

# *Easy Rider*



**Alaska McGann**, Kylie Walchuk & Daniel Rogers

“A man went looking for America...”  
and found an Independent Film



“one of the most successful independent productions of all time” (61).

“[*Easy Rider*] portrayed hippie life within the context of the American narrative tradition” (68).



“not the start of a wave of independent productions, but the commercial peak” (61).

“*Easy Rider*” was both a glimpse of what could have been and an insight into why it went wrong” (67).

# *Independent or not Independent?* That is the question.



“If *Easy Rider* started American independent film, then it also started the movement’s central contradiction—this is a cinematic movement that exists independently of the major studios, yet is reliant on their resources for distribution and exposure” (52).

*And the Verdict is...*  
*Easy Rider* is independent!

Despite these controversies *Easy Rider* is an independent film because it was able to “do Hollywood” in an independent way.



*Easy Rider* maintains its “independent backbone” because it effectively provides a critique of American culture in ways that pushed the boundaries of traditional Hollywood narrative.



# *Why? How? When? Where?*

- Innovative **filming** style
  - Jump cuts vs. superimposed images
  - Flash-forward foreshadowing
- Displayed risqué **counterculture**
  - Drugs allowed for Improv and Unmasking
- Small, **organic** production
  - Unplanned and all-too-often, unsafe
- Compromised **Religion**
- Unorthodox **Narrative** drive
  - Not driven by action or development
- Critiqued the “American Dream”



# *Mardi Gras: A Real Demonstration*

- Non-Actors
- Real Time—shot on location
- Hand-held camera
- Limited lighting
- Drunk/High Actors



# *Campfire Scene I (0:57:20-0:59:23)*

- Actual Smoking, Factual Highs
- Improv Dialogue
- Critique on American Society
- Corruption





# *Campfire Scene II (1:10:05-1:11:11)*

- America purges itself of George's corruption by killing him
- George represents the all-American boy. Any corruption of this is destroyed.
- Critique of American systems/culture
  - does not allow free individuals to exist.





# *Critique of “American Dream”*



# *Critique of “American Dream”*



# Compromising Religion (1:15:12-49)

- Hippie version of *Kyrie Eleison*, a religious hymn
- Satire of Communion
- Celebration for achieving the American dream
  - Wyatt rejects/critiques it again
- Direct comparison of prostitutes and religious figures



# *Acid, Religion and Independence*

- Use of non-actors
- Critique of Religion
- Experimental
  - fish-eye lens, rapid, unexplained, reflects high)
- Drugs on film
  - Unmasking
- Quasi-Improv





# *Perspectives a la Café*

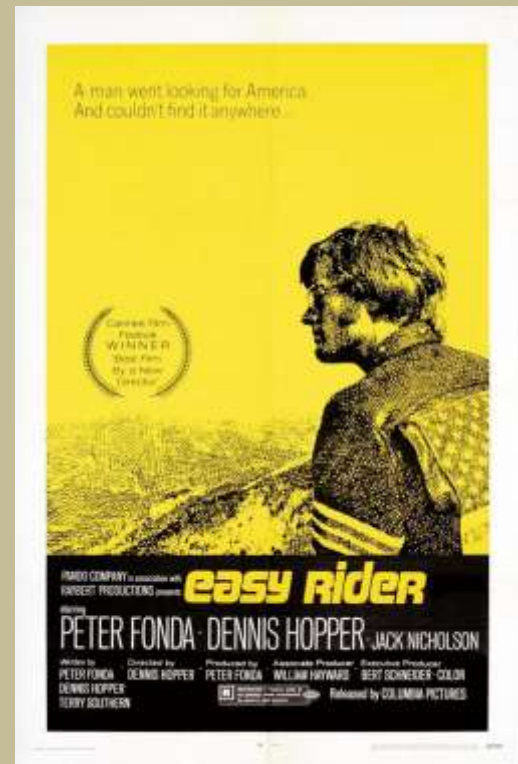
- Mirrors add transparency
  - Unmasking
- Non-scripted lines
- Multiple perspectives
- All non-actors



# Objections?

*Easy Rider* catered to several, **marketable** audiences and used certain familiar and **digestible** film techniques to make itself as accessible as possible—some would argue that this **compromised** its Independent agenda.

- Linear Narrative
- Mainstream Music
- Established Actors
- “Non-threatening”
  - demonstrated both the potential and the critiques of counterculture.
- Originally 3 hours—cut down



# Counter Arguments

“Although the 1960s were not yet over, it was evident that the counterculture revolution was winding down...[*Easy Rider* was] not a socially threatening proposition” (55).

“by re-editing *Easy Rider*... the film was more palatable, more accessible to the mass market, and paced in line with audience expectations” (60).

However! →

“...by supplying the studios with movies they could market, **but could not develop...**” (58).

# *Easy Rider* is so Independent

Easy Rider proved that Independent filmmaking and making money were not mutually exclusive.



Although *Easy Rider* as a film profited, the prioritization of the film was not money-making: instead, *Easy Rider* aligned itself with several Independent ideals and merely presented them in an inclusive, accessible way.