
Amelie Hastie. *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection and Film History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007. 242p.

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Caution: *Cupboards of Curiosity* is not for the causal film buff or scholar looking for a quick read. It is a rich text that explores how female stars and filmmakers Colleen Moore, Alice Guy-Blaché, Louise Brooks, Mary Pickford, Marlene Dietrich, and others used collections, memoirs, cookbooks, and scrapbooks to produce alternate film histories and personal biographies. Blending autobiographical theory, feminist theory, and film theory to create a verbal Venn diagram, Amelie Hastie uses the work of such diverse scholars as Shari Benstock, Gaston Bachelard, Mary Ann Doane, Sergei Eisenstein, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, and Leigh Gilmore to create a framework from which to view the intersects. *Cupboards* attempts to reveal how these women appropriated “a variety of personal or domestic forms to make their lives public, to reveal their presence in history, and to display their theoretical insights” (5). In doing so, Hastie stretches and “expand[s] the space of the film archive to deepen the space of film history” (14).

Concerned about the lack of appearance in early film histories of women who very recent scholars have identified as central to early film production, Hastie examines how women worked after their film careers to keep their film images and contributions to film theory and production alive. Each chapter addresses a different method of reconstruction beginning with an exploration of collections and scrapbooks and their historicizing function. Theorizing that collections work like film montage, each object relating to each other and creating new forms and meanings, Hastie focuses on Colleen Moore’s famous dollhouse as a signifying collection through which Moore “narrates a story of Hollywood in which women have more control over their own historical destinies” (39). Each room of the dollhouse is explored as a covert film history where each object, because it relates to one of Moore’s movie experiences, becomes a signifier in her reconstructed history.

The next chapters focus on autobiography as film history and explores the autobiographies of Alice Guy-Blaché and Louise Brooks. Guy-Blaché was an early film production pioneer, but had been all but left out of the standard histories and Brooks was remembered only for her sexual ambiguity on and off screen. Both women sought to use the genre not to reveal personal details, but to “reposition themselves in institutional memory” (73). Pointing out that film scholars often construct star biographies based on films and publicity materials thus positioning them to exist only within the confines of the cinema, Hastie invites readers

to re-vision them through their autobiographies, likening the autobiographies to “cinematic productions” which follow the same teleological narrative structure as classic film narrative and in which the authors make direct links between their film roles and their personal lives. Thus, the autobiography becomes film history and film criticism. Focusing on the Brooks’ text *Lulu in Hollywood*, and how it functions as a memoir in juxtaposition to her essay “Why I Will Never Write My Memoirs” which was not included in the original Lulu text, but was included in the 2000 edition, Hastie show how Brooks “offers a biography of other actors and players in Hollywood through a critical autobiographical lens” (108).

Chapter four explores how stars used their movie fame to market themselves as experts in other fields. Hastie examines such interesting documents as the cookbooks, *Candy Hits by Zasu Pitts* and *In the Kitchen with Love* by Sophia Loren and self-help books such as *Mae West on Sex, Health and ESP* and Mary Pickford’s *Why Not Try God?* Drawing on Kathleen McHugh’s work in *American Domesticity: From How-to Manual to Hollywood Melodrama*, Hastie theorizes that advice manuals written by stars “build on film narratives at once to offer an inter-textual knowledge about the star-author and to duplicate the narrative structure as a foundation for the advice” (169). Thus each text encourages readers to remember and reconstruct the star’s life and film career as they reconstruct a recipe or enact a piece of advice.

Cupboards of Curiosity is an ambitious work that challenges readers to view texts and stars in new ways and provides a plethora of secondary sources for film scholars to explore. By exploding traditional definitions of what constitutes film criticism, Hastie’s work asks us to see non-filmic productions as informative sources awaiting analysis by scholars. ✱