

# PRESS KIT

## memory film: a filmmaker's diary

An immersive, poetic documentary about transformation

mangana lieta (The Gorge), Launceston, Tasmania 1976



1974. I started filming on Super 8. I took my camera everywhere - around the city streets, on film sets, with my family, in the communes, with lovers and in the women's liberation movement - filming fragments, random moments.

**Producers** Tom Zubrycki and Jeni Thornley

**Editor** Lindi Harrison (ASE)

**Executive Producer** Sue Maslin

**Original Music** Joseph Tawadros

2023 JOTZ Productions with Anandi Films, Filmfest Ltd

## Synopsis

*memory film* is an immersive poetic documentary based on Jeni Thornley's Super 8 archive (1974-2003), filmed during the decades of her personal and political filmmaking, while producing *Maidens*, *To the Other Shore*, *Island Home Country* and the collaborative feature *For Love or Money*. The film documents three decades of activism and film production, amidst the dynamic politics of women's liberation and intense social change. *memory film* is also a road movie of an inner journey of liberation – gender fluidity, love and its tribulations, the pleasure and pain of motherhood, violence against women and the desire for a world free of war and colonising.



The Women Against Rape in War Collective, Anzac Day, Sydney 1983

### A space of possibility

*memory film* offers an enveloping experience of change, both personal and political. In its documentation of the decades 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. Rare Super 8 footage documents inspiring movements by activists to transform their lives, giving visibility to hidden stories. The parallel story of the filmmaker's inner journey – a crisis of self, gender, motherhood, family, war and spirituality, suggests *a space of possibility*, providing insights into the process of change. Quotes by poets and writers infuse the film, including Kate Jennings, Monique Wittig, The Three Marias, Sylvia Plath, Ann Sexton, Karla Dickens and Svetlana Alexievich.

### Farewell film poem to life/Fire Ceremony

Guiding the filmmaking is 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). Household holders 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 contemplative quotes by poets, Basho, Tagore and Dogen, interwoven with psychoanalytic extracts from Freud, Irigaray and Bion – and their pathways of liberation complement the emancipatory journey of feminism. It's uplifting, too, when Rumi's poem, *Dance*, accompanies the Super 8 dance sequence with Tawadros's ecstatic music of the oud. And then we return full circle to the sacred Fire Ceremony of the Doonooch Dancers – to First Nations and their continuing custodianship of country.

**'This fire's ceremony burns', Bobby McLeod [Monaro/Yuin] Wreck Bay, South Coast NSW.**



## A silent film with 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, interweave with the images. As there are no speaking voices, narration or interviews, the film offers an immersive experience of the interplay between public and private – transforming lives. *memory film* is unique as its legacy harks back to the silent movie era. Tawadros's expressive music score and Meredith's sensitive use of sound offers viewers a meditative, inner experience of social change. As editor Lindi Harrison and I layered guide track music and sound into the rough cut, the 'affect' was compelling, confirming my instinct that the 'silent film' conventions of image and music with no speaking voices was the perfect mode for Super 8 film in the digital era.

### 'My oud is my refuge'



'memory film' composer Joseph Tawadros  
[photo by 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.'

**Joseph Tawadros, 'About My Music', *The Four Seasons*, Australian Chamber Orchestra 2023.**

# The Archive

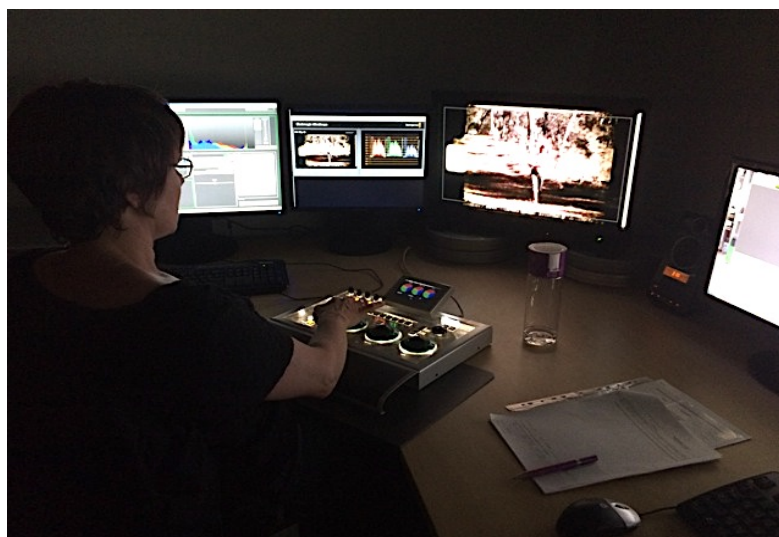
Super 8 has a physicality that suggests a tangible sense of historical place, alongside a sense of impermanence. Despite its grain, soft focus and defects, Super 8 captures a vigorous sense of inner and outer history. It is gritty and textured, evoking memory and time passing in a way that the sharp, high-definition digital image doesn't. Each of my previous documentaries recycled my Super 8 – hijacked it out of context, offering the possibility to see the images anew. By 2016 this Super 8 collection, stored in a damp cupboard at home, was degrading, growing mould and needing care. These 137 x 3 minute rolls and 9 composite reels were like 'gold'; they had served my filmmaking well, but they needed to be archived properly and digitized. I submitted a proposal to the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA), who subsequently acquired and digitized the collection.

**Preparing the Super 8 for donation to the NFSA, 2015**



'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 Seminar, AFTRS Sydney 2014**



**Digitising & grading the Super 8, Christina Sparrow, NFSA 2016**



# How a story is told

A list of things that quicken the heart

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 (11<sup>th</sup> 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.

Temple of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok, Thailand 1994



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.

## 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**

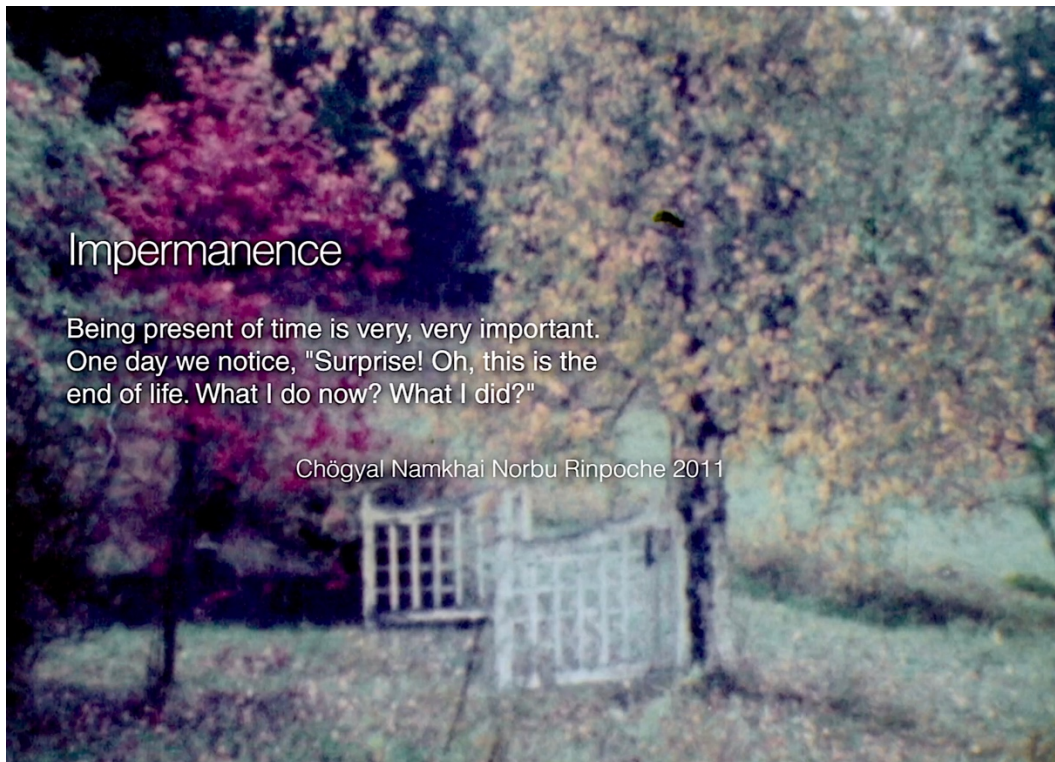
**Impermanence**

**Things that Quicken the Heart**

**The Ferment/The Fissure**

**Interior/Integration/Spirit**

# The quotes in 'memory film' provide a narrative arc



## Impermanence

Being present of time is very, very important.  
One day we notice, "Surprise! Oh, this is the  
end of life. What I do now? What I did?"

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche 2011

## Quoted in 'memory film'

- Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche** *My Reincarnation* 2011  
**Chris Marker** *Sunless* 1983  
**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 & *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* 563-483BC  
**Rabindranath Tagore** *On the Seashore* 1936  
**Robert Gray** *To the Master Dogen Zenji (1200-1253)* 1983  
**Shitou Xiqian** *Song of the Grass Roof Hermitage* (700-790)  
**Rumi** *Dance* c1244  
**Bobby McLeod** *Discovery* 2008



## First Nations 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. 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' written piece on the pain of 'Australia Day' (Invasion 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 (puralia 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 affect 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.

truwana [Cape Barren Island] Tasmania 1982



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 Aunt 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 26<sup>th</sup> January and First Nations resistance to it.

I have worked closely with the protocols developed for Screen Australia's *Pathways & 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.

# Review quotes-references

Does it feel strange to see your memories become archive?

Michael Loebenstein CEO NFSA 2016



The Austrian Film Museum would be delighted to program *memory film: a filmmaker's diary* as part of our ongoing curated seasons of films in Vienna. Your film, which in a fascinating and engaging way reconciles biography and the personal with a wider history of women's independent and political filmmaking in Australia is an important contribution, and we believe audiences here in Europe should be able to appreciate it on the big screen. **Michael Loebenstein, Director Austrian Film Museum, 2022**

Congratulations on a superb film!!! I loved it. From the opening sequence I settled immediately into the world of the film and was blown away by the music score as well as the quality, editing and sheer audaciousness of the images and the way it is woven all together. Part poetics, part social history, home movie and documentation of currents of change. It felt like full circle for Jeni's feminist film journey over nearly 50 years! The 'personal is political' made manifest.

I laughed, felt teary and was utterly absorbed by this meditation, reflection and above all celebration. of moments that continue to resonate!

**Sue Maslin AO Executive Producer, May 2023**

Thornley's rising sense of awareness constantly reframes previous films within new contexts, communicating a restlessness that highlights the evolving nature and power of the archive as well as the stories it can tell.

**Adrian Danks, [Senses of Cinema, 99](#) July 2021**

In Australian independent cinema over the last three decades, Jeni Thornley is the filmmaker whose autobiographical project has been to articulate feminism as a historical crisis of female subjectivity. As a founding member of the Sydney Women's Film Group and Feminist Film Workers, and as the daughter of a failed film exhibitor, Thornley's exploration of this crisis has been intimately bound up with cinema and the problems that the cinematic apparatus poses for women as spectators and as filmmakers.

**Felicity Collins, [Screening the Past](#), 2001**

Jeni Thornley, 'The enigma of film: *memory film: a filmmaker's diary*', *Constructions of The Real: Intersections of Practice and Theory in Documentary-Based Filmmaking*, (eds.) K. Munro et al., Intellect Books Series: Artwork Scholarship: International Perspectives in Education, 2023 (In Press)



# BIOS

**Director Producer Jeni Thornley** was born in Launceston, Tasmania in 1948 and was educated in Melbourne. She is a documentary filmmaker, writer and film valuer. Her award-winning documentaries *Maidens*, the collaborative feature *For Love or Money, To the Other Shore* and *Island Home Country* are landmark films in Australian independent and feminist cinema, widely distributed and screened on ABC TV and SBS. Jeni was active in distribution and exhibition at Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, worked on many independent films, wrote for *Filmnews*, was Manager of the Women's Film Fund and Project Coordinator, Documentary (AFC). Jeni lectured in documentary at UTS from 2002-2013 and completed her doctorate. She traces her passion in film to her father's family, who exhibited films in cinemas across Australia during the silent period, the 'talkies', and the TV era. She is currently a Visiting Scholar in the School of Communication, UTS and writes about film regularly. <https://jenithornley.com/> | [facebook](#)

**Producer Tom Zubrycki** has been making documentaries for over 45 years. He has won many awards for his work and his mentorship on behalf of the industry. As director Tom's documentaries have a distinctive observational story-telling style, and have focused around a personal response to the issues of the day. Films like *The Diplomat*, *Molly & Mobarak*, *The Hungry Tide Hope Road*. As producer and EP Tom has worked both with experienced and also new and emerging directors. His films include *Gulpillil - One Red Blood*, *The Weather Diaries*, *Teach a Man to Fish*, *Undermined-Tales of the Kimberley*. Recent films are *Ablaze*, *Senses of Cinema*, *memory film*, *Kindred* and *The Carnival*. Tom is a recipient of the prestigious Stanley Hawes Award and has actively championed the cause of the documentary sector. He is actively involved in several industry organisations including the Australian Directors Guild and OZDOX, the Australian Documentary Forum. [www.tomzubrycki.com](http://www.tomzubrycki.com)

**Editor Lindi Harrison (ASE)** is a highly acclaimed editor of award-winning Documentary, Drama and Arts programs for local and international broadcast, public exhibition and cinema release. Feature length documentaries include: *4*, which won a HUGO Award in Chicago; *The Snowman*, selected for Competition at IDFA, and won the Foxtel Australian Feature Documentary Prize; *Virtuosi*, screened in 35 cities and international festivals, and won the Outstanding Achievement for Dance on Film, Australian Dance Award. *SALT* received 16 national and international awards. *The Leadership* won the Ellie for Best Documentary Feature 2020 - Australian Screen Editor's Guild; Other titles by Lindi include, *I am a Girl*, *Sherpa*, *Embrace*, *Salt*, *Wik vs Queensland*, *Incarceration Nation*- 2022 winner Logie Awards - Most Outstanding Documentary. Lindi's 2023 editing credits include, *Kindred*, *The Carnival* and *memory film*. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0365710/>

**Composer Joseph Tawadros (AM)**, maestro oud player, is one of Australian music's most impressive and charismatic figures. He is a composer, improviser, storyteller as well as a brilliant exponent of the oud, the Egyptian lute. Tawadros's virtuoso technique and adventurous curiosity blends world music, jazz and classical seamlessly and shows his skills in contemporary genres as well as traditional Arabic inspired pieces. Joseph creates music that transcends labels and crosses borders. Joseph has recorded 14 albums of original music, with 14 ARIA nominations and 4 ARIA Awards and is known for his brilliant technique, deep musicianship and joyous style of performance as well as his solid repertoire of innovative, original music. Joseph tours extensively across Europe, America, Asia and the Middle East. [www.josephtawadros.com](http://www.josephtawadros.com) | [Spotify](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

**Sound Designer Tristan Meredith** Sound Designer/Mixer/Post Production Audio. ASSG award winner. Sound designer for Oscar, Emmy and AACTA award winning films. Work has screened at Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide film festivals, Venice Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival, LA Shorts, Antenna Film Festival, Montreal Film Festival, St Kilda Film Festival. Work screened on all Australian television networks, BBC, ITV, National Geographic, PBS, Universal, ARTE, Al Jazeera, Vice, CNA. <https://www.collarts.edu.au/faculty>

**Colourist Nicholas Hower** is a highly skilled technical expert, Senior Colourist, and the technical director and co-owner of Post Lab IO. With an extensive background in colour grading, Nick has worked on various projects, ranging from long-form feature films to documentaries, episodic productions, and commercials. He has delivered content to numerous international and domestic distributors and major streaming services such as Netflix, Stan, ABC and SBS. Nick's passion for colour grading is rooted in his love for the craft and his ability to bring energy to every grade session. <https://www.postlab.io/artist/nicholas-hower>

# CREDITS

<b>Writer, Director</b> Jeni Thornley	<b>Picture finishing</b> Post Lab.io
<b>Producers</b> Tom Zubrycki & Jeni Thornley	<b>Colourist</b> Nicholas Hower
<b>Editor</b> Lindi Harrison (ASE)	<b>DI Producer</b> Keisha Clements
<b>Executive Producer</b> Sue Maslin	<b>Supervising DI Producer</b> Darius Family
<b>Original Music</b> Joseph Tawadros	<b>Business Development Manager</b> Chris Luscri
<b>Engineer and Mixer</b> Sean Carey	<b>Titles</b> Roen Davis
<b>Super 8 Camera &amp; Archive</b> Jeni Thornley	<b>Media Conform Editor</b> Ahmadah Adil
<b>Sound Editor and Mix</b> Tristram Meredith	<b>Super 8 Digital Scanning</b> National Film & Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA)

## Technical Information

Format DCP/ProRes  
Genre Documentary Feature  
Country of Production Australia  
Year of Production 2023  
Running time 81mins 45sec  
Ratio 16:9  
Language English

## 'memory film' trailer

<https://vimeo.com/505107727>

## Key Contacts

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Thanks to NFSA for acquiring and digitising my Super8 Archive in 2016



**NATIONAL FILM  
AND SOUND ARCHIVE  
OF AUSTRALIA**



Financed with the assistance of  
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School of Communication, FASS  
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Screen Australia



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Executive Producer Gil Scrine

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Supported by the State Government of Victoria, Australia



Executive Producer: Mark Woods

**'memory film' was made on Garigal country (NSW) Australia  
Always was and always will be Aboriginal land**

**2023 JOTZ Productions with Anandi Films, Filmfest Ltd**