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Cinema Papers #121 November 1997

Scott Murray

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New Wave Japanese Cinema
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inbits

festivals

The 46th Melbourne International Film Festival.
CLARE STEWART, Venice. BRUCE MOLLOY.
documentary

Tahir Cambis and Alma Sabhaz discuss Exile in Sarajevo
technicalities

Does the emergence of new digital technology signal the end of filmmaking as we know it? SCOTT MCGUIRE vets the views of four leading figures of the Australian filmmaking industry.

pic preview

Moby Dick re-surfaces.
inreview

FILMS: Thank God He Met Lizzie; Year of the Dogs; Paws; Dust Off The Wagon; Max's New Suit.
TELEFEATURE: Malin Beach
VIDEO: Rhapsody
in August
BOOKS: Who The Devil Made It; The Undeclared War; Novel To Film; books received.

inproduction

dirty dozen

LA CONFIDENTIAL'S DEMON DOGS

Two Australians save Los Angeles in Curtis Hanson's adaptation of the "biggest, baddest, ugliest, deepest, darkest crime novel of all time", in the words of the novel's author, James Ellroy. Ellroy, Hanson and actors Kevin Spacey, Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce, Danny DeVito and Kim Basinger talk about LA Confidential.

Dynamic Duo

The Japanese independent film scene, with no single funding body and no government or private funding initiative, has suddenly re-launched itself onto the world stage. Chris Berry chats with two Japanese indie filmmakers about this emerging cultural revival.

Cannes' Favourite Son

In his third feature, Welcome to Woop Woop, Stephan Elliott takes a journey back into the desert to explore the dark side of the Australian psyche. The outspoken director talked to Jan Epstein after the work-in-progress screened at Cannes.

TOPLESS WOMEN

GO TOPLESS THIS CHRISTMAS!

"The freshest, cheekiest and most engaging film in years" - Paul Byrnes, Sydney Film Fest.

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ABOUT THEIR LIVES

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY BARRY SINCLAIR
MORAL RIGHTS UPDATE

Further to the news item in Cinema Papers #119, the Moral Rights campaign is pressing on apace and is gaining support from many quarters.

For those who came in late, the campaign concerns the introduction of the Copyright Amendment Bill in the House of Representatives, during Federal Parliament’s winter sitting. The bill suggests that moral rights be given to Australian film and television producers and directors, but not to writers.

This has received much criticism from writers, actors and directors such as Fred Schepisi, Ian Sardi, Geoffrey Rush, Baz Luhrmann, Mac Gudgeon and David Williamson, as well as international support from the Writers’ Guild of America. Support also comes from key industry groups.

A Senate Committee Hearing was held on 18 August, where the ‘moral majority’ presented its case, and gained some acceptance for its argument.

Opposition was initially felt from the ABC, the Screen Producers’ Association of Australia (SPAA) and the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS). Since then, the ABC now supports the authors’ rights, and SPAA has recognized the need to work with other groups to develop an industry consent clause, rather than the blanket waiver that has been proposed. Only FACTS remains opposed.

The Department of Communication and the Arts has met with FACTS, the ABC, AGWA and ASDA, and is now involved in amending the draft legislation to ensure that the blanket waiver will be removed and an industry consent clause inserted in time for the Senate Report, tabled in September.

REV IT UP, BABY

Evelation Magazine, a Perth-based youth culture and lifestyle publication, is presenting the REVelation Independent Film Festival, a season of independent new and archival films from around the world.

The Festival, a collection of 50 films, including shorts, animations, documentaries, features and retrospectives, has already screened in Perth as part of the Outrage Festival, and will be travelling to Sydney for the Fringe Festival in January 1998, and then to Adelaide for its Fringe Festival in February.

Riff highlights include the documentary, Timothy Leary’s Dead (Paul Davids, Todd Easton Millo); D.O.A, Les Koslowki’s Sex Pistols tour film; Beatflicks, a retrospective of Beat Generation filmmakers; and Australian Underground, an affiliated programme charting the underground/independent film movement.

CUTTING OUT THE BAD KARMA

Craig Lahiff’s new film, Heaven’s Burning, has had a five-minute scene cut for its Australian release.

The scene sees a war veteran, played by Ray Barrett, making a long speech about Japan suffering bad karma because of its involvement in WW2. It was cut as a collaborative decision by the director and the film’s distributors, REP, after a test screening, where the audience responded poorly to the scene in question. It was decided that the scene was not in keeping with the rest of the film’s mood or pace, and that the film would benefit from its excision. Both screenwriter Louis Nowra and Ray Barrett have been reported to be unhappy with the cut.

BOMBARDED WITH ONE SHORT FILM COMPETITION...

The Amnesty International Queensland Youth Network has announced the inaugural BOMBARd New Filmmakers Short Film Festival.

The Festival will be held at the Schonell Cinemas at the University of Queensland on 8-9 December, and is looking for films that explore the concept of Universal Human Rights.

Films can be less than 15 minutes and in any format, and must relate to “an idea of what rights are fundamental to a happy, healthy existence”.

VHS preview cassettes and $15 entry fee can be submitted by 7 November, 1997. For further information, phone: 61 7 3221 0221.

...AND AFTER ANOTHER; IT’S VERY QUEER

The presenter of the Mardi Gras Film Festival, Queer Screen, is also calling for entries for the 1998 My Queer Career Competition for Australian and New Zealand Queer Shorts.

With prizes including $2,000 cash and facilities supplied by the Stephen Cummins Film Trust and Metro Television, and international exposure for the winners, My Queer Career is the largest competition in Australia for gay, lesbian and queer short films.

Entry forms are available from Queer Screen, phone 61 2 9332 4938, fax 61 2 9331 2988, or email: info@queerscreen.com.au. The closing date for entries is 31 December, 1997.

THE MILLENIUM PROJECT

The Producer’s and Director’s Guild of Victoria and Open Channel have launched a new initiative, The Millennium Project. Centre around two themes, the end of the millennium and the centenary of Australian Federation, the project will take scripts by new screenwriters, give them to new directors, and assemble it into a feature-length film due to be released in the year 2000.

The film will contain four or five discrete stories that take place in or around the last ten days of the millennium, and are related only by this common theme.

For more information, telephone Cristina Pozzan, Executive Producer for the project.

CINEMA PAPERS • NOVEMBER 1997
Frameworks provides true 24FPS non-linear film editing from rushes syncing to picture lockoff.

Frameworks, first in non-linear in Australia, has once again taken the initiative in film editing. We are the first facility providing a dedicated non-linear assistant's room for syncing rushes which allows for true 24FPS cutting, providing frame accurate edl's, cut lists and change lists for feature films. This method of post for 24FPS film provides a one to one relationship with picture time code, film key code numbers and sound time code.

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(For further details, and a more complete explanation of the different post production methods, please contact Stephen F. Smith at Frameworks.)

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AUSSIE ACTRESS WINS OVERSEAS AWARD

Frances O’Connor won the Montreal Film Festival’s Best Actress Award for her performance as Nikki in Bill Bennett’s Kiss or Kill.

AIDA – SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

Richard Becker, Managing Director of Becker Group Limited, announced at the recent Movie Convention in Surfers Paradise the formation of the Australian Independent Distributors Association (AIDA), which will represent the common interests of independent film distributors in the Australian marketplace. Censorship, piracy and the promotion of Australian film are some of the issues it will address.

APPOINTMENTS

Film Australia’s Chairman Chris Chapman announced the appointment of Sharon Connolly as its new Chief Executive Officer, following the recent resignation of Bruce Moor. Connolly was previously an Executive Producer with the company, a position now filled by Megan McMurphy.

The Australian Film Finance Corporation (FFC) has appointed Susan MacKinnon as its new Documentary Investment Manager. MacKinnon has produced such documentaries as A Dinner For Six, You Must Remember This, Men and Their Sheds, Loaded and Eternity. She replaces Sue Seeary, who is now Manager of the FFC’s Melbourne office.

Village Roadshow Pictures has announced that Michael Lake has been appointed Managing Director of Village Roadshow Pictures, Australia. Lake is already Managing Director of the Warner Roadshow Movie World Studios in Queensland, and will divide his time between Melbourne, Sydney and the Gold Coast.

HOPING AND PLANNING

Speculation continues over the anticipated construction of a home for Sydney’s Cinémathèque at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA).

Of the $35,000,000 needed to complete the project, $10,000,000 has already come from private sources. An architect has been appointed and plans will be ready in November of this year. Construction is expected to begin in January 1998. This, as Co-ordinator David Watson explains, is dependent on the raising of the outstanding $25,000,000, and he’s hoping that the Federation Fund will contribute something.

Plans for the project include refurbishing the top two floors of the MCA, and adding an extra level of gallery space. There will be a visual resources centre and an 80-seat cinema, expected to be running by June 1998, with completion of the whole project forecast for late 1999. “We’re practically willing it into being”, said Watson. “We believe the time is nigh for it to happen.”
CALL FOR ENTRIES

Cafe Provincial and The Melbourne International Comedy Festival in association with Media World will present the 4th annual

CAFE PROVINCIAL COMEDY FILM FESTIVAL

on Sunday 5 April 1998
Fitzroy, Melbourne, Australia

To be eligible for entry, films must be no more than ten minutes long, be finished on 16mm stock, and be funny!

Prizes include:
- a $6,000 Award for Best Fiction Film
- a $3,000 Award for Best Animated Film

Entries close Friday 6 March 1998
For further information contact the Cafe Provincial on ph (03) 9417 2228 fax (03) 9416 1460

Dear Sir,

Far more important than identifying the old and bold, your article, "The Day Mr Valenti Came to Town" (Cinema Papers, #19, August 1997, p. 16), revived memories for me, at least, of one of the most pivotal incidents in the development of the Australian film industry over the past quarter century.

Had Jack Valenti not come to town for the express purpose of crushing the proposed box-office levy to fund Australian production, we may never have entered the era of subsidized funding and tax incentives.

The levy was one of the options canvassed in the landmark report (by the then Tariff Board (now Industrial Collection) to encourage a self-sufficient film industry in this country.

Had the well-intentioned but politically naïve demonstration not taken place, national passion engendered as much through film as any other medium of communication might be quite different today.

Public interest in the revival of feature film production in the late 1960s helped ignite the wave of nationalism that swept the Whitlam Labor Government to office in 1972.

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In an effort to stimulate further debate in your pages on a related historical theme, here is one press clipping to both illustrate our aspirations in the late '60s, and remind us of the outstanding achievement in Australian feature film production attained over the past quarter century. Too often, the basis on which that magnificent achievement was built is underrated. To suppose that there was no film industry to speak of in Australia between 1940 and 1970 is erroneous. There were more studios in active production then than there are today. Ajax, Artransa, Cinesound, Crawford, Avondale, Kingcroft, Porter, Supreme and Visatone as well as the Commonwealth Film Unit (now Film Australia) provided secure full-time employment and all-important training for hundreds of people in all aspects of production. Supreme, alone, was a mini-Hollywood with four producer-directors and 150 staff where every facet of filmmaking was conducted in-house. Australia's ever-increasing film accomplishments of the '70s, '80s and '90s are largely based on careers started in those environs.

Yours faithfully,

Roland Beckett
Wondering how it’s going to come together?

Whether it’s a feature in Fitzroy, a commercial in California or a doco in Dubai...
No matter where you’re shooting, who’s doing the cut or how you do the sound...

...you know you can pull it together at AAV

AAV Australia  digital pictures
mid glamour and glitz, the 54th Venice Film Festival presented its most prestigious award, The Golden Lion, to Takeshi Kitano's Hana-Bi. This is a good cop-bad cop film with a difference: the good cop beset by personal and professional problems becomes the bad cop when he decides to knock off a bank.

Australian representation this year was slim with only one film, True Love and Chaos (1997), by first-time feature director Stavros Andonis Effthymiou, shown in the Midday Session for young directors reflecting specific national cultures. The other major contribution was by Jane Campion, who had the honour of chairing the Jury to judge the winners of the major prizes.

The Festival had its controversies. New Artistic Director Felice Laudadio, who replaced previous director Gillo Pontecorvo (maker of the famous The Battle of Algiers [La Battaglia di Algeri, 1966]), has faced criticism for structural reforms to the Festival's organization as well as for his selection of films. Laudadio has strongly shifted the emphasis in the programme towards Italian films, with the major competition, Venice 54, having nine Italian films and only 13 from the rest of the world, four of these in English. A similar Italian predominance is evident in the rest of the Festival programme, and this earned Laudadio the ire of some significant critics and bureaucrats.

La Stampa referred to the Festival in a quaint Italianization as "in tilt", meaning that it is in a state of transition and instability. Not only was there a dominance of Italian film but some of the films were in regional dialects, and some dealt with issues still sensitive in Italian society. Ranzo Martinelli's Porzus attracted considerable publicity with its depiction of the massacre of Catholic partisans by Communist bureaucrats.

With the increased crowds this year, McDowell entertained the crowd of around 1,000 who were assembled in the main glitter palace of Venice. For more than one hour, McDowell entertained the crowd, providing an amazingly varied selection and attracted a galaxy of stars, including Harrison Ford, Sylvester Stallone, Mira Sorvino and Jeremy Irons, as well as most of the major Italian-speaking film actors in the world. The Lido is the ideal location for such a high-profile film event with its beautiful beaches, grand (if ruinously expensive) hotels, numerous cinemas and good restaurants.

Melbourne by Clare Stewart

"I'm toasting my favourite new perfume: success!" Sidney Falco (Tony Curtis) in The Sweet Smell of Success (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957)

There is no categorical, empirical measure for the success of a cultural enterprise. An event such as the Melbourne International Film Festival has to define the parameters of its own success. In her first year as Executive Director, Sandra Sdraulig was faced with the unenviable task of reversing a substantial deficit. The governing terms of her appointment were essentially to orchestrate a commercially-viable, high-profile cultural event and, in doing so, ensure its continuation, its life. The governing rhetoric generated by Festival representatives both pre- and post-Festival determined success through diversification and accessibility (cultural and commercial imperatives). While the final fiscal analysis is yet to be delivered, it seems appropriate to consider whether the Festival met with success on its own terms, and whether those terms need further consideration.

The Festival is a cinephile's annual fix. My sense of it is (like an aroma) entirely subjective and complicated by my own involvement on a shorts pre-selection panel. Foremost, however, I am a punter. I want the Festival to fuel my passionate addiction, to satisfy my desire to see the shape of the world's cinema as it is at this moment in time. I want it to be visceral, heady, expansive and stimulating. I want it to succeed.

The timeless fragrance

Every perfumer aims at creating a fragrance that will never disappear. The nature of the celluloid beast is that the cinema's great moments are forever disappearing. The Festival's role as a site for specialized programming becomes increasingly important as international archives struggle to take care of their ever-expanding collections (a dynamic evocatively captured in Bill Morrison's short, The Film of Her, and implicit in the project of Dana Ranga's East Side Story) and as the proliferation of art-house cinemas (falsely) give the impression that we get to see all there is. Sdraulig's streamlining of "spotlight" or "niche" programming, evident in the past few festivals, provided the context for some excellent (if incomplete) retrospectives and the showcasing of contemporary Spanish and young Asian cinema (which, though ensuring specific national/regional cinemas do not fall through the "gap", were not as interesting as they could have been).

The Sergio Leone retrospective curated by Paul Harris was enormously popular; any doubts punters may have had over the choice of screening works readily available on video were immediately dispelled by the impact of widescreen and Technicolor prints whose opening title-sequences alone were a revelation. Adrian Martin's erudite reclamation of Leone's cinema in the second Ivan Hutchinson Memorial Lecture (which was enhanced by his knowledge of, and respect for, the lecture's namesake) provided the programme with further dignity (although it would have been more provocatively scheduled after the audience had a chance to see most of the films). The completist in me shuddered at the minimized selection for the "All that Jazz" programme curated by Rick Thompson. Why not further validate its position in the Festival by screening those contemporary offerings which screened in Brisbane and Sydney: Robert Altman's Jazz '34, Robert Gibbons' It's Time for T and Cade Bursell's Sheila Jordan: in the Voice of a Woman? (The inspired staging of the title number from Stormy Weather [Andrew L. Stone, 1943] and the Nicholas brothers routine are never disappear. The nature of the celluloid beast is that the cinema's great moments are forever disappearing. The Festival's role as a site for specialized programming becomes increasingly important as international archives struggle to take care of their ever-expanding collections (a dynamic evocatively captured in Bill Morrison's short, The Film of Her, and implicit in the project of Dana Ranga's East Side Story) and as the proliferation of art-house cinemas (falsely) give the impression that we get to see all there is. Sdraulig's streamlining of "spotlight" or "niche" programming, evident in the past few festivals, provided the context for some excellent (if incomplete) retrospectives and the showcasing of contemporary Spanish and young Asian cinema (which, though ensuring specific national/regional cinemas do not fall through the "gap", were not as interesting as they could have been).

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There is no categorical, empirical measure for the success of a cultural enterprise. An event such as the Melbourne International Film Festival has to define the parameters of its own success.

A fresh and aldehyde top note

Every fragrance has an impact odour, the one that hits the skin and tangibly surrounds you in that cruis­cal decision-moment at the perfume counter. I'll buy hits the skin and tangibly surrounds you in that cru­table state known as childhood. I am sorry to have missed the Studio Ghibli programme curated by Philip Brophy; since several of my foyer encounters listed Pom Poko (Heisei Tanuki Gassen Pom Poko, Ai Gakawa, Toshi Eguchi, 1994) and Tombstone for Fire­flies (Horaru No Haka, Isao Takahata, 1987) as hits.

The Australian fare was dominated by the strength of those films which quicken my senses. Top of this cinephile's list was Happy Together, the latest, eagerly-anticipated collaboration between director Wong Kar Wai, DOP Christopher Doyle and designer-editor William Chang. Shot on a limb in Argentina, the rush of production circumstance and the struggle with representation became as much the material of the film as its romantic subject. This force is the basis for the idea extrapolated in Irma Vep: desire is what we make cinema from. Passion­ate and articulate Festival guests Olivier Assayas and Maggie Cheung, director and star of Irma Vep, pro­vided a film and a forum situated perfectly between cinema's nostalgic and political history and its pre­carious, polygamous future. Equally-impressive was Mohsen Makhmalbaf's extension of his previous pro­ject, Salaam Cinema (1995), in A Moment of Innocence, a self-referential investigation into the construction of time, memory and the act of making cinema; and the vigilant documentary work of Dana Ranga and Andrew Horn in researching and revealing the wonderful world of the Eastern Bloc musicals in East Side Story.

Bruce McDonald's surprisingly sophisticated rock mockumentary, Hard Core Logo (after Roadkill [1989] and Highway 61 [1991], energized by a punkish dis­regard for both its subject and the comic limits of an increasingly-popular form, found its (deliberately) gauche counterpart in Christopher Guest's inces­santly-hilarious parody of smalltown theatre, Waiting for Guffman. Inhabiting another stage altogether was Werner Schroeter's profound meditation on operatic tradition, passion and the grain of voice. Love's Debris (Poussières d'amour) pushed performance into the realm of vérité (or was it the other way around?) to culminate in one of the most startlingly-raw and loaded spectacles the act of filming could produce: Anita Cerrutti's dignified, traumatic, celebratory mime to an original recording of herself. Festival guest John Greyson's adaptation of Michel Marc Bouchard's play Lilies both continued and reflected on the tradition of queer cinema, staging and performance, and its questioning of modes of representation, while Sick: the Life and Death of Bob Flanagan Supermasochist succeeded in fil­mically replicating the performative aesthetics of its subject; director Kirby Dick creating what is in effect Flanagan and SM-partner Sheree-Rose's final, posthumous installation in a tortured body of work.

Jan Svankmajer's latest offering, Conspirators of Pleasure (Spikenci Stosti), dedicated to the sexual perversities of Freud, Sacher-Masoch, de Sade, Buñuel and Dalí, demonstrated a return to the vis­ceral mayhem of his earlier material, with a more successful integration of live-action than his recent version of Faust (1994). In a taut piece of program­ming, it was shown with a short from Luxembourg, Mécanomagie (Bady Minck, 1996), a neo-surrealist stop-motion "manifestation" of rhizomes via Deleuze and Guattari.

The Australian fare was dominated by the strength of the documentaries and (under-repre­sented) shorts. Trevor Graham's Mabo: Life of an Island Man and Tahir Cambis and Alma Saba'hz's Exile in Sarajevo continue to receive deserved critical acclaim, and their success will hopefully draw more attention to the crisis facing the documentary industry with the ABC, SBS and Film Australia currently subject to funding cuts. Ben and Sue Ford's Faces 1976-1996 and Lucy Lehmann's 500 Acres vitally engaged with the possibilities of the short film form, though the serious reduction in the number of shorts screened limited the fostering rôle the Festival tradi­tionally plays in the local scene. On the other hand, the consistent presence of Australian directors, cast and/or crew at screenings and Q&A sessions pro­vided a strong sense of our working industry. It is a practice which should be maintained.
GOT AN EYE for MUSIC?

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DAVID HIRSCHFELDER shine Strictly Ballroom the Interview. STEVE LAW (ABC Electronic Composer of the Year) NICK CAVE / MICK HARVEY / BLIXA BARGELD:
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Flowery, forgettable heart note

Despite containing the requisite number of high notes, the body of this year's Festival was depressingly lacklustre. With 50 percent of titles in the International selection (excluding the niche programmes) already in the hands of local distributors and most of these slated for release, there was good cause to speculate that the Festival is being reshaped as an art-house distributor's showcase. Not that commercial product is synonymous with mediocrity, but the majority of bland fare fell into this category (Mark Herman's *Brassed Off*, Kevin Spacey's *Albino Alligator*). As Deb Verhoveen pointed out in *The Melbourne Times*, this raises all sorts of questions to do with the appropriate allocation of government cultural assistance when a large proportion of the screenings are effectively commercial previews.

An overwhelming presence of average fodder directed critical attention both inwards and outwards. What was missing, as Adrian Martin noted in *The Age*, was the "cutting edge": films which really push the limits of cinema. In absentia were those brave, 'smaller' films which take risks that may not necessarily be sustainable but at least force the audience to rethink what cinema is or has the potential to be. Even those flawed works which at some level I would want to retrieve (Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, Kawase Naomi's *Suzaku*, Augustin Diaz Yanes' *Nobody Will Speak of Us When We Are Dead*) were safe programming choices and didn't really break new cinematic territory. The only truly avant garde offering, Level 5 (a dependable drawcard given Chris Marker's popularity in this town), was a disappointing return to familiar terrain although I am grateful for its inclusion on the grounds that I will probably never have the chance to see it again. Absent were titles by other internationally-significant directors: Tsai Ming-Liang's *The River (He Liu)*, Godard's *For Ever Mozart*, Kiarostami's *The Taste of Cherries*, Imamura's *The Eel (Unagi)* and Eloygan's *The Sweet Hereafter*. I am aware that the success of some of these films at Cannes (and elsewhere) creates enormous demand for prints; however, previous Festival Director Tait Brady was always quick to publicly acknowledge and account for obvious gaps. This genotype of programming choices (with a-star-from-Trainspotting-set-in-a-British-mining-village double-bill, *The Full Monty* [Peter Cattaneo] and *Brassed Off*, coming in first and second) is an absolute joke given the manner in which the voting took place (at least in Sydney there is a concerted attempt to ensure that each punter can only vote once). Festival Chairman Des Clark publicly equated a claimed 20 percent increase in box-office with an increase in attendance, failing to acknowledge that replacing single-screening passes with single-session passes would automatically up the income but not necessarily translate into a change in audience patterns. I'm not sure which sessions Festival board member and *The Age* critic Barbara Creed attended in order to comfortably claim that the success of "all" could be judged by the crowds. My experience diverged significantly, to the extent that a number of "sold out" sessions (including the single screening of Leone's *Once Upon a Time in America*) were a little over two-thirds full and people in the standby queue departed under the impression they would never get in. While I appreciate that these claims are in part an answer to the paranoia prevailing in the film community during the build-up to the Festival, I think the Festival representatives and Sandra Sdraulig have the tough task ahead of them: redefining and reconciling commercial impulse with cultural imperative (see "The Report Card" above).

Feltid, mephitic dry-down

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Exile in Sarajevo

by Ann-Maree Ashburn

The siege of Sarajevo is familiar to most of us via CNN footage: a city under fire from snipers in surrounding hills; mortar shells raining down on the city; a bloodied, disembodied limb in a shelled market-place.

The tragedy of Sarajevo, like war-torn cities the world over, rarely touched us on a personal level.

War overran Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. Exile in Sarajevo documents the siege of the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and is the work of two first-time film directors, Tahir Cambis and Alma Sabhaz. Cambis, originally from Sarajevo, came to Australia with his mother as a refugee following World War II. He has worked in Australia as a theatre director and actor and has appeared in a number of television series including The Sullivans. He co-founded Budinski's Theatre of Exile in Melbourne in the early 1990s. Sabhaz lived in Sarajevo, where she studied classical violin and mechanical engineering, before coming to Australia last year.

Cambis had attempted to enter Sarajevo in 1992, but was injured near the front, leaving him with a permanent limp in one leg. He returned in 1995 with cinematographer Roman Baska and filmed the final months of the siege. Baska returned to Australia before completion of the film and filming was taken over by Sabhaz, until then the sound recordist.

It is a candid and personal film, bringing the siege to us through the eyes of Sarajevas and through the ongoing cultural life of the city. The film counterpoints the horror with the music of the city, the beauty of its buildings, its rich heritage. Alongside footage of the 1995 massacre of shoppers in a market are images of a people struggling to do more than just survive under unceasing threat of death: young Sarajevan models stage a fashion parade for the camera; a rock band performs at a nightclub; a choir sings in one of the beautiful churches of the city.

One of the most disturbing images in the film is of a young girl, Nirvana, performing in a ballroom dancing competition. She was killed by a mortar attack days later.

In interview, Cambis and Sabhaz, clad head to toe in black, talk earnestly, with the serious air of committed activists. They interrupt each other, seeking to clarify answers, to better understand and convey the nature of war and humanity. Words like "world agencies", "brainwash" and "corruption" feature heavily in the language of Cambis. Sabhaz is friendly and open, tall and attractive; she brings a personal insight to siege and anger at the world's forsaking of her country.

Why did you make a film about the siege of Sarajevo?

Cambis: On a personal level, I felt like I was part of a nation that was being terribly slandered by the media in terms of who the Bosnians were. The myth was there was an ancient hatred, and that the cultural tradition of Bosnia was killing and slaughter and rape, when in fact it was being exported from Serbia next door.

Secondly, I had a deep disillusionment with my own civilization, with Western civilization, where we had an international and global media, but it was impossible to communicate what was happening because it was too complex. What was happening in that war, genocide and mass rape of a democracy in a multicultural society, was being condemned by Western societies, but it didn't matter because they were Muslims.

Do you think media coverage of the war was racist?

Cambis: Totally.

Sabhaz: The problem is the media can't cope with the term Muslim. It's very often connected with fundamentalism and terrorism. Whenever I watched reports from Bosnia, it was just about before reports from Iran or Beirut connected with a bombing or terrorist attack. Lots of journalists who came to cover Bosnia had very little knowledge of Bosnia. They simply couldn't cope with the complexity of the situation, and to please their audience they simplified it. That was why I and most Bosnians hated people who covered the war, because they didn't bring any good. The media created a lot of damage in Bosnia.

Did you have any qualms about the voyeuristic aspects of reporting on suffering?

Cambis: Yes. When we arrived on the scene of the massacre [at the market], I felt ashamed of having the camera in my hand. I felt more ashamed because I wasn't nervous, angry or upset. I felt ashamed because of how cool I was, and how coolly I felt about my past.

You didn't fear for yourself, or you felt nothing for the victims of the massacre?

Cambis: At that point, neither. The biggest fear was that someone would see, or be aware of, how little I felt at that point. I thought, "What am I committed to: the film or the city?"

In a bleak way at that particular moment, I was committed to the film, and said to Roman, "Film the river of blood." If you're committed for someone to drop, and, if they caught them on their camcorder, they'd sell the footage to CNN.

You revealed a lot of yourselves in the film, such as the blossoming romance between you and also your childhood, Tahir, as a refugee. Was this an attempt to overcome the feelings of 'dirty work', to lay your lives open as to what you were doing to the Bosnians?

Cambis: The project grew out of my...
them, mixing with them, rather than pretending that I wasn’t part of what was happening. You can’t go to a war zone and tell yourself, “I’ve got a camera, I’m not a part of this”, which is what happened to our cinematographer. He realized that the bullets were aimed at him, regardless of the camera. It was an attempt to put ourselves on the same footing. If we’re going to film you, we’re going to film ourselves.

**Documentary**

Cambis: It was a Louis Nowra play [Miss Bosnia]. It centred on women in Sarajevo, which is a touchy issue in Bosnia. They were portrayed in a degrading manner, as a bunch of clichéd eastern Europeans competing in this beauty contest for the last seat on a UN flight out of Sarajevo. There was no understanding that a lot of Sarajevans stayed in the city on principle.

There was a beauty contest in Sarajevo, which Bono [from the band U2] had written a song about. That contest was a send-up. It wasn’t done in earnest; it was a fuck-you to the Serbs in the surrounding hills.

Sabhaz: I wanted to go and see it – it was an act of resistance – but I didn’t have the courage. There was heavy shelling and horrible conditions in the city that day, but I was proud for all those beautiful young girls, when I saw how it was abused!

**Why do you feel like an exile?**

Cambis: I felt the policies of the Western countries had become really quite inhuman; all the rationalizations of atrocities in the name of one expediency or another. People who should’ve been shouting the loudest about what was happening in Bosnia and other countries were these days more concerned about career and funding and individual success. A lot of artists in the West seem to think art is about how to further your career.

Sabhaz: I watched a play on Bosnia staged in Melbourne and it showed me how some people used the Bosnian tragedy and war just to make an opportunity. Watching the play, I cried.

When I was a kid, I ended up being a stuntman on television, and I was always looking to the horizon. I was inspired by Neil Davis’ work in Vietnam back in the 1960s and Damien Parer in World War II. I’m an artist, an actor and a writer, and I see an aesthetic or an art in exploring war. I like to be personally challenged; I don’t like to be fake or phoney. If you want to know about war, then go to a war. And there’s a streak of recklessness that I like to expose in myself. I wouldn’t have gotten wounded if I’d been smart, if I’d stayed back where I should’ve stayed. I had to go to the very frontline where people were dying, and that was stupid.

**The idea of exile is a recurring theme in your work. Do you feel an exile as an immigrant in Australia?**

Cambis: It’s a state of mind. Having grown up as a child from another culture – I grew up in children’s homes – I battled to find a niche for myself in society where I could function and contribute. I had this dreadful urge to contribute and to not just exist. Through the years I realized that being the outsider wasn’t such a bad thing. I realized that it’s when you’re exiled or an outsider, you get a chance to observe.

**You mention in Exile in Sarajevo that you’ve always been a believer in causes. Do you think this is because you were an outsider?**

Cambis: I don’t think there’s any formula there. I’ve always been obsessed with causes. Maybe because I don’t have any family structure. The only thing I have really is a need to contribute to society in some constructive way. I can indulge myself like anybody else, but my scars and my pain has produced certain actions. I came to terms with my pain many years ago and discovered that when you open up the doors of pain and suffering you’re free.

**Was it a difficult film to make?**

Sabhaz: It was a painful process, but you are actually fighting for some principles. Anybody watching our film who is living in a small country will lose the delusion that, if something happened, the rest of the world would react.

**Why the title Exile in Sarajevo?**

Cambis: Because I was going there as an exile from my civilization, from Western civilization. I couldn’t stand living any more. I thought it was better to live in a city like Sarajevo, where death was high but the people were honourable; where people still maintained a multicultural and humane and democratic society despite the fact that they were being murdered.

**Are you drawn to war zones, to the extremes of human emotion and endeavour found in war?**

Cambis: Alma and I almost ended up in Zaire. We had the visas, the equipment and flights booked, but if we’d gone we couldn’t have finished this film. You’re aware of this network of evil, of corruption, all under the gaze of, or under respectable networks of, UN agencies and Western governments. Once you know about it, you can’t sleep at night.

I was always pining for adventure.

I said to Alma the night we finished cutting the film, “We’ve finished, but Nirvana’s mother goes on grieving; so do the hundreds and thousands of others. It’s just credits at the end of the film, but nothing stops.”

What concerns us is that people, like the people in this country, don’t see the connections between what happened in Bosnia and what’s happening in Australia.
Stephan Elliott’s flamboyant talent was discovered first by the French when his début feature, Frauds, was selected for screening at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993. The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert caused uproar at the Midnight Screening in 1994, and since then Elliott has deservedly been a favourite.

Cannes favourite. When news broke that Elliott’s work in progress, The Big Red (it is now known as Welcome To Woop Woop), was going to screen at midnight this year, expectations were understandably high. But hopes for another Priscilla were dashed when a more ambitious work with a much darker vision of Australia unspooled, stunning the capacity-audience into bemused silence. More than ever, he is the enfant terrible of Australian cinema. He spoke to Jan Epstein under the pines at Cannes the day after the screening.

How is it all going?

How is it all going? It is going great!

How does it feel to see “The Big Red” (Welcome To Woop Woop) on the big screen?

Absolutely terrifying, to be perfectly honest.

As you probably heard, I got hepatitis on the first day of shooting. Something wasn’t right, and then my eyes went yellow. So we shut down production for about two months, which was not much fun, because the set was in the most extreme place on earth and it was not built to last. We then had to spend a lot of money trying to keep it up. We lost a few crew and it was generally hard. The worst part was it pushed us into the hot season. The first day of the shoot was 53 degrees.

It must have been a nightmare.

It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life, but worse than that was we only finished a couple of weeks ago. I let the French have a look at it, just a version of it, and Gilles Jacob [Director of the Cannes Film Festival] really liked it. They told us that they would like to offer us a screening, but we weren’t ready.

So, I worked 24 hours a day for the past four weeks to get here. It is called a “work in progress” because I’ve been cutting on computer and this was the first time I have seen the film, on film, and in front of 3,000 people! That was tough. I was seeing things that I’d never seen before, like special effects.

I still think it has a pacing problem or two. Translators were working around the clock up to the night before, ringing every ten minutes desperately trying
to understand the Australian slang. It was really hard work. I limped here. I came over absolutely exhausted. I'm calming down now.

Has it been reviewed?
We can't really stop them. That is what my distributors are most worried about. They want a chance to test it, as Americans do. They want to get a feel for it, and that is fair enough. They were very, very nervous, which is why we only had one screening. They really didn't want the press to get in.

I enjoyed it, but I think the middle part...
The middle is a problem.

I really loved the top and the tail, the story and the characters. I loved the pace of it. What are you going to change?
I have to think about that in retrospect. That was a tough audience, you know. It's a humorous film, and you have to run a joke in front of an audience. I wish I'd done that with *Priscilla*, because there are a couple of gags in there that didn't work; I also pulled a couple of gags out of *Priscilla*. I was forced to take stuff out that I really wish I had seen first of all. There are a couple of jokes in *Priscilla* that are dead; I just cringe every time they come up in the film.

With humour, it is good to test. So this is going to be my chance to see what works and what doesn't. It changes country to country, so I'm going to try a couple of screenings in Australia, a couple in America.

You can't please everybody at the end of the day, but my gut will tell me what is worth keeping or not.

You don't agree with market research?
I've never done it before. All I've heard is horror stories about market research screenings, and all that stuff they do.

Do you prefer to trust your own instincts?
I trust my own instincts, and now I'm beginning to realize that. With *Priscilla*, as I said, there was stuff that didn't work. I pulled out one or two gags which I thought were going too far, but now I realize the film could have handled it. For this version of *Welcome to Woop Woop*, they made me take a few things out, really extreme things.

Like?
Mostly involving dead kangaroos.

To be fair, they said we need a chance to see how it is going down before we present it to the world's press. It was a huge fight, blood and guts, fists were flying, and I actually said, "I'm not going to [take them out]. I shot these things, I know what I'm doing." They said, "You can't put it in front of the world press when we haven't had a chance to see whether we can get away with it."

So they said we'll let you do it with an audience, but not the world press. I had to make a few compromises for Cannes, but under the promise that after this screening I can put them back in again and fiddle with it. This is a work in progress.

Variety again this morning said that some of the worst stereotypes of Australians are appearing there, and it is not going to go down well at home. That is Todd McCarthy's [chief film reviewer for Variety] opinion.

But I've heard that from other Aussies who have seen the movie. Do you want to provoke people?
Abso-bloody-lutely I do. I knew damn well what I was doing. Australians haven't lost their sense of humour. We are drowning in political correctness. I've had it with Margaret Pomeranz; her line back to me was "political correctness, that we have moved on, that it is not nice ..." What a load of crap! Are we that fucking weighted down now? Do we have to stick to these rules and regulations because the '90s have come along? Sod it. I can take anyone, I can take any of those people, drag them out back and introduce them to a couple of people who wander around some small outback town, and, you'll see, it is still alive and well out there. I am absolutely poking fun at it; I'm having fun with it, and, if they can't handle it, then I think that is a real shame, because Australians are known for their sense of humour.

Is it the flip-side to *Priscilla*?
The biggest response I've had after the screening is shock, because everybody expected another *Priscilla*. They think, "Stephan, desert...", and they were genuinely excited. Everyone was stunned after...
that screening. A lot of people – distributors, people in the marketplace – were not ready for it. They honestly thought they were going to see Priscilla and they didn’t get it. But the word is trickling out now, no matter what they feel.

The French reviews have been great, fantastic. The French completely got it. Le Monde yesterday was terrific; they put their finger on it without me opening my mouth. Brigadoon [Vincente Minnelli, 1954], they said; “They have created an Australian Brigadoon.” That’s what has been in my head all the time, thank you. And someone else said Mad Max [George Miller, 1971] meets Rogers and Hammerstein – thank you.

AND BARRY MCKENZIE?

And Bazza, which is what Barry Humphries was doing in there. I put Barry in there to say to people, “This is what we are doing.”

AND CROCODILE DUNDEE [Peter Faiman, 1986]? I WANT MORE OF THE COCKIES.

I love cockies. I’ve got cocky bites all over me. They are great birds.

AND THE GALAHS; IT IS GREAT FUN.

Having a great time is what it’s all about. The Rod Taylor character is a racist, sexist, fascist pig, and it is all done in such ridiculous taste. He is wearing pink safari suits and we are just having fun. But, at the same time, there is an absolute darkness to it.

There is a darkness to all my work. Priscilla had darkness to it – you get an Asian stripper standing on a bar firing ping-pong balls at the crowd. As funny as it is, there is an incredibly dark and quite a cruel side to it. Frauds was incredibly dark, too dark. I went too far with Frauds.

IN A WAY, THIS IS DARK BECAUSE YOU DON’T EXPECT DADDY-O [Rod Taylor] TO BE AS BLACK AS HE BECOMES.

At the same time, didn’t you find something quite heroic about him in his big spiel about “This is Australia, and I think it’s worth fighting for”? He is a great character in that it is black, funny and, at the same time, world’s biggest meteor crater in the desert. I found it in Priscilla. I just said to myself, “I’ve got to do something with that one day.” Then when we talked about Woop-Woop, I knew where I would stick it. I twisted it around, put a lot more humour into, joked it up a fair bit.

The big one was the music, which was a concept I’ve been playing with for a few years. I had to do something with Rogers and Hammerstein, and after a bit of an argument I talked them into it. I think they’re happy now.

Without it, I think their version of the film, the original version sticking to the book, would have probably been pretty black, like really black. Even if people would really want to see this, because this is mean, really mean.” But if we do it with our tongue firmly in cheek, I think we can get away with it. That is what I brought to it, I think.

WAS IT YOUR IDEA TO HAVE ROB TAYLOR?

I was a big fan of The Time Machine [George Pal, 1970] when I was a kid; it was one of my favourite films growing up. You poor old thing, this all means nothing to you ...

Then there was The Birds [Alfred Hitchcock, 1963]. I am absolutely poking fun at it; I’m having fun that is a real shame, because Australians are...
The revival of the Japanese independent film scene has been one of the highlights of the film festival circuit over the past few years. Regular festival-goers know that, along with Iranian and Taiwanese films, the young Japanese indies can be depended on for true cinematic vision. But we know little about the film culture from which these films are emerging. Reliable commentators like Donald Richie are more focused on older generations of filmmakers, and so far no one else has emerged to provide the bridge we need to get a complete map of the situation.

It was with this problem in mind that I welcomed the opportunity to spend some time with directors Kawase Naomi and Suwa Nobohiro, at the Brisbane International Film Festival for its special focus on the Japanese independent scene curated by Tony Rayns. Only 28 years-old, Kawase had just become the first Japanese woman director to win a major international award by scoring the 1997 Cannes Camera d'Or for her début feature, Suzaku. Named after the local gods, Suzaku observes the quiet disintegration of a family in the face of economic hardship when the railroad passes by Nijiyoshino village. Suwa, 36 years-old, was also attending with his début feature, 2 Duo. With improvisation and one-shot scenes, 2 Duo is both formally experimental and a moving account of a young couple who cannot communicate and destroy their relationship in the process. Both films were produced by Sento Takenori for the Bitters End Company in Tokyo.

In his catalogue essay for the BIFF focus, Rayns tries to explain the resurgence of Japanese independent film. He ends up drawing a blank: "[...] why are so many Japanese filmmakers doing it? Please look at these remarkable films — and then you tell me." After a little while with Suwa and Kawase, I began to understand how he feels. Merciless in the pursuit of knowledge, I grilled Suwa as he focused on a triple espresso and a pack of cigarettes after a red-eye flight from Tokyo. No, there is no single funding body, he told me, no single government or private initiative, no movement or manifesto that can explain this development. There are film schools, but few of the successful independents have trained in them and they are not centres like USC, UCLA and NYU in the USA, or the AFTRS and VCA here in Australia.

What about categories? Where do Japanese critics situate independent film?
I know that overseas people talk about Hollywood films and anti-Hollywood films, and in Japan we talk about major and minor films, but that is blurring now and I would say that my films and Naomi's films are somewhere in between major and minor films.

Gee, thanks, Nobohiro; that really clears things up.

What about you, Naomi? What do you think?
I try not to think in terms of Hollywood films, or Japanese films, or independent films or major or minors. People come to watch films that are interesting and I just try to make an interesting film.

Hmm...

Maybe this very absence of clear structure is crucial to any effort to understand the diversity of the Japanese independent scene. On the one hand, the studio system collapsed in the 1970s under the impact of television in Japan. Unlike in Europe or...
Although reluctant to be pigeon-holed, Kawase and Suwa certainly do share some common characteristics with certain other independents. Kawase suggests their work can be compared with films such as *Maborosi* (*Maborosi no Hikari*, Hirokazu Kore-eda, 1996) and *Okaeri* (Makoto Shinkozaki, 1995), which did the rounds of festivals last year. Also by young directors who emerged recently, they share a rejection of mainstream dramatic filmmaking, a de-emphasis of dialogue, an attention to visual detail and a quest for a certain realism. Suwa suggests this also corresponds to a demand from young Japanese, disillusioned with the postmodern highs of the 1980s bubble economy culture which they have come to feel was unable to respond to their needs.

In Suwa's case, *2 Duo* addresses these needs in various ways. First, there is the subject matter. The lead characters are ordinary working-class Japanese living in relatively modest circumstances, and so out of touch with their own needs and emotions that they cannot articulate their feelings or communicate directly. Second, there is his decision to improvise. Not surprisingly, he cites Cassavetes as a favourite director, but, beyond the idea of getting his actors to live their roles, he also incorporates devices that foreground the staging of this improvised reality. These include small scenes in which the actors appear discussing "their" feelings about what they are doing, but in which it is never quite clear whether they are speaking as their characters or as themselves. Also, there is the cinematography, characterized by single-take scenes and small lengths of black leader to mark such cuts as exist. In this way, the borders between performativity and authenticity are simultaneously marked and blurred.

Suwa worked out this cinematographic style in co-operation with his cameraman, Veteran Tamura Masaki is best known for his work with Japan's late great documentarian Ogawa Shinsuke, who had a deep commitment to socially-engaged documentary. Tamura also shot Suzuki, so it comes as no surprise to find out that Kawase and her crew followed the Ogawa mode on their shoot, moving into Nijiyoshino village, renovating and taking over an abandoned old farmhouse, working in the fields with the farmers and becoming part of the community.

If Cassavetes can be cited as an inspiration for Suwa's reworking of the representation of reality, Ozu seems to be a powerful source not only for Kawase, but also for the directors of films like *Maborosi* and *Okaeri*, and, in Kawase's case, this again constitutes an attempt to rethink reality and its representation. Asked about this, she cites both Ozu and Tarkovski:

"What I like about them is the way they approach filmmaking. I think that what they're trying to show is what you cannot express in words. For example, there's the scene in Ozu's Tokyo Story [Tokyo mono gateri, 1953] of the old man looking at the ocean. It's his profile and somehow from that picture you can feel his sadness. There's a famous scene of the daughter crying, but I wasn't so moved by that. I like the opposite of what Hollywood-style films show. Indeed, a certain sadness pervades Kawase's work. Her best-known Super 8 documentary, *Embracing* (1992), follows her own search for her father. Her parents separated when she was young and she was brought up by her maternal grandmother. Although she finds his traces everywhere, we never actually see him on film. Perhaps, with this in mind, it makes sense that in *Suzuka* the father walks out of the village, disappearing for ever and leaving his family behind to cope. In another film with an untradable title, *Kataomoni* (1994), she paints a loving portrait of her grandmother, somehow suffused with a desire to communicate her love for her while she is still around.

"The main theme in what I do is love, and what influence each individual has on the world, what they leave behind", Kawase explains. I ask whether this is a response to a sense of mono no aware, the Buddhist concept of the fleeting nature of human existence and its poignancy. I ask with trepidation, because in some cases this concept has become so debased through overuse that it amounts to little more than a Japanese version of Doris Day singing "Que Sera Sera: What Will Be Will Be". Fortunately, Kawase responds positively: Yes, I'm not going to be around forever myself! I'm very aware of that in my everyday life. That's the
When the press conference room at the Cannes Film Festival is packed, you know either the film will be a smash, or the cast is big. in the case of LA Confidential, it was both. After the paparazzi had flashed their bulbs, the celebrities took their seats: James Ellroy, who wrote the book; director Curtis Hanson; director of photography Dante Spinotti; screenwriter Brian Helgeland; actors Kevin Spacey, Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce, Kim Basinger and Danny DeVito.

All were relaxed, none more so than Crowe (who wore matching shades with Spacey), Basinger (who was graceful and laughed a lot), and DeVito (who couldn’t answer a question without clowning). Ellroy, the king of superior pulp, was the most articulate, enunciating carefully in often glittering prose. Jan Epstein reports.
they in fact are – and struggle to get along and find a way in that sort of twisted, tangled, wacky world of Ellroy’s imagination.

As to the last part of your question, we actually didn’t have to give the script to somebody to read. The key person was [producer] Arnon Milchan. When I met with him, he had not yet read the script. I took along a group of about 12 photos that I felt represented the way the picture would look and feel. I showed him the pictures and talked about the people that inhabited the story, and what I hoped the movie would accomplish. I showed him the pictures and talked about the people that inhabited the story, and what I hoped the movie would accomplish. His enthusiasm and commitment to that vision never wavered, and it was put most sorely to the test immediately.

When I came to him and said I would like to cast two Australians to play these two Angelino cops, he went along with it. We were then in a position to go to each of the other actors and say, “We are making this picture because we love it and we would like you to be in it”, as opposed to saying we would like you to help us find financing for the picture, which is the way movies are often made these days.

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Sometimes you can discover things in a choice of clothing, make-up or hair—or, in this case, a moustache. It sometimes helps you let yourself go. A lot of those clothes I would wear myself, but they were particular to this character, and they made me feel kind of like Dean Martin.

**COULD GUY PEARCE [ED ELEY] ALSO COMMENT ON HIS CLOTHING?**

Pearce: *Priscilla* actually was quite a departure for me. I don't usually wear those kinds of clothes—most of the time. It was actually nice to get into some decent suits for LA Confidential, male clothing for a change.

Obviously, clothing has a fairly large part to play in the character, and there is style and colour that pick up various aspects of their personality. [Ed] Eley in many ways is quite a cold character, and colours that were chosen were for various shades of greys and blues. In a stylized sense, it has quite a bit to do with the character—and it was quite nice to get out of a frock.


Did you have an actress in mind that you modelled your character on? Also, does Curtis [Hanson] or James [Ellroy] or anybody in the movie feel that, even though it is set in the '50s, you were really commenting on post-O.J., Los Angeles in the '90s?

**Basinger:** My wardrobe is really quite simple; Kevin is really right when he said Ruth Myers is an exceptional designer. She is wonderful and she really had an idea for each character.

It is very easy to look back over Veronica Lake's films, to see the way she dresses and the humour in many of her movies. So, we literally went back to the films, watched her and got the clothing. We really stole it from her.

**Hanson:** Do I think this is a reflection of LA today, post-O.J.? Why Los Angeles and why the early '50s is the question? Part of what is fascinating about the city and that time period is that a lot of things were starting, some of which looked great at the time, some of which didn't, all of which are with us today. For instance, it was a moment in time when the Los Angeles police force changed from a force that was corrupt in a typical way that involved graft and money-changing, and became modelled on a military operation, which preceded and led to the LAPD today.

Ellroy: The LAPD kicked black ass in the city of Los Angeles for a good 50 years. As a direct result of that, Rodney King was beaten up, we had some riots in 1992 and O.J. Simpson got off scot-free for a murder that he really committed. You can look to LA Confidential, the book, which was written pre-O.J. Simpson, pre-Rodney King, in suburban Connecticut. O.J. is no way there as a subplot, because I have no gift of prophecy.

The film stresses one of my big themes in my books, which is bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority. It is there. I think Curtis and Brian Helgeland may have had some sub-conscious tweaking i wanted to burn the LA-based crime novel to the fucking ground, and resurrect a revisionist monument to myself in the ashes of that fire. i wanted to write the biggest, baddest, ugliest, deepest, darkest crime novel of all time, set in LA, my fatherland, throughout 1950s, which is my first formative decade.

**Basinger:** I wanted to write the biggest, baddest, ugliest, deepest, darkest crime novel of all time, set in LA, my fatherland, throughout 1950s, which is my first formative decade.}

**DeVito:** What was your personal approach to the character and how did you want him to be?

Spacey: Of the reasons I was attracted to play him [Vincennes] was that I had had this really incredible run playing great, dark figures over a couple of years, which up to that point hadn't really been my experience. In theatre, I didn't find myself playing those kinds of characters, but I wanted to find a role, and hopefully a series of roles, that would give me the opportunity to play a character who, even though Jack has some slightly shady undertones, is emotionally available and not hermetically sealed.

Very often in writing characters that are darker or manipulative, as an actor you begin to feel that you could be in a room talking to yourself alone for as much as another character affects your character's behaviour. What I was looking for as an actor was an opportunity to go some place where I was just given an opportunity to be emotionally available, and this role offered all of that and a lot of humour—and a Studebaker.

**Corrrect me if I'm wrong, but one of the strands in the novel is the building of Disneyland, I'm just wondering at what point that fell out of the story, and how Mr Ellroy felt about its exclusion.**

Ellroy: It wasn't Disneyland, it was Dream-a-Dreamland amusement park, of my own making. It was founded by a mythical animator named Raymond Dieterling, who had two main characters named Moonie Mouse and Danny Duck. This had fucking nothing to do with Walt Disney, if you believe that! I think Curtis Hanson and Brian Helgeland were dead-on right in eliminating this plot. There were other juicer sub-plots to utilize and still bring the film in at that juicy 138-minute time frame.

**Danny DeVito, your presskit describes you as a visionary sleazemonger?**

DeVito: I didn't write that!

**What was your inspiration for this role?**

Spacey: Your character is a good guy, which is not unusual for you. What was your personal approach to the character and how did you want him to be?
**Paparazzi?**

DeVito: I was just caught up in that sleazemonger stuff. This character Sid? I've always wanted to play a journalist, someone morally pure, and I got a chance to also be a paparazzi in the movie. So, it is basically coming to these wonderful events all the time that are so inspirational.

**What about being on the other side of the paparazzi?**

DeVito: It is always fun, that is why I bring my camera to Cannes. You know, I am you, you are me, we are the walrus. So, it is fun. It is very nice to be here. I love being here.

Mr Ellroy, what were you trying to do with the classic LA detective novel of Chandler or Ross MacDonald? What is your attitude towards that?

Ellroy: I wanted to burn the LA-based crime novel to the fucking ground, and resurrect a revisionist monument to myself in the ashes of that fire. I wanted to write the biggest, baddest, ugliest, deepest, darkest crime novel of all time, set in LA, my fatherland, throughout 1950s, which is my first formative decade.

In 1953, which is the year my Confidential film is set, I was five years old and not cognisant of much. However, a few years later I started looking around and seeing things, and in 1958, when I was 10, my mother was murdered. It was an unsolved crime and my curiosity focused in on Mickey Cohen and his antics, every little bit of the frame. That impressed me and the vibes started getting very good about that time. Usually, American actors train in their respective milieu. For example, for Taxi Driver, De Niro worked as a taxi driver. Guy Pearce, did you have this kind of experience preparing the role?

Pearce: Russell and I both arrived in the country a fair time earlier than shooting began, so we spent quite a bit of time with the LAPD.

Crowe: We went out with them, but the problem with actually touring with Los Angeles police department guys is that [...] in 1953 there were different regional police precincts; there were different call signs on the radio; a different level of available armoury. So, a lot of the detail they were giving us was actually muddied into water.

Pearce: We had to translate what they were giving us. Most of the beneficial stuff was probably the early training films that we looked at.

Crowe: 1950s recruit films showed various moves to make. I did actually use one of them in the movie, where you actually reach between the guy's legs – it doesn't work very well in real life! What the LAPD was giving us was not necessarily important, other than policing is essentially the same now as it was then. You have authority over people, and that is the beginning of the structure of these characters. But the detail of these characters had to come from books; they had to come from things like the training films, movies of the time and also delving into the gold mine of Mr Ellroy's mind.

Pearce: Yes, there is a lot of detail in the book itself as far as character analysis, so a lot of it is there on the page really.

Kim Basinger, what was it like for you to be the main female character among a number of male characters? Secondly, you first show up in a cape, a symbol of death. Was that done on purpose? Was there any meaning behind that?

Basinger: The answer to your first question is that it was a mighty nice seat on the bus.

To your second question, as far as the cape is concerned, no, not really. I had seen that cape in one of her [Veronica Lake's] films. It wasn't exactly like that, but we thought it was really wonderful to keep the mystique of the character in the beginning, to keep her hidden. The pale white around her face worked for the opening.

James Ellroy, you said you were very satisfied with the film, but you also said that you wanted to write the most sleazy, dirty book. For me, the film is very clean and your book is very dirty. Could you comment on this?

Ellroy: One of the reasons the film got made is that it was cleaned up, slightly, and I'm very grateful for that. I wouldn't be having this wonderful experience of living the film, right here.

In Australia, we are very proud of both Guy [Pearce] and Russell [Crowe]. Curtis Hanson, I'd love to know what is it about the Australian guys that made you cast them in such quintessentially American roles as cops in LA?

Pearce: It's the free room and board we offered Curtis when he comes to Australia on holiday!

Hanson: Looking at the movie we all hoped to make, and Cheryl Crane, Lana Turner's daughter who shot Johnny Stompanato, a minor character in my book and in Curtis Hanson's film.

My deepest intellectual curiosities derive from Los Angeles crime in the 1950s and the design of LA Confidential, the novel, was to put it all into one big ugly pot. The miracle of LA Confidential, the film, is that most of my book is there intact in a way that I could never have imagined, with brilliant actors portraying characters that I created and giving them a visual life that is slightly mine, but more theirs [Applause.]

**Did you ever visit the set to see how this was happening?**

Ellroy: I asked Curtis if I could play Bud White and how much money he wanted from me to assimilate the role (but he turned me) down flat.

I did visit the set a few times and was impressed with the complexity and the density of the shot-by-shot work of Curtis Hanson and Dante Spinotti. I saw them shoot Mickey Cohen walking down the steps of the city hall and there was something going on in one of the things that was fascinating about the book was that you met these characters, each was doing something bad and none you liked. Gradually, as you kept going, you started to care about them.

Part of the advantage of casting actors who had not played roles similar to this before was that as soon as the audience saw Bud White or Ed Exley, they weren't bringing the actor's past history in other movies to the characters they were playing now. And, of course, Los Angeles is a city of people who have immigrated there from somewhere else. James made a comment to me, after we had cast not only Guy and Russell but also James Cromwell, that the only Angelinos on the set would be him and me.

Curtis Hanson, the evolution of the characters in your film is extremely important, particularly Exley. Did you shoot this picture out-of-sequence, and what kind of problem did that pose for the evolution of the actors?

Hanson: We tried as one always does to shoot in sequence, but ended up going wildly out of...
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As a spectator or practitioner, it is difficult to ignore the impact that digital technology is currently having on cinema. During the 1990s, digital workstations have become the standard production pathway for sound-processing and picture editing in feature films. Techniques enabling high resolution 2-D and 3-D image manipulation and seamless compositing have extended the domain of the computer from its initial foothold in titling into the construction of the film image itself. Today, digital imaging is not only usurping the place of many traditional special effects (from the lab to model-making, matte painting and even stunt performers), but increasingly touches the work of others such as production designers and set builders, make-up artists, film extras and even actors. While dinosaurs roam cinema screens the world over, it is traditional cinematography which seems closer to extinction. As digital cameras come into increasing use, it may well be that future film historians will find it convenient to use the centenary of cinema to mark the end of celluloid-based capture and projection.

Digital technology often seems to attract millenarian prophecies in this vein. The problem is not so much whether they are true or false, but that they are usually both true and false at the same time. It is undeniable that digital technology is significantly changing the way in which films are produced, exhibited and experienced, and all indicators suggest that these changes will only be heightened in the future. Yet, even if all the mooted changes coalesce into a competitively-priced "digital backlot", it is superficial to assume that a century of accumulated knowledge, skill and experience will be rendered redundant. Put bluntly, writers will still need to write stories and screenplays, producers will still need to worry about the bottom line, and directors will still need to combine narrative vision with military strategy to get the job done. What has changed, and will undoubtedly continue to change, is that there will be different production options to achieve a desired end. Up to now, most digital options have been concentrated in post-production, but increasingly the digital threshold is demanding a rethink of the whole production process, including the relation between production and post-production. How well the new technology will be utilized largely depends on the ability of people in different sectors of the film industry to communicate with each other, so that choices can be adequately assessed and the most appropriate pathway chosen.

It goes without saying that cinema, with its unique combination of optics, chemistry and mechanics, has always been closely bound up with technology. One might convincingly argue that the film industry has been dealing with technological change throughout its entire history, as new cameras, lenses, film stock, lights, sound-recording techniques, and the like have been introduced throughout the century. However, such changes have usually affected a particular department rather than cut across the entire industry. The digital threshold differs, inasmuch as it amounts to a paradigm shift, affecting the spheres of production, exhibition and consumption simultaneously. The only really comparable shift was the introduction of synchronized sound in the 1920s and 1930s.

With this sense of history in mind, earlier this year I conducted a series of interviews with people working in different parts of the Australian film industry. The initial aim of the interviews was to provide background material for a report I was researching into the impact of digital technology on feature film production in Australia. But, as the conversations continued, it became evident that they deserved a more extended public airing in their own right. Because those involved were able to draw upon a depth of
Rod Bishop
Director, Australian Film, Television and Radio School

**How do you prepare students to work in the film industry? Are they still getting experience using sprocket-based technology, or are students now pushed more towards computer skills?**

When we revised the curriculum last year, we made it post-graduate. As a training facility, it has this quite amazing employment statistic of 96 percent of all graduates since 1978 still being employed in the film and television industry.

One of the reasons I think that this is the case is because the school has been resourced enough to always operate at the high end. Equipment purchases have been made in advance of the industry adopting that equipment as standard. This is slightly a gamble, an informed opinion, as to what the industry is about to adopt.

So, a case in point would be your SGI workstations? Yes. When our students go through their courses, apart from all the conceptual and creative work they go through, they are trained on state-of-the-art equipment that the industry is just in the process of adopting. So, by the time they graduate, they’re very well qualified to pick up jobs immediately. I think this will be even more the case in the next 3.5 years.

**How do you think that digital technology is going to affect training for the film industry?**

What is definitely true, both here and internationally, is that digital training, or training people for the digital processes in film and television in the future, is not in the healthy state it should be. Not long after I got to the school I was contacted by CILECT [Centre International De Liaison Des Ecoles De Cinéma Et De Télévision] who are, if you like, the United Nations of film and television schools around the world. It has a bi-annual congress and in between the congresses it runs various workshops in various parts of the world. It has become apparent that some of the problems I’ve found at this school to do with the acceptance of digital technology exist in all of these other film schools around the world.

In many ways we are not only up with the best, we may be ahead of the best. Teaching staff, if they are tenured in the university system – here they are contracted for a six-year period – don’t have the same immediate requirements to adapt their processes to digital technology. They can put it off, they can scorn it, they can stay comfortable with what they know. I think that is a relatively endemic problem in traditional film and television teaching institutions throughout the world, not just here.

I think where the AFTRS has such a big advantage, like UCLA, FEMIS in France and to some extent the National Film School in London, is that the better-funded the film school is, the easier it is to build digital training into its structure. You can set up your digital people in a separate section, find ways to introduce digital training into the organization without it necessarily creating a huge confrontation with people who are finding it difficult to adjust to the processes.

The other factor, and I’m glad it’s starting to go away, is the hype about multimedia. The term multimedia already seems out of date to me. When multimedia was being heavily
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promoted in Australia a couple of years ago, what was being promoted was non-linear narrative. The CD-ROM gave you the opportunity to create intersecting, circular narratives, things that didn’t have to have beginnings, middles and ends; or, as Jean-Luc Godard has said, not necessarily in that order. If Greek drama couldn’t pull a crowd, it would have died 2,500 years ago. To actually have a fear that traditional narrative technique, with its hook, three or four-hour structure, plot points and resolution, is in danger because CD-ROMs have random entry and access points is just in the realm of the infantile. Unfortunately, it may play a factor in why traditional film and television teachers, particularly those in writing, find it difficult to adapt to the new era.

There is a big difference between new media and new technologies. New technologies are simply what we were talking about here, a new technology which allows the production process to be delivered in a different way. The fact that it has a non-linear facet to it is part of its technique, and you use that to shorten and make more efficient the production process. That’s all that means.

New media, on the other hand, is something different. CD-ROMs, with their random entry and exit points, and the Internet, suggest that a whole new medium could potentially be created. But it’s still a bit early to say whether that is true or not. The Internet and CD-ROMs are both being used as delivery systems primarily, and the amount of experimentation with them as new languages is very, very marginal.

A person who is computer literate should not only be able to cut on an Avid, but should be able to compose sound digitally on their computer. Multiskilling will take on a whole different meaning in the future.

Traditionally, in the film industry there hasn’t really been an official training structure. Most often, it’s been more on-the-job training. Anecdotally, at least, there seems to be a feeling that the rapid transition to using new technology has redefined many jobs, and interrupted the process of training. How do these things get trained, unless they are able to come to a place like AFTRS? Secondly, there seems to be a fear from a lot of experienced people — I don’t know whether it’s justified or not — that their knowledge is actually being thrown away unnecessarily; that people with film experience are going to get thrown aside for people who are computer literate. I’m not so concerned about the latter point because, as I said, if Greek drama couldn’t pull an audience, it would die. So, if people are highly skilled with that kind of structure and that kind of presentation of a narrative, there will always be a job as long as it’s true or not. The Internet and CD-ROMs are both being used as delivery systems primarily, and the amount of experimentation with them as new languages is very, very marginal.

stock has to reproduce so successfully that it’s unpickable to the ordinary eye, film will always be chosen. That’s quite clear.

What possibilities do you see for so-called garage producers with new technologies, given that the CGI for feature films like Johnny Mnemonic [Robert Longo, 1995] was done on PCs? Is that going to have an effect on the mainstream industry in Australia?

That’s another reason why the industry can’t afford not to deal with the new technologies on the digital side, no matter how expensive it seems to us at the moment, or how difficult it may be to do all our training. Apart from that, we are looking at an exponential difference in the cost of computer equipment from year to year to year; within five years, who knows? The two million dollars’ worth of hardware and software we have downstairs at the moment may be deliverable to PCs at home.

When you get to the point where you can stream digital images and sound from computer to computer — and, as we know, digital information can be endlessly reproduced without losing quality — and you can deliver it to remote PCs in houses all over the world, what’s to stop 30 people getting together, never meeting in their lives, but all participating in producing a feature-length film by actually sending the sound and image files to each other in cyberspace and into the computers.

Or, better still, beyond that level of mainstream commercial production, you get, say, 30 people talking to each other in a chat room, who all discover that they’ve got the right hardware and software to create something together. So they go ahead and do it. They aren’t going to care where the copyright lies, or what time of day it is. The questions arising will be more to do with intellectual property, ownership and security and things like that.

What sort of effects do you see on documentary film?

Let’s go back to two examples in Australia of digital manipulation, both of them in the press. Three years ago the Sunday Age ran its famous digitally-treated photograph of Jeff Kennett without any clothes on standing at a podium. Last year, after the Port Arthur massacre, we had that photograph of Martin Bryant being digitally altered on the front page of The Australian.
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Obviously, a lot of people 24 hours after the massacre were wondering how somebody could have done it. They are presented with a photograph of the alleged murderer with clearly crazy eyes and automatically assume – like me – that the picture explains it all. To me that signifies a major problem that is about to occur. If you can do that to history now, what's to stop you going back and doing it to historical films?

**Underlying a Documentary Film is a Faith that Those Events Did Happen. If that Rug is Pulled Away from Under Us, What Happens to Documentary Film in the Future?**

Well, the rug is slowly being pulled away anyway. Think about *Man Bites Dog* (C'est arrivé près de chez vous, Rémy Belvaux, 1992) for instance. There are parts of that film you probably accept as real because of the simulated documentary coverage, just as a lot of people thought Spinal Tap were a real band. Those sorts of things already exist. Where it becomes more serious is when it's possible to, say, create a murder scene in a documentary which didn't take place.

That, to me, is when you start to get to the rewriting of history. *Man Bites Dog* is a fictional work, *This Is Spinal Tap* [Rob Reiner, 1984] is a fictional work; they are fictional works masquerading as documentaries. But what you're suggesting is that you may be able to shoot a documentary and digitally alter one specific scene in it, bury it within the overall documentary context, and present an hour-and-a-half documentary film that has 30 seconds which has been fictionalized.

**Dominic Case**

**Group Technology and Service Manager, Atlab Australia**

Film has been a fairly stable and evolving platform which has lasted for a hundred years. We have now entered a period of very rapid technological change in the industry. When did this digital wave begin to break? What have been its main fronts?

I would say that around 1989-1990 was when things started to build momentum; or, the alarm bells were ringing, shall we say. Interestingly, the thing that people really noticed was when the Avid non-linear picture editing system first came in – or was first used by filmmakers. It turns out that sound had been quietly getting on to a non-linear system for a couple of years longer than that. Sound, for one reason or another, made the revolution more quietly but more completely, whereas it was the picture that really made the waves. The other wavefront has been digital effects for film. And, whilst Kodak was talking about that in the late ’80s, it was probably in about 1992 or 1993 that it was becoming a reality.

**Are there Industry Standards Emerging that Are Comparable to, Say, the Introduction of Steenbecks or Nagras?**

It won't be many years at all before we have what Kodak call the digital intermediate. A complete feature film will go into the digital world for everything that's currently done on film; colour grading, even editing will all be done on-line digitally.

The whole lot – titling, compositing – will come out as one complete digital negative. In terms of costs, memory and so on, it's quite preposterous now. But in four or five years it might be commonplace.

They say the devil's in the detail. The grand concept of non-linear editing or digital editing is fine and wonderful. All of those housekeeping details are nightmares now. They will change in a revolutionary style again, again and again.

Non-linear editing was originally pushed to the film industry by those selling the technology as a time- and cost-saving technology. To what extent do you think this promise was true?

Feature-wise, people have recognized that the concept that this will save money and time isn't so. They are discovering that 12 weeks on a Steenbeck is still cheaper than four weeks on an Avid. They are discovering that a phrase I quoted from somebody two or three years ago, that "we couldn't afford to do a non-linear edit", is true.

Three years ago, that divided people. Now everybody recognizes that a digital edit, a non-linear edit, is probably going to be more expensive, but it's going to save time and give more flexibility and that's what they are paying for.

When it comes to other sorts of things, commercials for example, nobody is going to cut film for a commercial anymore. It just isn't going to happen. But, by and large, and certainly looking at feature production, I think that the idea it was going to save the producer money has been thrown out.

**Has the Australian Film Industry Been Quick to Embrace This Technology?**

No, it has been slow, not because of the creativity or the resourcefulness, and certainly not because of the technological abilities of the local industry. The sort of films that we have made here, firstly, tend not to have budgets which would have allowed anything more that the odd digital title occasionally and, secondly, we haven't had any trail-blazing Jurassic Parks. There isn't the big feature industry on which to build a resource base. They can do a film like that overseas and buy a dozen Flame systems, for example, put them into a studio and use them on a number of other smaller budget pictures. We have never been able to build up the technical infrastructure, let alone the expertise to do the small films to follow on. We've had to build our own industry on commercials and that has changed the flavour.

**Given What You've Said about the Effect of New Technology on Different Aspects of the Film Production Process, Is There a Need to Start Thinking About New Production Paradigms?** For instance, the point at which what used to be called 'post-production' comes into a...
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The cinematographer needs to be determining factors. The time tends to be dictated by other things — usually it simply means that maybe the technological dictates. Production and post-production are certainly becoming more and more blurred. Wire removal, which used to be done on the set, is now done in post. The cinematographer needs to be aware of how a shot is set up because of the way it’s going to be treated in post. The cinematographer may then need to be involved in supervising the images that he or she has shot. There’s this concept I rather like of vertical editing and horizontal editing. Horizontal editing is putting the scenes together in the right order. Vertical editing is composing the image, compositing, adding bits, taking bits away, putting a different hoarding on the bus as it drives past, which used to be purely the preserve of image capture. That was something the cinematographer had control over. But now the image that the cinematographer delivers is just one component of the frame. So post-production is taking a lot more onto itself.

**Is there still a role for optical effects in film?**

Decreasingly so, because the cost of digital is coming down and it’s crossing over more and more of the boundaries. There are a lot of major feature films which still have traditional opticals, whether they’re titles or more conventional opticals. In *Paradise Road* (Bruce Beresford, 1997), for example, are some good old-fashioned blue-screen travelling matte shots. The camera is looking through the front of the car and you see the road disappearing in the window at the back of the car. It’s what travelling matte shots were designed for more or less. They have been doing it for 50 or 60 years and this is done just the same way. It could have been done digitally, but who needs it?

Opticals will probably disappear through wasting away, because as they are used less the expertise will disappear.

**It’s reminiscent of when people wanted to start shooting black and white film again in the ’80s. They found that they couldn’t get the tonal range they wanted.** Not because the lab didn’t have a black-and-white processing machine, but there was nobody running it who had the ability to control things in the same way. It was death by a thousand cuts, really.

**James Cameron suggests that end-to-end scanning of films is 5-10 years away. Then, everything — colour grading, titling, compositing — would be done in the digital realm. Do you think this is feasible in Australia?** Is it appropriate for the sort of films we are making here?

Yes it is, or it will be in time. That sort of full-length scanning is not because we are going to have a space ship exploding every shot. It’s because there are absolutely routine things that we do now photochemically in the laboratory, like colour grading, which will eventually be done with more ease and facility in a digital domain. It will be entirely appropriate to do it on any film.

I think the second part of your question is really a sort of Bob Ellis argument. One of his arguments is why shouldn’t we make a *Jurassic Park* in Australia; we made a *Babe*? Why the hell should the Australian industry restrict itself to making films about suburban couples in Melbourne with hernia problems? I think that was the example he chose. They are all small films, they are character-driven narratives rather than event-driven. Not that one is better than the other, but why should we say that we don’t do those sort of films?

**What about filmless cinema? Instead of shipping film reels, will distributors just pipe terrabytes of data into multiplexes everywhere.**

**Do you see this as a possibility?** I see it as a possibility. Kodak sees it as a possibility. There is one person at least within Kodak who has been quoted as predicting that within five years. I think it might be a bit more. It might be in five years that people somewhere are putting out digital or electronic images into what would have been otherwise a traditional projection cinema.

It was tried in Australia a couple of years back. A company called Satellite Cinema set up in a couple of small towns. Satellite Cinema didn’t actually beam a video signal up to a satellite and down again. A videotape was sent out by courier. What finally closed it down, I understand, was that the distributors were very touchy indeed about having a first release picture in a format that was so immensely primitive. It was a security issue. It’s interesting that it wasn’t a technological barrier that prevented the thing.

In fact, a similar thing is happening with digital video disc or digital versatile disc, which will replace VHS cassettes. It is floundering because the manufacturers of the software are very nervous about it. The technology can deliver whatever you want, but commercial interests tend to dictate how the technology is used.

**Digital technology gives film-makers very tight control over their materials — you might say that it’s a more painterly image, it’s more malleable, more plastic. And similarly with the sound, you can change any and every element of it. Do you think this is feeding an aesthetic change, that it’s leading towards a much more self-conscious, theatrical type of cinema?**

I don’t see any of those as universal trends, yet it is providing the ability for those things. It’s providing Peter Greenaway with the means to make *Prospero’s Books* [1991], for example, in a highly-stylized way, with frames within frames and so on, which is a part of his message of the book within the book and the story within the story. That was something various levels of technology enabled him to do. Having said that, I think effect films that have been all the go for the past 50 or 15 years don’t prevent the little character-driven dramas from being made in just the same way and looking just the same as they have done. I think there are different strands that now respond to different technological impulses.

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**Nicholas Beauman**

**When did digital non-linear editing start to come in?**

The last thing I cut on film was *White Sands* (Roger Donaldson, 1992). I have been using non-linear systems ever since. This system has been something I’ve been waiting for all my life. It’s just given me a new lease of life; it’s liberating and it enables me to be more adventurous than I’ve ever dared to be or had the time to be. It gives me enormous flexibility which I’ve never had before. You’d really have to drag me kicking and screaming back to a Steenbeck. I’d resist it to the bitter end now.

**With non-linear there’s no tape to wind, no cutting. Is it simply the lack of materiality, of having to shuffle things around, that enables you to be more adventurous?**

It’s a complex question in a way. In the old days, the rule-of-thumb when you were cutting on film was that you’d allow approximately a week per reel after the shoot to get to what we’d call a locked-off cut. Of course, when these systems first came in, places like Spectrum were saying, “We know they are more expensive to hire, but you’ll do it a lot quicker, you won’t need so many assistants, the editor can practically do it on his own.”

A lot of those things are true; you can cut a lot faster and make changes more quickly. But you can only think so fast, and editing still requires thought. I found very early on that you need your assistants around, they are an essential part of the package. I also believe very strongly that there is a training process involved here too. It think it’s very important for me to pass on what I know to people working with me. One of the disadvantages of non-linear is the picture quality is not nearly as good as on film, but I think that will improve as these systems become more sophisticated. At the moment you sacrifice storage space for picture quality; optimum picture quality eats up a lot of storage space. As all these costs come down, that will become less and less a factor.

When you do a cut on film, it requires you to think about how you are actually going to construct a scene a lot more carefully than if you are cutting on a digital, non-linear system. I can throw something together on non-linear very quickly and then look at it. I can put that cut aside, do another one and then
another. And I can then assess all three versions or show them all to somebody else for feedback. You can't do that so readily on film. Because of the time constraints and just how long it takes, you have to think about it very carefully. If it doesn't work, you have to peel all those splices apart again and start all over, and very few films can afford to do that.

During the shoot, I throw a first cut of a scene together fairly quickly, I'll put a scene together, see if it works, make a copy of it, and then do two or three versions of that scene straight off. I'll put them aside and go onto something else and maybe in two or three days' time I'll go back and look at those two or three versions again. Because it is such a fast process, I have the time to keep going back and refining and refining. By the time I actually show it to the director, the cut is in a much more polished state than I could ever have achieved cutting on film.

Here [on Lightworks], you can say, "I'll try it and if I don't like it, I've got an undo button". There's no harm in trying a cut; if I don't like it I can undo it. It's given me an enormous freedom to really be adventurous.

**One of the points you have raised is the question of training and the role of the assistant editor.**

Do you think there has been a problem in the transition to non-linear, that some editors haven't found it possible to pass on their skills? Conversely, has there been a demand from editors to get assistants with computer literacy and not film skills?

I think there is a bit of both. When I first started on Lightworks I was very keen to have somebody with computer skills because I had none. Apart from how I actually manipulate this machine, the back-up processes are very complicated. The first guy that I had working with me taught me and I taught him. I saw it as a two-way process.

Some of the anecdotal evidence is that assistants are working a lot of nights, are rarely involved face-to-face with the principal editor, are not getting that same passing-on of knowledge.

They are starting at noon and working through to later in the night; because they are track-laying and editing a three-minute promo for Fox, they need to have access to the system as well. My view is that once the industry worldwide embraces non-linear totally and film goes out the window -- and I've been predicting this will happen very quickly -- I think you'll find there will be a lot of competition with all these systems, and they'll come down dramatically in price. Then, what you will find, is assistant workstations.

The assistant will be around the corner, he'd have basically the same set-up as I have, and he'll be able to access the same material as I'm accessing, which will just be data. He'll then be able to work in tandem with me. I'll be able to say, "I've just finished this scene, take it over, I want you to lay some gun shots here and a door slam there, get rid of the director's cues."

I say to my assistants during the shoot, "Whenever I'm not around if you've got the time you can cut any scene you want." That's the other beauty; they can play around to their hearts' content. Not like when I was cutting on film. If I wanted to give a scene to my assistant and he fucked it up, I would have to work with him or her and reconstruct it, or put it all back in rushes form and start all over again.

Are you using a workprint and is that still a common practice in feature film production?

When the non-linear systems came in, because they were expensive to hire, the post-production houses were pushing the line of not having a workprint. Just transfer your neg to tape, digitize it into the system, and look at your rushes on tape.

You really need to see feature film rushes on the big screen. First impressions are very important and you can check for possible mistakes, focus problems, scratching. Then, of course, you have the film, so at some stage prior to the mix you can conform the cut that you have done on tape back onto film. You end up with a cut workprint that matches the cut on digital, which can then be used for screenings, slash dupes and neg matching.

Given that the new technology was often sold, at least initially, as a cost-cutting exercise in part, has it reduced editing time and cut production costs?

I personally think that's a mistake. Whilst you can put a cut together a lot more quickly on a non-linear system, you still need to walk away from the film, you need some breathing time. With non-linear systems now, if you still allow, let's say, 10 weeks to get to a fine cut, it gives the director time to really explore the material to its absolute, to really go through everything and try every option. I would argue very strongly for not reducing post-production, but for using the time to really get the best out of your material.

We are up to something like version five of the film [Oscar and Lucinda] at the moment, but in fact it's probably like version seven and there will be at least one other version after this. You just didn't have the time to go through the film that many times and in such fine detail when you were cutting on film. When I was cutting on film I can honestly say that there were a few films that I needed more time to refine, and would have benefited from the chance to explore other options.

Many non-linear systems are more than edit systems, they are becoming mini-effects suites. Is there a convergence between tasks that have previously been separate?

Absolutely. I've got opticals at my fingertips, audio and level controls, and all these things impact on my picture-cutting time as well. So, yes, I do a lot more sound-editing work than I would have in the past. Perhaps a quarter of my picture-editing time these days is taken up with editing and laying temp music, effects and trying out opticals.

Would it be fair to say that there's an increased demand for complexity in soundtracks because of the quality that's now available in the theatres?

It certainly would. Nowadays, you don't say, "Are we going to mix mono or stereo?" It's a question of is it going to be 2-track or 6-track stereo?
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Peter Doyle
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Where do you see the industry heading?

The way feature films are made will change significantly, in fact they already have. In about five years, feature films will be made in very much the same style as television mini-series for children are made to date. A lot of children's television series, particularly in Australia, involve quite a lot of effects that have to be put together very quickly with a reasonably limited budget. Digital conforming in feature films will be common within five years. That's where you'll see scanning of all negative, manipulation of some form, and then recording out of that.

That's what I call the James Cameron scenario. He thinks that end-to-end scanning of the negative is going to come within 5-10 years.

Well, actually it already is. I started work on a film with Vincent Ward where that is almost the case. So that's to be used for doing colour matching, titling, composites?

Also, treating the whole film to have a look and style that's unlike any other film.

And that's a cost-effective way of doing it?

I guess it will be shown in the box-office. When making these judgements of the impact of digital on film, you have to develop a new perspective on what the concept "cost-effective" actually is. If it generates a return at the box-office, it's cost-effective.

If you take James Cameron as an example, obviously he's working on high-budget films. In Australia, our production has generally not been oriented towards spectacular effects films, but to character-driven narratives. Does this preponderance of lower- or medium-budget films change the equation?

No, it will probably go the other way; even more so if you take the antithesis of James Cameron's aesthetic style. For some strange reason filmmakers feel insulated...

Because 35mm film is seen as the apex of what the look is...

Exactly. But the reality in Australia is that these wonderful narrative films end up being Super-16 blow-ups anyway. If you work out the mathematics of it all, video balance to film will actually give you more resolution than Super-16 to film. When I was working for Arri cameras in Germany, the big discussion was whether to continue with Super-16 as a production medium. I think the answer is clear in the announcement 10 months ago of a partnership between Sony and Arri in the development of Arri accessories for Sony digital cameras. So the future is pretty clear really.

What are the prospects of moving to filmless cinema in the near future? Not tape-based capture, but direct capture onto optical disc?

What you see is the development of hybrid cameras; both Arri's 435 and Panavision's Millenium show the beginnings of this. The viewfinder is digital, the output is digital, it records a digital split onto Avid or Lightworks discs, but it has to also record the 35mm negative. That is becoming the scenario. It's something Coppola has been trying to do for years, but in his way the whole technology got a bit complicated. It will be a while before a digital camera will be able to run at any speed from 1 to 120 Fps, with variable shutter as the 435 can now.

You mentioned the necessary emergence of new production paradigms. In what way do you see those evolving? A starting point is perhaps the fact that post-production is no longer something that comes after a film, it increasingly comes before and during the film.

What you see happening, which is already happening, is the de-linearization of film. The pre-visualization of the film means that it is possible for any crew member or any technical member of the film to be able to look at any part of that film in its pre-structured form and work out what they need to do.

The second area, which is more the aesthetic issue, is that you'll be able to actually make the film when you're sitting down at home, as previews. You have little stick men running round and getting the general moves and you can work out the choreography. No-one will even attempt to make a major film without doing what is called pre-vis or pre-visualization. The complexity with which that happens depends on the budget, and the type of director. If you look at a James Cameron or Jock McTernan film [The Lost Action Hero, Die Hard], for that big action sequences they will actually make the entire scene in a computer with little stick men and CGI animation and full camera moves, and that is what's signed off on. If that's signed off, the DOPs, the art directors and everyone else are then brought in, and they can then dial up what they need to know.

With de-linearization, the idea is that as soon as the negative is exposed, you will be able to access any image at any time in the production flow path. So, if you happen to be doing special effects, you want to be able to access the editing; if you are editing, you will want to be able to access the special effects; the sound department may actually want to access the editing and special effects. What you'll find is that it is becoming much more linear, as in picture cut, picture effects, sound cut, sound effects, final mix, final grade, release. You'll find that all sectors are happening at the same time. It happened on Alex Proyas' film [Dark City]. It's being shot, cut, special effects and sound effects are happening, and it's being test screened: all at the same time.

How has this affected the time span from say, the initiation of a project with the acquisition of the property to the point of release? It's being reduced from, on average, a two-year turnaround from the script to print, to one year from script to print.

differently, in terms of our company. Yes, the work is possible in Australia, but not necessarily by Australians. But then, that's not [inviting] a brawl, because in London not everyone doing digital film for feature films is English. In America you will find quite a lot of Australians and English people. So I think that Australian post-production companies need to just relax a bit and open their doors, and to change the reasons why they exist. That's my personal view.

Can you tell me about your involvement with the development of Cinemor? Why is it that some of the major software programs have been developed in Australia, or initiated here at least, and then gone overseas? How has that dynamic worked?

With Kodak, my involvement was to help develop film specific tools that could emulate what Commercial...
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DIRECTORS HAD BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO IN A VIDEO ROOM; SURPRISINGLY, WHAT IS EASY IN VIDEO, CAN SOMETIMES BE VERY DIFFICULT AT FILM RES, À LA SECONDARY COLOUR GRADING. ISSUES SUCH AS GRAIN MATCHING, COLOUR SEPARATION BASED ON THE SPECIFIC STOOLS AND DYNAMIC RANGE, ARE ISSUES THAT VIDEO TOOLS JUST CANNOT HANDLE.

THE REASON WHY SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT TENDS TO MIGRATE OUT OF AUSTRALIA IS THE LACK OF AN INVESTMENT INFRASTRUCTURE THAT YOU HAVE IN THE USA. THAT IS, STOCK OPTIONS, PUBLIC FLOATS, ETC. IT'S JUST NOT IN OUR CULTURE; WE TEND TO WORK THE REAL ESTATE MARKET, RATHER THAN STOCK OPTIONS ON NEW SOFTWARE COMPANIES.

THIS GOES BEYOND THE FILM INDUSTRY TO A LACK OF VENTURE CAPITAL GENERALLY... YES. SECONDLY, IT'S A GODAWFUL TIME-ZONE TO TRY AND DO ANYTHING. IT SOUNDS RIDICULOUS THAT IT SHOULD BE AN ISSUE, BUT IT ACTUALLY IS. I HAVE EXPERIENCED THAT PERSONALLY WORKING WITH CINEON, WHERE YOU END UP WORKING ALL NIGHT TO BE IN TOUCH WITH EUROPE AND UNTIL EARLY MORNING TO CONTACT THE USA.

THE OTHER REASON SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT IN VISUAL MEDIA REACHES A POINT AND THEN LEAVES AUSTRALIAN SHORES IS JUST SIMPLY THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION. IT'S JUST NOT THAT EASY TO ROUND UP A GROUP OF HIGH-END POST-PRODUCTION PEOPLE IN THE SAME ROOM AT THE SAME TIME HERE, AND GET A GENERAL FEEL OF WHAT THEY NEED, BECAUSE WHO DO YOU SPEAK TO? TO BE QUITE BLUNT, IT'S NOT REALLY A GLOBAL OPINION. A SOFTWARE PACKAGE REALLY NEEDS TO REFLECT WHAT THE MARKET NEEDS AND YOU NEED VERY STRONG FEEDBACK FROM THE MARKET. THE NEEDS OF AN AMERICAN POST-PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT ARE VERY DIFFERENT TO THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT, WHICH IS AGAIN VERY DIFFERENT TO AN AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT. I CONSIDER THAT THERE ARE ACTUALLY THREE MAJOR STYLES OF USAGE OF SOFTWARE POST-PRODUCTION APPLICATIONS, AND YOU REALLY NEED TO HAVE A VERY INNATE UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THREE.

GIVEN THE RAPID CHANGES OF THE LAST 5-10 YEARS, ARE WE REACHING A POINT WHERE SOME STABLE PLATFORMS HAVE A CHANCE OF BECOMING GLOBAL STANDARDS, IN THE WAY THAT THE STEENBECK OR THE NAGRA HAVE BEEN? YES; AGAIN IT ALWAYS HAS BEEN. IT'S JUST THAT PEOPLE'S DEFINITION OF IT WAS SMALL. WHETHER IT'S PRISMS, SOFTIMAGE, ALIAS — THAT CHANGES MONTHLY. BUT THE CONCEPT OF A THREE-DIMENSIONAL, IMAGE-PROCESSING TOOL HAS BEEN AROUND SINCE THE EARLY '80s.

WHATSOEVER YOU WERE USING FLAME, CINEON, MATADOR, AVID ILLUSION, SABRE, WHATEVER, IT'S STILL A TWO-DIMENSIONAL, IMAGE-PROCESSING DEVICE. THERE'S A NAIVE CONCEPT THAT ALL OF THESE TOOLS ARE NEW. THE FIRST USE OF A DIGITAL PICTURE WAS THE VERY FIRST TRANSMISSION BY MARCONI, WHICH WAS A FIVE-BIT, BLACK-AND-WHITE IMAGE, AND THAT WAS IN THE 1900s. NOT THAT MUCH HAS ACTUALLY CHANGED.

THE CONCEPT IS STILL PRETTY STANDARD. YOU ORIGINATE ON NEGATIVE, YOU SOMEHOW PUT THAT NEGATIVE INTO A FORMAT SO IT CAN BE MANIPULATED. IT USED TO BE LIGHT THROUGH AN OPTICAL PRINTER, NOW IT'S DIGITAL. YOU DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO AND THAT USUALLY GETS SPLIT UP INTO THREE AREAS: THE CREATION OF IMAGERY WITH A THREE-DIMENSIONAL PACKAGE; THE 2-D IMAGE MANIPULATION, OR THE REPAIR AS IN HAND-CRAFTING, ROTOSCOPES AND MATTING; THEN IT GOES BACK UP TO FILM AGAIN. THAT'S BEEN THE WAY SINCE THE EARLY '80s AND IT WILL REALLY CONTINUE TO BE THAT WAY FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

THE TOOLS THAT YOU'LL USE WILL OBVIOUSLY CHANGE. AT THE MOMENT, IT HAPPENS TO BE SGI-BASED WITH IMAGE VISION LIBRARY; MAYBE IN A FEW MORE YEARS YOU WILL SEE THAT CHANGE. IT USED TO BE TRANSUTERS WHEN CINEON FIRST STARTED, NOW IT'S PARALLEL PROCESSING. QUANTEL IS OFFERING DEDICATED TOOLS, BUT IT'S STILL BASICALLY THE SAME THING.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE TOOLS WILL CHANGE; WHAT I CALL "THE TRUCKS" — BASICALLY THE STANDARD GOOBLES THAT THEN NEEDED TO GET INTO THE HARDWARE PROGRAMMING AND IMAGE MANIPULATION. I THINK THAT IS A VERY INTERESTING AREA AND THAT IS WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING.

THE BIZARRE THING AT THE MOMENT IS THAT THE REALLY CREATIVE SHOTS ARE ACTUALLY BEING CREATED BY THE REALLY TECHNICAL PEOPLE, AND THE REALLY CREATIVE PEOPLE ARE ACTUALLY DOING THE REALLY MUNDANE WORK. THAT IS SOMETHING NO-ONES LIKE TO ADMIT, BUT IT IS ACTUALLY THE REALITY.

IS DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ALSO LEADING TO LESS PEOPLE WORKING IN THE INDUSTRY?

NO, IT'S JUST INCREASING.

BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEXITY OF WHAT NEEDS TO GO ON THE SCREEN?

YES; IT IS ACTUALLY INCREASING. WE ARE DOING 80 SHOTS AND WE HAVE 15 PEOPLE WORKING ON IT, AND THIS IS A PRETTY TINY BUDGET. THE LAST THING I WORKED ON WE WERE DOING THREE MINUTES OF THE FILM AND WE HAD 54 PEOPLE ON THE CREW FOR THREE MINUTES ALONE. IT'S PRETTY BIG. THE SOUND CREWS ARE GETTING BIGGER BECAUSE OF THE SHEER COMPLEXITY OF IT ALL. AND AGAIN, THE SPEED OF IT. YOU MAY WELL HAVE TWO OR THREE EDITORS WORKING ON THE FILM.

THE NEEDS OF AN AMERICAN POST-PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT ARE VERY DIFFERENT TO THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT, WHICH IS AGAIN VERY DIFFERENT TO AN AUSTRALIAN ENVIRONMENT. I CONSIDER THAT THERE ARE ACTUALLY THREE MAJOR STYLES OF USAGE OF SOFTWARE POST-PRODUCTION APPLICATIONS, AND YOU REALLY NEED TO HAVE A VERY INNATE UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THREE.

WHAT ABOUT THE EFFECT ON MODEL MAKING, AND EVEN MAKE-UP? IS DIGITAL WORK GOING TO REPLACE THOSE KIND OF PRACTICAL EFFECTS?

NO. I'VE HAD A QUOTE AT THE MOMENT TO REMOVE ONE-AND-A-HALF MINUTES OF A SIMPLE OFF A LEAD ACTRESS' FACE. MAKE-UP DID AS BEST THEY COULD ON THE DAY, AND THEN WE'LL GET IN AND CLEAN UP THE REST. THE LAST FILM I WORKED ON IN GERMANY THERE WAS A MAKE-UP ERROR IN CONTINUITY, SO WE WENT IN AND SOULVED THAT. AGAIN, IT JUST AUGMENTS IT, AND IN AN IDEAL WORLD WE WOULD WORK TOGETHER TO CREATE A NEW AESTHETIC, WHICH YOU SEE A LOT WITH MUSIC VIDEOS.

ONCE FILM AESTHETICS AND AUDIENCES BECAME MORE COMFORTABLE WITH A MORE OFF-BEAT AESTHETIC, YOU WILL SEE MORE CROSSOVERS IN TERMS OF FEATURE FILMS. JUST AS MAKE-UP ARTISTS FOR TELEVISION WERE USED TO DOING CERTAIN THINGS BECAUSE IT WAS TELEVISION AND NOT FILM, YOU WILL SEE CERTAIN THINGS HAPPENING BECAUSE IT IS DIGITAL AND NOT JUST FILM.
Digital Sound Editing and Mixing Suites
(with trees)

PhilMSound

Mix and Edit Suites 101 Eton Road Lindfield, contact Phil Judd tel 02 9413 8737 fax 02 9973 1955
Earlier this year, the RAAF base at Melbourne’s Point Cook was transformed into the port town of Nantucket for the production of the mini-series, *Moby Dick*. Its production designer Les Binns has worked on such films as *The Man From Snowy River* (and its sequel), *Stork* and *Alvin Purple*, as well as the mini-series *The Anzacs*, *Eureka Stockade* and *The Last Outlaw*.

Binns had an art background, and was at various times an exhibited painter, and an advertising, book and magazine illustrator. He then moved into the film and television industry as a production designer on television shows such as *Skippy* and *Animal Doctor* in Sydney.

He moved to Melbourne, joined Crawford Productions for an American co-production, *The Hands of Cormack Joyce*, and stayed on for three years, before moving on to work in feature films and mini-series. For the last two years he has worked both here and in the USA.

Although *Moby Dick* was filmed here, he got the job through an American production company. “It could have been done anywhere in the world, and finished up in my own backyard,” says Binns. “You think of *Moby Dick* as a period piece, but it was a really heavy-duty engineering situation. The Melbourne effects guys, Brian Pearce and Peter Armstrong together with Brian Cox in Sydney, built an enormous amount of difficult effects equipment to make old Moby swim around.”

Binns was responsible for creating the street scenes of Nantucket, a 35-metre replica of the Pequod, Captain Ahab’s ship, and a large horizon water-tank off the coast of Point Cook for the scenes at sea. “We decided we didn’t want to do it in a studio, we wanted [it] to be outside. That was one thing [director] Franc Roddam and I agreed we had to do to make the show work. We must have a real ship, in real water, with real background, real clouds, real air, real wind.”

They even managed to incorporate parts of a real whale into the realization of the great white whale, which also used computer-generated effects and animatronics.

For his recreation of Nantucket, Binns did the requisite research, but didn’t rely wholly on that. “I think sometimes realism can be a little bit boring,” he explains. “Sometimes you’ve got to exaggerate it to get the story across. So I made Nantucket an industrial whaling town; with muted colours and raw materials. I probably made it a little less pretty than it really was.”

Likewise, some of the ship’s interiors built in the studio were a bit bigger than they would have been – Ahab’s cabin in particular. “Cinematically we wouldn’t have seen much more than Ahab’s face,” he explains. “To get more of him, I made the cabin larger. Sometimes you’ve got to be flexible with historical research.”

Binns is keen for the horizon tank to be retained, and believes it is one of the best-placed tanks in the world. “With some improvements, it would be such a good thing to have in Melbourne. There’s a lot of potential down there to really get something going, but you can’t have a major film studio in every capital city. All the tank needs is for us to get behind it; some investor to take a lease on it for a while.”

PHOTOS: LES BINNS
Detail of the Pequod replica.

The horizon tank under construction.

The heavy-duty framework for the construction of the Pequod.

Pequod under construction in the untied horizon tank with Nantucket wharf in the background. The lighting grid is at the top of the masts.
THE GOLDEN AGE CONTINUES

WITH TWO NEW KODAK VISION FILMS THAT CUT GRAIN LIKE NOTHING BEFORE. A daylight balanced, Kodak Vision 250D color negative film and Kodak Vision 200T color negative film balanced for tungsten light. Both are medium speed products with the grain and sharpness of much slower speed films. Colors reproduce accurately. Latitude is exceptional. And both films intercut beautifully with other members of the Kodak family. Explore your imagination and capture your vision, with the gold standard in motion picture color negative films.

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Film

PAWS

Directed by Karl Zwicky; Producers: Andrew Finlay, Yvonne Watson; Executive producer: Renial Punillo-Russell.

Screenwriter: Harry Crapps, Director of photography: Geoff Burton, Production designer: Steven Jones-Evans, Editor: Nicholas Holmes, Composer: Marko Maglic, Animal trainer: Lyle Hua, Cast: Billy Connolly (voice of PC), Nathan Caravello (Zac Feldman), Emile Francois (Samantha Amakawa), Joe Petruzzell (Stephen Feldman), Caroline Gillmore (voice of Anja), Nicholas Blake (Billy Fieldman), Sandy Gómez (Anja), Norman Kaye (Alex), heater Neville (Harry Fieldman), Famke Janssen (Zac's mother) and PC's various computer programs. Australian distributor: Palace Entertainment. 1997. 35mm. 87 mins.

Australian filmmakers don’t have a great strike-rate with children’s films; the formulaic construction that such films demand works against most efforts. We seem to be much better at subverting the formula, hiding it with other non-formulaic elements or throwing it away altogether, than utilizing and manipulating the formula to produce successful, polished films.

This is a shame because, generally, the Australian treatment of children in film is a lot less patronizing and cloying than their treatment in American films, in particular. So what happens when that attitude is combined with the rigorous regimen of film formula? Something like Paws.

Essentially, it’s the story of a Jack Russell, PC, who belongs to an eccentric computer genius and crossword compiler, Alex.

(Norman Kaye). The pair are well-known at the local greyhound track, but when a sinister woman, Anja (Sandy Gore), and her assistant, Sibelius, turn up at the track looking for Alex, he is a little more than concerned. He downloads some vital information onto a floppy disc that he secretes in PC’s special backpack-harness with instructions to get it to his friend, Susie (Caroline Gillmore), and her daughter, Samantha (Emile Francois), when Anja arrives looking for his hidden fortune. In the ensuing conflict, Alex dies, and PC escapes.

Before he can deliver the disc to Susie, PC is knocked down by a car and found to be cared for by Amy (Rachael Blake) and her family. The disc ends up in her son Zac’s (Nathan Caravello) disc-box, mistaken for one of his. Zac is a typical 14-year-old boy interested in computers, who resents his stepfather, Stephen (Joe Petruzzell), and his younger sister, Binky (Freyja Meere), a pain in the neck. Somehow, between Zac’s computer skills and PC’s apparent affinity, a portable computer program that allows PC to talk to the Scottish tones of Billy Connolly no less – is created, and PC enlists Zac’s help in retrieving the disc and solving the puzzle left on it before Anja finds them and takes the disc.

All the elements here are fairly standard: the unhappy teenage misfit struggling in a new town; Amy, the female ‘friend’ interest, who thinks she’s better than Zac; the friction between Zac’s memories of his deceased father and his new stepfather; the implausible but accepted method of making the crucial animal character talk and interact with the humans; PC’s irreverent and jokey milieu; and the over-the-top character of the villain, Icelandic Anja, who is very much from the mould of Cruella de Vil.

Subplots, such as Zac’s involvement in lighting Samantha’s production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, attempt to round out the characters and the story, but end up coming across as gratuitous (especially when PC runs amok over the lighting-board and sends the whole play into predictable uproar). Similarly, scenes between Zac and his stepfather add an extra dimension to their relationship, but they are sometimes overdone and overplayed.

Paws is most successful when dealing with PC and the comic possibilities that a talking dog presents. Connolly’s voice gives him a life and a character that is in keeping with a Jack Russell, and a sure-hit with the audience: even before the dog receives his speech, he also elicits compassion for his understated sadness over Alex’s. 

Love and marriage

Two new Australian films, Lee Rogers’ Dust off the Wings and Cherie Nowlan’s Thank God He Met Lizzie, evolve around the notion that the modern marriage is a fearful, tantalizing yet inevitable prospect.
Films continued

YEAR OF THE DOGS


It is probably already a cliché, but Year of the Dogs could have just as aptly been titled "A Dog of a Year". Focusing on 1996, the last year of the Footscray Football Club before it became the Western Bulldogs, Michael Cordell's film takes us behind the scenes at the club during what was arguably its most tumultuous year since the proposed merger with Fitzroy in 1989. It was a year that saw the resigna-
tion of a coach, another proposed merger brought about by the pressures of an expanded national competition and the introduction to the club of a special "taskforce" of concerned businessmen keen to revive the fortunes of this ailing club. These dramatic events punctuated a season of abysmal on-field performances: thrashing followed thrashing, and the club staggered from crisis to crisis. Year of the Dogs attempts and succeeds in capturing these dramas in often inventive and very funny ways.

The overall structure of the film is very much dictated by the unfolding off-field events. These events then add drama to the actual game footage. The sequences at the games are inspired. Cutting from the field to the supporters to the coach's box gives the viewer a complete sense of the atmosphere at the games.

The use of television and radio commentary in the soundtrack also works well.

Year of the Dogs generally, though, works by metonymy. We follow the fortunes of three football players, two female supporters and a number of key staff; the coach, the club president and the assistant coach. Taken together, these profiles are meant to provide us with a palette from which we can draw a more complete picture of the club. For the most part this works well, particularly in relation to the players. Given that there are at least 42 players at the club, it makes sense to focus on a few. But while the supporters, Pat and Jenny Hodgson, are delightful to watch, they are not really representative of the supporters of the club. There is not enough sense of the working-class nature of the club, and the opportunity to use the club's supporters' fortunes metaphorically is lost. Cordell seems to want to steer clear from the political nature of football. And yet, in many ways, football and club loyalty are political. Much more could have been made of the ways in which the club intersects with the Footscray community. Footscray is one of the most multicultural-ly and economically-depressed areas in Victoria. Pat and Jenny can't possibly stand in for all of this.

That Michael Cordell chose 1996 as the year to make this film was extraordinary, but not necessarily fortuitous in terms of what it is undoubtedly a meritorious endeavour:

to document an aspect of Australian popular culture which deserves much and receives little critical, historical attention. But the very fact that it was a year characterized by drama draws the focus of the film away from the everyday in football. And it's the everyday, the ordinary, the little dramas, which make football a fascinating cultural phenomenon. The film at times does capture the very ordinary ways in which a football club operates and these are the film's highlights.

The backroom scenes and the pre-game addresses are fascinating. The story of the young player battling with cancer who is kept on by the club when they realize that to "drop" him from the list would destroy his already shaky morale is emblematic of what it means to be part of a club. The scenes showing players stripping and doing "the elephant walk" for female supporters to raise money for the club are hilarious. And the discussions of players' futures by board members who are keen to reduce operating costs but conscious of the contributions these players have made to the club, are engrossing. And it's these things which give the viewer a real insight into the club.

Year of the Dogs is entertaining and engaging. Whether it can make it in the cinema is yet to be seen, but it will certainly be a must-watch programme when it reaches television. You don't need to be a fan to enjoy it, either. Anyone interested in trying to uncover the mysteries of Australia's obsession with football would do well to start here.
DUST OFF THE WINGS


It may be a sign of the aging of narcissistic hedonism that there have been several comedies lately in which getting married is a fearful or tantalizing or fantasized prospect. If, and when, marriage happens finally in these films, part of their intended humour is in the expected release of air from the fantasy balloons of the people involved. In Four Weddings And A Funeral (Mike Newell, 1994), Charles (Hugh Grant) and Carrie (Andie MacDowell) never marry, hoping to postpone the inevitable deflation. In Muriel’s Wedding (P. J. Hogan, 1994), Muriel (Toni Collette) gets a great wedding but a phony marriage.

Dust Off The Wings is another in this series of films. It is a raucous, loud-mouthed and deliberately vulgar variation on this idea that getting married is a funny thing to do nowadays. As in Thank God He Met Lizzie (Cherie Nowlan), marriage, when it comes to the hero, is a let-down, and the bride turns out to be less than his ideal. But Dust Off The Wings is not a romantic comedy. It has no truck with depicting the relationship between the hero, Lee (Lee Rogers), and the woman he is going to marry, who is rarely seen, and mostly from the back. That’s sentimental stuff. The character of the fiancée is an expression mentioned but not used.

What the film does is intercut episodes in the lives of Lee and his best-man, Ward (Ward Stevens), and their mates and the girls in the sidelines in those fragile days just before, during and after the wedding, as Lee and Ward and mates meet up around Bondi and thereabouts on the way to buck’s night, a last disgusting act of buck’s night, a last disgusting act. Just as there is more sexual reportage in Dust Off The Wings than sex performed, there is endless talk about a relationship which is not depicted at all, endless yakking about sexual control, or, more exactly, its impossibility for ordinary males. However, more important than its quantity is the fact that none of the talking is a form of dramatic action. Dust Off The Wings is at its most interesting a documentary of a scene, but like many documentaries it is more talk than action. It lives up to its aims, though.

Dust Off The Wings

One could say, a film which is a kind of buck’s night, a last disgusting act before surrendering to propriety, but a eulogy, still, to the life of sex and surfing and drink, which Lee and his friends enjoy. In those bright brittle days before the wedding, Lee and Ward contemplate the knowledge that monogamy will deprive Lee of full-fledged membership in their three-legged hedonism, the good-bad life. Lee, anyway, is uncertain that he is capable of renouncing his membership, capable, that is, of achieving sexual discipline, and even doubtful that he really wants to. But the melancholy discovery that his fiancée is equally doubtful that she really wants to is a shock, and so the world teaches him that marriage has to be worked at to succeed.

However, it is not through moral edification that Rogers and Ward expect to appeal to their audience, but through being appallingly, yet amiably vulgar. Dust Off The Wings has a little sex, a lot more sexual reportage, and plenty of surfing to music. (Interpersed through the film are sequences of surfing cinematography, which fortunately don’t seem too out of place in the film’s video-clip structure.)

Thank God He Met Lizzie


Cherie Nowlan’s first feature film turns some clichés on their head. The lead character, Guy (Richard Roxburgh), is a nice nerd, but through flashbacks we learn he was a more daredevil character. Most Hollywood films are the other way round: from nerd to daredevil. When the film starts, Guy’s wandering through a trendy party looking for Ms Right, but he’s awkward and has no dress style. There’s only one woman that’s at
all interested in him, and she's a long-standing friend trying to play Dorothy Dix. We cut to Guy out on the street rescuing a pregnant cat and trying to find its owner, when she makes signs that she's about to give birth. That's when he meets female doctor Lizzie (Cate Blanchett) and this trusting soul invites him into her house and their relationship begins. She's blonde, attractive and intelligent, and everything a woman's supposed to be in the '90s. She falls for him because her biological clock is ticking, and he just happens to come along at the right time.

Guy and Lizzie embark on a dazzling, quick affair and six weeks later they're in love and the camera lingers on images of romantic fatal attraction. But the main focus of these scenes, which are shot Steadicam for maximum involvement, is Guy's increasing discomfort. The more this army of wellwishers pushes him into the arms of Lizzie, the more he remembers his past love, Jenny (Frances O'Connor).

As the wedding banquet proceeds, Guy is overwhelmed with memories of Jenny who is everything Lizzie is not. She's wild and unconventional, spontaneous, untidy, sexy and obsessive, with long dark curly hair. When she first sees Guy in a bar, she propositions him and he runs home scared. But Jenny has a friend, Poppy (Linden Dryfus), who can see that Jenny and Guy should end up in the cot, so with her help their glorious night of love making ensues.

It is in the middle of this second act that the film gets really interesting. While the wedding guests get into the serious business of celebrations and large consumptions of alcohol, Guy is increasingly drifting off into images of his previous love. Now when he sees Lizzie at his side, he hardly registers who she is or why he is there. The flashbacks gradually tell us the whole story of Guy and Jenny's love affair, and its eventual disintegration brought on by both of their inability to give more than an inch of their psyches. These scenes are shot hand-held, and they're so engrossing and moody that it's also a shock for the audience to come back to the wedding which is now looking more and more like a chaotic shambles.

The third act of Thank God He Met Lizzie is all about resolution, which in this film concerns bravery, resignation and a sort of watered-down love. The ending brings to mind what has often been said about Australians: that we're more interested in having a character overwhelmed by life's choices than in showing a character winning against great odds - which dominates American screenplays.

Thank God He Met Lizzie is shot by Kathryn Milliss, and it has a gritty, engaging style. The screenplay is an interesting attempt to tell a different type of story, although the wedding reception just seems to go on and on, till every last drop of storytelling has drained out of the characters. Occasionally these scenes felt a bit like television, but Richard Roxburgh, Cate Blanchett and Frances O'Connor's fantastic performances ensure that it is always very engaging to watch. Director Cherie Nowlan has certainly delivered a smart, different film, but if you're looking for a film as groundbreaking as When Harry Met Sally (Rob Reiner, 1989), you may be disappointed.

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tries in the world, face-to-face with a young Mongolian woman in traditional dress; their very encounter signals irrevocable cultural change. Similarly, when Guo Pei looks through an old family album with her mother, close-ups of the old black-and-white photos delicately evoke comparisons between old and new China. And when she displays and then models her grandmother's silks, speaking of the inspiration they lent her even from early childhood, it's easy to share Guo Pei's excitement about the future - about the artistry which might spring from such inspiration.

What's missing, to the film's detriment, is background detail, and insights which might better contextualize the women's story. We learn very little of the wider Chinese fashion industry and of the cultural and political change affecting it, of domestic and international markets' responses to new Chinese designers; such issues are dealt with only fleetingly and mainly in the film's last few minutes. The designers make occasional comments throughout about the constraints the revolution imposed upon Chinese clothing design and manufacture, but it's only at the last minute that they begin to discuss in any depth topics such as: cultural and political history; the ways in which they and the Chinese industry might now fare; how the industry might distinguish itself in the wider world. And aside from Guo Pei's brief showcasing of her grandmother's clothes, there's no mention at all of the many centuries of textile and clothing design which preceded the revolution - despite the fact that it's an extremely rich heritage which cannot help but inform contemporary Chinese design.

These are very frustrating omissions, and much as the focus on Sun Jian and Guo Pei as individuals offers a degree of satisfying intimacy as well as implicit commentary on the individual in contemporary China, further or rather deeper exploration of the subject would have made for a more engrossing and informative documentary. In the main, Mao’s New Suit opts for some bland and superficial portraiture which lingers too long on insignificant detail at the expense of substance, and viewing it is like being limited to a keyhole view of a widescreen scenario. It must also be said that for all the brouhaha about the film's focus on new Chinese fashion, we see the designs only very briefly, during the Shanghai show. This is a pity, because Sun Jian and Guo Pei - to their own surprise and delight - are evidently close to the top of their field. Furthermore, why is part of the fashion show shot in black and white? It gives an air of pastiche and a triteness to the sequence, as though the film is trying desperately (but unsuccessfully) to replicate the atmosphere and cinematography of other recent fashion documentaries (for example, Douglas Keeve's delightfully-candid Unzipped [1995], a style which doesn't fit with the remainder of the film. Following from this, cinematography is disappointing, overall - a glaring irony in a film centred on fashion and design. There are some beautifully-composed static shots and some striking landscape footage along with the scenes mentioned earlier, but much is forgettable. (Music, however, is a notable component, with an effective incidental score by Felicity Fox and equally strong pre-recorded selections.) Mao's New Suit gives us a moderately entertaining glimpse of one element of China's post-revolutionary reform; but a glimpse is all, and unfortunately it remains quaint when it might have been riveting.

© ELIZABETH TURNBULL

Sun Jian, left, Guo Pei, right, and models Mao’s New Suit.
telefeature

maslin beach

australian international pictures and
spandau films presents [sic] maslin beach.
director: wayne groome.
producers: andrew steward, wayne
groom, executive producer: omar schen.
schuffnitwitz: wayne groome, director of
photography: rodney bolt, production
designer: jacobi canty, editor: simon
whitton, composer: robert real.
sound recordist: marco augusto, sound
editors: simon whittoner, peter smith,
mike, peter smith, cast: michael allen
(simon), ella lavelle (marie), leytan lOVE
(shimer woman), simon bond (shimmer
man), edward scott (mike), lara
collins (paula), jamie ross (dave),
joshua moggan (daniel), kathryn moggan
(daniel's mother), kate simon (mike),
elle cyr (jimmy dell), albert
cabaret (right), omen sanders (sanders),
frances willing (shimakates), robbie moos
(brad), andy mcphie (dave masters), trayce
kordhtn (varsx), rosslyn wynzeld
(raclene), gary wadwell (bail), noel
punder (d rim).

those viewers who stayed watching
the nine network after charles rotholi,
(1995) on sunday 17 augus would have
quickly discovered that maslin beach is
the nude beach in south australia.
and the ample evidence
was there on screen with
a warning and an ma rating.
maslin beach is dated 1996,
and was made by australian
international pictures and spandau
films. writer and director
was wayne groome. basically, it is a
day-at-the-beach movie with
the novelty being the nude beach or,
rather, the mostly nude people
on the beach. however, the characters
are not novel. they tend to be
the kind of characters who would be
automatically listed if you were
doing an initial brainwashing.
there is a hero, simon (michael
allen), a pleasant-looking
dorkish type, and a heroine, gail
bonnie-jaye lawrence, a pleasant-looking
dorkish type. she falls for
simon at first sight, the trouble
being that the first sight she has of
him is when he's riding in an
ice-cream van picking his nose (true).
the film's running time is about
70-75 minutes, but it is checkful of
characters. they tend to appear for
one- or two-minute cameos
sketches and that's it. there are
the quartrelling lovers (several sets),
the surfiing looking for god
(and his unlikely gun), a cute little
boy, four women friends and two

in mind that many older japanese
still believe the war to have been a
war waged by japanese to free
greater east asia from the colonial
powers. this was a not entirely
ludicrous claim in the asian coun-
dies involved, where reaction to
the greater east asia coop-prosper-
jity sphere was mixed. while many
hated the japanese as military
occupents for their brutality, some
found attractive the promise of
independence from foreign rule. of
course, japan's military rulers were
insincere and racist, but, according
to buruma, some older japanese
persist in thinking that the war was
not a wholly bad thing. it is unclear
from rhapsody in august what
kurosawa thinks about this, since
the war is mentioned only as
a manifestation of an abstract evil.
the grandmother says, at a crucial
moment, "what's wrong with the
truth? (...) they dropped the bomb
and they resent being reminded of
it. they don't need to remember it
but they can't pretend ignorance.
they claimed they dropped it to
stop war. that was 45 years ago
and japan has not been stopped.
war is still killing people." the
belief expressed here that the usa
dropped the a-bomb to stop war,
that is, all war, is a curious one,
but apparently one which a lot of
germans have come to believe
due to the circumstances of
japan's post-defatibil attack.
the trouble with rhapsody in
august, however, is not just the
dubiousness of the views which
inspired its conception, but also
the thinness of the fictional
interaction of its characters, the
naive transparency of quite a few of
the scenes, so that the message or
point behind the scenes is unrea-
fected and obvious. when the
brother and sister talk about their
visit to hawaii together with
husband and wife, for exam-
ple, the point clearly is that the
mid-generation is crisis and
opportunist, in contrast to the
other generations. the
innocence of the children, too,
seems exaggerated so as to
make their new-found empathy
with the a-bomb victims an
insurressible expression of moral
purity. but despite these major
problems, rhapsody in august
may still be watched without
embarrassment: kurosawa still
has an eye, though milder
now, for beautiful symmetry
and asymmetry in composing
shots and camera movements
and in staging action for the
camera; and the film has those
milky pastels, bottle-glass brights
and silky darks peculiar to japa-
ese cinema. the film also has some
fine episodes with the children
joking around in grandma's
country house; some intriguing
moments of symbolism, a kind of
decorous surrealism breaking into
the dramatic action; the pleasing
use of a buddhist mantra and a
child's song picked out on an
organ to mark transitions between
scenes.

robert nery

rhapsody in august

directed by akiro kurosawa.
executive producer: toshi oshimura.
producer: hiro kurosawa.
associate producer: ishio
hozama.
associate producers: maye t.
inoke,
severine gaye.
scriptwriter: akiro kurosawa,
from the novel rhapsody in august
by kiyoko murata. director of
photography: toshio tsai.
masahiro ushi. art direction: yoshio
murakami. lighting: tameo shaw.
recording: randy mcmullen.
costumes: kazuo kurosawa.
music: from schubert and vivaldi
and shinichiro nebe. produced
by kurosawa productions.
presented by feature film
enterprise. Australian distributor:
roadshow home video.

in rhapsody in august, mention is made of
a recent film by akira kurosawa,
rhapsody in august, which is
described as "a rather mawkish
film... about the spiritual scars
left by the a-bomb in nagasaki..." a
lament, not just for the bombing
but the way memory passes into
history and history is quickly for-
gotten. four years after it was
made, the film has arrived on
our shores in video form, allowed
entry into australia by the eugenic
agents who decide which foreign-
languages films we see. since
not many japanese movies have
been commercially released recently
in whatever form, it is nice to have
rhapsody in august with us. but
why now, six years after the film
was made? the answer is not to be
found, as far as i can tell, in a read-
ing of the cinematic text. though
the film does have richard gere in
a brief but important role, nothing
in his current career seems to
explain why his presence in
rhapsody in august should interest
his fans. this is not to say his presence
(as opposed to performance) in
this film is a feature of the
text, as asking to be read. that as
may, he is surprisingly well-cast for
the character he plays - a half-
Japanese, half-caucasian
American - and gives a credible
performance in which he speaks
mostly japanese, albeit the rudili-
mentary (japanese of a
second-generation american.
rhapsody in august, i'agree
with buruma, is "rather mawk-
lish." but it is, as he says, a
politically- and historically-interest-
ful work, partly because the film
depicts a range of japanese
attitudes to the war, and partly
because of the sentiment and
attitudes the film expresses. its
local characters - a grand-
mother, four grandchildren
(three of them teenagers) and
their parents - represent three
generations in contemporary
japan, each of which displays a
kind of response to the
bombing of the city. the past -
the fact of the a-bomb - suddenly
matters when their lives are thrown
into confusion by the
discovery that grandma has a long-lost
brother, who migrated to hawaii
before the war, became american
by marriage, and is haunted by
re-awakened memories of
apple plantation, a canning factory.
in the confusion, the grandchildren,
who are staying with grandma,
send a letter to their american rela-
tives which informs them of the
anniversary of grandpa's death
from the a-bomb. mid-generation
brother and sister fly back from
their visit to hawaii before the let-
ter arrives, about which they leave
much to their consternation. they
find grandma in a disturbed state,
haunted by re-awakened memories
of the a-bomb, and the children
siding with her against their par-
ents' money-minded pragmatism.
in an interview with the latin-
american novelist gabriel garcia
marquez, published in a berlin
newspaper, kurosawa was asked
by the writer what "this historical
amnesia meant to the future of
japan and japanese identity". kuro-
sawa answered that the japanese
didn't like to talk openly about the
bombing. "our politicians, in par-
sicular, remain silent about it,
perhaps out of fear of the amери-
cans." until the usa apologizes to
the japanese people, said kuro-
sawa, "the drama won't be over". kurosawa's remarks express a
sense of themselves as victims of
the war - by way of the a-bomb -
which is apparently shared by
many, though certainly not all,
japanese, and is encouraged by the
memorial shrines of hiroshima and
nagasaki. this sense will seem
less absurd to australians if it is borne

video

rhapsody in august

© peter malone

yuppies who don't get to take their
clothes off as they are too busy
with mobile phone calls. ulti-
mately, she is on a third phone
while the other two talk to each
other. dialogue tends to be the
first-draft variety without the real-
ization that basic script
development is possible and even
a good thing. the characters talk
about love and relationships in
meaningful magazine phrases.

the only familiar actor is gary
wadwell as the fully clad ice-cream
seller who drives around with fully
unclad simon and talks about the
meaning of life: "life will show you
the way." this is the '90s, so there is
some swearing, a few prurient
sequences, a couple of gross char-
acters - especially one large

rnediterranean caricature who
prollyly the heroines -
and a gratuitous pseudo-freudian
incendious plot. a couple of
characters have fights and close
reconciliations on the beach and
in the water. the nudity is generally
unself-conscious and setups are not
cloyly photographed or artificially
framed - more like the old nudist
colony and volleyball films of the past
(if memories of glimpses in docu-
taries serve me correctly) the '90s
are different from the more
naive past, yet, apart from the
gross characters, this is a kind of
beach blankert bingo without the
songs and without the clothes.

peter malone

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CINEMA PAPERS • XXXX 1997
Welles danovich's mammoth book of manner, "I liked almost anybody with biographical interviews with American cinema illustrious book on and with Orson and books, which includes an extension of Bogdanovich's serving the voices and characters of the man if little about his work. Despite being, with indications of when, or indeed if, it will be published in a British or Australian imprint, despite being, without doubt, a highlight of film literature for 1997.

Who The Devil Made It is neither an academic text nor is it in the vein of populist film literature. (In this regard, the local book market's indifference possibly explains much about how the market is perceived.) In style, it is a profoundly old-fashioned kind of book: more than 800 pages of Q & A interviews peppered with a handful of black-and-white pictures. In terms of content, it is obsessed not only with biographical detail, but with preserving the voices and characters of American cinema's great auteurs.

The book is very much an extension of Bogdanovich's previously-published monographs and books, which includes an illustrious book on and with Orson Welles (This is Orson Welles), and pioneering monographs on John Ford and Howard Hawks.

The title comes from none other than Hawks, who proudly claimed in his inimitably straightforward manner, "I liked almost anybody that made you realize who in the devil was making this picture."


Just to tease us, Bogdanovich includes in his beautifully-penned, humble introduction a long list of names of directors with whom he has spoken and befriended during his 40-odd years as a filmmaker and historian. Another book, please!

The interviews vary somewhat in length and tone, from more than 100 pages with a surprisingly slighted position. In selecting directors who had long, if not entirely productive, careers (as is the case of Von Sternberg who made only 6 features after 1939) whose work bridged massive artistic and historic discontinuities (silent film to talkies; World War II; the decline of the studios and the advent of television), the book's only generalized theme is how these artists and craftsmen negotiated, and mostly succeeded, in utilizing cinema to tell audiences stories that somehow mattered to them. A single review cannot do justice to the wealth of material contained in this book; each chapter is deserving of a review of its own. The Hawks interview is definitely a centerpiece. We all know about Bogart and Bacall falling in love on the set of To Have and Have Not. Now that the informs the brittle dialogue and atmosphere of that remarkable film is best left to Hawks: When I told Bogart we were going to make her more insolent than he was he said, "Well, I don’t think you’ve got a very good chance of doing that." I said, "I’ll tell you one thing. She’s going to walk out and leave you with egg on your face on every scene you play together." "Well," he said, "I think I’ll take back what I just said."

The chapter dedicated to “the crazy Irishman”, Leo McCarey, is of the Laurel and Hardy and Marx Brothers movies, and more than adequately reveals the sensibility that lends McCarey’s films their nuances and delicate tones.

Significantly, Sidney Lumet’s chapter is the final one in the book – he is the only feature film director in the entire book alive and working, apart from Chuck Jones whose work is in animation. Lumet brings the book squarely into the present. Without the slightest prodding, he articulates one of the touchstones of Bogdanovich’s inquiry, a thread that runs through this testimonial of cinema’s first hundred years: Those who have had good work can admit the truth, which is: good work is an accident.” Sidney Lumet

of quotas and subsidies exacted on American movies. Second only to its aeronautical industry, cinema is America’s largest export. Europe

WHO THE DEVIL MADE IT

Without so much as a whisper on local shores, Peter Bogdanovich’s mammoth book of interviews with American cinema pioneers slipped onto the shelves of a handful of progressive bookshops several months ago. Now in its fourth printing in the USA, there is still no indication of when, or indeed if, it will be published in a British or Australian imprint, despite being, without doubt, a highlight of film literature for 1997.

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CINEMA PAPERS  NOVEMBER 1997

Puttnam relates that the rise of the multiplex was pioneered by the cluey independent operators Durwood and Son who, when they were unable to secure the site for a 700-seater in a Kansas City shopping mall, split it over two sites, side-by-side.

America. In his book, The Public Is Never Wrong, Zucker stated that

The creative dimension of film is just one of a series of connected activities [...] all of which are predicated on one fundamental principle: the maximization of profit. The multiplex is geared to this maximization of profit. The capital generated by the multiplex flows through all the tiers of exhibition, distribution and marketing, and multiplex movies are more frequently rented on video. Multiplexes are owned by studios which feed pro-
duction. Multiplexes target males aged between 12 and 29 and studios tailor their product exclusively for this audience; for example, Ghostbusters, E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial and Batman. Puttnam’s point seems to be that, as long as this audience is tapped and vying with its money, there will be money for film production.

Puttnam relates that the rise of the multiplex was pioneered by the cluey independent operators Durwood and Son who, when they were unable to secure the site for a 700-seater in a Kansas City shopping mall, split it over two sites, side-by-side. The Parkway II was a major success and by 1969 their company, American Multi-Cinema (AMC), opened its first 6-screen, going from underdog to overhaul. Puttnam opened AMC’s first 10-screen multiplex in the United Kingdom in 1986. Criticized as resembling a supermarket for fast food, it has proved extremely successful.

As a board member and advisor to Village Roadshow Australia, one of the fastest-growing, vertically and horizontally integrated distributor-exhibitors in the world, Puttnam is putting his mouth where his money is. It is no coincidence that Village Roadshow is a major Multiplex builder, planning to “create some 3,000 profitable screens from Bangkok to Buenos Aires well before the end of the decade”.

Village Roadshow is currently under investigation by the Australian Consumer Competition Commission for allegedly “squeezing” local independents. As Puttnam said of the studios that benefitted from the American Trust’s demise, “Monopoly, it seemed was a terrible thing, until you had one of your own.”

Michael Kitson
**EXPERIENCE AS REFUGEES?**

AUSTRALIA that babies. You can't afford to be selective, the new Holocaust of Europe. The Muslims will be [the victims of] any obligation to relate to them. It was the lengths the UN went to moment obliterate people's inclinations. "That phrase would in a Serb line, "All sides commit atrocity. The savagery is not unique as it is. There was a lot of inclination towards violence: mass murderers, Julian Knight, Martin Bryant. I could create a pretty savage, barbaric army. The reward for psychotic people is obvious.

**WHAT WAS OFTEN SHOCKING ABOUT THE CONFLICT IN BOSNIA WAS THE SAVAGERY.**

Cambis: The savagery is not unique to that region. It was systematic, very carefully organized and planned years before its occurrence; just as the Final Solution was. There is an army of criminals and people inclined towards violence: mass murderers, Julian Knight, Martin Bryant. I could create a pretty savage, barbaric army. The reward for psychotic people is obvious.

Sahbaz: And they use them to force others who are not savages to commit the same crimes and to share responsibility and guilt.

Cambis: What was truly shocking was the lengths the UN went to cover it up or to participate in the Serb line, "All sides commit atrocities." That phrase would in a moment obliterate people's inclinations to react and be outraged; "Oh, they're all like that" would be the response. I think of the 1990s as the 1930s repeated in Europe. Maybe the Muslims will be [the victims of] the new Holocaust of Europe.

Sahbaz: The first thing is to make them different, then you don't have any obligation to relate to them. Sometimes, it's not enough if they are black, they have to eat their babies.

**WHAT WAS YOUR AND YOUR MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE AS REFUGEES?**

Cambis: Her life after the war was one long misery, with only death bringing peace. For the first six or seven years when we were together, we were very close. When she got schizophrenia a bit later, she'd have paranoid spells. She'd say, "Someone's trying to kill me," and I'd be the parent for the duration. We'd go to the park because she'd say someone was trying to turn the gas on. I'd humour her, then we'd swap roles and she was the mother and I was the child again.

Going to Sarajevo and meeting Alma reminded me of the closeness of family over there; how much it's valued and how much I missed it.

In the film, we see you meeting your aunt in Sarajevo for the first time, but the meeting seemed melancholy.

Cambis: There was a sense of missing the boat; the country was halfestroyed, the relatives were dead or living overseas. There were all these wonderful family members who were musicians or performers and I'd missed out on it. It was too late. I met my sister whom I'd never met: she was a refugee in Israel, and we were like old mates.

Sahbaz: The story about exile starts with Tahir's mother; it continues now with the exile of other people, like Nirvana's mother, who went to live in St Louis, Missouri.

Was it difficult to get funding in Australia to make the film? Cambis: I lied a little bit. I certainly didn't say it was going to be as political as it is. There was a lot of support and courage shown by the AFC in this - a first-time director going to a warzone, with no presales.

**ARE YOU OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE OF BOSNIA?**

Sahbaz: I am optimistic but a lot depends on the West's attitude to the new Bosnia. If they continue to support and treat all sides as equal, like they did during the war, then it will be a bit hard.

Cambis: And that's the travesty of it. Even now there are more Serbs living in the Bosnian-controlled area than in the Serb republic, but the relevant agencies of the UN and NATO just won't acknowledge that because it's embarrassing. They've held the line for four years that it's not a land grab, it's not about power; it's ethnic hatred, religious and they can't live together. But just in Sarajevo alone are 60,000 Serbs who lived through the siege side-by-side with Alma, the Muslims and Croats.

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**17 Stephan Elliott**

1963], Zabriskie Point [Michelangelo Antonioni, 1970], then the big one, The Picture Show Man [John Powers, 1984]. It always astounded me, even though I was quite young at the time, that Rod Taylor was playing an American in an Australian film. He has just never really played an Australian character. I think in his career he has played two small Australian roles. Then I was living in the back of my head when I thought, "He (Daddy) O' is this grizzly, tough dinosaur, what about Rod Taylor? Where is he?" I phoned him in Los Angeles, found out where he was, threw open his front door, and there he was. There was the character, no casting involved, nothing. He was just standing in front of me and I just said, "How is your Australian accent?", and he said, "Bloody great, mate." It just went bingo. He walked straight through the door - a terrific moment, that doesn't happen very often. An awful article I read the other day called him the Mel Gibson of the 60s, and I thought that is a terrible thing to say, but it is quite true. At the time, he was the big Australian star doing good in Hollywood.

He was good, almost unrecognizable in the movie. One does a double take. He has been stuck over there [in the USA]. He does his bits and pieces, but it has been a while since people really have seen him.

And he had such fun doing it, too. He trusted me, though he had a lot of fears at the beginning. I talked him round, and, once he had made the decision to commit, he committed. He was completely fearless out there. A lot of what I do with actors is to push them doing things that they don't ordinarily do. I've done that on all three films, which is kind of tough sometimes. There is a lot of fighting and arguing, and sometimes just blind trust to get people to do things that they would never do. Once he made the commitment, he went for it. Once or twice he was really nervous, as was Terence [Stamp], as was Guy [Pearce], as was Phil Collins. They look to you and say, "Please." And you have to say, at the end of the day, "Trust me, you have to trust me."

You've had some big names in your films.

The way I usually cast is to ask the casting agent whom they think the roles would be good for. Once I get those, I throw the entire pile out the window. Also, when you get actors who are doing something new, they are a lot easier to handle. It is that trust thing again. When they are not doing what they usually do, when they are out of their depth, they have a tendency to be a lot more with you: a lot more collusive, and they will look to you for guidance a lot more, which is kind of good. They will fight with you because you make them do bad things, but, at the end of the day, because they haven't ever done it before, they don't really have an opinion. It is the ones that come pre-judged, judgemental, who have already worked out in their minds what they are going to do before they get there. That is tough. It is hard to give direction to actors who have already made up their minds.

**WHAT ABOUT JONATHAN SCHAECHE [TEDDY]?** I'd seen a film called The Doom Generation, a Gregg Araki film, and I thought he was pretty great in that. It lived in my head, and when we heard he was doing [The Tom Hanks' picture That Thing You Do], we had a casting session. I saw all the big American 25- to 32-year-olds, and it was obvious. I thought anyone who does this is going to be sort of obvious, let's take a chance. So we had a big confirm meeting. I flew over to Washington, saw him and then thought, "Fuck it! Let's give it a go, take a shot, see how he goes." He had a tough time, but I think he got through it.

**HE DOES IT WITH GREAT APLOMB.**

He's the ultimate fish out of water. He just stumbles through there.

He just grins.

Pay the man to smile sometimes, that face, you just go ... He has a face that you can hold a match up to. He lights up like a Christmas tree. A lot of people you have to light really hard, sometimes to get their best look or whatever. Jonathan, you can hold a bit of an old torch to him: clean, perfectly lit. Guy [Pearce], too, is an immensely-lightable person.

**WHAT WAS THE IDEA BEHIND THE COLOURS YOU USE IN THE FILM?**

This is the first time I kept away from the primaries. I think Australia went through the multi-coloured Strictly Ballroom phase. We did it, we got our attention, we screamed and yelled and clanged our pots and pans together, and got our attention. It is now time to be a little bit cleverer than that. It would have been very easy to jump back into old tricks, which I've done twice now, with huge, in-your-face primaries. In Priscilla, we stuck bright green dresses in a bright red desert. That was eye-catching. Not long ago I said, "We can't do that again. It is over, we have the attention now, we have to move on." Billy's Holi-

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HOW DOES THE day

Richard Wherrett, 1995] and the was a period. This time we worked very hard and it really hurt, because I love going for primaries.

We went for grey, very nasty sharp greys and deep blues. Then we hit Australia. As the film goes on, it let it creep out. The only time I let colour come into it was the funeral, because I thought they can bring their glad rags out for one thing. That was when Lizzie (Gardiner, costume designer) went insane. She was withheld for the entire film and at the last minute she let go.

I have a great story there, too. At the funeral, I said, “Lizzie, go for it.” It’s the big scene at the end of the movie, the costumes just go weilder and weilder and weilder. Meanwhile, Rod is getting a little bit funny. He eventually came up and said, “It is the funeral, the climax of the film. What is all this?” Looking for an excuse, because we were by that stage having fun, I said, “It’s Fellini, Rod; very Fellini.” He said, “Oh, Fellini.” You could see she wasn’t happy with that.

He went away, and a few more (costumes) came out and you could see getting more and more bristled, and finally we got the big moment. We’re all up there and he says, “Stephan! Stephan, come here!” I went over and said, “What is the problem?” He said, “I can handle the Ramboyant. I can handle the Fellini, but I can’t handle the clown. The clown has to go.”

I spun around and there was this extra dressed in a bright red wig with a big pyjama top on with big buttons and these two-foot shoes with a red nose. He said, “I will not have a clown at this funeral!” I had to hold a straight face and I said, “Okay, Rod, I’ll get rid of the clown”. I went over and said to the clown, “You have to go back to wardrobe.”

The clown didn’t have anywhere to go that night. He didn’t get dressed, so he went back to the church, we had all the stuff in it, all the cans, and he discovered the warm beer. The clown started drinking warm beer. So, we are doing the funeral and Rod is working himself up and people are crying, music is swelling, getting everybody in the mood and suddenly you hear, “Stephan! (screaming)”. And he said, “What is the clown doing back here?” The clown was completely drunk, stumping up the road. The clown was removed, poor clown.

HOW DOES THE FFC FEEL ABOUT IT?

I showed the FFC a videotape, an AVID cut of it. It was a bit unfair. I’m fighting for them [the FFC] now. From now on I’m going to demand more rights. Maybe they don’t put up over 50 percent of the money, but certain rude people automatically assume that because they own 50 percent of the movie they have all the rights. In fact, yes they do, in the real power play, but I think the FFC should be consulted a little bit more. I did show Catriona (Hughes, FFC chief executive) a copy, and she showed it to a few people who came back with a couple of suggestions. Some of them were quite good suggestions.

It is angering me now that a lot of people think they are going to get free money, that they are going to get money without opinions. I think the FFC should be consulted a little bit more, not as a group or as a body, but maybe they should have somebody in there, one of their filmmakers or people on the board, who should be in a position to give opinions or to be listened to, in some way, shape or form.

HOW DO YOU GET ALAN FINNEY FOR THE FILM?

I just find Alan Finney non-stop entertainment. Finney was at my house a couple of weeks ago in Australia and we had a big sing-a-long. It was great fun, we all got blind drunk and we were singing to Manhattan Transfer. Knowing how flamboyant the man is and how much fun he has, he was a natural. He is such a hog.

I told him in the very early days that I would let Roadshow have Priscilla – there was a buying war going on – on the proviso that Alan Finney wear a dress to the premiere. And he said, “Yes, fine, anything.” I had lawyers draw up a contract and send it off to him, and sure enough he signed it and it was all forgotten about. Come premiere time in Australia, I said, “Where is your dress?” He said, “You’re joking, aren’t you?” Finally, the poor man was humiliated. At the premiere, Alan Finney got up in drag – I think somebody got a few photos – and did a drag show in a bridal dress. He and I did it together, and we had buckets of blood poured all over us as well. I was trying to do that great line from Queen Margot, the wedding dress, and blood went absolutely all over everybody – Jamie Packer and all these people. My mother was in white silk, and blood went everywhere. Alan’s just a natural hog.

1 Alan Finney is Managing Director, Australian Film Production, Roadshow Film Distributors.

Dynamic Duo

very reason why I want to make films. It’s a way of leaving things behind and making people aware of things. I seek what we call satori in Japanese Zen Buddhism, or enlightenment.

“I hope to make my mark on history”, she goes on, in a more modest tone than that remark might suggest. I want to dedicate my life to establishing an image of history that functions a bit like the statues of the Buddha or the image of the Buddha. What do I mean by that? Thousands of years ago, people looked to the statue for security and peace, and through praying to the statue they were able to enrich their spirit and they are still able to do that today. That’s the kind of thing I want to achieve.

As we talk further, it becomes more and more clear that, in unassuming ways, both Suwa and especially Kawase have a very serious sense of a cinematic mission. Perhaps I have made the same mistake about Kawase that she tells me on another occasion many others have made about her. Kawase reflects: Not only in Japan but in any society, I think that being young and a woman means you are not going to be free from discrimination. It can’t be helped. Some men will think, “This young woman, what can she do?” But rather than fight that, what I’ve done is acted and shown results. I’ve achieved something.

Right now, Suwa is working on the script of his new film, about which he is not prepared to say a great deal yet. But it seems it will need more than 10 pages this time. Kawase has already made another documentary, shot on 16mm, about six of the families in Nijiyoshino and called Story of the Mountain People. It will be screened at the Yamagata Documentary Film Festival in November. Now she is preparing her next feature, which she is also thinking of shoting herself:

It’s going to be a love story. I’m planning to take a year to film it through the four seasons, starting with the rainy season when the people first meet until they fall completely in love. Clearly, newcomers Kawase and Suwa cannot represent the Japanese independent scene as a whole. But they do represent a powerful tendency within that vibrant and diverse culture that is gathering strength, and it looks like they will be around for a while to come. © Thanks to Julie Hayes for translation.

Demon Dogs

sequence due to all the production logistics. We try to remind each other of the clarity we established during the rehearsal period, of where everybody is at any given moment in the script. Guy’s character appears to be an idealist in the beginning of the picture, but at the same time he is an opportunist who is dying to get ahead, who is using those sneaky clean ideals to further his own career.

WHEN BOOKS ARE WRITTEN OR READ, WE PICTURE PEOPLE THEN CAST THE FILM IN OUR MINDS. DID YOU DO THAT, Mr ELLROY, AND THEN HAVE TO BEND THE IMAGE OF WHAT YOUR CHARACTERS WERE LIKE WHEN MR HANSON GATHERED HIS CAST?

Ellroy: When I wrote LA Confidential, I did not see any actors playing any of the roles, major or minor. After I wrote LA Confidential, I saw the late ... who, in fact, parenthetically died on a yacht in the Mediterranean of a heart attack with five women on board. He was rumoured to have the biggest dick in Hollywood history.

I thought about Steve Cochran as Trashcan Jack Vincennes, and I played with the idea of the late, great Sterling Hayden as Bud White, but, of course, they are both dead and unavailable.

Of all the actors, the one who comes closest to my fantasy visualizations of my characters is Mr Cromwell as Dudley Smith.

After I completed the LA quartet and one other book – Dudley Smith appears in four of my books – my wife and I were discussing potential filmic Dudleys and we settled on a Scottish actor Donald Moffat, whom Mr Cromwell somewhat resembles. I have to say Mr Cromwell is definitely the closest, but he never says Dudley’s immortal line, “Grand, lad”, in the film. He prefers “Boyco”.

Russell Crowe, by the way, took him to task because Russell states that “boyco” is a Welsh, not an Irish expression. It’s all too fine a point for me.

1 Spacey at the time was sporting a moustache for his forthcoming role as a Southern gentleman in Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil.

2 The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (Stephen Elliott, 1994).

3 At this point it appeared that Ellroy would name an actor, but he hesitated, in every likelihood thinking the better of revealing the actor’s identity and omitting it.

4 “Boyco” is an Anglo-Irish expression, used a lot by Welsh poet Dylan Thomas.
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Duan Jinchuan, winner of the Prix du Cinema du Reel (Paris) Award for his documentary 16 Barkhor Street South

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Production Survey

Features in Planning

Brothers at War
Land of the Long White Sheela

Features in Development

Harvest
Sally Marshall Is Not A Alien

Features in Pre-Production

Caffeine
Killer Jones
Sparx

Features In Production

The Boys
Head On
In The Winner Dark
Liquid Bridge
Reflections
The Thin Red Line
The Venus Factory

Features In Post-Production

Amy
Dead Letter Office
Family Crackers

Budgeted by: Ian Spenceley, Sharon Jackson, Michael Bond
Production crew
Location manager: Tim Burns
Production accountant: Sharon Jackson
Inserter: ACN Pty Ltd
Compliance: Sue West
 hinterland legal services: Jim McNulty
Travel co-ordinator: John the Travel Broker

Camera Crew
Camera operator: Les Hackett
Camera type: ARRI

Music

Composer:

John Eadon,  Stavros Asis, George Dyer, Roger Sturrock

Not an Alien

Producers: Andrew Thompson, Marine Denny

Scriptwriter:

Ivan Dunlop, Kerry Mewburn

Associate producer:

John Eadon

Music

Composer:

John Eadon

Not an Alien

Producers: Andrew Thompson, Marine Denny

Scriptwriter:

Ivan Dunlop, Kerry Mewburn

Associate producer:

John Eadon

Music

Composer:

John Eadon

Executional

International sales agent: Intrafilm, Rome

cast

Nicholas Hope (Lisbonian Jones), Tessa Borisen (Jessica)

Jones, a writer, is placed in a challenging exploration of the human psyche. When a body is found, Jones, the killer, is driven mad by what he has done, and realizes his only out of trouble is to get deeper into it.

SPARK

Production company: VERTIGO PRODUCTIONS

Distribution company: INTRAFLY/PALACE

Pre-production: 13/10-16/11/97

Production: 17/11-20/12/97

Post-production: 28/12/97

Principal credits

Director:ennie Clark
Executive producer: David Lightfoot
Co-producer: Scott McDowell

Production manager: Scott McDowell
Production accountant: Trudy Talbot

Completion guarantor: FACB
Legal services: Ron Warren

Shooting schedule: by David Lightfoot

Planning and Development

Script editor: Duncan Thomson

Casting: Angela Hersom

Production manager: Scott McDowell
Production accountant: Trudy Talbot

Completion guarantor: FACB
Legal services: Ron Warren

Government Agency Investment

Development: SA Film Corporation
Production: FCC and SAFG

Marketing

International sales agent: Intrafilm, Rome

Cast

Lucia Mastronardi (Tina), Nick and Vinny are two losers whose only salvation is Vinny's girlfriend Tina, who banks their plans to open a new cafe. The only remaining problem is how to get a prime location on Adelaide's slinky cafe-society corridor. Enter Rocky Pisan, local big-blower who thinks that his self-styled mafia-type credentials will help the boys secure a spot. Taking hard-up ex-convict Paulie along for the ride, the little big man soon witnesses Rocky's cheap power and driven violence, forcing the realization that they are in league with a low-rant Satan.

CINEMA PAPERS • NOVEMBER 1997
**THE BOYS**

Production company: Head On Productions, Pty Ltd

Producer: Robert Reich

Production sales: Margit Paul

Production design: Niel Hare

Sound: Pippa Morris and Tara Collins

DOP: Ben Smale

Editing: Paul Stone

Score: John Ross

**CAST**

**Adults**

Stephen Lawrence (Sandy), Ollie (Tom), Pips (Myra), Sarah (Ann), John (Peter), Jonathan (Tim)

**Children**

Luke, Jack, and Sam (the boys)

**CINEMA PAPERS • NOVEMBER 1997**

**An intense psychological drama, in the Winter Dark is set in a secluded country valley where Maurice Student’s wife who is desperate attempts to stop their lives and her family from crumbling. As the pain from an unspoken tragedy threatens to erupt from Maurice and her past, John and Rosie are drawn into the older couple’s desperate attempts to stop their unraveling.**

**LIQUID BRIDGE**

Production company: Avalon Films

Producer: Kim Wilson

Production sales: Richard Foster

**CAST**

**Adults**

Anna (Maggie), John (Troy), Sam (M. Student), Dave (F. Student)

**Children**

John (Troy), Sam (M. Student), Dave (F. Student)

**THE THIN RED LINE**

Production company: Pearl Pictures-Fox 2000

Producer: Rob Reiner

Production sales: John S. Corbett, Sherry Lansing

DOP: Dean Cundey

Sound: Marc Lauer

Editing: William Golden

Score: José Luis Cuervo

**CAST**

**Adults**

Wally (James Caviezel), Monash (Tom Hardy), Tommy (Peter Sarsgaard), John (Gabe Sapelka), William (Tobey Maguire), Larry (Mark Ruffalo), Lewis (Benjamin T. Barber), Doc (R. J. Mitte)

**Children**

Lance (Tobin Bell)

**THE VENUS FACTORY**

Production company: Tomsküpp Pictures

Budget: $850,000

**CAST**

**Adults**

Alex (Jason Gideon), Jamie (Michelle Johnson), Candy (Nicolette Dessy), Sally (Pamela Adlon), Phil (Tom Arnold), Dave (Michael J. Fox), Liza (Lara Flynn Boyle), Nick (David Alan Grier)

**Children**

Alex (Ryan Pinkston), Jamie (Jack Fisk), Candy (Linden Ashby), Sally (Pamela Adlon), Phil (Tom Arnold), Dave (Michael J. Fox), Liza (Lara Flynn Boyle), Nick (David Alan Grier)

**MARKETING**

International sales agent: Southern Star

**CINEMA PAPERS • NOVEMBER 1997**

**Features In Production**

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Producer: Robert Reich

Production sales: Margit Paul

Production design: Niel Hare

Sound: Pippa Morris and Tara Collins

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**MARKETING**

International sales agent: Southern Star

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A panel of ten 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 Dirty Dozen | BILL COLLINS | BARBARA CRED | SANDRA HALL | PAUL HARRIS | TIM HUNTER | STAN JAMES | ADRIAN MARTIN | TOM RYAN | DAVID STRATTON | EVAN WILLIAMS | AVERAGE |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|...............|---------|----------------|-------------|---------|
| **Absolute Power** | 7          | 5          | 7          | 5          | 8         | -          | -           | -       | -              | -           | 6.6     |
| Clint Eastwood   |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Albino Alligator** | 8          | 7          | 8          | 3          | 7         | 6          | 3           | 7       | 6              | 6           | 6.1     |
| Kevin Spacey     |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery** | 4          | -          | -          | 5          | 7         | 4          | -           | 3       | 6              | 4.8         |         |
| Jay Roach        |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Brassed Off**  | -           | 8          | 7          | -          | 7         | 8          | -           | 7       | 6              | -           | 7.2     |
| Mark Herman      |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Career Girls** | -           | 8          | 7          | -          | 8         | 7          | 1           | 8       | 2              | 8           | 6.1     |
| Mike Leigh       |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Doing Time for Patsy Cline** | -          | 7          | 7          | 4          | 7         | 8          | 1           | 8       | 6              | 7           | 6.1     |
| Chris Kennedy    |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Face/Off**     | 8           | -          | 6          | 5          | -         | 7          | 6           | 5       | 8              | -           | 6.4     |
| John Woo         |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Fever Pitch**  | 9           | -          | 9          | 6          | 6         | 8          | 6           | -       | 7              | 7           | 7.25    |
| David Evans      |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **For Roseanna** | -           | 4          | 7          | 1          | 4         | 8          | -           | 0       | 2              | -           | 3.7     |
| Paul Weiland     |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Kiss or Kill** | -           | -          | -          | 7          | 7         | 7          | 8           | 5       | 8              | 9           | 7.3     |
| Bill Bennett     |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Men in Black** | -           | -          | -          | 5          | 6         | 5          | -           | 7       | 6              | -           | 6.2     |
| Barry Sonnenfeld |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |
| **Smilla’s Sense for Snow** | 9          | 7          | -          | 7          | 6          | -           | 7           | 3       | 7              | 6.6         |         |
| Bille August     |             |            |            |            |           |            |             |         |                |             |         |

**Smilla’s Feeling... Oops... Sense**

Bille August's film is based on Danish writer Peter Høeg's novel, first published in English in the USA and titled Smilla's Sense for Snow.

The British then decided, as they are wont, to change the title: thus, Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow, as though this were some Victorian novel of sensibilities.

Under the Commonwealth book agreement, Australians are forced to buy over-priced, badly-produced UK editions instead of the invariably better American ones. Australians were mostly familiar with the UK title of Høeg's book.

**Problem:** when August made his film with the original English title, what to do audiences unfamiliar with that title in Australia and England? **Answer:** retile several prints.

**Additional problem:** a rogue American print with the true title slipped unnoticed by the distributor into Oz and screened happily at the Dendy Brighton in Melbourne. **Result:** cinematographers wasted many minutes over steaming cappuccinos arguing about the title on the film they saw.

Why don't UK publishers stick with the title chosen by the translator, and the US-designed cover as well!
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...and suddenly, overnight, the olive
shot to stardom...
and never looked back.