Out of the Ghetto

A movement beset by dogmatism and decline. Sound familiar? Actually, it's Catholicism.

Mike Ticher spoke to the editors of a new magazine which aims to revive Catholic thought.

Morag Fraser and Ray Cassin are editor and production editor of *Eureka Street*.

What was the impulse behind the foundation of *Eureka Street*?

MF: The Jesuits wanted to shift away from having close links purely with Catholic bodies—Catholic schools and the like. That move away from a dosed Catholic culture is one of the main motivations behind *Eureka Street*. Also, there has been a large number of closures of Catholic media organs in the last few years, and so there was a hole in the market which we want to fill. For the Catholics at whom it’s pitched (and it’s not just pitched at Catholics), there really isn’t anything else to read. This country has approximately a 25% Catholic population, and they’re certainly not all on the Right. That is our bread and butter audience, but unless we get beyond that niche we’re not fulfilling our purpose, which is to broaden out into a whole range of political, social, cultural and religious issues.

What does *Eureka Street* offer which other publications can’t?

MF: One of the things that struck us particularly was the concentration and decline in standards in the daily press, a closure of that journalistic culture. There were too many people who just knew one another, just knew the political scene. So one of the things that we claimed to offer in the very first edition was news that people are not necessarily going to read elsewhere, and written by people who are not just part of the journalistic culture.

RC: To some extent all monthly magazines have been in a position to benefit from the bad things that have happened in the mainstream media. The concentration of ownership of newspapers and TV channels has made them less attractive places to work, and a lot of journalists who really care about their craft are looking for other places to publish. Insofar as we’re offering anything different, we’re able to provide a link between those writers and others who are in more traditional Catholic circles.

MF: So much analysis in the monthlylies and the dailies in Australia in the last ten years has been economics-focused. This may sound like cant on my part, but to me it’s been a pretty value-free environment, and lots of people with a concern about economic downturn in this country are also concerned about a spiritual malaise that underlies that. There are ways of looking at things that are different from the business review pages, and it’s one of our aims to incorporate not just people’s concerns with how much money they’re earning, but what they’re earning it from, what the ethics are. For example, in the July issue we had a long article, by a philosopher about lying—not just Bob Hawke lying, but lying in general. Now there are not too many daily newspapers which can afford to do that. People lie in public life all the time, but we don’t take much time to stop and analyse it.

RC: Until the late 1950s, Catholicism in Australia was an Irish ghetto. That made it impossible for us to become too predictable because there are too many people around, all with different opinions.

RC: Very little. There might be people who think we should be more ‘religious’, but I don’t think they would form a definable group that would actually try to change the magazine.

MF: I think they’ve always been more specifically Catholic than this one.

How much latitude do you have to be critical of the church in general or the Jesuits in particular?

MF: It’s difficult to see that we could have trouble with the people who are financing the magazine, but if we don’t encounter some opposition from the wider body of the church, or Catholics generally, then we won’t be doing our job.

RC: Of course the magazine has a Catholic identity, but there is within the Catholic church a commitment to having a range of opinion and a respect for conscience. I think there’s a greater variety within the church than many people outside it realise. The number of beliefs that you’re really committed to holding is relatively small. It’s an interesting sign of the times that although *Eureka Street* is substantially under the sponsorship of the Jesuits, the day to day work is mainly done by lay people. If it had been started 20 years ago there would have been only Jesuits sitting here talking to you.

What in particular has made the difference between now and then?

MF: Australian Catholicism has changed quite dramatically, especially because of migration. Just in this office there are Arab Christians, Vietnamese Christians, Irish, Italians, Western Samoans, Lebanese. That makes it impossible for us to become too predictable because there are too many people around, all with different opinions.

RC: Australian Catholicism has changed quite dramatically, especially because of migration. Just in this office there are Arab Christians, Vietnamese Christians, Irish, Italians, Western Samoans, Lebanese. That makes it impossible for us to become too predictable because there are too many people around, all with different opinions.
Ray Cassin and Morag Fraser

created a very different kind of church from that which many people had known back in Europe.

What are the issues within the church that are going to be central to the debates in *Eureka Street*?

MF: The central question is the interaction of church and state politics. This a major issue in Europe at the moment, with the rise of religiously-inspired nationalism, while in America the church and state are embroiled in the legal aspects of abortion. Then there's social justice. The Catholic church does make fairly frequent statements on aspects of social justice; it's one of the better things it does. Jesuits have long been involved in trying to change attitudes towards the treatment of Aboriginals, for example. The church has become identified with overtly anti-establishment political movements in recent years—for example in Poland and in Latin America. Is there a danger that it has come to be seen more as a political vehicle than a repository of spiritual values? There already seems to have been a sharp decline in church attendance since the demise of the communist regime in Poland.

MF: Of course the church has always been deeply involved in politics. I don't think you can answer in general terms as to whether it's a problem for the church, since there are very specific problems in each country. The Polish question is very obvious because we have a Polish pope, but the problem of church-state relations is a universal one.

RC: What's interesting about the Polish example is that Poland seems to be in the process of becoming another Western country. I think some people have been dropping out of the church in Poland because their interest in it was originally as an expression of Polish nationalism. It's a problem for the church if it ever becomes too closely identified with a particular set of political arrangements. It essentially compromises it, and that's why this magazine can never be political in the partisan sense of the word. But we will be interested in politics in the wider sense, in encouraging people to think about political issues in a way that isn't narrowly self-serving.

*Eureka Street* covers many issues which have no discernible religious connotations at all, but also deals with straight theology. How do you reconcile the two?

MF: We don't physically divide the magazine up into 'the religious section' and 'the non-religious section' for a start. We would like to think that there's a certain ethos that pervades the whole magazine, and which you could broadly describe as Catholic. We keep a section on theology, because there's nowhere else accessible in Australia you can read about it, but we hope the values that you might find in the theological and religious articles are also the ones
which inform the rest of it. There’s a definable perspective, if you like, and you get that partly because you choose particular writers, and you tackle things in certain ways. It has a lot to do with honesty of argument and clarity of presentation.

RC: We want to have some communication with people outside the church. We want to show that because you happen to be interested in what some people might see as narrowly religious issues, it doesn’t mean you’re not part of the wider community too. What we’re trying to show is that nothing is off the agenda. One spin-off from that might be that people outside the church think, “oh well, if they’re interested in that, what have they actually got to say on religious issues”.

MF: That sounds a bit as though we’re trying to evangelise through the backdoor, which is not exactly what we’re about. We want people to think.

You talked about the magazine having a Christian ethos, and also about the current ‘spiritual malaise’ in Australian public life. Obviously *Eureka Street* doesn’t stand either for Fred Nile-style religious politicking, or for a retreat into purely spiritual concerns. How does one realistically apply spiritual principles to political questions?

MF: You can’t separate the two. Fred Nile’s Christianity is a very narrow religious manifestation and discriminates against a lot of people—that’s not what we’re interested in at all. There are people in Australian public life that manage to do the sorts of things that we are committed to—people who put their public lives on the line in the service of other people. It’s a very old-fashioned value, but there are some who still subscribe to it.

RC: In the main political parties there are people—like Michael Tate in the Labor Party and Fred Chaney in the Liberal Party—whose Catholicism has a lot to do with the interest they take in public affairs. They would undoubtedly disagree very strongly with each other about many things. But if they didn’t think about ethical issues in the first place, they wouldn’t be doing what they are doing. You could say that this magazine is a publishing expression of that interest in the way in which Catholicism fits into public life.

MF: Also I think it’s important to insist that there should not be a split between your ethical opinions and what you do in public. There shouldn’t be one world inhabited by political interests, and another, where ethical interests are espoused, cordoned off somewhere else. There’s been a long history in the Christian tradition of cutting yourself off from the world, and this magazine is not about that at all. It’s not a tradition that we either repudiate or deny, but we’re different. There are splits in public life and we would like to see them reintegrate. We’re at a fairly crucial time in our definition of what Australia is and it’s important that our depictions of Australia do ourselves justice.

MIKE TICHER is a member of ALR’s editorial collective.

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**Judy Horacek**

**RAINY DAY ACTIVITY:**

Working out exactly which animal is who in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*

- I just don’t see any resemblance to Lenin
- You mean animals didn’t take any part at all in the Russian revolution?
- So which revolution is “Watership Down” about?
- Who is Jonathan Livingstone Seagull & who is he working for??!

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(ALR: July 1991)
Strange Days

It’s official: we’re living in the 60s—again.
David Nichols (below) and McKenzie Wark (overleaf) look at the revival of 60s music and culture. What does it all mean? Does it mean anything?

“Later, when Grant became totally absorbed by a Charlie Mingus album cover, I disappeared into the bedroom and masturbated. I took my time and my fantasies were very detailed. It seemed like hours passed. Psychedelic jacking off—that was the 60s for you.”

So says The Doors’ drummer John Densmore in his newly published Riders on the Storm—My Life with Jim Morrison and The Doors. Densmore, having ‘lived it’, might be justified in writing off ‘the 60s’ like that. But it’s safe to assume that such a flippant attitude is anathema to most disciples of Morrison and The Doors. (Who, I should add, didn’t ‘live it’ for the most part. Densmore himself writes about youngsters who weren’t born when his band was at its peak who are now fervent followers of their music; it’s these kids who went to see Oliver Stone’s The Doors. Their thirty/forty-something parents were the minority.)

Looking back from the beginning of the 90s, ‘the 60s’ (the term, in this case, seems to mean ‘67–69 and maybe a little beyond) seem like a period of great musical and artistic experiment, adventure and innovation to people who conveniently ignore the fact that consumers then were as much interested in corny ballads and novelty records as they are today. The Doors, The Stones, The Beatles, Hendrix, The Velvet Underground—all those names and more are constantly being cited as the written-in-stone greats of rock ‘n’ roll, stylistic launch-pads for all that’s worthwhile in rock music now.

The last 12 months have seen the 20th anniversaries of the deaths of two of these ‘greats’—two Jims, as it happens—Jim Morrison (died July ’71) and Jimi Hendrix (died September ’70). Like another Jim—James Dean—their fans’ fascination with their deaths only fuels the flames of these iconic phoenixes. There’s another, more practical, aspect to worshiping a dead star, too. Unlike Bob Dylan’s admirers, for instance, a Hendrix or Morrison fan doesn’t have to be periodically embarrassed by a new record from a middle-aged shadow of a genius.

The similarities between Hendrix and Morrison are, of course, purely superficial. Same time, different places, different backgrounds—probably even different fan groups. Hendrix was an innovator, remembered by most as a technically brilliant guitarist but probably enjoyed by lay people largely as a great singer/songwriter. These days (despite the re-evaluation of his work by Charles Shaar Murray in the recent book Cross Traffic) Hendrix is seen as a bit of an anomaly—unlike Morrison, whose legacy is constantly described as “timeless”. This is because: (a) Oliver Stone’s movie gave us a vibrant and handsome Val Kilmer; recreating Morrison in-the-flesh and of-the-moment; (b) many Doors songs fit stylistically with more contemporary rock songs—unlike a lot of Hendrix’s heavy-riffing psychedelia; (c) the surviving Doors supervised post-Morrison releases respectfully and intelligently—whereas Hendrix’s posthumous releases are often scrambled and messy; and (d) dare I say it, Hendrix was black and Morrison white.

Noel Redding’s book on Hendrix, Are You Experienced? The Inside Story of the Jimi Hendrix Experience (co-written with Carol Appleby) tells us a lot about how the 60s are being reshaped and rewritten. Redding—who played bass in The Experience—has apparently spent the last 20 years steeped in bitterness, fighting (not very successfully) an alcohol problem and trying (with even less success) to reap some financial reward from his years as a member of Hendrix’s band. Indeed, the book reads as a relieved and legal woes. Redding (who come across as a likeable bloke) didn’t want to seem like a breadhead at the time, so he never bothered to ask his managers or Jimi what was going on moneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoneymoney.

In this respect, I think
we can say that nothing much has changed in the music industry.

Unfortunately, though, Redding’s recollections reveal little about Jimi himself. “A lot has been written about the man,” he understates early on in his book, “a lot of it true, as far as I know, and a lot of it crap”. People do say if you remember the 60s you weren’t really there—maybe that (and the two intervening decades) have blunted Redding’s reminiscing powers.

John Densmore, on the other hand, has a rosy array of Morrison stories on display. But then, he would have a different perspective: unlike Redding, he’s never been ‘down the dumper’; he only had to stand back and watch as The Doors’ legacy (and presumably his bank account) grew and grew. Unfortunately, the book does have an irritating 60s approach; parts of it are written directly as an open letter to the long-dead Jim (“Well, we finally visited your grave….”), and it’s heavy on Californian otherworldly philosophies. But at least it shows Morrison was as much an enigma to Densmore and the other Doors as he was (and is) to millions round the world. Snide comments about the occasional sixth-grade nature of Morrison’s lyrics aren’t going to make a blind bit of difference to this particular runaway gravy train.

Another point of interest: both books feature photographs of the star with the author/band member; they’re both saying, “Yes, I was there!” Redding has his head in Hendrix’s armpit; Densmore is peering over Morrison’s shoulder. Dare you doubt their claims?

The 60s are everywhere—and not just in the revived Hair stage show. They are the cuckoo in the 80s/90s nest, but they also provoke for many a (probably unfair) evaluation and re-evaluation of music, and other arts, today. Few of the people who bemoan the conservatism of music today really appreciate that the reason music got so exciting in the late 60s was the fact that it was an attack on a much, much deeper conservatism everywhere in that decade. But now, paradoxically, borrowing a 60s theme or look gives a project an ‘innovative’ theme—Australian band Third Eye springs to mind, with their highly colourful video presentation and ‘trippy’ concepts (and name), none of which seems even slightly out of place today with their very hi-tech electrodisco. Tie-dyed shirts, ultra-long hair, a thriving drug culture, ‘happenings’—our contemporary ultimate in ‘non-meaningfulness’ dance music, has taken on all of those trappings. There’s even nostalgia for 70s/80s groups like The Jam and The Sunnyboys who were themselves resurrecting a version of what they understand by 60s rock.

A lot has been made (and a lot of money has been made, for that matter, when the entrepreneurs finally caught on) in the last couple of years of the re-emergence of ‘the 70s’, as though the entire decade was a huge retrograde and tacky gross-out. However, now ‘the 70s’ too are being re-evaluated and regurgitated into the music, fashion and culture of the 90s, in both subtle and outrageously blatant ways, just as the 60s and hippiedom was reviled in the late 70s then rediscovered in the 80s.

The important thing is to keep an eye on the reality of times gone by in the midst of the nostalgia hype. Or rather, the important thing is to remember that there is no objective reality, only hazy and messed-up recollections, when it comes to summarising an era. Every generation will be looking back at their adolescence with reverence and emotion. Hopefully, even today’s 40-year-olds will get over theirs soon. After all, how much longer can radio DJs and middle-aged newspaper columnists keep telling us with awe that “it was twenty years ago today”?

DAVID NICHOLS is 26.
For McKenzie Wark the 60s revival is much ado about not much.

On my way out of Sydney's Martin Place subway the other day I came across two plush-faced teenagers sitting cross-legged on the pavement cradling beat-up guitars with peace stickers all over them. They wore headbands, and took turns choosing tunes from the Bob Dylan songbook. They played with such naive earnestness that, for a moment, you could forget that the songs had ever existed before.

This wasn't the first time lately I'd come across this 60s nostalgia. At peace demos during the war against Iraq you could spot little clusters of teen-hippies, all straggly hair and multi-coloured tie-dyed T-shirts. They seem really to believe that the 70s simply never happened. Of course, the 60s imagery recalled in this wave of 60s nostalgia, of which these are just two examples, never happened either. But that doesn't make it any less real to the young people so intent on reliving it.

Every pundit who can brandish a word processor has been busy deriding what the 60s revival 'means' in carbon-copy columns in the smart magazines. There are two fundamental mistakes in this line of thought, however. The first is assumption that there is a 60s revival, the second is that it could actually have a meaning at all. It's a cliche now: "If you can remember the 60s you weren't really there." It's meant to mean that you would have been whacked out on bad acid or too hyped up on spurious activism to notice. That, presumably, is what the 60s were all about. But if someone were to ask you what the 90s were all about, what is there to say? Well you could say that in the 90s there was a 60s revival, but that wouldn't help much. There always seems to be a 60s revival of some sort going on. The British pop pundit Julie Burchill even devoted an essay to the difference between early and late 60s, and how preferable the former was to the latter. In short, just as '90s culture' appears a diverse and meaningless miasma of contradictory and unreadable elements, we can safely assume that the recent past was probably pretty much like that too. The 60s only look like the 60s because a carefully selected series of images makes it so.

Certain icons accumulate condensed layers of significance. A 'young Elvis' picture is 50s, but Diana Ross and the Supremes are (early) 60s. Through the process of editing and recycling images come to stand for 'the times'—something which can have no meaning without this process of fabrication, arbitrary though it is.

'Signs of the times'—let's take The Doors as an example—can feed back into pop culture in seemingly nostalgic revivals. To some extent, the meaning arbitrarily assigned to such an image in the media might actually become 'real'. Young people now are encouraged to identify with The Doors and to associate a certain sexy, transgressive yearning for the sacred with Jim Morrison. Of course, there is nothing really '60s' about this; it is a commonplace of Romantic aesthetics. Morrison probably culled it from Rimbaud or Byron. He simply had the nous to combine it with the music technology and dress sense which were also floating aimlessly around at the same time. As for the music, steal-
In a few things from the blues might be typical of the American music business, but hardly of the 60s. It is he coming together of equally arbitrary, equally unmotivated borrowings and permutations from this or that corner of the pop cultural landscape, haphazardly stitched up in a neat, libidinal package that makes a certain ensemble of images ‘typically 60s’.

Of course, this line of argument doesn’t account for why The Doors and ‘the 60s’ should come back now, in the early 90s. Some argue that 60s nostalgia signals some sort of cultural ‘shift’. They then marshal dubious anecdotal evidence of the sort I mentioned earlier to prove that some general ‘spirit of the times’ has emerged.

Some suggest that, since the 80s were a revival of the 50s, then the 90s will be the contemporary equivalent of the 60s. Here it is usually assumed that decades which are self-centred and materialistic are followed by spiritualised or radical ones when people wake up to themselves. This ‘instant karma’ theory is on to something, but misses the point in assuming that there has to be any actual meaningful content in the patterns of these revivals. Pop culture these days seems to work by juxtaposing and recombining different but equally arbitrary bits of style jetsam and image flotsam to each other. At any given moment, young people will be borrowing little clusters of image, come from the media’s wake, and forming little group identities out of it. They might then set these little collections of cultural drift against each other: mods versus teds, punks versus skinheads, and so on.

This also happens temporally; each new style distances itself from its predecessors, often by inverting their styles. Hippies wore their hair long, so punks decided they had to shear the whole lot off. “The only good hippy is a dead hippy”, we used to say. This is why I look on the new age hippy teenagers in Martin Place with such ironic bemusement—I’m an old remnant of one of the subcultural styles they are turning the tables on!

As to why the 60s, specifically, are big in the 90s, this is simple enough. It has to do with this empty, meaningless, purely structural logic rather than the inner meaning of any particular image or style-point. Quite simply: none of the 15–25 year olds alive now and listening to The Doors could possibly remember them from the first time around. This is the first and only law of pop culture nostalgia waves. They will hit the first generation which missed out on them the first time. So stay tuned for the big 90s revival some time in the next millennium. By then, it will be crystal clear what ‘these times’ are (or rather were) ‘really’ all about.

Rather than look for meaning in any particular symptom of 60s revivalism, it makes more sense to look for the structural logic which churns the enormous ocean of signs and icons around. A significant factor explaining the apparent increase in very short-term recycling which has occurred in the last 20–odd years is the enormous proliferation of media vectors. Everyone today who has grown up in the TV world (and that means practically everyone in their early 30s on down) has a huge image-bank in their heads, all of it potentially rechargeable with new meaning.

Dredge poor, old, dead Jim Morrison out of the TV image data-bank, connect him up with a few 60s stock shots of long hair, dems, freaky behaviour and so on, hint broadly at a few tedious contemporary anxieties against which these pristine, shining images can be juxtaposed, and hey presto! A 60s-style revival. Young people today who hear The Doors on the radio, or see Oliver Stone’s film about them, will make of it what they want, but it will have nothing to do with the 60s. It has nothing much to do with anything. That’s the way things are with us TV babies. It’s all just a cut-up video clip, dancing in our heads. We no longer have roots, we have aerials. So we make up the past, like everything else, as we go along.

McKENZIE WARK is waiting for the punk revival.

ALR: JULY 1991
Who's Afreud...


If you are at all dubious about the merits of Freudian psychology, Castro's latest novel Double-Wolf will probably do nothing to reassure you. While the title of Castro's novel indicates the text's particular concern with the Wolf-Man, Freud's famous patient, the novel as a whole deals with psychoanalysis more generally as a combination of art, science and "bullshit".

While Castro's text is a highly crafted one, the writing polished and interesting, the reader may never get quite comfortable with the novel. I for one found myself oscillating between sympathising with and feeling alienated from Castro's personalities (for they are more personalities than characters). I began more than once to think "OK, I can handle this guy" and then the jerk would go and do/think/say something totally repulsive — but perhaps that was only because I am a moral prude and hypersensitive feminist (if you are neither of these you may find yourself feeling really cozy with Castro's male personalities — you may even be able to identify with them!)

Unsavoury characters aside, the novel undoubtedly displays Castro's skill as a writer. The traditional authorial voice disappears behind the narratorial voices of the Wolf-Man, Sergei Wespe, and the psychoanalyst, Arthur S. Catacomb. The story is told as a fragmented one; Castro makes the shift from one personality's consciousness to the other's smoothly; so smoothly, in fact, that one wonders if the separate personalities of Catacomb and the Wolf-Man are in fact speaking in separate voices. The Wolf-Man, reacting against "Old Sigmund [who] tried to slot me", attempts to reconstruct himself through his own writing. But is the narratorial voice which tells of the Wolf-Man's experiences the self-creating voice of Sergei Wespe, or has Catacomb succeeded in becoming the Wolf-Man's double, his ghost-writer mediating and to some extent even creating (as did Freud before him) the Wolf-Man's story? Lines of distinction become blurred and ambivalence becomes a definitive feature of the novel and its characters. The reader cannot be certain who is telling the story or stories and how much any of the stories are based upon fact and how much on fantasy, imagination, projection, distorted perception or just plain lies.

Double-Wolf is not always easy to read; like the Wolf-Man himself it sometimes confuses and, one suspects, deliberate so. "It is in classification," Wespe is told by a travelling companion, "that we can make sense of the world" — it is indeed sometimes difficult to make sense of Castro's text let alone the world it represents. Some readers in assessing Castro's novel may find themselves echoing Freud's response to Wespe "What you've written is bullshit...I, as the reader am the detective. You the writer are the criminal... irresponsible, confusive, hiding in your text. You have a predilection for wandering. You tell a story without seeming to have a point... when you are actually evading the point". Writing, like psychoanalysis, may after all be just an exercise in con-artistry.

Double-Wolf is interesting and thought-provoking, but it is not the sort of novel that will become everybody's favourite book. Read it if you enjoy ambiguity and have a moderate to high tolerance level for male anal/phallic fantasies and Freud (the last two are naturally coupled).

Moha Melhem

Death in Denis

Larry Death by Denis Freney, Mandarin Australia

Larry Death is forty, balding, overweight and en route to the dole queue. If the author were Desmond Bagley or Morris West, our hero would be plunged into deep intrigue and after a bit of biff and some raunchy sex, emerge as victor, a man renewed.

But Denis Freney is not Desmond Bagley. Larry's greatest act of physical prowess is running for cover. And while there are several passionate moments, it's not the uncontrollable male sex drive in operation but a deep and abiding affection - an emotion which recurs with surprising regularity. Don't get the wrong idea; machismo-free thrillers can still be absorbing. The murder of a political activist sends Larry Death speeding from his comfortable communal home in the leafy back streets of Sydney's Glebe to the seedy squallour of Manila' sex spots, into the Filipino jungle with the NPA guerillas and in front of a government death squad.

There's the traditional quota of evil generals, devastatingly beautiful prostitute-subversives, thick-headed cops and eccentric criminals: at times they become predictable. But the hero himself is well-rounded and complex, surprisingly believable despite obvious unsuitability for the orthodox hero-he-man role.

Larry Death is thick with the detail that defines a good thriller, drawn in the case from Freney's personal experience of Filipino politics and the struggle of the NPA. The exploration of gender politics may not be entirely successful, but Larry Death is a satisfying read.