



# URBAN AUSTRALIA AND POST-PUNK

Exploring Dogs in Space

*Edited by*  
David Nichols and Sophie Perillo



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Editors

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**Edward Clayton-Jones** is a well-known musician originally from Melbourne and presently living in Sydney. He was a member of Plays with Marionettes, The Wreckery and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. He continues to write, record and perform.

**Dr. John Clifforth** is a GP and singer/songwriter currently playing in various Melbourne bands.

**Dr. Cornelius Delaney** was born in Melbourne Australia. At 17 he changed his name to Nique Needles and started to play in post-punk band Microfilm before going on to form his own band The Curse. The Curse played around Melbourne for a couple of years until Delaney left town and went to Sydney. He found work acting in the theatre at first, then over the next 5 years appeared in several feature films. In 1985 he won an Australian Film Institute award for Best Supporting Actor for his work on *The Boy Who Had Everything*. In 1986 Delaney played the character Tim in *Dogs in Space*. In 1988 he won Best Actor in A Science Fiction Film at Fantascienza: The Rome Science Fiction and Fantasy Film Awards for his performance in *As Time Goes By*—a kooky Australian Sci-Fi film about a surfer who travels in time to find his long lost father. Throughout the '90s he exhibited his paintings regularly and in 2000 enrolled in university where he completed a Ph.D. in Visual Art.

Delaney now lives in the south of France where he continues to paint, exhibit and play music as Darky Valetta.

**Katherine Ellinghaus** is an Associate Professor of History at La Trobe University. She writes about settler colonialism, transnational and comparative history, and the social and cultural history of the United States and Australia.

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**Molly McKew** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her current research focuses on the countercultures of the 1960s and 1970s in inner-urban Melbourne.

**Cathy McQuade** was bass player in the 'classic' line-up of The Ears after which she played in popular Sydney group Deckchairs Overboard. She released her first solo album *Perfect Storm* in 2018. She was twice awarded 'Best Original Score' for her soundtrack to the 2018 film *The Widow* at both the Los Angeles Crime and Horror Festival and the Independent Short Awards.

**David Nichols** lectures in Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne, with a focus on history, culture, community and place. His previous books include *Community: Building Modern Australia* (co-edited with Hannah Lewi), *Trendyville: The Battle for Australia's Inner Cities* (with Renate Howe and Graeme Davison) and *Dig: Australian Rock and Pop Music 1960–1985*.

**Sophie Perillo** is an interdisciplinary performance artist, musician and writer. She has devised independent and collaborative performance works for Artist Run Initiatives, major galleries and festivals. She has performed in Melbourne bands The Ancients, PSA and Hi God People. Her research and writing is centred in gender theory, performativity and theatricality.

**Sam Sejavka** is a writer, outlier, hep C treatment advocate, musician and father to Polly. He was and is the singer in The Ears through their many incarnations as well as leading a host of other Melbourne bands since the late 1970s. He has had a long and successful relationship with the theatre both as a playwright and an actor.

**Dr. Zora Simic** is a Senior Lecturer in History and Gender Studies in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of New South Wales. She is a historian of twentieth century Australia and her research interests include past and present feminisms, postwar migration and popular culture. In her spare time, she writes book reviews and makes music playlists.

**Jules Taylor** worked in the music industry while playing in various 'little bands' in Melbourne, most famously Thrush and the Cunts. She was also volunteers co-ordinator for 3RRR-fm, after which she spent time in the film industry. She is a psychotherapist.

**Dr. Sarah Taylor** is a postdoctoral research fellow at RMIT University. Her Ph.D. research examined the history of live music in Sydney and Melbourne, using a combination of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and interviews with musicians. She has over ten years' experience working with maps, databases, and software development. She has performed with music group the Taylor Project since 2006.

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# Introduction

Sophie Perillo

This book collects impressions and analysis not only of the 1986 film *Dogs in Space*, but also—as per its title—the geographical and cultural world in which it was created.

It also looks at the film's own changing fortunes. In a 2016 article published by *The Conversation* to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the release of Richard Lowenstein's *Dogs in Space*, David Nichols and I wrote about initial responses to *Dogs in Space* by those with a stake in the value and virtue of 'punk rock':

The inclusion of some 'terrible' music, and the depiction of the bands' performances as a backdrop for violence, drinking, drug taking, ribaldry and so on, lent the film an air of decadence. To many in the mid-1980s, this seemed to indicate that Lowenstein was misrepresenting a serious, artistic, politically charged era.

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The critic Vikki Riley – who played in a band, Slub, with musician and actor John Murphy, who actually appeared in *Dogs in Space* – disliked Lowenstein's approach. Writing in *Cinema Papers* in 1987, she argued Lowenstein had lost an opportunity to capture a 'magic atmosphere' that had 'given way to clichés and tokenisms'. He had, she wrote, refused 'to acknowledge any effort at subversion that the punks in the film make'.

However, we wrote, 'as *Dogs in Space* celebrates its 30th anniversary, it feels like the world has caught up with the film. Many who dismissed it—including some of its cast—have revised their opinion of the production. They now see it as capturing an era more truthfully than they were able to appreciate in 1986. At the same time, a new audience has emerged who respond to the film on very different terms'.<sup>1</sup>

Few expected, upon its release in 1986, that *Dogs in Space* would have a longer life than a limited cinematic and video release. Yet in these testimonies from individuals involved in the 1970s share houses, in inner-city music and in the making of the film itself we see a new understanding of the value of that period and milieu. There are also numerous significant ideas and meanings within *Dogs in Space* and the diversity of contributors, and approaches to analysing the film, its cultural impact and the world it documents, reveals the film's remarkably wide-reaching appeal.

In a country like Australia, where a tendency to devalue culture has historically undermined the value of much of the film, music and art produced within it, it is unusual that such a film as *Dogs in Space* even had a chance of being made. It is also possible that the various names associated with Melbourne's post-punk music scene of the late 1970s, such as Nick Cave, Rowland S. Howard, and others from the art and film scene, as well as appearances from figures like fashion designer Alanna Hill, who became famous following the film's release, have assisted in its longevity. But it is also possible that it is something core to the film's depiction of alternative culture(s) and society that make it far more universal than a mere depiction of a time and place. I do not consider this film primarily historical: it continues to influence subsequent generations who are able to relate to the lifestyle it depicts.

The idea for this book first emerged when I was curating a season of films, *Carlton to the Yabba: Australian Film from the 70s to Now* at the

small but important Dane Certificate's Magic Theatre, in 2015. I invited Stuart Grant—a participant in late 1970s Melbourne music and in *Dogs in Space*—to introduce the film to a (largely) new audience. Seeing the film again, Stuart's opinion of it changed; he began to question the truth of its historiography. He continues his reflection on the film within these pages.

Something that has surprised me in the creation of this book is the personal accounts that it has encouraged from those contributors, both directly involved in the film and whose experiences help contextualise it culturally. During the commissioning, writing and dialogue surrounding this book, it has veered from its initial intention—of focusing on the film from the perspective of the director and others involved in its making—to one that encompasses perspectives from a vast pool of academics, musicians and cultural figures. The collection ultimately resembles an ethnographic account, with an interwoven balance of personal memoir and academic analysis which works together to illuminate the film and its position in culture, society and history.

I was a baby when *Dogs in Space* was released. My first encounter with the film, at the turn of the twenty-first century, came from at least three teenage obsessions: with films about music; the films of Noah Taylor; and with the world of inner-city share houses. The music films (for instance, *Empire Records* or *High Fidelity*) were intriguing, but never very satisfying. Taylor was the anti-heart throb at time when everyone around me had their celebrity crush. His persona across films such as *The Year My Voice Broke*, *Flirting* and *The Nostradamus Kid* was self-deprecating, funny and knowing; he made it clear that everything was bullshit but that it was necessary to negotiate the bullshit to find oneself. The Noah Taylor persona would always come through even if it was inconvenient in the film's narrative; it was simultaneously awkward yet self-assured. Not satisfied with heteronormative macho big-chinned poster boys—even the 'alternative' ones were highly masculine and hard to connect with—I identified with the kind of person he represented. He wasn't a rock star in his movies, but simply weird, a social misfit. Taylor does appear in *Dogs in Space*, but his (unnamed) role is negligible; he appears in one early scene and a party scene, a larger part for his character apparently left on the proverbial cutting room floor. But it was fitting that he was there.

Films like *Dogs in Space* showed me a world I could compare to what I'd researched on the bohemian lifestyles of figures like David Bowie, Lou Reed, Patti Smith and Iggy Pop. But this, like me, was *Australian*. Similarly, the film's music clip aesthetic appealed; it was not dramatic or overwrought, just people hanging out; its non-linear narrative made the whole film rebellious and punk in its refusal to adhere to a mainstream Hollywood-style arcs. Anything I could identify as embracing mainstream appeal, I liked less.

Though the suburb of Richmond lay between the suburb where I grew up and central Melbourne, it meant very little to me. By the time I was old enough to explore the city by myself, Richmond meant Bridge Road—commercial, cheap, boring shops selling generic clothes—a place I didn't want to go to—and Victoria St, which was known mainly for restaurants; I felt no connection to the area and nor did I connect *Dogs in Space* with Richmond.

However, when I was 14 or 15 I had a close friend who lived in Westgarth St., Fitzroy. She had an older brother and sister, both of who were in their early 20s and lived in typical share houses in the same area. We'd often stay there and sleep in her sister's bed while she went to some party. She was in some ways not unlike the Anna character in *Dogs in Space*; she was professional and successful, but also liked cool music and smoked weed. I remember once observing her while she slept on the couch, and thinking, 'this is what it's like to be an adult'. I was engaged with punk and grunge aesthetics and it was great to see people who *did things*, who were vibrant, part of a creative atmosphere. I wanted to be a part of Melbourne's creative culture; I was drawn to performance artists like the 'Delapidated Diva', Emma Bathgate, and her celebration of the feminine grotesque and subversive cabaret. I was aware, too, of cultural figures like Vali Myers, who were a part of that world and a continuity from a distant past both local and international.

So I was interested in Fitzroy and St Kilda. I spent a lot of time wandering around Fitzroy and I knew different places like the café-bar Rumbarella's, which featured in the film *Love and Other Catastrophes*. I knew there was something important about it and I wanted to be cool.

More importantly, I liked anything subverting bourgeois ideas moralistic ideas of how to live a life. I wanted to be nomadic, didn't want to own

a home, have children or be a lawyer like everyone else at my school. My goal was to be an artist—not even necessarily a successful artist—but to be like the characters in *Dogs in Space*, whose lives were like their artwork, disillusioned and nihilistic, with no solid hopes for future. I connected with that because it reaffirmed the way I failed to fit into the mainstream culture.

The chapters in this book approach many of these ideas—and some others—in a range of different ways and styles. The first section is, in large part, concerned with reminiscences from people directly involved with the world we would now typify as belonging to *Dogs in Space* (of course, without the film, interest in this time and place would certainly be far less notable). Many of the contributors who discuss their experience of either cultural creation in Melbourne in the 1970s, or involvement in the making of *Dogs in Space*, or both, are at an ideal place to contemplate both their own creative enterprise in the light of the film's sustained popularity and its ongoing relevance. Sam Sejavka, around whose life *Dogs in Space* was arguably based around, discusses some early, formative elements in his upbringing and nascent creativity which illustrate a much more rounded and accomplished man than the self-obsessed and selfish 'Sam' of *Dogs in Space*.

Sejavka's chapter is followed by short reminiscences from two men who were peripheral to the *Dogs in Space* world but whose memories of that time are invaluable for that reason. Peter Farnan, a school friend of Sejavka's, engineered some early recordings by The Ears and was in many regards a fellow traveller to that band; John Clifforth moved in slightly different circles during The Ears' existence but would later form a band, Deckchairs Overboard, with The Ears' bass player Cathy McQuade and, still later, would work with Troy Davies, a legendary figure in the lives of both Sam Sejavka and Richard Lowenstein.

Stuart Grant's piece is a rumination on the impact of *Dogs in Space* on his own life and presents some counterpoints to the conventional understanding of punk culture. Karen Ansel is an example of someone for whom punk opened doors into a range of creative worlds, and whose remarkable early career saw her—as a member of The Reels—appear on *Countdown* numerous times, a world that bands of the *Dogs in Space* milieu could only dream about.

Edward Clayton-Jones, Jules Taylor and Cornelius Delaney were all participants in the ‘original’ scene of the late 1970s, and all involved in the film’s production. Clayton-Jones and Delaney (known either as Nique Delaney or Nique Needles, the name under which he had an extraordinarily successful acting career in the 1980s) were labelmates in the 1970s, with the groups Microfilm and the Fabulous Marquises respectively. Though neither was a ‘little band’, both groups were regulars at the Champion Hotel. Jules Taylor, on the other hand, was a little band aficionado, with Thrush and the Cunts her best-known vehicle. All three discuss the dichotomy, and pleasures, of being asked to re-enact one’s earlier life in a big-budget cinema production.

Like Karen Ansel, Cathy McQuade leveraged pop success early in her career from unpromising ‘punk’ beginnings as bass player for The Ears; she was a member of Deckchairs Overboard and also, as mentioned by Sarah Taylor in her chapter, provided vocals for the hit single ‘Sweet and Sour’ by The Takeaways.

The first section of the book is concluded with images from Bruce Butler’s exceptional archive of materials from the 1978 Bowie queue, a legendary moment in Australian alternative culture which affected the lives of many who participated.

It would be a mistake to imagine that the second part of the book is not about ‘experience’. Although most of the authors within this section were in no sense participants in the late 1970s counterculture, their responses and understandings of *Dogs in Space* and many of its tropes are no less engaging. An extract from a comic book by Jerome Gaynor, detailing his own reactions to and understanding of the film as a teenager in the American suburbs, begins this section. Zora Simic then examines her own (and the world’s) responses to INXS, Michael Hutchence and *Dogs in Space*. Laura Carroll gives a forensic reading of some of the film’s conceptual threads and its relevance to all those who, for good or ill, romanticised the inner-city share house life it depicts.

Katherine Ellinghaus and Molly McKew contextualise that same share house life in a chapter on the rising phenomenon of countercultural domesticity, utilising interviews with individuals far more ideologically driven and pure than the *Dogs in Space* household. James Lesh and David Nichols examine the geographical place of the Berry Street, Richmond

house in which the film was set, bringing forward the role of public housing, protest, and gentrification in the preservation and use of the house.

Sarah Taylor's chapter on the Ears' and INXS' engagement with the music industry, comparing the two bands' experience and interaction, as well as comparing the industry in the late 1970s with the present day, reveals not only assumptions about the two groups and their relationship to the music business, but also provides a reminder of the way that the film's original audience would have perceived its depiction of performance and ambition very differently from contemporary viewers.

Lisa MacKinney's chapter, an analysis of the song 'Shivers', explores some of the background and value of a song which plays a central role to the film, running deeper than many casual consumers may have grasped. David Nichols discusses the legacy of the film's soundtrack album in the subsequent chapter.

Simona Castricum's chapter could, in some respects, have nestled appropriately in the first section of the book; it is a memoir, but it is also of course an analysis. Her overview of the impact the film has had on her life is a counter to anyone who would dismiss it as arcane.

The final two analytical chapters explore elements of the *Dogs in Space* world that do not directly connect to anything germane to the film itself, or the events it depicts. Yet both respond, in different ways, to aspects of the film which are among the many which perpetuate far beyond 'Melbourne, 1978'. Carolyn Hawkins' chapter on unofficial music venues is a piece of social research which provides not only a contemporary marker of the desire for music or art consumers to socialise outside the realm of sanctioned space, but also serves to show how much has changed in understandings of the commercial value of a music scene to the classic 'creative city'. Sorcha Mackenzie and David Nichols investigate a world which, while largely geographically removed from Melbourne, resonates with many of the ideas explored by the counterculture in the late twentieth century. They ask whether it is still possible to be rebellious in the conventional platforms of twenty-first-century social media.

The collection ends with a brief interview with Richard Lowenstein, conducted by Trevor Block close to a quarter of a century after *Dogs in Space* was originally released. Lowenstein has directed many fine fiction films—*Say a Little Prayer* is a somewhat forgotten masterpiece, and *He*

*Died with a Felafel in His Hand* is rightly celebrated—but he has also directed four documentaries that tease out elements of the *Dogs in Space* legend: *We're Living on Dog Food*, *Autoluminescent*, *Ecco Homo* and, most recently, *Mystify*. It might be imagined that, as much as the contributors to this book, and its editors, are fascinated by the *Dogs in Space* world and its dichotomies, Lowenstein, its creator, is at least as intrigued.

We would not presume to suggest this book is complementary to those films, or even that it is a counter to Lowenstein's published *Dogs in Space* diary which, at time of writing, had not been issued. We are aware, however, of the phenomenon of *Dogs in Space* as one which has a considerable distance yet to run.

In 2016, we contributed to a seminar at Monash University run by Dr. Tony Moore, author of *Dancing with Empty Pockets*. One attendee was a man in his twenties who came to the seminar entirely because of his enthusiasm for *Dogs in Space* which, he said, had been a part of his teenage years in the Riverina. Every weekend, he said, his friends would party to the video of the film, revelling in its debauchery and hedonism. What surprised him, following our presentation, was the discovery that the film was based on real events; a fact that had never occurred to him. It is realities like this which surely show that the *Dogs in Space* world is both rooted in a time and place and yet entirely free of any geographic or temporal anchor, and that its quality as a film and an evocation will continue to propel it much further beyond 'Melbourne, 1978'; its release date in 1986; or, for that matter, the present day.

## Note

1. D. Nichols and S. Perillo, 'Dogs in Space, 30 Years On—A Once Maligned Film Comes of Age', *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/friday-essay-dogs-in-space-30-years-on-a-once-maligned-film-comes-of-age-56288>, accessed 4 January 2019.



# If You Were a Freak, You Were Equally Excluded

Sam Sejavka

*I'm Sam Sejavka. I'm a writer and a singer. I'm twenty years old, but in one week's time I'll be twenty-one. Allow me to briefly describe my life up to this point. Half way through my HSC year at St Kevin's College, I left home and school and took a flat in St Kilda. I was seventeen. Shortly after that, suffering from nervous tension, I spent some weeks in a private psychiatric hospital. Though I never returned to school, I did sit my exams and managed to do pretty well, particularly in English. I lived a reckless life in St Kilda, spending time with the basest of the creatures who abide there. I wrote all this time, though the results were dubious. I was young and over-stimulated by my new found freedom. I was seeing a girl called Irene, but broke up with her around the turn of the year.*

*Before long, I was evicted for general rowdiness and spent a week or so wandering in St Kilda, staying at hotels and such. I was undergoing another personality crisis, but this time it was not quite as severe. I took up a new flat in Armadale and attended university, which I loathed. After two or three months I left, again undergoing a kind of crisis. I had done not a skerrick of work in*

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*this time. I found myself completely uninspired. I moved to Sydney, found a flat in Kings Cross and wrote. I viewed myself as something like the protagonist from Orwell's Down and Out in Paris and London—but under a shadow of inexperience and pretension the work I did was pretty well unreadable. [Woe the day I first read William Burroughs] I made no friends there. I never went out. I became a lonely bum, trying to live his twisted idea of a dream. I must say though that I was brave. I've never had quite the same attitude to food since I found myself starving up in Sydney. At times I would go to a nearby homeless shelter to partake of a dreadful brown gruel I will never forget.*

*In time, I found I no longer had the stomach for that kind of life and returned to Melbourne. I rented a house with George in Richmond and lived there six months, leading a wasteful sort of life. We had trouble with hoodlums in that place and were forced to leave suddenly with the house in a wreck. Though I pined for female company, but in its absence George and I enjoyed ourselves concocting and realising all manner of eccentric schemes. I left for a new flat in Armadale, determined to write as diligently as I could—and I did for while, but again it was forced, meaningless stuff. Inspired by William Burroughs, and much to alarm of my parents, I joined The Church of Scientology. Though my involvement was pretty marginal, [probably because I had no money,] it remains one of the stupidest things I've ever done.*

*In September, for several weeks, I camped out for David Bowie tickets. This was to be a turning point. I was introduced to heroin and LSD, though I'd had my fair share of other drugs previously. I made many friends and by the time of the next queue—this time for actual seating—I could almost have been described as gregarious. I spent those three weeks stoned in as many ways as it is possible to be. This is where the idea of the band was born. The night of the concert, my basement flat flooded and I could no longer live there [I'd forgotten to turn on the pump]. I moved home and around the turn of the year, The Ears began to practise.*

*In January 1979, I went to a science-fiction writer's workshop in Sydney where, among others, I encountered George Turner and a young Lucy Sussex. My next accommodation was a share house with school friends Mick Lewis (guitar) and Tim McLaughlan [keyboards] and here The Ears developed. We played for the first time in February. I returned to Melbourne Uni and could stand it this time only because I had found a girlfriend, Elise Valmorbida, with whom I fell madly in love. But I was far too immature to make something like*

*that work and the relationship had decayed to nothing by the end of the year. The group was playing regularly by now. I rented a new flat in Armadale, where I decided to once more quit university. Soon after that, I moved to a house in Berry Street, Richmond with Mick, Tim and Richard Lowenstein. I was a night bird, socialising as widely and wildly as I was able, living a life of utter debauchery. They were the days of the Champion Hotel, The Ballroom and The Exford. The end of the year came and I had frittered it agreeably away. It was 1980, I was nineteen. I was in a group and things were fine in a twisted sort of way.*

*I stayed in Richmond till March, then moved to Elwood, to the flat where I began this diary. I turned twenty. Our first single was released. I pursued women. We hired a manager, then a different manager. I went to parties. And in August, I met Christine. There followed the most rewarding period of my life thus far. I was not prolific, I was not together, I was just unreasonably happy. We slept together almost every night. I was totally, without qualification, in love. And love was what was most important. Soon after I met Christine, my father died. But the grief eased with time. Then on the twentieth of March, Christine overdosed and died. Now it's the twenty fifth of March; I'm sitting out the front of Milton St, watching some placid old people mulling over the detritus of their lives. Mine is a pain equalled only by the pleasure that it echoes.*

*25 March 1981 thurs 2.30 p.m.<sup>1</sup>*



My mother met my father at Greswell, a tuberculosis sanatorium in North-Eastern Melbourne which in later times became a drug rehab.

She was a country girl from Tasmania who had worked hard to become a nurse. She was always very quiet about where she got her degree (in Georgetown, I think, or Burnie) because those poor Tasmanian towns tended to have shoddy reputations.

My dad was an emigre from Latvia, who contracted TB about four years after his arrival in Australia. He had been conscripted to fight for the Germans in a unit called the Latvian Legions. This was a part of the Waffen SS, whose role was military in nature.

I think they were given a blood group tattoo or some other tattoo by which they could be identified as SS. He had this massive gouge in his

flesh. I never knew what it was, I still don't know for sure, but I think it was where he must have dug out the tattoo. I imagine that involvement with the SS in any form would have affected his eligibility to emigrate to Australia.

He was always paranoid about this. And about Soviet spies. Most of the other children of Latvian parents went to Latvian school on the weekends, but he wouldn't let me near other Latvians.

He arrived here in 1952, through a post-war immigration programme. He was required to work on a forestry project for two years, which further degraded his already poor health. During the war, he'd had his kidneys frozen. This was towards the end, the winter of '44-'45, when the Germans were retreating from the East. He was in a platoon of Latvians commanded by a German lieutenant from which he deserted twice. The first time he was caught but, for whatever reason, was not shot. The second time, he'd noticed the German lieutenant slinking off towards the back and sensed that he was going to do a runner. He figured that, as long as he stuck with his officer, he couldn't be accused of desertion. So that's what he did, despite the lieutenant wanting nothing to do with him. For a while he followed, twenty metres behind, but eventually they wound up walking together, through the forest, in the snow. Later, they rounded the top of a hillside to see a road at the bottom and a Russian motorised column. The Russians spotted them and opened fire. The lieutenant was shot dead. My dad fell too, pretending to have been hit. He would only have been eighteen at the time. It's hard to imagine that kind of fear. The Russians assumed they were dead and did not bother climbing the hill to finish them off. For a long time, my father was too frightened to move. He just lay in the snow pretending to be dead for so long he actually froze his kidneys. I learned this from my mother. There must have been so many stories I never heard because I never spoke of such things with my dad. I've no idea how he got from that hillside to an internment camp in Germany and thence to Australia. I've got some photos of Berchtesgaden, Hitler's retreat, so he must have passed through there at some point. It remains a mystery. I didn't get on with my dad so well and we never really talked. I was somewhat weird from the word go, and he couldn't get his head around it. I got on much better with my mum because she was sort of weird as well.

The film-maker Paul Goldman's mother became friends with my dad in the internment camp. They had some kind of thing going. The story is that he climbed over a barbed wire fence to get an apple for her from an orchard, but he tore his trousers, and she sewed them up for him—all very romantic. At the same time, in Melbourne, my mum was being avidly pursued by Dr. Goldman, Paul's dad, who was working at the same hospital as her. It's the most amazing coincidence. Paul put up the money for the first Ears recording, so he was very much a part of the Ears story. The tale of our parents' shared friendships emerged the day we brought a test pressing back to my parents' place from the Astor factory. When my mum was told Paul's surname, her questioning rapidly revealed the fact he was *that* Dr. Goldman's son.

So, my mum was a shy, country girl, my dad was a paranoid ex-German soldier. I think they may have wanted more than one child, but they only managed to get me. They were straight as a die. My mum was very religious and my dad happily went along with it.

He was an engineer by trade but couldn't use his qualifications in Australia. He worked as a design draughtsman instead, designing machines, making blueprints—I've still got some of those at home. At one point, he was designing ovens for Tip Top bread. I remember his blueprints for this giant cone with all these little loaf-sized holes in it. He always had a good job, but his health was really bad. He almost died of a heart attack when I was five, and he was one of the first people to have an artificial heart valve implanted. He lived a lot longer than they expected him to, but he was always really sick; kidneys, heart, blood pressure. Eventually he died of a stroke.

My parents were dedicated to being good Australian citizens. My father identified strongly with the term 'New Australian'. He was *proud* to be a New Australian. He had a noticeable Latvian accent and claimed to know five languages: Russian, Latvian, German, Polish and English.

Around grade four, I started getting bullied by one of my teachers. It was serious stuff for me. I used to sit in the shower crying. There were nightmares. I remember threatening my parents that I would run away from home if they sent me back to that horrible Mt Waverley Catholic primary school. Eventually, they got the message and somehow, with both

of them working, they raised enough money to send me to St Kevin's College in Toorak.

I was super-competitive at school and always very good academically. I was about twelve, I think, when I decided I wanted to be a writer. I got a typewriter for Christmas that year, an Olivetti Lettera 32, and started writing poetry. Between Years 10 and 11, I found a job in a plastics factory and raised the money to attend a science fiction writers' workshop run by some international SF bigwigs who were here for a world convention. Christopher Priest, who's still writing, and Vonda McIntyre, who's since passed on.

I met a number of well-known science fiction writers around that time: Robert Silverberg, Ursula Le Guin. I got to know George Turner quite well. He was a very well-regarded Australian science fiction writer.

I remember how excited I was at getting an honourable mention in the *Herald* poetry competition. A writer was what I was going to be. I was determined.

The first time I heard David Bowie, I was pretty young, sitting in the back of the car, with my parents upfront. The song was 'Space Oddity'. There was something in that music which absolutely captivated me. From that point on, I was a David Bowie freak. I still am, I guess. He provided the soundtrack for my later years of school, along with Lou Reed, Leonard Cohen, even Tangerine Dream.

I was also obsessed by the Beat Poets, Burroughs, Kerouac, Ballard, anything that was intellectually edgy. I had some supportive teachers too. Once I was allowed to write an English essay about Arthur C. Clarke's *2001*. But then year 12 came along. 1977. And that meant the Sex Pistols. I started acting out during that year. I only attended the first two terms. I began to dye my hair, which at the time was extreme. When my mother first saw me blond, she told me I'd never be allowed back in the house. I don't know if she really meant it, but I took her at her word. I got myself on the dole and found a flat in St Kilda.

I cracked up a bit around that time. I spent about three weeks in a rest home with some very disturbed people. I don't how mentally ill I was, but I rather liked the *idea* of being mentally ill. I remember my mother bringing me three packs of Camel 20s a day. It was her way of caring. In a way I was still acting out, but there was definitely something wrong at the

core. There was an element of—I don't want to call it narcissism—it was almost like I was searching for material to write about. I've got seventy pages stacked away somewhere that I wrote in that place. I'd be surprised if they contain one ounce of sense.

It was while I was there that I spoke on the phone with my literature teacher Brother McCarthy. He explained to me in precise detail the concept of anal retention. And I really have to give a nod in his direction for that, it really pulled me up, helped me—to that point I had been inclined to think that anything which came out of me was inherently fascinating.

Those were times when all I wanted was to be like William Burroughs or David Bowie or whoever. I was thinking in terms of writing still, but I would sing Bowie songs in front of the mirror. I remember that first flat I had, that mirror, I remember singing in front of it, endlessly.

We weren't really seeing bands at that time. But we were hanging around a lot on Fitzroy St. which was extremely sleazy then, me and my friend George. He was also portrayed in *Dogs in Space*. He played himself, the guy on the motorbike with a camera, who had the vigorous sex upstairs. Ring a bell? Apparently, he went quite wild when they filmed that scene, and, according to Lowenstein, they had to cut most of it. Crazy George, that's what he was called.

He was a good friend, but we were really bad for each other. We did a lot of stupid things. We lived together for a while in a house in Stephenson St, Richmond, a few doors down from Kath Pettingill's brothel. At one point, we decided to have a party, so we photocopied hundreds of invitations and posted them everywhere. Then we sourced about thirty chairs, mainly kitchen chairs, probably from hard rubbish piles, really rotten, covered in filth and mould, and arranged them around a sort of small arena that we'd made. Then we bought a pig from Victoria Market. It was maybe half-grown and we released it into the arena. We were seventeen. The idea was that people could sit and watch the pig snuffling around... we had grand ideas for this party.

Bikies showed up, inevitably, and started breaking down the walls and cupboards. The last we saw of the pig, a huge Coffin Cheater or whatever was walking down the street with it under his arm.

The house was a complete wreck but we still had all those awful kitchen chairs. The property backed onto the railway just down from South Yarra