

Scratch Pad 60

June 2005



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Based on **brg** 42, a fanzine for the **June 2005** mailing of ANZAPA by **Bruce Gillespie**, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough VIC 3088. Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@mira.net. Cover: 'Creatures Between Universes'. Graphic by Elaine Cochrane, using DJ Fractals.

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What I haven't been doing recently

Money, or the lack of it, has been much on my mind in recent weeks. The Bring Bruce Bayside trip was huge fun, but during that period (17 February–13 March), and the two weeks beforehand and the three weeks after, I didn't actually earn any money as a freelancer. After I returned, I did a large editing job, but haven't been paid for it yet. I've done other smaller jobs, and a huge index for which I am being underpaid, but none of these cheques has surfaced yet. And now, again, I have no Paying Work, which is why I have time to write for ANZAPA. Meanwhile, my annual superannuation payment bill wafled through the mail, plus my annual income tax bill, plus other bills, and I now owe Elaine about \$5000. (We do like to keep our accounts separate, but she has been paying all the expenses for the house move, so she doesn't have much money either. The last thing she needs are my debts as well.)

So here's a shameless advertisement for myself. I edit books, in Word 97 for Windows or .rtf, on screen. I don't edit maths and science books, which is why I'm short of work. (One of my once-generous clients is doing only two humanities textbooks at the moment; all the rest are maths/science textbooks.) I would love the chance to edit fiction, but have been offered very few opportunities during my career. I can prepare a pretty good index (I haven't had any complaints so far), and I would love the chance to review books or write other journalism for real folding cash. (Lots of people want book reviews, but very few people offer payment.) Ring me on (03) 9435 7786.

Take away the problem of money and things are burbling along okay — except that Elaine still needs to have a two small hernias investigated, so she doesn't feel as well as she might. The weather has been bright and wonderful, which means Victoria is back in its usual state of drought. (This makes eleven years in a row by my reckoning, except for the huge downpour last February.) But it is very nice walking around beautiful suburban Greensborough in late-May sunshine.

At the moment I have lots of time for writing fanzine stuff. Yes. But my main obligation is to write my Trip Report, and that's not easy. First, I'm afraid that I might fail to thank some of the umpteen people who did so much to make the trip a success. Second, it's quite difficult to state exactly how I was feeling at a particular time in late February or early March, and describe exactly what was so wonderful about a particular event. It's much easier to tell tales against myself as I bumbled around America, so I'll tell many such stories.

I have to write the whole thing (well over 10,000 words so far, and I'm still only in Seattle during the first week of the trip) before I can start whittling it down to a reasonable length. Thanks to Chaz Boston Baden's website, I have downloaded lots of photos of people I met at Corflu (although I still can't get anybody to send me a photo of Alan Rosenthal and Janice Murray, mine hosts in Seattle, together). I took some rather awful photos, but Bill Burns and Peter Weston sent me some great shots, and Marci Malinowycz was able to find the great photo of her at Gualala, a photo that also shows Art Widner's wonderful car, whose surface is a genuine Australian Aboriginal painting. The temptation is to scrap my narrative altogether, and just run the photos.

I should try to produce the next issue of *SF Commentary*, or (with co-editor Jan Stinson) the next issue of *Steam Engine Time*, or even the next issue of *The Metaphysical Review*, which hasn't appeared since 1998. For *SFC* and *TMR*, I have a bulging bag of goodies, plus many contributions sent electronically. I can't escape from writing the Trip Report, but producing my major magazines (the reason why people thought of paying for my trip in the first place) does seem rather more urgent.

If I produced issues of those magazines, I would still have no money to print or post paper versions of them. I really am skint at the moment. I could put up electronic versions on efanzines.com, but lots of my most faithful readers do not have computers, do not have access to

the Internet, or do not have enough grunt in their computers to download .PDF files. So I don't know what to do. Meanwhile, it would be a help to have the next issues all sitting there, edited and designed.

Apart from all that, I have been reading some good books (especially novels such as Gwyneth Jones's *Life* and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, and *Miracle Fair*, a book of poems by Nobel Prize winner Wislawa Szymborska), watching a few DVDs (best include *Collateral* and *The Final Cut*), and even listening to some music (I finally got around to listening to Robert Plant's *Dreamland* from a few years ago — so nice I played it twice — and a collection of Carl Perkins' very early recordings for Sun Records). And socialising with various groups of Melbourne fans. And sitting down and having Flicker the large black cat sit on me.

I've written (for money!) a few book reviews for a new magazine — I'll tell you about the magazine when the

first issue appears.

And, with Merv Binns, Dick Jenssen, Bill Wright, Alan Stewart, and Lee Harding, I was made a Lifetime Member of the Melbourne SF Club a few weeks ago. Actually, I was given this honour in October 2003, but the ceremony finally took place on 19 April. Jack Dann presided, and masterfully restrained himself from roasting the lot of us. Paul Stevens (who has disappeared from fandom) was also recognised as a LM of the MSFC, as was George Turner (who died in 1997) and Race Mathews (who did much to start the club in the early 1950s), who could not be there on the night. Thanks, Alison and Sue Ann and others involved in organising the ceremony and accompanying supper. I will try to get along to MSFC meetings more often, but won't promise anything.

— Bruce Gillespie, 23 May 2005

A Gillespie golden oldie from 1971

This is a job?

This is one of my first attempts to write 'personal journalism'. It describes my job in 1971. This was one of only two five-days-a-week, eight-hours-a-day regular salaried jobs I ever held. The first was as a teacher in a country secondary school in 1969 and 1970. When I attempted to escape from teaching, I was pointed towards the Publications Branch of the Education Department. I remained a seconded teacher there for two and a half years, before resigning in order to go overseas in 1973. In this job, which I found purely by serendipity, I learned much of what I still know about editing. I also met many of the non-fannish people who have stayed friends during the rest of my life. The article first appeared in the first series of *The Metaphysical Review*, No. 6, 1972, pp. 2–6, and was written, as near as I can tell, in late 1971.

As I was saying to Colin Bennett the other day . . .

That's always a good line with which to break into a conversation. And I only spoke to him for five minutes about an article I'm doing on early Australian films (yes, we had a film industry before 1930). Yet it's something of a revelation that Colin Bennett, film critic for *The Age* newspaper, and some sort of a hero to me for many years, has his own little desk on the huge floor that is the *Age*'s Features department, and that he works regular hours, just like the rest of us (regular hours from 5 p.m.–10 p.m., that is), and that he helps a lot of small and struggling film societies and amateur film makers, as well as taking up the cudgels about the huge issues that still plague the film industry in Australia.

In order to gain information for the same subject ('Part 2: Australian Film Makers Now') I also interviewed Giorgio Mangiamele, who has made five films so far, and not had much luck with any of them. Should I say that I half-interviewed Mr Mangiamele? After 19 years in Australia, he still has quite a strong accent, and he had to compete against a *Comet* summit meeting that was taking place in my room (i.e., three highly articulate ladies debating placing of a heading or the colour of an illustration). Mangiamele's first film, *Clay*, won three awards here and overseas, was praised by critics — and was shown for two weeks down at the Palais or the Dendy, a long way out of town, in 1965. The ABC showed it once on television, then it disappeared.

The consensus of opinion (including John Baxter's *The Australian Cinema*, which I used as my main text) is the Australian film industry is in a Pretty Poor State, and that Something Must Be Done. Like removing American control of the Hoyts and Greater Union cinema chains, for instance. Then everybody would show Australian films, and we would have lots of New Wave directors and a few Old Wavers as well, and Ingmar Bergmann would rise again on Australia's sylvan shores? I don't think so.

But that's not the point. The point is that before I researched the article, I had no idea that Australia ever had a feature film industry. (In 1911 we made and released nearly one film a week.) Now I know something more about the subject — certainly more than I can write into an article designed for 11–14-year-olds. At last I've found something I thought didn't exist, except for lucky people like Lee Harding — some kind of fusion between my job and my real interests.

Not that I write about science fiction (says he, rubbing his hands, plotting and scheming) but so far I've been able to write about subjects that interest me. Most Melbourne fans were surprised to learn that I was researching an article on 'Comics' for *Pursuit*, our magazine for Forms 1 to 3 in secondary schools. That was about five months ago. I asked Noel Kerr for information. He couldn't help me a great deal at that time, but he referred me to Ken Bull, who used to belong to ANZAPA.



Ken kindly supplied me with some interesting information, most which I couldn't use in the final article. John Ryan also sent me some interesting material, including the issue of *Comic Art* that talked about Walt Disney's main comic strip artist, Carl Barks. I obtained copies of Perry and Aldridge's book *The Penguin Book of Comics*, and Jim Steranko's far more interesting *History of Comics*. John Breden lent me some superb material. Unfortunately I could not feature panels from *Phoebe Zeitgeist* in my article.

This was my First Try, and the powers that be soon gave me the word that I was taking far too long to write the article. Actually I took only about three days to do the final research and write the article's first draft, but it took a *long* time to find the material I wanted. With a subject like that, I could have gone on all year researching material. If I had been writing for a newspaper, I would have taken far less time, and probably made a Keith Dunstan-type hash of the whole story. (Although spare a thought for the Keith Dunstans of the world, even after they make fun of science fiction conventions. Working journalists usually have to fit in two or three complete articles in the time it takes me to research one article.)

Doing research is hardly a real problem, however — except for every second article. I mentioned the article on films. At the same time as I researched that, I had to find material for an article I had suggested, 'Modern Developments in Music'. I planned to cover all areas of music, even though I don't know much about them except pop music. I've heard the names of Keith Humble, George Dreyfus, and our other contemporary serious composers. I had no idea what remained of the jazz scene in Melbourne. I had gathered the material about pop music from an interview I did at 3XY about three months before. I rang up local guitarist John Graham, about pop music, at about 11 a.m. The interview didn't go all that well. 'Well, what sort of music are you playing, John? What kind of songs? We're writing this for junior secondary students, and they may not know much about the folk scene at the moment.' 'Well . . . uh . . . y' know,' was the tone of the reply. 'We play traditional folk music. Some folk musicians play blues, but they're almost pop

musicians.' 'Well, what sort of songs *do* you play? Which countries do you get them from?' 'I get my songs from all over the place.' 'Can secondary students who want to talk up folk guitar learn from books?' 'Yeah — there are books all over the place. But there are only a few good guitar teachers in Melbourne — Marg Roadknight, and me, and . . .' 'Could we tell kids that you are available to teach guitar?' 'Yeah . . . but we only teach when we're not working. I have a few pupils for a few weeks at a time. I play guitar four nights a week . . . quite a decent living . . .' And so on. Perhaps I rang too early in the day.

Try as I would, I could not tie him down to a precise description of the type of music he played, and divisions there are in the folk world of Melbourne.

Perhaps it takes a PR person to speak to a PR person. When I rang up Bruce Clarke, of the Bruce Clarke Jingle Workshop (which makes many of Melbourne's radio and television advertisements) his first reaction was, 'My son at school gets *Pursuit*. How can I help you?' I arrived at the Workshop in St Kilda Road at 9 a.m. and left about 11. Geoff, from Publications Branch, came down and took a few photographs, then left to do some other work. Meanwhile, Bruce Clarke showed me how his pet synthesiser works. He was one of the first people in Australia to import a Moog synthesiser — I knew that before I started the interview. The real thing is a lot more interesting than the rather dull records of Bach the radio stations played a few years back. The synthesiser looks like a telephone switchboard attached to an organ keyboard. Clarke makes most of the sounds on the control panel, which allows almost any channel to switch into almost any other. The control panel contains filters, and oscillators, and vibrators, and voltage controls, and a huge catalogue of other terms that mean nothing to me. Conveniently, the sounds show in green lines on the oscilloscope beside the machine. The sounds come through a heavily mounted twelve-inch speaker at one end of a soundproofed room.

Not only did Bruce Clarke explain this apparatus so that I could understand what it was going, but he provided enough interesting details for me to write nearly a complete article on electronic music. He said that he has been experimenting with random music. I was particularly pleased because he told me the story of the latest random music concerts he's held (in the Dallas Brooks Hall). On one side of the stage sits Orchestra 1. The members of Orchestra 1 carry glissando instruments — clarinets, tubas, trombones, etc. On the other side of the stage sits Orchestra 2. They carry percussion instruments and strings — cymbals, triangles, glockenspiels, violas, violins.

Orchestra 1 looks at a goldfish bowl set up in front of it. On the front of the goldfish bowl, the organisers (Bruce Clarke and a few others, I presume) painted the lines of a musical staff. As the goldfish swims up and down, it moves around the music lines, and 'composes' a tune. The glissando instruments play this (necessarily) long, gliding tune.

At the same time, the members of Orchestra 2 wear sunglasses. On the inside of the sunglasses the organisers paint the lines of the staff. Through their five-lined spectacles, the members of the orchestra stare out at a frying pan set up in front of them. Popcorn fries on the pan. As the corn pops, the bits flick upwards — through the lines of the musical staff, as seen by the members of the orchestra. The long-suffering members of the orchestra play the notes the popcorn 'composes'.

I don't know whether that's credible, but I'll believe it. Better still, it makes a good yarn for *Pursuit*, and that's more than John Graham provided.

On the same assignment, I spoke to Keith Glass and David Pepperell up at Archie 'n' Jughead's shop — but that's another story. Go and buy some records there sometime. The article ended up as a treatise on electronic music, and my learned comments about rock music were scrapped again. Warner Brothers even gave me a review copy of James Taylor's *Sweet Baby James* for that article — and I have tried to fit the review into at least three different articles so far. With my luck, if I wrote an article about science fiction for *Pursuit*, it would probably turn into an article about tech school students who make their own spaceships.

But that's enough trade secrets (and I'm probably breaking every Public Service secrecy rule as well). All I set out to say was that I'm enjoying the current job a lot better than the last job I had. Officially I'm still a teacher, seconded to the Publications Branch of the Education Department. I'm doing work that trained journalists could do in half the time, and for twice the salary, but don't tell that to the AJA. I get teachers' holidays, salaries and conditions, which are not too bad if you inhabit an air-conditioned building like ours. There are catches: I can't gain promotion and stay within the Branch, or not without the Editor making a special bid for retransfer. A job like this wouldn't help me obtain a job in a newspaper, but it might carry some weight with a publishing house. As far as I can tell, we adopt standard editorial practices.

Best of all, the other members of the staff are great to work with (and when I say that most of them are married women in their twenties and thirties, don't get me wrong). I could even call the staff atmosphere 'fan-nish', beside which there is no higher compliment. It's a lot different from the Last Place I Was In. Secondary teachers usually don't work as a team — they are usually too busy solving their own problems and dodging the slings and arrows of outraged students. The tea room or

staff room is just a haven of rest from the chaos, except in some country schools, where the staff remain after school, and use it as a social centre as well.

However, our staff must work as a team, as nearly every manuscript and proof *must* be checked by three or four people. For instance, my 'Music' article, described above, originally went to Barbara, who is in charge of Pursuit, one of our Robins, who said to delete the last section on Progressive Rock and Modern Jazz, and to Gerald, who said almost the same thing. Out went the last section. The article came back to Barbara, who asked me if I could get some material on ways in which school children could make their own 'concrete music'. A phone call to Music Branch upstairs located the man who could help me. After that interview and several hours' writing, the extra four pages (about 500 words, double spaced, my handwriting) went back to Barbara, who okayed it. Our typist will type it and send it to the Editor. If he has no great objections to the article, he sends it back to Barbara, who sends it off to the printer. Theoretically, this elaborate process of checking and double checking means that we obtain a 'house style' for every manuscript, and that we leave in no spelling or grammatical mistakes. (A writer for our Branch needs to leave behind an inflated ego, if he or she has one. Often an article comes back cut to pieces, with pages completely rewritten.)

Our Editor (boss) is probably the most interesting person on the staff, mainly because of what we don't know about him. He came over from Hungary after the war (having escaped from both the Germans and the Russians) and landed at the Newport Railway Workshops, although he had a degree in journalism at a Hungarian university. He likes to tell us the story that the Railways gave him the job of 'smoke watcher' — sitting on top of building and watching for dangerous clouds of smoke if any of the boilers overheated. Needless to say, none of them ever did, so he learned English while smoke watching. He reached the offices of the Newport Workshops, convinced Melbourne University that it should accept his Hungarian degree, but took out a degree at Melbourne University anyway (with first class honours in everything). He became a teacher, and only three years ago joined Publications Branch. Since then he has risen to become the Editor. We all wonder in which year he will become Premier, or at least Director General. More important than his editorial ability is his ability to fight the enormous restrictions anybody faces within the Education Department. But that's another story, and Tibor doesn't tell us too much about his diplomatic manoeuvres.

I share a (fairly large) room with Maria, and one of the Robins. Maria is going to Italy in September, although I believe she is second- or third-generation Australian. The link with ye olde countrie (or the Italian equivalent) stays firm. It's a great shame that Robin is married. She has worked for *The Review*, at Footscray Girls High School (sounds far worse than Ararat Technical School), and has been overseas. The *other* Robin attended tutorials with me sometime during Dip. Ed., but otherwise I only remember vaguely that she was at university at the same time I was. She went to the USA for a year on an American Field Service Scholarship, and still helps to administer the scholarships. She has a husband named Les, who drives rally cars at a ferocious pace every second weekend. Barbara has been (you guessed!) overseas, quit teaching three times, and has worked for Nelson, the publisher. Her husband teaches at Altona High School, and wants me to go down to the

school to talk about science fiction. Fay worked for newspapers in New Zealand, and taught briefly in England. Her husband has something to do with engineering at Melbourne University (probably a professor or something, but I'm not too sure).

The 'oldies' form quite another group. Even last year, there were more 'oldies' than 'youngies'. However, the Branch obtained six people at the beginning of 1972, and the balance tipped (especially because Tibor always seems more one of Us than one of Them). Stan was the Assistant Editor until he was killed in a car smash about a week ago. He should get Workers Compensation, or rather, his w dow should, as Stan hated driving and suffered from dizzy spells. He was a very gentlemanly man who was sick much of last year, and should not have kept working. He was only driving because he was on a job for the Branch. His place will probably be taken by Colin, who has a rather strange position in the Branch. A fiftyish bachelor, he takes a rather fussy view of the affairs of the whole Branch. In some way I can't work out, he offends 'the girls' — possibly just because he's a bachelor, or perhaps he steps over some other

social boundary that guides places like ours. A long-time teacher, he's been in the Branch eight years, and probably knows more about it than anybody else on the staff.

Gerald is still a teacher-on-secondment, but it's fairly certain that he will obtain any promotions that are offered. He showed me the ropes when I joined the Branch, and I still help him with the Grades 5 and 6 magazine. A former teacher (as are we all), he received a phone call about three years ago, asking him if he would like to join the Branch. Like me, never having heard of Publications Branch before he joined, he had some misgivings. He does fairly well, maintains a conservative front, reads the same sorts of books as I do (except for SF), and has a wife and three marvellous kids. He may be an Up and Coming Writer fairly soon.

There are more interesting people I've met as well, including the Branch members I haven't talked about. But I ask: can you call this a job?

— **Bruce Gillespie, 1971** (*The Metaphysical Review*, first series, No. 6, pp. 2–6).

Addendum 1:

The beginning of the Australian film boom

During the second weekend in January 1972, Alan Sandercock visited from Adelaide, and we dashed around Melbourne, trying to find record shops that were not open and book shops that didn't have what Alan wanted. However, we did see *Stork* on the Friday night. I vote that *Stork* be an essential item in the program of the 1975 Worldcon, unless something much better comes along. By then it will look a bit oldfashioned, I suppose, but Bruce Spence's gangling antics as the Stork will stay just as funny as ever. Obviously, Stork is modelled a bit too much upon Bazza Mackenzie, but I

can say with certainty that Barry Crocker's portrayal of Bazza won't have as much lunatic energy as Spence's Stork. My favourite sequence is the chunder-painting scene, and I will always relish the sight of Stork bellowing quotations from Mabuse through a loud-hailer while his friend squirts the wedding party with a fire hose. When Stork tries to get a job, his other, button-down friend nudges him in the ribs, and says 'Don't tell him you went to Monash.' A film that Brian Aldiss in particular might appreciate.

— **Bruce Gillespie, February 1972** (*The Metaphysical Review*, first series, No. 7, p. 20).

Addendum 2:

Whatever happened to us?

- **Colin Bennett:** Film critic for *The Age* from the 1960s until the mid 1980s. Master of splendid urbane prose, constant supporter of Australian film-makers and film events, he has never been replaced adequately by later *Age* film critics.
- **Giorgio Mangiamele:** Better known as father of prominent Melbourne fan Claudia Mangiamele (gafiated in the early 1980s), Giorgio was a true pioneer of feature-length Australian film. His contribution is still under-appreciated, although a year or so ago Claudia hosted a festival of his films at ACMI in Federation Square. He died a few years ago.
- **Noel Kerr, Ken Bull** and **John Ryan** were prominent comics fans of the early 1970s. Noel had two periods of membership in ANZAPA — the first during its first few years (1968–1972), and again in the 1990s. Retired, he and Irene live in Carnegie. Ken Bull was a member of ANZAPA during its first year of operation. John Ryan was a major Australian fan for some years, but his executive job led him eventually to drop out of ANZAPA and fandom generally. His *Panel By Panel* (Cassell Australia; 1979), a personal appreciation of comics, appeared about the time he died, of a heart attack, at the age of 40. He is still missed.
- **John Baxter** published *The Australian Cinema* just

before the revival of the Australian cinema. Since then, John has been all over the world, written lots of books on the cinema, and settled in France. His new book is *We'll Always Have Paris*.

- **John Graham** died in a car crash on the night of his wedding, about twenty years ago.
- I presume that **Bruce Clarke** retired some time during the last thirty years, but I wouldn't want to claim certainty for that.
- **Keith Glass** became a major country performer during the 1980s and 1990s (best known for writing 'When Stan Was the Man' about Stan Rofe), owned a shop called Deep South in Glenhuntly, and seems to have moved permanently to Nashville.
- **David Pepperell** has done everything and been everywhere, usually popping up behind the counter of one or other of my favourite music shops. He wrote for various Melbourne magazines during the seventies. Haven't seen him for awhile.
- **Barbara Selvay** (was **Barbara Mills** when we were working together) remained with Publications Branch until it became Materials Production and was dismantled, then held a top public service job until she retired a few years ago. In the late 1970s she married **Tibor Selvay**, the Hungarian gent who was the Editor (my ultimate boss) while I was at Publications. He held a Directorate in the Education Department until he retired. He died a few

years ago.

- **Robin Whiteley** still sends me birthday cards and emails, and arranged for me to be invited to Publications Branch reunions. She and her second husband **John Collins** (who was at Curriculum and Research Branch when I was at Publications) have become freelance editors and publishers.
- **Robin Wallace** and her husband **John** gave me first option on taking over their flat in Carlton Street when they left in 1973. They have done many things, including sailing their yacht several times throughout the South Pacific. Last I heard, John was lecturing in Media Studies.
- **Maria Triaca** married, and wrote a book that was well reviewed some years ago (but I don't seem to have it in our library). I'm not sure where she's working these days.
- **Gerald Murnane** had written his first novel by the time I wrote the article. *Tamarisk Row* was published in 1973, about the time that first I, then he, quit Publications Branch. Gerald has published a number of books since, including two for Norstrilia Press. He and **Catherine** are now retired.
- **Publications Branch** itself was ringbarked, then nearly destroyed. Some time during the late 1980s it became **Materials Production**, and some staff were sent back to teach in schools. During the dying days of the Labor Government, all staff were offered 'the package', a financial incentive to resign. Junior publications were put out to tender, and *The Educational Magazine* disappeared. Science fiction's own **Meredith Costain** found herself producing singlehandedly magazines that had taken a squadron of us to produce in the early 1970s.

Bruce Gillespie

The bleakest book I've ever read: Philip K. Dick's 'A Scanner Darkly'

The Hollywood film of Philip K. Dick's novel *A Scanner Darkly* was scheduled to be released in May 2005. Perhaps it has already gone to DVD. Many of Dick's short stories have been made into films, but this is only the second film based on one of his novels. (The other was *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, filmed as *Blade Runner*.) Meanwhile, *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) was made the Book of Honour at this year's Potlatch convention, held in San Francisco, 4–6 March 2005. Potlatch is an annual convention of science fiction readers who gather to discuss their favourite reading matter. I was asked to take part in the introductory panel discussion of *A Scanner Darkly*. Here is my keynote speech. The other members of the panel were Howard Hendrix, novelist and academic; Lenny Bailes, reader and critic; and Grania Davis, long-time friend of Philip Dick until he died in 1982, and former wife of Avram Davidson and tireless anthologist of his posthumous works. The other panelists contributed strong opening statements, and audience discussion was lively. However, since I was guest speaker from Australia, I could put in the first words. This talk was also delivered to the April 2005 meeting of the Nova Mob.

It's very satisfying to attend my first Potlatch in 2005, the year when you pay tribute to Philip K. Dick and one of his most challenging novels, *A Scanner Darkly*. And it's all Philip Dick's fault that I am here on this platform in front of you, 12,000 miles away from home.

At the end of 1967, I was twenty years old, and had just finished my Arts degree. For a year and a half I had been buying a thin, duplicated magazine called *Australian Science Fiction Review* from the front counter of McGill's Newsagency in the centre of Melbourne, Australia. This magazine seemed like a repository of genius to me. I reread many of its pages recently. It still reads better than any SF critical magazine being published today. In November 1967, I had just finished passing exams and writing essays. Now I wanted to redirect all that energy to something that really interested me: I wanted to write deep and meaningful long essays about science fiction for *ASFR*.

For me in 1967, there was only one huge body of SF writing worth exploring: that of Philip K. Dick. At that time, few people had written about him. I had heard about John Brunner's pioneering essay. I didn't know

that Brian Aldiss was also writing about him. I had never seen any of the American fanzines, so I did not know about the Dick material that had appeared in *Light-house*, *Niekas* and others. I felt strongly that Philip K. Dick was the best SF writer in the world, and that everybody was ignoring him.

I sat down, scribbled copious notes in the margins of my Phil Dick books, wrote the long essays, and sent them to John Bangsund, the editor of *ASFR*, who lived in a suburb the other side of Melbourne. One night, John rang me. 'We're impressed by your articles. Would you like to come over to our place for the weekend and meet the *ASFR* people?' I was the shyest twenty-year-old in Melbourne at that time, but I couldn't pass up this opportunity. During that weekend at the end of 1967 I met many of the people who have had the greatest continuing influence on my life, such as John Bangsund himself, Lee Harding, George Turner, Damien Broderick, Rob Gerrand, John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds and quite a few others. Although Phil Dick didn't realise it at the time, he was my entry to the world I've occupied ever since: that of science fiction fandom. Nearly forty years

later, it is the world of SF fandom that has paid for my trip to America to attend Corflu and Potlatch.

In 1968 I became active in science fiction fandom. My articles failed to appear in *ASFR*. The magazine began to appear less and less often. It died in early 1969. I had my first real income at the beginning of 1969, so of course I began publishing a fanzine. I called it *SF Commentary*. It is still going, subject to a rather hiccupy schedule. The main initial reason for its existence was to provide a place where I could publish my Philip Dick essays. I sent *SFC* to Dick's American publisher in New York. My greatest moment in 1969 was receiving a letter of appreciation of Philip Dick, which led to a friendly correspondence that ended in the mid seventies when he decided that, like so many of his other friends, I was no longer his friend. We never knew what we did to upset him.

Those three long essays that I wrote about Dick's work in 1969 made *SF Commentary* an informal centre of Philip K. Dick fandom for some years. Many of my continuing best friends are people who took the trouble to meet me because they knew I had written about Philip Dick's work.

In 1972 Philip Dick sent to *SF Commentary* a copy of 'The Android and the Human', the speech he delivered to the Vancouver Science Fiction Convention that year. Publishing the speech was one of the high points of my life, especially as the speech marked the end of the dark period of Dick's life that he fictionalises in *A Scanner Darkly*.

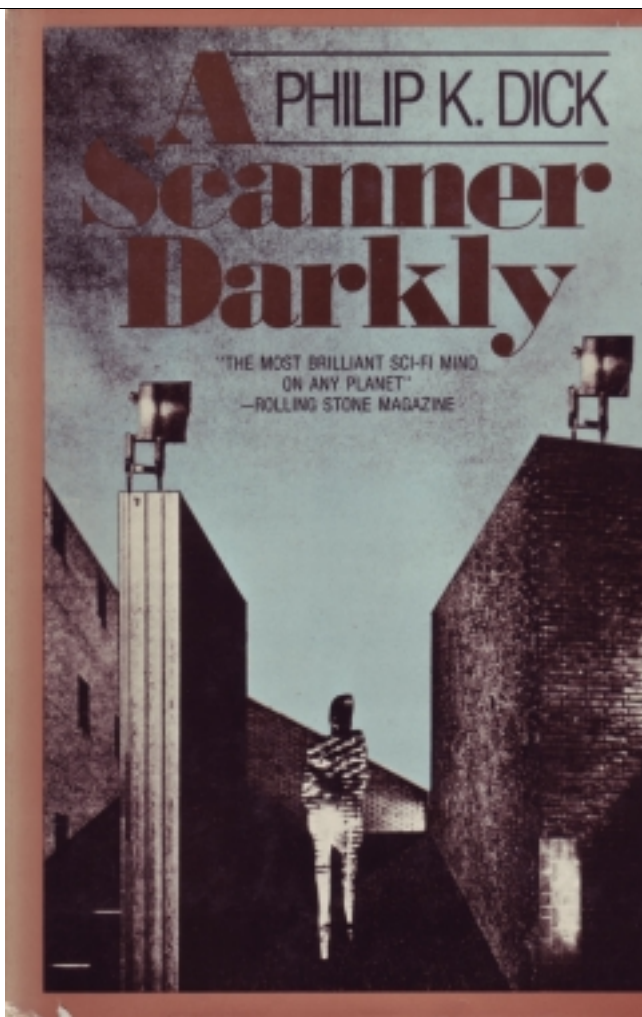
In 1975, Carey Handfield, one of Melbourne's more famous fans, suggested we start a small publishing company. What was more natural than to gather the Philip Dick material from the pages of *SF Commentary* and call the book *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd?* We published 1000 copies, and there are only a few file copies left. Our timing was superb — *Electric Shepherd* came out about the same time as the special Philip Dick issue of *Science Fiction Studies*, and took its place at the front of the huge armada of Dick scholarship that would follow during the next 25 years.

I won't claim much for *Electric Shepherd* itself, except that it was pretty much a first. It was a slim volume, and needs to be revised and expanded. These days I would disagree with many of my own opinions. The famous Stanislaw Lem essay, 'SF: A Hopeless Case — With Exceptions', in which he claimed that Philip Dick was the only Western SF writer worth anything, has been reprinted many times since. George Turner's cranky but accurate essay about *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said* is there. The early letters that Phil wrote to me are there, but not the very frightening last letters, the ones I found too intimidating to publish.

That's the autobiographical bit. Now for an abject confession.

When I went back to reread *A Scanner Darkly*, I realised I had not read it since 1977, when it came out. When I leafed through *Ubik* the other night, I realised I had not read it for more than 30 years. Except for Philip Dick's non-SF novels, about which I wrote in 1990, I've re-read hardly any of the great Philip Dick novels since I wrote those essays. Everybody in this room — indeed, everybody at this convention — will be able to offer opinions that are wiser and much more insightful than mine. I am going to be your ideal audience. For me, this convention represents a way to catch up on the most important author in my life.

Yet Philip Dick has never been far from my mind



during those years. Once you live inside *Ubik*, it lives inside you. One never forgets the last page of *Now Wait for Last Year* or the first or last pages of *Martian Time-Slip*, or the three stigmata of Palmer Eldritch, forever hovering on the horizon, an image now replaced by the fifty-year-old face of Philip Dick, forever hovering from the back covers of the endless reprints of his books. In the last thirty years Philip Dick has moved from a position of being an invisible writer to becoming *the* SF writer.

In all that time, I've never felt that *A Scanner Darkly* was a part of the mainstream of Philip Dick's work. It's probably the bleakest book I've ever read. Rereading it in the last week or so, I still felt that way. Even at the end of *Ubik*, when Joe Chip barely exists in half-life, awaiting an inevitable end, he grasps at the possibility that the spray can of *Ubik* will save him, will keep him clinging onto reality. At the end of *Now Wait for Last Year*, Eric Sweetscent is in similar dire straits, this time condemned to death through his use of JJ-180, the time-altering drug, but he has the courage to keep on keeping on. What we remember from Philip Dick's great books is that sense of very frail people maintaining their courage, just managing to survive.

I'll make a very large generalisation: most of Philip Dick's novels about people who discover that the reality with which they are familiar is actually a fake reality — that under and simultaneous with the world of ordinary existence lie different worlds, usually horrifying and dangerous, into which the main characters are plunged. The characters are judged by the way they deal with this transformation. Dick's main characters usually find some bare trace of hope, no matter how treacherous the

world in which they find themselves. The entertainment value lies in the extraordinary inventiveness with which Dick builds these worlds, combined with his cut-down, clipped prose and the way he leaves out everything but the essentials in his books. If only we could return to the 220-page SF novel!

A Scanner Darkly works quite differently from Dick's earlier novels. For a start, although it is set some years in the future of 1977, almost no science-fictional elements are introduced. The only SF invention is the 'scramble suit', worn by anti-drug agents when investigating dopers and pushers. This is a membrane made up of a surface of a million and a half electronically generated images playing over its surface, preventing the outsider from seeing the identity of the person inside the suit.

Apart from its one SF gimmick, *A Scanner Darkly* seems to be a realistic novel. It is based on Philip Dick's experience in 1971 and early 1972, when he had little income, but kept open house to a wide variety of drug users and other social drop-outs. Philip Dick's Epilogue to the book includes a list of a number of casualties of that drug scene. Little has changed; people rather like the people in this novel might be found scoring and selling drugs on the major streets of most cities in the world. The purpose of the novel is didactic — to warn people against getting involved in the world of hard drugs. In the novel, Substance D, the super-powerful drug that most of these people take, leads inevitably to brain death, then physical death.

Most of Phil Dick's SF novels tell of main characters who are placed in situations of despair, but keep their humanity and their perceptiveness despite the amazing roller coasters of world-shifting that we find in these novels. At the end of *A Scanner Darkly*, however, courage and humanity have been eliminated from the world of the main character, Bob Arctor. His personality has been destroyed; he can no longer react to the world as a human, but only as a kind of slow robot. He has become the dark scanner of the title, a mere camera who observes. He even discovers the source of Substance D, the drug that has destroyed him, but he cannot do anything about the situation.

For many insights about *A Scanner Darkly* I am indebted to the work of a fellow Australian, indeed a fellow Melburnian, Christopher Palmer. In 2004, he produced a brilliant critical book called *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern*. When I first looked at the book I thought it a bit too academic in approach, a bit too postmodern for my taste. Reading Chapter 10, Palmer's chapter on *A Scanner Darkly*, I find a brilliant analysis of the complexities of the book. Palmer uses his critical tools to shed light on aspects of *Scanner* that I had read and noticed, but which I had not been able to put into a pattern. I'm not sure how you would buy the book. It was published by Liverpool University Press, an organisation famous equally for the quality of its books and its determination to hide them from all purchasers. Last I heard, their books were not even listed on amazon.com.

The many useful points that Chris Palmer makes include his observation that the world of *A Scanner Darkly* is not that of your ordinary California. Its action excludes 'straights'. It's a completely self-enclosed world, like many of the worlds of Dick's SF novels. *A Scanner Darkly* begins where most of the other SF novels finish — in a world in which it is difficult to survive. For some time the characters do not realise this. Much of the enjoyment of the book is Dick's ability to put on the

page the endlessly wandering, loopy conversations of these people as they show their total inability to fix machines or anything else in ordinary life. Dick builds up absurdity upon absurdity; you just know he's heard one or other of his friends say every line in the book at some time or another.

There are almost no characters in the book who are not dopers, dealers or narcs, the representatives of the law. Bob Arctor is one of them, but in order to do his job he infiltrates the world of the dopers. In turn, he becomes addicted to Substance D, which progressively destroys his perceptions of the world around him. He becomes two people, Fred, the man in the scramble suit, who reports to his superiors and watches tapes of his own house; and Bob, the addict, who lives in the house being watched. Fred's assignment is to report on Bob.

There are plenty of harbingers of this totally paranoid world in Dick's earlier work, most often in the short stories. You can go back to 'Impostor', made into a movie a few years ago. The main character has no knowledge that he is actually the alien sent to earth. The main character of 'The Electric Ant', a much later story, finds out that he is actually an artifact run by a tape. When he cuts the tape, his existence ends.

Much of this aspect of Philip Dick's work has infiltrated into the movies as much as into written SF. Who could forget the image of the twins at the end of Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers*, men whose separate identities are portrayed brilliantly by one actor, Jeremy Irons, but whose identities fuse at the end of the film? Pure Philip Dick, although Cronenberg has never formally made a film based on a Dick story. Who could forget the revelation at the end of David Fincher's *Fight Club* about the identity of Tyler Durden? Again, pure Philip Dick, via the novelist Chuck Palahniuk, upon whose book the film is based. I can't believe Palahniuk isn't a Phil Dick fan.

It's this shifting world of identity, of a character shifting around worlds entirely inside himself, that is new to *Scanner Darkly*, but this divided world is also treated very science fictionally. The story teller is himself a character both inside and outside the action, interrupting scenes with quotations from German poetry. Or is it Bob Arctor, both divided inside the novel and divided from it as its story-teller? The world of this novel divides and subdivides, until Bob, who became Fred the narc, becomes Bruce the brain-dead drone.

What makes *A Scanner Darkly* a major book of Dick's work is the sheer level of invention, even if often the inventions are shown in the form of the wildest fantasies of various paranoid characters. Who is watching who? Who is betraying who? All these things are worked out in little bits of business, wheels within wheels grinding away at the characters' personalities.

Why don't we dismiss this as merely a manifestation of Philip Dick's personality undergoing a very dangerous screaming set of mental gear changes in the mid seventies? We know from all the books that have been written about Dick that he did undergo such a process. At the most obvious level, we like the novel just because Phil Dick has a more interesting personality than almost any other American writer of the twentieth century. In all the books of interviews I've read, friends, wives and girlfriends tell of the speed of Phil's mind, the brilliance of his wit. He took himself totally seriously, but on another level he didn't take himself seriously at all. He was always the subject of his own mirth, especially in *A Scanner Darkly*, in which Bob Arctor shows many of Dick's most uncomfortable personality traits.

On another level, Dick has, from all this mad palaver

and desperate series of actions, built a universal metaphor for the end of the twentieth century. That's why it's useful to consider, say, Chris Palmer's postmodernist interpretation of the book, or any one of the number of other interpretations that have been applied to it. *A Scanner Darkly* is a cut-off world, yet it has multiple connections with everything that's still going on, 22 years after Philip Dick's death and 33 years after the actions upon which it is based. Palmer points out that all the drugs, all the products people use in the novel are just that — manufactured and branded products. Only one character, once, expresses an interest in a product that has independent value: a rather good bottle of wine. When these people are not swapping and taking brand-name drugs, they are eating cheap brand-name food or drinks or buying cheap products that break down. Take away the drugs from this picture, and it remains the inescapable world in which many people now live.

Inescapability is the main concept of *A Scanner Darkly*, but that's also the element that links it with the wide sweep of his SF novels. There, the characters cannot escape from the alternate world into which they are pitched, but they can understand their predicament and retain a spark of human hope. However, in *A*

Scanner Darkly, the people cannot escape because this world they inhabit has robbed them of their essential humanity. That's why the last pages of the book are so extraordinarily sad and memorable: because Bob Arctor, now just a mindless worker called Bruce, has had even the concept of sadness and despair stripped from him.

So, to start the conversation, I'll ask a few of the questions I asked myself when I was re-reading *A Scanner Darkly*. Is it a realistic novel, or an expressionist, even postmodern novel? Was Philip Dick being entirely honest when he wrote that all he wanted to do was recall the lives of the people among whom he lived in 1971 or 1972? If it is actually as much about 2005 as it is about 1972, why? Is it quite different from Philip Dick's other work, a bridge to his last three books, or a seamless part of the great big SF novel that Dick spent his life writing? If it's so special and different, why are we discussing it this weekend instead of, say, *Ubik* or *The Man in the High Castle* or *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*? Questions, questions: that's what you get when you start talking about Philip K. Dick. Let's spend the weekend entering that extraordinary world, the mind of Philip K. Dick, writer.

— Bruce Gillespie, February 2005