4 The Discovery of Early Cinema

The Moment of "Silence"

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Abstract
This chapter reviews the study of early cinema in the 1980s, focusing on the significance of the rediscovery of early cinema for feminist film historiography and theory. The fact that women participated in every branch of early cinema while at the same time being denied a public voice brought the silence of film to the centre of feminist considerations; for those who were not allowed to speak in public, like women, and who lacked voice—for them, film, which relied on gestural rather than spoken language, offered equal opportunities to interact with what was happening on screen as it did for the dignified bourgeois male sitting next to them in the cinema. By rediscovering and imagining early silent cinema as a preparatory stage for a radically altered public sphere, emancipatory movements and a developing film scholarship were equally equipped with the means to critique the dominant "media public sphere."

Keywords: feminist theory, early cinema, silent film, film historiography, film criticism

Background

The rediscovery of early cinema had far-reaching consequences for thinking about film and cinema. What we were dealing with at the beginning of the 1980s was not just another field of archival and scholarly pursuits. Indeed, in West Germany film studies was only institutionalized at the end of 1980s—unlike film criticism. Riding the upswell of the 1960s and taking part in a widespread social awakening, film criticism in the wake of '68 had been diversified through various emancipatory movements,

Hagener, M. & Y. Zimmermann (eds), *How Film Histories Were Made: Materials, Methods, Discourses*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024
DOI: 10.5117/9789463724067_CH04

especially the women's movement, the gay and lesbian movements, and debates about colonialism and racism. Integral to this diversification was the strengthening of a politically engaged film scene and cinema culture coupled with efforts to establish critical methodologies in the academy. Film criticism moved between these scenes and movements. It traced an arc from the nascent film theory of the Weimar period to the film scholarship then emerging in the United States, Great Britain, and France. The writings of Siegfried Kracauer, Béla Balász, Rudolf Arnheim, and Lotte Eisner were all more or less indebted to criticism rather than academia. They tried to help the "spirit of film" (Béla Balász) achieve social recognition while also encouraging a debate, whether explicitly or implicitly, about the mediation of the ideologies through which politics and film capital exercised their power. This legacy became increasingly relevant during the formation of film studies worldwide.

Before the archival and academic rediscovery of early cinema, there was the discovery of cinema by the post-war generation of students and intellectuals, which marked a departure from the educated public's disdain for mass culture. For my generation, going to the movies meant breaking out of the institutions of the 1950s and a culture of rebuilding after the war. It meant experiencing liberation and claiming freedom from the intellectual paths laid out for us—extraordinary experiences that informed all our later reflections, including critical ones. We were critical not least of the "old" German cinema, the product of National Socialism and the 1950s. We were also self-critical regarding the social and cultural dispositions that this kind of film mobilized in the viewer.

Especially for female scholars, the prehistory of the rediscovery of early cinema includes the renewal of the women's movement. Along with a nascent feminist film practice and a feminist film criticism that was international from the start, the women's movement joined the cinema to enter the public sphere. The emancipation of women from images of men—from their subjugation to the male gaze or their identification with it—was not a strictly theoretical matter. It was an essential part of practical liberation.

Hence a divide began to emerge in the work of feminist film critics: on the one hand, a dedication to cinema, even a captivation; on the other, a wish for emancipation from male views about women and the world, which manifested in the films themselves. This wish could lead to a wholesale condemnation of the dominant cinema. At the very least, it raised a pointed question: What, exactly, is the female viewer supposed to do with "male cinema?" Yet feminists were not alone in their ambivalence. A growing debate about film contended with competing conceptions of cinema: as

a culture "from below," for example, or as an instrument of power in the hands of industry, economics, and politics. These politically motivated discourses called for a viable solution, both conceptual and practical, which in turn generated various efforts to identify an object that, due to its very ambivalence, resisted easy conceptualization. For instance: "male cinema" or the identification of film through its fundamental technologies, the so-called *apparatus theory*, where each film is inscribed in a dominant structure of viewing, which is then reproduced irrespective of the content that might be communicated in the best intentions.[1]

Critics consolidated their own political identities with respect to the characteristics they identified in the films. They spoke and wrote as representatives of the oppressed masses, which were excluded and deceived by the dominant cinema. Leftist and feminist theories inspired this critical engagement and signalled a new beginning: the intervention of critique into cinema. As a consequence, the practice of identifying could be abandoned, and the split attitude towards cinema could be dissolved in a process of transformation—a process that concerned the audience and the films. Independent theatres and communal movie houses were concerned with enlightening the public, educating the masses, and promoting self-reflective awareness. Criticism and film-making united to break completely with an idea of film as a mass medium inscribed in structures of domination. Political critique was no longer part of leftist and feminist movements that signalled a distance from their object, the mass medium. On the contrary, critique was incorporated into the cinematic movements and took up matters like the formation of the self, the emancipation of consciousness, and not least the ability to act. That a similar emancipatory movement could be found in places other than the "avant-gardes"—or rather, before them—was the explosive effect of the discovery of early cinema.

The discovery came at just the right time. Amid changes in the social and political outlook of the 1980s, the emancipatory movements fell apart or began to be incorporated into "mainstream" culture. The Cinema movement more or less came to a standstill. Subversive cinema held out for a while in West Germany in niches like the Super 8 scene. But without utopian and political movements to unite criticism with the public, little remained for critics to do than to accommodate the emerging neoliberal society. Film theory gradually migrated from independent publishing—journals like

1 See, for example, Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286–98.

Filmkritik or *Frauen und Film*—into the academy, also in West Germany. At the time, the goal was to earn a reputation as a scholar whose object of study was film. Gaining a foothold within academic institutions might have seemed to be a victory when seen in the perspective of a broader cultural recognition of film. In practice, however, it led to a decline in the politically motivated split between a critical intellectual, on the one hand, and a commercial cinema trapped in a system of capitalist production, on the other. Indeed, criticism was eclipsed by scholarly analysis; hence the object of analysis, film, lost its social explosiveness. Psychoanalysis and Marx's political economy no longer formed the theoretical horizons. They were replaced by aesthetics and, ultimately, by the film theory of Gilles Deleuze.[2] These were the products of the 1980s, the years of the rise of the digital media industry. Reflecting on the experience of cinema, the philosopher severs the connection between the viewing public and the films, which then unfold in the act of reflection as an aesthetic phenomenon related to Being and the World. Along with the idea of a "creator/author," it became normal again to talk about masterpieces. A way out of this structural regression was offered by the recovery of a suppressed history of early film.

The Discovery

A second awakening of cinema opened up a new world, hitherto unseen. We were once again a "naive" audience presented with unusual, unfamiliar films from the early period of cinema. But this time around, our experiences did not lead to critical distance. On the contrary, a movement took hold that was motivated by a sympathetic desire to rescue films that had disappeared from the cinema and that had been lost from memory. Archives began to invite scholars to go through collections that had remained in the dark for decades. The famous International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) conference of 1978, held in Brighton in the UK, was a seminal event. A few years later, Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, the festival still held in the northern Italian town of Pordenone, became a focal point for scholars, archivists, film-makers, and other enthusiasts. This festival let us immerse

2 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1. L'Image mouvement* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1983); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2. L'Image-temps* (Paris: Éd. de Minuit, 1985). It forms Part 2 of my book *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks: Das Drama des Frühen deutschen Kinos*; the American edition, *The Uncanny Gaze: The Drama of Early German Cinema*, did not include this part. Due to cost concerns, in particular the translation, the text had to be dramatically shortened. It seemed to me to be the lesser evil to restrict myself to Part 1 than to make cuts throughout the text.

ourselves in the world of silent film and fostered a feeling, an idea, for this other kind of cinema—experiences that had been buried were brought to life once more. A new field of research opened up in the universities where film studies had already been established, especially in the United States.

As I began my studies of early German cinema in 1985, Miriam Hansen, then at Rutgers, was already working on *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, which appeared in 1991.[3] She furnished me with texts like Russell Merritt's 1976 essay "Nickelodeon Theaters, 1905–1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," Charles Musser's "The Nickelodeon Era Begins: Establishing the Framework for Hollywood's Mode of Representation" (1983), or an issue of *Wide Angle* from 1982 with a contribution by Judith Maynes titled "Immigrants and Spectators."[4] As for early German cinema, I had to refer to research work coming out of literary studies for a start. In 1976, the German Literature Archive in Marbach published a comprehensive catalogue—*Hätte ich das Kino!* (If only I had the cinema!)—for an exhibition held on early German cinema.[5] Shortly thereafter, in 1978, *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909–1929* (The cinema debate: Texts on the relationship between literature and film, 1909–1929) appeared under the editorship of Anton Kaes.[6] That little red volume was, and remains, a treasure. Such pioneering work was followed in 1984 by Fritz Güttinger's collection, *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm* (Not a day without the cinema: Writers on silent film), an edition published by the Frankfurt Film Museum.[7] Yet it was the experience of early cinema in the theatre, especially in the unique space offered each October by the Cinema Verdi in Pordenone, that caused a reconsideration not only of how film history was written but also of earlier theoretical positions—and caused as well, let us not forget, extensive investigations in the catacombs of the archives.

3 See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

4 See Russell Merritt, "Nickelodeon Theaters, 1905–1914: Building an Audience for the Movies," in *The American Film Industry*, ed. Tino Balio (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 59–82; Charles Musser, "The Nickelodeon Era Begins: Establishing the Framework for Hollywood's Mode of Representation," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 22–23 (1983): 4–11; Judith Mayne, "Immigrants and Spectators," *Wide Angle* 5, no. 2 (1982): 32–41.

5 See Ludwig Greve, Margot Pehle, and Heidi Westhoff, *Hätte ich das Kino! Die Schriftsteller und der Stummfilm. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum Marbach 1976* (Marbach Schiller-Nationalmuseum, 1976).

6 See Anton Kaes, ed., *Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909–1929* (Munich: dtv, 1978).

7 See Fritz Güttinger, ed., *Kein Tag ohne Kino: Schriftsteller über den Stummfilm* (Deutsches Filmmuseum Frankfurt, 1984).

At the time, I would spend days, eventually weeks, at both the Ehrenbreitstein Fortress in Koblenz, where the Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv (National Film Archive) stored its films, and in the Berlin archives of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek (Foundation for German Cinema). And I was astonished: These films cut the ground out from under the theoretical positions of feminists (and leftists): they contradicted the psychoanalytic discussion of the gendered relationship between the subject and object of the gaze, as well as the verdict of British film critic Claire Johnston according to which "Woman as Woman" did not exist in film.[8] I saw women with binoculars peering into the distance or coming out of the shadows to pursue activities usually reserved for men. I saw maids spying on the comings and goings out on the street, looking into a mirror perched on the windowsill. I saw women shooting knowing glances behind the backs of their husbands.[9] Women as detectives, adventurers, or daring artists were clearly *Handlungs-Subjekte*—subjects (rather than objects) of the plot as well as of agency. The narrated plot, on the other hand, must have reflected the interests of women in the theatre: a desire to see themselves onscreen, their daily lives, their conflicts and struggles as well as their wishes and dreams.

The reality of women at the beginning of the twentieth century was suddenly made present. The documentary element of early cinema was quite prominent in the first narrative films as well as in the social dramas, if only because of the copious exterior shots, shots from the daily life of women, that is, from their daily reality. Going out for the evening with a scarf or an elegant shawl thrown over her shoulder, she crosses the street and waits before a stately house of the 1870s; she strolls along in front of the shop windows. The class distinctions of the interior spaces are quite obvious—the fixtures, the furnishings, the clothes—as are the social distinctions between the housewife, the woman of the middle class, and the elegant lady. But despite these differences, the same stories were being told about daily life in a patriarchal society and the struggles with its representatives. Seduced, betrayed, abandoned, the protagonists of these films also showed their resilience. The films were filled with the faces of women; and it was even possible to speak of a female "narrative perspective." In the short dramas,

8 Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema," in *Notes on Women's Cinema*, ed. Claire Johnston (London: SEFT, 1973): 24–31.

9 Siegfried Kracauer emphasizes this exchange in an essay: "Kult der Zerstreuung," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, March 4, 1926; reprinted in: Siegfried Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays* (Frankfurt am Main 1963), 311–17. For more on the diversity of the viewing public in early cinema, see Emilie Altenloh, *Zur Soziologie des Kinos* (Jena, 1914); newly edited by Andrea Haller, Martin Loiperdinger, and Heide Schlüpmann (Frankfurt am Main: KINtop Jahrbuch, 2012).

for example, the protagonists clearly opposed the male dramatic framework representative of the patriarchal order of society.

These films were "Alternative Cinema." Yet in its day, it was simply *the* cinema. A need to grasp that fact and verify such an emancipatory moment motivated further research. At first, this required learning more about the viewers in their historical and social context, as well as about the role of the actress in film production. This meant reading and understanding everything that could be found about contemporary reactions to the new cinematic phenomenon, especially documents in the trade press. The writings of the women's movement around 1900 also formed a rich background that encouraged an appreciation for what it meant to go to the cinema for women. First and foremost, such visits were an obvious violation of a ban enforced by both social expectations and by the police. The texts of the so-called "cinema reformers" made it possible to infer these revolutionary elements *ex negativo*. They took aim at the "immorality" of the films, which they saw in the exhibition of the female body, the love stories, and the tales of criminals. They also took issue with the cinema as a gathering place where people of both sexes could meet in the dark. The main line of attack for the defenders of morality, the guardians of culture, pertained, as it always does, to women—not least because of the association between the masses and femininity.

Studies of actresses and other sources permit the inference that the decidedly autonomous performance of an actress obtained its elan from being a step into freedom—and away from a feeling of being tied down by male directors and playwrights, which in the theatre was a form of semi-prostitution while film-making allowed for a more open dynamic.[10] Because few experiences and much less routines had been established with respect to film acting, a woman had to rely on her ability to perform in stories that were taken from daily life. Thus, her ability depended on her expertise in those daily routines. She was able to convey her closeness to a female public. She knew what would touch her public. In turn, knowledge about the meaning of the camera, about technologies of shooting and about ways of working with the camera, allowed an actress like Asta Nielsen to act in a way that would truly reach her audience. In this case, "truly" means in the depths of a viewer's feelings, in her memories, in her experiences of life.

10 This was an issue around 1900. Theatre actresses who were not stars earned little and had to pay for their own costumes. Therefore, they often depended on men in the audience, who paid for the costumes in exchange for the actresses becoming their mistresses. Cinema was being praised for not giving men the opportunity to go "behind the curtain" and have access to vulnerable actresses.

New Histories of Film, New Theories

Of course, the upheaval in thinking about film that occurred at the time did not pertain to feminist film criticism and its theoretical implications alone. An appreciation for early cinema and its wealth of films relativized other political-critical theories and provoked new attempts at theorization. The essential feature of these theories was their connection to history and, therefore, a break with categories whose validity was assumed to be general. From then on, it was about an "alliance between theory and history," as André Gaudreault put it in a veritable résumé of his own research.[11] He and Tom Gunning formulated concepts that helped early cinema achieve scholarly recognition while also questioning a general theory of cinema based on the gaze and voyeurism. The "cinema of attractions" put a psychoanalytically underpowered critical theory in its place, as did the detection of a presenting instance, a showman (*Monstrateur*), with the concept of narrative cinema for the fiction film.[12]

To formulate their concepts, Gunning and Gaudreault had in mind films that were made in the first decade of cinema, when the origin of the cinema in travelling fairs and variety shows was still perceptible even if stationary theatres already existed. In their view, it was possible to speak of early cinema from 1895 to 1903 or even 1907. This temporal boundary was not uncontroversial, and eventually, it was extended to 1917. For female scholars this was obvious since only then did actresses and the female public come into consideration. In 1992 Eric de Kuyper published an article that placed a "*cinéma du premier temps*" ("cinema of the initial period") alongside a cinema of the "*second époque*" ("second epoch"), an epoch that comprehended the first phase of the feature film, the beginning of the "long film," and the identification of actresses and actors and the formation of the star system.[13] Nevertheless, the concept "cinema of attractions" became a synonym for early cinema, as it remains. Originated from Eisensteinian montage-theory, this concept lent early films a political-aesthetic touch of the avant-garde while at the same time making careers in film studies that went well beyond examinations of the first decades of film—for instance, through investigations of action films and blockbusters. Yet the concept also

11 André Gaudreault, *Cinéma et attraction. Pour une nouvelle histoire du cinématographe* (Paris: CNRS, 2008); therein the section "Alliance de la théorie avec l'histoire," p. 24.

12 See André Gaudreault, "Narration et monstration," in *Du littéraire au filmique: Système du récit* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1988).

13 See Eric de Kuyper, "Le Cinéma de la seconde epoque. Le muet des années dix," *Cinémathèque* nos. 1 and 2 (May and October 1992).

unintentionally erases the constitutive role of women in the development of film—the women in front of the camera, in production, and in the audience. This erasure in the New Film History was not exactly new. During the 1980s, when I was watching early films and studying contemporary documents, I was shocked by the writings from the beginnings of film theory, which ranged from bourgeois defensiveness and the incrimination of women to critical disregard, ignorance, and thereby implicit exclusion.

A sharp opposition became apparent between the early reality of cinema and its portrayal in the field of public relations. Whereas cinema had opened itself to women, female authors in film criticism remained isolated. Nor did the women's movements aim to adopt the cinema, or, if they did, they restricted themselves to propagandistic goals, as Kay Sloan showed in the case of the United States in *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (1988).[14] In the 1970s, the women's movement played a central role in the spectrum of Alternative Cinema and its related criticism and theory. This was surely not the case at the beginning of the twentieth century. Women at the time did not participate in the cinema debates—an omission, it now appears in hindsight, and all the more reason to dedicate new research to the beginnings of public relations understood through the absence of the female voice. Film theory assumed a male stance from the start.

Silence

The fact that women participated in every branch of early cinema while simultaneously being denied a public voice moves the silence of film to the centre of feminist considerations. The soundlessness of the film is grounded in a particular inextricability from the cinema space—a connection, too, with the viewing public. In the first three decades of film history, the source of sound was in the cinema: a piano, an orchestra, and living, breathing people. In their performances, the musicians followed what was going on in the audience and onscreen. An awareness of both generated the musical accompaniment. With the discovery of early cinema, these findings became common knowledge: "Silent film was never silent." Hence earlier views, not least those of certain cinephiles, collapsed. Especially the German auteur films of the 1920s we know from screenings that took place in auratic stillness. Yet new attention to the music in silent cinema passed too quickly

14 See Kay Sloan, *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

over soundlessness as a proper aspect of film, though this was not the case among feminist historiographers. In 1999, scholars, archivists, and curators founded the international association "Women and the Silent Screen," whose conferences drew attention to matters of film projection.

It is about the otherness of silent film. An origin at fairgrounds and variety shows may well have influenced the first decade of film, but in order to understand the formation of mass culture in the twentieth century, it is equally, if not more important to attend to the direction that the cinema headed: into newly emerging spaces, dark rooms equipped with their own projection machine. As has already been noted, the place of exhibition, not the film itself, contained the source of sound, usually a piano. Outfitted with benches, stools, and chairs, a space arose that was open to people of both sexes and from different social backgrounds—a space, moreover, that was present in all regions of the world including where films were not made but were nevertheless seen. In short, the soundlessness of film, its "silence," was foundational to the connection it had with a new public; and this connection fostered its own developments. The element that allowed for comprehension was not the word, not writing. In his 1924 book *Der sichtbare Mensch oder die Kultur des Films* (Visual man, or The culture of film), Béla Balász celebrated the gestural language of film and overlooked the subversive moment of silence, not least due to his enthusiasm about the expressive capacity of the woman on the screen.[15]

Soundlessness meant freedom from the spoken word and an attachment to visuality—the communication of the visual, by means of what is visible. This freedom was there from the start. The cameramen and actresses developed a feeling for what could not be grasped in words. For those who were not allowed to speak in public, like women, and who lacked language—for them, the cinema afforded equal opportunities to interact with what was happening onscreen as it did for the dignified bourgeois male sitting next to them. Perhaps, it even afforded them better opportunities. Film historians formulated a new perspective on the 1920s. The silence of film is the decisive element that divides the first decades of cinema from later ones. Early cinema had opened the eyes of the audience for the presence of women in film, as well as for the manifold connections between women in film production and in the theatres. And this world could be found outside a canonical film history that hewed to the dynamics of production, including the separation of popular from avant-garde or auteur cinema.

15 See Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch oder Die Kultur des Films* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1924. Rpt Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

The power of men was established in the course of the 1920s, not least through a reversal of economic relationships between cinemas and production companies that favoured the latter—this called for the patience of women. Indeed, a coalition of capital, industry, and politics brought silent film to an end. The economic disempowerment of cinemas followed from a technical one: from that point on, sound belonged to the film and was brought into the cinema. This can be interpreted as a beginning of the end of a cinema that had been organized around a new kind of public sphere. In 1932, the author and film critic Dorothy Richardson wrote a farewell to the silent cinema for the journal *Close Up*. Her short text is subtitled "The Film Gone Male." She relates how silent films in particular constituted a thoroughgoing cinema with women and for women. The sound film opened a future for film as a "medium of communication." By contrast, earlier film "provided a pathway to reality" through "its insistence on contemplation."[16]

Emancipatory movements like the women's movement demanded reality in film and developed a critique of the dominant cinema. By imagining silent cinema as a preparatory stage for a radically altered public sphere, "Brighton 1978" and the rediscovery of early cinema were equipped with the means to criticize the dominant "media public."

What Follows?

In 1990, my study *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks: Das Drama des Frühen deutschen Kinos* (The uncanny gaze: The drama of early German cinema) was published, and one year later, I began working as Professor for Film Studies at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main.[17] In light of all the previous arguments and experiences, it was clear for me that film studies needed to be developed and pursued as cinema studies. This meant allowing for courses of study that moved between the seminar room and the cinema while also maintaining and renewing the connections with film movements. It also required departing from a focus on the film, the work, and

16 Dorothy Richardson, "Continuous Performance: The Film Gone Male," *Close Up* 9, no. 1 (March 1932): 36–38, https://picturegoing.com/?p=4471. I discovered this text late, 2018, in connection with the preparation for the Remake. Frankfurter Frauen Film Tage (Remake: Frankfurt Women's Film Days) festival and a publication on the occasion of the festival, *Zu Wort kommen* (Speaking Up).

17 See Heide Schlüpmann, *Unheimlichkeit des Blicks: Das Drama des Frühen deutschen Kinos* (Frankfurt a. M.: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990).

discovering theoretical horizons where the meaning of film can be grasped in the moment of its inextricability from the cinema.

The "transnational university reform" known as the Bologna Process came into effect at the turn of the millennium and led to the corporatization of the university and its course offerings. In forcing competition, elite education, and "excellence clusters," this process changed the conditions of teaching and research fundamentally. In the Bologna System there is a priori no room for anything other than achievement and, in particular, for what can be quantified according to a point scheme. Accordingly, there is no time to waste in the cinema. In 2000, the Institute for Theatre, Film, and Media Studies along with the other humanities departments at the University of Frankfurt moved into the former administrative building of IG-Farben Industries. Built at the end of the 1920s, the building later became the headquarters for American Forces in Europe, and today it is part of a sprawling new campus.

The turn of the millennium also saw the founding of the Kinothek Asta Nielsen e. V. by a group of film scholars, students, and cinephiles. This independent project was intended to bring film and film history—especially the neglected history of women—into the cinemas. At first, the Kinothek was a home for film scholarship, but it has long since occupied a place at the centre of Frankfurt and has been supported by both the city of Frankfurt and, beginning this year, by the state of Hessen. Since 2018, part of its work has been to organize the Remake. Frankfurter Frauen Film Tage (Remake: Frankfurt Women's Film Days) festival.

The Kinothek, and here I return to the beginning of my retrospect, owes its existence to a particular energy and a capacity for resistance—to a relentlessly autonomous work undertaken without institutional safeguards. An energy, a determination formed in the women's movements and in the cinema movements of the 1970s has sustained the founders and Karola Gramann, who was director until 2019. From the beginning of the Kinothek Asta Nielsen and especially after I left the university in 2008, I worked with Karola and others, in particular Gaby Babić, who has since taken over as director. For me, this project was an opportunity to sustain a connection between theory and praxis.

The practice of cinema, however, is becoming more and more difficult due to the pervasiveness of digitalization. In particular, attempts at making silent films a part of our present experience are restricted to the few archival cinemas that continue to cultivate analogue projection. In those places, at least, an awareness for film history is possible. The international association "Women and the Silent Screen" organizes its conferences around

those cinemas and invites female film historians, archivists, distributors, film-makers, and film curators, thereby building a bridge between the academy and cinema. Only, what happens to a public that still goes to the cinema and, naturally, still wants to go? The prospects are not good for encountering film history, and especially early cinema, in its integral form.

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