

“Documentary - a personal view” in "SECOND TAKE - Australian Filmmakers Talk” by Burton & Caputo, Allen & Unwin 1999

What I love about documentary is that it conveys the textures of everyday life like no other form can. It captures spontaneity and immediacy. It involves a process of discovery with often very unexpected twists and turns. There is never the opportunity to do a second take. I find this thrilling on the one hand, but exhausting on the other.

Unlike scripted drama, you can't plan a documentary. The best ones unfold of their own accord. Its in watching the unexpected coalesce or unravel which is the thrilling part of the process. From my experience it all depends on good planning, some intuition and a bit of luck.

The age of the Internet is revolutionising the communication industry making the definition of what constitutes a documentary very slippery these days. It won't be long before we'll all be eavesdropping into public or private situations round the globe, while non-professionals will broadcast their own home-movies down the net!

The nexus between technological changes and film aesthetics has always been a close one: witness the French new wave of the 1960's when filmmakers like Jean-luc Goddard took to the streets with light hand-held cameras, and the grass roots film movement that sprang-up around Super-8. Documentary is no exception. The lightweight 16mm cameras in the early 1960's produced the 'direct cinema' and cinema-verite' movements which resulted in filmmakers engaging in intimate ways with their subjects. The cost of camera and sound equipment, however, combined with 16 mm film stock and processing, limited filmmaking to a professional elite able to secure the necessary finance.

It's taken thirty years for this situation to change. In 1996 digital video cameras appeared on the domestic market which returned broadcast quality images but were also at an affordable price. The time is now fast approaching when everyone will be able to afford desktop non-linear editing. The question is how's this going to change the documentary? Will it survive in its present form or will it re-surface in different shapes and styles? I believe its possible to observe some of these changes already taking place.

I started making my first films in the early 70's - the early dawn of this technological 'revolution'. It was soon after video was first invented and the first primitive reel-to-reel portable black and white videotape recorders made their appearance. These were cameras attached to large bulky recorders that you were meant to carry on your shoulder. These dinosaurs were the equivalent of the modern digi-cam. In fact so primitive was this technology that I abandoned it after a couple of years in favour of 16mm!

What initially made black and white video popular was the claims it made for enabling social change. *This new technology would assist the empowerment of disadvantaged communities* - asserted the Canadian Film Board in the late 60's. Australia followed, and the Whitlam government established video-access centres across the country attracting idealist sociology graduates like myself who wanted to change the world!

The first video program I ever made was in 1974 was about an area in Sydney I lived in - Balmain - still then mostly working-class. It was about how people felt about container traffic plying the narrow residential streets making life hell for the residents. I shot the video in 3 days and then screened the roughly-edited tape a week later to a big crowd at the local town hall who sat with rapt attention watching themselves and their friends debate the issue. A few weeks later a delegation of residents walked into a meeting with the minister responsible, set-up the video playback and forced him to watch the program. The container terminal closed within a year and the trucks disappeared!

I was part of a group numbering less than 20. We called ourselves 'guerrilla video-makers', as we placed ourselves at the disposal of resident groups across the inner city making 'agit-prop' videos. The causes ranged from stopping expressway development to clamouring against people being uprooted for re-development. We turned each program around in less than a week screening it to crowds in halls, pubs, or simply in the street. (For a more detailed description of this work see METRO Magazine no 107.1996)

My first film **WATERLOO** grew out of this video work and the connections I'd made with people protesting against the break-up of inner-city communities. Waterloo is a suburb in Sydney where a group of people in 1977 were prepared to sit in front of bulldozers to prevent the state Housing Department demolishing their terraces to build 30-storey towers. I had conceived the film as a 'blow-by-blow' account anticipating that the shooting

would take place over a 12 months period. I was wrong. The issue was actually resolved very rapidly - in the first few weeks of filming. What could I do? I had to find another angle or another story. It was a situation I had to confront time and time again in subsequent documentaries.

It soon became obvious that the back-story had to become the film! The struggle to save a few blocks of houses in Waterloo needed to become a larger story of this working class suburb and its history. The idea was partly triggered by Margaret Barry - a woman who led these 'battlers'. Marg had lived all her life in a small terrace house that had become increasingly isolated by the devastation around her. She had a great sense of history. She knew every planning scheme, every government minister responsible for this urban 'blight'. It seemed to me sensible that this person who had 'been through it all' - tell this story of 50 years of misguided urban planning and the dislocation it caused.

Making our films was one thing, but showing them to audiences was another. It was the late 70's and early 80's - not that long ago! Yet it was still unheard-of for the ABC to buy-in independently made documentary. The little cinema in St Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst was, apart from the film festivals, and the educational market, our only window to the world. People flocked to this 100-seat screen, in the same way as they now flock to see Flickerfest or Tropfest. I remember making repeated representations to the documentary department of the ABC - and being told that, in spite of the prizes it received, my film was only of limited general appeal. It was not only me but also David Bradbury who had the same problem with his acclaimed film **Frontline**. Meetings were called, petitions gathered and letters written. Finally, by the mid 80's, independent documentary moved-on to occupy its rightful place in the mainstream of public television.

In 1977 I went to the now famous ethnographic film conference in Canberra where I met the who's who of documentary. It affected me profoundly. I was suddenly introduced to the films of D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, the Maysles Brothers, and Judith and David Macdougall. The *cinema-verite* style personified through films like **Primary, Salesman, Takeover** influenced me greatly and opened the door to whole new ways of making films. I responded to the spontaneous moments the roving camera captured, and how they mirrored the textures of everyday life.

For a while I rather fancied the idea of the camera being simply an objective recording device. My next two films borrowed heavily the purity of that style, but unlike my mentors of the 70's I was not content to be just a 'fly-on-the-wall'. Besides observation I wanted to use a whole range of other devices: re-enactment, re-flexive camera, acted voice-over. I also quickly came to the realisation that the camera was far from neutral.

Kemira - Diary of a Strike started spontaneously. 16 miners from a BHP colliery were suddenly presented with retrenchment notices. They barricaded themselves underground in a mine near Wollongong on the NSW south coast. It was an event that perfectly captured the spirit of the times. It was the early 80's and the comfortable days of near-to-full employment were over: unemployment rates were skyrocketing and traditional industries like coal and steel were shedding labour. But this time I didn't want to make a film in retrospect; I wanted to capture all the drama that was there in the heat of the moment.

Looking back it seemed a crazy thing to do. I had around \$4,000 saved - enough to buy and process just a few rolls of 16mm film. I decided to take the plunge, shoot as much as I could with a crew working on deferred wages and then present it to a funding body for post-production. The gamble worked. To go through the funding agencies would have necessitated the usual three months wait. (These days having a DV-cam and being able to shoot high ratio makes such gambles less risky.)

Keira marked the devices I was going to explore in my later films. They would have one or two strong main characters and a series of minor ones, plot turning-points and sub-stories - all classic narrative fiction devices. I would also learn the discipline of editing in the camera as I went along based on what might happen the next minute, the next hour, the next day or the next month. With a low-ratio film camera one had to be very careful when to rollover, so you always had to keep one step ahead of the action. Of course predicting the future was speculative at best! This did not become any easier if the heat of the moment threw-up a totally unexpected incident. (I am constantly amazed how people in an un-disciplined way now often shoot 120 hours of video for a one-hour program).

In **Kemira** events are presented chronologically in the form of a diary. The pit-top is the stage where the drama unfolds, told through our main character Ngaire Wiltshire, the wife of one the striking miners. What she

thinks and feels at any given time gives us the emotional layering to the film. We follow what happens to Ngaire over the ensuing months - charting her growing self-confidence following the break-up of her marriage, versus the growing demoralisation of the retrenched workers.

Using all this compelling raw footage I decided to construct the story without a conventional narrator. Instead I used radio reports to provide my voice-over links and explanation. I also wanted to complicate the story through adding other voices and other points of view. Why not intersperse the pit-top drama with another drama happening in another location - the Coal Tribunal where BHP was doing battle with the union officials? So I got hold of the Tribunal transcripts and then reduced the essential arguments down to a few lines. Actors playing the key protagonists read these lines complemented by a written text being typed onto the screen. Several months later I also re-constructed the occupation of the mine with the original underground strikers, and found archive footage, which gave the film the necessary historical context.

Critical success with **Keira** enabled me to obtain a Documentary Fellowship. This was a rare scheme initiated by the AFC allowing a filmmaker to make a film of his/her choice. So I decided to exploit my impeccable contacts with the union movement to do a film about another conflict. But this time I wanted to be much more 'on the inside'. I had the perfect opportunity. In Queensland 800 electricity workers had walked off the job protesting about the government's intention of privatising the South-east Queensland Electricity Board. The state was close to chaos with electricity blackouts every other night. Joh Bjelke Peterson, in the twilight years of his premiership, engineered the showdown with the unions that he'd long planned.

I wanted to present both sides of the 'battle' - but in different ways. I managed to get access to the minister given the job of resolving the dispute - Vince Lester. Vince was a farmer from central Queensland, whose claim to fame included walking backwards for charity and inventing a novel way of locking toilet doors. He provided me access to meetings in the bush, to debutante balls, country shows and garden parties - everything that was quintessentially Queensland.

I approached the film chameleon-like with a dinner jacket in my suitcase. Sometimes I would change clothes twice a day, flitting between National

Party barbecue and the union office. I felt I was capturing the extremes of Queensland political life: the arrogance of a government that knew it could win versus an embattled union tearing itself to pieces in trying to find a way to seize the initiative and win the strike.

There were no heroes in **Friends & Enemies** - I constructed them all as ambivalent characters. Vince was a clownish minister of state, but Bernie didn't fit comfortably into the stereotype of a working class hero either. He was an angry, bitter man who dominated the strike committee through sheer force of personality. He was the one who organised the pickets. But when strikers - except for a core group of activists - stopped turning-up, Bernie ran out of ideas. He then turned all his aggressive anger against the union officials blasting them about the way they ran the strike. As the strike dragged its way into the 8th month he grew more and more vociferous. He banged the table haranguing people who were his former allies, but he ran out of puff when his own wife started to turn against him. It was the women - the mothers and partners of the striking workers - who finally took over the organising role. Their warmth and dignity came to represent the moral conscience of the strike.

Unlike most of my films where I give my subjects the right of final approval, here because of the bitterness and extreme divisions no one person could ever possibly fit that role. As it stood, the film had no narration, just a few intertitles to signal where you were in the story. I tried to present the different political currents and sub-plots that unfolded over the 8 months as fairly as I could, but a person could read different things into the film depending on which part of the political spectrum they stood. The film premiered at the Sydney Film Festival where it received a very strong response, but what happened at its Brisbane launch took me completely by surprise.

A packed audience at the Schonnel cinema witnessed that historic screening. A section of the crowd clapped but then Bernie suddenly leapt to the stage denouncing me for allegedly misrepresenting him and leaving out crucial parts of the story. The audience erupted. For the next two solid hours the stage turned into a soap-box where the film was debated and argued by the protagonists on both sides. It was an experience that left me wounded and dazed.

Between 1987 and 1990 I made several films in quick succession including: **Strangers in Paradise** (co-directed with Gil Scrine) about a group of American tourists confronting indigenous Australians during the Bicentennial celebrations, **Lord of the Bush**, about rapid social change and its impact on the community of Broome in Western Australia, **Bran Nue Dae** about Jimmy Chi's musical of the same name and **Amongst Equals**, a feature length documentary about the history of the Australian trade union movement.

Amongst Equals is a cause celebre in trade union circles, and got me into big trouble with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) when I released the film illegally after a protracted battle over the fine-cut. The film was my idea originally, but became a bicentennial project funded with taxpayers' money, 'sponsored' by the ACTU and produced through the government film arm Film Australia who held the copyright. I knew that to arrive at a final film that would please everybody including myself would be an enormous task. Nevertheless, I pressed-on and travelled the length and breadth of the country speaking to all the relevant historians, and looking for suitable interviewees. I then wrote the script, which, to my amazement, met with total ACTU endorsement. Later I discovered they hadn't actually read it!

The peak union body's concerns didn't materialise until we had shot and cut the film. It emerged that what they'd really wanted was a hagiography, which downplayed the history of industrial struggle and highlighted the government-union Accord and the arbitration system. Naturally, I objected on the ground of censorship and the abuse of intellectual property. I had no intention of making a commercial simply to suit the ACTU's political agenda at the time.

Several months of meetings proved futile and I simply contacted the best journalist I knew on the *Sydney Morning Herald* and told him the story. It featured on page 3, displaced from page 1 only by the Gulf War, I was told. The reaction caught me completely by surprise. Usually filmmakers break their back trying to get the attention of the press. However, this time I couldn't keep them away! Finally we decided to have a one-off screening of the film at the Chauvel cinema. A few discrete posters and flyers went-up around the town! Well, the crowd stretched around the building. It was a night I won't forget in a long time!

In retrospect I was naive to think a film for a sponsor like the ACTU could ever be made which pretended to be historically accurate. It was a bitter lesson in institutional politics and the moral questions that arise for a filmmaker. I decided it was time for me to change course - at least in terms of subject matter.

I'd read in a newspaper about an Englishman Alistair McAlpine who apparently owned large tracts of Broome - a town in the remote north of western Australia. The report implied McAlpine had major designs on the development of the whole region and Broome was quite divided about his presence. There were the tourist operators who salivated at the prospects of rapid growth, and there was a large Aboriginal population who were concerned about the impact on land and indigenous culture.

The more research I did the more interested I became. McAlpine spanned a number of contradictions. He was a true blue Tory holding important offices inside Thatcher's Conservative Party - but he was also a conservationist with a small 'c' - having lovingly restored many of Broome's classic pearlshell villas plus the town's ancient open-air movie theatre. I obtained a letter of interest from the ABC, cashed-in my bankcard and headed north, having arranged to meet McAlpine in his private zoo. To my surprise he readily agreed to be involved. Soon I found myself filming the Redex rally and its motley crew (including McAlpine) arriving in Broome to the astonished stares of the mainly Aboriginal bystanders.

What fascinated me was the complexity of McAlpine's relationship with the Aboriginal community. He really polarised opinion. Many thought change was coming too fast. Others, including an elder Paddy Roe, were convinced that sacred sites would only be protected with a conservation-minded developer and McAlpine represented that ethos. The eventual film covered a year in the life of the community portraying how McAlpine cleverly endeared himself to both sides, bankrolling various projects including the spectacular musical BRAN NUE DAE.

My filming, however, was beset by frustrations - especially the fact that McAlpine never gave me the permission to film at his home or at meetings. I resolved this problem to an extent by setting-up situations where McAlpine would interact with other characters in the film and then standing back to film what would happen. Access is a problem that continually bugs documentary-makers. This hasn't been made any easier by peoples growing

distrust of the media and the unethical tactics that many tabloid journalists employ.

By the time I started my next film I was convinced that the best documentaries are ones in which the action springs directly from individual characters. Naturally one always has to start from an original idea, but the next step is to cast aside that idea and concentrate on finding a suitable character-driven story. This was the spirit in which I approached **Homelands** - probably my most satisfying film - although also probably the toughest.

My initial idea was to make a film about trauma and torture survivors - people who had survived a civil war and made their home in Australia. I had in mind to look at the social/psychological problems caused by the process of living the pain day by day, and how these were reflected in the tensions between the generations of a family. I decided to base myself in the Salvadorian community. Salvadorians had been arriving in Australia since the late 70's under the government refugee programme. A civil war had raged in the country for 11 years claiming 80,000 lives and forcing 20% of the population to leave the country as refugees. Human rights abuses were widespread.

However, as my research progressed and I started to 'audition' possible subjects, my ideas about the film began to change because the situation in the old homeland was also changing. In El Salvador peace talks were in progress and a permanent settlement was in sight. Many families I met were torn by a practical need to stay versus an emotional desire to return. The idea of homeland meant different things to different families, and to different individuals within those families.

Maria and Carlos perfectly epitomised these tensions. I stumbled on them - more by accident than design. They'd been going through a stormy and difficult period. Carlos had never really wanted to leave El Salvador and the struggle. Back there he had trained people as urban guerrillas - one of whom was his wife, Maria who herself had suffered a lot - kidnapped for 3 days, and tortured. The brutality of what both of them had been through became reflected in stresses within their marriage. These tensions were heightened as a result of their different experiences in Australia. Carlos worked as a cleaner in a hospital while Maria had a professionally fulfilling job as a teacher. Their children were well settled into Australian schools. Yet

it was no surprise to me that Carlos wanted to return as soon as the situation allowed. He actually left not long after filming started for an undisclosed period - perhaps around 6 months.

The price one pays for having a subject-driven film is that you break the traditional filmmaker's role of being an uninvolved observer. You try and win over your subject so they co-operate in the film. A degree of seduction is involved, to put it rather bluntly.

I was frankly unsure of my relationship with Maria. There was certainly trust on her side, but she also set-up an emotional dependence. For me the roles of filmmaker, friend, and counsellor overlapped and merged, and as the filming continued (it took place over a 12 month period) Maria, Carlos and I became involved in a complex three-way relationship. It all suddenly came to a head when Maria decided to leave Australia to track down her husband. When the two of us arrived in El Salvador Carlos turned a cold shoulder - in retrospect not at all surprising. It was something I realised later in the editing I needed to acknowledge. My presence was obviously affecting the dynamics of the situation. I decided to embark on a voice-over narration. I had never written one before because I always pretended to be invisible, but after 4 months of editing I came to the conclusion my own voice as the filmmaker had to be clearly heard and identified. A writer friend helped me inject the necessary 'nuance'. I believe it adds an important layer of meaning to the film.

There always remained the possibility that at any time Maria and Carlos would simply withdraw their co-operation. It all made for extremely anxious moments. When you make a film like **Homelands** you enter a form of 'social' contract - a mutual understanding. The film's subjects want something from you and you want something from them in return. I wanted the best possible film, and they wanted one which would educate the wider community about the real issues confronting refugees like themselves.

Naturally I needed to show the film to the family at fine cut. I sat there terrified knowing that they had the ultimate power of veto. (Formal releases don't mean a thing in this kind of documentary). Maria even brought-in her own audience of work colleagues - and 20 of us crowded around the Steenbeck (16mm edit machine). In the end a few tears were shed but there was nothing to fear.

So did the film make Maria into a martyr? Or, did it really empower her to take her life into her own hands? (Her marriage with Carlos broke up a year after the film was completed!) Did the film act as a psychodrama and have a therapeutic dimension? Five years on and these questions still go through my mind.

In my next film **Billal** my desire was to take an approach of a participant/witness and I make that very clear from the start. It was a technique of getting around the ethical dilemmas that loom as soon as a filmmaker wants to make somebody else's trauma the subject of a film.

Billal fell into my lap more by chance than design. My original intention was to focus on a group of teenagers who were about to leave high school in the outer west of Sydney where racial tensions controlled life. I planned to follow their lives over the ensuing 12 months, but then a dramatic U-turn suddenly occurred.

It was the Easter weekend of 1994. I hadn't started filming and was still in the process of 'auditioning' the film when I was called by one of the kids who told me that their friend Billal, a Lebanese-Australian, was a sudden victim of a 'hit and run'. The 16 year-old teenager was lying in a hospital bed in a coma with serious brain damage. I immediately changed tack to follow the new story - the aftermath - how Billal's family were to sort out their shattered lives over for the ensuing 15 months. The ABC, who had pre-purchased the original film, was easily persuaded to this new idea.

The family needed us as much as we needed them. They felt isolated. They felt they couldn't trust anyone - even social workers from their own community. We were the closest at hand. Our roles as filmmakers quickly became complicated as we became their counsellors and advocates. Our interpreter Alissar ended-up as an intermediary between the family and the bureaucratic outside world, and as the film progressed she herself became an important on-screen character. Through a process of reciprocity we forged a relationship which went beyond the film itself. As the filmmaker I felt myself to be part creator, part facilitator. This notion of advocacy is, I believe, one way of confronting the ethical problem

Billal turned out to be a waiting game. My original plan was to film key scenes that marked various stages of the boy's recovery. This was to be the

film's main narrative line. Simultaneously I concentrated on fleshing-out the other characters - especially the two brothers. However, unexpected events were to intervene. The family's aborted attempts at finding a new house suddenly created a separate dramatic line. The film then became not one story but several stories knitted together. To create some sense of all these story lines and the various twists and turns I adopted a technique I'd used in past films which was to begin the editing process from a very early stage. Rather than waiting 15 months to start putting together the story, we began the edit just after the first scenes had been shot. We did this on and off over for 6 months of the following 18 as we accumulated more material.

The art of making a film like **Billal** is to predict exactly just how things will turnout, and therefore just how long the shooting is going to take. The idea is not to be too intrusive, but also not to miss any vital moments. All we had going for us was the opinion of a few specialists who warned us of various stages of emotional and psychological adjustments Billal's parents were expected to go through. As the months went by, we were told, they would eventually become reconciled to their son's disabilities. Up to a point this happened but nothing prepared us for the shock when Billal's behaviour started to radically deteriorate after an operation which was supposed to actually make him better! It came as a stark surprise, not only to us, but to the family as well.

What difference, I wonder now, would it have made to **Billal** if we had digi-cams? Not much at all - I would suggest. We shot on a 20 to 1 ratio on 16mm to make a 90-minute film, and I would not have shot on a much higher ratio with tape. We had the family's privacy to consider - and to have over-shot would have alienated their trust.

As we near the end of the 20th century, I see three main genres of documentary emerging - prompted in part by the new advances in digital technological, and also by a much more competitive broadcast environment.

1. Factual soaps.

These programmes blur the distinction between documentary and entertainment. There is a strong appetite for them on television as reflected by the prime time slots they occupy eg. a British series **Driving School** (which first appeared on the ABC late in 1997). **Driving School** follows first time drivers and their instructors, and much of the action is shot from the back seat of a car with concealed cameras. The series is made-up of a series of 1/2-hour episodes - each shot over a period of about 5 days with two weeks to edit. Each episode comes with a fair dollop of humour usually at the expense of the poor complicit subject and is cut in such a way that it ends with a cliffhanger. The idea is naturally to lure the audience and entice them to keep watching the following week.

I imagine these docu-soaps taking-over many of the prime-time slots, forcing higher quality documentaries to later evening spots. This has certainly been the UK experience, and it presents a worrying pattern.

2. Video diaries & guerrilla filmmaking.

Gaining access to difficult and exotic locations with a digital camera has led to a new genre of personal documentary or, more accurately 'first-person reportage'. This initiative has been mainly broadcaster-driven eg. **Race Around the World** which aired on the ABC in 1997. The weekly half-hour programmes made-up of a number of 4 minute documentary 'sonnets' definitely captured the public imagination. But what accounted for their success? The 'game show' package certainly helped. Other reasons included viewers' vicarious fascination with unfamiliar and exotic locations, plus the strong presence and stamp of the filmmaker.

The British have taken this one step further. The 'local' has also become the 'exotic'. "**United Kingdom**" - a 26-part series of varying lengths - shot solely by one-person crews using digi-cams was commissioned by the BBC in 1996. 40 low-skilled crews - usually first-time filmmakers - took to the roads and gathered an enormous amount of footage covering the dreams, struggles and ordinary situations in the lives of their fellow citizens all over the country. I predict that public broadcasters in Australia will commission a not dissimilar series as well. Recent history shows that these kinds of ideas always tend to always travel south across the equator.

3. Mainstream documentary production, including television and feature documentary.

I fear for this sector which I make my living from - especially the feature documentary. There is always going to be a high demand for nature, animal and adventure documentary, but who is going to make those long, carefully crafted, observational films which capture the spontaneous drama of everyday life? Who is going to make the long archival-driven films demanding meticulous research?

I personally believe there will always be a place for the feature doc. It will survive because people both respect and enjoy strong compelling narrative, and some stories, like good fiction drama, demand 90 minutes or more to unravel. The availability of low cost high quality camera technology will inevitably influence the kinds of stories that are told and the style in which these films are made. The question is - how? My feeling is that documentaries will become increasingly linked to a director's singular vision. **Exile in Sarajevo** that I produced between 1995 and 1997 is a good case in point. This 90-minute film is set in Sarajevo in the final year of the siege of the city. Having a Hi8 camera allowed the directors Tahir Cambis and Alma Sahbaz to take over the shooting when the original cinematographer was forced to leave. They remained in the besieged city to witness the final 'act' - the liberation and re-unification of parts of the city under Bosnian- Serb control.

I'm currently evaluating the impact of DV (Digital Video) and where this work will take me. I still want to make documentaries of quality - where I am emotionally and intellectually committed to the subject-matter, and which will allow me to research, shoot and edit over a relatively long period of time (between 1&1/2 and 3 years). However, to be given this opportunity is becoming an increasingly rare privilege. One reason is that the independent documentary sector in Australia between 1994 and 1997 has shrunk by 40 per cent. Another reason is the segmentation of the industry I mentioned earlier.

Making a viable living from documentary is becoming harder rather than easier. For many years I managed to get-by making one film and than another, but now my personal income is drawn from a variety of sources - directing, producing, teaching, consulting, script assessing. In 1997 a group of us spent more time organising campaigns and representations to government than working on our own personal projects!

Advances in digital technology and the renewed interest in documentary it's caused have to be coupled with greater stability in the documentary industry itself. Back in the 70's one single government agency, the AFC, supported the independent sector. That's not the case now. Television pre-sales drive what goes into production. They determine what the FFC and Film Australia support. They are the backbone for the industry and it's impossible to do a documentary without them.

Making something without a broadcaster requires enormous enterprise on the part of the filmmaker, yet risk-taking is increasingly becoming the essence of the business and more and more people eager to make their first film are going down this track. You first must buy a digi-cam. You invest all your time and your spare cash into the film - shoot it yourself or deploy a small crew to work on deferred wages. You then present the film at rushes or rough-cut stage to a broadcaster. If you are very lucky you secure a licence for broadcast which allows you to hire a qualified editor for a few weeks and do a proper on-line and sound mix. It seems a desperate way to prize-open a broadcaster's door. A colleague of mine recently tried to go down this road herself. For someone like her in mid-career it caused much physical strain and enormous mental anguish.

Will DV effect the way I make films? Having a broadcast-quality camera on permanent stand-by will certainly allow me to do a lot more spontaneous shooting myself - both in the research and production stage. However in the overall budget DV should only bring down costs marginally. It will not make a huge impact on the key production roles - eg the editor, whom I consider to be the most important creative collaborator in any documentary. Good intuitive editors are hard to find and to my good fortune I have worked with editor Ray Thomas on the last 5 films. Ray and I have a very close working relationship and I get him involved in the film as early as practicably possible. Because the story inevitably takes shape as I shoot, Ray's constructive feedback from the very first set of rushes is absolutely crucial in determining what I do next.

The financing environment for documentary is much more complex than when I first began making films, and I am now in two minds whether to combine producing and directing as I used to do in the past. An ambitious

project requires securing that elusive overseas pre-sale, therefore a collaborative relationship with a producer is something I will definitely be looking for in my next project.

In choosing ideas I will look for situations that are as much character-driven as event-driven. Instead of focusing on a crisis or flash point like the strike in **Kemira** or **Friends & Enemies**, I'm more interested in situations that will yield me multi-layered characters. I don't mind whether they are located inside a family or a large institution like a hospital or a newspaper. With a mix of good characters and the right elements of conflict and irony it's not hard to then find a narrative structure. I'm also more inclined to rely in hunches and intuition based broadly on the experience I've gathered over the years.

In theory there are no places where a digital camera can't go, yet I predict that films that deal with society's core institutions are going to be increasingly harder to make. The problem will be to get around the spin-doctors that manage access to these corridors of power. (How often will we be able to see anything like **The House**, a 4-part verite-driven expose, which eavesdrops on crisis management in London's troubled Covent Garden?). Paradoxically it will be easier to turn the cameras onto the victims of society. In an American show **Cops** the camera follows a group of police to nail down an alleged criminal. The spectator is reduced to an un-involved voyeur of another person's suffering. The powerless have the status of oddly anonymous beings and the subject of the camera's fascinated gaze. Intimacy sometimes occurs at a serious ethical cost!

As documentaries are being appropriated by the needs of television, and as docu-soap is eating into the definition of what used to be called documentary, I believe that new challenges will confront the filmmaker. What will become important will be the struggle with access, re-defining the ethical boundaries, and experimenting with new ways of telling stories. The democratisation that DV has introduced also means that the very act of documentary production has to be viewed differently. More and more pressure will fall on the filmmaker, who continues to have ultimate power, to use it responsibly.