

Del Favero's video installation **Deep Sleep** meditates on the events during the 1970's surrounding the infamous Chelmsford Psychiatric Hospital, Sydney where patients were put to sleep in a deep coma for up to six weeks. Developed by Dr Harry Bailey, deep sleep therapy at Chelmsford saw up to forty people killed and thousands maimed in the quest to eliminate the painful memories which Dr Bailey believed was the cause of mental suffering. In 1990-1991 the deaths led to the largest criminal investigation into medical practice in Australian history, resulting in the closure of numerous hospitals throughout the country.

*Excerpt from Jill Bennett: **Dennis Del Favero: Fantasmia 1994-2004.** UNSW Press and Sprengel Museum Hannover: Sydney, Hannover. 2004.*

*Deep Sleep*, it could be argued, explicitly structures the uneasy relationship of 'sense memory' and testimonial narrative into its address to the viewer. This piece focuses on the doctor responsible for 'deep sleep therapy' after it has been revealed that scores of deaths have resulted from this form of treatment.<sup>1</sup> What appear to be interior monologues - or the fantasies and recollections of the characters - turn out to be testimonies delivered by witnesses before the Royal Commission inquiry into the implementation of 'deep sleep therapy' at the Chelmsford psychiatric institution. But whereas linear films such as *Shadow of Doubt* figure the journey from the 'world beyond knowledge' into a public realm of testimony as a one-way trip toward salvation, *Deep Sleep* resists the move toward narrative resolution and the possibility of an (impossibly) uplifting conclusion. *Deep Sleep* keeps us mired in the confused and irreconcilable relationship of testimony - or conventional narrative - and traumatic and/or psychotic memory. Voices here do not consistently match the subjects depicted on screen, so that the psychotic dimension of the memories of patients shapes the viewing experience itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Del Favero explains the 'plot' as follows: "At the centre of *Deep Sleep's* narrative is Dr Harry Bailey recalling an affair with a patient - and her subsequent death - that lead to his appearance before a Royal Commission, investigating the scores of deaths that occurred under his treatment. This recall takes place while he himself is undertaking "deep sleep" therapy after suffering a breakdown following the announcement of the Royal Commission. His lover appears in his recollection, speaking to him as if she too maybe somewhere inside the time of her own treatment. On the outside of the narrative is the Royal Commissioner who is trying to make sense of the various testimonies from former patients". (unpublished communication with the author)