

## Book Review

### **Contemporary Hollywood Cinema (2005 ed.);** Steve Neale and Murray Smith

*New York: CSLI, 1998, Routledge*

*Contemporary Hollywood Cinema* (CHC) takes a comprehensive overview of the Hollywood motion picture industry. This book brings together an ensemble list of contributors from the “Who’s who” in modern Hollywood cinema studies from North America, Europe and Australia, culminating in an introductory and thorough guide in providing the definitions, parameters, and features of the Hollywood cinema of today.

The book is divided into four sections, each with a theme, which forms the key focus for each section. The four sections are: Hollywood historiology; economics, industry and institutions; aesthetics and technology; and audience, address and ideology.

Editor Murray Smith introduces the book with an essay on the philosophy of Hollywood history which details the shifts in the nature of filmmaking since the 1960s which many scholars arguably see as the era of the classic Hollywood cinema being transformed and/or superseded by what has come to be known as ‘New Hollywood.’ The essay examines the changes that took place in the motion picture industry from various aspects, such as: narrative and aesthetic features; and the mode of production. The writer, from the outset, starts with unscrambling the ambiguous usage of terms such as ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ and what these terms truly encompasses and how they transcend mode of production and mode of film practice.

Various contributors focused on the breakdown of classicism of the pre-1960s studio era as a result of industrial organisation; and through the interdependence of the aesthetics of Hollywood films with their mode of production, which in themselves brought about a movie industry that places special emphasis on marketing and a profit-consciousness which drives the industry to derive its earnings from other means rather than theatrical box office alone. The book explores the economics of the popular American motion picture industry further with an analysis of the change in business practices where corporations, especially since the 1970s, altered how cinemas were organised and run through the vertical integrated media conglomeration; throwing cable TV and home video technology into the mix. These essays on media economics were purposefully arranged in a way it was followed by Tino Balio’s essay on the globalisation of Hollywood in the 1990s which considers the phenomenal investments on high-budget, high-concept films with big name stars and its reliance on visual effects and the resulting earnings brought about by the growth of the overseas market and, more importantly, the merger movement that took place in the American film industry.

CHC not only explores the large scale aspect of the film industry but also casts some light onto the American independent cinema, paying special attention to the case studies of New Line and Miramax and how these two companies, through adaptations and their diverse advertising and distribution methods, are surviving the stormy competitive climate in the economics of filmmaking. The economics of independent cinema is of special interest to many aspiring filmmakers and this topic is given its share of space in the pages of this book.

Content of popular movies such as *Batman*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are analysed based on their aesthetics and the usage of technology through its sound and soundtracks, widescreen presentation, colour, and editing and special visual effects in the movie.

Issues relating to ethnicity (in this case relating specifically to the representation of black people in movies); gender (the role of female characters in a selection of movies); sex and censorship (through the study of *Basic Instinct* and its femme fatale lead character) are the other subjects that this book addresses. A book on film industry is never complete without addressing the issue of genre and that is also explored here.

On the whole, with such wide-ranging topics sandwiched between the cover of the 300-plus page book, this is a must-have in the libraries of all film and cinema studies students, movie enthusiasts, or those who are interested in understanding more about what makes the Hollywood cinema what it is today. Undergraduate mass communication students with a special interest in film theory should use this book as a starting point to access the popular film industry while postgraduate students in the field will find this a useful addition which allows them to have a clearer and direct perspective without the clutter found in many other textbooks.

**Winston Lim**

*Taylor's College, Petaling Jaya*

Email: [winston.lim@taylors.edu.my](mailto:winston.lim@taylors.edu.my)