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National Cinemas series

General Editor: Susan Hayward

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Reflecting growing interest in cinema as a national cultural institution, the new Routledge *National Cinemas* series brings together the most recent developments in cultural studies and film history. Its purpose is to deepen our understanding of film directors and movements by placing them within the context of national cinematic production and global culture and exploring the traditions and cultural values expressed within each. Each book provides students with a thorough and accessible introduction to a different national cinema.

*French National Cinema*

Susan Hayward

*Italian National Cinema*

Pierre Sorlin

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# Australian National Cinema

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Tom O'Regan



London and New York

Introducing Australian cinema

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**INTRODUCTION**

*Australian National Cinema* reinterprets André Bazin's original question – 'What is cinema?' in terms of Australian cinema. As the title of this book suggests Australian cinema is a type of cinema – a national cinema. It is one among a number of national cinemas: British, Japanese, Dutch, French and Indian. A national cinema is made of the films and film production industry of particular nations. National cinemas involve relations between, on the one hand, the national film texts and the national and international film industries and, on the other hand, their various social, political and cultural contexts. These supply a means of differentiating cinema product in domestic and international circulation: these are the Australian films, directors, actors and these are the French. National cinemas also partake of a broader 'conversation' with Hollywood and other national cinemas. They carve a space locally and internationally for themselves in the face of the dominant international cinema, Hollywood. National film-makers indigenize genres, artistic movements and influences. So, for example, *Strictly Ballroom* (Luhmann 1992), *The Adventures of Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (Elliott 1994) and *Star Struck* (Armstrong 1982) are not only Australian musicals but each can be seen to Australianize the form. Australian cinema is also a type of national cinema. Like the British and New Zealand cinemas, it is an English language cinema; like the Canadian and Dutch cinemas it is a medium-sized cinema.

Like all national cinemas Australian cinema is a collection of films and production strategies. It is a critical category to be explored. It is an industrial reality and a film production milieu for which governments develop policy. It is a marketing category to be exploited. It is an appreciation and consumption category for domestic and international audiences. Australian cinema is a container into which different film and cultural projects, energies, investments and institutions are assembled. It collects a range of elements – people and things, screen identities, knowledges, strategies, films – that are loosely related to each other; a raft of different institutions and relations, ranging from the complementary to the combative to the completely unrelated. It involves many

different agents acting at a local, national and an international level who variously make, consume, produce, discuss, legislate and circulate Australian cinema. Heterogeneous ends, purposes, strategies and varieties of film-making are pursued under its rubric.

\* Australian cinema is a messy affair. It is a messiness not only in our ways of knowing, reading, consuming and producing films and the larger film-making milieu of which they are a part, but also a messiness among the films themselves with features as far apart as Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Bruce Beresford's *Breaker Morant* (1980), Dr George Miller's *Mad Max* films (1979, 1981, 1985 with George Ogilvie),<sup>1</sup> Jocelyn Moorhouse's *Proof* (1991), P. J. Hogan's *Muriel's Wedding* (1994) and Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993). Australian cinema is fundamentally dispersed. The issue facing those who coordinate Australian film is one of effectively handling this dispersal of films, strategies and ends for personal, financial, cultural, aesthetic, national and political benefit.

The study of Australian cinema asks: 'What are the uses of Australian cinema for those who consume, speak, write about and produce its films?'; 'What is Australian cinema in the situations it creates and finds itself located in?' and 'How do diverse actors make sense of Australian cinema?' In this study, I will address the films, the audience (including the critical audience) for these films, the industry within which they are produced, the local and international markets where they circulate, and the strategic role of government in sustaining domestic production. Undertaking this task involves an interdisciplinarity that draws on film criticism, cultural studies, cultural policy studies and film economics. The discipline which has evolved to undertake this task is national cinema analysis.

National cinema studies examine films and their diverse conditions of production. Such studies routinely survey the connections between text and local and international production, reception and distribution, and between these and the local and international, among society, cultures and peoples. Susan Hayward's *French National Cinema* (1993) and Thomas Elsaesser's *New German Cinema* (1989) are unthinkable without their respective industrial, critical, cultural, social and political milieus. Some studies emphasize the films and/or the discourses of the national cinema; others the hard facts of production, distribution, exhibition and circulation; some the social dimensions of the national cinema. But all national cinema analyses situate the cinema simultaneously as a natural object in the film world (its production and industrial context), as a social object connecting and relating people to each other (its social and political context) and discursively through language, genre and knowledges (its representations).

The issue facing those who study Australian national cinema is akin to that routinely facing film producers and policy makers – one of how to handle and organize this dispersal of films, strategies, viewpoints and ends. The critic's problem is one of writing the national cinema as a hybrid form, the film worker's problem is one of coordinating it as a multifaceted entity. 'National cinemas' present themselves to audiences, film workers and critics alike as so many

contingent links among disparate elements, disparate tellings, varied film-making projects. National cinemas are, in this sense, not so much coherent as dispersed.

At one time, this sort of dispersal was considered a problem disqualifying the study of national cinemas from screen theory. Christian Metz contends in his seminal book *Language and Cinema* (1974: 9) that because the cinema was such a 'multi-dimensional phenomenon' it did not lend 'itself to any rigorous and unified study, but only to a heteroclitic collection of observations involving multiple and diverse points of view'. For him 'cinema' ... is not a knowable object'. Under this view – and it is one which has persisted in various ways into the present – the study of a national cinema could be amenable only to observations and not to systematic knowledge.

Although I disagree with Metz, he does have a point. The national cinema writer must take on 'multiple and diverse points of view'. This imposes practical limits on any analysis. If I examine the intersections of text, industry, policy, economics and public reputation, the films necessarily get the more limited attention of synoptic review and not detailed textual exegesis. The reader is confronted with something more, and something less, than journalism, film reviewing, policy analysis, economic analysis and film studies. National cinema analyses poach from these apparently more fully achieved domains, and are dependent on their innovations. They mix and match the concepts and the innovations drawn from each field (thereby running the risk of failing to apprehend each sufficiently).

Metz rightly observes that the insights developed from film criticism's extended discussion of film meaning are not as available to the writer who examines 'the cinema' as a whole. Without the lengthy discursive trajectories and purification of language made possible by concentrating on a particular aspect of the cinema, the national cinema writer cannot match policy studies, economic analysis, and textual analysis on its own terms. National cinemas cannot bracket off all those other components that shape the circulation of films, in order to concentrate on one or two. They need to combine, to give due weight to a heteroclitic range of elements in one and the same place and at the same time. National cinema writing is that critical practice which thoroughly establishes and routinely works through the heteroclitic nature of cinema.

A national cinema focus forces an analysis of the connections between these elements and insists, however unevenly, on their collocation. The hybrid analytical strategies demanded in examining national cinemas are also its strength. Significantly, national cinema writing is neither the analysis of a film text nor policy discourse; neither film industry journalism and economic analysis nor film reviewing, but a mixture of each. Because a national cinema study needs to deal with texts, technology, language, power and society, it has a chance of holding onto the multiple connections that make the cinema 'possible' and drive it forward. The national cinema writer addresses the multiple personae of the filmmaker: as the one who creates with materials and technologies, who acts politically, who manipulates funding bodies, who lobbies, who needs to know the

market, financing and the local and international works of the cinema. Like the national cinema itself, national cinema writing needs to combine the local and the international. The local conditions, the relative speeds of development of domestic infrastructures, the specific and local histories of cinema regulation, politics and governmental subsidies, the discursive fields in which the national cinema is inscribed – these conditions give an inflection to the public's understanding of that cinema.

National cinema analyses are predisposed in some fashion to local history and sociology, to emphasizing the local as well as (and sometimes at the expense of) the international. National cinema writers have no choice: they must deploy hybrid forms of analysis. The special local, critical, cultural, historical and industrial milieu of each cinema needs to be 'translated' into a form available for various kinds of local and international circulation. By showing how these elements are combined, it becomes an arena which can travel along diverse and often public corridors. It can have importance to general readers, to those who programme film retrospectives and film festivals, to film and cultural critics, to policy makers, educators, industry economists, film-makers, politicians, and lawyers in the entertainment industries. It can become essential reading for students of film whether they are film-makers, those involved in the film industry outside the film crew, or screen studies students.

The study of national cinemas is the proof that it is possible to do things with our recognition of the cinema as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Multiple and diverse points of view can be the subject of our systematizing attention. Whereas Metz used his basic insight to legitimate his turn to the apparently more manageable and pure problems of film language, we use ours to lead cinema criticism back to the impure, admittedly eclectic, but none the less systematizing spaces of the cinema as a social practice. Those of us who do take part in it even think that such messy (John Hartley (1992: 23) calls them 'dirty') spaces are more interesting.

The problem every national cinema analysis faces is one of how to do justice to Australian cinema as a hybrid assemblage of diverse elements, statuses and films. One solution – and this is one adopted in this study – is to demonstrate a film milieu made up of antagonistic, complementary and simply adjacent elements, which are to be made sense of in their own terms. This means keeping the question of 'what is Australian cinema' as firmly and permanently open as it is on the Australian (and international) public record. My task here is not one of deciding which way of seeing Australian cinema is the right one but of showing how each element explains and discloses something about it. When I examine strategies of Australian film production and circulation I do not see my task as one of choosing among them, but rather of elucidating them. The task of national cinema studies, therefore, is not only to make sense of the films produced under its aegis, but also to make sense of those dispersed elements, strategies and purposes that produce, frame and circulate these films.

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

In Chapter 2 – 'Theorizing Australian cinema' – I argue that Australian cinema should be considered as naturalized by a combination of statuses. It is a 'natural' part of the screen world, it is a social bond circulating among people and defining that bond in their circulation, it is an object of knowledge and it is a problem of knowledge. Australian cinema is an assemblage which is simultaneously real, discursive and collective. I draw attention to the diverse knowledges about Australian cinema and how power is exercised through the application of knowledge.

The book then subdivides into three parts. In the first two parts, 'Making a national cinema' and 'Making a distinct cinema', I establish the nature of Australian cinema. In 'Making a national cinema', I consider Australian cinema as a particular kind of national cinema, sharing characteristics with other national cinemas. Here I foreground how certain knowledges, particular discursive figures, cinematic influences, formations of value and routine sense-making procedures normalize Australian national cinema on the horizons of diverse agents. In 'Making a distinct cinema', I consider the character of its diversity, its regularities, its cultural transfers (how it imports and indigenizes genres and film-making norms), and how they contribute to producing a distinct cinema. My emphasis in these first two parts is on those processes of naturalizing which make Australian cinema self-evident. These parts provide a map of the general field of Australian cinema within which the concerns of my third part – about how Australian cinema becomes a problem of knowledge – is established and maintained. In that part I ask: How does Australian cinema function as a vehicle for social problem solving? And how are knowledge, objects and people brought together in Australian cinema?

### Making a national cinema

In Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 I consider Australian cinema as a national cinema. These chapters compare Australian cinema to other national cinemas and show how the concept of national cinema is made operational in the Australian context. In Chapter 3, 'A national cinema', I survey more generally those characteristics which Australian cinema shares with other national cinemas. I discuss it as a response to Hollywood dominance, as a local and international form, as in part a festival cinema, which has a relation with the nation and the state, and which is messy in its local, national and international involvements. National cinemas are identified as a relational term – a set of processes rather than an essence.

In Chapter 4, 'A medium-sized English-language cinema', I consider Australian cinema as a type of national cinema. Its cinema market, closely resembles that of Canada, the UK and the USA in its English language mainstream, and its 'foreign language' (art house) and ethnic cinemas in the minor stream. Like the Dutch and Swedish cinemas, it is a medium-sized cinema. Like the English-

Canadian cinema, it is a medium-sized English-language cinema. And, like all small to medium-sized national cinemas, it is an antipodal cinema marked by unequal cultural exchange due to the pre-eminent role played by imports.

In Chapter 5, I consider the formations of value of Australian cinema generally. A diverse range of agents – critics, audiences and policy-makers – evaluate Australian national cinema as a whole through a limited number of conceptual means. These include:

- 1 a relation with a dominant Hollywood cinema in which the national cinema is situated under the sign of culture and Hollywood under the sign of the profane economy;
- 2 a division of value among national cinemas where some are seen to be prestigious, some 'Other' cinemas, and some simply mundane;
- 3 a division within the national cinema between its mainstream and its peripheral or independent cinemas; and
- 4 a positive evaluation of Hollywood and its legacy in local markets, which simultaneously values and devalues the local national cinema.

These four figures interact to produce unstable hierarchies of value. So while some find that Australian cinema lacks sufficient artfulness as a prestige cinema (it is seen to lack innovation at a formal and stylistic level), sufficient cultural difference to be an 'Other' cinema, and sufficient difference from Hollywood as a mundane cinema, others value Australian cinema as a cinema that is sometimes able to speak to the people of Australia and the world, successfully negotiating Hollywood genres, eschewing artiness and committed to entertainment values. Agents also discriminate within the local cinema between the mainstream and the minor stream, alternately favouring one over the other. The Australian national cinema is shown to be traversed by various wills to value.

In Chapter 6, 'Making meaning', I attend to how meaning and value is made from individual Australian titles. I show how particular kinds of Australian cinema and discursive figures are twinned, so as to create a changing public meaning and value for Australian cinema. film-makers, critics, audiences and policy makers routinely make meaning from and assign value to Australian cinema by interpreting it in a number of ways. They relate a film to society and public discourse (its social texts). They compare it to other Australian films, television productions, novels, theatre and poems (its local aesthetic intertexts). They think about its continuities and discontinuities with, on the one hand, British, European and Asian cinemas, and, on the other hand, Hollywood cinema and its production models (its international cinema intertexts). They find it either entertaining or informing; diverting or educational. They berate it for surrendering to commercial values. They castigate it for capitulating to middle-class 'good intentions'. Through such diverse interpretative acts, films – like the larger audiovisual culture they are a part of – have diverse public careers.

### Making a distinct cinema

In Chapters 7, 8, 9 and 10, I discuss the characteristics of Australian cinema which contribute to its production as a distinct cinema. I find Australian cinema's specificity to lie, not in any particular set of attributes, so much as in its relational character. This specificity emerges, on the one hand, from its diversifying, unifying, importing and indigenizing, blending and Othering dynamics, and, on the other hand, from its negotiation of its political and cultural weakness and the related importance to it of projecting Australian ugliness and ordinariness.

In Chapter 7, 'Diversity', I discuss the intrinsic diversity of Australian cinema. film-makers typically contribute to this or that pathway of the cinema with varying degrees of intensity over time, with some contributions – to the documentary and the western – being continuous over film history and other contributions – to the science-fiction film and the thriller – being relatively recent. They draw on a range of cultural differentiations from social life, politics and government. They reach out to non-Australian locations for story settings, materials and subjects. Australian cinema is largely of a one-off character and one in which film-makers routinely work across a variety of film forms. In its turn film criticism also bears the marks of this diversity.

In Chapter 8, 'Unity', I consider the paradox of how various agents – film critics, audiences, policy-makers, film-makers – routinely create unities and singularities for this diverse film-making. There are those regularities common to all national cinemas, such as a domestic informational and local symbolic goods archive, representing modal forms of the nation and local speech, which inform the production and circulation of films and provide agents with ways of unifying national film-making. Many of these agents develop a practical map of Australian cinema, in which it appears as a genre or type of dominant film-making or as so many thematic regularities – a masculinist cinema hypercritical of family life and male-female relationships which eschews conventional heterosexual romance structures and Oedipal trajectories. Critics and film-makers also unify Australian cinema around particular stylistic preoccupations – in particular naturalism – and around cultural and stylistic preoccupations with settings and landscape.

In these two chapters, I look at the ways in which agents think and assemble Australian cinema in diversity and at the ways in which they think and produce it in unity. Such processes of creating unity and diversity are not so much opposed as twinned. Sometimes, for example, critics narrow the meaning of Australian cinema to a handful of thematic, plot or other preoccupations, so as to claim that Australian cinema is stylistically and culturally homogeneous. Such narrowing then justifies their arguments for more diversity in the Australian cinema. Unity is specified as a problem in order to permit a greater diversity.

Because of the evident importance of the international cinema in an import culture, cultural transfers are a central issue in and for Australian cinema. Using the work of the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman, I develop a typology of cultural transfers in Australian cinema in Chapter 9. Lotman's five stages of cultural

transfer enable me to theorize the international circulation of concepts, films and styles in the Australian receiving context as multifaceted and multileveled. I use Lotman to reconsider Meaghan Morris's (1988) discussion of the unoriginality of Australian cinema and to position its specificity in the style and character of its negotiation of cultural transfers.

In the last of this section, Chapter 10, I seek more directly the distinctive character of Australian cinema. Here I make a case for its distinctiveness as a *relation* made of the intersection of a number of traits. These are: its manner of dealing with its one-off character and its unoriginality and cultural weakness as a medium-sized cinema, its narrative negotiation of Australian political weakness, its Othering of the Australian, and its blending of melodrama and the art film, and fact and fiction.

### Problematizing Australian cinema

Chapters 11, 12 and 13 examine various ways in which Australian film becomes more than 'film in the film world' and attaches itself to social domains and vehicles of social problematization. In Chapter 11, 'Problematizing the Social', I examine Australian cinema as a vehicle for representing and intervening in Australian lifeways, politics and symbolic culture. I consider how film-making organizes social meanings by exploiting social problems – relationship breakdown, custody disputes, incest, intolerance, generation gaps, Aboriginal and settler society relations – whether it be to motivate characters and generate tension between them in fiction film-making, or treat them as subjects for documentary and experimental film-making.

In Chapter 12, 'Problematizing gender', I look at one of the most public of problematizations in Australian cinema. The gender cleavage is not only an important structuring difference in front of and behind the camera. While women have always been depicted in the cinema, they still do not drive the narrative or participate in creative, technical and administrative positions to the same extent as men and the opportunities and wages for women actors and performers are nowhere near that for men. The problematizing of gender in social and cultural criticism and elsewhere impacts at the level of representation, politics, work practices and social organization in Australian cinema.

In Chapter 13, 'Problematizing nationhood', I examine how Australian cinema represents the Australian 'people-among-themselves' and defines them in relation to other like peoples. Specifying who the Australian people are, and might become, provides Australian cinema with something to represent, to be, and with materials to exploit. Audiences and critics recognize themselves in films and use them as a source to project their society and nation in a certain kind of way. Policy-makers, film-makers, critics and audiences rely on the existing political, civic and descriptive projects through which Australian society is represented to itself and the larger world. I discern four competing 'projects' for Australian society as a national society – a European derived society, a diasporic society, a New World

society and a multicultural society. Here I examine these formulations and their translation into film.

Finally, in Chapter 14, 'Critical dispositions', I turn the point of focus squarely on film criticism and national cinema description. I examine Australian cinema criticism as the intersection of cultural criticism, cinephilic and history discourses and the institutional networks that support them. I discern three different critical styles: 'symptomatic' (or demythologizing criticism), 'explicatory' criticism and remythologizing criticism (remaking its objects). Cinephile institutions are shown to transform through remythologizing film meaning; critical institutions through demythologizing the meaning of films; and historical institutions through narrativizing the relation between past filmic trajectories. I end with a brief self-reflexive examination of my own practice of problematizing Australian cinema. I ask what are the appropriate critical ethics to the diverse problematizations of Australian cinema. I believe that our best ethics are pluralist, as they allow for a diversity of equally valid ends.

This book emphasizes the plurality and diversity of Australian cinema and the open-ended interrelations developed for them. Diversity is taken to be a mundane property of Australian cinema. It is a naturally occurring property of a field and a logical consequence of diverse film-making, of critical and governmental projects. As it is constitutive, diversity is not taken to be an end in itself. My purpose in this study is to demonstrate how Australian cinema is a hybrid assemblage of elements that are continually being improvised, combined and recombined; and to develop a critical ethics appropriate to this situation.

Conceiving a national cinema as a mundane cinema is important to any national cinema. It refuses to see only its exceptionalism. It talks to the heteroclitic character of a national cinema in ways the self-defensive ethos of the oppositional and the self-congratulatory ethos of the prestigious cannot.

Sometimes there is an attempt to value the mundane cinema as such and to celebrate a diverse film industry by using those moments of spectacular local success to open out on to cultural and aesthetic discussion. In 1982 I wrote an article for *Filmnews* on *The Man from Snowy River* which was subsequently republished (1985a) in reaction to the then prevailing and subsequent reflexive denunciation of this film as in Rose Lucas' (1993: 103) words, 'a shamelessly opportunist pandering to the box office and to American film markets in particular'. This was a film with no redeeming features: aesthetically, politically and culturally. By using an 'American colonizer' the 'heat' was taken off our 'fine Australian pioneers' who were 'involved in an identical process of encoding the landscape within their own territorial and ideological parameters'. The film was also particularly 'objectionable' because of its 'stereotypical equation of women with a passive landscape to be cultivated or a horse to be ridden'. 'The love interest, Jessica ... is virtually indistinguishable from the missing horse'.

*Snowy River* was ideologically bad, technically bad, masculinist, poorly scripted and shamelessly commercial. We needed, I thought, better tools than these to explain a film which supplanted all previous successful Hollywood films to become the most successful box-office film in Australian theatrical exhibition (it was later eclipsed by *E.T.* (Spielberg 1982) and *Crocodile Dundee*). We also needed a better way of respecting the audience that had made it so successful than a declamatory critique that turned the audience into dupes of exploitative Americanized film-makers.

In my essay, I argued that film and cultural intellectuals had much to learn from *Snowy River* and its firm situation in Australian popular culture. *Snowy River* is a story loosely based on the famous Banjo Patterson poem. It has the main lead Jim leave his mountain home after the death of his father 'at the hands' of brumbies. He is forced out by the older mountain men who tell him he must earn the right to return to the high country. He works as a horse wrangler on the plains for a wealthy and hard American squatter, Harrison (Kirk Douglas). There he meets and falls in love with Harrison's daughter (Sigrid Thornton) and is subsequently forced to leave. He is able to return to the mountains when he catches Harrison's prize colt which has escaped to the brumbies. He succeeds, where everyone else has failed, in the film's central spectacular chase sequence. He and his surrogate father - Harrison's despised half-brother Spur (also played by Kirk Douglas) - win back their self-respect and community respect.

Film criticism needed to set aside its notions as to what constituted a 'well made' film in order to work out how this film connected with audiences. How was it that, for example, those very scenes that were, for critics, evidence of poor scripting, staginess and touching animal clichés, were also those appreciated and identified by audiences as what they liked about the film (O'Regan 1985a: 244)?

Identifying the film as a commercial film - a film made for money not critics - as a final shaper and clue to its meaning did not help either, because all that encouraged us to do was 'see it as imitative in a bad sense, dismiss it as if it had no significant structures, regard its commercial success as a "con"'. (245). The tools we needed to explain its phenomenal success involved recognizing what this sort of film was - 'a kangaroo western', a popular melodrama mixing actors from Australian television soaps with Hollywood (Kirk Douglas). It also involved a strategy of address on the part of the film-makers which envisaged its audience as the 'whole of Australia' where Australia was seen to be not so much as a 'unified national character' but 'diverse publics'. The film-makers saw themselves as providing something for each - 'parents, kids, those who never go to the cinema, cineastes, adolescents of both sexes'. I argued that the film displayed the marks of this selection when 'what appeared plausibly and appreciatively as kitsch and this quotation appeared to other audiences as something real, new, genuine' (250). We also needed to recognize aspects of Australian popular culture for what they were. I wrote:

The terrain *The Man* inhabits is that of the cigarette commercial, clothes, fashions, real estate, tourism, soap opera (melodrama), bush dancing, John Ford and John Wayne. In other words, the film is firmly situated within Australian popular culture. The 'fictive space' of Australia and the locale that the film calls upon is one formed in and informed by television, the press and radio; rather than the state, existing Australian feature films, or ... literature.

(245)

The film was also situated in contemporary values and debates. So Harrison (the bad guy) rails against feminism. Jim (the Man) talks in the language of animal liberation when he breaks in the colt from Old Regret. Clancy admonishes the predatory Harrison in terms that make sense 'only within an ecological frame of reference'.

I thought cultural critics could learn from this film. It could help them understand just how localized and specific to them were some of the ideas they imputed as a general Australian condition. I was specifically thinking about the 'bush as alien, foreign, mysterious, uncolonisable, predatory or revengeful'. In the stead of these, the film posed a much more ordinary, banal and pragmatic relation with the bush: 'it is a commercial, ecological, desirable, pleasurable, traversable, and indeed acquirable space' (246). White Australians were not 'Europeans', they were not 'intruders in the bush'; nature was not a 'hermeneutic' (as in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*) and Aborigines and Aboriginal culture did not 'provide the keys to an experience of ... the Australian landscape' - as in *Walkabout*, *The Last Wave* and *Manganinnie* (247). The bush is not separate from the film-maker and the audience. It is simply available. 'It is not alien although it is unfamiliar' (247). The outback folk in turn were not 'the vicious, nasty, racist, ugly, predatory people of *Wake in Fright*, nor the European peasantry of *My Brilliant Career*', rather they were 'variously simple, naive, dignified, affectionate, likeable and resilient'. What