Feminist Approaches to Early Film History I

An Overview

Annette Förster & Eva Warth

The 1978 Brighton conference is considered to be a landmark event in the investigations of early cinema. Not only did it trigger a renewed scholarly interest in the early years of the new medium, but it also brought about a conceptual and methodological reorientation of historical investigations which resulted in the growing importance of early film history as a research field in film studies. The substantial body of work addressing issues of gender and early cinema over the past two decades represents a significant contribution to this research area – a contribution, however, which is marked not only by considerable heterogeneity of topic and methodology, but also by its dispersal and the astonishing fact that individual explorations hardly ever reflect upon each other.

The purpose of this article is to provide a systematic overview of the kind of questions on gender and early cinema which have been raised – or neglected, in order to suggest future research perspectives. While individual studies are mentioned to illustrate different approaches of feminist historical research, we make no claims to being exhaustive. The following survey presents the various theoretical paradigms dominating historical research from the 70s to the 90s in chronological order. However, we will attempt to avoid the traps of a teleological trajectory by not only emphasizing breaks and differences between theories and methods associated with different areas of study and goals, but also by revealing similarities and parallels between various approaches, thus highlighting affinities which tend to remain obscured in accounts based on the notion of theoretical progress and paradigm opposition.

The 70s and 80s: sociology and apparatus theory

Around the mid-seventies, a number of attempts to reconsider film history from a feminist perspective were undertaken almost simultaneously. They shared the basic assumption that films and filmmakers from the past could provide models for a feminist counter-cinema by means of analyses of the workings of and forms of resistance against patriarchal
ideology in films and film production. Their common aim was to understand the kind of female positions, pleasures, subject positions or constructions of femininities which were offered by cinema. Right from the beginning, however, the approaches and tools differed, and such differences were, quite contrary to what is often assumed, immediately addressed. This discussion of feminist methods quickly took the form of an opposition between theory and history, with theorists claiming that they had better tools for analysing ideology and criticising historical studies for simply introducing women into film history. In our examination of feminist research in the field of early and silent cinema, we intend to go beyond such claiming and blaming by reconsidering oppositional paradigms rather than simply repeating them.

Feminist interventions in film history like Marjorie Rosen (1973), Molly Haskell (1974) and Sumiko Higashi (1978) discussed — what we would now call — historical constructions of femininity on the screen. They contrasted them with the social and professional lives of female film viewers and stars, and examined their interrelationship. Such juxtaposition may indeed be methodologically problematic, but we ought to consider that in the early 70s, it was not (yet) common to address questions of discursivity and construction of meanings in the context of film history. Thus, like other film histories, Rosen and Haskell tell chronological stories from the teens to the 60s. And like other social historians, they take the ‘contents’ of films and documents at face value. In contrast to non-feminist film histories of the time, however, they deal relatively extensively with the era of silent cinema, and they acknowledge the massive participation of women — both in the audience and in the industry — therein. Moreover, instead of concentrating on masterpieces and their creators, they adopt the point of view of female film goers, address issues of representation, or reconstruct careers of women film makers, thus questioning the (non-)significance attributed to them in conventional film histories (e.g. Sharon Smith, 1975). And last but not least, their archive-based research, re-viewing of extant films and re-reading of documents accessible at the time, prompted a contextualisation of their findings which opened up a wide range of questions pertinent to the issue of gender and silent cinema.

In these studies, method indeed tends to be implicit, yet their complete rejection under the label of ‘reflection theory’, as has become common practice in genealogies of feminist film studies, does not seem to be altogether justified. Thus Rosen, for example, carefully acknowledges reciprocities in the relations between cinema and its (female) audiences: ‘The medium (...) was (...) a form of popular culture whose scope was so encompassing that it at once altered the way women looked at the world
and reflected how men intended to keep it." Central to her analysis is a notion of struggle and conflicting interests. Drawing on women's magazines and cinema trade papers, Rosen argues that the rising tide of female autonomy from the mid-teens onwards was taken into account by the industry, in contradictory ways at first, but eventually with a strong tendency to emphasise old morals (like marriage) in opposition to the 'new morality' brought about by changes in women's social life. In other words, Rosen treated silent cinema as a moral and social discourse which both responded to and shaped lived realities. What matters in her analysis, is that its feminist perspective challenges the idea of progress and growth towards maturity displayed in film histories and that it describes silent cinema as an increasingly conservative institution.

Patrice Petro (1990) points out a similar strand in Molly Haskell's study, which, in Petro's words, 'reveals how the cinema has functioned historically to obscure women's accomplishments and further invest the male point of view with what [Haskell] calls the 'big lie' of Western civilisation – the idea of women's inferiority'. In contrast to Rosen, Haskell does not relate cinematic representations of femininity to women's social reality, but to the myth of heterosexuality which has pervaded cinema throughout. Petro argues that by setting up such a norm, Haskell avoids the pitfalls of reflection theory on the one hand, but on the other hand reduces 'the history of women and film to the (failed) history of heterosexual romance in American cinema and culture' and thus marginalises issues deviating from and irrelevant to this norm. In addition, one may question the validity of ahistorical norms against which historical trajectories are judged – a critique which also applies to universalist and unifying claims in feminist film theory. In comparing Rosen's and Haskell's feminist film historical accounts in the light of more recent theoretical developments, Rosen's study seems akin to culturalist trends in that it situates cinema in broader cultural and social contexts of the period, while Haskell's work can be related to textual and apparatus oriented analysis which privileges questions of 'filmic specificity and its ideological affiliations."

Feminist film research in the seventies and eighties predominantly took the latter direction. Following Claire Johnston's proposition that 'only an attempt to situate Arzner's work in a theoretical way would allow us to comprehend her real contribution to film history', feminist scholars adopted and adapted semiotic-psychoanalytic strategies in textual analyses of spectator- and authorship. With this move, feminists engaged in the history-theory debate which dominated film studies throughout the eighties. More importantly, however, this engagement entailed an initial turning away from historically specific research, and, most notably, from femi-
nistent investigations of early and silent cinema. In light of this observation, it seems significant that Dorothy Arzner’s work as an editor and director not only of sound, but also of silent films has been conspicuously absent from subsequent assessments of this female Hollywood director’s oeuvre and feminist authorship.

As has been pointed out by Sumiko Higashi in her contribution to the Camera Obscura ‘Spectatrix’-issue (1989), the history-theory opposition in feminist film studies has been sustained at the expense of archival research and contextualisation. Moreover, as early cinema studies of the 90s have made clear, film texts were isolated from their historical conditions of exhibition and reception and were mainly studied in terms of their inscriptions of patriarchal ideology. A seminal instance is Linda Williams’ 1981 essay ‘Film body. An implantation of perversions’. Through an analysis of photographic studies of the body in motion by Eadweard Muybridge of 1880, which were projected in the so-called ‘zoopraxinoscope’, as well as trick films made by George Méliès at the beginning of the century, Williams points out the genderedness of the cinematic apparatus, as it enables the male image-producer to master sexual difference through, on the one hand, the fetishisation of the female body at the level of the cinematic signified and, on the other hand, the awe for the capabilities of the machine at the level of the cinematic signifier. Williams thus argues that even before Classical Hollywood Cinema, the woman’s body had already been inscribed into the fetishistic and voyeuristic regime of the cinematic apparatus. In other words, the cinematic apparatus and its distribution of gendered subject positions is perceived as timeless and structural. To be sure, Williams’ analysis has posed an important challenge to the idea of alterity attributed to early cinema by early film historians. On the other hand, it has laid bare the determinism and ahistoricity of such claims, which construct once more, in the words of Judith Mayne, ‘the master narrative of a cinematic apparatus seemingly destined to represent the polarity of male and female subject.’ The inability of this master narrative to account for historical difference, may also provide an explanation of the initial reluctance of feminists to venture into early film studies.

Aside from Mayne, most notably Heide Schlüpmann has developed an alternative approach to gender and early cinema in her book Unheimlichkeit des Blicks (1990) in which she carefully avoids said master narrative and constructs a historically grounded discourse. From an analytical perspective which emphatically includes women’s views and interests, this study highlights relations and contradictions between women’s presence in cinema and in historical realities, and points out discontinuities in emerging cinematic discourses and differences between genres. Schlüpmann analyses specific forms of early and silent cinema in Wilhelmian Germany.
as public means of perception and reflection for women—of and on woman herself, of and on other women and, highly threatening for bourgeois mentality, of and on sexual difference. At that specific historical moment cinema entailed a potential for oppositional female perception, which was most significantly embodied by the actress Asta Nielsen in German ‘social dramas’, a genre which addressed lived realities and scopophilic pleasures of women in the audience at the same time."

Other efforts, yet more from within the textual paradigm of apparatus theory, to reckon with historical specificities of discourses were made in the mid-eighties. E. Ann Kaplan’s ‘Mothering, feminism and representation’ (1987) and Annette Kuhn’s *Cinema censorship and sexuality 1909-1925* (1988), e.g., defined the historical span of their research rather succinctly. Kaplan discussed a construction of femininity—motherhood in this case—in a variety of discourses, of which film was but one. Like Williams, however, she rendered a structural analysis of textual motherhood in literature and cinema without relating her reading to the historical contexts which produced it. In contrast to Kaplan, Kuhn’s study focuses precisely on the historical reception of specific films and explores the interactions of texts and contexts, which enables her to rethink issues such as the workings of censorship, discourses about the body and its sexuality, and relations between knowledge and power vis-à-vis cinema as an institution and cinema as a mode of representation at a given historical moment.

**The 90s: culturalist approaches**

Film theory in the late 80s was characterised both by an effort to historicise theory and theorise history which, at the beginning of the 90s, led from apparatus theory’s focus on the text and its determination of subjectivity, to Cultural Studies theories with their emphasis on culture as a complex network of institutions, representations, and practices in which subjectivity is constructed in the overlap of diverse discursive fields. Culture is conceptualised as a site of struggle in which the production of meaning cannot be controlled, but only contested in an arena of conflicting discourses and social practices. As these practices are comprehensible only in historical terms, microhistories attempt to trace the discourses and practices of agents at certain moments. The centrality of the filmic text now makes way for a more open, dispersed and non-linear field of research in which film is studied as an intersection of a range of discourses that circulate through a culture, a shift which leads to investigations of representation, reception and production through intertextual, intermedial, and contextual perspectives.
The appeal of the culturalist paradigm to feminist criticism was threefold. Not only did both share the political concern of a neo-Marxist conceptualisation of culture as site of struggle for power, but the agency attributed to social subjects and the emphasis on historical specificity offered a welcome departure from the determinism, pessimism and universalism of apparatus theory.

Two consecutive issues of Camera Obscura, 20/21 (1989) and 22 (1990), document this theoretical and methodological watershed in feminist historical research. While the research accounts on female spectatorship assembled in the 1989 ‘Spectatrix’ issue is still dominated by apparatus theory, and features culturalist approaches only in the context of television studies and in rare applications to film history, the contributions to the succeeding issue on Film History share a concern for historical and geographic specificity in their explorations of the ways in which a particular history and economy (consumer capitalism) transformed not only the organisation of narrative and visual pleasure, but also the forms of subjectivity associated with the female spectator. The culturalist framework of these investigations is underscored by the book reviews in the same issue, which focus on feminism and Foucault, non-linear, Gramscian conceptualisations of cultural history, and modernist sites of female consumer culture.

In the articles featured in this issue of Camera Obscura and the culturalist studies on early cinema that followed, consumer economy is employed as the predominant historical matrix for the analysis of discourses of feminine subjectivity. With its disruption of the traditional spatial dichotomy of production and consumption and the shifting boundaries of public and private as gendered spaces, consumer capitalism brought about a renegotiation of gender roles in which the cinema can be regarded as a nodal point. The importance of cinema for the discursive struggles on female subjectivity during the period are seen in the symptomatic position cinema offered to women, both in terms of representation and spectatorship: as both spectacle and spectator, as commodity and consumer, as consumer of images and the image of the consumer.

In their effort to delineate this paradoxical positioning of women in early cinema, feminist film historians of the 90s rely on methodologies developed within the Cultural Studies framework such as contextualisation of cultural practices, analysis of discursive and intertextual meaning production, microhistories and self-reflection of the researcher. These methodological practices will inform our survey of culturalist approaches to gender and early cinema and our critical comments.

In those studies which approach early cinema in the context of various cultural practices, the link between early cinema, sexual difference and
consumerism is established in relation to cultural institutions such as the department store and the amusement park. Like cinema, these institutions define femininity in relation to public space, the organisation of the gaze, and consumption. In contrast to social historical studies on urban female leisure culture and the emergence of the department store — by Lary May, Kathy Peiss and Susan Porter Benson — which are used as source material, research within the Cultural Studies paradigm — by Anne Friedberg, Lynne Kirby and Lauren Rabinovitz — establish the relationship between department store, amusement park and cinema by reading these institutions as texts, which generate specific looking behaviour by linking consumption to a specific, non-fetishistic gaze marked as female.

Thus, Lauren Rabinovitz focuses on Chicago’s nickelodeons, movie theatres and amusement parks to explore the ways in which cinema, in conjunction with other forms of mass entertainment, incorporates and defines female sexuality in relation to public space, the acts of looking and consumption. For Rabinovitz, the pleasures offered by these institutions to its female audiences express the conflicting values of sexism and sexual independence, whereby the double-edged process of subjectivity and objectification is seen as central in reclaim female desire in the service of patriarchy.

While studies which contextualise female film consumption by referring to related cultural practices focus mainly on the first decade of film, the construction of sexual difference in films up to 1915 is primarily explored through discourse analysis. The tendency towards standardisation, the streamlining of heterogeneous programming and different modes of address brought about by cinema’s adaptation to bourgeois norms, provides the historical backdrop for these analyses focussing on the construction of female audiences and female spectatorship in various discourses. The ways in which specific discourses promote the repression of a heterogeneous cinema culture and its association with women is approached mainly via censorship or industrial discourse in trade papers.

A seminal study on historical spectatorship, Miriam Hansen’s *Babel and Babylon* (1991), examines the spectator as historical construction both generally, in terms of the replacement of the viewer as a member of a plural, social audience (Babylon) by a standardised, textually constructed spectator (Babel), and, more specifically, in terms of the implications of this institutionalisation for female audiences. Hansen approaches spectatorship in the context of theories of the public sphere by Habermas, Negt and Kluge, whereby the cinema of the silent era is seen as a site of conflicting tendencies between the cinema as universalising ideological idiom on the one hand and its possibilities as a heterogeneous horizon of experience on the other. While Hansen’s extensive analysis of Griffith’s
INTOLERANCE examines these tensions between heterogeneity and standardisation textually, the investigation of the Valentino cult highlights alternative, subcultural appropriations of – by now – standardised texts which temporarily derailed the consumerist appropriation of female desire. Although Hansen’s account of silent cinema spectatorship is marked by a definitive historical trajectory, it rejects the notion of linear development by exposing the struggles and contradictions this trajectory implies. Hansen’s analysis of resistant readings by female Valentino spectators and fans find further support in an article by Gaylyn Studlar (1991) who examines fan magazines in her investigation of how women were positioned as viewers/readers/consumers within discourses aimed at influencing women’s reception of Hollywood film. Rather than occupying the textually constructed position of total investment in the filmic illusion, these female Valentino spectators derive fetishistic pleasure from the play of text and intertext, discovery and disavowal, make believe and transparent marketing mechanisms.

Heide Schlüpmann traces (in 1996) the shift from actual audiences to a textually inscribed ideal audience in the context of pre-Weimar German cinema in a particular discourse on spectatorship, the call for ‘an education of the audience’ in the German trade press of the 1910s. While women were regarded as educative forces themselves and were therefore excluded as addressees of this campaign, their repression in this particular audience discourse mirrors the repression of earlier forms of cinematic pleasures and the repression of cinema’s association with women and the working class in the standardisation of cinema along the lines of bourgeois art. The suppression of a female engagement with cinema is traced both in the area of production, where the increasing importance attributed to the director undermines the actress’ creative autonomy, as well as in the area of reception, where correct forms of behaviour modelled after the bourgeois subject replace more heterogeneous and uncontrolled audience activity now marked as mistakes. While Schlüpmann’s account of standardisation practices in German cinema parallels Hansen’s study of American films, it also draws attention to national differences by referring to a specific conjunction of class and nationality in the construction of a bourgeois cinema that was considered as specifically German by its producers.

Another study which delineates the contestation of positions of visual mastery and control through institutional discourses in the mid-tos is Stamp Lindsey’s 1996 investigation of white slave films as a genre which succinctly illustrates the conflicts in defining a place for women as spectators: female patrons are wooed as a guarantee for cinema’s respectability, yet this very respectability is considered to be threatened by female voy-
eurism. The analysis of white slave films as a singular instance in which female spectatorship was theorised and problematised within the industry itself illustrates the urgency and the concern of the industry to come to terms with the conflicting positions of female viewers as both spectator and spectacle, consumer and commodity and the necessity to define a place for the female spectating subject in cinema’s imaginary optical field.

This concern is further explored in Staiger’s study Bad women (1995) which traces the struggles in the discursive construction of woman as cultural sign in pre-WW1 American cinema (1907-1915) both in terms of representation and spectatorship. Staiger examines this contestation through censorship which, in line with Annette Kuhn’s previous study of regulative institutional discourses, is not seen as restrictive but as a practice producing meaning such as resistance and transgression. The standardisation of narrative cinema is here regarded as a means to redefine women and female sexuality, as it allowed both the study of sexuality and its containment through a narrative organisation rooted in bourgeois morality.

Next to these studies which examine early cinema and sexual difference by focussing on discursive negotiations of female spectatorship, culturalist approaches are also employed in studies focusing on issues of representation which are primarily addressed through intertextual methodologies. Unlike those studies of the 80s, which regarded early films as affirmations of patriarchal ideology, culturalist approaches characterise these films as spaces in which sexual difference is negotiated. Unlike apparatus theory studies, in which the cinema of attraction and early narrative cinema is seen as dominated by an unchallenged economy of the male gaze, cultural studies approaches emphasise the polysemic nature of early cinema and the struggle between different power positions associated with different modes of looking. Constance Balides analyses this struggle by exploring gender dynamics in terms of the competing definitions of ‘space’ and ‘place’, whereby ‘space’ refers to the experiential space of female everyday activities, and ‘place’ to a field of vision associated with male viewers. Here, the cinematic dramatisation of sexual difference centres on the legitimate use of space (as experiential space or field of vision) and the right to define it as one or the other. Balides relates this cinematic negotiation of space intertextually to publications of the reform movement as well as literature and magazines focussing on the visibility of women in public space.

Hansen’s reading of Goldilocks (1907) shares Balides’ notion of the filmic text as a site of struggle, yet it emphasises the hierarchisation of discourses, which is accomplished through the way in which modes of spectatorship associated with the cinema of attraction and connoted as
female are incorporated into a master discourse of male spectatorship established through narrative organisation. 

While Hansen traces the standardisation and unification of formerly heterogeneous forms of spectatorship as far back as early, pre-1910 narrative films, the repression of heterogeneous modes of address did not evolve as a linear and unified process. Thus Ben Singer's analysis of serial-queen melodramas of the mid-1910s illustrates the persistence of specific modes of address and pleasures associated with female spectatorship. According to Singer, this genre offered a distinct female address whereby the construction of female subjectivity displayed by the active heroine can be supported intertextually through generic references, through magazines and fashion, but also sociohistorically.

Following Cultural Studies work on television reception, culturalist examinations of early cinema were conceived as case studies, as microhistories emphasising the differences and specificities of symptomatic readings rather than representativity and generalisation. Investigating of geographically and historically limited areas, as, for example, Lauren Rabinovitz' study of urban mass entertainment in Chicago at the turn of the century or Giuliana Bruno's assessment of the work of a Naples film maker in the 1910s, emphasise the intersections of various cultural discourses and practices and their productions of meaning. Giuliana Bruno's study Streetwalking on a ruined map offers a comprehensive assessment of female subjectivity which attempts to synthesise issues of representation, spectatorship as well as production in relation to the work of Naples filmmaker Elvira Notari. With great theoretical and methodological sophistication, Bruno succeeds in making the lack of historical evidence productive by exploring the lost territory through multiple discursive sites (painting, literature, urban culture etcetera). In addition, Bruno's work displays a high degree of self-awareness. Self-reflexiveness not only shapes the construction of the research object, but also her historiographic methodology. The exploration of the filmmaker's work is regarded as an intersubjective process which implies the double construction of female authorship: the authorship of the filmmaker Elvira Notari as well as that of the researcher Giuliana Bruno are established in a mutually dependent process.

Although this culturalist research presents promising models for historical investigations of constructions of sexual difference in representation and spectatorship, some critical observations seem in place referring to its historiographic methodology and general problems of cultural studies research, observations which also suggest new research perspectives.

Temporal focus. Most culturalist studies focus on the years 1907-15, a period which, due to changes in representation and exhibition practices that privileged certain social groups, seems especially suited for studies in
which cultural processes are seen as hegemonic struggles. While the notion of culture as a site of conflicting forces is traced in a wide variety of discourses and practices of this period, studies which examine later periods, such as the silent films of the 1920s, adhere to the monolithic concept of a standardised Classical Hollywood Cinema which limits this notion of cultural struggle to the area of reception as in the studies of Miriam Hansen and Gaylyn Studlar which examine Valentino's popularity with its female audiences as example of subcultural reading practices.

*Contextualisation.* Cultural Studies' focus on meaning production through contextualisation poses a twofold problem. On the one hand, and Bruno's work may be mentioned as an example here, the shift away from the centrality of the film text may be seen as a welcome departure from formalist constraints. Yet its relegation to the very margins of the investigation seems equally problematic. On the other hand, where is one to draw the line in the move away from the text? As demonstrated in culturalist studies in other areas, such as audience research in which television viewing is seen as a practice embedded in a potentially endless range of other everyday practices, contextualisation may lead to an impasse by overstretching the limits and thus the definitions of the research object.

*Self-reflexivity.* The insight, shared by Cultural Studies with New Historicism, into the partiality of all historiographic accounts and therefore the need for self-reflection, has certainly led to more sophisticated historiographic methodologies. As the epistemological mise en abyme of postmodern ethnographic accounts illustrates, however, this call for self-reflection may lead to other methodological dead ends.

**Future perspectives**

In spite of the problems and limitations of culturalist approaches to film historiography, some of which have been outlined above, the application of culturalist methodologies to questions of gender and early cinema not only leads to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between cinema and the construction of female subjectivity, but also provides promising perspectives for further research. Thus, as with textual and reception analysis, explorations of gender issues in the context of production may greatly benefit from cultural methodologies, particularly in terms of early cinema's unique openness to flexible roles and careers (such as producer, director, script writer and performance artist) which proved especially advantageous to women such as Alice Guy, Elvira Notari and others. In this context, future investigations of individual careers of
women in the early film business might also profit from an epistemological shift in reading biographies no longer as evidence but as particular textual discourses themselves.

However, pointing to production as a relatively unexplored area of feminist historiography does not imply that textual analyses of the past two decades have exhaustively charted the terrain. Thus one of the unexplored spaces so far is the issue of constructions of masculinity in early cinema, a lack which seems particularly striking in light of the growth of research on cinematic representations of masculinity in studies of the 90s. Another somewhat troubling area is the virtual absence of psychoanalytically oriented approaches in recent years, whereby the centrality of psychoanalysis in apparatus theory has been replaced by an almost complete rejection due to the seeming incompatibility of psychoanalysis and cultural studies. Instead of getting trapped in one-dimensional paradigm oppositions, future feminist historiographic studies might benefit from a careful reconsideration of seemingly 'obscure' methodologies by, for example, considering psychoanalytical approaches based on notions of fantasy. Thus De Lauretis and Cowie suggest to read films as a mise-en-scène of fantasy which allows multiple forms of identification, including an identification with the fantasy scenario itself. Instead of accounting for a fixed positioning of the spectator, psychoanalysis is here used to theorise a more fluid and heterogeneous psychic engagement with the filmic text, an approach that seems particularly suited to early cinema due to the looseness of its narrative organisation and its integration of multiple point of views.

Another issue underexposed in existing feminist research into early and silent cinema is non-fiction film and its specific conditions of production and reception.

Finally, although studies of the past decade tend to advocate historical and geographical specificity, feminist research on early cinema is often characterised by blurry boundaries which tend to obscure historical differences within early cinema (cinema of attraction, early narrative cinema, silent cinema). In addition, the concentration on American cinema has resulted in a relative neglect of issues concerning geographical and national difference. Here, future investigations following the work of Patrice Petro and Heide Schlüpffmann on German cinema, Judith Mayne on Soviet cinema, and Annette Förster on France and The Netherlands may offer new perspectives which will deepen our understanding of the complex issues on gender and early cinema.
Noten

2 S. Smith, Women who make the movies, 1975.
3 M. Rosen, Popcorn Venus, p 23.
5 See: M. Rosen, Popcorn Venus, ‘Forword’.
8 For a geneaology of feminist film theories of authorship provoked by Johnston’s article see: J. Mayne, ‘Female authorship reconsidered’, in Idem, The woman at the keyhole, Bloomington 1990. In Directed by Dorothy Arzner (Bloomington 1996) Mayne abandons such theories in favour of a ‘study in portraiture’ but still does not adress Arzner’s work in silent cinema in a distinct manner. For a historiographic critique of notions of authorship see A. Förster’s article in this issue.
10 Our thanks to Thomas Elsasser for pointing this out.
12 According to Schlipmann, the genre as it existed in Germany ought to be distinguished from types of social problem films in other countries. H. Schlipmann, Unheimlichkeit des Blicks. Das Drama des frühen deutschen Kinos, Basel/Frankfurt am Main 1990.


23 B. Singer, 'Female power in the Serial-Queen Melodrama. The etiology of an anomaly', in: *Camera Obscura* 22, January 1990, p. 91-129.

