

Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood

“Despite the widely publicised prejudice faced by women in Hollywood, since around 1990 a significant minority of female directors have been making commercially and culturally impactful films across the full range of genres. This book explores movies by filmmakers Amy Heckerling, Nora Ephron, Nancy Meyers, Catherine Hardwicke, Sofia Coppola, Kimberly Peirce, Kathryn Bigelow and Greta Gerwig, including many which are still critically neglected or derided, seeing them as offering a new understanding of genre filmmaking. That is, like many other contemporary films but in a striking proportion within the smaller set of mainstream movies by women, this body of work revels in a heightened genre status that allows its authors to simultaneously address ‘intellectual’ cinephilic pleasures and bodily-emotive ones. Arguing through close analysis that these films demonstrate the inseparability of such strategies of engagement in contemporary genre cinema, *Heightened Genre* reclaims women’s mainstream filmmaking for feminism through a recalibration of genre theory itself.”

—Mary Harrod is Associate Professor in French Studies at the University of Warwick. She is the author of *From France with Love: Gender and Identity in French Romantic Comedy* (I.B. Tauris, 2015) and the co-edited collections *The Europeanness of European Cinema* (I. B. Tauris, 2015), *Women Do Genre in Film and Television* (Routledge, 2017, winner of the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies Best Edited Collection Prize 2019) and *Imagining ‘We’ in the Age of ‘I’: Romance and Social Bonding in Contemporary Culture* (Routledge, 2021).

“Mary Harrod’s *Heightened Genre and Women’s Filmmaking in Hollywood* breathes new life into the feminist film theory debates we had nearly forgotten. Noting the increase in popular genre films directed by women, she responds to this important development with a challenge to us in the form of new theoretical terminology. Affect theory meets and mingles with genre convention in her concept of “heightened genre.” And if the female director is a “*cine-fille*,” as Harrod proposes, she may be even more “cineliterate” than male counterparts who may not be crediting their audiences with as much genre knowledge as they deserve. I predict that we’ll be engaging with “heightened genre” for years to come.”

—Jane M. Gaines, Professor of Film, Columbia University; Author, *Pink-Slipped: What Happened to Women in the Silent Film Industries?*

“Harrod’s study of women filmmakers’ work in genre cinema represents an important contribution to feminist film studies and to genre studies. The book articulates persuasively the necessity of accounting for self-reflexive techniques as an element of genre filmmaking, one that involves powerfully emotive connections with audiences. Harrod’s lucid analyses of women filmmakers’ genericity gives space to films and filmmakers much discussed – *Clueless*, Bigelow – and those too rarely elaborated in the frame of authorship (notably Hardwicke’s *Twilight*). Across multiple genres including the gothic and horror, teen film, war movie and rom-com, Harrod’s analysis is consistently nuanced and perceptive. *Heightened Genre* fully demonstrates the feminist potential of genericity, analysing women filmmakers’ participation in genre, rather than extolling them for subverting genre codes.”

—Yvonne Tasker, Professor of Media and Communication,
University of Leeds

“Perceptively identifying what she calls ‘women’s aptitude for heightened genre filmmaking,’ Mary Harrod incisively diagrams how a renewed attention to affect as both an aesthetic and an emotion can re-politicize not only films but also entire genres long thought to be incapable of that work. Analyzing female filmmakers’ self-conscious use of intertextual relay that goes beyond pastiche in order to make emotive address, Harrod upends received wisdom about genre film making. In so doing, she persuasively recuperates female-directed roms-coms, teenpics, fantasy film, and action movies for both the discipline of film studies, and—perhaps even more importantly—for their impassioned audiences.”

—Suzanne Leonard, Professor of English, Simmons University

“Through a theoretically informed and detailed examination of the aesthetics of a range of films by contemporary women filmmakers, Harrod examines how women filmmakers imprint their authorial signatures through foregrounding personal style in the midst of generic conventions. In her close analysis of teenpics to rom coms and war films to sport films, as well as the heritage film and docudramas, Harrod shows how the filmmakers heighten the conventions of mainstream genres, harnessing their affective power to negotiate the intimate relationship between experience and ideology, drawing the spectator into the cinephilic feminist orbit of the cine-*fille* filmmaker. In the midst of a new rise in popular feminism, this book opens up new space for feminist film studies to rethink the relationship between women and popular forms of cinema.”

—Shelley Cobb, Associate Professor of Film, University of Southampton

Mary Harrod

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and Women's
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The Rise of the Cine-*fille*

palgrave
macmillan

Mary Harrod
School of Modern Languages and Cultures
University of Warwick
Coventry, UK

ISBN 978-3-030-70993-8 ISBN 978-3-030-70994-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70994-5>

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern, that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment is but a hand playing with finely-ordered variety on the chords of emotion, a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge.

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

For Hugo

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank for their key support over the period of researching and writing this book, non-exhaustively, Katarzyna Paszkiewicz, Hilary Radner, Celestino Deleyto, Yvonne Tasker, Ginette Vincendeau, Phil Powrie, Timothy Shary, Christine Gledhill, Frances Smith, Agnieszka Piotrowska and anonymous readers used by Palgrave Macmillan among other organisations. I would also like to thank colleagues at the University of Warwick and in particular Stella Bruzzi for inviting me to present a section of this work in the Film and Television Department, as well as Charlotte Brunsdon, Alastair Phillips, James MacDowell, Douglas Morrey and all colleagues in French Studies. I thank Raphaëlle Moine, Diane Negra, Suzanne Leonard, Belén Vidal, Diana Holmes and David Pettersen for support in general, Michele Pierson for an inspiring Media Aesthetics MA course at King's College London many years ago without which I would likely never have undertaken this project, and for collegiality, among many others, William Brown, Tom Whittaker, Charlie Michael, Christopher Holliday, Roberta Garrett, Catherine E. Clark and Clara Bradbury-Rance. I am grateful to Alice Kelikian and the Genre Films in Cinema and Television class of 2017 at Brandeis University for allowing me to air the research in a teaching forum, as well as the Comparative Media and Writing Department at MIT, and particularly Eugenie Brinkema, for a Visiting Scholarship to pursue it; PhD and other students at Warwick for all their insights and Reece Goodall for additional support; and the organising committees of the BAFTSS 2017, DWFTVH 2018 and SCMS 2019 conferences where I presented related papers. Gratitude is also due to the staff of the British Library, the BFI Film Library and the Warwick

Library—notably Kate Courage—in particular, for making research possible even in a pandemic; to Shaun Vigil, Camille Davies, Jack Heeney and all the editorial team at Palgrave; and to Isabel Seligman for her beautiful cover illustration.

Parts of Chaps. 2 and 3 of this book were originally published as the book chapter “‘As If a Girl’s Reach Should Exceed Her Grasp’: Gendering Genericity and Spectatorial Address in the Work of Amy Heckerling’, in Frances Smith and Timothy Shary (eds), *ReFocus: The Films of Amy Heckerling* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and I thank the editors, as well as Gillian Leslie at Edinburgh University Press, for facilitating their reproduction.

Finally, I thank those closest to me for putting up with the ‘heightened’ states associated with academic work, especially in 2020. Nothing would be possible without the support of Hugo, Elodie, Kit, Marion, Jeric, Tanya, Henry, Lydia, Abbie, Kate, Rosie, Alix and Geli, as well as other friends too numerous to list but no less significant for it.

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