Bernadette Luciano, and Susanna Scarparo. *Reframing Italy. New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking*. West Lafayette (Indiana): Purdue University Press, 2013. Pp. 248. ISBN: 9781557536556. \$45.

This co-authored study by Bernadette Luciano and Susanna Scarparo offers a timely and incisive appraisal of a body of films made by women directors active in the Italian film industry in recent years. It engages not only with the work of well-established directors such as Cristina Comencini and Wilma Labate, but also with that of younger, less widely known figures who have directed both feature films and documentaries that contribute to what could loosely be described as a new wave of socially engaged cinema. Though many of the films discussed here are already familiar to international audiences, several others have rarely been seen outside Italy, and even in Italy have received little exposure beyond the festival circuit.

Luciano and Scarparo acknowledge at the outset the cultural and institutional constraints that have affected both the advancement of women within the Italian film industry and the general visibility of their work. In Italy, as elsewhere, more women are making films today than ever before, although the majority of them struggle to achieve the recognition necessary to direct more than one or two feature-length films. Furthermore, even the most successful among Italy's women directors are frequently given short shrift by Italian film historians and critics. It is precisely this critical marginalization of the work of Italian women filmmakers that the volume seeks in part to redress.

The authors' probing analysis of the body of films at the heart of their inquiry contextualizes this work in relation both to Italian film history and the broader sociocultural landscape of contemporary Italy. Rather than aiming at an exhaustive exploration of films directed by women in contemporary Italy, their study focuses selectively on the work of those filmmakers whom they perceive as committed to exploring women's histories, experiences and perspectives in ways that resist or defy the established cinematic tradition. The concept of reframing emerges throughout the book in various ways. The authors examine, for example, how the work of these directors disrupts the codes of the conventional cinematic gaze, formulating new modalities of looking and narrating the social world, which challenge patriarchal representations. Their study also probes the ways in which the filmmakers intervene in the articulation of women's history, not only by offering fresh insight into women's participation in particular historical contexts

but also by making the stories of women and their relationships with each other more visible in the cinematic space. In addition, by approaching the problems of Italian society through the lens of gendered marginalization, as the authors argue, the films of many of these directors make an effective contribution to debates on some of the vital issues of the contemporary moment.

Acknowledging the daunting challenge that the legacy of Italy's film tradition presents for women directors, Luciano and Scarparo offer three case studies demonstrating how the filmmakers engage with and respond to the work of their imposing cinematic forebears. Reading the young female protagonists of Cristina Comencini's *Mobbing*, Wilma Labate's *Domenica* and Costanza Quatriglio's *L'isola* against the young male figures in some of the most celebrated films of the national canon (and particularly the neorealist films of Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rossellini) they deftly argue that these contemporary films not only serve to expose the patriarchal preoccupations underpinning Italy's cinematic heritage, but also offer new models of agency and subjectivity to their 21st century viewers. In the process, they assert, the filmmakers succeed in transforming "the nature and the narrative workings of traditional realism and neorealism" (47).

In a chapter that foregrounds the complex articulations of the mother-daughter relationship found in several documentaries and feature films by contemporary women filmmakers, the authors address the theoretical issues linked to this traditionally under-represented dyad. Here and elsewhere they attempt to bring into dialogue the rich legacy of Italian feminist writing on the maternal and the thematic emphases in the work of a younger generation of women directors with varying levels of interest in or awareness of this tradition. The book's central chapter is devoted to the issue of the filmmakers' engagement with the past, highlighting the emergence of several documentaries and feature films by women that are focused on remembering and reinventing women's history. Although many of the feature films discussed here fall into the critically devalued category of the biopic, the authors argue that, collectively, the filmmakers' deployment of this genre serves an implicitly subversive purpose, that is, to expose the authoritative claims of conventional historical narrative "by emphasizing the fictionality of history from a gendered perspective" (86). In exploring the striking and highly inventive use of cinematography, sets, and props in Antonietta De Lillo's *Il resto di niente*, for example, they show that the deployment of such strategies invites the viewer to become aware of the artificiality of all historical articulations of the past,

in other words, to the fact that the past can never be represented without recourse to artifice (99).

The last two chapters of the volume are dedicated to the ways in which the films of contemporary women directors engage with two of Italy's most pressing social issues—the tensions surrounding the huge surge in immigration that has occurred over the last twenty years, and the challenges posed by the shift to a post-Fordist labor economy in approximately the same period. Each chapter examines both feature films and documentaries, revealing how the filmmakers deploy the intersecting discourses of gender, race, class, and social mobility to offer some distinctive insights on contemporary Italian society. Here, as elsewhere, the authors do not limit their discussion to an examination of themes, but rather, through a series of incisive close readings, they pay careful attention to the ways in which narration is shaped through the operations of form and style, and is rendered more complex through processes of self-reflexivity.

Although the book highlights the new perspectives activated in the cinematic imaginary through the work of these women directors, it does not essentialize their cinematic output. In other words, Luciano and Scarparo are careful to avoid the implication that films made by women automatically reveal specific truths about what some might purport to be a universal female experience. All of the individual case studies are fascinating, and as a whole, the book suggests that the output of women filmmakers in Italy at present is far more varied, stylistically rich, and intellectually complex than one might have imagined. In an appendix to the volume the authors provide video links to interviews with six of the filmmakers, thus offering students and scholars an opportunity to hear the directors describe their vision and experience in their own terms.

This theoretically astute study is written with clarity and grace, and is accessible to students and specialists alike. As there is no comparable book available in any language, its contribution to Italian film studies, Italian cultural studies, and women's studies is of substantial importance. In short, it offers an indispensable point of reference for future research in these fields.

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