ian andrews

dLux media|arts
innovative film, video, new media and sound arts

presents

A Retrospective: Electro-matic

Screening @ Dendy Quays 8.45pm Monday 18 June 12.00pm Wednesday 20 June 2001
48th Sydney Film Festival Dendy Opera Quays Cinema 2 Circular Quay, Sydney

Lost and found

Around 1979 I began reading the works of William Burroughs: The Naked Lunch, The Ticket that Exploded, The Soft Machine, and Nova Express. Burroughs' writings got me interested in experimenting with tape recorders to cut-up and manipulate sound. In 1981 I happened to find, on the side of a road, several boxes full of 16mm films. I began to cut the film up into small segments and randomly join it back together again. In 1983 I began to show the film along with my sound work at various events. This film project called "Of Things Injurious" always remained a work in progress. Because I didn't have a proper splicer and the film was joined together as best as I could manage, it often got chewed in the projector. So some bits would be lost and new segments would be added over time. I was never particularly precious about it.

The Age of the Video Fun Cassette

In 1984 I began working with video. Video recorders (VHS), at that time, were still quite expensive, so I picked up some old J-format , black and white, reel to reel machines, and a black and white camera. After mucking around with these dinosaurs I eventually rented a VHS machine which I used to assemble my various experiments and pieces. I made tapes which I sent to other artists across the world in much the same way that I had been exchanging audio cassettes. In the early eighties there was a strong culture of international networking, tape exchange, and collaboration. This was the age of the fun cassette. The idea was to put everything on tape and send it out to the world. Unlike film and video art, this practice which was linked to industrial, post punk culture, involved a devaluing of the work as a commodity, and putting the emphasis on exchange of ideas, which had its roots in Fluxus and the mail art movement.
The first of these tapes was Chloroform, (1984) thirty minutes of 16mm cut-up, manipulated in various way with video processing. Followed by Fastest Accelerating TV: twenty five minutes of video cut-up and Corrosion Mechanisms: black and white video cut-up from the J-format experiments.
More cut-up work followed in 1985-86: Jet Vein Deflection, Auto Icon, News Vacuum and Krush Kill Destroy.

Culture Jamming

Eventually I more or less gave up on the activity of tape exchange. Most of Europe has the PAL video system, while the Americas and Japan have NTSC. Due to complexity and expense of system conversion videotape exchange (unlike audio) was mainly limited to Europe(which, apart from the UK, lacked the culture of scratch video/cut-up). Much of the cut-up work had a political message and so I was desperate for a wider audience. Due to copyright concerns, much of this work could not be shown on television or regular venues. One method of distribution was to record short cut-up excerpts onto the end of rented video cassettes, providing future viewers with a nice little surprise. Another method involved projecting onto buildings in the city.

Battleship Potato

1987 saw the formation of Battleship Potato (John Jacobs, Garry Bradbury and myself). We put our money together and bought a couple of old top loading U-matic editing decks and began to create videos for the music, which we were then making together. We produced a number of video clips including A Hindu Vision of a TV Repairman in Hell (1987). Which was made in a collaborative way by each taking turn to insert edit on the fly, cutting in and cutting out in time with the music over a number of passes. One persons cuts would either write over previous shots or sit next to them in a kind of ad hock way.

Desiring Machines

The period of 1989 to 1996 saw the production of a number poetic, essay type films. I had devoted much time to the study of French Post-Structuralist philosophy, in particular the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and these films are, to some extent the result of visually working through these ideas. Joey: an electro-mechanical boy (1989) is based on Bruno Bettelheim's case study of a schizophrenic child (first brought to my attention via Deleuze and Guattari's book Anti-Oedipus). Joey concerns the depiction of human subjectivity from a purely machinic perspective. I did not seek to provide a formal representation of Joey's condition but rather, a poetic visual and aural interpretation of his inner world. In Deathless (1990), a pseudo-documentary, concerning the poetics of death and its cultural iconography in Western society, the human body is flung into battle, obliterated in the air, consumed by carrion birds, worms and bacteria, while a catholic priest recites a reassuring eulogy for the soul (in German and English). Beneath the narration, however, a Nietzschean reading, presents itself; litered with notions of discontinuity, dissolution, loss of identity, forgetting, and silence. In Phonogramm (1992) an office worker struggles to negotiate a path between two extremes: schizophrenic ecstacy, and paranoid withdrawal. Like Joey, the worker is connected to an ensemble of machines (typewriter, pen, gramophone, machinegun) which both store and determine his output.

Programme (1996) was the first Post-UTS video and is unashamedly packaged for an audience weary of difficult films (or with shorter attention spans). This film is based on a piece of found home movie footage from the 1940s or 50s which documents the activities of a military training institution for young boys in Sydney. The military precision of the "in camera" editing and the frugality of the

film usage for this piece impressed me. It seemed that the editing had been subjected to the same discipline as the boys depicted in the film who were made to run, march, salute, exercise and vault to a strict rhythm. In the filming of these exercises much effort has been made by the camera operator not to waste a single frame. This example of austerity filmmaking inspired me to re-edit the footage on video, carrying the process further by ordering the frames into precise sequences based on the rhythms of military marches and adding the element of repetition. The sequences are punctuated by segments of text based on Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punishment," in which Foucault speaks about the penetration of the human body by a regime of meticulous control which underlies all of the institutions of Western society (School, church, hospitals, prison, etc.) generally described as discipline. The "correct means of training" ensures the correct use of the body, which ensures the correct use of time, which is completely purged of useless or non-productive behaviour.

In these terms I try to raise the question of the future of Australian society by invoking our past as a penal colony. There is some irony (and surely a little embarrassment) in the fact that one observes that this event, which is not too distant in our own history, is carried out under the auspices of the Union Jack, and not our own (however inappropriate) flag.

Information Economy

One of my concerns over the last decade has been the emergence of the global information economy and its repercussions on society. In the late 80s concerns about the misuse of technology often focused on big government, Big Brother, surveillance, secret service, etc. I tried to shift the debate more towards a privatised scenario, dominated by large corporations and decentralised financial markets of capitalism. In other words, from a centralised model, to one which is networked and dispersed. Zeroville (1993) is a critique of this model of late capitalism, economic rationalism and globalisation. The film is based on Jean Luc Godard's Alphaville (1966) which depicts a technological dystopia of the future. But where as Godard presents us with a totalitarian future of the modernist fictional model (Orwell, Huxley), my aim was to re-present his ideas in the context of the decentralised, deterritorialised development of late capitalism and postmodern culture. I used Godard's idea of depicting a futuristic metropolis using banal images from the present. I made this video while studying at The University of Technology, Sydney, so the forbidding corporate architecture of the UTS tower complex, on Broadway, provided me with a perfect set. Several years later I decided to re-examine some of the ideas expressed in Zeroville, in the light of the development of the internet, and I was astonished to find how much the tide of popular opinion had shifted, from the suspicious technophobia and paranoia of the eighties, to the opposite extreme: the euphoric technophillia of the "digital age" of the late 90s. Data Panic (1998) was, this time, inspired by George Lucas' THX1138 which opens with a montage of technical operations, messages, warnings, alerts, advertisements of a closed but media saturated society. Data Panic is also a remake of an earlier video, Terminal Zone (1988), out of which, along with Zeroville, it plunders a number of shots. The voice over and inter-titles (error/warning messages), written with a random sentence generator, are interspersed with well known advertising slogans such as Nokia's "human technology," and Nike's "just do it."

Scratch Video and Animation

My first animation film: Hyperspace (1989) was made with a 16mm Oxbury rostrum camera at UTS. It consisted of hundreds of small images cut out of 1950s magazines and made to move around in "outer space." In the next few years I would carry this technique into digital video with computers. The availability of reasonably inexpensive personal computers, that had the ability to digitize and animate video, occurred in the late 80s with the introduction of the Commodore Amiga. In 1991 I produced a number of shot digital video animations which appeared in Plastic (1991) and Harm Machine (1991).

The next year I joined the scratch video group: Subvertigo with John Jacobs and Marco Fante. Subvertigo provided live visuals at dance parties, raves and other events often for up to twelve hours at a time. To do this we put together a huge and complex array of equipment consisting of Amiga computers, Fairlight CVIs, feedback cameras, roving cameras, vision mixers, oscilloscopes, video synthesisers, processors, colourizers and VCRs which was like a pulsating organic electro brain that was never completely within our control. This absurd machine was fed with many hours of video cut-up which we had all produced in the 80s.

Neo-Minimalism and Molecular Media

In 1999 I began experimenting again with 16mm film. As a reaction in the opposite direction to the fast cutting style of my previous films and my work with Subvertigo.

Departure (1999) was constructed by superimposing a number of 16mm film loops to create slowly moving textures. The film loops were chosen from found film, and painted and decaying strips of film. The loops are combined by a video process known as a non-additive mix. The result is has a dreamlike painterly quality which looks something like a cross between the work of Derek Jarman and Max Ernst.

Programme

Departure

Harm Machine

Phonogram

The Harm Machine

Phonogram

Zeroville

Data Panic

A screen is a surface that displays pictures and yet can hint that something is concealed behind it. It is an emblem of ambivalence about what can be seen and not seen, what is spectacularly fascinating and what is fascinatingly secret, what is pleasurable and what is fearful, what is conventionally acceptable and what is repressed.

Laura Mulvey, 1992

...the truth about truth is difficult to situate, impossible to express, but nonetheless endlessly inviting of whatever impassioned, misguided stories we can dream up to tell about it."

Adrian Martin, 1999

Agit-pop humour, an unnerving wit and a quixotic formalism underscore the prolific and exquisite video, sound and performance art of Ian Andrews. Electro-matic foregrounds the key works of a consummate bricoleur whose electro-filmic assemblages playfully examine and interrogate the information ether.

At once philosopher, cultural activist and media luminary, Ian Andrews' work has evolved out of the post-punk anything goes milieu of the early eighties.

His random and anarchic use of found images and incidental sounds are deployed and cut-up in his video art films, animations, sound/radio art. Combined with the deft implementation of analogue video synthesis, outmoded equipment, digital graphics and low- tech effects, Andrews' elicits a mongrel and strange new media.

The advent of domestic video technology, (Andrews' was armed with two VCR's), in the 1980's ushered in a new chapter of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. This era witnessed a significant convergence of public and private in the information landscape.

This simple recording technology afforded artists and householders alike the newfound possibility for the contemplation of television. To archive it, to review and repeat it, to pause, to fast forward, to slow-mo and single frame view and to self-edit. Most notably it radically facilitated the altering, reframing and 'personalizing' of broadcaster programming.

For Ian Andrews this feel for new technology presaged a revolutionary interactivity with television that had traditionally impacted upon cultural belief systems as a 'given' since the 1950's. It was an opportunity to interrupt television for the first time, to 'capture' it and reveal it's breaks in transmission, it's gaps, slippage's, accidents, abstractions, it's phantoms and concealed images.

Andrews and his peers collated vast personal archives from television. These "found" images and sounds became the touchstone for a life vigil of reframing, representing and recoding familiar cultural formations.

Combined quite randomly with other found materials; discarded Super 8 and 16mm film, reel to reel sound tapes and a plethora of eclectic sound grabs, Andrews has created prismatic assemblages which take to task the unthinking consumption of media. In so doing he has forged a hybrid, dystopic frequency for information's renewal, contemplation, reflection and critique. His role since has been to evince a fantastic and mnemonic parallel media.

It is this reification of television, this hybrid alchemy that underpins all of Andrews's electronic interventions. Joey: An Electromechanical Boy (1989) and The Harm Machine (1991) both poignantly emblematize this philosophical rupture.

Joey: An Electromechanical Boy (1989) a Super 8 film that is based on the real life story of a schizophrenic boy who lives as a machine. Juxtaposing appropriated television montages alongside a dramatised choreographic spiral of descent, Andrews' anticipates the sensations of Joey's ecstatic flight. The frenzied spectrum of machinic images and bodily images connote Joey's odyssey towards the realm of binary code and electronic circuitry. Andrews speculates on the attendant sacrifice of imagination, emotion and the loss of subjectivity itself.

The Harm Machine (1991) parodies 1950's schlock horror and sci fi films. This prismatic film reframes and satirizes the anxious television and filmic images of the cold war period and the arms race induced technological developments since the 1950's. Machine gun paced montages and peripatetic cut-ups and juxtapositions from 'terrorvision'. Collisions of panic stricken faces, images of labyrinthine computer metropolises, dark architecture and an ethereal, foreboding soundscape

represent the schism between mythic perceptions of an imminent technological apocalypse and the futuristic potential for sentient technologies.

Phonogram (1992) echoes the recurring schizophrenic subtext in Andrews ' works. The fast paced convergences of bodies and machines and appropriated images are intercut with narrative drama. This multinarrative film portrays a sensitive office clerks relationship to old and new technologies, the differing ways to archive and store personal information and the complexities of information/memory retrieval. Andrews questions traditional relationships to information and privacy in the spectre of burgeoning surveillance technologies.

Zeroville (1993) in this faux Jean Luc Goddard film, secret agent Johnny Antipodes is a maverick hacker who upends a pedagogic information monopoly. Zeroville is Andrew's most narratively driven film with a sparing usage of montage and appropriated images.

Programme (1996) represents found home movie footage from the 1950's, which portrays the activities of a boy's military training institution in Sydney. Here Andrews shifts gear from a fast editing style and uses found images with abundant repetitions and loops to discern a more abstracted and contemplative form. He pays homage to Foucauldian ideas of institutional control and punitive systems. The loops and repetitions imbue Andrews work with a mesmeric style that paves the way for a newfound minimalism and self-reflexiveness in Andrew's future works.

Data Panic (1998) resonates with a satirical and fast edit approach of earlier work. Andrews reveals the ironies and fears surrounding the information economy, its distribution networks and concealed dark subterfuge. Data Panic revisits Andrews's fascination with the paranoiac mythologies fostered by the media to explain the fluctuations, mercurial nature and self-empowerment of technological change.

Forgotten Memory Series (2000) extends the loops, repetitions and meditative nature of films like Programme. Here Andrews' pairs back his appropriated media images to abstraction; a convergence of moving image and still. What Andrews terms "neo minimalism". These works parallel the spirit of Derek Jarman's latter day films, whose formal colour explorations invoked mood, emotions, alchemical references and has proffered transmutative qualities.

Similarly, Andrews' later work concerns itself more with formalism; composition, saturated colours, deep saturated hues and gestural textures. He pairs back the peripatetic to allow for the contemplation of the formal. The prolific use of low-tech effects and hand rendering that are painterly and alchemical in appearance. For instance Andrews used salt to treat and scratch the film. He has used discarded technology (an old titling Colouriser) to instill the video with a richer palette and paradoxically, a filmic appearance, to illuminate its ghost like subjects.

Ian Andrews's analogue vigil invites us to interrogate the dizzying highs and lows of the information stratosphere, to question easy consumption of difficult things. His incendiary, revealing assemblages inspire us to look at differing juxtapositions and imaginary frames of reference. As if to forge his own frequency of chaotic and deterritorialised broadcasting, Ian Andrews' vast archive of hybrid 'cut ups' have presciently anticipated the current digital trend for self publishing, web-camming and video streaming technologies.

The works in this festival simulate a prime-time programme selection from a dystopic television station. These are analogue prototypes which remind us to encompass and celebrate older technologies. These are important works that profoundly precede today's web based activism also geared to culture jamming, advert-busting and media deconstruction.
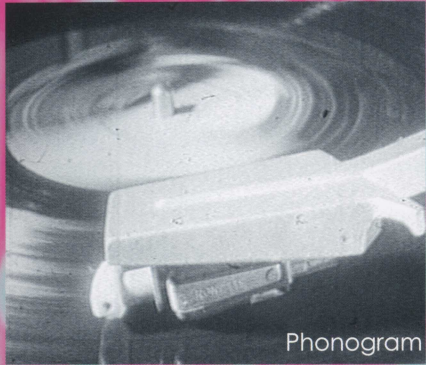
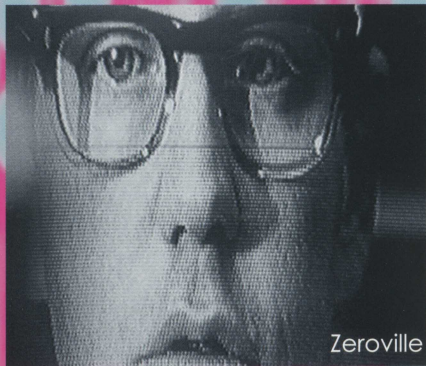*...A man that looks on glass,*

On it may stay his eye,

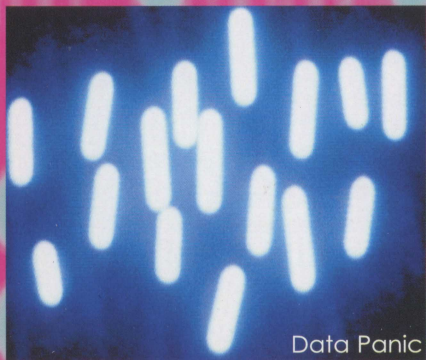*or if he pleaseth, through it pass.*

And then the heaven espy...

The Elixir, George Herbert

A selection of works from Ian Andrews.
Born 1961, sydney. Graduated with B.A. Honours, University of technology Sydney, 1994. Experimental film and video maker/sound artist since 1981. Film and video works include *Chloroform* (1985), *Beyond Contol* (1987), *Joey: an electromechanical Boy* (1989), *Hyperspace* (1989), *Deathless* (1990), *The Harm Machine* (19910, *Plastic* (1991), *Phonogramm* (1992) and *Zeroville* (1992).,

Andrews' works are typically mongrel assemblages of animation, scratched and painted film, appropriated images, "found film," digital graphics, and video synthesis. 'These films resist interpretation, more often raising questions and reframing representations rather than providing refuge in easy consumption. They engage in a strange and playful recoding of familiar cultural formations.'

Live Perfromance

Interval

Phonogram
Dir: Ian Andrews | 7.30 minutes | 16mm | 1992

A short experimental film in which an office worker struggles to negotiate a path between two extremes: schizophrenic ecstasy, paranoid withdrawal. The worker remains connected to an ensemble of machines: typewriter, pen, and gramophone, which store and determine his output. But occasionally he escapes in daydreams of flight. The film is in the style of a collage/cut-up with a Musique Concrete soundtrack.

Phonogram. 1. A unit symbol of a phonetic writing system, standing for a speech sound, syllable, or other sequence of speech sounds, without reference to meaning. 2. A telegram phoned to the recipient.

Phon-o-gram, gram-o-phone; gram from the Greek word gramma, something drawn or written, or grammon pertaining to a stroke or line. If "phonogram" refers to the written mark, and ' gramophone" to a record player or phonograph. And if phonography refers to a system of writing, what is the connection between the regime of recording (sound, image) and the regime of writing? Memory?

Joey: An Electromechanical Boy
Dir: Ian Andrews | 10 minutes | Super 8 | 1989

An interpretation of the true story (psychological case study by Bruno Bettleheim of a schizophrenic boy who lives as a machine. He wishes "to become completely automatic in order to rid of his unbearable humanity." The film is not meant to be a formal representation of Joey's condition but rather a visual and aural interpretation of his world.

The Harm Machine
Dir: Ian Andrews | 9 minutes | Video | 1991

Coldwar technofear and Scientific terror. A humorous look at the pseudo-scientific and pseudo-philosophical discourse of 1950s B grade sci-fi and catastrophe films. An assemblage of "found" concrete poetry and composite images.

Zeroville
Dir: Ian Andrews | 10 minutes | super 8 > video |1993

Secret Agent Johnny Antipodes has a mission: to disable Zeroville's central computer installation. With the help of agent X21 he evades the economic rationalism of the sinister FRUMP organization. A short homage to Jean Luc Godard's Alphaville.

Zeroville is a Sci-fi/film Noir story of a futuristic society. At another level Zeroville will function as a critique of 90s rationalization, new conversatism, privatization, and postmodernism. It is also, more generally, a film about architectural spaces and how they embody relations of power and ideology. Zeroville is also slightly parodic of the Film Noir genre and should not be taken too seriously. Zeroville (the city) is a technological dystopia of not so distant future. It could be Silicon Valley, Turin or the Multi Function Polis.

Programme
Dir: Ian Andrews | 2.19 minutes | Video | 1996

This film is based on a piece of found home movie footage from the 1940's or 50's which documents the activities of a military training institution for young boys in Sydney. The military precision of the in "camera" editing and the frugality of the film usage for this piece impressed me. It seemed that the editing had been subjected to the same discipline as the boys depicted in the film who were made to run, march salute, exercise and vault to a strict rhythm. In the filming of these exercises much effort has been made by the camera operator not to waste a single frame.

This example of austerity filmmaking inspired me to re-edit the footage on video, carrying the process further by ordering the frames into precise sequences based on the rhythms of military marches and adding the element of repetition.

The sequences are punctuated by segments of text based on Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punishment," in which Foucault speaks about the penetration of the human body by a regime of meticulous control which underlies all the institutions of Western society (school, church, hospitals, prison, etc.) generally described as discipline. The "correct means of training" ensures the correct use of the body, which ensures the correct use of time, which is completely purged of useless or non-productive behavior.

In these terms I try to raise the question of the future of Australian society by invoking our past as a penal colony. (Notice that this military spectacle is carried out under the Union Jack). We must become a republic (at the very least) if we are ever to be more than children of a dead empire.

The result is a structuralist - materialist montage based upon the rhythms of disciplinary time, punctuated by commands, shouts and whistles.

Data Panic
Dir: Ian Andrews | 4.45 minutes | Video | 1998

Close to trillion dollars a day changes hands globally in foreign exchange transactions. Only 15 percent corresponds to actual commodities or capital. The incredible speed of the New York stock Exchange's superdot electronic order routing system means that the Dow Jones can swing back and forth by more that 50 points in a matter of minutes. These conditions bring about a condition known as "data panic" : a feeling of insecurity and anxiety that engulfs every transfer of digital information, from international trade to electronic banking.

Data Panic combines images of commuters, tape streams, ATMs, terminals, workstations, printers, status indicators, traces and scans with computer animated icons, diagrams, pictograms, error messages, warnings, numbers, barcodes and binary digits. An advertorial style voice narrates a nonsensical commuter generated text interspersed with information technology advertising slogans.

Data Panic is a subtle satirical critique of the unbounded euphoria, which often surrounds the marketing of new technology and the ideology of globalistaion.

Forgotten Memories Series
Dir: Ian Andrews | 9.34 minutes | Video | 2000

Consider a film or video in which an artist explores certain memories through images of there past. Or consider a documentary, which interprets historical images of notable subjects. Then consider a film in which the images bear no such relations to either the filmmaker or to history as such but, at the same time, depict significant (perhaps) moments in some unknown persons life. What happens to our interpretation here as the images drift, dislocated from any historical or authorial reference? After the images loop a number of times do we tend to inject them with our own stories?

Departure was constructed by superimposing a number of 16mm film loops to create slowly moving textures. The film loops were chosen from found film, and painted and decaying strips of film. The loops are combined by a video process known as a non-additive mix. The result has a dreamlike painterly quality that looks something alike a cross between of Derek Jarman and Max Ernst.

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Electro-matic