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Book Review: Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking by Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo

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Luciano, Bernadette, and Susanna Scarparo. *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2013. Pp. 256. ISBN: 9781557536556. \$45.00 (paperback). \$38.99 (ePdf). \$38.99 (ePub).

It was 1988 when, in the first publication in English on Italian women directors, *Off Screen: Women & Film in Italy*, edited by Giuliana Bruno and Mara Nadotti, Paola Melchiori raised the question: "When a woman becomes the one who looks, what image of her sexual identity does she reflect? How does she go beyond the representation and identities of her unconscious conditioning as mother or sexual object?" (186) Now, twenty-five years later, after years of scattered scholarship on this subject and within the horizon of a postfeminist society in the aftermath of *Berlusconismo*, Bernadette Luciano (University of Auckland, New Zealand), and Susanna Scarparo, (Monash University, Australia), attempt a thorough response to that question. *Reframing Italy* represents a long-awaited chapter in the study of the history of Italian cinema and of gender relations in contemporary Italy, and an invaluable cross-disciplinary tool for teaching.

Organized thematically around a series of crucial theoretical articulations of the cinematic productions of Italian women filmmakers, the book uses as its structural principle the Deleuzian concept of "framing," which includes "everything which is present in the image," from characters to sets and props, encompassing the orchestration of multiple and shifting points of view in the frame and what is present without being seen or understood (8). The process of "reframing Italy," of creating new meanings from a new female perspective, from women's "shifted gaze," according to the formula of filmmaker Paola Sangiovanni (114), produces a new vision, approaching tradition, history, society and the cinematic industry with new interpretive paradigms.

The authors investigate the recent cinematic production of Italian women filmmakers framing their critical discourse within the context of gender studies, referencing particularly the Italian feminist philosophical school of *Il pensiero delle differenze*, from Luisa Muraro to Adriana Cavarero, as well as Anglo-American feminist film theory. Through an intense film analysis, Scarparo and Luciano establish a deeply focused vision of contemporary Italy, which displays in the foreground the new women's subjectivity, narrative, and aesthetic, while visibly maintaining the whole context of the debate between cinematic legacies, genres, and transnational perspectives.

In their introduction, Scarparo and Luciano highlight four different moments of intervention undertaken by Italian women filmmakers: as from the four subsections of the introduction, these interventions consist in reframing tradition, reframing history, reframing society, and framing the industry. The relationship of these women with tradition intertwines with the legacy of neorealism via the trope of the child in a transforming landscape, transposing the neorealist father-son plots within the horizon of a mother-daughter paradigm. These directors reclaim a gendered interpretation of the neorealist tradition—from Francesca Comencini, operating against a De Sican archetype, to Costanza Quatriglio, reconfiguring Visconti and Rossellini's Sicilian legacy, to Wilma Labate gendering her stories in the streets of contemporary Naples in parallel with Pasolini's, Amelio's and Capuano's suggestions. They put marginal characters and points of view at the center of a feminized space, a space notable for its peripheral and domestic character. They shift the old patriarchal axis and neorealist anxiety around fatherhood, creating a feminine dimension of the narrative and of the landscape.

The same female axis of motherhood—which recalls the symbolic order of the mother of Luisa Muraro—is at the center of the actions these filmmakers take to reframe history: Alina Marazzi, Fabrizia Sargentini and Susanna Nicchiarelli reclaim the mother and her specific perspective by putting into action the feminist practice of *partire da sé/ starting from oneself*, in order to reconfigure their relationship with the maternal and return both agency and subjectivity to their mothers. At the same time these cinematic endeavors become a political project, which reads the

maternal as a powerful foundation for women's status as subjects. This undertaking is all about owning the mother and letting the mother own herself, reestablishing her authority, freedom, empathy and understanding.

The other side of this rediscovery of the mother is the establishment of women's genealogy. Scarparo and Luciano reconnect the historical films produced by women directors such as Sandrelli, De Lillo, and Nicchiarelli for feature films, and Marazzi and Sangiovanni's for documentaries, with the feminist debate on the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on women's biographies. However, these Italian directors make of their protagonists not heroines but women who, while remaining within the boundaries of their gender, are ahead of their times. Alternatively, they choose to give voice to multiple subjects, to a collective movement (in the case of Marazzi's and Sangiovanni's treatment of the feminist movement of the Sixties and Seventies), with the clear political agenda of creating a dialogue between history and life, facts and lived experiences, events and emotions.

For the authors, "reframing society" means focusing on contemporary issues of transnational mobility, migration and displacement, or on the New Economy configuration and its consequent impact on the workforce, particularly in the form of the mobbing and precariousness it has inflicted on women. From Francesca Pirani to Cristina Comencini, from Marina Spada to Costanza Quatriglio, from Francesca Comencini to Anna Negri and others, the book follows these filmmakers' trajectories and their effort to maintain in focus tensions and polarizations in the social texture of contemporary Italy specifically from the standpoint of women, contextualizing their production within unresolved postcolonial issues and post-Fordist configurations of exploitation. Luciano and Scarparo portray Italy, after years of *Berlusconismo*, from a gender standpoint, as having an urgent need for "different roles for women, both as filmmakers and as characters" (189). Thus, notwithstanding the difficulties women in the cinematic industry face in writing, directing, producing and distributing their "reframed" films, the authors emphasize how these shifting narratives and gazes are important in order to reconfigure new possibilities for women beyond Berlusconi's *velinismo*, beyond their fate as sexual objects with no agency, as bodies on display.

An especially interesting feature of the book is that it offers the opportunity to watch an online appendix of interviews with some of the directors the authors analyze: from Spada to Marazzi, from Sangiovanni to Pirani, every single director is asked to specify her perspective on theoretical debates about the definition of female gaze or of a women's cinema.

The only problem with the book is that some film material discussed is not readily available. Thus, notwithstanding the accuracy of the synopsis and of the analysis, some discussions remain abstract from the stylistic standpoint. Including some images would have helped readers get a better idea of the specific filmic aspects of the movies. One can only hope that this book will promote a rediscovery and redistribution of at least part of this material in DVD format also available with English subtitles.

In conclusion, Scarparo and Luciano have produced a critical tour-de-force about new trends in contemporary Italian women's filmmaking, which I believe could reignite the debate on gendered film practices in Italy. *Reframing Italy* appears as a crucial conceptual tool for scholars and for women (and not only for women), for stimulating a collective reawakening and intellectual appraisal of the critical issues that currently occupy center stage in the cultural debate on gender relations and their representation in Italian cinema.

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