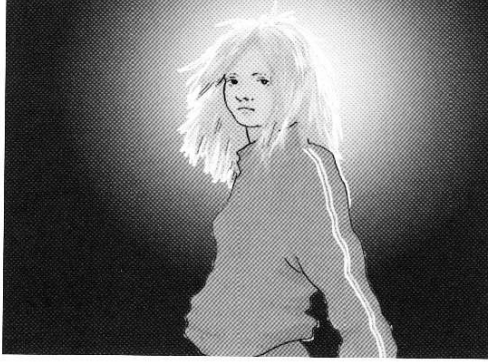


Viv Miller
THE POWER Part II

THE POWER Part II is a pop song simultaneously sincere and not. Its self-consciously awkward, clunky style – a mix of hand painted cell animation, overlaid text, and a couple of basic effects (flickery colours, ball travels across screen in straight line etc etc), put together in Flash – sits against the musings of the poetic text. With its pop song-inspired structure and a soundtrack of pure sentimental cheese, *The Power* knowingly mimics the faux-bonding of a singalong to some 'sincere' pop tune'.

*it's always
my struggle
your struggle
and everything.*

Miller's story book drawing style lends itself perfectly to the folksy imagery of trees and rolling hills and mountains. The peasants that populated her previous work have been replaced by 'very Melbourne' 20-something men and women, dressed in identical grey streetwear. There is a genuine unhappiness oozing from these caricatures of Generation Post-Banal.



The geometric abstract drawings that are cut in and out of the video might also hint at another conception of 'sad', a sweet centre of nostalgic longing wrapped in layers of dreamy Bauhaus modernism. Miller has animated certain drawings by adding small moving components: again the ironic playing out of the potential of these pictures (and poseurs) to 'come to life'. A section of the animation is devoted to a young woman struggling to and finally succeeding in getting out of a beanbag.

Miller's words are inspired by charming pop fakery (she notes John Farnham's 'You're the Voice' as an example) though they also seem to imitate a teenage poem written privately in a diary. Clichés of self-empowerment are dotingly assembled amongst knowingly bad grammar, poetic sentiment and vernacular quotation – *Son, you're a gun...* In the video, these words play across the screen in uncomfortable fits and starts - all very reminiscent of karaoke. It's an everyday tale of people getting together and feeling like they can overcome the odds.

The original music accompanying the video sounds a lot like Jean Michel Jarre, the French synthesiser pioneer who, while other early electronic musicians were exploring the new genre's outer limits, was determined to stick to spacey melodies. In Jarre's later career he also pioneered the stadium concert – before live audiences of millions, playing five keyboards at a time, dressed in ridiculous futuristic capes with the stage illuminated by choreographed laser shows and fireworks. The music operates in the same way as the text, the drawings, the rest of this piece: ironic, self-conscious, a half serious deterrent to sincerity, a spanner in the works, that would otherwise pilot the blinkered 'us' on our emotional journey.



The story begins, we are surrounded by a cartoon construct of nature: generic green leaves and brown trunks with just the right amount of branches and tufts of grass growing tastefully at the base of the trees. We can't live like this – we are at an impasse. The characters' blank, melancholic faces betray this not-so-secret longing. Like the prehuman apes in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, such longing seeks a vision, a gift from above to alert us to our higher calling. This vision is perfect, simple, yet infinitely complex: it is an abstract drawing, what Miller calls the 'plastic sublime' of culture. Culture leads us out of nature. It's what separates man from the animals. Our collective ingenuity, our capacity for brilliance, is embodied in these colourful squares and circles. It has, like the depressive watching TV from a beanbag, lain dormant for too long. Our lives really begin at adolescence. The vision compels us to lurch forward, out of the tangled forest of apathy. This is much more than the hollow doctrine of new age self-improvement. We can look over the valley of pain and betrayal, and across to the perilous mountain peak, our future journey.

Michael Ascroft

ALL IMAGES
THE POWER Part II 2005, animation still.