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Feminist Media Histories: An International Journal

Special Issue on Curating Feminist Film Archives

Guest Editors: Maggie Hennefeld and Laura Horak

“The loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them.”

Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts” (2008).

“Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive. But rather at the word ‘archive.’”

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995).



Let us begin, instead, with the word “curate,” whose etymology extends from medieval priesthood (*curatour*, “a parish priest”) and from the “curing of disease, restoration of health” (in Old French) and now denotes the authority “to select and organize artistic works for presentation in something such as an exhibit, show, or program.” This special issue of *Feminist Media Histories* is dedicated to sharing stories about the revival of forgotten feminist film archives. We approach the task of curation beyond its official job designation (of “curator”) to include anyone whose labor involves curating feminist archives (as educators, activists, artists, web designers, librarians, or museum and gallery workers). We define “feminist” broadly and intersectionally—as anti-racist, anti-colonial, queer, trans, and crip. By “films” we mean reels of celluloid, but also digital and video audiovisual works. “Archives” refer not only to institutions that preserve celluloid and other material artifacts (although they are also those!), but to any gathering of surviving films along with media traces that once existed but are no longer extant. Curating *feminist film archives* might even involve applying a feminist lens to collections that would not ordinarily be viewed in such a frame.

Feminist film curators of the twenty-first century have cultivated imaginative and playful ways to navigate the loss, fragmentation, and repeated erasures endemic to the material preservation and collective memory of cinema. Writing forgotten women and other marginalized “makers” back into film history has been a rallying cry of the field of feminist historiography, exemplified in writings by Giuliana Bruno, Jane Gaines, Usha Iyer, Debashree Mukherjee, Shelley Stamp, Jacqueline Najuma Stewart, Patricia White, Yiman Wang, Zhen Zhang and many others. In some cases, this work involves reclaiming otherwise uncredited creative labor. In others, this endeavor has taken a vividly “speculative” and often reparative or fabulative turn, as pursued in a recent *FMH* double-issue edited by Allyson Nadia Field, as well as in Alix Beeston and Stefan Solomon’s forthcoming volume, *Incomplete: The Feminist Possibilities of the Unfinished Film*.

True to form, feminist film curating exceeds traditional methods in academic scholarship. Examples run the gamut from digital networks ([The Women Film Pioneers Project](#), [Kin Theory](#), [Rise Up!](#), [Edited By](#), and [New Directions in Film Historiography](#)) to archival film festivals ([In Visible Colors Remediated](#), [Orphan Film Symposium](#), and [FIC-Silente](#)), as well as DVD/Blu-ray releases (Kino’s [Pioneers: First Women Filmmakers](#) and [Pioneers of African-American Cinema](#)), online compendia (Another Gaze’s [Another Screen](#) and Maya Cade’s [Black Film Archive](#)), and gallery exhibitions such as HKW’s [No Master Territories](#) and BAMPFA’s [The Future Is Feminist](#). These projects often involve non-traditional forms of academic labor that question university hierarchies and what “counts” as research in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. In that spirit, feminist and queer filmmakers—Cecilia Barriga, Zoe Beloff, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Assia Djebar, Zackary Drucker, Cheryl Dunye, Azza El-Hassan, Su Friedrich, Barbara Hammer, and Karen Pearlman—frequently draw on the remains of the archive to envision lost or impossible counter-histories of cinema and thereby **to curate new feminist film futures**. Last but not least, podcasts create sonic adaptations of the

unheard canon, as in the queer tour-de-force [The Film We Can't See](#), which unearths surviving audio footage of a fictive, anti-fascist Sergei Eisenstein feature that would have co-starred Louise Brooks and Paul Robeson.

As the curators of [Cinema's First Nasty Women](#), a 4-disc DVD/Blu-ray set of silent-era films featuring slapstick comediennes and cross-dressing women, we are especially interested in collaborative, unorthodox, or otherwise **irreverent** models of feminist archival film curation in the twenty-first century. We invite submissions of traditional (which is not to say conventional) academic essays (which will be sent for blind peer review) AND shorter-form creative experiments: interviews, roundtables, personal essays, anarchic poetry, feminist dithyrambs, polemical manifestos.

Potential contributors, please send a **300-word abstract** along with a **brief bio** to the guest editors, Maggie Hennefeld (mhennefe@umn.edu) and Laura Horak (LauraHorak@cunet.carleton.ca), no later than **November 15, 2022**. Contributors will be notified by December 15, 2022; article drafts will be due by April 15, 2023 and will then be sent out for anonymous peer review.

Feminist Media Histories is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to feminist histories of film, video, audio, and digital technologies across a range of time periods and global contexts. Inter-medial and trans-national in approach, *Feminist Media Histories* examines the historical role gender has played in varied media technologies, and documents women's engagement with these media as audiences and users, creators and executives, critics and theorists, technicians and laborers, educators and activists. *Feminist Media Histories* is published quarterly by the University of California Press. More information is available here: <https://online.ucpress.edu/fmh>.