

# Blurred LINES



**20,000 Days On Earth** explores Nick Cave's life. Directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard tell *Anna Smith* about blurring fact and fiction

**I**T'S a very strange, perplexing, brave document.' So says Nick Cave of *20,000 Days On Earth*, a new film dramatising and visually enhancing a day in the life of the cult Australian musician. Cave is shown performing, composing an album with Warren Ellis, confiding in a psychoanalyst and driving around Brighton, chatting with former collaborators Ray Winstone and Kylie Minogue in the back seat of his car. An atmospheric, stylised version of the truth, it's an extraordinary achievement from British artists/directors Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard that joins a growing number of successful documentaries blurring the lines between fact and fiction – dubbed anything from 'neorealist docs' to 'hybrid features'.

'The whole film is a construct but most of the dialogue was unscripted and only ever said once,' explains

Pollard. 'Does that make it real? Reality feels like a far more slippery state than we usually think of, it's not a fixed and singular thing.'

It's an interesting assertion. When portraying a rock star's character in the context of his work, is the 'real' him as relevant as the alter ego we see on stage? Is it possible even to separate the two? In their bid to communicate the essence of Cave's image and creative force, Forsyth and Pollard present genuine dialogue within staged sets.

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'We worked with an art director to create a visual representation of what we thought Nick's office should be like,' says Pollard.

Cave thinks this angle is the film's greatest strength. 'What I like most about the film is that it's a fiction,' he says. 'Nothing is really real but within that kind of filmic line these great truths get told. All the sets are constructed but what happened



**Sowing the Seeds:** Jane Pollard and Iain Forsyth discuss ideas with singer Nick Cave and his wife, Susie Bick

within the constructed set was very real, it was ad-libbed. This was a very original way of interviewing somebody, getting a different reaction from them.'

You sense that few film-makers could have got the strong-minded Cave to sign up for this, fewer still to share his intimate thoughts during a session with a psychiatrist. But Forsyth and Pollard had worked with Cave before, and pitched *20,000 Days...* to him after achieving promising footage of him and Ellis in the studio. 'This film was only

possible because of the existing friendship,' says Pollard. 'The trust was already firmly established. Like any collaboration, not least our own, the more you work with someone, the better you get to understand each other. A sort of shorthand evolves over time. We have a good idea of what Nick's concerns will be the moment a camera is turned on, and we now have a pretty good idea how to free him up from those worries.'

Describing a climactic scene in which Cave performs live at the Sydney Opera House, the pair neatly

exemplify their approach. 'We decided to try splicing Nick's old performances into the footage,' says Pollard. 'Lyrically, Nick is talking about transforming, which resonates with the bigger themes of the film, but we wanted a way to break through the surface of the present,' says Forsyth. 'These flashbacks to the past gave us a way to peer through the cracks. A deeper truth about the mythology of performance was able to reveal itself through these moments, these slippages.' The truth about the mythology, indeed.