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A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism by Patricia Mellencamp; Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment by Laleen Jayamanne

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of statistics about the presence of women in the profession and an assessment of the feminist content of philosophy textbooks published in 1993–94. Nye found that most introductory texts include little or no material by women philosophers, let alone feminists. Nevertheless, she optimistically predicts that "as more women enter the field, standard texts may . . . be bypassed completely in favor of original sources chosen by instructors" (190)—sources that demonstrate the work being done at the border.

Here, at its end, can be seen an echo of the contention with which the book began; despite relatively little change in the "institutional behavior" of philosophy, feminist philosophy poses a serious threat to the mainstream, a threat that "is paradoxically acknowledged in the very refusal of [mainstream philosophy] writers . . . to mention its name" (xii). I am willing—indeed eager—to believe this is so; nevertheless, optimism that changes will occur in the profession is different from evidence that they will.

Philosophy and Feminism is a book that could whet the appetite of new readers of feminist philosophy, perhaps particularly those familiar with philosophy's mainstream tradition. |

A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism. By Patricia Mellencamp. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995.

Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment. Edited by Laleen Jayamanne. Sydney: Power Publications, 1995.

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Feminist theory has been carrying on a stormy affair with the movies for twenty-five years, on several continents. Two recent contributions, one American, one Australian, reflect on time—periodization and what the future holds—while acknowledging that the passion for cinema at the heart of this endeavor will disrupt any predictable critical narrative. Patricia Mellencamp and Laleen Jayamanne have been prominent figures in what Mellencamp calls *film feminism* since the latter part of the 1970s; all of Mellencamp's books are enriched by her experience as an indefatigable conference organizer, editor, and educator, and Jayamanne's 1985 film *A Song of Ceylon* was one of the first to bring a postcolonial political consciousness to the rigorously formalist interrogation of femininity and representation that grew from the feminist critique of dominant cinema. The concepts of

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temporality with which these two books work are admittedly provisional; Mellencamp's "five ages" grant the field a historical weight while mocking linear history with their inventiveness, and Jayamanne claims only to capture a "moment," which is notably one of generational and intellectual renewal. And while both books are committed to the rigorous theoreticism for which film feminism is noted and are dotted with the proper names of male authorities – although not those of the usual suspects – they are also activist texts. Historical consciousness here entails a rejection of orthodoxy and a sense of the timeliness of a thoroughgoing feminist critique of film and media as we enter a new image-saturated millennium and cinema's second century. It is ultimately among the strengths of these books that they are not definitive new standard texts but interesting and interested contributions to a collective project, a crucial moment. In fact, Mellencamp's book grew from her keynote address to the conference from which Jayamanne's volume is drawn. Her talk appears as the anthology's lead essay and is its only U.S. contribution.

An unabashedly idiosyncratic, sometimes downright goofy, writer, Mellencamp cuts through the necessary theoretical rehearsals (What is continuity editing? Is the gaze male?) with personal anecdote, humor, and self-irony, and her perspective is fresh and expansive. Her omnivorous critical taste combines early and classic Hollywood films (*The Cheat, Cover Girl, Vertigo*) with avant-garde feminist films by Aboriginal artist Tracey Moffatt (*Night Cries, Bedevil*), features by women from the Republic of Georgia, and contemporary mainstream film events from *Sleepless in Seattle* to *Basic Instinct*. Her authorities range from Lisa Simpson ("a brilliant spokesgirl for feminism," xi) to Michel Foucault, and frequent asides explore credits sequences, self-help literature, the history of neurasthenia, and the career of Clara Bow, all by way of illuminating her central concern: women's experience. "Wa-hoo, wa-hoo!" (96) she might interject.

While Mellencamp sets out to typologize film feminisms, her account is admittedly "biased and irregular" (11). Her five leaky categories comprise "intellectual feminism," which "pays homage to the frog prince of theory" and which Mellencamp explores by way of such diverse films as Buster Keaton's *Sherlock, Jr.,* the 1990s remake of *Little Women, Pulp Fiction,* and the National Film Board of Canada's documentary on lesbian history, *Forbidden Love,* and "irascible feminism," which, like the first category, is defined by sexual difference and within male terms. However, it expresses anger at those terms in proto- (*The Quick and the Dead, Metropolis*) or crypto- (*Silence of the Lambs, Thelma and Louise*) feminist ways. "Experimental feminism" does not denote avant-garde film practices. Rather, it explores "other differences" (9) exemplified in the work of talented, diverse women directors and screenwriters such as Jane Campion, Callie Khouri,

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and Yvonne Rainer. "Empirical" and "economical" feminisms are meant to be materialist categories that take history and money rather than sexual difference as points of departure and critique, and the former, anti-intuitively, is Mellencamp's rubric for avant-garde work such as Jayamanne's. Mellencamp repeatedly invokes Virginia Woolf's dictum that financial autonomy is crucial to women's creativity, and she is right in stressing its importance to a capital-intensive medium like filmmaking. Yet categories that frankly are so difficult to distinguish among are not terribly fruitful ways to organize an intellectual history. Nor do they make for a balanced book: age one, intellectual feminism, introduced as a "blind alley" (16), nevertheless merits 112 pages, while age five is very economical indeed—a scant ten-page paean to Sally Potter and her film *Orlando*.

Mellencamp's overarching trope—romance, or "What Cinderella and Snow White Forgot to Tell Thelma and Louise," the title of her introduction—allows her directly to connect wider cultural myths about female beauty, aging, and living happily ever after to the often arcane language of feminist film theory (whose indebtedness to Lacanian psychoanalysis is typified in Laura Mulvey's crucial essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" [1975]).[1] Obsession is an everyday concept whose psychoanalytic description (compulsive, self-canceling acts driven by anxious thought) Mellencamp retrieves for film analysis; unfortunately, her incessant returns to the idea of romance enact rather than elucidate obsession. For example, her nods to lesbian critiques of heterosexism in feminist theories of narrative and the gaze ("woman as image/man as bearer of the look," in Mulvey's phrase) are ultimately canceled out by her definition of lesbianism as little more than waiting for the princess rather than the prince (8, 105). And "What's a white girl to do?" (276), however self-mocking a question, is hardly an adequate approach to long-standing debates on racial and ethnic representation and attendant questions of history, authorship, spectatorship, and critical paradigms and priorities.

Mellencamp's ebullient inclusiveness too frequently excludes her reader; her breathless prose pauses for passing references for no longer than the beat of a comma splice: "Thus passing resembles camouflage and mimicry, along with masquerade" (237). "Thus it has been argued that Black Victoria was a stereotype in the service of black men, which might explain [*Within Our Gates*'] end" (231). The book would be much more effective if aggressively edited for length (one Busby Berkeley or Nora Ephron film would be sufficient; footnotes are too numerous and wordy, yet sometimes necessary citations are omitted or misplaced) and structural clarity. The

[1] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," reprinted in Patricia Erens, *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 28–40.

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few incorrect spellings (it's Kath*a*rine Hepburn [36]) and misstatements of fact (Marlene Dietrich's character in *Blonde Venus* does not travel with an African American maid as Mellencamp claims on page 39, although Hattie McDaniel does have an important scene in the film) are minor, but they matter in a book that asks its reader to take in and trust so much information.

A Fine Romance is a pedagogical book—you can almost hear Mellencamp, the teacher, drawing on a wealth of lived experience and knowledge (comments on avant-garde film, television, comedy, and age—the topics of her other books—are especially incisive). If you enjoy her verbal virtuosity in this way, you can wait for dropped threads to be picked up later in the book. The turnaround time of academic publishing does not do justice to Mellencamp's refreshing choice (and a wise one, if one wishes to attract new generations of women to cinema studies) to emphasize contemporary films. *French Kiss* did not exactly capture the zeitgeist; Mellencamp would make a great film reviewer ("*This Is My Life* is schmaltzy. . . . But I loved it and empathized with the tug between children and work and children and dating," 92).

Jayamanne's collection, *Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment,* also avoids predictability. Its transnational, transgenerational, and aesthetic orientation means the inclusion of noncanonical films and theoretical paradigms. The volume has to create its own timeliness, and the results are mixed.

The films discussed are mostly by male auteurs ripe for scholarly feminist commentary: big names such as Martin Scorsese and Robert Bresson, and mavericks such as Chilean exile Raul Ruiz, whose baroque aesthetic is taken up in Jayamanne's own contribution, and Nicholas Roeg, of whose trippy 1971 survival-in-the-outback film *Walkabout* Tracey Moffatt avers: "I think I'm the only aborigine in Australia who will admit to loving this film" (quoted on 61). But given Australia's prominence in film feminism, not only through the theoretical work of Jayamanne, Barbara Creed, Meaghan Morris, and *Kiss Me Deadly* contributor Lesley Stern, but also through the numerous social issue documentaries, lesbian short films, experimental works, and feature films produced by Australian women since the 1970s, through the Women's Film Fund or independent initiatives, a U.S. reader might wish that the "moment" this book captured were one in which women's filmmaking figured more centrally.[2] If Gillian Armstrong and Jane Campion are international names, younger and more experimental directors such as Ana Kokkinos (*Only the Brave*) and Jocelyn Morehouse

[2] Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed, and Freda Freiburg, eds., *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Richmond: Greenhouse, 1987).

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(*Proof*) are too little known in the United States. It is in fact Mellencamp's essay that discusses Jayamanne's film *Rehearsing* and Moffatt's stunningly eccentric ouevre; her extensive quotations from filmmakers' statements, informants on Australian policy toward aboriginal peoples, and local press whet the appetite for an even more culturally contextualized account of Australian women's work. Instead, the only woman director to whom an essay is devoted is Kathryn Bigelow (*Blue Steel*), whose made-in-Hollywood genre parodies are a fine feminist puzzle. But *Kiss Me Deadly* amply demonstrates another real strength of Australian feminism—its impatience with rehearsing a "few dull, programmatic statements" (4) in favor of mining philosophy and cultural theory for usable elements. Walter Benjamin on collecting and photography and Michel de Certeau on "the practice of everyday life" are used to approach cinema studies, and, in particular, the nature of our encounter with the moving image, differently.

But it is French philosopher Gilles Deleuze whose influence is freshest and most evident here, particularly on the reconceptualization of film as a time-based medium. In his two volumes on cinema, he develops and valorizes the notion of the *time-image*. Put rather reductively, the time-image (frequently a take of long duration) asks us to perceive anew, to disrupt our ordinary attention and automatic sensory-motor response to the cinema. Chantal Akerman's frontal medium-long shots of a woman peeling potatoes and performing other household tasks in real time in *Jeanne Dielmann* (1975) would be a good example. But these contributors are not just using Deleuze to elevate one director's art over others, much less to prescribe "feminine" ways of filming or seeing. Most notably, Deleuze's ideas facilitate a break from predictably gendered models of desire and lack in film viewing. Mellencamp heads one section of her book: "Black Aesthetics: Why Sergei Eisenstein and Gilles Deleuze?"; while encouraging women to explore new theoretical models, she reminds us that "the emperors [are] at least semi-naked" (21). Such questions of authority, homage, and affiliation are crucial ones. Admittedly, the theoretical edifices constructed to discuss film texts in essays on involuntary memory by Jodi Brooks, authorship and German Romanticism by Toni Ross, or the fourth-person singular by Melissa McMahon are somewhat top-heavy, and essays on Bigelow and R. W. Fassbinder/Alexander Kluge by Needeya Islam and Michelle Langford, respectively, are overly deferential to these filmmakers' work. But the volume's rigor as well as its eclecticism provide a reassuring sense of true intellectual adventuring—for example, in the more experimental writing of Jayamanne and Stern (in her essay, *The Red Shoes* meets *Raging Bull*—and they click) or in the scope of Ross's account of Roeg's *Bad Timing*.

Excellent introductory feminist film texts and anthologies (Kaplan,

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Kuhn, Erens, Carson) have by now sunk into the water table of women's studies.[3] Mellencamp's commitment to new work by women enriches the field. When not captured in criticism, films fade from view, and teachers and students have missed too many "moments." Jayamanne's collection introduces fascinating theoretical approaches to what contributor Jodi Brooks calls our "obsessive, monomaniacal attraction to the very idea of cinema" (77). Both texts revive the flame for feminists. I

[3] Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, eds., *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Erens; E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983); Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema,* 2d ed. (London: Verso, 1994).

Paris Was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank. By Andrea Weiss. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995.

Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry. By Elizabeth Butler Cullingford. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996.

The Mirror and the Killer-Queen: Otherness in Literary Language. By Gabriele Schwab. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Bonnie Kime Scott, *University of Delaware*

All three of these books will interest those who view modernism through a feminist lens. They range widely in their difficulty and appeal, from the biographical portraits of Andrea Weiss's *Paris Was a Woman* to the abstract theoretical constructions, applied to experimental texts, of Gabriele Schwab's *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen.* In between is Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's reconsideration of Yeats's love poetry, which makes the historical context of women in Ireland highly accessible while engaging with the growing body of feminist studies of male modernists.

Replete with glossy illustrations and exhibiting a celebratory tone, *Paris Was a Woman* should increase the audience for the extraordinary women who set the tone for the Left Bank between the wars. The book is a spin-off of Weiss's feature documentary film of the same title. It has much of the same visual and narrative appeal as Renata Stendhal's *Gertrude Stein in Words and Pictures.* By reproducing not just photographs of the principal characters but also images of letters, covers, passports, and clippings, Weiss stimulates interest in the archives. Notes connect readers to the primary

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