

Im letzten Viertel des Buches werden fotografische Arbeiten der deutschen Künstlerinnen Marta Asfalck-Vietz und Gertrud Arndt sowie der beiden Spanierinnen Remedios Varo und Maruja Mallo vorgestellt, die sich in ihrem Werk mit massenmedialen Frauendarstellungen ihrer Zeit auseinandersetzen. Da, wie Gozalbez Cantó bemerkt, eine rezeptionshistorische Studie massenmedialer Bilder nicht zu leisten wäre, stellt die Untersuchung der künstlerischen Aneignung medialer Bilder eine wenn auch nicht repräsentative, dafür aber visuell ansprechende Alternative dar. Dieser Teil der Studie ist sehr gut gelungen und spannend zu lesen, begegnen einem doch erneut dieselben klischeehaften Frauendarstellungen wie in den Massenmedien, aber verfremdet und parodiert durch die Gestaltung der Künstlerinnen. Bezeichnenderweise wurden diese Bilder, die nachdrücklich ein emanzipatorisches Anliegen formulieren, zu Lebzeiten der Künstlerinnen nie ausgestellt.

Insgesamt bewegt sich die Studie sehr geradlinig auf ikonografischen Bahnen: Sie führt die LeserIn von einem Bildtypus zum anderen, der mittels einer ausführlichen, alle körpersprachlichen Details und modischen Accessoires eines Frauentypus erfassenden Bildbeschreibung und anschließender Interpretation erklärt wird. Unweigerlich befällt einen dabei das Gefühl, an der Oberfläche dieser massenmedialen Bilder haften zu bleiben. Eine gestraffte Präsentation mit weniger akademischem Ballast und stärkerer Fokussierung auf gesellschaftspolitische und geschlechtsspezifische Fragestellungen hätten die durchaus spannenden zentralen Ergebnisse von Patricia Gozalbez Cantós Studie besser zur Geltung gebracht. Dennoch, das reichhaltige Bildmaterial und die zahlreichen Detailanalysen liefern wertvolles und anschlussfähiges Material für unterschiedliche Fachrichtungen der *visual studies* und für weiterführende Fragestellungen.

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Alison L. McKee, **The Woman's Film of the 1940s: Gender, Narrative and History** (= Routledge Advances in Film Studies), New York: Routledge 2014, 207 p., 32 illus., ca. EUR 120, ISBN 978-0-415-83306-6.

This is an ambitious book. Its focus is relatively narrow (Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s) but its theoretical remit is broad (varieties of psychoanalytic readings). The main thrust of the argument is that an androgynous spectatorship can be inferred by careful readings of familiar films such as "All This, and Heaven Too" (Anatole Litvak, 1940) and "The Ghost of Mrs Muir" (Joseph L. Mankewicz, 1947). Some of the detailed textual analyses are excellent, but they are, I think, hampered in their effectiveness by the rather cumbersome use of explanatory models, which obscure and unbalance the focus.

In the introduction, Alison L. McKee picks her way with some adroitness through the ideas of Mulvey, de Lauretis, Bergstrom and many others, in an attempt to lay out

the field and also to distinguish her own position from that of her predecessors. The problem, though, is that her account is so exhaustive that it is occasionally a punishing read. It is difficult to ascertain an original position when the theoretical hinterland is laid out in such an intensely scrupulous way. The chief aim of the introduction is to demonstrate the fragility of the notion that melodrama is predicated on the “male gaze”, but due to the proportions of the argument – so much space is taken up with describing the intricacies of extant theories – that the “androgyny” insight is obscured. A simpler structure and a greater privileging of the notion of the flexible audience would have been helpful. And so would the notion that, in culturally significant films, *multiple* readings are always possible by the audience.

Each of the chapters focuses on a specific film or groups of film. Chapter two’s focus on “All This, and Heaven Too” adduces an interesting range of flanking material. McKee revisits the original novel by Rachel Field, on which the film was based, and also surveys some of the surrounding source material which she used (and some which she did not). This is full of interest; but it would have been also useful to show the *means whereby* such ideas got into the script, and the way in which the material was transformed by those whose job it was to make them cinematically serviceable.

Chapter three deals with history and melodrama, and specifically with “That Hamilton Woman!” (Alexander Korda, 1941). Here McKee argues convincingly (81) that Joseph Breen, then head of the Production Code’s administration, insisted on the initial flash-back in order to punish Emma for her transgressive desires. The film, in its melodramatic expression, “formulates a relationship between gender and history” (89) – a relationship that is, of course, predicated on a feminine model of subjectivity and pleasure. McKee elucidates this idea further in her analysis of “Random Harvest” (Mervyn LeRoy, 1942).

Other chapters broaden the remit by noting similarities between films which, on the face of it, seem to perform quite different cultural functions. “Now, Voyager” (Irving Rapper, 1942) and “Brief Encounter” (David Lean, 1946) are elided together to further an argument about femininity and popular film. It seems to me, however, that the films are light-years apart from each other in the autonomy that they accord to their female protagonists. The heroine of the first film does not, to be sure, get her heart’s desire, but she can live according to her own choices and laws. The heroine of the second is dragooned, albeit willingly, into a social arrangement that represses her and puts her desires beyond the pale. The two films adumbrate entirely different national cultures. And it is here that the notion of melodrama as a transnational genre appears most unconvincing.

One of the main problems in this book is the slipperiness of the category of “the woman’s film”. There is an attempt to define it as a “phantom genre” (4–10). But I think a more rigorous *industrial* perspective would have profited the analysis. You cannot create a taxonomy of a genre by referring to its iconography alone, or indeed to its subject matter, as on page 38, where a “woman’s film” is characterised as such “by virtue

of its star Bette Davis and its focus on female experience". Rather, it might have been useful to pay attention to the shifts in policy changes in the respective studios, and to the way in which the producers fine-tuned their product to bring about a satisfactory exchange – of the audience's pleasure for their profit. The nature and composition of the viewers changed profoundly in the period in question, of course, and the transformation and then retrenchment of sexual mores in the war and post-war years did have measurable effects on audience taste. Any producer of the "woman's film" who ignored that, did so at his peril.

Overall, then, "The Women's Film of the 1940s" provides a welcome focus on images of women in crisis in a key period in social history. It is a matter for individual judgment as to whether a theoretical or a more materialist approach is preferable. One thing is certain: that judging from this book, genre study has a great deal of mileage, and is still a fruitful field for investigation.

One final point: the images in this book are very well chosen and researched. But they are ill-served by the visual production process, and appear grainy and etiolated. It has to be said that this is not a problem with this book alone, but of most Routledge ones and a lot of other publishers'. It ought to be possible, in the digital age, to produce images which give a better approximation of the visual richness of black-and-white film culture.

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