The Experimental Art of Arthur and Corinne Cantrill

A thesis submitted in total requirements for
The degree of Masters of Arts (by research)

Samia Mikhail (BL; BA; CFFD)

Department of Cinema Studies
School of Applied Communication
Portfolio of Design and Social Context
RMIT UNIVERSITY
City Campus, Melbourne
Australia
April 2006
APPROVALS

Statement of authorship

This thesis does not contain any material published elsewhere, except where references are made in the text of the thesis. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Signed:
Samia Mikhail

Date: 5 – 10 - 2006
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Arthur and Corinne Cantrill for their support and help in showing me many of their films in their house in Brunswick. They gave me some of the written texts from their multimedia performances and fifteen issues of *Cantrills Filmnotes* magazine and allowed me to interview them three times. They also provided a list of all the articles written about them in the last forty years. The Cantrills gave information about their filmmaking history and the magazines.

I thank Sophie Lisonnet for her help in collecting the articles from the University of Melbourne library.

I thank Cinemedia, in whose theatre I watched hundreds of films from their collection. I thank Sara J. Guthrie for giving me a list of experimental films in the National Film and Video Lending Service.

I thank Jill Grevatt, Sara Zadeh and the Learning Skills Unit for assisting me as a researcher for whom English is a second language.

I thank my supervisor Lisa French for advising me to follow the right steps to solve the many structural problems in my second language as well as reading and advising on the discussion in the thesis.
# CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

3

**ABSTRACT**

6

**INTRODUCTION**

7

**CHAPTER 1**

**Background 1**

An outline of the terms related to this thesis
Experimental film in America, Europe and Australia

**Background 2**

The beginning of the Cantrills' films
Personal, independent and experimental, the collaborative partnership of the Cantrills
The Cantrill's partnership in domestic and professional space

**CHAPTER 2**

**The European influences on the Cantrills**

The London period
Influences on the Cantrills
The influence of Moholy-Nagy
Artaud and cinema, Artaud and the Cantrills

**CHAPTER 3**

**How the Cantrills applied the idea of Expanded Cinema in Australia**

Arthur Cantrill's ANU fellowship
_Harry Hooton_, a Cantrills' film
The launching of the _Cantrills Filmnotes_
The Cantrills' manifesto
Expanded Cinema
Expanded Cinema exhibitions
Rejection
Audience to extend discussion

**CHAPTER 4**

**Landscape films and the theatrical representation of the Cantrill**

The Cantrills attraction to the Australian landscape
Their personal involvements in their landscape work
The duality, landform/film form
ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the effect of the personal history of Arthur and Corinne Cantrill, two independent filmmakers, on their style of filmmaking. It analyses their representation of film-form experimentation within national Australian art in a range of independent film works. It reflects on their cultural relation to the general history of independent filmmaking in Australia, America and Europe. It studies the circumstances that resulted in the appearance of the Cantrills’ experimental film and their relation to international art theories and film experimentation.

This thesis will examine how the Cantrills’ film works, which were often critical of conventional filmmaking styles, and their critical writing, statements and promotion of their independent and experimental film work contributed significantly to theoretical discussion and argument about the physical nature of film within Australia. This examination is explored through asking and answering the central question:

The work of Arthur and Corrine Cantrill is theoretically drawn from a tradition of European arts and visually drawn from Australian landscape and urban culture; can their work be identified and understood as Australian art?
**Introduction**

This thesis comprises five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction provides the main reasons for the choice of the subject, and the need for this research within its field.

The first chapter is divided into two background sections. The first contextualizes the Cantrills’ film work within an overview of independent filmmaking. It deals with a selected history of experimental, avant-garde and underground filmmaking in America, Europe and Australia connected to the Cantrills’ film work. It sets the historical context of experimental film when the Cantrills started their film work.

The second background section provides an overview of the personal experiences and cultural backgrounds of the Cantrills, and outlines how they developed their knowledge of international experimental film and theories. It covers the basic characteristics of the Cantrills’ collaboration, which produced a large amount and a particular style of experimental film work.

The second chapter observes the strength of the relation between the Cantrills’ film work and some major European theories of art, and the effects of the film work and works of art of other experimental filmmakers, and schools of art and architecture. This chapter analyzes the theoretical and the cultural resources that influenced the style of the Cantrills’ film work, which focus on national subjects and international theories and techniques.
The third chapter focuses on the quality and the importance of Cantrills’ experimental regional work produced in Australia. This chapter studies the importance of this period in the Cantrills’ history, answering part of the central question of this thesis. It illustrates how they increased their practical knowledge on the subject of film-form, which is the result of the influences of some European art theories. This chapter inspects the confusion between the spectators and experimental films, and how the artists’ personal statement about their film works enhanced the dialogue on the film-form in Australia. It explores the contribution that the Cantrills made in offering Australian audiences new experiences.

The fourth chapter explores the Cantrills’ intense involvement in a personal, poetic and cinematic relationship with the Australian landscape theme. This chapter discusses the writings of some experimental film critics in Australia who highlighted the importance of the Cantrills’ style. It also examines the style of their expansion into theatrical film-performances and their personal statement about their relationship to the landscape films. It will show how the Cantrills explored largely the possibilities offered by ‘colour separation’ as a film-form study and applied it to their films about Australian landscapes. Therefore, this chapter discusses the production and presentation of many landform films and how they enlarge the awareness of Australian identified themes and examine whether the Cantrills’ work were representing an Australian imagery to answer the central question of this thesis.

The fifth chapter examines the development of the Cantrills’ history by further involvement in the personal themes and self-portrait films and how the personal
history includes aspects of social Australian history. The chapter reflects on how the Cantrills related their continuity as filmmaker to the continuity of film.

I hope through this study to pose and then to explain various aspects of the Cantrills’ film works through their personal history and explore how the quantity and quality of their Australian work became visible nationally and internationally. I hope also to introduce these issues to those who may be newcomers to the topic of Cantrills film works, and provide new sources for scholars, students and those interested in the history of filmmaking in Australia in general.

**Introduction to the thesis**

Arthur and Corinne Cantrill have been life and artistic partners for more than forty years. Both are the makers of more than one hundred and sixty original films and twelve theatrical film-performances. They edited one hundred issues of *Cantrills Filmmotes* magazine from 1970 to 1999, a publication that represents the only continuous record of experimental filmmaking in Australia over thirty years. The Cantrills are well represented in many of the main international experimental film collections and film libraries around the world.

This thesis will connect the Cantrills to their cultural resources and show how they studied and conducted experiments on the theoretical theme of the ‘nature of film’ and applied this to Australian subjects. This created a certain duality that distinguished most of their film work. This thesis will explain the circumstances that shaped the combination of their written historical statements and their films in the history of Australian independent filmmaking, reflecting on the Cantrills’ theatrical
performances, which included their films, themselves and their audiences together to learn about film form.

The aim of this thesis is to answer the following central question. The work of Arthur and Corinne Cantrill is theoretically drawn from a tradition of European arts and visually drawn from Australian landscape and urban culture; can their work be identified and understood as Australian art?

This thesis will discuss how the multiplicity of the Cantrills’ knowledge, from international and regional resources (cinematic, theoretical, cultural and personal), established experimental, independent and Australia film work integrated into the contemporary world of experimental filmmaking.

**Rationale**

Studies and books in the area of Australian experimental film are limited. Likewise, there is a gap in the area of research on how experimental film affects audiences. The work of experimental filmmakers in Australia is marginalized and largely ignored. This research will explain how the Cantrills’ film work integrated theory and practice and how it played an important role in bridging the gap in the knowledge of film-form in Australia. Apart from Cantrills Filmnotes and Australia’s first underground newspaper, Ubunews (Mudie, 1997, p.6) in the sixties documentation of the history of Australian experimental film was poor; until the mid 1980s there was little material, discussion or information about experimental film in general in magazines, newspapers and books. Then some books started to
specialize in experimental cinema in Australia. *Cantrills Filmnotes* constitutes a vast, underutilized key resource used critically in this thesis.

In order to understand their contribution and the size of the influence of the European theories of art on their work, it is essential to analyze the work of the Cantrills within its historical context, record its development and situate the Cantrills’ work within the history of experimental and independent film. Film critic Sheldon Renan explained that the films were called experimental for trying to do things that had not been done before. “But the term was not accurate, because filmmakers were artists expressing themselves and not scientists conducting a logical inquiry” (Renan, 1967, p.22)\(^1\). The term ‘independent film’ was defined by Renan, (1967, p.22) as “free of Hollywood. But the name has been taken by a variety of filmmakers, including Hollywood-type films outside of the studio system.” It was defined by Monaco (1981, p.459), who was explaining the meaning of underground film as, “independent film, made without connection to the usual sources of funding and distribution, usually on small budgets, noncommercial cinema.” Both definitions are suitable to describe the Cantrills’ film work and are the way in which ‘independent film’ is used in this thesis.

It is critical to bring to the fore the history behind the making of the Cantrills’ films and magazines because it increased the knowledge about film culture in Australia and helped to promote discussion about film-form matters. This thesis will indicate evidence of how the Cantrills’ film work exposed audiences to the vocabulary of film, the knowledge of film-form and its creative possibilities, and how to be aware

---

\(^1\) “In the twenties, experimental was a word used to describe the montage films of the Russians. But by the forties it was the word for works such as Deren’s *Meshes of the Afternoon*, Anger’s *Firework*, and Peterson’s *The Lead Shoes.*” (Renan, 1967, p.22)
of Australian cultural subjects and Australian landscape. The Cantrills’ did this by using film as an artistic instrument to improve life through seeing, questioning and understanding.

**Aims**

The aim in studying the history of the independent filmmakers Arthur and Corinne Cantrill was to investigate whether their unique style of film work and writing were influenced by European theories of art. The thesis considers a range of preoccupations (Australian landscape, urban cultures and personal subjects) to see if they reflect European influences.

The co-operation between Arthur and Corinne Cantrill gave rise to a huge body of research in the area of film form. This thesis will study the history of the Cantrills in their own word, the circumstances that led them to present their own work, the style of their presentation, and their statements about their exhibitions. Through interviews with them, bibliographical documents and *Cantrills Filmnotes*, this thesis will examine the factors that helped them to turn the influences on them into a productive intellectual body of work. It highlights the important collaboration that occurred since 1960 between husband and wife. The Cantrills are two experimental and independent film practitioners who worked together as researchers, filmmakers, producers, distributors, performers and writers to promote and discuss the theme of film-form.

The history of particular connections and surroundings which contributed to both their filmmaking and their successful co-operative partnership demonstrates how
travel, reading, art movements, festivals and art theories encouraged the Cantrills to adopt the experimental film-form. Studying the history of the Cantrills as independent filmmakers will reveal aspects of their approach to filmmaking and recognize them for their important contribution nationally and internationally.

This research proposes a reading of the Cantrills’ body of film work, and the writing associated with it, with the aim of uncovering the knowledge included in their film research. The thesis explores the experimental nature, quality, aesthetic style, method, content and written historical context of the Cantrills’ film work. European theories of film-form will be mentioned and discussed in relation to the Cantrills’ work, firstly in their Expanded Cinema, and secondly in their major subject, the landscape films, which they called Landform/Filmform.

The Cantrills included in their film work subjects about unrecognized Australian artists. This thesis considers those artists to have constitutes an Australian theme that was then represented to a world audience. Evidence was collected on how the Cantrills, through their personal knowledge and view of Australian landscape and urban cultures and their interest in European theories of art, could compose independent/experimental Australian film work. This research studies the elements of complexity existing in the Cantrills’ film work that made their film work develop a specific Cantrills’ style, different from other film work around the world.

This thesis will show how their personal history serves as a layered background to the development of their art. There will be examples of economic and intellectual factors, both negative and positive, that isolated the Cantrills, affecting the form of
their films and the number of films they eventually produced. Many of the Cantrills’ films are inspired by their own views and reflections on their personal and domestic spaces or their history. Some of their subjects and interests relate to their childhood, their private houses, their travel, as well as the relationships they established in Europe at various times. The Cantrills’ domestic life was well organized to serve their pursuit of making films and exchanging intellectual knowledge.

This thesis will scrutinize the efforts made by the Cantrills throughout their lives to produce experiments and make them available to the public. It considers the effects that their experiments had on the medium of film and illustrates the capacity of the film medium. They have used their own money, family, houses and minds to serve this medium.

Scope

Some major themes and genres in the Cantrills’ history and film work are discussed in this thesis. They form part of the experimentations conducted with film-form between 1969 and 2006 in Australia, and include two children’s films related to the Cantrills’ philosophy of artists’ self-representation and child freedom; documentary films related to the Cantrills beliefs that Australian intellectual artists should be represented, exhibition of Expanded Cinema films where they introduced the influence of European theories of art, some major landform/film-form films and self-portrait films where Australian and personal themes were discussed extensively. This thesis does not discuss the many films and series about children that they made at the beginning of their filmmaking, plus the thirteen films that the Cantrills made about themselves when they were traveling in Asia, mostly in
Indonesia, and the films they made in Berlin. These are about film-form and are personal, but not about the Australia, and therefore they have not been discussed because they are not relevant to the research question of this thesis.

**Method**

The duality of each of the Cantrills’ films caused the research to follow two interconnected directions. The first path discusses the relationship between the film work of the Cantrills and the theoretical history of film-form. Evidence taken from their writing will testify to the meaning of this relationship. Most of the practical research of art theories that the Cantrills adopted revolved around the physical nature of film and extended into ‘pre-cinema history’, which, when referred to in this thesis, refers to the period when scientists were developing experimentation on cameras and projectors before the realization of the first moving pictures.

The second path explores the Cantrills’ use of Australian themes (including their personal themes) in their filmmaking and the textual statements they made about their film work. These two paths combined revealed the Cantrills’ unique aesthetic style.

The history of the Cantrills was followed chronologically in order to delineate precisely the evolution of their art. The films discussed in this thesis are those that created new eras during the evolution of their film practice. The achievements of their particular aesthetic style, during their research into film-form, is examined by relying on primary sources and other sources, which help to set out the basics of the
Cantrills’ method of work and politics, and this research will include evidence of their economic independence from, and relation to film funding bodies in Australia.

This thesis records some of the available public reaction to the Cantrills’ film work, to offer a picture of the relationship between audiences and experimental film. However, there are interviews with the Cantrills about this subject and this thesis will include a discussion of their philosophy.

The films and magazines produced by the Cantrills are a rich source of data that have been useful but are necessarily limited to the Cantrills’ perspective and, therefore, other research has been used.

The major sources of research in this thesis are mainly qualitative, in the form of first hand information derived from interviews conducted by the researcher with Arthur and Corinne Cantrill (from 1999 to 2003). These interviews gave a subjective perspective on their experimental film, and assisted this research to explore important questions and to interpret the work within its context. In these interviews, the Cantrills pointed to the major issues and movements in Australia during their lives, through their personal historical descriptions. They provided an index of their work to this research and an index of articles written about them. Information was drawn from Arthur Cantrill’s memoirs, from the articles that Corinne Cantrill wrote about their history and from her self-portrait film *In This Life’s Body* (1984).
The Cantrills’ statements about their films are essential for the purposes of this research given the relative paucity of research available. In the period between the 1960s and the 1970s, critical opinions and analyses about experimental, avant-garde and underground cinema were rare in Australia. Most of the articles written in the 1960s and 1970s, by people from outside the experimental film scene, are mainly descriptive and expressed surprise at the entity that was experimental film. The radical writing of the Cantrills in particular (their manifesto and major claims against televions people and narrative cinema) is of interest. The practice of the ‘personal’, the ‘subjective’ and the ‘individual’ in their language is a process that helped construct the many articles in the Cantrills Filmnotes. I will refer to this kind of writing where appropriate. This thesis will recognize and examine the efforts the Cantrills made as individuals in introducing their research on film-form to Australia.

For filmmakers like the Cantrills, personal statements about their work were part of their philosophy to create connections with audiences. The Cantrills defined their work and clarified many issues about the failure and success of some of their experiments; they could also connect their work with events that were impossible to discover in any other resource. They explained their relationship with each other, with their work and with film funding bodies. They talked about their own independent workspace (in their domestic space), as a model to set an example for other independent filmmaker in film industry.

Additional information included in this thesis was collected from articles, films or magazines and interviews with other filmmakers. I watched the Cantrills’ films and numerous other Australian experimental films especially UBU films, John Dunkley
Smith films, Michael Lee films and many others in order to see the Cantrills in the Australian film context of that period. Then I watched many of their available films again, this time in the context of European art theories as the Cantrills interpreted their relation to them in their Cantrills Filmnotes. I compared information and made sure that the dates and periods were correct and valid. I examined the quotes from the interviews and related them to the historical events. I found evidence of the climate and context of experimental film and filmmakers in Australia from descriptions given by Australian filmmakers in a variety of newspapers and journals. This thesis draws on information gleaned from a bibliography of articles written about the Cantrills in Australian newspapers, on-line materials, books and film encyclopedias and Cantrills Filmnotes. Articles directly related to the Cantrills and to other experimental films from the same period were used in this research. The critical observation of this thesis, is influenced by the theoretical writing of many Australian critics such as: Andrew Pike, Dirk de Bruyn, Sam Rohdie, Adrian Martin, Kris Hemensley, and Rolando Caputo.

The Cantrills created not only their art, but also their version of a critical text that related their art to the history of art theories and practices. Their many statements about their work were necessary for this thesis because of the lack of critical writing about experimental films in Australia. It is a tradition for avant-garde, experimental and underground filmmakers around the world to write personal statements about their work because of the many individual varieties of styles. Sheldon Renan, (1967, p.17) said that “there are almost as many different kinds of underground films as there are underground filmmakers.” Many articles written about the Cantrills’ films, especially in the 1970s, were simply trying to explain how their films differed from
commercial types of films. This shortage of critical writing about experimental filmmaking explained the necessity of the *Cantrills Filmnotes* magazine, which was full of individual statements of filmmakers, theories of film-form and manifestoes by film theorists. Very few critical articles discussed the knowledge that existed in the Cantrills’ research about film-form, or related their work to the historical researches of film-form in Europe or America. This thesis will read the Cantrills according to many previous experiences of experimental film work and it will use the insight of previous critical writing and restructure it inside the critical text of this thesis. The act of criticism, however, is a second language superimposed on the original language that is the film work and its statements in this case. This thesis will highlight the art theories in relation to the Cantrills’ work by the original writers and the interpretations of the Cantrills to explain how the Cantrills transfer this previous wealth of art theories into a contemporary practice of film.
CHAPTER 1

Background 1

An outline of the terms related to this thesis

Some terms relevant to this thesis are explained in this section and describe films that broke away or oppose commercialized cinema for example, ‘experimental film’, ‘avant-garde film’, ‘underground film’, ‘abstract film’, ‘independent film’, ‘pure cinema’, ‘hand made film’ etc.

‘Experimental film’ is used to describe unique experimentation in the film area, and is used also to mean avant-garde film. For example, film critic Parker Tyler explained that after 1920 a whole gamut of technical means was soon in use among the avant-garde (more generally known as experimental) filmmakers. This finally included direct painting and drawing onto the film strip (Lye, McLaren and others) (Tyler, 1974). In the 1960s, the UBU group in Sydney and the Cantrills at the beginning of the 1970s named this type of film work ‘hand made film’. Hans Richter declared that the avant-garde developed during the decade 1921-1931 and that, beside being ‘non-commercial’ and ‘non-representational’, it was ‘international’ (Tyler, 1974, p.157). Renan (1967, p.21) explained: “Avant-garde means in the front rank, or the newest thing. The first film avant-garde was in the twenties, it rose out of modern art, especially dada and surrealism1, and so the films, like the works of arts, were called avant-garde.” Film critic Philip Drummond (1979, p.10) saw that avant-garde films have a less direct relationship

1 Clair’s Extracte, Ray’s Emak Bakia and Bunuel/Dali’s Un Chien Andalou.
to dominant forces of production: “These films will be produced outside the dominant systems of production and exploitation and hence place themselves in a different and usually less stringent economic relationship to audiences.” Film critic Robert Stam (1989, p.55), distinguished between avant-garde types: “The films of the avant-garde were defined not only by their distinct aesthetics, but also by their mode of production, usually artisanal, independently financed, with out links to studios or the industry.” Ian Christie usefully distinguishes between three distinct movements:

(1) The Impressionists (Abel Gance, Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, and early Germaine Dulac), who are closer to a kind of national ‘art cinema;’ (2) the partisans of ‘pure cinema’ (Fernand Léger, Later Dulac); and (3) the surrealists (Christie, in Drummond et al., 1979). In political terms one can distinguish between a high modernist avant-garde preoccupied with autotelic form, and a ‘low’ carnivalised, anti-institutional, and anti-grammatical avant-garde which attacked the art system (Stam, 1989, p.55).

In his book, Theory of Film, Siegfried Kracauer explained the split between avant-garde films and mainstream narrative:

The avant-garde artists broke away from the commercialized cinema, not only because of the inferior quality of the many adaptations from plays and novels that swamped the screen. However, more important, out of the conviction that story, as the main element of feature films, is something alien to the medium, an imposition from without. It was a revolt against the story films as such, a concerted effort to shake off the fetters of the intrigue in favor of purified cinema. The literature of the time abounds with protestations to this effect. In 1921 Jean Epstein called the story a ‘lie’ and declared categorically: “There are no stories. There have never been stories. There are only situations without tail or head; without beginning, center, and end.” (Kracauer, 1960, p.178).

---

Two terms have been popular in describing personal films during the second half of the 1950s and run up to the present; they are ‘independent’ and ‘underground’. Renan, (1967, p.17) declared that ‘underground film’ as a definition is risky, but he defined it anyway as the following: “If it can be called a genre, it is a genre that can be defined only by cataloging of the individual works assigned to it. The film medium is full with possibilities, and the underground filmmaker has widely explored these possibilities.”

He explained that an underground film described an attitude of the determination that the films should be made and should be seen despite all economic and legal barriers (Renan, 1967, p.22) and an underground filmmaker tends to make films of things in his/her actual life: “He uses people and places from his own life, because they are what he has feelings about. But actual life for the underground filmmaker may be only raw material to be manipulated into the form of his personal perspective (Renan, 1967, p.25). ‘Abstract films’ are described by Renan as films without a subject; they are abstract or non-objective. Their subject is their pattern, their rhythm, their sense of light and colour (Renan, 1967, p.31). Malcolm Le Grice confirmed in his book Abstract Cinema and Beyond that Wassily Kandinsky is credited with the earliest abstract painting in 1910 and Kasimir Malevich is the initiator of suprematism. However, Le Grice mentioned that the first abstract films made between 1910 and 1912 were the films of Bruno Gorra and Arnaldo Ginna. After 1915 other artists including Hans Arp and two of the artists who contributed directly to abstract film, Eggeling and Richter, began to explore the possibilities of motion and transformation using simplified geometric forms (Le Grice, 1977, p.16).
‘Independent film’ is a term Corinne used for the films produced by the Cantrills’ cooperative filmmaking that is separate from commercial and narrative film production. They also used other terms such as ‘film-form’, which is used to describe their investigation of, and experimentation on, the physical image on the chemical emulsion layer on the film base. (For more information, see Lipton, 1972, p.51). ‘Filmform/landform’ is another term they used and it refers to their films about the Australian landscape, which includes film-form experimentations and landscapes subjects. The Cantrills also used the term ‘hand made film’, which means film made without a camera, by scratching and drawing directly onto the film material. ‘Unstaged reality’ means in this thesis the filming without preparation of the mise en scene.

Experimental film in America, Europe and Australia

America and Europe

The Cantrills started their filmmaking in Australia in the 1960s in a time when artists, filmmakers and theorists in many places around the world were excited about changing and creating new waves in visual arts, conceptual arts and theoretical and critical writing about art and film. Experimentation started to appear in many aspects of human life. New experimentation in the film medium increased discussion about the physical nature of film and asked the question: what is film? The experimentation in and about film challenged the film medium practically and theoretically. American experimental
filmmaker Jonas Mekas has described the independent and the avant-garde as the opposition of Hollywood cinema, describing it as the dynamic that kept the film medium alive:

I would say that bohemia is an oppositional way of life, as compared to the rest of society. This duality is always needed, it produces a dynamic; energy is created. ... If you eliminate the oppositional cinema, the same as if you eliminate bohemia, cinema would become dead. Certain energy would go out (Frye, 2002, p.10).

Waves of experimental cinema appeared for short periods and then disappeared in various countries in the 1960s. The cooperation of experimental filmmakers in this period produced remarkable, independent, experimental, underground and avant-garde films. Experimental cinema stimulated the relationship between audiences, art and film and increased the understanding of the capacity of the physical nature of art and film. Experimental and underground filmmakers came from diverse backgrounds. For example, the Andy Warhol Factory group in the sixties in New York came to underground filmmaking from the medium of visual arts. Film critic Parker Tyler (1974, p.35) described Warhol’s style in the following way: “Warhol’s anti-film has meant a significant anticlimax for the avant-garde movement because it represents a primitivism lodged in the limitations of film’s strict technical beginnings.” The American artist “Harry Smith has been a painter, a student, a heroin addict and an alchemist and he has utilized all these activities in his work” (Renan, 1967, p.178). New York's movie life was very busy in the fifties. Its vivacity was described in an interview with Jonas Mekas:

... on 42nd street between Sixth and Eighth Avenue, there were maybe fifteen movie houses, and you could see everything, and spend all night watching
movies. You could see four or five westerns. You know, they were specializing: westerns, imported European films – ‘art’ films, they were then called – comedies, short subjects, newsreels and so on (Frye, 2002, p.3).

Mekas believed that in the United States “there was and still is, the oppositional cinema. It managed to keep alive, though it seems sometimes like there are three or four years where it falls asleep. Then it picks itself up again” (Frye, 2002, p.3).

The exporting of the American underground films to Europe started in 1958 according to Renan in his book *The Underground Film* (Renan, 1967, p.223). The Brussels Experimental Film Competition invited the most celebrated American underground filmmaker Brakhage to show a retrospective and he won awards. Renan wrote:

As a project of the New American Cinema Group, David Stone took fifty-four independent productions to the 1961 Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. … The real underground assault on Europe took place in 1963 and 1964 with the forming of the International Exposition of the New American Cinema. First presented by Mekas at the Third Brussels Experimental Film Competition, and then shown in museums and schools all around Europe by P. Adams Sitney, this selection of underground work received unbelievable publicity and caused not a few student riots (Renan, 1967, p.223).

Filmmaker Valie Export explained that the incorporation of modern linguistics of art, music, philosophy, psychoanalysis, etcetera, nourished European culture that had been destroyed during the First and Second World Wars. “The period of the 1950s and 1960s was a segment of history marked by artistic innovation and political provocation” (Export, 2003, p.2). In London after the mid-sixties interest in the ‘underground’ film was growing. Curator of The London Filmmakers’ Co-operative and British avant-garde film (1966-76, May 2002) Mark Webber explained that early pioneers such as Len Lye, Antony Balch, Margaret Tait and John Lathan had already made remarkable personal
films in England, but by the mid-sixties interest in underground filmmaking was growing.

“On his arrival from New York Stephen Dwoskin demonstrated and encouraged the possibilities of experimental filmmaking and the Coop soon become a dynamic centre for the discussion, production and presentation of avant-garde film” (Webber, 2002, p.1). Figures such as Peter Gidal, Malcolm Le Grice, John Smith, Chris Welsby, Annabel Nicholson and Jeff Keen went on to become internationally celebrated filmmakers (Webber, 2002, p.1). Arthur and Corinne Cantrill were in London from 1965. They made variety of films in London and witnessed the excitement of London underground filmmaking. Corinne described it:

Large numbers of Americans and Europeans came there to work, and the Arts Laboratories were set up. These are being set up all over England, in provincial towns, everywhere. They’re not subsidized, people put money into them themselves, and all kinds of people, artists, potters, theatrical people, filmmakers, work together under the one roof (Hall, 1969, p.47).

British experimental filmmakers made significant innovations with multi-screen films and expanded cinema events, “producing works whose essence was defined by their ephemerality. Many of the works fell into the netherworld between film and fine art, never really seeming at home in either cinema or gallery spaces” (Webber, 2002, p.1). Filmmaker, artist and academic Peter Mudie described how the developments of this particular type of film, which utilized the medium of film as a platform for experimentation in the sixties, related to earlier experimentations:

From the *Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich in 1916, through the Paris based Dada and Surrealists period of the 1920s; and the rise of the New American Cinema in the 1940’s – this was a cinema that very often provoked suspicion and outrage. Yet, by the early 1960’s it was clear to see that this particular form of cinema would be
able to sustain its momentum parallel to the radical proliferation of alternatives being explored in other forms of art, and (to a large extent) separate from the politicizing demands of capitalism. In particular, the American avant-garde was able to incorporate a high level of speculation upon various (and at times disparate) developments of the past similar to that within theatre, literature, music and the static arts of the 20th century. As those films began to circulate around the world, a critical / theoretical base developed, others began to acknowledge the possibilities proffered (Mudie, 1997, p.8).

The Cantrills in their *Filmnotes* (issue number 5) believed also that the sixties art and film movements were connected to the theories of art in the twenties. They invited filmmakers and critics to investigate this radical and important period, “when electronic technology was getting under way and able to translate the intuitions and predictions of the previous decade” (Cantrills, 1971, p.9). They believed that the main influence and resource were the theories of Artaud and the manifesto of European Futurists Cinema3, written in 1916 by Marinetti, Analdo Ginna, Giacomo Balla, Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli and Remo Chiti. Valie export believed that the Expanded Cinema works in the sixties in Europe related to the futurist manifesto: “The mission of the Futurists was fulfilled in the multimedia, intermedia activities of ‘Expanded Cinema’ under the motto of the expanded concept of art” (Export, 2003, p.4). However, Malcolm Le Grice4 in *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Le Grice, 1977) thought, that the Futurist Manifesto was invested into only a small quantity of the works of the twenties. He also thought that the

---

3 The futurist manifesto quoted by Malcolm Le Grice in *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977, pp.11-12): The manifesto understood cinema to be an autonomous art, one must face the cinema as an expressive medium in order to make it the ideal instrument of a new art, immensely vaster and lighter than all existing arts. It must become anti-graceful, deforming, impressionistic, synthetic, dynamic, and free-wording. One must free the cinema as an expressive medium in order to make it the ideal instrument of a new art, immensely vaster and lighter than all the existing arts. We are convinced that only in this way can one reach the poly-expressiveness toward which all the most modern artistic research are moving.

4 A member of the London Film-makers Co-operative that was founded in 1966. It was based upon the artist-led distribution centre created by Jonas Mekas and the New American Cinema Group. For further information see Webber (2002, p.1).
activity in Europe and especially Paris between the wars\(^5\) largely evolved from the Surrealists influences of the pre-First World War period and from the vast experimental sphere ‘Soviet montage’\(^6\) in the early twenties Soviet Union. “The artists whose abstract work has most in common with the aim inherent in the early film movement were all Russian.” For more information see Le Grice (1977, p.16).

In his book *How to Read a Film*, American film critic James Monaco named Louis Delluc, in France, as the first important esthetic theorist of film. And European filmmakers as Abel Gance, Jean Epstein, Germaine Dulac, Rene Clair, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp provided practical examples of film as art while the commercial cinema produced little of value, while German Expressionists\(^7\) set about consciously raising the esthetic standards of German film (Monaco, 1981, p.241). Then came the other Soviet filmmakers mentioned by Monaco who made films after the First World War between 1924 and 1930 and whose films remain major landmarks in the history of cinema, especially *The Battleship Potemkin*, probably the clearest example of Eisenstein’s influential theories of montage. For more information see Monaco (1981, p.243).

Dziga Vertov was developing his theory of (film truth) in his films *Kino Pravda* (1922-25) *Kino Eye* (1924), and *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) (Monaco, 1981, p.243). Vertov has turned away from the most fundamental illusion of film, the illusion of

---

\(^5\) First World War and the Second World War.

\(^6\) As named by David Brodwell & Kristin Thompson in *Film Art* (1986, p.359).

\(^7\) Writer Carl Mayer, Designer/painters Hermann Warm, Walter Rohrig, and Walter Raimann played significant roles in the movement, as did directors Robert Wiene, Fritz Lang, Murnau and Paul Leni. For more information see Monaco (1981, pp.241-242)
movement, and forged ahead with the notion of the pure materiality of film, thereby conclusively defining certain semantic problems. In 1935 he wrote in his journal (Aus den Tagebchern, Vienna, Austrian Film Museum, 1967):

A quite different task confronts you, if the subject is complex and if you can only use an individual frame for its construction which, ranged alongside each other, are no more than letters of the alphabet. You must form words out of the letters, phrases out of the words, and articles, sketches and poems, and so on out of the phrases. This is no longer montage but film writing! This is the art of writing with film-frames (Weibel, 1979).

This celebration of experimental filmmaking in Europe flourished after slow post war periods, where political history affected European avant-garde cinema, as described by Austrian Valie Export, independent avant-garde filmmaker and artist:

The bankruptcy of European culture in 1945, the attempt to jump over the graves of 25 years of political darkness and to find a connection with the avant-garde movements of the 1920s and the avant-garde that had been exiled left their imprint on the efforts of the artistic groups of the post-war period. While the majority of the European population turned blithely toward a purely economic project of restoration, groups of artists and intellectuals attempted to uncover the foundations of European crisis and culture, and to find new constellations by connecting with oppressed and forgotten movements in art and thought, from Dada to Surrealism, from linguistic philosophy to constructivism. This mood also redefined concepts of cinema and film (Export, 2003, p.2).

In Australia

At the ‘History and Film Conference’, which was held in Canberra in 1981, the Cantrills’ paper included historical information on Australian cinema. They outlined that they considered the films of the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer in 1901 as the first experimental films known in Australia, the second being the experimental films that Len Lye made in 1921 in Sydney. There is no recorded research or information about
experimental film in the 20 years between Spencer’s and Lye’s films. Film critic and filmmaker Albie Thoms wrote:

The existence of some sort of ‘experimental’ film activity, in this early period, is evidenced in a reminiscence by Len Lye, a New Zealander now regarded as one of the greatest avant-garde film artists, whose film art was not recognised until he was given freedom to develop his research with the GPO Film Unit in London in the 1930s and later in New York. In the American magazine Film Culture (29, 1963) Lye recalled: ‘Sydney, Australia, was where I learned animation ... This was in 1921 ... I experimented with painting on film but I let it go because there was a lot of things I wanted to do’ (Thoms, 1978, p.77).

Lye has been described by the Cantrills (1980), and Renan (1967) as the pioneer of this genre of ‘hand made’ filmmaking. He introduced it to the experimental filmmaker Norman McLaren, who became renowned for his work in this genre with the National Film Board of Canada.

None of the writing about experimental film in Australia mentioned the existence of any experimental film activity between 1921 and 1952, for example, Cantrills Filmnotes (Breailey, 1971, p.43); Albie Thoms’s article ‘The Australian avant-garde, 1972’, (Thoms, 1978, p.75); and Janet Merewether (2003, p.132). Film academic Tom O’Regan gave a picture of the general situation before the sixties: “The post war Australian feature cinema up until the decisive explosion of the 1970s was significantly – and mostly – a consequence of the outreaching of other national cinemas – British, American and even French and Japanese cinemas” (O’Regan, 1996, p.73). Ken G. Hall (1980, pp.8-9) described the period from the mid-1940s to the 1970s as “the Dark Ages of film production in this country.” The cultural colonization and the economic situation in the forties and fifties in Australia stifled most filmmaking activity. The formation of
‘Experimental Film Productions’ at Melbourne University by Gil Brealey in 1952 was a beginning of a change in alternative film scene. In that year, Gil Brealey made some films and became the president of the Melbourne University Film Society. This information is taken from an interview with Gil Brealey from the first Australian Filmmakers’ Festival, Sydney 1971, and published fully in the *Cantrills Filmnotes* (Brealey, 1971, p.43). A glance at the economic situation of filmmakers in Melbourne in that period is described by Gil Brealey:

It should be remembered that money was not free in those days and we were among the first wave of working class students to get into universities. There were only six State high schools with small matriculation classes in those days. Government and education scholarships had just begun and we lived on $6 a week. It was the shortage of dough that stifled filmmaking, besides it was more fashionable to write poetry or act up with the drama club. Film was still a rather dubious art form. The film industry in Australia was dead without even the occasional documentary of note until *Back of Beyond* in 1954 (Brealey, 1971, p.43).

However, Thoms thought it possible that there was experimental filmmaking but it is unknown given that there is not any research into this area in Australia. Thoms wrote that “it is possible that another Len Lye was working somewhere, his discoveries being ignored, as commercial filmmakers fought to survive foreign takeovers of their means of production and distribution” (Thoms, 1978, p.78).

The Cantrills recorded as much information as they could find about the history of Australian underground, avant-garde, independent and experimental films in the *Cantrills Filmnotes*. They meant to fill as much as possible of the gap that was created by the lack of research in the experimental film area before the sixties. They published the article by Gil Brealey (1971, p.43) as historical evidence of Brealey’s individual effort made at that
critical time in the history of Australian film. The Cantrills Filmnotes played a recognized role in republishing many important details about experimental and independent cinema. Arthur Cantrill introduced this article and mentioned that “many people affirm the important contribution Gil Brealey made to the Melbourne film scene in the 1950s” (Brealey, 1971, p.43). Brealey called his group Experimental Film Productions though they were not really involved in making ‘experimental’ according to any definition of experimental film, but their film work doesn’t belong to “entertainment and ‘leisure’ complexes”, as film critic Philip Drummond (1979, P.10) defined the dominant cinema. And it can fit in the category of alternative cinema. “The cinema of the avant-garde pose a number of alternatives to mainstream models, determined by a different set of ideological imperatives and motives” (Drummond, 1979, p.10). Janet Merewether documented in her research:

Aside from films made by Gil Brealey’s experimental Film Group formed in Melbourne in 1952, and the work of Norma Disher and the Waterside Workers’ Federation Film Unit based in Sydney, there appears to have been little in the way of independent short filmmaking in Australia, aside from home movies, before the mid 1960s. However, techniques associated with the avant-garde traditions from the US and Europe started to filter into Sydney during this period, especially though the UBU group (Merewether, 2003, p.132).

Thoms believed that many of what were called ‘experimental’ films were merely the efforts of young filmmakers to train themselves in film craft. This was after 1956 when numerous “experimental, underground and avant-garde filmmakers around the world self-financed their film activities to gain access to the few available film producing organizations. These were … television companies or groups depending on television as a market” (Thoms, 1978, p.78). Thoms related between the absence of an established
industry, undeveloped medium of experimental film which was unfamiliar to Australians and the act of many Australian filmmakers who financed independently a personalized productions from television sales (Thoms, 1978, p.78). The way Arthur and Corinne Cantrill started their filmmaking is a true example of what Thoms wrote.

The Cantrills witnessed the economical history of experimental film from the fifties onwards. They wrote for the Australian Film Commission review: “In the 1950s and 1960s, 16 mm film stock and processing were inexpensive, and films were self funded” (Cantrills, 1999, p.145). Australia followed the rest of the world, and the Australian experimental scene started to become busy at a later stage in the sixties. A look at the history of experimental film in Melbourne shows that the number of experimental films began to increase in the early 1960s. This coincided with a number of important events in the development of film in general. There was “the beginning of the Melbourne and Sydney Film Festivals, the establishment of the State, National and Embassy Film Lending Collections as well as the growth of film societies, greater access to tertiary education after World War II” (Cantrills, 1999, p.145). Some artist-immigrants arrived from Europe during the sixties: for example, Dusan Marek, a Czech surrealist painter, at one stage a member of UBU (Mudie, 1997, p.6), Stanislaw Ostoja-Kotowski and Ludwig Dutkiewicz, two Polish artists they arrived in 1949, all three of whom settled in Adelaide; and photographer Giorgio Mangiamele, who settled in Melbourne (Cantrills, 1999, p.145). Arthur Cantrill stated that Ostoja-Kotowski’s projection of multi-media Sound and Images performances 1956 in Adelaide, were the closest to the Cantrills’ type of expanded cinema. The Cantrills saw his show in Adelaide and it influenced them (Mikhail, 2000a).
The major problem for many experimental filmmakers in Australia was that Australian newspapers and journals at the beginning of the sixties were not involved seriously with critical writing on this new cinema. Some questionable forms of critical inquiry were being developed on avant-garde films in the sixties in the form of statements from experimental filmmakers themselves as they wrote descriptions and manifestoes on their own films. These difficulties accompany experimental, underground and avant-garde films to this day. Sam Rohdie (1980, p.183) explained a consequence of this: “The discussion of the avant-garde film has been outside the terms of general film debate, as if ‘on its own terms’. In practice of ‘on its own terms’ has meant a discussion of avant-garde film in relation to artistic modernism and work in the traditional arts.” Most of the film theories that are developed and worked on are about narrative film. Narrative film theory tended to neglect avant-garde film and theories of avant-garde film have equally tended to neglect the relation between avant-garde film and narrative film (Rohdie, 1980, p.205)\(^8\).

Many people who started to make this ‘experimental film’ in Australia came from a non-film background. Albie Thoms gave the example of Bruce Beresford’s *The Hunters*, 1960,\(^9\) Duzan Marek’s *Adam and Eve*, Adelaide, 1963, and Arthur Cantrill’s *Australian Flora* Series, Brisbane, 1963. Thoms saw that this series presaged Cantrills later genuinely avant-garde work, as the films explored the natural phenomena and the nature of perception of the film medium (Thoms, 1978, p.79). However the Cantrills (1979,p.43)

---

\(^8\) See Peter Wollen’s “‘Ontology’ and ‘Materialism in Film’”, Screen, Vol.17, No. 1, Spring, 1976.
accused the book of Albie Thoms\textsuperscript{10} of “a total silence on the work of many other very interesting filmmakers working in the early 1960s, especially those from Melbourne. Not a word about Paul Winkler’s early work, he began working in film in 1962 without guidance from UBU.” This criticism shows some tension between the Cantrills in Melbourne and UBU in Sydney, when both groups are important in Australia’s alternative film history.

Compared with their European and American counterparts, Australian experimental filmmakers were not as prolific at the beginning of the sixties but by the mid-sixties there was an explosion of experimental and independent filmmaking. Contributing factors at the time included the political climate, opposition to the Vietnam War, the sense that alternative lifestyles were possible, and the new waves of filmmaking in Europe and North America.

Sydney’s experimental filmmaking began in the early 1960s with the artists David Perry, Garry Shead and Peter Kingston. In 1963, Albie Thoms with Bruce Beresford had already made \textit{It Droppeth as the Gentle Rain}, presciently to do with global pollution, and based on Jacques Prevert’s surrealist ballet. David Perry had completed in 1964 his own animated film \textit{Swansong in Birdland} (Thoms, 1978, p.79). In Melbourne there were young filmmakers such as Philippe Mora, Chris Lofven and Nigel Buesst, who made \textit{Fun Radio} (1962), which the Cantrills (1999, p.145) described as a dynamic celebration of

\textsuperscript{9} Is a poetic expression of a personal response to kangaroo shooting
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Politics for a New Cinema}, Albie Thoms, 1978, was one of the rare books written about avant-garde cinema in Australia in the 1970s.
commercial radio in the context of a Melbourne summer, with a complex layered soundtrack. Ken Shepherd began filmmaking with a 20 minute experimental portrait called *Les Gilbert: The Making of an Artist* (1963) and German born Paul Winkler began making 8mm films in 1963.

The formation of the first consciously avant-garde filmmaking group ‘UBU’\(^{11}\) in 1965 followed a casual discussion between Albie Thoms and David Perry. They collaborated on the production of *The Spurt of Blood* (1965) for Thoms’ multimedia stage production *Theatre of Cruelty* taken from a play scripted by Artaud.

UBU films was Australia’s first group devoted to making experimental films, and the first Australian organization to establish extensive network for the exhibition and the distribution of independent films. UBU produced Australia’s first lightshows, and published this country’s first underground newspaper, *Ubunews* (Mudie, 1997, p.6).

Paul Winkler made his first 16mm film in 1967. “His early films were a kind of experimental documentary, but with *Red and Green* (1968), he got on the personal style of a vigorous, even visceral use of colour, texture and format.” (Cantrills, 1999, p.145) David Perry made *Sketch of Abigail’s Belly* (1968): “Described as a poetic expression of the beauty and urgency of pregnancy, the film was considered obscene and banned by the censors until 1970” (Merewether, 2003, p.132). John Dunkley Smith, a well-known Australian visual artist who used film medium extensively in his artwork, is considered

\(^{11}\) Peter Mudie said of the UBU film group: “Formed in 1965 by Albie Thoms, David Perry, Aggy Read and John Clark, its early filmmaking associates included Bruce Beresford, David Stiven and the extraordinary Garry Shead. They were later joined by such diverse filmmakers as Nigel Buesst, Paul Cox, Bruce Petty, Jim Sharman, Peter Weir, Dusan Marek, Yoram Gross, Paul Winkler and a schoolboy named Philip Noyce.” For more information see Mudie (1997, p.6).
an experimental filmmaker. He witnessed some cultural and film activities of the sixties in Melbourne, and said that the experimental film in the sixties was not really connected to the film industry.

The way that I got involved was when I was at art school in Ballarat, in the final year they introduced the subject that was called History of the Arts, which was supposed to be a broad subject, history of various art forms. My geography teacher was teaching at my school for years. He runs the very conservative Hollywood British narrative film, ... then he decided to run a history of cinema course ... he did show some experimental film like the New American cinema in the sixties. ... He showed that, as a small section of that history of cinema of course. I remember at the same time around 1969, I read about a show that the Cantrills did in Melbourne at the Age gallery called the Expanded Cinema, they had *The Boiling Electric Jug* film performance it involved multiple projections ... I came down to see that exhibition, and I came to see a film by Stan Brakhage. Those two things together interested me because I have been interested in kinetic art. I, was interested in art that changes rather than static like painting. Films have possibility to experiment with things that have motion in them. I came to film from the art perspective rather than the film industry. John Dunkley Smith quoted in (Mikhail, 2000c)

A remarkable aspect of film culture in Melbourne in the sixties and seventies was the solid support for it from teachers in high schools and colleges. “Several teacher-artists stand out: Lloyd Jones at University High, then Roy Irvine at Melbourne High and Graeme Cutts at Seaford Carrum High, then at Rusden College” (Jones, 1996, p.43). This collective supported and increased the understanding of experimental film in Melbourne. Art teacher Lloyd Jones described how the influences of art spread in the world and how film festivals began to have an impact on the world of education.

I was intrigued and inspired by the Canadian Film Board’s fostering of experimental films. Works that reflected on the screen the earlier theories and attitudes of visual arts movements I had studied in my training years as a prospective art teacher. In the mid 1950’s at Prahran Technical College, we were privileged to have William Splatt as our lecturer in the History and Appreciation
of Art. Bill reasoned that the real art of the twentieth century was to be seen on the screens, not canvases. The powers that were disagreed, and he belligerently announced the fact that he was not allowed to include ‘Film Appreciation’ in this course. He volunteered to provide us with a course after hours in his time, and ours! (Jones, 1996, p.43)

Ross Gibson has said that the “experimental scene started the new Australian cinema” (Mikhail, 2000b). The Cantrills (1999, p.144) believed that their personal challenges guided them into film experience as “the result of a certain state of mind, an attitude born of personal freedom; a sense of adventure, resourcefulness, and a need to achieve something new in film.” The Cantrills associated themselves with a group of researchers, theorists and experimentalists in film.

The next section will set the independent film works of the Cantrills into the core of their collaboration, which produced important research in film-form combined with a huge record of Australian films.
Background 2:

The beginning of the Cantrills films

It is the filmmakers who create the art of cinema; it is through reflection on those individual films we have liked (or we have disliked) that we have gained insights into the art of the film (Metz, 1974, p.3).

In the fifties, Corinne worked for the Children’s Library and Craft Movement (C.L. & C.M.) in Sydney. She described it as “pioneering children’s libraries before the government entered this field. The movement encouraged child art and self expression in many forms, while the schools still had us drawing apples and pears with mean little pastels” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.116). Corinne went to Brisbane to live in 1957. She established a branch of the C.L. & C.M. there. Arthur was sent up by the Sydney organization to help Corinne with a big school holiday project. He also worked for the movement, this time as a specialist in puppetry (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.116). Arthur recalled their meeting in his memoir:

I helped set up and run the outdoor creative leisure activities outside the library, and, as told in Corinne’s film In This Life’s Body, decided to stay on, and prepared to make the move to Brisbane to live with Corinne and her 3 year old son, Aaron. We sold the house she had bought, and purchased another house with a big garden in Indooroopilly. Our son Ivor was born. I had to find a job in Brisbane (the children’s centre had no funds for staff) and after unsuccessfully trying to design puppets for TV commercials, applied for a job as cutter and splicer at ABC TV, which was about to start transmission in Brisbane. I spent a day with Gunnar Isaakson in Sydney learning to splice 16mm film, and he wrote a reference to support my application, which was successful. In a couple of years I was promoted to film editor in charge of the Film Editing Section, mainly concerned with news film, but also film ‘inserts’ for other programs (Cantrill, 2003).

When Corinne and Arthur began filmmaking, the C.L. & C.M. was making a series of films about children’s creative activities for the ABC Children’s Hour. “We had a
talented group of children coming to the Brisbane Centre at this time, so we proposed that we make a series of films about the work being done in puppetry, collage, painting etc.” (Cantrill, 1987, p.186). They made eleven films\textsuperscript{12}, ten minutes each about children to add to the C.L. & C.M. series that was still being made in Sydney. However, they were the means of building up their film and sound equipment. They bought their Bolex, a 16mm camera, tripod and editing gear and continued production.

The Cantrills gradually disengaged themselves from the Creative Leisure Centre work to give all their free time to their own filmmaking. Corinne Cantrill stated: “Right from the beginning, we established a particular working pattern that we have stayed with since working from home with our own equipment, rarely using hired facilities, never involved with film crews and all that imitation film industry stuff” (Mikhail, 2000a). Two important films of that period were Metal Collage and Making Window Pictures (1962). They are black-and-white silent films about the activities that the Cantrills made with the children in the C.L. & C.M. Centre. These films are a simple idea about children creating their own space. Dirk de Bruyn explained the relationship between Corinne and her mentor, Mary Matheson, who influenced Corinne’s method of teaching art to children. Dirk de Bruyn explained that Mary and her sister, Elsie Rivett, were independent thinking women who had been influenced by the ideas of Herbert Read, who had written about education through art in the thirties in England. They both believed very strongly in

\textsuperscript{12} The National Library destroyed most of those films because the Cantrills’ names were not on them and the library had not realized they were the Cantrills films. Three of them were reprinted when they found out that they had destroyed them. The State Film Centre, which is a separate collection, have other copies, but most of the original have now been found.
developing one’s own working methods. When asked by a child, ‘How do I use this?’ Mary responded: “If it’s of use to you, you will know how to do it” (de Bruyn, 1997a, p.7). This pioneer method aimed to establish independent artists and was a feature of the Cantrills’ films from that time. They saw working with children creatively in this way as work that could lead to critical social change. When they applied this method to their film work they knew that they were leading a critical change in filmmaking. Dirk de Bruyn quoted Postman, who said:

Good learners prefer to rely on their own judgment. They recognize especially as they get older, that [an] incredible number of people do not know what they are talking about most of the time. As a consequence, they are suspicious of ‘authorities’ especially any authority who discourages others from relying on their own judgment” (Postman, 1969, p.32). This quote appears in a section about the Inquiry Method that seems a lot like the approach that Mary Matheson was promulgating in that it pushes the onus back onto the ‘students’. The Inquiry Method attempts to deal with three problems that McLuhan has characterised as label-libel, the rearview mirror and the non-ABCEDness way of looking at phenomena. Label libel refers to the tendency of dismissing ideas by the process of naming them. That false assumption that if you know its name, you know what it is. The rear-view mirror is about our preoccupation with where we came from and our need to define the terms of the past technologies and languages, rather than our immersion in the now. ABCEDness refers to a linear perspective, which hides from us the non-linearity of things, the idea of multiple answers, perspectives (de Bruyn, 1997a, p.7).

The simplicity in the films Metal Collage and Making Window Pictures serves the method of the centre not to direct the child but to make the material available and watch how the child expresses his individual view. The same philosophy about child freedom, later was carried out strongly through Corinne’s film In This Life’s Body, where she examined this theory, using the story of her body to question what would have become of her if she had had the opportunity to express her individuality at an early age. (The Cantrills also practised this method with their autistic child Ivor, a child visual artist who used his own style of naïve art without any interruption from his parents.) Since Metal
Collage and Making Window Pictures, the Cantrills have established a base of cinematic and visual language to express the many facets of their work. Their attitude to film has always been about this need to create new ways, new skills of thinking that look forward to new kinds of films. The Cantrills’ suspicion of authority started there, when they decided that it was best for the child artists in the Centre to follow their own pathways. Dirk de Bruyn (1997a, p.70) saw the beginning of the Cantrills’ future film style when he watched Metal Collage and Making Window Picture:

I got the impression that I was witnessing here a development and exposition of the ground rules of the [Cantrills’] later working with the material of film and the cultural and/or physical landscape of Australia. That it should take its point of departure from the immediacy of child’s play seemed significant to me in a place like Australia where its colonial art had no established tradition of its own but depended on the European connection and ignored indigenous art completely. In fact in 1960 Koories were not even considered Australian citizens. We should all know such history about the politics of exclusion in this country.

When the Cantrills began their filmmaking, television had just begun in Australia and ABC television at that time was supportive of film. According to Arthur this support stopped around 1964-1965: “You could make a film silent and they would do the sound track which was a very expensive item in making the film” (Mikhail, 2000a). Many filmmakers did not have professional sound equipment. When the Cantrills started making films, they were having difficulty with sound until the film laboratory advised them to buy good sound equipment. However, the Cantrills’ films in the 1960s kept on the margin of the film industry or what we call mainstream filmmaking as they were trying to lay down a cinematic visual language with a sense of Australian culture.
The Cantrills went on to make children’s films for the ABC independently. They worked for the C.L. & C.M. on the weekends only. Arthur made ten episodes of a shadow puppet series of Homer’s *The Odyssey*.\(^\text{13}\) The Cantrills made several silent interludes for the ABC as fill-in films between programs. The ABC inserted a musical sound track for them, with the exception of the five *Native Trees of Stradbroke Island*, the tracks of which were a mix of sound effects recorded on location and flute music by Nancy Tow. The interlude films moved the Cantrills from children’s and documentary style films into experimental work. They made *Mud* and three other films, four minutes each in 1963: *Galaxy, Nebulae* and *Kinegraffiti*. The experimental films were of abstract images and fireworks, with Music Concrete\(^\text{14}\) soundtracks Arthur made especially for them. Since then Arthur has always done the sound composition for their films, saying, “finding the right relationship between image and sound has always fascinated me” (Cantrill, 2003).

Their next project was a thirteen episode series for the ABC called *Kip and David*. Arthur made a bush elf puppet, Kip, which was both glove and marionette, who interacted with David, who was played by their six-year-old son, Aaron. The films had a nature, art and craft theme. Corinne and Arthur collaborated on the scripts. They recorded and mixed the narration. It had a very big emphasis on nature study.

With all their early films, Arthur did the camera work, as well as the editing and sound. The Cantrills were also making short films to try out all sorts of ideas and skills, to learn

\(^{13}\) See filmography at the end of this thesis.

\(^{14}\) French term means (montage of music made of non-musical sources.)
the craft. Selling those films to the ABC was not so easy, so all these films had to be made anonymously.\footnote{Arthur claims that the ABC would not have bought any if they knew he had made them because he was an ABC employee. “One day I hid at the back of the garden when two high-level ABC executive men, in Sydney ABC, came to discuss a contract with Corinne. They wanted to know if we had named ‘Kip and David’ after ABC executives Kip Porteous and David Stone” (Cantrill, A., 2003).}

The Cantrills struggled to get the films accepted and be paid a decent price. The ABC tried to buy material as cheap as possible. “So much energy went into this battle of wits, and this was at a time when it was ABC policy to support local filmmakers. When Sir Charles Moses left the ABC in 1965, the policy of local support came to an end and we could see it was time for a move” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.116).

**Personal, independent and experimental, the collaborative partnership of the Cantrills**

The history of the Cantrills’ family is related fundamentally to their film work and relevant to contextualize the thesis question. When the artistic collaboration started between Arthur and Corinne Cantrill, they were already established as the owners of a house and their income was increasingly spent on acquiring film equipment (Cantrill, 2003).

In her statements for the book *Don’t shoot darling!* Corinne described their filmmaking as “a sort of family cottage industry” (Freiberg, 1987, p.334), but Kris Hemensley calls it “co-operative organization” (Hemensley, 1984a, p.26) Corinne also stated: “Our
filmmaking has always been a sort of co-operative organization!” (Mikhail, 2000a). In 1977, Corinne evaluated her work relationship with Arthur, after seventeen years of collaboration:

In many ways, it is very difficult talking of our work (meaning the joint collaboration between Arthur and myself) in an experimental area of filmmaking in Australia. Arthur and I have a good working relationship. We both work very hard and contribute equally to films. There is no director, assistant, manager or servant. We both use the camera, though we often do things that require four or six hands. We work on the editing and sound together, trying out ideas and possibilities to arrive at the best solution. If there is a conflict on a certain point of editing, or development, we try it both ways to arrive at a decision, and if in doubt, we never rush a decision, we might leave a part of the film in for further consideration after seeing it a few times hope that the right direction will be clear. We both do our share of drudgery, Arthur does the editing and splicing for example and I do the administrative work, book keeping, ordering materials and chasing work from the laboratory (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.121).

For Corinne, an independent filmmaker must be a resourceful person. He/she must know the possibilities of his/her medium and must understand the physical and chemical nature of the material processes and the equipment used at every stage, as well as using this knowledge for intelligent economy of means. She specified that ‘experimental’ is a term that is different from the term ‘avant-garde’ or ‘underground’ and again it is different from the term ‘personal’ film. “I see ourselves as ‘independent’, ‘personal’ filmmakers, the words ‘experimental’, or ‘avant-garde’ in particular we would consider pretentious” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.121). Corinne saw that the word ‘experimental’ had been misused by opportunists and there is no area of creative activity in Australia so maligned, disliked, misunderstood and dismissed like this area. She explained the misunderstanding of the meaning of the term ‘experimental film’, especially from the funding bodies: “The film establishment … for years had a thing called the Experimental Film Fund which was
mainly to fund work lacking in any experimental qualities”. Corinne, who has a low regard for professional commercial filmmaking said they are “predicated on an assumption of wastefulness” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.121). After 17 years of experience in independent experimental and personal filmmaking with Arthur, she advised:

You have to organize your personal life so that he/she has the time and money to be able to keep working. And having done the work, to be able to find the people who will want to see. I have always believed that if something is of interest to me, then it must be of interest to some other people too (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.121).

However, the Cantrills’ film work has connections to many sorts of alternative films but it is hard to categorize their experience. Andrew Pike illustrates how the Cantrills’ cooperation was different from mainstream avant-garde art.

It is easier to say what the Cantrills' cinema is not, than to say, what it specially is. Few of their films fit easily into established schools of radical or avant-garde film. Both in their content and historically in the process of their making and exhibition, the Cantrills' films exist separately from the mainstream of the past underground and the present alternative cinema with their co-operative organizations and assertive political ideologies (Pike, 1979, p.2).

The Cantrills’ films aren’t experimentation on film-form only; most of the Cantrills’ films have an Australian subject. Neither are they underground films as defined by Parker Tyler (1974, p.31): “It is the democratic ideal of free expression.” They work differently from the young underground filmmaker who according to Tyler (1974, p.32) “gets unlimited credit for good intentions, so that regardless of his ability to realize the ideas, regardless of the ideas themselves, the fact that he wants to use film as a medium of self expression is, in advance, the chief virtue of whatever he may produce.” Each of the
Cantrills films is a study in the physical nature of film, a study mixed between experimentation on film-form and personal choice of subject. They did not work on film for freedom of self-expression as in underground film, neither was their main purpose to oppose the medium of narrative film. Some of the Cantrills’ films have personal stories, such as In this Life’s Body (1984), The Berlin Apartment, (1987), The Becak Driver – superimposed (1999) etc. but they treated their stories differently from narrative films (see chapter five of this thesis). Some of the Cantrills’ films are abstract films or visual art films, such as in Myself When Fourteen (1989) and Meditations (1971). When the Cantrills colour the material of a film, they do it without ignoring the camera’s role. Although Ivor coloured himself stepping in Myself When Fourteen this was filmed with a camera.

The Cantrills’ films are different from other filmmakers’ work because of the plurality of collaboration, which join the two professional and artistic individual minds of Arthur and Corinne plus Ivor (in the Cantrills films about him). The Cantrills made few hand-made films without a camera but most of their work was filmed by a camera and they coloured, scratched and drew on top of their films. In UBU’s Hand Made Film Manifesto, one of the descriptions was “Let photography be no longer essential to film-making -- Hand Made films are made without cameras.” (Thoms also quoted in Mudie, 1997, p.77) What is the art of the Cantrills? Critic Sam Rohdie explained: “If subject matter to the Cantrills is thought of as some kind of content, and process as its formation, what they institute ideologically is a notion of coherence as a mutual unity of content and form”

16 Hand Made Film Manifesto, written by Albic Thoms and signed by the UBU group.
(Rohdie, 1980, p.189). Andrew Pike read the Cantrills’ experience slightly differently: “The Cantrills can be seen to adhere rigorously to a private set of ideas that has evolved from within their own work. Theirs is a self-contained, self-generated cinema, consistent within its own logical framework.” (Pike, 1979, p.2)

To name the Cantrills’ film works as personal, independent and experimental, it will only enlarge their title. Their work is personal but it is objective as it concerned with experimenting on film-form in each film. The Cantrills’ experimental “film was not just their chosen medium, it is in a sense, their message: its material properties have been at the heart of their work for four decades.” (Hawker, 2000, p.1)

Described by Andrew Pike (1979, p.2) “The Cantrills are artists concerned with seeing, not seeing through an ideology to perceive political and social realities, but seeing through the eyes, and so to discover the wonders of sight.” Their target is to create awareness through the eyes of the spectator, “Their films look at familiar objects and re-perceive them for us, re-create them in ways that reveal textures, shapes, light and movement to us” (Pike, 1979, p.2). There is a connection to Artaud’s description in Cinema and Reality: “We have yet to achieve a film with purely visual situations whose drama would come from a shock designed for the eyes, a shock drawn, so to speak, from the very substance of our vision…” (Artaud, 1976, p.151)

When the Cantrills started, experimental film was not supported financially. They funded their individual research and experience. Their freedom to experiment was necessary as
the only way to make progress in their work. In my many interviews with the Cantrills it became clear that they believe in the importance of what they have been doing and their co-operative method of work, their knowledge about, the chemical (color, printing and processing), the electrical (camera light and projector), the theatrical film-performances set involvement, and the way they organized their life were all necessary to be able to produce work continuously. Their choice of the subjects, the connections that they made with film organizations overseas and the publishing of the *Cantrills Filmmotes* all helped their film work to keep blossoming.

Kris Hemensley (1984a, p.26) described the complexity of their relationship: “The degree of collaboration between Arthur and Corinne Cantrill is unique in contemporary art, or at least uniquely productive, which deserves a study on its own.” Each represents a different piece of the jigsaw puzzle that makes the work successful. Arthur is the technical artistic side of the Cantrills’ filmmaking process. His background as an electrical engineer has assisted him in a logical way of thinking and fed into his understanding of the physicality of film, the functioning of the camera and the projector. It assisted him to see things from an intriguing perspective but he was not alone. Corinne helped create films with him. She is the financial and business side of their co-operative organization. He was the guy taking the pictures and doing the editing at the beginning, then later Corinne joined in when he had a problem with one of his eyes. (Freiberg, 1987, p.334)

To develop an understanding of their relationship we now look at the shared philosophy of Corinne and Arthur, a collaboration which resulted in huge research in film-form
theories, history and recognition of Australian-identified subjects. Corinne was drawn to researching the very personal subject of her own view. Discovering and promoting her individual view as an artist was most important. She was the one in the partnership who wanted to relate the film experience, the objective, to the personal experience, the subjective. The films they have made about the landscape in Australia happened in Corinne’s special places. Arthur was drawn into discovering the history of the anthropologist cinematographer Baldwin Spencer while Corinne was discovering the magical site of her childhood and her subjective response to remembering it. If their partnership was dominated by Arthur’s skills in filmmaking and the discovery of the capacity of film in the first ten years of their career, it was dominated by Corinne’s love of the Australian bush and landscape in the rest of it. They exchanged interests: Arthur made many landscape films with colour separation techniques and Corinne made films studying the entering of the light into her living room. Corinne’s Light Shards (2001) is a film influenced by creation of the idea of cinema as projected light. Their films and most of their written articles are signed by both of them and it is difficult to guess whose idea is in each film or whose article it is in the Cantrills Filmnotes. There was no resolved answer until the Cantrills themselves declared in their interviews that Corinne filmed a few films by herself (cf. p.130 of this research) and Arthur added sound to them later. Arthur also did work by himself on some children’s films at the beginning of their collaboration. Most of their work had a shared credit. They cannot remember exactly who suggested what at the time of the making of the films. The inflexible attitudes that led to the lack of support for the basic culture of films and made some experimental filmmakers
suffer in Australia could not stop Corinne and Arthur from questioning the attitudes toward film-form in Australia and encouraging their audiences to learn about it.

The reasons that made many articles in the seventies ignore the efforts of Corinne, when journalists and film critics wrote about the Cantrills’ films, were many. First, Arthur was publicly known as the one who received the fellowship, he was an editor in some ABC and in BBC television programs and he was the head of the Media Arts Department at the Melbourne College of Advanced Education later on. Corinne’s life before she met Arthur was unknown as she had already spent five years of cultural absorption in London, Paris, Rome and Copenhagen in the fifties, and had lived by freelance journalism and teaching English in Europe. The many articles Corinne wrote (to be visible) about the importance of her involvement in their collaboration explained the descriptive details of her life stories, as did Corinne’s autobiographical self-portrait experimental work *In This Life’s Body.*

Their appearance in their theatrical sets shows further their roles in their collaboration. Arthur was involved more with taking the pictures behind the camera at the beginning of their filmmaking and he was the man seen behind the projectors screening their films. He explained the importance of his involvement behind the projectors: “When looking at two screens, I have to decide which one I am going to concentrate on and in that decision lies how I will relate one image to another” (Stevens, 1987, p.4). Corinne appeared as a character in their films whereas Arthur rarely appeared as a character. It was necessary for Corinne to explain how she started gradually to be involved behind the camera,
insisting that her job as distributor selling the films was the most difficult part of the production.

I participated with the filmmaking with Arthur, taking part in all the decisions of filming, editing and sound. I came up with ideas for films, some good, others not so good. I did all the business side of the work; the most critical part was selling the films to the ABC for a good price and terms. It was a struggle to get a fair deal, and invariably meant refusing the first offer and insisting on a better one. The films were sold to film libraries, and quite early on, I started to sell the films to overseas television – New Zealand especially at this time. (Mikhail, 2000a)

Corinne’s involvement behind the camera added a different touch to the Cantrills’ films. The films that Corinne filmed by herself like *At Eltham* (1974) and *Light Shards* or made about herself such as *In This Life’s Body* are quite different to the films they both made, not in terms of the aesthetic style but in the way the subject is treated. Her films fully explain her ideas. Her stories are very descriptive and go in many directions to fully explore the themes visually and in words. Many of Corinne’s films involved humanistic matter and analysis while Arthur and Corinne’s films made together concentrated more on forms. Most of the films that are Arthur’s ideas are musical and full of technical explorations of film technology such as: editing, study of colour and colour separation and study of light; but Corinne takes her place between the accessories in the theatrical set. Corinne’s remarkable voice is recorded in many of the Cantrills’ film performances with spoken text. Especially their films are about Australian bush and landscape. This subject is emotionally related to Corinne, who was a botanist in her youth. However, Arthur mentioned that the Australian landscape is the only thing he likes about Australia.
The Cantrills partnership in domestic and professional space

The Cantrills mixed skillfully between domestic and professional spaces. They collaborated in various different types of locations: the artistic, the domestic and the scientific. Firstly, their house was used as domestic space and as a studio for editing. Secondly, there was the artistic space where their theatrical sets took place. Thirdly, there was the un-staged space in front of the camera, which swayed between the domestic (inside their house and outside it, travelling) and the landscape. The many films about their son Ivor, were made in his domestic space where he explores freely his profession as visual artist or his mise-en-scene without any repression or manipulation from the filmmakers. The Cantrills recorded many films about different situations from Ivor’s daily attitudes when he worked in his favorite drawing spot. Each member of the Cantrill family appeared in some of their films. No one dominates the other. They had a laboratory at home, where they experimented with film materials, hosted the film work they took in the un-staged space. The theatre hosted the work done in the Cantrills’ other non-created spaces; the casual, domestic and the natural landscape, that they loved, were represented.

The Cantrills’ films and performances offered to their audiences many opportunities to know about the Cantrill family and their involvement with film. They made many films about their house, for instance domestic aspects of family life: the chair with Corinne enjoying the sun in the backyard, their flowers, their cat and Ivor’s drawings and his Christmas cards. Their own films were their self-mirror. They recorded light entering the windows, and certain items they liked in the house. Their family life was organized in an
atmosphere suitable to make films. They used what was convenient for their films from their vicinity. They exhibit themselves to serve an idea in a film but, at the same time, they recorded real situations in their lives such as Corinne and Arthur sitting on chairs while the natural light changed in the living room in *Interior Exterior* (1978). They also recorded themselves in their films when they traveled to Bali or Europe, for example, *The Becak Driver – Superimposed*, they had a friendship with a Balinese shopkeeper and they funded his dream shop and made a film about the process. In the landscape films, the Cantrills went outside their domestic space. They had themselves, the camera in their hands and the land. They recorded the land in all sorts of possibilities.

They also worked as technicians imprisoned in their own house studio, face to face with the endless experimentations, which were reflecting their intellectual involvement with film as a chemical product and with film editing. The second space is their laboratory, where they made many printing experiments on film gages (35, 16 and 8 millimetres), discovering colour intimacy with film. They recreated the film experience in their own laboratory as scientists to create suitable colour.

In the created and staged space, they screened their films in theatres. The theatre is where they showed the multiplicity of spaces in their art staging film materials taken out of its natural context to participate in a theatrical artistic set. In the Expanded Cinema shows (terms and description in Chapter 3), they projected films, light and slides on multiscreens, objects and variable surfaces. They also manipulated the colour in front of the projectors. They included the sound of taped music and they performed next to the screen.
using their voices. The accessories in each performance were an extension of the same nature of the subjects in the screened film. Sometimes they involved audiences as part of the theatrical film-performance sets in some projects. In the Cantrills’ theatrical film-performances, they express their many messages, their theories about film as the art of light, aesthetic style, film-form processes and the content of their films. The Cantrills offer all these combinations of their style to their audiences to connect them to the elements of film process and capacities. Critic Andrew Stevens (1987, p.4) saw in the Cantrills’ performances an unexpected job for the audience: “There is much more work on the part of the viewer in taking it all in. People do not expect to do this kind of work when watching a film.”
CHAPTER 2

The European influences on the Cantrills

The London period

The Cantrills were not very well known as filmmakers in Australia before they left for London. Corinne recalls: “We decided that the only way we could go on with our film work was to help our son to develop and expand out of the autistic condition. At that time, London had a good reputation for helping autistic children. We felt that our son might benefit from being there.” (Mikhail, 2000a) In Brisbane, John Huntley, a man from the British Film Institute, visited the Cantrills and saw some of their work. He gave a public lecture on the veranda of their house, organised by the Brisbane Cinema Group. This event was followed later by a farewell retrospective screening before they left in 1965 to spend the next four years in London. Corinne revealed another reason: “We went to London also for a change of air, and to try to place our work with overseas TV. This proved to be a good decision for our autistic son and for our work.” (Mikhail, 2000a) Huntley provided a reference and Arthur approached animators John Halas and Richard Williams for a film job in London and succeeded. He became a film editor for Halas and Batchelor Cartoon Films, editing and laying tracks for their television series. Later he joined BBC TV as a film editor first in current affairs, then in the documentary department. The support the Cantrills got from Arthur’s work as film editor at Halas helped them to stay in London for four years. Having to make creative decisions very quickly in BBC film editing was extra training for Arthur.
The Cantrills in London were preoccupied with the pursuit of technical excellence and skills, particularly editing and complex sound compositions using organic, electronic and musical sources. These skills were needed for the Cantrills’ independent organization. They learned that experimental filmmakers do not distribute through commercial channels, as Corinne explained in an interview with Sandra Hall: “Experimental filmmaking is all part of an overall philosophy to life, which has a lot to do with non-materialistic attitudes.” (Hall, 1969, p.47) They decided to create new films of their own as part of creating an alternative society.

The artistic ambitions of both Corinne and Arthur to be artist filmmakers and to create new film work were the main challenge behind all the important events in their lives. The cultural life in Europe in the sixties challenged the Cantrills and encouraged them to move from documentary to experimental film. Making more documentary films would not develop their experience any further from their Australian film experience. The Australian film industry until this stage was making a lot of documentaries and very little experimental film. Tom O’Regan summarized the history of Australian documentary:

Documentary is the oldest continuous tradition of film-making in Australia and one of the most important. Newsreels survived in the cinema, when feature film-making declined in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and during this period the documentary provided opportunities for intellectuals to be involved in the cinema. There is hardly any aspect of Australian film-making – fictional or experimental – which has not been touched in some way by the documentary. The documentary lays most claim to being Australia’s major, even singular, contribution to world cinema and television programming. In virtually every major documentary genre there are outstanding Australian examples (O'Regan, 1996, p.170).
The Cantrills’ information about overseas films before they went to London came from books and some foreign films which had been brought to Australia. Arthur described the situation in Australia as having no film school and no teaching in cinema, only a little bit of film appreciation at high school (Mikhail, 2000a). On their way to England in 1965, the Cantrills read very closely the book by the German Siegfried Kracauer *The Nature of Film*. They described it as the first work of film theory in English. It was first published in 1960 in Britain then republished in 1961.

In the sixties, there were very few books about films to read, a few of them by Kracauer were very intuitive. He was very materialistic, very much pre-occupied with objective reality in cinema, the photographic quality of cinema and very suspicious of abstract film. He thought that this whole thesis was to do with the service of objective reality, of recording the reality in a very objective way, so he is very much interested in documentary. He has some interesting things to say in a time when there was so little else going on (Mikhail, 2000a).

The first two years abroad were difficult ones but then the Central Office of Information, the British Council, and the Arts Council began helping the Cantrills to have their films shown both in England and at European festivals. The experimental filmmakers in London were very well organized. Corinne recalls: “The way they showed their films was to take over a theatre at 11 o’clock, perhaps three nights a week, and charge cheap admission” (Hall, 1969, p.47).

The Cantrills were very active in this period, enjoying and absorbing the cultural life in London in particular, and Europe in general. Two major improvements they made in London were: first they started to enlarge their film skills by experimenting on film-form but with a subject, and second they were identifying themselves as Australian filmmakers and placing their work into the international film scene, which they carried on doing most
of their lives. The films the Cantrills made before London have an experimental element and documentary nature while the films they made in London tend toward enlarging the study of the nature of film as form in relation to a new subject in each film.

Until the end of the London period, the Cantrills’ film subjects were mainly about Australian and European artists and art. Before London, they made a group of five films about an Australian artist under the name of Robert Klippel Sculpture Studies, and these were the most ambitious films the Cantrills made until 1965. They chose an artist who was important for the development of Australian art but was on the margin. The ABC bought and ran the whole of each film. These films were studies of pieces of sculptures, which were very abstract in trying to find ways to express the quality of the sculpture, its energy and the force. The challenge of the Klippel films was to convey three-dimensional work in two-dimensional film. They began to experiment on the capacity of the camera to record the artwork from many angles and movement – recording at the same time their subjective views as the filmmakers. The Cantrills worked with composer Larry Sitsky at this stage. It was a learning experience. Arthur explained: “In one of those films the soundtrack was like a whole group of voices but it is the one voice at different speeds” (Mikhail, 2000a).

In London, they made two films about Charles Lloyd called The Incised Image (1966) and Dream (1966). Charles Lloyd is an Australian artist who they had known in Sydney,

---

17 The Cantrills made films on the drawings of artist Robert Klippel, called: Robert Klippel Drawings, 1947-1963, (1965); the ABC refused to buy this film. Corinne recalled that they were shocked (Mikhail, 2000a).
and who had become a printmaker when he moved to London round 1960. The Cantrills (1979, p.6) consider this film as a survey of his prints where he discusses the ideas behind his work, many of which were derived from Australian landscapes. A documentary but with a more experimental coda that liberated them from documentary constraints. “The film conveys these image sources with a concluding sequence of animated print details cut to a composition of electronic, musical and natural sounds.” (Cantrills, 1979, p.6). In *The Incised Image*, the Cantrills were searching the nature of his printing, his art form as well as their own film-form. The film shows his techniques of dry-point etching, and then moves on to a demonstration of one-plate multi-coloured printing. Lloyd discusses the infinite possibilities for etching the plate and then shows how he evolves a colour philosophy for a particular plate in the proofing and printing process. They used two series of his dry-point prints: Movements and Combats, which featured small parts, bird parts, and human fire in various movements, suggesting to the Cantrills the possibilities of animation as film skills. The film *Dream* elaborates a mix of human and electronically manipulated sounds, depicts cycles of peace and aggression in human society, and mixes the medium of film with the medium of art. The important collective cultural factor in these films was that the Cantrills recorded part of the creative printed visual art history of Australian Charles Lloyd. The Cantrills shot other films trying to recreate the object by moving the camera according to Arthur’s feelings toward the object. They experimented with *Burghers of Calais* (1967) on Rodin’s classical sculptures group in a London park. In this film they experimented with two different light conditions: sunlight and overcast light.
Corinne used the opportunity of being in Europe to sell their films to television in England and Ireland in 1966. She did a lone winter selling trip around Scandinavia, Holland and Belgium. She spent great effort, time and money trying to promote their film work. She had some success in selling the films, especially to the four Scandinavian television Networks, and in getting distribution and entering them into festivals (Cantrill, 1987, p.187). She described her feeling about this trip: “It was this heavy involvement with television people in many countries, which really turned us away from narrative and documentary” (Cantrill, 1987, p.187). Corinne recalls that she suffered while selling their films to television people (Mikhail, 2000a). The many meetings to sell her films created within her a rage against television networks. By expressing her anger, she recorded part of the history of the misunderstanding and split between commercial films and experimental filmmakers. She wanted to record the failure of the television mentality to adopt artistic movements and intellectual artists’ work:

The people who work at televisions are such pigs; there is no other word but neurotic. I remember a French film made about French television for Polly Magoo, just like my own experience in dealing with French television. I remember that I used to do all the selling of the film. Arthur was not involved and he was very lucky. I went to preview some films at French television and this man was saying: “I am so busy, I am so busy.” While he was looking at our film he was also looking at another different film on some monitor and taking phone calls and kept on telling me how busy he was. I thought this is the worst experience I had ever had in my life. Dealing with the ABC after 1965 was even worse than that, so we really wanted to turn our back completely on television (Mikhail, 2000a).

Corinne regretted later their involvement with commercial television: “We did not want to be involved with the neurotic personalities attracted to television, and we’ve never liked the medium. We had also realized that we were not really interested in documentary
work” (Cantrill, 1987, p.187). When she was researching into her life to make her self-portrait film *In This Life’s Body* she admitted that all this effort was a waste of time. She said: “Every success in selling a film to television delayed the decision not to pursue this course.” The course of getting out of documentary wasn’t only due to the difficulty of selling film work to television. It was a convenient time for fundamental changes in the Cantrills’ film work.

The Cantrills refused to set up their own little production company to make and sell films to TV channels, which they considered would be the death of their creativity in experimental filmmaking and the end of their freedom. They decided to earn their living from different sources and use their spare time “intelligently” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.116), according to Corinne. This was the end of a phase of their filmmaking. The Cantrills wanted at this stage of their life to concentrate on studying the physical nature of film. Filmmaking had more possibilities than documentary.

The course Corinne and Arthur wanted to pursue coincided with attending the Fourth International Experimental Film Competition 1967-1968 in Knokke, Belgium. “It was a revelation, a breakthrough. For the first time we were really exposed and we became aware of the large body of avant-garde film from New American Cinema\(^{18}\), plus a lot of interesting work from Germany and Europe” (Mikhail, 2000a). Their attendance at the Fourth International Experimental Film Competition helped liberate them from past experience. A new challenge and vision of film opened up for them to make a major

---

\(^{18}\) See Chapter 1 p.25, for more information on New American Cinema.
decision about their work. It confirmed their interest in making experimental film only.

“‘Knokke’ Experimental Film Festival\(^{19}\) rearranged our thinking about film completely and put us in touch with the worldwide avant-garde film movement in a way we had not experienced before. There were isolated manifestations of the avant-garde in London,” Corinne said (Mikhail, 2000a). The Cantrills knew Malcolm Le Grice and Steven Dwoskin, and their work in London, but it was nothing as wide ranging as the massive representation of the New American Cinema and the important German and European work at Knokke. Corinne described the vivacity of this festival as a powerful generator for bringing together experimental filmmakers from all over the world.

Knokke Experimental Film Festival was really a non-stop day after day of experimental film. There was the Michael Snow premier of ‘Wavelength’. They screened several old experimental works. ‘Knokke’ was the only significant experimental film festival in the world; it was held every five or four years the last one was in 1974-75. ... The one we went to was 1967-1968 always over Christmas and New Year was probably the greatest one of all. It was during the counter culture revolution, the Vietnam War, you know, people came from Japan and Italy and Germany. They did the retrospective on Gregory Markopoulos. Yoko Ono was there and showed her *Bottoms*. It was just the most extraordinary experience and did really change our life. This festival really said to us, we do not want to go and make documentaries; we are going to get out of this. After this festival, we had to go back to London and finish making this documentary, which we began, but we never ever want to make a documentary again (Mikhail, 2000a).

After Knokke, they finished off their film *Henri Gaudier-Brzeska* (1967-1968), a successful documentary. Arthur designed the sound for all the Cantrills’ films in London.

\(^{19}\) A short name of the Fourth International Experimental Film Competition, held in 1967-1968 in Knokke, Belgium.
except for the Gaudier-Brzeska documentary, where they engaged David Lumsdaine as composer.\textsuperscript{20} The Cantrills made another film called \textit{Gaudier-Brzeska Drawings} (1968), a compilation of Gaudier-Brzeska drawings not used in the previous film but which are of interest for art study reference.\textsuperscript{21} It is a Cantrills tradition to use the left-over footage from a film to make another, compiling of the rest of the material into a new film. Possibly the Cantrills did not want to waste film material, especially if they could experiment with the rearrangement of the material. They made another film about the relationship between camera and art object called \textit{Red Stone Dancer} (1968). It was to celebrate their departure from the limitation of the documentary form. They explained:

Several times in the past we had been impressed by the apparent vitality of a randomly arranged roll of out-takes, compared with the laboriously edited film sequences of which they are residue. Based on this idea, the film is virtually a roll of trims from the Red Stone Dancer sequence in the main Gaudier-Brzeska film. It was made in the spirit of iconoclasm very rapidly (Cantrills, 1979, p.6).

The cultural life of London was so intense that they did relatively little work in their free time, just three half-hour documentary films and five experimental short films. The Cantrills began the move into pure experimental film work. The film \textit{Moving Statics} (1969-70) with Will Spoor, Ellen Uitzinger and Tony Crerar, was one of the most important experimental films involving experimentation on the camera’s functions.

\textsuperscript{20} This film was about a foreign young French Vorticist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who died in the First World War. The narrators were Richard Bebb and Daniel Monceau. Gaudier-Brzeska’s associates in London included Jacob Epstein, Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound. Much of the commentary is drawn from Gaudier-Brzeska’s artistic manifesto and all his writings. This film was bought and shown on BBC and other television networks and, as it reached millions of viewers, it is the Cantrills most widely seen film.

\textsuperscript{21} The films were taken up by the British Council and the Arts Council of Great Britain, but the Australian ABC channel refused to buy them, an event that pushed Corinne to make the comment: “they probably do not like artists with difficult names. Who knows how they think, if they think!” (Cantrill, 1977, p.116)
and the editing process. Will Spoor is a Dutch performer, working in abstract areas of movement and mime. He had a considerable understanding of the potential of film and his aim was to extend his work in ways that were impossible in live theatre. They used combinations of animation and in-camera superimposition to create structures of body movements. Their film about Will Spoor was an example of experimenting on documenting the movement of the artist as well as experimenting on the sound, which they described: “Our work in sound composition reached its peak in this film with complex organic and electronically achieved sounds. This was the most valuable collaboration we have had with another artist since Larry Sitsky, an intense concentration of his and our energies and talents” (Cantrills, 1979, p.6).

In *Moving Statics*, the Cantrills experimented with the Bolex camera, exploiting the in-camera possibilities of superimposition and animation. One shot has 32 superimpositions on it. For all these films, Arthur operated the camera, and largely designed the in-camera effects, in collaboration with Will Spoor, “who had lots of ideas” (Cantrills, 1979, p.6), and Corinne. *Moving Statics* changed the Cantrills’ approach to filmmaking in many ways. Arthur’s experience in editing and the creative knowledge of filmmaking are strongly evident in this film, which is about the movement of the human body of a mime artist, edited and superimposed to surprise the audiences and make them aware of film as combinations of frames and camera work. The Cantrills wanted their audience to know about the passage of 24 frames per second that make the motion of a film. For the Cantrills to do that they had to go through many processes of in camera superimposition, single frame shooting and editing to achieve the effect of 32 superimpositions in the film.
Andrew Pike saw in this collaboration that Spoor gained freedom to move and the Cantrills gained freedom to re-form their approach to film:

They presented Spoor in reverse and inverted motion, defying gravity through the device, so simple, obvious and yet bold, of running film backwards and upside down through the projector. His collaborations with the Cantrills not only gave him physical and temporal freedom but it gave the Cantrills the beginning of a new direction for their own work as artists (Pike, 1979, p.2).

*Moving Statics* is a representation of the movement of body through the film. The Cantrills compose this film to show the audience the composition of the moving image per second. They slow the speed of the film projection from 24 frames per second to one frame per second. Visually this experiment is clearly connected to the experiment of Etienne Jules Marey between 1870s and 1880s in France (Ceram, 1965, p.129) and Eadward Muybridge 1872–1897 in America (Ceram, 1965, pp.121-123 and 124). These early photographic experiments paved the way for the development of the motion picture camera. Muybridge was interested in the movement of humans and animals. In one of his experiments, he shot a naked woman kicking an object, with three cameras, each with twelve takes to discover the functioning of the human movement in moving film. This was one of the experiments to create the moving camera and the projector later. The Cantrills used the technology of a created ‘motion camera’ to achieve superimposed effects, which resulted in showing the many different movements of the body frozen for one second. The Cantrills worked with Spoor to record his kind of art in detail. They posed his movement like pausing film frames in time and framed the artist movement. The Cantrills achieved flexibility in making the movement and artistic beauty that they created. It is a scientific film showing an excellent knowledge of the camera and giving
more understanding of the physical nature of film. Spoor used the film medium as an expansion of his work as a mime when he worked with the Cantrills. Both mediums could break through the restraints on human power to move. Andrew Pike explained in Mid-Stream\textsuperscript{22} the nature of this philosophy:

The declaration was essentially non-humanist, voicing a decision to explore subject that lay outside of conventional humanist art with its focus on man, his conflicts and his destinies. As a dancer, Will Spoor sought to move in ways that could not be recognized as conventional animal or human action, in order to provoke new thoughts by confronting the audience with new movements: ‘new movements generate new thoughts’ Spoor quoted in (Pike, 1979, p.2).

The Cantrills were able to come out with different ideas from the film material left from Moving Statics film to make other two films. Rehearsal at the Arts Laboratory (1969-70) was filmed from a still photographic essay of Will Spoor rehearsing a play of Tardieu\textsuperscript{23}, at the arts laboratory, Drury Lane. The photographs were taken before Moving Statics began and were a means towards familiarizing themselves with Spoor’s work. The sound track is a recording made at the time of the photographic session.

They made Imprints in 1969, out of image fragments from the Will Spoor material; they declared that “this was our first manifested involvement with the relationship between film and visual perception” (Cantrills, 1979, p.7). It is in two parts: Retina Imprints,\textsuperscript{24} which was an experiment with persistence of vision, extending and re-arranging movement in time; and Memory Imprints, which were fragments of bizarre images that impress themselves on one’s memory.

\textsuperscript{22} Catalogue Essay about the Cantrills work. Melbourne 1979. (Cantrills, 1979)
\textsuperscript{23} Jean Tardieu, born 1903, died 1995 (checked on google search).
\textsuperscript{24}
Margaret Jones interviewed Arthur Cantrill in London before they left to Australia and he said: “I do not want to make film especially concerned with the human condition or pointing to a moral. If one is to better the human condition, it will be through helping to create a new visual language: the liberation will come through the observance of new images” (Jones, 1969, p.2). This quote shows a strong influence from Artaud’s writing (1976, p.151) about film (mentioned in Chapter 1 p.48).

**Influences on the Cantrills**

There is a connection between the Cantrills’ experience and that of filmmakers in Europe, like the Underground Film Movement in London in the sixties and some American self-portrait and home video films. The Cantrills made a connection between film in Australia and European art. The end of the sixties was an encouraging time for the Cantrills to start new experiments in art and film and to expand their film knowledge. Many aspects about film form, as a subject in a film, were unknown in Australia to large audiences. The Cantrills started to transfer their knowledge and awareness of film and art culture from around the world to Australia through their films.

The Cantrills’ film work displays an understanding and interaction related directly to some European theories of art. This connection has been under-recognised and largely ignored by film and art critics. When the Cantrills adopted ideas from the theories of Europe, it was a choice that led to an exchange of intellectual knowledge. By living in Europe, making connections with filmmakers, showing their films in festivals and galleries, they

---

24 Is the imprint of the image left on the retina/brain for a fraction of a second after it goes from the screen.
introduced to the world of art some regional theories of art through their film performances, in particular the visual works and theories of Australian artists, and the philosophy of Len Lye (see this Chapter) and Harry Hooton (see Chapter 3). Indeed the Cantrills offered discussions of European and local theories for Australian readers on the pages of Cantrills Filmnotes. They decided to publish the Filmnotes in response to the absence of intelligent writing on experimental cinema in Australia. Arthur Cantrill recalled in a personal memoir the availability of critical books about film theories in Australia when they begin to take interest in film:

In the fifties, we were reading Eisenstein theories of film form, they were the first serious film theories published in English. Many people were very enthused by Eisenstein and every thing he made, his writings were our first connection with theories of montage. That was some of the first, what you may call, experimental montage that we saw. There have been French writers but they had not been translated to English yet (Mikhail, 2000a).

The Cantrills made a study of the relation between object and camera in their five films on the works of Australian sculptor Robert Klippel. There is a possible influence from Eisenstein’s style of filming, where he shot the sculptures of the lion from various angles to give movement to the lion, or when he shot the sculpture of the Russian Czar in Battleship Potemkin. Arthur Filmed from various angles and movements around the sculpture and experimented on editing to achieve the maximum effect of the sculpture, following Eisenstein’s connection of shots. Eisenstein’s theory of ‘Intellectual Montage’ was described by David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson: “The maximum effects would be gained if the shots would not fit together perfectly, if they created a jolt for the spectator; he also favored the juxtaposition of shots to create a concept, as we already seen with his technique of ‘Intellectual Montage’” (Bordwell, 1986, p.387). Before
London the Cantrills were influenced by Eisenstein. In London they experimented on the sensitivity of the camera and film material to natural light on Rodin’s sculpture. After London the Cantrills wanted to use other European theories plus their own collaboration of theories. They filmed many objects to try new experiments in editing and the camera’s relation to the object, which added a conceptual dimension to Australian film and a challenge to the filming of sculpture. Filming an object according to Christian Metz gives “a higher degree of reality, and the corporality of objects” (Metz, 1974, p.7). About the reproduction of the object in film motion Metz differentiated between the object perceived and the perception of that object. He argued:

The reproduction resembles the original more or less great, of clues to reality. … The vital, organizing faculty of perception is more or less able to realize (to make real) the objects it grasps. Between the two factors, there is a constant interaction. A fairly convincing reproduction causes the phenomena of affective and perceptual participation to be awakened in the spectator, which, in turn, give reality to the copy (Metz, 1974, pp.6-7).

In the seventies, the Cantrills introduced the theory of Surrealist Andre Breton, who called for a “total revolt of the object” (Cantrills, 1971, p.17). The Surrealist sculptors referred to their work as objects: “Once the object is constructed, I tend to see in it, transformed and displaced, facts which profoundly moved me, often without my realizing it …” (1930s–Alberto Giacometti quoted in Cantrills (1971, p.17). In the Cantrills’ film-performance *Concert for Electric Jug* (1971), they projected a film of a boiling jug on four real boiling jugs located in front of a white screen. The real jugs produced noises and vaporizations, the steam was mingling with the film image which affected the canvas and made it wet and shiny. The real boiling jugs existed live against the filmed jug on the screen. This combination, between the real object and the filmed one, was intended to
celebrate the object for its own sake and to remind the audience of the difference between a real object and its picture. Their films about the objects have relations with important elements of Surrealism, in particular the celebration of the ordinary object: “Ordinary objects were rescued from their conventional surroundings and given different meanings and values in their new context, sometimes gaining a life of their own” (Cantrills, 1971a, p.17). The Cantrills applied different theories to other films, for example, in Passage (1983) they celebrated the branches of trees but this time representing connections to the subject of the film. They expanded the screen with actual physical Australian trees.²⁵

The influence of Moholy-Nagy

Bauhaus artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy²⁶ wrote on cinema, with particular emphasis on his ideas for multi-screens, three-dimensional screens, layers of gauzes etc. This technique eventually influenced the Cantrills’ work in their ‘Expanded Cinema’ exhibition. In Filmnotes Arthur Cantrill helped to introduce the theory of Moholy-Nagy to Australian readers and filmmakers in 1971. The Cantrills’ ‘Expanded Cinema’ exhibition was mainly an exploration of the idea of ‘projected light’ that Nagy explained in his theory of space and time (Cantrills 1971, p.11).

Art movements as universal practices develop and move in connection with one another. Every theory of art relies partly or totally on previous theories and art. For example, when Moholy-Nagy was thinking of multi-screen projection, it happened after Abel

²⁵ It was a special film-performance season at La Mama theatre, Carlton.
Gance had been experimenting with his three-screen ‘polyvision’ in *Napoleon*. Moholy-Nagy saw multi-screen film as a means of achieving a new dimension of simultaneity and space-time. He made a series of kinetic light sculptures, the best known of which is the light display machine, or light space modulator, a mobile construction of steel, plastic and wood with 140 coloured and plain light bulbs activated during a two-minute cycle. The moving parts of perforated metal, mesh sheets, rods and spirals modulated the light, creating a light display on the inside walls of a cube, or any surrounding surface. Moholy-Nagy looked forward to the development of a new “art of light” and saw the potential in film for manipulating light in space and time. He made a film of the abstract images generated by his light-space modulator of his *Light Display Black White Grey* (1930). Moholy-Nagy complained: “The relations of space and light in the cinema situation were absurdly primitive, being restricted to the everyday phenomenon of light rays entering a room through a window aperture.” (Moholy-Nagy quoted in Cantrill (1971, p.15).) Arthur explained that Moholy-Nagy called for research into the action of light and colour in filmmaking. Even in narrative film, he advocated ‘scenery of light’. “Moholy-Nagy looked to film to provide a new space-time visual art. He saw clearly that film, as any other artistic creation, “must fully exploit the characteristic properties of its medium” and “must involve a consideration of the specific potentialities of its medium if it is to achieve an intrinsic ‘organic’ quality” (Cantrill, 1971, p.12). His theories of film appeared to influence many filmmakers for example the London Filmmakers’ Co-

26 Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) was a Hungarian painter, photographer, filmmaker, designer, sculpture, environmental artist, educator, important theorist and practitioner who taught in the Weimar Bauhaus in Germany from 1923 until 1928, where he began his work in colour and light experiments.
operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76\textsuperscript{27}. The main concentration of the LFMC films were studies of light on film material, the relationship between the projector and the screen, and the capacity of editing in creating visual art in film; and there was a single experiment on colour printing. Moholy-Nagy believed that in the future walls would be constructed especially for the distribution of light (such a scenic concept). Light will be a tool for vision in motion rather than a setting for sentimental naturalism (the way light is used in the theatre and film to serve the story) (Cantrill, 1971, p.12). He said: “The scenic background of the future will be conceived as a mechanism for the production of light and shade and as a complex of planes for the differential absorption and reflection of light” (Cantrill, 1971, p.12).

Arthur declared that his work was strongly influenced by the Bauhaus movement. When the Bauhaus art movement started in Germany, they applied their theories to all visual arts. The Bauhaus conducted workshops where the artists made masks, costumes and studied the mechanical, optical, and acoustic requirements of stage work. The students worked on stage sets, studied movement and representation, and were trained in stage direction. They collaborated on productions that took place not only at the Bauhaus but also went on tour, and in the process secured wide publicity for the school. Moholy-Nagy increased the elements, which dazzled the eye visually in theatre, replacing the drama as the main element. The school of design applied within the work of theatre; photography was, in the eyes of Moholy-Nagy, the ideal creative medium for a ‘new vision’. He

\textsuperscript{27} The program shown in the Melbourne Film Festival 2002 and was about the first decade of the London Filmmakers’ Co-operative and British Avant-garde Film 1966-76. It was titled \textit{Shoot Shoot Shoot} and accompanied with a newspaper describing the statement of each filmmaker on his film and a little biography. It was Curates by Webber, M., 2002.
sought in this ‘pure design of light’ new possibilities for the perception and interpretation of a ‘new world’ radically transformed by the impact of modern technology. Moholy-Nagy, with the abstract light-pictures of his photograms, his unconventional perspectives and image depiction, the montage and collage techniques, and the multiple exposures, became a pioneer of experimental photography (Bauhaus, 2003).

In their Expanded Cinema exhibition in the seventies, following the theory of Moholy-Nagy, the Cantrills called on filmmakers to undertake research and experiments in film-form to study its affects on audiences, in order to enlarge the understanding of the capacity of the film medium. Their call encouraged a similar practice by those following the theory of Moholy-Nagy who called for an enlightened, forward-looking application of new technology to improve society:

Emotionally, most people live within the old dimension of anachronistic fixations, tribal prejudices. They are immune against any suggestion for a better use of their resources because in our verbalistic society all such arguments can be answered by counterarguments for the status quo. What is needed is a discovery of the elements of existence, work, recreation and a fearless demonstration of their fundamentals relative to our time without paralogy. We have to free the elements of existence from historic accretions, so that their function and effectiveness will be unimpaired (Bauhaus, 2003).

The Cantrills were also influenced by Moholy-Nagy’s straightforward style of writing, in particular by his description of the situation of art in the world and his invitation to artists to free art from its historic accretions. He decided that “what we need is a rediscovery of the elements of existence, work, recreation and a fearless demonstration of the fundamentals relative to our time without paralogy” (Cantrill, 1971, pp.11-12). The Cantrills declared: “All we want now is the film experience – the optical and aural
stimulation it can give. We want to be intellectually involved with the film form. Concerned with the matter of film, rather than its content” (Cantrills, 1971c, p.3). The Cantrills outlined all the artists, writers and theorists who affected their film work clearly in their statements in the Cantrills Filmnotes.28

Artaud and Cinema, Artaud and the Cantrills

Maurice Saille (1958, p.147) wrote about Antonin Artaud’s influences: “The hailstorm of his thought now batters our own; the harp of his nerves vibrates in the world’s void; and the knell has rung for several transitory forms of literature and art.” The Cantrills were interested in how they could apply Artaud’s theory to a kinetic medium to challenge the traditional expectation of audiences from film. Artaud was quoted in the Cantrills Filmnotes: “I proposed a theatre in which violent and physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theatre as by a whirlwind of higher forces” (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13). The Cantrills explained: “Artaud aimed for an art culture which, rather than be a system of cerebral calisthenics for an intellectual elite, was a ‘culture-in-action, growing within us like a new organ, a sort of second breath’. He looked to primitive cultures as closer to his ideal” (see Artaud, 1958, p.8). The Cantrills raw recording of their subjects is affiliated to Artaud’s ideas, for example their ‘Landforms’ films, which were observing primitive landscapes of Australia. They concentrated on the primitive quality and capacity of nearly every subject they have

28 For example, the article Arthur wrote about Moholy-Nagy (Cantrill, A., 1971), or the article Corinne wrote about her film In This Life’s Body (Cantrill, C., 1984). She explained how some personal writing influence her style of writing for this film, for example D. H. Lawrence’s letters and essays, autobiographies by Kropotkin, Gandhi, Dovzhenko, Anais Nin’s diaries and Sydney Peterson’s The Dark of the Screen.
explored. They went on to try to represent the pure meanings of the land through exploration of the many angles that can be created between land and a camera controlled by a human mind, Australian Aboriginal culture, research of primitive colours, and their research of the primitive anthropological cinematography of Baldwin Spencer. By searching for primitive subjects, the Cantrills opened a large area of study, discovering many angles and possibilities. They chose personal subjects as ideas for their films. For example, their films about their son Ivor Rainbow—Diary (1984), Myself When Fourteen (1989) Ivor’s Ceramic Exhibition (1998) Ivor Paints (1995)—translate a domestic quality as another example, Corinne’s self-portrait film In This Life’s Body, which is characterized by simplicity, used primary resources and basic domestic materials. The Cantrills were defining the terms of past technologies and languages; their art is their mirror, preoccupied with where they come from.

Artaud’s book Theatre of Cruelty (1938) was intended to reassert all the time-tested magical means of capturing sensibility. He was looking for the theatre of the action which replaced all sorts of stages and auditoriums (Artaud, 1938, p.96). The Cantrills interpreted some of Artaud Theatre of Cruelty (first manifesto), explaining that the approaches used by Artaud are described as consisting of intensity of colours, lights or sounds. Artaud (1938, p.97) wrote: “The action of voice will unfold, will extend its trajectory from level to level.” The Cantrills explained that Artaud utilizes vibration, tremours and repetition, whether of a musical rhythm or a spoken phrase, as well as special tones or a general diffusion of light, which can obtain their full effect only by the
use of dissonances. “We shall cause them to overlap from one sense to another, from a colour to a noise, from a word to a light, from a fluttering gesture to a flat tonality of sound” (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13). Artaud’s writing on lighting reads like a formula for an inspired modern environmental light show. The Cantrills described the light as it must recover an element of thinness, density and opaqueness with a view to producing sensations of heat, cold, anger and fear (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13). Artaud invited artists to research “the particular action of light upon the mind. The effects of all kinds of luminous vibration must be investigated, along with new ways of spreading the light in waves, in sheets, in fusillades of ‘fusillades of fire’ in order to produce the qualities of particular musical tones” (Artaud, 1938, p.95).

From the Cantrills’ point of view, Artaud (1938, p.96) was mainly concerned with theatre reformation: “A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle” or “the spectator will be placed in the middle of the action and is engulfed and physically affected by it.” His ideas have had an immense influence on other forms, including music and cinema. In his *Theatre of Cruelty*, Artaud proposed an experience that was directed to the entire organism, not merely to the mind. Acting vigorously on all the senses even to the point of assault – and this was one meaning of the term cruelty (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13). The Cantrills interpreted Artaud as meaning mixed media environmental experiences, combining several art forms, to the point where they can concur in a sort of central expression without advantage for any one particular art.

In the *Theatre of Cruelty*, the spectator is in the centre and the spectacle surrounds him. In this spectacle the sonorization is constant: sounds, noises, cries are chosen first for their vibratory quality, then for what they represent… light is interposed
in its turn. Light which is not created merely to add colour or to brighten, and which brings its power, influence and suggestions with it (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13).

The Cantrills researched and studied the capacity of the film medium and expanded the use of film elements in their Expanded Cinema presentations. These challenged traditional viewing habits, using not only multi-screen projection, but also projections onto specially sculptured screens, some of which abandoned the traditional flat white screen plane, and replaced it with coloured and textured materials. These materials radically alter the projected image, giving it illusions of three dimension by changing colour value, and creating permutations in perception of the same images on the varied surfaces. Their work practices Artaud’s theory of theatre. He wanted his audience to capture the sensibility of the theatre medium by using all sorts of effects. He enlarged and expanded the traditional limit of the use of theatrical elements and experimented on them in different contexts and combinations. The Cantrills quoted Antonin Artaud from his book *The Theatre and Its Double*:

> If music affects snakes, it is not on account of the spiritual notions it offers them, but because snakes are long and coil their length upon the earth. Because their bodies touch the earth at almost every point and because the musical vibrations, which are communicated to the earth, affect them like a very subtle, very long massage. I propose to treat the spectators like the snake charmers’ subjects and conduct them by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions (Cantrills, 1971b, p.13).

The Cantrills saw Artaud’s comments on music as prophetic. He was determined to involve high decibel vibrations similar to vibrations produced by hard rock bands, unearthly sonority [strange, frightening, unreasonable, inappropriate], and wide frequency range electronic music:
The need to act directly and profoundly upon the sensibility through the organs invites research, from the point of view of sound, into qualities and vibrations of absolutely new sounds, qualities which present day musical instruments do not possess and which require the revival of ancient and forgotten instruments or the invention of new ones. Research is also required, apart from music, into instruments and appliances which, based upon special combinations or new alloys of metal, can attain a new range and compass, producing sounds or noises that are unbearably piercing (Cantrills, 1971b, p.14).

Before Artaud, in a London Colliseum program of June 1914, futurists had been experimenting with ‘noise tuners’ and had performed them sandwiched between a variety acts. Performance of Two Noise Spirals was composed and conducted by Luigi Russolo (Cantrills, 1971b, p.14).

The Cantrills always reported this kind of research in the Cantrills Filmnotes, and included the names of the inventors of the earliest experimentation of this kind. They wanted to show respect for the people who had set up the experiment and to play a role in recognizing the art and the artists as diametrically opposite to the politics of the commercial industries, which ignored the experimental arts. According to the Cantrills, Artaud’s statement in Cinema and Reality (Artaud, 1976, p.150) raised a criticism of abstract film\(^{29}\), which would seem to apply to hand-made film:

There is no doubt that everything we have seen up to now under the title of pure or abstract cinema is a long way from reaching what seems to be one of the essential requirements of cinema. Because we are perfectly able to conceive and appreciate the abstract quality, which lies in the spirit of man, we cannot respond to purely geometric lines, without value of meaning by themselves and which have nothing to do with the sensibility, which the camera eye is so well equipped to capture. The effect of cinema should be so profound that it leads one into the spiritual realm. ... Vibration should be generated which correspond to states of mind, which are known or imagined... real or dreamed. The sensibility of pure

\(^{29}\) See p.22 of this thesis for information on abstract film.
cinema should be based on the restitution of forms of this order; following a rhythm, which is the specific contribution of film art. You will look in vain for a film which is based on purely visual situations whose actions spring from stimuli addressed to the eye only and is founded on the essential qualities of eyesight, untrammelled by psychological or irrelevant complications or by a verbal story expressed in a visual terms. The visual action should operate on the mind as an immediate intuition (Cantrills, 1971b, p.15).

There is a relationship between the meanings of pure cinema, which should be based on the restitution of forms of this order. According to Artaud, restitution means the return of something to the condition it was in before it was changed. The immediate reception of the picture in the eye is the only pure cinema before it travels through the brain, where many ideas about film are reserved and where the picture will be controlled by previous ideas about film. This theory is connected to the film practice of the Cantrills when they shot many films leaving a full freedom for the audience to see and realize the visual without the filmmakers’ comments. When the Cantrills talk about their film they talk about their experiment and in a way does not affect the spectator’s receiving of the visual. Another influence is Len Lye’s theories: “For me, first of all, film is visual”¹ (Cantrills, 1980, p.25). Lye spoke of his childhood memories in New Zealand: “The sea and land, the discovery that forms in his paintings resemble primeval forms: spiral cell structures, nerve ganglia. He spoke of the fact that all the evolutionary experience of the species is stored in the nucleic acid of one cell” (Cantrills, 1980, p.25). The ‘hand-made’ films were a realisation of pure cinema theory in Lye’s opinion.

The Cantrills were very much influenced by his theories. Lye was one of the earliest filmmakers who experimented on the flat colour silhouettes of dancing figures based on

---
¹ These sentences were written on the pages of Cantrills Filmnotes as a tribute to Len Lye.
photography. Lye is the pioneer of this style of filmmaking. In 1968, Lye was invited to
give a program of his work at the Second Cambridge Animation Festival in England, and
this was the only time the Cantrills personally met him. He wrote:

My film talk is called ‘The Absolute Truth of the Happiness Acid’. The absolute
truth of the title refers to the gene-pattern, which contains the one and the only
natural truth of our being. With six films and some seventy slides we will see how
 genetic juices seep into art. This evidence will support the logic of Clive Bell,
 who said, ‘art lies in your genes’. The films and slides show unconsciously
depicted information, which could only have been derived from the genes

‘Hand-made’ film was used by filmmakers such as Len Lye and Norman McLaren in
Canada. Len Lye’s famous animation film Tusalava (1929) was first shown at the
prestigious London Film Society in 1929. In the seventies in Australia the Cantrills
organized thirty people at a workshop to make a ‘hand made’ film The Calligraphy
Contest for the New Year (1971). It was projected through an anamorphic lens onto a
screen of black paper. Arthur progressively painted it white then cut away to allow the
image to fall onto a second white screen mounted behind it. Len Lye’s theories interested
the Cantrills and they wrote about him:

In the 1920s among the few who were interested [in the ancient cultures] were the
anthropologists – and Len Lye. Fifty years ahead of his time, he picked up on the
vitality of the early cultures, making his own valid representation of the art of the
‘old brain’, and this involvement stayed with him to the end of his life (Cantrills,
1980, p.25).

The Cantrills were also interested in the ancient culture of Australia but their practice of
Lye’s theories was completely different to Len Lye’s style of practice. They approached
the film experience and they were conscious of the importance of their individual view
and choices of subject (or that of other artists who were the subjects of their early films). They also approached film-form according to what interested them in film. When the Cantrills recorded the Australian landscape, they declared their personal love of both the Australian bush and botany. Many of the Cantrills’ works were about their immediate response and feelings toward the land. The influence of Len Lye’s ideas encouraged the Cantrills to follow their personal interest in the Australian landscape and to transfer this special interest about the relationship of the filmmakers to the landscape, at the time of filming, into the film material itself.

The Australian types of films that are related directly to the Cantrills’ landscape films were the anthropological cinematography of Baldwin Spencer (1901). This relationship appeared in the anthropological and personal record of Australian native culture in the early years of cinema. For the Cantrills this cinema was important for many reasons: “In the early years, cinema was not primarily concerned with narrative – much ground-breaking work was carried out by non-narrative filmmakers working in ‘actuality’ or, to a lesser extent, scientific filmmaking” (Cantrill, n.d., p.1). Baldwin Spencer used the camera and the film material to record historical fact in a pure experimental style with no editing, no effects or manipulation of the picture. Arthur described Spencer’s work as “a work [that] falls within the early tradition of scientific filmmaking, a genre that was the first to use certain strategies such as macrophotography, and in Spencer’s case covering an event from several angles, and the composition of moving the images in deep space” (Cantrill, n.d., p.1).

Probably the largest body of extant work from the first years of Australian filmmaking is that of Walter Baldwin Spencer, filmed in 1901 during an
ethnological expedition into Central Australia. In the 1960's a 45-minute 16mm print was made of the uncut 2,547 feet of 35mm negative that had been preserved (Cantrill, n.d., p.1).

In *The Land is Not Empty* (2000) the influences of Vertov are clearly visible in the Cantrills' aesthetic style. Dziga Vertov's works in film reminded the audience of the existence of the camera, "favoring a 'cinema eye' approach to recording and shaping documentary reality" (Bordwell, 1986, p.387). In many of their films, the Cantrills insisted on reminding the audiences that it was a film they were experiencing; Vertov's theory of 'un-staged reality' is realised in many of the Cantrills' films. The Cantrills also showed Australian landscape as it really was. When the Cantrills shot the bush with a hand-held camera, it was un-staged and there was no editing but they were constructing a view, a representation. The Cantrills also opposed all this record of reality when they screened their work onto double and triple screens and sometimes they superimposed images. The Cantrills' method of representation took the ideas of un-staged reality to serve the idea of the Expanded Cinema experience.

In 1922 in the *We Manifesto*, Vertov wrote: "From time to time we exclude the object 'human being' from the shots in a film ... (and) we discover the souls of the machines" (Weibel, 1979, p.49). In the Cantrills' films throughout the 1970s humans appeared as shapes, "forming patterns within the film frame, with no life of their own beyond the temporal and spatial limits of the film" (Pike, 1979, p.3). The human faces at the end of *Fud 69* (1969-70) rapidly appear in sequences taking on a composite form, with a marked change of physical form of the hair, eyes, nose and mouth. "People in 4,000 Frames are equated with objects such as street signs, film cans and cars. In other films the human
condition is expressly excluded perhaps, though, being more eloquently expressed by its very absence” (Pike, 1979, p.3).

The Cantrills were creating their own style while they were examining previous theories of film and art, and they expanded these theories by using them in different multimedia fields. In their film Meditations (1971) they used the geometrical form of the circle and applied it to an animation style. Meditations is a film without a story. Its content is creating visual art out of film materials.

Theories of films and arts that existed before the Cantrills enabled them to take ideas from various sources for their work. Their work reflects their rich experiences and absorbance of art cultures. The following chapters will show how the individual expressions of Arthur and Corinne Cantrill collaborated to produce film experimentation and performances that represented ‘Australian art subjects.’

Artaud wrote about cinema as “it does not detach itself from life but rediscovers the original order of things” (Artaud, 1976, p.152). However, the influence of art theories were strong on the Cantrills, the many personal home movie films were shown in Europe’s experimental festival and encouraged later on a Cantrills’ personal family subject. The first film they made on their return from London was Home Movie a Day in the Bush (1969-70). The film involved the bush and a cinematic approach to the human subject. The circular movements of the Cantrills’ two boys running in repeated patterns through the bush, in relation to the camera, formed the subject of the film. The film is an
experiment on the interplay between those elements. The following chapter will show how the Cantrills re-established their experimental film experience in Australia.
CHAPTER 3

How the Cantrills applied the idea of Expanded Cinema in Australia

Three major events happened in the Cantrills’ history in the period between their arrival from London 1969 and their departure to America 1974. The Cantrills started to be known in Australia when Arthur received the Fellowship in Creative Arts at the Australian National University in 1969 in Canberra. They set up the Expanded Cinema exhibition (1970-1972), which many Australian newspapers reported. The Cantrills launched *Cantrills Filmnotes*, a magazine specializing in experimental film. It was the first magazine to focus exclusively on experimental, underground, avant-garde and structuralists movements from around the world and Australia, and most of its subjects and articles were written by experimental filmmakers. During this period, the Cantrills also launched their film manifesto, which was seen as using provocative language and provoked much criticism. The Cantrills manifesto was different in content from the first manifesto written on experimental film in Australia, the Hand Made Manifesto of Albie Thoms and the UBU group in Sydney in 1965.

This chapter will follow chronologically the events of this period, showing how the Cantrills began their work in film-form using Australian subjects, and how they showed many influences and shared their experience with Australian audiences.

**Arthur Cantrill’s ANU fellowship**

Leaving London’s busy cultural life was difficult for Arthur, especially since they had started to get involved in the new wave of film movement there. Arthur described their
work situation in London: “We had had a lot of support for our work in London from the BFI and the British Council, and we did not expect the same degree of support in Australia, despite the ANU fellowship” (Cantrill, 2003). Arthur recalled in his memoir: “Corinne was happy to leave London, which she found depressing. I was not so happy – I had felt at home in London, as if I’d found the country of my ancestry” (Cantrill, 2003). Corinne’s decision helped the emergence of the Cantrills’ new experimental film work in Australia, where Corinne preferred to contribute. Despite being moved by the landscape, Arthur always felt uncomfortable in Australia, stating: “From adolescence, I have felt quite at odds with the Australian society – I cannot understand it at all (and now at the time of writing, I’m even more alarmed by it)” (Cantrill, 2003). Corinne observed that this came about when:

In Brisbane in 1964, Dr Val Vallis of the Queensland University Philosophy Department, recommended Arthur as an ANU Creative Arts Fellow to Clem Christesen (editor of Meanjin) who was on the Fellowship Committee. Arthur didn’t have to apply, Christesen nominated him. Christesen visited us when we were in London, and the fellowship came through while we were there. So we left London in 1969 to take it up (Mikhail, 2000a).

The combination of the Cantrills’ characters inspired their work; Arthur was interested in the support of scientific research into film-form in Europe which then attracted him to experimental film. Corinne, the Australian from a mixed race and cultural background, was never satisfied with the limitations of one culture. Corinne broadened Arthur’s experience away from science to the cultural and the artistic. For Corinne the ‘exhibitionist’ (Cantrills, 1984, p.61) Australia was an important place, ready she believed to start experimenting on film independently. They both wanted to find out
about film’s capacity to include experimentation and they believed experimenting on film-form was going to increase their own knowledge.

Since their research was primarily into film form, a dominant theme in the European film scene, it is possible that they may have received more recognition as artists in Europe than in Australia, or possibly have become artists in the European film art scene. Corinne’s decision to come back to Australia and keep the connection with European experimental art festivals and art organizations helped them to use European theories of art as referential knowledge of film-form and then to apply it to Australian regional themes. By doing that, they were bridging European art and art theories with Australian art. The Cantrills’ practice was unusual at that time in Australia and Margaret Jones from The Sydney Morning Herald in 1969 described them as “a pair of quiet revolutionaries” (Jones, 1969, p.2). It was an important step that the Cantrills came back and made most of their film works about identifiable Australian subjects, which would not have been possible had they stayed in Europe. Since their arrival, the Cantrills have worked solely in experimental filmmaking.

They came back to Australia from London at a personal high point. It was the first time a fellowship had been given to a cinematographer. Arthur’s fellowship also attracted a lot of publicity, for example The Australian 20 September 1969. The Nation Review, 15 May 1971, The Bulletin, 20 February 1971. This helped the Cantrills to publicize and to invite people to the launching of their art, which many Australians had not experienced before.
It was an intensely productive time, which coincided with the stirrings of public interest in ‘new cinema’, or ‘underground film’, as the press preferred to call it.

The fifteen-month fellowship has been the only period in the Cantrills lives when they were able to work solely on their filmmaking. This fellowship uprooted Arthur Cantrill from his full-time job as a film editor.\textsuperscript{30} It was a chance to investigate the “real stuff of film”, as Jones titled her article about the Cantrills, and “probe its use in Australia” (Jones, 1969, p.2). Arthur Cantrill declared: “If one is to better the human condition, it will be through helping to create a new visual language: the liberation will come through the observation of new images” (Jones, 1969, p.2). The Cantrills were now back in their home environment, and as further commented on by Margaret Jones (1969, p.2) they were “trying to analyze the reasons for local hostility to an art form accepted everywhere else in the world. They think the main problems were geographical isolation, archaic standards of censorship, and the highest duty on imported film in the world.” The fellowship strengthened not just their work but, by recognizing the existence of cinema as an art form, also strengthen the position of experimental film in Australia. Their main project during the fellowship was the monumental \textit{Harry Hooton}. It was shown on university campuses in most Australian cities.

\textbf{Harry Hooton, a Cantrills’ film}

When the Cantrills took up the fellowship in 1969-1970, they had many ideas behind

\textsuperscript{30} As independent filmmakers /cinematographers the Cantrills did not make money from their films to support themselves, as explained in their background in chapter 1.
their work. They wanted to question why many of the Australian artists who are intellectuals were neglected within the academic scene. Firstly, the production of their feature experimental film *Harry Hooton* (1970) on an unknown Australian poet was made partially to provoke the wider film industry in Australia and to support intellectualism through this representation of the intellectual artist Harry Hooton. Secondly, and most importantly, they wanted to challenge Australian audiences about the nature of film through creating visual art from the film medium and exhibiting these films in a provocative way to surprise the Australian audience.

Harry Hooton was the subject of what may be the first Australian-made avant-garde film biography. Hooton was described as “locally famous as a coffee-shop philosopher and poet defiantly anarchist and materialist” (Lawson, 1970, p.21). The Cantrills were influenced by his work and they thought “what he has to say becomes increasingly more meaningful as time goes on” (Jones, 1970, p.15). Hooton died in 1961, when the Cantrills just started their film career. Journalist Peter Coleman’s recollections of Hooton offer an insight into a forgotten muse:

> Until this recent film, I doubt whether his name would have meant anything at all outside Sydney and even there, only a few would know of him. Yet when he was alive he was a prince of bohemians and disciples sat at his feet—most of the time in blank incomprehension (Coleman, 1970, p.16).

Lines from the last verse of Harry Hooton’s poem ‘It is great to be alive’ are heard at the beginning of the final hand-printed sequences of the film. The parallel partnership between Hooton’s poetry and the Cantrills’ filmmaking represented collaboration between two individual philosophies, one of Hooton through his voice and poetry and the
other of the Cantrills’ experimental style. Andrew Pike (1979, p.2) explained this relation: “Hooton asserted the need for ‘power over things’” and then Pike (1979, p.2) compared him with the Cantrills, who “asserted their own power over the thing of their choice the film medium itself.” Hooton’s philosophy saw the liberation of man through an enlightened application of technology.

My poems are revolutions, of the builders, the living great,
Searching with god-like hunger new matter to animate-
And of cities steeled in silence, now growing articulate:
Of things, machines, our creatures, reaching in lever and rod
To touch the hands of their creators, praying to us their god… (Hooton quoted in Cantrills, 1971e, p.19).

Years ahead of his time, he was scorned by the academics and stayed embittered to the end of his life. For Hooton, it was vital that humans made war on matter, rather than on one another: “Let Moron war on Moron, while we build heaven in no man’s land…” (Pike, 1979, p.2) Pike argued that the *Harry Hooton* film is “an essay, attempting not only to declare Hooton’s view of an ideal world, but to create that world or images from it. Hooton’s dream was the creation of an anarcho-technocracy, in which man would have the power to control his material environment” (Pike, 1979, p.2). Hooton asserted for power over things:

Not the rule of one man over man, monarchy, nor of no man over man anarchy, but the rule of all man over matter: Manarchy and this is the new aesthetics, Manaesthetics. The anaesthesia of self-forgetfulness, forgetfulness of man – the unselselfconsciousness which lies at the source of all creativity” (Hooton quoted in Pike, 1979, p.2).

The Cantrills re-created the poetry of Harry Hooton in this film verbally and visually. *Harry Hooton* interprets poetry through the abstracted camera-work, and succeeds in
bringing the philosophical ideas of the poet closer to audiences. Corinne wrote: “Hooton is a very interesting poet who continues to be ignored by our poetry establishment. We didn’t want to make a film about the man Harry Hooton, but to embody his ideas of Anarcho-Technocracy in film, to extend his ideas in film form” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.117).

It was not the first time that the Cantrills formed a partnership with another artist and it was not to be the last. In the sixties in Australia, there was little encouragement for intellectualism. As Margaret Jones (1970, p.15) commented, “Australia has not produced many Gurus” The Cantrills felt that there was a need for representation of Australian art and ideas in order to fill this gap. To elevate the Australian cultural film scene, they adopted the philosophy of poet Harry Hooton: “Art is the communication of emotion to matter” (Cantrills, 1971e, p.19). The Cantrills felt it was necessary to recognize and value the existence of Australian intellectuals and their theories. The making of films about Australian artists using the works and words of poets, artists, filmmakers, technicians and intellectuals, asserted their existence and gave them visibility in Australia and internationally.

The Cantrills considered *Harry Hooton* as one of the most important periods in their own filmmaking and in the history of avant-garde biographical film because of Hooton’s poetic philosophical interpretations of the building of inner Sydney. This film was a continuation of a previous Cantrills’ theme, which recorded the voice and the work of many intellectual artists of the Australian scene in the sixties. They wanted to background
their film work as intellectual art to balance major European art theories. They worked with the sculptor Robert Klippel, who eventually became one of the most important sculptors in Australia in the twentieth century, after being ignored in the sixties. The Cantrills could see how essential it was to bring forward, by film records, his art and theory as an Australian artist. They insisted on using only the artists’ voice-over or work in films they made about his/her art.\(^{31}\) The use of the voice-over, in the Cantrills films about artists is to allow the personal statement of the artist to represent their art. The Cantrills refuse to play the role of authority. In that manner, they continue to make films about Australian artists, movements, and themselves. *Harry Hooton* has a connection to the history of poetic experimental film, exemplified in experimental films such as Jean Cocteau’s *Orpheus Trilogy*, which was made over a period of thirty years: *Blood of a Poet* (1930), *Orpheus* (1950) and *Testament* (1960), and San Francisco poet James Broughton, whose film *Testament* (1974) combined his twin interests of poetry and film, to name a few.\(^{32}\)

As Jones (1970, p.15) stated, “The *Hooton* film is a brave undertaking in a society notably unreceptive to experimental cinema.” It was the first film of its type to be recognised and funded by the Australian government through the fellowship. “It seemed

\(^{31}\) As in *Henry Gaudier-Brzeska* (1968), *The Incised Image* (1966), *In This Life’s* (1984), *Video Self-Portrait* (1971) and all the films they have made about artist Ivor Cantrill (see Cantrills filmography at the end). They dedicated another film *At Eltham - Metaphor of Death* (1974) to another poet, Charles Buckmaster, who died in 1972. “The film begins and ends with a fading statement he left pasted to a brick wall.” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.15) They used the poetry of Garrie Hutchinson also in *Skin of Your Eye* (1973).

\(^{32}\) This information was taken from the index of the film collection held in the National Film and Sound Archive, 1999.
appropriate although ironic that we should make a film tribute to the man who rejected and was rejected by Australian academic circles, while we ourselves were attached to the university, we wanted this to be an epic film work” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.8). The Cantrills were allowed to use a collection of audiotapes on which Harry Hooton had recorded his ideas and poems before he died.

Now Harry Hooton could speak directly from the film. The idea of someone else reading his work had always discouraged us in the past. This was to be a film not about the man Harry Hooton, but an embodiment of his ideas Anarcho-Technocracy [of Hootonics] in film. It can also be thought of as a film edition of Hooton’s magazine 21st Century, of which only two issues were ever published (Cantrills, 1979a, p.8).

The Harry Hooton character and his poetry were equally important alongside the recording of historical and political facts centring on the technical urban evolution of Australian society in the sixties, in particular the building of Sydney’s industrial high-rises. The Cantrills decided to focus on intellectuals, an unorthodox subject in film. The Cantrills and Hooton belong to the same radical school of thinking in that they believe in the same poetic aim: to recreate the individuality of the artist, through film research and poetry. The Cantrills chose to make this film about Hooton, the anarchist poet who appreciated technology but questioned it.

As much as it was important to represent an Australian subject about a poet, the representation of the Cantrills’ experimentation on film material was the other side of their focus. The Hooton film can be considered as the first film work which demonstrated the Cantrills’ experimental filmmaking skills. “Arthur and Corinne Cantrill have spent the past year trying to enlarge the experiences of Canberra film enthusiasts … filmmaker,
film projector, image and audience opening up new attitudes to film, in aiming to expand ‘the boundaries at cinema’’ (Fuller, 1970, p.9). Even though the Cantrills had made many films before, they had not yet experienced the rejection that this type of film would face. The rejection came from film critics who read the film *Harry Hooton* according to the narrative film measurement. Sylvia Lawson opened her article: “I found Arthur and Corinne Cantrill’s film *Harry Hooton* a considerable disappointment.” The article ended: “I can find no reason why any particular shot should come just where it does, and not twenty minutes earlier or later, if you re-shuffled the lot it could make no important difference. This is anti-cinema” (Lawson, 1970, p.21). Filmmaker Phil Noyce defended the Cantrills’ work saying: “I am afraid that for Miss Lawson and her breed of reviewers, bound as they are to the confines of narrative type literary criticism, there is no hope. We must bear with them until they die, and then bury them with prints of Eisenstein classics” (Noyce, 1970, p.15). The Cantrills explained their misunderstood style in the *Hooton* film, which explores many techniques specializing in the physical nature of film. It “is conceived as a huge energy field: combining the energy of light, energy of colour, energy of movement and energy of sound – a dense, vibrating, pulsating work, ... Most people cannot rise with the film, they feel crushed by its intensity. That is a pity” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.117). This film is “a celebration of Hooton’s definition of art as the communication of emotion to matter” (Cantrills, 1979a, pp.8–11). The Cantrills described the work in precise detail:

---

33 The colour mixes were unpredictable, at least at first, with surprisingly pure, saturated colours resulting. Sometimes a pencil torch, colour filtered and with its beam narrowed by a mask, was used for printing; this gave a smoky, flickering effect. In some cases, the stock was colour fogged over all before printing. A similar technique was used to contact print strips of 8 mm film onto 16 mm earlier in the film (Cantrills, 1971e, p.19).
We were dealing with the matter of film in exposing it to light and in the editing process. *Harry Hooton* is a vast work of synthesis. It combines a gamut of filmic strategies. Moving from the didactic documentary-like ideas early in the film where the elaborate editing is dominant; through an animated collage of newspaper material as the frame work for the grey, ugly, social and political facts of our time; then into multi-imagery, computer generated images, hand-printed material [8mm and 16mm], junk footage, footage shot by friends and references to our past work such as the Gaudier-Brzeska, Will Spoor, Charles Lloyd and Klippel films. The *Hooton* film also refers back to itself. Following Hooton’s ‘death’ in the film, there is a ‘resurrection’ and the images seen earlier return transmuted to a higher level of cinematic energy. One of the strategies used in the final part of the film is the camera-less hand printed imagery printed with layers of coloured light, a symbol of the liberation from any barrier between the filmmaker and the filmstock (Cantrills, 1979a, p.11).

*Harry Hooton* has a connection with “the first hand printing of movie film done by the surrealist painter Man Ray in 1927 in his *Return to Reason*, a development of his still photographic Rayograms” (Cantrills, 1971e, p.20). The Cantrills explained further this connection: “He placed small objects on to 35 mm black and white stock and light fogged it to make silhouette impressions of leaves, cogwheels, feathers etc. These he intercut with scenes of Paris” (Cantrills, 1971e, p.20).

The *Hooton* film has tiny sections of pure colour Corinne explained: “two or three frames which mediate the images that follow” (Rohdie, 1979, p.400). The Cantrills thought of pure colour in terms of light vibrations,Arthur called it: “wavelengths uninterfered-with

---

34 Corinne described the work printing of colour in *Harry Hooton* film: “It is such an incredible effort to mediate the colour of images by these subliminal two and three frame images of pure colour” (Rohdie, 1979, p.400).
by optical systems as far as possible. The light was striking directly onto the film35, and this seemed important for us to work through at the time” (Rohdie, 1979, p.400). The Cantrills explored the medium of editing and printing film to obtain a purity of colour that they could not achieve just by filming. Harry Hooton was the Cantrills’ first real interest in the creative use of colour film. Apart from using colour to record artwork in their documentaries, the main part of their work had been in black and white. The hand printing of film, first worked into Harry Hooton and carried through into later films, was another attempt to manipulate film and light without sophisticated mechanical aids. Harry Hooton is described by Corinne as: “a tour de force of editing. By the time we came to the end of that period [the fellowship period] we moved right away from editing. Having done so much there was almost nothing more to say” (Rohdie, 1979, p.400). Phil Noyce put hope in the younger generation who understand the Cantrills’ type of film in Australia, describing, “the hundreds of students who raved about the Cantrills films” (Noyce, 1970, p.15). However, Arthur refused to be labelled as an underground filmmaker. Sandra Hall, writing for the Bulletin at the time, stated:

Underground filmmaking was probably about as far from Establishment approval as any art form can get, dogged as it is by censorship troubles and conveniently lumped together by so many people over 35 with hippies, pot, and their ‘sixties-style’ mysteries they’d rather not think about. The University has maintained a policy of giving the fellowship to practitioners of the ‘neediest’ arts (Hall, 1969, p.47).

35 When you use light directly onto the film stock, you get a quality and a purity of colour you do not get when light passes through the camera and that is one of the very interesting things about the hand printing (Rohdie, 1979, p.400).
Arthur Cantrill stated in 1969 that he was in sympathy with *underground* aims, particularly in the search for a new audience. He approved of the ‘underground’ breaking away from the restrictions of the commercial cinema by running its own cooperatives for the distribution of the co-op. members’ films. However, he did not see himself as an ‘underground’ filmmaker. “I am working towards the area of the abstract painter. I want to push experiments beyond its present limits” (Jones, 1969, p.2). Arthur was an expert in film technology and an artist who knew his craft well. He could see the unlimited and undiscovered area in ‘film as art’ in Australia, and one of the Cantrills’ main targets was to enlarge Australian experiments that differed from other experimental work around the world. As Hall commented on the emphasis, whatever the Cantrills do is bound to lie squarely on that word, experimental: split-screen exploration of the physical properties and the mystique of gold, some animated films, some abstract ones without using a camera and some filmed research. Arthur quoted in an article by to Sandra Hall:

“What happens when we see film, the effects of colour, the after-image, and so on. The cinema grew so quickly into a rich industry that a lot of the basic groundwork about the nature of film was never done.” In the “film as a new art form - with entirely new sets of references” argument, the Cantrills are convinced purists, more in line with UBU and the “jolt the audience out of their old patterns of responses” school than with the other groups of filmmakers springing up in Sydney and Melbourne who can still enjoy a good argument about the merits of a John Ford Western (Hall, 1969, p.47).

In this period the Cantrills were able to make many small films for special screenings and as well footnote films and sketches of ideas. The possibilities of reusing and recycling material for other purposes were pushed to their limits with the Expanded Cinema multiscreen work. In 1970, the Cantrills travelled the university campus circuit giving screenings of their new work. This was followed by “the Expanded Cinema presentations
in Melbourne at the Age Gallery which was seen by thousands of high school students” (Cantrill, 1987, p.189). The interest generated by that kept them busy with screenings in schools, colleges and galleries. “We started up the Living Cinema screenings, on Sunday nights at the Maze (in Flinders Street) for four months from February 1971, and these included several cinema poetry manifestations with poet Garrie Hutchinson” (Cantrill, 1977, p.117).

The launching of the *Cantrills Filmnotes*

The Cantrills gained experience from showing their films in Australia and the criticisms of their films, as documented by Garrie Hutchinson (1971), that “The major criticism of the films are that they are not movies and that if they are supposed to be paintings or poems with light then they don’t work.” These, with the need in Australia for promoting Australian local artists and filmmakers were enough reasons for the Cantrills to start a vehicle to discuss their experimentation on film and the work of other experimental filmmakers through the *Cantrills Filmnotes*, broadening the knowledge of the Australian readers about experimental films.

*Cantrills Filmnotes* is an important resource on Australian experimental art and film. The Cantrills experimented in the scientific phenomena of film-form; their investigation was a conscious decision to include all varieties without reference to any specific ideology. They wanted to open up the medium for investigation, for their own knowledge and “to make films which defy analysis” (Cantrills, 1971c, p.3). In March 1971, the Cantrills
began publishing *Cantrills Filmnotes* magazine continuously until year 2000. Noted film historian and writer Freda Freiberg stated:

*Cantrills Filmnotes* became and has remained, a forum for independent filmmakers to present their work in their own voice and on their own terms, rather than a forum for the analysis and criticism of this work (Freda Freiberg, 1987, p.335).

By the end of the sixties, art and film practitioners in Australia were still isolated from the work of their peers around the world. Arthur Cantrill referred this isolation to economic and censorship reasons: “It’s so sad that little of the new films work gets out here—not only is it the geographical isolation but the enormous duty charges of 6c a foot which make it almost impossible for the small-time distributor” (Perlez, 1969, p.20). Corinne thought that this isolation was because of the censorship of erotica and nudity films: “bad enough that they censor for Australian audiences; worse that they censor for the rest of the world” (Perlez, 1969, p.20). This in the Cantrills’ opinion “stunts any growth of the film schools and serious film appreciation”. Through *Cantrills Filmnotes* explanation of specific theories of art and their relation to film such as the theories of the Bauhaus artists, Surrealists, Structuralists, new American and Italian cinema, experimental festivals and many others were explored. The discussion of art theories and experimental artists became a continuous tradition in the *Cantrills Filmnotes*. In return, they introduced to the world some Australian theories of art through their experimental film experiences written in *Filmnotes*, e.g. Len Lye’s philosophy, Harry Hooton, each experimental filmmaker’s individual philosophy and statement on filmmaking, etc.
It is understandable that Corinne was so pushy to sell the *Cantrills Filmnotes* to Australian filmmakers, audiences and critics: she recorded their names if they bought the magazine and, if not, she questioned them. Corinne explained: “Some people may be amused to see me aggressively selling the magazine at film screenings, but this is how the magazine has survived for sixteen years” (Cantrill, 1987, p.189). It was important that Australian critics, academics or employees in film associations support such a magazine for five dollars twice a year. This attitude explains why Australia did not create its own ‘Gurus’ - an intellectual group who could shake the film and art industry and move the industry out of the tight line of the commercial filmmakers who are interested primarily in making the genius film which is going to win an award at Cannes.

*Cantrills Filmnotes* “has made an incredible contribution to the cause of experimental film in Australia. It goes all over the world and it is an important reference source to work being done in Australia” (Cantrill, 1987, p.189).

**The Cantrills’ manifesto**

The Cantrills wrote their manifesto for a weekend school on the history of experimental film (which aimed to indicate some new attitudes to cinema). The launching of their manifesto served the Cantrills to set up theoretically, politically and promotionally their experimental filmmaking. Politically the manifesto declared clearly an attack on narrative cinema.
We’ve exhausted the human situation as film material—we’ve seen a million love affairs, intrigues, socially committed films, anti-war films, we’re not interested in who’s up who and who’s paying any longer. We’ve been sated by countless films on Man and his confrontation with life [mainly from East Europe – it didn’t get them very far] (Cantrills, 1971c, p.1).

Promotionally their style in the manifesto was provocative and offensive. Provocative voices create discussion. Theoretically it was the launching of their philosophy and decisions about how they were going to deal with film.

All we want now is the film experience – the optical and aural stimulation it can give. We want to be intellectually involved with the film form, concerned with the matter of film, rather than its content. [The greatest films are those in which the form is the content, as in music.] We want to improve the condition of man with our images and sounds, to create a new awareness of visual and aural beauty. To wrap our film frames around the world and warm it up a little. Man has lost the ability to see, to hear; his senses have become stunted. We want to regenerate them (Cantrills, 1971c, p.1).

The Cantrills’ manifesto declared a separation from narrative cinema, stories and analyses. Their films are analyses of film-form and their statements are substituting for criticism.

Our films have no story because all the stories have been told and retold, on the gray pages of literature until they are meaningless, like a word repeated again and again. They have been dissected, analyzed in the morgues of universities. We want to make films, which defy analysis, which present a surface so clean, so hard, that it defies the dissector’s blade (Cantrills, 1971c, p.1).

Andrew Pike thought that the verbal expressions of Harry Hooton, “Art is the communication of emotion to matter” (Cantrills, 1971e, p.19), and Will Spoor,36 “new movement generates new thought” (quoted in Pike, 1979, p.2) partly inspire the New Cinema Manifesto of the Cantrills. Before Hooton and Spoor, Artaud thought of cinema

---

36 English mime artist and dancer who collaborated with the Cantrills on their film Moving Statics (1969).
as it “exalts matter and reveals it to us in its profound spirituality, in its relations with the spirit from which it has emerged” (Artaud, 1927, quoted in Sontag, 1976, p.152). The Cantrills’ manifesto included aspects of Artaud’s philosophy of cinema. Artaud thought that narrative cinema is not following the right path of what cinema should be. He described narrative cinema as:

A kind of venial hybrid art which insists on translating into more or less suitable images psychological situations that would be perfectly at home on the stage or in the pages of a book but not on the screen, since they are merely the reflection of a world that depends on another source for its raw material and its meaning (Artaud, 1927 quoted in Sontag, 1976, p.150).

Artaud also saw that cinema “works with matter itself, cinema creates situations that arise from the mere collision of objects, forms, repulsions, attractions. It does not detach itself from life but redisCOVERS the original order of things” (Artaud, 1927 quoted in Sontag, 1976, p.152).

The Cantrills’ deliberate use of strong language provoked equally spirited responses including one from the Chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts, Dr. Coombs: “Frankly I find aspects of that statement frightening in its arrogance and its fanaticism” (Cantrills, 1971c, p.1). This remark was mentioned in many articles written about the Cantrills’ manifesto.

The Cantrills wrote that “Marx and Freud are dead” in the way Nietzsche did when he declared: “God is dead” (Kaufmann, 1968, p.98). The death of God for Nietzsche is the death of spiritual matter and the death of a spiritual way of thinking which had dominated
the world for ages. Likewise, the Cantrills launched their philosophy with such a declaration to announce the end of the psychological situations in film and the ideological era of Freud and Marx and social realism and the beginning of their new “film experience – the optical and aural stimulation it can give” (Cantrills, 1971c, p.1). To liberate the viewer of film from the “psychological situations” that Artaud described and to create an intellectual discussion about what film is, the Cantrills chose to discuss the relationship of the physicality of film and its sensibility to each other. The form of film is chemical (colour and printing), material (16 mm 35mm 8mm made out of silver, plastic, chemical, colour and black-and-white etc.) and electrical (light and sound, camera and projector). Then they project their experiment to stimulate the sensibility of the audience toward the film as physical.

The example of Eastern European film was weak as it generalized the situation of East European cinema and ignored the research into the nature of film and art in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. (See references to Russian cinema in Chapter 1, p.28 of this thesis.) The Cantrills’ manifesto in 1971 was political and represented a sharp cut with any past expectations, any possible connection with narrative cinema. There is a strong connection between the philosophy of the Cantrills’ manifesto and the writing of American underground filmmaker Stan VanDerBeek37 of whom Sheldon Renan (1967, p.22) said, “he coined the term ‘underground film’.38

---

37 (creator of the environmental MOVIEDROME)
38 Renan refers also to VanDerBeek on 20 other pages through the book. Renan, S., 1967. The Underground Film, an introduction to its development in America: London, Studio Vista Limited.
Both VanDerBeek and the Cantrills announced the undertaking of new experimentation in art. VanDerBeek was describing the power of the ‘renaissance man’ and the Cantrills’ manifesto was announcing their adoption of the film-form experience and their participation in the new era of ‘renaissance man’, the experimental film and art scene in Australia.

We are talking about the metaphor of man who is really multi man...the Renaissance man who wants to draw in or soak up all that is in our culture...and massages it or uses it and gives it back to us... Recently we have grown out of our industrial puritan background and our romantic aspects and are now quite seriously and enthusiastically embracing our technology, it seemed to me... Every new technical invention, rather than hurt the previous state of our aesthetic has done the exact opposite. It has geared it up. We have just speeded up our whole sensitivities and our sense organs are just expanding quite literally. We are using the term Expanded Cinema as a simile to that effect (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4).

The Cantrills saw the new movements of experimental film as connected around the world. In the second issue of Filmnotes the Cantrills published an article referring to the importance of the UBU Manifesto on Hand Made Film and the UBU group, and after that the Cantrills extended their writing to the theoretical and historical references of hand made film. The Cantrills announced their agreement with VanDerBeek’s description of new filmmakers: “We are in a period of the filmmaker as artist, the ‘new renaissance multi-man’, the investigator of all aspects of the film experience” (Cantrills, 1971, p.8). VanDerBeek was a pioneer in the development of experimental film and live action animation techniques, a visionary of avant-garde and Expanded Cinema. He advocated a utopian fusion of art and technology, and produced theatrical multimedia experiments that included projection systems, dance, planetarium events and the exploration of early computer graphics and image-processing systems (VanDerBeek, 2005).
Expanded Cinema

The term ‘Expanded Cinema’ originated in America in the late 1950s and early 1960s to describe multi-screen, mixed media and environmental film work; i.e. cinema expanded to fill more than one screen, to include elements from theatre, dance, painting and sculpture, and to increase audience involvement and participation. This development was prophesied by the futurists in 1916 and pioneered by Napoleon (1925), a three-screen film by Abel Ganç (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Artist and filmmaker Valie Export found that in the mid-1920s, Bauhaus artist Moholy-Nagy also “had suggested rippling screens in the form of landscapes of hills and valleys”, movable projectors and apparatuses that made it possible “to project illuminated visions into the air, to simultaneously create light sculptures on fog or clouds of gas or on giant screens” (Export, 2003, p.4). In the mid-1960s, the concept of Expanded Cinema that was being explored in America and had become established in Europe as a part of a structural film inquiry, was concerned mainly with the foundations of the medium. “British filmmakers led a drive beyond the screen and the theatre and their innovations in Expanded Cinema inevitably took the work into galleries” (Webber, 2002, p.1). In a step towards later complex projection pieces, for example Castle One (1966), “Malcolm le Grice hung a light bulb in front of the screen. Its intermittent flashing bleaches out the image, illuminates the audience and lays bare the conditions of the traditional screening arrangement” (Webber, 2002, p.1).

Birgit Hein explained: “Expanded Cinema is not a stylistic concept, but rather a general indicator for all works that go beyond the individual film projection” (Export, 2003, p.4). Export explained the meaning of Expanded Cinema as “multiple projections, mixed media, film projects, and action films, including the utopia of “pill” films and cloud
films. Expanded Cinema also refers to any attempts that activate, in addition to sight and hearing, the senses of smell, taste, and touch (Export, 2003, p.4). She argues that, “in Expanded Cinema, the film phenomenon is initially split up into its formal components, and then put back together again in a new way. The operations of the collective union of film, such as the screen, the set of the theatre, the projector, light and celluloid, are partially replacing the single screen” (Export, 2003, p.4).

Expanded Cinema freed the cinematic image from its traditional role. The screen no longer the flat rectangle white screen, but broke free from the two-dimensionality of the surface. Film as art no longer limited to its symbolic expression, but replaced by real signs. Sound was separated from image and originated in front of the microphone, the figures created through holes in the celluloid. Experimental filmmakers make it possible to engage individually in every element of film-form to reform and reinterpret context. It frees image-connected thought from its traditional expectations. Expanded Cinema is a collage expanded around time and unlimited possibilities of layers, formatted in time and space. “The inter-media techniques, the destruction and abstraction of the material, as well as the film projection and participation of the audience, were among the prerequisites of the Expanded Cinema” (Export, 2003, p.2). In 1966, VanDerBeek wrote in Film Culture ‘Expanded Arts’ edition 39: “Everything expands, in all directions, there is an interconnection between all of the arts, literally between them all, and this is what it is

39 The magazine Film Culture No. 43, 1966, was devoted largely to Expanded Cinema, with an account of a symposium in New York, interviews and articles on Expanded Cinema.
about. I mean, let’s say that art and life really should be one, and let’s see what happens if we really make them one” (Export, 2003, p.2).

**Expanded Cinema exhibitions**

The Cantrills set a role for themselves was to reproduce Expanded Cinema in Australia. They were not looking for a place in the mainstream art film scene for themselves. They felt that there was a necessity for them as film practitioners in Australia to research film form. Theoretically, they relied on the definition of VanDerBeek: “Expanded Cinema presentations are often by their nature exploratory, experimental, unfinished, trying something out on the audience, the audience feedback being a part of the experience” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). They were experimenting with no real permanent values. Corinne Cantrill explained: “A lot of things we do are throw away ideas” (Perlez, 1969, p.20). They were making a film deliberately boring and wiring up microphones so the soundtrack becomes one great crescendo of audience reaction (Perlez, 1969, p.20). This philosophy of not establishing any film value was a way for the Cantrills to get away from the rectangular form of the screen and to learn “what is film?” (Perlez, 1969, p.20). They did that to disappoint the audiences and make them question the film as form. Malcolm Le Grice wrote in *Films and Filming*, February 1971 about his experimental *Castle One* which the Coop considered as Expanded Cinema activity (Webber, 2002, p.1). He explained his interest in the way the individual constructs variety from his perceptual intake: “The light bulb was a Brechtian device to make the spectator aware of himself. I don’t like to think of an audience in the mass, but of the individual observer and his behaviour. What he goes through while he watches is what the film is about” (Webber, 2002, p.1). In one of the Cantrills’ experiments, they also used a real light bulb
dangling out of the screen to remind the audience of the screening process (Mikhail, 2000a). Arthur Cantrill recalls that they were influenced by the writing on Japanese artist Takehisa Kosugi who runs the projector without film: “there’s a photo of him doing it in Studio Vista London 1968 with a caption underneath: Takehisa Kosugi "destroys" a film, cutting the screen away strip by strip in Sheldon Renan book” (1967, p.248) ⁴⁰. This was an inspiration for the Cantrills to make Calligraphy Contest for the New Year (Mikhail, 2000a). Arthur recalls: “However, we elaborated on his concept by painting the black screen white before cutting it away, while the hand painted film was running on it. A second white screen behind the painted and cut-out black screen finally showed the image” (Mikhail, 2000a).

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, the Cantrills were actively experimenting with film-form. Their Expanded Cinema exhibition at the Age Gallery (1971) was “an exploration of possible new relationship between filmmaker, film, projectors, screens and audience” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Their aim was to expand the film experience, “releasing it from the familiar white rectangular screen, and to introduce something of the spontaneous live quality of the theatre” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Arthur Cantrill wrote an interpretation about how Moholy-Nagy criticized “the white rectangular screen of the cinema as nothing more than a substitute for easel or flat mural painting” (Cantrill, 1971, p.15). The Cantrills, through their approach to experimental cinema, chose to write about the theories of art as many faceted. Firstly, they explained these theories in the Filmnotes and, secondly, they connected them to their own artistic

⁴⁰ There’s also a brief reference to him in the book Film & Film, p.33
practice. For example, the metaphor of ‘multi-man’ explained by Stan VanDerBeek mirrors their own experiments, they believed. VanDerBeck quoted again:

We have entered a period of something called ‘approximate art’. We’re manufacturing dictionaries about our visual ability to digest material and the artist’s ability to play around with it and make new images so that our whole culture is soaking up a tremendous amount of visual stuff right now of all kinds (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4).

The Cantrills believed that film first is the art of projected light, which could be projected onto various surfaces and colours or combined with other elements in the space that surrounds the projection. The Cantrills experimented on light through the camera as in Harry Hooton (1969-70) and without the camera they experimented with the projector and on the screen changing the surfaces, multiplying them or making them changeable during the same show, and also with hand made films. Andrew Pike (1979, p.4) explained that the aim of the Cantrills’ rejection of film convention and of linear film grammar “is partially an attempt to turn back the attention to film history and to see film as the magical instrument of light that it was before big business laid an almost exclusive claim to it as an industrial product.” They were practicing Moholy-Nagy’s theory of light. “Film is to provide a new space, time and visual art” (Cantrill, 1971, p.19). The Cantrills’ experimentation connected their Australian work to European theories. Their interpretation of the European theories produced certain “Cantrills’ film work” by size, subject, space, style and technique. Arthur Cantrill wrote an analysis of Moholy-Nagy’s theories of light, showing a practical connection to the Cantrills’ interpretation of them:

For Moholy-Nagy the term space-time stood for many things: relativity of motion and its measurement, integration, simultaneous grasp of the inside and outside,
revelation of the structure instead of the façade. It also stood for a new vision concerning materials, energies, tensions and their social implications. ... He criticized the tendency of film production to be inspired more by the aesthetic of painting and theatre than by considerations of the action of light ... It is also possible to replace the present single flat screen by concave or convex sections of differing sizes and shapes that would produce innumerable patterns by continually changing positions like the facets of a prism in motion. Different films could be projected simultaneously on the walls of the cinema and astonishing effects might be obtained by simultaneously focusing a number of projections on gaseous formations, such as smoke clouds, or by the interplay of multiform luminous cones. Finally, the morphology of light will gain by the general installation of three-dimensional projections (Cantrill, 1971, p.15).

Arthur Cantrill’s introduction of the theories of Moholy-Nagy in 1971 in *Filmnotes* invited Australian readers and filmmakers to investigate further the important period of the Bauhaus experiments on light photography and art (Cantrill, 1971). If we look at some of Moholy-Nagy’s writing on cinema, with particular emphasis on his ideas for multi-screens, three-dimensional screens, layers of gauzes etc., we find them in some of the Cantrills’ work in the Expanded Cinema exhibition, which was a development of the ‘art of light’, manipulated light in space. They exploited the properties of the film medium to achieve a new space-time visual art.

The level of influence of Moholy-Nagy on the Cantrills was significant; it helped to inspire Arthur at one stage to follow systematically his theories and experiments (Cantrill, 1971, p.15). Moholy-Nagy created a design for a convex sphere segment screen, where three films A, B and C, would be simultaneously shown, the projectors in movement to make the image slide over the screen in the direction of the arrows, superimposing at predetermined times. He suggested using this either for narrative films (e.g. the lives of three characters inter-acting) or for non-objective light projections. Arthur Cantrill designed a “concertina screen” for Expanded Cinema shows. Two
projectors simultaneously fill the alternate planes with an image. In this case, they both show the same film, the left hand projector showing an inverted version. Expanding and contracting movement of the screen will alter the image, as will changing the point of view of a moving spectator. Two different contrasting films could also be projected onto the alternating planes.

The Cantrills invited their audience to participate live in their film experience. This explored the overlapping and mixing of several art forms such as painting, sculpture, music, live action and film combined to create experiences which tend to be unique in each performance, for example projection onto layers of gauzes, where the audiences entered the moving film image. According to the Cantrill’s explanation of Moholy-Nagy, he complained that the relations of space and light in the cinema situation were absurdly primitive, being restricted to the every day phenomenon of light rays entering a room through a window aperture. He suggested that it would be possible to enrich our spatial experience by projecting light on semitransparent screens, planes, nets, and trelliswork, suspended behind each other (Cantrill, 1971, p.15).

In the Expanded Cinema exhibition in Canberra, Arthur experimented with such simple ideas as projecting film onto a black screen and slowly painting it white so that, with each brush stroke an element of the projected picture became visible. He began his work in Expanded Cinema in London in 1968 at the Drury Lane Arts Lab, then extended this experiment in 1969 at both the Australian Universities Drama Festival and the Sydney Underground Festival, and after that in further demonstrations in Canberra (Thoms, 1978, p.121). This resulted in the development of this form of Expanded Cinema, a multi-screen film-performance developed at ANU, which was presented at the Age Gallery in
Melbourne, February 1971, under the sponsorship of the National Gallery of Victoria. Andrew Pike (1970) described the Cantrills’ Expanded Cinema exhibition as “an ‘event’ which is supposed to fill the mind, as opposed to a ‘happening’ which blows it.” As well as an experiment, which investigates the role of reflected light in the perception of film images, the Cantrills described their projected films onto screens of varieties of textural surfaces and three-dimensional surfaces, as radically altering the perception of form. Often the same image was projected simultaneously onto two quite different surfaces. Most of the films used in these experiments are designed for projection onto specific surfaces (Cantrill, 1987, p.188). The Cantrills explained how the projection of a circular shape onto a spherical object alters perception of that circle, giving it a dimensional quality lacking in the normal two-dimensional projection. Projection onto an elongated cone also creates a different perception of the same circle (Cantrill, 1987, p.188). They described in details how the projections fall clearly into the theatrical category of happenings. In one, filmed images from Wyndham Lewis’s Vorticist magazine Blast were projected onto a collage screen also composed of images from Blast, while Arthur Cantrill read Lewis’s manifesto over a mike. The Cantrills went all over Australia lecturing and screening these films (Cantrill, 1987, p.188).

In Canberra we initiated our multi-screen, mixed media work including outdoor events we have never done since (projection onto a burning screen, projection onto a screen of water). We arranged presentations of this exploratory work in Canberra to packed audiences. During the fellowship, we also arranged two long weekends of the history of avant-garde film at ANU, to which people came from all over Australia. There were relatively few such films in Australia at this time, and it was very difficult to make up the programs. We made several films especially for the weekends to fill in some gaps – notably 4000 Frames and The Boiling Electric Jug film (Cantrill, 1987, p.188).
The experimentation of Expanded Cinema worked against narrative film screening, which doesn’t change from one screening to another. Some of the screening experiments that happened during the early show in Canberra were dropped in the Melbourne show, for example the burning screen and the projection onto water fountains, but much new material was developed for the Melbourne exhibition. This exhibition was not intended to be final. It changed and developed from show to show and was the beginning of a further development of the painted and sculptured screens. The Cantrills projected their film Eikon (1969-70) onto gold and silver screens. They projected a film of space images called Dome, Cone and Inverted Cone Screens (1971). This film was cast onto a projecting dome with a white cone pointing to the projector, which was caressed by dot and line images. They projected the black and white film Blast through a series of coloured Mandala discs rotated in front of the projector, which turned the black and white film into colour film. They projected Concert for the Boiling Electric Jug (1971) and their film Calligraphy Contest for the New Year (1970), a hand painted work on film material and incised film images, which was cast onto a black cinemascope screen progressively painted white. The same screen was cut away from behind, at first as a huge decorative, oriental paper-cut to allow the film image to pass through the spaces to encounter a second, white screen behind the film, which was projected until the first screen was entirely cut away.

Visitors to the show cannot miss the first screen because they will be moving through it, with “scintillating colour images spraying around their ears.” Three layers of fine white net hang across the entrance to the gallery, while one of seven engaged projectors works across and through its flimsy gauze surface (Flett, 1971, p.47).
At the same show the Cantrills also ran a three screen projection where they projected film one after the other and one next to the other: Robert Klippel – Junk Sculpture, a film about three sculptures that are superimposed and filter-coloured during projection. Poem of Machines (1971) shows the images of city constructions and machines. In Gold Fugue, (1971), gold images from art and nature are in musical fugue form. Room (1971) is a contemplative study of a room from the point of view of the inhabitant. A three-screen version of 4000 Frames has an image per frame, 24 separate images a second multiplied by three. Negative Positive was a simultaneous projection of negative and positive images superimposed, filtered and coloured during projection.

NOW at The Age Gallery in Spencer Street, we have ‘Expanded Cinema’. That is what the vibrant clashing-coloured posters up all over Melbourne are telling people. If you go there, you will find that Arthur and Corinne Cantrill are doing more than expanding the film show at their first Melbourne exhibition. Through exploration of the relationships of screen to film and to both the camera and the audience, they are exposing its every element, thereby creating new audio-visual dimensions (Flett, 1971, p.47).

These kinds of extensive Expanded Cinema projections were the first of their kind and size in the Australian context. Many of the Cantrills’ audiences were young art people. “We had huge school groups in every day” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Alan McCulloch, art critic for the Herald wrote: “rewarding, climactic, the art of painting has become harmoniously wedded to photography, science, physics and the general manifestations of a changing space age vision of the universe” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Ann Galbally of The Age said it was “the most creatively exciting experience in Melbourne at the moment showing the versatility of the medium and its closeness to certain art movements of the past thirty years” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Certain members of the film establishment had
more difficulty. They said, “It’s all very beautiful, but what does it mean?” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4) “When are you going to make films with social comment? You have all the techniques at your disposal” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). The Cantrills wanted at this stage of their experiments to engage Australian audiences in the ideas that films are something more than just recorded narrative or documentary ideas. They created a kind of kinetic optical sculpture from “overlapping and mixing several art forms, from film screen, projector, projectionist and audience—all part of the total film experience” (Cantrills, 1971d, p.4). Andrew Pike (Pike, 1970, p.1) said: “The event was far from frivolous: The evening was sobering as well as elating, a sincere and stimulating attempt to explore possible new relationships between filmmaker, film, projector, image and audience.”

The Cantrills at this point of their experience with Expanded Cinema were popularizing these kinds of performances and experiences. In Canberra News, Peter Fuller wrote: “The Cantrills will encourage their audience to participate in the film experience more fully, rather than being passive, recipients of images” (Fuller, 1970). In Revolution, Albie Thoms wrote: “This is an important film event, bringing film into the context of gallery art, at the same time expanding cinema beyond its limited industrial applications. Cantrill is exploring a dimensional screen aspect of expanded cinema hardly touched upon by foreign artists”41 (Thoms, 1978, pp.121-122). Dougal Macdonald in The Canberra Times wrote: “After seven years of reviewing films on these pages, I regard the work of Arthur Cantrill as one of the most significant influences on my attitude to film as an art medium and a form of expression and thus as a life factor” (Macdonald, 1971, p.11).

41 Published in Revolution, Melbourne, March 1971.
Rejection

The Cantrills’ practice of experimental film in Australia at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies proved the absence of audiences who experienced watching avant-garde, underground or experimental films. The shortage of hosting experimental film in local film festivals in Australia played a role in this absence. Expanded Cinema introduced the Cantrills’ audiences, and led them, film after film, into an understanding of the physical nature of film. Corinne described how difficult it was at the beginning of the seventies to show experimental films. She gave a picture of Australian film society as “lacking imagination” with experimental films as an “elitist thing, a game of one upmanship” (Hines, 1969, p.21). Furthermore, Corinne stated how the small audience number affected the production of experimental film:

We are only able to show our work to one another. The price of hiring even a small city theatrette is exorbitant, and it is no good expecting the big theatres to take our work because when they buy a main feature, [they] have to take the rest of the program as a package from the distributors whether they like it or not (Hines, 1969, p.21).

When the Cantrills came back to Australia, they wanted to discover new possibilities for themselves and make images that they found pleasurable. Their aim was to create films to share with other people that they knew and who had similar philosophies. In my interviews with the Cantrills it became clear that they wanted to help activate and liberate the visual senses of Australian audiences from the traditional expectations of narrative films; they wanted to make films that could make perceptual changes in the human condition. They wanted to change the factors that stopped the audience from seeing. They
felt the need to increase serious Australian involvement and experimentation in the nature of film. The Cantrills believed that, through understanding the nature of film, the level of thought, visual awareness and appreciation could be raised. They aimed at creating a new way for people to deepen their understanding of film language and art. They did not set an interpretation for an ideology to study languages of art but they challenged the audience by using “techniques that have very much to do with the process of film: the act of photography, the act of editing and the action of light upon a film” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). Their aim was to create a new style that was intellectually provocative and to help create questions around the nature of film itself. The Cantrills wanted to focus on creating awareness within Australian audiences of the physical language of film.

It was necessary for the Cantrills to differentiate, through their statements and newspaper interviews, between narrative and experimental cinema, not to allow any doubt about the separation between the two approaches: their experimental medium and the story film medium. Hoping that the audiences will watch their shows without the traditional expectations they usually have when they watch narrative film. The Cantrills, with other experimental filmmakers, highlighted an urgent need for alternative festivals for new independent filmmakers. The Cantrills described loudly their irritation with the narrative film festivals:

How these [film] festivals reinforce all the old attitudes and create hostility to New Cinema – the old loud voiced opinions and posturing, the attitudinizing, the noisy applause for rubbish such as animated ‘wool dolls’ and animated nests for Russian dolls, and the oafish hostility as soon as the first frames of, say, the Richard Hamilton film appear on the screen. At the end of this depressing fortnight, we want to rush into the streets shouting, NO MORE FESTIVALS! NO MORE MASTERPIECES! NO MORE DRAMA (Cantrills, 1971f, p.4).
The first Australian Filmmakers Festival in Sydney, 23–29 August 1971, was organized. Part of the Cantrills mission was to keep audiences up to date with the international experimental film movement and to improve their awareness of film and art theories. They did that continuously in the *Cantrills Filmnotes*. Arthur criticised the National Film Library for neglecting to import enough timely experimental films produced by other cultures to sufficiently educate Australian audiences. On the pages of *Cantrills Filmnotes* (Cantrills, 1971a, p.17) a decade after the beginning of the Australian experimental film wave and 43 years after the making of the film, he celebrated the arrival of *The Andalusian Dog* (Dali and Luis Bunuel, 1928) to Australia. The *Andalusian Dog* was described by Moholy-Nagy as “one of the great milestones of the avant-garde efforts to create a genuine motion picture art” (Cantrills, 1971a, p.17). The Surrealist’s statement at the beginning of *The Andalusian Dog* stated the philosophy of Dali and Luis Bunuel: “The motivation of the images was, or was meant to be, purely irrational. They are as mysterious and inexplicable to the two of the collaborators as to the spectator. Nothing in this film symbolizes anything” (Cantrills, 1971a, p.17). Showing a film like *The Andalusian Dog* to Australian film audiences created questions on the nature and purpose of filmmaking.

To describe a Cantrills’ film in words one needs to absorb a series of articles on technical film language that would be more understood by film students and film practitioners than amateurs. The Cantrills were not able to describe in small statements the huge content of each film. The only way to read the Cantrills’ films is by watching them. Corinne described some of the viewers’ reactions to the screening of their films:
We have been to screenings where there have been screaming, raging demonstrations against what has happened on the screen. We do have this almost perverse inclination to show our work as wildly as possible. Sometimes we choose the audiences so we would not face such difficulties. We may choose to show the work at colleges or in certain environments where we know we can handle the situation (Rohdie, 1979, p.360).

Corinne was aware of the difficulties of absorbing the knowledge that a new film work could bring to audiences. She explained: “When the film is shown to people for the first time I don’t think anyone can possibly expect to get from it what we got from seeing it dozens of times” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360).

Many articles written about the Cantrills in the seventies relied fundamentally on the Cantrills’ statements to explain the purpose of their films or shows. This indicated the difficulty of film criticism in the sixties and beginning of the seventies in Australia in finding a common language to deal with this new type of film. Experimental filmmaker Dirk de Bruyn felt that this period was a negative era. He also gave the example of Sylvia Lawson’s comment as evidence of negativism.

The Cantrills have identified the late 60s and early 70s when the foundations for an Australian film industry were being laid, as a time of growing negativism about avant-garde film. There were also no records or program notes made for screenings, even of The Age Gallery event. It was this absence and developing negative climate that motivated Corinne and Arthur to open up a space where there would not be an authoritarian rant passing opinion on others, but a place where artists could speak with their own voice. (de Bruyn, 1997b, p.38).

What the Cantrills demanded were skilful critics who had knowledge in film-form to be able to fill the gap that existed between their type of critical work and audiences. Their films are as critical as Godard’s films. Godard described his films: “I still think of myself
as a critic and in a sense I am more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film” (Belfond, 1968, p.171). One of the other factors that isolated the Cantrills’ film work from media promotion was that they could maintain a distance from the funding bodies, as they were successfully able to cover their costs under the skilful management of Corinne. “Their movies have been greeted with a thunderous silence from the tastemakers, who were apparently annoyed at having some of your actual underground movies around without the statutory mogul industry bleeding it from above” (Hutchinson, 1971, p.585).

Andrew Pike’s (1979) article on the Cantrills, ‘The art of seeing’ showed a rare example of an experimental filmmaker who successfully read and understood the Cantrills’ film work. He could explain the unique theme in the Cantrills’ work. It was not clear until this stage of their filmmaking that their style of the seventies (described in Chapter 4) would shape the Cantrills’ experience all through their artistic life. The Cantrills’ collaboration is the other side of this picture. They were drawn to certain ideal types of experiments relating to the beginning of film medium: “The common denominator of a metaphor for life or energy is light. We see no difficulty in using this as a common metaphor for what might be regarded as somewhat romantic ideals, and combining these with physical material approaches to the filmmaking question” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360).

**Audience to extend discussion**

The Cantrills encouraged “their audience to participate in the film experience more fully, rather than being passive, recipients of images” (Fuller, 1970). The importance of
audience involvement was a significant factor that compelled the Cantrills to be involved in an international network of experimental filmmakers and to make comparisons between their various audiences in Australia, Asia, Europe and America. The Cantrills nurtured their audience to be able to read film in many layers: a form layer, an art layer, and a cultural layer. The Cantrills’ films raised issues of form as well as the psychologies of perception and intellection.

Sam Rohdie, lecturer and film critic, discussed with the Cantrills whether their terms in writing about their film work, and their description of the processes in some detail, are the terms in which the Cantrills wish their films to be discussed and understood. He chose an example of their writing: “Filmscapes are created from superimposed layers of landscape, skyscape, and bush; harmony of movements between layers of superimpositions. The film is structured in the camera with a minimum of editing” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). Or, “Here is this film, it goes through these processes. You can see the processes in the film” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). Arthur was concerned about their introductions to guide audiences that they might impose a set opinion on the audiences, and said:

I am very conscious of the difficulty of writing prescriptions for the guidance of an audience. At times, I am quite worried about it, and I think it can short-circuit a viewer’s responses and contribution to the work. Sometimes I wish we had not written them. … We may be writing material that does not do the films justice at all, and is just poor criticism (Rohdie, 1979, p.360).

The Cantrills clarified in their introductions to their films that they are searching into a different area in the film medium. They did not have expectations of their audiences but
they were hoping that audiences would develop individual responses and that these would not be limited responses.

The Cantrills relied on their individual efforts to promote and show their film works in many cities in Australia and they hoped for an audience who could question the capacity of film-form. Another concern of the Cantrills’ films was how audiences receive experimental film content and how could they change their expectations. They wanted their audience to understand the idea that film is a flexible medium that has the potential to improve the human condition, and they were showing this flexibility through spreading knowledge of the physical nature of film elements. The Cantrills wanted to challenge critical analysis and to take the mind of audiences beyond the camera and the screen to the laboratory so they can start to separate the constituents of film in order to find out what it contains and discover its structural possibilities. Frequently audiences were having problems in communicating with these forms of experimental cinema. Corinne’s candid remarks targeted the negative influence of narrative cinema:

We always feel embittered that our work does not get a wider public showing. But then when I go to a cinema which is trying to show a better type of film – such as The Longford in Melbourne – and I see the people there in the audience, and hear their talk, I just know that the problem isn’t with our films, but with society. There is an enormous barrier between ourselves and most people (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.117).

They made films to prepare audiences in an inclusive manner, to exercise an understanding about the physical nature of film. Arthur said, “Our work straddles the art scene and the film scene and demands a lot more audience participation than your standard type of cinema” (Stevens, 1987, p.4).
The Cantrills’ discussion with film audiences was a part of their experimentation on film-form to show alternative use of film in a way that should allow the audience to suggest other possibilities. The assertion of Philosopher Roland Barthes’ that in literature the true voice is not in the writing but in the reading, could as well be applied to art and its audience, i.e. the reception is as crucial as the creation of art (Heath, 1977, p.147). Barthes (Barthes, 2003) gave the cinema as an example of interfacing between the perceptual and the conceptual that provides information saying, “by watching a film, the viewer is actively involved with creating the film in the viewers’ mind. The viewer puts a personal mark upon the film, and the film becomes the viewers. Then the film adds to or subtracts from the notions that the viewer created. In case the film is to reveal its form, how the viewer would reflect on it. It is not the filmmaker or artists responsibility to give out the meanings of the work. In the Cantrills films, the reader will discover the form by watching. This is the way of the Cantrills to improve discussion of film form, so the reader can put his own marks over their films by watching. In Australia, the experimental film scene was still at an early stage and the Cantrills’ work was complicated and dense, and it was a difficult case for an audience who is trained to watch only traditional type of narrative films or documentary. Andrew pike gave an example of this uncommon situation:

In 4,000 Frames for example, 4,000 separate images, only a few of them repeated, are flashed before us at a rate of 24 a second. The eye of each viewer reads the images at its own slower and variable rate, so that no two members of the audience ever see quite the same film, and even after a dozen screenings any individual viewer will be seeing a new film each time as different images are selected by his eye and register themselves on his consciousness. The film is a
game played between the film and the audience, communicating the filmmakers’ eagerness to sharpen the seeing process, to see more and to see it more clearly. (Pike, 1979, p.3)

Pike is trying to open a discussion different to Roland Barthes theory. The types of information the audiences were receiving in the Cantrills’ work were under the control of the filmmakers and the shapes of representation in the many theatrical film-performances. Pike affirmed the Cantrills films’ visual control: “The idea of seeing again is central to the Cantrills work, reconstructing one’s order and focus of vision” (Pike, 1979, p.3). Since the Cantrills discovered the complexity of their films as visual lessons about film-form, they extended their role from showing the pictures to teaching about their relation to the pictures, they were there between the viewers and their film works easing their work for their audiences. They exist strongly in their performances, in their voices, the choice of the subject and in their statements to affect the viewers to a big extent. By doing that the Cantrills reduced the full freedom of the viewers and influenced the viewers ability to recreate the work according to their own mind.

This discussion is linked to further questions about whether the audience wants to learn how to read the structure of art or have knowledge about it. To have knowledge of film is an open subject exactly like when making a decision to read books or not to read them. The Cantrills set up the discussion of film-form as opposite to narrative cinema. They accepted their small audience share, spreading the knowledge of film as form and making it the most important theme in their life.
For a year, the Cantrills managed to live by giving programs, lectures, multi-screen work, and filmmaking workshops all over Australia until they ran out of money. Then they made *Island Fuse* (1971) and *Skin of Your Eye* (1973). With these two films, they started a new process, opening a new area in the research of film-form to see how this interaction of the elements of this process will be received by the Cantrills’ viewers.

Unlike Burke and Wills, the Cantrills will continue to survive in their journey through the wilderness of the Australian film community. The Cantrills have faced vehement rejection of their work from many quarters, but have forsaken the soft options available to them and remained true to their own convictions. In their consistency, clarity of vision and rigorous sense of purpose, they can only continue to grow as artists. Their work already constitutes a major and extensive body of film that places them firmly in the forefront of Australian cinema and Australian art generally, a position that must inevitably gain increasing recognition after the mad scramble of the film community for elusive financial gain gives way to a calmer appraisal of just what has been achieved in the 1970s. (Pike, 1979, p.4).

Until this stage, the Cantrills were establishing their experience, choosing the hard independent way but creating their line in the history of the Australian arts. After the Expanded Cinema experiments which concentrated mainly on urban Australian culture and the establishing of the *Cantrills Filmnotes*, the next discussion will follow how they enlarged their artistic experience further into theatrical film-performances concentrating on Australian landscapes culture as a subject. The next chapter will examine whether the Cantrills works were representing an Australian imagery.
CHAPTER 4

Landscape films and the theatrical representation of the Cantrills

The Cantrills’ travelling to Europe and America influenced their nostalgic decision to come back and settle in Australia to make films about its landscape. This chapter continues to answer the thesis question. It will explain how they used their long experience in filmmaking to make Australian landscape films. The Cantrills used their reservoir of information about art and film theories, film history and film science, which they gathered from reading, travelling, sharing festivals and experimental film events in Europe America and Australia, to create a large amount of Australian experimental landscape film work. They created awareness of the uniqueness of Australian landscape and bush culture.

Two major influences determined what the Cantrills did in the period from their return from America in 1975 to the beginning of the making of In This Life’s Body in 1982. Firstly, inspired by the beauty and uniqueness of Australian landscape, the Cantrills began intensely filming this landscape, which helped them to develop their film experience toward a representation of Australian identified landscape imagery. They left the items of urban culture (their electric jugs, sculptures, painting on the screen, buildings, cars and faces of people in the streets, etc.) behind them, obsessed with discovering a new relation to Australian landscape in their films.
Secondly, the Cantrills expanded their experiments on film by creating theatrical film-performance contexts for their experimental films. They enlarged the writing of their personal statement about their film practice. They also chose to participate inside this context, representing themselves as the creators of this work. They were playing the role of the critic inside their own work. Their personal history in relation to their film history were the subjects of their statements. Arthur revealed another purpose of them: “We used writing prescriptions for the guidance of an audience in a La Mama theatrical film-performance *Fields of Vision* where we quoted out several descriptions of a given film while it was shown. These descriptions were written over the years” (Mikhail, 2000a). Arthur was an experienced film teacher at American and Melbourne universities in this period and this influenced the Cantrills’ films in a didactic way implying skills for explanation. In order to encourage the audience to participate in their activities, the Cantrills declared that they looked to a kind of generous films, instructive but not brutal. There is no brutality of any kind in the Cantrills’ films. The Cantrills refused to become arrogant and accuse their audience of insensitivity, as they confess in their interview with Sam Rohdie (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). They wanted to be clear and to be understood in Australia to upgrade the representation of their Australian alternative experimental film.

The Cantrills’ inspiration with the landform theme was encouraged by various aspects: personal, historical, artistic, experimental poetic and intellectual. However the camera angles are limited and the human ideas are small in such an infinite Australian landscape, the Cantrills were able to manipulate the chemical, electrical and technical capacity of film to record as much as the human eye with camera could catch and express their
absorbing of the beauty of the land. They treated the land with modesty, Corinne declaring that “each landscape at a given time or season can suggest an apposite film-form. It goes without saying that we are not interested in repeating the ideas from past landscape films: once an idea is fully developed for us, we pursue new lines of investigation” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). Arthur explained: “We have chosen certain techniques, or processes which very often seem to be related to that landscape” (Rohdie, 1979, p.361).

The Cantrills wanted to represent the kinds of images that recognize the Australian landscape, which solidify their Australian work against the destruction caused by ‘colonial art’, which was defined by Dirk de Bruyn as art that “…had no established tradition of its own but dependent on the European connection and ignored indigenous art completely” (de Bruyn, 1997a, p.7). The Cantrills’ established a tradition in their Australian landscape films that recognized indigenous culture as inseparable from the landscape culture, the Cantrills’ special places and memories plus their romantic approaches, their personal cinematic interests, and the history of Australian landscape which connects indigenous people to white European people.

The Cantrills made poetic connections with places to which they were emotionally attached, searching for self-identity. The Cantrills’ awareness that their film work needed to belong to where they emotionally belonged seems romantic, but the Australian landscape is the intimate place where the Cantrills could express a personal interest toward its subjects. Corinne explained their central concern in their large number of
landscape films saying: “One of the things we are concerned about is to try and work towards an Australian consciousness. The Australian landscape is basic to an Australian consciousness” (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). The Cantrills experienced their Australian consciousness through their personal interest in certain memory places and aspects, hoping that their awareness of their intimate relation to the landscape will encouraged audience awareness of theirs. Experimental filmmaker David Cox explained that the relation between the understanding of the self and the making of the film is a kind of establishment in itself. He gave the example of Dirk de Bruyn’s Homecomings\(^{42}\)(1988): “Dirk took himself back physically and spiritually to his point of origin and makes the event/experience real by filming it. Are we all to attain understanding of ourselves only when the films are made, processed and played back for us?” (Cox, 1989, p.10)

The Cantrills wanted to come back to Australia to make a cycle of films with the Australian landscape as a subject in which they saw the basic elements of Australian life and heritage, a repository for spiritual energy (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). They described in the Filmnotes, how they weren’t interested in any American subjects when they lived in America: “The work we did undertake was all related to Australia. There is the paradox of Australia being an appalling social and cultural milieu especially for innovatory film and yet it is the place where we have done our best work.” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34) The Cantrills knew many America filmmakers who were also deeply involved in landscape filmmaking of the area they were attached to emotionally (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118).

---

\(^{42}\) A diary film exploring personal and cultural identity made over several years. (1983-1988) Producers:
The Cantrills wanted their cinematic landscape practice to start from Australia and not from New York or London or Europe. Their massive work on the Australian landscape began after living for two years in America between 1973 and 1975. (Arthur was offered a teaching job with the school of art at the University of Oklahoma and they spent a year in Oklahoma and a year in Pennsylvania.) All the new work the Cantrills made in the USA contained Australian material. After they completed *At Eltham – A Metaphor on Death*, they did months of work on the multi-screen version of *Skin of Your Eye*, which took a very long time to create on slides. The Cantrills extended the investigation in this area until they felt that they knew everything about this process and then they started to introduce their audience to what they had learnt. For the presentation of a version of *Skin of Your Eye*, they printed 700 slides from the film frames projected on six screens plus the multi-screen of the film. This largest stretch of screening has not been widely seen in Australia except for one performance in Brisbane and a couple in Melbourne.

They had a busy two years in America, where they made many American filmmaker friends who were interested in what the Cantrills were doing. The Cantrills showed their experimental films widely in America and Canada\(^4\). They also visited American alternative film venues and learned how they run screening in America, they wrote a report for the *Filmnotes* showing their impression after visiting film departments of colleges and universities comparing with Australia:

---

\(^4\) Dirk & Alison de Bruyn as it is referred in the Catalogue of National Film & video Lending Service.

\(^3\) The Cantrills gave public screenings of their work in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Portland etc. They visited film venues such as Canyon Cinematique, Berkeley Film House, Pacific Film Archive, Video Free America and Anthology Film Archive etc. (Cantrills, 1973, pp.4-5).
In America there is a vital film culture – in every genre. American filmmakers have an understanding and interest in film history and aesthetics, and its entire technology – chemistry of film, the equipment, the process, fully understanding its nature and potential – in a way which certainly does not exist in Australia. The ability of young filmmakers to make their own equipment: optical printers, to modify equipment for special needs is extraordinary (Cantrills, 1973, p.4).

The Cantrills produced the Filmnotes at a cheaper cost in America and there was a lot of interest in the magazine as the voice of Australian alternative filmmakers. Corinne confessed a couple of years after coming back from America that the North American support kept the magazine going (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). With all this excitement in America, it was important for the Cantrills to return to the isolation of Australia and to find a cinematic path for themselves. Corinne explained their reason to come back to Australia as: “I don’t want to be an expatriate living in the USA. However difficult, we’ll push on here” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118).

Kris Hemensley (1984, p.28) wrote of “the Landform Filmform vein that almost defines Arthur and Corinne Cantrill’s oeuvre.” The Cantrills played a role in Australian culture similar to that of the writer Henry Lawson, who has been described by John Barnes as “the voice of the bush. The bush is the heart of Australia … for some of us; our responses to Lawson’s writing still tend to get mixed up with feelings about ‘the real, the true Australia’” (Barnes, 1986, p.2). Lawson writes stories as one of the Australian bush people. He impressed his contemporaries as a reporter and observer, opening their eyes to the reality around them: “We do not yet, we Australians, know our country.” (Lawson quoted in Barnes, 1986, p.2) Lawson offered an intense and narrow personal vision, as Frank Sargeson once pointed out: “Lawson was not a realist in the usual sense of the
word. He looked at the desolation of the Australian inland, and he saw his own interior desolation” (Barnes, 1986, p.2).

Rolando Caputo (1981, p.15) argued that Australian avant-garde practice is excluded from the rubric of ‘national cinema’ and therefore is by definition a non-cinema. The major reason behind this exclusion is perhaps that the avant-garde redefines the systems of cinematic relations and the function of the elements of the basic cinematic apparatus. The apparatus alone is not useful for the production of a realist aesthetic and a classic narrative and cannot produce a representational ‘cultural image’. He asked: “If the alternative cinema is not engaged in the production of representational ‘cultural image’, what kind of ‘images’ does it produce and to what effect?” (Caputo, 1981, p.15) He chose the landscape work of the Cantrills as an alternative cinema example to support his argument. He explained the representational effects in the Cantrills’ films: “the photographed images are composed of events and objects, which are immediately socially recognizable”, and their images in their landscape films are “Australian landscape, bush and outback” (Caputo, 1981, p.16).

The Australian landscape has a set of codified meanings attached to it, such as loneliness, isolation, beauty, ugliness and freedom. The metaphoric meanings given the landscape are produced both by the culture generally and by artworks specifically. ... Because the landscape is registered through photographic reproduction, the Cantrills’ films inherit a priori the meanings ascribed to the landscape by the culture” (Caputo, 1981, p.16).

Landscape films are a national subject. The Cantrills’ awareness of the Australian landscape, which holds its own sacred history, represented in a distinct category in their film work, reinforces the presentation of uniquely Australian subjects in the international
experimental art context. Landscape was the core subject, not the background for people. “For us, this is the essential Australia, the unique and interesting thing about Australia – and the special thing that we relate to here” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). In one of the interviews the Cantrills made with filmmaker Harry Smith in the Filmnotes, Smith encouraged them to turn their attention to the unique Australian landscape:

Why does Australia exist? Australia exists for a great number of reasons. It is a continent upon the earth upon which we dwell and was made separate at a very early time so that a great number of animals and philosophical ideas grow there that don’t grow in other parts of the world, … If it selects the proper road to follow, Australia will be the empress of the world (Smith, 1974, p.7).

The uniqueness of Australian landscape attracted many filmmakers and cinematographers, one of whom to comment was Gideon Bachmann:

There is a sense of space in this landscape that I have never felt anywhere else, and a quality of light which seems unique in its brittle horizontality and transparence. A life rhythm results from these facts and from the great distance to elsewhere. …Nothing in Australia can be shortened or abstracted (O'Regan, 1996, p.208).

The representation of Australian themes powered the Cantrills. They wanted to enlarge the awareness of Australian landscape through cinematic practice, bridge Australian original themes with the world of art and film and bring to the public, through their personal involvement with film, the essence of their theory to facilitate the emergence of Australian identified art and culture within the larger international art/film scene. When the Cantrills were introducing their films on the cinematography of Baldwin Spencer, they asked a important question: “Why do we know about Lumiere’s’ the train arriving at the station’, but not the Tjitjingalla Dance Ceremony?”44 The Cantrills showed their work

---

44. The dance ceremony of an Aborigine tribe that was located in Central Australia in 1901.
widely around the world and in Australia. The choice of Australian film history, Australian landscape and Aboriginal culture as subjects for most of their work concentrated mostly on icons that contrast Australia from the rest of the world and contrast the Cantrills as well from the rest of the experimental filmmakers. What then were their style, quality of work and politics, and what steps did they follow to represent all that?

The Cantrills attraction to the Australian landscape

Reading the Cantrills’ statements in the Cantrills Filmnotes shows that the earliest commitment they had toward the Australian landscape goes back to early 1962 with four short films The Native Trees Of Stradbroke Island (Cantrills, 1979, p.5). These films were concerned with the theme of isolation from the contemporary world of Brisbane where the only contact with cinema was art house features. The Cantrills shot a lot of material, which later was converted into abstract images.

In London, the Cantrills had a dream of making certain kinds of films about the essence of the Australian landscape, concentrating on geology and botany (Jones, 1969, p.2). They recorded birds’ songs and experimented on them. As Arthur declared in an interview with Margaret Jones (1969, p.2) in London: “Bird song is already near an electronic sound. It is a pure, clear sound, which lends itself to electronic manipulation”. Arthur also takes other sounds, for instance “natural and artificial thunder and percussion and by changing speed and reversing, reverberating and other devices produces a soundtrack of unearthly effectiveness” (Jones, 1969, p.2). The Cantrills reflected the
meaning that they absorbed from the land in many different sound recordings and camera angles.

Between coming back from London and going to America, the Cantrills made an important landscape film called Bouddi. The Cantrills saw this film as “it offers a new vision of the bush” (Cantrill, 1979, p.28). They filmed it in the Gosford area in 1970: “We wanted … in this film to liberate ourselves, the camera and to shake off much of the past, which still clung to our thinking about film. The breakdown of the light meter on the first day at the carved rocks of the Aboriginal cave area hastened the liberation process” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34). Bouddi recorded the classic sandstone landscape of the central NSW coast with its intense growth of the trees and the red of the angophora trunks. The Cantrills described details of the Australian coastal bush: “the cicadas, the Christmas beetles, the barks, the scribble patterns on the trees, the serrated leaves, shadows, flowers, orchids, the myriad detail crowding the eye all the time. The ocean below hastening the descent [childhood responses] – all this is Bouddi” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34). The Cantrills included Aboriginal music on the soundtrack to echo their feeling for the Australian earth, rocks and trees. It was the beginning of an awareness of Aboriginal culture, music and values. Bouddi was an essential step to Earth Message (1970). “Of all our work, no other film has been made so surely, so certainly and so inevitably. Originally, we intended this film only for ourselves” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34).

The Cantrills explained that the experimentation in Bouddi has kinesthetic stream of life metaphors for summer, creation, intensity and growth and included a face of a teenager. Other landscape films do not involve humans in front of the camera such as in Earth
Message and At Eltham-Metaphor of Death. In Earth Message, the experiment is about the layers of images of inland mountains and hills, in winter and at sunset. The camera movements were choreographed around Banksias, Callistemons and Hakeas and rushing through grasses in an animated film. In contrast, Corinne’s film At Eltham-a Metaphor of Death begins and ends with a fading statement left pasted to a brick wall in memory of the poet Charles Buckmaster, who died in 1972. The film was dedicated to him (Cantrill, 1979, pp.27-28). At Eltham-a Metaphor of Death conceptually is a film of the stillness of the bush. According to Corinne the film was also about “a cinematic process” (Rohdie, 1979, p.361). Corinne (1974, pp.34-35) explained the typical Australian landscape involved in this film as two classic Australian landscape images a river seen through gum trees, and a eucalypt-covered hill. Most of the shots are long static shots but the movement comes from playing the camera function: the focus, the lens aperture and the Bolex fade mechanism to change the light, colour and definition of the landscape. The film shows a similar concern with re-perceiving and reconstructing nature through the technical process of cinematography. The impact of the film is through a broken, irregular, series of glimpses of a heavily timbered landscape seen through varying degrees of light intensity. As the camera shutter is opened and closed, the filmmaker presents a lyrical assembly of light and dark of brilliant sunshine and heavy shadows. The natural rhythms of time, in the divisions between day and night, are broken, condensed and rearranged by the camera throughout this process. “Our perception of the landscape alters radically as the volume of light received by our eye is manipulated” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34). Like most of Cantrills’ work, this film is a challenge to their perception of things. “The film is lyrical, but the music of its lyricism is atonal and discordant, jarring and
provoking us into new awareness” (Cantrill, 1974, p.34). Corinne (1987, p.190) declared this film and another one is hers and Arthur involved at a later stage to record the sound for them:

In 1971, I made a work in progress Looking for the Desert then recorded a spontaneous narration to the film. This tentative work was important to me as forerunner to a lot of work, which followed, influenced by the style of narration in some later films and in the film/theatre works at La Mama. In 1973, I filmed At Eltham—a Metaphor of Death, developing ideas about ‘playing’ the camera functions like a musical instrument, and of responding to the scene in the camera viewfinder intuitively and immediately, not planning but a spontaneous movement response (Cantrill, 1987, p.190).

Since At Eltham – A Metaphor of Death, the Cantrills moved away from the dense, highly structured and intense work of 1969 to 1973, the period during which they made Harry Hooton, Earth Message, Island Fuse, Skin of Your Eye, developing a simple, austere style making it easier for their audience to relate to their film: “We wanted to turn away from the strong emphasis on bench-editing of film. … We wanted to turn now to other aspects of the filmmaking experience and to definitely bring an austerity and somberness to the colour philosophy of the new work” (Cantrills, 1979, p.12).

**Their personal involvements in their landscape work**

The Cantrills described their work with the Australian landscape as one of the great passions of their life, and a source of inspiration to which they constantly turn as filmmakers (Cantrill, 1974, p.34). Making films about the Australian landscape counter-balanced their involvement with European film-form theories. Arthur explained their particular relation to the filmed landscape: “We have chosen certain techniques or processes which very often seem to be related to that landscape. Not so much to depict
the landscape as it exists out there, but to reflect our response to it at a given time” (Rohdie, 1979, p.361).

Corinne wrote about their films in the bush like a romantic botanist. She translated her views to readers for them not to miss any detail of the place where the Cantrills filmed. The way she described the area where they shot the Home Movie - A Day in the Bush is a good example of her detailed writing:

Two figures walking in a classic half cleared Australian bush scene, such as could be found ten thousand times over, on the edge of any town, the remnants of the great eucalypts waiting the vandals final blow, the fallen trees, the alien grass and weeds, the inevitable charring of bush fires gone through, the Acacia, Hakeas, Melaleuca shrubs of fast optimistic growth disguising the scars. This incredible bush scene, known to every Australian, so taken for granted, so vulnerable (Cantrill, 1974, p.34).

Arthur and Corinne Cantrill shared an interest in the Australian landscape but each approached their subject in their own way. Arthur depicted the landscape by applying cinematic colour separation experiments to make ‘his’ own version of that nature; Corinne recorded the bush as it was. She preferred to make statements about her relationship with her special places in the Australian bush and landscape in romantic, intimate and poetic details. Corinne included black-and-white negative footage of herself naked by a bush rock pool in the opening of In This Life’s Body (this footages filmed in 1983 at same time and location as their films Corporeal, Angophora, Sandstone and Warrah). It is a visual parallel between the sweep of sandstone at the bush site and the interior landscape of Corinne’s body in the ultrasound scans;
I figure at this bush site both as a reflection in the rock pool, and as a figure lying on the bed of sandstone, as the human being in the womb of nature; it is an image that is true to my values, and is important to me. This sequence precedes the story of my life. It could be thought of as the life in the womb of nature, before birth. Also, I figure in a landscape - the Hawkesbury River’s sandstone country, which has, from my earliest years been important in my life. My aunt had a holiday cottage there, where all my holidays were spent. The ‘visionary’ episode in the ocean rock pool at Kilcare, when I was three, is in this area. In 1970 when we were filming Bouddi, Arthur and I went searching for the magical site; we found it, but it was the child’s precious dream destroyed by adult perception! The rock pool was small and insignificant. But this part of Australia remains the place where I first remember experiencing what I would describe as transcendent wonder, and where we have since made some of our finest films. In This Life’s Body opens and closes at the bush rock pool: sandstone, water, angophorlas. That pleases me (Cantrill, 1984, p.62).

Corinne studied botany for several years when she was teenager. She explained her involvement with botany as a misguided response to intense feelings about the Australian bush at an early age (Cantrill, 1984, p.62). Running parallel with botany was a strong interest in Sydney’s cultural life of the 1940s. Botany connected Corinne to scientific research in nature as it later did in film form. In the narration of In This Life’s Body, she described her involvement with botany and science as another blessing in her life:

Studying the complex structure of organisms, the ingenious scenarios of life cycles, the adaptiveness of living things, ... gave me an evolutionary perspective on the human place in the order of things. The practical requirements of botany imposed orderliness on me: the dissecting drawing, documenting, and recording accurately. When I outgrew my passion for botany, I moved right away from it, though the influence has stayed with me ever since (Cantrill, 1984, p.62).

This balance between the romantic and materialistic themes in Corinne’s life parallel the balance in the Cantrills’ films. The scientific and the romantic is a metaphor of the flexible collaboration between Arthur and Corinne, two filmmakers who created aesthetic duality in their film style distinct from the experimental film milieu.
These films move from personal interest, when they participate in the theatrical film-performances the Cantrills organize, to a wider context, when they participate in the dialogue that the Cantrills create with their films and with their audiences. The Cantrills play the role of mediators, explaining their films to their audiences in order to create awareness toward the landscape. Andrew Pike analyzed the Cantrills’ intentions toward the viewer:

The elements of the energies are observed by the Cantrills and those that are inanimate – rock, leaves, horizons – are animated by the camera, and assembled and shaped for the viewer so that he too can experience them. Through these methods of technical manipulation of film, new landscapes are created from the familiar, making it impossible for the responsive viewer to see the old landscape in quite the same way again. The idea of seeing again is central to the Cantrills’ work, reconstructing one’s order and focus of vision (Pike, 1979, p.3).

Before discussing the Cantrills’ theatrical performances, it is important to mention some critical discussions about the duality in the Cantrills’ landscape films. This duality gets the attention of couple of film critics in Australia and that shows real recognition for the Cantrills’ work in Australia.

**The duality, landform/film-form**

The following discussion is to demonstrate how the Cantrills created in their films a duality between the Australian landscape as subject (representing the particular, the romantic, the transparent) and the physical form of film (representing the intellectual and the materialist). This artistic duality has characterized the Cantrills’ films since the beginning of their film experience. Film critics discussed the complexity of the Cantrills’ landscape films in similar approaches. Kris Hemensley explained the duality of the
Cantrills’ works, making an insightful observation regarding their genre of work and describing its flexibility:

They have coined a term for one aspect of their art, which seems to me to speak to all of it: Landforms/Filmforms. It is a perfect juxtaposition of the transparent and the materialist, the representational and the abstract, and it occurs as a hinge and not a bolted duality, again and again in their work. Such epiphanies of modernism underpin their engagement with “place” (Hemensley, 1984, p.1).

Film-form matters for the Cantrills: all their professional life was about film, theories of film and film experiments. The Australian land also matters: it is the place where they have done their best work and it is the place of childhood and youth. They presented the Landform, offering their experience of film-form to show the land. The title Landform holds an anti-social meaning: the land as a form, pure and primitive by itself, without the appearance of human body, no political or social elements, empty and presented through the cinematic eyes of the Cantrills, mixed harmoniously with experimentation on film-form and similar to the primitive physical nature of film. The only human existence in those films is that of the filmmakers behind the camera. (In some of the Cantrills’ landscape films, some Aboriginals or their voices appeared.) The existence of the filmmakers did not interrupt the harmony between the primitive look of the land and the record through the camera. Rolando Caputo read further this complexity of meanings in the Cantrills’ landscape films as a sign of unity, formality and homogeneity.

Given the combination of romanticism and materialism which structures the Cantrills’ work, one would expect to find within their films a set of irreconcilable textual differences and oppositions. But rather one finds a work directed towards a unity, a homogeneity, a formal synthesis, the conjoining of signifier and signified in mutual significatory support. The Cantrills remain amongst the most prominent and prolific Australian avant-garde filmmakers and their work of colour separation is of great value (Caputo, 1981, p.21).
In an interview with Sam Rohdie, Arthur affirms that their films have links with romanticism and that they don’t try to hide this link (Rohdie, 1979, p.360). Caputo read the presence of two opposing discourses—romanticism and materialism—in the Cantrills’ work as paradoxical, explaining that:

‘Reperceiving the familiar landscape’ has been the artistic domain of romanticism since the last century. Much of the textual practice of the avant-garde has been directed as a polemic against romanticism. For the avant-garde ... textual practice is based on a recognition and foregrounding of the material signifiers of a language (art) system. Romanticism represses the fact that the artwork is codified by the formal structure of the language system. Any articulation, expression or enunciation is the result of the internal play of linguistic/semantic relations ... of the language system (Caputo, 1981, p.20).

Corinne affirmed that they are trying to create on purpose a relationship between a cinematic process and a particular landscape (Rohdie, 1979, p.361). Kris Hemensley called this complexity of the Cantrills’ works “the art of Arthur and Corinne Cantrill” (Hemensley, 1984, p.1). The following discussion explains what the art of the Cantrills is. The art of the Cantrills is an expression of what they are, their knowledge and their cultural background, but mostly their collaboration. This collaboration between the electrical engineer Arthur, who came to film from a materialistic approach and Corinne the botanist, who came to film from the unlimited knowledge that exists in the landscape, are learning and teaching about film-form and personal identity with a full awareness of twentieth century culture and movements in art and life.

Adrian Martin (1988, pp.95-96) summarized the Cantrills’ experience in his article *Nurturing the next wave*, describing them as “Australia’s foremost avant-garde filmmakers, [who] continue to rigorously pursue some of the classic experimentalist concerns
of the 1960s and 1970s; a dual exploration of, on one hand, landscapes and environments, and on the other the materials of film itself.” He saw that the shape of the development of the Cantrills’ work was extended “occasionally into a theatre-performance context” (Martin, 1988, pp.95-96).

The duality of the Cantrills’ style in films is represented in their theatrical film-performances. The Cantrills wanted to enlarge the connections between different media (theatrical space, film, human voices, recorded voices, projector and screen) to develop their art of representation, working toward a contemporary context for their film work. They wanted to offer the important experimental films that they made in the first half of their life practice to the viewers of the next generation. The Cantrills composed another space, the theatrical performance sets, to represent complicated issues in their artistic work. They also wanted to include themselves live in front of the screen.

Films as theatrical representations

The Cantrills show their film work in theatrical film-performance celebrations. They collaborate with each other in relation to their films as they represent film-form research and Australian context. This collaboration has taken film away from the traditional cinema screening to be screening in theatres and galleries. In this space, the film becomes a participant in the theatrical context, equal to the narrator, screens, projector and sounds. In these theatrical performances, sounds, texts and music became independent, separated

---

45 See Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, especially Books I and II.
from film materials. The Cantrills played them on a tape recorder most of the time, as narration through a microphone or shared between the film and the narration.

Since 1971, the Cantrills have exhibited their theatrical performances regularly at La Mama theatre in Melbourne. These performances grew out of *Concert for Electric Jugs* (film-performance, Cantrills, 1971) and the Canberra Expanded Cinema exhibition. Corinne described them as different from film screenings. The set of the theatre in those film-performances was like an extension of the films. The Cantrills used the theatre to create a set where they project the film. Corinne described them as “…long multi-screen works with film and slide, live narration and things like that. We have done about twelve different things at La Mama over the years” (Mikhail, 2000a).


The Cantrills wrote an important statement in 1978 about the specificity of the theatrical performances that hosted their films. This statement outlined the progress of their film work and their involvement in their films and art. What the Cantrills wanted to achieve for the period followed their return from America, was to portray themselves as the makers with their film experiments as the product. This product participated into another artistic context named film-performance theatre:

Our films exist as multiple prints in various film libraries, and can be projected by anyone, but we increasingly want the presentations that we give to have a unique quality, something more formal, theatrical; something that cannot be canned,
repeated; that exists only in the memories of those who were there. There are special arrangements of our work, that live only at the performance. With this in mind, we prepared *Fields of Vision*, an analysis of the filmmakers’ preoccupations with the Australian landscape in attempting to create a wider consciousness of it through cinematic practice. It developed into a work for four 16mm projectors and tape recorder, with the filmmakers as protagonists, duration 105 minutes. The repeated experience of presenting and seeing our own work has inevitably led to constant re-evaluation, changed emphasis, and seeing connections between past and new work (Cantrills, 1979b, p.27).

Setting the differences between the unique way the Cantrills present their theatrical programs and the way film libraries present them was necessary. For the Cantrills to be present at every screening in order to have control over the projection, the quality of the image, the sharpness and the sound, was the major idea in their theatrical representations (Cantrills, 1979b, p.27). The Cantrills’ films represented their individual and subjective views. They wanted to represent their physical collaboration but were thinking of the future of their work in the hands of others.

This is something you have to leave it to fate and whoever is arranging the exhibition will have to be entrusted with the problem of lighting and the ambience surrounding the work. Film is particularly susceptible to these problems, especially when we make a new film such as *Grain of the Voice*. We like at least initially to be in some control when the film is first shown (Cantrill, 1980, p.38).

The Cantrills’ style of representation developed over thirty years to films as theatre with live narration and a three-dimensional structure set around the film screen. The control over the projection, image, sharpness and sound quality was done by Arthur, while Corinne welcomed everybody at the door, played the narrator and advertised to sell the *Cantrills Filmnotes* at the end of every show.
Films about Baldwin Spencer

The Cantrills demonstrated by their filming of the Australian landscape that they are searching for pure Australian icons with no connection to European or American influences, sharing Harry Smith’s interest in the recognition of native cultures. He said:

The Aborigines work with things that I am interested in, which are poetry, music, and painting. I really do not care about governments or organized societies. I am more interested in the Aboriginal system, which has sometimes been referred to as an ‘Ordered Anarchy’. A.P. Elkin, who is another great anthropologist, was the first one who really got down to the Aboriginal culture. The wonders of it had been seen in the photographs that Spencer and Gillen took. But it was only Elkin that opened up the mystical world of the Aborigines (Smith, 1974, p.7).

The uniqueness of this particular culture, which promotes and distinguishes Australian subjects and presence, was exemplified in the re-filmed by the Cantrills from the anthropological films of Sir Baldwin Spencer. In Oklahoma they made two films on an optical printer. In Reflections on Three Images by Baldwin Spencer, 1901 (1974) they worked on material taken from the cinematography of the anthropologist Walter Baldwin Spencer, who recorded remarkable footage of the Arunta people of Central Australia. Of his surviving cinematic work, the three sequences the Cantrills re-filmed are the only ones easily accessible to the public. The Cantrills state a connection to Baldwin Spencer’s work,

The accumulated damage and rhythmic density fluctuations in the emulsion of the old hand cranked footage creates a counterpoint to the repeated analysis of images often on the threshold of invisibility. The work is a meditation on the vulnerability of tribal people through the vulnerability of film as a recording medium. Baldwin Spencer’s work is that moment early in Australian film history with which we feel a deep connection (Cantrills, 1979, p.18).
After *Reflections on Three Images* by Baldwin Spencer, 1901, the Cantrills made a second film about Baldwin Spencer’s anthropological film work called *Negative/Positive on Three Images* by Baldwin Spencer, 1901. They exaggerated visually the damage of film materials, to the point where figures appear and disappear from the screen and the action of the film emulsion begins to eclipse the subject matter. Positive and negative versions are finely intercut to further elaborate these fluctuations and the ambiguity of the negative/positive reading of the images. Primarily, these films were made to compare the process of refilming from a rear projection screen with optical printer copying. The Cantrills remembered that “Optical printer copying was an obsession for students at the University of Oklahoma” (Cantrills, 1979, p.18). The Cantrills wanted to try a different experiment on film material but the experimentation on Baldwin Spencer’s film material from 1901 became like a political metaphor for the connection of Australia to the history of film and for the fate of the tribal Aboriginal people. Kris Hemensley argues:

In the special case of the Cantrills’ use of a tiny but priceless sequence of the explorer-photographer Baldwin Spencer’s footage of Arunta dancers at the turn of the century (the rigor of their devotion to which creates a kind of trance state in which one begins to see through the veils of essence and representation), they are in a position to deal with a construct of what Edward Said has called “imaginative geography”. (For Spencer actually choreographed the Aboriginal dancers): to reintegrate it in a history that includes the myth (ours) and the substance (theirs). Such a position is certainly problematic and not without controversy. What the Cantrills cannot be accused of is that “seductive degradation of knowledge” (Saïd, E.) which is the brand of cultural imperialism everywhere (Hemensley, 1984, p.2).

The Cantrills made three Cineprobes at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MOMA), the first one being in March 1975 from Baldwin Spencer’s films and some earlier landscape films (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.117). The main outcome of the
Cineprobe was to reclaim Australia’s place in the early history of cinema at time of inventions by reworking a couple of minutes of Baldwin Spencer’s film.

The Cantrills’ work questions the recognition of Australian film in the history of film. This matter was supposed to be the responsibility and concern of the Australian Film Archive and the government. In a paper given by Arthur and Corinne Cantrill at the History and Film Conference in Canberra (1981) they ask:

Where is that moment of film history, which we ourselves can be most engaged? We asked ourselves this question in America, in 1974 - surrounded by American filmmakers and scholars, many of whom had found that moment in their film history for close engagement. From the distance of America, we saw clearly the domination of our Australian life by other cultures. We knew about Lumières, Méliès, Edison, D.W. Griffith, and the ABC of film history. But what of Australian film history? So little survives. Which is that moment of Australian film history that is for us? Not films of early sporting events, nor horse races, nor evangelical extravaganzas or even narrative film. For us it was the 1901 film work of Walter Baldwin Spencer: connecting our interests in Primitive Cinema, scientific film, Australian landscape and Aboriginal Australia (Cantrills, 1982, p.27).

The Cantrills explain how important it was for them to search for a typically Australian image from the history of film that identified as Australian and appeared in film as different from British. Baldwin Spencer’s Aboriginal footage was that image. The Aboriginals are the people who have the knowledge of this land. They are the experts who can identify their land. The other use of the Baldwin Spencer films was for the optical printer to examine both the textural and the textual content of the film first exposed by Spencer in the central Australian desert at the turn of the century. In Studies
in Image (De) Generation, (1975) Spencer’s original images are almost obliterated by an accumulation of passages through the printer (Cantrills, 1982a, p.30).

In 1975, Arthur joined the Film and Television Department of Melbourne State College as a lecturer in film and the Cantrills made Studies in Image (De) Generation Nos. 1, 2 & 3 (each 10 minutes long). These three films were derived from Negative/Positive on Three Images by Baldwin Spencer, 1901, a film that was printed onto extra high contrast stock (enlarged) to make Study No.1. This, in turn, was printed onto the same stock to make Study No. 2 in the series. Then Study No.2 was used as the material to make Study No.3, again printed on high contrast stock. Each succeeding print progressively became more contrasting until the third one had virtually no grey left in the image. As a result, the original action is progressively replaced by the action of the film material. These three films were used in the theatrical performance Edges of Meaning developed by the Cantrills in 1977, in which they examined some of the implications of the material of Baldwin Spencer (Cantrills, 1982a, p.31).

The Cantrills explained how they made Studies in Image (De) Generation from their experimentation on Baldwin Spencer’s original film material. The films are ‘image analysis films’, in which new films are created out of available old material. Nevertheless, they are an affirmation of the Cantrills’ awareness that new techniques are often needed in order to be able to see old images with the fullest clarity through the assertion of technical control over a material process. It is particularly difficult to relate the ‘image analysis films’ of the Cantrills to the working of any particular theory of film.
Andrew Pike explained: “All these films are involved in the process of discovering images, of perceiving them where they were not perceived before, or perceiving them in new ways that in turn generate new thoughts” (Pike, 1979, p.3). The positive and intuitive drive to discover new ideas in the Cantrills films make them anti-systematic in their approach but consistent and rigorous within the context of a rejection of schematic ideas. The meaning of the Cantrills’ films is intimately bound up in the visual elements of each image.

Kris Hemensley read the quick passage of the dance footage in Studies in Image (De) Generation as meaning transition because of the political absence of the Aboriginal culture as central power. He wrote after watching the event of the Cantrills’ film work in Paris:

The images, of men dancing and women kneeling and bending, are like drawings on a Japanese fan. They are waved into and out of sight. The Cantrills’ film is similarly extended, proffered, and retracted. The film is a dance, most explicit in its moments, in its momentary transmission through the very air. It is as light is: a condition of supreme magnitude, commonly apprehensible only as the gradation of its absence, the knowledge of mortality, transience, and ephemerality, informs that word, as it does the Cantrills’ film work and any work in film (Hemensley, 1984, p.3).

The representation of Australian imagery in the theatrical film-performance Edges of Meaning (Cantrills, 1977) was based fundamentally on the five Baldwin Spencer films studies (described earlier). The text that the Cantrills read in this performance was taken from Baldwin Spencer’s book The Native Tribe of Central Australia, co-authored by F.J. Gillen. The films and the writing in this performance were the Cantrills’ investigation of
Baldwin Spencer’s works plus their critical writing on the non-recognition of Australian film history.

The layout of *Edges of Meaning* has varied in each theatrical film-performance, especially the size of the screen, the arrangement of the stills and the artefacts. The spoken text changed as each time the Cantrills chose different extracts from Baldwin Spencer’s text. The concerns of the Cantrills in *Edges Of Meaning* was the recognition of the history of primitive cinema, that is the work from the first years following 1895 (the beginning of the moving image) which had technical, artistic and political naïveté. This history is a reflection of white culture in Australia and the cinematography of Baldwin Spencer in 1901. He shot thousands of feet of film, processing it himself, made many wax cylinder recordings and shot hundreds of still photographs. The importance of his contribution to the history of cinema is still not fully recognized (Cantrill, 1979, pp.21-22). The following Cantrills’ statement shows how reading Baldwin Spencer’s writing on Aboriginal culture influenced their work: “Through reading, came our need for further knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture as a system for sustaining the spiritual life of this continent” (Cantrill, 1979, p.22).

The Cantrills’ point was to create awareness, on the one hand, of the true history that was recorded by an anthropologist and their experimentation on the Australian landscape connected to an older experiment of a similar type serving as a convenient metaphor. On the other hand, the Cantrills used Baldwin Spencer’s old material to bring a record of the Aboriginal desert people and their culture to the awareness of the audiences. However,
the historical metaphor in Baldwin Spencer’s footage is not the main idea of the Cantrills’ film. Instead the film’s force comes after the Cantrills developed a printing process that revealed film material and the patterns of light and dark which appeared in a piece of film when it is projected and then subjected again to the printing process.

**Touching the Earth**

The Cantrills declared that their planning of the *Touching the Earth* series, (1977) was strongly motivated from their reading in the USA of Baldwin Spencer’s work (Cantrills, 1979a, p.17). The combination between the landform in a historical and contemporary meaning and film-form as an intellectual subject (with formal cinematic concerns) qualified the Cantrills’ experimental landscape film work to represent an Australian imagery. In their statement about *Touching the Earth* to get a loan from the Australian Film Commission in 1976 and 1977 to make 90 minute film, the Cantrills described their intention in making this series:

> We want to deal with Australian landscape as linking the evolution of geology, botany and the animal world to present; as a connection between the ancient Aboriginal culture which saturates this land and ourselves; and exploring the connection between our own recent cultural history (the work of Lawson, Streeton, Xavier Herbert, Judith Wright) and today. If there is a social purpose in the landscape films, it is to create an awareness of the environment, the original Australian landscape and to contribute to a quiet understanding of its significance. In doing this we hope that our film will connect with the political struggles against uranium mining, clear feeling of forests, sand mining and above all with the struggle for Aboriginal land rights. We are not going to do rhetorical, political films on these matters, through we were deeply tested in this resolve with Ocean at Point Lookout when confronted with the traumatic situation on Stradbroke Island (Cantrills, 1979a, p.17).

based on the Olgas. The Cantrills went back to Stradbroke Island (Queensland) to complete the first film of this cycle, which is a study of the ocean: *Ocean At Point Outlook*. The location of the film is another place related to the Cantrills’ favourite spots when they used to live in Brisbane. The film is a long look at the ocean, frozen moments of ocean surface, of waves forming, advancing, breaking, horizons, calm days, storms and sunsets. The ocean is seen through the three standard camera lenses, on five different film stocks (Cantrills, 1979a, p.18). The Cantrills experimented on colour printing with this film as well. The film has long silences. The sound is used in a testing quality, like testing appropriate sounds against the film. There is a silent sequence and then a sequence with sound added. The sound is tried fading in or cutting in and out hard sync. The Cantrills expected the spectator to think about sound on film, its meaning, what it brings to the film, and about silence. In *Ocean at Point Lookout*, the Cantrills chose not to show the destruction of Stradbroke Island caused by sand mining and showed only a little corner of what remained inviolate. Any statement about the tragedy of sand mining is external to the film (Cantrills, 1979, p.18).

*Near Coober Pedy* is a study of the desert plain unrelieved by foliage or geological structure, inviting comparison with the sea plain and horizon of the previous film. It is cut into three sections: *Heat Waves* has in-camera dissolves combined with the heat shimmer on the horizon, *Horizon Play* shows a composition of the horizon line within the frame, and *Fields of Vision* is a view from a moving vehicle exploring the tendency for the flat landscape to revolve round a point on which the eye fixates. The camera systematically
scans the plain beginning close to and proceeding out to the horizon (Cantrills, 1979a, p.18).

The other film *At Uluru* is “a consideration of Ayers Rock, which rises unexpectedly from the desert sandhills, dealing mainly with its exterior forms under changing light conditions over a number of days” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.18). The film is sequences filmed at different times of the day to collect different aspects of this “amazing monolith” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118) as Corinne described it. Corinne filmed distinct sequences, others by Arthur, while Peter Yuill who assisted the Cantrills on the trip to Central Australia filmed from the top of Ayers Rock. “All our past memories of filming sculpture were revived at Uluru. It is like the largest and most extraordinary stone carving ever. “I hope the film will increase veneration and love of this place in many people, hope it will get people to think about it in a new way” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). The film made the Cantrills aware of the dangers of commercial exploitation and development. “I feel very deeply about Uluru and Central Australia. All the glories of Europe – cathedrals, old cities, Roman walls, Greek temples–seemed less interesting and beautiful than the natural forms and mountain ranges in that area” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). Similarly, Corinne Cantrill’s voice on the soundtrack of *At Uluru* asserts that theirs is not a film about Aboriginal religious beliefs or legends relating to Ayers Rock. It is about something else, something that has its own life independent of man’s rationalization or understanding of it, the mass of rock itself, its form, its textures and its innate life.
The beauty of the Central Australian landscape led the Cantrills to move from the style of filming they had been using in around film-form to move to observational filmmaking. They followed their feelings while filming, accepting what nature would offer. What the Cantrills did then was to record as much as they could of the rock from various angles and views (at different times) and following the feeling the Rock created within the filmmakers: “The Central Australian landscape is amongst the most extraordinary and beautiful that one can find anywhere in the world” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.118). Their observations of nature created a separate film, *Moving Picture Postcards* (1978) which was shot in Central Australia.

With the *At Uluru* film the Cantrills were experimenting in an unknown place with unexpected colour. “The original expectation was that it would be dry and desert like, maybe dust storms. But there’d been a lot of rain and it was lush and green, so whatever preliminary thoughts we’d had before leaving Melbourne had to be changed in this totally different landscape” (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.119). Corinne discovered that filming at Uluru had a thousand possibilities for films and there were so many unrepeatable moments:

One evening, dusk, part of the Rock was a staggering dark blood red colour. We did not film it as we were wanting to record dusk from another part of the rock. We thought we would come back the following evening at the same time – but nature does not repeat so easily – it was not the same – we never saw that colour again. There were so many visions like this (Cantrill & Johnson, 1977, p.119).

The fourth film of this project was *Katatjuta*, the Olgas, which are situated 30 km west of Uluru, and were continually recurring as the background presence of *At Uluru*. “It is
believed by the Aboriginals to be inhabited by mythological ancestors and it is a place to be approached with circumspection” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.19). The film was influenced by the uncomfortable sense of having intruded and of being watched: “one feels a sense of mystery and apprehension at Katatjuta, the complex domed structures with their rows of ‘windows’ suggest an abandoned city of temples or even because of their uncanny symmetry space vehicles” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.19).

The Cantrills explained how their exploration and their discoveries of the landscape were interpreted in their films. They showed the meanings of places through their cinematic experience. They wanted to record their personal views, their interests and “to discover their wonders of sight” (Pike, 1979, p.2) of the pure landscape. Their feelings for certain landscapes were captured by the camera, treating the land with respect. Their landscape films are regarded as independent films that differentiate their Australian experimental films from the rest of the films around the world. Each land has its independent culture and knowledge of its bush and geology, native trees and tribes that are still able to live their unique traditional life.

**Film process touching the Earth with colour separation**

The move of the Cantrills toward simpler filmmaking expresses the simplicity and richness that exists in Australian landforms. The poetic, colourful and moving landscape has meanings and history, and the Cantrills allowed all those meanings to appear in their films. The essence of the Australian land exists in the knowledge of the Aboriginal culture of the land. The Cantrills’ personal reaction to the land, which is expressed in
their films, is to be closer to its essential meaning. The land was seen through their camera as they saw it and felt it as humans. The Cantrills redesigned the land with elements of their cinematic art. They sometimes changed its colour and increased its transparency and at some other times they superimposed footage. Their other manipulations appeared in the various rhythms of their theatrical performances. These artistic additions expanded the possibilities of creating extra awareness of the landscape.

The Cantrills’ worked on colour separation processes as an intimate theme. Their films include colour experiments related to the research they made about colour, and it was their way to adorn the Australian landscape they loved. In 1974, when the Cantrills visited the Eastman House Museum of Photography in Rochester USA, they were impressed by the display of the early work in colour photography and film, and the many ideas and systems that had been developed. They wanted to experiment and examine for themselves some of the early techniques. In 1975, they did some tests with technical help and advice from Peter Yuill. They rediscovered an earlier style of processing colour and they applied their discoveries to the Australian landscape films.

The Cantrills made a number of three-colour separation films in Central Australia where their camera moved from one hill to another horizontally: Three Colour Separation Studies – Landscapes (1976) and Three Colour Separation Studies – Still Lifes (1976). They described their attractions and entertaining side as in the occurrence of the unrealistic colour of the moving clouds or birds, in magenta, cyan or yellow, depending on which separation occurred. The marked contrast between the super-definition of the
Rock and the fantastic play of colour in the sky made the film feel as a visual art piece. These films were able to change the reality of nature while studying the reality of colour recording on black-and-white stock. The Cantrills wrote about their films with a lot of love, describing the success of the experiment and the beautiful visuals they could achieve with the three-colour separations (Cantrills, 1977, p.38).

In the article ‘Rediscovering an Early Colour Process’ (Cantrills, 1977, p.38), the Cantrills thought about colour as an important part of the chemical processing in film-form. At the same time, they wanted to drive the audience to think about the chemical development of film, leaving them with the question of how close printed colour is to natural colour. The illusionary effects that they created in their three-colour separation films are part of the basics of film processing in the laboratory but they are also about the enjoyment of the artistic tricks that they could create with unusual visual scenes like changing the reality of natural colour, for instance. The Cantrills chose their angles very carefully to help to present colour separations in film and to show the many different versions of colour without falling into a boring educative style. In fact the films with colour as the main subject were the most entertaining and artistic. Another main aim behind the experimentation of colour was to discover the way a finer result with colour printing was achieved in the early days of colour cinema and then lost in new print stock\textsuperscript{46} (Cantrills, 1977, p.38).

\textsuperscript{46} In 1977, the Cantrills wrote in their Filmmnotes as scientists, “Reversal colour printing has recently become a problem. A few years ago when prints were made on Kodachrome 7387 fine results were comparatively easy to achieve, but since the introduction of the two new print stocks, 7389 and 7390, the quality in respect to the relationship of the colour balance in original and print seems to have deteriorated” (Cantrills, 1977, p.38).
The Cantrills were dissatisfied with the colour of both reversal and negative prints. This led them to consider the early methods of colour photography, which involved separating out the three primary colour components of a scene by photographing on black-and-white negative film stock through colour filters, and then restoring the colour by printing or projecting the black-and-white separation through the same filters\textsuperscript{47} (Cantrills, 1977, p.38).

The artistic representation of colour studies was influenced by the beauty of the land and the Cantrills’ feeling toward this land, spreading unrealistic colour over the real images. In many shots of major locations involved in the three-colour separation films, such as Corroboree Rock in Central Australia, they turned the colour of the hills into delicate pink, mauves, yellow and green effects. They shot the Trephina Gorge in Central Australia, Mount Conner and Ayers Rock at sunrise. In a later printing experimentation, they ran some colour manipulation for exploration purposes. For example, they switched the red strip into the green roll and vice versa, and dropped out one strip altogether. This gave some very promising colour shifts with a blue sky becoming an unreal rosy pink in one variation (Cantrills, 1977, p.39).

\textsuperscript{47} The technique dates back to 1861, when the British scientist James Maxwell made the first colour projection of a still image by photographing the same scene three times on three separate black and white negatives through red, green and blue filters, and projecting positive copies in superimposition using the appropriate filter for each transparency. There were difficulties in applying the principle to cinematography because of the film movement in shooting and projection. We considered exploring the Kinemacolour process, but the colour limitations, plus the technical problem of converting our Bolex camera and projector to run a rotating filter in front of the lens, caused the postponement of this for a future occasion (Cantrills, 1977, p.38).
The Cantrills have an interest in static images and this was an area which they experimented with in the colour separations. They began a series of static studies on the landscapes and still lives connecting their experiment to what Cocteau had said on time flow: “One could sense the flow of time passing through the filmed image as compared with a still photographic image of the same static subject” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.17). In *Three Colour Separation Studies – Still Lives*, “we have three time-flows through the same image, a concept specifically dealt with in a later film, *Notes on the Passage of Time*” (Cantrills, 1979a, p.17). The Cantrills moved from creating visual art of the landscape for the colour separation experiments to filming the landscape without any technical manipulation.

**Fields of vision**

The theatrical performance *Fields of Vision* (1978), included four 16 mm projectors, tape recorded and live voices of the filmmakers commenting on the work as it is shown. *Fields of Vision* (Cantrill, 1979, p.27) begins with a prelude of *Ocean* (1978) over three screens. It moves to the landscape films from 1970, which deal with cinematic metaphors for various manifestations of energy (botanical, geological and zoological) in the landscape. The Cantrills’ concerns move from dealing with human perception of the environment including their human optical system for analyzing colour; and their view of the landscape and the chemistry, optics and physics of film, including their interest in those areas in relation to their cinematic work with landscape as subjects. They presented also extracts from earlier films (*Bouddi, Earth Message, Island Fuse, Looking for the*
Desert\textsuperscript{48} and \textit{At Eltham}, which were condensed and shown in parallel sequences on three screens. The Cantrills showed their past film work, which is at the same time their own past history. They included extracts from \textit{At Uluru} and the film \textit{Meteor Crater, Gosse Bluff} (1978). \textit{Travelling} was shown in selections on three screens from unedited footage on travelling across Australia; \textit{Near Coober Pedy} (1977) included three prints with different colour balances shown side by side. \textit{Hillside at Chauritchi} (1978) was shown on the fourth projector while the other three were reloaded with film for part two. Part two of \textit{Fields of Vision} begins with an exposition of the history and theory of the three-colour separation process, using red, green and blue filters on the projectors to demonstrate the mixing of coloured light to give white light (Cantrill, 1979b, p.27). The Cantrills showed (through the projection of \textit{Interior/Exterior}) the differences between human perception and cinematic vision. Another film, called \textit{Printer Light Play}, showed 84 different printer light variations of the red, green and blue printer lights. A second screen carried an unchanging colour negative version of the same image, as a control (Cantrill, 1979, p.27).

With the presentation of \textit{Fields of Vision}, they engaged the audience in testing, searching, re-evaluating, re-arranging, varying and thinking. Arthur explained their relation to the audience: “It’s not as if we are attempting to record the landscape to make people feel good about the fact that landscape exists” (Rohdie, 1979, p.361). They reviewed their published statements over the years on their most widely shown film \textit{Bouddi} and how they tried from the point of view of many years and screenings to arrive at its meaning to

\textsuperscript{48} This film is not mentioned on the list of the Cantrills’ filmography; some films the Cantrills made were included once in the film performances as extracts from past films.
them now. They talked about the surface qualities of film stock, the field of vision of various lenses, depth of field, real time and cinematic time (Cantrill, 1979, p.27).

The identity of regional films

The Cantrills tried to create awareness of the existence of the Australian landscape’s philosophy. Their films are a search for its forgotten meaning. This philosophy was mentioned to the Cantrills by NewYork artist Harry Smith (1974, p.7): “There is a philosophy as great as that of Greece at your very doorstep. But it is difficult: you have to learn a very difficult languages. I do not know any of them: I do not even know the principles that Australian languages are based on.” The Cantrills’ film-performance, designed to enhance awareness of the philosophy of Australian landscape.

The Cantrills believed that the image of the landscape as a childish romantic place required further development and maturing. They were recording the Australian landscape from a personal perspective. They went completely their own way when they made films that were challenging Australian values or films about their own favorite places. They contributed to the artistic growth of Australia. Unlike earlier films emphasizing nature, *The Second Journey (To Uluru)* is a close-up study of form, texture and vegetation. The monolith (Uluru) is still depicted in the vast, desert environment, but the motivation for this second study is the exploration of the interior details of the Rock and the caves of Aboriginal culture. The film opens with flashing “postcard” images of Uluru, taken from the first film and shot from a travelling car as it approaches the monolith. The narration records observations of devastated cattle stations, land raped by dust storms and fire, the cancerous growth of the tourist industry and the loss of
Aboriginal land claims to Uluru itself. “The Second Journey to Uluru is not so much a transcendence of this as a simple quest to visually and aurally commune with the remnants of an ancient monolith” (Bishop, 1981, p.498).

The Cantrills broke the formal picture of Uluru and Aboriginal culture as postcards for tourist attraction. They observed the Rock showing that it has various meanings in its visual and cultural representation of a certain special sacred place of Aboriginal people. “Uluru radiates a mythical energy in its botanic, geological and animal life. The Cantrills restored at least some of the respect and integrity echoed in its Aboriginal name” (Bishop, 1981, p.497). They went from the flat photograph of the Rock into close-ups of small details, showing the magic in certain light and angles. The natural changing of colour of the Rock shows the sacred meaning visually. They were able to introduce to the audience what they saw and what they felt. They stayed there filming for days, focusing on the changing views of the Rock, changing from time to time, from day to day, from morning to afternoon to night, to moonlight. They were able to catch this beauty from many different angles. Uluru in the Cantrills’ film is represented as people might see it when moving around the rock, to catch its beauty, to watch the changes of the colour and feel its mysticism.

Structurally the film presents the results of 14 days of observation, recorded in the mornings late afternoons and evenings. Uluru is shown against seven sunrises, its form at first shimmering and then vigorously pulsating as the fierceness of the day approaches. The filmmakers are drawn to the side of the monolith, its sheer walls pressing down upon them, its immense form apparently stretching to the horizon in both directions. The sound track is composed of sparse narration of natural sounds but at time it is completely silent, the camera providing a visual caressing of the nooks, crannies and outcrops of rock, making them appear
indistinguishable from the texture of eucalyptus bark. At other times, the soundtrack roars with insect noises, recorded in the echoing hollows of the caves in which the filmmakers shelter from the midday sun (Bishop, 1981, p.497).

The human appearance in the Cantrills’ landscape films is limited to the primitive footage of Aborigines dancing taken at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the use of Aboriginal music in Bouddi and Earth Message was in keeping with most of the Cantrills’ pursuit of unspoiled Australian landscapes. The Cantrills have rejected most visible signs of human presence, including that of Aborigines. Although Aboriginal rock paintings appeared in At Uluru, the Cantrills do not romanticise the Aborigines and portray them not as part of nature, but as people who hold knowledge of Australian music, painting, geology, culture and history. The Cantrills treated the land similarly to the way Aborigines did, with love and respect. In Earth Message, Aboriginal music is used on the soundtrack. Andrew Pike (1979, p.3) explained this use of Aboriginal music as serving “to underline the idea of the film as a dance or a celebration rather than to attach any particular historical value to the landscapes as former Aboriginal land. The music also does not add an awareness of time past, as the film is concerned with timelessness.” The music underlines the Cantrills’ vision of the landscape as an eternal synonym of knowledge. In later landscape films, especially the series Touching the Earth, Andrew Pike (1979, p.3) observed that without the aid of Aboriginal music or a soundtrack of any kind, the spirit of the dance survives and is sustained substantially. The dance continues in silence, with images creating their own rhythms.

Andrew Pike thought that the repetitive structure in Aboriginal dance provides an atmosphere to all of the Cantrills’ landscape films. The subtle different representation of the Cantrills’ land images comes from the influence of the structure of Aboriginal dance.
Both the music and the images in the Cantrills’ films are constructed from repetitions, but these repetitions are not duplications (Pike, 1979, p.3). The subtle differences that the landscape images have and the non-linear structure of the Cantrills’ film work make the audience more alert to these differences. Images of the landscape record the surface of the landscape but also penetrate and include harmonies and energies. The Cantrills discovered and experienced in the bush a repetitive visual meditation that is originally central to the forces of the places. They recreated the land again through their camera, manipulation of film images and projectors. Each landscape expresses itself through their films. Whether it is in a Central Australian desert, Ayers Rock, a rocky headland on Stradbroke Island, or the rolling hills around Canberra, the landscape “pulsates with a life of its own”. As Andrew Pike put it:

The films are thus both observations of nature and recreations of it. In these recreations, new relationships are established between the elements of the landscape by means of the Cantrills technical control over the medium in complex superimpositions, cutting and repetition. Moments of blackness in Ocean at Point Lookout remove our sight and serve to make us see more clearly when it is restored. Elsewhere rapid pulsating images, in which the camera moves frenetically, are juxtaposed with long sustained images in which the camera barely moved at all and the juxtaposition invites us to see the energy pulsating in the seemingly static image, to feel the energy bursting beneath the surface (Pike, 1979, p.3).

The landscape films play a central role in the Cantrills’ work towards raising an Australian consciousness. Discussing whether their Australian culture is an urban culture, which produces this image of the landscape, Corinne refused to admit that nature is an urban pre-occupation. But Arthur agreed in a conversation with Sam Rohdie that nature in film is a pre-occupation from the point of view of one living in the city.
It is a concern of experimental filmmakers to limit the extrinsic connotations of the things they film. Objects are made banal, left as residues or serve as backgrounds for other kinds of work to do with film processes. Landscape is a subject, which is full of connotations such as romance, loneliness and freedom (Rohdie, 1979, p.361).

Urban culture in Australia is very new, the newest in the world, with no depth yet, no purity. The Cantrills wanted to enhance certain images of Australia and show the basis of Australian culture. They left space in their landscape films for the audience to confront the objective land and the subjective Cantrills’ view where they limited the existence of the elements from urban culture.

The landscape themes in the Cantrills’ films are considered as great lyrical poetry of Australian landscape themes, especially those landscapes untrammelled by human contact. In their landscape films, the bush is the matter on which the Cantrills applied the force of their ability to reperceive and reconceive the familiar. They represented the poetic nature of the Australian outback. In modern experimental films, their films represent the very ancient and the sacred in the land. When the Cantrills filmed Uluru, they used the film technology to the maximum of its capacity to represent the meaning of the Rock, the Aboriginal tribal lands and the bush. They screened these icons in contemporary theatrical spaces, unlike Australian land culture represented in important galleries and museums of art in the world.

**Political statement, Grain of the Voice**

In Harry Smith interview (1974, p.7) Smith reflected on how Australians ignore Aboriginal culture:
The Australian government wants Australia to be a sort of another United States, whereas there is still a chance that the knowledge that the Aboriginals had can be put to use. It was proved years ago that all human beings have the same intellectual capacity; that there are no lower races or higher races or anything like that. They all have the same capacity for thought, but the historical background of the thought is different in all societies. The historical material that is run through the brain is different in here and in there (Smith, 1974, p.7).

The Cantrills projected the film *Grain of the Voice* in a theatrical setting with a live component of extra media taking part before and between each of the four parts of the film. They installed a three-dimensional structure around the film screen. They also made double-screen or triple-screens shows such as *Meteor Crater, Gosse Bluff* (1978), where the middle screen was a superimposition and the two outside screens were showing hills moving in opposite directions.

The visual part of *Grain of the Voice* is a meditation on stolen tribal lands. Corinne (1980, p.38) said that it is about “lands that were stolen from the Aboriginals very recently. We are talking about the past few decades.” Throughout the film, the Cantrills visited remarkable, beautiful sites that were of sacred importance to Aborigines but which are now tourist picnic spots and parts of grazing stations. The most tragic of all is Pine Gap, which can only be approached at a great distance. This is an extraordinary area, and contains a controversial military installation. The area has some of the most important cave paintings in the vicinity, which do happen to be just outside the installation. “As you approach, a man with a gun rushes up and flags you down and you say, we were told there are interesting cave paintings nearby. But it’s very depressing to see what we Europeans have done to this area, where there are still many tribal people living” (Cantrill, 1980, p.38). The Cantrills see the visual part of the film as meditation on
Aboriginal lands, and they hoped it would connect up in a meaningful way with the struggle for land rights and recognition of Aboriginal rights in this vital area where thousands and thousands of tribal people are still living in Central Australia (Cantrill, 1980, p.38).

The techniques and interest in filming the three-dimensional art form sculptures, the Klippel and Gaudier-Brzeska films, are linked with the Cantrills’ Australian landscape films, in particular Grain of the Voice. The question of the modulation of light by three-dimensional objects that is a feature of human made sculpture or natural geological phenomena is of interest to the Cantrills. There is also a connection in the style of filming and how the camera communicates with the sculptures in the Robert Klippel films. Grain of the Voice is the sequel to Edges of Meaning that the Cantrills had undertaken at La Mama couple of years ago, which was a film-performance theatrical piece based on Baldwin Spencer’s cinematography in Central Australia in 1901. With this film, they reworked some of his images and presented them with a tape recorder and a spoken sound context using narration. While that was about a 19th century Englishman’s reaction to Australian original culture, Grain of the Voice in a sense is to do with the personal reactions of the filmmakers to the culture. Corinne described the differences between the two projects:

We went to Central Australia under the impetus of having read and thought about Baldwin Spencer’s work, and literally with his book in hand. But the very first place we went to, Emily Gap, on which he wrote in detail - we were so disturbed at what had been done to this very sacred place, it affected all our filming. We really distanced ourselves and most of Grain of the Voice follows on from this shock and disappointment and it is a very distanced film” (Cantrill, 1980, p.40).
The Cantrills described *Grain of the Voice* as “an expression of despair, weariness and helplessness” (Cantrill, 1980, p.43). The Cantrills were tracing Baldwin Spencer’s steps, his writings, photographs and his film material from eighty years earlier. They described their feelings as soon as they were in the same spots discovering the recent devastation of an ancient society and culture, and to what end. They were saddened and turned away. “These were our thoughts after the visit to Unthurqua, Emily Gap, a sacred site of the Witchetty Grub Totem for thousands of years, now swept away, now a tourist picnic spot (Cantrill, 1980, p.43).

Helplessness, because finally the Aboriginal people are alone in their struggle, with pressures from every side, with the government and its ever changing policies, with missionaries, with the police, the white settlers and the tourists. Their stoicism, and good-naturedness in the face of so many problems, which threw us into deep despair on their behalf, may carry them through. Any people which has lived with the trials of harsh natural elements has perhaps learned that patience, which we, isolated from the elements, have never learned (Cantrill, 1980, p.43).

*Grain of the Voice* is based on a series of recordings the Cantrills made with the Pitjantjatjara people, in the Areyonga Settlement, west Central Australia. The Cantrills collaborate with Areyonga people on the sound track. They described this relationship:

They were happy to record some song cycles dealing with travelling across the country, they’re secular songs, of course we wouldn’t be allowed to record sacred ones. They are dealing in one case with a group of women traveling across the landscape, and they are the sorts of songs that worked in very well with our intentions to film the landscape (Cantrill, 1980, p.39).

The Cantrills said that most of the imagery in this film focuses on central Australian landscapes, with a very small amount of film of the singers. Nothing of the songs on the
tapes has been shortened, edited, trimmed, or tidied up (Cantrill, 1980, p.41). The Cantrills made sure that the interpretation of the film was not literal. They did not want to know the meanings of the words. They did not film the scenes of the singers in synchronization with the sound. They kept the integrity of the tapes as recorded, the entirety and wholeness of the voices. The entire sound reflection of that afternoon was recorded (Cantrill, 1980, p.41).

The Cantrills announced that the disappointment that highlighted *Grain of the Voice* was different from all the previous films about the landscape. This film connected with their formal cinematic concerns but it does not have the formality of *Home Movie – A Day in the Bush*, neither the animated stream of a thousand details in *Bouddi*, or the carefully layered images, organised camera movements and animation in *Earth Message* (Cantrill, 1980, p.41).

“They continue to film because film matters to them” (Hemensley, 1984, p.1). The Cantrills were interested in a different idea in each new film. They wanted to develop new ideas and pursue new lines of investigation. Their investigation in this film was more a political statement and a historical comparison between the situation in Spencer’s time and in recent times. Arthur Cantrill used a quote from Margaret Preston to defend the Cantrills’ philosophy. Preston said: “The evolution of the artist is not up a vertical ladder, it’s more like a horizontal ladder, you move from one area to another, and you don’t necessarily think of your self advancing or improving on anything that’s gone before, you just move into another area” (Cantrill, 1980, p.39). The next chapter will show the move
of the Cantrills to another area that represented Australian cultural discussion but this time through personal and self-portrait films.
CHAPTER 5

Personal films, Cantrills films

Introduction

P. Adams Sitney in his essay about ‘autobiography in avant-garde film’ said “for twenty years the word ‘Personal’ has been attributed to a majority of independently made avant-garde films.” The research into the ‘personal’ world of the filmmaker/author to be the main subject of a film required an examination for the language of film. It relied strongly on the influences of the writing of personal stories history from novels and researches (like the writing of authors from the classical writing such as Cicero, Montagne, J.J. Rousseau, Wordsworth and Chateaubriand, Virginia Woolf, Thoreau or the Contemporary Didion, Hoagland, Plutarch, Nietzsche and Sartre and many other writers who wrote personal essays about themselves.)

Personal films named as ‘diary film’ such as Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania, for P. Adams Sitney, ‘self portrait films’ and ‘memory’s movies’ like Film Portrait (1971) of Jerome Hill, ‘essay films’ like Letter From Siberia for Chris Marker, ‘home movie’ like the films of Stan Brackage and Jonas Mekas, ‘autobiography films’ as Par excellence for Hollis Frampton or the Testament of James Broughton’s etc. These kinds of personal films connected together in many technical and structural areas, but shaped by what is ‘personal’ as the main concentration of the filmmakers in the films. Chris Tillan, (1972, p.8) defined personal film as:

Each man sees himself as centre of the universe. In personal movie the filmers records his environment from this central viewpoint and there lies the fascination: A chance to see reality as it exists for another person. The movement is away from fiction as we realise that our own lives are more complex and fascinating.”
The word ‘individual’ is about this combination that led to make what is ‘personal’ that is differ the person from the other combinations that make the individuality of other people. This combination is made out of the history, memory, events, genes, background, culture, education, social and moral values, and the personal dreams which drive this combination the way every person can see himself or herself.

Personal in film shared film technology (cameras, Laboratory, editing and screening) filmmakers manipulate the images, in an experimental manner using a lot of photographs of themselves and their relatives in the visual, to show the physical appearance and connections of the characters. Themes like birth and death exist nearly in every story or were layers behind stories. The failure of film materials to recreate the past and memories in that kind of personal films led many ‘personal’ filmmakers to discuss the film capacity in their films. They have to talk as part of the film about what was convenient and unconvenient to the chronology of the story and in that case filmmakers used perfectly their imagination and creativity to create visually and in the text what remind and connected to the reality of their memory.

**In This Life’s Body**

In This Life’s Body is a personal film preoccupied not only with the telling of the story but with conveying understanding for the past of the author, with searching for the peculiar character of the recognizing consciousness. This makes the search in the past of Corinne objective in an autobiographical works. It is more detached than confessional. It is narrated in an analytic manner.
“I think there are a couple of works, which are going to show themselves to be extremely influential in the long run, on the local and in the international scene. I think *In This Life’s Body* is a masterpiece, and it will be around in a hundred years time.” (Ross Gibson quoted in Mikhail, 2000b) This chapter will discuss two important films of the Cantrills: *In This Life’s Body* a self-portrait of Corinne Cantrill, and *Prestonia*, about the history of the Cantrills’ house parallel to the history of cinema.

*In This Life’s Body* is a representation of aspects of Australian cultural imagery through the discussion of the personal memory of Australian experimental filmmaker Corinne Cantrill. Corinne’s existence as a filmmaker and her unique contribution to the Cantrills partnership is strongly linked to her ability to use her personal life to create this film. The film introduced by Adrian Martin (1988, p.95) as “a rare venture by the Cantrills into the realms of story-telling and identifiable representational imagery, but it is entirely consistent with the purity of their other researches.” It is an important film for this thesis because it researched the history of ‘Corinne’, half of ‘the Cantrills’ collaboration, as she connected her history to the Cantrills’ film work. It shows through a study of Corinne’s childhood aspects of Australian cultural and social backgrounds and the economical factors that defined her personality and in turn influenced fundamentally the Cantrills’ film work. This film highlighted events from the birth of Corinne in 1928 until the film started in 1982. It covered cultural aspects introduced by Kris Hemensley:

It is a cultural autobiography, that is to say, it presents a portrait of the arts milieu from the 1940’s to the 1980’s. It staggers me to think of Corinne as having been
active so long, from her mid teens in Sydney, her twenties in Europe, and again in her thirties [in Brisbane], the USA in her forties, and nowadays a globetrotter from a crucial Melbourne base (Hemensley, 1984, p.28).

Corinne made this film to find out the circumstances that led to who she is and where her characteristics come from. “In her own words, she recreates her own story” (Hemensley, 1984, p.27). Corinne remembered many things such as the Saturday afternoon at the pictures, teachers, schools and names of flowers. She also situated the story of the violence in her own family between her parents when she was a child in a time of other violence, the Second World War. She described it in the film: “She had grown in an era of hatreds and narrowness. People hated Tykes, Yids, Dagos, Japs, Chinamen, Black Fellas, Gypsies, the Bosses, Pig Iron Bob. With war, now they could really hate their heads off” (Cantrill, 1984, p.60). She remembered her mother: “She was just a part of society that was mean, carping, nagging, not given the joy of its children – a society that thought of children as creatures to be controlled” (Cantrill, 1984, p.59). She also remembered: “There was a turmoil of ideas at home – Communism, Theosophy, an acute sense of world events: the idea of social justice, an awareness of India and its religions” (Cantrill, 1984, p.60). Corinne worked as artists’ model: “Norman Lindsay took some study of me” (Cantrill, 1984, p.59). Corinne found place in her film to remember the portrait of the pedagogue Fanny Cohen, a feminist in her practice ahead of ideological rhetoric, while going through her journey from Corinne Joseph (the descendent of a Jewish Iraqi father who’s family migrated to Asia and then to Australia, to the daughter of Anglo European mother Jewish). Her marriage to Arthur was described by Kris Hemensley (1984, p.28) as: “Anglo-European contemporaneity (both influences out of kilter with the conservative torpor of mid century Australia.”
What made *In This Life’s Body* an important film is the use of the subjective theme of Corinne’s personal life story inside an objective cultural Australian envelope. She recorded her personal history and the history of her family in connection to her as the genetic extension and it is written from Corinne’s point of view. Personal themes were the concern of Corinne as an artist and that theme shaped art in the last half of the twentieth century.

Since the 1960s, artists increasingly sought to break down the boundaries between art and life and to make a connection between art and society. Art became increasingly directly related to the social, economic and historical environment. The artist’s body was used as the primary signifying material of the artist’s gesture. Making the body a site on which ideas could be enacted (Warr & Jones, p.201).

*In This Life’s Body* is a film that discussed strongly the philosophy of the individual being as a social being. Its discussion is in the core of an art debate that has enriched the dialogue between artist and society. It declared extra information about the human being as an individual and as a social being.

Corinne Cantrill was quoted in Sandra Hall’s article criticizing the acting in ‘story film’. She says: “Robert Bresson, the French director now uses non-actors in all his films, because he says that each time an actor opened his mouth it is insincerity. In addition, I think as he does. If I made a story film, I’d use non actors” (Hall, 1969 p.47). The main point of Corinne’s work was about discovering new possibilities using film, as material offers itself to filmmakers, to create his/her own style film. This film was in her own style, where she used her biography and her personal photographs in a long feature film.
*In This Life’s Body* included ‘a version’ (as she called it) of her personal story, without using actors. This film is also an essay about using photographs in autobiographical film. It is a film of photographs or “portraits of time” (Hemensley, 1984, p.27). The photographs represents aspects of the history of photography in Australia. Corinne told her story parallel to the chronological order of the family photographs and turned it into a study of the notion of photographs as frozen moments within a moving film. She expanded the use of photography to construct most of the two and a half hours of film. Corinne’s concerns were in the transformation of the photographs into another medium:

The movement of the film grain from frame to frame, the varied framing of the image, the length of shots, the cuts, fades, dissolves – the large projected image in the dark room – how did these elements transform photographs into films? What differences between seeing an image with the cut edges of the photo, and seeing it so that it fills the frame? (Cantrill, 1984, p.61).

*In This Life’s Body* is connected strongly to Corinne’s interest in the Australian bush, the Cantrills’ landscape themes and to film-form research. “*In This Life’s Body* reintegrates the social and historical body with the landscape, the world” (Hemensley, 1984, p.28). The film connected visually and thematically to the Australian landscape films, to some of the children’s films the Cantrills made in the beginning of their film work and to the films they have made about Australian and European artists. Corinne is an Australian artist, yet *In This Life’s Body* escaped the regional theme. It represented Corinne’s opinions about the freedom of the child within society, when she discusses through her story how a person is composed of many natures, as she explained in her statement about *

*In This Life’s Body* in the *Filmmotes*:

I would like to reflect on the two powerful desires in our lives: that tension between the desire to be a free-wheeling individual – separate, autonomous, unfettered, alone, with a sense of freedom, space, power – and the desire to be in
union, part of a harmonious family, in a warm relationship, in wider social groupings, co-operative. Not opposite desires and positions but different points on a wave form path (Cantrill, 1984, p.66).

The Cantrills’ successful collaboration as a modern essay about art is in their search for the individual self in connection with the objective and subjective points which helped them to create their own ‘wave form path’. Corinne explained the challenge for humans individually and at every level of social relationships as in the movement between these two powerful desires. This movement creates reconciliation to allow us “to experience the contradictions of our many natures and the problem of our ambivalence” (Cantrill, 1984, p.66).

The representation of the autobiographical in an edited cinematic story in this film created a critical debate. Corinne doubt whether she can call it autobiographical or confessional film. “There remain other profoundly hurtful things of which I cannot speak” (Cantrill, 1984, p.66). “I hoped that if I could push my memory back into my earliest years, I might lay bare the sources of my anxiety” (Cantrill, 1984, p.58). “There are years without a single photograph, though these are the most interesting years for me” (Cantrill, 1984, p.62). However, In This Life’s Body has a strong connection to autobiographical literature, personal stories or self-portrait films. Corinne was influenced in the writing of the text of this film by reading “Anais Nin’s diaries, Laleen Jayamanne’s Prodigal Daughters, Ania Walwicz’s writing, Valerie Kirwan’s Will to Fall” (Cantrill, 1984, p.60).
Corinne took the discussion of the ownership of photography into further analyses to broaden the understanding of the photographic theme. “When I started this film, I thought photographs were just surfaces”⁴⁹ (Cantrill, 1984, p.58), she said, but as she committed herself to the project she realized that “the surface has its own meaning”⁵⁰ (Cantrill, 1984, p.58). She questioned whether the photographs can hold true human memories or are superficial to human history. She also discussed the influence of Hollywood movies on social life in Australia and human behaviour. “I have been named after a Hollywood film star” (Cantrill, 1984, p.58). Corinne gave examples her mother’s fashion as “whatever was dictated by Hollywood” (Cantrill, 1984, p.58). This discussion runs parallel to another discussion measuring the amount of truth in an autobiographical text.

What makes this film important extends beyond Corinne’s discussion of autobiography and photographs. It is in fact the individual perception of Corinne about her own story and how her consciousness of her history framed the subject of the film and made the film relate to a complicated narrative genre of film. Corinne is the author of the text of In This Life’s Body which conveys understanding for her past but at the same time Corinne was searching for the peculiar character which her consciousness decided to recognize. This makes her autobiographical search of her past character objective. It is more detached than confessional and is narrated in an analytical manner. Her memory is invasive and directed at the audience. She described how her character grew and blossomed in the film: birth, a childhood full of sadness, a passionate teenager, dreams of discovering life and travelling, intellectual surroundings, a revolutionary character who

⁴⁹ From the text that Corinne Cantrill wrote for the film In This Life’s Body, 1982.
never accepted the limitations imposed on her by society. She created her own independent film co-operative with Arthur Cantrill. This arrangement and the independence it afforded them saved them from many distractions imposed on filmmakers by the industry. Corinne ended up recording her personal history and her work process into her film *In This Life’s Body*, where in the last half of the film her contribution to the partnership is brought to light.

Corinne’s powerful and definitive voice, which is technically a narrated voice-over, is part of the film-form experiment. The voice-over is used to narrate, criticize, discuss and build what Corinne as author decided is her past picture. Corinne was providing information from her memory in a similar way to poetry, to convey an individual consciousness and an interior thinking voice. She was not reporting events from her past or telling little stories but she was offering to her audience a certain controlled amount of information about how she felt toward certain behaviour. She explained how her parents’ relationship crisis led to her being an anxious, independent girl. She spoke in order to wonder as she was assembling her picture. Together with the picture, Corinne’s voice helped the film move forward. Corinne’s voice both sets the rhythm and establishes the character of the images. Corinne was discovering at the same time what Patricia Hampell calls “the extraordinary pliancy of the first person: not simply that it has a story, but that it can tell one. The self is not a source or a subject; it is an instrument” (Hampell, p.57).

---

50 ibid
Corinne’s story shakes the surface of the photography in this film. She extracts a depth of discussion for every photograph. This discussion ran between Corinne in the present and Corinne the child, the teenager and the creative woman. She turned the seemingly mundane photographs into important pictures. They changed from the normal family snap-shots and street photography to parallel the political, social and multicultural context of more than 54 years of the twentieth century. She shook off the surface of the Cantrills’ experience by recording her own history as the female who independently created her individual culture working in partnership with Arthur Cantrill. Ten years older than Arthur, she experienced migration and independence. In this film, she went deep down, back to her childhood to show how her personality was formed.

*In This Life’s body* is a certificate of the intelligent, flexible and powerful mind of Corinne Cantrill, who protected her ideas and drove them according to her complicated but clear view. A personality who successfully managed to protect her work from external dangers (e.g., all sorts of commercial theories about making films, the film funding bodies who expected a certain type of cinema, the box office cinema). *In This Life’s Body* is a coherent work similar to the Cantrills’ collaboration, which is controlled wisely by expert economy and artistic talent of both Arthur and Corinne.

**Ivor films**

The Cantrills filmed many personal films about their son Ivor Cantrill (Australian artist who lives with them), his work and daily life routine. Both Corinne and Arthur wrote about Ivor’s involvement in their cooperative independent film work.
Ivor is an autistic person since birth. This condition has limited his ability to communicate verbally. Ivor grew up in a filmmaking family and from an early age participated in film projects, often appearing in films such as his parents’ _Harry Hooton, Home Movie – A Day in the Bush_. He experienced screenings of much avant-garde and animated film, and developed an innate feeling for the timing of frame structures in hand drawn film and the more conventional technique of animation on paper (Cantrill, 1988, p.67).

Ivor drew Christmas cards for Cantrills’ family friends. Corinne and Arthur recorded those cards in a film _Ivor’s Tiger Xmas Card_ (1994) and another film about Ivor’s artwork was _Ivor’s Exhibition_ (1995). In another film he was playing around the camera with his brother Aaron when they were little in _Home Movie - A Day in the Bush_, or when Ivor was playing in front of the camera when he was teenager in _Myself When Fourteen_, or Ivor having a haircut in Bali, _Agung Gives Ivor a Haircut_ (1991).

**Projected light and the death of cinema**

In 1988, the Cantrills returned to the USA. They found there was a spirit of deep pessimism about the future of film. This experience influenced them. They returned to Melbourne and began work on the _Prestonia: Projected Light_ and _Autumn Light_ films (Cantrills, 1989, p.11). Both were filmed on 16 mm Kodachrome. This project had been considered for a long time, since the Cantrills were in Berlin in 1985. They explained: “_The Berlin Apartment_ film influenced the _Prestonia_ work, and there are many similar concerns in both films. 1988 was the centenary of the building of the house, and the tyranny of significant dates gave another stimulus for the project” (Cantrills, 1989, p.11). They showed the original copy on their projector with two screens and sound on tape, live voice, plus slides and archaeological facts at La Mama. The screening was like a
celebration of the rich, saturated quality of original Kodachrome. Corinne describes the work:

Not striking a print freed us financially to make a two-hour work. Since then we have shown it in Australia, North America, Europe and New Zealand using unknown projectors, and by some miracle there is still not a scratch on it, though it has been projected in rehearsals and performances over a hundred times. Maybe there is an angel watching over *Projected Light*. By now film laboratory charges were so high for 16mm there could be no pleasure in working with such an expensive medium. Parallel with this was our anxiety about the sheer volume of film materials filling the house: originals, work prints, trims, mag., tracks, optical tracks, and answer prints, release prints. Now it is impossible to sell prints of the films, it is an environmental/ecological error to keep adding to this. When we die who is going to deal with it all? [Two years ago the accumulating burden of our ‘professional’ mode of 16mm production was finally sheeted home when we realized that the work urgently needed to be reprinted if it was to be preserved, it suddenly seemed impossible to continue filmmaking this way.] This is one of the imperatives to work in Super 8 (Cantrill, 1997, p.61).

Corinne filmed about 5000 feet of film over seven months. “Because of the subtlety of the light she distrusted the exposure meter, and developed an intuitive sense for the exposure by ‘feeling’ the quality and intensity of the light, remembering it, keeping notes on everything shot, including the time of day” (Cantrills, 1989, p.11). This method of working gave the Cantrills a deeper involvement with the quality of light than would have been possible by depending on the exposure meter. The *Prestonia* material showed the Cantrills’ desire to engage oneself with filming the house and its surrounds and “dozens of small illuminated details heightened the drama of contrast between light and dark areas of images, so different from every day perception” (Cantrills, 1989, p.11).

When La Mama theatre invited the Cantrills to contribute to their 21st birthday season in October 1988, it was decided to use the *Prestonia* material as the basis for a film performance, *Projected Light – On the Beginning and End of Cinema*. David Cox, who
considered the Cantrills to have represented a genuine ‘golden era’ of film in Australia wrote in *Filmnews*:

The Cantrills seem to paint a picture of themselves as the last of a rare breed held in self imposed exile in their physical and aesthetic studio/fortress ‘Prestonia’, custodians of an ancient and noble craft and philosophy – ‘kinema’, not cinema, not film even, necessarily, but projected light as art form? The meditative pondering of reflected light waves as they enter the house via windows, cracks, spaces between leaves in the trees outside and when needed via the mechanical apparatus of film (Cox, 1989, p.10).

The Cantrills announced in the *Projected Light* performance that ‘Prestonia’ is the name of the Cantrills’ house, which was built in 1888, a remarkable year in the history of cinema, music, art, as well as in the architecture of Melbourne. *Projected Light* as a meditation brought together a history of early cinema, which recurs often in 1888 and ‘Prestonia’ and its history as Victorian architecture. As C. W. Ceram described, Louis Aime Augustin Le Prince (1842-1890) spent two years between 1886 to 1888 developing a camera and a projector with sixteen lenses. “In his patent statement dated January 10, 1988, he was certainly the first to do this – separate devices for taking pictures and for projection. … He also succeed in making his first film projection” (Ceram, 1965, pp.141-142).

The Cantrills’ statement about the *Projected Light* film performance talks about “the possible influences of cinema on architectural detail, a homage to Kodachrome – and death: death of film, our own deaths and the transitory nature of life, perhaps alluded to throughout the film by the transitory path of light in the house” (Cantrills, 1989, p.11).
This work in some ways was a contradictory work between the life-affirming imagery and the pessimistic narration. “I am not making this film because I love this house... I am making it because I am here... this is where I am now... it’s all here around me... no need to go out looking for subjects or themes” (Cantrills, 1989, p.39). Their images were about life and light filmed in the rain, on windy days, at sunset and at night. The imagery concentrated on “the beauty in the things that are around us which we no longer see” (Cantrills, 1989, p.39). The last words in Projected Light are:

We are part of that small band – the filmmakers – we are making the last films with the remnants of the last film materials. Just as, at another level, we may be the last people, witnessing the last forests, the last birds and animals. [All those encounters in Nature, which first attuned the eye and ear to nuance of tone and form]. The end of Kinema is upon us – one keeps working (Cantrills, 1989, p.39).

The Cantrills referred to the audience in Projected Light: “Whereas these ideas were articulated in the narration (sparing the audience the terrors of silence!) Autumn Light is informed by the ideas of Projected Light without stating them in words” (Cantrills, 1989, p.39). David Cox explained in his article ‘The Light on the Hill’: “There is a political message bubbling away beneath the surface of Projected Light, ‘it is to make film before the entire medium disappears.’ A kind of techno-conversation where the underground film environment is declared a national park” (Cox, 1989, p.10).

From 1986, the Melbourne Super 8 Group became a meeting point for many people working with the format, offering regular screenings and a festival. In 1987, the Cantrills made The Walking Track at Wilson’s Promontory, a landscape film, which was a precursor to Tidal River in 1996, aiming to create a texture of place. A program note written by Arthur at the time in Corinne Cantrill’s article:
We are walking to Tongue Point at Wilson’s Promontory along the bush track. It is very hot. We’re following this pre-ordained white sandy path, unable to penetrate to the left or right, there’s nothing else but to go ahead, knowing that, however long the walk, the destination will be reached. It is not unlike a projector tracking a film – the audience obliged to follow the filmmaker’s path inscribed on the strip, which will end at a pre-ordained place. The camera meanwhile, delights in the pleasures of the bush, the details and textures at either side, pretending the track doesn’t exist, losing itself in another world in microcosm, but returning to the path from time to time as if to be assured that we are ‘on track’. We arrive at Tongue Point. After the viewing, there is nothing else to do but reverse the tracking, the duration of which will be shortened by familiarity (Cantrill, 1997, p63).

The Cantrills worked with 16mm and 8mm films and once with 35mm in Floterian - Hand Printings From a Film History (1981). In 1990 they started working on Super 8 film materials. It was a very sensitive problem for them, having to adapt after a long period of working on 16mm. In the 1970s they used standard Super 8 cameras occasionally on projects such as filming in Central Australia and Lorne, some of which was hand printed in Floterian and the Jas Duke film Sound Poem. The last film they made in 16mm as printable, releasable film with optical sound tracks was: Waterfall (1984), a colour separation films.

“Experimental films are works which need to be experienced” (Koller, 1994, p.10). Waterfall is the fourteenth of the Cantrills’ colour separation study films on MacKenzie Falls in the Grampians, Victoria. The red, green and blue separations were shot on 16mm black-and-white negative and were printed with colour filtration onto Eastmancolor print stock. The colour appeared around the edges of the leaves, the trees, the grass and the slashes of water. “Waterfall is the most dynamic of their three colour separation series” (Koller, 1994, p.10). When the Cantrills started to experiment on colour separation, they were very careful to have as little movement in the frame as possible fearing the technical
effects. “By 1979 we began incorporating more and more movement to further develop the time colour relationship. And we believe we are closer to achieving the full potential of this technique” (Cantrill, 1984, p.2). As Arthur Cantrill stated (in the Cantrills Filmnotes 45 and 46) slow shutter speeds were a feature of the 19th Century photographic experiments done by Eadweard Muybridge. “The only way to achieve this in cinematography is through a very slow shutter speed, in fact a time exposure in each frame, and the Bolex 16mm spring-wound camera is one of the few capable of this operation” (Cantrill, 1984, p.2). Arthur Cantrill, explained:

‘Waterfall’ begins with footage shot at 24 fps, but even here there is a hint of the ‘Muybridge effect’, as the 3 superimposed images of moving water combine into a solid white undifferentiated flow, surrounded by coloured activity caused by variations in the flow patterns during the three exposures. The solid white body of water contrasts strongly against the dark, still background. The effect is then enhanced by slowing the shutter speed to 12 fps, and finally to exposures of a half to one second per frame, using the time-exposure facility on the camera, and a greatly reduced f-stop. As there is no precise exposure control, the exposures were guessed which resulted in slight changes of density on the three separations, producing colour tints in some shots (Cantrill, 1984, p.2).

The Cantrills found that “by using the three colour separation process, they could achieve startlingly realistic colour, superior to ordinary tri-pack film stock with unreal displacement of colour occurring where there was movement in the frame” (Koller, 1994, p.10). The Cantrills’ knowledge of the early history of cinema reflects their desire to rediscover the nature of the recorded image. What they have achieved throughout their careers as filmmakers, through constantly questioning and discovering the medium of film and exploring images, “is a pursuit of the essence of the filmic experience” (Koller, 1994, p.10). This thesis about the Cantrills is calling for their work to be recognised and celebrated in their lifetime and in their country.
CONCLUSION

The work of Arthur and Corrine Cantrill is theoretically drawn from a tradition of European arts and visually drawn from Australian landscape and urban culture; can their work be identified and understood as Australian art?

This thesis explains how the theoretical influences on the Cantrills stemmed from European theories of art in the 1960s. Researching the film work and statements of the Cantrills revealed that their work is also influenced by Australian theories which derived from visual art, poetry, literature and Aboriginal culture. The Cantrills produced Australian experimental films that were compatible with international experiments and research. The Cantrills through *Cantrills Filmnotes* helped challenge a field of writing about independent alternative Australian film. They distribute the magazine around the world. Their tours, travel and teaching overseas accessed the art works in festivals of other artists, from different cultures, and they collected experiences for learning and creating. They have also gained insight and gathered knowledge about ways to present their Australian films.

The lack of recognition of the Cantrills film-form in Australia in the seventies, and the interest in it from European and American experimental film networks, emphasize the Cantrills’ role in creating a profile for Australian experimental film globally. The lack of knowledge about film in Australia and the rejection that the Cantrills described in many articles, and particularly after the big success of the period of Arthur’s fellowship and the
Expanded Cinema exhibitions, had mainly a positive effect by forcing the Cantrills to increase connections with experimental film networks around the world. This was a chance for innovative Australian independent film to be shown overseas. It offered support and encouragement for the Cantrills to keep producing experimental film and challenged them intellectually. The lack of recognition was taken by the Cantrills as a rejection from Australia. It forced the Cantrills to look for a critical language to discuss their work. This thesis reveals aspects that led to the launching of the Cantrills Filmnotes magazine and its importance as a unique historical document of time and place.

This thesis reveals that the Cantrills were mediators in connecting the movements of experimental art and film overseas with Australian practice. Through researching the Cantrills Filmnotes, this thesis highlighted an opportunity offered for the individual opinions of many independent and experimental filmmakers from Australia and overseas to write about their experience in this unique magazine. The Cantrills published interviews with many artists who worked in the experimental film field from Australia and overseas. That was important for Australian filmmakers to compare their films with overseas experiences. These artists recorded their own theories about art or film in the Filmnotes. For many of those films the only record that still exists is what the artists wrote about their work in Filmnotes. This research reveals also that the Filmnotes were published to record experimental film experiences in Australia after the Cantrills discovered the types of Australian audiences.
The discussion in this thesis profited from articles, interviews and statements written by various critics and experimental filmmakers in Australia who were familiar with the Cantrills’ work and who followed the Cantrills’ progress over the year. Their articles were used as evidence to show the effects of the Cantrills on the experimental film area in Australia in the last forty years of the twentieth century. They also provided analyses of the Cantrills’ style that helped to clarify the complexity in their aesthetic style, and support the main argument of this thesis to identify the Cantrills work as Australian. The Cantrills’ statements about their work, published in Cantrills Filmnotes and other newspapers and film journals, shed light on their history as experimental filmmakers during the last thirty years within the context of experimental film history in Australia and their connection with many experimental sources around the world. The Cantrills Filmnotes were an irreplaceable source of detailed information and documentation about the Cantrills and were used widely for this thesis.

The documentation in this thesis, of the Cantrills’ travelling outside and inside Australia, recorded events that the Cantrills claimed helped them to exchange influences between Australia and overseas. However, the Cantrills offered their radical alternative films and performances as they opened largely the material nature of film to the public in Australia.

This research revealed that living overseas provoked within the Cantrills a desire to enlarge their work about the Australian landscape and its cultural imagery. They became experts on Australian landscape film subjects but their exploration of the meanings of the landscape did not block the way for the exploration of the physicality of film. Abroad
they discovered how important it was to them to go back and work from Australia. The Cantrills’ film work, their research and their statements were used widely as the main evidence and source to investigate the main question.

The Cantrills’ movements in life and their artistic work are about the challenges that global art creates widely within local (Australian) art. The Cantrills’ genre of cinema was constructed to serve as an enlightening experience for general audiences. Their research on film-form was intended to draw the audiences to the endless possibilities that have existed in film-form; something that needed to be re-discovered and spread within Australian culture. Reading art in any medium is a subject that has concerned intellectuals around the world in the twentieth century. Fundamentally, this thesis approached the theme of reading following the progress of the Cantrills’ philosophy and methods. This research reveals that the Cantrills’ experience with Australian audiences led them to improve their film-performances to find an approach that can facilitate their film work to Australian audiences. Wherever they exhibited, they introduced audiences to the aesthetic experience of film-form and, at the same time, they tried to increase the audiences’ awareness of Australian imagery to establish a connection through an Australian landscape theme. When the Cantrills began their independent research in the area of film-form in the sixties in Australia, there was little experimentation in this area. Australia had not developed its own intellectual information about the philosophy of film-form. They changed the perception that experimental film was largely ignored and unknown by producing the Cantrills Filmmotes magazine and continuously showing their work around Australia. Their discussions about their films involved audiences
intellectually in their performances and selected shows. The body of work produced by the Cantrills between the 1960 and now is an important resource that offers audiences the chance to develop their knowledge about film. It exists to challenge audiences’ minds to new ways of seeing, and new vistas on the relation between the human mind and the technologies that humans create: Camera, film material, chemical processes and projector.

Experimental film often dissects the process of filmmaking itself, and demonstrates or exposes the technical components from which films are made. This process of exposing the component properties of film was realized in the Cantrills’ films from aesthetic and conceptual perspectives but without falling into a dry scientific presentation. They created a place for discussion, a forum about the ways art can expose its nature and be understood, to enhance the act of ‘seeing’ and the communication between audience and artistic work represented this time by the medium of film.

This research values the Cantrills’ experiments on film-form as an example connected to an international scientific study about the capacity of film-form. The literature review includes a widespread discussion of film as an art medium - from a theoretical and intellectual perspective from the 1920s to the 1970s, when new waves of experimental filmmaking occurred in different places and times. Drawing on these earlier theories, the Cantrills supported their film work by introducing the theories of artists who were involved with film-form, such as Moholy-Nagy, Artaud, Breton, Buñuel, Dali, Epstein, Eisenstein, Kracauer and others from Europe. They also introduced scientists who
experimented on colour, light, camera and projectors such as Eadweard Muybridge, James Maxwell, Thomas Young and Man Ray. The Cantrills introduced Australian cultural aspects through theories of art to the world by dedicating many of their film works to Australian artists and poets because “we were all so easily forgotten” (Cantrill, 1974, p.36). They made documentaries and experimental films recognizing Australian artists, poets and filmmakers such as Harry Hooton, Charles Buckmaster and Garrie Hutchinson, as well as the sculptor Robert Klippel, the artist Charles Lloyd, Ivor Cantrill and themselves as filmmakers. The Cantrills recognized the early history of Australian cinema when they researched the early work of the anthropologist Baldwin Spencer in 1901. Each of those artists included his/her theory about his/her art in these films. The Cantrills’ films about Australian artists and intellectuals, as historical documents, are there to be remembered. This thesis shows how the Cantrills’ film work through their personal angles balanced the influence of foreign theories of art on them with the representational images of the Australian landscapes and urban culture. This balance helped to elevate the Cantrills’ work to the status of original Australia art. This thesis has investigated how their film co-operation successfully achieved their goals.

The Cantrills recognized regional and indigenous subjects and were attracted to subjects that represented Australian landscape. This thesis has pursued the subject of the landform film-form (which is the main body of the Cantrills’ work). It has focused on when they recorded ancient parts of the Australian landscape that hold unique iconic meanings and showed them to the world.
The Cantrills debated the ideas of intellectuals who raised questions about the basis of film, art, writing forms and nature. They did this in order to increase the cultural and intellectual discussions of artists, audiences and critics. The thesis allowed the interrogation to be explained in terms of why important figures from the artistic area in the Australian region like the Cantrills were not supported financially (although they continuously served Australian art at their own expense).

The thesis discusses the outcome of the eighteen months the Cantrills worked in Canberra (with the support of the Australian National University funding) as the most productive period of their lives, a period in which they continuously made experimental films. Arthur compares it with their present circumstances: “I’m retired from work, but now we can’t afford the cost of filmmaking, and we hate the idea of funding from the Film Commission – the ‘kiss of death’. (AFC stands for always fucking cinema, in our opinion!” (Cantrill, 2003). This comment illustrates the Cantrills’ ability and desire to continue experimenting in the film area. The ANU funding was a unique opportunity given to experimental art from a government source. It confirms that artists need support to produce valuable work; in the Cantrills case, they produced work that expanded experimentation. They were pioneers in Australia. The Cantrills created Expanded Cinema and theatrical film-performance events that challenged and expanded film screening taking the film out of its traditional place. For their Expanded Cinema exhibitions, they mostly drew visually from the Australian urban culture and partly from Australian landscape culture. The Cantrills set their film-performances to show their film work within a theatrical atmosphere and to include elements outside of the film medium.
The performances used a multiplicity of cinematic, theatrical, cultural elements and the Cantrills’ personal statements. They told the history of their relation to their film work and their intention behind it to increase audience awareness of their Australian imagery and question the subject of film identity.

The Cantrills’ comments on their work (and on funding bodies) has provided an opportunity for this thesis to record examples of the anger of artists that represented the dilemma they faced between their ability and desire to continue experimenting in film-form and their poor economic situation.51 When the Cantrills pointed out in their magazine that experimental film in Australia is neglected they were searching for the reasons that made such important art ignored and hidden in Australia. They wondered why Australia had not promoted its film treasures. Consequently, the marginalization of these films from the mainstream means that Australian audiences have been missing something enlightening and uniquely Australian.

Their co-operation is one of the most productive in Australia, if we consider the quantity and the theoretical quality of the work produced. The responsibility of the Cantrills toward research in film-form and toward Australian art has been studied profoundly in this thesis. The Cantrills have done a lot of film work in their lives and were able to support their work independently and exhibit it continuously in Australia and overseas. The active life style they followed as independent collaborators allowed them to produce,

51 It is not within the scope of this work to discuss the funding bodies, or the Cantrill's relationship with them, and therefore this issue is not explored here. They have received some funding but their current economic situation means that it is very difficult for them to afford to make films.
as individuals and together, a huge number of experimental films in Australia, firstly by working on purely Australian subjects and secondly by the intellectual discussions of the art form they recreated in Australia (by their film practice and promoted largely through their performances) and through the Cantrills Filmnotes magazine. The Australian imagery and themes and the theories of film-form grounded the basic work for an “Australian film evolution”. This thesis finds that Australia has not celebrated the Cantrills as artists who produced important independent intellectual art in their field.

They recorded the history of their artistic work together with their individual history. As independent artists the Cantrills were very specific that their subjects not fall into commercial areas but used the domestic subjects from their daily life to experiment on film material.

This thesis shows how the Cantrills’ activities flourish despite the little financial support they get from film funding bodies in Australia and despite the miseries of independent filmmaking. They did show their films continuously in universities and at the La Mama theatre in Melbourne, and also by organizing travel overseas and presenting their films at festivals and important mainstream museums of art around the world. They did that with the help of a network of friendships that they wove over the years overseas and because of the respect their works garnered from experimental filmmakers worldwide. This research presents a history of the Cantrills’ lives devoted to film work and has evaluated the individual efforts and the dedication of their lives to the area of research in film.
Most of the developments in global experimental film relied on individual filmmakers such as the Cantrills, or small groups, more than institutions. Studying experimental artists will reveal work that is unlikely to be experienced in cinemas. This shows the need for Australian experimental art movements to be organized by art centres and museums to be shown to the public. It needs people other than filmmakers and artists to take up this job so filmmakers can keep experimenting and writing about their experiences.

This thesis recorded the historical context of how the Cantrills’ experimentation evolved. Their activities looked at film-form, in mathematical terms, as an infinite medium like the human mind. Each of their films was about a new experiment in film-form. Their film work and their multimedia performances in the seventies, eighties and nineties exerted influence in the area of experimental film, theatrical film-performance and presenting Australian subjects. They promoted the study of early cinema, when projected light films replaced narrative film. Multi-dimensional screens and installations have replaced the one flat screen and film-performances have been mixed with visual art and theatrical sets. The cinematic aspect dominates the visual art and theatrical aspects in their shows. They projected films on objects, turning the flat screen into three-dimensional art work. They touched on the history of Australian film by refilming old Australian films about Aboriginal culture. They made extensive experiments on colour separation films. Their experience of colour separation was recorded in its quantity and quality in the world of experimental film. It was important in terms of the chemical experimentation, and the visual aspects added beauty to the representation of Australian landscapes. Film was used without a camera, in a pure drawing style, recognising genres of films that have been lost.
for other genres. The Cantrills’ aesthetic style in their films exist to remind us that the making of film is always open to the homogeneity of art, research and creativity.

As illustrated through the thesis, the Cantrills’ work can be identified as Australian art but also as international art. This research concludes that the films produced by Australian independent filmmakers Arthur and Corinne Cantrill have been influenced theoretically by some European theories of art, which they have interpreted in their own way and combined with inspiration from the Australian landscape, urban culture and the Cantrills’ personal history.

However, the Cantrills are influenced by some European art theories and practice and this influence gave the Cantrills’ Australian experimental film work an international flavour. Yet the Cantrills’ film work carries an Australian identity in its subject, is geographically practiced in Australia and financially produced by Australian filmmakers who are attached to the Australian landscape culture. The Cantrills used their wide knowledge to represent landscape and urban Australian culture as important. Their films came to pay respect to a landscape that they personally loved. The individual involvement of the Cantrills in international experimental film events increased the involvement of Australian experimental film work in the international art and film scene.
REFERENCES


http://www.sensesofcinema.com


http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/17/mekas_interview.html


APPENDICES

Arthur and Corinne Cantrill - Filmography

(16mm unless otherwise noted)

A series of silent, scripted, 10-13 mins, B&W children's art and craft films made for ABC TV (who added the sound) between 1960-1963:

*Bottles into Dolls* (Camera: Morgan Jones)

*Glove Puppets 1: Making heads* (Camera: Morgan Jones)

*Glove Puppets 2: Painting Heads and Dressing* (Camera: Morgan Jones).

*Glove Puppets 3: Scenery and Production* (Camera: Morgan Jones)

*Henny Penny Comes to Life, Looking at Insects, Looking at Leaves, Looking at Trees, Making Window Pictures, Metal Collage.*

*Shadow Play* (Camera: Morgan Jones)

A series of 10, 10 min. episodes with shadow puppets made for ABC TV: *The Odyssey.*

A series of 13, 12 min. episodes made for ABC TV: *Kip and David.*

*Zoo,* 30 min.

Several 5 min. silent ‘interludes' made for ABC TV, e.g.

*Feeding the Ducks, Pebbles, Tower of Blocks,* etc.

A Series of four 6 min. studies of native flora:

*Banksia Serrata, Banksia Integrifolia, Casuarina Equisetifolia, Pandanus Pedunculatus,*

Films made from 1963:

*4000 Frames, An Eye-Opener Film,* 3 min. 1970

*Adventure Playground, London,* 6 min. 1966

*At Eltham,* 24 min. 1974
Angophora and Sandstone, 15 min. 1979**

At Black Range, 12 min. 1984**

Agung Gives Ivor a Haircut, 4 1/2 min. Super 8mm, 1991

Articulated Image, 4 mins, Super 8mm [16mm enlargement], 1996

Airey's Inlet, 6 mins, Super 8mm [16mm enlargement], 1997

Boudi, 8 min. 1970

Blast, 6 min. 1971

Bali Film, 32 min. super 8mm, 1990

Coast at Pearl Beach, 11 min. 1979**

Corporeal, 18 min. 1983***

Cairns, 8 mins 44 secs, Super 8mm, 1998

Capricornia, 24 mins, 2001

Dream, 4 min. 1966

Days in Ubud, 31 mins, Super 8mm, [16mm enlargement] 1992

Eikon, 3 1/2 min. 1969

Earth Message, 23 min. 1970

Experiments in Three-Colour Separation, 21 min. 1980**

Early Morning at Borobudur, 20 minutes, Super 8mm, 1995

F.N.Q. Night, 4 mins, Super 8mm, 1997

Fud 69, 6 min. 1969

Fragments, 13 min. 1971*

Floterian - Hand Printings From a Film History, 12 min. 35mm and 16mm, 1981

Film of Circles, Squares, Triangles, Lines and Dots, 11 min. 1981 [with Ivor Cantrill]
Floriana on the Esplanade, 6 mins [16mm enlargement], 1997

Floriana on the Esplanade, 8 mins. Super 8mm [16mm enlargement], 2001

Folded Sandstone, 16 mins, 2001

Galaxy, 4 min. 1963

Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, 30 min. 1968

Home Movie - A Day in the Bush, 4 min. 1969

Harry Hooton, 83 min. 1970

Hillside at Chauritchi, 6 min. 1978

Heat Shimmer, 13 min. 1978**

Gold Fugue, 3 min. 1971*

Grain of the Voice Series:

1--Rock Wallaby and Blackbird, 66 min. 1980

2--Two Women, 32 min. 1980

3--Seven Sisters, 19 min. 1980

Garden of Chromatic Disturbance,** 13 mins, 1998

Imprints, 4 min. 1969

Island Fuse, 11 min. 1971

Interior/Exterior, 3 min. 1978***

In This Life's Body, 147 min. 1984

In the Shadow of Gunung Batur, 8 min, Super 8mm, 1993

Ivor's Tiger Xmas Card, 7 mins 18 secs, Super 8mm, 1994

Ivor's Exhibition, 15 mins, Super 8mm, 1995

Ivor Paints, 78 minutes, Super 8mm, 1995
Ivor's Xmas Card 1997, 3 mins, Super 8mm, 1997

Illuminations of the Mundane - Winter, 21 mins, Super 8mm, 1997

Illuminations of the Mundane - Late Light, 12 mins, Super 8mm (16mm enlargement), 1998

Illuminations of the Mundane - Spring, 12 mins, Super 8mm (16mm enlargement), 1998

Ivor Paints Arf Arf, ** 5 mins, 1998

Ivor's Ceramic Exhibition, 5 mins, Super 8mm, 1998

Jalan Raya, Ubud, 15 mins, Super 8mm, (16mm enlargement) 1995

Kinegraffiti, 4 min. 1963

Light Shards, 6 mins, Super 8mm (16mm enlargement), 2001

Mud, 4 min. 1963

Moving Statics, 28 min. 1969

Meditations, 6 min. 1971

Milky Way Special, 3 min. 1971

Meteor Crater, Gosse Bluff, 6 min. 1978*

Moving Picture Postcards, 16 min. 1978**

Myself When Fourteen, 19 min. 1989 (with Ivor Cantrill)

Ming-Wei to Singaraja, 7 1/2 min, Super 8mm, 1993

Nebulae, 4 min. 1963

Nine Image Film, 3 min. 1971

New Movements Generate New Thoughts, 11 min. 1971

Negative/Positive on Three Images by Baldwin Spencer, 1901, 10 min. 1974

Near Wilmington, 6 min. 1978
Notes on the Passage of Time, 14 min. 1979**

Notes on Berlin, the Divided City, 30 min. Super 8mm, (16mm enlargement) 1986

Nimnims in the Garden Xmas Card, 6 mins, Super 8mm, 1998

Ocean, 15 min. 1978*

Pink Metronome, 3 min. 1971*

Pan/Colour Separations, 11 min. 1980**

Passage, 65 min. 1983***

Petunias, 4 mins, Super 8mm (16mm enlargement), 1996

Robert Klippel Sculpture Studies, 5 films, each 5 min. 1964-1965


Red Stone Dancer, 6 min. 1968

Rehearsal at the Arts Laboratory, 4 min. 1969

Room, 5 min. 1971*

Reflections on Three Images by Baldwin Spencer, 1901, 17 min. 1974

Rainbow Diary, 17 min. 1984 (with Ivor Cantrill)

Rendra's Place, Depok, 8 min., Super 8mm, 1992

Ramayana/Legong, 5 mins 36 secs, Super 8mm, (16mm enlargement) 1995

Skin of Your Eye, 117 min. 1973

Studies in Image (De)Generation Nos. 1, 2 & 3, each 10 min. 1975

Simple Observations of a Solar Eclipse, 16 min. 1976

The Incised Image, 25 min. 1966

The City, 8 min. 1971*

The Boiling Electric Jug Film, 8 min. 1971
Three Colour Separation Studies - Landscapes, 13 min. 1976**

Three Colour Separation Studies - Still Lifes, 13 min. 1976**

Touching the Earth Series:

1--Ocean at Point Lookout, 46 min. 1977

2--Near Coober Pedy, 15 min. 1977

3--At Uluru, 80 min. 1977

4--Katatjuta, 24 min. 1977

Two-Colour Separation Studies, 16 min. 1980

Time/Colour Separations, 18 min. 1981**

The Second Journey (To Uluru), 74 min. 1981

The Bemused Tourist, from Bogor to Bandung, 23 min, Super 8mm, 1992

The Berlin Apartment, 120 min. 1987*** (new version 1992)

The Pause Between Frames, 4 min., Super 8mm, (16mm enlargement) 1993

Tidal River 38 mins, Super 8mm, 1996

The City of Chromatic Dissolution, ** 21 mins 30, 1998

The City of Chromatic Intensity, ** 5 mins, 1999

The Becak Driver - Superimposed, *** 20 mins, Super 8mm (16mm enlargement), 1999

The Land is Not Empty, 26 mins, 2000

Unturqua, 6 min. 1980

Video Self-Portrait, 6 min. 1971

View From the Balcony of the Marco Polo Hotel, 4 min, Super 8mm, 1992/ rev. 1993

White-Orange-Green, 4 min. 1969

Warrah, 15 min. 1980**
Wilpena, 23 min. 1981

Waterfall, 18 min. 1984**

Walking Track, 20 min. Super 8mm, 1987

Walking to Yeh Pelu, 10 min, Super 8mm, 1993

Zap, 2 min. 1971

Film/Performance Works

*: 3-screen film

**: 3-colour separation film

***: 2-screen film


Concert for Electric Jugs 1971. Film of boiling electric jug projected onto four boiling electric jugs.

Expanded Cinema 1970-1972. Included multiscreen projection onto patterned and 3-D screens, and onto burning screens and screens of water. Also included following two works.

Edges of Meaning 1977. Film images by Walter Baldwin Spencer on two screens at right angles, installation of Spencer frame enlargements and Corinne Cantrill reading from Spencer's writing.


Passage 1983. Two-screen film of journey from Melbourne to Central Australia with live and recorded commentary and action by C. and A. Cantrill; installation of sand, trees, tent, garments, camera; film stills.

Journey Through a Face 1984. 120 minutes. Autobiographical film with live and recorded commentary and action by Corinne Cantrill, installation of photographs, flowers, garments.

Projected Light 1988. 120 minutes. (Two-screen film and slides about filmmakers' house and early and pre-film history, especially during 1888, the year the house was built. Live and recorded commentary by A. and C. Cantrill on cinema as an art of projected light.)

The Practice of Filmmaking 1981. (two-screen - 16mm and Super 8 - film based on the production of the Cantrill film The Second Journey (to Uluru) with live commentary and action by C. Cantrill; installation of sand, trees, tent etc.)


The Bemused Tourist 1997. 2 hours. Three-screen and installation of batiks etc. using Super 8 film shot in Bali and Java, with recorded music and effects and live commentary.

The Becak Driver - A Story from Yogyakarta 1998. 2 hours. Two-screen Super 8 and
16mm film and slides and installation of batiks etc., with recorded music and effects and live commentary.