

June Hwang

Janet Ward: Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany

2001

<https://doi.org/10.17192/ep2001.4.2410>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hwang, June: Janet Ward: Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany. In: *MEDIENwissenschaft: Rezensionen | Reviews*, Jg. 18 (2001), Nr. 4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17192/ep2001.4.2410>.

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a Deposit License (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual, and limited right for using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute, or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the conditions of use stated above.

Janet Ward: Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany

Berkeley: University of California Press 2001, 358 S., ISBN 0-520-22299-7,
\$ 19.95

Weimar Germany is often seen as the epitome of modernist thought, art and culture. It is then fitting that Janet Ward's book *Weimar Surfaces*, which works on redefining modernity, would focus on this era. Ward proposes that "we reenact the surface terrain of Weimar Germany as one of the most dazzling examples of the modern period and reassess it according to its own merits" (p.2). While she

acknowledges the impossibility of removing ourselves from our present moment, she believes that there are ways to see modernism in a different light. Ward suggests that we stop considering modernism and postmodernism as solely chronological phenomena. Instead, we should look for the "interconnectedness" of the two so that we can understand "those modern elements that still underpin postmodern expression" (p.3). This approach provides a new understanding, not only of Weimar culture and modernism, but of visual media as a whole.

The text focuses on what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the "pictorial turn" (p.8), more specifically the visual, everyday aspects of Weimar culture. With this emphasis, Ward maps the journey from "modern street-based surface" to today's more abstract electronic stimulation through internet and television, showing us the relationships between modernism and postmodernism.

Ward explores four aspects of surface culture: architecture, advertising, film and display windows. To each of these topics she brings extensive archival research that take us closer to the everyday experience of surface culture. She then uses these concrete examples to historicize theories about modernist culture, including the works of Simmel, Kracauer, Benjamin, Debord and Baudrillard. Put into historical context, the theories can be re-read and 're-enacted', giving us a better understanding of how the abstract and the concrete are interrelated.

Ward's methodology is particularly effective in her reading of film. Siegfried Kracauer's attitude towards the *pro-Film/anti-Kino* dichotomy allows one to celebrate film while simultaneously criticizing the exhibition practices and the dangers of film as propaganda. By emphasizing the subtlety and complexity of Kracauer's texts, Ward pushes his work in new directions and away from binary oppositions. She brings together analyses of film production, exhibition practices and film itself, thus showing us how much can be gained by re-embedding film in its socio-historical context.

Weimar Surfaces not only looks at each of the four themes separately but also explores the connections between them. One of the threads through the topics is the impact of city street advertising on popular culture and ideas of mass psychology. With the introduction of electricity, "modern advertising was the first textual presence on the street to give expression to the very power of mass culture..." (p.98) Advertisers used "psychotechnics" (p.98) in order to find out how to captivate the people walking by and how to encourage them to buy their products. Movie palaces used their constantly changing facades to lure people inside. This form of street advertising was considered critical to the film's financial success and an integral part of the film itself. Ward also looks at display windows and the window dressers who acted as what Mike Featherstone calls "cultural intermediaries" whose job it was to bring the latest styles and aesthetics to the masses on the streets (p.223).

Ward gives an insightful and critical look at the topics she covers, all the while showing us how they are interrelated. Her sophisticated analysis achieves a delicate balance between past and present, examining culture from the everyday level while never losing sight of the larger theoretical framework. *Weimar Surfaces* is an excellent example of an interdisciplinary approach to cultural phenomena.

June Hwang (Berkeley)

Hinweise

- Angelopoulos, Theodoros : „Die Ewigkeit und ein Tag“. Die Filmnovelle und Gedanken zum Entstehen eines Filmes. München 2001. 108 S., ISBN 3-88377-690-4.
- Carlson, Steve: Auf dem Set in Hollywood. Frankfurt/M. 2001. 257 S., ISBN 3-86150-227-5.
- DEFA-Stiftung (Hg.): Apropos: Film 2001. Das Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung. Berlin 2001, 400 S., ISBN 3-360-00955-X.
- Denzer, Kurt (Hg.): Cinearchea - Sichtweisen zu Archäologie-Film-Kunst. Kiel 2000. 48 S., ISBN 3-933598-15-X.
- Filmmuseum Berlin (Hg.): Musik zum deutschen Film. Vol. 1. 1900-1945. Berlin 2001. 45 S.+ CD.
- Fuld, Werner / Thomas F. Schneider (Hg.): Sag mir, dass Du mich liebst. Erich Maria Remarque - Marlene Dietrich. Zeugnisse einer Leidenschaft. Köln 2001. 224 S., ISBN 3-462-03032-9.
- Geyer, Peter (Hg.) Klaus Kinski: Fieber - Tagebuch eines Aussätzigen. Frankfurt M. 2001, 128 S., ISBN 3-8218-0855-1.
- Gocic, Goran: Notes from the Underground. The Cinema of Emir Kusturica. London 2001. 196 S., ISBN 1-903364-14-0.
- Kanzog, Klaus: Grundkurs Filmrhetorik. diskurs film Bd. 9. München 2001. 225 S., ISBN 3-926372-09-5.
- Kassabian, Anahid: Hearing Film. Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music. London 2001. 189 S., ISBN 0-415-92854-0.
- Keane, Stephen: Disaster Movies. The Cinema of Catastrophe. London 2001. 134 S., ISBN 1-90336-405-1.
- King, Geoff / Tanya Krzywinska: Science Fiction Cinema. From Outerspace to Cyberspace. London 2000. 128 S., ISBN 1-90336-403-5.
- Kreutzer, Hermann / Manuela Runge: Ein Kofler in Berlin. Marlene Dietrich - Geschichten von Politik und Liebe. Berlin 2001. 175 S., ISBN 3-7466-8075-1.
- Lehman, Peter (ed.): Masculinity. Bodies, Movies, Culture. London 2001. 318 S., ISBN 0-415-92324-7.
- Lexikon des Internationalen Films. Ausgabe 2001. München 2001. 1 C'D-Rom, ISBN 3-634-23021-5.
- Lindeperg, Sylvie: Clio de 5 à 7. Les actualités filmées de la Libération: archives du futur. Paris 2000. 320 S., ISBN 2-271-05791-4.
- Loacker, Armin (Hg.): Ekstase. Edition Film und Text 4. Wien 2001. 513 S., ISBN 3-901932-10-0.
- Mazdon, Lucy: France on Film. Reflections on Popular French Cinema. London 2001. 180 S., ISBN 1-903364-08-6.

- McDonald, Paul: *The Star System. Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities.* London 2000, 134 S., ISBN 1-90336-402-7.
- Miller, Toby / Ni  n Govil / John McMurria / Richard Maxwell: *Global Hollywood.* London 2001, 280 S., ISBN 0-85170-845-5.
- Moritz, Charlie: *Scriptwriting for the Screen.* London 2001, 174 S., ISBN 0-415-22912-X.
- Mothes, Ulla: *Dramaturgie f  r Spielfilm, H  rspiel und Feature.* Konstanz 2001, 164 S., ISBN 3-89669-332-8.
- Petersen, Christer: *Jenseits der Ordnung. Das Spielfilmwerk Peter Greenaways: Strukturen und Kontexte.* Kiel 2001, 144 S., ISBN 3-933598-18-4.
- Platthaus, Andreas: *Von Mann und Maus. Die Welt des Walt Disney.* Berlin 2001, 252 S., ISBN 3-89487-402-3.
- Reclams Elektronisches Filmlexikon. *Die besten Filme, die wichtigsten Regisseure.* Stuttgart 2001, CD-Rom, ISBN 3-15-100217-X.
- Saunders, John: *The Western Genre. From Lordsbury to Big Whiskey.* London 2001, 131 S., ISBN 1-90336-412-4.
- Schuhl, Jean-Jacques: Ingrid Caven. Frankfurt/M. 2001, 310 S., ISBN 3-8218-4719-0.
- Schwan, Stephan: *Filmverstehen und Alltagserfahrung. Grundz  ge einer kognitiven Psychologie des Mediums Film.* Wiesbaden 2001, 196 S., ISBN 3-8244-4458-5.
- Sudendorf, Werner: Marlene Dietrich. M  nchen 2001, 191 S., ISBN 3-423-31053-7.
- Thomas, Deborah: *Reading Hollywood. Spaces and Meanings in American Film.* London 2001, 128 S., ISBN 1-90336-401-9.
- Wells, Paul: *The Horror Genre. From Beelzebub to Blair Witch.* London 2000, 130 S., ISBN 1-90336-400-0.
- Wiebrecht, Ulrike: Marlene Dietrich. Berlin 2001, 160 S., ISBN 3-89809-032-9.
- Yau, Esther C.M. (ed.): *At Full Speed. Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World.* Minneapolis 2001, 342 S., ISBN 0-8166-3235-9.