

## BOOK REVIEW

***D Is For Daring: The Women Behind the Films of Studio D.*** Gail Vanstone. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2007; B& W photos; 280 pages; ISBN 978-1-894549-67-7; \$28.95 (paper).

Film is a powerful medium shaping the politics of visual representation of women. It has remained a critical focus of feminist academic interest across various disciplines. The examination of Canadian feminist film theory and feminist activism cannot be completed without a discussion of Studio D, the world's first and only government funded women's film studio. Founded by Kathleen Shannon in 1974, Studio D was a key player in shaping Canadian National feminist culture, particularly during the period of the 1970s to 1990s.

Gail Vanstone's book, *D is For Daring: The Women Behind the Films of Studio D*, provides a comprehensive overview of Studio D, its internal dynamics and dilemmas within the studio and the National Film Board, and its relations to other women's and feminist groups. Situating herself as a feminist cultural studies scholar as well as a person who has been impacted greatly by the documentary films Studio D produced, Vanstone offers an intimate look at materials collected from a wide range of sources, including archival documents and photos as well as in-depth interviews with Studio D founders, members, staff, and filmmakers. Surprisingly, many of these materials have never before been made available. The breath and depth of the materials collected in this book provide a fresh look of the history of Studio D's struggles and achievements as well as its role, both complicit in and potentially disruptive on, construction of Canadian nationhood.

The focus of this book is not a critical analysis of Studio D films, but rather the impact the women behind Studio D made on Canadian women's movements, national feminism, and Canadian cultural industries. During its twenty-two years of operation, Studio D regarded filmmaking as a practice of feminist activism, insisting on the right of ordinary women to be filmmakers, to tell their stories from their own perspectives and in their own voices, and of recovering women's voices hidden throughout history. However, there have been abundant critiques of Studio D and the films it produced over the years. Most of these critiques target the privileging of white English-speaking middle-class feminists within the Studio, and their failure to consider the racialized and classed experiences of other Canadian women. While recognizing the validity of these critiques, Vanstone reminds us that Studio D constantly struggled with limited resources and funding support from the government while their request of more ethnically inclusive staffs was constantly denied due to budget cuts.

This is an excellent textbook for courses on Canadian feminist film history and cultural studies. As a feminist film scholar myself, one whose life has been touched and transformed by feminist theory and women movements, I can well relate to Vanstone's passionate curiosity about the role of and contributions made by Studio D. This book is not merely a tribute to the legacy of Studio D, however. Vanstone asks several critical

questions in re-thinking how to more productively view Studio D's role as a feminist instrument of change in Canada. It is also the first in-depth record of those feminist pioneers, reminding us what we can do now and what is left to be done in the future.

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