

The Feminine Eye: lecture 2: THE BIGAMIST: 1953: 80m:

April 11:
week #2

Women Directors during the Hollywood Studio Era:

Dorothy Arzner

Ida Lupino

Screening: **THE BIGAMIST** (Ida Lupino, 1953)

flashlight?

Lois Weber & rise of studio system:

Weber: made 4 more films re: birth control:
 including: 1917: THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE
 June 1917: left Universal to start her own production company:
 shifted away from “heavy dinners”:
 socially progressive films:
 made “lighter” films: re: marriage & domesticity
 we don’t know: whether she grew tired of problems heavier films invited:
 or because industry itself changing: late 1910s:
 moving away from progressive activist filmmaking:
 in favor of entertainment
 “preachy” films: fell out of favor: newspapers:
 cinema: should be used for entertainment:
 not propaganda
 WHERE: model of cinema: rapidly disappearing:
 films made to inspire people to social activism
 after initial success: her production company folded: 1921:
 Weber: found it harder & harder to get work in Hollywood
 Weber’s career fell prey to circumstances in Hollywood in early 1920s:
 not place that welcomed independent production:
 especially companies run by women:
 who’d played big role in creating films
 instead: increasing consolidation of power:
 in small number of major film studios:
 who also increasingly controlled exhibition
 increasing cost of filmmaking
 increasing control of MPPA:
 these conditions: made it increasingly harder:
 for independent companies to operate
 coupled with cultural shift: made Weber’s progressive films out of step:
 with Hollywood’s glamour-driven Jazz Age:
 Weber’s career went into decline
 Weber: 1 of few women writers who had successful directorial career:
 but: wasn’t able to hold on to it much past 1922:
 after that: directed only handful of films
 her funeral: attended by all Hollywood:
 later: she was left out of film history
 1939: died: alone & penniless:
 writer Frances Marion:
 good friend:/ Oscar winning writer:
 1st woman: win Oscar for writing: 1930: BIG HOUSE
 paid for funeral
 Weber: 1 of women forced out of studios:
 when men / big business: took over

today: examine: 2 women directors in Hollywood during studio era:
 1930 thru 1960s: ~ 30 years
 1 of these women:

Dorothy Arzner:

b. 1900: San Francisco:

grew up in L.A.: father owned restaurant:

frequented by Hollywood celebrities

studied medicine at USC:

then left school: 1917-18:

worked overseas in ambulance corps: WW I

after returning to states:

gave up medical studies

decided to become film director

filmmaking career:

began at Paramount Studios

started as typist

wrote scripts

worked as editor: great success:

threatened to move to Columbia:

if Paramount wouldn't let her direct film

Arzner: directorial career:

1927: 1st film: FASHIONS FOR WOMEN

1929: THE WILD PARTY:

Clara Bow's 1st talkie

early sound period: mike limited:

Arzner: put mike on fishing pole:

invented 1st boom mike

1933: CHRISTOPHER STRONG:

K. Hepburn as world champion aviatrix:

when film made: Amelia Earhart alive:

look at reception Hepburn's char gets:

after successful flight

clip: CHRISTOPHER STRONG: ch 9: 2 m

Arzner: directorial career: continued:

1936: CRAIG'S WIFE:

Rosalind Russell / John Boles:

married about 2 years

Russell: wife who values material possessions:

her home: most important thing to her:

more important than her husband

more important than people / her family

in film: we see her:

forbidding husband to smoke in house

isolating him from friends

getting angry because husband's aunt:

invited neighbor into house while she was gone

fussing with furnishings:

especially: large vase on mantelpiece

criticizing women who work for her

husband: in love with her:

doesn't see what she's doing to his life:

until climactic confrontation:

clip: CRAIG'S WIFE: ch 9 +: 0:51:30 mark: 3 m

Arzner's films: sometimes:

offer contradictions to spectator's relationship:

with what's onscreen: for example:

DANCE, GIRL, DANCE: 1940:

re: rivalries & friendships of group of women:

trying to make living working at burlesque hall

Lucille Ball: sassy showgirl

Maureen O'Hara: aspiring ballerina

film: contrasts:

Ball's hard-nosed pragmatism

O'Hara's almost virginal idealism

also examines idea of dance as erotic spectacle:

performed by women for men

climax comes: O'Hara: after being booed offstage:

by burlesque (male) audience:

shames leering male audience:

tells them off for their voyeurism

clip: DANCE, GIRL, DANCE: ch 14: 2m

Arzner: continued:

Arzner as director: seldom moved outside of traditional genres:

comedy / melodrama

but: her stories often stress plight of women

her best work: explores economic, sexual & social options:

available to women living & working in patriarchal society:

CHRISTOPHER STRONG: 1933:

woman pilot must choose between:

bearing illegitimate child to weak married lover

or her career & becoming sacrificial victim

THE BRIDE WORE RED: 1937:

gold digger impersonates society women:

in order to trap millionaire

not much re: her films was stylistically radical or “feminist”:

but: her work has interesting satirical edge:

her predilection:

strong-willed, independent heroines

witty dialog:

often at expense of patriarchal customs

Arzner: lesbian: but she kept quiet re: it:

so no trouble with studios:

unlike director James Whale:

career ruined: open re: being gay

1943: Arzner: had to quit career as director:

because of poor health

later life: made docs & commercials: for TV

filmmaking teacher: UCLA

d. 1979: La Quinta, CA

Ida Lupino:

Lupino: only other woman director during studio era:

only woman making Hollywood films:

from 1944: after Arzner retired:

until 1960s

b. 1918: London, England:

parents: both stage actors: show biz family

1933: mother took her to audition:

Ida got part mom wanted

made her 1st film: England: HER FIRST AFFAIR

1934: came to Hollywood:

at this point: bleached blonde:

small parts: nothing special

1939: LIGHT THAT FAILED:

performance got her better parts

then: signed contract with Warner Bros.

in most of her films: Lupino cast as:

hard-luck but sympathetic woman from wrong side of tracks:

1940s: THEY DRIVE BY NIGHT

HIGH SIERRA

DEVOTION:

no could play hard-luck dame like Lupino:

holds her own vs. some of biggest leading men of day:

Humphrey Bogart

Ronald Colman

John Garfield

Edward G. Robinson

called herself: "poor man's Bette Davis":

often cast in parts Davis didn't want to do

like Davis: rejected inferior scripts:

put on suspension by Warners

Lupino: for years: successful actress: Warner Bros.
 left studio: 1947: freelanced as actor
 1948: did 2 things:
 married Collier Young: film executive
 merged with Emerald Productions:
 with Young & Anson Bond
 next year: 1949: directed 1st film:
 NOT WANTED: 31 years old
 next year: 1950: Young & Lupino: split with Bond:
 founded their own film company: Filmmakers:
 thruout its history: known for collaborative filmmaking:
 stable set of: actors
 producers
 directors
 musicians
 screenplays: often co-scripted
 members of Filmmakers team:
 alternated various roles on set
 Lupino: seemed to thrive on this kind of collaboration:
 where her various talents could flourish:
 in atmosphere of mutual support & creative freedom:
 like Jean Renoir
 soon after they founded company:
 Lupino & Young divorced
 1951: Lupino: married actor Howard Duff:
 she & Young remained close collaborators
 after Young married Joan Fontaine:
 2 couples Lupino & Duff
 Young & Fontaine: socialized frequently

Emerald Productions & Filmmakers: companies Lupino & Young started:
 were formed & developed in middle of:
 many significant circumstances & contexts:
 industrial, ideological & personal: for example:
 during years their companies Emerald & Filmmakers were in business:
 1948 – 1954: 2 major US Supreme Court decisions were made:
 greatly impacted film production:

1. 1948: year Lupino founded Emerald Productions:
 same year: US Supreme Court ruling:
 US vs. Paramount Pictures:
 stopped monopoly on film distribution & exhibition:
 that major studios had been enjoying:
 ruling: essentially was beginning of end for studio system
 with this ruling: vertical integration of industry:
 studios controlling production, distribution & exhibition of films:
 now prohibited:
 as result: independent studios rose up in earnest:
 between 1946 – 1956:
 number of independent film companies:
 climbed from 70 to 165
 by 1958: 65 % of Hollywood films:
 made by independent companies
 fact that Filmmakers worked using collaborative system:
 rather than 1 based on rigid hierarchies:
 allowed company to benefit from court ruling:
 & its effect on Hollywood film industry
2. 2nd US Supreme Court decision: came in 1952:
 at high point of Filmmakers' production:
 “miracle decision”: extended 1st amendment to include films:
 freedom of speech guaranteed to other media:
 newspapers / radio:
 now extended to films, too
 Filmmakers: known for tackling controversial social issues:
 ruling had significant impact on its films

so: during period when Filmmakers operating:
 2 important changes came about in Hollywood:
 financial monopoly of major studios: lessened
 strict monopoly of Production Code: diminished
 both these changes: beneficial to independent companies like Filmmakers

Lupino: as director: social realist:

tackled subjects not usual for Hollywood films:

1st 4 films: as director: 1949 – 1951:

NOT WANTED

NEVER FEAR

OUTRAGE

HARD, FAST & BEAUTIFUL:

deal respectively with:

unmarried mother

dancer who contracts polio

rape victim

daughter forced into playing professional tennis:

by domineering mother

these films gave Lupino reputation:

being early feminist filmmaker

has unsentimental generosity towards her chars:

humanist: rather than ideological

expressed in images closer to low-key realism:

than to melodrama

films she directed: like chars she plays as actor:

unsentimental: but generous

tough: but vulnerable

hard on outside: sensitive inside

examples:

1950: OUTRAGE:

re: rape: focuses on victim: how she deals with it

clip: OUTRAGE: ch 5: 3.5m

Ann Walton: Mala Powers:

leaving home to return to work:

for 1st time after attack

her POV emphasized:

not that many c/u's used

we understand her pain even in LSs

1951: HARD, FAST & BEAUTIFUL:

mother: Claire Trevor: filled with dreams:

forces daughter: Sally Forrest: to become tennis champion

clip: HARD, FAST & BEAUTIFUL: ch 11: 2.5m:

mother & daughter argue

who else was tackling subjects like these in early 1950s?

Lupino: despite being thought of as early feminist:
 also made more male-centered films:
 most notably:

1953: THE HITCH-HIKER:

essentially 3-char film: all 3 men:
 no women in the credited cast:
 only women appearing in film:
 unbilled b/g chars

tense thriller re: 2 fishermen:
 pick up hitch-hiker:
 turns out to be psychotic killer

Geoff Andrew: re: HITCH-HIKER:

“It’s a taut, stylish *film noir* that plays more effectively with claustrophobia (the car) & agorophobia (the desert) than most road-movies by male directors.”

clip: THE HITCH-HIKER: ch 9: 3.5m

Lupino: later in life: continued directing & acting:
 mostly for TV:

1st as actor: then as director: thru 1970s:
 primarily adventure & crime series:
Untouchables / Bonanza / Have Gun, Will Travel:
 male-centered texts

but: TV structured differently from filmmaking:
 she lost her authorial control as director:
 instead of personal projects:
 respected “hired hand”

for info on TV career: go to imdb.com

d. 1995: Burbank, CA

Lee Grant: actor & director:

studied at Neighborhood Playhouse: NYC
 blacklisted by HUAC: refused to testify vs. husband
 won 2 Oscars:

Best Supporting Actress: 1975: SHAMPOO

Best Doc Feature: 1986: DOWN & OUT IN AMERICA

talks re: Ida Lupino

clip: Lee Grant on Ida Lupino: 5.5m

Arzner & Lupino films in DVD library

THE BIGAMIST: 1953:

BIGAMIST: only film made during studio period:

directed by woman who also stars in film

last film Lupino made for Filmakers:

1st film they distributed:

good part reason company eventually was dissolved

marks shift from Filmakers concentration on women-centered stories:

to narrative focused on man's POV:

but he's caught between 2 women

BIGAMIST: elements of film noir: f/b structure:

both: draws on conventions of genre:

& simultaneously rejects them:

traditional noir anti-hero: tough, hard-boiled, violent:

anti-hero: BIGAMIST: more passive than violent:

critique of post-war gendered identity:

bigamy: act more passive than violent

not traditional noir anti-hero

investigation of emotionally passive masculinity:

calls attention to precarious state of "manhood":

after WWII

bigamy: man's crime: patriarchal right:

woman couldn't afford 2 houses

2 women in film: but no femme fatale:

women aren't pitted vs. each other:

not stereotyped

also examines marriage as legal & social institution:

Harry's 2 relationships together:

represent conflicting ideals re:

marriage in post-war US

on 1 hand: emerging equality between husband & wife

on the other: traditional desire for hierarchy:

husband: ultimate authority

film: largely sympathetic presentation of Harry's situation

watch twin beds in film

Edmund Gwenn: Mr. Jordan in film:

Santa Claus in MIRACLE ON 34TH ST: 1947

1:55 pm: break

2pm:

screening: THE BIGAMIST

post-screening:

genre: mixture: part:

melodrama

film noir

social problem film:

at time BIGAMIST made: both:

noir & social problem films on decline:

HUAC: studios wary of filmmakers:

interested in issues of class & social unrest

shifts in narration: also signify shifts in genre

different locations: different mise-en-scène:

SF: shot in brighter tones:

apartment: minimalist: sleek 1950s style:

Fontaine: fits right in

LA: visually: darker place:

setting for many noir films

film: in general: attempt to get inside Harry's head:

initial stage of film:

Mr. Jordan: our narrator:

our initial stand-in

1st 2 shots: establishing shots:

economically set us in SF:

GG Bridge

hilly street

opening: in context of legal & social system:

Harry & Eve trying to adopt child

he's suspicious

cleaning woman: Jane Darwell:

another level of investigation:

as Mr. Jordan dictates

what's in Mr. Jordan's past?

"If you had made a mistake once,

you wouldn't want to ever let it happen again,

not where a child is involved"

we never find out

Mr. Jordan's connection to law marginal:

not a cop

Harry & Eve: bedroom: beds right next to each other:

1934: PC

Eve wakes him: clanging monkey for kid:
more cruel than cute?

Eve: “Mr. Jordan looks like Santa Claus,
just like a man who gives babies away”

Gwenn: Santa Claus in MIRACLE ON 34TH ST:

wink-wink: reinforced on bus tour:

makes Mr. Jordan more benevolent:

Santa: determines if we’re naughty or nice: his power

Harry: calls her “perfect wife”

Mr. Jordan’s home visit:

Harry: remark re: mole on right shoulder:
sabotaging chances with “Santa Claus”

Mr. Jordan: investigates Harry in L.A.:

standing & looking at exterior of building:

he’s a detective: of a sort: but not threatening

at Harry’s work: asking questions:

hasn’t been staying at motels lately

letter opener: “Harrison Graham”:

leads to Harry’s double life

at Harrison’s house:

baby cries

double life discovered: going on “about 8 months”:

Harry: “I’ve got to make you understand”

Mr. Jordan: “How could a man like you, successful, admired,
get into a position as vile as this?”

Harry: “Loneliness ...”

that’s what happened: 1 Sunday afternoon:

Harry stuck in L.A.: couldn’t get home to Eve:

he called her: she was in “executive mode”

decided to go for walk: f/b begins: dissolve

f/b: narration shifts to Harry's POV / voice-over:

remains there for remainder of film:

he has authority over how his story is told:

but way he tells it makes him man who doesn't act:

victim of circumstances beyond his control

at very least: women in his life mutually implicated in:

his behavior:

at worst: they're responsible for it

retrospective narration:

protects him from accountability for his actions:

events happened to him:

not experiences he controlled

casts himself as lonely man:

nearly helpless in his attraction to another woman

we must take everything he tells us on faith:

what would women's stories be?

f/b structure: hallmark of both:

signature of Filmmakers' style

hallmark of film noir

Harry walking: talks of distance between him & Eve:

how marriage became "business partnership"

tour bus: stars' homes: Jimmy Stewart, Jack Benny, etc.:

Harry: "Here were people going someplace & I went along with them":

passivity shown in voice-over narration:

he's being led / just going along

Edmund Gwenn's house: wink-wink:

initiates conversation with Phyllis

Phyllis: "I'm just crazy about bus rides":

so she can get off her feet:

waitress: working woman: independent

speaking as Lupino?

lots of buses in her films

bus ride: ends where it begins: like Harry's narration

offers escape: to fantasy world of celebrity

bus: not where chars in movies usually meet:

too pedestrian: usually: train:

bus: marker of class:

site of Civil Rights struggles: Rosa Parks

Phyllis: not immediately receptive to Harry:

"What is this, the story of your life?"

Harry: can use some tips on pick-up lines:

Phyllis offers some

she refuses his invitation to dinner:

then invites him to dinner herself:

Lupino: this kind of self-assurance:

her stock & trade as actor

Chinese restaurant: she takes him to place where she works:
 he takes her home: she says she wants to leave things:
 with them not knowing much about each other:
 but tells him she was just as lonely as he was on bus
 Harry: room: doesn't expect to see Phyllis again:
 but he feels "good again" because of having been with her:
 why does Harry turn to Phyllis?
 Eve: oblivious to his desires for their marriage
 Phyllis: offers active invitations
 Harry's call to Eve: confesses he "cheated" on her:
 Eve: treats it like joke: it's business call:
 her trust in Harry: based in her own self-assurance?
 back home: Harry's "a little bit sick of the deepfreeze business":
 just wants weekend with Eve: but she has big plans:
 Harry: "Eve's the brains & I'm the brawn":
 she's usurped his role as breadwinner / provider
 knows all mechanical details of product
 Harry's there to refill brandy glasses
 in bedroom: beds farther apart: symbolic of their lack of closeness:
 Harry & Eve: framed separately:
 Harry tries to talk re: how much time they spend together:
 Eve: sleepy: her back to him:
 they can't get away just now
 back in L.A.: Harry back at Chinese restaurant:
 mini-montage: dating: voice-over: just being with her is enough:
 taking her home: 1st kiss
 at work: voice-over: he's not the "take it or leave it kind":
 going to call it off with Phyllis
 Harry's room: Phyllis brings birthday gift:
 Phyllis: "You kill me"
 Acapulco: she tells him about past love:
 but doesn't want to know about his life:
 dancing: "I'm afraid of being in love with you"
 romantic tune sung
 back in SF: Eve packing: father's heart attack:
 she doesn't ask him re: anything but business
 Harry: brings her gift: "who do I have to thank for this?"
 Harry: wants to stay home from now on
 airport: Eve tells Harry how she felt re: not being able to have kids:
 how hard it would be to raise someone else's kid:
 now: father near death: seems selfish

end of f/b: Harry & Mr. Jordan:
 new f/b begins: dissolve: Harry on street
 Harry in L.A.: doesn't go to see Phyllis:
 but goes to Chinese restaurant
 Phyllis's landlady: "I think she needs you"
 Phyllis: "I don't need anybody. I can take care of myself. I'm a big girl now.":
 independence: she didn't contact him re: it
 "It's yours, if that's what you mean":
 no mention of pregnancy:
 "I don't trap my men this way"
 maybe she was afraid he wouldn't want her to have baby:
 never had anything of her own before
 doctor: she's not in good shape:
 "fooled me at 1st with that flip act of hers:
 but that's not the real Phyllis"
 Harry: can't ask Eve for divorce:
 "how can you hurt someone so much?"
 phone call from Eve: father died
 Harry stays with Phyllis: "for the 1st time I felt needed"
 "I loved Eve but I never felt she needed me"
 Harry & Mr. Jordan: both talking in voice-over
 Harry tries to tell Eve:
 she talks re: how she let him down
 fixing up nursery
 Harry in waiting room: son born prematurely:
 Phyllis gives him what Eve cannot
 Eve: surprise visit on anniversary:
 meeting kid he knows
 Phyllis: gossip re: Harry & other woman: Eve:
 tells him to get out: he does
 Harry & Phyllis: meeting in park:
 he can manage \$85 / week
 she asks him to take her home:
 "we need you"
 have double bed: not twin beds

end of f/b: Harry & Mr. Jordan:

Mr. Jordan: “so you had your out & didn’t take it”

says he’s not a cop:

“I can’t figure out my feelings towards you:

I despise you & I pity you”

Harry: writing to Phyllis:

cops waiting for him

Eve: friend “Tom”: tells her re: Harry:

we don’t hear him: we see Eve’s face / hear music

trial: lawyer: Harry: not hero / not monster:

if he’s taken Phyllis as mistress:

some would have turned blind eye

instead: gave her & son:

his name & honorable place in community

judge: as presiding legal representative :

responds to Harry’s case sympathetically

many bigamous marriages going on:

strikes at roots of our society

tragic irony: “I suspect the defendant:

may have even loved both these women:

perhaps he even needed them both”

both women there: c/u’s:

not question of which 1 he’ll go back to:

but which 1 will take him back

he must support both women:

must name son in will

they’re all “decent” people:

when man breaks moral laws we live by:

we don’t need man-made laws to punish him:

penalty of court: smallest punishment

sentence to be passed in 1 week

Harry & Phyllis: S/RS: tentative smiles:

women: look at each other

Phyllis leaves courtroom

Harry & Eve: S/RS:

she turns: walks to door: looks back at Harry

Harry: exits by other door

Eve: lingers: THE END:

final shot: freeze frame:

years before 400 BLOWS

Harry as noir anti-hero:

- passivity: avoids opportunities to own up to facts:
 - passive approach: his questions & answers: ambiguous:
 - his affective responses: he's primarily a reactive char
- he inspires ambivalence:
 - Mr. Jordan: "I can't figure out my feelings for you.
I despise you & I pity you"
- ambivalence logical: Harry leading double life:
 - seems almost split in 2:
 - his own doppelganger: film noir
- Harry's double life:
 - reflected in Lupino's dual role in production
- secrecy of his life: made more acute:
 - neither woman shares his experience:
 - but: neither do we:
 - no prolonged views of his life with either woman

women: not stereotyped / not femme fatales:

- film: reveals no duplicity in women:
 - they're both:
 - sincere & goodhearted
 - charming & confident

Lupino: like Gwenn:

- plays expected type of char

Fontaine: cast vs. type:

- not simpering heroine:

- Hitchcock's REBECCA

- not wary wife of SUSPICION

- not lovesick Lisa of LETTER FROM UNKNOWN WOMAN

- BIGAMIST: remaking of this char in postwar era

comparison of Harry's 2 marriages:

women: interchangeable: VERTIGO?

represent conflicting ideals for postwar age:

prevalent mood of suspicion & secrecy:

linked to: aftermath of both WWI & Korean War

HUAC hearings

following wars: relationships between men & women:

filled with conflict & mistrust:

dealt with in many films of period:

FROM HERE TO ETERNITY: also 1953

BIGAMIST: lets us see ways men & women:

learned to identify themselves in postwar era

Eve: Harry lonely: she's more business partner than marriage partner:

deep freeze business: metaphor for marriage?

treats Harry with trust: not suspicion

with father's death: re-evaluates her choices

"companionate marriage": took root in 1920s & 1930s:

lasted into 1950s:

response to changes in women's rights:

marriage: defined in more equal terms

lack of intimacy in bedroom:

symptomatic of broader emotional disconnect:

blow to Harry's male ego:

he's not bread-winner

doesn't dominate her

Harry: never felt needed by Eve

Phyllis: offers alternate fantasy of marriage to Harry:

he's not breadwinner in marriage to Eve:

seeks that role elsewhere

independent: repeatedly tells Harry:

she wants nothing from him

but: ultimately: what Harry wants:

she offers thru her pregnancy:

sense of need

marriage as alternative to homicide

attitude of film toward marriage: ambivalence?

repetition of marriage: simultaneous desire:

to have it

to rebel vs. it

contemporary reviews:

concentrated on issues of genre & verisimilitude:

“soap opera” qualities

lack of hero or villain

ambiguity of ending

next week:

April 18:

week # 3

Women Documentary Filmmakers:

Trinh T. Minh-Ha: Vietnam/U.S.

Zana Briski: England

Barbara Kopple: U.S.

Screening:

HARLAN COUNTY, U.S.A. (Barbara Kopple, 1976)