

*Straight Roads and Crossed Lines: The Quest for Film Culture in Australia?*  
by Barrett Hodsdon. Shenton Park, WA: Bernt Porridge Group, 2001, pp.269,  
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The ambitious approach to film criticism and consumption in Australia, apparent from the title of this highly personal and polemical work, is carried over into every aspect of its detailed and wide-ranging consideration of post-war Australian film culture. However, the question mark in the title indicates the author's pervasive scepticism about the very persistence of an Australian film culture, a mature and relevant engagement with film viewing and making, lying behind and beneath the resurgence of film production since the 1970s. This occasionally combative cynicism extends even to the captioning of stills and illustrations, and frames the book's argument as an extended essay, or open letter to those who could or should have better addressed the political, commercial and intellectual challenges of a new national film industry.

The author's study of Australian film culture is undertaken along three interdependent routes of enquiry, pursued through three complementary sections: a chronological consideration of film funding, consumption and legislation; a close examination of independent and underground filmmaking, and the Australian assimilation of post-war aesthetic and critical milestones, such as the French *Nouvelle Vague* and auteurist approaches to film study; and a final series of reflections upon the circumstances pertaining in the contemporary industry. This approach is thought-provoking because of the juxtapositions it entails: the outlining of the influence of British, American and European film cultural activity and critical practice upon Australia from the 1950s to the present enforces a reassessment not just of the politics and polemics of one Antipodean new wave, but of the substantial reappraisal of the 'successes' (on a variety of commercial or artistic footings) which have dominated (and circumscribed) discussion of the Australian revival.

This book offers a range of invaluable insights to the critical and cultural hinterland of the Australian film revival in revealing the more radical roots of independent filmmaking, the limitations of liberal film societies and academic approaches and the broader strokes of government policy which legislated a renewed feature film industry into existence. It represents a highly opinionated, extremely worthy, perhaps unexpected but arguably vital postscript to the first three decades of the new Australian cinema, and, in refocusing debate upon the origins and relevance of that revival, it seeks to set a new agenda for contemporary national cinema.

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