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The Place of Cinema and Film in Contemporary Rural Australia

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Abstract

Decades of population decline, prolonged drought and the loss of important local services have significantly eroded the quality of life in many Australian rural towns, resulting in increasing levels of social dislocation. Against this backdrop rural cinemas operate as sites of popular entertainment and enjoyment, but are also highly valued as positive spaces around which isolated communities can gather and interact. They provide opportunities for engagement with film culture, but can also help promote important local community connections. This article explores the challenges of accounting for the cultural and social multiplicities of the rural cinema experience, and reflects how some of the prevailing film as text/film as event delineations might be productively be reconsidered within critical studies.

Keywords: Rural cinema, Australian cinema, Cinema history, Film audiences, Social belonging

Introduction

The public exhibition of films in rural Australia takes place in a wide variety of settings. These range from modern multi-screen venues through to older-style single screen cinemas, many of the latter pre-dating the arrival of television from the mid-1950s. In very small and remote towns, where film exhibition is generally not viable on a commercial basis, screenings are facilitated in both purpose-built and make-shift facilities by local councils, community co-operatives, film societies and a few courageous entrepreneurs. Across each of these different situations, cinemas often play an important role in local social and cultural life. They provide audiences with a connection to the global cultural and communications landscape, thereby helping address the sense of isolation which can be an unappealing feature of rural life. Beyond entertainment and enjoyment, cinemas also help to support social networks and have a role in helping to promote a positive sense of local belonging.

This article examines the meaning of contemporary movie-going for audiences in rural Australia. Focusing on attendance as an embodied practice, the discussion explores the significance of cinema's sociality and how this is shaped by its geographic situation. It also considers the integral place of the film within the cinema experience – a factor that is regularly overlooked within studies concerned with film-going practice. Historical research has demonstrated that the details of particular films are often difficult for audiences to recall after the viewing event. This has given scholars cause to question the extent to which screen content matters within the broader cinematic encounter (for example Allen 2006: 58-60, Jones 2003: 234-235, Kuhn 2002: 253, Maltby 2011: 9-11). While these studies establish that films are often peripheral to memories of screening events, they have tended to give limited consideration to the way in which movies might have been significant in other ways. Reception studies, on the other hand, have emphasised the connections between screen content and viewing contexts, but remain concerned primarily with how these interconnections influence the way in which specific texts are used and understood by audiences. Complicating these somewhat artificial delineations, present day accounts of movie-going in rural Australia indicate that both film content *and* the richness of the social encounter play a key role in drawing audiences to the cinema. At a conceptual level, their experiences suggest that in order to more accurately reflect this multiplicity, critical studies need to move beyond some of the oppositional film as text/film as event demarcations.

This article is based on data gathered from a program of empirical research conducted at rural cinemas in Australia during 2009 and 2010. The study is based around seven primary micro-study sites and also draws on information gathered from five secondary studies. These sites encompass a wide range of exhibition situations, from regional multiplexes through to small, community-led film enterprises. Material has been gathered from audiences at these sites via recorded oral interviews and written surveys. A total of thirty two people have participated in interviews, comprising a mix of males and females aged from their mid-teens through to their late 60s, although the overall profile is skewed towards older females with just over half the interviewees being women aged over 50. A three-page written audience survey was distributed in two of the micro-study locations – Merimbula (population 3,800, ABS 2006¹), and Sawtell (population 12,000, ABS 2006) – yielding a total of 136 responses. Interviews have also been conducted with a range of industry professionals including fifteen cinema owners and managers (from the case study sites and elsewhere), and nine others involved in rural cinema in some capacity (such as film distributors, film festival managers and government agencies).

Critical Context

My research in rural Australia is situated within an expanding area of inquiry centred on understanding cinema-going as a geographically-situated practice rather than solely as a textual encounter. While the metropolitan has provided a popular site for such investigations, there have been a number of studies in Australia and the United States that

have focused on the specificities of rural cinema attendance. Scholars such as Robert Allen (2006, 2011a), Kevin Corbett (2008), Kevin Cork (1995) and Nancy Huggett (2002) have drawn attention to the rich sociality of non-metropolitan movie-going experience. Extending these investigations, Gregory Waller (2004, 2005) and Anne Helen Wilson (2006) have explored the close personal and economic ties that often exist between rural cinema operators and their local communities. With a slightly different emphasis Kate Bowles (2007) and Dylan Walker (2007) have examined how physical environments can influence patterns of exhibition and attendance in Australian small towns, and Ross Thorne (2007) has looked at how rural infrastructures, specifically rail networks, have determined what appeared on rural screens in the early twentieth century. Adding to the breadth of these accounts, research centred on the development of movie fan culture has emphasised elements of connection rather than differentiation between metropolitan and rural audiences (Fuller 1996, Huggett 2002).

While embracing a diverse range of perspectives, the common thread running through this body of research is its historical focus – much of it centred on the period before the introduction of television, unlike my study which is situated within a contemporary timeframe. However, despite the chronological differences, accounts of early cinema-going have helped establish several key conceptual issues that are relevant across multiple time periods and geographic locations. They draw attention to three issues that have particular significance to my investigations: first, this research has demonstrated the rich diversity of situations in which audiences have watched (and not watched) films in public places; second it has emphasised the importance of wider economic, social, ethnic and cultural networks in shaping the physical characteristics of exhibition and the meaning of individual cinema experiences; and third it has highlighted the broad range of factors, beyond simply seeing a film, that can influence decisions about attendance and the subsequent place of these events in personal memory.

These three issues have emerged as important thematic concerns in my research with audiences in rural Australia. However, what has also been prioritised is the place of the film as a key factor influencing the frequency and timing of attendance. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley and George Potamianos argue that there should be space in cinema studies for the ‘examination of reaction to specific films as well as of the practice of moviegoing in which habitual attendance at a theatre or exhibition space outweighed the impact of any particular film shown’ (2008: 3). While the concerns that Fuller-Seeley and Potamianos identify are both active streams of critical inquiry, they tend to co-exist more than they intersect. Accounts of cinema-going focused on its social and geographic situation tend to downplay the significance of what was on the screen, while reception studies concentrate on how audiences read particular texts, despite its recognition of the significance of the viewing context. Moving outside some of the conceptual confines of these discrete approaches, several scholars have demonstrated the value of research that is more engaged

with the inherent duality of cinema-going – an experience shaped both by the film being screened and by the broader contexts in which the act of its consumption takes place. For example, Janet Harbord has illustrated how sites of movie consumption can play a crucial role in shaping the meaning of different film cultures (2002: 39-58); Deb Verhoeven (2007) highlights the importance of both on-screen and off-screen factors in her profile of the successful Greek cinema circuit that operated in Melbourne from the 1940s to 1970s; and Ramon Lobato (2007) has looked at how industrial and cultural imperatives have affected the international distribution and consumption of Nollywood films. The approach of these scholars inspires this analysis of the diverse and complex cinema experiences articulated by contemporary film audiences in rural Australia.

Cinema in Rural Australia

Decades of population decline have significantly eroded the quality of life in many parts of rural Australia. More recently the impact of a long-term severe drought and flooding, and the lingering negative outcomes of a series of government-led competition policy reforms introduced in the mid-1990s, have further undermined the vitality of many small towns. In places where these events have resulted in significant job losses and the erosion of agriculture-based incomes, there have been negative follow-on effects on local retail activity, funding for support services (such as schools, hospitals), and even rates of crime.² A government inquiry into the impact of the policy reforms concluded that in some small settlements where the loss of employment had been particularly high, the multiplier effect was sufficient to threaten the ‘critical mass’ of the entire town (Productivity Commission 1999: 386).

A succession of governmental reviews conducted over the past two decades has concluded that people living in rural Australia are generally disadvantaged in comparison with their metropolitan counterparts (see Australian Human Rights Commission 1999, Productivity Commission 1999, 2009). These reports cite disparities across numerous key social and economic indicators, including rates of unemployment, which are typically higher in rural areas, and incomes, which are typically lower. In terms of education, rural teens and young adults are less likely to participate in senior schooling, vocational training and tertiary education (Australian Human Rights Commission 1998: 13). Standards of health care and patient outcomes regularly fall short of metropolitan benchmarks, and the accessibility and adequacy of basic services such as banking, telecommunications and utilities (water and electricity), are ongoing issues (Productivity Commission 1999: 40-45, 290, Irvine et. al. 2010: 4). Collectively, these adverse social and economic conditions have been linked to heightened feelings of hopelessness and despair (Australian Human Rights Commission 1998:14-15). They manifest themselves in statistics such as rates of depression, suicide and crime, which sit well above the national average in many rural towns (Irvine et. al. 2010: 4, see also previous endnote). Youth suicide is a particularly serious issue, with rural males

aged 15-24 almost twice as likely to end their life in this way than their urban contemporaries (National Health Alliance 2009).

Against this backdrop, cinema is one of the most popular forms of cultural entertainment in non-metropolitan Australia. In industry terms 40 per cent of national screens are located outside Australia's five major capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth) and account on average for around a third of annual national box office revenues (Screen Australia 2010a, 2010b). The diversity of screen content, together with the cinema's relative affordability, can draw audiences from a wide range of demographic, socio-economic and geographic situations. Movie-going does not require any special skills or interests in order to participate, unlike other popular social collectives such as sporting clubs, professional organizations or hobby-related groups. In contrast to licensed hotels and clubs, cinemas are open to people of all ages limited only by the classification of the film being screened. It is for these reasons that cinemas tend to function as relatively egalitarian spaces in many rural towns.

The Social Contexts of Rural Cinema-Going

The social frameworks that exist around movie-going are varied and diverse. Cinemas provide places around which friendships and family connections are consolidated and extended, where romances blossom (or fail) or where special occasions are celebrated or remembered. In small towns, attending a public film screening can help alleviate the isolation that many rural people struggle with, particularly those who live and work on outlying farms and who spend much of their time alone. For women, cinemas can provide an opportunity to get together away from the boorish atmosphere of the local pub. For teenagers, an evening at the cinema can represent social freedom, one which lends a sense of purpose to 'going out' and provides a welcome contrast to the aimlessness, and sometimes destructive, alternative pastime of hanging around in public parks or streets.

These aspects of cinema attendance have figured prominently in accounts given by audiences in rural Australia. Confirming the social nature of cinema-going, the vast majority of respondents to the written audience surveys conducted in Merimbula and Sawtell indicated they usually go to the movies in the company of another person – 37 per cent with friends, 28 per cent with their partner and 24 per cent with other family members (such as children, grandchildren and siblings). Only 11 per cent said they usually went to the cinema alone. Audiences who participated in interviews indicated their attendance habits followed a similar pattern. As a woman from Merimbula explained: 'I usually like to go to the cinema with someone else – either my husband or friends. I do sometimes go on my own too but that's usually only when no one else wants to see the film with me' (Merimbula resident, female, 56-60 years). Opportunities for interaction with friends and family can add to the appeal of the cinema as a venue for watching films. A young man in the small town of Barraba (population 1,200, ABS 2006) explained during our discussion about why he

preferred his local theatre to watching television at home, 'it's heaps better watching movies at the cinema. There's more people and you can be with your friends' (Barraba resident, male, 15 years old). Cinemas provide forums for conversation before and after the film screening, which can also lead into other activities. Among the respondents to the written survey, 61 per indicated they regularly extended their cinema outing by combining it with another event such as going to a café, pub or restaurant. For some audiences the social interaction continues throughout the film. For example, the owner of the cinema at Barraba, Andrew Sharp, reported that the teenagers who dominate his Friday night screenings (including the young man quoted above) tend to talk to each other throughout the film. It is a practice Sharp says is not tolerated at other times when adults are present.

Beyond the pleasures of social interaction, rural audiences also reveal a link between cinema-going and a positive sense of local belonging. Patrons indicate that non-metropolitan cinemas are valued not just as a place to get together. They are also appreciated for their intimate atmosphere, where audiences enjoy the feeling of familiarity and personal recognition. As a patron at the First Avenue Cinema at Sawtell, a coastal town in northern New South Wales explained:

When I lived in Melbourne I went to the cinema for the same reasons as most people – for entertainment and relaxation; for enlightenment or to be challenged; or on a date. Now that I have moved to Sawtell I still go to the local cinema for the same reasons but with one very important additional reason – to meet and see other people from around town – and that has really changed my whole outlook on cinema-going. (Sawtell resident, female, early 60s)

Later in the same interview when discussing the five-screen multiplex located in the nearby, and much larger, town of Coffs Harbour (population 47,000, ABS 2006), this woman's partner added, 'I don't really like going to the Coffs cinema much. You feel anonymous there in a way you don't at Sawtell. You feel as if you go there just for the film and little else' (Sawtell resident, female, late 50s). Similar views were articulated by a regular patron at the community-operated cinema in Bowraville, a very small town on the coastal fringe of northern New South Wales (population 1,000, ABS 2006). We discussed an Australian film festival she had attended several weeks before at a commercial three-screen cinema located about 20 minutes' drive from the town. Describing her experience at the festival, this woman said:

The films were good, there was only one with Eric Bana in it I didn't like too much. But it didn't feel right going there [pause] ... you know, there wasn't anybody you knew there. Not like here [Bowraville] where you come and see quite a few [people] that you know. (Bowraville resident, female, late 60s)

These close and special experiences can encourage the development of strong emotional connections between audiences and their local cinema. These feelings are often conveyed in clear statements like those from the residents of Sawtell and Bowraville set out above. They are also sometimes articulated through staunch expressions of loyalty and a desire to see their local venue nurtured and preserved. As one patron at Sawtell emphatically stated: 'if the cinema here [Sawtell] closed I would stop going to the movies, that would be it'. She went on to add: 'I have to drive about 20 minutes to get here. I actually live closer to the big cinema in Nambucca Heads but I don't like it, it's too commercial, and I'd never go there' (Urunga resident, female, mid 60s). Several patrons at Merimbula also indicated their connection through expressions of concern about keeping hold of their local cinema. The following comments are drawn from the final question of the written survey where respondents were asked 'if there is anything else you would like to tell us about the local cinema':

It would be a disaster to ever take it away. My whole family go all the time.
(Merimbula resident, female, aged over 65)

I hope that unlike other small villages/towns in Australia we NEVER surrender this facility. (Merimbula resident, female, aged 46-55) (emphasis in original text)

We don't ever want to lose it. (Merimbula resident, female, aged 56-65)

While these statements are indicative of the high regard that rural audiences often have for their local cinema, they are also slightly problematic. The Sawtell cinema has been under threat of closure several times and was experiencing some widely publicised difficulties at the time the statement above by the Urunga resident was made. The cinema at Merimbula, on the other hand, has thrived ever since it was established in the mid 1990s and has never been in any danger of closing. In this context the concerns articulated by its local residents are more difficult to understand. However, considering these statements within a broader context, one that takes in not only the cinema but also the wider environment of the town, offers a way forward. As outlined earlier, rural settlements in Australia are characterised by varying degrees of social and economic disadvantage. Poor access to key services and the inconveniences and hardships that result from this, are persistent issues for many people living outside metropolitan areas. These can have a major impact on shaping the outlook of local residents. For example, in Merimbula while the town is fortunate to have a cinema it does not have a high school, which means a round trip on the bus of around 2 hours per day to another town for every child over 12 to continue their education. Merimbula does not have a hospital nor does it have a Centrelink office, which adds to the burden of reporting for the regular face-to-face interviews that are mandatory for residents receiving unemployment benefits. Within this wider situation it becomes possible to understand how

people might be prompted to articulate concerns about retaining local facilities, even when there is no imminent threat of loss.

Place of the Film

In addition to facilitating social interaction and enhancing community engagement, cinema-going also connects audiences with a myriad of on-screen places, people and ideas. While my research with rural Australian audiences points to the deep significance of the social aspects of cinema-going, it also indicates the film is an integrated and significant part of the experience. Non-metropolitan cinema owners and managers consistently emphasise the importance of screen content to admissions, including the owner of the Merimbula cinema who explained:

It is really important we have that smorgasbord of different films going all the time. Even in school holidays we need to have something in there that will screen at 10am in the morning for my regular seniors patrons. (Denis Parkes interview 26 April 2009)

Similarly the manager of the local government-owned cinema at Gunnedah in northwest New South Wales (population 7,500, ABS 2006), commented that with regard to attendance 'the films affect things more than anything' (Susan Wilson interview 13 August 2009).

These assertions correlate with information gathered from audiences in the written surveys. In the questionnaire respondents were asked about why they go to the cinema. They were offered six possible reasons and asked to separately rate the importance of each one on a scale from 'very important', 'fairly important', 'not very important' to 'not at all important' – the results are presented below in descending order:

Question: Below is a list of reasons often given for why people go to the cinema. Please indicate how important each of these are to *you* when deciding to go to your local cinema?

Results

	Very important
To see a particular film	77%
Socialise with family or friends	30%
Support the local community	21%
Special offers (eg. discount tickets/movie/meal deals)	14%
Celebrate a special occasion (eg. birthday)	8%
Nothing else to do	2%

'To see a particular film' was overwhelmingly nominated as the most important factor influencing attendance, regarded as 'very important' by 77 per cent of respondents. This was followed by 'socializing with family or friends', which was rated as 'very important' by only 30 per cent, although it did rate more highly in the next category down 'important'³. Interestingly, among those people who nominated seeing films as the most important reason they went to the cinema were the three respondents from Merimbula quoted in the previous section, who utilised their 'free space' in the survey to make comments about the importance of the cinema to the local community.

While the results of the written surveys emphatically connected films with attendance, this was less clear in the audience interviews. Despite the fact that almost all the participants were above average in terms of their frequency of attendance⁴, some hardly mentioned the films at all, even when prompted. During the interviews each person was asked to recall some of the films they had most enjoyed seeing at their local cinema. This often brought about a significant pause in the conversation as they struggled to recall titles. In contrast, information about their social experiences at the cinema and its place in town life generally flowed much more easily. Interviews with film audiences from the 1930s and 1940s conducted by Janna Jones (2003: 234-235) and Annette Kuhn (2002: 253) in the United States and United Kingdom respectively, reveal a similar vagueness around films. Yet, as both Jones and Kuhn note, their participants were often able to remember other aspects of their cinema experiences in great detail – for example, the cinema's decor, where they sat, who they went with and what they wore. Kuhn was led to conclude 'For the majority, going to the pictures is remembered as being less about the films and stars than about daily and weekly routines, neighbourhood comings and goings and organizing spare time' (2002: 100). However, sitting alongside these accounts, are studies by Fuller (1996) and Huggett (2002), which detail the place of movie fan culture in rural life during the first half of the twentieth century. This research indicates that what was on the screen has occupied more than a passing or temporary interest for many cinema-goers.

With regard to contemporary rural Australia, what then is to be made of the seemingly conflicting accounts of film-going given by audiences attending the same cinema in the same chronological period? Which emphasis – the film or the cinema's sociality – more accurately reflects what is significant about the experience of watching a film in a public setting? Historical studies carry the implicit suggestion that if films were sufficiently important audiences would remember more about them. However, as Kuhn argues films texts are often not useful for the purpose of recounting narratives of life events, which tend to figure prominently in memories of cinema-going (1995: 166). In a similar vein Richard Maltby asserts that films 'do not seek out landmark status for themselves but are designed to fade back into the overall field of our cultural experiences' (2011: 11). While a single film might capture our attention for two hours, the connection with the person with whom we see it may last decades, over which time the relationship is continuously reperformed and

reinforced. When asked to reflect on their cinema experiences it is perhaps not surprising that for audiences these aspects of attendance take precedence over memories of individual movies. However, while we may never be able to adequately reconstruct the place of the film from oral history, it does not necessarily follow that movies were not important at the times they were viewed. Part of the value of conducting research with contemporary audiences may lie in its capacity to more clearly highlight the multi-faceted nature of the cinema-going experience, something that can be increasingly obscured with the passing of time.

Regarding the differences between the written surveys and interviews, it is also appropriate to consider whether differences in my information gathering methods may account for some of the apparent inconsistencies between the written survey responses and the interviews. As Kuhn points out, constructing an interpretive framework around raw ethnographic material relies on the researcher making sense of not only *what* is said but also *how* it is said (2002: 9, emphasis mine). Written surveys can encourage more perfunctory responses, while in oral interviews participants may be inclined to give their answers more careful consideration. Some qualitative elements, such as hesitations in giving answers to questions, can be obvious in an interview setting but almost impossible to measure in a questionnaire that is completed in private. While each methodological approach has its strengths and its limitations, it does not necessarily follow that responses elicited from one source are more valid than those from another. Prioritising material from both perspectives, however, offers an alternative and potentially constructive way forward. It creates space for a more thoughtful consideration of the film within the cinema experience, but one that is not predicated on delineating it from the wider social and economic contexts of its consumption. In this way it is possible to understand how the social aspects of cinema-going can have a major role in shaping the nature of the experience, but that decisions about attendance can still pivot around what is screening. For example, the woman from Bowraville quoted above was drawn away from her local town by the films on offer at another cinema, although for social reasons it was an experience she did not find fulfilling.

The often complex interactions between sociality and content were articulated simply but with great clarity by a young woman I interviewed in the town of Bingara in north-west New South Wales (population 1,200, ABS 2006). Here she is speaking about her experiences at the local The Roxy Theatre, originally built in the 1930s but closed in the 1950s before it was restored and reopened in 2004:

Now we've got a cinema here [Bingara] and they show recent, up-to-date movies, it's great. I love it. You come here and you bring your friends out and have a night out. It's great fun.....If I see a movie is coming up I talk to my

friends about it and if they all want to see it too then we come along. (Bingara resident, female, mid 20s)

It is probably unlikely that agreement from *all* her friends is a necessary prerequisite, but the statement nevertheless highlights the inherent multiplicity of cinema attendance. This woman's statements indicate that while the chance to see a recent film might provide the initial attraction, her friends constitute the social framework that completes the evening out. On the other hand, she also suggests the desire to socialise locally may be an important motivation, something that is conveniently facilitated by the reopening of the cinema and its appealing films. Articulating a similarly layered account of moving-going, the woman from Sawtell quoted earlier outlined a diverse range of reasons why she attends her local cinema – 'for entertainment and relaxation; for enlightenment or to be challenged; or on a date', or 'to see people from the town'.

Conclusion

The accounts of cinema experiences offered by audiences in rural Australia illustrate how going to the movies is shaped by a wide variety of both on-screen and off-screen factors. Cinemas provide local residents with access to an enjoyable and globally popular leisure activity. They can also contribute positively to their sense of social connection and local belonging, particularly in isolated and disadvantaged communities. While these aspects of cinema attendance are often deeply felt and articulated with great conviction, audiences also demonstrate that the film also remains a central feature of their experiences. As demonstrated the latter can influence decisions about attendance and help shape the appeal of the cinema as a preferred site for social interaction.

Studies focused on the broader social, economic, geographical and ethnic networks against which cinema attendance is set have greatly enriched critical understanding of the meaning of movie-going. However, film attendance is a practice determined not only in the wider aspects of everyday life. It is also a highly personalised practice that is intimately shaped by individual agency – the continuity and discontinuity of personal filmic tastes, friendships, mood, age, and so on. Robert Allen has argued 'the heterogeneity and open-endedness of the experience of cinema require an open-ended and open-source historiography' (Allen 2011b: 86). I suggest this is equally applicable to contemporary studies. Examining how rural audiences in Australia negotiate the respective roles of films and friends at the cinema opens up a way of not only imagining how movie-going can vary between places but how it can mean different things to people within the same geographic and social clusters. Further, as audience comments indicate, going to the cinema can represent something different at each encounter. These shifting, and sometimes conflicting, meanings highlight the potential limitations of working from fixed critical perspectives. Further, they demonstrate that engaging with the empirical and conceptual multiplicities of cinema attendance can open a

productive middle-ground – one that may be key to writing a more holistic and satisfying account of what cinema-going means in contemporary rural Australia and beyond.

Biographical note:

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Notes

¹ Measured data for rural populations is available only via the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Census. The most recent Census was conducted in 2006 with the next survey due to be conducted in mid-2011.

² The remote town of Wilcannia, in far west New South Wales, provides an example of the impact of the competition policy reforms. In the 1990s as part of the push to commercialise the national telecommunications company, Telstra, a significant number of its rural depots closed. This included the depot in Wilcannia, a decision which resulted in the loss of 90 jobs in a town with a population of just 1,200. Many people moved away in search of work elsewhere. Those who remained had to contend with a number of difficulties, including a massive increase in crime. In the two years following the closure of the depot, the number of cases coming before the town's circuit court jumped from around 20-30 per month to over 120. This was brought under control again only after the introduction of some targeted regional employment initiatives (Gerritsen, R. 2000, 'The Management of Government and its Consequences For Service Delivery in Regional Australia', in Pritchard, B. and McManus, P. (eds.) *Land of Discontent: the Dynamics of Change in Rural and Regional Australia*, UNSW Press: Sydney, pp.126, 129).

³ 'Socialising with family or friends' was rated as 'fairly important' by 44 per cent of the survey respondents.

⁴ The majority of interview participants stated they went to their local cinema at least once a month. This equates to an average of 10-12 visits per year, well above the Australian national average of 4 visits per year (see Screen Australia 'Top 10 countries ranked by number of cinema admissions per capita, 2004–2008', <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/gtp/acompadmitper.html>)