

Creative Documentary Research: Making Feminist Film Histories

By Karen Pearlman

Abstract:

As statues tumble around the world, debates rage about enshrining racism and misogyny alongside the deeds of rulers and warriors. Questions arise for filmmakers and film scholars. How we can create memories of cultures, people, and deeds that have not been enshrined or glorified in media, and, in many cases are not even preserved in official archives? How can we recognise the importance of the conversations that happened in private? The creativity, compassion or innovations that did not involve ruling or warring? This keynote asks in particular about Soviet women in film in the 1920s. It takes the creative practice research film, *I want to make a film about women* (Pearlman et al., 2020) as a case study in using 'speculative documentary' as a film form that explicitly acknowledges the first-person perspective - the hopes, fears, ethics, and curiosity of the filmmaker that arise in the process of making new, feminist, film histories.

Biography:

Karen Pearlman writes, directs, and edits screen productions. She researches creative practice, distributed cognition, and feminist film histories. Collected by major film archives around the world, her trilogy of films about historical women editors (2016, 2018 & 2020) have won 30 competitive national and international awards from peak industry bodies and film festivals, including 3 for best editing, 3 for best directing and 6 for best documentary. Her 2020 film, *I want to make a film about women*, was longlisted for an Oscar and shortlisted for an Australian Academy Award. The special jury prize citation from the Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival reads: "a film of innovative brilliance, celebrating the inexhaustible, essential tenacity of suppressed artists everywhere". The films and Karen's academic writing comprise a multi-modal study showing that the innovations for which the famed 'Soviet montage era' of filmmaking is known, rest, in substantive measure, on the creative work of women editors. Karen is also the author of the widely used textbook on editing, *Cutting Rhythms* (Focal Press) now in its 2nd edition and with translations into Chinese, Korean and Turkish. She is a senior lecturer in Screen Production and Practice at Macquarie University, in Sydney Australia, and a director of Macquarie University's Creative Documentary Research Centre.