

Langford, Barry: *Post-Classical Hollywood. Film Industry, Style and Ideology since 1945*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2010. ISBN: 978-0-7486-3858-1; XVIII, 302 S.

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Barry Langford's 2010 „Post-Classical Hollywood: Film Industry, Style and Ideology since 1945“ covers a wide range of issues. As the subtitle indicates, Langford, whose publications include „Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond“<sup>1</sup>, is interested in how the film industry, its social circumstances, and film style are connected. While he sees David Bordwell's, Janet Staiger's, and Kristin Thompson's „The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960“ (1985)<sup>2</sup> as a „classic“ (p. XII), he argues against its claim of unity in most film productions up to the 1960s. Langford also underlines the importance of an analysis of social circumstances which the aforementioned study does not cover. He writes that „the stories Hollywood films tell [...] are profoundly influenced by, and responsive to, both concrete historical issues and events [...] as well as the ideological currents that circulate around and through such events“ (p. XV) – an argument he convincingly pursues throughout the book.

The book consists of three parts: „Hollywood in Transition 1945–65,“ „Crisis and Renaissance 1966–81,“ and „New Hollywood 1982–2006“. Each of these parts is made up of three chapters addressing one of the three aspects mentioned in the book's subtitle. Each part also features an introduction which shows the changing movie theater situation in Columbus, Ohio as representative of developments in the United States (p. XVI) from studio-owned theaters via drive-ins to multiplexes, to just name a few. These introductions illustrate the situation a movie audience would have been exposed to at different times. Furthermore, each part features two „The Biggest, the Best“ sections about the top-grossing and award-winning films of the mid-decade. The book's conclusion takes a look at what Hollywood means and where it stands

today.

The complex changes in the movie industry over the past 60 years are many, analyzed comprehensively in Langford's book. It focuses on the „United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.“ et al.“ case of 1948, which meant that the studios had to rid themselves of the exhibition side, the ownership of theaters. Langford addresses the studios' changing roles after losing the theaters, moments of crisis – shrinking audiences soon after World War II, the advent of television, video and DVD – , the importance of merchandise as well as mergers, and today's status of studios as „‘filmed entertainment’ divisions of the transnational media conglomerates News-Corp, Sony, Time Warner, Walt Disney“ (p. XI).

The study looks at materialism and conservatism in Hollywood, for example why the self-imposed Production Code was soon behind on social developments, but also at reasons for perceived failures to be more progressive such as the fact that movies, considered mere entertainment, were not protected by the First Amendment until the early 1950s (pp. 47–48). Langford shows that the production of blockbusters always was a primary aim, if arguably less so in the early 1970s when directors addressed the mostly young movie audience, but then again after the 1975 success of Spielberg's „Jaws“. (As Langford's concise discussion in „The Biggest, the Best“ emphasizes, „Jaws“ was the most successful film financially in 1975 while the very different film adaptation „One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest“ won the five most important academy awards.) The book shows the unpredictability of the market and the impossibility of finding homogeneity in its film productions at any given time, but especially since the 1980s. As Warren Buckland writes in his introduction to „Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies“ of 2009, „[s]erious study of Hollywood has galvanized around three trends: (1) the aesthetic; (2) the interpretive; and (3) the industrial-economic (or me-

<sup>1</sup> Barry Langford, *Film Genre. Hollywood and Beyond*, Edinburgh 2005.

<sup>2</sup> David Bordwell / Janet Staiger / Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema. Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, New York 1985.

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dia industry studies)".<sup>3</sup> Langford is interested in all of these and more, such as the close analysis of social circumstances. Yet by stressing detailed descriptions and by the emphasis on the heterogeneity of the films produced, his study represents a very useful survey of recent historical and theoretical developments, rather than a pointed argument about the concept of „post-classical“ Hollywood.

The book's editing is faulty at times. Langford selects „The Biggest, the Best“ for each mid-decade, namely the film of each mid-decade that did best at the box office and the one that was most successful at the Academy Awards; twice, these films are the same, namely „The Best Years of Our Lives“ (1946) and „The Sound of Music“ (1965). However, there are problems with the sections in which two films are discussed: in spite of the title, the best (meaning most successful in terms of academy awards) comes first, and while this warrants explanation, the „Best Picture/Box Office No. 1“ designation is missing in the table of contents, which just states, for example: „The Biggest, the Best: 1995 (‘Braveheart’, ‘Toy Story’)“. This is rather confusing in an otherwise interesting and detailed description of a film's merits and reception, both then and today.

Furthermore, there are some inconsistencies, and to illustrate this, I take the example of three films, „The Player“, „Short Cuts“, and „The Constant Gardener“. While the release dates of the first two are correctly stated in the index („The Player“ was released in 1992, „Short Cuts“ in 1993), this is not the case in every mention of them. „The Constant Gardener“ (of 2005), on the other hand, has the wrong release date in the index and once again in the book, namely 2002; once, in another chapter, the date is correctly given as 2005. Mistakes like these distract from the quality of a book which is impressive in its scope and sheer number of examples.

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<sup>3</sup> Warren Buckland (ed.), *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*, New York 2009.