

# Introduction: The Place of the Contemporary Female Director

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The essays in this special issue originated in a two-day international workshop we convened at Monash University, Melbourne, in November 2011. Titled “Between Worlds: The Place of the Female Director in Twenty-First-Century Film Cultures and Feminist Theory,” the workshop was motivated by the renewed intellectual energy in recent feminist film theory around questions of women’s filmmaking. Our group shared a particular sense of excitement about Patricia White’s work on emerging industrial and textual crossovers between women’s cinema and world cinema, so we were delighted when she accepted our invitation to give a public lecture in Melbourne on this topic and to lead the workshop in her role as Faculty of Arts Distinguished Visiting Professor.<sup>1</sup> In turn, we were invited to propose this special issue to *Camera Obscura* and then to work as coeditors.

We organized the workshop around a series of case studies and invited junior and more senior women scholars to submit papers that identified and analyzed key issues in the field. The workshop elaborated on these issues through concentrated discussion. The event was partly inspired by the possibility of identifying

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avenues for collaboration among women scholars from diverse disciplines in the humanities. We were particularly interested in how an institutional culture of collaboration might be enabled in our university and believed that the question of the female director offered a fruitful place to begin. Acknowledging the interdisciplinary and transnational legacy of the feminist film tradition in Australia, which includes the work of influential scholars such as Meaghan Morris, Lesley Stern, Laleen Jayamanne, Helen Grace, and Barbara Creed, we saw the forum as an avenue for a group of newer Australian women scholars to consider how their individual research interests might be brought to bear on a new set of questions and problems for women and film. Our discussion encompassed women's film practice in Europe, South America, Asia, Australia, and North America.

Contributors to this issue were asked to consider the workshop theme of "between worlds." Rather than imposing a unifying paradigm, this theme was intended as a cue for authors to consider how, given the mutable cultural terrain of the twenty-first century, the work of female directors might be negotiating different, perhaps even disjunctive, worlds. In-betweenness thus functions throughout the following essays as a critical prism through which individual authors consider the current industrial, theoretical, and cultural values that frame female directors and their work. It encompasses existential and temporal worlds; geopolitical formations such as regions and nations; cultural worlds such as first nations, settler cultures, and diasporas; and the industrial worlds of art cinema, world cinema, and national cinemas. The essays offer approaches that, in some cases, make explicit the worlds that particular female directors navigate through and, in other cases, leave them implicit in the analytical framing. The methodological breadth is clear, with each contribution framing its object of inquiry differently. Some broach aspects of the conventional director study, others the scope of regional filmmaking and national cinema and politics.

Taken together, the essays offer an innovative way to approach women's film practice in the twenty-first century. The contemporary landscape of cinema production and interpretation is providing new possibilities for defining the female director as

an object of analysis. This is due not only to systemic changes in transnational pathways for production and distribution but also to the visibility of directors like Kathryn Bigelow, Sofia Coppola, Lucrecia Martel, and others. Building on these shifts, and attending to examples beyond these much-discussed auteurs, each contributor in this issue examines a director and the manner in which her practice is uniquely contemporary as it moves between different worlds, cinematic and cultural.

### Note

1. A version of this public lecture has been published as Patricia White, "Global Flows of Women's Cinema: Nadine Labaki and Female Authorship," in *Media Authorship*, ed. Cynthia Chris and David A. Gerstner (London: Routledge, 2013), 212–28, and is incorporated into Patricia White, *Women's Cinema/World Cinema: Projecting Twenty-First-Century Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).