

# memory film a filmmaker's diary

In association with Melbourne International Film Festival Premiere Fund



Doonooch Dance Co



A film by Jeni Thornley

memory film: a filmmaker's diary

An immersive, poetic documentary about transformation



AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS OF MEDIA

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<https://theeducationshop.com.au>

<https://metromagazine.com.au>

© ATOM 2025 ISBN: 978-1-76061-687-8

**STUDY  
GUIDE**



# Summary

<b>Title</b>	<i>Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary</i>	<b>Classification</b>	M (mature themes, nudity)	
<b>Director</b>	Jeni Thornley	<b>Length</b>	82 minutes	
<b>Release date</b>	2023	<b>Language(s)</b>	English	
<b>Category</b>	Poetic Documentary	<b>Official trailer</b>	<a href="https://youtube.com/watch?v=q4b_okg9HAM">youtube.com/watch?v=q4b_okg9HAM</a>	
<b>Synopsis (short)</b>	A journey through a filmmaker's Super 8 archives (1974-2003), filmed during three decades of her political and personal filmmaking, documenting the politics of social change, feminism and search for liberation.			
<b>Learning areas</b>	English • The Arts (Media Arts) • History  Tertiary level: English • Gender Studies • Cultural Studies • Screen, Media and Filmmaking • Modern History	<b>Learning intentions</b>	<p>This production provides opportunities for students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore how personal archives can be used to tell political and cultural histories through poetic and experimental forms.</li> <li>• Examine the emotional and philosophical implications of memory, time and impermanence in documentary storytelling.</li> <li>• Consider how feminist perspectives, motherhood and gender identity are represented without narration or interview.</li> <li>• Analyse how sound design and original music function as narrative and emotional devices in a silent documentary.</li> <li>• Consider how a film editor works with the music and sound design.</li> <li>• Reflect on the filmmaker's ethical approach to using home movies and working with Indigenous protocols and communities.</li> <li>• Evaluate how archival footage can be recontextualised to challenge dominant historical narratives and highlight hidden stories.</li> <li>• Consider independent filmmaking production; for instance, how did the filmmaker raise the production and post-production budget.</li> </ul>	
<b>Year levels</b>	This film is best suited for tertiary students. Selected excerpts may also be appropriate for senior secondary students, particularly those exploring documentary forms, Australian history and feminism. Teachers are encouraged to preview the film to determine its suitability for their specific cohort.			
<b>Key themes/topics explored</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memory and impermanence</li> <li>• Feminism and gender politics</li> <li>• Poetic and experimental documentary form</li> <li>• Pathways of liberation: transformation and inner journey</li> <li>• Art and activism</li> <li>• First Nations sovereignty and colonisation</li> </ul>			
<b>General capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal and Social Capability</li> <li>• Ethical Understanding</li> <li>• Critical and Creative Thinking</li> <li>• Intercultural Understanding</li> <li>• Literacy</li> </ul>			
<b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures</li> </ul>			
<b>Additional information</b>	This film includes scenes of non-sexual nudity as part of its artistic and autobiographical expression. Teachers and facilitators are advised to preview the film and consider the maturity and sensitivity of their audience before screening.			
<b>Additional information</b>	<p>See the filmmaker's website: &lt;<a href="http://jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/">jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/</a>&gt;</p> <p>Watch <i>Memory Film</i> on SBS On Demand: &lt;<a href="https://sbs.com.au/ondemand/movie/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/2426582595867">sbs.com.au/ondemand/movie/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/2426582595867</a>&gt;</p> <p>Read the CTEQ resources in 'Contested Histories: The Documentaries of Jeni Thornley', A Retrospective, Melbourne Cinémathèque. &lt;<a href="https://melbournecinematheque.org/category/present-year/contested-histories-the-documentaries-of-jeni-thornley/">melbournecinematheque.org/category/present-year/contested-histories-the-documentaries-of-jeni-thornley/</a>&gt;</p> <p>See Jeni Thornley's Documentary Blog: &lt;<a href="http://jenithornleydoco.blogspot.com/">jenithornleydoco.blogspot.com/</a>&gt;</p>			



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PUSH PLAY  
TO WATCH TRAILER



DIRECTOR JENI THORNLEY

## Synopsis

*Memory Film* is a poetic documentary by Jeni Thornley based on her Super 8 archive (1974–2003), filmed during the decades of her personal and political filmmaking producing *Maidens* (1978), *To the Other Shore* (1996), *Island Home Country* (2008) and the collaborative feature *For Love or Money* (1983).

Documenting the activism of three decades, amidst the intense sexual politics of radical feminism and social change, *Memory Film* is a road movie of an inner journey of liberation – gender fluidity, utopian feminism, love and its tribulations, the pleasure and pain of motherhood, violence against women and the desire for a world free of war and colonising – accompanied by a sweeping score by Egyptian-Australian oud maestro Joseph Tawadros.



# Curriculum links

The experimental nature of *Memory Film* offers students a unique opportunity to explore how meaning can be constructed through unconventional film techniques, making it especially relevant to English curriculum focus areas such as hybrid texts, representation, and the relationship between form, voice and purpose.

## English

### Unit 1

**Investigate the relationships between language, context and meaning by:**

- Explaining how texts are created in and for different contexts. ([ACEEN001](#))
- Evaluating the choice of mode and medium in shaping the response of audiences, including digital texts. ([ACEEN003](#))

**Examine similarities and differences between imaginative, persuasive and interpretive texts including:**

- Explaining the ways language features, text structures and conventions communicate ideas and points of view. ([ACEEN004](#))
- evaluating the impact of description and imagery, including figurative language, and still and moving images in digital and multimodal texts. ([ACEEN007](#))

**Analyse and evaluate how responses to texts, including students' own responses, are influenced by:**

- Purpose, taking into account that a text's purpose is often open to debate. ([ACEEN008](#))
- Personal, social and cultural context. ([ACEEN009](#))
- The use of imaginative, persuasive and interpretive techniques. ([ACEEN010](#))

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by investigating the impact and uses of imaginative, interpretive and persuasive texts. ([ACEEN020](#))**

### Unit 2

**Compare texts in a variety of contexts, mediums and modes by:**

- Explaining the relationship between purpose and context. ([ACEEN021](#))
- Analysing the style and structure of texts including digital texts. ([ACEEN022](#))
- Evaluating similarities and differences between hybrid texts, for example, infotainment, product placement in movies, hypertext fiction. ([ACEEN023](#))

**Investigate the representation of ideas, attitudes and voices in texts including:**

- Analysing the ways language features, text structures and stylistic choices shape points of view and influence audiences. ([ACEEN024](#))
- Evaluating the effects of rhetorical devices, for example, emphasis, emotive language and imagery in the construction of argument. ([ACEEN025](#))
- Analysing the effects of using multimodal and digital conventions such as navigation, sound and image. ([ACEEN026](#))
- Analysing how attitude and mood are created, for example, through the use of humour in satire and parody. ([ACEEN027](#))

**Analyse and evaluate how and why responses to texts vary through:**

- The impact of language and structural choices on shaping own and others' perspectives. ([ACEEN028](#))
- The ways ideas, attitudes and voices are represented, for example, how events are reported differently in the media. ([ACEEN029](#))

**Reflect on their own and others' texts by:**

- Analysing the values and attitudes expressed in texts. ([ACEEN038](#))
- Evaluating the effectiveness of texts in representing ideas, attitudes and voices. ([ACEEN039](#))
- Explaining how and why texts position readers and viewers. ([ACEEN040](#))



## Unit 3

### Compare texts from similar or different genres and contexts by:

- Analysing language, structural and stylistic choices. ([ACEEN041](#))
- Explaining how each text conforms to or challenges the conventions of particular genres or modes such as crime fiction, advertising or short films. ([ACEEN042](#))

### Compare and contrast distinctive features of genres by:

- Analysing the techniques and conventions used in different genres, mediums and modes. ([ACEEN044](#))
- Considering how the conventions of genres can be challenged, manipulated or parodied. ([ACEEN045](#))

### Analyse and evaluate how the conventions of texts influence responses including:

- How expectations of genres have developed and the effect when those expectations are met or not met, extended or subverted. ([ACEEN048](#))

### Reflect on their own and others' texts by:

- Explaining how meaning changes when texts are transformed into a different genre or medium. ([ACEEN058](#))
- Comparing and evaluating the impact of language conventions used in a variety of texts and genres. ([ACEEN059](#))

## Unit 4

### Evaluate different perspectives, attitudes and values represented in texts by:

- Analysing content, purpose and choice of language. ([ACEEN063](#))
- Exploring other interpretations and aspects of context to develop a considered response. ([ACEEN065](#))

### Evaluate how texts convey perspectives through:

- The selection of mode, medium, genre and type of text. ([ACEEN066](#))

- The ways points of view and values are represented. ([ACEEN067](#))
- The selection of language features that generate empathy or controversy, for example, juxtaposition of image and text. ([ACEEN068](#))

### Reflect on their own and others' texts by:

- Analysing and evaluating how different attitudes and perspectives underpin texts. ([ACEEN076](#))
- Questioning the assumptions and values in texts. ([ACEEN077](#))
- Identifying omissions, inclusions, emphases and marginalisations. ([ACEEN078](#))
- Discussing and evaluating different readings of texts. ([ACEEN079](#))

*Memory Film* may also be of interest as a supplementary text in the study of Modern History for its depiction of social change, offering a personal lens through which to examine key historical movements and narratives.

## Modern History

## Unit 2

### Perspectives and interpretations

- Analyse and account for the different perspectives of individuals and groups in the past. ([ACHMH056](#))
- Evaluate critically different historical interpretations of the past, how they evolved, and how they are shaped by the historian's perspective. ([ACHMH057](#))
- Evaluate contested views about the past to understand the provisional nature of historical knowledge and to arrive at reasoned and supported conclusions. ([ACHMH058](#))

### Women's movements

- The achievements and legacies of women's movements. ([ACHMH069](#))

### Recognition and rights of First Nations Peoples

- The continued efforts to achieve greater recognition, reconciliation, civil rights, and improvements in education and health. ([ACHMH076](#))



# Pre-viewing questions and activities

## What is a memory?

- Share a powerful personal memory and why it has stayed with you.
- Consider:
  - How might memories shift over time?
  - How does memory differ from history or archival records?
- How might a filmmaker capture memory on screen?
- What happens when we turn private memories into public records?

## Home movies and personal archives

- Have you ever watched old home movies or family videos? What emotions or thoughts did they evoke?
- What might be the ethical considerations in using personal footage (yours or someone else's) in a public film?
- In what ways can home movies document social or political change?

## What was going on in Australia? (1970–2000)

Before watching *Memory Film*, take 10–15 minutes to get a sense of what was happening in Australia during the time period it explores.

- Choose two of the topics below. Reflect on your existing knowledge and conduct additional web research.
  - Second-wave feminism in Australia
  - Aboriginal land rights activism
  - Anzac Day protests
  - Australia Day resistance or Invasion Day
  - The women's liberation movement
- Changes in ideas about gender, motherhood or identity
- For each topic you choose, write down:
  - One key event, protest or campaign from that time.
  - One question you have or something you're curious to understand better.
- After watching the film, return to these topics and see what new insights the documentary gives you.

Visit  
Jeni's website:  
[jenithornley.com](http://jenithornley.com)

## Who is Jeni Thornley?

Jeni Thornley is a pioneering feminist and documentary filmmaker whose life experiences deeply shape *Memory Film*. Understanding her background will help you better appreciate the film's personal, political, and poetic layers.

Also see: 'Contested Histories: The Documentaries of Jeni Thornley', A Retrospective: [<melbournecinematheque.org/category/present-year/contested-histories-the-documentaries-of-jeni-thornley/>](http://melbournecinematheque.org/category/present-year/contested-histories-the-documentaries-of-jeni-thornley/)

As you explore the websites, answer the following:

- What kinds of films has Jeni made before *Memory Film*? What themes or issues do her earlier films explore?
- What does her biography or film history suggest about the kind of stories she wants to tell?
- How has her personal life (e.g. where she lived, her activism, family or community involvement) influenced her filmmaking?
- Jeni describes *Memory Film* as a 'farewell film poem'. What might that mean? Based on what you've read, what do you expect this film to feel or look like?



# Viewing questions

As you watch the film, take note of some of the experimental techniques used in it, in the table below ▼

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ACROBAT

Technique	Describe a scene/ moment where this is particularly effective	What effect does this have?	What might it mean or suggest?
Use of silent film structure (no voiceover/ interviews)			
Super 8 film texture (grain, colour fade, softness)			
Archival/found footage reuse			
Chapter headings and poetic/ literary quotes			
Episodic/list- based structure			
Time-lapse footage, slow rhythm (consider the editing style)			
Music and sound design as narrative/ emotional tools			
Bodily imagery (hair, skin, movement, dance)			
Reflection on time passing, death, memory (death poetry)			
Repetition of imagery or symbolic visuals			



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## Pause and reflect

Using the table below ▼ note the point at which the film moves into a new chapter or theme. Before moving on, reflect on the message, mood or key ideas communicated by the chapter you just watched.

## Soundtrack sketch

Choose a short section of the film. Use lines, shapes or colours to show how the music and images made you feel.

## Australian history vs Jeni's history

- What aspects of Australian history does the film document? What do we learn about these events?
- What factual information do we learn about Thornley through the film? Consider her professional experiences, personal experiences, autobiographical details like where she lived or how many children she had.
- What and how do we learn about Thornley's character, values and beliefs, or about how she felt about the events she has witnessed?

Chapter	Message or key ideas	Mood
Acknowledgement of Country		
Impermanence		
Things that Quicken the Heart		
The Ferment / The Fissure		
Interior/ Integration/Spirit		



JO TAWADROS AND ENSEMBLE  
PHOTO: SANDY EDWARDS

- In Japanese culture, *jisei* poems are written as a final reflection. How does the content, tone or structure of *Memory Film* reflect this spirit?
- How does *Memory Film* use poetic elements – like repetition, symbolism and mood – to communicate its ideas?
- What happens when spiritual and poetic voices are blended with political and psychological ideas? How does this influence your interpretation of the film?

## Post-viewing questions and activities

### *Farewell film, poetry and transience*

*Memory Film* is guided by the tradition of Japanese death poetry. In Japan, elders and Buddhists write poems to express their feelings about the transience of life and the inevitable passing of all things – a ‘farewell poem to life’ (*jisei*). Householders write poems as a gift to their children – a legacy of beauty and insight gathered over years. This contemplation of ageing and approaching death, yet also brimming with life, offers a poetic impulse to the film. *Memory Film* evolves into a meditation text, with quotes by poets Basho, Tagore and Dogen, interwoven with psychoanalytic extracts from Freud, Irigaray and Bion. Their pathways of liberation complement the emancipatory journey of feminism. It is uplifting, too, when Rumi’s poem, *Dance*, accompanies the Super 8 dance sequence with ecstatic music of the oud.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The film is described as a ‘farewell film poem to life’. What do you think the filmmaker is saying goodbye to? How is this sense of farewell expressed visually and emotionally?

- The film meditates on the changing nature of politics and transformation. What moments or sequences communicated this particularly effectively, and made you reflect on the passing of time, aging or loss?
- Is this a film about death, or is it more about life? Explain your answer using one or two specific scenes or quotes from the film.
- Consider the idea of legacy. What kind of legacy – emotional, political, artistic, familial – do you think Thornley is leaving behind?

#### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Write your own *jisei*-inspired reflection. It could be in the form of a poem, letter or single sentence that captures something you’d want to pass on about your life, values or observations.
- Using stills (or imagined scenes), assemble a sequence of five moments that together form a poetic reflection on life’s fragility or beauty.
- What might your own farewell film look like? Consider the moments, people, places or ideas you would include and explain what impression your film would leave behind.
- Rewrite a short scene from the film in prose, then in poetic form. How does the poetic version shift your interpretation or emotional response?

## An experiment in sound, silence, and music

*Memory Film* is an experiential, lyrical documentary expressing cinema's power, not via 'issues', but with a poetic sensibility blending images, music and sound.

The superb soundtrack counterpoints the grainy textural quality of the Super 8. Original music by oud maestro Joseph Tawadros and creative sound design by Tristan Meredith interweaves with the images, skilfully edited by Lindi Harrison (ASE). As there are no speaking voices, narration or interviews, the film offers an immersive experience of the interplay between public and private. *Memory Film* is unique as its legacy harks back to the silent movie era. Tawadros' expressive music score, Meredith's sensitive use of sound and Harrison's creative editing offers viewers a meditative, inner experience of social change.

Listen to Joseph Tawadros' album, *The Virtue of Signals*, featuring original music composed for *Memory Film*: <[open.spotify.com/album/0ZirOJ25dlzYAbWcU5vef9](https://open.spotify.com/album/0ZirOJ25dlzYAbWcU5vef9)>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What emotions or ideas did the absence of narration and dialogue evoke as you watched the film? Did this silence invite a different kind of attention or interpretation that you would normally experience when watching a documentary?
- Read the following comment from *Memory Film* composer, Joseph Tawadros, and his reference to music as a 'compositional diary'. In what ways does the music feel personal, emotional or reflective in the film? Can you name a moment where the sound felt like a form of memory?
- Tawadros says his oud music is not tied to genre, culture or time. Do you think this timeless, cross-cultural quality adds something to the film's themes of memory and transformation? Why or why not?
- What challenges might a filmmaker face in financing an experimental, deeply personal film like *Memory Film*?

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Choose a short section of the film. Watch it once with sound and once without and write down what changed in your interpretation, mood or focus.
- Choose another piece of instrumental music (from any culture or genre). Rewatch a short scene with this new soundtrack. What changes in the tone, meaning or emotional impact?
- Joseph Tawadros says his oud playing links him to his family, his aspirations and his identity. Write a short paragraph, poem or drawing describing a sound, song or instrument that connects you to your past, identity or emotions.



COMPOSER JOSEPH TAWADROS

PHOTO: DANIEL SPONIAR

*My oud is my refuge, my comfort and true friend. And, although it is already a very big part of my everyday life, it is also a metaphysical outlet and healer, a link between my reality and my aspirations. Its charismatic sound reminds me of my parents: my father's voice in the bass and my mother's in the treble ... The music covers a range of diverse voices, compounding all that I've learnt in my decades on this planet and converting those experiences to sound – a compositional diary, if you will ... It's not about placing it in any genre, culture or time, but how it moves us as humans and can be shared together regardless of our background.*

Source: <[aco.com.au/news/2023-february/joseph-tawadros-about-my-music](https://aco.com.au/news/2023-february/joseph-tawadros-about-my-music)>



L-R LINDI HARRISON (EDITOR) JENI THORNLEY AND TOM ZUBRYCKI (PRODUCER) AT CHURCH ST RECORDING STUDIOS PHOTO: SANDY EDWARDS

## Editing and telling the story

Following is part of Jeni Thornley's reflection on the making of the film:

### How a story is told

*By 2020, I had shot-listed the Super footage, organizing the rushes chronologically. Then I catalogued them by themes. I was influenced by filmmaker Chris Marker's reference to Japanese court poet Sei Shōnagon (eleventh century), affectionately acknowledged in his essay film Sunless. Her random lists also offered Memory Film an episodic, list-based structure for the film.*

*Shōnagon had a passion for lists ... One day she got the idea of drawing up 'a list of things that quicken the heart'. Not a bad criterion I realize when I'm filming.*

– Chris Marker

*As I edited the first assembly, clear narrative strategies emerged: the Super 8 archive would provide the only images; there would be no narration, interviews or speaking voices. Chapter headings and quotes would provide the narrative arc that voiceover may have offered, providing analysis and a space to think, a counterpoint to the film's mesmeric strategies.*

*These approaches, their origins linked to silent movie conventions, would create strong visual and emotive storytelling.*

Source: *Memory Film* press kit

<[jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/](http://jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/)>

### Evolution of 'a mind' across time

*Memory Film's editor Lindi Harrison asked probing questions which further clarified the film's structure, meaning and rhythm: Why is that shot there? What is it doing? Is there a story? Where is it going? Specific questions too – Why did you follow the women after working on the film *Journey Among Women*. What was the motivation and where is the footage to show it? In due course, the central question emerged: what is this film really about? Once again, the images and their historical movement across time answered the question. Gradually the film evolved into 'a document of a mind' – sifting and sorting across years, developing insight out of chaos. Collaborating with Harrison in the intense edit phase, this 'journey of a mind' evolved into five distinct chapters that documented decades of activism and interiority.*

- » Acknowledgement of Country
- » Impermanence
- » Things that Quicken the Heart
- » The Ferment / The Fissure
- » Interior / Integration / Spirit



### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Instead of traditional scenes, the film is structured around visual fragments and chapter headings. How does this list-based or episodic structure shape your experience as a viewer?
- Thornley was inspired by Sei Shōnagon and her poetic lists in *The Pillow Book* – such as ‘things that quicken the heart’.

- What kinds of images in *Memory Film* ‘quicken your heart’?
- Make your own short list of things that quicken your heart, based on your viewing.

- The editor, Lindi Harrison, helped guide the film’s direction by asking questions like, ‘Why is that shot there?’

Choose a moment from the film and try to answer these questions yourself:

- Why this shot?
- What is it doing?
- How does it connect to the overall story?
- The film has been described as ‘a document of a mind’. How is this different from a documentary that focuses on external events or social issues?
- Consider the five chapter headings and pick one to focus on. Reflect:
  - What themes, emotions or ideas did it explore?
  - How did the combination of imagery, music and editing communicate that theme?
- Were there any moments in the film where you felt a sense of progression, tension or change, even without dialogue? What helped create that?

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Inspired by Sei Shōnagon, choose a theme (e.g. ‘Things that disappear’, ‘Things that comfort’, or ‘Moments of resistance’) and list five personal memories, images or moments that relate to it. Imagine how you’d visually represent each one.



SOUND DESIGNER TRISTAN MEREDITH

PHOTO: JENI THORNLEY

## Super 8 film

Super 8 is a type of motion picture film format introduced by Kodak in 1965. It became popular for home movies and low-budget filmmaking because it was cheap, portable and easy to use. The film came in a small three-minute cartridge, making it more accessible than earlier formats.

Unlike today’s digital cameras, Super 8 uses actual film stock – strips of celluloid that must be processed in a lab. The footage has a grainy, nostalgic look, sometimes with light flares and soft focus that give it an emotional and historical feel. Many filmmakers still value Super 8 for its ability to evoke time, place and memory in a deeply personal way.

In *Memory Film*, Jeni Thornley uses Super 8 footage to capture raw, intimate glimpses of her life and activism from the 1970s to the early 2000s. The film’s flickers, scratches and soft focus aren’t flaws – they’re part of the storytelling. Because Super 8 degrades over time, its visible wear becomes a visual metaphor for memory itself: fragile, textured and ever shifting.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What feelings or ideas come to mind when you see grainy images, flickers or scratches on old film?
- How do you think the imperfections and visual decay of Super 8 film help tell a story about memory, identity or history?



PREPARING THE SUPER 8 FILM FOR  
NFSA ACQUISITION AND DIGITISING

- Why might some filmmakers choose to use Super 8 today, even when digital cameras are easier and more advanced?
- If you were making a film about your own life, would you choose a smooth digital style or a raw, aged look like Super 8? Why? You might consider incorporating a vintage filter to digital footage, such as [8mm Vintage Camera](#).
- Can damaged or faded film reveal more truth than a clean, high-definition image? Why or why not?
- How does *Memory Film* use Super 8 film differently from how we use smart phones or social media to document life today?



CHRISTINA SPARROW GRADING  
THE SUPER 8 NFSA 2016

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Watch a few short clips or look at still images from different types of film, like Super 8, VHS and digital. Can you tell which is which? What kind of mood or feeling does each one create?
- Create a chart that compares the characteristics and qualities of different types of film, and which outlines when filmmakers might want to choose to use one type of film over another.
- Make a visual collage that represents a memory.
- Use faded colours, blurs, handwritten text or even scratches to give it a Super 8 style. Write a short note explaining your choices.
- Make a short video reel using a Super 8 app. Can you tell the difference between the 'app' image and the 'real' Super 8 in *Memory Film*?

## Archive as a metaphor

Assembling the film involved cataloguing fragile Super 8 reels, physically handling and caring for the archive, as well as working through the emotional and political memories each image evoked. This tactile interaction with the past prompted deeper introspection and creative re-evaluation. Reflecting on the process, Thornley mused:

***What image do you choose to represent or communicate an idea, or a feeling; how do you work with your own subjective memory ... and how might your own personal archive link to public history – the historical record of a nation? And where does your intention and ethics play out in all of this? Consider the difference between approaching the archive as a source of shots for a film, in contrast to thinking about the archive as metaphor – reading the grain of the archive to hear the whispers in the archive, to see the problem of the archive and what’s not there; and to think about the nature of power in the production of the archive itself.***

– Jeni Thornley, 'Maestros of the Archive', OzDox, AFTRS Sydney, 2014.

[youtube.com/watch?v=vffFWtXjgdU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vffFWtXjgdU)

LEFT: CHURCH OF SAN GIACOMO VENICE  
RIGHT: THE THINKING BREAD (BION)



ANZAC DAY  
SAILORS MARCHING  
IN SYDNEY 1983

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you think of a moment in *Memory Film* where the images seem to suggest something more than what they literally show?
- Thornley asks: 'What image do you choose to represent or communicate an idea, or a feeling?' Choose a single shot or sequence from the film.
  - What idea or emotion do you think it communicates?
  - Why do you think this image was chosen?
- The filmmaker refers to the archive as something that can 'whisper' or reveal what's missing. What do you think she means by this? Can absence be just as powerful as presence in an archival film?
- Thornley's archival filmmaking is in the autobiographical mode, constructing 'an archive of the self.' Research other autobiographical films and consider their textual strategies.





- How might your own personal archive (photos, videos, journals, memories) connect to larger social or historical stories?
  - Can personal stories offer valid historical insight? Why or why not?
  - What responsibilities might you have in deciding what to share and how?
- Think about the inclusion of other people (family, community, protest groups) in personal footage.
  - What ethical questions arise when reusing such material in a public film?
  - How do you think Thornley navigated these challenges?
- Thornley comments about ‘power’ embedded in archives – in who is recorded and who is not. Reflect on what voices, bodies or events are missing from the traditional historical record. How does *Memory Film* attempt to restore or reinterpret that record?
- Does *Memory Film* feel like it has a missing story, voice or perspective?
  - Was this absence deliberate, unintentional, or part of the film’s message?

## CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Find an old photo, home video, or journal entry of your own. Write a short reflection exploring:
  - What it shows.
  - What it doesn’t.
  - What it might mean to someone else outside your personal context.
- If you were to create your own ‘memory film’ from fragments of your life or your community’s history, what would you include, and why?
- Choose a metaphor (e.g. a suitcase, a mirror, a ghost, a faded map) to describe what an archive means to you. Write a short paragraph or poem exploring that metaphor and how it relates to memory, truth or power.
- Choose one scene from the film that feels deeply personal. Research or reflect on the kinds of permissions and consultations that would be ethically required for its inclusion. Write a short commentary explaining your reasoning.
- Between 2016-2017, the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) purchased and digitised Jeni Thornley’s Super 8 film collection, thus ensuring its survival. Research the NFSA’s work with audiovisual preservation and prepare a brief presentation which argues its importance and the need for sufficient and ongoing funding.



TEMPLE OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA  
BANGKOK THAILAND 1994

## A space of possibility

*Memory Film* offers an immersive experience of personal and political change. In its documentation of 1974–2003, the film reveals ongoing journeys towards gender equity, diversity, human rights and First Nations sovereignty. *Memory Film* brings to light an intense and dynamic era of Australian history. The footage documents inspiring movements by activists to transform their lives, giving visibility to hidden stories. The parallel story of a filmmaker’s inner journey suggests a space of possibility, providing insights into the process of transformation. Quotes by poets and writers infuse the film, including Kate Jennings, Monique Wittig, The Three Marias, Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton, Karla Dickens, Jim Everett and Svetlana Alexievich. Other texts suggest psychotherapy and Eastern spirituality as pathways for self-understanding.

Watch the sequence here: <[vimeo.com/1101768474](https://vimeo.com/1101768474)>

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does a ‘space of possibility’ mean to you in the context of this film? What possibilities – personal, political or creative – does it open up?

### A Space of Possibility

going bush alone  
to a hut up north, Gumbaynggirr country  
I start to film myself  
a chance to reflect, to take a  
second look, to grieve.



WOMEN AGAINST RAPE IN WAR  
ANZAC DAY SYDNEY 1983

- *Memory Film* captures moments from 1974 to 2003. These were decades of activism, protest and feminist thinking. How do these historical movements still feel relevant today? What has changed, and what hasn’t?
- The filmmaker’s personal reflections sit alongside footage of political action. How do the personal and political reinforce each other in the film? Can you separate them?
- What do the quoted voices of poets and other writers and thinkers add to the film’s message of transformation?
  - How does literary language deepen or shift the tone of the film?
  - What do you think guided the decisions about what quote to include and where?
- The film weaves together feminism, human rights, First Nations sovereignty and spiritual and psychoanalytic ideas. Do you think this blend makes the film more powerful or more complex to engage with? Why?
- What inspiration can contemporary audiences take from this archival material? What forms of activism do you see emerging today?

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Create a visual timeline showing key historical movements or events depicted in the film (1974–2003).

Add your own reflections about the significance of these events on your own life today.

- Write a paragraph or poem beginning with: ‘A space of possibility is...’

Draw on the film’s themes of memory, resistance, creativity, or identity.

- If you could add one more quote or voice to the film, whose would it be, and why?

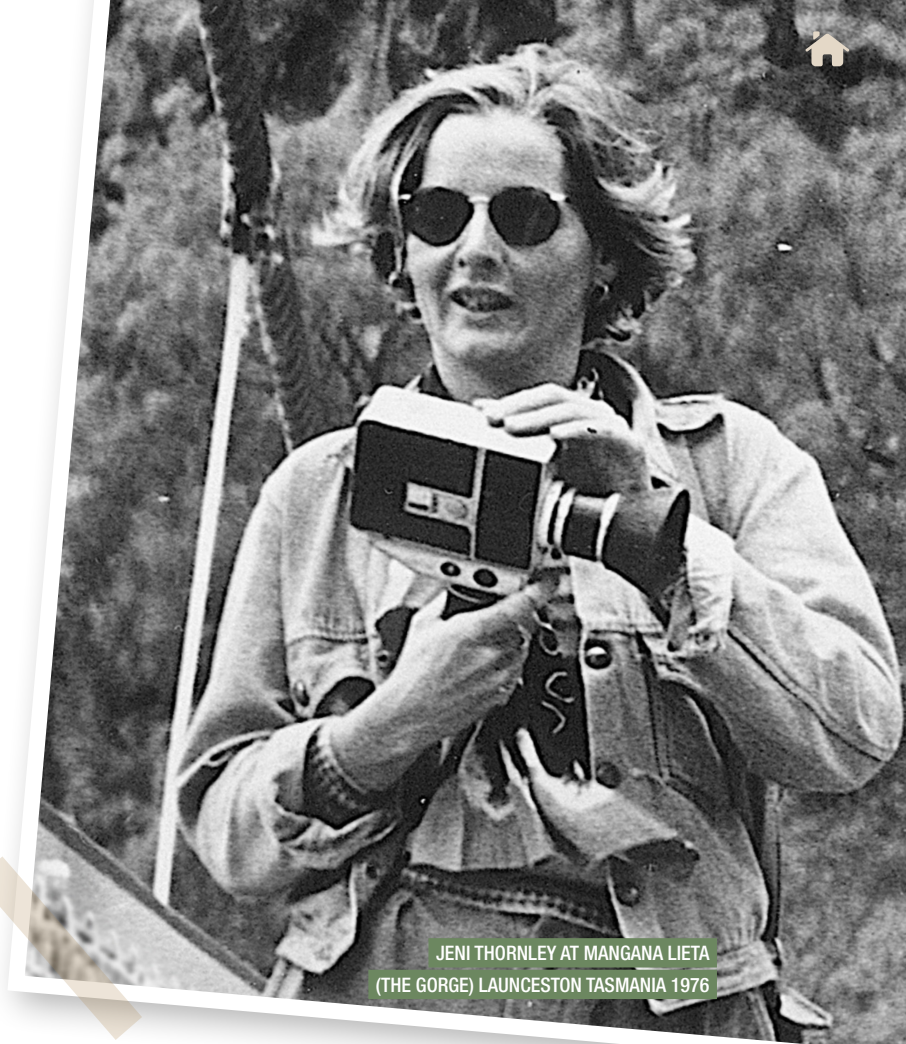


## Feminist and psychoanalytic layers

The film explores the 'fissure' in women's consciousness – a place where personal and political revolt begins. Thornley connects radical feminism with psychoanalysis and spirituality, proposing these as interconnected paths of liberation.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does the film show the difference or tension between women's private lives and their public roles? Why might this be important in feminism?
- What does the film say about motherhood? How are feelings about being a mother shown without using words?
- The filmmaker links feminism with therapy and self-reflection. How do the old home movies help show this process of working through the past?

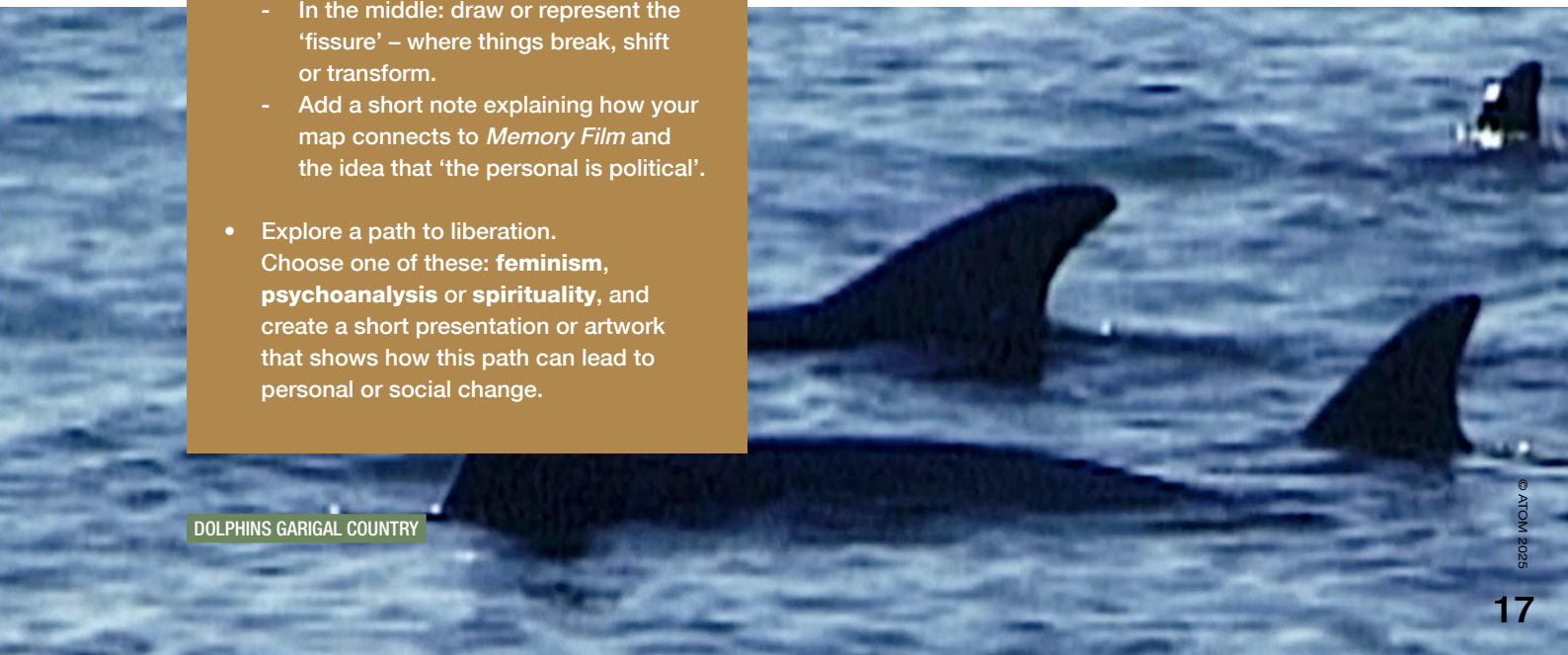


JENI THORNLEY AT MANGANA LIETA  
(THE GORGE) LAUNCESTON TASMANIA 1976

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Create a visual map showing a clash or overlap between your private and public self.
  - One side: your personal thoughts, emotions or experiences.
  - Other side: outside pressures, roles or expectations.
  - In the middle: draw or represent the 'fissure' – where things break, shift or transform.
  - Add a short note explaining how your map connects to *Memory Film* and the idea that 'the personal is political'.
- Explore a path to liberation. Choose one of these: **feminism**, **psychoanalysis** or **spirituality**, and create a short presentation or artwork that shows how this path can lead to personal or social change.

- The film has a calm, meditative pace and includes spiritual ideas. How do these choices affect how you feel about the film's message?
- Does the film make you think about your own emotions or family patterns? Why might this kind of personal reflection be part of feminist thinking?
- The film doesn't give clear answers or neat endings. How does this match the ideas it explores about identity, change, or emotional growth?



DOLPHINS GARIGAL COUNTRY



DOONOOCH DANCE COMPANY

Jeni Thornley comments:

*First Nations themes are only included when they intersect with my own experiences in Aboriginal country, such as growing up in 1950s Tasmania amidst 'The Great Australia Silence'. Later, learning of the powerful Aboriginal resistance to the colonisers, near my Auntie and Uncle's sheep farm in Big River country, led me to make my documentary Island Home Country. Also, filming Tubowgule in 2000 created heightened awareness of the 'deep history' of ceremony and culture. Later, filming a white Australia Day ceremony on a local NSW beach in 2003, also developed my understanding of the crisis represented by the date of 26th January and First Nations resistance to it.*

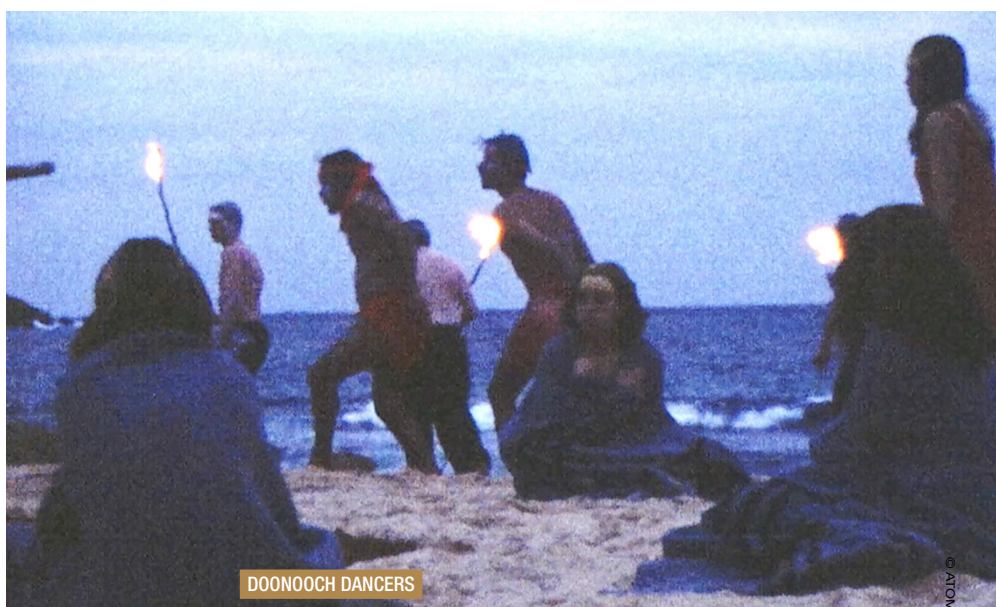
## First Nations and Protocols

Pulsing through *Memory Film* is the impact of colonising and First Nations cultural survival, represented by Palawa poet Jim Everett, Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens and Super 8 footage of the 'Tubowgule Welcoming Ceremonies', Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival with Doonooch Dance Company and guest performers (Artistic Director and Choreographer Stephen Page, Bangarra). The 'Welcoming Ceremonies' open and close the film as an Acknowledgement of Country, paying tribute to cultural survival and communicating 'quiet country' and 'deep time'. Politics around conflicting notions of Australia Day is also documented, with Karla Dickens' writing on the pain of Australia Day for First Nations People.

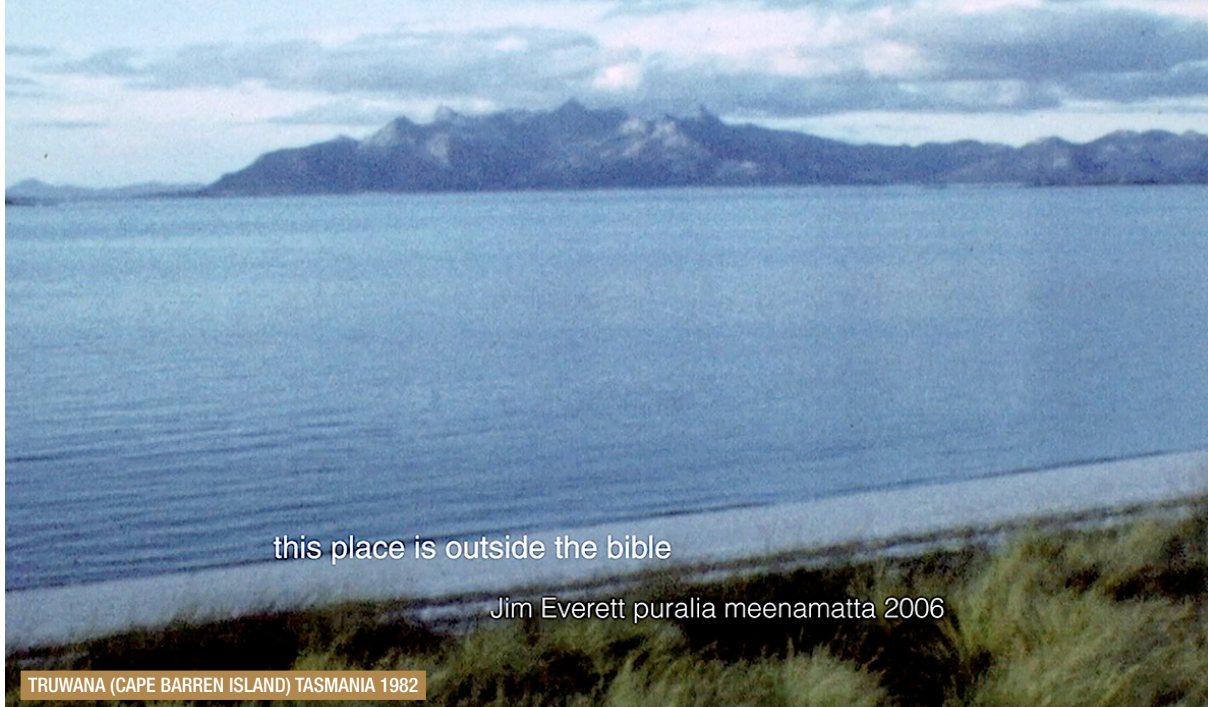
The militaristic British colonising of Tasmania and the Black War of 1830 is documented. Quotes by Palawa activist and writer, Jim Everett (*purulia meenamatta*), focus the Tasmanian episode on the continuing post-colonising journey. The Super 8 images reverberate with affect and a palpable sense of historical place – especially the reality of invasion and the convict site, Port Arthur. Yet, the powerful effect of image and sound also conveys a deep sense of 'quiet country' in the bush, in the blue waters of Cape Barren Island – country that sustains life, country that has never been ceded.

*I have worked closely with the protocols developed for Screen Australia's Pathways and Protocols and with the Tasmanian version, Respecting Cultures: Working with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community and Aboriginal Artists. Communication, consultation and consent is intrinsic to protocols practice and is an ongoing journey. This process, in Tasmania for Island Home Country, and with Doonooch Dance Co., Bangarra, Jim Everett and Karla Dickens for Memory Film, has been a humbling, learning experience. It paved the way for an ethical consultative permissions process with everyone filmed in the Super 8.*

See the *Memory Film* press kit on Jeni Thornley's website: <[jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/](http://jenithornley.com/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/)>



DOONOOCH DANCERS



this place is outside the bible

Jim Everett puralia meenamatta 2006

TRUWANA (CAPE BARREN ISLAND) TASMANIA 1982

### DISCUSSION

- Why do you think the filmmaker chose to include First Nations stories only when they intersected with her own lived experience? What are the strengths and limits of this approach?
- *Memory Film* opens and closes with the 'Tubowgule Welcoming Ceremonies'.
  - What feelings or ideas does this footage evoke for you?
  - Why do you think Thornley structured the film this way?
- How does *Memory Film* represent both the impact of colonisation and the survival of First Nations cultures?
  - What is the effect of showing both historical references (like the Black War) and contemporary resistance (such as Karla Dickens' writing on Australia Day)?
- Look up either *Screen Australia's Pathways and Protocols* or *Respecting Cultures: Working with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community and Aboriginal Artists*.
  - Summarise 3–5 key principles outlined in these guides.
  - How do these principles appear to have been followed in the making of *Memory Film*?
- In your own words, explain the importance of communication, consultation and consent in documentary filmmaking. What could happen if these are not followed when working with Aboriginal communities or archives?
- Jeni Thornley refers to working with cultural custodians like Jim Everett. Why is it important that First Nations collaborators are not 'subjects' of the film, but participants in shaping how they are represented?
  - Thornley calls her process a 'humbling learning experience'. What do you think she means by this?
  - How might humility play a role in cross-cultural collaboration?

### CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Create an audio collage or mood board using free sound clips (e.g. birdsong, water, wind, music) that evokes the feeling of 'quiet country' and 'deep time', as seen in the film's bush and water scenes.
- Choose a First Nations voice from the film (e.g. Jim Everett or Karla Dickens). Research more about their life and work explain how their perspective contributes to *Memory Film's* ethical and poetic power.
- Imagine you are preparing to create a short documentary involving First Nations content.
  - Draft a one-page ethics plan that includes how you would engage with Traditional Owners or communities.
  - Include your plan for obtaining permissions, giving back, and respecting cultural boundaries.



## Poetic documentaries that have influenced Memory Film

Choose one film, or extracts from one film, and write a short reflection comparing its style, sound, and structure to *Memory Film*. Discuss: How do both films challenge traditional documentary storytelling?

*Baraka* (1992), Ron Fricke. *Baraka* is a Sufi word meaning 'blessing'. The non-verbal film shows images of religion, nature, war and city life and its oppressions. <[vimeo.com/73539438](https://vimeo.com/73539438)>

*Dogora: Ouvrons les yeux* (2004), Patrice Leconte. A wordless, impressionistic observation of everyday life in Cambodia. <[allocine.fr/film/fichefilm\\_gen\\_cfilm=108101.html](http://allocine.fr/film/fichefilm_gen_cfilm=108101.html)>

*The Gleaners and I* (2000), Agnes Varda . Varda's wonderfully idiosyncratic, self-reflexive documentary in which she explores the world of modern-day gleaners. its oppressions. <[archive.org/details/varda-gleaners/The+Gleaners+%26+I+Agne%CC%80s+Varda\\_2000.mp4](http://archive.org/details/varda-gleaners/The+Gleaners+%26+I+Agne%CC%80s+Varda_2000.mp4)>

*Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), Godfrey Reggio. Part of a trio of non-narrative films (*Qatsi*) depicting different aspects of the relationship between humans, nature and technology.

This wordless poetic documentary features a haunting score by Phillip Glass and shows the effect that cities and modern technology have on human life. <[criterion.com/films/28034-koyaanisqatsi](http://criterion.com/films/28034-koyaanisqatsi)>

*Mother Dao the Turtlelike* (1995), Vincent Monnikendam. A compilation of clips from documentaries filmed by Dutch cameramen (1912-1932) in their former colony of Indonesia; with a soundtrack of Indonesian music and recited poetry – a sharp counterpoint to the images. <[mubi.com/films/mother-dao-the-turtlelike](http://mubi.com/films/mother-dao-the-turtlelike)>

*Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), Dziga Vertov. A visionary, transformative experimental film– a narrative-free portrait of city life. <[mubi.com/films/man-with-a-movie-camera/trailer](http://mubi.com/films/man-with-a-movie-camera/trailer)>

*Rain* (1929), Joris Ivens. Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens' classic city symphony uses disconnected shots to evoke how it feels to experience a rainstorm in Amsterdam. <[archive.org/details/pioggia-1929-joris-ivens](http://archive.org/details/pioggia-1929-joris-ivens)>

*Sans Soleil (Sunless)* (1983), Chris Marker. A poetic essay film exploring time, place, and memory through travelogue, personal reflections, and philosophical ruminations. <[vimeo.com/328606733](https://vimeo.com/328606733)>

*Swastika* (1973), Philippe Mora. The Nazification of Germany from 1933 to 1945 told through a compilation of Nazi footage, newsreels, propaganda films and Eva Braun's home movies. <[mubi.com/films/swastika](http://mubi.com/films/swastika)>

## Meaningful words

The narrative arc of *Memory Film* is provided by quotes from the following texts and films (in order of the film).

- Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, *My Reincarnation*, 2011 (film)
- Chris Marker, *Sunless*, 1983 (film)
- Sheila Rowbotham, *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*, 1973
- Kate Jennings, *Just the Two of Us*, 1975
- Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, 1694
- Daly Pulkara, *Quiet Country*, 2004
- Jim Everett, *Interview*, 2008 and *Meenamatta Discussion*, 2006
- Jane Mills, *Journey Among Women* DVD essay, 2009
- Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, 1969
- The Three Marias, *New Portuguese Letters*, 1971
- Sylvia Plath, *Elm*, 1962
- Ann Sexton, *The Abortion*, 1962
- Sigmund Freud, *Remembering, Repeating, Working Through*, 1914
- CP Cavafy, *Ithaka*, 1911
- John McGahern, *The Barracks*, 1963
- Rumi, *Poems*, 1207–73
- Karla Dickens, *On Australia Day*, 2013
- Kozan Ichikyo, *My Coming, My Going*, 1390
- Rinki Bhattacharya, *Behind Closed Doors*, 2004
- Deena Metzger, *Something in the Belly*, 2009
- Luce Irigaray, *When Our Lips Speak Together*, 1980
- Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Time*, 2009
- Wilfred Bion, *The Thinking Breast*, 1962
- Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl*, 1997
- Gautama Buddha, *The Great Departure*, 563–483 BC
- Rabindranath Tagore, *On the Seashore*, 1936
- Robert Gray, *To the Master Dogen Zenji* (1200–1253), 1983
- Shitou Xiqian, *Song of the Grass Roof Hermitage*, c.700-790
- Rumi, *Dance*, c.1244
- Bobby McLeod, *Discovery*, 2008



## Further reading

### Feminism

- Hanisch, C. *The personal is political: The women's liberation movement classic with a new explanatory introduction*, 2006.  
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<[archive.org/details/womansconscious00rowb](http://archive.org/details/womansconscious00rowb)>
- Waldman, D. *Feminism and documentary*, University of Minnesota Press 1999.  
<[archive.org/details/feminismdocument0000unse](http://archive.org/details/feminismdocument0000unse)>

### Film

- Danks, A. 'Action and Reflection: Autobiography, Film History and the Australian Independent Documentary,' *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 99, July 2021. <[sensesofcinema.com/2021/australian-autofiction-2/action-and-reflection-autobiography-film-history-and-the-australian-independent-documentary/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2021/australian-autofiction-2/action-and-reflection-autobiography-film-history-and-the-australian-independent-documentary/)>
- Loreck, J. 'Memory Film: A Filmmaker's Diary', *CTEQ Annotations on Film*, Issue 111, October 2024.  
<[sensesofcinema.com/2024/cteq/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2024/cteq/memory-film-a-filmmakers-diary/)>
- 'Maestros of the Archive', OzDox Forum, AFTRS Sydney 2014 (video). <[youtube.com/watch?v=vffFwTXjgdU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vffFwTXjgdU)>
- Piotrowska, A. *Psychoanalysis and Ethics in Documentary Film*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2023.  
<[google.com.au/books/edition/Psychoanalysis\\_and\\_Ethics\\_in\\_Documentary/vTDCEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1](http://google.com.au/books/edition/Psychoanalysis_and_Ethics_in_Documentary/vTDCEAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1)>
- 'Q+A: Jeni Thornley, Anran Li and Festival Director Al Nigrin on *Memory Film*', *United States Super 8 Film +DV Festival 2025* (video).  
<[youtube.com/watch?v=Hwl1t\\_3hCp8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hwl1t_3hCp8)>

'Women's Gaze and the Feminist Film Archive,' *Future Feminist Archive Symposium* AGNSW, 2015 (video). <[vimeo.com/122498137](https://vimeo.com/122498137)>

### First Nations

- Everett, J. *Meenamatta Water Country Discussion*, with J Kimberley, Bett Gallery, Hobart 2006.  
<[paranapleartscentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/meenamatta\\_lena\\_narla\\_puellakanny\\_catalogue.pdf](http://paranapleartscentre.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/meenamatta_lena_narla_puellakanny_catalogue.pdf)>
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<[screenaustralia.gov.au/about-us/doing-business-with-us/indigenous-content/indigenous-protocols](http://screenaustralia.gov.au/about-us/doing-business-with-us/indigenous-content/indigenous-protocols)>
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<[archive.org/details/japanesedeathpoe0000unse](http://archive.org/details/japanesedeathpoe0000unse)>
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<[dn720003.ca.archive.org/0/items/the-pillow-book/The%20Pillow%20Book.pdf](http://dn720003.ca.archive.org/0/items/the-pillow-book/The%20Pillow%20Book.pdf)>





TEMPLE OF THE EMERALD BUDDHA  
BANGKOK THAILAND 1994

# Awards

- Australian Innovation Award, Black Magic MIFF, Nomination 2023
- Top 10 Australian Films 2023, The State of Australian Cinema
- Best Documentary, Australian Film Critics Assoc., Nomination 2023
- Best Sound in Documentary, Tristan Meredith AACTA Nomination 2024
- Semi Finalist, Madrid Arthouse Film Festival, June 2024
- Semi Finalist, Sacramento Independent Film Festival, Summer 2024
- Honourable Mention, USA Super 8 Film and Digital Video Festival 2025
- Honourable Mention, Experimental Forum LA 2025
- Silver Award, Spotlight Documentary Awards, Atlanta 2025
- Finalist, Orion International Film Festival, Best Feature Documentary 2025
- Semi Finalist, Blow-up Arthouse Filmfest Chicago 2025
- Cinematography and Photography Awards London Nomination 2025
- Semi Finalist, Tokyo Women Film Festival 2025

*Memory Film* was made on Garigal country (NSW) and Naarm (VIC), Australia.

Always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

# Credits

Writer and Director JENI THORNLEY  
 Producers TOM ZUBRYCKI and JENI THORNLEY  
 Editor LINDI HARRISON (ASE)  
 Original Music JOSEPH TAWADROS  
 Sound Design TRISTAN MEREDITH  
 Executive Producer SUE MASLIN  
 Super 8 Camera and Archive JENI THORNLEY  
 Super 8 Digital Scanning NFSA  
 Colourist NICHOLAS HOWER (CSI)  
 Picture Finishing POST LAB.io  
 Edit Workflow Consultant MARCUS EKERMANN UTS  
 Project Consultants TOULA ANASTAS, MEGAN McMURCHY and STEPHEN GINSBORG  
 Produced by JOTZ Productions with Anandi Films

Produced with the financial assistance of the  
**Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund**  
 Supported by the State Government of Victoria, Australia



Executive Producer: Mark Woods

Produced with the assistance of the  
 Producer Equity Program  
 Screen Australia



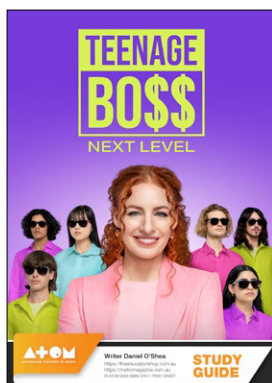
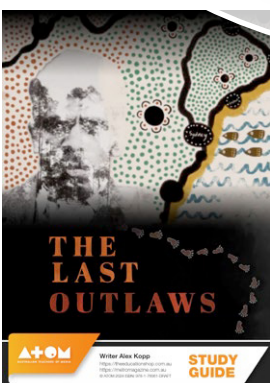
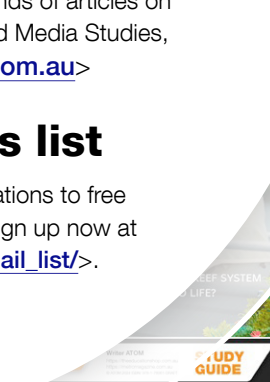
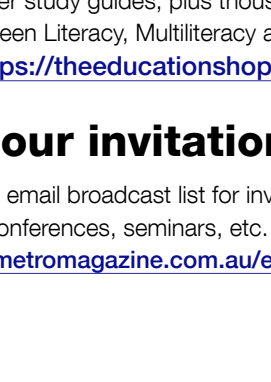
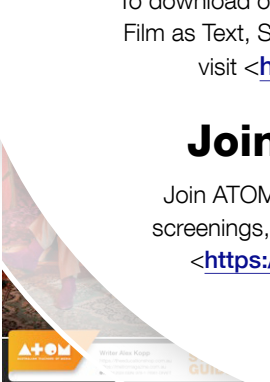
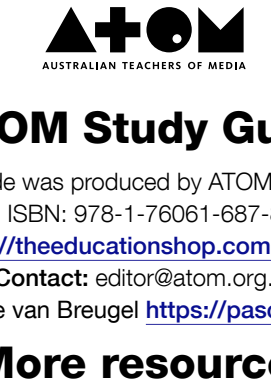
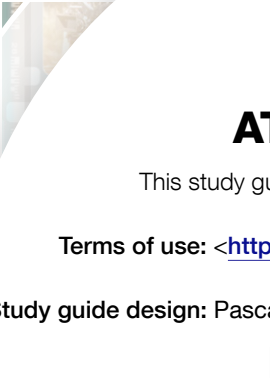
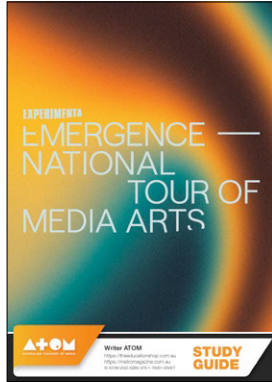
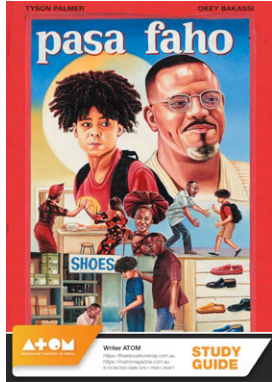
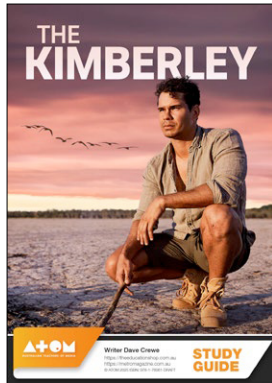
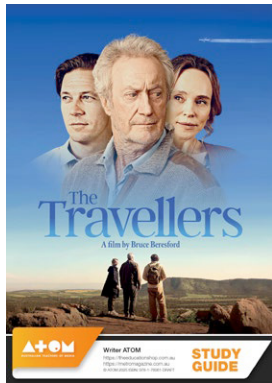
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School of Communication, FASS  
 University of Technology (UTS)



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