



*SURFACE
IMPRINT*

AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILMS AND VIDEOS

S U R F A C E

Le Corps Imagé

Stephen Cummins 12 mins

Ec/Static

Toula Anastas 8 mins

White Woman

Anne Marie Crawford 4 mins

Elevation

Stephen Cummins 11 mins

Decoding the Link

Benay Ellison 7 mins

Cunlick

Dalia Shelief 3 mins

Carlton-Dancer

Stephen Gunning 6 mins

The Jar

Colleen Cruise 9 mins

Eat

Kathy Drayton 17 mins

I M P R I N T

The selection and screening of a diverse group of films and videos as a program inevitably - and hopefully - sets up some sort of dialogue between them, even before a written introduction attempts to do so. Aspects of each work reverberate off those of others, and in the process common fields of interest are magnified beyond what they would be in any of the of the works taken alone. This introduction will continue this process by drawing out some of the fields of interest and exploration the works in this program share, though only being able to signal the diverse trajectories along which these threads are explored from one work to another.

Surface-Imprint does not set out to be either an overview or sampler of Australian experimental film and video productions or scenes. Consisting solely of works from Sydney and Melbourne, it has instead drawn together a number of works which deal with particular networks of concerns. What they share is an investment in image and sound both as fields of play and as a means of visual and aural intensity, whether this be through colour and composition as in *Cunlick* and *Elevation*, through relentless visual rhythm(s) as in *Eat*, or in the soundtrack - as with the eroticized pulse - the almost guttural shuttle of the lift in *Elevation*, or the multiple rebounds of the beat in *Ec/static*.

There are two currents that run through this program as a whole. The first is a general mode of fascination and pleasure in the mutability of forms and the conjuring of images. Ranging from the melancholic to the humorous it shifts most of the works - from those working with formal properties of the image to those more directly working with narrative - into the arena of play and evocation. Taking such forms as pleasure in gesture, timing, movement and composition, it ranges from the voluptuous sweep and trajectory of the woman's arm, in all its repetitions, in *Ec/static*, to the relentless swooping of the figures - themselves doubled twice over - in *Cunlick*, where the gesture is only fulfilled as it crosses from one figure to another and back. It verges on modes of fascination reminiscent of early cinema and protocinematic devices, and not only in this pleasure in movement and stasis. Luminosity and the very appearance and disappearance of forms is also a source and object of fascination, becoming at times almost awesome. Anticipation and slippages of reference are also played with. In *Ec/static*, an irreconcilable gap is established and mobilized between the 'Muybridge-style action' or event and its naming through the intertitle. And yet whilst both 'action' and intertitle are rhythmic forces in this film, and neither name nor event can fulfill each other, it is the intertitle - the name or description - that can never live up to the sensuousness of the movement.

The second current running through this program is an interest and exploration of the possibilities of the performing body as a visual figure. Here the performing body need not be given priority over other performative elements of the image - it is one visual figure amongst others. A filmic or video body/figure which shares with other elements of the sound and image tracks (e.g. light, elements of mise en scene) the ability to inscribe a rhythmic and figural beat.

Many of the works share a dual process in which the performing body is increasingly rendered simply a visual figure - a means of rhythmic and tonal articulation within the image - whilst the image itself is embodied,

becomes almost carnal in the pleasures it takes in itself. In *Ec/static* for instance, a longing for the close-up emerges through the repeated black and white frontal sequences of the body-in-motion. This longing is answered, however, not with a close-up of the performing body (the partial glimpses of the body at closer range in this film serve a quite different function), but with voluptuous, static, close-up shots of pieces of old machinery. In these shots the composition and stasis of the image infuse it with a visual sensuousness and intensity, an eroticisation of the image which also appears in the camera's movements through vacated spaces and later in the move into flush-like colour.

It is the specifically filmic and video bodies and their potentials that are explored in these works - as luminous figure/form, as surface or depth, in their capacities for establishing visual rhythms to the point of eroticas and their scope for fascination and pleasure in movement, stasis and form. These can be seen as three forms of inscription in the image: through an intensity of light which can seem to almost burn on to the image; through the production of the figure as a surface, a projection or inscription on the image; and through the workings of movement and rhythm - whether graphic, tonal or gestural - as a means of inscribing a beat and carving a trajectory into the image. This rhythmic inscription can be generated from both sound and image tracks and the relations between them, as for instance in *Ec/static*, *Cunlick* and *Elevation*, where the image and soundtracks seem to beat against and punctuate each other in a sort of mutual imprinting.

In many of these works, movement, sound, timing and light push the image towards ideas of the imprint, the desire for the indexical image - the image bearing the mark of a contact, of an absence. The image-body serves as a major force in this fascination with the indexical image and as such it is often rendered a somewhat precarious form, threatening to fall over into abstraction. At least three forms of this image-body can be distinguished in these works (though these three are neither comprehensive nor mutually exclusive, with many of the works operating with all three and more). These could be provisionally called the light-body (the body as a luminous zone); the pulse-body (the visual or aural figure as a rhythmic force, establishing a sort of beat or pulse across the film or video - and also across the spectating body); and the surface-body (where the imaged body itself becomes a surface to be written upon).

The light-body: the body as a luminous zone which disfigures and erodes textures and forms, threatening boundaries. *The Jar* is exemplary here, with its melancholic ovals of white light which eat away at the rest of the image - a luminance in which it is impossible to tell whether there is a body or not behind it. *White Woman* also works with the light-body, though here also moves into the rhythmic figure: the quality of the reshot, punctuated footage resulting in luminous bodies - almost water colour - whose movements establish a constant light-beat across the image.

The pulse-body appears in a multiplicity of forms in this program, from the step printing of *Eat*, to the tremulous image of *Cunlick*, a tremulousness resulting not just from the repeated and circular movement of the figures, but from the constant vibration of colour and sound. The rhythmic figure is also foregrounded in many of these works by a play with motion and stasis, whether this be through the repetition of

movements and their arrest (as in *Cunlick* and *Ec/static*), or through the continuation of a movement from one figure to another (as in *Le Corps Image*, where the captured movement of the figure projected is followed through by the body which serves it as a screen, the release and relaying of a movement).

Finally the body-surface, which is taken to two different extremes in *Decoding the Link* and *Le Corps Image*. In *Le Corps Image*, there are the bodies serving as screens for other images and the images (of bodies) projected upon them, the film consisting of a sort of mutual seduction of the two. *Le Corps Image* works with the image-body as a surface not only by disrupting depth queues but through an eroticisation of that surface. It becomes a desiring surface from which other image-bodies can be conjured, as in the moments when the projected images emerge from the embrace of the bodies they have been projected upon like photos in a developing tank. The image-body becomes a surface constantly folding in on itself, a surface which makes visible the images projected on it only to swallow them up again.

In *Decoding the Link* this desire for the indexical image is at its strongest. Consisting of an animated series of colour photocopies of bodies, the visual figure or image-body here has a dual nature: it is both an image of a body in a state of contact (pressed against the surface of the photocopier), and also at the same time appears to be the mark of this contact. The effect - enhanced by the quality of the colour like freshly-spilt ink - is that of an imprint, the translucent traces of bodies in motion. This strange presence/absence of these visual figures is further amplified by the way they ascend into and out of sight. The verticality of their movement is similar to that of credits at the close of a film, which also pass before the eyes of the spectator signaling the loss of that which has gone before. More than all else, these images (and this desire for the indexical image) are reminiscent of the 'direct photography' in Michel Tournier's story *Veronica's Shrouds*¹, where the photographer Veronica, who appears as a thoroughly monstrous being, progressively transforms her lover/model Hector into a body which can leave its imprint on a surface without the mediation of a camera. (By the end of the story, Hector, who has suffered various forms of dermatitis as a result of Veronica's methods, has disappeared in to the photos, eroded away by each photo which has been literally peeled off him).

Veronica uses big sheets of photographic paper and quite simply starts by exposing them to the daylight. The only reaction of the sensitized paper thus exposed, without a developer, is that it begins to turn a very, very, pale yellow. After this she immerses poor Hector in a developing bath (metol, sulphate of soda, hydroquinone and borax). The while he's still wet, she lays him down on the photographic paper, in one position or another. After that, all she has to do is wash down the paper with an acid fixative... and send the model off to take a shower. The result of all this is strange, flattened silhouettes, a flat projection of Hector's body rather like, as Veronica actually said in so many words, what remained on some walls in Hiroshima of the Japanese blown up and disintegrated by the atom bomb.²

1. Michel Tournier, *Veronica's Shrouds* in *The Fetishist*, trans. Barbara Wright (Methuen, London, 1984)

2. *ibid* p.106

Le Corps Imagé

Stephen Cummins 1987 (Super 8) Colour 12 mins
Sound- Jon Evans, Cathy Vogan
Dancers- Andrew Charker, Louise Katz, Sue Ellen
Kohler, Chris Ryan, Kristóff Seilhan, Nicole Sorby,
Kevin Woodham.

Le Corps Imagé is a seductive exploration of idealised physical beauty and movement. Cummins' work is thick, luxurious and flows like honey. We enter a slow moving dreamworld of confusing dimension, a webb world from which we may, like Sleeping Beauty, emerge in a hundred years. Linda Apps Filmviews

This work is simply not executed but set in motion. A simple enviroment is constucted: a cave composed of set, lighting, cameras, projectors. Into this restricted enviroment are introduced two variables; one serial, the other continuously variable; the preselected transparencies and the flesh and blood of the actors. From this Theatre of tangible things come film and photographs which dissolve forms into fluids, producing an imagery of the flesh which is unformed..... McKenzie Wark (from *I Was A Hostage of Pleasure* Catalogue essay from LE CORPS IMAGE)

Ec/Static

Toula Anastas 1988 (Super 8 on Video) Colour and
B&W 8 mins

Music and Sound Design- Simon Hunt

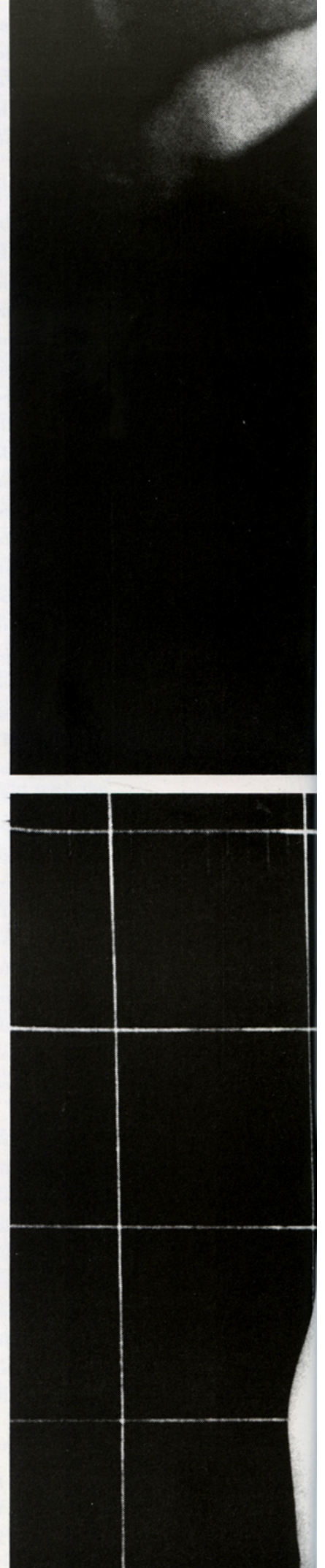
Performers- Charlie Aarons, Jane Elworthy.

In Edward Muybridge's photographic series *Human and Animal Locomotion* what became interesting for me wasn't the way the bodies moved through the space, which was his intention, but how this space had been constructed as a space for scientific observation, and what had been obscured from view.

White Woman

Anne Marie Crawford 1988 (Super 8) Colour 8 mins
Music -Adrian Martin and Anne Marie Crawford

She hides in little cracks. She is able to get herself in behind the edges of doors. She can squeeze herself into these maze like crevices and go in and in. Further and further inside so that no-one can find her.





Ec/Static Toula Anastas



Le Corps Imagé Stephen Cummins

Elevation

Stephen Cummins 1989 (16mm) Colour 11 mins

Music and Sound Design- Simon Hunt

Cast- Christopher Ryan and Herbert Robertson

Elevation is a celebration of gay sexuality, a love story set in an elevator. On the journey we pass a number of stories. The elevator can be transformed from a public space and a private space by the pressing of a button.

Decoding the Link

Benay Ellison 1988 (16mm) Colour 7 mins

Musicians- Cello, Ion Pearce Vocals, Lisa Stevens.

Models- Ariel Ballanchine, Catherine Chang, Benay Ellison, Ara Koopelian, Keith Najjar.

A staccato Symphony in photocopy montage. A new technology contemplation of the Nude.



Anne Marie Crawford

Cunlick

Dalia Shelief 1988 (U- Matic) Colour 3 mins

Sound- Jane Stewart and Dalia Shelief

Its hard to find words to describe a video that deals with the absence of A word. Its easy to visually treat an image taken from a Japanese Band-aid tv commercial. Its harder to treat an absence in language. The absence here is the missing opposite term for the over-used word -phallic - So whats new? Can cunlick replace it? Does it want to replace it? What's the relation between the two? How does the video relate to these words?

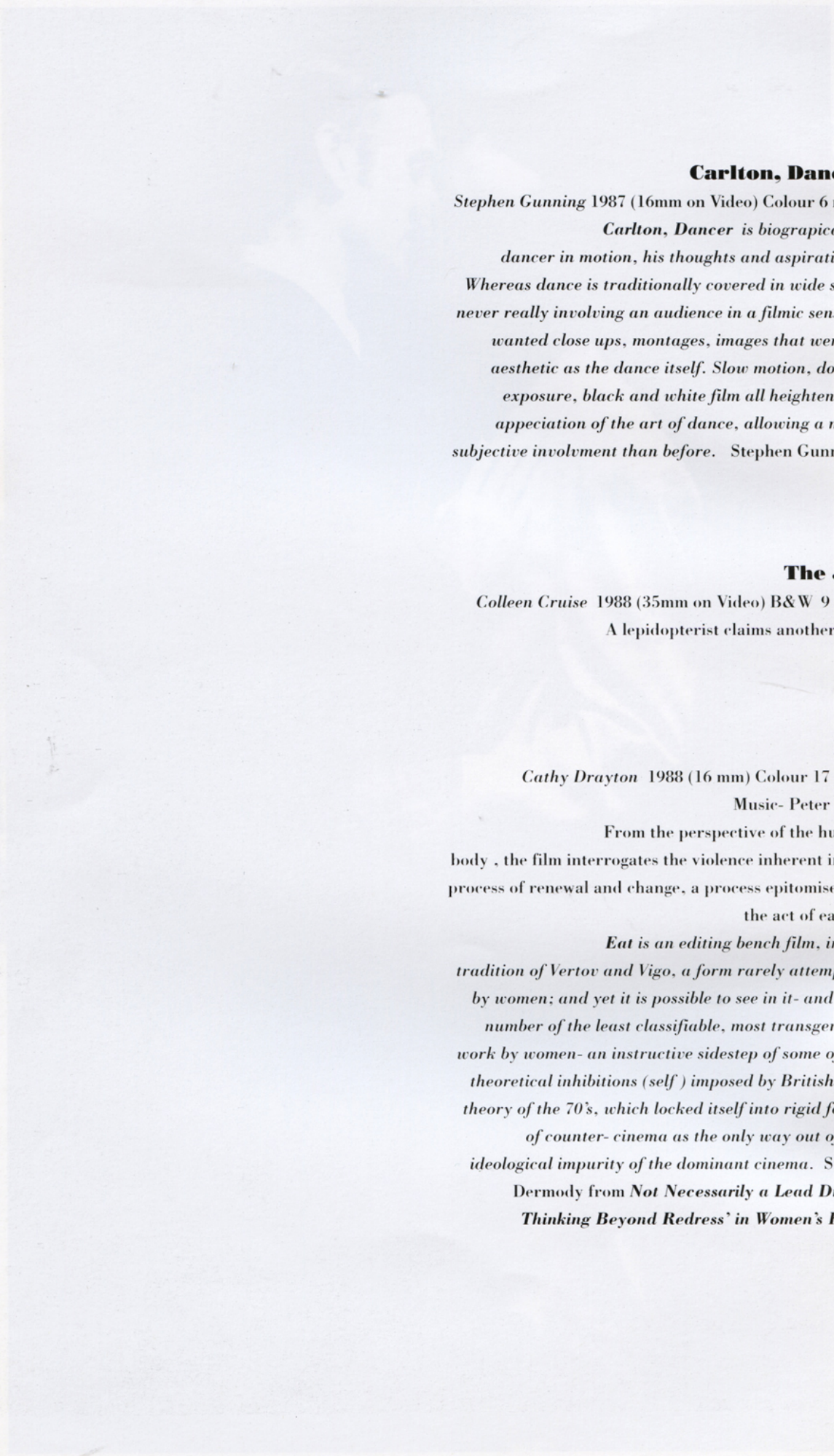
The repetition of the wavy image draws attention to the sound track and breaks the usual dominance of the image. The sound track is composed of voices only; varying in speed and expression where each voice and phoneme tries to find/ lose its position in the structure.

When Simon saw the video, he said:

Are those straight lines phallic?



Elevation Stephen Cummins



Carlton, Dancer

Stephen Gunning 1987 (16mm on Video) Colour 6 mins

Carlton, Dancer is biographical; a dancer in motion, his thoughts and aspirations. Whereas dance is traditionally covered in wide shot, never really involving an audience in a filmic sense, I wanted close ups, montages, images that were as aesthetic as the dance itself. Slow motion, double exposure, black and white film all heighten our appreciation of the art of dance, allowing a more subjective involvement than before. Stephen Gunning.

The Jar

Colleen Cruise 1988 (35mm on Video) B&W 9 mins

A lepidopterist claims another life.

Eat

Cathy Drayton 1988 (16 mm) Colour 17 mins

Music- Peter Reid

From the perspective of the human body, the film interrogates the violence inherent in the process of renewal and change, a process epitomised by the act of eating.

Eat is an editing bench film, in the tradition of Vertov and Vigo, a form rarely attempted by women; and yet it is possible to see in it- and in a number of the least classifiable, most transgeneric work by women- an instructive sidestep of some of the theoretical inhibitions (self) imposed by British film theory of the 70's, which locked itself into rigid forms of counter- cinema as the only way out of the ideological impurity of the dominant cinema. Susan Dermody from *Not Necessarily a Lead Dress: Thinking Beyond Redress' in Women's Films*



Cumlick Dalia Shelif



Eat Kathy Drayton

**This tour was made possible with the assistance of
the Australian Film Commission.**

Special Thanks to the **Dendy Cinema, Sydney** for
financial assistance with the catalogue

Thanks to The Super 8 Film Group, Media Centre
University of Technology Sydney, Toulia Anastas,
Jurgen Bruning, Jodie Brooks, Liz Friend, Paul Fogo,

Gretta Kool, Margie Medlin, Gary Warner.

Cover Image-Cunlick Dalia Sheief

Typeset by Stace Darley

Printed by Snap Printing, Surry Hills

For more information about the films and the
filmmakers please contact: Stephen Cummins,

PO Box A306 Sydney South, N.S.W. 2000,

Australia. or

The Sydney Super 8 Film Group Inc., PO Box 424,

Kings Cross, N.S.W. 2011 Australia.

