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Neue Filmliteratur

Vorgestellt von... Marguerite Engberg

■ Palle Schanz (Hg.): *Filmbyer* [Film Cities]. Hellerup: Spring 1998. 271 Seiten, Abb. ISBN 87-90326-14-8, 248 kr.

„Filmbyer“ is about the cities we meet on film: either cities which we know beforehand, as, for example, Paris, Rome, Berlin, New York, and Copenhagen, or cities which no longer exist, as Rome of the Antiquity, or cities of the future. The essays collected in this book were written by Danish and foreign specialists.

The opening essay by Pierre Sorlin gives a general introduction to the subject. Sorlin examines the ways film cities have been treated throughout film history. He has studied especially the role of cities in European films, and found that more than 60 percent of all fiction films are set in urban surroundings. However, according to Sorlin the information we get about the cities in these films is all too often superficial. The same distinctive marks are repeated again and again: a shot of Big Ben indicates London, a shot of the Eiffel Tower Paris, and so on. Sorlin takes German director F. W. Murnau as an example of how film cities figured in early film. During the first two decades of this century two different views of the city competed on film. In *Der letzte Mann* (1924) and *Sunrise* (1927) Murnau gives us these two different views. In *Der letzte Mann* the action is set in Berlin, but the film does not try to present the city which is only seen in a few glimpses, which never constitute a consistent whole.

In his American film *Sunrise* on the other hand, the city is, according to Sorlin, like a person, an organic whole, against which the film's protagonists have to fight, and in which they live either a pleasant or a difficult life. Nowadays the way cities are depicted on film differs much from how they were treated in classical films. There are many reasons for this change, one of the main being that nowadays, apart from their historical centres, all cities are alike. So what we get now is, as a rule, a fragmented, floating description of a city.

In his contribution „Copenhagen as Metropolis“ Karsten Fledelius discusses whether or not Copenhagen may be considered a film city. After having read his article one is forced to conclude that Copenhagen is not a film city. For to be a film city involves that the city forms an active part of the film and is not only used as a setting for the story, as has been the case with Copenhagen throughout Danish film history, at least according to the examples Fledelius gives us.

Of special interest to a German readership will be Torben Kragh Grodal's article „Berlin from the Sky and on Earth“. Grodal begins his contribution by stating that two typical options of filming a city are either to shoot it from a high point, such as a tower or a helicopter, or to shoot it just the way cities are usually perceived and experienced, i.e. in the size and from (everyday) views natural to the human eye. Grodal calls the former kind of shot „survey shots“, and the latter „central-type shots“. For him the element of time hardly exists in survey shots, and they would therefore resemble a still photograph. In central-type shots, on the other hand, time holds an important position.

Taking these two kinds of shots as his starting point, Grodal analyses German films

about Berlin from Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* to Wim Wender's *Der Himmel über Berlin* and *In weiter Ferne, so nah*. Grodal makes many excellent observations, as e.g. when he writes that a major difference between Ruttmann's and Wender's ways of approaching Berlin lies in the fact that Ruttmann moves from the country into the city, whereas Wenders moves from the sky towards the earth.

Grodal concludes that Berlin has undergone a number of distinct phases in the way it was captured on film. During the Weimar period filmic descriptions oscillated between objective fascination, socialistic distaste and (bourgeois?) fear of the boundless, anonymous and sensual temptations of the city. During the Nazi era Berlin was the city of monumental parades. After the end of the war Berlin retained its symbolic importance as an expression of disunion, before Wenders finally scarred, over-symbolised and re-aestheticised Berlin.

The first part of the book comprises two more articles, one of them being Patricia Knuth's „New York interpreted“, in which she deals with Martin Scorsese's and Woody Allen's interpretations of this city. However, I shall confine myself to articles which have Berlin and the German cinema as their subjects, as e.g. Peter Larsen's contribution „The Cities of the Future and the Future of the Cities: The Urban Space of Science-Fiction Films“. He chooses Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* as an early example, and argues that Lang was obviously fascinated by the animalistic „mechanical simplicity“ of the city, but also had a sense of the complexity of the keeping up of a problematic social system. Ever since the days of Lang many science fiction films have examined the ambiguous space between the Heaven and Hell of (post)modern urbanity. Their stories do not differ much from earlier films of that genre, but the surroundings, the settings do make a difference. The new and shining facades in *Metropolis* have been replaced by entangled, chaotic decay, e.g. in George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). It is a pity that Peter Weirs *The Truman Story* had not been released at the time Larsen wrote his article, for it might perhaps have enlarged the scope of his contribution.

The second part of the book concentrates on „Film architecture and Cities“, and here Helmut Weihsmann's contribution „City Symphonies: The City as a Place of Film Performance and Filmic Representation in Early Films“ is of central importance. He focuses his interest on three cities: Paris, Berlin, and Moscow, and discusses films made in these cities during the early years of cinema history. Besides the already mentioned films, he also pays detailed attention to Alberto Calvacanti's *Rien que les heures* and Billy Wilder's and Robert Siodmak's *Menschen am Sonntag. About Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt, Rien que les heures* and Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera* he points out that these films describe not only authentic sections and elements of a city, but that they are films which develop around cities, no matter whether they are realistic, rhetorical, impressionistic or poetic.

Anders Troelsen, in his contribution, describes urban space as filmic scenography. He centres his interest mainly on Italian films, including Bernardo Bertolucci's *La strategia del aragno* (1970) and *Under the Sheltering Sky* (1991), but also accommodates in his argument James Ivory's *A Room with a View* (1986).

Two authors of this volume, Berit Anne Larsen and Rikke Rosenberg, have chosen Peter Greenaway's sumptuous work *The Belly of an Architect* (1987) as the focal point of an excellent analysis, which clearly demonstrates their sense of visual observation. The

third part of the book, „The Film in the City“, moves somewhat away from the main topic of the book, at least in my view. It comprises articles about film and musicals in Denmark, about Danish movie theatres, and one individual theatre in Copenhagen. Regrettably, the book is mainly illustrated with pictures taken from videoprints. This results in faithful reproductions, whose quality, however, is of course not as good as with frame enlargements.

vorgestellt von... Jan Kindler

■ Hans Krahl (Hrsg.): **Geschichte(n): NS-Film - NS-Spuren heute**. Kiel: Ludwig, 1999, 224 Seiten, 14 Abb. ISBN 3-933598-00-1, DM 38,00

Hinter dem etwas umständlichen Titel verbirgt sich eine Aufsatzsammlung aus dem Institut für Neuere Deutsche Literatur- und Medienwissenschaft der Universität Kiel. Der Band ist konzipiert als Beginn einer neuen Publikationsreihe (Limes Kiel = Literatur- und Medienwissenschaftliche Studien Kiel), die sich ihren Gegenständen vor allem auf filmsemiotischen Grundlagen nähert. Dieser Ansatz wird mit einem gewagten thematischen Spagat verbunden: über eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema NS-Film hinaus nimmt die Mehrzahl der Autoren auch „mediale Kontexte“ ins Visier. Zur Debatte stehen damit auch die Spuren, die die NS-Filmproduktion in der Medienwelt seit 1945 hinterlassen hat.

Ausgehend von der traurigen Tatsache, daß latente Indoktrination auch durch NS-Unterhaltungsfilm filmwissenschaftlich zwar längst belegt ist, dies aber kaum zu einer Neuorientierung im politischen Umgang mit dem NS-Filmerbe geführt hat, wollen die einzelnen Aufsätze auch zu einem bewußteren, reflexiveren Umgang mit dem NS-Film beitragen. Durch den dabei praktizierten „filmphilologischen“ Ansatz, der das Instrumentarium der Literaturwissenschaft auf den Film überträgt, entstehen mitunter bestechend scharfe Analysen, filmspezifische Aspekte werden jedoch bisweilen vernachlässigt.

So liefert Petra Grimm eine diachrone Untersuchung der deutschen Filmkomödie, in der sie schlüssig die Vermittlung konservativer Positionen als zeitübergreifendes Prinzip belegt. Zwischenzeitlich verläßt sie jedoch den diachronen Ansatz und versucht sich für die NS-Filmkomödie an einer Systematisierung nach dem Grad von „Systemkonformität“. Ihre Einteilungen anhand von Einzelbeispielen bleiben jedoch methodisch fragwürdig und sind mitunter auch schwer nachvollziehbar. Hier hätte es, wie sie selber einräumt, „jeweils einer weiteren Analyse“ der einzelnen Komödien bedurft (S. 64). Anregend bleiben ihre Thesen zu verschiedenen Modellen einer Funktionalisierung von Partnerwahl, die im Mittelpunkt des Beitrages stehen.

Auch Katja Kirstes Aufsatz zu „Tod und Patriotismus in Fliegerfilmen“ erarbeitet grundsätzlich sehr gelungen die Funktionalisierung männlich-soldatischer Mythen im NS- und amerikanischen Fliegerfilm. Ihre Erkenntnisse über Dramaturgie und politische Kontexte von männlicher Initiation und Todesdarstellung hätten jedoch sehr gewonnen, wenn die Frage der filmischen Inszenierung nicht so konsequent ausgeblendet worden wäre.