

**Schauer, Bradley, University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Blood Sport: ROLLERBALL and Violence in 1970s Hollywood"**

This paper positions the controversy surrounding Norman Jewison's 1975 science fiction film ROLLERBALL within the context of genre filmmaking and industrial self-regulation in 1970s Hollywood. Beginning in the late sixties, declining revenue and a shift toward youth audiences led the major studios to embrace exploitation practices, including increasingly explicit sex and violence. This change in content was facilitated and affirmed by a major industrial transformation – the institution of the Motion Picture Association of America's ratings system in 1968.

Despite the ratings system's legitimization of "adult" content, even established directors like Jewison were vulnerable to charges of exploitation – especially when they worked in traditional exploitation genres like science fiction. ROLLERBALL was taken to task by critics and spectators for its graphic violence, and the Code and Ratings Administration slapped it with an 'R' rating, damaging its commercial prospects. Private correspondence between Jewison, United Artists executive Arthur Krim, and CARA head Richard Heffner raises questions concerning the representation of violence within the context of a progressive narrative, as well as the extent to which film style can either support or undercut political themes in mainstream filmmaking.

ROLLERBALL was intended as a leftist critique of big business and television violence; however, the finished film is a deeply ambivalent text, constructed around several contradictory stylistic and thematic impulses. Specifically, there exists a tension between the film's violent action sequences, which prefigure the impending emphasis on impact and spectacle in commercial cinema, and the rest of the film, which is more closely aligned with the socially-conscious, art cinema-influenced American films of the late '60s and early '70s. Although it was a commercial disappointment, ROLLERBALL is an important transitional work that highlights the increasing influence of exploitation filmmaking upon the mainstream. This paper is based on clippings and correspondence taken from the Norman Jewison Papers at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research.

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