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Albert Moran and Errol Vieth  
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## **Film in Australia** *An Introduction*

*Film in Australia: An Introduction* is a groundbreaking book that systematically addresses the wide-ranging output of Australian feature films. Adopting a genre approach, it gives a different take on Australian films made since 1970, bypassing the standard run of historical texts and actor- or character-driven studies of Australian film. Comedy, adventure, horror, science fiction, crime, art films and other types are analyzed with clarity and insight so the reader can recognize and understand all kinds of Australian films, whether they are contemporary or older features, obscure gems or classic blockbusters.

*Film in Australia* explains how particular types of films work, identifies sub-types, and surveys the work of local film makers in the different genres. Authoritatively argued for film studies courses, and based on the authors' deep and extensive knowledge of Australian film, it is also enjoyable and accessible for the general reader. A must-read for all students of Australian film.

**Albert Moran** is a professor in the School of Arts, Media and Culture at Griffith University.

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# Film in Australia

## An Introduction

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## Preface

The genesis of this book lies in a dissatisfaction with the accounts of Australian cinema offered elsewhere, which seemed to postpone or retard an engagement with film in favour of other matters. At least three different types of these deflectionary approaches can be noted. First, there is the general history that tells the 'story' of Australian cinema in terms of recognizable patterns including rise and fall, boom and bust, with a series of familiar character types including film directors, actors, subjects and companies. A second kind of account is pitched at a more general level and concerns even larger entities derived from government policy, state agencies, film distributors, exhibitors and, especially, Hollywood. Both of these approaches are valuable in terms of the contextual understanding of the film industry that they provide, yet in both these accounts film, including the analysis of particular films, tends to be incidental, a reminder to the reader that the business in question is that of cinema and not, for instance, manufacturing or mining.

Meanwhile, another kind of inquiry is beholden to Cultural Studies and Australian Studies. Here, too, the investigation of specific films again tends to be elided in favour of more synoptic interpretations of Australian culture and society. Typically, this last kind of account seeks to interpret a supposed *zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, adducing a conceptual grid, usually a couplet or triad, which becomes the grand framework for understanding the films. In other words, film seems only to be a point on a journey whose real goal is broadly sociological, historical or even philosophical. Seeking another way forward, it seemed worthwhile to write an account that stressed the prevailing presence of film in Australia not as a prelude to something else but as a fact in itself. In turn, an emphasis on genre seemed to be the best way of approaching this goal. Recognizing and understanding film in terms of particular film classes or types is a necessary first step in their analysis and interpretation. It helps the viewer to grasp not only what a film means but how it means. Comparing and contrasting, recognizing similarity and difference, relating one film to another offers a more comprehensive and valuable way to proceed in the understanding of film in Australia. It is surely the case that comprehending what is filmic about these

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films is a necessary first step towards understanding what is Australian about them.

Various people helped in the research, writing and preparation of this book. Thanks are especially due to Sharon Klein at Griffith University library, who facilitated access to written material and films that were not otherwise available. In turn, Andrew Leavold, owner of Brisbane's Trash Video, was a mine of information and another great source of films on both video and DVD. Andrew is one of the great institutions and embodiments of Australian cinophilia – long may he reign over the Planet of the Tapes! In the early stages of the work, Albert Moran was also most fortunate in being able to tap into some of the encyclopedic film knowledge of Bruce Hodsdon at the Special Collection section at the State Library of Queensland. Various colleagues at Griffith University also deserve thanks for their input. Pat Laughren first suggested the idea of the book although he might not recognize the offspring. Tony May continues to be sceptical of the value of genre criticism while always being prepared to help with particular films. Cory Messenger assisted in the late stages of the work, tracking down specific films and their synopses and suggesting various other titles. Danni Zuvella has been wonderful in sharing her voluminous knowledge of Australian avant-garde and experimental cinema. Elizabeth Davies has been extremely helpful in so many ways. Finally, special thanks to Kate Moran for help in the late stages of the work.

Although the intention concerning authorship was that both writers would each contribute approximately half the text, this did not eventuate. Instead, Albert Moran wrote Chapters 1 to 7, 9 and 11 to 14 as well as providing the Afterword and Bibliography, while Errol Vieth contributed the chapters on horror and science fiction. Jill Henry has been a wonderful publisher while Susan Hanley has helped guide the manuscript during its production. Greg Alford is to be thanked for editing the manuscript and Sally Chick for arranging the cover.