Foreword

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In this book Chris Beasley and Heather Brook interrogate the interplay between politics and culture in Hollywood film in the context of US cinematic, social, and political culture, while articulating and illustrating the specific character of a cultural politics approach to film. As they delineate their approach in chapter 1, the authors outline a view of Hollywood film as a form of ‘soft power’. They cite Carnes Lord who points out that soft power – the cultural dissemination of depictions of the USA as a place of freedom, openness, and democracy – has been of considerable significance in building America’s global dominance (Lord, 2008: 61). This passage strikes me as a profound illustration of what is at stake with regard to recent domestic challenges to American democratic virtues, which are increasingly in tension with the ongoing promulgation of soft power via Hollywood film.

In this context, Beasley and Brook show how Hollywood film has constructed, and continues to construct, narratives of security which deal with threats, fears, conflicts, and wars to provide assurance that the existing order can absorb and contain threats and challenges from within and without. *The cultural politics of contemporary Hollywood film* also shows how Hollywood film provides social critique that engages forms of gender, racial, and class injustice with in-depth readings and critiques of a wide range of popular Hollywood films.

The authors draw on an impressive array of contemporary literature and critical studies of Hollywood film to provide original and illuminating analyses of how contemporary Hollywood film is an important force of cultural politics. Rather than restricting the analysis to more

stringent understandings of power as capital-‘P’ politics, Beasley and Brook connect their studies with broader forms of current thinking about politics and power in film, as well as with cultural sociology and cultural studies which focus on meaning in the context of society-wide power relations and ‘tend to analyse films as thematically concerned with identities – including, typically, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and sometimes class’ (Ch. 1, p. 10).

Individual chapters in Part I of *The cultural politics of contemporary Hollywood film* focus on security, engaging forms of social order and disorder, war, fear, and fearsome monsters. These studies engage popular genres ranging from war films to horror films, showing that representations of disorder and fear are contrasted with visions of order which demonstrate how US society has dealt with its fears, disorders, social conflicts, and wars. Yet after these analyses of film and macro issues like ‘Security’ in Part I, Part II deals with micro issues of ‘Relationalities’ and issues like gender, intimate relations, romance, and marriage. Following trends within contemporary feminism, the authors deal with the position of women and with masculinities in their examination of ‘Bromance’ and the associated Hollywood trend regarding dealing with male relationships.

Part III on ‘Social Critique’ engages how Hollywood films critique society, yet the authors question the extent to which Hollywood films really ‘offer any challenge to dominant power relations with regard to nation, culture, class, gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, or other axes of power’ (Ch. 11, p. 283). Their studies show how both realist and fantasy films can engage in forms of social critique, but are concerned to show the limitations of these critiques that fail to seriously challenge in any collective or radical form existing state, economic, or patriarchal power. Nevertheless, in the current era more radical alternatives and struggles may still erupt.

Since Hollywood film is a global power, the authors fittingly conclude with an examination of ‘Global Agendas’ and how Hollywood film exerts global influence, yet is resisted by certain national cinemas and filmmakers. After the ‘Golden Age of Hollywood’, and the ‘New Hollywood’ era beginning in the 1960s, contemporary post-2001 ‘Conglomerate Hollywood’ is now producing high-budget, effect-laden, genre blockbuster films that offer a global spectacle with enthralling

visuals and simple narratives accessible to global audiences. While Hollywood continues to exert a sort of 'cultural imperialism', the authors suggest that there is also a growing hybridisation whereby Hollywood incorporates elements from other national cinemas as well as, I would argue, cinemas and filmmakers that resist the Hollywood models. In the face of the formidable soft power of cinema, the authors point out that the USA, China, and other countries are concerned about restricting 'foreign influences' and deploying quota restrictions on foreign cinemas that threaten national interests and markets. Thus, contemporary Hollywood cinema is a contested terrain, not only nationally but globally, as new technologies expand the power and reach of contemporary cinema, making the cinema studies of the sort produced by Beasley and Brook an important lens through which to view contemporary culture, society, and politics.