Extraordinary Undercurrents:

Australian Cinema, Genre and the Everyday

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

__________________________
David Thomas
8 June 2006
Acknowledgements

It seems that most of the colleagues and friends I have made at Murdoch University are in agreement: despite the best intentions, completing a project like this involves continuously unpredictable cycles of productivity, frustration, successes, and failures. It has occurred to me, on occasion during the less enjoyable of these cycles, that any material of genuine worth appearing within the following pages must either be pure luck, or the result of the input of a wiser person. With that in mind, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Garry Gillard, for his extraordinary patience, expertise, and personal and professional support during my candidacy. Our lengthy and rewarding association has not been solely about the production of a dissertation however, and thanks are also due to Garry for his guidance in relation to my endeavours with teaching, and writing for publication.

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Abstract

‘Extraordinary Undercurrents: Australian Cinema, Genre and the Everyday’ investigates how the critical uptake of genre-based cinema has been incorporated into the cultural and industrial rubric of Australian national cinema. The thesis offers, in part, a revaluation of theoretically under-emphasized texts (as well as texts that have been the subject of much higher levels of scrutiny), in order to establish recurrent threads within Australian cinema. In doing this, the thesis offers new and original knowledge in the form of developing a perspective for a revised critical and theoretical analysis of genre cinema within Australian cinema, challenging the presumption of the kinds of texts that can be seen as articulating the nation. The groups of films examined herein form nodes through which a network of important and divergent ideas about nation, national identity and social organization come together in the form of narrative and thematic undercurrents.

These (generally malevolent) undercurrents are articulated in the filmic representation of a range of conventional personal, social and cultural dichotomies, and of particular interest are the events, characters and narratives in which the everyday is confronted by the abstract, abject and uncanny. The undercurrents I identify are shown as the textual sites in which transgression - both inside and outside the frame - and intertextuality are collocated, representing the convergence of material which simultaneously operates outside of genres, while reinforcing textual similarity. The undercurrents I identify provide a theoretical direction in analysing interaction between national cinema, culture and identity.