

Book Review

Rosanna Maule, *Sustainable Resilience in Women's Film and Video Organizations: A Counter-Lineage in Moving Image History*. Taylor & Francis, 2023.

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Rosanna Maule's *Sustainable Resilience in Women's Film and Video Organizations: A Counter-Lineage in Moving Image History* offers a thought-provoking exploration of feminist and LGBTQ media activism across North America and Western Europe since the 1970s. In this book, she presents a meticulously researched analysis of six feminist media organizations: Drac Màgic, Women Make Movies (WMM), Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV), Leeds Animation Workshop (LAW), bildwechsel, and the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (CASdB). With precision and critical rigour, Maule argues that the resilience and longevity of these organizations underscore their role as "counter-archives" that challenge and reimagine traditional moving image history through a "contingent, anti-hierarchical, non-linear approach to moving image culture" (9). Her work not only addresses critical gaps in feminist/LGBTQ media historiography but also contributes to contemporary discussions about the "sustainability" (19) of grassroots activism in an increasingly neoliberal and digitized cultural landscape. Throughout this book, Maule's prose is both accessible and critical, reflecting her deep engagement with feminist theory and her extensive fieldwork with these organizations. Her use of primary sources, including interviews with founding and long-standing members, enriches her narrative and provides insightful perspectives into the lived experiences of feminist media activists. She also integrates historical and cultural context seamlessly, offering a nuanced understanding of the broader political and social forces that have shaped these organizations' trajectories.

Structurally, Maule begins by situating the founding of these organizations in the socio-political context of the Women's Liberation Movement and second-wave feminism, noting their shared commitment to advancing gender-focused audiovisual work. Here, Maule builds upon B. Ruby Rich's notion of feminism's search for

women's cinema as "part of a broader strategy to claim a larger world for women" (2013, 160). Despite differences in typology, scope, and regional context, these organizations coalesce around a common goal: to create alternative infrastructures for film production, distribution, and preservation that foreground feminist and LGBTQ voices. Maule identifies three key factors that have sustained these organizations: "community-driven structures, affordable cinematic technologies, and anti-discriminatory practices" (1). By embracing these principles, Maule argues, these organizations have resisted the patriarchal and corporate dominance of mainstream media while fostering inclusivity and diversity in their practices.

A notable strength of the book lies in its case studies. The chapters in *Sustainable Resilience* seamlessly weave together historical analysis, theoretical insight, and empirical evidence. In doing so, Maule explores the collaborative ethos that underpins these organizations, emphasizing their rejection of hierarchical governance in favour of inclusive and community-focused practices. For example, Women Make Movies, founded in 1972, evolved from a grassroots initiative into the world's leading distributor of films by and about women, later expanding into "a production facility and a community workshop, both to train women in filmmaking and to produce films within a feminist-informed context" (56). Here, Maule highlights the organization's innovative production assistance programs and its role in promoting historically marginalized voices in the global cinematic landscape. Similarly, Drac Màgic, based in Barcelona, demonstrates how feminist organizations can sustain long-term cultural relevance, advocating for "a political and theoretical practice of feminist media" through initiatives like the Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones festival, which promotes gender diversity and social transformation (135).

In Montreal, Groupe Intervention Vidéo (GIV) demonstrates remarkable adaptability by employing digital platforms to "adapt video to women's needs and struggles" (62). Through its flexible approach to "participative and interactive activities" (62) and its efforts to "rethink its targeted audiences" (63), GIV remains steadfast in its commitment to feminist and LGBTQ representation while successfully broadening its reach to diverse audiences. The Leeds Animation Workshop, "a feminist-informed collective" which is "pioneering a new relationship between power and the people" (64), takes another approach, producing animated films on social issues that engage with diverse audiences through innovative storytelling and public screenings. Bildwechsel ("image change"), based in Hamburg, serves as a transnational hub for feminist and queer artists. Defining itself as "an artist+ and activist+ self-organized group," the centre fosters connections and supports projects that challenge conventional media practices. Lastly, Paris' Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir (CASdB), with its extensive archive of feminist and queer works, illustrates the importance of "the dissemination and preservation of feminist film and media works and history" in maintaining cultural memory and advancing gender equity (77).

Employing feminist and queer theory, Maule's examples emphasize the material, emotional, and ethical dimensions of archival work in her reading of the histories of these organizations. Scholars such as Judith Butler and Ann Cvetkovich inform her analysis, particularly in framing these organizations as counter-archives

that disrupt hegemonic narratives of memory and history. Through careful historical research, Maule reveals how feminist media collectives have sought to redefine traditional notions of archiving and historiography, emphasizing participatory approaches and inclusive methodologies. Maule is, however, sure to acknowledge the inherent challenges in feminist historiography, including the uneven power dynamics of transnational feminist praxis and the predominance of white, middle-class leadership within many of the organizations she examines. In this history, Maule also critically addresses the limitations of these organizations, particularly their “positions of privilege as white, middle-class, Western feminist organizations” that still, in part, reproduce broader social hierarchies and structures of power (46). While she acknowledges these shortcomings, she situates these organizations in a broader transnational feminist network, highlighting their efforts to engage with diverse identities and promote intersectional approaches to media activism. For instance, WMM’s emphasis on representing women of colour, LGBTQ women, and women with disabilities demonstrates its commitment to expanding the scope of feminist media practices.

Another particularly compelling aspect of Maule’s analysis is her discussion of the “digital transition” of these organizations (198). She examines their innovative use of online platforms for distribution and archival preservation, noting both the opportunities and challenges presented by digitization. For example, organizations like CASdB and bildwechsel have embraced digital tools to enhance accessibility and sustain their activist missions, while also grappling with ethical considerations related to the representation of vulnerable communities. The examination of these dynamics in *Sustainable Resilience* offers a thoughtful reflection upon the evolving nature of feminist media activism in the digital age.

While Maule’s focus on organizations from the Global North may limit the scope of her analysis, she is careful to acknowledge this limitation and to situate her work in the larger context of feminist media activism. Her reflections on the tensions and divisions within the Women’s Liberation Movement, particularly regarding race, class, and sexuality, add depth to her critique and highlight the complexities of feminist praxis. By engaging with these issues, Maule not only enhances the critical relevance of her work but also invites further inquiry into the global dimensions of feminist media history. *Sustainable Resilience* serves as both a testament to the enduring legacy of the feminist media organizations and a call to action for future generations of activists and scholars. In chronicling the achievements and challenges of feminist film and video organizations, Maule offers a powerful narrative of resilience, creativity, and collective action that is as inspiring as it is academically insightful.

References

Rich, B. Ruby. 2013. “The Confidence Game.” *Camera Obscura* 28 (1): 157–65.