Who in Heaven? Tracey Moffatt: Men in Wet-Suits and the Female Gaze

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Heaven is Tracey Moffatt’s 28 minute long video which she produced, or “lovingly compiled” as she says in the credits, in 1997 for her visual art exhibition at the Dia Center in New York. This exhibition also featured two photo-series and her much acclaimed short film: Night Cries—A Rural Tragedy (1989). Heaven was shot on hand held 8mm video tape and features staged and unstaged footage of “good looking” male surfers removing wet suits and otherwise “changing” their clothes. This short film slips between the generic boundaries of video art and film. The distribution company Ronin Films has released it with a cover that proclaims: “Heaven, a film by Tracey Moffatt” and yet Jane Cole, who worked on Heaven as editor and cinematographer, was very clear in her understanding that she was working on a piece of visual art. In Cole’s words, Moffatt’s artistic frame of reference is “completely slippery.”1 This essay explores such “slipperiness” in Heaven not simply with regard to artistic conventions but also to the difficult, teasing intersections of “looking” with gender and race.

Although it was produced as a videotape, I refer to Heaven as film not only because Ronin Films released it as a film but also because its length, content and form provide a narrative cohesion that recalls Moffatt’s other films: the three ghost stories in Bedevil (1993), the short film Nice Coloured Girls (1987), and Night Cries—A Rural Tragedy. As in Heaven,

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the soundtracks of the two latter films were mostly constructed from non-synchronized sound. I also want to discuss it as a text that can be understood within parameters of film, literary and narrative theory. Within these parameters, _Heaven_ can be understood as playing both with Laura Mulvey's original concept of a gendered, male cinematic gaze and with those experiences of looking at other people that Jane Gaines calls "looking relations"—social relationships that exist within the cinematic gaze (326). My discussion explores several kinds of looking that are part of the experience of this film and also the idea that vision is a social act that takes place in specific conjunctions of space and time. I consider these acts of looking in the context of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura and with regard to his comments on the mimetic faculty. I draw on Bakhtin's device of chronotope as a way in which to describe how this film's narrative of looking is inscribed through space and time: ways that suggest a meta-narrative of subverted gender and race relations. In short, I will argue that _Heaven_ challenges socially dominant modes of looking.

**Moffatt the Performance Artist**

Cole produced a 25 minute documentary, _Up in the Sky: Tracey Moffatt in New York_ (1999), focusing on Moffatt as she prepared for the Dia exhibition. In this film, Moffatt describes how she first conceived of _Heaven_ whilst living in a beachside suburb as she drafted the script for another of her films. She was left alone during the day while her companion went to work and in her words,

I was, just like, bored? So I started to film these guys taking their clothes off just out the window... I shot it on video 8, home video, very shaky camera, I wanted it to look like a bored housewife shot it.

Moffatt goes on to describe how she asked various women she knew to film similar subject matter: male surfboard riders changing their clothes in the semi-private space of their cars. Cole herself was one of six cinematographers; sites included Sydney's Bondi Beach and Avalon Beach.²

In the sense that her art performs images of her own body and draws on narratives based on her own personal history, I suggest that Moffatt's artis-
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tic practice can well be described through Rebecca Schneider’s concept of
the performance artist.3 Such an artist works with her own body in order to
inscribe “time images” that mark the existence and history of specific sets of
power relationships. A performance artist works in a “socially inscribed
fraught space” (53) that is simultaneously both private and public. While
Moffatt appears as an actor in her feature film Bedevil, in Heaven she trans
forms her own act of looking at men getting dressed in a space which is
both private and public into an autobiographical performance of vision. She
creates her film from images of men—some of whom she films herself and
some filmed by other people. Her filmmaking positions these filmed men
also as performance artists; people who reveal their own bodies as narrative
sites for performance both in the public space created by the apparatus of
film and in the literally public space of Australian beaches. In Heaven,
Moffatt is again a performance artist in the sense that she explicitly identi
fies her filmic vision with a private act of profilmic visual fascination; she
embodies the camera’s looking with her own eyes. In this context, the film
embodies a vision that is gendered female and also Aboriginal Australian.
Across the social divides that are created by gender and racial distinctions,
Moffatt plays constantly with the much theorized gap between the repre
sented and the real. Drawing on Benjamin’s essay “On the Mimetic Fac
culty,” Michael Taussig describes this gap in terms of a specific under
standing of mimesis as “a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous,
connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived” (21).
In a similar sense, Schneider draws on both Taussig and Benjamin as she
describes the experience of viewing “the explicit body in performance.”
“The secret is that the viewer and viewed are entangled in sensuous con
tact, sensuously complicit in the scene—bodies are engaged” (89).

Many acts of looking are implicated in this film. In Heaven, acts of
filming explicitly implicate the sensuous act of viewing other people’s
bodies; the camera’s gaze is thrown back at us in a way which makes our
own act of viewing this film almost unbearably obvious, or literal. In
Schneider’s and Taussig’s sense of “the mimetic faculty,” Heaven’s text
provides images that provoke a sensual way of knowing the secrets which
lie in the gap between real people and their filmic representation. These
secrets belong to the people whose images Moffatt uses in order to create
Heaven. We only have access to them through her filmic practice—
through the stories she asks you to tell yourself about which you are
watching and even about your very act of watching. In this film, the gap between the real and the represented is collapsed explicitly into social relationships between the filmmaker(s), the people filmed, and people who watch the film. The closure or collapse of this gap in *Heaven* recalls another passage from Schneider in which she describes how performance art frequently “aims to make explicit, to render literal, the symbolic foundations by which the thrill of loss and insatiability is exhibited in the space of the particular” (6). She goes on to claim that, “To render literal is to collapse symbolic space” (6). After Benjamin, Schneider discusses this “collapse of symbolic space” in terms of dialectical images and she names some of the problems involved with using such images as follows:

The challenge in engaging dialectical images seems to lie somewhere between—a space at once exceedingly private full of located and personal particulars of reading, and radically public, full of socially inscribed dreamscape, pretexts for reading. (53)

In the sense of dialectical images, the unbearably obvious act of vision that occurs in watching *Heaven* literally engages bodies. It is an audiovisual text that transgresses the boundaries of technology. For example, a woman watching this film in the context of an exhibition of visual art can herself be watched as she watches good-looking men (of various ethnic backgrounds) undressing. In Australian vernacular language, we can “perv” on her as she “pervs” on them. While to “perv” means “to be a pervert”: “one who has been . . . corrupted,” (*The Shorter Oxford Dictionary on Historical Princials* 1963), in Australia this term also carries a sense of humor and cheeky subversion. So there are two ways of describing the looking relations involved in the experience of *Heaven*. Firstly, the act of looking is corrupted by an exploitation of power relationships that are simultaneously made possible and exposed through the experiences of production and reception. Secondly, there is an element of subversive fun that pervades our acts of looking at this film: with Moffatt and the other cinematographers, we are daring to look, over and over again, at scenes that should merit only a glance in polite society.

Although performances of production and reception depend on an individual’s pathways of memory and history, these many and different per-
performances always venture forth into experience using those depictions of time and space that are seen and heard through *Heaven*’s filmic text. I want to go on now to investigate the particularity of that “socially inscribed fraught space” which is claimed and inhabited by the audiovisual images of *Heaven*. I want to describe it in terms of physical space, in terms of time, and then as a site of a social narrative that takes place in a nexus of space and time.

**Social Space and Time**

*Heaven* focuses on beaches: beautiful, liminal spaces in *between* land and sea. The film focuses more closely on male surfers—and on the places where they change out of or into their wet-suits: the thermal body-suits they wear to keep their bodies warm over long periods in the water. These places where they change are usually by their cars or *on their way* to their cars. Although each car may be the personal private space of particular surfers, the areas around them and the beach itself are part of a public space where people deliberately expose their bodies in public display. The space which this film depicts is *in between* public and private. It is a public space that can be transformed into a private space through acts of dressing and undressing. In this sense, a person can inscribe space as public or private through using her/his body in various ways. The sculpted muscles and small tattoos that adorn the bodies of the surfers in the last sequences of *Heaven* invite another understanding that is reinforced by the repetitive acts of dressing shown in the film.

Space may prove intractable to such transformations between private and public and/or, in this sense of “dress” as a mark of public accessibility, some people are never completely undressed or naked. They always move and display themselves in a manner that assumes that all space is public and that no part of their bodies might remain unseen. Such people are always prepared for public display and so they inscribe the space within which they move as one that implicates a constantly threatened exposure of body and self: private space may have disappeared. Moffatt compiled her film from footage that usually focuses on men on their way into the water or coming out of it or washing themselves after surfing or changing their clothes after or before surfing. *Heaven* depicts a particular passage of time that occurs during events which can best be described as “before” or
“after” surfing. These are time events that are particular and personal to each surfer. As I have already suggested, the acts of dressing and undressing are usually associated with personal, private activity. Only the opening and closing scenes present the event of surfboard riding itself—that synaesthetic experience of uncontrolled mass and movement which occurs when a body rides on a wave of water.

As referred to earlier, Schneider describes that “fraught space” which is created by the use of dialectical images as that which exists “between the personal particular and the socially inscribed” (53). In Heaven, such a space can be described as private time that takes place in a public space. Speaking from my own experience, it is not an uncommon event to want to change into or out of swimming gear without dashing to the privacy of changing rooms (even if such rooms exist). Moffatt’s film, however, depicts this conventional yet transformative activity over and over again. Her focus questions this mundane, everyday activity as it can be seen to occur through a particular group of people: young fit male surfboard riders. In order to look more closely at how this space and time can be described as socially inscribed, it is interesting to consider, even if briefly, Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope and its application to film.

Although he does not offer a clearly stated definition, Bakhtin uses this term in order to describe a knitting together of space and time both within historically real situations and within the narrative worlds of fictional and non-fictional literary texts. Michael Holquist says of the chronotope:

Like the utterance, chronotope is not a term that can be invoked ‘in general.’ It must be a chronotope of someone for someone about someone. It is ineluctably tied to someone who is in a situation. (255)

Bakhtin specifically limits his discussion of this term “as a formally constitutive category of literature” (84), but does not exclude the possibility that it could be used in the discussion of discourses constituted by other signifying practices, such as film. And his description of the literary chronotope strongly evokes film:

Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged
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He distinguishes between three kinds of chronotope (250–8). Firstly, chronotopes can be “transcultural”—in Holquist’s words, “not cut off
from the cultural environments in which they arise” (111). Sharon Swen-
son refers to this aspect of the chronotope as that which describes how a
text is contextualized in the historically real world, and how a text there-
fore can be considered as useful to a specific area of discourse. She names
this aspect “The Value-Laden Nature of the Chronotope” (45). Secondly,
the chronotope is a device that can be used to describe the space/time rela-
tionship of various motifs in a text (Holquist 109). The third understanding
of this device lies in the way in which it can be used to distinguish be-
tween various categories or genres of narrative within a particular textual
signifying practice. Holquist describes this use of the chronotope in rela-
tion to narrative categories of the novel, which are dependant on the Rus-
ian Formalist distinction between how an event is assumed to unfold in
time and how such a chronology is altered in the telling (113–4). With re-
ference to film this aspect of the chronotope contextualises a particular film
both within filmic genres and within those societies in which a film is cre-
ated and received.

It is the motif chronotope, however, that is particularly useful in order
to describe the “thickening” of space and time which can be discerned in
this film. Heaven draws on a repetitive use of a motif chronotope that
could be described as one of “changing out of wet clothes in a public
space.” The definition is not neat, but it does allow a way of bringing these
two aspects of Schneider’s “fraught space” between the personal and pub-
lic sphere into one conceptual description. Whereas Bakhtin’s literary con-
cept of the chronotope calls on perceptions drawn from creating and inter-
preting written language, the filmic chronotope is a device embedded in an
artistic practice which relies most strongly on perceptions drawn directly
from vision and hearing. It is interesting to reconsider such descriptions of
time and space in the context of audiovisual practice.

There is no synchronised soundtrack for Heaven. We only hear Felicity
Fox’s carefully crafted soundscape of “found sound.” Visual images are
punctuated by eruptions of music: snatches of traditional North American
and African drumming and chants that Fox found in the University of
Sydney’s music library and which she worked through with ambient sound. Most of the film’s images are carried over a noise that sounds like small washing waves—a noise that also travels through the imagined images of early colonial contact in New South Wales which are depicted in Moffatt’s earlier short film Nice Coloured Girls. This audio intertextual suggestion from her previous film and the “primitive” drumming and chanting in Heaven introduce a level of awareness (if almost subliminal) of colonialism and its legacies of racial stereotypes. Moffatt’s particular manipulation of sight and sound in this film, however, is focused on vision and visual images, and her own embodiment of the camera as an instrument of vision constitutes a dominant discourse in the film. While the motif chronotope of “dressing in a public space” is useful to describe how space and time in Heaven congeal in the film’s depiction of a particular social activity, it is Benjamin’s drifting descriptions of the aural gaze which allow a closer focus on how the film addresses the space constituted by men’s bodies. This concept also provides a way of even more closely examining how these images of bodies move through time in their acts of changing their clothes and in the way the men interact, through space and time, with the person operating the camera.

**Gazing in Heaven**

In order to discuss more closely how this film manipulates acts of looking, I want to draw on Benjamin’s idea of the aural gaze and particularly on the ways in which distance is involved in this concept:

To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. This experience corresponds to the data of the mémoire involontaire. These data . . . are unique: they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them. Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises the “unique manifestation of a distance.” . . . The essentially distant is the inapproachable. (“Baudelaire” 188)

Benjamin goes on to describe how in the sense of an aural gaze, this inapproachability and distance are combined with an expectation of a returned gaze, an impossible expectation:
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What is involved here is that the expectation roused by the look of the human eye is not fulfilled. Baudelaire describes eyes of which one is inclined to say that they have lost their ability to look. (“Baudelaire” 189)

With Heaven, Moffatt can be understood to transform, through the apparatus of film, an actually returned gaze into an aural one. I am talking here about the segments which depict direct addresses to the camera. Indeed throughout the film, Moffatt swings constantly between using images where the surfer is unaware of the camera and confronting images of direct address to the camera. The former images are perhaps more easily understood to involve an aural gaze because when we have watched images of people who do not know they are being filmed, we know that there is no chance of them turning around and looking at us back despite our impulse to expect such a returned gaze. I propose, however, that images of people who directly look into our eyes through the device of the camera also offer the opportunity for aural gazing. The camera itself is the device that offers a sense of distance: eyes that look into a camera’s lens “have lost their ability to look”; they will never see us in the camera as we look at them and yet such addresses to the camera can confront the viewer with many assumptions and expectations towards an interactive gazing with the people whose images manifest as film.

When direct address to the camera occurs, a profilmic interactive gaze (between a filmmaker and the person whom they are filming) is transformed into an aural one for the film’s viewer. This transformation recalls Miriam Hansen’s detailed discussion of Benjamin’s concept of aura and its application to film. Hansen relates Benjamin’s concept of aura to a theory of experience that he claims underlies his middle and later writings. She particularly notes how the distance which is implied by the aural gaze is better described in terms of time:

Indeed, an important aspect of Benjamin’s notion of the aura is its complex temporality—which inscribes his theory of experience with the twofold and antago-

nistic registers of memory and history. (189)

These “two-fold antagonistic registers” can be described, perhaps, also in terms of personal/private and public social arenas of recalling the past.
This antagonism can thereby also be described as the way in which a single specific body can be the site for both kinds of recollection (or correspondence) via the act of looking at such bodies as filmic images.

Laura Mulvey’s seminal work on the cinematic gaze in classical Hollywood cinema locates woman as image and man as “bearer of the look” (19). She names three different ways of looking in film:

There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. (“Visual Pleasure” 25)

Paul Willemen extends Mulvey’s work as he describes a “fourth look” in cinema: “the look at the viewer” (107). He bases his idea on Jacques Lacan’s conceptualization of “not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other” (Willemen 107) and defines this look as one that sets up a site of address between that which is looked at and the person who is looking. Whilst remembering that it is only the image of a person which can be looked at through film, this fourth look nevertheless recalls Benjamin’s words that “to perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return” (188).

This aspect of aura needs to be considered in relation to the element of “distance” or deferral in time or space with which Benjamin imbues this concept. Jodi Brooks describes the “return of gaze” in Benjamin’s theory as having “less to do with any literal return of the gaze than with a process of activating/animating the field of correspondences” (“Between Contemplation and Distraction” 83). Brooks uses Benjamin’s concepts in order to examine what she calls:

a mode of spectatorship which involves a logic of suspension, fascination, and an intense but absent concentration: an intensification of the gaze at the same
In this sense, the concept of “aura” impacts not only on Willemen’s fourth look, the “returned look” in cinema, but also on the processes of imagination and spectatorial performance in film which can lead to Barbara Creed’s “fifth look” (29): the “look away”—a look also provoked in me through the nausea induced by Heaven’s shaky hand-held camera style.

Willemen insists that this fourth look is not a look at the filmmaker, but at the camera. I suggest there is also a sixth look which is directed explicitly towards the filmmaker: an address directly to camera or just past the camera. This look towards the interviewer frequently occurs in documentary film. In this sense, the act of viewing this kind of filmic event can also clearly be described as “watching someone else’s watching.” The return of gaze involved in such an act of watching can be understood to capture a particular sense of time and space which belongs not only to the people involved in the original, profilmic act of mutual “looking,” but also to the film’s viewer who must also bring Benjamin’s “deferral of time and space” to her or his act of viewing. It is possible then to locate Moffatt’s embodiment of the “filmmaker as camera” as a direct manipulation of both the filmic subject’s ability to return the gaze of the camera and the ability of the film viewer to receive such a gaze. Such a gaze can perhaps best be described as that which originates between the person filmed and the person filming and which, via the camera, simultaneously is also a gaze between the person filmed and anyone else who might watch what the camera films in the form of the projected, edited film. This sharing of cinematic looks recalls how Subhash Jaireth draws on Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia in order to describe as heteroscopia “the presence of someone else’s seeing in my seeing” (201). Yet there is a whole range of images that is purposefully excluded in this film, at least in terms of primary focus: images of women. This exclusion calls attention again to the way in which Heaven plays with an inversion of Mulvey’s concept of classical Hollywood cinema and the gendered pleasure involved in participating as a male bearer of the cinematic gaze in a patriarchal society—while noting that my use of the term “male” indicates here a subjective position rather than a gendered body.
Gestures of Unpleasure in Heaven

In Cole’s documentary, as referred to earlier, Moffatt explicitly en-genders the camera in this film as female; and this female camera is only interested in looking at male bodies. Such an inversion of gendered discourse first appears, as do many role inversions, as a simple line of resistance that is directed towards an ideology which favours one gender over others: yes, women can commodify men too! Interestingly, Mulvey’s more recent work addresses a female gaze which she associates with the myth of Pandora’s box: “As in the myth of Pandora, the woman’s look is often directed towards enclosed, secret and forbidden space” (Fetishism and Curiosity 62). And so Heaven poses the following questions—what does it entail for a woman if she looks in public at male bodies in contemporary Western society? Is she transgressing social convention? Is she forbidden to look? Are men’s bodies a social secret that cannot be looked at by women, in public? It is also interesting that the interactive looking which Heaven performs is between a dark-skinned woman, her cohort of anonymous female colleagues, and men. This looking is socially unexpected; in a colonial context, it is prohibited. The film does not explain this looking, it observes it and speculates.

A further consideration of this film, however, in terms of Willemen’s fourth look in cinema invites another way of understanding Moffatt’s invitation towards an inverted, female gaze. In her use of images of men who directly confront and otherwise address the female camera, she is not simply offering images to be looked at. She is inviting the viewer to also explicitly view another’s act of looking, thereby provoking an awareness of the viewer’s own act of looking at the film and the images of men depicted through the film. This awareness in turn allows or even creates a certain effect of distancing or alienation from the filmic image in the act of viewing, no matter the gender of the viewer. Rather than elide the concept of aura further with the sense of distance that is involved in Willemen’s fourth look, I now want to consider ways in which to describe Heaven’s dominant performance of gendered vision within the wider context of filmic performance as a mimetic, pan-sensual mode of movement.

In her discussion of the film Love Streams (John Cassavetes 1984), Brooks describes how Cassavetes’ films “develop a gestural practice written through by crisis” (“Crisis and the Everyday” 77). She develops her idea of
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gestural practice in film by drawing on Benjamin's essay “Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death,” particularly where he discusses Kafka's work as “a code of gestures” and relates it to the Brechtian concept of theatrical gestus or gest (120–1). Brooks describes how Cassavetes' filmic gesture of crisis can be understood in terms of Benjamin's call for 'a gestural practice which does not simply document or imitate the structuring of experience in modernity, but rather mimetically embraces it as the basis for a new form of transmissibility and narrativity" (“Crisis and the Everyday” 83).

Any consideration of Heaven in terms of a filmic gestural practice needs to take into account the film's manipulation of cinematic looks and the gender inversions further suggested by Moffatt's exclusion of female images. I suggest that the gestural practice of this film should be described in terms of looking but that there are two antagonistic kinds of looking that are at issue. One look involves the subversive look of the female camerawoman, the male body and the subsequent coercion of the film's viewer into a gendered viewing position, whether this position belongs to a woman or a homosexual or bisexual man. In other words, the viewing position of this gendered camera. The second kind of looking that occurs, however, is in direct response to this gendered camera. It takes place between the cinematographers and the people they are filming. These particular acts of looking display the filmed surfers' anger, irritation and amusement at being filmed and questioned. The most significant example occurs in the segment that Cole filmed at Avalon Beach, which shows two young men entering the water with their boards. As the film progresses, however, other young men look back at the camera and the person filming; these looks more frequently also involve voluntary (even if sometimes provoked) displays of buttocks and penises.

A sense of exhibitionism overlays the latter segments of the film, particularly those filmed by Moffatt herself at Bondi Beach. There is a sense of humorous arrogance as the men challenge and thereby transform the voyeuristic camera into an instrument of their own bodily display. The dominant gender then is not afraid to be looked at by a mere and powerless woman with a camera. In the context of Heaven, the dominant gender—masculine—can be understood not so much as the “bearer of the look” as a permutation of Mulvey's insight into the male gaze; in this film, the viewing subject might well be woman but man nevertheless still con-
trols this looking. Moffatt plays with ideas of the female and male gaze, then, in ways which do not constitute a simple gender inversion. She presents interactions between people that happen because of and through the devices of camera and film. Her play is not only with vision. It is worth noting one other confronting way in which this film addresses the viewer: Heaven presses against the boundaries of genre in audiovisual form. This pressing against boundaries of filmic form provokes a violent collapse of viewing categories in Heaven that can be understood in terms of several questions: what kind of outside viewer is intended for this work? Has the work been produced for the general film-going public, people interested in documentary film, the “art world,” or just the people who made this film?

Subversive Acts—A Creative and Generic Chronotope

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, Heaven was produced as a project for the Dia Center. It was shown more recently on a continuous play-loop at the National Gallery of Australia’s 2000 retrospective exhibition of Moffatt’s work. Heaven does not even try to meet commercially released film’s conventions of acknowledgment of who has been filmed and who has done the filming. In the credits we simply are told that the film was “lovingly compiled” by Moffatt, “excitedly edited” by Cole and “ecstatically soundscaped” by Fox. The people who were filmed were not acknowledged in any way; nor were the people who shot the footage. This style of crediting associates Heaven more with a ruthlessly eclectic mode of visual art rather than with film.

Heaven can be considered part of Moffatt’s ongoing exploration of the boundaries between various modes of visual communication. She traces such boundaries through her practices of film and photography, and I have considered elsewhere this particular nexus in Moffatt’s work at some length. In making Heaven, however, Moffatt explicitly addresses an uncertainty about the meeting place between film, with all its history and conventions (which include the avant garde), and audiovisual work which is more usually understood to include video installations and film/video art. In other words, in releasing Heaven as a short film through Ronin and simultaneously exhibiting it in art galleries in the context of her previously acclaimed short fiction film Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy, Moffatt is exploring more than the boundaries that make it possible to distinguish be-
tween narrative film and film/video art; she is also blurring distinctions between documentary film and fictional film. Moffatt’s artistic practice in this film can be described as challenging those generic boundaries implied by Bakhtin’s *generic* chronotope. There is a major question mark hovering over whether or not this film has a *generic* chronotope, or whether, perhaps, it would be more useful to say that it has several operating at the same time, and that this simultaneous operation confuses and challenges generic boundaries. The *generic* chronotope of *Heaven* is one of genre crossing. Space and time come together in too many ways for one genre to be definitive. This genre of genre crossing is another way of describing the sense of questioning that is implicated in the production, distribution and viewing of this film. *Heaven*’s wider gestural practice encompasses all these processes rather than individual interpretations of its audiovisual text.

Such gestural practice encompasses all those many other confusions concerning power relations that are involved in the making and viewing of this film and which I have described particularly in terms of vision. It is also possible to describe such power relations through Bakhtin’s first kind of chronotope, the *intertextual* or *creative* chronotope: that narrative conjunction of space and time “inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and which constitutes the distinctive life of the work” (254). It is this particular sense of “exchange” that is significant for describing the way in which *Heaven* enters society’s discourses on authorship, film-viewing and the value of generic distinctions. Moffatt’s positioning of the cinematographer as a participating actor in this film does not merely draw attention to film’s technology; it also represents this invisible, unheard actor as interacting with the people whom she films. The cinematographer’s gaze, through her camera, constitutes the major dramatic figure in this film. The looker, as well as the looked at, is the performance artist positioned at centre stage in *Heaven*’s drama.

An audience is shown, however, not only the interactions, which take place between the cinematographer and the people she is filming, but also the interventions into those people’s lives that she undertakes as a filmmaker. We are finally shown exactly the extent of this intervention as we see a hand reach out from the space of the camera towards one of the social actors. The camera has a hand: a brown hand that can pull a towel away and expose a white male bottom! The camera has a body is which is gendered somehow—but how is only conclusively accessible through
Moffatt’s own comments about the film’s genesis and through her position as its principal and female author (and I also know from Cole that Moffatt herself filmed these final sequences). Moffatt relies on the placement of this film as an auteur text for her challenging female gaze. Her position as auteur relies on the film’s credits, the video’s cover, the acknowledged authoring that is displayed in visual art exhibitions and her public interviews. As she compiles her footage of unacknowledged people shot by unacknowledged people, Moffatt’s role as filmmaker can be understood in terms of a light hearted cheek that challenges dominant looking relations.

With this humorous and awkwardly filmed work, Moffatt nevertheless offers a considerable resistance to the power of the cinematic gaze to commodify all those who appear before it. Similarly, she resists people who would stifle her with the conventions and ethics of established genres of audiovisual practice. In Heaven, the cinematic gaze is challenged and confused through the filmmaker’s manipulation of many different kinds of looking. Although the act of authoring is solely, and perhaps misleadingly, attributed to Moffatt, the motif, the generic and the intertextual, creative chronotopes of this film clearly implicate a wider social discourse that questions and challenges those specific power relations which operate as people manipulate space and time in order to create stories of sound and vision.

Notes
3. Moffatt uses her own body as model in the photoseries Something More (1989), Pet Thang (1991), and Scarred for Life (1994). In the film Bedevil Moffatt plays the younger Ruby in the story “Choo Choo Choo Choo.” This character is based on her birth mother.

Works Cited
is and through her position now from Cole that Moffatt relies on the placement of male gaze. Her position as ver, the acknowledged au- and her public interviews. ged people shot by unac- ter can be understood in minant looking relations. York, Moffatt nevertheless he cinematic gaze to com- y, she resists people who established genres of au- xie is challenged and con- many different kinds of und perhaps misleadingly, the intertextual, creative social discourse that ques- tions which operate as people s of sound and vision.

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Something More (1989), Pet in Bedevil Moffatt plays the his character is based on her

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Contributors

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Mark Dorrian is a Senior Lecturer in Architecture in the University of Edinburgh. He is co-founder of Metis—an atelier for art, architecture and urbanism—whose first book, Urban Cartographies, was published in 2002. With Gillian Rose he is co-editor of Deteriorialisations: Revisioning Landscapes and Politics (2003). His writing has been published in Artifice, Chora, the Journal of Architecture and Word & Image. Currently he is working on two books: one on the grotesque and the other on transformations in images of the city during the rise of romanticism.

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Catherine Summerhayes is currently convenor and director of AD—Art of the Documentary, a combined conference and public festival to be hosted in November 2003 by the National Institute of the Humanities, Australian National University. She has taught film theory and cultural studies at the University of Canberra and teaches in the Film Studies Program at ANU. Her doctoral thesis was “The Cultural Performance of Film” and her current research area is in documentary studies. She has published on documentary film in Metro and Media International Australia—Incorporating Culture and Policy, and has written extensively on the work of Tracey Moffatt. She has also written entries on Moffatt and John Hughes for the *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, Ed. Ian Aitken, London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers (forthcoming, 2003).
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