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Sammelrezension Flaneur-Figuren I

Rhonda K. Garelick: *Rising Star. Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siècle*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1998, 231 S., ISBN 0-691-01205-9, \$23.95

Anke Gleber: *The Art of Taking a Walk. Flanerie, Literature and Film in Weimar Culture*

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1999, 283 S., ISBN 0-691-00238-X, \$14.95

The dandy and the flaneur emerge on the landscape of European culture as figurations of writing's capacity to observe, evaluate and transcend modernity's spiritual and material conditions. Literary and scholarly representations of these figures traditionally recount the experiences of an individual man who asserts his status as a cultural subject through the creation of performative and visually rich texts. Princeton University Press has published two significant studies that apply formal analysis, historical research and gender and media theory to demonstrating that the story of the dandy and the flaneur is not the story of the man of letters alone.

In *Rising Star*, Rhonda K. Garelick accounts for the influence of women's public performances on the articulation of French decadent dandyism as both personal and textual aesthetic. This rigorous study elucidates the turn-of-the-century movement in terms of the contemporary notion of camp and evokes current media celebrities, for example "the artist formerly known as Prince", to reveal the performative quality of gender and public identity in an earlier era. Comparing the

fluid relationship between masculine and feminine, performer and audience and high and low culture in both periods, Garelick's genealogy of the dandy sustains what might be considered unlikely connections between contemporary American popular culture and high French literature of a century ago. In *The Art of Taking a Walk*, Anke Gieber distills from the writings of Benjamin, Kracauer and Hessel a cogent definition of flânerie as a perceptual and narrative disposition both informed by and descriptive of the emergent medium of film. Applying Kracauer's imperative for a critical redemption of reality, she seeks in German theory, literature and film a flâneristic female subject position that Weimar narratives and recent scholarship often overlook. Her seminal study reveals scenes of the femme flâneur's struggle for emergence, disavowal and emphatic presence.

Garelick and Gieber base their studies of gender and representation in a social and political history conceived in terms of space and spectatorship, revealing modernity's propensity to define social and individual identity in terms of access to and use of private and public places. Tracing the inscription of subject positions in literature and performance, their books establish how the male artist's emergence from the isolated sphere of bourgeois interiority and his confrontations with women in urban settings brought about a shift in the objects and forms of modern cultural production.

Against the backdrop of the French Revolution and technological modernization, Garelick recounts how the dandy, as both author and fictional character, was driven out of the literary salon and how he encountered women on new terms in the arena of mass-culture. Performers such as Sarah Bernhardt and Loie Fuller, along with the fashionable women in public audiences, called the decadent dandy's attention to female social display and performance, recasting his elitist, masculinist conception of artistry. *Rising Star's* portrayal of this encounter demonstrates how this radically new view of women conditioned the textual innovations in narrative voice, temporality, dialogue and imagery that characterize the decadent movement from Lorrain to Wilde.

While Garelick's dandy cultivated his role and texts in the enclosures of dance halls, nickelodeons, theaters and the pavilions of World's Fair, the main figure of Gieber's study existed in an world of radical exteriority. In a thorough account of literature from Heine through Kracauer, Gieber explains historically and describes formally why and how theorists, authors, narrators and characters of flâneur literature inhabited the streets. She describes the parallel urban emergence of both sexes and addresses how the appearance of women in the Weimar Republic's changing environment of work, commerce and leisure impacted literary and visual culture. Her analysis of the prostitute in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* fragments, the stone women in Hessel's *Ein Flâneur in Berlin* and the women on the street in *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* underscores women's capacity for capturing and momentarily holding the attention of author, camera and character in an atmosphere of acceleration and transience.

The evolving textual relationship between women and modern memory was intrinsic to both flanerier and dandyism. In late nineteenth-century France and Weimar Germany, revolution and the mechanization of labor were perceived as threats to the singularity and self-determination of the creative mind—principles founding the artistry of the aesthete and man of letters. In life and in writing, the dandy and the flaneur ventured to preserve traces of unique subjective experience in mass culture. *Rising Star* and *The Art of Taking a Walk* forcefully contend that women mediated the dandy and the flaneur's attempt to create texts resisting the amnesia of the market. For example, Garelick investigates how fashion, print culture and early cinema colored the image of the technologized female performer in the work of Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Gleber ascertains that women, as subjects of representation and objects in circulation in the worlds of fashion, shopping, advertising and the cinema, embodied the commodification of personality. As the objects of a sensitive and desirous gaze, they registered the deeper significance of surface appearances in the writings of Benjamin, Kracauer and Hessel.

Gleber portrays flanerier as perception transformed into phenomenological theory and text and Garelick describes decadent dandyism as subjectivity translated into performance. Their two studies concordantly call attention to women's presence and active participation in these processes. Gleber argues that the cinematic quality of the flaneristic aesthetic determined its inextricability from the experiences and contributions of women in Weimar culture. By integrating essays from the debates surrounding cinema's advent in Germany (the Kino-Debatte) with Kracauer's 1960 *Theory of Film*, she points out the metaphorical and structural similarities between descriptions of the gaze of director, camera and audience and the types of looking practiced in flaneur literature. To substantiate female participation in the culture of scopophilia, she focuses her book's concluding section on theoretical accounts of Weimar female cinema spectatorship and on the highly visual narratives of Irmgard Keun and Charlotte Wolff. If she had accounted for the several women who published on the subject of early film in Germany from the teens through the thirties, Gleber could have given additional evidence to women's historical contribution to the theoretical formulation of a cinematic flanerier. Nonetheless, Yvette Biro's more recent writing on the liberating potential inherent in the multiplicity of cinematic views, voices and identifications facilitates Gleber's success in clearing the way for the *femme flaneur*.

Rising Star and *The Art of Taking a Walk* provide a striking illustration of the relationship between women as represented in modern culture and women as the creative and perceptual subjects of modernity. By redeeming creative artistry and discerning perception for female performers, spectators and writers, Garelick and Gleber make decisive contributions to an international discussion about the significance of gender, technology, economics and politics in the history of performance forms, recording media and literary movements.

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