

BOOK REVIEW

## Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture

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*Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archive from a Film Culture* examines the relationship between women, feminism, and Italian cinema and focuses on feminist and cinematic theory, employing an empirical, archive-based methodology. As stated in the introduction, the book's 12 chapters are divided into three sections: film consumption (chapters 1–5), representation (chapters 6–8), and production (chapters 9–12).

Part 1, 'Cultures of Film Consumption: Affective Spectators and Activist Audiences', focuses on how the role of women in Italian film audiences evolved from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. This section investigates cultural discourses, opinion surveys, and the emotional and activist roles played by women spectators. Chapter 1, 'Searching Gender in the Audience: Cultural Discourses and Opinion Surveys', investigates the gender dynamics and discusses the decrease in female viewership after the Second World War, which was influenced by a process of domestication. The chapter also touches on the role of feminist movements and their endeavours to shape women's participation in mass culture. Chapter 2, 'The Spectator in the Magazine: Cinema-going, Ideology and Femininity', examines how women used cinema, as portrayed in women's magazines from the early 1960s, to navigate gender norms. It highlights cinema as a space where societal expectations were challenged and explores its significance within broader cultural shifts. Chapter 3, 'Feminist Spectatorship and Transformative Publics: Aspirations and Legacies of the Feminist Film Festivals', delves into the reception of *Personal Best* (1982), directed by Robert Towne, within American feminist circles, sparking debates among politicised lesbian communities. It explores how Italian feminist film critics utilised new platforms to cultivate politicised spectators. 'Italian feminist film critics did something very similar when in the 1970s they began to use feminist "spaces" like activist magazines, film festivals, and political collectives to build a community of politicized spectators' (p. 48). Chapter 4, 'Patterns of (In)visibility: Lesbian and Queer Counterpublics', examines the rise of lesbian counterpublics amid the decline of second-wave feminism. It explores their strategies for visibility and resistance, like DIY publications. The chapter also addresses challenges faced by lesbian and queer activists in Italian cinema, contrasting their approach with mainstream feminist groups. Chapter 5, 'Feminists and Porn: Protests and Campaigns',

examines the Italian feminist movement's stance on pornography, seeing it as a driver of women's objectification and violent gender dynamics. The chapter highlights protests during the liberalisation of sexually explicit media in the 1970s and advocates for a nuanced understanding of pornography's socio-cultural impact within feminist discourse.

Part 2, titled 'Cultures of Representation: Sexuality, Race and Politics', examines the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and politics in various periods of Italian cinema, offering insights into the cultural and social contexts within which these films were created and viewed. Chapter 6, 'Asexuality and Housework in the Anthological Comedies of the Mid-1960s', analyses anthological comedies from 1964 to 1966, part of the 'Comedy Italian-style' genre, shifting focus to the challenges of the emerging middle class and married couples. The chapter explores the political implications of asexuality within feminist theories of social reproduction. Chapter 7, 'Ines Pellegrini: Navigating (Post)colonial Representations in the "Sexual Revolution"', examines the portrayal of the Italo-Eritrean actress in Italian media during the 1970s amidst the resurgence of colonial narratives during the 'sexual revolution'. 'Pellegrini's trajectory in the Italian media reflects the role of racialized and colonial discourses in the media culture of the "sexual revolution", particularly in soft-core pornography' (p. 96). The chapter examines her roles across prime-time TV, soft-core cinema, and arthouse films, exploring the intersections of race, gender, and culture. Chapter 8, 'The Beginning of the End? Depoliticised Feminism in Fellini's *City of Women*', discusses Federico Fellini's film *City of Women* (1980) and his interaction with feminism, his depoliticisation strategies during production and his limited understanding of feminism despite collaboration with feminists. 'In *City of Women*, feminism has a significant presence and occupies a central position in fears of "every Italian man at a certain point of his life (middle age) at a certain point in history"' (p. 107).

Part 3, 'Cultures of Production: Maps, Labour and Archives', explores the historical background of women filmmakers and professionals in the 1970s. It examines the gender discrimination and financial obstacles encountered by women within the film industry. Chapter 9, 'Sexism and Women's Work: Mara Blasetti, Production Manager', investigates the structural sexism in the film industry through Blasetti's experiences as a production manager. It highlights historical neglect of gender issues and the entrenched nature of sexism and harassment. Chapter 10, 'A Map of Open Questions: A Feminist Genealogy of Women Directors (1935–70)', scrutinises the obstacles faced by Italian female filmmakers working in the field, especially those who attended Rome's Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia (CSC) to study film direction. It sheds light on production cultures, top-down policies, and gender issues while emphasising the necessity for comprehensive study on the gender distribution of CSC teaching personnel and students. Chapter 11, 'A Materialist Trajectory in Feminist Filmmaking: Rethinking Labour and Consciousness-raising', examines the efforts made by Italian feminist filmmakers in mainstream film, television, and communal filmmaking, examining the theoretical and practical obstacles they faced because of financial and technological limitations. 'The materialist trajectory in feminist filmmaking explores the urgent need to focus on organizing labour in terms of economic and gendered relations' (p. 160). Additionally, it underscores the industry's failure to address systemic injustices and advocates for a reformative agenda concerning women's participation in film. Chapter 12, 'Feminist Spaces and Knowledge Exchange: Adriana Monti's Archive', on Monti's archival work and her collaboration with director Alina Marazzi to digitise her experimental Super 8 reels, highlights Monti's commitment to collaborative filmmaking and her activism in Milan during the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter discusses key films by Monti, such as *Il piacere del testo* (1977) and *Bagaagli* (1981). In the concluding chapter, Missero ties together the book's themes, highlighting women's substantial contributions to the industry.

The book's assertion holds significance: women have been pivotal in shaping the evolution of Italian cinema, both in front of and behind the camera. It offers a valuable and eloquent insight into women's cinematic encounters as reactions to patriarchy across local, national, and transnational cinematic landscapes. *Women, Feminism and Italian Cinema: Archives from a Film Culture* should appeal to a variety of readers intrigued by feminist film criticism, scholars in Italian cinema, cultural studies, gendered communities and anyone seeking to explore and comprehend contemporary Italian society and culture.