people are talking about these incentive schemes as if they're some sort of charismatic light which is automatically going to step them making dogs. They're not.

But they might engage a few more minds in a business which has a way of overturning the theories of those who believe they have its measure.

In the few years since the industry's revival, generalisations about who and what works at the box-office have been embraced and discarded at a rate which ought to (but won't) encourage all future attempts to second-guess the tastes of an Australian audience. Alvin Purple and Barry McKenzie made the Ocker hero invincible and their sequels saw him defeated. For a while it seemed as if anything by David Williamson might work. Then came The Removalists. Lyricism and nostalgia worked in Picnic at Hanging Rock. Lyricism and nostalgia failed in The Irishman and The Mango Tree. Storm Boy showed that the family film worked. Blue Fin showed that it didn't. Some of the successes had what could be called art; some merely had novelty value, but both attributes are hard to allow for in market research terms. The film industry today is no place for anyone who wants to push a line; nor should it be allowed to contract because a handful of people in strategic positions have dubious notions as to what constitutes commercialism.

At the same time subsidies should not be tied entirely to a scheme based on box-office profits or there will be more fruitless attempts at exploitation than there have been in the past. If there is to be both cultural innovation and profit, it may be necessary to set up new forms of subsidy in conjunction with the old.

Australian films have already accomplished much, only some of which can be computed at the box-office. Against all odds, they have been noticed, welcomed and applauded in some of the world's most difficult markets by some of the world's most jaded critics and best-served audiences. They have won for themselves an advantage. Tony Buckley says, "They are the best and cheapest propaganda Australia has ever had." Whether they can use this advantage properly depends not on the need to play safe or weave fantastic stories about the loveliness of everything. It depends on the industry's ability to attract and cultivate good minds. So far it has technicians and directors (although it may not have these for long if the Americans become really interested), but it has few writers. It has produced a cinema rich in style but lacking power, and that deficiency could, in the end, prove to be more debilitating than any amount of industry politicking. Between high excitement and blind panic there is a fine line.