

## REFERENCE

Carroll, Noël. *The Specificity of Media in the Arts*. 1985.

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## RECLAIMING THE ARCHIVE: FEMINISM AND FILM HISTORY

*Vicki Callahan, ed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010, 460 pp.*

Many women film studies scholars would agree that there remains a gender imbalance—in film and media representations surely, but also in the study of film theory and film history. Vicki Callahan has brought together a monumental volume that addresses these slights and erasures, grouping the twenty original essays of *Reclaiming the Archive* into four sections—reception, authorship, early cinema, and the postfeminist future. Interweaving feminist theory, film theory, and feminist film history, these articles apply key principles and diverse methodologies to a wide range of topics, including unknown or forgotten films and digital work; women filmmakers, writers, and performers; and female spectators and participants.

Many of the scholars included in this collection are familiar names (such as Laura Mulvey, Janet Staiger, Annette Kuhn, Yvonne Tasker, and Patricia White), and many more have produced work here that will find them included not only in the feminist film theory course (which was Callahan's inspiration for the collection) but also in the standard film theory and history classes. These essays demonstrate awareness of the feminist film scholar's role in relation to film history and film theory as well as the continuing importance of feminism as social activism. Thus, although each article addresses a specific media text or individual(s)—itself a reclamation—there is an ongoing critique of past and present theory and criticism.

Laura Mulvey's "Unmasking the Gaze: Feminist Film Theory, History, and Film Studies" exemplifies this approach (17–31), recontextualizing and critiquing her own landmark essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,"

which was based on textual analysis, the prevailing methodology of the late 1970s. Turning to an analysis of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, she traces the fiction from the 1926 Anita Loos novel through a lost 1928 film version and finally to the 1952 film directed by Howard Hawks. Mulvey employs a multivalent approach that combines cultural analysis of the female spectator, the shifting economic strategies and global status of the Hollywood film industry, and the meaning of stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell and arrives at a conclusion concerning the role of Hollywood as a national film industry in the 1950s and its ideological significance.

Many of the essays included here similarly use lost, ignored, underappreciated, or misunderstood films and digital media as sites from which to launch robust explorations of text and context, history, and theory. This scholarly versatility appears in Janet Staiger's historical typology and tracing of the "fallen woman." Drawing from nineteenth-century poetry and fiction and then early twentieth-century naturalist novels, Staiger demonstrates with a central example of *A Fool There Was* (1914) the transformation from the literary "vampire" to the cinematic types of the "vamp" and the femme fatale. Her conclusion speaks of filmmakers' mitigation of this threatening type in order to address male filmgoers of the time.

Joanne Hershfield also draws from literary sources in "Santa and Nation-Building." Hershfield situates *Santa* (Moreno, 1931), an early sound product of the Mexican film industry, in relation to Mexico's postrevolution history and the demographic shifts that produced a

dramatic increase in prostitution in the cities by young girls from the countryside. Hershfield shows how *Santa* underwent transformations from naturalist novel to silent film to sound film, becoming emblematic of Mexico's modernity. As a sound film, it contributed to the postrevolution regeneration of the Mexican film industry. This is a valuable glimpse into the rise of a national cinema, in part because of its *difference* from the US industry.

*Reclaiming the Archive* includes a number of fascinating star studies. Victoria Duckett examines Sarah Bernhardt's appearance in a short, experimental sound film for the Paris Exposition in 1900, delving into Bernhardt's roles as producer, performer, and star in the dueling scene from *Hamlet*. In addition to analyzing this authorial star image, Duckett also explores the theatrical "spectacular" form of cinema that would soon become marginalized (210). The negative critical reception the film received suggests that the male critics simply did not understand what Bernhardt was doing as an artist and producer, though the star's unapologetic responses prove she remained unfazed.

Examining a star of another culture, Ayato Aito's piece on Japanese star Ayako Wakao is a subtle, heartbreaking analysis of a female performer constrained by a male director—in this case, Yasuzo Masumura—who was nevertheless indispensable to his process: an "oracle" (160). Saito examines elements of Wakao's performances and the actor's own comments to argue Wakao's performances resisted the masculine vision of the director.

Other star-related articles include Suzanne Leonard's study of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton as they "performed" their marriage in film and the press (92) and Patricia White's examination of the barely closeted relationships of Mercedes de Acosta with Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich. Whereas Leonard's article traces the Taylor-Burton marriage via flamboyant postmodern representations of heterosexuality in popular culture, White focuses on letters and other ephemera from de Acosta's private collection and the unspoken, physical manifestation of the women's emotions through shared

fashion "enthusiasms" for masculine dress. Clearly, sexual preference historically determined how publicly stars' love affairs could be incorporated in their star images and roles.

Although previous research has been done on early women screenwriters and on studio-era directors Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino, Shelley Stamp's essay on Lois Weber and Giuliana Muscio's piece on a group of women screenwriters reveal their impact on early film and their power in the industry. These essays show how the popular and trade press downplayed the women's contributions, while in their private lives the women grappled with their "inappropriate" status as top earner in the family. Muscio argues that these professional women with families contributed to the nation's cultural transition to modernity (302). But we see how Weber's and the writers' careers faded as the Hollywood system of compartmentalization and institutionalized sexism prevailed.

A global or multicultural perspective informs several of the essays in this volume, some explicitly acknowledging the critiques of the second wave of feminism as a middle-class, white, First World movement. Two essays on African American women and film speak to earlier lacks in critical study. Terri Simone Francis employs an "intersectional" approach to thinking about race and gender (99). Francis analyzes the role of the "scary spectator" as both object and subject—a black female spectator who disrupts the classical cinematic illusion either through transgressive appearance and behavior in the movie theater or by critiquing the film from her position as black feminist (100). Her most intriguing analysis concerns a series of shorts featuring Josephine Baker, who exhibits, Francis says, a "double consciousness" first proposed by W. E. B. DuBois—"always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (qtd. in Francis 112–13). Francis argues that Baker is an active agent in these films, controlling her private performance, but at a certain point her performance becomes public, and she is the object of strangers' gaze. Given this humiliating example,

Francis's turn to the parodic *Scary Movie* (2000) is an exhilarating illustration of the subversive purposes of the "scary spectator."

Anna Everett further addresses the issues of black female involvement in the media—here in grassroots organizing via the Internet. Contrasting two women's groups that held events in 1997—one the Cyberfeminist International, organized and attended primarily by white women, the other the Million Woman March, a primarily black group of women—Everett demonstrates how both groups moved beyond second-wave feminism. Her chilling conclusion, however, unites the futures of all feminists involved in the new media, warning that "quite literally . . . the most potent new signifier of female equity and agency represents . . . an alarming coalition of poor, working-class, multiracial multinational women . . . dying for the right to kill other women" (396).

In contrast to this challenge of the future, Annette Kuhn's "ethnohistorical" study of female audiences of the 1930s offers an authentic look into the past (60). Based on interviews collected in the 1990s, the essay gives us not references to individual films, but the aura of the cinema, recollections of favorite stars, and how these influenced young girls' aspirations.

This is a type of audience research too rarely attempted—time-consuming, difficult, and invaluable.

Callahan's own contribution offers another interview, here with artist Lynn Hershman Leeson. Leeson's work includes a virtual archive (in *Second Life*) of women artists' work from the past forty years and also explores the nature of women in the media, as artists and as participant/spectators—what Callahan calls "a feminist *activist* project about writing with media" (422). A recurring theme is funding and value, with the artist resolving in the course of the interview to value herself more.

There are a few disappointing essays in this volume, but many more excellent ones than mentioned here. *Reclaiming the Archive* succeeds in making visible and valuable many themes, films, and individuals that have been erased or discounted. This volume should become indispensable for equipping future scholars theoretically and methodologically and for offering them a richer archive integral to a new film history.

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