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Collaborative Film Authorship: Writing Latinas Into the Picture

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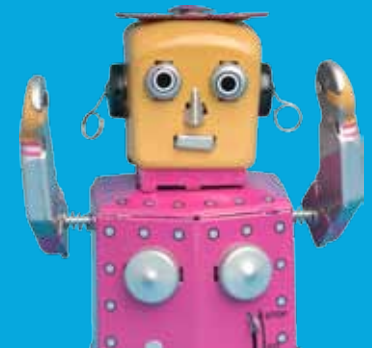
WRITING LATINAS INTO THE PICTURE

EXCERPT FROM PLENARY SESSION BY MIRASOL RIOJAS

U.S.-based Latinas have generally been included in film history through an analysis of their on-screen representations and contributions as directors of short, experimental, and documentary films. Unfortunately, as far as the filmmakers are concerned, the shorter formats I mention fail to receive the level of popular, critical, and scholarly recognition that feature films receive. Particularly since the 1990s, the number of Latinas working on features has increased significantly. To put this in perspective, Martha M. Lauzen's, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of

Women in the Top 250 Films of 2007," found women represented only 6% of directors that year.¹ Although there are no statistics available with regard to what percentage of these women were Latinas, they account for only a fraction of that 6%. It is also important to note that even Latina directors who do gain access to the means of production still have only limited opportunities within the industry.² The small number of Latina-made feature films available for analysis reflects Latinas' marginalization within the industry, which has been reproduced in the writing of film history.

Feminist film theory has repeatedly called for the redefinition of authorship in order to account for women filmmakers. Yet most calls for alternative models of authorship do, for the most part, maintain the director at the center of their work.³ The notion of authorship, still tightly bound to the director, contributes significantly to the relegation of Latina filmmakers to



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the margins. For although they have rarely occupied the roles that earn them recognition according to the auteur model, Latinas' absence from the director's chair should not be confused with a lack of participation in the creative process. By developing a collaborative model of authorship that expands beyond the director as the principle creative force to include screenwriters, producers, and cinematographers who contribute their labor and creative ideas to the making of feature-length films, the history of Latina filmmakers becomes more accessible.

In order to account for the wide range of Latina filmmakers' contributions, we must reconsider the ways in which we think of authorship while taking into account the industrial factors that influence how the discourse around authorship develops, as well as what cultural forces bring to bear in the process. We must consider not only theoretical issues related to the way that creative control is conceptualized, but also more materialist concerns such as legal and economic issues associated with assigning authorship to particular individuals. Who has artistic control over the films? How are the films marketed

and why? Who is invested in defining authorship in particular ways, and what is at stake in each case? If we begin exploring these types of questions, we have a remarkable opportunity to document the important work that Latina filmmakers are doing. We have the opportunity to write them into the picture.

Mirasol Riojas is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA. She was the conference coordinator for this year's Thinking Gender conference.

Notes

1. Lauzen, Martha M. *The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women in the Top 250 Films of 2007*. (Same study available for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, and 2005.)
2. Nancy Savoca and Darnell Martin, for example, have both been the subject of numerous scholarly articles and have received attention in the popular press.
3. The list of titles that follow in this vein includes (but is not limited to) books such as Judith Mayne's *Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990; Annette Kuhn, ed., *Queen of the 'B's: Ida Lupino Behind the Camera*, New York: Praeger Paperback, 1995; Christina Lane's *Feminist Hollywood: From Born in Flames to Point Break*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000; Geetha Ramanathan, *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*, London: Wallflower Press, 2006.



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