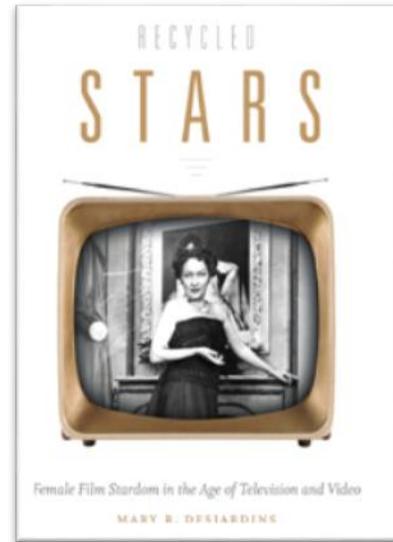


Mary R. Desjardins, **Recycled Stars: Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video**, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015, 320 pp., \$26.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Catherine Bednarz
The Pennsylvania State University, USA

Recycled Stars: Female Film Stardom in the Age of Television and Video is the culmination of Mary R. Desjardins’s years of study and work on stars, fandom, and the film industry. Desjardins’s book bridges the gap from film to television stardom in two different time periods: from 1948 to 1960 and then through the 1980s and 1990s. This focus through time is to show how these stars are “recycled” or “to expose who is invested in and who profits from the reemergence or sustained popularity of particular stars” (p. 3). Emphasizing female stars in particular is reflective of the fact that women were under particular scrutiny to maintain a certain identity both on- and off-screen. A handful of stars—Gloria Swanson, Loretta Young, Mary Astor, Ida Lupino, Lucille Ball, and Maureen O’Hara—are examined more closely because of their experience transitioning to new media while attempting to maintain a certain image. In this way, this book is not just another biographical star study or historical piece. Rather, Desjardins uses a multidisciplinary approach to discuss the recycling of stars. Although film and television studies play a prominent role throughout the piece, there are also significant elements of critical cultural and feminist theories.



The first chapter discusses Gloria Swanson’s acting career and transition from film to television and back. In this chapter, Desjardins explores Swanson’s glamour, fashion, personality, age, and comebacks, exploring how or if a glamorous film persona could be maintained on television. What could be just another star study piece or a clichéd discussion of the transition from film to TV becomes a dynamic conversation about feminine performance by highlighting the maintenance and recycling of star personas and the resulting commodification of women. For example, by having their own talk shows, Swanson and Faye Emerson “manipulated patriarchal expectations by participating in fashion” (p. 37). This chapter also discusses the history of the female image on television and criticism of the “feminine spectacle.” Racial issues and inequality are also exemplified using the case of Hazel Scott, indicating that even though Scott had the same level of visibility as Swanson and Emerson, she had less influence because black advertisers could not afford to support her.

Advancing the idea of early television as a new opportunity for aging female stars, chapter 2 discusses how film stars appeared in television roles that mirrored their established film personas. The discussion of actresses’ personas carries through this chapter and maintains the overall topic of film to television, but the analysis comes from more of a television studies perspective. While the examination of the roles discussed in this chapter adds a dimension to the overall theme of the star persona, this chapter

in particular lacks integration of other disciplines that could leave the reader wanting more. Chapter 3 moves the focus from film and television performance to societal performance. This chapter provides an insightful discussion of fan magazines and gossip magazines. Fan magazines promote a cultivated image of a star, whereas gossip magazines often attack this image. This is a refreshing way to discuss fan and gossip magazines and how they interact and affect a star's persona. Bringing these two approaches together allows for the realization of a metaconversation about a star's societal performance. The fourth chapter provides an impressive analysis of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz as a star couple and of their persona as a couple on- and off-screen across multiple platforms. This examination of the couple brings their biography beyond the basics and discusses what happened in their marriage and how they were affected by their participation in the "marriage mythology in a patriarchal, capitalist culture" (p. 188).

Desjardins does not deviate from her overall theme of recycled stars throughout each chapter; however, for those readers not primarily interested in film history, the in-depth biographies and stories seem a bit too detailed. The book would be more persuasive for these readers if the stories were shortened or broken up more evenly by the supplementary methods.

The book's strength is in its multidisciplinary analysis. Presented in an approachable way, the book brings together film studies, critical cultural analysis, and feminist theory. Most notable is the fifth chapter, and final analysis, on body and identity politics. Regarding such issues as sexuality, eating disorders are unexpected but important to consider for a total picture of stardom. The main example of this chapter is *The Karen Carpenter Story* in which Karen Carpenter's biography and struggle with anorexia are told using dolls. Discussing this recycling of stars and the lack of control a star or her estate has over her image brings a unique human element to what might otherwise be a matter-of-fact topic in film history.

In addition to being multidisciplinary, this book demonstrates the importance of considering different elements of film studies together. Areas that were previously separate in film studies, such as stardom, fandom, and industrial factors, present a completely different understanding of the field when brought together—an understanding that could greatly benefit future research and study.

As Desjardins indicates in the conclusion, many film students no longer know older film stars. This may make comprehension or interest challenging for a younger audience, even with the detail provided in the book. With guidance from other readings or in-class discussion, however, this book or stand-alone chapters would be effective and enlightening for an advanced undergraduate class or graduate class in film studies. It may also fit well with feminist media studies courses or any other women's studies, communication, star studies, or related graduate courses.