

DIST: GEMINI/MODICON

**The Violent Earth** is three stories. First, the story of a country, New Zealand, second, a story of a pioneeringuckshop roof again, is haunted by the death of his father, hates his mother’s new boyfriend and his bully son, and has just discovered that he has to spend Christmas with the lot of them down at their beach house by the Bay. All looks hopeless until Albert, Joey’s long-lost great-grandfather, appears unexpectedly after a stint in prison. Joey soon finds himself a wonderful friend and a partner in crime.

**FFC Funding Decisions**

Following Board meetings on 18 December 1996 the FFC has entered into contract negotiations with the producers of the following projects:

**Head On** (95 MINS)

*GREAT SCOTT PRODUCTIONS*

D: ANA KOKKINS

P: JANE SCOTT

**Features**

**Head On**

A wild journey through an inner urban world of bouzouki clubs and gay pubs, wing cops and Turkish taxi drivers. Nineteen-year-old Ari doesn’t work, doesn’t study, and has no faith in the future. Drugs are his escape. Sex is where he loses himself.

- a journey to his own kind of freedom.

**James (90 MINS)**

*CARMELINA PICTURES/BLACKWOOD FILMS*

D: LYNDIA HEYS

EP: ROSS MATTHEWS

P: MARCEL BERDIS, SHARON KIUSER, LYNDIA HEYS

W: STUART BEATIE

DIST: REP, OVERSEAS FILMGROUP

James Grant is the most admired School Captain ever bred at Lawley Grammar and the most legendary Rugby Captain ever to lead the First Fifteen. And the Dux of the school.

James is on the path to success, and nothing is going to stop him... except one small thing. James loves to dance ballet and is desperate to get out of his system while he still has the chance. He secretly auditions for a small ballet performance of flames and

**Features in Production**

A Rhythm

Alison

The Stone

The Sugar Factory

The Violent Earth

You Always Hurt

**Features in Post-production**

Aberration

The Big Red

Black Ice

Four Jacks

Kiss or Kill

My Blessing

Oscar and Lucinda

Out of the Blue

Paws

The Well

The Gas Chipper

Grameham Bond - The Volunteer

**Your Move**

Sound of One Hand Clapping

**Shorts**

Run Magna

The Gas Chipper

Grameham Bond - The Volunteer

**Documentary**

**Documentaries**

Mama Tina

Saint or Sinner

Wild Ones

Lillian’s Jungle

Love’s Tragedies

The Ones You Love

Wool Princesses

Talking 1997

**Production Survey**

Aberration

The Big Red

Black Ice

Four Jacks

Kiss or Kill

My Blessing

Oscar and Lucinda

Out of the Blue

Paws
neglect and violence to become a champion to the street children of Ho.

Irish woman who overcame a lifetime of angry, yet profoundly inspiring story to

Christina Noble's outspoken, often

With the Euthanasia Laws Bill (1996) for the right to die. But at what cost?

total harmony with their aquatic

filmmakers new to the area of natural

laws in the Northern Territory. Initially

overturn the Northern Territory law, the

Wee Willie Winkie and

ild Ones is four unique stories

involving animals and people in

wild life of the Pied Currawongs of

documents the rescue of an orphan wombat by Gaylene Parker, a local

by John Fox

broadcast: Karen TATE
**ABERRATION**

Production company: Summum Films
Distribution company: Beyond Films
Production: Sydney
Production: 27/2-18/4/97

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**

Director: Alexander Grant
Producer: Phillip Teras
Co-producer: Scott Law
Executive producer: Craig Wilson
Scriptwriter: James Richards
Production design: Grant Major
Production design: Brilliance
Location: Sydney, Melbourne, New Zealand

**CAST**

Joel Edgerton, Alastair Fyfe, Anna McGahan, and Steve Lebherz.

---

**THE BIG RED**

**WANTED**

Production company: Scala Productions; Unithan Films
Production office: Sydney
Production: 16/9-11/96

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**

Director: Stephen Elliott
Producer: Fiona Gilmour
Co-producer: Antonia Barnard
Executive producer: Nick Powell
Scriptwriter: Cameron Johnston
Costume designer: Terri Kibbler
Production designer: Cameron Johnston
Location manager: Tania Symons
Unit manager: Edwina Duvall

---

**FIRE AND WATER**

Production company: Windmill Films
Production: Sydney
Production: 18/11-5/12/95

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**

Director: Anthony Maras
Producer: Phillip Teras
Co-producer: Simon Smith
Scriptwriter: Simon Smith
Art director: Mandy Anderson
Production design: Karen Knowles
Location manager: Tania Symons
Unit manager: Edwina Duvall

---

**THE LION’S SHARE**

Production company: John Hirst Pictures
Production: 18/11-5/12/95

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**

Director: Christopher Louden
Producer: Phillip Teras
Co-producer: Simon Smith
Scriptwriter: Simon Smith
Art director: Mandy Anderson
Production design: Karen Knowles
Location manager: Tania Symons
Unit manager: Edwina Duvall
THANK GOD HE MET LIZZIE
TRUE LOVE AND CHAOS

SHORT FILMS

BUM MAGNET
Production company: JUNO/TEST PRODUCTIONS
Pre-production: 2-13 December 1996
Production: 15/1-17 December 1996
Post-production: 10-21 February 1997

PRINCIPAL CREDITS

Director: Michelle Warner
Producer: Cathy Fraser
Co-producer: Michelle Warner
Scriptwriter: Michelle Warner
Director of photography: Steve Isaac
Sound recordist: Bob Hebbert
Editor: Ray Cooper
Production designer: Laura Elnikoff
Costume designer: Kyle O'Brien
Composer: Andy Parsons
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Shooting schedule by: Tony De Pasquale
Budgeted by: Cathy Fraser

PRODUCTION CREW

Production manager: Mark Warbarn
Focus puller: Bob Foster
boom operator: Ken Tratckor
make-up: Ken Campbell
Hairdresser: Steve Morris
Stunt co-ordinator: Steve Morris
Casting: Garratt Hughes
Casting: Sue Foreman
Art director: Laura Elnikoff
Prop buyer: Cathy O'Donnell
standing postis: Nicola Lewis

WARDROBE

wardrobe supervisor: Kyle O'Brien

POST-PRODUCTION

Post-production supervisor: Ray Cooper
Sound editor: Andy Parsons
recording studio: DSGN LABORATORY
Titles: Optical & Graphics
Lavatories: AltLab
Film gauge: 16mm
Shot: 7293
Video transfers by: Videolab
Off-line facility: DRK PRODUCTIONS

Graham Bond — the Volunteer

يوم جمعة
موسم الطيور
الحياة في البرية

Graham Bond — the Volunteer

Production company: FIREBRAND FILMS & LIDOO Fun P/L

PRINCIPAL CREDITS

Director: David Barker
Producer: Gareen Calverley
Scriptwriters: David Barker, Luke Robertson
Director of photography: Mark Warhama A.C.S.
Sound recordist: Bob Claxton
Editor: Mark Bennett
Production designer: Adam Head
Costume designer: Nick Hartigan

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Casting: Sue Manford
Production manager: Gareen Calverley
Location manager: Colin Oddy
Unit manager: Anders Baker

PRODUCTION CREW

Assistant grip: Mark Warbarn
Safety rigger: Joe Schwaiger
Focus puller: Bob Foster
boom operator: Scott Piper
make-up: Tess Natiok
Saloon girl: Liza Darby
Safety rigger: Jo Schwartz
Still photography: Paul Brodin
Unit producer: Judy Green
Casting: Margarett Trunalian
Pacific Film Catering
Robbie Kavanagh
Post-production

Music supervisor: Mark Santis
.linspace: Dhil - Studio
Lavatories: AltLab - Queensland
Film gauge: 35mm
Off-line facility: Cutting Edge

CAST

Jeffrey Walker (Peten), Simon James (Jason), Luka Roberts (Scurry Ball Man)

A t the end of an eventful school day, two friends retreat to the old Gas Stripping Tower to escape the flow of the everyday.

Graham Bond — the Volunteer

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# Nihil Obstat Nine

**Lone Star and William Shakespeare’s Romeo & Juliet** Top the Field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breaking the Waves</td>
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<td>The Celluloid Closet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crash</td>
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<td>DragonHeart</td>
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<td>The English Patient</td>
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<td>Fly Away Home</td>
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<td>Grace of My Heart</td>
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<td>Le Hussard sur le Toit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Le Portrait of a Lady</td>
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<td>Mars Attacks!</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
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<td>Mirror Has Two Faces</td>
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<td>The Portrait of a Lady</td>
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<td>Radiance</td>
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<td>Scream</td>
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<td>Someone Else’s America</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Shakespeare’s Romeo &amp; Juliet</td>
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</tbody>
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**Note:** Nihil obstat [Lat., ‘nothing stands in the way’] Words appearing on the title page or elsewhere in the preliminary pages [...], indicating that it has been approved as free of doctrinal or moral error.

A panel of nine film reviewers has rated 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 Collin** (The Age); **Barbara Creed** (The Age); **Sandra Hall** (The Sydney Morning Herald); **Paul Harris** (“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); and **Evan Williams** (The Australian). David Stratton is at Berlin Film Festival.
You cannot afford to miss the premier Broadcast and Film industry forum in the Southern Hemisphere. Key players from around the globe will converge upon Sydney for the staging of this world class exhibition and conference programme. Join us for four days of invaluable information exchange and discover the latest ideas and technology in your industry. SMPTE '97 - Your competitors are coming .... You've got to be there!


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YES! Please send me further information on: ☐ visiting the exhibition  ☐ attending the conference

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