

Reappraising the Renaissance

The New Hollywood in Industrial and Critical Context

Nicholas Godfrey
Bachelor of Arts (Honours)

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
December 2014

Department of Screen and Media
School of Humanities and Creative Arts
Flinders University
South Australia

Contents

Introduction... 1

The New Hollywood that Couldn't... 1
Aims and Context: Which New Hollywood?... 8

Chapter One: *Easy Rider*... 22

Chapter Two: Variations on a Theme - Five *Easy Riders*... 54

Part I: *Five Easy Pieces*... 56
Part II: *Two-Lane Blacktop*... 79
Part III: *Vanishing Point*... 126
Part IV: *Little Fauss and Big Halsy*... 149
Part V: *Adam at 6 A.M.*... 162

Chapter Three: Politicising Genre... 175

Part I: *Dirty Harry*... 179
Part II: *The French Connection*... 202

Chapter Four: The Limits of Auteurism... 222

Part I: *The Last Movie*... 222
Part II: *The Hired Hand*... 254

Conclusion... 278

Bibliography and Filmography... 293

Thesis Abstract

This thesis offers a reappraisal of the “New Hollywood” of the late 1960s and early 1970s that aims to move beyond the currently accepted reductive historical models. It challenges many of the assumptions underlying prevailing accounts of the period, including the makeup of the orthodox “canon” of New Hollywood movies, the time frame within which the movies were contained, and the role played by the critical establishment in determining the ways in which the movies of the period were understood. Bringing together industrial context, textual analysis and critical (re)interpretation, it examines the complex interplay of factors that allowed a movie such as *Easy Rider* to achieve commercial and canonical success, while so many of its contemporaries and imitators failed to make an impact, either at the box office or within the annals of film history.

Taking the cultural and industrial impact of *Easy Rider* as its starting point, the thesis identifies a number of unifying characteristics shared by the youth-cult road movies spawned in the wake of Hopper’s film. While these films were unable to replicate *Easy Rider*’s commercial success, the thesis explores the partial reappraisal of this cycle, and its significance within the critically-constructed New Hollywood canon.

The contemporaneous violent cop cycle of urban thrillers elicited highly politicised responses from mainstream film critics in 1971. An examination of the differing stylistic practices, adherence to generic convention and modes of stardom in *Dirty Harry* and *The French Connection* reveals both these films to be hybrid works that do not comfortably fit the New Hollywood mould, in turn determining the legacies enjoyed by these films.

The limitations of the New Hollywood canon are similarly tested by *The Last Movie* and *The Hired Hand* (both 1971). As commercial and critical failures that

inspired no further production cycles, these films contrast markedly with 1971's more stylistically conservative commercial successes such as *The Last Picture Show*.

Belying the myth of auteurism that has become central to New Hollywood lore, it becomes clear that the Classical generic modes of Old Hollywood endured within the New Hollywood moment. By 1971, American film critics had already developed a set of aesthetic parameters that determined the conditions of entry to the rapidly-codifying New Hollywood pantheon.

The arguments in this thesis provide the basis for a broader and more contextualised reappraisal of the transition from Classical to contemporary modes of production.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been completed without the help of the following individuals: My principal supervisor Richard Maltby was extremely generous with his time and his vast repository of knowledge, and was always on hand to offer an erudite turn of phrase to lead me down avenues I would otherwise not have considered. I would not have undertaken this research project without the encouragement and enthusiasm of my secondary supervisor, Ruth Vasey, and without her pugilistic vigour and incredible attention to detail at the eleventh hour, I may well not have finished it. To my family, especially my parents Julia and Stephen, for their unflagging support, and to my partner Louise Berlecky, whose patience and good humour spanned the duration of this project, I extend my gratitude.

