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Recollecting Lotte Eisner: Cinema, Exile, and the Archive, by Naomi DeCelles. University of California Press, 2022, 226 pp.

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It has been a great pleasure to read this very impressive monograph. Wielding a vast array of archival material, Naomi DeCelles traces the life and influence of German-French film critic and writer Lotte Eisner (1896–1983), co-founder of the *Cinémathèque* in Paris. DeCelles' level of historical analysis is suitably advanced for such a subject, so much so that this book would probably appeal mostly to film historians and scholars of film historiography. That said, the book's clear diachronic structure—coupled with its lucid prose—provides a very readable and digestible examination of an overlooked but critical voice within film history as a whole. In this vein, DeCelles clearly sets up her scholarly intention from the outset: in short, Eisner was extremely influential in inter- and post-war German cinema, and thus deserves much overdue scholarly attention. This previous lack of attention is further complicated by the fact that much of Eisner's work has been misinterpreted, or even widely misread. As such, DeCelles clearly lays out Eisner's two primary contributions to film history at large. First, in founding the *Cinémathèque française*, Eisner "established a major archive of interwar German cinema" (1). Second, Eisner "wrote some of the first postwar scholarly studies about the aesthetic and historical contexts of Weimar-era films and filmmakers" (1). Accordingly, these two claims anchor the entire book's methodology and analysis.

DeCelles articulates that she does not "attempt to provide an exhaustive study of Eisner's biography" (4), later labelling the book's "narrative structure" as "quasi biographical" (155). While this declaration certainly holds merit, her four chapters are very comprehensive, and nevertheless demonstrate the work of a detail-oriented historian focused on the specifics of dates, events, and so on; in other words, DeCelles demonstrably shows a highly sophisticated understanding of film historiography. To reiterate my previous point, in many ways, her book is an example of classic film historiography—even if not described explicitly as such. For example, let us consider how DeCelles very helpfully lists, seemingly exhaustively, the many archival spaces and sources that she consulted while undertaking her deep dive on Eisner: these include (unsurprisingly) the *Cinémathèque française*, the New York Public Library, the University of Southern California (where some of Fritz Lang's "personal correspondence" can be found), the University of California, Los Angeles and Werkstatt Film in Germany: the latter two spaces hold correspondences by poet Èduoard Roditi and documentary filmmaker Sohrab Shahid-Saless, respectively. I intentionally mention all these archival spaces here, since it is these types of lists that buttress DeCelles extensive work, exemplifying the true vastness of such an archive: and it is this archival depth and breadth that makes it so surprising that Eisner is so overlooked within film and media studies scholarship. Furthermore, in addition to such secondary literature and correspondence on Eisner, DeCelles makes sure to showcase what she has found from her research into Eisner's personal archive, particularly in her doctoral dissertation, journalism, and

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memoirs. This vast array of diverse sources, in DeCelles' words, "reframes" one's previously held perspectives on Eisner as a person, as well as her work and career (5).

It seems that the word "reframe" is critical here. DeCelles rightly points out that Eisner has been marginalised throughout film history, and that there needs to be a reframing and revision of film history in a general sense, so that silenced female voices are brought to the fore and given fair and proper representation. Indeed, Eisner was not the only female film journalist working during the interwar period, with others including Iris Barry, Winifred Bryher, Colette, C. A. Lejeune, and Louise Straus-Ernst. DeCelles posits that one of the reasons behind this silencing of Eisner's voice has been the continued misreadings—and thus misrepresentations—of several of her written works, such as *L'écran démoniaque* (*The Haunted Screen*), which was published in French in 1952 and 1965, and then in English in 1969 and 1973. *The Haunted Screen* is one of Eisner's renowned works; however, it has been "frequently misunderstood and misrepresented", due to the biases of film scholars who favour Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* published in 1947; Kracauer's text casts a "long shadow" over Eisner's one (6). As such, the primary goal in *The Haunted Screen* is often said to be the documentation of Weimar cinema, which therefore "demonstrates how certain films prefigure the aesthetics and politics of Nazism" (6). However, DeCelles correctly identifies that Eisner's discussion of German reification ideologies is clearly within the context of Romanticism, not Nazism—which is apparent from reading Eisner's text itself, rather than what has been written about it in secondary sources.

Thus, the impetus behind DeCelles' study is not just to fill in a gap due to a lack of scholarly attention. Rather, there is also the need to address the many misrepresentations of Eisner's contribution to film history and film studies—something of which many readers of *Recollecting Lotte Eisner* may not be aware. For example, DeCelles heavily criticises the use of "diminutive language" against Eisner and her work, especially by film historian Barry Salt in his 1979 essay "From Caligari to Who?". In DeCelles' words, Salt's claims are "pugnacious", "misleading" and "false", due to his limited evidence base; notably, he seemingly completely ignores Rudolf Kurtz's 1926 *Expressionismus und Film* (*Expression and Film*), focusing exclusively on John Willett's 1970 text *Expressionism* (12–13). DeCelles' strong language is ostensibly justified, especially given the factual errors in Salt's piece concerning Eisner's perspectives towards German Expressionism. A case in point for DeCelles is Salt's claim that there had been no film criticism that had mentioned mise en scène, costume or acting style in designating whether films—or parts of films—could be classified as Expressionist. Eisner, however, did indeed make such arguments in *The Haunted Screen*, as well as in her article "*Aperçus sur le costume dans les films allemands*" (13). It is through such rebuttals (and these are not the only examples of factual errors in previous scholarship) that DeCelles establishes her voice and intervention, and thus the overall importance of her monograph.

In the four chapters that follow this very long and detailed introduction, DeCelles diachronically outlines Eisner's life and influence, utilising the expansive archive at her disposal. Furthermore, these chapters are not only presented chronologically; each one also presents a different type—or theme—of archival material. Chapter One, "*Fräulein Doktor Eisner*", considers Eisner's written memoirs, and specifically what they say about her childhood. These texts concern, for example, her self-described "gender dysphoria" (17), and the role that gender and class in general had at that historical juncture (the turn of the century in Germany). DeCelles' first chapter also includes a sophisticated analysis of Eisner's doctoral dissertation, "*Die Entwicklung der Komposition auf griechischen Vasenbildern*" ("The Development of Composition in Greek Vase Paintings"), which showcases both Eisner's own archival

proclivity, as well as her "zippy prose" (34). Chapter Two ("A Reluctant Bellwether: Dr. L. H. Eisner and Flapper at the *Film-Kurier*, 1927–1933") considers Eisner's journalism, and how her voice as a film critic evolved over time, especially since her dissertation. Notably, during this period (the 1920s) Eisner openly described herself as the first female critic in Germany.

Chapter Three ("'*La seule historienne*': Exile, Salvage and Community at the *Cinémathèque Française*"), deals with Eisner's time at the *Cinémathèque française*, during the Occupation (1940–44). Alongside co-founder Henri Langlois, Eisner would spend this time cataloguing "early film ephemera, documentation, and elements" (79). Unsurprisingly, this chapter is also very much informed by DeCelles' own archival research at the *Cinémathèque*, primarily at its administrative archives (18); DeCelles' methodology here is also buttressed by the theoretical framework of queer historiography (see Cvetkovich). Chapter Four, "'Lacunae Everywhere': Iterative Historiography and the Midcentury Palimpsests" is where the nub of Eisner's importance in film history is most self-evident, and why mischaracterising her is so egregious. More specifically, in this chapter, DeCelles does a deep dive into Eisner's scholarly publications, including both the French and English editions of *The Haunted Screen*, her books on F. W. Murnau and Fritz Lang, as well as her many articles (of which there are over seventy). DeCelles points out here that Eisner would "revise, expand, and reshape in each successive edition" (18). Moreover, via these texts one can see Eisner's influence not just on film history, but also film method; her vast archive of scholarship would create a "model of stylistic analysis that borrowed from art historical vocabulary and methods yet was centered about the moving image" (124). Put simply, film analysis was purely visual for Eisner, as seen in her in-depth analysis of visual tropes in Fritz Lang's œuvre (125).

The book's conclusion ("The Woolly Mammoth of the *Cinémathèque*") ties up nicely its "quasi biographical" diachronic study of Eisner. Interestingly, DeCelles begins with a close reading of Shahid-Saless's documentary *Die langen Ferien der Lotte H. Eisner* (*The Long Vacation of Lotte H. Eisner*, 1979), a suite of interviews over four days that demonstrate how consistent Eisner's stories were up until her final years, continuously corroborating her ideas from years past—as well as being extremely consistent in her many other interviews ("the same phrases, in the same intonations, even across languages") (142). Referencing such a film thus neatly synthesises Eisner's huge influence at the end of her life and career. What I also greatly appreciate in this conclusion is how DeCelles understands the limitations of her study; while her book clearly does important work, voices are still marginalised within archival practices, and there are no easy solutions at hand. For instance, DeCelles highlights how there is still a need to take into consideration non-normative forms of archives, such as oral histories, and archives of "feeling". While Eisner explicitly did not describe herself as a feminist, DeCelles nevertheless posits that feminist media historiography highlights exactly what has occurred in the misrepresentation of Eisner's (and other's) voices. DeCelles quotes from Shelley Stamp, who proposes that "meticulous case studies of individual women and discrete historical moments have done little to disrupt conventional histories. They remain on a parallel track, interesting footnotes to the central story" (37). I thus also appreciated DeCelles' use of the word "glean" in her conclusion, describing her (feminist) archival methods—referring specifically to Agnès Varda's essay film *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000). To glean here would be harvest fragments, and "restore" them "in the present" (157–58)—a goal that I would argue De Celles' book successfully achieves. DeCelles' monograph is an erudite and intriguing piece of scholarship, and convincingly makes a case for shedding light on marginalised voices in film history.

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