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978-0-521-38768-2 - New Australian Cinema: Sources and Parallels in American and British Film

Brian McFarlane and Geoff Mayer

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**NEW AUSTRALIAN
CINEMA**
SOURCES AND PARALLELS
IN AMERICAN AND
BRITISH FILM

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To our wives, Geraldine McFarlane and Lesley Mayer,
and to Lisa, Kylie and Rebecca Mayer

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PREFACE

This book has grown out of an interest in contexts as well as texts. New Australian cinema seems to us to exhibit some of the qualities of classical American cinema, that mode which has dominated film-making practice for so many decades. It also has certain important elements in common with the period of high British cinema in the 1940s and 1950s, 'high' in terms of prestige and prolificacy. The main intention of this book is to throw light on the Australian film revival through making comparisons of these two kinds. As a result, it is structured as follows. Chapter 1 lays the broad basis for the comparative enterprise. Chapters 2 and 3 address the indebtedness of new Australian cinema's narrative procedures to the classical Hollywood models. This model is established through a close reading of three American films, one from the 1930s and the other two from nearly sixty years later. A number of Australian films is then examined in some detail to show the persistence—and crucial divergences—from this model. Chapters 4 and 5 take a more wide-ranging approach. Though there are occasions when a closer reading of a particular film is seen as appropriate, these chapters are essentially concerned with broader issues and tendencies. Chapter 4 argues a basis for useful comparison between two English-speaking cinemas during those periods when each seemed nearest to establishing a national identity. Chapter 5 looks at the kinds of films that emerged from the two countries in those periods, and speculates on the strategies adopted by would-be national cinemas in English-speaking countries. Chapter 6 offers some tentative conclusions.

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Having lived with the emergence, efflorescence and possible wilting of the new Australian cinema, we felt we had an observer's working knowledge of the phenomenon. In order to get a comparable sense of British cinema of the period, we viewed (or re-viewed) 350 of its products, the meagre pickings of late-night television screenings and video shops, supplemented by a couple of sustained viewing bouts at the National Film Archive, London. As well we are grateful to a large number of people who were actively involved in British cinema (1940–1960) and who agreed to be interviewed. Their reminiscences, perceptions, information and opinions gave, as nothing else could have, a sense of what the British industry felt like to those who helped to create it. In this connection thanks are due to: Jean Anderson, Ken Annakin, Renee Asherson, Sir Richard Attenborough, Roy Ward Baker, Vincent Ball, Dirk Bogarde, Roy Boulting, Betty Box (who also arranged a tour of Pinewood Studios), Muriel Box (Lady Gardiner), Dora Bryan, Kathleen Byron, Phyllis Calvert, Ian Carmichael, George Cole, Sidney Cole, Michael Craig, Sir John Davis, Michael Denison CBE, David Farrar, Bryan Forbes, Harold French, Lewis Gilbert, Marius Goring, Dulcie Gray CBE, Richard Gregson, Val Guest, Sir Alec Guinness, Guy Hamilton, Sir Anthony Havelock-Allan, Dame Wendy Hiller, Valerie Hobson, Sir Michael Hordern, Raymond Huntley, Gordon Jackson, Pat Jackson, Rosamund John, John Justin, Jean Kent, Deborah Kerr, Philip Leacock, Jack Lee, Herbert Lom, John McCallum, Virginia McKenna, Lord (Bernard) Miles, Sir John Mills, Ronald Neame, Bill Owen MBE, Muriel Pavlow, Nova Pilbeam, Michael Relph, Margaretta Scott, Dinah Sheridan, Donald Sinden CBE, Sylvia Syms, Ralph Thomas, Ann Todd, Richard Todd, Bill Travers, Sir Peter Ustinov, Gogie Withers and Sir John Woolf. Eight of the above interviews were conducted by telephone or letter or on tape; the rest were face-to-face meetings.

Thanks are also due to the following who provided valuable commentary on the period: Lindsay Anderson, whose main directing career belongs to the post-1960 period but who, as editor of the journal *Sequence* and Free Cinema film-maker, had both a critic's and an insider's view of the period, and who helped to set up two of the interviews listed above; film scholar and author, Charles Barr; the *Times* film critic and author, Geoff Brown; Philip French, film critic of the *Observer*; Tim Palleine, critic for the *Guardian* and other journals; and David Meeker, Features Films Officer of the National Film Archives. At the British Film Institute, Jackie Morris (Viewing Service Assistant, National Film Archive); Clyde Jeavons (Curator, National Film Archive); and Ed Buscombe (Head of Trade Publishing, BFI Research Division) were also helpful.

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In Australia, we are grateful to Ken Berryman at the National Film and Television Archive; James Sabine of the Australian Film Institute Library, Melbourne; Monica Maughan, who shared an actor's perceptions of the Australian film industry; Tom Ryan for his valuable comments on the manuscript; Sam Oliphant, Toula Zarris, Jennifer Trigger and Sophie McFarlane, who typed large slabs of the manuscript, and of the interviews; and Lisa Daniel, who acted as research assistant in the last stages of the book's preparation.

For assistance with locating stills, we are grateful to the Stills Department of the British Film Institute, London, and the Stills Department of *Cinema Papers*, Melbourne.

The former Chisholm Institute of Technology, now part of Monash University, contributed substantially to the cost of the British-based research for the book and the study leave in which to undertake it. This assistance is gratefully acknowledged, as is that of the Arts Faculty, Monash University, which funded the research noted above.

If the book widens the parameters for discussion of new Australian cinema, it will have served its purposes.