

Vicki Callahan (ed.), *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*. Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2010, 460 pp.

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I think primarily of *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* as a particularly useful map of the field of feminist film history as it appears today. It is, however, a complex map: old abandoned houses are still marked out for those who might wish to make them habitable once more, while undiscovered areas are highlighted to encourage the exploration of new territories. In other words, *Reclaiming the Archive* is a book situated in the present, but one that manages to stay firmly rooted in the history of feminist film studies while functioning as a source of inspiration for future feminist scholars.

The field of feminist film history is usually understood as having emerged from a general dissatisfaction with the feminist film theory of the 1970s. In part, this can be viewed in light of a more general tendency within film studies to position history and theory as oppositional. However, during the last fifteen years there have been many voices pointing out the inaccuracy of such binary thinking, and arguing instead for the need to see these approaches as intertwined. In her introduction, Vicki Callahan makes it clear that *Reclaiming the Archive* is intended as one such voice, correcting this type of 'historical amnesia *within our own history as feminist film scholars*' (p. 4). It is thus part of an ongoing self-reflexive turn which transforms feminist film history into feminist film historiography and enables continuations, and points of collaboration, between feminist theory and empirically grounded historical considerations. This fruitful play between theory and history, past and present, is written into the very structure of the book: the sequence of its four sections suggests a loose chronological order, in which each focuses on an issue important for the history, the present, and perhaps the future, of feminist film studies.

The first section, 'Gazing Outward: the Spectrum of Feminist Reception History', focuses on spectatorship. The importance of this theme for 1970s feminist film theory is thus acknowledged, while a majority of the articles exemplify the subsequent move towards reception studies dealing with specifically female spectatorship. The historic link becomes most apparent in the inclusion of Laura Mulvey's article 'Unmasking the gaze: feminist film theory, history, and film studies' (p. 17), which, as Callahan rightly points out, should be considered a 'supplement' (p. 12) to Mulvey's seminal *Screen* essay from 1975, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema'. Considered in tandem, these two essays mirror more general developments within feminist film studies: the psychoanalytic framework has been replaced by considerations of social and historical context. This example demonstrates the usefulness of this anthology for teaching, if combined with a number of texts taken from the history of feminist film studies. As a whole, *Reclaiming the Archive* is also

valuable for students as a smorgasbord displaying the different approaches and methods used within feminist film history today. In this particular section, I found Annette Kuhn's article on girls growing up with cinema in the 1930s an important example of how ethnographic methods can be used within cinema studies (p. 58). Considering the growing importance of fan studies, and the general interest in more empirically grounded methods amongst younger scholars, more such examples are needed.

The second section, 'Rewriting Authorship', serves as a reminder of how the focus on spectatorship and representation in the 1970s resulted in a search within the film industry for positive examples of women who actually had agency. The 'rewriting' of the section title rightly suggests that the articles manage to avoid the classic pitfalls of auteurism-centred feminist film history. Callahan and her contributors are thus part of a strong move to vitalize what has been called 'lost and found' research. The Women Film Pioneers project run by Jane Gaines, for example, is immensely important in demonstrating the sheer number of female film workers from the silent period yet to be rediscovered. Like Gaines and others, *Reclaiming the Archive* seeks to widen the concept of authorship, which has traditionally been almost solely assigned to the role of director. Patricia White's article on Mercedes de Acosta is interesting for its placing of authorship partly within celebrity culture, alongside cinema (p. 231). Furthermore, *Reclaiming the Archive* supplies good examples of auteurist approaches that, in Lauren Rabinovitz's words, 'look for places of women's creativity within cinema but that historicize economic and social conditions relative to specific women's lives'.¹ These are no simplistic utopian celebrations; Ayako Saito's interesting discussion on the complex relationship between the actress Ayako Wakao and the director Yasuzo Masumura (p. 154) is just one of the articles considering the difficulties women have in their attempt to establish agency.

Early cinema has traditionally been the focus of most 'lost and found' research and it still holds a strong position within the field of feminist film history, enjoying support from the successful Women and the Silent Screen conference series. It is therefore fitting that the third section of *Reclaiming the Archive*, 'Excavating Early Cinema', presents articles dealing with female film workers, female fans and the representation of women during the early period. This topic has seen many excellent publications already, with *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* especially notable among a number of recent monographs, anthologies and special journal issues.² This section of *Reclaiming the Archive* stands up very well amongst its peers, but I do think it is advantageous that the anthology as a whole has a wider historical range. As early cinema research has already attracted much attention, there is definitely a sense that later histories have been somewhat neglected. I think it is safe to suggest that we are now seeing a tendency within the field to encompass more recent periods. The relatively new Women's Film History Network – UK/Ireland, for example, works to encourage research on the whole of film history.

1 Lauren Rabinovitz, 'Past imperfect: feminism and social histories of silent film', *CineMAS*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2005) pp. 21–34.

2 Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra (eds), *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

Finally, 'Constructing a (Post)feminist Future' discusses postfeminism, cyberfeminism and new media. As its title suggests, this section is clearly intended to point to the future of feminist film studies, but I find it most useful as a reflection of the contemporary situation. Callahan's enthusiasm for digital media and the internet is indeed contagious, and there is no doubt that new media is an important field of research that deserves more attention from feminist scholars. In her introduction Callahan argues for an appropriation of the technology/terminology of new media which would enable 'Feminism 3.0': 'a new network of collaboration, across generations as well as across other divides of sexuality, race, and ethnicity' (p. 6). While I do find this metaphorical construct seductive, I am not completely convinced that the technology itself shows such feminist potential. Anna Everett's article on cyberfeminism and cyberwomanism does, however, provide an insightful discussion that left me feeling more optimistic about the potential for feminist uses of the internet (p. 384). As a film studies scholar working predominantly on television, I was also happy to find a couple of discussions on television texts in this section. However, I do believe that feminist considerations on television deserve a more prominent place within the field. Considering the many calls for crossing traditional divides and widening the field, I hope the future promises even stronger feminist collaborations between film studies, television studies and media studies.

In conclusion, Callahan and her contributors have established a strong sense of unity by so thoroughly intertwining the considerations of gender, sexuality, class, race and ethnicity. I am also confident that their attempt at 'presentifying' the field (p. 2) will pay off, and that *Reclaiming the Archive* will convince a new generation of scholars of the continuing importance of feminist film studies.

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Flavia Laviosa (ed.), *Visions of Struggle in Women's Filmmaking in the Mediterranean*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 212 pp.

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Visions of Struggle is a unique collection which provides an excellent example of comparative feminist praxis whilst stimulating critical debate around women's filmmaking, the political, social, cultural and industrial contexts within which women's films are produced, and the films' representations of women's issues. The volume consists of ten insightful essays focusing on identity, gender politics, political resistance and violence in relation to both cinematic representation and the lives and status of women in Mediterranean culture. The chapters study women's cinemas of Israel, the Maghreb, Turkey, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, the