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Los Angeles

Working Girls:  
The History of Women Directors  
in 1970s Hollywood

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements of the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Film and Television

by

Maya Montanez Smukler

2014



## **ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

Working Girls:

The History of Women Directors

in 1970s Hollywood

by

Maya Montanez Smukler

Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Janet L. Bergstrom, Chair

This dissertation examines the relationship between the feminist movement and Hollywood during the 1970s, specifically as it impacted the hiring practices and creative output of women directors working in the film industry. Due to the activism of the feminist movement, in particular the feminist reform efforts of the Women's Committees of Hollywood's professional guilds—the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and the Writers Guild—the number of women directors in 1970s Hollywood began to increase compared to previous decades. From the mid-1930s till the mid-1960s, only two women filmmakers had careers as directors in Hollywood: Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino. This research reveals that between 1966 and 1980 there were at least fifteen women making movies in the commercial film industry: Karen Arthur, Anne Bancroft, Joan Darling, Lee Grant, Barbara Loden, Elaine May, Barbara Peeters, Joan Rivers,

Stephanie Rothman, Beverly Sebastian, Joan Micklin Silver, Joan Tewkesbury, Jane Wagner, Nancy Walker, and Claudia Weill. However, in spite of this increase, the overall numbers were bleak. Women directed only 0.19 percent of the 7,332 feature films made between 1949 and 1979. By studying the biographies and filmographies of the fifteen women directors making feature films during this era, this dissertation explores how the progress that took place during the 1970s was paradoxical: feminist reform efforts made possible a noticeable rise in the number of women directors at the same time that Hollywood's institutional sexism continued to create obstacles to closing the gender gap.

The dissertation of Maya Montanez Smukler is approved.

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I was first introduced to the study of American women feature film directors as an undergraduate at Boston University when I saw Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1971) and Claudia Weill's *Girlfriends* (1978) in Professor Ray Carney's illuminating class on American Independent Film. Professor Gerald Peary, another of my BU instructors, introduced me to Dorothy Arzner, Ida Lupino, and Stephanie Rothman. His book, *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology* (1977), co-edited with Karyn Kay, was a tremendous influence that set me on my course. For well over a decade before attending graduate school I was able to combine my interest in women filmmakers with a professional career working in production with women directors, and at organizations dedicated to those filmmakers such as the American Film Institute's Directing Workshop for Women and Women Make Movies.

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Working Girls: The History of Women Directors in 1970s Hollywood*

On March 7, 2010, American filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Director.<sup>1</sup> The film she directed, *The Hurt Locker*, also won an Oscar for Best Picture. Accepting the award, Bigelow described to the global audience how “this was the moment of a lifetime.” The presentation of this award was a crowning moment with historical roots in Hollywood and American culture that reflected the breakthrough decade of the 1970s. Bigelow, who received her MFA from Columbia University School of the Arts Film Program in 1981 and directed her first independent commercial picture, *The Loveless*, in 1982, was presented the Oscar for Best Picture by Hollywood icon, Barbra Streisand. Streisand had begun cultivating her ambition to direct in the 1970s before completing her directorial debut with the studio-made film *Yentl*, in 1983.<sup>2</sup> *Yentl* won Best Comedy/Musical and Best Director at the 1984 Golden Globes; and in 1992, Streisand’s second feature, *Prince of Tides*, was nominated for Best Director at the Directors Guild Awards and was nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. Although her output as a director has received some of the highest acclaim of any filmmaker working in Hollywood, Streisand has never been nominated for Best Director at the Academy Awards.<sup>3</sup> The historical significance of the 2010 Best Director award for both these women was emphasized by the enthusiasm with which Streisand announced the award for Bigelow: “Well, the time has come, [pause] Kathryn Bigelow. Whoahoo!” As the music swelled, and Bigelow arrived at the podium, she

could be heard saying to Streisand, “I am so honored. I am so honored,” while Streisand enviously joked about the statue, “Can I hold this?”

In this exchange, the legacy of American women directors was implicitly acknowledged on stage: by Kathryn Bigelow’s Oscar win, Barbra Streisand’s obvious disappointment in never having been recognized by the Academy Awards for her work as a director, and the respect the two women displayed for each other’s place in history. As if this symbolism was not enough, as the two directors exited the stage the orchestra played Helen Reddy’s 1975 women’s liberation anthem, “I Am Woman.” A clichéd but resonant soundtrack, the song linked Bigelow’s award as a woman director to the feminist movement of the 1970s.

The 1970s was a crucial decade for women directors working in Hollywood. Due to the activism of the feminist movement during that decade, in particular the feminist reform efforts taking place within Hollywood’s professional guilds—the Directors Guild of America (DGA), the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and the Writers Guild of America (WGA)--the number of women directors making commercial feature films began to increase compared to previous decades. My dissertation examines the relationship between the feminist movement and the film industry during the 1970s, specifically as it impacted the hiring patterns and creative output of women directors working during this decade. During the silent era, an estimated fifty-seven women were directing films.<sup>4</sup> From the mid-1930s till the mid-1960s, only two women filmmakers had careers as directors in Hollywood: Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino. Between 1961 and 1966, two New York-based women were directing independent feature films outside of Hollywood: Shirley Clarke and Juleen Compton (both will be discussed in more detail in this

chapter).<sup>5</sup> Not including Clarke and Compton, my research shows that for the first time in almost forty years, the number of women directors began to increase: between 1967 and 1980 there were fifteen women who had made feature films within the commercial United States-based film industry, either within the studio system or as independent filmmakers. (The criteria that I will use to define these terms will be explained further in this section.) These fifteen directors were Karen Arthur, Anne Bancroft (1931-2005), Joan Darling, Lee Grant, Barbara Loden (1932-1980), Elaine May, Barbara Peeters, Joan Rivers, Stephanie Rothman, Beverly Sebastian, Joan Micklin Silver, Joan Tewkesbury, Jane Wagner, Nancy Walker (1922-1992), and Claudia Weill (see Appendix 1 for a list of their films).

The scope of this project begins in the late 1960s, roughly around 1967, when a wide range of social movements and shifting cultural attitudes taking place in the United States began to influence the film industry's approach to audience demographics, the content of its films, and its production practices, all of which impacted women directors and their professional experiences throughout the 1970s. The scope of my project ends in 1985 with a study of the landmark lawsuit filed by the Directors Guild on behalf of its women and minority members against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros. for employment discrimination. I argue that this lawsuit serves as a symbolic culmination of a decade of feminist reform efforts that had taken place within the film industry during the 1970s that affected women filmmakers, both directly and indirectly. This legal case also concludes my dissertation with a look forward to the 1980s when the number of women directors gradually continued to increase because of the feminist activism of the prior decade that took place within the film industry.



Within this date span of 1967 to 1985, my project hones in on the years between 1970 and 1980 when each of these fifteen women (with the exception of Rothman who made her first movie in 1966) directed her first commercially oriented feature film. Some of these fifteen directors made only one picture during the decade, while others made as many as seven. Some of these women directed television before directing movies, while several of them worked almost exclusively in television after directing features. Although my main concentration will be on the filmmaker's work during the 1970s, this study will consider the complete arc of each woman's career. These fifteen directors were not part of a cohesive group and in many instances did not know of one another. Rather, they are broadly connected by their gender, a historical moment and location (the impact of the feminist movement on commercial filmmaking during the 1970s), and a shared ambition to direct feature films. The manner in which their films were made and their career trajectories are as diverse as their makers. For example, some movies were produced or distributed by major studios, some were low-budget exploitation films made by minor studios, and others were independently produced and distributed by individual production companies.

In addition, the level of commercial success varied greatly within this group of directors. Some movies were successful upon release, such as Joan Micklin Silver's directorial debut, the independent feature *Hester Street* (1975). Made for an estimated \$400,000, the picture was critically well received and earned approximately \$5 million at the box office garnering a Best Supporting Actress nomination for its lead performer, newcomer Carol Kane.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the studio-made *Moment by Moment* (1978), written and directed by Emmy winner Jane Wagner and starring two prominent performers, Lily

Tomlin and John Travolta, was met with tepid reviews that reported audience walkouts.<sup>7</sup> As this suggests, the films made by these directors experienced a range of box office and critical success and failures.

My goal in this dissertation is not to determine if these films and their makers were “good” or “bad,” as measured by critical acclaim (press reviews, industry and film festival awards) and commercial success (box office earnings). Instead my objective is to consider a comprehensive view of the circumstances of these filmmakers’ professional lives by studying the production and reception of their work within the cultural climate of the film industry in the 1970s. For instance, Chapter 3 profiles comedian Joan Rivers’ film *Rabbit Test*, which she co-wrote and directed. The film received mediocre reviews. However, in those reviews, critics expressed enthusiasm for Rivers’ talent and an interest in seeing her next project. “As it is, *Rabbit Test* is more good intention than comic invention,” warned the reviewer for *The Independent Film Journal*. “But in Rivers’ case the seed for movie comedy success is there.”<sup>8</sup> In this example, the film’s poor reviews revealed how Rivers’ reputation as an accomplished comedian softened the tepid reception of her film. While her film did not stand out as a critical success, the courtesy afforded to her by reviewers demonstrated her standing in the entertainment industry.

Similarly, the limited textual analysis that I conduct of the thirty-four films made by these filmmakers is intended to add perspective to the study of each director’s experience and interest in making movies during these years. For example, in Chapter 2, I discuss how Barbara Peeters and Stephanie Rothman, who each wrote and directed low-budget exploitation films geared towards a youth audience, frequently created character configurations of three female friends at the center of a narrative that contained ample

doses of action, romance, and sexuality. My analysis of these plot devices and characterizations serve a larger argument of how the two filmmakers struggled to maintain their creative agency and feminist beliefs within the confinements of the exploitation marketplace, which was dominated by male producers and directors who expected sensationalist storylines with large quantities of female nudity.

Not all fifteen directors began their careers in commercial filmmaking. Several were from the East Coast and part of different artistic communities, such as improvisational comedy and documentary filmmaking centered in New York City. Some were performers or writers in film, television, and/or on stage before moving into the role of feature film director. Many continued to shift between multiple careers, such as actress, writer, and producer, while also directing. Frequently they would combine their skills on individual projects. For example, Anne Bancroft starred in, wrote, and directed the film *Fatso* (1980); Joan Rivers co-wrote and directed *Rabbit Test* (1978); as did Stephanie Rothman, who directed and wrote or co-wrote all seven of her feature films. Frequently, and not necessarily by their own choice, some of the filmmakers only made one feature film, such as Barbara Loden (*Wanda*, 1970) and Jane Wagner (*Moment by Moment*, 1978); while others, like Lee Grant, who made her first film, *Tell Me a Riddle*, in 1980, did not make another feature, *Staying Together*, until 1989. Some women who had created bodies of work as directors in the 1970s, at different points in their careers, found it impossible to continue directing movies. After an acrimonious experience with Paramount Pictures on the film *Mikey and Nicky* (1976) that labeled her as a “difficult” director, Elaine May worked as a screenwriter and actress before directing her final film, *Ishtar*, in 1987.<sup>9</sup> In 1980 Barbara Peeters directed her fifth low-budget independent film,

*Humanoids from the Deep*, after which she became an established television director of episodic, one-hour dramas. At the time Peeters had strategized that moving out of low-budget filmmaking and into television would lead to a career directing mainstream movies, but she found that the transition from exploitation to Hollywood was unachievable for her as a woman director.<sup>10</sup> More than thirty years after completing *Humanoids from the Deep*, she has yet to make another feature film.

To clarify certain terms that I will use to describe these filmmakers, the films they made, the production communities in which they worked and the historical period that they occupied, I will use the term *commercial film* or *feature film* interchangeably to represent a singular and broad definition of narrative feature films intended for a diverse, but commercial marketplace. Throughout the project I will describe in more detail the particulars of how a film was financed and distributed, specifically in Chapter 2, which is organized around two independent production communities: first, exploitation films, also known as B-films or low-budget independent films; and second, art house films or independent commercial films. Characteristic of the production and distribution trends of commercial filmmaking during this era, some movies were partially financed by a studio or an established independent production company or produced independently and picked up for distribution by a major studio.<sup>11</sup> Others were funded by some combination of nonprofit grants, contributions by private investors, relatives, friends, and the filmmaker's credit cards. What each film in this study shares is that they were narrative features intended for a commercial, revenue-generating marketplace: a movie theater with a ticket-buying audience. These distinctions make clear that although during this period of study many women directors were working in documentary, experimental, or

avant-garde filmmaking, the subject of this project is female directors of commercial feature films.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Liberation of 1970s Hollywood**

Still experiencing a postwar slump, the film industry during the 1960s and into the early 1970s was forced to reckon with the proliferation of a diverse and successful independent filmmaking community, the enduring dominance of television, and a changing audience demographic whose tastes were influenced by the many social movements of the era.<sup>13</sup> During these years, film culture in the United States thrived in its diversity as the marketplace for non-studio-made pictures expanded, both inspiring a young generation of filmmakers and cultivating the tastes and purchasing power of a large youth audience. An influx of foreign films, with subject matter frequently contested by American film censors as being too explicit, screened in art house theaters; a variety of low-budget independent B-films dominated drive-ins and grindhouse theaters; and independent films, those made with neither studio nor big business financing, experimented with form and narrative conventions, while utilizing grassroots modes of production, distribution, and exhibition.

In 1968 a new rating system by the Code and Rating Administration (CARA) was established that introduced lettered categories (G, PG, R, and X).<sup>14</sup> This system enabled a range of “adult” content to be included in movies that ran the gamut of high-culture art cinema, low-budget exploitation pictures, and avant-garde films. CARA, as an industry-created organization, allowed the studios to stay current with changing cultural tastes by creating a self-regulating classification method that sanctioned adult content in

Hollywood films. The realization, through the success of movies such as *Easy Rider* (1969), that young directors might be those most adept at making films targeting the cash cow youth demographic, combined with CARA's permission for studio films to broaden their spectrum of "appropriate" subject matter, created a conducive set of circumstances for a new generation of Hollywood filmmakers.

These industry changes, in audience demographic, modes of production, marketplace regulation and distribution, and changing economic conditions prompted the studios to take more chances on the next generation of directors. Journalist Mel Gussow, writing for the *New York Times*, summarized the status of Hollywood in 1970:

Hollywood—the old studio system—is dead, but movies as a medium have never been more alive. Doors once locked by tradition, unions or inertia are wide open. Film students are directing features. Playwrights are writing original screenplays, and they are not being ground into studio formulas. No subject is taboo...Studios are no longer the only places where movies are made, financed and distributed. The movie industry has fragmented into a million places. Power is decentralized.<sup>15</sup>

These industrial and cultural conditions foster a popular and romantic historicization of 1970s Hollywood as an era of extraordinary potential for young filmmakers. In *Lost Illusion: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979*, David A. Cook describes this period as "a time in the history of...the [US film] industry [when] almost anyone with talent and the will to do so could become a film director."<sup>16</sup> While this period in film history was extraordinary in the way cultural conditions and infrastructure shifts within the entertainment industry provided opportunities for a new

generation of filmmakers, it is important to make clear that white male directors continued to dominate the industry.

By the end of the decade, in 1979, six female members of the Directors Guild—Susan Bay, Nell Cox, Joelle Dobrow, Dolores Ferraro, Victoria Hochberg, and Lynne Littman—felt mounting frustrations with their inability to get hired within the industry, and formed the Guild’s Women’s Committee. (The biographies of several of the Committee members and the group’s activism will be detailed in Chapter 4.) Determined to accurately assess their current employment status, the group spent a year researching the actual employment statistics of women directors in Hollywood. According to their research, between 1949 and 1979, 7,332 feature films were made and released by major distributors. Women directed 14, or 0.19 percent, of those 7,332 films.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, these statistics were given to the media in an attempt by the Women’s Committee to draw attention to evidence of sexist hiring by individual production companies, film studios, and television networks.

Starting early in the decade, the feminist movement had begun, in various ways, to influence Hollywood’s own political consciousness raising. On screen, the women’s movement and its objective of female autonomy were represented by characterizations and narrative themes in several kinds of movies, including large-budget studio films directed by men such as *Klute* (1971, Warner Bros., Alan Pakula), *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* (1974, Warner Bros., Martin Scorsese), and *An Unmarried Woman* (1978, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Paul Mazursky). Off screen, myriad female industry employees organized various kinds of networking groups. In 1973 Women in Film emerged as a nonpolitical association created by established women in the industry.<sup>18</sup> In 1974 the

American Film Institute, a mainstream conservatory for a new generation of filmmakers, still run by an old-guard Hollywood patriarchy, founded the Directing Workshop for Women, a hands-on program that trained individual women to become film and television directors. (The Directing Workshop for Women will be discussed in Chapter 1.)

While the DGA did not make a concerted effort to address the low employment numbers of its female directors until 1979, between 1974 and 1976 both the WGA and SAG compiled statistical surveys that explicitly documented the disenfranchisement of its women members. These efforts, spearheaded by the two organizations' individual Women's Committees, were reported on widely by the press: the WGA documented the low numbers of women writers working in film and television, and SAG called for improved roles for actresses.<sup>20</sup> (The work of SAG and the WGA's Women's Committees will be discussed in Chapter 1.) Interestingly, while the DGA was slower than SAG and the WGA to organize within its membership ranks around issues of employment discrimination, it was its Women's Committee, founded in 1979, that pressed the issue in court. On July 25, 1983 the DGA filed a class-action lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California against Warner Bros., and on December 21<sup>st</sup> a case against Columbia Pictures for employment discrimination against the Guild's women and minority members.<sup>22</sup> On August 30, 1985 Judge Pamela Rymer ruled in favor of Columbia and Warner Bros., and effectively against the DGA. The case exposed, through the research conducted by the Women's Committee leading up to legal action, an explicit pattern of sexist hiring taking place in the film and television industries. Nonetheless, because the lawsuit was technically a failure, the loss in court confirmed that after a



decade of attempts at feminist reform of the industry, there was no reliable legal recourse to discrimination based on sex and race, specifically with regard to the position of director. In spite of this bleak news, more women had begun directing feature films throughout the 1970s, and that number would continue to grow, slowly, during the 1980s. Progress was so miniscule it could be perceived as regressive. Yet the very existence of fifteen women directors of feature films working at different times throughout the 1970s meant some were able to break through the barriers to advancement. How they were able to do that is the central question of this dissertation.

### **Women Directors in Hollywood: Guy to Bigelow**

Kathryn Bigelow's 2010 win of the first Best Director Oscar given to a woman in the eighty-two years of the Academy Awards suggests that female directors have had a difficult relationship with Hollywood. By no means on parity with their male peers, there were still a considerable number of women directors during the early days of Hollywood. In 1896 Alice Guy, a twenty-three-year-old Frenchwoman, was one of the first filmmakers to develop techniques in narrative filmmaking while a secretary at Gaumont Film Company in Paris. In 1907 Guy moved to the United States, and in 1910 she opened her state-of-the-art film studio, Solax, in New Jersey, which she self-financed. From 1910 to 1914, Solax produced as many as three hundred films. Guy oversaw and directed at least fifty.<sup>23</sup>

During these years, film production frequently took place in individual director units not supervised by company executives or a single producer. The "doubling in brass" tradition, borrowed from the theater, where above- and below-the-line employees

performed double-duty, created a fluidity between jobs.<sup>24</sup> The leading lady might also be in charge of hair, makeup, and costumes, and the actress could also be the picture's screenwriter. This system discouraged the establishment of labor hierarchies and the gender segregation associated with later stratifications in the studio system, allowing women opportunities to gain a broad selection of experience that was accepted as the norm, as it was for their male peers. Lois Weber had her own movie studio and in 1916 was chosen to direct Universal's biggest feature to date, *The Dumb Girl of Portici*. At the time she was ranked as one of the industry's top ten directors along with D. W. Griffith and Thomas H. Ince.<sup>25</sup> Frances Marion, head writer for MGM, directed a handful of films, including *The Love Light* (1921), which starred her best friend Mary Pickford. Former actress Dorothy Davenport took up the megaphone after the death of her husband, famed actor Wallace Reid. As a tribute to her deceased spouse, Davenport was listed in her directorial credits as Mrs. Wallace Reid. Lillian Gish directed one feature starring her sister Dorothy; comedian Mabel Normand directed numerous movies, some including Charlie Chaplin; and Nell Shipman made action adventure films on location in the wilds of Idaho in which she performed all her own stunts.<sup>26</sup>

By the end of the 1920s, the cultural legitimacy that women had given to the film industry was replaced by financial legitimacy as dictated by masculinized Wall Street.<sup>27</sup> Production eventually became structured around the centralized producer system that limited the flow of collaboration previously experienced between crew positions. The establishment of craft unions further diminished women's employment opportunities and contained them within sex-typed jobs, such as secretaries and assistants, which had less creative and economic power. During the classic studio period, women were almost

entirely locked out of directing films. From the mid-1930s through the late 1960s there was never more than one woman director at a time working in commercial films: Dorothy Arzner was employed as a studio director from 1927 to 1943; and Ida Lupino directed for her own independent production company between 1949 and 1953 before making her last and only studio-produced and distributed film, *The Trouble with Angels* for Columbia Pictures, in 1966.

By the late 1960s, coinciding with the mobilization of the feminist movement on a national level, a few more women began to work as directors in the film industry. Stephanie Rothman, who graduated with a master's degree from the University of Southern California's (USC) School of Cinematic Arts in 1964, later worked as an assistant to the successful low-budget film director-producer Roger Corman. This was her entrée into writing and directing exploitation films, all of which she made with her husband Charles Swartz. Rothman directed her first film, *Blood Bath*, also known as *Track of the Vampire*, in 1966. Director Beverly Sebastian also collaborated with her husband, Ferd Sebastian, on several low-budget exploitation films, her first being *I Need* in 1967. Other filmmakers such as Joan Tewkesbury and Barbara Peeters began honing their directorial skills as students of theater and dance before moving into film production. Tewkesbury attended USC's School of Theater in 1958 and directed plays and acted in television commercials before working with director Robert Altman as the screenwriter for his films *Thieves Like Us* (1974) and *Nashville* (1975). She directed the feature film *Old Boyfriends* in 1979 before becoming a successful television director. Peeters attended the theater program at the Pasadena Playhouse in 1964. She began working in low-budget B-movies in the late 1960s and wrote and directed several

exploitation films, many for Corman's New World Productions, before also becoming a prolific television director. She made her first film, *Just the Two of Us*, in 1970.

Crossover between the television and film industries was a significant factor in the careers of these women. Karen Arthur directed two feature films, *Legacy* (1975) and *Mafu Cage* (1979); in 1976 she began directing television. Joan Darling and Nancy Walker were well-known actresses and television directors prior to making feature films: Darling's *First Love* (1977) and Walker's *Can't Stop the Music* (1980), after which they each returned to television. Jane Wagner had already won two Emmy Awards for her work as a television writer with her creative and life partner Lily Tomlin prior to writing and directing her only feature film, *Moment by Moment* (1978), which starred Tomlin and John Travolta. She then returned to television and the theater as a successful writer-producer.

Academy Award-winning actresses Anne Bancroft and Lee Grant directed films while maintaining their careers as performers. Bancroft directed one film, *Fatso* (1980), for which she also wrote and co-starred. Grant made *Tell Me a Riddle* (1980) while continuing to act in film and television and maintain a productive career as a television director. Joan Rivers was a popular comedian who appeared frequently on television and in successful one-woman comedy shows. In 1978 she co-wrote and directed the film *Rabbit Test*, a comedy starring Billy Crystal as the first pregnant man. Elaine May was also a well-known comedian before Paramount produced her first film, *A New Leaf*, in 1971 that which she wrote, directed, and starred. She went on to direct three more studio films, two of which she also wrote.

Working outside of the studio system, independent filmmakers came from various backgrounds to make feature films in the 1970s. Joan Micklin Silver began working in educational movies in the early 1970s. In 1975 she wrote and directed her first feature, *Hester Street*, a period piece about Jewish immigrants in the late 1800s. Her husband, Ray Silver, who worked in real estate, produced and distributed the film. Together, as independent filmmakers, they made several more pictures, eventually securing studio financing and distribution deals. Barbara Loden, a well-known theater, television, and film actress, wrote, directed, produced, and starred in her independent film *Wanda*, which won the International Critic's Prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1970. Claudia Weill began her formative years on the East Coast making documentaries within the feminist filmmaking community. In 1978 she financed her first feature, *Girlfriends*, through artist grants and grassroots fundraising. The picture was a success on the film festival circuit; its critical acclaim drew the attention of Warner Bros., which distributed the movie. Weill's second feature, *It's My Turn*, was made for Columbia Pictures in 1980.

As gleaned from this introductory sketch, the careers of these women are diverse and, in many instances, disparate from one another. I describe these directors as a figurative "generation," because although they shared the same era, professionally, they varied in ages: Nancy Walker, the oldest, was born in 1922 and Claudia Weill, the youngest, in 1947. I also refer to them as a "group," although they did not work together or make films collectively—several of them did not even know each other. They are "grouped" together by their mutual historical experience. As I have established, discussions of the content of their work and how it might relate to the choices that these women made and opportunities they were offered will be included in my examination of

their industry biographies, but textual analysis is not the framework that informs the project as a whole. Instead, this dissertation privileges a comprehensive look at these individuals' biographies and filmographies as a way to investigate a crucial historical juncture during the 1970s when industrial and cultural factors led to the increase, yet continued marginalization, of women directors. This is not a study of feminist filmmakers, although some of the directors profiled may identify as such, nor is it a study of feminist films, although some of the movies may be read as such. Rather, this project is an examination of the relationship between the feminist movement and the commercial film industry as it impacted women directors. This is not a study of "women's films."<sup>28</sup> It is a study of the women who made feature films in the 1970s.

### **Chapter Organization**

As a way to understand the historical relevancy of this "generation" of filmmakers, and the intricacies of their careers, my dissertation situates this group within the industrial, sociopolitical, and legal circumstances that created the momentum in the late 1960s and into the early 1980s necessary to boost the number of working women directors. The chapter organization reflects the tiered scope of the project. First, 1967-1985, a range that positions the question of how the number of women directors increased during these years within the debates over equal employment opportunities for women and minorities within Hollywood. Second, the meta-scope of 1970-1980, a ten-year span that focuses on the production histories of those individual fifteen directors. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on this group of filmmakers: Chapter 2 examines six directors within the context of different independent filmmaking communities (exploitation and

commercial art cinema) that existed outside of Hollywood, but also experienced a mutually dependent relationship with the studio system; and Chapter 3 is structured chronologically, studying films made between 1970 and 1980 to profile nine directors individually and consider patterns, similarities, and anomalies women directors experienced in commercial filmmaking during the course of the decade.

Chapters 1 and 4 bolster the director studies of the middle chapters by creating a chronological cultural and industrial perspective. Chapter 1 establishes the context for the debates over equal employment opportunities for women and minorities in Hollywood, first with government intervention by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1969, followed by the feminist activism taking place in the early 1970s by the professional guilds, SAG and the WGA, and at organizations like the American Film Institute. Chapter 4 continues the discussion started in Chapter 1, bringing it up to 1979 by focusing on the Directors Guild's Women's Committee and their fight against sexist hiring practices and the subsequent 1983 class-action lawsuit (decided in 1985) filed by the Guild against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros. for the employment discrimination of its women and minority members. These bookend chapters establish an historical framework in which to position the professional biographies of the fifteen women directing features in the 1970s. Studying these filmmakers within the larger context of the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the internal industry activism presents a way to understand how the film industry changed from forty years of having no more than one woman director working at a time to slowly increasing those employment statistics. This gender analysis of the 1970s film industry also raises a

compelling question: considering the cultural and industrial shifts taking place, why did that amount not increase more?

### **Chapter 1: *Feminist Reform Comes to Hollywood***

Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation's subject by starting in 1977 and 1978, a moment in time when women directors and sexism in Hollywood were frequently covered in the press. This chapter discusses the ways in which second wave feminism influenced Hollywood by examining the era's cultural products (Hollywood's popular "New Woman" films) and production cultures (attention paid to women directors in the press in terms of their hiring; industry attitudes about the place of women in Hollywood). The second section of the chapter studies the different efforts taking place to address job discrimination based on gender and race: in 1969 the EEOC hearings on the film and television industries' violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act; in the early 1970s the internal industry feminist activism of the professional guilds, SAG and the WGA; and in 1974 the AFI's Directing Workshop for Women was established to train women for the job of director.

### **Chapter 2: *Starting Out Independent: Exploitation and Art House Cinema***

Chapter 2 focuses on women who started as feature film directors, meaning they had never held a prominent position in the industry prior to directing (e.g., screenwriter, actress). Six filmmakers, all of whom started as *independent* filmmakers, are discussed in this chapter. They are broken into two groups:

- Low-budget exploitation films: Barbara Peeters, Stephanie Rothman and Beverly Sebastian



- Independent commercial/art house cinema films: Karen Arthur, Joan Micklin Silver and Claudia Weill

### **Chapter 3: *Crossing Over: Performers and Screenwriters Turn Film Director***

Chapter 3 focuses on women who were established in other industry careers before they crossed over into feature film directing. In all of these cases it can be argued that their professional relationships and the high-profile success of their non-director careers helped them transition into the role of director (although not all of them would make more than one feature, some never directing again, others directing television).

Chapter 3 is organized chronologically and profiles nine women:

- Actresses: Anne Bancroft, Lee Grant, Barbara Loden, Nancy Walker
- Comedic performers (live performance, television, and film): Joan Darling, Joan Rivers, Elaine May
- Screenwriters (film and television): Joan Tewkesbury, Jane Wagner

### **Chapter 4: *Radical Feminists: the Directors Guild of America***

Chapter 4 discusses in detail the circumstances leading up to the DGA's 1983 class-action, job discrimination suit against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros., including the formation of the Guild's Women's Committee in 1979 and its attempt to negotiate affirmative action policies with the studios, networks, and major production companies. This chapter also considers the impact of the court's 1985 verdict in favor of the two studios and the long-term effect of the case's defeat on the Directors Guild, its female members, and women directors in general, working in the industry.

### **Chapter 5: *Desperately Seeking Something: 1970s Perseverance and 1980s Progress***

The conclusion of this dissertation looks towards the future—the 1980s—speculating as to how the number of women directors making feature films in the United

States continued to grow in the following decade. Although equality in numbers was not achieved, between the independent film communities and Hollywood, there were considerably more women filmmakers than during the prior decade. The figurative “generation” of 1970s women directors’ achievements and considerable amount of disappointments were “ground breaking,” but more effective for the next era.

### **Methodology and Sources**

Existing scholarship on Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s continuously favors male filmmakers. This is evident in works such as Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-and-Rock ‘n’ Roll Generation Saved Hollywood*; David A. Cook, *Lost Illusion: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979*; Geoff King, *New Hollywood: An Introduction*; Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*; and Michael Pye and Linda Miles, *The Movie Brats: How the Film Generation Took Over*.<sup>29</sup> Female directors, if discussed, are considered in the occasional chapter on representations of women and/or feminism in texts like Jim Hiller’s chapter “Unequal Opportunities: Women Film-Makers” in *The New Hollywood*; Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner’s chapter “The Position of Women” in *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film*; and Robin Wood’s “Images and Women” in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. Other scholars often justify the omission of female directors in their work by citing the low numbers of women working during the decade. In his tell-all biography of the male directors who dominated 1970s Hollywood, Peter Biskind explains that “this [was] a time when there were virtually no woman directors save for Joan

Micklin Silver and Claudia Weill....”<sup>31</sup> Thomas Elsaesser in his chapter “American Auteur Cinema: The Last—or First—Picture Show,” written for an anthology on Hollywood in the 1970s, admits that the era was dominated by male directors and so is the collection of essays. However, “[t]he one exception is Barbara Loden...”<sup>32</sup> John Pierson, in the introduction to his history of American independent film during the 1980s and mid-1990s, which discusses 1970s independent distribution and exhibition, after a mention of Joan Micklin Silver’s independent feature *Hester Street*, he adds a parenthetical: “(Sadly, Joan, Claudia Weill [*Girlfriends*], and Lee Grant were just about the only American female directors in the seventies.)”<sup>33</sup> While it was true that the number of women directors was small compared to their male peers at the time, as my research shows there were fifteen of them, not only one, two, or three. Furthermore, contrary to these authors, paltry numbers do not exclude subjects from my study, but rather qualify them. The exception, the virtually absent, the parenthetical are the main subjects of my project.

Academic studies of women directors in Hollywood during the 1970s tend to be sweeping histories with generic scopes, such as Barbara Koenig Quart’s *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (1988). Although she conducts a detailed textual analysis of May, Micklin Silver, and Weill’s films, ultimately, the broad framework of her book-- on women directors working in the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, and the “Third World”--makes Quart unable to thoroughly discuss her subjects in any detailed social, historical, or production context. Instead they are evaluated by the overarching category of gender, which tends to flatten any discussion of individual filmmakers. Similar in the lack of a complex historical context is Mary G.

Hurd's *Women Directors & Their Films*, which is structured more as a catalog of predominately American women directors. Hurd explains that her purpose is for "the reader of [the] book [to] be introduced to basic biographical and critical information about selected women directors."<sup>34</sup> In this sense, both of these books provide some preliminary information on women directors, but what is most interesting to me are those filmmakers they omit, who tend to be the majority of the fifteen directors I am studying.

This is an inquiry I asked most pointedly of *Women Filmmakers & Their Films*, edited by Amy L. Unterburger. An impressive tome of over 500 pages, this index covers early cinema up until 1998, when the book was published, and includes over 250 entries of women working in film, predominately from Europe and North America. For this text, the category of "women filmmakers" includes directors, as well as several other above-the-line positions such as animators, editors, and producers. The editor makes clear that with the assistance of over eighty esteemed advisors, the selection of individuals was a "difficult process." Undoubtedly, the attempt to be as inclusive as possible is an enormous challenge for a catalog of this kind (multiple careers in film spanning 100 years), and it is only realistic that some names might be overlooked. However, for a decade of such importance to women filmmakers, only three--Elaine May, Joan Micklin Silver, Claudia Weill--of the fifteen women making feature films in the 1970s are included in this book. How can a text dedicated to correcting the omission of women filmmakers in film history perpetuate the same error? What are the reasons for a book on women directors to leave out those working during such an influential decade as the 1970s?

This exclusion stems from the influential body of feminist film scholarship that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s whose focus was the critique of mainstream cinema and how Hollywood's visual representations and cultures of production were reflective of the industry as a patriarchal hegemony.<sup>35</sup> During this time, feminist film scholars also emphasized in their work contemporary women filmmakers who functioned within noncommercial production communities that often rejected Hollywood conventions and production models and instead mobilized filmic modes such as experimental, avant-garde, and documentary. Frequently these filmmakers and their films were overtly political and feminist. Directors of these kinds of films who were often written about included Joyce Chopra (US), Michelle Citron (US), Laura Mulvey (UK), Jan Oxenberg (US), Sally Potter (UK), Yvonne Rainer (US), and Julia Reichert (US). Feature film directors of the 1970s who were studied were almost exclusively European, such as Chantal Akerman (France), Nelly Kaplan (France), Agnès Varda (France), Margarethe von Trotta (German), Lena Wertmüller (Italy), and Mai Zetterling (Sweden).<sup>36</sup>

In her 1994 essay "Women Filmmakers," published in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, Diane Carson presents an outline for teaching a college class on "women filmmaking," whose "objectives are to analyze alternative as well as conventional images crafted by women and to establish the breadth and depth of women's substantive contribution to cinematic history."<sup>37</sup> Her proposed course covers close to 100 years of cinema history over multiple categories "animation, fiction and nonfiction, narrative and experimental. It includes studio-generated and independent work, American and foreign productions." Unit One focuses on the silent era; Unit Two on the 1930s-1950s; and Unit Three on "Contemporary Women Filmmakers: The Sixties

to the Present.” Carson begins this section enthusiastically: “So many possibilities exist within this unit that making choices proves extremely difficult.”<sup>38</sup> Her task is an ambitious one: create a filmography of women directors that is international, multiformat, and representative of three decades. However, absent are all of the filmmakers who made commercial features in the United States during the 1970s. Representing that era and those kinds of films are only European directors (i.e., Akerman, Varda, von Trotta, Zetterling).

Surprisingly, in the Introduction to the section on “Women’s Cinema” in the collection *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film* (1979), the volume’s editor, Patricia Erens, explains how “[i]n the early Seventies the prospects for women were brighter than ever, although Hollywood studios had yet to entrust the direction of a major film to anyone other than Elaine May.”<sup>39</sup> She goes on to mention Arthur, Loden, Rothman, Peeters, Micklin Silver; and anticipates Tewkesbury and Weill, who at the time Erens’ book was being published were releasing or in production on their first films. Ironically, although the editor does well to acknowledge the change taking place in U.S. commercial filmmaking in the 1970s with the range of women beginning to direct, none of the contributors to the anthology write on those directors.

As independent filmmakers who made commercial movies with feminist themes, Joan Micklin Silver and Claudia Weill bridged the divide between feminist film theorists and commercial cinema.<sup>40</sup> Of particular interest to academics was Weill’s first independent feature, *Girlfriends*, which was entertaining in its portrayal of themes that reflected the women’s movement’s agenda: marriage, careerism, and female economic independence.<sup>41</sup> Elaine May, who was frequently torn apart by feminists for her depiction

of female characters, as often as she was praised, could not be excluded because she was the only woman during the 1970s to have begun to build an original body of work in the studio system. In her book *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film*, Joan Mellen conveyed her displeasure with May's depiction of female characters in her 1972 film *Heartbreak Kid*, claiming that the director's "unfortunate offering of crudely stereotyped women, recognizable ethnic types presented at their worst for the sake of a few cheap laughs which come far less frequently than supposed by the reviewers."<sup>42</sup>

As surveyed in the existing scholarship, women working in commercial cinema during the 1970s occupied an awkward place in the view of feminist scholars: if they were not making explicitly feminist films, working in nontraditional narrative formats, or were international filmmakers, they were excluded. The absence of these filmmakers has carried over to current research on American women directors from this period, a lapse my project will fill.

More detailed histories of women directors in the 1970s have tended to be written by journalists within studies that focused on all kinds of women professionals working in Hollywood. This distinction is not meant to denigrate those works, but rather to recognize the differentiation between academic texts and popular film histories in their methodologies, sources, and readership. Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and the American Dream* and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* are important histories of women in Hollywood written *in* the 1970s (both books were published in 1973). Primarily concerned with actress biographies and representations of women in film throughout Hollywood history, each book does briefly mention women directors from the silent and classical eras. Published so early in the decade, they only

have a chance to introduce Shirley Clarke, Barbara Loden, and Elaine May at the start of those women's careers. Haskell and Rosen continued to cover women directors throughout the decade—and into the present--in the popular press. Their articles during the 1970s on the growing population of directors are important primary sources that I refer to throughout this project.

Rachel Abramowitz's *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (2000) and Mollie Gregory's *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (2002) focus on above-the-line industry employees. Each follows a similar linear chronology, beginning their histories in the late 1960s and concluding around the time their books went to press, in the early 2000s. Both books do not center exclusively around directors, but rather a wide range of women, including writers, producers, editors, studio executives, production designers, agents, and actresses who crossed over into directing and/or producing; Gregory discusses television and film equally, while Abramowitz concentrates more exclusively on women working in Hollywood. As journalists, each author's main source materials are the interviews they've conducted with subjects. Both books have been invaluable to my dissertation in the sheer quantity of information collected on women working in the contemporary film and television industries--subject matter and individuals who rarely are privileged in academic or commercial film histories.

In the past ten years there has been a significant amount of research conducted on women filmmakers during the silent film era. The work of these scholars has been most influential to this project, providing useful examples of methodology that reach across four key fields of film study: social, industry, feminist, and director studies. An astute,



well-documented historical text, Cari Beauchamp's biography *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* achieves such a combined and quadrupled effort. Beauchamp reappropriates the traditional "great man of [film] history" format by concentrating on a female object of study within a historical biography. Focused on the overlapping personal and professional lives of several prominent women working within Hollywood from 1916 to 1940, the book also retains as its main historical object the successful screenwriter (who also directed three silent films) Frances Marion.

In addition to providing historical evidence that substantiates an understanding of gendered labor in early Hollywood and the proliferation of women as writers and directors during the silent era, Beauchamp's book provides a useful model for my study in the way it centers on a woman subject, but does not omit her male contemporaries in the process. Louis B. Mayer and Irving Thalberg are featured prominently within Beauchamp's text—Marion was MGM's most successful screenwriter during the classic period, working closely with those male executives. This is applicable to my work in that I am not attempting to write a separatist history of the women of 1970s Hollywood, but rather incorporate their careers within the record of that period. *Without Lying Down* is also a model for me in the way it considers the intersection of other kinds of industry jobs within the study of a main subject; in Beauchamp's case a writer, in mine, directors.

A common approach to studying women directors during the silent era is within the historical framework of "lost and found."<sup>43</sup> Many of the filmmakers from this period have been left out of well-accepted accounts of early cinema, and the prints of their films literally lost and sometimes, literally, found. I argue that the classification of "lost and

found” does not suit the women directors of the 1970s. The aim of my dissertation is not to “rewrite” the history of Hollywood during the 1970s or construct a separate history of women directing commercial films during that period. Instead, this study is an *expansionist* and *integrationist* film history: my objective is to *expand* the existing historical narrative of the 1970s film industry, to then *integrate* within it the contribution of women directors during this period. These women have not yet been lost: many of their films are not widely available, but are accessible; many of these individuals are not privileged in film history, but they are still very much alive, in all cases still working and enthusiastic about being interviewed.<sup>45</sup>

There are other perceptive theorizations made by feminist film scholars of early women directors that have been instructive to my subject albeit with a difference of fifty years. For example, in Kay Armatage’s biography of silent filmmaker Nell Shipman, the author champions Shipman as a worthy historical subject “not because she was unjustly ignored in the history books, unique, ahead of her time, or a lost genius, but because her work in popular genres welcomes a variety of methods of reading and unfolds issues of modernity, generic conventions, and cinematic practice.”<sup>46</sup> Armatage refuses to equate “lost,” “forgotten,” or “marginalized” with the male-centric tendency of film production studies--specifically ones geared towards areas of authorship--with the “naïve historical claims” that to be resuscitated by scholarship must mean that the lost subject was a genius: “absence on the one hand and their uniqueness on the other.”<sup>47</sup>

I incorporate aspects of Armatage’s approach into my investigation of women directors during the 1970s. The majority of the subjects in my dissertation have been understudied and in many instances entirely left out by not only the dominant texts on the

film industry in the 1970s, but also feminist film histories conducted on those years. Like Armatage's impetus to write about Shipman, my motivation to write about these filmmakers is not to resurrect maligned geniuses, but instead to acknowledge their participation as commercial directors within a specific industrial and cultural moment as a way to consider the history of the era in which they worked. Therefore, subjective determinants of "talent" compared to other directors or measurements of box office revenue do not decide their inclusion within my study of 1970s filmmaking. Instead, the criteria needed to be a valid and valued historical subject are the diverse circumstances of each individual's career trajectories that created the opportunity for them to direct feature films during this decade.

Key to my research have been primary sources, including paper archives, film and television archives, and oral histories that, for the most part, I have conducted. Crucial to understanding and reconstructing the cultural-industrial context of 1970s Hollywood and its intersection with the feminist movement has been information in newspaper and industry trade papers and their coverage of individual directors and film titles. To understand the feminist activism within the professional unions, the DGA, SAG, and WGA, I have relied not only on press coverage of these events, but also on the publications produced by each of the guilds. Throughout the 1960s and 1980s, each of the three guilds published either an internal newsletter available to members only and/or a magazine for purchase by the public that served as a publicity mechanism for the organization and its members. While internal documentation was not always easily accessible to me from the guilds themselves, their newsletters provided valuable insight into the unions' internal dialogs, as well as the way they presented themselves to the

public. Other guild publications that are crucial in forming an understanding of women directors' advancements during this time are the membership directories released by the DGA beginning in 1967 through the present. Following the example set in 1979 by the Guild's Women's Committee, I've culled from those lists further numerical breakdowns to create a nuanced understanding of "progress."

In reconstructing the 1983 DGA lawsuit, I reviewed the complete court documents located at the National Archives and Records Administration in Riverside, California. In Chapter 4, drawing on the details of the plaintiff (DGA) and defendants' (Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros.) arguments, I attempt to understand the flaws implicit in the DGA's legal strategy and the strengths in the studios' defense formulated around a legacy of confidence at the core of the motion picture industry's enduring power.

Most rewarding to my research are the substantial oral histories that I have conducted with women directors and those who were their peers during this era. For this project I spoke with the following filmmakers (with some, multiple times): Gwen Arner, Giovanna Nigro-Chacon, Juleen Compton, Nell Cox, Joan Darling, Joelle Dobrow, Victoria Hochberg, Lynne Littman, Elaine May, Barbara Peeters, Susan Smitman, Joan Tewkesbury, and Jane Wagner; and with the following Directors Guild executive officers who were active in the 1970s: Warren Adler, the late Gil Cates and Michael Franklin; and attorney Chris Knowlton, who was part of the legal team representing the DGA in 1983. I also corresponded at length with Jan Haag, founder of the Directing Workshop for Women; and journalist David Robb, who covered the unions for *The Hollywood Reporter* in the 1980s and whose reporting on the DGA lawsuit is so important to my

understanding of the case. There are several existing oral histories and interview collections that have been invaluable to assembling my subjects' biographies, including those conducted by UCLA's Center for Oral History Program, the DGA's Visual Oral Histories, and the American Film Institute's Harold Lloyd Master Seminar, which was started in 1968.

Oral histories are a complex primary source. Individuals' personal experiences can and do reveal fine points that are not accessible to researchers in press clippings, business contracts, memos, or legal documents. Frequently, an interviewee is the only witness to a situation that has no other way to be documented. There is also distinct excitement in speaking to your historical subject, in person. During the interview, your topic has literally come alive. To ask questions of and talk over historical events with someone who "was there" energizes what you've read and, ultimately, what you will write. An expectation that I had before every interview was "Finally, I will get the answer to that research question I have not been able to figure out!" Alas, the live historical subject can be as inconsistent, puzzling, and enigmatic as any other material source, and many times the question you have fixated on may not even be relevant. Memory is subjective and memories are easily forgotten and confused.<sup>48</sup>

For example, I interviewed four founding members of the DGA Women's Committee: Nell Cox on several different occasions in New York City and Los Angeles; and together, Joelle Dobrow, Victoria Hochberg, and Lynne Littman during a six-hour dinner. As interviewees, each of these women was enthusiastic, outgoing, and more than generous with information, insight, and time. All of them agreed on a wide range of details pertaining to their relationships with each other and the advocacy work they

spearheaded at the DGA: from what they wore, ate, letters they wrote, meetings they held, impressions they shared of certain people, and the most specific details of conversations in which they participated. However, no one could agree on the year and place they met. Initially, to me, this meeting, in establishing the timeline of the Women's Committee, seemed of utmost importance. As an historian, this lapse challenged my training to focus on dates as a way to verify a chronology and, as a result, history. But the inability to confirm, made even funnier and more frustrating by discussing it with the historical subjects themselves, was a lesson in the ephemeral qualities of the past that historians strive to make solid.

Discrepancies in memory can also lead to multiple accounts of the same event, creating the potential for a rich historical analysis. Again, using my interviews with the Women's Committee members as examples, both Cox and Hochberg, on separate occasions, told me a story about how director Mel Brooks stood up for them at a DGA National Board meeting when the group was trying to garner support from the board. Both women described Brooks as "energizing" and like a "lightning bolt" while chastising his fellow board members that not to support the women's efforts to fight discrimination would be to "send them back to the shit house."<sup>49</sup> Where these women's accounts diverge is Cox remembers Brooks responding to Elia Kazan in the context of Kazan's reputation of "naming names" during the Blacklist, while Hochberg remembers Brooks's argument with Ivan Dixon in terms of the Guild's supporting gender over race. The shared portion of the memory corroborates that Mel Brooks was an outspoken supporter of women directors. In an attempt to get a third perspective on the event, I contacted Brooks himself. Unfortunately, he declined my request to be interviewed.<sup>50</sup> In

this instance, where the memory forks suggests two equally plausible responses by male members of the DGA and what associations they—Brooks, Dixon, and Kazan—made with the women’s fight for gender equality: the discrimination of Hollywood directors was based on race, gender, and political affiliation.

### **Before Hollywood: New York City Filmmakers**

Before the women’s movement began to infiltrate Hollywood in the 1970s-- between Ida Lupino’s reign as the studios’ only woman director during the early 1950s and the hiring of Elaine May, in 1971--there were two New York City-based, independent filmmakers: Shirley Clarke and Juleen Compton. Born in 1920 in New York City to a wealthy family, Clarke began her artistic work as a dancer. In the 1950s, using a Bolex camera she had been given as a wedding present, Clarke began making short experimental films that explored the relationship between dance and cinema. Clarke and her peers, Willard Van Dyke, D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and brothers David and Albert Maysles, were part of the New American Independent Film movement that emerged in New York City during the late 1950s and 1960s. This group was influenced by the approach to realism and the tradition of social relevancy in American documentary, cinema verité, and the growing popularity of European cinema, such as Italian Neo Realism and the French New Wave. In 1958 Clarke, with Van Dyke, Pennebaker, Leacock, and the Maysles, established Filmmakers Inc., a co-op that served the production and networking needs of the independent film community in New York. In 1960 Clarke and fellow filmmaker and film activist Jonas Mekas founded the New

American Cinema Group, an informal group organized to encourage independent commercial films.<sup>51</sup>

In 1961 Clarke transitioned from short, experimental films to feature endeavors when she made *The Connection*, a screen adaptation of a play by Jack Gelber. *The Connection* was a scripted and edited narrative film about a cinema vérité crew making a documentary about a group of drug addicts awaiting their “connection.” The movie projected the Beat and jazz aesthetics—in dialogue, characterization, camera and editing work—that permeated popular culture at the time. The film was also provocative in its subject matter, portraying with some degree of realism the squalor of a junkie’s tenement apartment filled with cockroaches and syringes. In a 1962 interview, Clarke explained her philosophy on filmmaking: “Right now, I’m revolting against the conventions of movies. Who says a film has to cost a million dollars, and be safe and innocuous enough to satisfy every 12-year-old in America?...I just want to pick up a camera and go out and shoot the world as it really is.”<sup>52</sup> *The Connection*’s explicit depiction of a drug addict created conflict with the New York State censors; the legal battles that ensued helped generate publicity for the picture. The movie screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961 to positive reviews, and Clarke became recognized as an example of the emerging style of independent features being made in the United States.

Clarke’s next project, *The Cool World* (1963), was the story of an African American teenager faced with challenges associated with Harlem in the early 1960s: drugs, violence, and crime. Clarke, now divorced, collaborated on the project with her boyfriend Carl Lee--she as director, he as an actor, and they adapted the story together. Like her previous work, the film was independently produced, financed, and distributed.



Praised for its authenticity, Clarke's approach continued to be informed by issues of realism rooted in a cinema vérité tradition, but in a fictional narrative form marketable for a commercial release. Its topical subject, the impact of urbanization on race, class, and young people, filmed on location in New York City, with a cast of predominately nonprofessional actors and accompanied by a jazz soundtrack, continued to place Clarke's cinematic style within contemporary bohemian culture. *Cool World* had a theatrical release in New York City and showed in some cities around the country; it screened at the Venice Film Festival in 1963.

By the end of the 1960s, the camaraderie experienced during the formative years of the New American Independent Cinema movement had begun to dissipate. An innovator of independent filmmaking that served as an alternative to Hollywood, Clarke aspired to make movies with more financial sustainability and access to a broader audience. In a 1975 interview, the filmmaker reflected, "I never thought about the money situation until, one day, I realized there *was* a situation: I had made two successful films and wasn't able to get money to do another."<sup>53</sup> In 1968 Clarke came to Los Angeles to play a version of herself in Agnes Varda's *Lion's Love*, a fictional film about a New York independent filmmaker trying to make a movie in Hollywood. By 1975—in real life—Clarke was actively trying to make films in Hollywood. The New Yorker talked to an audience of students at the American Film Institute about being a woman in Hollywood: "People ask me why I haven't made Hollywood films. I reply, 'If I were a man, I might have tried to be Orson Welles.' But, as a woman and an artist, it's impossible. Producers think of us in childlike terms, as cute, or sweet, or cunning. During a meeting it's always 'honey' or 'sweetheart' ...they don't take us seriously."<sup>54</sup> Lodged between industry

sexism and the different value systems of Hollywood's (profit-making entertainment) and New York's (the artist as filmmaker) approach to filmmaking, she was frustrated by the experience.

Clarke admitted to being a latecomer to the women's movement and the perspective it might have provoked for women directors—both in their work and their efforts *to* work. After being part of Varda's film, she had a moment of deep reflection and became more involved in feminism. "I became active in women's groups and found out where other women were coming from. Before, I didn't even know other women filmmakers." Clarke's self-critique seems especially harsh. Although her formative years occurred during a period of radical transformation for cinema, she reflected on the feeling of isolation during those years:

As I got more into the women's movement, I realized how I had let myself be brainwashed. I never felt my films were as worthy as men's, and I never felt women were as important. For years I'd felt like an outsider so I identified with the problems of minority groups. I used all kinds of standins [sic] for me in my films because I didn't think anyone was interested in my personal life, as a woman. I thought it was more important to be some kind of goddamned junkie who felt alienated rather than to say I am an alienated woman who doesn't feel part of the work and who wants in.<sup>55</sup>

Clarke was a pre-liberationist. The movement did not yet exist to help her break through the isolation with an ideology, language, and the peers to comprehend, in a cultural context, her experience as a woman. Almost all the directors I interviewed spoke of their admiration for Shirley Clarke, even before I could ask them about her. Her career

may not have reached its full potential, but the younger generation repeatedly acknowledged the importance of her work. Nell Cox, who began her career working for Leacock, Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers in the mid-1960s, described Clarke as an “extraordinary woman.” “It was so heartbreaking that she could not get anywhere [upon moving to Hollywood],” recalled Cox. “She said she would scream and holler and practically faint on the floor and grovel and they wouldn’t hire her after all those wonderful features that she made.”<sup>56</sup> Barbara Peeters remembered meeting the director at the Canadian Women’s Film Festival sometime in the early 1970s where Peeters’ low-budget biker film, *Bury Me an Angel*, was screening with Clarke’s *Portrait of Jason*. Worried that her exploitation picture might be out of place at such a serious feminist event, Peeters found solace with Clarke and the actress, Viva. “We all ended up in the balcony with a pint of gin!” recalled Peeters.<sup>57</sup>

Clarke continued making films, but was never able to do another narrative feature. Instead, she shifted her focus to documentary features: *Robert Frost: A Quarrel with the World* (1963, Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature), *Portrait of Jason* (1967), and *Ornette: Made in America* (1985). In 1978 she bought the rights to Joan Didion’s novel *A Book of Common Prayer*, but claimed “no studio considered it possible to turn the book into a film.”<sup>58</sup> She was never able to produce the project independently. Always an innovator, Clarke had begun to work with video in the early 1970s; in the 1970s and 1980s she taught film and videomaking at UCLA. She died in 1997.<sup>59</sup>

Unlike Clarke, Juleen Compton did not begin her career in the avant-garde film world of 1950s New York. Instead, during those years, she cut her teeth as an actress in the city’s equally innovative theater community a decade before she would write,

produce, and direct two independent feature films, one in Greece—*Stranded* (1964)—in which she also starred, and the other in the United States—*The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean* (1966). In 1988 she made her last film, *Buckeye and Blue*.

Very little has been written about Compton's work as a filmmaker. One of the most extensive studies was done by Harold Clurman, Compton's second husband, as part of a chapter in his 1974 book *All People are Famous (instead of an autobiography)*. I was fortunate to interview Compton in 2013 and 2014. The following profile is mostly comprised of our conversations.

Juleen Compton was born in 1932 or 1933 in Phoenix, Arizona. Her father left when she was a child and her mother, a home economics teacher, remarried a man who was a prominent attorney in the Phoenix area. Compton moved to New York City by herself when she was seventeen to study ballet, but was told soon after her arrival that she was too short to be a dancer. "I got there and I went to a line up for an audition, and they said, 'You can't be a ballet dancer, you're too little,'" remembered Compton of her first weeks in New York City. "I was 5-foot-2. [George] Balanchine liked girls to be at least 5-foot-8 or 5-foot-9."<sup>60</sup> Abandoning her aspirations to be a dancer, she soon settled into the role of a popular ingénue in New York's theater community. In 1950 at age seventeen she was cast as Little Red Riding Hood in the Children's World Theatre's production playing opposite Jason Robards as the Wolf. Other roles included, in 1955, the maid in the Fourth Street Theatre's production of *The Cherry Orchard*; in 1956 she was hired by Margo Jones' theater company in Dallas, Texas for its winter stock company; and in 1957 Compton co-starred with Roddy McDowall and Zero Mostel in the short-lived Broadway production of *Good as Gold*.<sup>61</sup>

During the 1950s Compton balanced her two careers—one as an ingénue on the stage and the other in real estate. According to Compton sometime between 1950 and 1952 a friend introduced her to the prominent real estate developer Norman Winston. Winston became an important mentor to the young woman bringing her into the field of interior and exterior design where she excelled as a colorist (an expert on color design). By 1955 she had established herself in this profession, in particular by being hired as part of a government contract to redesign military bases in Dayton, Ohio and Limestone, Maine.<sup>62</sup> As an actress she was part of the tight-knit theater community in New York City where she was close friends with playwright Clifford Odets; and studied acting with Lee Strasberg who recommended that she take acting classes with Harold Clurman, theater director, critic, and co-founder of The Group Theatre. In 1961 Compton and Clurman were married.<sup>63</sup> Eventually, though, Compton had come to understand her limits as an actress. “I realized, ‘I’ll never be a leading lady.’ I didn’t have this big voice. I wasn’t tall. So I thought, ‘You know what, I want to direct. Forget about acting.’”<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to her acting career, her work in interior design and real estate was expanding. In 1961 Compton was in the process of purchasing a four-story red brick school building in Greenwich Village for \$256,000, with another \$250,000 ready to invest in restoration. Her plan for the building was to transform it into the Village Centre, a theater multiplex housing four stages and a theater school.<sup>65</sup> Her success in real estate and as a colorist provided her with the financial resources for her next artistic venture: directing movies. In 1964 Julieen Compton was in production on her first independent feature film, *Stranded*.<sup>66</sup> Filmed in Greece, Compton wrote, directed, produced, and starred in the picture. The filmmaker had made her first trip to Paris in 1950 and since

then had traveled frequently to Europe where she would eventually own real estate and live part-time. *Stranded* was her autobiographical story of a young American woman (played by Compton) traveling through Greece with her American lover (Gary Collins) and French, gay, best friend (Gian Pietro Calasso). Shot in multiple European locations, Compton used a Greek crew, and completed post-production in Paris. The film screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1965 and had a theatrical run in Paris.<sup>67</sup>

What is surprising about *Stranded* is the freedom Compton's protagonist, Raina, enjoys throughout the movie. Reporting for *Variety* from Paris two months before the Cannes Film Festival, Gene Moskowitz described Compton's character in the film as a "heroine [that] may get caught up in some spicy and even equivocal goings on in Europe, but has a buoyant morality of her own that keeps her a truly innocent character and gives what she hopes is a zest to her film without pontificating or moralizing."<sup>68</sup> Raina partakes in several love affairs, travels around Europe at her own whim and expense, and rejects marriage offers for no other reason than she likes her life the way it is. Compton, as writer-director, never makes her on-screen alter-ego suffer the punishments often imposed on similar types of female characters in films during this era: sexual freedom that becomes stigmatized as promiscuity and punished by sexual assault or the containment of female agency through marriage. Compton's drive to make her first movie without any formal filmmaking training was similar to Raina's unrestrained curiosity and confidence in pursuing her interests and living life on her own terms. The filmmaker recalled that she made the picture for under \$300,000, investing her own monies into the project. "I acted in my first movie because I thought, 'That's how I'll get into movies. I'll make my own movies and then I'll make movies in Hollywood.'"<sup>69</sup>

In 1966 Compton returned to the United States to make her second feature, *The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean*.<sup>70</sup> Written, directed, and co-produced by Compton, the film was about a clairvoyant teenage girl, played by Sharon Henesy, who is taken advantaged of by a boy-band fashioned after the Beatles when they exploit her powers as part of a hoax revival. Filmed in the Ozarks with a cast of young and unknown actors (twenty-five-year-old Sam Waterston co-stars in his first film appearance), the narrative's focus on the struggle of a teen girl to resist romantic temptation and manipulation and assert control over her psychic powers, in 1966, presented pre-liberation themes about female agency that were rarely portrayed on screen. Stylistically accomplished, the movie is an impressive example of independent feature filmmaking during the mid-1960s. Created outside an established production community, such as Shirley Clarke's and Jonas Mekas's New American Cinema Group, as she had done with *Stranded*, Compton produced her film with a small cast and crew and self-financed the project with funds from her lucrative career in real estate. *The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean* screened at the San Francisco International Film Festival; and similar to *Stranded* the movie did not have a wide theatrical release in the United States.<sup>71</sup>

During these years, Compton continued to thrive in real estate and interior design. In 1970 the *New York Times* profiled her new eight-room “duplex with a two-story-high living room in a fine old building in the Sixties on Lexington Avenue.” Described as “an actress who has dabbled successfully in real estate and who has now turned to directing movies” also owned an apartment in Paris on the Rue de la Sourdiere. “I'd found I was spending at least half of my time in Europe,” explained Compton in the interview, “—I made my first movie, *Stranded*, in Greece—and so it seemed sensible to

buy a place in Paris...But of course I wanted to have a home in New York, too.”<sup>72</sup> Juleen Compton, a successful businesswoman with homes in New York and Paris, was able to self-finance her low-budget independent art house films with no investments from Hollywood or support from established independent filmmaking communities. However, the ability to make her own movies also had its detriments to the legacy of Compton’s films. Self-financing meant there were no investors to pay back and therefore the impetus to find distribution was minimal. Without a theatrical release, her work was not widely reviewed in the press or industry trade papers; without a distributor multiple prints of her movies were not made and circulated meaning that knowledge of the work and access to materials (film prints and paper documents) were impossible mostly because those materials did not exist. In 2013 reflecting back on her years making independent films, Compton felt that what she had lacked was a strong producer to take over once she completed the project. For her what was most interesting and what she was good at was making films, but the next stage, selling them to a distributor and seeking out an audience, was an aspect of filmmaking that did not appeal to her.

Compton did want to make films in Hollywood. She had moved to Los Angeles by 1974, when accepted into the American Film Institute’s pilot year of the Directing Workshop for Women (DWW). During this time, Compton and DWW co-founder Jan Haag became close friends. Compton hosted a networking lunch for Haag rallying support for the Workshop. Haag described her:

[Compton], a self-made millionaire, had the most delightful house in Bel Air.... Before I met her, she had also been invited by Andre Malraux, then Minister of Culture in France, to be his official castle-restorer because she



had flawless taste and loved to live around lumber and flying plaster dust. She declined the honor re [sic] the castles and had recently moved to the City of the Angels to, again, try her hand at movies. She was brilliant, witty and had infinite energy.<sup>73</sup>

Compton wrote the script in 1974 for the NBC television movie *The Virginia Hill Story* about gangster Bugsy Siegel's girlfriend, Virginia Hill. Directed by Joel Schumacher, the broadcast was praised by Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times*, who called it a "good punchy melodrama."<sup>74</sup> In 1975 Mary Murphy's *Los Angeles Times* column, "Movie Call Sheet," which reported on scheduled productions and film releases, noted that "Juleen Compton's story of a real estate saleswoman torn between romantic fantasy and personal independence in Southern California, called 'Open House', will be made by AIP in association with Spangler, Spangler & Sons Pictures. Compton is executive producer."<sup>75</sup> According to Compton, the film was made into a television movie, but she ultimately had nothing to do with it.

Upon arriving in Los Angeles, Compton had been advised that the best strategy to directing films in Hollywood was to start as a screenwriter. For many years during the 1970s she was successful in selling her scripts, but the experience did not yield the professional results she had hoped for, and creatively the process was repellent. She was pigeonholed in a manner that would become common for many women directors in the 1970s discussed in this dissertation. "Oh you're a woman writer. Write a women's piece of trash," Compton was advised by television and studio executives. "I wrote some *wonderful* things, but they would never do them. I once said to the executives: 'Why do

you buy them if you're never going to do them?' They said, 'We don't want anyone else to do them. Keep them off the market.'"<sup>76</sup>

In 1988 Compton made one last feature film, *Buckeye and Blue*, an action filled Western about a young woman outlaw, in which she wrote and directed under the name J.C. Compton because she wanted to maintain gender ambiguity. Independently produced, this time the filmmaker had a distributor, Academy Entertainment. The experience became a negative one when the distributor made her change the ending to make it less feminist. Buckeye, the film's female protagonist, undergoes profound self-discovery throughout the narrative in terms of her own autonomy and power as the leader of a gang of bank robbers, and with regards to her idol and love interest, the outlaw Blue Duck Harris. As Compton had initially intended her script to end, Buckeye chooses to continue the "quest" of self-discovery rather than foregoing her independence in order to become part of a romantic couple. Instead the distributor forced the filmmaker to alter the ending having Buckeye awake from a sleep where she had dreamt all her adventures and accomplishments.

Following this disappointing experience, Compton returned to New York City where she opened the off-Broadway theater company the Century Center for the Performing Arts serving as its artistic director for a decade. In the 2000s she and her husband, Nicholas Wentworth, established a private foundation, the Century Arts Foundation, which issues grants to a variety of arts organizations. On her decision to leave Hollywood after close to twenty years of trying to make a career for herself within the film industry, Compton cited profound self-preservation:

I didn't want to be tough. I didn't want to sell my soul to the devil for an armor. I liked my soul and if I had to forfeit it for an armor, no reward would have been great enough. A reward to me was to *realize* yourself, not sell yourself. How can you realize yourself to sell yourself? It's a contradiction in terms. That's why I say to win is to lose and I left Hollywood. I just couldn't see myself as a bitter old woman living in a Bel Air mansion.<sup>77</sup>

A transnational, multi-professional, Juleen Compton's formative years as an artist took place in New York City during the 1950s and 1960s. Her work as a theater actress, theater owner and her marriage to Harold Clurman informed her filmmaking that took place outside of Hollywood's stylistic conventions and modes of production. In this way, Compton can be compared to Shirley Clarke. Both women belonged to burgeoning New York artistic communities that valued the exploration of realism in films represented by performance, visual style, and production methods that were made more versatile with the use of portable equipment and smaller budgets. Compton fared better in Hollywood than Clarke, having written two produced television movies, but her inability to continue her career in the entertainment industry might suggest that the two women who shared a New York—and for Compton, a French--independent filmmaking sensibility could not embrace, nor were they embraced by, Hollywood. Furthermore, as part of the generation that preceded second wave feminism, Clarke and Compton did not benefit from a broader social movement to gain entrance to male-dominated Hollywood. If the women of the 1970s were groundbreakers with access to the tools of reform provided by feminism, these two women of the early 1960s struggled with fewer means to do the same.

## Will You Last?

In the early 1980s, Joan Tewkesbury began developing a project she had written called *Saving the Rainbow*, about the period when Atlantic City was being demolished so that Donald Trump could rebuild. “I loved the way Air Stream trailers looked,” Tewkesbury remembered. “So I envisioned this woman owned a trailer park of Air Stream trailers that was right in the heart of—enough square feet of the mega real estate people who were trying to buy her out. And her thing was all about retired people, but her retired people would be Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly—you know all those good folks.” Tewkesbury imagined Katharine Hepburn as the lead in this group cast of luminary Hollywood seniors. She secured a meeting with the legendary actress at her home in New York City. “So we talked and she said, ‘I think this is a lovely idea, dear, but I don’t do ensemble work,’” Tewkesbury laughed remembering the conversation. “At the end of the meeting she looked at me and said, ‘It’s wonderful dear. Do you think you’ll last?’ and I said, ‘What do you mean?’ and she replied, ‘As a director...I’ve worked with [Dorothy Arzner] and she would have been wonderful and do you think you’ll have staying power.’ I said, ‘Yes, I will.’ And then she said, ‘Well that’s good dear.’”<sup>78</sup>

Tewkesbury found humor in the story as she told it some thirty years later. At the time she was speechless: “I thought, ‘Huh.’” How should one answer such a blunt question about their professional fate? Especially asked by an iconic actress known as the embodiment of female independence? To date, Joan Tewkesbury has directed one feature film. Ultimately, she has made good on the answer she gave Katharine Hepburn with a prolific career writing, directing, and producing television movies and episodic series.

Whereas Hepburn wondered in the 1980s about the survival rate of women directors, the question that interests me is how this generation of women directors emerged during the 1960s and 1970s? What drove these fifteen women? Who encouraged them, or as the case may be, discouraged them? What makes them representative of the cultural zeitgeist of that era? How did the social and political momentum generated by the feminist movement infiltrate the seemingly impenetrable, sexist, and exclusive culture of the film and television industries? Linked together by their shared moment in history, industrial location, and their professional skills and aspirations, their biographies and the scope and challenges of their professional lives as directors of feature films reveal a history of filmmaking that deserves to be told.

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<sup>1</sup> Including Bigelow—in 2010--there have been a total of four women nominated for an Academy Award for Best Director: Lina Wertmüller, *Seven Beauties* (1977, Italy), Jane Campion, *The Piano* (1994, Australia), Sofia Coppola, *Lost in Translation* (2004, United States).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of Streisand's ambition to direct starting in the 1970s, see Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Ironically, Streisand is a frequent presenter at the Academy Awards for its most prestigious honors, including: Best Director (Clint Eastwood, *Unforgiven*, 1993), Best Picture (Clint Eastwood, *Million Dollar Baby*, 2005), the Academy Honorary Award (Robert Redford, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> This number is calculated from the *Women Film Pioneers Project*. Due to the fact that the early film industry was configured differently than the classical Hollywood studio system and the studio system and independent commercial film communities of 1970s this number may be interpreted in different ways considering each filmmakers' body of work. For my purposes, it demonstrates the high presences of women filmmakers in the United States during the silent era compared to later decades. Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds., *Women Film Pioneers Project*, Center for Digital Research and Scholarship, New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> See the following authors who also speak to this statistic: Ally Acker, *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema 1896 to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1991); Louise Heck-Rabi, *Women Filmmakers: A Critical Reception* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1974); Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary, eds., *Women and the Cinema: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977); Annette Kuhn, ed., *Queen of the 'B's Ida Lupino Behind the Camera* (Westport, CT: Prager, 1995); Judith Mayne, *Directed by*

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Dorothy Arzner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-1971* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Sharon Smith, *Women Who Make Movies* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Molly Haskell, "How an Independent Filmmaker Beat the System (With Her Husband's Help)," *The Village Voice* 22 Sept. 1975: 83; Leticia Kent, "They Were Behind the Scenes of 'Between the Lines'," *New York Times* 12 June 1977: 83.

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Tomlin and Travolta in 'Moment'," *Los Angeles Times* 22 Dec. 1978: G28.

<sup>8</sup> "Buying & Booking Guide: Rabbit Test," *The Independent Film Journal* 14 Apr. 1978: 8.

<sup>9</sup> Dan Rottenberg, "Elaine May...or She May Not," *Chicago Tribune* 21 Oct. 1973: 55-58; Andrew Tobias, "For Elaine May, a New Film-But Not a New Leaf," *New West* 6 Dec. 1976: 57-65.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Gomery, "The American Film Industry of the 1970s": 53-59.

<sup>12</sup> For histories of "feminist filmmaking" during the 1970s see: Robin Blaetz, ed., *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, eds., *Women & Experimental Filmmaking* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2005); B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the cultural trends and economic changes that shaped Hollywood's modes of production, distribution, and exhibition during the late 1960s and 1970s see: Douglas Gomery, "The American Film Industry of the 1970s": 53-59; Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993) 8-36. For production histories of the 1970s that also include an examination of the era in terms of genre, individual filmmakers, and independent commercial film communities that existed outside of the dominant cinema, but frequently shared with it audiences, production staff (above- and below-the-line), and exhibition spaces (i.e., exploitation and cult or "midnight movies") see: David A. Cook, *Lost Illusion: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983); David E. James, "'Movies Are a Revolution' Film and Counterculture," *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s & 70s*, eds. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle (New York: Routledge, 2002) 275-303; James Monaco, *American Film Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>14</sup> For histories of the MPAA and CARA rating system see: Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Justin Wyatt, "The Stigma of X: Adult Cinema and the Institution of the MPAA Ratings System," *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*, ed. Matthew Bernstein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 238-263.

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<sup>15</sup> Mel Gussow, "Movies Leaving 'Hollywood' Behind," *New York Times* 27 May 1970: 36.

<sup>16</sup> David A. Cook, *Lost Illusion: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) 98.

<sup>17</sup> Letter to signatories from Michael Franklin regarding employment statistics, 20 June 1980, "DGA Clipping File," Margaret Herrick Library.

<sup>18</sup> For a history of the establishment of Women in Film see: Mollie Gregory's *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> According to Mollie Gregory, WGA member Joyce Perry leaked the incriminating numbers to Sue Cameron, feminist columnist of *The Hollywood Reporter*; the data was linked to a specific studio, network, and in several cases individual television shows (7-11). The WGA's Women's Committee was founded in 1972 (Gregory 5). SAG's Women's Committee was founded in 1972 by Kathleen Nolan who was elected president of the Guild for two terms (1975-1979). Nolan was the SAG's first woman president. David F. Prindle, *The Politics of Glamour: Ideology and Democracy in the Screen Actors Guild* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) 107.

<sup>22</sup> Directors Guild of America, et. al v. Warner Brothers Inc. and Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc, 1985 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16325; 2 Fed. R. Serv. 3d (Callaghan) 1429, 30 Aug. 1985.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald Peary, "Alice Guy Blache: Czarina of the Silent Screen," *Women and The Cinema A Critical Anthology*, eds. Karyn Kay and Gerald Peary (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1977) 140-141.

<sup>24</sup> For discussion of "double in brass" see Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006) 39-42.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Slide, *Lois Weber: The Director Who Lost Her Way in History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996) 110.

<sup>26</sup> For additional sources on women in early Hollywood see: Kay Armatage, *The Girl From God's Country: Nell Shipman and the Silent Screen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Cari Beauchamp, *Without Lying Down: Frances Marion and the Powerful Women of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds., *Women Film Pioneers Project*, Center for Digital Research and Scholarship, New York: Columbia University Libraries, 2013; Alison McMahan, *Alice Guy Blaché: Lost Visionary of the Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Anthony Slide, *The Silent Feminists: America's First Woman Directors* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996).

<sup>27</sup> For discussion of how the early film industry moved into a business model that excluded women see "Part Two: 'A Business Pure & Simple' The End of Uplift and the Masculinization of Hollywood 1916-1928 in: Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006) 133-203.

<sup>28</sup> Here I am using Mary Ann Doane's definition of the "woman's film" a Hollywood genre popular particularly during the 1930s and 1940s that focused on a female protagonist's point of view, with a narrative that revolved around "female problems"

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(domestic life, children, self-sacrifice), and was geared toward a female audience. In the 1970s the “New Woman Film,” which I discuss in Chapter 1, updated the classical Hollywood genre for a second wave feminist generation. Still privileging the female protagonist’s perspective and targeting a female audience, the 1970s woman’s film took on themes that resonated with the women’s movement like economic, reproductive and sexual independence and female friendship. Unlike its predecessor, the genre in the 1970s did not feature glamorous characters and frequently ended without narrative resolution. For classical Hollywood woman’s films see: Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 3. For 1970s New Woman films see: Annette Kuhn, “Hollywood and New Women’s Cinema,” *Films for Women*, ed. Charlotte Brunson (London: British Film Institute, 1986) 125-130.

<sup>29</sup> For additional histories of 1970s Hollywood that favor male directors see: Todd Berliner, *Hollywood Incoherent: Narration in Seventies Cinema*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, and Noel King, eds., *The Last Great American Picture Show* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004)—with the exception of Bérénice Reynaud’s essay “For Wanda,” on Barbara Loden; Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness: Penn, Stone, Kubrick, Scorsese, Spielberg, Altman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Biskind 398.

<sup>32</sup> Elsaesser 50.

<sup>33</sup> John Pierson, *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes: A Guided Tour Across a Decade of American Independent Cinema* (New York: Miramax Books, 1995) 12.

<sup>34</sup> Hurd vii.

<sup>35</sup> The following writings are not meant as a comprehensive list, as there were many texts written by feminist scholars during the 1970s and 1980s on representations of women in classical Hollywood films. See for example: Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman’s Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); “Part I The classical and contemporary Hollywood Cinema” in E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983); Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975); Linda Williams, “‘Something Else Besides a Mother’ *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama,” *Cinema Journal* 24.1 (Fall 1984): 2-27.

<sup>36</sup> For example the following texts include chapters and essays on these filmmakers: Charlotte Brunson ed., *Films for Women*, (London: British Film Institute, 1986); Patricia Erens, ed. *Sexual Stratagems The World of Women in Film* (New York: Horizon, 1979); Lucy Fisher, *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women’s Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>37</sup> Diane Carson, “Women Filmmakers,” *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) 456.

<sup>38</sup> Carson, “Women Filmmakers” 463.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Erens, “Introduction, Part Two: the Women’s Cinema,” *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*, ed. Patricia Erens (New York: Horizon Press, 1979) 129.



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<sup>40</sup> In her chapter “American Directors,” Barbara Koenig Quart profiles three women from the 1970s: May, Micklin Silver, and Weill. She categorizes Micklin Silver and Weill’s first movies as “feminist independent films” and describes the directors as “feminist mainstream filmmakers.” See Quart 37-59.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to Quart’s section on Weill, also see: Chapter 7 “Girl Groups: Female Friendship” in Lucy Fisher, *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women’s Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 216-249; Christine Geraghty, “Three Women’s Films” and Annette Kuhn, “Hollywood and New Women’s Cinema,” both in *Films for Women*, ed. Charlotte Brunsdon (London: British Film Institute, 1986) 125-130; 138-145.

<sup>42</sup> Joan Mellen, *Women and their Sexuality in the New Film* (New York: Horizon Press, 1973) 41.

<sup>43</sup> For example see Radha Vatsal, “Reevaluating Footnotes: Women Directors of the Silent Era,” *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 119-138.

<sup>45</sup> Of the fifteen directors, three are deceased: Anne Bancroft (1931-2005), Barbara Loden (1932-1980), Nancy Walker (1922-1992).

<sup>46</sup> Kay Armatage, *The Girl From God’s Country: Nell Shipman and the Silent Screen* 26.

<sup>47</sup> Armatage 27.

<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the challenges presented in conducting and using oral histories as historical “evidence”; the interviewee’s telling of the “truth,” and the ways in which the interviewer chooses to decipher that information see: Ronald J. Grele, “Oral History as Evidence,” *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006) 43-101.

<sup>49</sup> Nell Cox, PI. 8 Apr. 2011; Victoria Hochberg, PI. 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Brooksfilm Limited, “Interview Request,” e-mail to author, 28 May 2013. E-mail.

<sup>51</sup> Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 110; 119.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene Archer, “Woman Director Makes the Scene,” *New York Times Magazine* 26 Aug. 1962.

<sup>53</sup> Susan Smith, *Women Who Make Movies* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, Publishers, 1975) 45-46.

<sup>54</sup> Sandra Shevey, “Pic-Maker Shirley Clarke Says Second Class Status of Women in Films is Result of Viewers’ Standards,” *Variety (D)* 28 Jan. 1975.

<sup>55</sup> Linda Gross, “Rebel Film-Maker: An Out-of-the System Person,” *Los Angeles Times* 21 June 1978: H1.

<sup>56</sup> Nell Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 April 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Linda Gross, “Rebel Film-Maker: An Out-of-the System Person,” *Los Angeles Times* 21 June 1978: H1.

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Van Gelder, “Shirley Clarke is Dead at 77; Maker of Oscar-Winning Film,” *New York Times* 26 Sept. 1997.

<sup>60</sup> Juleen Compton, author interview, 7 Sept. 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Compton’s performance in *Little Red Riding Hood* for the Children’s World Theatre was described to the author in an interview with Compton conducted on Sept. 7, 2013.

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Also see: Harold Clurman, *All People Are Famous (instead of an autobiography)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 280; "Fun for Children," *New York Times* 25 Mar. 1950: 13. For *The Cherry Orchard* see: Sidney Fields, "Only Human," *The New York Mirror* n/d 1955, "Juleen Compton Clipping File," New York Performing Arts Library. For *Good as Gold* see: Sam Zolotow, "Run of 'Candide' May Close Feb. 2," *New York Times* 18 Jan. 1957: 16; "Sad and Happy Yuletide Faces in a Comedy Opening This Week," *New York Times* 3 Mar. 1957: 107.

<sup>62</sup> A discussion of her work as a colorist on these military bases told to author in an interview conducted with Compton on July 9, 2013 and Sept. 7, 2013; also see Sidney Fields, "Only Human," *The New York Mirror* n/d 1955, "Juleen Compton Clipping File," New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>63</sup> Clurman had been married to Stella Adler, the renowned acting teacher, since 1943; the couple divorced in 1960 in order for Clurman and Compton to wed. Juleen Compton, author interview, 9 July 2013; Harold Clurman, *All People Are Famous (instead of an autobiography)* 280.

<sup>64</sup> Juleen Compton, author interview, 7 Sept. 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Lask, "Little Woman with Big Ideas About Her New Theater," *New York Times* 30 Apr. 1961.

<sup>66</sup> At the time of this writing Juleen Compton and her husband Nicholas Wentworth own the only available copy of *Stranded*.

<sup>67</sup> "Women Directors Multiply," *Variety* 19 May 1965: Corinne Crawford, "Petite Miss Compton is Bigger Than Life," *Los Angeles Times* 23 Dec. 1966.

<sup>68</sup> Gene Moskowitz, "More Femmes Directing Films." Ironically this article on Compton and contemporary women directors working in Europe includes a note from the editors that the "National Board of Review has just rediscovered Alice Guy-Blache, now 91 and living in Brussels."

<sup>69</sup> Juleen Compton, author interview, 7 Sept. 2013.

<sup>70</sup> At the time of this writing the only prints available of *The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean* are those owned by Compton and Wentworth; and one 35mm print located at the UCLA Film and Television Archive.

<sup>71</sup> For a description of the San Francisco screening see: Corinne Crawford, "Petite Miss Compton is Bigger Than Life." According to the MoMA press release, the film screened at Cannes in 1969 where it won a "special award." My current research on the film has not found any other material verifying that it screened at the Cannes Film Festival. "Cineprobe Presents a Feature Film by Juleen Compton: 'The Plastic Dome of Norman Jean'," Press Release, the Museum of Modern Art, 10 March 1970 Google search 31 Jan. 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Virginia Lee Warren, "She Throws Out All the Furniture and Moves Every Few Years," *New York Times* 5 Jan. 1970.

<sup>73</sup> Jan Haag, "Women Directors in Hollywood," janhaag.com, 2007, 13 July 2012 <<http://janhaag.com/ESTheDWW.html>>.

<sup>74</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Virginia Hill Given An Extra Dimension," *Los Angeles Times* 19 Nov. 1974.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Murphy, "Movie Call Sheet: Film Forecast for the New Year," *Los Angeles Times* 31 Dec. 1975.

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- <sup>76</sup> Juleen Compton, author interview, 7 Sept. 2013.
- <sup>77</sup> Juleen Compton, author interview, 7 Sept. 2013.
- <sup>78</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 27 Jan. 2011.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Feminist Reform Comes to Hollywood*

This chapter establishes the broader political, cultural, and industrial setting of the 1970s in which women directors worked. The first part of this chapter begins at the end of the decade, from 1977 to 1979, and examines how women directors were portrayed in the popular press. At the close of the decade, there appeared to be a significant amount of coverage on these filmmakers, in which the media were often outspoken in describing the level of sexism these women faced trying to work in Hollywood. This first section also discusses the surge of popularity during the final years of the 1970s in what were labeled as “New Woman” films: movies made by the studios that exploited feminist themes. This attention from Hollywood, as described in the press, gives an understanding of how the status of women in the industry fit into the larger feminist framework of the time. The second part of this chapter starts in 1969 and studies the efforts to reform gender and racial discrimination in the entertainment industry, first led by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), a federal agency, and continued in the early 1970s by the professional unions, specifically the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA). The chapter concludes with a history of the American Film Institute’s Directing Workshop for Women (AFI, DWW). Founded in 1974, the Workshop was an answer to the low number of working women directors in Hollywood, providing resources for participants to make short films that could be used as calling

cards. The program was an example of an effort—within the industry—to improve employment opportunities for women filmmakers.

### **Coming Out**

The years 1977 and 1978 were pivotal for women directors in Hollywood. For the first time since the 1910s, they appeared as a critical mass—if but a small one. Their numbers did not rival those of their male peers by any means, but collectively the handful of filmmakers indicated a measure of progress while simultaneously drawing attention to the continued, and significant, gender gap within the industry.

Between 1970 and 1978, twenty-five films had been made by a total of twelve female directors. By 1976, Karen Arthur, Barbara Loden, and Joan Micklin Silver had each made one film; Elaine May, three; Barbara Peeters, three; Stephanie Rothman, seven (two completed in 1966 and in 1967); and Beverly Sebastian, four. In 1977, Micklin Silver completed her second feature and Joan Darling her first. In 1978, Joan Rivers, Jane Wagner, and Claudia Weill released their first films; and Peeters completed her fifth. These twenty-five films made up 1.23 percent of 2,027 films released by major and minor studios in the United States between 1970 and 1978.<sup>2</sup> Looking to the future, in 1979, Arthur would make her second film; Micklin Silver her third; Sebastian her fifth and sixth; and Joan Tewkesbury would finish her first feature film. In 1980, Anne Bancroft, Lee Grant and Nancy Walker would each complete their first features; Weil would release her second; and Peeters her fifth.<sup>3</sup>

Writing for *Ms.* in 1977, film critic and historian Marjorie Rosen reflected on the status of women in filmmaking:

A couple of years ago women filmmakers were closet movie directors. Their energy and numbers were in the East, their focus was on documentaries and personal revelations. For them, “film” meant an alternative vision to the drivel about earthquakes, sharks, and homoerotic gangbusters passing for what we commonly call “movies”...but [the film industry] seems to be the ironic center for women who want to be, yes—directors.<sup>4</sup>

Rosen identifies this new crop of directors as bound for Hollywood. Describing these directors as such recognized their interest and potential to be part of the creative and economic power that defined Hollywood. To acknowledge these women was also to confront their absence in patriarchal Hollywood and challenge the popular notion held by many in the film industry, that women were not cut out for the job of director. Rosen draws an important distinction between the “personal revelation” filmmakers from the “East [coast]”—code for the feminist, counter-cinema filmmaking that also flourished during the era--and the commercial aspirations of women coming out of the Hollywood director “closet.” By differentiating between the two kinds of filmmakers, the author makes a significant point that not all women directors were the same, nor should it be assumed that they are. Most essential was Rosen’s revelation that not only were there women skilled and ambitious enough to thrive in Hollywood, but that women wanted a part in profit-making cinema.

A common opinion in Hollywood was that women did not possess the necessary ambition to succeed within the business, especially as director--one of the industry’s most coveted positions. Such detractors believed that women were innately conditioned to

nurture, based on their biological ability to have children. This quality, deemed wholly “female,” was considered contrary to the (masculine) competitive drive essential to making it as a Hollywood director. Veteran casting director and film producer Joyce Selznick claimed that,

...drive and energy coupled with talent are the essential elements of success for a woman today. I really don't think women have tried to get into the industry. You see, you have to want it, want it so bad, need it so bad, that you would sacrifice almost everything for it. Most women aren't ready to do this. They become involved with other interests and lose that need to succeed. I may get into some hot water over this, but if a woman cannot break through the initial wall of just being a woman in a man's industry, she probably has no right to produce film.<sup>5</sup>

For an essentialist like Selznick, women were controlled by their biology that would ultimately take over and derail their ambition. “Other interests” for women meant family, which they would have to “sacrifice” in order to have a career. Inevitably they would choose being a wife and mother over work, proof that they lacked the passion and commitment--the “need”--to succeed professionally. Because, according to this perspective, for women there was only one choice: their biological destiny. If they couldn't “break through” this defining quality of “just being a woman,” then in fact they were the weaker sex, unqualified and undeserving of a place in the entertainment business. Furthermore, biological destiny and career-making films were mutually exclusive, and at least according to Selznick, it was impossible for a woman to choose both and succeed. There was also a fear in Hollywood that women's physiology rendered

them out of control. Estrogen made them too docile to command a movie and too irrational to handle the responsibility. In 1978, Verna Fields, an Academy Award winning film editor who later became the vice president of production at Universal in the 1970s, identified this negative stereotype and the likelihood of it affecting women filmmakers when she remarked,

The worst thing that could happen to a woman director, even at this point, is that she should have trouble on the set, go over budget, over schedule, that kind of nonsense. I think it would be very easy for a lot of people to blame it on the fact that she had no control—that she didn't shoot well that day because she had her period.<sup>6</sup>

In a 1979 interview conducted at the American Film Institute, filmmaker Joan Micklin Silver refuted the assumption that women lacked the necessary gumption required to succeed in Hollywood. By this point in her career Micklin Silver had made two films in collaboration with her husband-producer, Ray Silver: *Hester Street* (1975) and *Between the Lines* (1977), both independently financed and distributed. At the time of the interview her third feature and first studio project, *Chilly Scenes of Winter* (United Artists, 1979), had just been released. “I’m sure lots of people quit because it is just too damn hard,” she offered, describing her personal experience in making films as something common to both women and men. “It is. It’s terrible. You have to lean into it all the time. I mean, you have to lean into it all the time. You have to push at it and push at it. It’s incredibly hard. But it’s such a thrill to do it. I mean, to make a movie is so worth it. It’s so worth ever bit of it.”<sup>7</sup> In 1979, Micklin Silver was the mother of three daughters and collaborated with her husband on her filmmaking endeavors. For her,



filmmaking and family coexisted, and the “terrible” challenge of making movies was the motivation that helped her stay the course.

Joanna Lee (1931-2003) echoed Micklin Silver’s work ethic with equal gusto. Lee, a successful television writer-producer-director, who also wrote, directed, and starred in the independent film *A Pocket Filled with Dreams* (1976), was almost always described by her striking looks in interviews.<sup>8</sup> In 1978, she joked how, early in her career, she used assumptions about her appearance as a way to gain access for her work. “I used to write simple, mindless sitcom [sic]. I was very ‘cute.’ So they said, ‘Let’s hire her, I hear she’s got a great pair of legs.’ What did I care? I would’ve worn a G-string as long as I had four good ideas in my briefcase and I’d sell one before I left the office.”<sup>9</sup> Quick to make light of the industry’s notorious reputation for demanding female sexuality as collateral for employment, Lee did not sacrifice her professionalism or her personal integrity. “I was always very prepared. I always dressed terrific, looking fancy but acting *very* straight. And I worked six days a week for ten years. I see people waiting for things to be given to them; well, I broke my ass.”<sup>10</sup>

Lee’s work won her an Emmy and Golden Globe awards and several other nominations. In addition to success with sitcoms, in the 1970s and 1980s she excelled in the television movie format, where she frequently created programming focused on social issues such as divorce and teen pregnancy. Perseverance and hard work were required for anyone—female or male—determined to succeed in the industry. In her 1999 autobiography, *A Difficult Woman in Hollywood*, she offered the reader her mantra for working in the entertainment business: “So, how do you become a producer in Hollywood? Simple. Have a vision. Have guts. And be willing to risk everything.”<sup>11</sup> Lee

was cognizant of what was required to compete in the exclusive, cutthroat media industry. Her success and preparedness to “risk everything” dismisses Selznick’s parochial attitude about women not having the innate tenacity to thrive in Hollywood. Lee’s perspective also shows her awareness of how being a woman could function as both an asset, in the most superficial way (“femaleness” as employment currency), and as a detriment (a limited and mostly false currency), suggesting a complexity to being a woman in Hollywood.

Interpreting the low number of working women directors as “women aren’t ready” or had “no right to produce a film” was to underestimate how pervasive sexism was in the industry. Even the most determined female was not unaffected by such insidious obstacles. Speaking candidly in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1978, director Nell Cox attested to the very real reality of gender-focused hostility: “I’ve had studio executives look me right in the eye and say there are no women directors because there are no women qualified—and I’ve been directing films for 18 years and done a feature.”<sup>12</sup> This deliberate disregard of Cox—a woman and a qualified director—to her face demonstrates the level of misogyny that existed in Hollywood. For an executive to feel comfortable in making such a statement is evidence of the industry’s accepted belief system of keeping women out of positions with creative and economic power. In the 1960s, Cox began her career as a prolific documentarian as part of the New York City cinema verité movement before transitioning to narrative filmmaking as writer-director of the feature film *Liza’s Pioneer Diary* (1976) for the PBS series *Visions*. In the mid-1970s, she relocated to Hollywood and started directing episodic television, working on network shows such as *The Waltons* (which she also wrote for) and *M\*A\*S\*H*.

Cox's experience of being confronted with contempt for her professional qualifications was not uncommon for female directors. Blatant sexism was a constant hurdle that many women publicly acknowledged they encountered while trying to get work. Due to the paltry number of women in power positions, many found themselves seeking work from a male-dominated industry unaccustomed to recognizing a potential female peer: she was a type of colleague they had never seen nor imagined before. In 1978, Martha Coolidge shared that "I've had executives say I was one of the few women directors they'd met who they felt was not intimidated by them. That means they assume that women directors are intimidated by men." Known in the 1970s for her documentaries, Coolidge crossed over to feature films in the 1980s; and in 2002 became the first, and thus far, only, female president of the Directors Guild of America. "On the other hand," Coolidge explained, "I've had a couple of meetings with [male] producers who wouldn't look at me, where literally they didn't know what to do. A woman director was just incomprehensible to them."<sup>13</sup>

Dan Melnick, vice president of production at MGM, identified how sexism was ingrained in the male-centric culture of Hollywood, admitting, "We don't have many women in management positions. Here you have what is symptomatic of the whole industry, which is a tradition that takes a long time to overcome. To be honest about it, there are many of us in this business who have unconscious areas of being threatened by women executives." Making sure to align himself on the right side of progress, Melnick added, "I think I am fairly comfortable with them."<sup>14</sup> In 1973, at the time of that interview, MGM had not hired a female director since Dorothy Arzner's *The Bride Wore*

*Red*, in 1937. The studio would not work with a woman director until 1984 when it produced Gillian Armstrong's *Mrs. Soffel*.

Although by the end of the 1970s Hollywood began to recognize a new kind of filmmaker--a female one--the trend of a "new breed" of director had started a decade earlier in the late 1960s. Towards the end of the 1960s, the industry faced serious profit losses and released fewer films each year.<sup>15</sup> Those pictures the studios did produce were made for very large budgets and were anticipated to recoup equally large profits at the box office. Audiences, now dominated by a younger demographic, did not respond to the lavish musicals that were once Hollywood's most reliable genre.<sup>16</sup> High-cost titles such as *Hello, Dolly!* (1969, 20th Century-Fox) and *Sweet Charity* (1969, Universal) were failing at the box office, while smaller-budget movies like *Alice's Restaurant* (1969), *Medium Cool* (1969), and *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), about topical social and political themes, were excelling. In particular, the success of *Easy Rider* in 1969 had become the litmus test of a film's box office achievements. "Increasingly these days, the Easy Riders are riding high at the box office, while the Doctor Dolittles are in ill health indeed," reported Stanley Penn for the *Wall Street Journal*. "The hits of 1969 are a new breed of movie—most often low-budget, carefully crafted films that bear the distinct stamp of an individual director or producer and that are explicitly tailored to a youth audience."<sup>17</sup>

Hollywood struggled to understand and appropriate this new filmmaking paradigm of independent productions made for and by the "youth." During this time, a popular notion circulating in the press was that the ideal candidate to direct motion pictures was anyone young, especially those just starting out. "Novelists, playwrights, critics, film editors, cameramen, photographers and actors are being given opportunities

to direct—and so are film students,” wrote Mel Gussow for the *New York Times* in 1970. He went on to say,

The industry is blooming with potential Orson Welleses, film prodigies wearing flowered shirts, beards and bell-bottoms. Many are graduates of film departments at the University of Southern California and University of California in Los Angeles, which are “raided” every year as if they were basketball teams. Some of the new filmmakers just come in off the street.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it is hyperbole that filmmakers were being hired “off the street,” but the focus on film students was not. In the United States, an increase in film programs at universities and colleges had taken place during the 1960s. In 1967 it was reported that “60,000 graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in 1,500 film courses at 120 colleges. All three figures are double those of last year and expected to double again in the fall semester....”<sup>19</sup>

Attuned to their losses, studio executives considered all possible options of finding the next hit and its maker. In 1967 executives from 20th Century-Fox organized a “college-weekend” at the Yale Club as a promotional opportunity for the studio, where they screened some new releases for an audience of forty-three student representatives from twenty-nine different Eastern schools. The event was also an opportunity for old-guard Hollywood to reach out to the youth contingent, as both a powerful filmgoing demographic and the next generation of filmmakers. In a panel discussion, studio president Darryl F. Zanuck attempted to appeal to the crowd by painting himself and his company as open-minded and forward thinking:

In this industry today, certainly we must explore. We must move on. I've seen it from the silent days go into talk [sic], and I've had them tell me that talkies were a three-picture deal and then they'd be out. I've gone through all those stages of it and I want to keep working. Not because of financial reasons particularly, because I want to be a part of creating, a part of whatever is new.<sup>20</sup>

Zanuck was honest in his proclamation of wanting to keep his studio current, but financial reasons were clearly the real impetus for the studio head. The failure of *Doctor Dolittle* that year would set an unfortunate precedent for the studio's future: in 1969 Fox would release two big-budget flops with *Star!* and *Hello, Dolly!*<sup>21</sup>

Well-publicized success stories of student-to-studio filmmaker fueled the young director mythology (e.g., Frances Ford Coppola, UCLA, George Lucas, USC, Steven Spielberg, California State, Long Beach, Martin Scorsese, NYU).<sup>22</sup> However, similar to the halted statistics of working women directors, film school also proved an unwelcoming place for female students. In 1970, out of 350 film majors at USC, 20 were women; at UCLA, of the 500 film majors, 30 were women.<sup>23</sup> In describing the aspirations of his female students, USC professor Bernie Kantor articulated Hollywood's chauvinism in describing the barriers his students faced in pursuing their professional aspirations: "A burning, passionate desire to do film leads girls into film school," Kantor explained (an advocate who was not wholly liberated by the fact that he referred to grown women as "girls"). "The girls are well aware that there are no places—beds but no places—for a girl in the profession. Most are placed in jobs, USC sees to that, but not in the places the girls want. The typical offer is as secretary."<sup>24</sup> While Hollywood imagined itself as open to

hiring new, young directors who had not come up through the meritocracy of the previous generation, the industry was closed-minded with regard to gender parity.

Hollywood, it seemed, was an unwelcoming place for women directors. And yet, their coverage in the press--even in accounts of discrimination suffered and misrepresentation by their critics--conveyed that the motion picture industry was changing. The disparity between female and male directors was still striking, but so was the increase in working women filmmakers from previous decades. On a national level, the feminist movement gave buoyancy to the struggles and accomplishments of these directors. During the 1970s, women's rights were being elevated to *human* rights. Social and public policies were becoming gender specific, and laws were being passed that addressed inequality based on sex. In 1972 the ratification of Title IX legally enforced equal opportunity between women and men in education and school sports. Although it would fail to be ratified in 1982, also in 1972 the Equal Rights Amendment passed Congress, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. The landmark case *Roe v. Wade*, decided by the Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, legalized abortion and increased women's reproductive rights.<sup>25</sup> In 1974 Congress passed the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, allowing married women to obtain credit in their own name. Congresswoman Barbara Jordan became the first African American and the first woman to give a keynote speech at the Democratic National Convention in 1976. On October 31, 1978 Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, which prohibited discrimination against pregnant women in their place of employment.<sup>26</sup>

The impact of the women's movement on politics and federal legislation influenced all areas of U.S. society. In 1970 protests and legal action were launched

against employment discrimination in the publishing industry: on March 16, 1970 the female members of *Newsweek* filed a lawsuit against the magazine's management, which they eventually settled in favor of the employees; and on March 18, 1970 the women employees at *Ladies' Home Journal* staged a "sit-in." *Boylan et al. v. The New York Times*, a suit filed in 1974 against the *New York Times* by its female employees alleging job discrimination based on sex was settled in favor of the women on October 6, 1978.<sup>27</sup> Influential books on a range of feminist topics published during the decade contributed to the ongoing public debate about gender and introduced a generation of women writers, activists, and intellectuals such as Germaine Greer (*The Female Eunuch*, 1970), Shulamith Firestone (*Dialectics of Sex*, 1970), Susan Brownmiller (*Against Our Will*, 1975), and Shere Hite (*The Hite Report on Female Sexuality*, 1976).

In this heady climate, not all women directors were outspoken feminists: some didn't identify themselves as such, while others talked openly about their political affiliations and discussed the feminist themes in their work. What was true for all women directors during the 1970s was that their lives were a feminist experience whether they aligned themselves with the movement or not. The increasing number of opportunities, as limited and difficult as they may have been, for these women were part of the ripple effect created by the larger sociopolitical movement that was very much intertwined with popular culture. At the end of the decade, the mark of the women's movement had begun to make an impression on Hollywood by how feminism could turn a profit.

During 1977 and 1978, while the film industry added more women directors than ever before (six) to its payroll, the studios also seemed to embrace representations of women on screen. In her *New York Times* article, "Hollywood Flirts with the New



Woman,” Jane Wilson wrote, “Credible female life has hardly been a noticeable feature of American movies in recent years, nor have human relationships been a dominate theme, but now, all of a sudden, there is a rush of movies in varying stages of preparation in which women are presented as real people involved in a gamut of relationships.”<sup>28</sup> A slew of studio releases centered on female protagonists had earned box-office and critical acclaim, including *Annie Hall* and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Diane Keaton, 1977), *The Goodbye Girl* (Marsha Mason, 1977), *Julia* (Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave, 1977), *The Turning Point* (Shirley MacLaine and Anne Bancroft, 1977), and *An Unmarried Woman* (Jill Clayburgh, 1978). Richard Brooks, director of *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, credited the feminist movement with Hollywood’s sudden interest in female-driven narratives: “It was women’s organizations and the general outcry for realistic women figures on the screen that resulted in these new films.”<sup>29</sup>

Some studios began publicly admitting what the feminist movement had spent years campaigning for: women warranted screen representation as complex, multifaceted characters who would appeal to a complex, multifaceted, ticket-buying female demographic. Gareth Wiggan, 20th Century-Fox’s vice president of production, acknowledged that “...it has emerged in a general way, that there is now a marked preference for movies about relationships between people. And if you want to do movies about relationships between people, you can’t just have men. Women are people too.”<sup>30</sup> While considerably late in this admission, at the very least Hollywood was catching up with the fact that women could influence the box office.

Throughout the decade feminist film critics criticized the way in which Hollywood maligned women’s roles and actresses’ careers. In her 1973 book *From*

*Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell lamented, “From a woman’s point of view, the ten years from, say, 1962 or 1963 to 1973 have been the most disheartening in screen history. In the roles and prominence accorded women, the decade began unpromisingly, grew steadily worse, and at present shows no signs of improving.” Citing the explicit sexual violence against women in movies like *Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Straw Dogs* (1971), Haskell echoed what many women in Hollywood would say about the era: the industry responded to the feminist movement by becoming even more misogynistic. “The growing strength and demands of women in real life, spearheaded by women’s liberation, obviously provoked a backlash in commercial film: a redoubling of Godfather-like machismo to beef up man’s eroding virility or, alternately, an escape into the all-male world of the buddy films from *Easy Rider* to *Scarecrow*.”<sup>31</sup> In her book *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film*, Joan Mellen expressed similar disappointment in studio films that had female leads and co-stars, such as *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1970), *Carnal Knowledge* (1971), and *Klute* (1971), for what she felt were degrading characterizations of women. “Despite the vociferousness of the Women’s Liberation Movement and its campaign to awaken in the media, particularly in advertising and television, a sense of the sexual identity and dignity of the independent woman, the contemporary cinema persists in spitefully portraying the sexuality of its women as infantile and dependent.”<sup>32</sup>

This critique of Hollywood in the face of feminist change taking place in the United States appeared regularly in the press. Writing for *Daily Variety*, in 1974, Jane Ross conducted a survey of female casting in all the major studio films of that year. Out of a total of 127 films and 2,437 roles, 1,757, or 72.10 percent, went to men, and 680, or 27.90 percent, went to women.<sup>33</sup> In 1975, successful screenwriter and vocal feminist

Eleanor Perry wrote an article for *Variety* titled “If You Wanna Make a Film About Women, Better Forget It.” Perry detailed the sexist obstacles she faced in attempting to sell her screenplay adaptation of the successful feminist comedy novel, *Memoirs of an Ex Prom Queen*, by Alix Kates Shulman. “The word was that 1975 was going to be a terrific year for women on the screen,” wrote Perry, hopefully. “The word was that there was a desperate need for scripts with strong roles for women.” However, the response she received while shopping her script around was less than enthusiastic: “Not right for Streisand or Minnelli so there’s no bankable star to play the girl. Too risky to go with an unknown. You can’t make a picture without a male star. I’d be interested if you’d make the sex explicit—don’t cut away from all those scenes in bed. I could sell it as an erotic picture.”<sup>34</sup>

The small amount of headway made in the late 1970s left some suspicious of whether the industry had undergone a genuine shift of consciousness or was only motivated by profit. Shirley MacLaine--whose role in *The Turning Point* opposite Anne Bancroft garnered the seasoned actresses many feminist accolades, as well as box office revenue--was nonplussed by Hollywood’s new approach to female-driven films. In 1978 she told Janet Maslin of the *New York Times*, “They’re starring the women together now, just like they starred the men together for five years but they still can’t figure out what to do with adult men and adult women on the screen. And starting a serious discussion about feminism in Hollywood is still the quickest way to empty a room out there.”<sup>35</sup> Paul Mazursky, the writer-director of *An Unmarried Woman*, a film that became one of Hollywood’s most lauded depictions of 1970s feminism, considered his movie’s success in the most cynical of terms: “Only when you see many women in the Senate and

Congress will the image of women in films truly change. You can't expect movies to reflect a fantasy."<sup>36</sup>

As with the increase of women directors by the end of the decade, the noticeable roles for actresses were complicated by a sense of pessimism that the industry's showings were superficial at best. Journalist Taffy Cannon declared,

1978 is being heralded as The Year of the Woman, when females return triumphantly to the silver screen after a decade which saw them replaced by crashing automobiles, gushing blood, endless chases, male buddies, high explosives, provocative prepubescence, rampaging animals and a plethora of disasters....Or so the story goes. Unfortunately, the situation isn't that simple or straightforward, although the plight of Hollywood women has undeniably improved both on and off screen.<sup>37</sup>

In 1979 Claudia Weill attributed the success of her independently produced, feminist-themed *Girlfriends*, which was picked up for distribution by Warner Bros., to the popularity of New Woman films. "I think I made a good film and it came at exactly the right time," said Weill. She continued,

If *An Unmarried Woman*, *Julia* and *The Turning Point* hadn't come out before mine, no studio looking at my film would even have understood that there was a market for such material. But when I went to Hollywood a year ago, they were really looking for women. If one came along, they took her seriously. If enough of us women get our feet in the door during this period, within a year or two we'll be professionals like everybody else, not just the company freaks.<sup>38</sup>

Weill's optimism, in 1979, was well founded. The number of women directors was at its peak (an estimated nine women had films either in release or production), and the New Woman film was experiencing a boost at the box office. However, the majority of the best-known "women's films" were written by male screenwriters, and, with the exception of *Girlfriends*, exclusively directed by them.

Several women during this time made films centered on female protagonists and even spoke openly about a desire to see better, more complex representations of such characters, but it should not be assumed that the "woman's film," in its 1970s incarnation, was the preferred genre and only narrative interest for these directors. The relationship between women directors and the popularity of New Woman films during the late 1970s is a forced association. The connection demonstrates Hollywood's attempt and willingness to appropriate topical issues (feminism) to boost its revenues and reputation. But the connection also confirms Hollywood's *unwillingness* to allow women—both in front of and behind the camera—to be industry profit makers. The film business was determined to contain its female employees' success--and with it their power--even if it meant losing money that these directors and actresses could have made for the studios. This containment of power was detailed by Haskell and Mellen in their books about women in Hollywood; and described by Perry and MacLaine in each of their stories about the difficulties they encountered in making meaningful films about women. Most importantly, this power dynamic stood out in the fact that the successful New Woman films were those written and directed by men who received artistic autonomy and adequate economic resources from the studios to bring their creative vision to the screen. A paradox of progress had begun to emerge: the small, yet clearly growing

number of women directors was continuously met with the entrenched sexism that guided the film industry and stunted these filmmakers' careers in feature films. Hollywood patriarchy was not going to be easily transformed even by the strength of the women's movement.

### **Hollywood's Civil Rights**

While film critics, actresses, directors, screenwriters, and studio executives grappled with feminism on and off screen at the end of the 1970s, within the industry, starting at the beginning of the decade, a variety of activists focused on changing discriminatory attitudes in a more official capacity. Initially, the U.S. government attempted to intervene on behalf of disenfranchised workers using the strictures of civil rights laws. However, Hollywood's desire to maintain its power structure found allies with a changing political administration and was able to deflect the social and economic justice demands being made by employees. By the early and mid-1970s, a strong, local community of activists began to develop within the industry's professional guilds. These organizations, guided by their female members, took up the cause of equal employment where the government had proven ineffectual.

In the 1960s no formal civil rights mechanism existed in Hollywood to regulate sexual and racial discrimination at any level of industry employment. However, in the early 1970s, carrying over the momentum of the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the broader feminist movement's focus on employment equity began to work its way into the film and television industries. Activists working outside the industry, the most well-known being the National Organization of Women (NOW),

and those inside, specifically the female members of the professional guilds (the Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and the Writers Guild), initiated reform efforts that set in motion critiques of Hollywood's sexist hiring practices. These groups proposed various remedies in an attempt to overhaul the system, in particular, affirmative action programs. At the core of each of these groups' attacks was the gathering of statistical evidence to prove the employment discrimination experienced by women working in production (above- and below-the-line<sup>39</sup>) and for actresses working in front of the camera. Key to reformers' influence was the utilization of the media to create awareness of gender inequality in the entertainment business. Accusations of prejudice were supported by statistical data that was circulated in the mainstream press, frequently in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*, and in particular the industry trade papers *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*. Media attention to these demonstrations was detailed. Protestors released the statistics as a way of outing studios, production companies, networks, and individuals as perpetrators of sexism and racism. Such reportage introduced into industry vernacular the reality of feminist protest of and within Hollywood and in doing so helped legitimize this opposition by recognizing in a public forum the frustrations of the female workforce.

As argued repeatedly by activists, female employees, and journalists, the reason for women's low employment numbers was not due to a lack of qualified applicants. During this time many women experienced in below- and above-the-line positions were eager to work. It was the systematic exclusion based on their gender that was the norm within Hollywood's patriarchal hegemony that prevented them from getting hired. At the start of the decade, protestors began the process of enlisting federal agencies and

professional guilds to play significant roles in negotiating between broadcast and film companies and their frustrated and marginalized workers. Government agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulated broadcasting, and the EEOC, established in 1965 to protect employee civil rights, served as external industry legal watchdogs; and unions like the DGA, SAG, and WGA were internal industry organizations that protected their members' creative and economic rights. Systematic change became continuously more elusive for these activists throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, but what they did accomplish was the more subtle and gradual introduction of a feminist consciousness into the media industry that sparked a dialogue around the disenfranchisement of female workers and changed, ever so slightly, the treatment of these employees. Although a concentrated effort on behalf of women filmmakers would not take place until the end of the decade through the political action of the DGA Women's Committee (discussed in Chapter 4), the feminist campaigns in the early 1970s would not only set an example for later activists, but also, in small steps, begin to break ground for those directors.

### **The EEOC Comes to Hollywood**

Since the 1930s, Hollywood had secured the ability to self-regulate the content of its films under the internal jurisdiction of the Production Code, which was replaced in 1968 by the Classification and Rating Association governed by the industry organization, the Motion Picture Association of America. On May 3, 1948 the Supreme Court ruled against the studio system in the anti-trust case *United States vs. Paramount Pictures*, ending Hollywood's system of vertical integration, which had allowed the major film



studios to control the production, distribution, and exhibition of their motion pictures, to the disadvantage of theater owners and independents.<sup>40</sup> This legal decision dismantled the core of Hollywood's power structure--making the studios careful to avoid any threat of government intervention in the future. In this setting of lingering federal control, on March 13, 1969, the EEOC conducted a hearing in Los Angeles on job discrimination in the film industry.

The EEOC was established in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson to enforce Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which stipulated that it was illegal for employers to discriminate against workers on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Commission did not have the power to make court-level, legally binding decisions to settle conflicts. Rather, its jurisdiction allowed for a federal investigation of discriminatory employment disputes with the authority to recommend to the Justice Department the filing of a lawsuit. Led, in 1969, by Chairman Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., an appointee from the Johnson administration, the Los Angeles meeting was part of an effort by the Commission to investigate employment patterns of the major business sectors in the country. Beginning in 1967, the EEOC had evaluated the textile industry's employment of African American workers in North and South Carolina, held hearings in New York City concerning the white-collar job sector's hiring of women and minorities, and looked at Los Angeles' aerospace and media industries.<sup>41</sup> Representing the film studios at the 1969 hearing were executives from Universal Studios, Warner Bros./Seven Arts, 20th Century-Fox, and Walt Disney; television networks ABC, CBS, and NBC; and union spokesmen from the Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers

(AMPTP), Motion Picture Machine Operators, and IATSE (Local 790, Illustrators and Matte Artists, Local 847, Set Designers and Model Makers, Local 854, Story Analysts).

The Commission believed that the motion picture and television companies could and should have a written affirmative action plan as evidence of their commitment to being equal opportunity employers, particularly in the era of the Civil Rights Act. Ten years later, the women of the DGA would push for a similar plan of action, calling on the entire film and television industry to implement quotas and timetables as a way to hire more qualified female directors. In 1969, and 1979, respectively, making such demands of the industry, by either federal agencies or employees supported by their union, met with enormous challenges. Such a measure would ask studios and networks to actively recruit, hire, and train minority groups as a way to balance what the testimonies were revealing: Hollywood was dominated by a white male labor force. Walt Disney, Warner Bros., and 20th Century-Fox each admitted that they did not have any affirmative action policies in place. Throughout the hearing, the commissioners seemed unable to hide their incredulosity at the respondents' answers confirming their companies' lack of diversity and failure of incentive to make any changes. In many instances these companies refused to acknowledge there was even a problem that needed to be addressed.

As a way to feign some innocence, the companies put the blame on factors outside their control. According to James Riddle, Vice President Western Division at ABC, "it was a geographical problem."<sup>42</sup> The network was located in Hollywood, which made transportation difficult for minority clerical recruits traveling from other parts of the city. For Arthur Schaefer, Industrial Relations Manager for Warner Bros./Seven Arts, his small staff of four lacked the resources necessary to actively recruit prospective

minority hires. In response to Commissioner Luther Holcomb's inquiry as to what the company's future plans were to expand in this area, Schaefer deferred any responsibility by responding, "Sir, I haven't the slightest idea. We are now being acquired by Kinney National Services, which is another company, and I wouldn't have the slightest idea what our plans are for next year."<sup>43</sup> His was just one little department in a very big corporation, now in the throes of a conglomerate takeover. Achieving workplace equity was beyond his control.

Schaefer's answer echoed a sentiment voiced in other testimonies from 1969 that studio hiring was not organized in a centralized manner, and as a result the industry's workforce was not aggregated in a way that lent itself to the rigid structure of an affirmative action plan. As Frank H. Ferguson, Resident Counsel for 20th Century-Fox, detailed in a written statement to the panel, employment in the craft and technical areas was subject to change week to week depending on fluctuating feature film production schedules, and in the case of broadcasting, when network programming aired or a television series went on hiatus. As he explained,

[T]he nature of the motion picture industry, that is, its labor pool on one hand, and the peculiarity of its labor demands on the other, make long range planning and programming difficult. Due to the illness of a principal player or another matter beyond the producer's control an immediate alteration of the schedule becomes necessary, and the set must be started and completed at an earlier date. This calls, on a day or 2 day's notice, for the employing of the craftsmen necessary to commence and complete the set. They must immediately be recruited from available sources.<sup>44</sup>

This line of reasoning allowed the studios to use the unpredictability of a decentralized production system as an excuse to rely on word-of-mouth hiring of a familiar labor pool—the only kind that could be “available” on short notice. Implied in this rationale was that while Hollywood’s labor force was not diversified, the necessary time and effort it would take to make changes were impractical and inefficient in the face of the constant industry demands and deadlines. Fifteen years later, Columbia and Warner Bros. would fall back on similar reasoning against the Directors Guild in the union’s suit regarding racial and gender discrimination of its members, arguing that the studios were not in charge of hiring crews, but that each production was a unique combination of professionals who worked well together based on previous productions and word-of-mouth recommendations. According to the studios—in 1969 and again in the early 1980s--the highly creative environment of making films depended on such organically, well-matched relationships that could not coalesce in the calculated confines of affirmative action’s quotas and timetables.

At the end of the day of testimonies at the 1969 hearings, Daniel Steiner, General Counsel for the EEOC, made the panel’s closing remarks. He declared that the hearings had shown there was “clear evidence of a pattern or practice of discrimination in violation of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” within the motion picture industry.<sup>45</sup> The Commission was critical of the studios’ lack of official affirmative action and recruitment plans. Faced with company representatives tripping over claims that their studio was committed to diversity, the panel was unconditional in its final judgment that “[they had] seen, in sum, no concrete evidence of a willingness to change the employment pattern in this industry” and would recommend that the Commission follow

up with the Department of Justice regarding a possible legal suit against the AMPTP, television networks, films studios, and the different craft unions.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, for the EEOC, the main culprits were the craft unions and their roster lists.

Studio productions hired union crews, and the crews were chosen from lists compiled based on a craftsman's seniority within his or her respective union. Those with the most experience were at the top of the list and therefore hired before others with less experience became eligible for employment. Seniority was determined by the most hours worked (i.e., individuals with the most experience), and to have worked those hours a person would have been in the union the longest. In order to join a union the applicant was required to have worked a certain amount of hours, but to get steady work on a film or television production an individual had to be a member of the union.<sup>47</sup> Historically, the unionization of the film business had been part of Hollywood's transition into a masculinized industry; in 1969, industry unions—for both below-the-line and above-the-line positions--were dominated by a white male membership. In this context, men of color and all women existed outside union culture. Furthermore, membership applications reinforced their marginalized status. Not uncommon on applications to craft unions were racial/ethnic profiling questions such as whether a prospective member was "foreign-born."<sup>48</sup>

Due to the fact that these craft unions were made up of predominately white men, the nationality question suggested to the EEOC that the organizations were actively controlling the makeup of their constituencies. Nationality had no bearing on whether a prospective union member could do his or her job, but racial and ethnic profiling was a means of enabling what the panel felt were patterns of discrimination.<sup>49</sup> Similarly

problematic to the EEOC were the unions' reinforcement of family lineage as a means of member status as suggested in the application question, "What type of vocation did your father and/or guardian pursue for a livelihood?"<sup>50</sup> Embedded here was an automatic vetting based on paternity: if a father had worked in the industry and been part of the union, then, regardless of qualifications, his son was an assumed member of that community with access to all its perks. Father-son hiring maintained the white-patriarchal hierarchy of the union by favoring familial legacy over individual skill and aspiration--affecting both women and men outside of these bloodlines. Furthermore, passing down a trade between only male generations coded such jobs as "male," thus creating for women—both white and of color—a double obstacle: they were not a man (in order to do men's work) and not the male descendant of a male union member (in order to be accepted into the union).

In October 1969, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the Justice Department had named Columbia, MGM, Paramount, 20th Century-Fox, Warner Bros., television networks ABC and CBS, and the AMPTP and IATSE in a "secret" memo regarding alleged racial discrimination.<sup>51</sup> (Universal Studios was excluded based on the company's comparatively better record.) By the early spring of 1970, in agreement with the EEOC, the Justice Department had decided it would not take the issue to court and instead negotiated a settlement with the entertainment industry focused on affirmative action. In April 1970, the *New York Times* reported, "Seventy-two movie and television production companies agreed to an equal-employment plan that includes hiring, training and upgrading of minorities and sets racial quotas." Although the companies "[denied] the existence of discrimination, [they] agreed in the document to the need for remedial

training and for affirmative action to insure equal employment.”<sup>52</sup> Those named in the suit included the three television networks and their four primary craft unions; seventy-three film producers and their nine local film craft unions; and the AMPTP, IATSE, and the Moving Picture Machine Operators (MPMO).<sup>53</sup> The major film studios that signed the agreement included Columbia Pictures, MGM, Paramount Pictures, 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, Walt Disney Productions, and Warner Bros.<sup>54</sup>

The plan accounted for nonacting-related, below-the-line positions such as camera and sound technicians, costume and set design, grip and electric, editors, and hair and makeup. Writers, directors, and producers—working in both film and television—were not included in the settlement. The agreement focused on creating ways to integrate the unions’ rosters. Emphasized in the plan were instructional programs that would guarantee placing “at least one Negro and one Spanish-American” from trainee groups onto union referral lists, as well as eliminating discriminatory job testing such as questions about origin of birth. These measures were intended to insure “every five new employees would be members of a minority group and to establish a job-training program with participation made up of two-fifths Negroes and two-fifths Mexican-Americans.”<sup>55</sup> The EEOC and Justice Department defined their goals numerically, hoping to assure that 20 to 24 percent of media industry craft jobs were staffed by minorities and that, ultimately, after a certain amount of years, the separate minority pool created by this fair hiring plan would merge into the main union roster list--thus finally racially integrating those labor organizations and as result, the film and television industries as a whole.

The agreement focused solely on race, specifically African Americans and Latinos, because they were the two largest non-white demographics in the general Los

Angeles workforce.<sup>56</sup> The agreement also focused exclusively on male employees, because, according to an attorney with the Department of Justice who was part of the investigation, women did not constitute a large enough portion of the workforce to be considered their own labor pool worthy of factoring into the plan.<sup>57</sup> In fact, women made up an estimated 22 percent of the industry workforce.<sup>58</sup> Ignoring women in this way was inconsistent with the EEOC's mandate to protect workers against discrimination based on race, color, religion, *sex*, or national origin. When collecting employment data from companies—including the film studios in 1969--the EEOC required them to fill out the agency's Standard Form 100/Employer Information Report (EEO-1 form). This paperwork included individual categories accounting for the number of all permanent and part-time employees broken down by the total number of men and women and then into a subcategories of male and female minorities identified as "Negro, Oriental, American Indian, Spanish Surnamed American." In 1969, the EEO-1 reports submitted to the EEOC by six of the major film studios estimated that the film industry's cumulative workforce was a total of 16,046 employees, 3,663 (22.8 percent) were women. According to these forms, the Commission had data on race *and* gender, but chose not to foreground "sex" along with race as a class of discrimination in their analysis of Hollywood in 1969, nor did the Justice Department in its subsequent settlement in 1970.

During the hearing, the members of the EEOC, Chairmen Alexander and Luther Holcomb, and Commissioners William H. Brown, Elizabeth J. Kuck, and Vincent T. Ximenes, consistently focused their line of questioning on the status of male employees of color. Not until midway through the hearing did Commissioner Kuck ask during the IATSE's testimony if sex was included along with race, creed, color, and national origin



in the union contract's nondiscriminatory clause. Once confirmed by union representative Josef Bernay that in fact sex was not included in the clause, Kuck requested that it be added.<sup>59</sup> Chairman Alexander immediately upheld her comment adding that "this Commission feels that sex discrimination, and its pervasiveness in this society, is important business. We are not interested in the mere addition of the word 'sex'; we are interested in the inclusion of women at every level without the prior biases that we, as males, may have, and it should be based upon their talents."<sup>60</sup> However adamant these commissioners were about the inclusion of sex, gender was not mentioned again during the duration of the hearing. Only two journalists included women in their coverage of the hearings and then only in the sparsest of terms. Both the *Los Angeles Sentinel* and *Chicago Daily Defender* mentioned in their one-page articles that "While women held a higher percentage of white collar jobs [compared to blue collar jobs], only one fifth of them had jobs above clerical level."<sup>61</sup>

For a federal investigation of this magnitude not to prominently address "sex" as a category of discrimination was to ignore 30 percent of the workforce for one of the country's largest business sectors. Ignoring women as an employment demographic also devalued the jobs in which they were over-represented. Feminized jobs were a crucial component to Hollywood's workforce. In addition to service jobs in food preparation and housekeeping, women dominated clerical positions such as secretaries and assistants that functioned in all departments; and by the 1970s, women were over-represented in the areas of casting, hair/makeup, publicity, wardrobe, and script supervision. Denying gender and gendered jobs also served as a way to ignore the fact that women were disproportionately represented in low-wage positions with little authority. Women were

not being hired as executives or managers of departments. Nor did they hold positions of authority, such as associate and assistant directors, stage managers, or unit production managers, in below-the-line production jobs on film and television crews. Grip, electric, and camera departments were historically off-limits to women. Those professions were controlled by male-dominated trade unions that justified their exclusion of women by claiming that operating the necessary equipment was too dangerous or heavy for females.

At the end of the 1960s, the government's privileging of race—men of color—over gender (all women) can be understood within an historical context of the prevailing social justice movements of the era. While the feminist movement had begun organizing on a national level starting in the early 1960s, it was the African American-led civil rights movement that continued to mobilize federal-driven social reform—focused on race—during the decade. As an historical occasion, the events in 1969 and 1970 serve as a marker for the transition of the civil rights movement that dominated the country's sociopolitical consciousness during the 1950s and 1960s to the white, middle-class women's movement that prevailed during the 1970s. A closer analysis of the EEOC hearings reveals that both race *and* gender should have been areas of legitimate concern for the agency. The percentage of women working in Hollywood justified their acknowledgement as a discriminatory class. Furthermore, within Hollywood's patriarchal power structure, employees were discriminated against for reasons of gender and race; race and gender, as general categories, were not mutually exclusive of each other.

The legacy of the Civil Rights Act and its situating race and sex against each other was a factor that influenced the outcome of the 1970 affirmative action negotiations. The voluntary, “good will” agreement between the government and the film

industry did not exist in a civil rights vacuum. The U.S. recession during 1969 and 1970 impacted Hollywood significantly: increased interest rates, combined with a reduced production schedule that depended on a few large-budget films that did not appeal to the changing youth demographic, had financially impaired the industry to the sum of approximately \$200 million. The country's economic downturn ended in 1971, but not before Hollywood lost an additional \$300-400 million.<sup>62</sup> President Richard Nixon was instrumental in rescuing the film industry from pending financial disaster by creating tax shelters and investment tax credits that allowed studios to take advantage of significant tax breaks on production costs. At the time, such provisions were the primary source of financing in Hollywood until 1976, when tax code reform prohibited such business deals.<sup>63</sup> As evidenced by these special considerations afforded by Nixon to the major studios, the relationship between the federal government and Hollywood was a close and sympathetic one. If the government was willing to facilitate financial deals with the industry to help it avert financial crisis, then it was no doubt willing to work with those same companies on an antidiscrimination plan that avoided court intervention and public criticism. It is no surprise then that the Justice Department kept its negotiations regarding job discrimination "secret" from the press. The lack of transparency allowed the relationship between Hollywood and the government to go undebated in the media, keeping the public uninformed about the unique concerns given to the industry, both financially and with regard to workplace ethics. The lack of transparency meant the relationship between Hollywood and the government (and the relevant financial information and workplace ethics) was kept from the public.

Nixon not only supported Hollywood's efforts to maintain its white, patriarchal hegemony, but the administration used this situation as an opportunity to assert its executive power over the EEOC. Shortly after the March 14, 1969, hearings concluded, Commissioner Alexander, a Democrat, came under attack from the cantankerous Republican senator, Everett McKinley Dirksen of Illinois, who accused the EEOC chairman of "harassing business men over job discrimination," describing the meeting in Hollywood as "carnival-like hearings." Dirksen threatened that he would "go to the highest authority in this Government and get somebody fired."<sup>64</sup> On April 9, Alexander resigned his post as the head of the EEOC. A carryover appointee from the Johnson administration, Alexander had been the head of the EEOC (established by Johnson in 1965) since 1967, a term that was scheduled to expire in 1972. While it was not uncommon for an incoming president to reassign positions of federal commissions and departments, Alexander's removal seemed symptomatic of the EEOC's changing approach to monitoring business industries under the Nixon administration. In a memo affirming his commitment to the Civil Rights Act, President Nixon stated, "I wanted to emphasize my own official and personal endorsement of a strong policy of equal opportunity within the Federal Government."<sup>65</sup>

Outcry from several members of the House of Representatives, as well as Senator Edward Kennedy, a Democrat from Massachusetts, doubted the president's commitment to job equity. Specifically, Kennedy criticized the administration's multimillion-dollar contracts with textile companies and highway developers from whom the government required only informal assurance regarding fair employment policies, even while these industries were notorious for their discriminatory hiring practices. Not surprisingly,

Alexander, faced with his looming dismissal, voiced his dismay that the Nixon administration was altering the tenor of the EEOC, declaring, “Superficial statements about hard-core unemployed or about plans for progress or other volunteer actions are nice, but not sufficient.”<sup>66</sup>

The EEOC’s confrontation with Hollywood and the Justice Department’s subsequent negotiations demonstrate the complexities of enforcing federally mandated civil rights in the film industry. Without the backing of a court order, the agreement--and the disempowered employees it was meant to protect--had no legal recourse if the plan was not followed. One government lawyer described the situation as “another gentlemen’s agreement... which sound good but are loaded with loop-holes even a racist could crawl through.”<sup>67</sup> Instead, the responsibility to see through this pledge of workplace reform rested on the accused, in this case one with power: the network, the film studio, the producer, and the labor union. As illustrated in the 1970 negotiations, such a plan allowed for both the industry and government to appear amicable to the demands for fair hiring without any legal obligation to implement or enforce systems of real change. Though the plan established numerical goals for how many minorities should be hired through special roster lists and job training programs, the actual number of jobs for minorities increased only slightly.

In 1976 the California Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights conducted a follow-up investigation of the 1969 EEOC hearings and published its findings in a 1978 report titled “Behind the Scenes: Equal Employment Opportunity in the Motion Picture Industry.” According to the Advisory Committee, the major motion picture studios, IATSE, and the MPMO had not diversified their workforce (in the case of

the unions, their membership) in a meaningful way over the last eight years. Although the numbers of women and minorities had doubled since the last investigation, those statistics were very low to start with, the concentration of jobs existing mainly in craft, laborers, and service workers (dominated by men of color) and clerical work (dominated by all women).<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, film production had declined during the decade, while the number of minority employees in the broader California workforce had increased.<sup>69</sup> The Committee cited the industry's culpability for the lack of progress as similar to the EEOC's findings in 1969. The major studios did not have official written affirmative action plans as part of the companies' hiring policies, and the partial ones that did exist were not strictly enforced.

As was the case in 1969 and 1970, the unions and studios took turns blaming each other. In defense of the unions, it could be said that production had declined and the studios and production companies did not hire as much, so the rosters did not have the opportunity to rotate names from the bottom of the list to the top. More damaging was that the studios continued to maintain their own roster lists, insuring an insular hiring pool that was yet another obstacle for minorities not historically part of union culture. Studios countered that the unions' strict roster system prohibited companies from hiring minorities--guild members who presumably had lower seniority ranking because they were newer to the organization. In actuality, the craft unions and the film studios were equally complicit in the use of seniority lists, as the two systematically negotiated collective bargaining agreements that reinforced this hiring structure. The Advisory Committee also cited the federal government as part of the problem. Following the 1970 agreement, the EEOC, empowered by the Justice Department, had failed to monitor how

well the film studios were maintaining their part of the plan. EEOC staff that was required to enforce the details of the agreement had been drastically downsized. In 1974 the 1970 agreement expired, and neither the EEOC nor the Justice Department made an effort to renegotiate the terms.<sup>70</sup> It was apparent that these government agencies had made a conscious decision not to pursue job discrimination based on race and gender in Hollywood.

The 1969 EEOC hearings and the subsequent Department of Justice agreement with Hollywood were significant in several ways. The department's lackadaisical treatment of Hollywood demonstrated the complexities of government enforcement of federal civil rights legislation within private industry. Democratic commissioner Alexander's conflict with the incoming Nixon administration inspired a bipartisan battle, suggesting that interpretation of federal law was at the discretion of the political party in power at the time. The 1970 agreement exposed the backdoor allegiance between the film industry and the Nixon administration that not only functioned as a financial safety net for the studios, but also maintained the patriarchal power structure that defined both the government and the entertainment business. The events of 1969 and 1970 also set a precedent for *good faith* agreements with regard to discriminatory hiring in the media industry. Such agreements would be a constant in Hollywood throughout the 1970s, providing a compromise for conflicts between female employees and the companies they accused of inequities in hiring. Initially, these concessions appeared hopeful for women workers in their attempts to be considered for jobs made inaccessible by sexist hiring patterns. Ultimately, however, good faith concessions showed the power wielded by the industry.

Although these proceedings were essentially a failure in that they did not create a reliable system of employer accountability and employment improvement, they were successful in that they brought awareness at the start of the decade to labor injustice within Hollywood. Throughout the 1970s, below- and above-the-line employees began organizing to change Hollywood's culture of sexism and racism. During these years, female members of trade and technical unions filed several lawsuits on the grounds of discrimination; and there were also many historical moments for those unions in admitting their first female members.<sup>71</sup> Activism also took place within the professional guilds. Women members of the Screen Actors Guild and the Writers Guild led high-profile critiques of the industry. Supported by their respective unions, these protests were conducted within the context of civil rights legislation, but did not rely on federal intervention and instead attempted change through internal-industry grassroots organizing.

### **Women's Committees: Insider/Outsider Status**

In November 1972, Steve Toy, writing for *Daily Variety*, announced, "A campaign to press for the demands of women in showbiz has become industry-wide."<sup>72</sup> Women employees collectively advocating for each other, across guild memberships, created a sense of camaraderie and power in numbers and professions that nudged studio and network heads to meet with representatives. During these years, each guild's efforts at feminist reform were reported on jointly in the trade papers. The solidarity amongst industry women was widespread.



During the early 1970s, feminist community building had begun between SAG, WGA, DGA, Inter-Studio Alliance of Women, Rights of Women Playwrights (New York), the National Organization of Women Image Committee, and Actors Equity and Publicists Guild Local 818.<sup>73</sup> In 1972, in an uncustomary move, SAG and the WGA mobilized together to meet with television networks and discuss how they could improve their hiring track record with regard to women. Kathleen Nolan, founder of SAG's Women's Committee (and who became the Guild's first female president in 1975), was particularly driven by a vision of collaborative activism amongst all industry women. "SAG-WGA joint women's committee will enlarge and grow to encompass all the creative women in America--a pretty lofty objective," admitted Nolan.<sup>74</sup>

From 1972 to 1976 both the WGA and SAG compiled annual statistical surveys that explicitly documented the disenfranchisement of its women members. These efforts were spearheaded by the two organizations' individual Women's Committees, which the press reported on widely. As told to Mollie Gregory by Sue Cameron, feminist columnist of *The Hollywood Reporter* during the 1970s, "In November 1973, Joyce Perry [WGA Women's Committee member] slipped me a copy of the WGA Committee's survey of the '72 to '73 shows. I was truly amazed. That survey shocked me. I printed it word for word without anyone's permission, just slapped it in there and sent it off."<sup>75</sup> The data focused on television writers and was linked to specific studios, networks, and in several cases, individual shows (see table 1).<sup>76</sup> The Committee's data was the first of its kind to be collected by a Hollywood union.

Reporting on the numbers for *Variety*, Bill Greeley addressed the industry's mood of casual participation on the precipice of a revolutionary shift: "In the light of a lot of

talk about opening up the field to more women writers, the women's committee of the Writers Guild of America (West) has made a survey which is likely to surprise more than the hardline women's rights advocates."<sup>77</sup> The federal government had come to Hollywood in 1969 and left in 1970 with signed affirmative action promises. Three years later this insider insurgency was a reminder that employment equity reform had just begun in Hollywood. Using the industry trade papers as their forum, these employees, not yet contained by a mediating agency like their Guild, confronted the media power structure on feminist terms. As union members, the women were Hollywood insiders, but by identifying their employment alienation from their professional community, they positioned themselves as outsiders.

### **Guild Women**

The WGA Women's Committee was founded in 1971 at the initiation of member Diana Gould, who described her fellow comrades-in-arms as "a strong, closely-knit group of women writers, and we all gain a great deal of strength from meeting with each other and knowing that we are not alone...At every meeting there is an excitement just from knowing that there *is* a Women's Movement and that our cause is just and that we will not be stopped."<sup>78</sup> This new generation of forward-thinking writers were received with some trepidation by their union. Interviewee Maggie Weisberg conveyed the hesitancy that a portion of the membership felt about moving into the feminist age by admitting in the first paragraph of her cheerful profile of Gould, "In this discomfiting era of pressure and demands for change at a pace faster than we are willing to accommodate, we sometimes feel that the words *revolutionary* and *undesirable* are synonymous. And if

that sounds like Personal True Confessions, so be it. Most of us are somewhat guilty of dragging our heels.”<sup>79</sup>

Unabashedly products of their time, the Committee was not shy about naming their influences: “Others of us came for the chance to meet other women writers. Others of us came from the Women’s Liberation Movement—yes, still the Women’s Liberation Movement.”<sup>80</sup> They were proud to be members of the Guild and were fully aware that hard work and talent had earned them entrance to an exclusive organization of an elite community. However, the Committee was also aware of the fact that their achievements and the inadequacies of the WGA to sufficiently serve their needs were not mutually exclusive: the women’s criticisms of Hollywood also implicated their Guild. Enlisting the board’s support to confront industry sexism would be a necessary asset and ultimately the board was willing to participate, to a degree, as a way of smoothing out its own culpability.

The Committee found an ally in board member Howard Rodman, initially the only male member, who was influential in getting support for the collecting of statistics.<sup>81</sup> Also of great importance to the group was WGA Executive Director Michael H. Franklin, who followed up the release of incriminating data with a letter to all 850 Guild signatories. Franklin began by positioning the Guild as a promoter of equal opportunity: “...we do want all of our members to have an *equal chance* at employment... We want you to employ our members solely on the basis of merit, not because of sex, color, age or any other reason not related to talent.”<sup>82</sup> Accompanying the letter was a copy of the 1973 statistics detailing the number of women and men writers hired on individual shows. Franklin presented the information as an opportunity for producers to “Analyze these

findings with a view to examining your own hiring practices.” However, the executive director’s intention was not to assist in merely a passive reflection. This introduction was followed by a questionnaire that asked explicitly about company attitudes toward hiring women: “Have you done anything subtly or directly to discourage women from seeking writing employment on your projects? Do you believe that men write better than women? If so, do you have solid evidence to support that belief? Have you ever employed a woman as a writer? If not, why?”<sup>83</sup> Early in the decade, a letter like this sent by the executive director and reprinted in the organization’s newsletter sent a clear message to its membership and the industry that the Guild’s position would be in support of its female members.

This ambitious and driven community of women pushing for these changes provided the momentum responsible for generating the networking and organizing efforts that brought about feminist awareness. This was a time of “firsts,” and therefore very few women mentors were available to guide this attempt to dismantle, at least a little bit at a time, Hollywood’s patriarchy. Franklin would be one of the era’s most influential and ardent advocates for guild women. From 1978 to 1988, as the National Executive Director of the DGA, he supported the efforts of their Women’s Committee and the eventual lawsuit brought by the Guild against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros. for gender and racial discrimination. To have a male executive, established writer, director, or producer vouch for the women’s agenda was essential; while the statistics should have spoken for themselves, having a powerful man validate the women’s protests gave them a voice in male-centric Hollywood.

SAG's Women's Committee was founded in 1972 by Kathleen Nolan when she was the Guild's first vice president. In 1975 Nolan was elected as the first female president of the Guild by a landslide victory (she would later be elected for a second consecutive term). In May 1973 Nolan discussed the results of the SAG Women's Committee's latest survey, this time calculating numbers of women across the industry and placing the tallies within the context of a shared reality of employment imbalance: 8 women out of 3,000 producers; 23 women out of 3,100 directors; 347 women out of 3,500 writers; 11 women out of 2,000 editors. Nolan acknowledged the misleading nature of such numbers, explaining, "When you look at the 347 women writers you realize they are not all working—only about half that number are. Out of the 23 directors, you could count on one hand the number actively directing. Of the 38 percent of women actors in SAG, 92 percent are unemployed."<sup>84</sup>

Later that summer, executives at all three networks met with "Chair Lady" Nolan at a "soft sell confrontation" luncheon, the sixth of its kind sponsored by SAG's women and minority committees. Touted as an "historic meeting" and the "first of its kind" by Guild and network representatives, the event was the first of the series to allow the press to be present. Thomas Sarnoff, NBC west coast VP and board chairman of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, responded to the group's complaints with careful concern, acknowledging the problem without making any definitive promises:

No matter what we try to do, there's no way that we can do it fast enough to satisfy all of you. That doesn't mean that we're not trying, or that we don't care. If when we don't do things that we should do or that you think we should

do, you don't get mad at us, but help us to learn while we try to teach, then I think we will all succeed in this effort.<sup>85</sup>

In 1976 the federal government returned to Hollywood to follow up on the 1970 affirmative action agreements. This time the studios and trade unions were far less eager to please the General Services Administration (GSA) reporting for the California Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The GSA was frustrated by its lack of enforcement power, as the majority of media companies did not fall under its control. This time, unions resisted providing employment records, and subpoenas had to be requested for Warner Bros., Paramount, and 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, who did not attend the proceedings. Universal was the only studio agreeable to having their files audited, but the effort seemed less about job equity and more of an empty presentation of numbers.<sup>86</sup>

At this point, how many meetings had women, minorities, and studio representatives held with each other? The statistics were still low and still very real, but the headlines in the trades had lost their ring. A sense of fatigue had settled on what, just a few years ago at the beginning of the decade, promised something new. In place of all the “firsts”—first released statistics, first meetings, first agreements—now guilds and federal agencies chased studios and networks for annual reports on whom they were not hiring. Eventually, contractual provisions in guilds' basic agreements would become the new “good faith effort” recommending that companies try harder to end gender discrimination. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this would be especially true of women directors, whose fierce activism within their union, the Directors Guild, at the end of the decade would be recognized, but also controlled in the “Non-Discrimination” Article 15 of the Guild's 1981 Basic Agreement.

Above-the-line female employees found themselves locked in a paradox: the industry acknowledged the inequities faced by women working in production, but did not admit any official policy of sexual and racial discrimination, nor were they willing to participate in any aggressive solutions for change (i.e., court-ordered enforcement, affirmative action timetables and quotas). Government-mandated mediations and affirmative action solutions, and nondiscrimination policy clauses in guild contracts, created loopholes at every turn, making clear that the film and television business would not be required to follow through on any lasting policy changes. While these flaws created impasses for reformists by derailing their strategies of confrontation and rectification, the dialogues throughout the decade did allow for some measure of job openings—small as they were—to take place. This push and pull between some small change while the system stayed in place would be the struggle experienced by women directors during these years.

### **A Directing Workshop for Women**

During the early 1970s, while SAG and the WGA were releasing employment statistics to the press and creating discourse within the film and television industry regarding its sexist hiring policies, the American Film Institute (AFI) made its unique contribution to the feminist reform actions of the time. In 1974 the AFI created the Directing Workshop for Women (DWW). The objective of the Workshop was to train women already established in industry careers for the job of film director. During the early years, the program did accept women who had directed independent features (e.g., Karen Arthur, Juleen Compton, Joanna Lee) but had not yet worked for a studio

production. Eventually, the only directing experience the program accepted was television (news and episodic) and documentaries. Founded by Jan Haag, the DWW was a direct response to the absence of women directors working for the film studios. In 1974 Elaine May was the sole woman to have directed for a major studio—*A New Leaf* (1971, Paramount) and *Heartbreak Kid* (1972, 20th Century-Fox)—since Ida Lupino made *The Trouble with Angels* in 1966 for Columbia Pictures. During the beginning years, participants were selected through a competitive application process and were then given access to production and editing equipment and a small budget to make two short films that they could use as demos or calling cards. A program like the Workshop was a practical answer to an industrial situation that was becoming a sociopolitical problem: increase the number of working women directors by training more women to be directors and in doing so attempt an intervention into Hollywood’s policy of sexist hiring.

The AFI was founded in 1967 by President Johnson, who pronounced in the White House Rose Garden, “We will create an American Film Institute, bringing together leading artists of the film industry, outstanding educators and young men and women who wish to pursue the 20<sup>th</sup> century art form as their life’s work.”<sup>87</sup> Funded in large part by the federal National Endowment for the Arts and the Ford Foundation, the Institute had offices and a theater in Washington, D.C., close to its financing, and its film school facilities in Los Angeles, close to the industry. Under the leadership of its first president, George Stevens, Jr., the nonprofit organization took on film preservation efforts, provided training and educational programs for film students, administered multiple filmmaking grants (some with a focus on independent productions), and hosted an



annual, televised Lifetime Achievement Award that honored industry veterans such as John Ford (1973), James Cagney (1974), and Orson Welles (1975).

In many ways the AFI was an appropriate place for the hands-on activism of the DWW. A conservatory dedicated to training the next generation of filmmakers taught by seasoned professionals, many of whom were still working in the business, bridged a practical education with industry resources. The Institute occupied a middle ground by supporting upcoming filmmakers not yet working in the system--some interested in making Hollywood films, others focused on independent productions. At the same time, the AFI's ties to Hollywood were strong. In 1974 its board of trustees included several studio and network executives, such as Ted Ashely (Warner Bros.), Barry Diller (ABC), Frank Yablans (Paramount Pictures), Gordon Stulberg (20th Century-Fox); film producers David Brown, David Picker, Walter Mirisch; and actors Warren Beatty and board chairman, Charlton Heston. Of the thirty-eight board members, five were women: actresses Shirley MacLaine and Cicely Tyson; screenwriter Eleanor Perry and journalist Shana Alexander; and Joan Ganz Cooney, president of the Children's Television Network.<sup>88</sup> Lifetime Achievement Awards were bestowed upon a film industry icon; and guests to their Master's interview seminars spotlighted performers, screenwriters, producers, directors, editors, and cinematographers who were currently working as a way to connect students with contemporary Hollywood. AFI's ties to Hollywood bolstered its legitimacy at "bringing together leading artists of the film industry. . . ." These affiliations also extended to the organization a role in perpetuating Hollywood's patriarchal system.

In December 1970, activists representing the group Women for Equality in the Media (WFEM) protested sexual discrimination and “marched on” the Institute. The press described the incident in confrontational, military terms: “In preparation for a long siege they carried sacks of food and a list of 12 demands ‘which must be met before we leave,’” reported Mary B. Murphy for the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>89</sup> The more than fifty feminists included documentarian Francine Parker, production assistant Judy Binder, and women’s rights lawyer Arlene Colman Schwimmer.<sup>90</sup> The group presented a list of grievances to Stevens, “who looked uncomfortable squeezed onto a couch with four women, and surrounded on the floor and chairs by the rest.”<sup>91</sup> The women insisted that AFI meet the following demands: distribute 51 percent of its awards (grants, scholarships, internships) to women--and nonwhite women--because women made up 51 percent of the national population; focus recruitment efforts on women in high schools and college with attention paid to disenfranchised communities of color; employ women in half of all areas of the AFI staff; create a permanent board of directors composed of five women “to review and combat discrimination and stereotyping of women in the film industry and serve as a research and production group to be funded and have office space provided by AFI.”<sup>92</sup> WFEM’s protests were substantiated by statistical evidence of gender discrimination: out of the conservatory’s forty “fellows” (students), only two were women; in the apprentice program, no interns assigned to directors had been women; in three years, of sixty to sixty-five filmmaking grants, three had been awarded to women; out of twelve television grants, none had been designated to women.<sup>93</sup>

In 1970 WFEM’s protests had made Stevens aware that the Institute was implicated in the current feminist critique building throughout the film and television

business. Although the creation of the DWW, four years later, was an unrelated turn of events, the “siege” did result in bringing Jan Haag into the Institute’s intern program. The Academy Intern Program placed aspiring filmmakers on major productions. The first woman accepted to this program, Haag was assigned to *Harold and Maude* (1971) and director Hal Ashby. A director of educational films for the John Tracy Clinic and the Department of Health Education and Welfare, Haag was beginning to experiment with the early video technology in the 1970s. She had applied and been rejected for an AFI grant, but was known to Kay Loveland, who oversaw the internship program and “pounded” on Stevens’s desk to get him to accept Haag as the first female intern.<sup>94</sup> Haag, who described herself as AFI’s “Token Woman,” did not know about the WFEM protests or even about the group’s existence. She attended one of their meetings at the Institute only after her boss, Antonio (Tony) Vellani, suggested she might find it of interest. In a recent interview, Haag remembered that during that meeting, “...I was still very new and unknown, as I recall, no one spoke to me and I didn’t say a word...later, I was interested in the fact they hadn’t let me know about the meeting. But this may not be surprising, as I WAS the TOKEN WOMAN, the feminist...there probably weren’t any other feminist around to fill me [in] on what was going on.”<sup>95</sup>

After completing the internship, Haag was hired by Vellani, director of AFI’s Center for Advanced Film and Television Studies, for the position that would eventually become Admissions and Awards Administrator that included overseeing the Academy Internship Program, the Independent Filmmaker Program, and the Center for Advanced Film Studies Admissions. A few years later, in 1974, Vellani and Haag were passed a letter from Dr. Matilda Krim expressing an interest in helping the Institute, in particular

supporting women in film. Krim, a research scientist, who in the 1980s would become an influential AIDS activist, was also married to Arthur Krim, who at the time was chairman of United Artists. Haag met with Matilda Krim, Eleanor Perry (screenwriter and vocal feminist), and Michel Novak from the Rockefeller Foundation to brainstorm what would soon become the Directing Workshop for Women. Securing \$35,000 in start-up funds, Haag and Vellani finalized the pilot program's details. As Haag called around looking for possible candidates, she was surprised by the overwhelming response they received from established women: the "Big Ladies."<sup>96</sup>

Haag never imagined the DWW to be a film school: "They, these top Industry Women, didn't so much need repeated experiences as they needed tapes to use as demos. They didn't need, nor were they given, instruction. The DWW was designed for quick accomplishment, not talk. It was *not* a workshop for students."<sup>97</sup> She and Vellani agreed that, during the beginning years of the Workshop, the participants needed to be high-profile women who were already experiencing success in their current industry job. A program of unknowns would not generate any attention, but a roster of Oscar- and Emmy-winning actresses and producers, studio executives and guild presidents, prolific editors and writers would catch Hollywood's attention. The first year's group included (producer) Julia Phillips, who had just won an Academy Award for Best Picture for *The Sting* (1973); (actresses) Ellen Burstyn, Lee Grant, Margot Kidder, Susan Oliver, Lily Tomlin, Nancy Walker; (SAG president) Kathleen Nolan; (television writer-producer-director) Joanna Lee; (casting executive and vice president of creative affairs at Columbia Pictures) Nessa Hyams; (writer and actress) Maya Angelou; (producer-editor) Susan Martin; (script supervisor) Marjorie Mullen; (network news writer-producer-director)

Giovanna Nigro-Chacon; (novelist and television writer) Gail Parent; (feature film editor) Marion Rothman; and (independent filmmakers) Karen Arthur and Juleen Compton.

Haag and the DWW were criticized for focusing on women of such high stature who appeared to already have access to the necessary Hollywood resources. Aware of the immense obstacles facing women wanting to direct, five years later, Haag continued to be a stout defender of her program's "celebrity" factor by explaining that "...if you had started the workshop with completely unknown women, you could not have had nearly that kind of bombshell effect on the whole Hollywood scene. When [we had] Julia Phillips and Lee Grant, Kathleen Nolan, Ellen Burstyn participating in it, that really shook the studio heads awake. It shook the agents and producers..." One of them had remarked to her, "Oh, they must be *serious*—to lay their career on the line for a budget of \$360 [per student tape] and say 'I'm going to take a chance.'"<sup>98</sup>

Participants were expected to make two tapes (the equipment available was early videotape) for a budget of \$300. The short films ranged anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour determined by the director. AFI provided them with a crew made up of the conservatory's student body, this in addition to any professional help they brought to the production at their own discretion and expense. Many of the participants excelled in this kind of environment—no instruction, little provided funds, and limited equipment. "I shot my tape as if I were shooting film," explained Lee Grant. "It was like having scratch paper. It was wonderful for someone who is learning...The AFI crew was wonderful! Such concerns, such tastes. I am very grateful for my workshop experience."<sup>99</sup> "Many of the women in the first cycle could have bought and sold AFI," said Karen Arthur, describing the access to resources—monetary and filmmaking connections--some of her

more established colleagues had. “But that’s missing the point. The women needed the workshop for camaraderie and courage.”<sup>100</sup>

Some of the harshest critics of the early DWW were participants themselves. Joanna Lee, one of the more experienced members, ended up leaving the program when her expectations were not met. “All the program offers is one little half-inch videotape camera and a couple of kids from AFI as crew. We are getting no advice from professional directors.”<sup>101</sup> Also of concern were discrepancies between participants; for example, though all were seasoned professionals in their respective crafts, not all of them had access to the same kinds of resources. Giovanna Nigro-Chacon, a recent transplant to Hollywood from New York where she had worked for NBC News, encountered difficulty when the program expected her to cover the costs of her shoot. “When I finally got them to advance me \$75 because I had no money...I was told that in order to get the rest of my money I had to have a validated receipt from the building manager where we shot the project,” described Nigro-Chacon at the time. “They [AFI] told me that I should not have tried to do the project if I was poor and finally they told me that my attitude stinks. What kind of elitist statement is that?”<sup>102</sup> Refining the Workshop’s kinks would be an ongoing process. The pilot year was ambitious. Haag had originally planned for a program budget closer to \$200-300,000, but the funders could provide AFI with \$30,000, quickly. The second year, the Workshop budget increased to \$100,000 with support from the Rockefeller Foundation and \$10,000 from alum Julia Phillips; in its third cycle, up to \$150,000 with additional funding from the John and Mary Markle Foundation; philanthropist Anna Bing Arnold contributed to the DWW’s first three years.<sup>103</sup>

Jan Haag and Tony Vellani's strategy during the pilot years to tap into celebrity status and recognition as a way to qualify a woman in Hollywood as capable of directing a studio film was bold, practical, and a little desperate. But desperation in the bleak number of women directors was what spurred the Workshop's founding in the first place. It was bold to acknowledge that if the male power structure could not be moved to consider the talent of a female filmmaker, then why not play to its most superficial criterion: celebrity status. The famous women made the program successful by their participation in it, and their participation in the program helped further their directing careers. In Haag's words:

[T]he DWW fulfilled its mission the day its Membership was announced. All the amazing tapes that were subsequently made in the DWW were gravy because those Big Ladies were in there and on the strength of their names the program was visible. VISIBLE. We were instantly successful because we were made up, no matter how sketchily, of the Visibly Successful. Fame legitimized not only the Workshop, but also the director potential of the women in it... The Moguls heard! They listened! They began to take the volcanic ambitions of the women seriously. Not because of anything they did, but just because a band of Top Notch Women were given the chance to band together to make a statement. The statement being: "We want to direct."<sup>104</sup>

By stacking the Workshop with notable Hollywood women, the hope was that their existing reputations would not only boost the profile of the program--drawing the attention of studio executives and producers--but also their theory that those men in

positions of power would be more likely to hire a woman to direct whose reputation was already well founded and familiar. This was a practical approach to tackling a difficult problem. Haag and Valleni had assessed what resources they could tap into—feminist funders not affiliated with Hollywood, the AFI’s industry connections to offer legitimacy, a pool of potential candidates who had a degree of insider status and knowledge that they could apply to the job forbidden to women, directing. Finally, the Workshop’s original impetus, the short films or “tapes,” would provide for women the tangible proof of their potential talent. Forty years later, the Directing Workshop for Women is still active. Challenges of equipment and crew continue to be smoothed out, and a cap on budgets is in place to equalize participant spending. In 1980, when Jean Firstenberg replaced George Stevens, Jr., as AFI’s president and began to oversee the program more directly, the emphasis on high-profile, celebrity participants lessened to focus more on women who were extremely accomplished industry employees—screenwriters, producers, editors, cinematographers—but who did not have the “visibility” of the first generation.<sup>105</sup>

In the 1970s, the program had an impact in a way that was proportional to its resources and the participants (on an average twelve women each session) that it served. Several of the women from those years did go on to make features, although most not until the following decade: Karen Arthur (*Mafu Cage*, 1978, and *Lady Beware*, 1987), Anne Bancroft (*Fatso*, 1980, a feature-length version of her DWW short), Lee Grant (*Tell Me a Riddle*, 1980), Nancy Walker (*You Can’t Stop the Music*, 1980), Lynne Littman (*Testament*, 1983), Juleen Compton (*Buckeye and Blue*, 1988), Nessa Hyams (*Leader of the Band*, 1988). Some made their theatrical debuts as late as the 1990s, as in the case of



Maya Angelou with her film *Down on the Delta* (released in 1998). Other participants from the 1970s started careers as television directors: Marjorie Mullen and Joanne Woodward directed a few episodes, while Karen Arthur, Lee Grant, Joanne Lee, and Nancy Malone embarked on long and prolific careers in broadcasting. Unlike its compatriots, the Women's Committees of the guilds, the Workshop did not attempt the path of negotiations by meeting with studios or networks. Instead, but still in concert with the discourse taking place during the era, the DWW contributed to the feminist reform efforts by focusing on a material solution: training industry women as directors.

Again, to study the historical place of women directors in Hollywood begs the question of how to measure progress. Borrowing the statistical model developed by the previous generation of activists in their interrogation of industry racism, feminist protests during the 1970s systemized the numerical method that is still in use today. Reading this quantitative evidence, progress is unequivocally miniscule. In 1979 the Women's Committee of the Directors Guild released the first ever compiled statistics on women directors. The Committee's research showed that between 1949 and 1979, 7,332 feature films were released. Women directed 14, or 0.19 percent, of them. In 2013, 6 percent of the top 250 films made in Hollywood were directed by women. According to Martha M. Lauzen's annual report, *The Celluloid Ceiling* conducted by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University, this number has decreased 3 percent between 1998 and 2012 when an average of 9 percent of the top 250 films made in Hollywood were directed by women,<sup>106</sup> What these numbers argue— indisputably-- is that only the most minute amount of progress has taken place, in the 1970s, the 1980s, the 1990s, and the present day. But to view progress, or failure, as

straightforward is to miss the important work and experiences of those filmmakers whose small numbers, according to these statistical models, constitute inadequacy, but whose existence proves that change was taking place. Having established the political, cultural, and industrial context of the 1970s with regard to the reception of women filmmakers in Hollywood, the next two chapters will look closely at the experiences of the fifteen who were working as feature-film directors during this era.

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<sup>2</sup> The total number of films released during these years are from the Motion Picture Association of America cited in David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2000) 492.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1 for film titles.

<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Rosen, "From the Folks Who Are Taking Over Hollywood," *Ms.* December 1977: 1.

<sup>5</sup> Lilly Lipton, "Sexual Discrimination In Films," *Daily Variety 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Issue* 29 Oct. 1974: 74.

<sup>6</sup> Kirk Honeycutt, "Women Film Directors: Will They, Too, Be Allowed to Bomb?" *Los Angeles Times* 6 Aug 1978: 1.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview, American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> Lee's only feature film, *A Pocket Filled with Dreams*, was made in Greece and screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1975. At this time no available print of the film has been located and there is not much written about the movie: it is unclear whether it had any theatrical release in the United States. For a brief production and release history see Joanna Lee, *A Difficult Woman in Hollywood* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999) 59-71.

<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Rosen, "From the Folks Who Are Taking Over Hollywood."

<sup>10</sup> Marjorie Rosen, "From the Folks Who Are Taking Over Hollywood." Rosen's italics.

<sup>11</sup> Joanna Lee, *A Difficult Woman in Hollywood* (New York: Vantage Press, 1999) 71.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk Honeycutt, "Women Film Directors: Will They, Too, Be Allowed to Bomb?" *Los Angeles Times* 6 Aug 1978: 11.

<sup>13</sup> Kirk Honeycutt, "Women Film Directors: Will They, Too, Be Allowed to Bomb?," *Los Angeles Times* 6 Aug 1978: 1.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Murphy and Cheryl Bensten, "Women in Hollywood: Part I, Fighting to Enter the 'White Male Club,'" *Los Angeles Times* 14 Aug. 1973.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of studio losses at the end of the 1960s and attempts by Hollywood to find the next "hit" see: Thomas Schatz, "The New Hollywood," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, eds. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993) 8-36; Paul E. Steiger, "Movie Makers No Longer Sure What Sparkle Is," *Los Angeles Times* 17 Nov. 1969: 1; Mel Gussow, "Movies Leaving 'Hollywood' Behind," *New York Times* 27 May 1970: 36; Aljean Harmetz, "How Do You Pick a Winner In Hollywood? You Don't," *New York Times* 29 April 1973: 135.

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<sup>16</sup> In 1968, Jack Valenti, president of the MPAA, spearheaded, with the financial support of the major studios, a survey tracking moviegoing demographics. Daniel Yankelovich, Inc. reported that 58 percent of film audiences were between the ages of 16 and 29; 30 percent of those were between the ages of 16 and 20. Wayne Warga, "Facts of Life About Movie Audiences," *Los Angeles Times* 29 Dec. 1968: O1.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley Penn, "Focusing on Youth: A New Breed of Movie Attracts the Young, Shakes Up Hollywood," *Wall Street Journal* 4 Nov. 1969.

<sup>18</sup> Mel Gussow, "Movies Leaving 'Hollywood' Behind," *New York Times* 27 May 1970: 36.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Windeler, "Study of Film Soaring on College Campuses," *New York Times* 18 Apr. 1968: 58.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Champlin, "Can Film-maker Find Happiness in New Hollywood?" *Los Angeles Times* 4 June 1967: C11. Also see Vincent Canby, "Zanuck Discusses Films with Youth," *New York Times* 1 May 1967: 44.

<sup>21</sup> See: Robert E. Dallos, "20th Century-Fox Earnings Decline in First Quarter," *Los Angeles Times* 21 May 1969: C9; Wayne Warga, "It's Nail-Biting Time at 20th Century-Fox," *Los Angeles Times* 15 June 1969: O1; Alexander Auerbach, "20th Century Omits Dividends as It Posts \$4.6 Million Loss," *Los Angeles Times* 29 Aug. 1969: C12.

<sup>22</sup> For sources that focus on the male student-to-studio filmmaker trend of the 1960s and 1970s see my discussion of these texts in the Introduction (21).

<sup>23</sup> Rochelle Reed, "No Lib Yet for Women in the Entertainment Industry," *Hollywood Report* 16 Oct. 1970: 1.

<sup>24</sup> Rochelle Reed, "No Lib Yet for Women in the Entertainment Industry," *The Hollywood Report* 16 Oct. 1970: 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 93 S. Ct. 705, 35 L. Ed. 2d 147 (1973).

<sup>26</sup> For histories of the 1970s feminist movement and its impact on American society see: Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, Random House, 1999); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> For histories of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Newsweek*, and *New York Times* discrimination disputes see: Patricia Bradley, *Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism 1963-1975* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003); Lynn Povich, *The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of Newsweek Sued their Bosses and the Changed the Workplace* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Jane Wilson, "Hollywood Flirts With The New Woman," *New York Times* 29 May 1977: 1.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Mellen, "Hollywood Rediscovered the American Woman," *New York Times* 23 Apr. 1978: 2.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Wilson, "Hollywood Flirts With The New Woman."

<sup>31</sup> Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973) 323.

<sup>32</sup> Joan Mellen, *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* (New York: Horizon Press, 1973) 55.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Ross, "Box-Score on Distaff Roles in Films," *Daily Variety* 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1974.

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<sup>34</sup> Eleanor Perry, "If You Wanna Make a Film About Women, Better Forget It," *Variety* 7 Jan. 1975.

<sup>35</sup> Janet Maslin, "A Turning Point in the Career of Shirley MacLaine," *New York Times* 22 Jan. 1978.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Mellen, "Hollywood Rediscovered the American Woman," *New York Times* 23 Apr. 1978: 2. During the 1970s, there were four women senators: Elaine S. Edwards (D-Louisiana) 1972, Muriel Humphrey (D-Minnesota) 1978, Maryon Allen (D-Alabama) 1978, and Nancy Landon Kassebaum (R-Kansas) 1978-1997.

[http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women\\_senators.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women_senators.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Taffy Cannon, "Women in Love with Film, but Sex Barriers Remain," n/p, October 1978, "Women in Film" Clipping File, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

<sup>38</sup> Carol MacGuineas, "Portrait of the Filmmaker as a Young Woman," *The Cultural Post*, National Endowment for the Arts, July/August 1979.

<sup>39</sup> "'Above-the-line' and 'below-the-line' are industry terms that distinguish between creative and craft professions in production. The distinction is derived from a particular worker's position in relation to a bold horizontal line on a standard production budget sheet between creative and technical cost, establishing a hierarchy that stratifies levels of creative and craft labor." Miranda J. Banks, "Gender Below-the-Line Defining Feminist Production Studies," *Production Studies Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, eds., Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009) 89. Below-the-line jobs refer to technical crafts, such as camera operators, editors, hair, makeup and wardrobe, set decorators, editors, grips, and gaffers. Above-the-line positions refer to those who hold both economic and/or creative power (sometimes at the same time), such as studio executives, producers, directors, writers, production designers, cinematographers, actors.

<sup>40</sup> *United States vs. Paramount Pictures*, 334 U.S. 131 (1948).

<sup>41</sup> Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Hearings Before the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on Utilization of Minority and Women Workers in Certain Major Industries, Los Angeles March 12-14, 1969* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969): 2-3. Hereafter EEOC Hearings March 1969.

<sup>42</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 341.

<sup>43</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 189.

<sup>44</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 532-533.

<sup>45</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 227.

<sup>46</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 228.

<sup>47</sup> For explanation of union membership and roster lists as they functioned in 1969 see: EEOC Hearings March 1969, 116-126; 149-164.

<sup>48</sup> IATSE membership forms included in EEOC Hearings March 1969: 501-508.

<sup>49</sup> According to the testimony, the memberships of two craft unions are mentioned. One union had approximately 4,000 members of which 8 were black and 51 Latino. The second union had an estimated 1,000 total members that included 1 black member and 50 Latinos. These members were presumably all male. EEOC Hearings March 1969 153.

<sup>50</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 158

<sup>51</sup> Robert Kistler, "Film Executive Blames Hiring Bias on Unions," *Los Angeles Times* 19 Oct. 1969: 14.

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Delaney, "Major Moviemakers Agree to a Fair-Hiring Plan," *New York Times* 1 Apr. 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Vincent J. Burke, "Film and TV Minority Job Plan in Effect," *Los Angeles Times* 1 Apr. 1970.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Delaney, "Major Moviemakers Agree to a Fair-Hiring Plan," *New York Times* 1 Apr. 1970. It appears that Universal Studios was excused from signing the agreement based on the company's better track record in hiring minorities.

<sup>55</sup> Vincent J. Burke, "Film and TV Minority Job Plan in Effect," *Los Angeles Times* 1 Apr. 1970.

<sup>56</sup> In 1967, the city's labor force was made up of 10.1 percent Latinos and 7.4 percent African American. "Executives Participating in 3-Day Public Hearing," *Los Angeles Sentinel* 13 Mar. 1969.

<sup>57</sup> California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, *Behind the Scenes: Equal Employment Opportunity in the Motion Picture Industry* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978): 13-14. Hereafter *Behind the Scenes*.

<sup>58</sup> This percentage was calculated from the number of employees—broken down by gender—submitted individually by the studios (MGM, 20th Century-Fox, Universal, Walt Disney, Warner Bros.) as part of the 1969 hearings. According to the studios' accounts there were a total of 16,046 employees; 3,663 were women. Columbia and Paramount did not attend the hearings, therefore their employee numbers from 1969 are unknown. EEOC Hearings March 1969, 498-549.

<sup>59</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 165.

<sup>60</sup> EEOC Hearings March 1969, 165; 168.

<sup>61</sup> "Executives Participating in 3-Day Public Hearing," *Los Angeles Sentinel* 13 Mar. 1969; Ethel L. Payne, "EEOC Slates Discrimination hearings," *Chicago Daily Defender* 11 Mar. 1969.

<sup>62</sup> David A. Cook, *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970-1979* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2000) 9.

<sup>63</sup> Cook 12.

<sup>64</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "Dirksen Upbraids U.S. Rights Official: Dirksen Upbraids Rights Aide at Hearing," *New York Times* 28 Mar. 1969: 1.

<sup>65</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "President to Replace Chairman of Job Opportunity Commission," *New York Times* 29 Mar. 1969.

<sup>66</sup> Marjorie Hunter, "President to Replace Chairman of Job Opportunity Commission," *New York Times* 29 Mar. 1969.

<sup>67</sup> Harry Bernstein, "U.S. Ready to Settle Bias Case Against Movie, TV Industries," *Los Angeles Times* 5 Feb. 1970.

<sup>68</sup> For example, in 1968, Walt Disney Productions total number of employees was 1,320 workers: 340/women, 21/women of color, 97/men of color (16). In 1976, the studio employed a total of 1,513 workers: 405/women, 45/women of color, 166/men of color (17). Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation had similar low growth rates. In 1969 its total workforce was 3,136 employees: 493/women, 21/women of color, 126/men of color (22). In 1976 the company's total staff was 1,858: 689/women, 93/women of color, 116/men of color (23). Source: *Behind the Scenes* 1978.

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<sup>69</sup> *Behind the Scenes* 1978, 41.

<sup>70</sup> For discussion of the demise and ultimate failure of the federal agency to enforce within the entertainment industry the 1970 antidiscrimination agreement see *Behind the Scenes* 1978, 36-38.

<sup>71</sup> For examples of sex discrimination and technical unions see: Bill Edwards, "Femme Lenser Sues to Join IA," *Variety* 12 Oct. 1971; "Bri Murphy First Woman Accepted by IATSE Photogs," *The Hollywood Reporter* 14 Mar. 1973; "Lady Film Cutter Sues MGM Over 'Discrimination'," *Variety* 9 Apr. 1973; Ron Pennington, "Woman takes Grip on Universal Assignment, Breaks Male Hold," *The Hollywood Reporter* 14 Aug. 1973; "First Female Grip Checks into TBS," *The Hollywood Reporter* 5 Sept. 1973; "Projectionists Get 1<sup>st</sup> Femme Member," *Variety* 28 June 1974; "Barbara Robinson Named IATSE Representative," *Variety* 22 July 1974; "And a Woman Shall Lead Pub Labor Talks," *Variety* 13 Dec. 1974; "Sound Local 695 Stingy With The Money for Gals, Madery Claims," *Variety* 31 Dec. 1976.

<sup>72</sup> Steve Toy, "Femme Showbiz Movement Broadens," *Daily Variety* 29 Nov. 1972.

<sup>73</sup> Steve Toy, "Femme Showbiz Movement Broadens," *Daily Variety* 29 Nov. 1972.

<sup>74</sup> Steve Toy, "Femme Showbiz Movement Broadens," *Daily Variety* 29 Nov. 1972. Also see Steve Toy, "Creative Women of America Formed by Union Talent to Plug Femmes," *Daily Variety* 27 Apr. 1973.

<sup>75</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002) 9.

<sup>76</sup> "Women's Committee Statistics Report," 7 Nov. 1974, "Internal WGA document," Writers Guild Foundation Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles.

<sup>77</sup> Bill Greeley, "Ladies Demand Their Writes on TV," *Daily Variety* 31 Oct. 1973.

<sup>78</sup> Maggie Weisberg, "A Council Profile: Diana Gould," *WGAW Newsletter* Feb. 1972: 6-7. Author italics.

<sup>79</sup> Maggie Weisberg, "A Council Profile: Diana Gould," *WGAW Newsletter* Feb. 1972: 6-7. Author italics.

<sup>80</sup> Diana Gould, "Women Writers," *WGAW Newsletter* June 1972: 16.

<sup>81</sup> Gregory 8.

<sup>82</sup> Michael H. Franklin, "Underemployed Women," *WGAW Newsletter* June 1974; 6-7.

<sup>83</sup> Michael H. Franklin, "Underemployed Women," *WGAW Newsletter* June 1974; 6-7.

<sup>84</sup> "SAG Survey Shows Very Low Femme Employment in TV Shows," *Daily Variety* 4 May 1973. It is unclear as to how and from where these statistics of multiple professionals were collected; I list them here to establish a general sense of the status of women across the industry. Also important to note that the "23 directors" Nolan mentions were most likely a combination of DGA categories other than feature film directors such as assistant directors and television directors of predominately news and special "live" television events.

<sup>85</sup> Will Tusher, "Femme Kissonoff on TV Charged at SAG Seminar," *The Hollywood Reporter* 8 Aug. 1973; Steve Toy, "'Historic' Meet as SG, Top Net Exex Discuss Minorities," *Daily Variety* 8 Aug. 1973.

<sup>86</sup> Will Tusher, "GSA Report Alleges Serious Underutilization of Femmes, Minorities in Film Industry," *Daily Variety* 27 Oct. 1976.

<sup>87</sup> John H. Averill, "Stevens Heads New U.S. Film Institute," *Los Angeles Times* 6 June 1967: C9.

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- <sup>88</sup> Press release for first year of Directing Workshop for Women, "Women to Direct," AFI Sept. 26, 1974, "Directing Workshop for Women" Clipping File, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
- <sup>89</sup> Mary B. Murphy, "Women on March, Give AFI Demands," *Los Angeles Times* 11 Dec. 1970.
- <sup>90</sup> "Women's Libs March on AFI; Want 51% All Scholarships," *The Hollywood Reporter* 10 Dec. 1970.
- <sup>91</sup> Mary B. Murphy, "Women on March, Give AFI Demands."
- <sup>92</sup> Mary B. Murphy, "Women on March, Give AFI Demands." Also see "Women's Libs March on AFI; Want 51% All Scholarships," *The Hollywood Reporter* 10 Dec. 1970; "Film Institute Hears Women's Equality Demands," *Daily Variety* 11 Dec. 1970; "Women's Lib Group Presents Formal Demands to Stevens," *The Hollywood Reporter* 11 Dec. 1970.
- <sup>93</sup> Mary B. Murphy, "Women on March, Give AFI Demands."
- <sup>94</sup> "Pounding" story in email from Haag to author. Jan Haag, "Directing Workshop for Women," message to author, 20 Aug. 2012. E-mail.
- <sup>95</sup> Jan Haag, "Directing Workshop for Women," message to author, 20 Aug. 2012. E-mail. Haag's capitals.
- <sup>96</sup> Jan Haag, "Women Directors in Hollywood," janhaag.com, 2007, 13 Jul 2012 <<http://janhaag.com/ESTheDWW.html>>.
- <sup>97</sup> Jan Haag, "Women Directors in Hollywood," janhaag.com, 2007, 13 Jul 2012. Haag's italics.
- <sup>98</sup> Louise Sweeney, "Lights! Camera! Affirmative action!," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 Aug. 1979.
- <sup>99</sup> Louise Sweeney, "Lights! Camera! Affirmative action!."
- <sup>100</sup> Mary Mizell, "AFI Women Directors' Workshop," *Premiere* 11.5 (1981): 19.
- <sup>101</sup> Mary Murphy, "A Camera is Not Enough," *Los Angeles Times* 27 Oct. 1974.
- <sup>102</sup> Mary Murphy, "A Camera is Not Enough," *Los Angeles Times* 27 Oct. 1974.
- <sup>103</sup> For funding sources see: Jan Haag, "Women Directors in Hollywood," janhaag.com and Mary Mizell, "AFI Women Directors' Workshop." Future AFI president Jean Firstenberg was a program officer at the Markel Foundation when it first funded the DWW.
- <sup>104</sup> Jan Haag, "Women Directors in Hollywood," janhaag.com, 2007, 13 Jul 2012 <<http://janhaag.com/ESTheDWW.html>>. Haag's capitals.
- <sup>105</sup> AFI alums who have directed features films: Neema Barnette, Lesli Linka Glatter, Randa Haines, Victoria Hochberg, Matia Karrell, Jennifer Warren.
- <sup>106</sup> Letter to signatories from Michael Franklin regarding employment statistics, 20 June 1980, "DGA" Clipping File, Margaret Herrick Library; Martha M. Lauzen, PhD, "The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind the Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 250 Films of 2013," Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, School of Theatre, Television and Film, San Diego State University: 2.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Starting Out Independent: Exploitation and Art House Cinema*

This chapter focuses on women directors who began their careers in the 1970s directing independent feature films: Barbara Peeters, Stephanie Rothman, and Beverly Sebastian, in low-budget exploitation films; and Karen Arthur, Joan Micklin Silver, and Claudia Weill, in smaller commercial projects. All of these directors made their first films outside of Hollywood, although some of them would go on to work for major studios and television networks later in their careers. Before making their first features, each of these women did work related to filmmaking. Peeters and Rothman were employed in various below-the-line positions on film crews. Sebastian started in still photography. Arthur was a trained ballerina and performed in musical theater. Micklin Silver began writing for education media. Weill made documentaries. Unlike those individuals who will be profiled in Chapter 3, who were all prominent writers and/or actresses before they became directors, none of the women here transitioned into the position of director from a well-established industry career.

For the purposes of this project, American independent cinema during the 1970s is defined in two ways. The terms *exploitation*, *B-films*, and *low-budget independent films* are used interchangeably to describe films that were made cheaply for budgets around \$500,000 or less, were produced in large quantities, and targeted a youth audience.<sup>1</sup> These films were identified by their excessive portrayal of sex, female nudity, violence, and action sequences. They were also recognizable by the frequent use of genre conventions including, but not limited to, horror, science fiction, biker, nurse, and teacher



films. B-films tended to exploit topical subjects. In the 1960s and 1970s that meant depictions of an antiestablishment, youth-focused counterculture typified by drug use, rock-n-roll, and casual sex, as well as storylines about values inherent in the era's social movements such as racial inequality, antiwar protest, sexuality, and feminism.

Exploitation films used marketing campaigns that capitalized on the films' excessive content by including flashy images and sensationalized taglines in movie trailers, posters, and advertisements for trade publications and newspapers. Because these films were made on the cheap and often contained explicit or salacious material they tended to feature lesser-known performers.<sup>2</sup> In terms of this study, it should be emphasized that these films also relied on and exploited lesser-known directors. As a result, sensationalized marketing campaigns compensated for star power. Exploitation films had their own distribution networks, as well as dedicated exhibition sites, such as grindhouse theaters and drive-ins that targeted dedicated audiences that tended to be a younger demographic of both women and men.

The second kind of American independent cinema discussed in this chapter is described as *art house*, *smaller commercial films*, or *independent commercial films*.<sup>3</sup> These films were also made cheaply, but because they were not all produced using a similar production and economic model like exploitation films, their budgets could range from under \$100,000 to over \$1 million. Directors making art house films faced obstacles unique to their kinds of projects. Unlike B-films that were supported by a distribution and exhibition system designed to sell similar movies to a specific market, the smaller commercial films did not have that same network. In comparison, independent art house films were not homogeneous in terms of genre or stylistic choices; therefore they did not

have a single target audience. Their budgets were small not because they were adhering to a production model of churning out titles quickly for mass consumption, but because financing was constricted to either finding a private investor, piecemeal donations from friends and family, or cobbling together funding from nonprofit, grant-making institutions. Art house cinema depended on the domestic and international film festival circuit to generate exposure in the press that would hopefully build an audience and attract the attention of a distributor. They also relied on museums and nonprofit arts organizations as sites for exhibition and to build cultural cachet that also would help draw audience and critical attention. Different from exploitation films, these independent films were in main competition with studio productions whose access to financing and distribution budgets made them difficult to rival.

Both art house and exploitation films existed on the margins of Hollywood and were differentiated from the mainstream industry by a disparity in economic resources that affected production value and creative opportunities for the smaller films, as well as distribution and marketing prospects. At the same time, these three production communities were closely linked. Audiences in the 1970s moved regularly between art house, exploitation, and dominant cinema, as did above-the-line workers. As will be discussed in this chapter, both independent communities were a launching pad for writers, producers, directors, and actors to move into mainstream films and television. In some cases, the transition proved impossible.

Considering the resistance that women experienced throughout the 1970s within the motion picture industry, the inclination of the six filmmakers who are the subjects of this chapter to begin their careers on the margins of Hollywood seems almost expected.

How else could they make their films—for each, her very first film—if not outside the major studios and in several cases without financing or distribution from an established film company? However, while this argument holds true in some regards, making independent features had its own set of challenges. For those working in exploitation, their creative autonomy was often restricted by the demands of the B-film market. Art house directors did not have the financial clout or the industry connections to match the studio films they competed with. For both, restrictive budgets frequently prevented these directors from realizing the full capacity of their talent. This chapter examines how these six filmmakers, in spite of these challenges and sometimes because of them, navigated through their respective independent film communities to make their first films.

#### **STEPHANIE ROTHMAN**

*“Many people are surprised and don’t believe that women can assume positions of leadership and decision-making, that they can come to grips with the various technical aspects of film-making—which, of course, is nonsense.”<sup>4</sup>*

**Stephanie Rothman**

In 1964 Roger Corman, a prolific independent producer-director of B-films, was looking for an assistant. The producer culled his development staff and production crews from the ranks of inexperienced young people eager to break into the film business. In search for a qualified assistant, he mined local Los Angeles universities looking for someone—man or woman—who was at the top of their class, with classroom training in the technical and creative aspects of filmmaking and most of all eager and ambitious to make movies. On the recommendation of Bernard Kantor, Chairman of the University of Southern California’s Cinema Department, Stephanie Rothman was sent in for an

interview. Rothman, a twenty-eight-year-old graduate student in the film program, had recently won the Directors Guild Student Director Award and \$1,500 cash prize for her proposed documentary on Alice Ehlers, a world-renowned harpsichordist who taught at USC. Rothman was the first woman to receive this honor. The assistant job entailed reading scripts for potential projects and working in production on low-budget independent films already in development. Rothman abandoned her student film and accepted Corman's offer, "He asked me if I would be interested, and I said, 'Yes! I would love to!'"<sup>5</sup>

Corman remembers interviewing two recent graduates for the position, Rothman and Julie Halloran from University of California, Los Angeles, whom he would marry in 1970 and would become his producing partner. "Stephanie Rothman was Phi Beta Kappa in English Lit from Berkeley, top of her class with a master's degree in film from USC. She had just won the Director's Guild Award as the outstanding student director at an American university. There was no way I could not hire Stephanie. So I offered her the job and I asked Julie for a date. Both said yes."<sup>6</sup>

Born in New Jersey in 1937, Rothman moved to Los Angeles with her parents in 1945. She was an only child in a middle-class, secular Jewish home: her father was a neuropsychiatrist, and her mother was a public health nurse and medical social worker before Rothman was born, when she then became a stay-at-home mother. Socially conservative and politically liberal, Rothman's parents were committed to exposing their child to a liberal arts worldview with a high value placed on education. "They wanted me to be educated and pursue a career that would feed me rather than a career that would make me starve," explained Rothman of her mother and father's approach to parenting.<sup>7</sup>

Growing up with this kind of encouragement and support, Rothman excelled as a student, graduating high school at sixteen and going on to UCLA for two years before transferring to University of California, Berkeley, where she majored in sociology.

Since she was a girl, Rothman had always been interested in film. She would go to the movies weekly, enthralled by pictures such as *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and *The Razor's Edge*. "I adored films," she remembered of her cinephilic awakening. "It didn't matter whether it was a good one or a bad one, I was just entranced by the images, and just by the opportunity to escape into a world of strange images."<sup>8</sup> While at UC Berkeley she saw Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. "That [film] absolutely astounded me, because it said everything I wanted to say about the human condition as I understood it...I was absolutely awestruck by it."<sup>9</sup>

Upon completing her bachelor's degree, Rothman abandoned a master's degree at UCB in sociology when she became dismayed at the rampant sexism in academia. Anxious and unsure about what to do next, in 1959, Rothman returned to Los Angeles, where she started work as technical writer at Systems Development Corporation (SDC), an early software company. She was curious about filmmaking, but not knowing anyone who worked in the industry, and without any visible role models, she did not know how to make filmmaking a feasible career. "It sort of occurred to me that it would be wonderful to be able to make films at that time, but I did not think of that as a career goal because I had no idea how one could go about doing this."<sup>10</sup>

While working at SDC, Rothman met Jeb Gholson, a cinematographer in his thirties who specialized in underwater and action photography. Gholson explained the nuts and bolts of filmmaking to Rothman, even taking her to a television studio where she

saw for the first time a production in process. This exposure began to demystify for Rothman the craft of filmmaking and started to make real the possibility of it as an obtainable career. Gholson had trained by apprenticing to a cinematographer and thought she might do something similar, although he had “never seen a girl apprentice to anybody.”<sup>11</sup> As an alternative, he recommended she go to film school. Although the 1960s would mark a period when a younger generation would gain access to Hollywood without the help of nepotism or through the system of meritocracy (in particular, entrance and advancement with the unions), and in many cases through film school, in 1960 access to a career in filmmaking was still illusive. Film school was not yet a popular or prevalent course of study as it would become by the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Compounding these factors was the fact that as a woman, Rothman was highly underrepresented in Hollywood and in film school.

Rothman was one of the only women in the USC film program when she began graduate school in 1962. Visiting the program before starting she saw that all the students were male and that she would be the only woman. “They were lugging all this equipment around and they were doing things with pieces of equipment that I had never seen before. It was an alien world to me,” Rothman said of her first impression. Faced with the reality of being the sole female in a field that was, in film school, a microcosm of the film industry, Rothman was trepidatious about whether the program would be the right choice for her and whether she would be able to learn the skills needed to succeed. She consulted with department chair Bernard Kantor for advice. Kantor was enthusiastic about Rothman’s abilities, reassuring her that based on her academic record and her self-determination that she would do fine. “Of course you will, don’t worry about it,” he told

her. “You’ll master it if you want to.” Bolstered by his encouragement, she enrolled in the program.

In 1964, with a graduate degree from USC’s Department of Cinema, Rothman was hired as Corman’s assistant. She had what would be characterized as a typical experience in that post (specific to him as a producer): she was quickly promoted based on her skills, talent, and drive, all of which were necessitated by low-budget productions’ fast-paced schedule and her boss’s frugal nature. Rothman initially provided script coverage and conducted set-visits to his various productions, keeping her boss informed of any problems. Soon, her responsibilities increased to directing second unit on films like *Beach Ball* (1965, dir. Curtis Harrington); and in 1966, Corman asked her to take over the troubled production of director Jack Hill’s *Blood Bath* (also known as *Track of the Vampire*), having her rewrite scenes and shoot new footage for the picture. For this project, Rothman received her first screen credit for co-writer and director, which she shared with Hill.

In 1967 Corman hired Rothman to direct the teen beach comedy *It’s a Bikini World*. Working with Rothman on this film as co-writer and producer was her husband, Charles S. Swartz. The couple had met in 1962 on the first day of film school while in line to register for classes.<sup>13</sup> *It’s a Bikini World* was significant in that it was the first feature film she directed on her own and also because it marked the beginning of a creative and business collaboration with her husband that would span her entire career in filmmaking. In 1969 Corman hired the pair to serve as production executives (including but not limited to location scouting, production managers, production designers, storyboard artists) on his film *Gas—s-s-s!...* (also known as *It Became Necessary to*

*Destroy the World in Order to Save It*). And in 1970, when Corman started his own production and distribution business, New World Pictures, he hired Rothman and Swartz to make the company's first film, *Student Nurses*: she as director, he as producer, and together they came up with the story idea.

Rothman benefited tremendously from those early years working for Corman, and she remembers how important and exciting they were to her as a filmmaker during her formative period after graduate school. In an oral history conducted by Jane Collings at UCLA's Center for Oral History over several months during 2001 and 2002, Rothman described that period as "very challenging. It was fascinating. I really enjoyed it...Roger gave a lot of young people the opportunity to work as filmmaking professionals. He gave them a degree of responsibility and freedom that nobody in Hollywood would do, ever."<sup>14</sup>

At USC, exposed to the reality of filmmaking as a profession, Rothman knew that she wanted to be a writer-director. Grateful to Corman for the opportunity to begin honing those skills, after *It's a Bikini World*, she realized that low-budget exploitation films were not where she wanted to make her career. During this time, Rothman had hopes of breaking out of sensationalist independent film production and into the mainstream industry. However, she found this extremely difficult and eventually impossible to do. To get a job in Hollywood required access to certain networking circles, through family, personal, or guild connections, none of which Rothman or Swartz had. The young director also experienced the limits imposed on her gender. "I couldn't get an agent to represent me," explained Rothman of her professional standing in the late 1960s. "I had no access, for example, to anyone producing television shows who might be



looking for young directors. They sometimes gave people a chance, but they certainly didn't give women a chance. Nobody I knew was hiring women, and the few times I enquired I was told, they don't hire women."<sup>15</sup> In 1970, when Corman offered the couple *The Student Nurses*, the director understood her present predicament. "At that point I realized two things," remembered Rothman. "First of all, that I was not going to get an opportunity to make films anywhere else. Only Roger was giving me that chance, and I really appreciated it because I saw that my chances anywhere else were nonexistent."<sup>16</sup>

On *The Student Nurses*, Rothman made a compromise that she would struggle with for the rest of her years as a film director. While she was still working within the strictures of exploitation film (small budgets, short production schedule, and the company's requirement of scenes with violence, action, and female nudity) at the helm of her own film and in collaboration with Swartz, she was able to integrate her personal politics into the project. Although Corman did not ask for the film to reflect the progressive views of the day, he was not at all opposed as long as the message was packaged in typical exploitation excess. Rothman laughs when retelling her boss's instructions: "Make it exciting, and I want some action in it, I want some excitement. I want lots of nudity, and come up with an interesting story."<sup>17</sup>

Rothman was outspoken about being a feminist from the beginning of her career. Writing for the *Hollywood Reporter* in 1972, Will Tusher described the filmmaker in no uncertain terms as "Stephanie Rothman—a 35-year-old distaff director who is not coy about her age or her Women's Lib viewpoint...."<sup>18</sup>

In *The Student Nurses*, as well as her following films, Rothman invokes feminist themes and characterizations, such as female friendship and the value of women working,

employed in a variety of careers including, but not limited to, those traditionally associated with men. Her films celebrate female agency and individuality, but never at the expense of the group's well-being.<sup>19</sup> While women are the protagonists of her movies, male characters are given the same opportunity for growth and potential. Her fair treatment of both genders was described by one interviewer in 1970 as rooted in the fact that as "[a] dedicated feminist, Miss Rothman feels women's lib ought to be followed by a men's liberation movement. 'Men have to realize it's all right to be what they want, even if the role is traditionally female.'"<sup>20</sup> The story of four student nurses (of varying hair color and ethnicity) emphasized camaraderie amongst the cohort in friendship and professionalism while never sacrificing each character's distinctiveness. The friends are a diverse group: Pricilla (Barbara Leigh) is the 1960s flower child open to experimentation; Sharon (Elaine Giftos) considers the philosophical side of nursing when faced with the challenges of a terminal patient; Lynn (Brioni Farrell) finds her political consciousness after she provides medical attention to a radical Chicano protest group; and Phred (Karen Carlson) is a steadfast careerist unwilling to bend any rules on her path to secure employment.

Many critics understood the constraints dictating these movies and often celebrated the films in spite of and sometimes because of those limitations. *Variety* described *The Student Nurses* as "a good contemporary dual-bill...The acting level is fair at best, which drags down what otherwise is a well-crafted film...Rothman's physical direction is excellent...Don Spencer's script is good...Pic is an exploitation item to be sure, but beyond those angles, general audiences will find a surprising depth."<sup>21</sup> Other reviewers were fickle and unforgiving, unable to make any concessions. One such critic

described the story as what “appears to be a first draft and goes off in as many directions as a strung out octopus in attempting to keep up with four nurses....” Critical, yet somewhat sympathetic, the review does not hold Rothman entirely responsible by admitting that while “Miss Rothman’s direction is of little help in keeping all the trails the story takes in focus, though, in all fairness, it is doubtful anyone could have or would have done much better.”<sup>22</sup> With the aid of good reviews and in spite of the bad ones, *The Student Nurses* was a success, earning over \$1 million in rentals.<sup>23</sup>

Rothman declined Corman’s offer to write and direct the next installment of the nurse series. Instead they agreed on making a vampire film together. “I’ve always wanted to make every kind of film I could, at least once,” she told an interviewer in 1981. “To see what the demands of the particular genre were and whether I could make it.”<sup>24</sup> *The Velvet Vampire* provided her with the chance to momentarily stave off the sexy girl group genre that was taking hold while also transforming the traditional vampire narrative. Rothman’s version was set in contemporary Los Angeles and the surrounding desert areas where vampire Diane LeFanu (Celeste Yarnall) rides her dune buggy in the sunlight and seduces her victims as a genial host in her elegant desert ranch house. Different from the traditional lore, this blood sucking predator was an assertive, tantalizing, modern-day female. “The only way that I could see to make this kind of film and to make it interesting was to reverse expectations,” justified Rothman. “The obvious passivity of women in vampire films was both disturbing to me and rather boring.” As dictated by the marketplace, originality was a necessity for the filmmaker, who with a limited budget ultimately felt she couldn’t go up against well-known horror producers. “I couldn’t compete with the [vampire films] made by Hammer Films. I didn’t have the money, I

didn't have the facilities... all you can do is hope that you have presented it in a way that people will laugh in recognition at the fresh twist you have given it."<sup>25</sup> Box office returns for the film were low. Rothman speculated that the picture's failure may have also been due to how it "fell between two schools. [It was] not a traditional horror film nor a hard-core exploitation movie."<sup>26</sup>

By 1971 Rothman and Swartz had left New World Pictures, this time over money. As much as Corman was credited for giving new filmmakers the chance to work, he was equally as notorious for not paying them enough. When he offered the couple even less than the low rate he was already paying them for their next project, the trio amicably parted ways. New World's head of distribution, Lawrence Woolner, had started his own low-budget independent production-distribution company, Dimension Pictures, and asked Rothman and Swartz if they would join as partners. The couple agreed, and instead of investing money, they committed their "labor and imagination" to the business.<sup>27</sup> Rothman was Vice President of Creative Development in charge of seeking out potential projects and overseeing script development, as well as directing (and co-writing) features with Swartz who was Vice President of Production.<sup>28</sup> Together the wife and husband team made three feature films during their tenure at Dimension: *Group Marriage* (1972), *Terminal Island* (1973), and *The Working Girls* (1974). Still desperate to get out of exploitation films, they joined Dimension in the hopes of more creative control and an opportunity to build their body of work as a bridge into mainstream filmmaking or television.

At Dimension, the couple continued to incorporate their personal politics into the work they wrote-directed-produced for the company. Like Corman, Woolner was open to

the addition of social politics as long as none of exploitation's copious sex, nudity, and action was spared. Rothman and Swartz's three films maintained a focus on the dynamics of a group of characters. *Group Marriage*--a marriage farce with a swinging 1970s twist--follows three heterosexual couples in Los Angeles who participate in the shenanigans of a polyamorous wedlock. In *The Working Girls*, designed similar to *The Student Nurses*, three women become roommates and their separate storylines intersect, leading to three times as many opportunities for sexual escapades and the occasional fisticuffs with gangsters. Finally, *Terminal Island*, a dramatic action film, centered on the struggle for power amongst the exiled inmates of an interracial, co-ed prison colony located on an island.

As would become Rothman's identifiable style, her feminist sensibility was conveyed in each of these films. Her protagonists are female and are marked by a sense of empowerment that is individually defined and yet always serves the community of characters. Key to the protagonists' ambition and identity is a focus on career and vocation; every character has a unique skill-set that plays a part in each film's narrative as a way to explain individual motivation, and scenes showing them at work are used to move the plot along. For example, in *Group Marriage*, Chris (Aimée Eccles) has a day job working at a car rental business, but her real talent is as an auto mechanic. Her ability to fix cars is used as a narrative device to introduce new characters. In *The Working Girls*, Honey (Sarah Kennedy) is an innovative and unemployed entrepreneur. Unable to find work, she places an ad in the paper: "I will do anything for money. Young woman. MA in math. Phi Beta Kappa. Can solve your problems. Will work cheap." Such a line was titillating enough for a drive-in audience in its suggestion of sex for money without

sacrificing any of the film's feminist message conveyed in a woman with an advanced degree in a masculine field determined to create her own career path. Her search for work functions as a narrative device to introduce the movie's other "working girls." Jobless and homeless, Honey meets Denise (Laurie Rose), an aspiring artist/billboard painter, who offers her a place to stay with her and her roommate Jill (Lynne Guthrie), a cocktail waitress by night, law student by day. In *Terminal Island* the female convicts band together to fight the most abusive male prisoners. Pooling their collective talents and their female solidarity, they form an unstoppable army: Carmen's (Ena Hartman) grandmother taught her about poisonous plants, knowledge she then uses to make lethal darts; and Lee (Marta Kristen), who is incarcerated for blowing up banks as a means of political protest and was working on a PhD before getting arrested, is an ingenious chemist who configures makeshift bombs from minerals she finds on the island.<sup>29</sup>

For Rothman, the depictions of female friendship, frequently through acts of work, was appealing and feasible in terms of the balance she was able to strike while employed by Corman and Woolner, respectively. "I could show a relationship amongst women that at that time just wasn't shown that much, which was that they were only friends, but their concerns were quite adult. They were not frivolous. They were not looking for husbands. They were not obsessed with clothing, or their looks...."<sup>30</sup>

Mainstream movies in the 1970s disproportionately featured male protagonists, and low-budget filmmaking's mandate to exploit femaleness, most prominently through sexual objectification and acts of sexual violence, as a service to male protagonists, made female camaraderie particularly challenging. Rothman's women were team players as much as they were leaders.

*The Working Girls* was the last film Rothman directed for Dimension. Sometime in 1974, Woolner elected not to renew Rothman and Swartz's annual contract with the company. Unknown is the exact reason for his decision. One consideration might be that Woolner felt that the couple's taste was becoming out of place with his company's products; he most likely knew that they were unwilling to make even more sensationalized content. For Rothman and Swartz, in addition to not being satisfied with making exploitation films, thought that Woolner's business plan was not working. Looking back in 2007, Rothman reflected that

...we could see that the way [Woolner] was managing the company, it wasn't likely to be very successful, and that what was happening is that a few pictures made money and the rest didn't. A lot of it had to do with the kind of material that he was selecting. While he would ask our opinion of these projects, he wouldn't necessarily agree with it, and he tended, in our opinion, to pick projects that were not as promising and were not as likely to be commercial.<sup>31</sup>

*The Working Girls* was also the last movie Stephanie Rothman made during her career as a filmmaker. After leaving Dimension, she did everything possible to move out of exploitation pictures and into more mainstream media production. She and her husband, who was also looking for work, optioned the rights to Philip K. Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle*, and although it was well-received by several literary agents at Creative Artists Agency, the two could not garner real interest. The project never came to fruition.<sup>32</sup> As was her earlier experience, connections to jobs working for the networks and for the studios were illusive. She reached out to friends employed in television, got

new agents who showed her films around, but to no avail. Some comments came back that companies were not willing to work with a woman, even one as experienced as she was.<sup>33</sup> A combination of being a woman director and being a woman exploitation director prevented her from crossing into mainstream film. While the “Roger Corman School of filmmaking” graduated several men who went on to have illustrious careers making studio pictures, many with fewer credits than she, such a crossover for Rothman proved to be impossible. At a 2008 screening of her film *The Velvet Vampire*, I asked her if she had ever thought about crossing over to Hollywood. In response, she explained her hopes and the eventual dead ends that she met:

It’s like crossing to the valley of death, or life, or whatever. It was my fervent wish that I would be able to make mainstream films. I wanted to, I never got the opportunity. I tried for about 10 years and then I gave up and just decided to continue living my life, not making films anymore. Was there any interaction between me and people who made mainstream films?...I was called in to meet an executive at MGM after I’d made *The Velvet Vampire*, in fact it was perhaps three or four years later. And this person said to me “Oh, you know, we were talking about you the other day in a meeting, because we’ve hired the younger brother of Ridley Scott to make a film, and we think we’d like it to be a vampire film, and we were talking about how we would like it to sort of be like *The Velvet Vampire*.” And my response was, “Well, if you want a film like *The Velvet Vampire*, why don’t you get Stephanie Rothman to make it?”<sup>34</sup>



### **For Better or Worse: Director-Wife & Producer-Husband**

The premature end of Rothman's career was also the termination of the director's extremely productive filmmaking partnership with her husband. Although he would go on to be the CEO of Entertainment Technology Center, a research unit in the School of Cinema and Television at USC, and head his own media industry firm, Charles S. Swartz Consulting, *The Working Girls* would be their final film and their last on-screen collaboration.<sup>35</sup> The couple was together until his death in 2007. Articles and reviews of Rothman's work almost always acknowledge Swartz as the producer of her films and often mention that the team was married, but there was never any special consideration paid to the uniqueness of a director-wife and producer-husband team. What was rare about this combination was not that they were married--spousal collaborations have a long history in Hollywood--but that in the 1960s and 1970s there were so few women directors at all.<sup>36</sup> On the infrequent occasion that a reporter would draw attention to this personal-professional combination it was to emphasize the progressive, egalitarian nature of the duo. In 1970 Kit Snedaker wrote in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, "The Swartzes work together daily on their pictures—'He's my favorite colleague and best friend,' Miss Rothman said—and share housekeeping chores when they can't find a maid."<sup>37</sup>

During this period, there were five director-wife/producer-husband couples: Anne Bancroft and Mel Brooks, and Joan Rivers and Edgar Rosenberg, who will be discussed in Chapter 3; and Stephanie Rothman and Charles Swartz, Beverly and Ferd Sebastian,

and Joan Micklin Silver and Ray Silver, each discussed in this chapter. In Chapter 3, I do address the fact that because Jane Wagner and Lily Tomlin were domestic partners when they made *Moment by Moment*, Tomlin, as a star, helped Wagner get her first directing job. Their situation is somewhat different from the spousal director-producer teams in that they were a star-director/writer team. From the objective observer's point of view, these couples (with the exception of Rivers and Rosenberg, who were separating at the time of his death) appeared to have strong relationships, based on the fact that they are still together or were together at the death of their spouse and have conveyed in the press, over multiple decades, a positive relationship. However, the reality of these couples' relationships is of course impossible for the historian to truly know. Furthermore, regardless of how mutually supportive and professionally in synch a couple may be, making films in Hollywood was a challenging and unpredictable occupation even for the best producer-husband and director-wife team.

Falling back on sexist assumptions that within the male-centric culture of Hollywood a woman director could benefit from the "protection" of a male producer, the wife-husband model should succeed. In this worldview, if male executives were resistant to the idea of a woman overseeing a multimillion dollar budget, they would feel comfortable making the deal with a male producer. This argument fails in that it relies on the belief that not only does a woman director need the protection of a man, but also that a male producer could defend a woman director from industry sexism or from the demands any director or producer—regardless of gender—is faced with from studio executives, stars, crew, publicists, distributors, etc. This line of reasoning is also problematic in that it romanticizes marriage—within a heterosexist context—in the sense

that wives need or look to their husbands as a guardian and that husbands would assume such a role and be successful at it. As will be explored, to some degree, with these five couples, each pair had a different experience. For Rothman and Swartz, as best friends and successful collaborators, no combination of director-producer, husband-wife could get them through the impasse of Stephanie Rothman being a woman director of exploitation films.

### **BEVERLY AND FERD SEBASTIAN**

*“We learned a long time ago—to keep peace in our family. We’ve been married fifty-eight years you learn little tricks along the way--we share a mutual credit--produced, directed and written by Beverly and Ferd Sebastian--on everything we do.”<sup>38</sup>*

**Beverly Sebastian**

Similar to Rothman and Swartz, spouses Beverly and Ferd Sebastian also worked in independent, low-budget exploitation films. However, unlike Rothman and Swartz, who were hired to make films for a company that was able to finance and distribute their work, the Sebastians produced and self-distributed many of their films. The couple also differentiates themselves from Rothman and Swartz in that they shared credits as writer, director, and producer on the majority of their movies. To date the Sebastians have made an estimated fourteen films together: their first feature-length film was *I Need* (sometimes listed as *I Need a Man*) made in 1967, and their most recent, *Running Cool*, was released in 1993.

Beverly and Ferd met at a skating rink in the mid-1950s when they were eighteen and nineteen years old--he from Texas and she from Georgia. The pair was married ten days later. From early on the couple were collaborators. When Ferd quit his job as a pipe

fitter to begin work as a photographer, Beverly ran the darkroom while her husband took pictures. The couple lived in Houston, where they transitioned from still photography into making television commercials and educational films. A feature film was the logical next step.<sup>39</sup> *I Need* was produced for \$7,500 and self-distributed by the Sebastians, out of necessity because no distributor would pick up the title. With the profits earned they were able to pay living expenses and finance their second film, *The Love Clinic* (1968).<sup>40</sup> The couples' early films appear to have centered on strong sexual themes and explicit depictions. According to the American Film Institute Catalog's description, *I Need* was about a woman who was raped at ten years old and as an adult becomes a sex addict who eventually goes insane because of her past trauma's impact on her life.<sup>41</sup>

In the early 1970s, the Sebastians made what *Variety* was calling a "new rash of sex education marriage manual documentaries...." Their 1970 release, *Marital Fulfillment*, was one such cinematic "how-to-do manual." Distributed by All-Film Enterprises, a company that specialized in sexploitation films, the picture was shot on 16mm and then blown up to 35mm theatrical release print for a budget of \$15,000.<sup>42</sup> At the time of its release, based on similar films released by All-Film Enterprises, *Marital Fulfillment*'s projected box office returns were to be over \$1 million.<sup>43</sup>

In its review, *Variety* noticed how the movie purposefully toed the line between soft-core pornography and an educational film in an effort to appeal to a broader audience and avoid critics who might write it off as a "sex house" picture. Instead, *Marital Fulfillment* was "a technically adroit cinema handbook which manages to be both instructional and arousing--graphic indeed without showing the two remaining screen nonos (penetration and erection) but still enough to elicit gasps from maiden aunts

everywhere.”<sup>44</sup> Noting that while this genre was sure to be short lived for its inherent lack of depth and repetitiveness, this particular picture stood out for Ferd’s high-quality camera work that helped the film “[avoid] the dirty-motel-room look of some other sex pix.”<sup>45</sup>

Continuing to work in the genre of nonfiction “sexpics,” in 1971, the Sebastians made the documentary *Red, White, & Blue!* about the pornography industry and the debate about obscenity taking place at that time within the Supreme Court. Again, reviewers were quick to point out the way in which the filmmakers showed explicit material under the rubric of a “pseudo-journalistic format,” which allowed access to a range of ticket buyers and venues. *Variety* picked up on how the movie featured clips from upcoming films made by the documentary’s own distributor Entertainment Ventures, Inc. “‘Red, White & Blue’ is touted as ‘an in-depth study of censorship and obscenity in America.’ What it really is is a 90-minute trailer for the distrib [sic] Entertainment Ventures Inc. feature nudie ‘Trader Hornee.’”<sup>46</sup> Although the film was unenthusiastically received, the filmmakers, acknowledged as both Ferd and Beverly, were again commended for “work that is straight forward, ungimmicky and professional.”<sup>47</sup>

In 1972 the couple moved out of the “educational” format and into non-pornographic exploitation films where they continued to employ sexually themed narratives. Tapping into cultural trends, *The Hitchhikers*, produced by their production company, Sebastian Films, Ltd. and distributed by Entertainment Ventures, was about a group of co-ed hippies--reminiscent of the Manson family without the brutal violence--who pose as hitchhikers to rob unsuspecting male motorists.<sup>48</sup> Their next film, *Bloody*

*Friday* (1973, also known as *Single Girls*), capitalized on the era's singles culture and the popularity of the slasher genre, creating a storyline about an island retreat called "Liberated Living" whose sexual encounter group is threatened by a serial killer. The film was produced by the Sebastians and distributed by Dimension Pictures.

Beverly and Ferd excelled in movies that hinged on elaborate action sequences, particularly those with chase scenes, explosions, shootouts, and female sexuality and nudity, the defining characteristics of 1970s B-film. In *Gator Bait* (1974), a fierce, scantily clad Cajun woman (Claudia Jennings), must defend herself and her family in the swamplands, a feat that often requires her to flee lecherous men in her speedboat. *Flash and the Firecat* (1975) reprised a Bonnie and Clyde narrative in a contemporary setting that had the outlaws (Roger Davis, Tricia Sembera) racing the law in dune buggies. Their 1977 release, *Delta Fox*, followed a hit man (Richard Lynch), who finds himself a target and must track his enemies using fast automobiles and gun battles. The film's opening sequence was an expertly executed car chase worthy of a big-budget Hollywood picture.

Absent in the Sebastian's work were the overt progressive cultural attitudes seen in Rothman's films and Barbara Peeters' films (to be discussed in the following section).<sup>49</sup> This was not unusual for the exploitation films made in the 1970s. My emphasis here is only as a point of distinction between other filmmakers and to underline that low-budget independent film communities were diverse in their subject matter and approach.

The couple credited much of their success in knowing who their target viewers were. Of *Flash and the Firecat*, produced for \$300,000 and produced and distributed by Sebastian Films, Ferd admitted, "We [make] the picture with the 14-year-olds in mind

because they like vehicles... You've gotta remember there's L.A. and the movies that do well in L.A. and then there's the rest of the world."<sup>50</sup> The Sebastians were frequently painted in the press as down-home, "folksy" Southerners, unpretentious and unlikely to put on Hollywood airs. However, Beverly was worried that, as wealthy filmmakers living in Los Angeles, they would lose touch with "common-folk." As the primary screenwriter for the majority of their films, she described her technique as "...listening to people talk. I put it down on paper just the way they say it."<sup>51</sup> "We make our movies for the Sears-Roebuck audiences," added Ferd. "Our audience is a blue-collar audience from 12 to 50 years old."<sup>52</sup>

The Sebastians were not part of Roger Corman and his young filmmakers' apprenticeship model. Instead they entered the film industry through the marginalized sexploitation genre as independent producers and distributors. Early in their career, they produced for smaller independent companies as in the case of *Marital Fulfillment* (All-Film Enterprises), *The Hitchhikers* (Entertainment Ventures, Inc.), and *Bloody Friday* (Dimension Pictures). By the mid-1970s, all their films were self-distributed through Sebastian Films Ltd. and Sebastian International Pictures Distribution Co. (SIP). Filmmaking was an inclusive family business: their two sons, Ben and Tracy, appeared in several of their parents' films and were listed as contacts for SIP.<sup>53</sup> The low-cost, self-sufficient, do-it-yourself approach to filmmaking, in combination with self-distribution, provided a lucrative business for the Sebastians. For example, made for \$10,000, '*Gator Bait*'s script was written in a weekend, preproduction was no more than four weeks, the film was shot in ten days, and the Sebastians, in addition to producing, directing and writing, were also responsible for sound, lighting, camera, wardrobe, and makeup.<sup>54</sup>

According to calculations made in 1975, the film grossed \$4 million with \$1 million net profits for the filmmakers.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike other wife-director and husband-producer couples who worked together, but in clearly demarcated roles always reflected in the film's credits, the Sebastians collaborated so closely they shared job titles. "We learned a long time ago—to keep peace in our family," explained Beverly. "We've been married fifty-eight years you learn little tricks along the way--we share a mutual credit--produced, directed and written by Beverly and Ferd Sebastian--on everything we do."<sup>56</sup> (Though the two shared the main creative credits of their work, Ferd always took a sole credit for cinematographer.) Reviews of their work acknowledged both Beverly and Ferd as they were listed in their film credits. Kevin Thomas in his review for the *Los Angeles Times* of *The Hitchhikers* praised the pair: "...producers-writers-directors Ferd and Beverly Sebastian are able, imaginative (and even graceful) film-makers who may have what it takes to go on to bigger things."<sup>57</sup> "The team of Ferd and Beverly Sebastian has the ingenuity to make much out of little," wrote Marjorie Bilbow, for *Screen International*, describing the couple's work on *Flash and the Firecat*. "They have taken the No. 1 basic plot of countless exploitation B-movies—a crime followed by a chase—and made a highspirited [sic] lark with splendidly exciting stunts but no real violence."<sup>58</sup>

It appears that in reviews of their films, no special attention was paid to the unusual fact that a husband and wife were co-directing. Again, this was unusual because there were so few women directors during that time and because co-directing, in general, was equally as rare. As independent filmmakers who successfully self-distributed their films, the couple not only controlled their work, but this autonomy also allowed them to



create a production community of their own design, that is, with co-directors, producers, writers.

Answering Kevin Thomas's prediction that the Sebastians "have what it takes to go on to bigger things," the couple signed a three-picture home distribution deal in the late 1980s with Paramount Pictures, for which they made a sequel to '*Gator Bait*—*Gatorbait II: Cajun Justice* (1988); *American Angels: Baptism of Blood* (1989), an action film about female wrestlers; and *Running Cool* (1993), a story set in the South about a biker community featuring real bikers fighting for land rights. As with the "sex education" films they made in the early 1970s, which crossed over between soft-porn, exploitation, and mainstream audiences, the couple continued to maintain the connection between the dominant motion picture industry and low-budget, independent filmmaking.

During the mid-to-late 1990s the Sebastians retired from making movies and began their next career in religious-based charity work. In 1993, while shooting *Running Cool*, Ferd was diagnosed with a heart condition that required immediate bypass surgery. Six months after the procedure the prognosis was dire. "I was down for the count," he explained. "The doctors said my best chance would be if they blocked off or killed half of my heart. I would be severely restricted in my activity but that if I didn't do it I was sure to have a massive heart attack which would probably kill me."<sup>59</sup> Never before a devout person, it was then that Ferd had what he would later describe as a religious transformation. On the way back from the doctor to the Paramount lot he heard a voice "as clear as day as if he was sitting next to me: Jesus is the answer."<sup>60</sup>

In 1999 Ferd was ordained as a minister in the Mt. Zion Church of Jesus Christ and established his online ministry, 2Jesus.org.<sup>61</sup> In 1994 Beverly established her

organization, the National Greyhound Foundation, a nonprofit that rescues retired greyhound racing dogs.<sup>62</sup> Using prints of their films preserved in the Paramount archives, Beverly, Ferd, and their son Ben founded Panama Films Distribution, LLC in 2012 and began to reissue several of the family's titles.<sup>63</sup> Still resourceful independent filmmakers, the couple has used the re-release of their films not only to make a profit, once again, but also as a platform to promote their charity work. Each DVD contains a variety of extra features, such as promotional videos of Beverly discussing her charity efforts with greyhounds and working with prisoners to train these dogs as service animals. Also included is Ferd's testimony about his spiritual conversion. Smoothing out the incongruity between evangelical Christianity and the explicit sexuality and violence of their films, Ferd appeals to fans as a way to entice—and market to--potential believers: "Maybe the audience would never come into a church, they would never see a TV evangelistic, but they would look at this movie and might find out that Ferd Sebastian--he made all these movies. He did all these things and yet Jesus saved him. You can't do anything too bad that Jesus won't save you if you would just ask him."<sup>64</sup>

## **BARBARA PEETERS**

*"The argument that women are too emotional to direct is a very bad holdout. It takes a very emotional person to direct."*<sup>65</sup>

**Barbara Peeters**

Between 1970 and 1979, Barbara Peeters wrote and directed five low-budget, independent films. Like Stephanie Rothman, she made movies with explicit feminist themes, and she worked for Roger Corman honing her craft in the fast-paced, industrious community of exploitation film. Also like Rothman, Peeters had aspirations to direct

mainstream films, but encountered sexist obstacles that prevented her from doing so. Similar to Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Peeters' first foray into filmmaking was through more marginal sexploitation films, as an actress and writer. Peeters was unique from both of her contemporaries in two ways. First, she did not make films with a life partner, but instead directed on her own, often working with different producers and production companies. Secondly, during the 1980s she transitioned from low-budget filmmaking into a prolific career as a television director of network one-hour dramas.

Barbara Peeters was born in 1943 in Davenport, Iowa. When she was nine years old, her family moved to a farm in Tipton, Iowa. As a child she always wanted to “make movies,” without yet knowing what that meant or could mean. Each week, she would go to the local movie theater—The Heartgrove in Tipton--and watch films. The owner, an old man who was going blind and changed the reels without seeing, would let her come back and watch for free in the projection booth. Later, when she was working at Paramount and driving through the gates, where the guard gave her a pass and said, “Hello Miss Peeters,” she was amazed that she had arrived at such a level of success. “I grew up on a farm in Iowa,” she remembered some thirty years later, enthusiastically and joyfully. “I was a girl!”<sup>66</sup>

She attended the State University of Iowa as an undergraduate, where she majored in Theater Arts. At twenty years old, Peeters was young, ambitious, and road hungry. Working for a summer in Cripple Creek, Colorado, playing poker and panning for gold, she earned \$12,000 in cash. Describing her choice to go to California, Peeters framed the decision as a classic fork-in-the-road, life-changing moment. “I was down at the train station and I flipped a quarter. Heads would have been New York City, tails,

California.”<sup>67</sup> Landing on tails, she traveled west. With a recommendation from one of her professors, Peeters attended a training program at the Pasadena Playhouse, which she graduated from in 1964. Recounting those years in the mid-to-late 1960s as very “intense,” the young filmmaker worked constantly always focused on building her career.<sup>68</sup>

Soon Peeters transitioned from theater into independent filmmaking, working on a variety of low-budget sexploitation and exploitation genre films. She was a costume designer on Walnut International’s *The Fabulous Bastard From Chicago* (1969), a period piece about a 1920s bootlegger-gangster that was “aimed strictly at the skin trade...[playing] up frank Lesbian (sic) scenes as well as sadism, fisticuffs and murders.”<sup>69</sup> The following year was significant for Peeters. Richard (Dick) Compton, the screenwriter for *The Fabulous Bastard From Chicago*, hired her as a script supervisor on his biker revenge film *Angels Die Hard* (1970), which he wrote and directed. Less sexually explicit, the movie was distributed by Roger Corman’s New World Pictures. Also in 1970, she wrote and co-starred in the sexploitation women-in-prison film *Caged Desires*, directed by Donald A. Davis and made for Hollywood Cinema Associates, a distributor of sexploitation films. As if this wasn’t already enough work, that year she wrote and directed her first feature film, *Dark Side of Tomorrow* (also released as *Just the Two of Us*), the story of two Los Angeles housewives who have an affair.

The producer of the film, David Novik, had wanted Dick Compton to direct the picture, but Compton was busy on another project. In his place, the director recommended Peeters for the job. “Dick calls me and says, ‘Ok, you want to direct, here it is. This guy’s got \$5,000 for a director. Tell him you want \$10,000 for the script and

when he says he can't afford it, tell him you'll direct it for the same price," remembered Peeters of her crash course in deal negotiations. "I said, 'OK!'"<sup>70</sup> Novik agreed to hire Peeters, for both script and director duties at a rate far less than the originally imagined \$10,000. Hesitant about hiring a woman director, Novik teamed his cinematographer, Jaque Beerson, with Peeters as co-directors (they share a credit).

*The Dark Side of Tomorrow* (1970) received paltry reviews. It seemed critics were less forgiving than usual of low-budget filmmaking's limitations. The *Hollywood Reporter* bemoaned "the tendency among exploitationers to take a first draft and say, in effect, 'This is good enough for the money we have. Next time it'll be better.'" <sup>71</sup> *Variety* was more generous in its assessment of the film's best efforts, describing the film as a "low-budget indie melodrama about loneliness and lesbianism, in that order...that tries hard to be sensitive and in good taste, not successfully enough to make it commercially as art but just enough to take it out of the sexploitation class."<sup>72</sup> As was the norm with exploitation films not to be dependent on reviews, Peeters was undeterred by the poor critical response and immediately started work on her next project, writing and directing *Bury Me an Angel*.

*Bury Me an Angel*, a revenge biker film about a sister who takes to the road to find her brother's killer, starred a six-foot-tall real biker, Dixie Peabody, who was French and Native American. The two women had become good friends on *Angels Die Hard* for which Peabody and several other non-actor/real bikers were hired as extras. Peeters got the idea for *Bury Me an Angel* one night on location for *Angels Die Hard* while hanging out in a bar with the cast and crew. Rita Murray, who had a role in the film, was interested in financing a motorcycle movie about women riders. Peeters, already primed

for the independent filmmaker hustle, jumped at the chance and pitched Murray an idea right on the spot. “I have one!” she told her. “You do? What’s it about?” asked Murray. Peeters looked over and saw Peabody shooting pool with some of the other bikers and launched into a tale she made up on the spot “about a 6 foot tall woman...I then shot back to the hotel room. Got the typewriter out [mimicking fast typing gestures]. Wrote the treatment out and then handed it to [Murray] the next day. She goes ‘Oh, wow. This is good! Do you have the script?’ I said, stalling, ‘Oh, yeah, it’s back in LA....’”<sup>73</sup> Rita Murray and her father John Meier were inexperienced producers interested in getting into the film business; they financed the picture, each receiving an executive producer credit. New World Pictures distributed the movie, marking Peeters’ and Corman’s first project together.

*Bury Me an Angel* stands out--in the biker genre that had by 1971 become clichéd and repetitive--for its female protagonist, Dag. Peabody convincingly portrayed this loner by using her inexperience as an actor to create a naturalistic portrait of an aloof individual hell-bent on the mission to avenge her brother’s murder.<sup>74</sup> The performer, at home on her motorcycle, offered a new take on the traditional biker style of leather jacket and heavy boots. Instead, Peabody donned a two-toned 1960s hairstyle, leather riding pants with slits on the side and soft-shoed moccasins; her character often rode with her feet on the handlebars. What also makes this film distinct is the way in which Peeters refrains from excessively sexualizing Peabody on-screen and is conscientious in making sure that the character of Dag is never brutalized as part of the narrative. This was a unique detail during a time in film--and in exploitation biker films in particular--when sexual violence against women characters was a common and casual occurrence. *Bury Me an Angel* was

Peeters' favorite film. "I do like sagas," she explained. "I do like people going on adventures and discovering themselves on the road. In my most naïve state I did everything in *Bury Me an Angel* that I wanted to do. Since I had no restrictions. We were on the road," she said through a big smile.<sup>75</sup>

Representing the community effort inherent in independent filmmaking, the filmmaker enlisted her friends to work on the picture, some of which was filmed in her house in the San Fernando Valley. Peeters describes her work experience during these years as collaborative and fun. "It was very communal. It wasn't so much competitive as it is now. In the independents it was like do wardrobe for me and I'll do masks for you. Do my lighting and I'll do your gripping. We all just liked working together. So we took whatever job was needed."<sup>76</sup>

Following *Bury Me an Angel*, Peeters began steady work for Corman's New World Pictures. In this environment, where so many films were being made and so quickly, everyone had the opportunity to learn all aspects of production. Peeters was a working writer-director, but she was also the production manager on *Night Call Nurses* (1972), second unit director on *Student Teachers* (1973), art director on *Young Nurses* (1973), and the location manager on *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1977)--just to name a few credits. Peeters' proficiency in overseeing the action sequences as second-unit director on several New World films garnered her glowing reviews in the trade papers. For her work on *Eat My Dust* (1976), *Variety* credited her skills as such: "On the lowest-common-denominator level of cheap thrills, the film is very effective, with lots of wrecks and stunts well coordinated by Ronald Clark Ross, and slapdash but gaudy action direction by [director Charles B.] Griffith and second-unit director Barbara Peeters."<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, on *Moving Violation* (1976), directed by Charles S. Dubin, she was praised by the *Variety* reviewer with a familiarity that not only made her seem like a household name, but also elevated the below-the-line position of second unit director: “Demolition derby...[where] the filmmakers are occupied with engineering virtually non-stop auto wreckage...Barbara Peeters did her typically good job of second unit direction.”<sup>78</sup>

In 1975 Peeters wrote and directed *Summer School Teachers*, another installment of New World’s trio of female teachers and nurses franchise. Roger Corman’s approach to these films was a “three girls in a dilemma formula,” as described by Peeters, “[w]hich broke down [the ninety-minute narrative] into about thirty minutes per woman.” Echoing Stephanie Rothman’s experience making *Student Nurses*, Peeters explained that “every fifteen minutes there had to be tits and ass, an action sequence, or a car chase. [Roger] didn’t care what you did as long as you got those basic elements that he felt sold these B-movies. The rest of it, great, as long as it moved *quickly*.”<sup>79</sup>

The story of three midwestern young women who travel to Los Angeles for summer teaching jobs, *Summer School Teachers*, is a comedic romp that adheres to the requisite female nudity and action scenes while also introducing a feminist storyline. One of the teachers (Candice Rialson) takes on the sexist school administration and starts an all-woman football team that demands equal rights. *Boxoffice* applauded the film’s representation of women, declaring, “It is refreshing to see women portray strong, aggressive and believable characters in this picture, instead of the passive, part-of-the-furniture type roles now generally available to women.”<sup>80</sup> In her review, *Los Angeles Times* reporter Linda Gross, accepting the constraints of the genre, found room to appreciate the film: “Despite the obvious limitations of parlaying sex, football and the



Equal Rights Amendment, 'Summer School Teachers' is an entertaining and breezy exploitation film....<sup>81</sup> Gross also acknowledged Peeters' skill in a film limited to the "three girls in a dilemma formula": "Even though she operates on a very superficial level, screenwriter Peeters deals with real issues like the danger of labeling people or the trauma of a teacher-student romance. As a director, Peeters excels in zany slapstick."<sup>82</sup>

Peeters' next directorial effort was *Starhops* (1978) released by First American Films.<sup>83</sup> Although this movie was not made with Corman and New World Pictures, it also followed the "three girl formula." The story of three women who take over a burger stand, the actresses spend the majority of the film on roller skates wearing red, white, and blue string bikinis. But the film's pro-small business, anti-corporation theme cuts through the portrayal of the female characters as being just "burger bunnies." The women use their feminine wiles to flirt their way into a bank loan and grow their business while fighting an oil tycoon who is trying to take over their property. Like most of the "three girl" films this is a working-girl movie. Again, Linda Gross admired how "Director Barbara Peeters makes you care about these no-nonsense working women. Peeter's [sic] direction exudes energy and displays style and skill in the handling of actors and action."<sup>84</sup>

Contemplating the feminist themes in these two films more than thirty years later, Peeters considers how the political rhetoric embedded in the pictures was a reflection of "the way we lived our lives." Likening her good friends and frequent collaborators during the 1970s, Terri Swartz, a co-producer on *Starhops*, and Josh ZanZera Willow, her current producing partner, to the women in the film, "[*Starhops*] is camp. Just these girls running amok. It was stuff we would have done, just crazy kind of stuff."<sup>85</sup> *Variety*

complimented the “girls running amok,” attributing the success of the movie, with an otherwise “threadbare plot,” to how it was “...directed in [an] upbeat fashion by Peeters, who employs rapid cutting and lotsa [sic] visual humor to keep the mixture bubbling away.”<sup>86</sup>

Although Peeters found making movies in the 1970s enjoyable, *Starhops* marked an extremely difficult time for the filmmaker in her personal life. Peeters had been diagnosed with terminal stage melanoma. During the film’s production she was undergoing an experimental treatment program at UCLA. “We’d call wrap for lunch and I’d get into the car and go over to UCLA,” remembers Peeters. “I’d be back and in about ten to fifteen minutes I’d start throwing up and sweating.”<sup>87</sup> Trained in the efficiency of low-budget filmmaking, Peeters storyboarded every shot of her film the night before, so the next day, on set, there were no surprises or moments of indecision. “The faster you have to go and the less money you have to deal with the more you have to prep.”<sup>88</sup> Lying on the floor of the women’s bathroom after returning to the set from the hospital, Peeters would hand her shot list to producer Swartz, who would go out to the crew and relay the director’s instructions until she was well enough to return to the set.

One day the key gaffer innocently approached the director (who had concealed her health from the crew). He told Peeters that he had sent some of the guys off to buy watermelon, because when his wife was pregnant and had morning sickness that was the only thing she could keep down. “I looked at him and thought, ‘He thinks I’m pregnant,’” she remembers incredulously. “I thought that was really cute because he was so concerned and thought it was too hot for the pregnant woman to be out here.” Laughs Peeters, “‘Well, if you think that’s bad, I have cancer and really shouldn’t be out here!’”<sup>89</sup>

Peeters finished *Starhops* on time and on budget. She credited the familiarity generated amongst crew members in low-budget filmmaking where people worked together repeatedly with limited resources and became so practiced in the art of making a deadline “so the director should be able to fall over the cliff and the crew continues on.”<sup>90</sup>

Worried about getting work while rebuilding her health, Peeters accepted when Corman offered her a directing job on what would become *Humanoids from the Deep* (1980), a science fiction film set in the present day about genetically altered sea monsters that wreak havoc on the mainland, especially on young, attractive women. Typical of a Corman film, the production was non-union. Peeters had joined the Directors Guild in 1978.<sup>91</sup> Although it was not necessary for her to be a member of the Guild while working on non-union independent films, she saw her membership as part of a larger strategy that she imagined for herself in the future directing studio films. In accordance with the DGA Basic Agreement, Guild members can only work for companies that were signatories of the union. New World Pictures and *Humanoids from the Deep* were not. Peeters was sure it was her assistant director, who was after her job, who turned her in to the DGA. The Guild fined her \$15,000, more than what she was getting paid for the job. Corman promised to pay the fine, but in the end did not.

Making the situation worse, after completing principal photography, Peeters was told by the film’s producer, Martin Cohen, that some additional scenes would be shot. What was added to the final film, according to Peeters and one of the movie’s lead actors, Ann Turkel, was footage of gratuitous female nudity (even for low-budget film) and rape scenes that had no value to the narrative. “It was a good quality film and the footage was

beautiful,” said Turkel at the time of the film’s release. “The (added) stuff is like out of a bad porn movie.”<sup>92</sup>

Peeters was public about her anger regarding what happened on *Humanoids*. In a profile done of the film’s conflict in the *Los Angeles Times* she said, “I may sound lame standing around with my hands in my pockets saying, ‘I didn’t shoot it.’ And it may sound like sour grapes now, but I’m really goddamned mad...I’m worried that feminists will see this movie and say ‘How can she do this? How can she justify it?’”<sup>93</sup> *Variety*’s review of the film was aware of the troubled production, stating, “Given...the fact that considerable footage was added to director Barbara Peeters’ original footage, editor Mark Goldblatt did a good job in making disparate elements at least hang together...”<sup>94</sup>

However, even acknowledging the power grab that took place, the reviewer honed in on the fact that Peeters was a woman director. “Irony of the entire production, which will confound feminist-minded critics, is that a female helmer was behind one of the more woman-degrading pix to come down the pike in some seasons.”<sup>95</sup> This infuriated Peeters, who responded to the article in the *Los Angeles Times* by calling out an industry double standard. “It seems to be built into the business,” said Peeters, “that a woman director is reviewed, criticized and looked at as a *woman* director. I don’t remember seeing anywhere where a man is criticized for putting male sexuality back 50 years.”<sup>96</sup>

In a letter to the editor, Corman refuted the accusations his former employee made in the press that he was antifeminist by stressing, “As for my being a male chauvinist, I can only point to my record of employing more qualified women in responsible positions than any other producer in Hollywood. Barbara Boyle [executive vice president of New World Pictures] is a past president of Women in Film and an Honored Worker for the

feminist movement, both in films and in the community.”<sup>97</sup> According to this description, it seems that a person with such an esteemed feminist track record would have made different choices about footage and handling conflict with one of his longtime employees. On the other hand, apart from any of his political positions, Corman had always prioritized financial profits over relationships with any of his employees, female or male.

By the time the *Humanoid*'s debacle had transpired, Peeters and Corman had been working together for eight years. In 2010, considering why Corman behaved the way he did in 1980, Peeters, through laughter, was frank: “Because the dollar in fine art means a lot to Roger, [and] the future of his children, and the size of his house, and the quality of his furniture means more than his word.”<sup>98</sup> Although Stephanie Rothman has made clear that she did not end her working relationship with Corman on bad terms, she and her husband's decision to leave New World Pictures was predicated on the famed producer's unwillingness to share profits with his filmmakers.

The irony was not that a woman made what the *Variety* reviewer predicted to be one of the most anti-woman films of the season, but that Peeters' public outrage got her a job in television. Agents Richard Lewis and Ronny Leaf approached Peeters after reading the article. They liked her “spunk” and felt that her experience in cheap, quick feature films would translate perfectly to the equally fast-paced schedule of one-hour episodic television. There was also a nervous buzz circulating within the industry that the government might start enforcing affirmative action policies (to be discussed in Chapter 4). As a result, television networks were hiring very few “token” women to put forward an antidiscrimination face. Peeters remembered, “They were using Karen Arthur and myself—‘Oh, affirmative action, we've got a girl on ours. We hired a woman director.’

But it was the same two women directors on everything. And then Gabrielle Beaumont started directing....So [the three of us] were basically being used. They wanted a couple of women who could cut the mustard and use them on everybody's set.”<sup>99</sup>

Prior to this, Peeters had never had an agent, as it was not necessary working in the exploitation community with its tight-knit network of workers. Furthermore, because in exploitation both above- and below-the-line labor was cheap, and writers and directors typically made no profits from the box office earnings of a film, there were no hefty deals for agents to negotiate or earn a percentage from. Leaf and Lewis were correct in their prediction that Peeters would excel in network television and make herself and her agents a lot of money. She was hired regularly on one-hour dramas such as *Falcon Crest*, *Matt Houston*, *Cagney and Lacey*, and *Remington Steel*. In her first year, Peeters directed seven episodes, a number that was considered normal for a veteran director. Soon she was preparing one program, while completing post-production on another; in another production season, she directed eleven shows. Working at such breakneck speed, Peeters began to burn out by the end of the decade. In her experience, there was little creative control for a television director. Drained by the lack of autonomy and the relentless schedule, she moved to Oregon in the 2000s where she produces commercials and documentaries.

When interviewed in 2010 Peeters reflected on the intricate plan that she had devised for herself, “when I was young and foolish,” she said, smiling:

I was going to go from independents into television and get some movies of the week and then I was going to move up to features--*DGA features*.

There were *no* women getting to move up. I was told: “Are you kidding?”

You're lucky to be working. Don't even think about a feature." On my days off I would be looking in *Variety* at the production pages calling my agent saying, "Hey so and so is doing a teen movie over at Paramount. Get me up for it." He'd say, "Are you kidding? They won't consider you." "Well, why not? I've done teen movies. I've done B-movies. I'm doing television. I can work a short schedule." And he goes, "Honey, John Hughes is going to direct that."

Laughing she said, "It was always the boys."<sup>100</sup>

## **KAREN ARTHUR**

*"I'll kiss my way through anything before I fight. I'm not a run-in person. I deal with conflicts differently: I manipulate. I think direct confrontation is a male space and that doesn't suit me. The point is that I get my way."*<sup>101</sup>

**Karen Arthur**

Born in Nebraska in 1943, Karen Arthur was raised by her single mother who moved the family to Palm Beach, Florida, when Arthur was a child. As a teenager, Arthur was a member of the ballet company sponsored by Frank Hale's Palm Beach Playhouse. It was there that she was introduced to choreography, which she describes as providing her with a foundation for directing. "That's where I really learned the skills," explained Arthur in a 2011 interview. "I realized at one point, everything I knew about choreography in terms of right, left, the stage, if I turned the stage upright it was a frame. It was a motion picture frame."<sup>102</sup>

Around age eighteen, Arthur realized that she was not going to succeed as a ballerina. Moving to New York, where she worked steadily as a "triple threat" theater

actress—singing, dancing, and acting--she decided to leave for the West Coast because “I never got the brass ring on Broadway...I figured, while I still have a face and body, I should go to Hollywood!”<sup>103</sup> Starting off in Hollywood as an actress, Arthur was hired in minor roles for television and film. She joined the Melrose Theater, where she realized that she didn’t want to act, but instead direct, and in Hollywood that meant movies.

With no prior experience in production, Arthur began to strategize how to build her skill-set by tapping into the resources available in Los Angeles’ wider film community. She took a summer production class at UCLA where she made her first film, shot on 16mm, called *Hers*, an autobiographical short that gave her the opportunity to familiarize herself with both the technical and creative aspects of production. She was accepted to the American Film Institute’s internship program that paired new filmmakers with Hollywood veterans. (A few years earlier, Jan Haag had been the organization’s first “token” female participant in this program.) Arthur was assigned to Arthur Penn’s feature *Night Moves* (1975). It was on this film that she met John Bailey, then a focus puller, and his wife, Carol Littleton, a film editor just getting her start. Bailey and Littleton would collaborate with Arthur on her first two feature films as cinematographer and editor, respectively.

During this time, Arthur saw writer-actress Joan Hotchkis perform her one-woman show, *Legacy*. She was captivated by Hotchkis’s portrayal of Bessie Hapgood, a self-involved, upper-middle-class woman experiencing an emotional breakdown under the pressures of a vapid and materialistic society consumed with plate settings and domestic help. Arthur convinced the actress that the play was meant for the big screen; and Hotchkis agreed not only to reprise her role on film, but also write the screenplay.



Raising funds for the independent production proved challenging. Arthur raised money in fits and starts, securing donations from Hotchkis's wealthy family; and after several attempts, was awarded a \$10,000 contribution from the AFI Independent Filmmakers Grant.<sup>104</sup>

In 1975 *Legacy* toured the international festival circuit, but found landing a domestic distribution deal difficult.<sup>105</sup> Through the work of a French film agent, Jeannine Seawell, the picture was distributed in some parts of Europe. Critics' response to the movie was mixed. It seemed that to several, there was something off-putting about the format—the monologue did not translate well to the narrative structure of a feature film. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* described it as “a most peculiar sort of movie but not a very good one.” Wishing that the film had some humor in its treatment of this rich woman's problems, as a way to humanize her, he wrote, “Nothing that either Miss Hotchkis or Miss Arthur does can disguise the awkwardness and artificiality of this monologue form, which finally destroys any serious thoughts the filmmakers might have about women, the bourgeoisie, sex, America and the difficulty of getting good domestic help in Southern California.”<sup>106</sup>

Like Canby, Marjorie Rosen was unsettled by the film's overwrought seriousness. Writing for *Ms.* magazine, she pondered the category of “women's films” in her review of films made by women about women screening at the Cannes Film Festival that year. Whereas the end of the 1970s would see the New Woman's film emerge from Hollywood—both dramatic and funny—Rosen observed that, in 1975, “...nobody seems to be laughing at films these days, and especially not at women's films.”<sup>107</sup> She did not fault *Legacy*—shown at Cannes that year—for its motive in taking on the “grievances” of

its female protagonist, but rather that the film “leaves no feminist cliché unturned. There’s boredom, booze, pills, a disinterested shrink, a loveless marriage, a withholding mother; there’s the obligatory masturbation scene (in a sunken bath, in the midst of a telephone chat with a friend), the discussion of menstruation, the allusions to menopause.” By the end of her review, Rosen pleads with a final question: “I mean you *do* know the Women’s Movement has a sense of humor, don’t you?”<sup>108</sup>

While critics debated the role of humor in a dramatic film about a woman, what stands out in the reviews of *Legacy* are the expectations some critics had of a woman director in relation to her female subject. Reviewing the film from the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland, Gene Moskowitz of *Variety* championed the picture and in particular drew attention to how Arthur, “who was a legit dancer, singer and actress, and made some shorts, does well with her first feature. She does not intrude and allows Hotchkis to grow through her actions and words.”<sup>109</sup> Moskowitz felt Arthur did right by Hotchkis, as the screenwriter and actor. The phrasing of his praise can also be read as a strategy to prop up the first-time director. By cataloging her background in the arts, Moskowitz validated her new talent and introduced Arthur to Hollywood.

Some critics projected onto Arthur a gendered obligation. Canby worried that *Legacy* was “uncommonly cruel for a film about a woman made by a woman.”<sup>110</sup> The suggestion that there is an obligation amongst women constricts women directors and writers to working only within certain themes, characterizations, and even genres. Who decides what is suitable subject matter for a film by a woman about a woman? One argument would say that female agency in film is defined by a woman filmmaker. Hotchkis created the character of Bissie Hapgood as a vehicle for herself so that the

cruelty was of her doing. Rosen attempts to get at this question of gendered standards by asking, “How generous should we be to ‘women’s films’? Do we defer to sisterhood and apply a different set of criteria?”<sup>111</sup> She ultimately does not answer these questions in her review, but in asking them, Rosen echoes demands made of women directors during these years. In the 1970s, these filmmakers were oddities, in that there were so few of them pushing through an industry patriarchy designed to keep them out. As a result, the reasons for their uniqueness forced them to answer to those, in this case film critics, still functioning within Hollywood’s male-centric design that dictated the parameters of what a woman director *should* be.

For Arthur and her collaborators—Hotchkis, Bailey, and Littleton--the benefits of making an independent film were significant:

We were learning with each other, but we had the freedom because there was no studio saying “Oh, you can’t do this and you can’t do that.” There were no big stars saying “Oh, I wouldn’t do this and I wouldn’t say that.” Nobody looking over our shoulders. It was us...And sure we made mistakes and they’re in the film for all to see. But it was *so* challenging and *so* invigorating it was *so* exciting to be out there on our own doing our own thing. In something we *believed* in.<sup>112</sup>

After *Legacy*, Arthur began work on her second feature, *Mafu Cage*. Also based on a play that Arthur had seen in 1971 in Europe, it was the story of two sisters entrenched in a dysfunctional, highly dependent relationship with each other. The project appealed to Arthur as a career strategy. She considered *Legacy* to be an art film and thought that making a movie like *Mafu Cage*, with its horror and thriller qualities, would give her

an opportunity to attract a larger audience and in doing so expand her range and marketability as a filmmaker.<sup>113</sup>

While Arthur began the slow and arduous process of finding investors for her next independent film, she worked at honing her craft as a filmmaker. In 1974 she was accepted to the pilot program of the AFI's Directing Workshop for Women, and in 1976 she began directing television. Michael Gleason, a friend from her theater days, had become a successful television writer and was developing the series *Rich Man, Poor Man* for Universal. He was impressed with *Legacy* and went to the Universal executives with the intention of giving her a job as a director on his new show. Their reaction was, "Oh for God sakes, Michael, fuck her, don't hire her." Gleason's response was, "You don't understand, I don't want to fuck her, I want to hire her. She's going to be a really good director."<sup>114</sup> Ultimately, Gleason succeeded in getting Arthur hired on the series. Arthur was an oddity on the Universal lot. "You're the first woman director we've seen on this [sound] stage since Ida Lupino," male technicians would tell her while visiting the set to pay witness to history.<sup>115</sup>

During this time, Arthur secured a private investor for *Mafu Cage*--a businessman from Arizona who had no ties to the film industry, but was interested in the "Hollywood experience." He contributed \$250,000 to begin production. She re-teamed with Bailey and Littleton, who, since *Legacy*, had embarked on successful careers as cinematographer and editor, and she cast veteran and Oscar-winning actress Lee Grant as the lead. The two women had met at AFI when both were participants in the DWW. Joan Micklin Silver introduced Arthur to Carol Kane, whom Micklin Silver had recently worked with on her film *Hester Street*.

*Mafu Cage* toured the festival circuit in 1978, screening as part of the Director's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival. However, reviews of the film were mediocre. Charles Champlin of the *Los Angeles Times* found Grant's and Kane's performances "excellent," but the plot to be lacking. "The story...is absurd without being absurdist, Grand Guignol melodrama without a saving sense of the preposterous, a two-penny shocker tricked out as if it were a serious study of schizophrenia."<sup>116</sup> Reviewing the film at the Dallas USA Film Festival, film critic Arthur Knight was more generous, appreciating the filmmaker's skill in making such a unique film, independently. "Absolutely nothing about this movie betrays the fact that it was made on a very low budget. But it is heartening to know that a film of this quality can be produced independently of the major studios—and that because of this independence, the film makers can depart so widely from conventional stories and themes."<sup>117</sup>

Similar to *Legacy*, *Mafu Cage* found some distribution in Europe, but was unable to secure a formal release in the United States. There was a place for small, art house films, like *Legacy* and *Mafu Cage*, on the festival circuit, where screenings would serve as a showcase for these projects to audiences and generate press. However, for independent filmmakers, distribution was the lynchpin in securing a successful life for their film. A contract with a distribution company provided a budget for marketing and sales and relationships with exhibitors--costs that most filmmakers could not afford on their own. In the 1970s, distribution was controlled by the major studios, a competitor that Arthur did not have the resources or the connections to match.<sup>118</sup>

In 1978, while struggling to sell her independent film, Arthur signed a four-picture development deal with Universal. The experience of trying to get projects made

within the system, however, proved too frustrating as well. For four years she supported herself this way, but none of her projects came to fruition. In a 1986 interview, Arthur explained the development deal conundrum. “You earn enough to live on, but you’re not saying ‘Action!’ Eventually I threw my hands up and said, ‘No more.’ I called my agent and said, ‘Let’s do TV.’”<sup>119</sup>

Arthur’s career in television gained traction by the end of the 1970s when she started directing the one-hour action drama series *Hart to Hart*; and in the 1980s for shows such as *Cagney and Lacy* and *Remington Steel*. In 1985 she won an Emmy for Outstanding Directing in a Drama Series for her work on *Cagney and Lacy*. Her career continued to flourish, especially in television movies and miniseries, for over forty years.

In 1987 Arthur directed her last feature film--to date--*Lady Beware*, a psychological thriller starring Diane Lane. She began development on the movie as part of her Universal deal in 1978. It was almost a decade later when a new production company, Scotti Bros. Entertainment, agreed to finance and distribute the movie.<sup>120</sup> Arthur had a similar experience to that of Peeters on *Humanoids*. The producers felt her version needed more explicit material, and so, without the director’s consent, they used outtakes of footage with actress Diane Lane naked to add to the finished film. Arthur was adamant in the press that the film was re-cut without her permission and the final version exploitative in its handling of Lane’s character and on-screen performance.<sup>121</sup> This is not a situation unique to women directors, but to filmmakers who do not have the clout to negotiate deals that provide them with final cut. However, women were disproportionately represented as those directors who wielded less authority and were therefore vulnerable to executive powers because of the gender gap in Hollywood.

Karen Arthur was able to access the few resources in Hollywood that were designated for women directors—the DWW and in some respects the AFI Independent Filmmakers Grant—to garner financial support and industry credence for her two feature films. As an independent filmmaker, producing films whose content challenged the conventions of the commercial film marketplace, she found it difficult to compete with larger films and as a result was unable to successfully secure distribution for her work. In spite of this, it was also her ability to successfully produce and direct two feature films outside of Hollywood that helped her build the skills to start directing television and impress those hiring that she was qualified for the job.

## CLAUDIA WEILL

**Interviewer:** *Did your personal life suffer during the years it took you to make “Girlfriends”?*

**Claudia Weill:** *As for whether I’ve lost something while I’ve been making the film. I just don’t know. That’s like people asking me what it’s like to be a woman filmmaker. That’s hard for me to judge since I have no idea what it’s like to be a man filmmaker.”<sup>122</sup>*

Whereas Arthur found distribution for her films difficult to come by, Claudia Weill’s independently produced feature, *Girlfriends*, was picked up in 1978 by Warner Bros. in what Stephen Klain of *Variety* romanticized as the indie director’s “whirlwind Hollywood odyssey.”<sup>123</sup> The film is set in contemporary New York City and follows Susan (Melanie Mayron), an aspiring photographer in her twenties, as she navigates losing her best friend to marriage, her own relationship quandaries, and the missteps of a young adult embarking on the start of her career. Weill, a New York-based filmmaker, whose prior experience had been in documentary, often feminist-themed projects, had

begun work on the film in 1975. Four years later she had relocated to the West Coast and was signing a two-year development deal with a major studio.

Born in 1947 in New York City and raised in Westchester County, Claudia Weill did not grow up a cinephile. Weill's mother was a lecturer in the Far Eastern department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and her father was the president of the men's fashion boutique, the British American House.<sup>124</sup> As an undergraduate at Radcliffe College, her interest in painting led her to photography, which eventually introduced her to cinematography. In 1967, while still a student at Radcliffe, she worked on the documentary *Revolution*, about San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district, where she learned about film production. Weill continued to make short documentaries while still in school before graduating in 1969, *cum laude*. After college, Weill worked for PBS, directing several episodes of *Sesame Street* and programs for New York City's channel Thirteen-WNET's series *The 51<sup>st</sup> State*. As a director-cinematographer, in 1973, she made the documentary *Joyce at 34*, which profiled filmmaker Joyce Chopra ruminating during her pregnancy on motherhood and career. New Day Films, a feminist filmmaking collective that Weill had co-founded in 1971 with a group of filmmakers, including Chopra, Julia Reichert, and Jim Klein, distributed the project. Also in 1973, Weill collaborated as co-director and cinematographer with Shirley MacLaine on the documentary *The Other Half of the Sky: A China Memoir*. The film was nominated for an Academy Award.

Beginning to tire of documentary filmmaking, in 1975, Weill and screenwriter Vicki Polon, a colleague from PBS, began conceptualizing the story *Girlfriends*. Originally imagined as a short film, Weill had some second thoughts: "The story just



seemed to want to go on. It was mostly pretty boring, but I really liked Susan, the main character...I wanted to know what happened to her.”<sup>125</sup> At one point, Barbara Schultz, producer for *Visions* (on KCET, Los Angeles’ PBS station), offered Weill the opportunity to make the film as part of the program. *Visions* was an independent filmmaker series that funded feature films for broadcast, with budgets of an estimated \$200,000. Weill declined. “I turned it down because I was just terrified. I mean the thought of having \$200,000 and having to make a 90-minute film was much too scary.”<sup>126</sup> Instead, at her own pace, Weill made the movie for an estimated \$500,000, the budget consisting of \$90,000 of grant monies from the AFI Independent Filmmaker’s fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York State Council of the Arts, as well as donations from family and friends along the way. In a 2011 interview, Weill remembered, “When you graduated from college, they used to send you a credit card. So I used that a lot!”<sup>127</sup>

For the cast and crew of the film, it was a “labor of love.” Starring an up-and-coming cast of unknowns (Melanie Mayron, Christopher Guest, Bob Balaban), the production relied on its actors’ commitment over the years. Mayron, in particular, who at twenty-five years old had appeared in smaller parts in films and television, was invested in the feature, hoping it would be her breakthrough role. The serendipitous timing of the picture’s release with Hollywood’s recent output of New Woman films gave both cast and crew a boost of confidence that their movie had a chance to do well.<sup>128</sup> “I *really* became involved in the completion of the film, for my sake and everybody’s,” explained Mayron of her hopes in an interview during the picture’s successful release. “When ‘Julia’ and ‘Turning Point’ and ‘An Unmarried Woman’ started to happen, I knew the

stage had been set for what we had begun long before those films, and I *prayed* for Claudia to pull it off.”<sup>129</sup>

*Girlfriends* had a successful screening at the Rotterdam Film Festival and was then quickly accepted to Cannes. The film had interest from independent domestic distributors, but prompted by the positive reviews the film was receiving on the festival circuit, Weill, who had never been to Hollywood, flew to the coast and “checked into a cheap hotel, and started looking up the numbers of the studios in the phone book. Now I could say, ‘Hi, you don’t know me, but I have a film which I produced and directed and which the Cannes Film Festival has accepted.’ And they listened.”<sup>130</sup> Within two weeks, she secured a screening of *Girlfriends* with studio executives. Warner Bros. picked it up for distribution in April 1978, and the film was theatrically released in the fall of that year.<sup>131</sup>

*Girlfriends*, a story two young women entering adulthood and struggling through some uniquely female situations (career vs. marriage, motherhood vs. independence), embodied the feminist spirit of the era, while not being politically contentious. The film, while broaching some serious topics such as abortion, relationship malaise, both romantic and platonic, also had a sense of humor. (Mayron, Guest, and Balaban would each go on to notable careers in comedy.) Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his glowing review of the movie, gave a sigh of relief, describing how “*Girlfriends* is the first fiction film to come easily and spontaneously--i.e., nonpolemically--out of the culture of women’s liberation. Feminism operates as an assumption, not as an argument.”<sup>132</sup>

While not being overtly feminist, Weill and her collaborators were consciously making a film that spoke to their experiences as twenty-something female New Yorkers,

and in doing so filled in a gap Weill felt existed in current cinema: she never saw anyone who looked like *her* in a movie: “[We] wanted to make a movie about someone like us.”<sup>133</sup> As she explained in an interview with Gene Siskel during the film’s release: “I’m not interested in stories about superwomen or women as victims. I’m interested in stories about everyday girls, everyday women, everyday people. I like my characters to be flawed a little bit, to have a sense of humor about themselves and not to be too gorgeous.”<sup>134</sup> The film was also very much a human story, and Weill was quick to emphasize this in interviews as much as she was to identify, as a filmmaker, her interest in bringing unseen female characters to the screen. For her the two were not mutually exclusive. “[*Girlfriends*] is a classical genre picture, a film of initiation...It’s a ‘growing up film’...the difference with my film is that it’s about a *woman* doing this. But it’s the same story that we’ve seen all the time about men.”<sup>135</sup>

Generating a buzz at high-profile film festivals, the movie was proving its commercial appeal. Mayron’s insight that the film’s release was well timed to piggyback on the success of Hollywood’s New Woman films was not lost on Warner Bros. *Variety* pointed this fact out in its glowing review of the film. “Without ‘Annie Hall,’ ‘An Unmarried Woman,’ ‘The Turning Point’ and the recent spate of films with strong women characters, there would be no ‘Girlfriends,’ at least there would be no ‘Girlfriends’ through Warner Bros. That would’ve been a shame because this is a warm, emotional and at times wise picture about friendship deserving of a wide audience.”<sup>136</sup>

In addition to being in line with popular social trends, *Girlfriends* also brought the studio prestige for “investing” in new talent outside of the establishment. The press glommed onto the young, “rising star, Hollywood outsider” story. Cecile Starr, writing

for the *New York Times* began her profile of Weill by noting how, on the eve of its theatrical release the film has a “number of unprecedented achievements already to its credit. It’s the first independent American dramatic film to be primed with grants...[and] in a matter of weeks [Weill] sold it for world distribution to Warner Bros. And even before the release of ‘Girlfriends,’ Warners signed Miss Weill to develop two more features.”<sup>137</sup> Charles Champlin praised the movie: “One of the small miracles of this year’s Cannes Film Festival...a candid, intelligent, informed, affectionate, deeply affecting and wryly funny examination of the lives of young career women in Manhattan now. It was, in fact, a double miracle...” by being a struggling independent film made on grants and then distributed by Warner Bros.<sup>138</sup>

Champlin was also keen to point out the benefit to Warner Bros. in taking up the small film. “The risk is not high by the standards of ‘War and Peace’ or ‘Sorcerer,’” he explained. “But it is a bet on a little-known film-maker--a woman--and on the kind of film (quite like ‘Rocky’) which cannot afford to hire stars and so creates them instead.”<sup>139</sup> For the studio, distributing the film was an inexpensive investment. With no production costs to cover, the company would be able to reap distribution profits without any financial risk.<sup>140</sup> In 1979 the film made it onto *Variety*’s list of “Big Rental Films of 1978” for earning \$1 million at the domestic box office.<sup>141</sup>

Weill signed a two-picture development deal with Warner Bros., but would produce no projects with the studio. Her next film, *It’s My Turn*, would be made by producer Ray Stark’s company, Rastar, and distributed by Columbia. The budget was \$7 million. Eleanor Bergstein wrote the film; she and Weill had met years before when the director was starting *Girlfriends*. Originally Bergstein and Weill began developing *It’s*

*My Turn* for PBS's *Visions*, but encouraged by the film's eventual executive producer, Jay Presson Allen, Weill bought back the rights, and with Clayburgh interested in the lead role, took the project to Ray Stark.<sup>142</sup>

Released in 1980, *It's My Turn* represented to many critics a last tribute to 1970s (cinematic) feminism where women struggled to be acknowledged as equal to men in public and private spheres. These characters, entering the 1980s, had "arrived" and were now struggling to balance their professional and romantic lives. The film starred Jill Clayburgh, still a box office draw from her success in *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) and *Starting Over* (1979), both of which garnered Academy Award nominations for Clayburgh. In *It's My Turn*, Clayburgh plays Kate Gunzinger, a brilliant, bumbling, and beautiful math professor, successful in her career as an academic, but indecisive and disheveled in her personal life. She's torn between her architect boyfriend, played by Charles Grodin, and her new love, Michael Douglas, a professional baseball player. Her character is also very accident prone throughout the film, tripping and stumbling constantly, a feature that Weill had intended to be funny and endearing.

Critical response to *It's My Turn* was mixed. The movie and its makers had substantial champions. *Variety* described it this way: "A wonderfully witty yet realistic look at love relationships...a cut above most of the romantic comedies coming down the studio pike as of late." In particular, the reviewer attributed the success of the film's approach to the ability of the director. "In her second feature, director Claudia Weill has managed to zero in on both the funny and tragic sides of falling in love while keeping the action moving and the story intact."<sup>143</sup>

Weill's interest in the material was rooted in her belief that during the late 1970s women and men were beginning to be overrun by careerist goals at the expense of their personal lives. "I wanted to get into something that I think is happening to a lot of people," she explained in an interview at the time of the film's release. "[A]nd that's that they're making significant progress in terms of their work, but they're finding themselves emotionally impoverished—their relationships are negotiated to support their work or they're not involved in any relationships at all."<sup>144</sup> Many reviewers, who liked the film, responded to Weill's theme and found in the movie an honesty in its portrayal of characters faced with the professional vs. personal dilemma. Charles Champlin admired Weill's work along with that of screenwriter Bergstein: "Lines and scenes are at their most effective a rewarding combination of wit and poignance, with a real feeling for character and relationships." He was won over by Clayburgh as the archetypal contemporary 1970s woman: "'It's My Turn' is sharply funny and full of well observed characters, and Jill Clayburgh is marvelous yet again as the model of the modern woman, torn this time not only between men but between dreams."<sup>145</sup> Writing in the *Village Voice*, Andrew Sarris was effusive in his praise for the filmmaker and the film. "Claudia Weill's *It's My Turn*, with a particularly brilliant script by Eleanor Bergstein, has emerged quite unexpectedly as one of the most affectingly civilized entertainments of the season."<sup>146</sup>

Clayburgh, as the representative for the liberated and successful woman, also fatigued some reviewers. In her Op-Ed column for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, Julia Cameron considered *It's My Turn* as an example of the negative impact of Clayburgh's appeal. "In fact, Jill Clayburgh is so non-threatening as to be virtually non-

functional. To the men, she says, ‘See? The New Woman is really just like the Old Woman—a klutz, no competition, nothing to be worried about.’ To the women, Clayburgh says, ‘See? you can keep your new high-powered job *and* your old feminine wiles.’ *Feminist* is really just the long form of *feminine*.”<sup>147</sup> For this reviewer, Clayburgh’s character as a genius mathematician, who stumbled around in high heels unable to make an informed decision about her personal life did not seem a humorous portrayal of real life, but rather a counterfeit representation of female empowerment. Others, such as Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic*, who liked *Girlfriends*, was disappointed in Weill’s first studio project, calling it “false and foolish from beginning to end, except when it’s trite...Nothing in this film becomes it like the [sic] leaving it.”<sup>148</sup> Like Cameron, Kauffman also found fault in the film’s leading lady, which only added to what he considered a vapid plot to begin with: “...[Clayburgh] lacks the script’s basic requirement: to make us wish we were that woman (if you’re female) or that we were with her (if you’re not).”<sup>149</sup>

Robert Osborne, writing for *The Hollywood Reporter*, found the film “hit-and-miss.” For him, something was amiss--literally missing from the film itself. “Along the way, one gets the impression there must be something left on the cutting-room floor, or in the typewriter of the scenarist...there are so many hazy explanations, unexplained turns and bottomless holes [in the film]...”<sup>150</sup> Osborne may have been intuiting something that really happened during the making of the film. During production, rumors had begun to circulate in the press that Weill and Stark had met with some disagreements, specifically during the editing of the film; and that her leads, Clayburgh and Douglas, “walked all over” her during the process.<sup>151</sup> It was reported that Douglas was “so distressed with ‘My

Turn' [sic]...he's telling friends he'll do nothing to promote its release." The gossip column put all the blame on the screenwriter and director, citing a source from Columbia who claimed, "There was nothing the actors could do to save it. The script was weak, the directing even weaker, and Claudia succeeded in alienating many people who could have helped her."<sup>152</sup> Weill admitted that the producer and stars asked for some script changes, but her stance in the press was that she welcomed the input. "If their criticism hadn't come I would have searched for it. I never made it a secret that I didn't know all the answers. I like to encourage actors to try things their way. I consider it part of the creative process."<sup>153</sup>

Weill consistently answered in a diplomatic manner all interview questions about rumors of her contentious relationship with Stark and stars, avoiding any critical statements about her experience. To Gregg Kilday of the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* she responded to such a question in more general terms about what it was like to work for a major motion picture company: "When you're given several million dollars to make a movie, there are all kinds of pressures," she explained. "There's always give-and-take. A producer and a filmmaker often have different ideas. But you work them out." In a final statement of ownership over her film and presenting a confidence in the experience she had making it, Weill said, almost defiantly to Kilday, "If I was unhappy with the film, you'd know it."<sup>154</sup>

In his 1994 biography of Michael Douglas, author John Parker describes the source of the alleged friction as coming from Ray Stark's office. According to Parker, Stark did not like Weill's version of the movie and in an effort to undermine her authority leaked rumors to the press. Douglas was shocked at the reports that he hated the film. He



called Weill immediately to tell the director they were not true. Executives at Columbia then instructed the cast not to speak to the press about the story. In Parker's account, Stark reedited Weill's version of the movie; the studio preferred hers, but it is unknown which version was released in theaters.<sup>155</sup>

Although sources and details about this conflict are vague, what does seem likely is that producer Ray Stark or those in his company to some extent were able to exert their power over Weill. Co-star Grodin came to Weill's defense, saying in the press during production that he "resented the way she was treated." The actor explicitly called out the double standard in Hollywood by stating, "If she were a man she wouldn't have been treated that way."<sup>156</sup> A year after the film's release, Weill, still discussing any disputes in veiled terms, did admit that she and the project were treated differently because she was a woman. "The pressures were the same as on any other Hollywood feature, except (the project) got more attention, more scrutiny because I was a young woman making my first film for a Hollywood studio, which is like being a bit of a freak!"<sup>157</sup> Stark, a veteran of the Hollywood patriarchy, may have been threatened by a woman in the power position of director. Furthermore, a female director's rarity in the studio system drew more attention to her and, by association, the men who hired her. (Weill was the first woman director Columbia had hired since Dorothy Arzner directed *First Comes Courage* for the company in 1943.) As a result, the producer may have wanted to keep in check any authority Weill might try to establish as a female director of a major motion picture. Recutting her film and releasing negative information about her to the press were all ways that Stark could assert his power.

Thirty years later, Weill still does not describe the experience at Columbia as wholly positive or negative, but did reveal a story that paints a clear picture of the power dynamic between a young first-time female director and a veteran male producer. While in production on *It's My Turn*, "Stark would come on set and literally run his hand down my back to see if I was wearing a bra or not. That was acceptable at that time. The notion of a woman director was really alien," she told an audience in 2011 during an interview with filmmaker Lena Dunham at a screening of *Girlfriends*.<sup>158</sup> Regardless of the fact that Weill was a director helming a major studio production with a cast of Hollywood's top stars, her power was limited. During that time, there was no recourse for sexual harassment within the industry. This kind of behavior was a normalized part of Hollywood culture, and she was expected to laugh off Stark's conduct in a gesture of good humor to prove that she was not a "difficult" woman and instead willing to play along as "one of the guys." "It was a very hostile climate," she went on to explain. "And you could not engage in a hostile [battle] because you would lose."<sup>159</sup>

Some press reported that *It's My Turn* was a box office failure.<sup>160</sup> What is difficult to determine is whether the rumors of Ray Stark's dissatisfaction with the film ultimately meant that he withheld in some capacity studio resources during the release of the picture; on a creative level it is also hard to determine how the conflict interfered with the final version of the film. The movie received substantial positive reviews from major publications, and box office reports during its opening months reported promising earnings.<sup>161</sup> Ultimately, the movie grossed \$5.5 million against an estimated budget of \$7 million.<sup>162</sup>

After *It's My Turn*, Weill directed theater and television, including several television movies and multiple episodes on series such as *Chicago Hope*, *thirtysomething*, and *My So-Called Life*. In 2013, she directed an episode of Lena Dunham's HBO series, *Girls*. Weill has yet to make another feature film. For her it was a conscious decision to move out of feature films and into television. The episodic schedule was more accommodating for a working parent, and while there was less fame associated with being a television director compared to that of a film director, the work was still exciting and the salary lucrative.<sup>163</sup>

Claudia Weill's formative years making independent, small-budgeted documentaries and content for public television introduced her to grant-making opportunities to support her first commercial film. Like Karen Arthur, she was able to garner support from the AFI Independent Filmmaker grant that was geared toward supporting women and minority filmmakers. Crucial to Weill's success with her first film was the way in which the domestic and international film festival circuit served as a marketplace for *Girlfriends* to find wider distribution. Also key to the success of *Girlfriends* was the picture's fortuitous release during the popularity of Hollywood's New Woman films at the end of the 1970s. Because of this timing, Warner Bros. took notice of Weill and her film as an inexpensive way to cash in on the popular trend. As a result, the picture reached a large audience, and with it, Weill gained access to work as a director in mainstream film and television.

In this way, the film industry's interest in women—on-screen and behind the camera—as a means to capitalize on what was fashionable at the time worked in Weill's favor. It also created a burden for the director. Because her first two films were about

contemporary women working through the issues of “liberation,” the filmmaker was constantly saddled with questions about her identification as a feminist and her work as a *woman* rather than her perspective as just a *director*. Demonstrating a similar mix of self-assurance and diplomacy that she had when asked about her working relationship with Ray Stark, Weill answered comfortably to the question of being a feminist filmmaker. “I am a feminist and a film maker. But I don’t believe in making didactic or rhetorical films. I believe you move people by making them laugh or cry. To me that is the most political thing you can do,” she told the *New York Times* in 1978 during the release of *Girlfriends*. Unafraid to identify as a feminist in an industry that did not welcome such affiliations, Weill was also clear that to do so did not mean that she or her work should be pigeonholed. “I feel no pressure to stick with women’s films. It seems to me extremely chauvinistic to assume that because you are a woman director you have to make films about women or relationships. Feminism is a point of view you can use on any subject, even a big entertainment film.”<sup>164</sup>

## JOAN MICKLIN SILVER

*“Frankly, what distinguished me from other independent filmmakers—men and women—who were just as talented was that I had a husband who was able—and willing to help me. I wish I could clone him and give one to each of my filmmaker friends.”*<sup>165</sup>

**Joan Micklin Silver**

Joan Micklin Silver’s filmography maps the opportunities experienced by independent filmmakers during the 1970s who were able to transition into 1980s studio filmmaking with their creative vision reasonably intact. Firmly rooted in the genre of

romantic dramady, her body of films reflects the changing arena of heterosexual romance from the casual seventies to the image-conscious eighties.

Joan Micklin Silver was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1936 to parents of Russian Jewish descent. She attended Sarah Lawrence College. Shortly after graduation, at twenty-one, she married Raphael (Ray) Silver. The couple moved back to Ray's hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, where they had three daughters. In 1967, the family relocated to New York, and Ray opened a branch of his real-estate business, Midwestern Land Development Corp., while Joan began to explore a career in filmmaking.

Her first entry into the film business was working in educational media for such companies as The Learning Corporation, where she wrote and directed three short films. Through this work, Micklin Silver met producer Linda Gottlieb. For Gottlieb, she wrote the screenplay for *Limbo* that was made by Universal in 1972. Dismayed with the final outcome of her script and struck by the powerlessness of the writer in the filmmaking process, Micklin Silver was determined to protect her future work by becoming a director. However, in 1972, the opportunity to get hired as a director was elusive if not impossible. "Those were the years of very flagrant sexism, women were absolutely not working at all in television," she said in a 1988 interview.

Women were only making feature films if they--like Shirley Clarke and Barbara Loden, my immediate predecessors--managed somehow to find backdoor ways to money. I didn't get anywhere. I got screenwriting offers, but not directing offers. My husband saw my frustration and said 'I don't know if you're talented or not but you certainly have the right to find out.'"<sup>166</sup>

With no prior experience in the film business, Ray used his financial skills and business contacts from a successful twenty-five-year career in real estate to start another career with his wife. “I didn’t feel that I was doing her a favor,” Silver said of stepping up to produce for his wife. “I think it’s a lot different for a woman in the creative world than it is for a man. Men have got this whole support system—the old boys.”<sup>167</sup> Deciding that the best, and possibly, only option to sidestep the sexist obstacles facing Joan was to create for themselves a different way of filmmaking.

The couple independently produced and self-distributed their first feature film *Hester Street* (1975)—she as writer-director, he as producer--a period piece about Jewish immigrants living in New York City in the early 1900s. The film began production in fall 1973. To create a convincing New York immigrant community in the early twentieth century, the movie was filmed in black and white on location in Greenwich Village and had considerable portions of dialogue in Yiddish. After being convinced by the Teamsters that the picture needed to be a union film, cast and crew were paid union scale, and shooting was completed within thirty-four days. The film was made for under \$400,000. Because it was a period piece, much of their small budget was spent on costumes, sets, and a dialect coach to work with actors on learning the necessary Yiddish for the part.

In November 1974, Joan and Ray had a finished version of the film and began sending it around to studios in hopes of finding a distributor. Although they had an agent, Howard Housman, at William Morris in Los Angeles, the process of getting access to the people with power proved to be difficult. For new filmmakers with no industry standing, Hollywood’s pecking order was a deterrent. “You always want the top person,” explained

Ray. “But this is excruciatingly difficult since, as he’s the most important person, he’s also the least available.”<sup>168</sup> There was interest from some independent domestic distributors, but none had the financial stability to assure the filmmakers that they would get a return on their investments. A small period-piece film, about Jewish immigrants with no well-known stars, made by first-time filmmakers proved to be a challenge to sell to companies, large and small. According to Ray, distributors rejected the picture because they thought it was “a totally ethnic, Jewish film and only old Jews would see it because younger people could not relate to the story.”<sup>169</sup> Joan remembers this as an extremely difficult time. “I went through one of the worst winters of my life. The only offer was to release it on 16mm to the synagogue market.”<sup>170</sup>

The film began showing at festivals. It received positive reviews by a predominately non-Jewish audience at the USA Film Festival in Dallas held on the campus of Southern Methodist University. This response fortified Joan and Ray’s belief that their movie was not limited to a niche audience.<sup>171</sup> The film screened at Cannes, where it also received good reviews. George Moskowitz, covering the festival for *Variety*, predicted that the film would be a “sleeper” hit. He also singled out Micklin Silver as a new talent who “should be a filmmaker to be reckoned with after this effective and touching film.”<sup>172</sup> Ray was able to sell distribution rights to some European markets, making a profit that he could invest back into a wider release effort.

Helpful to Ray was John Cassavetes, who had self-distributed his own film *Woman Under the Influence* in 1974. The veteran director encouraged him to do the same. Important for the Silvers’ success was to generate critical attention in New York and with those favorable reviews build some box office earnings. Once the film was

established as reputable in New York City, there was a better chance that the rest of the domestic market would be receptive.<sup>173</sup> Ray hired Cassavetes' booking agent, Blaine Novak, to assist with the marketing; their publicity campaign was so successful that Carol Kane was nominated for an Oscar. The film grossed an estimated \$5 million.

The couple's second film, *Between the Lines* (1977), was also directed by Joan, produced by Ray, and financed out of their earnings from *Hester Street*. The story of a young and ambitious staff of an independent newspaper in Boston in the midst of a corporate takeover, the film featured an ensemble cast, including Lindsay Crouse, Jill Eikenberry, Jeff Goldblum, John Heard, Marilu Henner, and Gwen Welles in some of their first starring roles. Written by Fred Barron, a journalist who based the script on his experience working for the independent Boston paper, *The Real Paper*, the movie was set in 1977 and captured the complex dynamics of a group of friends and co-workers wrestling with the fading social and political idealism of the 1960s.

The Silvers self-distributed *Between the Lines* through their company Midwest Film Productions, but found the experience more difficult than when they'd done the same with *Hester Street*. In 1975, studio films opened nationally at about eighty theaters, so the Silvers had fewer options to screen their film. Ray Silver held the studios' increase of an even wider release schedule responsible for the change in distribution patterns since 1975. "By 1978, when we were distributing *Between the Lines*, we found it difficult to get either the theaters we wanted or the numbers we wanted," said the indie producer-distributor. "We'd ask for twelve theaters in Atlanta, and we'd get six."<sup>174</sup>

Critics found the film's overarching theme of journalistic integrity in the face of corporatization of the media to be the least interesting part of the film. What did stand out



to reviewers was the cast. The *New York Times* thought the film was “at its best when it ambles in and out of [the characters’] lives, overhearing lovers’ quarrels, professional conflicts, office politics...the performances, which are uniformly first-rate, the kind of ensemble work in which no actor is more or less important than another.”<sup>175</sup> *Variety* was impressed with the film’s estimated budget of \$800,000. “Every cent of the budget shows on the screen and it should be received, with open arms, [by] the class of customers for which it has apparently been made—the young.” The reviewer praised the script, the performances, and “Joan Micklin Silver’s firm director’s touch.” This reviewer had nothing but praise for the film, except that “the overall handsomeness of the cast is one of the [film’s] unbelievable aspects.”<sup>176</sup>

Having made two successful commercial films outside the studio system, in 1979, Micklin Silver made her first studio picture, *Head Over Heels* (also known as *Chilly Scenes of Winter*), released by United Artists. Set in Salt Lake City, *Head Over Heels* was the story of Charles--played by John Heard in his second film with the director--a thirty-year-old civil servant who falls in love with a married co-worker, Laura, played by Mary Beth Hurt. The movie was a romantic dramady that revolved around the ups and downs of Charles’s obsession with winning Laura, which in the first version of the movie concludes on a happy ending. The film was filled with a quirky cast of characters: Charles’s neurotic mother played by Gloria Grahame and his best friend, Sam, in an early role for Peter Riegert, who would star in Micklin Silver’s next film, *Crossing Delancey*.

Actors Griffin Dunne, Mark Metcalf, and Amy Robinson, and their newly formed company, Triple Play Productions, produced the film, which Micklin Silver adapted from Anne Beattie’s novel *Chilly Scenes of Winter*. Triple Play had optioned the rights to the

story and were looking for a writer to adapt it when Micklin Silver, who had always been interested in the book, contacted them. At the time, Micklin Silver had a two-picture development deal with 20th Century-Fox. Robinson knew Claire Townsend, a creative executive who was working at Fox. Townsend supported the project, and Micklin Silver was signed to write and direct with Triple Play producing. Eventually, Fox lost interest in the film, and Townsend took the deal with her when she left the studio to work for United Artists as the vice president of production, where the picture was ultimately made for \$2.2 million. Salary deferrals kept the budget low: most of the cast had deferred a portion of their pay and Micklin Silver, three-quarters of her income.<sup>177</sup>

*Head Over Heels* was marred as soon as it got to United Artists. The film was made during a time when UA was in the midst of company turmoil. Prompted by a major dispute with its parent corporation, Trans America, the longstanding and successful UA leadership had quit the company in 1978. This management upset, in combination with the studio's loss suffered in the production of *Heaven's Gate*, a film that went \$30 million over budget and led to the downfall of the company, impacted the small film.<sup>178</sup> "They felt the need to push somebody around and there was my little movie!" Joan said in defense of her film years later to an audience of students at the AFI.<sup>179</sup>

The studio had changed the title to *Head Over Heels* because they felt that the original title of Beattie's novel, *Chilly Scenes of Winter*, was too dark and that audiences would think it was an Ingmar Bergman film rather than a bittersweet romantic comedy.<sup>180</sup> However, *Head Over Heels* also misrepresented the film's depth of feeling concerning its themes of romantic relationships. Beattie, who was supportive of the producers' and

director's vision of her book, joked that *Head Over Heels* "sounded as if Fred Astaire should be dancing across the credits."<sup>181</sup>

UA's marketing department felt that the film was peculiar and therefore difficult to sell. As a result they rushed the release, skipping over preview screenings that the director felt could have been worthwhile in gauging audience response as a way to fine-tune the movie's final version. The film received mediocre reviews. Vincent Canby was unsure as to what was wrong with this "tantalizing movie, seeming to be on the verge of some revelation of profound feeling that, at long last, never comes."<sup>182</sup> In an unlikely, and lucky, turn of events, in 1982, UA Classics decided to re-release the film under the condition that Micklin Silver edit the ending that leaves Charles and Laura happily together. "When they said that to me," explained Micklin Silver. "I said 'look, I've been dying to do this, this is wonderful.'"<sup>183</sup> No reshoots were necessary. The director cut the final scene, and the film—retitled *Chilly Scenes of Winter*--closes on Charles alone, but ready to start over. The small re-release of an already small film generated positive reviews. Sheila Benson of the *Los Angeles Times* was triumphant in her reaction: "'Chilly Scenes of Winter' [is] an impeccably performed comedy frosted with sadness... Silver has assembled a splendid cast and achieved performances which are vivid and haunting. Her writing is almost equally successful."<sup>184</sup> As for the title that United Artists had originally balked at, Benson forgave its gloominess. "For all its bleak title," she wrote. "'Chilly Scenes' is a warm, lovable, enormously appealing film."<sup>185</sup>

Although her first studio picture had been an arduous experience, Micklin Silver preferred working with an established company. In 1979, soon after making *Head Over Heels*, the filmmaker who had accomplished the near impossible feat of making two

commercial features independently was adamant: “Oh, I would much rather work with the studios. Everything costs so much--all the costs are up, up, up, up--and it’s just enormously hard. If you’ve never made films before—as far as I’m concerned, make any kind of film you can. I mean, make it any way. But having got this far along, I hope that I can get studio backing for the films I want to do.”<sup>186</sup>

Micklin Silver would go on to work for the studios, directing three more feature films: *Loverboy* (1989), *Big Girls Don’t Cry...They Get Even* (1992), and *A Fish in the Bathtub* (1999). She also directed many television movies for networks such as PBS, HBO, and Lifetime Television. Different from her earlier movies that she wrote and directed, much of Micklin Silver’s work after the late 1980s did not originate with her as the writer, but instead as a “director for hire.” This was a position that she was excited to take. Her 1988 film, *Crossing Delancey*, serves as a bookend to the body of work that she, in collaboration with her husband, created during the 1970s. The film starred Amy Irving as Isabelle Grossman, a single, thirty-year-old New Yorker who teeters between the Lower Eastside, where her lovable and meddlesome Jewish grandmother hires a matchmaker, and a 1980s “independent” single woman living on the Upper Westside. Based on the play by Susan Sandler, who also wrote the screenplay, the film was produced by Michael Nozik with Ray Silver as executive producer. Amy Irving’s then husband, Steven Spielberg, helped get the film to Warner Bros. The specificity of *Crossing Delancey*’s narrative about the experiences of a New York Jewish woman balancing cultural traditions with contemporary gender roles connected to the themes that Micklin Silver began in *Hester Street* a decade earlier. *Crossing Delancey* also resonated with her interest in the complex and evolving emotional terrain present in the transition

into adulthood, subject matter the director approached in *Between the Lines* and *Chilly Scenes of Winter*. In these four films, she is playful in her approach to romantic themes, while never using humor to undermine the seriousness of falling in love or heartbreak.

Joan Micklin Silver is a singular example, not only in this chapter alongside her peers in independent film, but within this complete history of women directors. She is the only woman in this study who was able to build a body of work, during the 1970s and then into the 1980s, that was hers without any studio or producer interference. (On *Chilly Scenes of Winter* during the re-issue of the film she was able release her ideal version.) She acknowledged that “what distinguished me from other independent filmmakers—men and women—who were just as talented was that I had a husband who was able—and willing to help me.”<sup>187</sup> It is important to emphasize her ability to *control* her creative vision and means of production and distribution--because she had a dedicated *producer-distributor*--was the key to her success. Whether he had to be her husband or not, is indeterminable. In addition, her material was unique and also had a strong commercial appeal. This same description can be applied to the Sebastians, who, my research suggests, were content producing exploitation films (compared to Rothman and Peeters). The Sebastians’ ability to establish themselves as independent writer-director-producer-distributors and their understanding of what kind of material would appeal to their “Sears and Roebucks” audience provided them with a long and lucrative career. These were difficult combinations to come by and ones that the Micklin Silvers and the Sebastians were fortunate to find. The fortuitous circumstances of those two couples’ careers helps to emphasize the achievements of Karen Arthur, Barbara Peeters, Stephanie Rothman, and Claudia Weill, who in spite of facing considerably more roadblocks during their

professional lives as directors, still managed to make films that are important representations of the creative output of 1970s independent filmmaking.

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of exploitation films in terms of sensationalized style and promotional strategies see: Eric Schaefer, “‘Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!’ A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959” (Durham, Duke Univ. Press, 1999) 1-16. For an overview history of the 1970s Roger Corman “generation” of exploitation filmmakers see: Maitland McDonagh, “The Exploitation Generation Or: How Marginal Movies Came in from the Cold,” *The Last Great American Picture Show*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, and Noel King (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004) 107-130. For an historical study of exploitation films’ exhibition patterns see: David Church, “From Exhibition to Genre: The Case of Grind-House Films,” *Cinema Journal* 50.4 (Summer 2011): 1-25. For a discussion of exploitation films’ production schedule see: “The American Film Institute Seminar with Roger Corman, March 11, 1970,” *Roger Corman Interviews*, ed., Constantine Nasr (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011) 44-61.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Schaefer, “‘Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!’ A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959,” (Durham, Duke Univ. Press, 1999) 8.

<sup>3</sup> For histories related to art house—commercial independent films of the 1970s see: Annette Insdorf, “Ordinary people, European-style: Or how to spot an independent feature,” *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005) 27-33; John Pierson, *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes* (New York: Miramax Books, 1995). For a discussion of independent commercial film distribution in the late 1970s and early 1980s see: Gerald Peary, “Getting It On or How to Make Deals and Influence Exhibitors,” *American Film* 1 Sept. 1981: 60-64.

<sup>4</sup> Will Tusher, “Dimension Pictures Opens Up Opportunities for Women,” *Hollywood Reporter* 1 June 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Rothman, interview with Jane Collings, UCLA Center for the Study of Oral History, 29 Jan. 2002: 75.

<sup>6</sup> Roger Corman and Jim Jerome, *How I made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: Da Capo, 1990) 124. Rothman confirms this same story in her oral history with Jane Collings (75).

<sup>7</sup> Collings 13, 11 Dec. 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Collings 28, 11 Dec. 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Collings 47, 11 Dec. 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Collings 47, 11 Dec. 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Collings 49, 11 Dec. 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Collings 62, 29 Jan. 2002. This was William W. Melnitz’s advice to Rothman in the early 1960s when she was looking into film programs. He advised her to apply to USC over UCLA because the latter was primarily a theater program. UCLA offered film production courses, but they were part of a theater arts program where a student would have to take theater courses, learning how to sew costumes and build sets before getting to any relevant film training.

<sup>13</sup> Collings 66, 29 Jan. 2002.

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- <sup>14</sup> Collings 76-77, 29 Jan. 2002. Italicized emphasis in the transcript of Collings' interview.
- <sup>15</sup> Collings 90-91, 29 Jan. 2002.
- <sup>16</sup> Collings 85, 29 Jan. 2002.
- <sup>17</sup> Collings 86, 29 Jan. 2002.
- <sup>18</sup> Will Tusher, "Dimension Pictures Opens Up Opportunities for Women," *The Hollywood Reporter* 1 June 1972.
- <sup>19</sup> For a discussion of the feminist themes in Rothman's films see: Pam Cook, "Women Directors in Hollywood: Stephanie Rothman," *The Cinema Book*, ed. Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1999) 309-310.
- <sup>20</sup> Kit Snedaker, "Movies," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 20 Sept. 1970.
- <sup>21</sup> "The Student Nurses," *Variety* 17 Sept. 1970.
- <sup>22</sup> "Rothman Helmed Exploitationer," n.p, n.d, "The Student Nurses" Clipping File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- <sup>23</sup> Roger Corman and Jim Jerome, *How I made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (New York: Da Capo, 1990) 181.
- <sup>24</sup> Tony Williams, "Feminism, Fantasy and Violence: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 9.2 (1981): 85.
- <sup>25</sup> Ben Sher, "Q & A with Stephanie Rothman," *Center for the Study of Women Update Newsletter* 1 April 2008.
- <sup>26</sup> Tony Williams, "Feminism, Fantasy and Violence: An Interview with Stephanie Rothman," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 9.2 (1981): 86.
- <sup>27</sup> Collings 150, 27 Feb. 2002.
- <sup>28</sup> Will Tusher, "Dimension Pictures Opens Up Opportunities for Women," *The Hollywood Reporter* 1 June 1972.
- <sup>29</sup> For a discussion of Rothman's use of feminist themes in *Terminal Island* see: Henry Jenkins, "Exploiting Feminism in Stephanie Rothman's *Terminal Island*," *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Pop Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2007) 102-124.
- <sup>30</sup> Collings 103, 12 Feb. 2002.
- <sup>31</sup> Collings 157, 27 Feb. 2002. In its first year, Dimension invested \$1.5 million in five films and grossed an estimated \$8-10 million (*The Hollywood Reporter*, 16 Feb. 1972). Although the company maintained profitability throughout the 1970s, the stakes for independent film companies—producers and distributors, in Dimension's case, both—were extreme. As a small company selling low-budget films its fate rested considerably in the hands of regional distribution exchanges, where as a newcomer it had little clout. By the end of the decade the company was named in several lawsuits regarding disputes over distribution deals (Ed Lowry, "Dimension Pictures: Portrait of a 1970s' Independent"). On January 30, 1981, Dimension Pictures filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy ("21st Century Acquires 28 Films From Dimension," *Boxoffice* Sept. 1981).
- <sup>32</sup> Collings 231, 18 Mar. 2002.
- <sup>33</sup> Collings 229, 18 Mar. 2002.
- <sup>34</sup> This question was asked by the author during Stephanie Rothman's Q & A with Ben Sher at a screening of *Velvet Vampire* that took place in Bridges Theater at UCLA in

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March 2008. Ben Sher, "Q & A with Stephanie Rothman," *Center for the Study of Women Update Newsletter* 1 April 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Carolyn Giardina, "Led USC Showbiz Tech Unit," *The Hollywood Reporter* 14 Feb. 2007, 12 Nov. 2013 < <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/led-usc-showbiz-tech-unit-130201>>.

<sup>36</sup> Director-wife, producer-husband teams were not unusual during the silent era, although job categories tended to be fluid at times. At her New Jersey studio, Alice Guy-Blaché directed films sometimes produced by her husband Herbert Blaché; as did spouses Lois Weber and Philip Smalley. In the late 1940s, Ida Lupino and her second husband, Collier Young, worked together in the director-producer capacity on *Never Fear* (1950). After the two were divorced in 1950, they continued a successful professional collaboration. Young produced four of the subsequent films his ex-wife directed and was the creator/executive producer for the CBS sitcom *Mr. Adam and Eve* (1957-1958) starring Lupino and her third husband, Howard Duff. In 1967, married couple Tom Laughlin and Delores Taylor collaborated on their "Billy Jack" series (*Born Loser* [1967], *Billy Jack* [1971], *The Trail of Billy Jack* [1974], *Billy Jack Goes to Washington* [1977]). The films' original directing credits were T. C. Frank or Frank Laughlin, pseudonyms representing the couple's collaboration. Although when the DVDs were released in 2005, the directing credits on the packaging were parenthetically amended with only Laughlin's name.

<sup>37</sup> Kit Snedaker, "Movies," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 20 Sept. 1970.

<sup>38</sup> "When Lightning Strikes Thunder Rolls...The Making of *Running Cool!*," DVD Extra, *Running Cool*, Dirs. Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Panama Films, 2012. DVD.

<sup>39</sup> Ralph Kaminsky, "Sebastians Rely on 'Common Folks' As Key to Filmmaking, Distributing," *Boxoffice* 28 Apr 1975: W-1.

<sup>40</sup> *The Love Clinic* might also be known as *Oral Hygiene for the Handicapped*. "Marital Fulfillment," *Variety* 13 May 1970: 14.

<sup>41</sup> *I Need a Man* aka *I Need* (1967) and *The Love Clinic* (1968) are currently unavailable in any screening format. According to an interview with Ferd in 1999, the lab where the negatives were held went bankrupt, and all the materials were stolen. Andrew Leavold, "Interview with Gator Bait's [sic] Ferd Sebastian," *Mondo Stumpo!*, 25 Nov. 2007, 10 Dec. 2013 < <http://mondostumpo.blogspot.com/2007/11/ferd-sebastian-interview-1999.html>>. The description of the film's plot and credits are from the *AFI Catalog*. Richard Krafur, ed., *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures in the United States: Feature Films 1961-1970* (Los Angeles: Hollywood Film Archive, 1996) 517.

<sup>42</sup> "Marital Fulfillment," *Variety* 13 May 1970: 14.

<sup>43</sup> Addison Verrill, "Cable-TV Might Be Home-Opener for Sex Manual Theatrical Films?" *Variety* 13 May 1970: 38.

<sup>44</sup> "Marital Fulfillment," *Variety* 13 May 1970: 14.

<sup>45</sup> "Marital Fulfillment," *Variety* 13 May 1970: 14.

<sup>46</sup> "Film Reviews: Red, White and Blue," *Variety* 1971 March 3: 22.

<sup>47</sup> "Film Reviews: Red, White and Blue," *Variety* 1971 March 3: 22.

<sup>48</sup> The budget for *The Hitchhikers* is unknown. Based on other films of its kind released by Entertainment Ventures, the picture was most likely made for an estimated \$100,000. See Gregg Kilday, "The Movies and Pornography: Part II Financial Versus Artistic Motivation," *Los Angeles Times* 12 July 1973: E1. *The Hitchhikers* was ranked 92 out of



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104 movies in *Variety*'s "Big Rental Films of 1975" (7 Jan 1976: 52) for earning \$1.425 million.

<sup>49</sup> The exception here is *Running Cool* (1993) that could be read as an anti-corporation land-rights narrative where a community of bikers fight the local developer who is trying to take over the wetlands owned by a fellow rider.

<sup>50</sup> Gregg Kilday, "The Emergence of the Minimogul," *Los Angeles Times* 1975 May 18: R37.

<sup>51</sup> Ralph Kaminsky, "Sebastians Rely on 'Common Folks' As Key to Filmmaking, Distributing," *Boxoffice* 28 Apr. 1975: W-1.

<sup>52</sup> Gregg Kilday, "The Emergence of the Minimogul," *Los Angeles Times* 1975 May 18: R37.

<sup>53</sup> The way in which the couple's positions were listed within the distribution arm of their filmmaking suggests a shared responsibility. An advertisement in *Variety* for SIP titles lists Ferd as the "Production" representative and Beverly and son Ben as "World Sales" representatives (*Variety* 18 Oct. 1978: 146). *Boxoffice*'s list of theatrical feature film distributors names Beverly as President of SIP and Ferd as Vice President ("Distributors of Theatrical Films," *Boxoffice* 1987 Sept 1: 40).

<sup>54</sup> "When Lightning Strikes Thunder Rolls...The Making of *Running Cool!*," DVD Extra, *Running Cool*, Dirs. Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Panama Films, 2012. DVD.

<sup>55</sup> Gregg Kilday, "The Emergence of the Minimogul," *Los Angeles Times* 1975 May 18: R37. According to the website for Panama Films Distribution, LLC, the Sebastians' most recent film company, *Gator Bait* was made for a total of \$90,000 and grossed \$15 million. N/d, <<http://panamafilms.com/>>.

<sup>56</sup> "When Lightning Strikes Thunder Rolls...The Making of *Running Cool!*," DVD Extra, *Running Cool*, Dirs. Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Panama Films, 2012. DVD.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Take of a Backwoods Runaway," *Los Angeles Times* 3 June 1972: B6.

<sup>58</sup> Marjorie Bilbow, "The New Films: Flash and the Firecat," *Screen International* 6 Aug. 1977: 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ferd Sebastian, "This is Why I know God's Word Is True," 2Jesus Testimonies, August 1998 2 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.2jesus.org/testimony/wordistrue.html>>.

<sup>60</sup> "When Lightning Strikes Thunder Rolls...The Making of *Running Cool!*," DVD Extra, *Running Cool*, Dirs. Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Panama Films, 2012. DVD.

<sup>61</sup> Ferd Sebastian, "This is Why I know God's Word Is True," 2Jesus Testimonies, August 1998 2 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.2jesus.org/testimony/wordistrue.html>>.

<sup>62</sup> The National Greyhound Foundation, Inc., Sebastian Int. Marketing, 2003, 2 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.4greyhounds.org/about.html>>.

<sup>63</sup> Panama Films Distribution, n.d, 2 Nov. 2013 <<http://panamafilms.com/>>.

<sup>64</sup> "When Lightning Strikes Thunder Rolls...The Making of *Running Cool!*," DVD Extra, *Running Cool*, Dirs. Beverly and Ferd Sebastian, Panama Films, 2012. DVD.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Gross, "A Woman's Place Is in...Exploitation Films?" *Los Angeles Times* 12 Feb. 1978: 35.

<sup>66</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>67</sup> Alan Rosenberg, "Barbara Peeters-Don't Ask Her About 'Humanoids from the Deep,'" 19 Apr. 2012, 20 June 2012 <<http://ashlandplayreviews.com/barbara-peeters-dont-ask->

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her-about-humanoids-from-the-deep/>. This story was also told to the author in a conversation during 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>69</sup> “Film Reviews: The Fabulous Bastard From Chicago,” *Variety* 2 Jul 1969: 26.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>71</sup> John Goff, “‘Dark Side of Tomorrow’ Dim Any Day at Boxoffice,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 2 July 1970.

<sup>72</sup> “Film Review: The Dark Side of Tomorrow,” *Daily Variety* 2 July 1970.

<sup>73</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010. Peeters was the sole author on *Bury Me an Angel*’s script.

<sup>74</sup> Dixie Peabody’s real brother, Dennis Peabody, played her brother in the film. In an eerie turn of events, he was killed in a motorcycle accident in Nebraska soon after the film was made.

<sup>75</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>77</sup> “Film Reviews: ‘Eat My Dust,’” *Variety* 28 Apr. 1976: 30.

<sup>78</sup> “Film Reviews: Moving Violation,” *Variety* 28 Jul 1976: 24.

<sup>79</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010. Emphasis made by Peeters.

<sup>80</sup> “Summer School Teachers,” *Boxoffice* 19 Aug. 1975.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Gross, “A Parlay of ERA, Sex and Football,” *Los Angeles Times* 29 Apr. 1977: G19.

<sup>82</sup> Linda Gross, “A Parlay of ERA, Sex and Football.”

<sup>83</sup> *Variety* reported that Peeters replaced Stephanie Rothman as director on *Starhops*; “creative differences” with Rothman were blamed for the change (“Bar Replaces Stephanie,” *Variety* 13 July 1977: 21). On some of the film’s promotional material, Rothman is given a credit as screenwriter (Cover, *Boxoffice* 3 Oct. 1977). In an interview with the author, Peeters didn’t recall knowing anything about this situation when she was hired for the film. Further research has not reveal any interviews where Rothman mentions *Starhops*.

<sup>84</sup> Linda Gross, “‘Starhops’: Female Horatio Alger Tale,” *Los Angeles Times* 10 Mar. 1978: F33.

<sup>85</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>86</sup> “Film Review: Starhops,” *Variety* 22 Mar. 1978: 26.

<sup>87</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.

<sup>91</sup> “Barbara Peters,” *Directory of Members 1977-78* (Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1979) 266. The Directors Guild made Peeters change her name to “Peters.” Barbara Peeters, author interview, 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>92</sup> Andrew Epstein, “‘Humanoids’ Haywire, Women Say,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 May 1980: 5.

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Epstein, “‘Humanoids’ Haywire, Women Say,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 May 1980: 5.

<sup>94</sup> “Humanoids from the Deep,” *Variety* 23 Apr. 1980: 22.

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- <sup>95</sup> “Humanoids from the Deep,” *Variety* 23 Apr. 1980: 22.
- <sup>96</sup> Andrew Epstein, “‘Humanoids’ Haywire, Women Say,” *Los Angeles Times* 8 May 1980: 5. Article’s italics.
- <sup>97</sup> Roger Corman, letter, “Corman On Women In Power,” *Los Angeles Times* 25 May 1980: 25. In this letter, Corman also attempted to distance himself from the film by saying that he did not produce the picture (Martin Cohen, producer and Hunt Lowry, co-producer), even though his company released it and he was the one who hired Peeters and consulted on the added footage. In 1996, he reclaimed authorship when the film was re-released on home video as part of “Roger Corman Classics” for his company New Horizons. The VHS also included an on-camera introduction by the producer where he made no mention of their public dispute and praised her work on the film. “Barbara Peeters was a young woman director whose work I’d admired very much. If I have any distinguishing thoughts on hiring directors is I try to go on ability—I don’t care if it’s a man, woman—whoever is the best at that time. And it was a little unusual to have a woman do this type of bloody horror film, but I felt Barbara was the best.”
- <sup>98</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>99</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>100</sup> Barbara Peeters, author interview, 11 Apr. 2010. Emphasis made by Peeters.
- <sup>101</sup> Linda Gross, “Karen Arthur Dares to Do It All,” *Los Angeles Times* 16 Apr. 1978: N54.
- <sup>102</sup> Karen Arthur, Interview, DVD Extra, *Legacy*, Dir. Karen Arthur, Scorpio Releasing, 2011. DVD.
- <sup>103</sup> Karen Arthur, Interview, DVD Extra, *Legacy*, Dir. Karen Arthur, Scorpio Releasing, 2011. DVD.
- <sup>104</sup> “Ten Share \$80,000 of Film Institute; 424 Disappointed,” *Variety* 10 July 1975: 22.
- <sup>105</sup> *Legacy* screened at the San Francisco and Chicago film festivals in 1975 (*The Hollywood Reporter* 8 Oct. 1975); and at the Los Angeles International Film Exposition, also known as Filmex (*Variety* 20 Oct. 1975); and at the London Film Festival (*Variety* 8 Oct. 1975).
- <sup>106</sup> Vincent Canby, “Day in the Life of Bessie Hapgood: Karen Arthur ‘Legacy’ at Cinema Studio,” *New York Times* 3 May 1976: 41.
- <sup>107</sup> Marjorie Rosen, “Suffer Much, Learn Much?” *Ms.* Nov. 1975: 46.
- <sup>108</sup> Marjorie Rosen, “Suffer Much, Learn Much?” *Ms.* Nov. 1975: 46.
- <sup>109</sup> George Moskowitz, “Legacy,” *Variety* 27 Aug. 1975.
- <sup>110</sup> Vincent Canby, “Day in the Life of Bessie Hapgood: Karen Arthur ‘Legacy’ at Cinema Studio,” *New York Times* 3 May 1976: 41.
- <sup>111</sup> Marjorie Rosen, “Suffer Much, Learn Much?” *Ms.* Nov. 1975: 46.
- <sup>112</sup> Karen Arthur, Interview, DVD Extra, *Legacy*, Dir. Karen Arthur, Scorpio Releasing, 2011. DVD.
- <sup>113</sup> Karen Arthur, Interview, DVD Extra, *Mafu Cage*, Dir. Karen Arthur, Scorpio Releasing, 2011. DVD.
- <sup>114</sup> Karen Arthur, Interview, DVD Extra, *Mafu Cage*, Dir. Karen Arthur, Scorpio Releasing, 2011. DVD.
- <sup>115</sup> Nancy Mills, “‘Lady Beware’ Warning Never Intimidated Her,” *Los Angeles Times* 29 May 1986: J1.

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- <sup>116</sup> Charles Champlin, "Movie Review: Madness, Horror in 'The Mafu Cage'," *Los Angeles Times* 1 Dec. 1978: I26.
- <sup>117</sup> Arthur Knight, "On Film," *Westways* May 1970: 60.
- <sup>118</sup> For *Legacy* and *Mafu Cage* budgets see: Linda Gross, "Karen Arthur Dares to Do It All," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Apr. 1978: N54. During the 1970s the seven major studios controlled worldwide film distribution making it extremely difficult for outside companies to compete or independent filmmakers to release their films with major distribution deals. The costs for theatrical films were in the multimillions: in 1972 the average budget was \$2 million; in 1976, \$4 million; and in 1980, \$10 million. "An independent entrepreneur would need to raise so much money to create and distribute theatrical films as to make most such ventures unprofitable" (Douglas Gomery, "The American Film Industry of the 1970s": 53).
- <sup>119</sup> Nancy Mills, "'Lady Beware' Warning Never Intimidated Her," *Los Angeles Times* 29 May 1986: J1.
- <sup>120</sup> Nancy Mills, "'Lady Beware' Warning Never Intimidated Her," *Los Angeles Times* 29 May 1986: J1.
- <sup>121</sup> Nancy Mills, "'Lady Beware' - Or Director Beware?" *Los Angeles Times* 13 Sept. 1987: 24.
- <sup>122</sup> Cecile Starr, "Claudia Weill Discusses 'Girlfriends'," *Filmmakers Newsletter* October 1978: 28.
- <sup>123</sup> Stephen Klain, "'Girlfriends' Release Puts Claudia Weills [sic] Into Majors," *Variety* 11 Aug. 1978: 3.
- <sup>124</sup> "W.S. Teller Wed Claudia Weill," *New York Times* 15 Jul. 1985: A9.
- <sup>125</sup> Carol MacGuineas, "Portrait of the Filmmaker as a Young Woman," *National Endowment for the Arts, The Cultural Post* July-Aug. 1978: 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Carey Winfrey, "Claudia Weill: It's Her Turn Now," *New York Times* 7 Dec. 1980: D1.
- <sup>127</sup> Claudia Weill interviewed by Lena Dunham, Human Resources, Los Angeles, 14 Oct. 2011. Quotes noted by author while in attendance at the screening.
- <sup>128</sup> Paul Mazursky, writer-director of *An Unmarried Woman*, credited Weill, a friend, with suggesting New York City locations for his studio picture. Both *Girlfriends*, which went into production years before *An Unmarried Woman*, and Mazursky's film have many scenes that take place in SoHo (Cecile Starr, "Claudia Weill: From Shoestring to Studio," *Los Angeles Times* 6 Aug. 1978: D11).
- <sup>129</sup> "Melanie Mayron: A Dream of the First Starring Role," *Los Angeles Times* 20 Aug. 1978: P43. Italics in the original article.
- <sup>130</sup> Carol MacGuineas, "Portrait of the Filmmaker as a Young Woman," *National Endowment for the Arts, The Cultural Post* July-Aug. 1978: 5.
- <sup>131</sup> Carey Winfrey, "Claudia Weill: It's Her Turn Now," *New York Times* 7 Dec. 1980: D1. Warner Bros. pick up date see: "GIRLFRIENDS, Production Information," Warner Bros., "Girlfriends, 1978 Production File," Margaret Herrick Library.
- <sup>132</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Movies: One Feminist Film that Works," *The Saturday Review* 2 Sept. 1978: 28.
- <sup>133</sup> Claudia Weill interviewed by Lena Dunham, Human Resources, Los Angeles, 14 Oct. 2011.

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- <sup>134</sup> Gene Siskel, "Directors' Ranks Gain a New Winner," *Chicago Tribune* 15 Oct. 1978: F4.
- <sup>135</sup> Gene Siskel, "Directors' Ranks Gain a New Winner," *Chicago Tribune* 15 Oct. 1978: F4. Italics in original article.
- <sup>136</sup> "Girlfriends," *Variety* 5 May 1978.
- <sup>137</sup> Cecile Starr, "Claudia Weill: From Shoestring to Studio," *Los Angeles Times* 6 Aug. 1978: D11.
- <sup>138</sup> Charles Champlin, "'Girl Friends': On 'Rocky's' Road," *Los Angeles Times* 20 Aug. 1978: P1.
- <sup>139</sup> Charles Champlin, "'Girl Friends': On 'Rocky's' Road," *Los Angeles Times* 20 Aug. 1978: P1.
- <sup>140</sup> For a discussion of Warner Bros. interest during the 1970s in distributing independent films see: James Monaco, *American Film Now* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 400-401.
- <sup>141</sup> "Big Rental Films of 1978," *Variety* 3 Jan. 1979: 50.
- <sup>142</sup> Gregg Kilday, "It's Her Turn in the Big Time," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 22 Oct. 1980: D6.
- <sup>143</sup> "It's My Turn," *Variety* 22 Oct. 1980: 24.
- <sup>144</sup> Gregg Kilday, "It's Her Turn in the Big Time," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 22 Oct. 1980: D6.
- <sup>145</sup> Charles Champlin, "Good 'Turn' Deserves A 'Loving' Companion," *Los Angeles Times* 24 Oct. 1980: G1.
- <sup>146</sup> Andrew Sarris, "Films In Focus: Energy Isn't Everything," *Village Voice* Oct. 22-28, 1980: 180.
- <sup>147</sup> Julia Cameron, "You Mean Jill Clayburgh is the '80s Woman? That Means None of Us Will Get *Anything* Done," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 13 Nov. 1980: A17. Italics in original article.
- <sup>148</sup> Stanley Kauffmann, "Stanley Kauffmann on Films: Mod and Victorian," *New Republic* 18 Oct. 1980: 24.
- <sup>149</sup> Stanley Kauffmann, "Stanley Kauffmann on Films: Mod and Victorian," *New Republic* 18 Oct. 1980: 24.
- <sup>150</sup> Robert Osborne, "It's My Turn," *The Hollywood Reporter* 22 Oct. 1980.
- <sup>151</sup> For mention of conflict see: Gregg Kilday, "It's Her Turn in the Big Time," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 22 Oct. 1980: D6; Richard K. Rein, "Claudia Weill Steps Up to the Big Leagues of Hollywood Directing with Hit Aptly Titled 'It's My Turn'," *People* 1 Dec. 1980.
- <sup>152</sup> "The Douglas Syndrome," *The Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 1 Aug. 1980.
- <sup>153</sup> Marilyn Beck, "Marilyn Beck's Hollywood: 'It's My Turn' Director is Ready to Sound Off," *The Milwaukee Journal* 8 Oct. 1980: 3.
- <sup>154</sup> Gregg Kilday, "It's Her Turn in the Big Time," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 22 Oct. 1980: D6.
- <sup>155</sup> John Parker, *Michael Douglas Acting on Instinct* (London: Headline Publishing Group: 1994) 170-171.
- <sup>156</sup> Richard K. Rein, "Claudia Weill Steps Up to the Big Leagues of Hollywood Directing with Hit Aptly Titled 'It's My Turn'," *People* 1 Dec. 1980.

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- <sup>157</sup> Clarke Taylor, "Weill: She Did it Her Way and Their Way, Too," *Los Angeles Times* 6 June 1981: B8.
- <sup>158</sup> Claudia Weill interviewed by Lena Dunham, Human Resources, Los Angeles, 14 Oct. 2011.
- <sup>159</sup> Claudia Weill interviewed by Lena Dunham, Human Resources, Los Angeles, 14 Oct. 2011.
- <sup>160</sup> Clarke Taylor, "Weill: She Did it Her Way and Their Way, Too," *Los Angeles Times* 6 June 1981: B8.
- <sup>161</sup> *It's My Turn* earned \$2,232,290 during its first three days playing at 636 theaters. Teri Ritzer, "'It's My Turn's' 1st Week B.O. Tally Exceeds \$2.7 million," *The Hollywood Reporter* 5 Nov. 1980. The film's domestic rental earnings for its first two months were estimated at \$5 million; and it had been pre-sold to television (ABC) for \$4.5 million ("Col Presold 'Crazy' 'My Turn', to ABC" *Variety* 31 Dec. 1980: 5).
- <sup>162</sup> *It's My Turn* box office earnings see: "Big Rental Films of 1980," *Variety* 14 Jan. 1981: 29. Estimated budget for *It's My Turn* see: "Weill Takes Her Turn At Directing Big-Budget Pic," *Variety* 5 Nov. 1980: 6.
- <sup>163</sup> Claudia Weill interviewed by Lena Dunham, Human Resources, Los Angeles, 14 Oct. 2011.
- <sup>164</sup> Judy Klemesrud, "'Girlfriends' Director On Female Friendship," *New York Times* 4 Aug. 1978: A12.
- <sup>165</sup> Leticia Kent, "They Were Behind the Scenes of 'Between the Lines'," *New York Times* 12 June 1977: 83.
- <sup>166</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 1 Nov. 1988.
- <sup>167</sup> Sharon Rosenthal, "Two On An Island," *Daily News* 23 Mar. 1981: M8.
- <sup>168</sup> Molly Haskell, "How an Independent Filmmaker Beat the System (With Her Husband's Help)," *The Village Voice* 22 Sept. 1975: 83.
- <sup>169</sup> Joseph McBride, "Overcome Exhibs Fear of Yiddish, 1896," *Variety* 25 Feb. 1976: 7.
- <sup>170</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview with Michael Pressman, Directors Guild Visual History Project, New York City, 19 Sept. 2005.
- <sup>171</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, letter, "Pic Not 'Too Jewish' For Dallas Festival," *Variety* 28 May 1975: 7.
- <sup>172</sup> George Moskowitz, "Film Reviews: Critic Week-Cannes, Hester Street," *Variety* 14 May 1975: 27.
- <sup>173</sup> Addison Verrill, "So They Distributed Film Themselves," *Variety* 18 Feb. 1976: 5.
- <sup>174</sup> Gerald Peary, "Getting It On or How to Make Deals and Influence Exhibitors," *American Film* 1 Sept. 1981: 61.
- <sup>175</sup> Vincent Canby, "Film: Good Reading 'Between the Lines'," *New York Times* 28 Apr. 1977: 76.
- <sup>176</sup> "Film Reviews: Between the Lines," *Variety* 20 April 1977: 73.
- <sup>177</sup> "Three Actors Unite As UA Producers," *Variety* 30 May 1979: 39.
- <sup>178</sup> For a detailed history of United Artists during the time *Head Over Heels* was made—although no mention of the film or those related to it are included in the book--see: Tino Balio, *United Artists The Company That Changed the Film Industry* (Madison: The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987).
- <sup>179</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 1 Nov. 1988.

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- <sup>180</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 1 Nov. 1988.
- <sup>181</sup> James Atlas, "How 'Chilly Scenes' Was Rescued," *New York Times* 10 Oct. 1982.
- <sup>182</sup> Vincent Canby, "Screen: 'Head Over Heels,' Drama, Open," *New York Times* 19 Oct. 1979: C12.
- <sup>183</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview with Michael Pressman, Directors Guild Visual History Project, New York City, 19 Sept. 2005.
- <sup>184</sup> Sheila Benson, "Obsessive Love in 'Chilly Scenes'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Oct. 1982: J4.
- <sup>185</sup> Sheila Benson, "Obsessive Love in 'Chilly Scenes'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Oct. 1982: J4.
- <sup>186</sup> Joan Micklin Silver, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles 26 Oct. 1979.
- <sup>187</sup> Leticia Kent, "They Were Behind the Scenes of 'Between the Lines'," *New York Times* 12 June 1977: 83.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Crossing Over: Performers and Screenwriters Turn Film Director*

This chapter examines nine women directors who were established in successful careers within the mainstream entertainment industry as writers and performers before they crossed over into feature film directing in the 1970s. These filmmakers include actresses Anne Bancroft, Joan Darling, Lee Grant, Barbara Loden, and Nancy Walker; comedians Elaine May and Joan Rivers; and screenwriters Joan Tewkesbury and Jane Wagner. As Academy Award- and Tony-winning actresses, Emmy-winning writers, and popular comedians, each of these women had established professional reputations in Hollywood or the television industry that helped them to transition into the job of director. This is not to suggest that these women's entries into feature filmmaking was made easy because of their preexisting status. Rather, the years, and sometimes decades, each spent working their way up through other respective careers resulted in significant accolades based on their individual merits. At the time that each of these women made their first films, the professional relationships they had developed and the skills they had cultivated, and in some situations the money they had earned, presented them with the opportunity to pursue the next step of their careers as a director. As will be discussed in this chapter, in many cases the revered status that these women occupied before becoming directors and their professional relationships with successful men in Hollywood did not help them avoid the sexist obstacle that several faced as filmmakers.



The unique challenge of this chapter is how to give depth to the connection among these nine women beyond simply the commonality of having begun in other careers. Although this is a binding similarity that creates a broad context for the opportunities they each encountered, their preexisting roles in the industry were very different from one another, as were their career trajectories to the point of making their first film and their experience as a filmmaker. Unlike the six women in Chapter 2, who began their careers as independent filmmakers where they worked in similar modes of production, distribution, and exhibition, and in the case of Peeters, Rothman, and Sebastian sometimes working within the same genre conventions, the directors in this chapter lack a unity found in a shared production community. These nine directors did not all work in the same genre. Some made comedies, others romantic dramas, some gangster films, and even one musical. Anne Bancroft, Joan Darling, Elaine May, and Jane Wagner made films financed and distributed by major studios. Barbara Loden, Lee Grant, Joan Rivers, and Joan Tewkesbury made a variety of independent features with budgets ranging from \$100,000 to \$1.5 million.

As directors the nine also experienced gender in a range of ways. In 1977 Paramount Pictures publicized its hiring of Darling as a woman director in an attempt to appear as part of the solution in addressing discriminatory hiring practices. May, who directed two features for Paramount and one for 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox and who had a reputation for being difficult to work with was described by one of her colleagues as setting back the progress of women directors because of her well-known erratic behavior. In contrast, Wagner felt that the unhappy experience she had while making her first film had little to do with her being a woman and more to do with the fact that she did not

enjoy being a director. As a way to emphasize the range and difference amongst these filmmakers, this chapter is organized chronologically, starting in 1971 with Barbara Loden and ending in 1980 with Nancy Walker. This approach allows for the individual profiles of each filmmaker to be situated within the context of commercial filmmaking throughout the 1970s, while also studying how as women their gender did, or in some cases did not, affect their professional experiences to give an understanding of the industry's relationship with gender politics throughout the decade.

## **BARBARA LODEN**

*It all comes down to this: if you don't want to be a part of what exists you've got to create your own reason for existence.*"<sup>1</sup>

**Barbara Loden**

Barbara Loden died in 1980 after a three-year struggle with cancer. She was forty-eight years old. A *Los Angeles Times* obituary ran the headline: "'Dumb Blonde' Made One Brilliant Film."<sup>2</sup> This was a tasteless caption for the death notice of the late actress turned award-winning writer-director. It seemed that the reporter was attempting to play on the apparent incongruity between her critically acclaimed film *Wanda* and the characters Loden was best known for early in her acting career when she was singled out for her good looks and often typecast as the "dumb blonde." She detested these roles and during the press attention on the release of her film was frequently candid in interviews about how they impacted her sense of self. "I didn't think anything of myself," she revealed in 1971. "So I succumbed to the whole role. I never knew who I was, or what I was supposed to do."<sup>3</sup>

Born in 1932, in rural Marion, North Carolina, Loden managed to break away from a difficult family life and at sixteen moved to New York City with \$100. She got a job as a model for detective and romance magazines and danced in the chorus at the Copacabana Club. Ernie Kovacs saw her working at the club and in 1956 hired her as his comedic and sexy sidekick on *The Ernie Kovacs Show*. By 1957 she was appearing on Broadway in small roles. It was also around 1957 that Loden began a turbulent personal and professional relationship with successful film and theater director Elia Kazan, twenty-three years her senior, which lasted until her death. She was cast in supporting roles in the films *Wild River* (1960) and *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), both directed by Kazan. In 1964 Loden won a Tony Award for her performance as Maggie, a character closely resembling Marilyn Monroe, in Arthur Miller's autobiographical play *After the Fall*, also directed by Kazan. Following *After the Fall*, Loden continued to perform on stage while also raising her two young children. Her son Leo, whom she had with Kazan while he was married to his first wife, Mary Day Thacher, was born in 1962; and her son Marco, whom she had with her first husband Larry Joachim, was born in 1964.

Loden got the idea for *Wanda* from a newspaper article. It was a story about a woman who had been convicted for being an accomplice to a bank robber. When the judge sentenced her to twenty years in prison, she thanked him. Loden was fascinated by what she perceived as the woman's sense of relief. "She wanted an institution to supervise her and regulate her. But why did she get into that state where she thought it would be a good thing to be sent to jail? That was the beginning of my ideas for 'Wanda'."<sup>4</sup> As a young woman, Loden turned to acting classes "to get over being withdrawn and inhibited. It was like group therapy."<sup>5</sup> For many years she was a student

of acting coach Paul Mann, who trained her in the method approach that drew on an actor's personal experience and memory. In this context, the character of Wanda was one that Loden had been cultivating for years.

*Wanda* takes place in an industrial working-class setting of the coal mines of Pennsylvania. It is the story of a poor, unemployed, and aimless young woman who does not have access to opportunities and also lacks the awareness to look for them. The film follows Wanda as she meanders from divorce court, to dive bars, and a motel room with a sleazy traveling salesman until she meets up with a small-time bank robber, Mr. Dennis, played by Michael Higgins. He is belligerent and controlling, and he is also the only person who shows her any kindness; Mr. Dennis buys her a new dress and high heels, in which she delights, and encourages her to improve her reading skills. In return, Wanda does not fight back and counters with a passive and blank, but almost amenable, manner.

Loden's primary investor for the film was Harry Shuster, whom she had met in 1966 when she and Kazan were on safari in Africa. Shuster was the president of National Leisure, Inc., a Los Angeles-based company affiliated with Lion Country Safari, an African wildlife preserve. With no prior experience in filmmaking, he took on the title of producer and financed the film for an estimated \$115, 000.<sup>6</sup> Through a mutual friend, Loden and Kazan were introduced to Nicholas T. Proferes, who became the film's cinematographer and editor. Proferes had worked as an apprentice editor for cinema-verité filmmakers Robert Drew, Richard Leacock, Albert and David Maysles, and D. A. Pennebaker. Through that experience he learned the handheld, documentary-style camera techniques that gave *Wanda* its naturalistic look.<sup>7</sup>

Production took place in 1969 with a crew of four people, including Loden, Proferes, lighting and sound technician, Lars Hedman, and Christopher Cromin, an assistant. The small cast was made up of inexperienced actors with the exception of Loden and Higgins. Loden's wardrobe, which consisted of two outfits, cost \$7 dollars from Woolworth's, and Higgins wore some of Kazan's old suits. Sometimes the director would cook for the crew; and when her babysitter quit, she took her two children to the set.<sup>8</sup> "I wasted money because I didn't know what I was doing," she admitted after the film was completed, but promised that "my next film will be made much cheaper."<sup>9</sup> In the press, Loden was forthright in her disdain for Hollywood. "I really hate slick pictures. They're too perfect to be believable...The slicker the technique is, the slicker the content becomes, until everything turns into Formica, including the people."<sup>10</sup> The New York "underground" filmmakers inspired her. "I thought movies had to be so technical and had to have big crews," explained the new director, "[b]ut Warhol's movies were out of focus sometimes and had poor sound."<sup>11</sup>

Loden, and Proferes for his technical skill, were praised for the effective and unpolished look of the film that critics felt revealed an honesty in mood, setting, and character. Roger Greenspun of the *New York Times* enjoyed the film "because it seems at home with its idioms, close to its action, opening up only rarely and to moments of genuine insight and not admiration-begging cinematic claptrap. *Wanda* is a small movie, fully aware of its limits, and within those limits lovely."<sup>12</sup> George Moskowitz, reporting from the Venice Film Festival where the movie won the International Critics Prize, heralded Loden as a new filmmaker with much potential, specifically in her ability to realize characters and her skill in cultivating performances. "Miss Loden may lack polish

in her direction as yet, but she makes up for it by a knowing feeling for her milieu and characters and does not condescend or try to make them exemplary or pitiable in any way. This is in a U.S. film tradition but without the pat social blames and castigations and moralizing.”<sup>13</sup> Reviewers forgave Loden and *Wanda* for its novice qualities, instead finding in her beginner’s touch an original and moving cinematic style.

As expected, reporters asked Loden about her Oscar-winning director-husband’s involvement in the project. She credited Kazan with being the one to encourage her to make the film. “It was his idea, actually that I should direct it. He gave me courage, sort of set me up an organization...He was a great questioner, he made me think. But he wouldn’t tell me anything. He left me alone and finally disappeared.”<sup>14</sup> *Variety* reported, “Visiting his wife on the local set, Kazan said that he had no connection with the film, (‘I’m just around and run errands. It’s Barbara’s project.’)...”<sup>15</sup> Critics also saw past her Hollywood connections and evaluated the film as her own. In his glowing review, Vincent Canby took care of the nepotism question: “I suppose it’s impossible not to wonder about any aid she might have received from her husband, but ‘Wanda’ does not have the look of a Kazan film. It looks like an original.”<sup>16</sup>

Loden began writing the script for *Wanda* in 1961 when she was “hanging around the house” pregnant with her first son, Leo—a “love child” with Kazan.<sup>17</sup> Although she and Kazan would marry and live together years later, at the time of her pregnancy the two had decided to end their romantic relationship. Kazan was not only married and also involved in a number of other extramarital affairs, he was an absentee father to Leo for many years.<sup>18</sup> Although it is unknown how Loden felt about having a child with Kazan under these circumstances, her film was influenced by the complexities of their

relationship. In an interview at the American Film Institute in 1971, she described how Wanda and Higgins were based on the early interactions between her and Kazan. “[Kazan] is a very forceful, very authoritative person...,” she explained to the audience, “that’s why I was first attracted to him because I was one of those floaters floating around and I met a dynamic force that was able to give me some kind of direction. It just happened to Wanda, but with the wrong person.”<sup>19</sup>

After showing at festivals, *Wanda* had a short-lived theatrical distribution screening at Cinema II in New York City and in Los Angeles at the Plaza in Westwood.<sup>20</sup> Shuster established Bardene International Films to self-distribute the movie. It is unknown what his experience was releasing the picture. Loden was buoyed by the attention and acclaim the movie received, specifically the award at Venice. In a 1995 interview, Proferes described how Venice “completely changed [Loden]. She became a director in her own mind. She had a vision.”<sup>21</sup>

Determined to make more films, she and Proferes continued developing projects. In 1971 it was reported in the press that Loden’s next film would be *Love Means Always Having to Say You’re Sorry*,” the story of a housewife who gets involved with three men at the same time. Co-stars were listed as Michael Higgins, Joe Dallesandro, and Steve Billings; Loden was said to be writing, directing, and starring in the picture.<sup>22</sup> That same year, riding the industry buzz of *Wanda*’s success, Army Archerd reported that Ray Stark was interested in making films with Loden.<sup>23</sup> In 1974 she was listed in *Variety* as being part of writer-director Henry Jaglom and producer Bert Schneider’s newly formed HHH Rainbow Productions. The company’s goal was to make low-budget features for around \$1 million that were “freed from traditional economic pressures and studio restraints.”

Other members of the company were Jack Nicholson, James Frawley, Carole Eastman, Penelope Gilliatt, Paul Williams, Dennis Hopper, and Martin Scorsese.<sup>24</sup>

None of these projects materialized. The years after her film, Loden directed off-Broadway productions and taught acting classes.<sup>25</sup> She and Proferes remained creative collaborators until her death, and the pair was occasionally romantically involved. They never made another feature together, but in 1975 they made two short films, *The Boy Who Liked Deer* and *The Frontier Experience*, for the Learning Corporation of America, an educational media company. In a 1971 interview with Rex Reed, Loden proclaimed, “I’ve got more movies in me, but they will have to be done my way. I’m not interested in entertaining people. I only want to do things that mean something to me, that I can say about a human being on film and then communicate that feeling to others.”<sup>26</sup> Dead at age forty-eight, Barbara Loden had tried for almost ten years since the release of her first and only feature to make another film. It is unclear exactly what prevented her in the years soon after she made *Wanda* from starting another project (by the end of 1970s she was consumed with battling the cancer that would eventually take her life). Perhaps her determination to do things *her way* and her dislike for the commercial aspect of filmmaking were deterrents. What is clear is that in 1971 the release of *Wanda* was acknowledged by reviewers not only on its own merits, but also as film directed by a woman--a breed that was so rare that early in the decade it could not go unnoticed by the press.



## ELAINE MAY

*“Clint Eastwood could do anything because he’s tall and they respect him and in that way it is better to be Clint Eastwood than a woman in Hollywood.”*<sup>27</sup>

Elaine May

In her 1971 article, “Lights! Camera! Women!” Marion Meade noted that that year “a rather remarkable development has taken place.” Two films were released starring the women who wrote and directed them: Barbara Loden’s *Wanda* and Elaine May’s *A New Leaf*. On one hand, the two filmmakers and their films could not have been more different from one another. The former, independently produced and distributed, was an atmospheric, melancholic character study, while the latter was a studio-made screwball comedy with slapstick undertones. For Meade what the two films and their makers shared was “Barbara Loden, of ‘Wanda,’ and Elaine May, of ‘A New Leaf,’ give us an unusual slant on the realities of women’s existence and feelings. Their heroines—Wanda and Henrietta Lowell—reveal facets of womankind not ordinarily seen on the screen.”<sup>28</sup> In 1971 both Barbara Peeters and Stephanie Rothman each made a film: for Peeters her second (*Bury Me an Angel*) and for Rothman, her fourth (*The Velvet Vampire*). One year into the decade the number of women directors had increased 50 percent from the previous year, making the grand total four. Also of significance was the range of material these four filmmakers were producing: Loden’s semi-autobiographical wander, Peeters’ biker heroine, Rothman’s desert vampire, and May’s clueless botanist.

Elaine May was the only woman director to create a body of work within the studio system during the 1970s. During the decade, she made three films: *A New Leaf* (1971, Paramount), which she wrote, directed and starred in; *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972, 20th Century-Fox); and *Mikey and Nicky* (1976, Paramount), which she wrote and

directed. Born in 1932 in Philadelphia, May was raised in a theatrical family. Her father, Jack Berlin, was a well-known actor in the Yiddish Theater and would often bring May on stage with him. After her father died when she was eleven, she and her mother moved to Los Angeles.

At sixteen years old, she married Marvin May and at eighteen had her only child, Jeannie Berlin. The marriage dissolved after seven years. Elaine May's mother raised Jeannie until she was ten when May then moved them to New York City to live with her.<sup>29</sup> Never having graduated high school, May hitchhiked to the University of Chicago because the school did not require a diploma. There she met Mike Nichols. The pair formed an improvisational comedy team in 1954 as part of the Compass Players, in which May was a founding member. Nichols and May went on to great success until they amicably disbanded in 1961. Nichols then went on to be a successful theater and film director. May spent the 1960s as a playwright-director, screenwriter and (film) actress, before making *A New Leaf*, her first feature film.<sup>30</sup>

In May 1968, the press reported that May had been signed to direct *A New Leaf* for Paramount.<sup>31</sup> The movie went into production during the summer of 1969. *A New Leaf* was the first feature film directed by a woman for any studio since Ida Lupino's *Trouble with Angels* was made for Columbia Pictures in 1966, which itself was the only movie of the 1960s to be made by a woman for a studio. May's hiring on *A New Leaf* as a triple threat—writer, director, actor—was the studio's way to economize on paying for talent. Howard Koch, the film's producer, suggested to Charles Bluhdorn, CEO of Gulf & Western, parent company of Paramount, that May would be willing to be paid less for writing and acting if she could also direct. (May was paid \$50,000.) Koch also pitched

May as the first woman to direct for Paramount, which he argued could be a perk for the company's reputation, making it the only motion picture studio at the time to have hired a female director. Robert Evans and Frank Tablans, Paramount executives at the time, resisted the offer, but Bluhdorn agreed.<sup>32</sup> "When I started the first movie I directed I really didn't want to direct [*A New Leaf*]," explained May in a 2006 interview. "And the guy who represented me, [Hillard] Elkins, said they won't give you director approval but they will allow you to direct it... And then they wanted to have Carol Channing play the woman, and I said, 'No it has to be someone who really disappears. It's the guy's movie.' I said, 'Can I pick the person?' And they said, 'No, but you can play it. And all for the same money.'"<sup>33</sup> These two accounts of how May began her directing career both allude to the fact that the studio was interested in getting the most for its money and a first-time filmmaker was a good investment to exploit.

*A New Leaf* was a dark comedy starring May as Henrietta, an earnest and oblivious botanist-heiress married to Henry, played by Walther Matthau, a bankrupted millionaire plotting the murder of his bride for her fortune. The film's original budget was \$1.8 million dollars. Within the first two weeks of shooting, the production was already twelve days behind schedule. By the end of principal photography, filming had gone forty-two days over and had cost \$4 million.<sup>34</sup> Editing on the film also went over schedule, and eventually the studio stepped in and took the picture away from May. Evans, then Paramount's head of production, supervised the re-editing of the film, changing May's original ending, in which Henry succeeds in murdering Henrietta, to a more uplifting romantic version, in which he has a change of heart and does not go through with the crime. In response, May sued the studio, claiming in the complaint filed

by her attorneys “that the script was drastically changed and there has been a distortion and truncation of plaintiff’s work.”<sup>35</sup> Koch appealed to the judge directly by showing him Paramount’s version of the film. “The lights went down,” recalled Koch decades later. “And the judge sat there and he screamed and laughed, and the lights go up and he says, ‘It’s the funniest picture in years. You guys win.’”<sup>36</sup> Heard in the New York Supreme Court, the judge denied May’s request for an injunction, and Paramount went ahead with the release of the film as planned.<sup>37</sup>

Regardless of the conflict between May and Paramount, and in spite of the director’s attempt to be disassociated from the picture, the film did well at the box office. Opening around Easter of 1971, *Variety* reported, “Paramount’s solid-gold ‘New Leaf’ at Radio City Music hall [was] continuing to crowd them in with a holiday take of something near \$250,000. Despite her objections, the success of the film will almost certainly establish Elaine May as an important director....”<sup>38</sup> By the end of the year, the film had grossed \$5 million.<sup>39</sup> Reviews praised the filmmaker’s freshman efforts on her first film, and many acknowledged this success despite May’s attempt to distance herself from the studio’s version of the picture. *The Hollywood Reporter* found some of the comedy uneven, but admitted, “One forgives the indulgences, one genuinely wonders what the picture was like before it was cut....” Endorsing the film, the review continues, “For those who lack enthusiasm for slickly manufactured comedies, ‘A New Leaf’ is a lovely alternate way of seeing the world, and there will be a lot of people who will welcome the change.”<sup>40</sup> Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune* described how “Miss May writes and directs with uncommon grace.... Her comedy--both visual and aural--is

reminiscent of such classic films as ‘It Happened One Night’ and ‘Bringing Up Baby.’ Tender zaniness and all that...[*A New Leaf*] deserves your attention.”<sup>41</sup>

In January 1972 May started production on *The Heartbreak Kid*, directing Neil Simon’s script for 20th Century-Fox.<sup>42</sup> The film was a classic 1970s romantic comedy: hilarious at the expense of great heartbreak (as the title aptly suggested). Charles Grodin starred as Lenny, a Jewish New York newlywed obsessed with appearances on his honeymoon with bride, Lila, played by Jeannie Berlin, May’s twenty-three-year-old daughter, who is less self-conscious, eating candy bars in bed and talking incessantly during sex. Lenny leaves Lila for Kelly, an idealized blonde WASP in a bikini, played by Cybil Shepherd. *The Heartbreak Kid* was completed without any studio interference or delays due to May’s creative process, occurrences that would plague each of the three films she wrote and directed. Anthea Sylbert, who was the costume designer on *A New Leaf* and *The Heartbreak Kid*, and knew May well, thought that she did well as a “director for hire,” because the script was not hers. “It divorces you slightly,” explained Sylbert. “You can look at the material a little more objectively than your own material.”<sup>43</sup>

The film was well received and grossed an estimated \$5.5 million at the box office.<sup>44</sup> Berlin and co-star Eddie Albert were both nominated for Best Supporting Actor and Actress Oscars. Vincent Canby credited the movie as “a first-class American comedy” due to the talents of May rather than the veteran Simon. “‘The Heartbreak Kid’ occasionally goes for laughs without shame (which is what has always bothered me about Simon’s brand of New York comedy), but behind the laughs there is, for a change, a real understanding of character—which is something that, I suspect, can be attributed to Miss May. The film is an unequivocal hit.”<sup>45</sup>

May was beginning to accumulate a string of hits as she started production on her next film, *Mikey and Nicky*, which she would write and direct. *Mikey and Nicky* starred John Cassavetes and Peter Falk in a gangster-buddy melodrama that takes place during the course of one night centered on two mobster best friends, one of which (Falk) has been hired to kill the other (Cassavetes). May had sold *Mikey and Nicky* to United Artists in 1969 while she was in production on *A New Leaf*. At that time, Cassavetes and Falk were already attached, and the film was set to start shooting during the spring of 1970.<sup>46</sup> Surprisingly, based on her recent history with the studio, the director ended up back at Paramount, but this time under the protection of studio chief Frank Yablans who had become a champion of the filmmaker. *Mikey and Nicky* was budgeted at a modest \$1.8 million. Paramount was extremely cautious working with May a second time. The studio produced a thirty-three-page, single-spaced contract in which the company stipulated that if the film went over budget, the costs would come out of May's salary. Furthermore, if the film went above 15 percent of the budget, Paramount would be allowed to take it over. In return, May was given final cut—complete control over the picture's final version--and the guarantee that she would not be required to go to the Paramount lot, meaning she would not have to do business with Robert Evans, her nemesis from *A New Leaf*. The film was to be finished and delivered to the studio on June 1, 1974.<sup>47</sup>

Even with the built-in protection and warning system, the film's progress quickly digressed. Originally intended as a ten-day shoot, production began in the summer of 1973 in Philadelphia and did not wrap until the following March. May was notorious for reshooting scenes, repeatedly, and requiring the crew to dismantle and rebuild sets, including repaving the street because she wanted the characters to be walking in a

different direction.<sup>48</sup> The director was demanding beyond the logistical parameters of a film production—even those of a major studio with ample resources. But May’s talent was also acknowledged and revered by those around her. Journalist Dan Rottenberg observed during his visit to the set in 1973: “She may be shy, insecure, nervous, gawky, and female in a field dominated by men. But she is also a perfectionist in an age of schlock. For that reason everyone on the crew, from [her producer Michael] Hausman on down, worships her.”<sup>49</sup>

Paramount agreed to rent out several rooms in the West Hollywood, Sunset Marquis Hotel where May oversaw the editing of the film—a process that suffered a prolonged chaos similar to the production. In Andrew Tobias’s expose of the film’s debacle in *New West*, published around the time of the movie’s theatrical release, he described May during the editing as “obsessed.” “You could walk by her rooms at two or three in the morning and there she would be with an editor, cutting.” May rarely left the hotel suites, which “were hopelessly strewn with candy wrappers, half-eaten sandwiches, and, seemingly, months of accumulated cigarette butts.” The joke was that the only way for the studio to get a copy of the film was to call in the health department.<sup>50</sup> The flipside to such obsessive behavior was May’s acute understanding of the movie she wanted to make. Sheldon Kahn, one of the film’s editors, described her as the “brightest person I ever worked with...Elaine has a photographic memory. If we cut a scene thirteen ways, she’d go, ‘The third way was the best.’ Then she’d recall it frame by frame.”<sup>51</sup>

In September 1975, May had been editing the film for over a year when Paramount finally refused to advance the production any more money. She then sold the movie—legally Paramount’s property—to Alyce Film Inc., a company owned by Peter

Falk, for \$90,000. Paramount sued the filmmaker, and a judge ordered her to return the film. May returned all but two reels of the movie, keeping them hostage in the hopes that Paramount's new vice chairman, Barry Diller (who had replaced Yablans), would agree to releasing additional funds. In a phone call between the two, Diller told May, "If you return it, I give you my word that things will go right for you. But I won't be blackmailed..." Within minutes, the missing reels were delivered to Diller's office.<sup>52</sup>

Paramount gave the film a limited release at the end of 1976. Including legal fees, the picture ended up costing the studio close to \$5 million. Those critics who wrote about it were bewildered. Charles Champlin was remorseful in his poor review of the film. "In a long lifetime you are not apt to find more intelligence and good acting expended on a lost cause than in Elaine May's 'Mikey and Nicky'."<sup>53</sup> For *The Independent Film Journal*, the months spent working with her two actors had paid off, but not for the benefit of the overall movie. "Cassavetes, in fact, has rarely been better. Unfortunately, the story is slight and the reverberations from what transpires, intended as shock waves, emerge more like ripples. Downbeat in subject and commercial prospects. Elaine May loses her story, her characters and most of her audience."<sup>54</sup>

Within the years following *Mikey and Nicky*, May was gradually able to regain some status within the industry. In 1978 she was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Screenplay with Warren Beatty for *Heaven Can Wait* (1978). Ten years later, with the Oscar nod and the clout of her stars Beatty (who also served as a producer) and Dustin Hoffman, May directed *Ishtar* for Columbia Pictures. However, the director had similar feuds with the studio and the film suffered a buried release and damning reviews. After the disappointment of *Ishtar*, May was nominated for her screenplay for *Primary*



*Colors* (1998) directed by her longtime friend and collaborator, Mike Nichols. She continued to serve as a non-credited “script doctor” on films and write for the theater.

In 1967 Nichols predicted years before her conflicts with the studios that “Elaine is going to suffer in Hollywood. She must have complete control of a given situation. Out there she will be at the mercy of many people.”<sup>55</sup> Perhaps the difficulty she experienced as a writer-director was adapting her creative process to fit within the strictures of a production schedule that was controlled by deadlines, the budgetary bottom line, and upper management. During the late 1960s, May had thrived doing improvisation where she could practice the technique over and over again, but the content and audience were different every time. She once described improvisation as “nothing more than quickly creating a situation between two people and throwing up some kind of problem for one of them.”<sup>56</sup> Mark Gordon, one of her collaborators in the Compass Players, described her this way: “She had a commitment to improvisation, and she was not going to let it go....She was truly remarkable.”<sup>57</sup> Even when she and Nichols became famous and developed skits and routines, their ability to workshop the material together drew on the kind of spontaneity discouraged on a multimillion-dollar film set.

Looking back on her experience making studio-produced films, May put the blame on company politics. “Every movie I made except for *The Heartbreak Kid*, the studio changed regimes in the middle of the movie. It’s not a great thing because whoever is coming in doesn’t like you a) because you have been chosen by someone else and they don’t really know whether they want to take responsibility for it.” She also had a moment of self-reflection in which she considered her role in the difficulties repeated in each film: “And it could just be me because I’ve had trouble with every movie I’ve done. I had

trouble with *A New Leaf*. I had trouble with *Mikey and Nicky*. I didn't have trouble with *The Heartbreak Kid* because I was hired for it. But with every movie that I have done, I may just be a pain in the ass."<sup>58</sup>

Critic and historian Todd McCarthy, who was May's assistant on *Mikey and Nicky*, suggested that May's impractical behavior as an unruly individual and the only female director making films for a studio impeded the prospects for other women during the decade:

I really do believe that [May] set back the cause of women directors in Hollywood by ten years. The isolated moments when she could really put all else out of her mind and concentrate on the work, she was great. But every negative notion that any male executive might want to have about how difficult it might be to work with a woman director was confirmed by her: "She was irresponsible. She didn't know what she was doing. She couldn't be controlled."...All those things that people with conventional minds wanted to believe—she confirmed them in spades.<sup>59</sup>

What is plausible is that May's behavior and reputation for being difficult resulted in the end of her career as a director. After *Mikey and Nicky* she was not able to direct another film until regaining legitimacy within Hollywood by earning an Oscar nomination for her co-authored screenplay on Warren Beatty's *Heaven Can Wait*.<sup>60</sup> With some status restored and vouched for by Beatty and Hoffman, two powerful actors at the time, May was able to direct *Ishtar* almost ten years after *Mikey and Nicky*. She has not directed a film since *Ishtar* went overbudget by a supposed \$40 million.<sup>61</sup>

It is difficult to believe McCarthy's notion that the nature of May's idiosyncratic behavior as a filmmaker, alone, set back her female peers by confirming male executives' sexist fantasy about why Hollywood should not hire women directors. Compared to male directors, women were not doing well getting hired by the studios before May held Paramount's film for ransom in 1976. In 1977, one year after the company's dispute with May over *Mikey and Nicky*, Paramount hired Joan Darling to direct *First Love*. She was the second woman, following May, to direct for a major studio since 1966.

## JOAN DARLING

*"What I think happened with me was everybody was looking for a woman director. I was lucky that I caught that wheel. Anyone who hired me got a lot of press."*<sup>62</sup>

**Joan Darling**

Joan Darling was born Joan Kugell in 1935 in Newton, Massachusetts, and grew up in Brookline. Her father, a lawyer, died when she was eleven, and her mother, formerly a housewife, opened an antique store to support Darling, her two brothers, and sister. Since she was a child, Darling had been interested in acting. "As a very little girl, I saw my first movie and I was instantly cursed with a passion to be an actress," she told *TV Guide* for an interview in 1973. "Women's lib wasn't even a gleam in Betty Friedan's eye back then, but I knew I didn't want to be just a traditional wife and mother. Being an actress, I felt, was one of the ways a woman could control her own life."<sup>63</sup>

In 1956 she attended Carnegie Institute of Technology; during the summers, she studied Shakespeare in Ashland, Oregon. In 1958 Darling moved to New York City, where she worked nights at a bank photographing checks to keep her days open to sit on the floor by the pay phone in her apartment building waiting for an audition call back. In

1960 she became the only female member of Ted Flickers' successful improvisational group the Premise. In 1971 she was cast in her "breakthrough" television role as Owen Marshall's secretary, Frieda Krause, on ABC's *Owen Marshall: Counselor at Law*. She played the character for three years, and when that job finished, she wrote a treatment for a ninety-minute television movie on the life of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, imagining herself in the lead role.<sup>64</sup>

Darling pitched the Meir idea to Norman Lear, who was a social acquaintance she had done some writing for on a film that was never produced. After hearing the pitch, Lear asked Darling, "Do you want to be a director?" She looked at him and said, "I don't know anything about directing." His response was, "I think that's what you really are."<sup>65</sup> This story seems incredible in how random and easy it was for Darling, never having directed film or television, to receive an unsolicited job offer from one of the most powerful producers in television. During my interview with her in 2012 she swore this is how the story went. "It's absolutely word for word!"<sup>66</sup> Lear was preparing a new series, *Mary Hartman! Mary Hartman!* The two spent eight weeks developing the show, after which he went on vacation for two weeks and left Darling to shoot the pilot.

Lear was aware of Darling's extensive experience in acting, her work in improvisational comedy, and her reputation as a sought-after acting coach. (Her Hollywood acting workshop had a waitlist of 250.)<sup>67</sup> According to Darling, at that time, Lear was also making a concerted effort to hire a woman director. "The thing about Norman that is so important in this story is he was *absolutely* committed to breaking the barriers for women."<sup>68</sup> At this time, in 1974-1975, the attention being paid to gender discrimination within the film and television industries was prominent enough that

production companies, networks, and studios were feeling the pressure to change their hiring practices. However, as Barbara Peeters would observe of her experience getting hired to direct television in the early 1980s, employing a few “token” women was the industry’s self-serving way to make it seem to their critics as if they were committed to creating gender equality. Studio executives were not shy about the pressure they felt to diversify their workforce even if they didn’t seem to take it that seriously. Darling, driving off Universal Studios’ lot one day when she was directing for the miniseries *Rich Man, Poor Man*, passed studio chiefs Lew Wasserman and Sid Sheinberg, whom she knew from her years on the Universal series *Owen Marshall*. “When I got to the gate, Sid Sheinberg yelled to me, ‘Hey Joan, what are you doing on the lot?’ ‘I’m directing *Rich Man, Poor Man*.’ He said, ‘Oh God, if only you were black!’”<sup>69</sup>

Darling’s agents also felt that the industry was looking to hire women directors. They sent her pilot of *Mary Hartman!* to Grant Tinker, producer of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show (MTM)*. Based on her work, Tinker hired Darling for an entire season of *MTM*. Her *MTM* episode, “Chuckles Bites the Dust,” was nominated for a Primetime Emmy and Directors Guild Award in 1976. Lear hired her to direct a significant portion of *Mary Hartman!*’s first season. In 1976 the show became a national phenomenon; its star Louise Lasser graced the cover of *Rolling Stone*, *Newsweek*, and *TV Guide*. Darling was the first woman to direct an episode of *M\*A\*S\*H*; in 1977 she was nominated for a second Primetime Emmy for her episode “Nurses.” Between 1975 and 1979, Darling was one of the most prolific female television directors. In addition to *MTM*, *Mary Hartman!* *Mary Hartman!* and *M\*A\*S\*H*, Darling directed episodes of sitcoms *Rhoda*, *Doc*, *Fay*, *Phyllis*,

and the pilot to what would become *One Day at a Time*; as well as the miniseries *Rich Man, Poor Man*.

While Darling was busy directing sitcoms she hadn't seriously considered directing features until 1976 when Lawrence Turman, who had produced *The Graduate*, approached her with the script for *First Love*. The movie was to be made at Paramount and starred William Katt, an up-and-coming heartthrob in his first leading role, opposite Susan Dey, who at the time was best known for her role on the television show *The Partridge Family*. The young actors played co-eds: Katt as Elgin who has been holding out for a romantic ideal and falls hard for Dey's Caroline who is more experienced in love and sex. The film was meant to capture the depth of a first love—its joy and pain—and the nostalgia that the experience leaves once it's over.

The studios were also feeling the pressure to hire at least one woman, and Paramount considered Darling a good candidate. She was an Emmy-nominated television director well versed in single and multi-camera setups, had extensive experience with actors, and knew how to run a set. She could get the job done, and Paramount would get the publicity. Turman also thought that Darling, as a first-time film director, would be easy for him to control.

Trouble with Turman started early in the production. At six in the morning on the third day of shooting the producer told her, "Joan, I think we're making a terrible movie."<sup>70</sup> She was so upset that she couldn't get in the van to go to the set. Turman's attempt to plant doubt in the mind of the director was his way of creating a power dynamic: he as a veteran producer and she as an insecure, first-time director. Despite his

attempts to disable her, Darling, as was her style, established a good rapport on the set, where cast, crew, and director bantered and joked with each other.<sup>71</sup>

After the shoot ended, Darling left the editor alone—as was customary—to assemble a rough cut of the footage. She returned to discover that Turman had interceded and edited his version of the film. “I came back and saw two hours and thirty-five minutes of the worst movie I’d ever seen,” Darling confided to an audience at the AFI in 1977 around the time of the film’s release. “I remember sitting on the floor the night I saw that rough cut in my house, by myself, scared to death. I mean, I was going under the bed and never coming out.”<sup>72</sup>

Darling called her more experienced friends, veteran film editor and studio executive Verna Field and director Steven Spielberg, for advice. They told her that Turman was “being a bad boy” and that she should fire the editor. She then called her friends from her improv days, Buck Henry and Mike Nichols, who had made *The Graduate* with Turman. Both men confirmed that they had had similar interference from the producer on their picture. In the process, she discovered that her contract had been negotiated badly, leaving out things such as the right to a preview that Darling felt would have helped her fine-tune the film. As a first-time director, she did not know what she was entitled to. By the time she found this out it was too late to override Turman or the studio’s final word.<sup>73</sup>

Critical response to the film was even. Arthur Murphy of *Variety* felt the script was weak and that “the never-ending pall of doom that hangs over everything” weighed down the story. But he was also impressed with how the film refused to exploit the topic of young love and sexuality best conveyed in what he cited as the casts’ excellent

performances.<sup>74</sup> Molly Haskell felt that there were moments when the movie was uneven. She commented that Elgin and Caroline's relationship "[left] too many questions unanswered, and the film seems more elliptical than it is meant to be." Perhaps intuiting Darling's disagreements with the studio over editing choices--conflicts that did not seem to appear in the press beforehand--Haskell noted, "(As a footnote, in the plot synopsis given critics at the screening there were some four scenes clarifying the relationship that do not appear in the final cut.)"<sup>75</sup> Writing for *The Hollywood Reporter*, Arthur Knight found that "despite its occasionally raunchy dialogue and frequent bed scenes [the film] is as sweet and touching an inquiry into the nature of youthful romance as anyone could wish for." Knight drew attention to Darling's accomplishment as a first time director "making an impressive screen debut...she manages not only the atmospherics with conviction, but has elicited sustained, complex performances from her largely youthful cast."<sup>76</sup>

The majority of reviewers addressed the fact that a woman directed the film. This was not unusual, as many of my examples throughout this study show, critics were aware of the small number of women directors and sometimes even advocated for them in the pages of their reviews. Paramount exploited Darling's gender in the publicity materials for the film. Framed by the press department's interview, Darling put a friendly face on feminism. She admitted to not being an ardent feminist, explaining that she'd "never been a political person in terms of my professional life."<sup>77</sup> She was also candid about the responsibility she felt to her female peers. "Once I began directing, I realized how unusual it was for me as a woman to be doing such a job...if I succeed then it will make



it easier for other women to be given the responsibility by male studio executives to become directors.”<sup>78</sup>

The studio also capitalized on Darling’s gracious disposition and good nature: she could make feminism funny and friendly. One press release described the director as “a small, cheerful woman, who in the midst of the total confusion known as moviemaking, never loses her cool or her sense of humor.”<sup>79</sup> According to Darling, “[B]eing a woman has been a great help...the entire crew has been helpful and I think part of their helpfulness has come from the fact that they realize this film stands for more than most films.” A happy female director supported by a male crew demonstrated that Paramount was a progressive company. Another press release--one of the longest at four and a half pages—gave a detailed history of Dorothy Arzner as the pioneer who made Darling’s success possible.<sup>80</sup> Paramount was not only in line with contemporary social issues, but the company was also on the right side of *history*. Placing Darling within an historical scope showcased her unique importance in 1977, and it was the studio that gave her the opportunity.

Paramount’s PR department had conducted the interview and structured the themes for the press release, but Darling was speaking genuinely. In her 1977 interview at the AFI and in an interview with the author in 2012, she reiterated that she was aware of being one of the few highly employed women directors and that she felt a responsibility to do well so that her peers would have a chance. Darling had always felt that her poor treatment on *First Love* was not about being a woman and had more to do with being a first-time director. I would interject that because there were so few women directing during these years their minority status reinforced the long-standing belief that

men could exert their power over them, as was the case between Turman and Darling. If women were powerful, there would be more of them in positions of authority. For as “progressive” as Paramount had suggested itself to be in the film’s publicity, it was still a patriarchy maintaining its status.

In 1977 the director was openly disappointed about her experience making the film, confessing, “I will not look at that film ever again, as long as I live. That’s how I feel about that film right now.”<sup>81</sup> In 2012 she still remembered the experience as a difficult one. Between the meddling of her producer and the studio executives, “I’m not going to say they butchered the movie,” stated Darling, “but they pulled a lot of the subtlety out of it. They diminished it.”<sup>82</sup> Between 1979 and 1980, Darling tried to make her second film based on the book *The Boys of Summer*, a story about Jackie Robinson and the Brooklyn Dodgers, but the project met a dead end at UA during the company’s period of transition and turmoil. While she was hired to direct one more feature in 1986, the family comedy *The Check Is in the Mail...*, starring Brian Dennehy and Anne Archer, after *First Love*, Darling returned to a busy career directing television that continued well into the 1990s. In an interview conducted while she was making *First Love*, Darling summarized the relentless dilemma women directors were forced into during the 1970s where job opportunities were limited and the scrutiny focused on those hired was intense: “The question is, do you want to be a politician or a director? Do you want to be a director or pave the way for other directors? I think my ambition is to have enough autonomy to paint my own paintings.”<sup>83</sup>

## JOAN RIVERS

*“I’ve learned that by being nice and deferring, you can only hurt yourself. You must be a Barbra Streisand. You have to have the guts to say no.”<sup>84</sup>*

**Joan Rivers**

In 1978 when comedian Joan Rivers made her first and only feature film, *Rabbit Test*, a satire starring Billy Crystal as the first pregnant man, she was already a household name writing jokes for Ed Sullivan and making countless television appearances, including on Johnny Carson’s *The Tonight Show* and *Hollywood Squares*. She also played the Las Vegas circuit for \$55,000 per week and at the time was considered the highest-paid opening act.<sup>85</sup> Photographed on the set of her film for publicity stills while wearing a T-shirt that said “Director Person,” Rivers summarized her professional path, explaining, “My whole career has been one rejection after another, and then going back and back and pushing against everything and everybody. Getting ahead by small, ugly steps.”<sup>86</sup>

Rivers established her self-deprecating brand of humor at the start of her career as a comedian. Born Joan Molinsky in 1933, Rivers grew up in Larchmont, New York. She attended Connecticut College and graduated from Barnard College in 1954. In 1958 Rivers began the arduous climb through the ranks of the comedy world. Always working in a joke, she described those years in a 1978 interview as “if a trash can had a bulb, I played it. Strip joints. Places so Mafiosi you were scared to say, ‘Stop me if you’ve heard this.’”<sup>87</sup>

Rivers and her husband, Edgar Rosenberg, moved from New York to Los Angeles in 1973. By then a known performer with a broadcast presence, Rivers was eager to

enhance her television career by writing screenplays and acting in movies. That year she wrote the script to the ABC television movie *The Girl Most Likely to . . .*. During the same time, a script she had written, *Roxy Haul*, about a man who kidnapped the Radio City Music Hall chorus line, was going to be made at Columbia Pictures, but the deal fell through. In *Still Talking*, one of her many autobiographies, Rivers describes her frustration at that time, “I was more and more in demand in Las Vegas—but that increasingly pigeonholed me as a Vegas comic. No acting jobs were being offered. My new scripts were being turned down.”<sup>88</sup>

Rivers collaborated on the script for *Rabbit Test* with Jay Redack, a writer-producer on the television game show *Hollywood Squares* on which the comedian was a frequent guest. The story was about Lionel, a young and inexperienced man, played by Billy Crystal in his first film, who teaches night school and lives next door to his mother and becomes the first pregnant man after a one-night stand. Lionel then turns into a miracle figure who is idolized by world leaders and (the voice of) God. The picture’s hodge-podge cast was made up of established comedians, including Imogene Coca, Roddy McDowall, Doris Roberts, and Alex Rocco.

In 1977 Rivers and Rosenberg began to shop around the script for *Rabbit Test*; the project was rejected by every studio in town. For one weekend Dan Melnick, at the time head of MGM, had agreed to make the film for \$1.3 million dollars, but the following week he left the studio and without him the deal died.<sup>89</sup> Rivers and her husband, who acted as her manager and often as the producer of Rivers’ television projects, began to raise money on their own. At one of the comedian’s Las Vegas shows, the couple met Thomas Pileggi, a businessman from Philadelphia, who became one of the film’s primary

investors and eventually a close family friend. Embassy Pictures, which distributed the picture, put up \$500,000; Rivers and Rosenberg mortgaged their home and took out loans against her future Las Vegas shows to raise the remaining balance for the picture's \$1 million budget. The film was made for an estimated \$1.2 million.<sup>90</sup>

The production came in one day ahead of its twenty-four day shooting schedule and \$100,000 under budget.<sup>91</sup> The film grossed \$4.7 million at the box office.<sup>92</sup> Rivers edited the film in her garage and sometimes even in a space next to her dressing room at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas where she was performing.<sup>93</sup> *Rabbit Test's* marketing campaign was unique in that it used Rivers' status as a recognizable celebrity to sell the film. She was included in the film's poster—as Joan Rivers—wearing a “Director Person” T-shirt with a shocked expression next to a visibly pregnant Crystal. The tagline read “Where do you buy maternity jockey shorts?”

Rivers' tenacity for self-promotion and skill at creating herself as a brand was exceptional. “Joan Rivers” the personality received good reviews in the numerous interviews and profiles that were conducted of the writer-director regarding her experience making the film, but critics were nonplussed by the movie itself. Influenced by the tone of Rivers' stand-up style, the picture's flimsy plot was dominated by sight gags. *Variety* described it as “an extended Joan Rivers monolog with throwaway pictures.” To this reviewer the array of comedian cameos in the film were “occasionally amusing, but make the pic [sic] seem slapdash, as if Rivers had to finish their scenes because these performers had something better to do in an hour.”<sup>94</sup> However, *The Independent Film Journal's* tepid review of the film was still enthusiastic of Rivers: “More comic inventiveness and fewer crass scatological jokes would have sharpened the

material and made the laughs memorable. As it is, *Rabbit Test* is more good intention than comic invention. But in Rivers' case the seed for movie comedy success is there."<sup>95</sup> During the film's release, the first-time filmmaker defended her work in the context of her male peers. "Sure, it's uneven. But so was *Take the Money and Run*. So were *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* and *The Producers*. Look, this is no *Annie Hall* or *Silent Movie*. I haven't been at it for ten years like Woody Allen and Mel Brooks."<sup>96</sup>

Never without a joke, Rivers was still able to show a glimmer of honesty in describing her experience on the set of the film. Unsurprisingly, for any first-time director, the otherwise brash comedian felt she had to prove a level of confidence and competency to her crew:

When you get on the set the first day, it's very hard to prove yourself with old, tough crews. I had to prove that I could climb wherever I had to, that I could swear whenever I had to, that I could be tough if I had to. Then I'd go off in a corner and cry a lot, which nobody ever saw. But after that first day or so, I never felt that my being a woman meant anything to the crew. Either they respect you or they don't, they like you or they don't; but whichever it is, it's totally asexual.<sup>97</sup>

After *Rabbit Test*, Rivers never directed another movie. She continued to try and make her *Roxy Haul* script, which at one point was to go into production during the summer of 1978, but ultimately the project was never produced.<sup>98</sup> Her reasons for not pursuing a career as director are unclear except that the difficulties she faced in raising money on her first feature were enough to discourage Rivers from considering making another. Also in consideration was the fact that her career in television, live performance,

and as an author continued to grow and morph in the following decades. Hers was (and still is) a busy and booming career. On how directing a feature film affected her, Joan Rivers recalls, “[T]here were two Big Breaks [sic] in my life. One was the first time I was on Johnny Carson’s show—February 17, 1966—and he said on the air, ‘You’re going to be a star.’ Then there was the second major turning point—actually directing a movie. The first day on the set changed my whole life I mean, they let me do it. When I said, ‘Action,’ nobody laughed.”<sup>99</sup>

## **JANE WAGNER**

***“One should accept passion as short-lived, though I don’t pretend to know the answer to loving. Should we go moment by moment, or should we require the long view?”<sup>100</sup>***

**Jane Wagner**

In 1978 Jane Wagner became the third woman to direct a movie for a major studio and Universal the third studio to hire one. Unlike Paramount’s handling of *Darling*, Wagner and her film, *Moment by Moment*, which she wrote and directed, was not touted as the poster-girl for women directors nor the studio as a feminist patron. This project had other big publicity appeal to exploit. The movie featured two top stars of 1978: Lily Tomlin and John Travolta.

Wagner was born in 1935 in Morristown, Tennessee. Her two uncles who were involved in local theater introduced her as a teenager to acting. With their encouragement she auditioned and was accepted to Barter Theater in Abingdon, Virginia. At seventeen years old, Wagner left Barter with \$300 she had earned as part of the company and moved on her own to New York City. She got a room at the YWCA for \$10 a week and began to pursue an acting career, but was soon discouraged after so many rejections.

Wagner was an entrepreneurial artist: she played the piano, wrote music, and eventually established a career as a successful textile designer for the Kleenex company Kimberly-Clarke and Fieldcrest linens, where she developed the Teach-Me-Read line of children's bedding.<sup>101</sup>

By the early 1960s, Wagner's peers were successful and creative women. They included columnist Liz Smith, advertiser Jane Trahey, and author and publicist Pattie Goldstein, who had worked for CBS and NBC and introduced Wagner to Gloria Safire, who became her agent. In 1969 Wagner submitted a script, *J.T.*, about an African American boy living in Harlem, to CBS's series the "Children's Hour," produced by Jacqueline Babbitt and Barbara Schultz. CBS accepted the work, which won Wagner a Peabody Award. Lily Tomlin, who in 1969 was well known for her appearances on the television show *Laugh-In*, saw *J.T.* and contacted Wagner hoping the writer would help her develop an album for her precocious child character "Edith Ann." The album, which they ended up writing in one weekend, was their first creative collaboration and the start of their personal relationship.

Between 1973 and 1976, Tomlin and Wagner created several Emmy-nominated television specials for networks ABC and CBS: Wagner as writer and frequently producer, and Tomlin as star. In 1974 and in 1976, the television specials *Lily* (CBS) and *Lily Tomlin* (ABC) won Emmys for Best Writing in which Wagner was included. In 1977 the couple collaborated on Tomlin's one-woman show, *Appearing Nightly*, which won a Tony Award. These works featured Tomlin performing a catalog of characters that used comedy as a platform to talk about social issues such as feminism, race, class, sexuality, and contemporary politics. In 1975 Tomlin appeared in her first feature film, *Nashville*.



She was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the film.

After seeing a performance of *Appearing Nightly*, John Travolta, who admired Tomlin immensely, was determined to work with her on his next project. In 1977 Travolta was known for his character Vinnie Barbarino on the sitcom *Welcome Back, Kotter*, and he would arrive at mega-stardom with his performance as Tony Manero in *Saturday Night Fever* released that same year. The actor had a three-picture contract with producer Robert Stigwood: *Saturday Night Fever* was their first film; followed by *Grease* in 1978; *Moment by Moment* would be the third project. Stigwood was the manager of the disco-rock band the Bee Gees. He had also produced both the stage and film versions of the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973) and the band The Who's rock opera film *Tommy* (1975).

From the onset, the veteran producer was not convinced that a Travolta-Tomlin venture (a non-musical comedy) would be the most advantageous follow-up to his first two films with the actor. However, Travolta's current level of stardom gave him leverage in choosing the third project; Stigwood screened some of *Saturday Night Fever*'s footage for Tomlin and Wagner, who were impressed, and the deal was made. "Lily and John decided they wanted to do a drama," explained Stigwood. "Well, the whole world was bidding for this third project, all the distributors. I didn't like the story that Jane came up with, but everyone wore me down."<sup>102</sup> While doing press for *Saturday Night Fever*, Travolta gushed about how much he was looking forward to his next film. "I was so excited about it I called at 2:30 a.m. and woke Lily and Jane up to talk about it."<sup>103</sup> He

and Stigwood initially disagreed on the project, but finally the producer submitted. “If John doesn’t want to commit to another musical, then fuck it, let’s do it.”<sup>104</sup>

In 1977 Tomlin had signed a three-year contract with Universal to star, write, produce, and possibly even direct, two films.<sup>105</sup> *Moment by Moment* became one of the two projects. Stigwood’s company Robert Stigwood Organisation (RSO) produced the film for Universal for an estimated \$7 million. Wagner was hired to direct. Having written and produced for the stage and television, she felt that her next step was directing.<sup>106</sup> Even with her extensive accomplishments as a writer-producer, the filmmaker was aware of the fact that her affiliation with mega-star Tomlin helped her get the coveted job of director. As she explained in the press in 1978, “I haven’t had bad experiences for being a woman but I think it’s harder for women to develop a power base and experience you need. I’ve been very lucky. Lily has been a platform for me and we’ve been so offbeat that no one in the past thought to stop us.”<sup>107</sup>

The idea behind *Moment by Moment* was a serious and sexy romantic drama between an older woman and younger man (at the time Tomlin was thirty-nine and Travolta twenty-four) that Wagner had been thinking about for a while. It was the story of Tricia, a rich Beverly Hills housewife who was going through a divorce when she meets Strip, a young street hustler from Hollywood. The two embark on a love affair at her Malibu beach house where they struggle over differences of age, class, upbringing, and relationship expectations: Tricia, the “good wife,” was looking forward to having casual sex for the first time, and Strip, who has only ever been sexually objectified, was searching for real love.

Response to the film was brutal. In 1980 Travolta, then able to joke about the experience, remarked, “[Y]ou would have thought that Lily and I had committed murder,” he laughed. “I thought, migod, don’t ever do a movie people don’t like; they’ll kill you.”<sup>108</sup> Doug Edwards for the *Advocate* was vicious in his response to the movie, declaring it “a disaster of such magnitude that it virtually defies comprehension” and that “its outcome should be bypassed for theatrical release altogether and, rather, should immediately be sold to the nation’s university and college film schools as the definitive text for instruction in how *not* to make a movie.”<sup>109</sup> Frank Rich at *Time* was horrified, calling the film “downright perverse,” and bemoaned the misuse of its actors. “For a couple of hours, two of the screen’s best actors, John Travolta and Lily Tomlin, walk around overdecorated rooms and whisper sweet nothings to each other.”<sup>110</sup> Wagner took the brunt of the blame. “Not helping matters is Wagner’s banal script,” accused the writer for *Variety*, “which has cliché piled atop cliché, and dialog that evokes embarrassing laughter.”<sup>111</sup> Edwards blamed Wagner for being an “inept” director with a “disregard for staging, pacing emotional rhythm, or for any of the other basics of dramatic film structure and language.”<sup>112</sup> Kevin Thomas was one of the few reviewers who liked the film. In his attempt to rescue it from slaughter he mentioned how badly the movie had been brutalized. “‘Moment by Moment’...a tender romance, has incurred some of the worst preview reactions within recent memory. It’s said that at one showing, 77 walkouts were clocked.”<sup>113</sup>

The movie, which earned \$7,161,00 at the box office--essentially breaking even--was never released on home video.<sup>114</sup> The reasons for why it was disliked has as much to do with the actual film as it does with the public’s expectations of John Travolta in 1978.

Different accounts of the production suggested pressures common to any production, but do not paint a chaotic scene. Wagner was forced to cut a storyline that might have helped to develop more of Travolta's character. Stigwood recalled tensions between the stars who started fighting over small, inconsequential things such as would Tricia wear gold bracelets when they first sleep together.<sup>115</sup> In an interview before the film's release, Travolta refuted rumors that Stigwood was considering replacing Wagner.<sup>116</sup> Stigwood, who closed the production down for a three-week "cooling off" period, held himself accountable for the film's flaws. "I have to take full responsibility. I could have shut the film down completely."<sup>117</sup> It is unknown why he didn't or how seriously he had considered such a drastic option for a film that was not running over budget or over schedule. Travolta regretted not fighting harder to have his character's name changed. "Strip" became a joke amongst audiences and reviewers. When Tomlin's character would call out Strip's name in a dramatic or romantic scene it played as a command for him to actually strip. "I begged them [Wagner and Stigwood]," Travolta told Gene Siskel in an interview a year and half after the film's release, "but I didn't push hard enough. I had too much respect for them, which sometimes can get in the way."<sup>118</sup>

Wagner, as the film's writer and director, experienced the most anguish. In retrospect, Wagner felt that it was not in her "nature" to direct. "I have a vision for something. Maybe the work should be reflective of that vision, but the actual making it happen, drives me crazy." The majority of the film took place on the beach. Over thirty years later, Wagner found the humor in what at the time was challenging. "Shooting at the ocean. Having to match waves coming, to wait for the sun coming in—ooh!" she laughed. "It was so much more than I ever wanted to deal with, technically."<sup>119</sup> As a first-

time director perhaps she wasn't prepared enough or she lacked the authority or experience to correct, on set, what was not working in a scene. In 2011 the filmmaker reflected on what went wrong: "You watch the dailies and you know it wasn't right, but you have to go and shoot the next day, but a whole new, different scene and you're haunted by what you missed the last day, but you have to go on to the next scene and it's really painful, but I didn't have the power to just stop everything and say 'It didn't work.'"120

Taking into consideration Wagner's trepidations as to her ability to do the job and the tensions on the set, what stands out as more of a detriment to the film was Travolta's stardom in 1978. *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*, which was released in June 1978 while *Moment by Moment* was in post-production, were two of the top-grossing films of the decade. In 1978 Travolta was a phenomenon. Any film that he was to have made would have been scrutinized. Critics had their reasons for disliking *Moment by Moment*: Tomlin and Travolta had similar hairstyles and therefore looked like lovers who were brother and sister; the film was a concentrated study of romance that dedicated the majority of its screen time to just the two protagonists, an unconventional portrayal for a Hollywood film; audiences expected comedy and dancing based on both actors' previous work. But the rage that it invoked appeared to be about something more than a movie that reviewers found disappointing. "I never saw such force directed toward something," reflected Travolta. "I must have made a pretty big impression with my first two films for there to be that kind of disappointment."121 Travolta suffered through many more poorly received films, particularly during the 1980s, which suggests that the expectations for the young star were a bigger obstacle than the work itself.

Neither Tomlin's nor Wagner's careers faltered post-*Moment by Moment*. In 1985 Tomlin won a Tony Award for her performance in *The Search for Intelligent Signs of Life in the Universe*, written and produced by Wagner. The production was adapted into a movie for Showtime and received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Variety, Music or Comedy Special. The couple continued to collaborate with each other to great success, Wagner as writer and producer, but never again as director. Perhaps she was correct in knowing where as an artist she could do her best work. Regardless of her possible realization while making *Moment by Moment* that she did not like directing, "[the] criticism really hurt," said Wagner in 1979. "I wanted to show that two people who feel there is no romance left anymore can suddenly find it...Nobody, nobody, would accept that."<sup>122</sup>

## JOAN TEWKESBURY

***"It was not quite the same for women at that time. If you ever stopped to look at it, it would stop you cold. So I never stopped to look."***<sup>123</sup>

**Joan Tewkesbury**

Joan Tewkesbury had met Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner on the set of director-producer Robert Altman's film *Nashville* in 1974. Tewkesbury had written for Altman *Thieves Like Us* (1974) and *Nashville* (1975), which would be an enormous success upon its release. By then the screenwriter already had aspirations to direct. Two years earlier, Tomlin had optioned the rights to Cynthia Buchanan's novel *The Maiden* that *Variety* announced Wagner would write the screenplay and Tomlin would star.<sup>124</sup> The three women began collaborating on the project, with Tewkesbury as director, and Altman signed on to produce. Altman then "punched somebody from the studio (Columbia

Pictures) in the nose on the set of *Nashville* and ruined that relationship as he did a lot of times,” remembered Wagner, laughing. “Altman was notorious at that point for being very difficult so that project quickly got killed.”<sup>125</sup> Four years later, Wagner and Tomlin would make *Moment by Moment*, and in 1979, Tewkesbury would direct her first film, *Old Boyfriends*. Altman did not work on either movie.

Joan Tewkesbury was born in Redlands, California, in 1936.<sup>126</sup> An only child, she was encouraged by her mother, a frustrated dancer who worked as a nurse, to study dancing as a young child. At age ten, she was cast with thirty-six other girls in the Maureen O’Brien-MGM film *The Unfinished Dance*. At eighteen, Tewkesbury was the understudy for Mary Martin in Jerome Robbins’ Broadway production of *Peter Pan*. Eventually, she realized that she was not interested in pursuing a career as a dancer. Robbins recommended she go back to school. In 1958 she enrolled in the theater program at the University of Southern California, where she honed her skills as a choreographer and theater director. During this time she married Southern California land developer Robert Maguire. The couple lived in the San Fernando Valley; in 1963 and 1965 they had two children. Around 1970, frustrated with her role as a suburban housewife, Tewkesbury separated from her husband. During this time, she was directing actor Michael Murphy in a play. Murphy had worked with Altman who came to see Tewkesbury’s production. Awed by his movie *M\*A\*S\*H* (1970) and eager to work in film, she called the director’s office to set up a meeting where she told him, “I don’t know exactly what I can do here. I have danced, acted. I’ve sold coffee in commercials. I want to work in film.”<sup>127</sup>

Altman hired her as the script supervisor on *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971). This experience was her film school. Altman was the “king” of his set, but his productions also fostered a family dynamic that made a strong impression on Tewkesbury, which would inform her creative approach throughout her career. When the picture was finished, he advised her, “If you really want to direct a movie, nobody will let you unless you write a script.”<sup>128</sup> She then spent the next year writing *After Ever After*, a dark comedy about the end of her thirteen-year marriage. Geraldine Chaplin was set to play the character based on Tewkesbury; Altman was signed on as producer. “One of the most amazing phone calls I ever got, [Altman] called and said ‘I will produce your movie,’” remembered Tewkesbury in an interview for the Directors Guild Visual History Project in 2006. “I almost dropped the phone. What I realized was Bob was in a position to see what worked for him and worked for you too. He had to keep making movies too. I think he also thought I could be funny.”<sup>129</sup>

During this time, Altman asked Tewkesbury to write the screenplay for *Thieves Like Us* and then *Nashville* (1975), which received Oscar nominations for Best Director, Best Picture, two Best Supporting Actresses, and won for Best Song. At the moment of *Nashville*’s success, Altman said that they should try and get her film made. “We couldn’t raise ten cents on Geraldine Chaplin. And we couldn’t raise ten cents on me. At the end of *Nashville* no studios were interested in a dark comedy about the end of my marriage,” laughed Tewkesbury in 2010.<sup>130</sup> “I had gotten a great deal from [the *Nashville* experience] and I truly wanted to direct a film by that point [1975], but *it---was---just---hard* for the girls. And I hate to say it, but it was a difficult time. Alan Rudolph could get his movie financed [and produced by Altman]. We couldn’t make the arrangement for



me.”<sup>131</sup> Alan Rudolph had been Altman’s second assistant director on *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *California Split* (1974), and *Nashville* (1975); he wrote the script for *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976). In 1976 he wrote and directed his first feature film, *Welcome to L.A.*, which Altman produced. The film was derivative of his mentor’s work, in style and narrative, so much so that Rudolph used two of Altman’s actors, Keith Carradine and Geraldine Chaplin.<sup>132</sup>

Production designer Polly Platt introduced Tewkesbury to her agent Jeff Berg, who signed the aspiring director. Berg represented Paul Schrader who at the time was known as a screenwriter for movies such as *Taxi Driver* (1976); in 1977, he wrote and directed his first film *Blue Collar*. In 1979 Tewkesbury was offered *Old Boyfriends* to direct, a script written by Paul and his brother, Leonard, whom he collaborated with often; Paul acted as executive producer on the picture.

*Old Boyfriends* starred Talia Shire, known at this time for her work in *The Godfather* and *Rocky* series. She played Dianne Cruise, a recently divorced psychiatrist in the midst of an identity crisis. Faced with an emotional breakdown, Cruise sets out on a road trip in search of her old boyfriends played by Richard Jordan, John Belushi, and Keith Carradine. The film resembled something of a road movie that invoked themes of revenge and romance with a suspenseful score created by David Shire, the actress’s husband. Independent producer Edward Pressman made the movie for an estimated \$2.5 million; it was distributed by Avco Embassy Pictures.<sup>133</sup> Tewkesbury recalled the politics that brought her to the project. “Jeff Berg blackmailed Pressman into letting me direct my first movie, because [Pressman] had wanted to be in business with Paul Schrader.”<sup>134</sup> The original screenplay, titled *Old Girlfriends*, was about a man going back to revisit his past

relationships, “and then suddenly ‘women’s movies’ were hot,” Tewkesbury said sarcastically, “and so [Schrader] changed it to a girl going back on this journey.”<sup>135</sup>

Both Schrader and Tewkesbury were frustrated during the making of the movie. Schrader wrote in his book *Schrader on Schrader*,

I mistakenly thought at the time that I shouldn’t direct it because I, as a man, couldn’t really penetrate the female psyche sufficiently and so on. There weren’t many opportunities for women directors at the time and I saw myself as being able to alleviate the situation, so I supported Joan. I would have [as director] pushed things more and made them more edgy, more spooky, more scary, with characters that are more mesmerizing and more obsessive.”<sup>136</sup>

“Schrader was backed up directing movies and couldn’t direct *Old Boyfriends*,” explained Tewkesbury. “He turned it over in one way and didn’t turn it over in another way.”<sup>137</sup> She rewrote some of the script to soften the darker elements, which upset Schrader who “would have been more comfortable if we had directed it like a horror film.”<sup>138</sup> Michelle Rappaport, Schrader’s girlfriend at the time, was one of the movie’s producers. Tewkesbury felt she had somewhat of an ally in Rappaport who was looking out for the picture that otherwise might have been taken over by its co-writer-executive producer. “He wanted a revenge film,” said Tewkesbury. “We wanted a revenge film, *but* with some psychological preparation.”<sup>139</sup>

The critics’ response to *Old Boyfriends* was moderate. Similar to Joan Rivers’ reception during the release of *Rabbit Test*, reviewers separated their praise for the director from a film they felt was lacking. What stood out to the majority of them was the potential of Tewkesbury as a director and a curiosity as to why, as an accomplished

screenwriter, she would have chosen, especially as her directorial debut, to work with the Schrader brothers' flawed script. David Denby of the *New Yorker* was candid in his surprise: "I can't imagine what the witty, loose-tongued Tewkesbury thought she was saying in this glum, undernourished movie. The screenplay, written by the ubiquitous writer-director-menace Paul Schrader and his brother Leonard, is completely lacking in common sense and ordinary definition...*Old Boyfriends* feels like a workshop production; now I want to see a real movie from Tewkesbury."<sup>140</sup>

Like Denby, Robert Osborne writing for *The Hollywood Reporter* was disappointed in the film, but still rooting for Tewkesbury's future. "Despite the fact that it was obviously made with good intentions and good breeding, 'Old Boyfriends' doesn't really add up to much more than a rather disjointed odyssey..." wrote Osborne. "Tewkesbury, in her debut as director, has moments—only moments—but still shows a potential for interesting work to come."<sup>141</sup> The film screened at the Director's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival. During a press conference a young French female filmmaker raised her hand and said to Tewkesbury, "I think this movie is shit. You wrote *Nashville*. Did you do this movie simply to make your first movie?" Unapologetically, the director said, "Yes." Telling the story thirty years later, Tewkesbury laughed remembering how "Schrader was kicking me under the table."<sup>142</sup>

In 1979 Tewkesbury wrote and directed *The Tenth Month*, a television movie starring Carol Burnett and produced by her husband Joe Hamilton. She would then go on to a very successful career as a television writer, director, producer of movies of the week, such as *The Acorn People* (1981), *Cold Sassy Tree* (1989), and *Sudie and Simpson* (1990); direct one-hour episodic programs including *Northern Exposure*, *Picket Fences*,

and *Doogie Howser, M.D.*; and produce and direct the series *The Guardian*. She never directed another feature film. Tewkesbury enjoyed immensely the actual making of *Old Boyfriends*—working with the actors and her crew. But the long process of getting to direct a film, and as a writer one that did not originate with her, was difficult. She felt fortunate that she had an agent who advocated for her, but the insidiousness of sexism was powerful. “It was not quite the same for women at that time,” she said reflecting on the double standard decades later. “If you ever stopped to look at it, it would stop you cold. So I never stopped to look at it. And you were never quite sure why. There was always an underlying frustration and you could never quite address because it was never overt, but there was this Chinese Wall.”<sup>143</sup>

Joan Tewkesbury’s vivid description of the nebulosity of sexism stalling women directors’ careers in the 1970s is especially poignant considering, as early as 1975 with the success of *Nashville*, how primed she was for the job. As Robert Altman had advised her: to direct in Hollywood one needed to write a script. Tewkesbury had written one for a film that received several Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture. Following this achievement she had written her own script to direct. While her male peers, Alan Rudolph, Paul Schrader, and John Milius transitioned from the position of screenwriter to director—of their own screenplays—she was unable to do the same.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Tewkesbury’s ties to Altman, whether as a screenwriter who worked with the accomplished director or he as her potential producer, were not connections strong enough to break through the film industry’s gender barrier.

## **ANNE BANCROFT, LEE GRANT & NANCY WALKER**

The first feature films of Anne Bancroft, Lee Grant, and Nancy Walker were all released in 1980. By 1980, all three had been well-known actresses for decades in theater, film, and television. Bancroft and Grant had won Academy Awards; Grant and Walker had won Emmys. The three had also been participants in the AFI's Directing Workshop for women: Grant and Walker were part of the pilot program in 1974; Bancroft was accepted in the second year of the program in 1975-1976. At the time, the three were selected, not only based on their potential talent and ambition to direct, but also as part of Jan Haag's strategy to choose high-profile participants who would bring the program prestige and notoriety.

Each of these directors made three very different films at the close of the 1970s and start of the 1980s. Grant directed the independent feature, *Tell Me a Riddle*, the story of an older couple coming to terms with aging. Bancroft wrote, directed, and co-starred in *Fatso*--a sentimental comedy about a compulsive eater--for 20th Century-Fox. And Walker directed the extravagant musical *Can't Stop the Music* produced by EMI Films. That these women had been actively trying to direct a feature film as early as 1974 and 1975, but had not been able to see that ambition come to fruition until 1980, highlights the fact that even known actresses' considerable level of stardom could not be harnessed into the necessary power to help their careers as filmmakers. Grant described the transition from actress to director as if she had committed a major offense. "The minute I said 'I want to direct something, it was like, 'What is that smell in the room? Who did what here?' It was like I was stepping out of character. I was intruding in a place where it

was not attractive. It was not pleasant. Their words were: ‘But do you know how to be a captain of the ship?’”<sup>145</sup>

## ANNE BANCROFT

***“I don’t want to direct a Mel Brooks film. I want to direct an Anne Bancroft film! This is a matter of identity! And Mel agrees with this!”***<sup>146</sup>

**Anne Bancroft**

Anne Bancroft, originally Anna Maria Louisa Italiano, was born in the Bronx on September 17, 1931. She studied at the New York Academy of Dramatic Arts and in 1951 signed a contract with 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox, appearing in small roles in inconsequential films. Bancroft described this early period of her as career as unremarkable. “Twentieth Century Fox told me what to do and I did it. I learned nothing.”<sup>147</sup> In 1958 Bancroft won her first Tony Award for her performance in the Broadway production of *Two for the Seesaw*, in which she co-starred with Henry Fonda, followed by her second Tony Award for her role as Annie Sullivan, teacher to Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker* in 1959. She reprised the role in the film adaptation of the play for which she won an Academy Award for Best Actress in 1963. In 1967 she played Mrs. Robinson, a stylish and dissatisfied Southern California housewife in the movie *The Graduate*, a role in which she received an Oscar nomination for Best Actress. In 1971 Bancroft turned forty--by Hollywood’s standards, “old.” The interesting characters that she had played in the years prior started to become difficult to come by. It was fortuitous then that she would join the Directing Workshop for Women in 1976 and begin to develop her creative skills in a new way as a writer-director *and* performer.<sup>148</sup>

Bancroft made *Fatso* as a short film while in the DWW. It starred Dom DeLuise, Ron Carey, and Estelle Reiner--principle cast members who would appear again in the

feature version.<sup>149</sup> Three years later, in May 1979, she was preparing to direct the film as a feature for 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox produced by her husband Mel Brooks' company Brooksfilms. In 1980 she was one of six women between 1971 and 1980 to have directed for a major studio.<sup>150</sup> *Fatso*, a romantic comedy set in an Italian-American neighborhood in New York City, starred Dom DeLuise as Dominick DiNapoli, an overweight man in his early forties who decides to improve his eating habits when he falls in love with Lydia, played by Candice Azzara. Bancroft co-starred as Antoinette, Dominick's overbearing sister who is so concerned for her brother's health that she is borderline hysterical most of the time. The film follows, with a mix of humor and sensitivity, the challenges Dominick faces in changing his eating habits in the pursuit of true love.

In its press material, 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox did not draw attention to the fact that a woman directed the film. (In 1980 this was still a rarity, as Fox's last woman director was Elaine May and *The Heartbreak Kid* in 1972.) However, the studio did make mention of Brianne Murphy, the film's cinematographer, the first female director of photography to shoot a studio picture.<sup>151</sup> Bancroft was adamant in wanting to hire women on her film. "When I started I wanted as many women as possible in [sic] the crew," explained Bancroft in a 1979 interview. "I said isn't there a woman director of photography and they finally found Bri...."<sup>152</sup>

Murphy came to Hollywood in the 1950s in hopes of becoming a director of photography (DP). To be a DP on a studio film meant joining a union. As discussed in Chapter 1, being a member of a technical union was imperative for below-the-line craftspeople in order for them to get hired on studio pictures; and those unions were some of the most discriminatory sites for women in Hollywood. Murphy worked on low-

budget, non-union films for many years to gain experience. In 1973 she was the first woman to join the Local 659 of International Photographers of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE); and in 1979, when she was hired to shoot *Fatso*, she was still the union's only female member.<sup>153</sup>

It is unclear if Bancroft had been actively trying to make a film during those few years in between the DWW and her deal with 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox. She was, however, also focused on her work as an actress: she appeared as Mary Magdalene in the television miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1977; and she received an Oscar nomination in 1978 for Best Actress alongside her co-star Shirley MacLaine in the film *The Turning Point*.

For Bancroft, collaborating with her established performer-director-producer husband was a strategic decision in getting her film made. During this time Brooks made three of his own films at 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox: *Silent Movie* (1976), *High Anxiety* (1977), and *History of the World: Part I* (1981). His relationship with Fox gave Bancroft access to a studio deal that she most likely would not have otherwise been offered. The opportunity for her to direct also coincided with Brooks' interest in producing projects with new directors, that is, those other than himself.<sup>154</sup> According to Brooks, "I began lending a lot of free advice to a lot of young film makers [sic] who couldn't get in the studio doors without my validation. So I decided to put them under my own banner."<sup>155</sup> Bancroft could be considered a viable investment for the studio as a first-time director based on her status as an accomplished actress and her participation in the DWW years before, but her husband's attachment gave her and her film even more rank.

Critical response to the film was mixed. Michael Sragow, writing for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, delivered a particularly harsh critique of what he thought was



Bancroft's poor direction and lack of comedic timing, describing how the writer-director "appears to believe that by *not* directing the film consistently toward comedy, pathos or romance, she can achieve them all. But her characters aren't full enough to contain those three dimensions, so what she gets is *failed* comedy, *failed* pathos, *failed* romance."<sup>156</sup> Sragow also focused his attack on Bancroft's inability to be original. "It's impossible to tell whether she has any literary or directorial personality, so derivative is her work. Her idea of comedy derives as surely from the excesses of her husband, Mel Brooks, as her sense of drama does from the little-people sappiness of Paddy Chayefsky and her notion of romance from Chaplin—'Young Marty Goes to Weight-Watchers Under City Lights.'" For this reviewer, Bancroft was unsuccessful in writing, directing, and starring in her own work, which he considered a poor imitation of her husband's humor.

Tom Cullen, reviewing *Fatso* for the *Village Voice*, also panned the film, calling it as "bumbling and sluggish as its title would suggest, a lamentable affair which ricochets uncontrollably between attempts at hilarity and pathos."<sup>157</sup> Like Sragow, this reviewer was also relentless in accusing Bancroft of drawing heavily on her famed comedian husband with no success. "Writer-director Bancroft, wife of Mel Brooks, is the latest of [Brooks'] disciples, following Gene Wilder and Marty Feldman, in grooving on pain and on comic protagonists with arbitrarily exaggerated physical disabilities....Unfortunately, Bancroft has about as much instinct for comedy as Michelangelo Antonioni has for farce."

Writing about the film for *The Hollywood Reporter*, critic Arthur Knight was much more forgiving of what other reviewers were insistent in pointing out: Bancroft's uneven directing and what many considered her own "dreadful" performance as the

overbearing Antoinette. As he had done in his review of Joan Darling's *First Love*, Knight emphasized the efforts of a first-time director most pointedly by considering Bancroft as equal to her male peers. "For all [Woody Allen's] humor, his first efforts had far more bumbles than 'Fatso,'" compared Knight. "As a director on her first major outing...she still has a long way to go before she achieves the technical security and artistic maturity of an 'Annie Hall' or 'Manhattan.' Nevertheless, she's well on her way, and I can only say that I'll have no reticence about viewing the next Anne Bancroft movie, whatever it may be called, whoever may be its star. Maybe she'll become the Italian Woody Allen."<sup>158</sup>

Knight was also acutely aware of how the film contributed to an historical first by having Murphy as its cinematographer, pointing out that "it's important to note also that, however the miracle was accomplished, 'Fatso' was photographed by a woman—Brienne Murphy--and very well."<sup>159</sup> Kevin Thomas, for the *Los Angeles Times*, also gave the film a favorable review, and also recognized the importance of Murphy's achievement. Thomas ended his review with an emphatic praise of the female DP that simultaneously shamed the industry for taking so long: "'Fatso' (PG) also marks a fine theatrical feature debut for cinematographer Brienne Murphy, who as far as anyone knows is the first woman director of photography ever to work for a major Hollywood studio. To say it's about time is to indulge in reckless understatement."<sup>160</sup>

Bancroft never directed again after *Fatso*. "I think to be a director you have to have a certain kind of personality which I don't have," she explained. "I do not like manipulating people. My greatest philosophy is to let everybody just be who they want to be, but it isn't workable. Somebody has to have a very dominating hand, and I just don't

have that kind of hand.”<sup>161</sup> In interviews during the years following the movie’s release, it was common for the actress-director not to mention the project, her experience making the picture, or any follow-up thoughts on directing.

Brianne Murphy, interviewed by Mollie Gregory in her book, *Women Who Run the Show*, suggests that there was a power dynamic between Bancroft and Brooks that might have made directing challenging for the first-time filmmaker. According to Murphy, “Word had gotten around that [Brooks] was very controlling.”<sup>162</sup> For one thing, Bancroft and Brooks watched dailies—the footage shot that day--alone. Industry custom was for a director and her cinematographer to watch together, so that they could discuss what footage the director liked; often dailies might include other members of the cast and crew, at the director’s discretion. Murphy would view the footage without Bancroft in the film lab prior to Bancroft and Brooks watching it on their own together. “I guess he told her what he liked,” surmised Murphy from the odd behavior.<sup>163</sup>

As told by Murphy, Brooks would pick up his wife from the set every day. “We never knew when he’d arrive, and it seemed to be at his convenience rather than hers because whenever he did appear, she’d start wanting to complete a shot,” remembered Murphy. On one such day he came while she was still shooting. Without saying hello or introducing himself to anyone Brooks went to the video assist—a monitor attached to the camera that shows what is being filmed--and in the middle of the shot said, “Cut, cut, that’s no good, that won’t work, cut it.” Nobody on a set says “Cut” except the director. Bob Lavar, the camera operator, responding to this breach, looked at Brooks and said, “Who the fuck is that little guy?” Describing the scene, Murphy recalled, “All hell broke loose. Very upset, Anne picked up her stuff and left.”<sup>164</sup>

The following day Bancroft was very late to the set. Finally she arrived and asked Murphy to come see her in her dressing room. Visibly distressed and red-eyed from crying, Bancroft said to her DP, “I hate to tell you this, but Mel says you have to fire Bob....Mel says he’s potentially dangerous.” Murphy defended her camera operator, explaining to Bancroft that Lavar was defending and protecting *her* power as the director. Still not convinced, Bancroft brought Murphy back into her dressing room later that day. “I guess Mel had gotten to her,” Murphy said. “She and I went through it again. I said I wouldn’t fire the operator, there was no reason to, and he should get a medal. It was a standoff. We got no shots all day.”<sup>165</sup>

Eventually, the production resumed and Lavar kept his job. “[O]n the set everybody loved Anne and we had a wonderful camaraderie,” emphasized Murphy. “Anne Bancroft is a very talented person [and] I always thought she could have been a great director.”<sup>166</sup> Murphy’s memory of Brooks treading on his wife’s authority and the difficulty she had asserting herself sheds a different light on Bancroft’s reasons for not wanting to direct beyond not having the right “personality.” Perhaps the “dominating hand” that she found counterintuitive to her own approach to directing (of letting “everybody just be who they want to be”) was more about having to negotiate power with her husband when she was in the position of ultimate creative authority.

Married since 1964 (and up until her death in 2005), the couple presented a harmonious relationship.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, on one hand, it seems unsurprising that Bancroft would write, direct, and act in a film as her husband had always done, possibly inspired and encouraged by him; and that as a successful writer, director, producer, performer, Brooks in turn would help his wife pursue her filmmaking goals. While any combination

of these things may have taken place, questions about power seem apparent in Murphy's memory of the pair. Although the couple worked on several movies together, they were all movies in which she appeared as an actress while he served as actor-writer-director (e.g., *Silent Movie* [1976] and *To Be or Not to Be* [1983]).

In 1980, when Brooks established his production company Brooksfilms, the filmmaker described how he wanted to keep his name and its association with comedy separate from his company. "I very skillfully hid my name when I created Brooksfilms," he explained. "I very assiduously kept the name Mel Brooks away from [these projects]." <sup>168</sup> Whatever his intention might have been, the company's title very clearly had his name in it, suggesting that Brooks' ability to disassociate himself from other filmmakers' projects was more difficult than he had imagined. This may have been especially challenging in the case of Bancroft, about whom he said, in 2013, "I liked her so much I couldn't get enough of her." <sup>169</sup>

After her single foray into directing, Bancroft continued to act in film, television, and theater until her death from uterine cancer in 2005 at age seventy-three. <sup>170</sup> Although she did not seem to speak much of her experience as a Hollywood director or as a woman director, she was candid about the age discrimination actresses experienced in the industry. In an interview in the *New York Times* in 1984 promoting her role in the film *Garbo Talks*, Bancroft explained her predicament in Hollywood as a fifty-something-year-old woman: "I have a good life, and it's very hard to find something you really want to go to work in. People don't write wonderful parts for women, because women have not been given a chance to live wonderful lives that people would want to write about, and because most of the writers are men." <sup>171</sup> Her understanding of the exclusion of women's

creative agency and representation within the film industry could apply to the role of director as well.

## NANCY WALKER

***“To tell you the truth, disco isn’t anything I’d want to live with forever, but I think we can make a terrific movie out of it.”***<sup>172</sup>

**Nancy Walker**

Born Anna Myrtle Swoyer in 1922 in Philadelphia, Nancy Walker started her career on the stage primarily performing musical theater, with an emphasis on comedy, before moving into television as an actress. In 1970 she became popular as Ida Morgenstern, the overbearing mother of Rhoda (Valerie Harper), best friend to Mary Tyler Moore on the *Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Walker’s Ida became a recurring role on Harper’s spinoff series, *Rhoda*. She was not only a guest character on both these sitcoms, she also directed episodes of each programs. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, Walker was not only the first woman to direct for *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, but possibly the first woman to direct a sitcom.<sup>173</sup> (Joan Darling followed a few years later.) Walker was nominated for a total of eight Emmys for supporting actress on *Rhoda* and the series *McMillan & Wife*, in which she also had a recurring role. During these years she also appeared on television as the spokesperson for Bounty paper towels. Her famed tagline was “Bounty, it’s the quicker picker-upper.”

During the 1970s, Allan Carr became her manager. Carr, whose other clients during that era included Ann-Margaret and Olivia Newton-John, was known for his elaborate showmanship. “Allan has changed our lives,” said Walker in a 1977 interview with *TV Guide*. Carr renegotiated her contracts with *Rhoda* and *McMillan & Wife*,

“quadrupling [her] price.”<sup>174</sup> He also negotiated her program, *The Nancy Walker Show*, on ABC in 1976, which was cancelled after one season. Carr was a manager turned producer and promoter. Following the success of *Grease* (starring Newton-John and John Travolta), which he co-wrote and produced, *Can’t Stop the Music*, originally titled *Discoland*, was to be his follow-up--contemporary disco--musical extravaganza. The filmed starred the popular disco group The Village People, whose costumed performances played on cultural stereotypes and coded lyrics that appealed to a large gay fan base.

*Can’t Stop the Music* was about a supermodel and her roommate, an aspiring music producer, played by Valerie Perrine and Steve Guttenberg, who “discover” and make famous The Village People. Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner made his screen début as a straight-laced lawyer who becomes Perrine’s love interest. The plot of the film was of little importance, as the lavish musical scenes were the crux of the movie’s appeal. The British company EMI Films produced the picture for a reported budget of \$20 million: an estimated \$13.8 million was spent on production and an additional \$5 million on promotion.<sup>175</sup>

Carr was also known for his decadent parties where ample amounts of drugs and sex (gay and straight) took place openly and every rank of celebrity was invited, along with the press so they would be sure to report on the festivities in next day’s paper. In contrast, Walker seemed an odd choice for *Can’t Stop the Music*. In 1979, when she was signed to the project, the director was fifty-seven years old. She had been married to acting coach David Craig since 1951 (and until her death in 1992). The couple had one child. Profiles of her in the press emphasized her professionalism, busy work schedule,

and the dedication to her family. Nowhere did those articles mention weekend binges at Carr's parties.

Walker had extensive stage experience as a performer in musical theater in the 1940s and 1950s, and understanding of actors, having been one for so many years, but her directing background was in three-camera sitcoms. Tom Buckley of the *New York Times* pondered her choice for director of *Can't Stop the Music*. "If you were Allan Carr and you were looking for a director for 'Discoland' starring the Village People, whom would you be likely to choose? A young fellow, 30 years old tops, right, who had grown up in the rock world and then...segued into the even more fervid world of Studio 54...Wrong. You pick Nancy Walker, whose career in show business dates back approximately to 'Blossom Time'..." Buckley was snarky and ageist in his comments, but not entirely off the mark. In the same article, Walker confirmed her miscasting on the production when she admitted, "Rock [music], I've got to tell you, I don't get. I kind of shy away from it, in fact. I never understood the words, and from what I've read it's probably just as well."<sup>176</sup>

Carr's biographer, Robert Hofler, suggests that the producer-promoter chose Walker to direct his elaborate production, which he wrote, produced, and created the publicity campaign for, because he needed someone he could in turn direct. Walker was surprised by Carr's offer to direct her first feature. When he asked her, "Are you ready for a change of life?" she responded, "What do you mean, professionally or menopausally?"<sup>177</sup> At the time, the star and her manager were close, as was the nature of that business relationship. To compensate for Walker's inexperience directing musicals, choreographer Arlene Philips would direct the musical-dance sections of the film (as was



common in musicals).<sup>178</sup> Considering these factors, it appeared that Carr would have an able and compliant director on his crew.

In the press, Walker was enthusiastic about making the year's most publicized musical dance film. She credited Carr with being the one to offer her a feature to direct. "Everyone said, 'why don't you do it' but nobody said 'on my time!' [referring to directing a movie]. 'Only Allan Carr said, 'let's do it,' and I can't believe how smoothly everything is going.'" She gushed about the dynamic on the project. "We're all having a gorgeous love affair making the film—," listing all the cast members to make sure her interview read like a press release.<sup>179</sup> Hofler interviewed several principle cast and crew members who described a different situation on the set of *Can't Stop the Music*. Perrine recalled how by day four of the film shoot she and Walker were fighting. David Hodo, one member of The Village People, remembered Carr pulling the two women off the set and into his limousine where he threatened, "If you two cunts don't start getting along, I'm going to publish it in every magazine and newspaper in America."<sup>180</sup> Eventually, Carr had to separate the women: for Perrine's scenes, Walker could be seen off set watching *All My Children*.<sup>181</sup> The press sheets released by the film's distributor, Associated Film Distribution, covered up any sort of discontent by literally silencing the director. Instead, the material described how "Allan Carr was delighted with the fact that his director also knew how to get a film in the can on time. The diminutive Nancy worked so quietly on the set of 'Can't Stop the Music' that visitors were not certain who the director actually was. She speaks in a low-key voice and allowed her assistants to call out the orders to cast and crew." Perrine was quoted saying, "Being an actress herself,

Nancy knew how to communicate with the minimum of confusion. She never wastes words.”<sup>182</sup> Not being on set, Walker never had to.

When the film was released in 1980, disco had fallen out of fashion and audience response to the movie was tepid. Fortunately, for Walker, reviewers didn’t seem to hold the director responsible for the flaws of the film. *Motion Picture Product Digest* offered support by suggesting that “Nancy Walker, the director, is the veteran performer of many a Broadway musical and she worked hard to cover up the weaknesses of ‘Can’t Stop the Music’ by having all the actors and singers conduct themselves with unflagging energy.”<sup>183</sup> It was clear to critics that this over-the-top film was Carr’s creation and subsequently, his responsibility. “Obviously Allan Carr is a genius, right?” Exclaimed David Ansen of *Newsweek*. “Who else would have had the insight to put the Village People in the same movie? Who else would have hired comedienne Nancy Walker to direct ‘the movie musical event of the ‘80s!’? Who else would have gotten Baskin-Robbins to name an ice-cream flavor after his movie?” Ansen’s sarcasm was uncontained when he declared, “[*Can’t Stop the Music*] is the first all-singing, all-dancing horror film, the ‘Dawn of the Dead’ of the disco generation. If this movie doesn’t scare you, you’re already dead...”<sup>184</sup>

Shortly after Walker finished the film, she was diagnosed with lung cancer and then had a hip replacement.<sup>185</sup> Once her health stabilized, she returned to television, directing a few episodes of the sitcom *Alice*, but mostly focused on her acting. At the time of her death from cancer in 1992, she was working on the Fox series *True Colors*. Walker did not make another feature film. In interviews following *Can’t Stop the Music*, she does not mention much about her experience on the film, and it is unclear what

relationship she and Carr maintained once the project was completed. However, at one of the movie's premieres, she appeared to have strong feelings that she conveyed to film critic Robert Osborne when she told him, "You think I'm sitting through this piece of shit again," before leaving the theater when the film started.<sup>186</sup>

## LEE GRANT

*"I don't think Elaine [May] and Barbara [Loden] are Women's Lib types. They're extraordinarily talented directors."*<sup>187</sup>

Lee Grant

During the 1970s, Lee Grant claimed to have had no awareness of women directors' struggles to be hired or that she might even be interested in becoming a filmmaker. "It never entered my consciousness, because all I was was an actress and that's all I wanted to be."<sup>188</sup> Born in Manhattan in 1927 as Lyova Haskell Rosenthal, Lee Grant began her career as a child-actress performing in the theater. As a young adult, she began appearing in films and was nominated for her first Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1951 for the film *Detective Story*. During the 1950s, she and her first husband Arnold Manoff were targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee; the couple was blacklisted from working in Hollywood. By the mid-1960s, Grant was able to clear her name, and her career began to flourish again in both television and film. Throughout her career as an actress, she was nominated for several Emmy Awards and Oscars. In 1966 she won an Emmy for Best Supporting Actress in *Peyton Place* and another for her performance in *The Neon Ceiling* in 1971. She was awarded an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in 1976 for her role in *Shampoo*.

In 1972, while appearing on Broadway in Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* opposite Peter Falk, Grant began making plans to direct the script *I'm Waiting*, written by Sam Reese and produced by her second husband, Joe Feury. She told the *New York Times* that she wasn't giving up acting for directing, but that "I'd be an idiot not to try to exercise the talent others think I have."<sup>189</sup> The project was never completed.

Grant's first directing job was in 1968 for the Actors Studio West in Los Angeles of the stage production *The Adventures of Jack and Max*. In 1973 George Schlatter, known for creating *Laugh-In*, asked her to co-direct the one-hour television special *The Shape of Things*, a comedy revue made for CBS that played on contemporary topics related to the women's movement. The offer came out of the blue. "George!" she exclaimed. "Get a hold of yourself! I've never directed anything. And a comedy show? Where are you coming from?"<sup>190</sup>

It turned out to be a positive experience for her. Grant co-directed the program with Carolyn Raskin, a producer for *Laugh-In*, who took care of the camera positions, while she staged and worked with actors. The show starred Phyllis Diller, Valerie Harper, Lynn Redgrave, Joan Rivers, and Brenda Vaccaro. Grant also appeared in the cast and was nominated for an Emmy for her performance. The *Los Angeles Times* noted that it was the first time two women co-directed a major television special.<sup>191</sup> Mary Murphy joked that Grant "became the first woman to direct a prime-time entertainment special with hot rollers in her hair."<sup>192</sup>

In 1974 Jan Haag, from the AFI's Directing Workshop for Women, called the actress, asking her for recommendations of possible candidates for the program's pilot year.<sup>193</sup> Grant thought, "Why not me?"<sup>194</sup> The DWW turned out to be an important

experience for her. Although the program's first year had been picked apart by critics who disagreed with Haag's decision to choose only high-profile women in the industry as a way to generate press and instill confidence in potential employers familiar with their "celebrity" reputations, Grant benefited from the chance to practice the craft of filmmaking. "I love this workshop," she said in an interview in 1974, "even if we are being given equipment that is one step above Mickey Mouse."<sup>195</sup> Grant's short film, *The Stronger*, based on August Strindberg's one-act play, screened at festivals and won an award at the Chicago Film Festival.<sup>196</sup>

*Tell Me a Riddle* was a Godmother Production, a San Francisco Bay Area producing team of three women in their late twenties: Mindy Affrime, Rachel Lyon, and Susan O'Connell, the "Godmothers." *Riddle*, based on a story by Tillie Olsen, was their first feature film. Melvyn Douglas and Lila Kedrova starred as an older couple grappling with their almost fifty-year marriage and the realities of getting older. Independently financed, the project took two years to put together while the producers raised money from several individual investors. Eventually, Saul Zaentz and Michael Rosenberg of Fantasy Films also became producers on the film. The movie was made for an estimated \$1.5 million.<sup>197</sup> A male director under consideration for the film had recommended Grant to the "Godmothers." She was interested in the film for personal reasons: the couple were Russian Jewish immigrants, similar to Grant's family. "It was about people I cared about. It was about my roots...and it had all the intimations of the politics which interested me."<sup>198</sup>

Janet Maslin of the *New York Times* described the film as "a slow, restrained, dignified effort." The critic vacillated between what she considered the movie's touching

qualities and its persuasive sentimentality, advising, “If you bring the right sad baggage to it, you may be deeply moved; if you resent being manipulated, you may be moved in quite another direction.”<sup>199</sup> In contrast, Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* was impressed by the film’s honest depiction of old age and death, particularly in “this era of mega-million hardware and special effects movies.” Thomas was moved by the performances of veteran actors Douglas and Kedrova, but also the film’s effective visual sensibility. “It’s not a surprise that a fine actress can elicit extraordinary portrayals from her cast,” acknowledging Grant’s capabilities, “but ‘Tell Me a Riddle’s’ power is not only in its performances but in its images... Grant and [cinematographer] Fred Murphy dare to hold an image long enough to establish a sense of place and mood....” For Thomas the movie was powerful in its ability to “[tell] the truth about what it is like to grow old in America.”<sup>200</sup>

Grant enjoyed working with the actors and her cinematographer on *Riddle*, but ultimately what she realized on her first feature was that she only wanted to make movies about things she really cared about. “I tell you, it was a lot of work. When you’re acting you do your thing and go home. As director your day never seems to end. I was permanently exhausted [on *Riddle*].”<sup>201</sup> In a 2008 interview, Grant recalled how by the editing stage of the film she and the producers were battling each other over the final product. “Here were these three young women, so passionate that they raised the money to do *Tell Me Riddle* and the only chance they got to put in their two cents was after filming. So they wanted to fight for *their thing*, but by this time this was something I had given birth to.”<sup>202</sup> She laughed while reminiscing, but during the release of the picture it appeared the experience had given her clarity on choosing future projects. In 1980 she

told Rodrick Mann of the *Los Angeles Times*, “Understand, I’m not gung-ho on directing. I could only do something that really interested me.”<sup>203</sup>

While she had been waiting for the “Godmothers” to raise money for *Riddle*, Grant had made her first documentary, *The Wilmar 8*, about a group of women in Minnesota protesting job discrimination at the bank they worked for. It was this experience that informed the majority of the director’s subsequent work. After *Riddle*, her career as a director was primarily of documentaries (for television) and television movies. In these formats she was prolific and successful. In 1986 her HBO documentary, *Down and Out in America*, won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Grant also continued to act in film and television through the early 2000s. She was hired to direct two feature films, *Staying Together* in 1989 and an unfinished Bruce Willis movie called *Broadway Brawler* in 1997. On both those projects, Grant was fired. In her defense she claimed to have had difficulties with the male actors, in particular Willis who was a big star at the time. “I have such an antipathy to star stuff,” she explained. “He was taking his jet out every weekend to fuck somebody...and something in me turned off.”<sup>204</sup>

In his book, *The Gross: The Hits, the Flops—the Summer that Ate Hollywood*, former editor-in-chief of *Variety* and former studio executive Peter Bart describes the production’s problems in a similar way. Compared to the blockbuster action films Willis was known for, *Broadway Brawler* was a small independent movie. Three weeks into the filming the star was displeased with the footage and wanted to pull out of the project, and because he was Bruce Willis, the production closed down.<sup>205</sup> Again, in 2008, Grant was candid and introspective about the experiences and what she saw as her weakness in directing stars, particularly male movie stars:

I think I saw that I wasn't meant to be there [on a Hollywood feature film], I couldn't deal with stars and I could not deal with production companies. As an actress I was a diva. I am. As an actress you have everything going your way—everyone wants you to feel comfortable and happy in order for you to do your job. And you're spoiled. I carry that with me as a director. When I feel that I can't work with somebody, when their work is so off-putting to me, all the things that are not good director qualities come up in me.<sup>206</sup>

Her admission that her “diva” qualities as an actress got in the way of her directing the two features she was fired from may have been true. However, her prolific career making documentaries and television movies suggests that she was capable of maintaining her “good director qualities” in presumably a variety of situations that arise during production. This distinction is made to emphasize that her “failure” on a project may have been due to particular circumstances rather than her inability in general to make feature films.

A commonality amongst all of the women in this chapter, aside from May, is that they each were only able to make a single film during the decade. With the exception of Wagner, who from her experience on *Moment by Moment* felt that she did not actually want to be a film director, the others had actively tried to direct more than one movie during the 1970s. The attention being drawn to the rampant sexism in the industry during the decade had made some studios try to exploit the situation for their own benefit as in the case of Darling. For all the fanfare and press that Paramount generated praising themselves for hiring a woman director the company did little to guarantee that she was



able to do her best work, and ultimately make a better product for the company without interference from a controlling producer.

Not all of the difficulties these nine women experienced could be identified as a result of sexism. Darling did feel she was being targeted as a first-time director; Tewkesbury was up against Paul Schrader, who--regardless of the fact that she was a woman--just wanted to direct his own script; and in her own words, May might have been a "pain in the ass." At the same time, their troubles as first-time directors were amplified by the fact that there were so few women making films. Every time a woman directed one, which might be on an average of two to four films a year, an unnatural scrutiny was aimed at them. And while the attack on their gender may not have been as obvious as Ray Stark running his hand down Claudia Weill's back to see if she was wearing a bra on set, as Joan Tewkesbury said, "you could never quite address it because it was never overt, but there was this Chinese Wall."

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Miss Loden's 'Wanda' --- 'It's Very Much Me': Barbara Loden and 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 8 Apr. 1971: G1.

<sup>2</sup> Burt A. Folkart, "'Dumb Blonde' Made One Brilliant Film," *Los Angeles Times* 8 Sept. 1980: B21.

<sup>3</sup> McCandlish Phillips, "Barbara Loden Speaks Of the World of 'Wanda'," *New York Times* 11 Mar. 1971: 32.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Miss Loden's 'Wanda' --- 'It's Very Much Me': Barbara Loden and 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 8 Apr. 1971: G1.

<sup>5</sup> Rex Reed, "Watch Out for Barbara's 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Feb. 1971: 52.

<sup>6</sup> In her essay on *Wanda*, Bérénice Reynaud draws attention to the different accounts of the film's budget: Loden, when asked in multiple interviews, said the film cost an estimated \$115,000; in his autobiography, Kazan says \$200,000 (Kazan, 793); and Nicholas Proferes has the budget at \$75,000 (interview with Reynaud). Bérénice Reynaud, "For Wanda," *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, Noel King (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2004) 245. Shuster owned one-third of the film, while the rest was owned by the Foundation for Filmmakers, a nonprofit established by Loden, Kazan, and their attorney, Milton Wessel. Any profits from *Wanda* would go to the foundation for future films. Army Archerd, *Variety* 2 Apr. 1971

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- <sup>7</sup> Bérénice Reynaud, "For Wanda," *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, Noel King (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2004) 230.
- <sup>8</sup> Loden cooking for her crew see: Bérénice Reynaud 231. Babysitter, Rex Reed, "Watch Out for Barbara's 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Feb. 1971: 52.
- <sup>9</sup> Rex Reed, "Watch Out for Barbara's 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Feb. 1971: 52.
- <sup>10</sup> McCandlish Phillips, "Barbara Loden Speaks Of the World of 'Wanda'," *New York Times* 11 Mar. 1971: 32.
- <sup>11</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Miss Loden's 'Wanda'---'It's Very Much Me': Barbara Loden and 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 8 Apr. 1971: G1.
- <sup>12</sup> Roger Greenspun, "Young Wife Fulfills Herself as a Robber: Barbara Loden's Film Opens at Cinema II," *New York Times* 1 Mar. 1971: 22.
- <sup>13</sup> George Moskowitz, "At Venice Film Fest: Wanda," *Variety* 2 Sept. 1970: 32.
- <sup>14</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Miss Loden's 'Wanda'---'It's Very Much Me': Barbara Loden and 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 8 Apr. 1971: G1.
- <sup>15</sup> "Barbara Loden's Own Film Project: On Set, Hubby Elia Kazan Raps Television As 'Mutilators' of Celluloid," *Variety* 3 Sept. 1969: 17.
- <sup>16</sup> Vincent Canby, "Wanda's a Wow, So's THX," *New York Times* 21 Mar. 1971: D1.
- <sup>17</sup> Kazan described Leo as his and Loden's "love child." Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) 616. Writing the script while pregnant see: Rex Reed, "Watch Out for Barbara's 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Feb. 1971: 52.
- <sup>18</sup> The most detailed account of Loden and Kazan's relationship, and much of Loden's life, are found in Kazan's autobiography and is therefore from his perspective. For a discussion of Loden and Kazan's breakup while she was pregnant see: Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988) 616-620.
- <sup>19</sup> Barbara Loden, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 2 Apr. 1971.
- <sup>20</sup> "Shuster, Loden Confer on 'Wanda' Opening," *The Hollywood Reporter* 28 Jan. 1971; "Bardene 'Wanda' Distrib," *Variety* 18 Feb. 1971; *Wanda* Display Ad, *Los Angeles Times* 11 Apr. 1971: C17.
- <sup>21</sup> Bérénice Reynaud, "For Wanda," *The Last Great American Picture Show: New Hollywood Cinema in the 1970s*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser, Alexander Horwath, Noel King (Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2004) 230.
- <sup>22</sup> "She's 'Sorry' Now," *New York Times* 31 Jan. 1971.
- <sup>23</sup> Army Archerd, *Variety* 2 Apr. 1971.
- <sup>24</sup> "Form HHH Rainbow For Filming; Goal: 'Low Budgets From Names'; Zuker, Jaglom, Lange Out Front," *Variety* 1 May 1974: 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Mel Gussow, "The Stage: Ing's 'Love Death Plays'," *New York Times* 10 Jul. 1975: 19; Carol Lawson, "Broadway," *New York Times* 28 Mar. 1980: C2.
- <sup>26</sup> Rex Reed, "Watch Out for Barbara's 'Wanda'," *Los Angeles Times* 21 Feb. 1971: 52.
- <sup>27</sup> Elaine May, interview with Haden Guest, Harvard Film Archive, 13 Nov. 2011.
- <sup>28</sup> Marion Meade, "Lights! Camera! Women!," *New York Times* 25 Apr. 1971: D11.
- <sup>29</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 2000) 58.
- <sup>30</sup> For a history of May and the founding of the Compass Players see: Janet Coleman, *The Compass The Improvisational Theatre that Revolutionized American Comedy* (Chicago:

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The University of Chicago Press, 1990). For a detailed account of May's personal and professional biography see: Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> A.H. Weiler, "Elaine May Director," *New York Times* 12 May 1968.

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (New York: Random House, 2000) 61.

<sup>33</sup> Elaine May, interview with Mike Nichols, Film Society of Lincoln Center, 26 Feb. 2006, 1 April 2008 <<http://www.filmcomment.com/article/elaine-may-in-conversation-with-mike-nichols>.>

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Tobias, "For Elaine May, a New Film-But Not a New Leaf," *New West* 6 Dec. 1976: 58.

<sup>35</sup> "Evans May Have Been Thinking of Her," *Variety* 10 Feb. 1971: 13.

<sup>36</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> "Deny Elaine May's Plea," *Variety* 10 Mar. 1971: 4.

<sup>38</sup> "'Leaf' Is Radio City 250G Easter Egg; 'Love 65G 17<sup>th</sup>,' 'Ginger' Hot 32G; 'Andromeda' \$34,045; 'Claire's' 15G," *Variety* 14 Apr. 1971: 9.

<sup>39</sup> "Big Rental Films of 1971," *Variety* 5 Jan. 1972: 9.

<sup>40</sup> Larry Cohen, "New Leaf," *The Hollywood Reporter* 10 Mar. 71: 4.

<sup>41</sup> Gene Siskel, "Elaine May Turns Over 'A New Leaf' Just for Laughs," *Chicago Tribune* 28 Mar. 1971: E1.

<sup>42</sup> "Hollywood Production Pulse," *Variety* 22 Mar. 1972: 34.

<sup>43</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> "Big Rental Films of 1973," *Variety* 9 Jan. 1974: 50.

<sup>45</sup> Vincent Canby, "Film: 'Heartbreak Kid'," *New York Times* 18 Dec. 1972: 56.

<sup>46</sup> "Elaine May's 'Bumpy Ride' on 'Leaf'; Manduke Sticks on 'Mickey (sic) & Nicky'," *Variety* 27 Aug 1969: 6.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Tobias, "For Elaine May, a New Film-But Not a New Leaf," *New West* 6 Dec. 1976: 59.

<sup>48</sup> Dan Rottenberg, "Elaine May...or She May Not," *Chicago Tribune* 21 Oct. 1973: 55.

<sup>49</sup> Dan Rottenberg, "Elaine May...or She May Not," *Chicago Tribune* 21 Oct. 1973: 55.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Tobias, "For Elaine May, a New Film-But Not a New Leaf," *New West* 6 Dec. 1976: 65.

<sup>51</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> For the phone call between Diller and May see: Andrew Tobias, "For Elaine May, a New Film-But Not a New Leaf," *New West* 6 Dec. 1976: 66. For details of the lawsuit and the disappeared film reels also see: "Par, Elaine May Sue Each Other; Film Over-Budget And Incomplete," *Variety* 29 Oct. 1975: 5; "Par Charges Criminal Conduct In 'Mikey' Suit Vs. Elaine May," *Variety* 15 Sept. 1976: 5.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Champlin, "'Mikey, Nicky' Play Cat and Mouse," *Los Angeles Times* 25 Dec. 1976: D1.

<sup>54</sup> "Buying & Booking Guide: Mikey & Nicky," *The Independent Film Journal*, 24 Dec. 1976: 30-31.

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- <sup>55</sup> Thomas Thompson, "Whatever Happened to Elaine May?" *Life* 28 July 1967: 59.
- <sup>56</sup> Thomas Thompson, "Whatever Happened to Elaine May?" *Life* 28 July 1967: 54B.
- <sup>57</sup> Janet Coleman, *The Compass The Improvisational Theatre that Revolutionized American Comedy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990) 167.
- <sup>58</sup> Elaine May, interview with Mike Nichols, Film Society of Lincoln Center, 26 Feb. 2006.
- <sup>59</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood*: 68.
- <sup>60</sup> It is an example of ironic sexism that Beatty is also often described as an "obsessive" filmmaker for the prolonged time he spends as a "perfectionist" on the films he makes as actor, writer, director. For a discussion of Beatty's difficult behavior see: Peter Biskind, *Star: The Life and Wild Times of Warren Beatty* (New York: Simon & Shuster) 232.
- <sup>61</sup> The original budget and ultimate cost of *Ishtar* has long been in dispute. May claims that the studio sabotaged the film and leaked incorrect information about how much the production was going over budget. Elaine May, interview with Haden Guest, Harvard Film Archive, 13 Nov. 2011. In his biography of Warren Beatty, Peter Biskind describes the different, and inconsistent numbers on the film citing sources that said the picture was made for \$26, \$34 or \$51 million. The film's box office gross was \$12.7 million. Peter Biskind, *Star: How Warren Beatty Seduced America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010) 336; 382.
- <sup>62</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>63</sup> "To All the Friedas of the World," *TV Guide* 17 Mar. 1973: 15
- <sup>64</sup> The details of Darling's early career were told to the author in an interview on Aug. 13, 2012. Also see: "To All the Friedas of the World," *TV Guide* 17 Mar. 1973; Louise Farr, "Hollywood's Newest Darling: In the Director's Chair," *New West* 10 Oct. 1977: 56.
- <sup>65</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>66</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>67</sup> Louise Farr, "Hollywood's Newest Darling: In the Director's Chair," *New West* 10 Oct. 1977: 56.
- <sup>68</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012. Darling's emphasis. Lear was well known for the socially progressive content of his 1970s sitcoms such as *All in the Family*, *Good Times*, *Maude*, and *One Day at a Time*, but he had a poor track record hiring women directors. *Mary Hartman! Mary Hartman!* had several female writers on staff, including Ann Marcus and Gail Parent; the series stood out as the only one of his shows with a surplus of women directors, three in all: Darling, Kim Friedman, and Nessa Hyams. This information was culled from the credits of *Mary Hartman! Mary Hartman!*.
- <sup>69</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>70</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>71</sup> Robert Sklar, "A Woman Directs in Hollywood!" *American Film* July-Aug. 1977: 12.
- <sup>72</sup> Joan Darling, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 16 Nov. 1977.
- <sup>73</sup> The details of Darling's conflict with Turman were told to the author in an interview on Aug. 13 2012; also see Joan Darling, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 16 Nov. 1977.
- <sup>74</sup> Art Murphy, "Film Review: First Love," *Variety* 2 Nov. 1977: 17

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- <sup>75</sup> Molly Haskell, "'First Love' and Other Mixed Blessings," *New York* 14 Nov. 1977: 132.
- <sup>76</sup> Arthur Knight, "Movie Review: First Love," *The Hollywood Reporter* 2 Nov. 1977.
- <sup>77</sup> *First Love* press release 1, "Joan Darling Likes Her Test As Woman Director Of A Major Film As Former Actress Brings Her Talents To 'First Love' Project." Paramount Pictures, 1977, "First Love" Clipping File, Margaret Herrick Library.
- <sup>78</sup> *First Love* press 1.
- <sup>79</sup> *First Love* press release 1.
- <sup>80</sup> *First Love* press release 2.
- <sup>81</sup> Joan Darling, interview at American Film Institute, Los Angeles, 16 Nov. 1977.
- <sup>82</sup> Joan Darling, author interview, 13 Aug. 2012.
- <sup>83</sup> Robert Sklar, "A Woman Directs in Hollywood!" *American Film* July-Aug. 1977: 12.
- <sup>84</sup> Arthur Knight, "Joan Rivers: Director Person," *The Hollywood Reporter* 3 Mar. 1978: 42.
- <sup>85</sup> Richard Meryman, "Directing her First Movie Or Cracking Up Carson, Joan Rivers Has Angst in Her Pants," *People* 9 Jan. 1978: 46.
- <sup>86</sup> Richard Meryman, "Directing her First Movie Or Cracking Up Carson, Joan Rivers Has Angst in Her Pants," *People* 9 Jan. 1978: 45.
- <sup>87</sup> Richard Meryman, "Directing her First Movie Or Cracking Up Carson, Joan Rivers Has Angst in Her Pants," *People* 9 Jan. 1978: 46.
- <sup>88</sup> Joan Rivers and Richard Meryman, *Still Talking* (New York: Random House, 1991) 90.
- <sup>89</sup> Joan Rivers and Richard Meryman, *Still Talking* (New York: Random House, 1991) 103.
- <sup>90</sup> Joan Rivers and Richard Meryman, *Still Talking* (New York: Random House, 1991) 105; Bobby Shriver, "At Last, Joan Rivers Made Her Own Movie," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 7 Apr. 1978: B1.
- <sup>91</sup> Bobby Shriver, "At Last, Joan Rivers Made Her Own Movie," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 7 Apr. 1978: B1.
- <sup>92</sup> *Variety* "All-Time Film Rental Champs," 9 Jan. 1980: 52. *The Hollywood Reporter* claimed the film earned over \$10 million in the U.S. and Canada. *Variety*'s totals are calculated from U.S. box office numbers only. Conceivably the film could have earned \$5 million in Canada. "Rivers Destroys Note That Pledged House for 'Test'," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 25 May 1978: 13.
- <sup>93</sup> Bridget Byrne, "Joan Rivers at the Controls-Zany 'Rabbit Test'," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* 20 Sept. 1977: B1.
- <sup>94</sup> "Film Reviews: Rabbit Test," *Variety* 1978 Feb. 1978:19.
- <sup>95</sup> "Buying & Booking Guide: Rabbit Test," *The Independent Film Journal* 14 Apr. 1978: 8.
- <sup>96</sup> Bruce Williamson, "Movies," *Playboy* May 1978: 24.
- <sup>97</sup> Arthur Knight, "Knight at the Movies Joan Rivers: director person," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3 Mar. 1978: 8.
- <sup>98</sup> Bruce Williamson, "Movies," *Playboy* May 1978: 24.
- <sup>99</sup> "Joan Rivers," *Los Angeles* Jan. 1978: 124.

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- <sup>100</sup> Lawrence Christon, "Someone's Listening to Jane Wagner Again," *Los Angeles Times* 16 April 1978: 60.
- <sup>101</sup> Details of Wagner's biography told to me in a personal interview on May 27, 2011. Also see: David Halberstam, "The Brightest Lights on Broadway," *Parade-Daily News* 18 May 1986.
- <sup>102</sup> Nigel Andrews, *Travolta: The Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998) 96-97.
- <sup>103</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Travolta's Best Foot Forward for Disco Role," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Dec. 1977: 31.
- <sup>104</sup> Nigel Andrews, *Travolta: The Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998) 97.
- <sup>105</sup> Gregg Kilday, "Tomlin Signs Two-Picture Pact," *Los Angeles Times* 25 Jan. 1977: F8.
- <sup>106</sup> As a first-timer it was not unusual for Wagner to be hired by Universal, which was noted in the press for hiring several "newcomers." What was unique was the fact that she was Universal's only woman director. Charles Schreger, "Pictures: Universal Mostest on Firstest," *Variety* 26 Apr. 1978: 4, 42.
- <sup>107</sup> Lawrence Christon, "Someone's Listening to Jane Wagner Again," *Los Angeles Times* 16 April 1978: 55.
- <sup>108</sup> Gene Siskel, "'Urban Cowboy': Will Travolta fever rise again?" *Chicago Tribune* 1 June 1980: D3.
- <sup>109</sup> Doug Edwards, "T 'n' Fizzles Brinks Job Sizzles," *The Advocate* 25 Jan. 1979.
- <sup>110</sup> Frank Rich, "Cinema: Winter Camp," *Time* 25 Dec. 1978
- <sup>111</sup> "Film Reviews: Moment by Moment," *Variety* 20 Dec. 1978: 30
- <sup>112</sup> Doug Edwards, "T 'n' Fizzles Brinks Job Sizzles," *The Advocate* 25 Jul. 1979.
- <sup>113</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Tomlin and Travolta in 'Moment'," *Los Angeles Times* 22 Dec. 1978: G28.
- <sup>114</sup> "Big Rental Films of 1979," *Variety* 1 Jan. 1980: 70. In the last few years the film has been streaming on Netflix and HBO, but still has not been officially released on DVD.
- <sup>115</sup> Nigel Andrews, *Travolta: The Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998) 99.
- <sup>116</sup> Judson Klinger, "Playboy Interview: John Travolta," *Playboy* Dec. 1978: 115.
- <sup>117</sup> Nigel Andrews, *Travolta: The Life* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998) 106.
- <sup>118</sup> Gene Siskel, "'Urban Cowboy': Will Travolta fever rise again?" *Chicago Tribune* 1 June 1980: 21.
- <sup>119</sup> Jane Wagner, author interview, 27 May 2011.
- <sup>120</sup> Jane Wagner, author interview, 27 May 2011.
- <sup>121</sup> Gene Siskel, "'Urban Cowboy': Will Travolta fever rise again?" *Chicago Tribune* 1 June 1980: D3.
- <sup>122</sup> P.H.B., "'Moment by Moment' Seemed Like Hour by Hour," *Los Angeles Times* 23 Dec. 1979: 14.
- <sup>123</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>124</sup> "'Maiden' to Omnipotent," *Variety* 19 Jan. 1972: 32.
- <sup>125</sup> Jane Wagner, author interview, 27 May 2011.
- <sup>126</sup> The details of Tewkesbury's biography were told to the author in an interview on April 16, 2010. Also see Jan Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles* (New York: Limelight Edition, 2000) 48; 52-53.
- <sup>127</sup> Jan Stuart, *The Nashville Chronicles* (New York: Limelight Edition, 2000) 54.

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- <sup>128</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, interview with Katt Shea, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 2 Dec. 2006.
- <sup>129</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 27 Jan. 2011.
- <sup>130</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>131</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, interview with Katt Shea, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 2 Dec. 2006. Emphasis made by Tewkesbury.
- <sup>132</sup> Tewkesbury introduced Geraldine Chaplin to Altman when she was interested in the actress for her film *After Ever After*. Chaplin later had a featured role in *Nashville* before starring in Rudolph's film. Rudolph went on to a prolific career as a writer-director.
- <sup>133</sup> Hedy Kleyweg, "'Old Boyfriends,' 'Conan' on Pressman's Schedule," *The Hollywood Reporter* 24 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>134</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, interview with Katt Shea, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 2 Dec. 2006.
- <sup>135</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, interview with Katt Shea, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 2 Dec. 2006.
- <sup>136</sup> Kevin Jackson, ed., *Schrader on Schrader* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004) 122.
- <sup>137</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>138</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, interview with Katt Shea, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 2 Dec. 2006.
- <sup>139</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010. Emphasis made by Tewkesbury.
- <sup>140</sup> David Denby, "Old Boyfriends," *New Yorker* 9 Apr. 1979: 91.
- <sup>141</sup> Robert Osborne, "Movie Review: Old Boyfriends," *The Hollywood Reporter* 26 Mar. 1979.
- <sup>142</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>143</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 16 Apr. 2010.
- <sup>144</sup> John Milius was the screenwriter for *Jeremiah Johnson* (dir. Sydney Pollack, 1972), starring Robert Redford, and *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (dir. John Huston, 1972), starring Paul Newman, before directing his own script, *Dillinger*, in 1973. Milius would continue a successful career throughout the 1970s as both a writer, for himself and others, as well as a director. Even though Robert Altman was, as Jane Wagner put it, "notorious" for fighting with studio executives, he had made several successful films during the 1970s and was one of the most notable directors of the decade. As demonstrated by the opportunity Alan Rudolph experienced from having the veteran filmmaker as the producer on his first film, Tewkesbury should have been able to benefit in a similar way.
- <sup>145</sup> Lee Grant, interview with Barbara Kopple, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 25 June 2008.
- <sup>146</sup> James Robert Parish, *It's Good to Be the King: the Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks*, 228.
- <sup>147</sup> Robert Berkevis, "Anne Bancroft, Stage and Film Star in Voracious and Vulnerable Roles, Dies at 73," *New York Times on the Web*, 7 June 2005, 3 Feb. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/07/movies/07cnd-bancroft.html>>.
- <sup>148</sup> Judith Martin, "Toward More Women Directors: Doubling the Odds for Success," *The Washington Post* 21 Jul. 1976: B7.

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- <sup>149</sup> James Robert Parish, *It's Good to Be the King: the Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks*, 228.
- <sup>150</sup> For Bancroft preparing *Fatso* in 1979 see: Aljean Harmetz, "Mel Brooks to Film Own Version of 'Elephant Man'," *New York Times* 1 May 1979: C20. Harmetz's article names Brooks' company as "Crossbow Productions," but the credits on the film poster say "Brooksfilms Ltd," which was his new company set up for his turn at more dramatic work. James Robert Parish, *It's Good to Be the King: the Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2007) 227.
- <sup>151</sup> "Anne Bancroft: Lady with Three Hats," n/d 1980, "Fatso Press Kit," Dom DeLuise Special Collection, Margaret Herrick Library: 2.
- <sup>152</sup> Susan Smith, "Bri Murphy: Eye of the Camera," *New York Times* 27 May 1979: M34.
- <sup>153</sup> Susan Smith, "Bri Murphy: Eye of the Camera," *New York Times* 27 May 1979: M34; "Bri Murphy First Woman Accepted by IATSE Photogs," *The Hollywood Reporter* 14 Mar. 1973
- <sup>154</sup> Brooks' company, Crossbow Productions, had produced his films *The Producers* (1967), *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Silent Movie* (1976) and *High Anxiety* (1977). According to his biographer James Robert Parish, Brooks was starting to be interested in more serious work: in 1979 his company was developing *The Elephant Man* (1980) directed by David Lynch, his first studio released picture.
- <sup>155</sup> Aljean Harmetz, "Mel Brooks to Film Own Version of 'Elephant Man'," *New York Times* 1 May 1979: C20.
- <sup>156</sup> Michael Sragow, "'Fatso': Looking for Mr. Cholesterol," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* 1 Feb. 1980.
- <sup>157</sup> Tom Cullen, n.t., *Village Voice* 11 Feb. 1980.
- <sup>158</sup> Arthur Knight, "Fatso," *The Hollywood Reporter* 1 Feb. 1980: 24.
- <sup>159</sup> Arthur Knight, "Fatso," *The Hollywood Reporter* 1 Feb. 1980: 24.
- <sup>160</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Fat, 40 and Fed Up in Bancroft's 'Fatso,'" *Los Angeles Times* 1 Feb. 1980; F1.
- <sup>161</sup> James Robert Parish, *It's Good to Be the King: the Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks*, 229.
- <sup>162</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*: 138.
- <sup>163</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*: 138.
- <sup>164</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*: 1938-39.
- <sup>165</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*: 139.
- <sup>166</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show*: 138-139.
- <sup>167</sup> Rebecca Traister, "A Fine Romance," *Salon.com*, 8 June 2005, 17 July 2013 <[http://www.salon.com/2005/06/08/bancroft\\_brooks/](http://www.salon.com/2005/06/08/bancroft_brooks/)>; Mel Brooks, interview with Judd Apatow, Town Hall, *SiriusXM*, 27 Apr. 2013, 17 July 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP8WRS36m1U>>.
- <sup>168</sup> James Robert Parish, *It's Good to Be the King: the Seriously Funny Life of Mel Brooks* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2007) 229.
- <sup>169</sup> Mel Brooks, interview with Judd Apatow, Town Hall, *SiriusXM*, 27 Apr. 2013, 17 July 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wP8WRS36m1U>>.



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- <sup>170</sup> Robert Berkevis, "Anne Bancroft, Stage and Film Star in Voracious and Vulnerable Roles, Dies at 73," *New York Times on the Web*, 7 June 2005, 3 Feb. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/07/movies/07cnd-bancroft.html>>
- <sup>171</sup> Leslie Bennetts, "Bancroft Portrays a Feisty Frump," *New York Times* 15 Oct. 1984: C13.
- <sup>172</sup> Tom Buckley, "At the Movies: Nancy Walker to Direct 'Discoland,'" *New York Times* 22 June 1979: C8
- <sup>173</sup> "Nancy Walker Set to Direct MTM," *The Hollywood Reporter* 28 Aug. 1973.
- <sup>174</sup> Arnold Hano, "Funny Lady?" *TV Guide* 19 Feb. 1977: 25.
- <sup>175</sup> "Carr, EMI Sign Nancy Walker to Directing Pact," *Variety* 13 Nov. 1979: 21; [*Can't Stop the Music* box office grosses], *The Hollywood Reporter* 8 July 1980.
- <sup>176</sup> Tom Buckley, "At the Movies: Nancy Walker to Direct 'Discoland,'" *New York Times* 22 June 1979: C8.
- <sup>177</sup> Tom Buckley, "At the Movies: Nancy Walker to Direct 'Discoland,'" *New York Times* 22 June 1979: C8.
- <sup>178</sup> "Nancy Walker Helms 'Discoland;' Arlene Phillips Will Choreograph" *Variety* 16 May 1979.
- <sup>179</sup> George Christy, "The Great Life," *The Hollywood Reporter* 9 Nov. 1979.
- <sup>180</sup> Robert Hofler, *Party Animals A Hollywood Tale of Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'N' Roll Starring the Fabulous Allan Carr* (New York: De Capo Press, 2010) 107.
- <sup>181</sup> Robert Hofler 113.
- <sup>182</sup> "Film Directing Bow for Nancy Walker on 'Can't Stop the Music'," Press materials, n/d, "*Can't Stop the Music*" Clipping File, Margaret Herrick.
- <sup>183</sup> "Reviews: 'Can't Stop the Music,'" *Motion Picture Product Digest* 9 July 1980.
- <sup>184</sup> David Ansen, "Can't Stop the Music," *Newsweek* 7 July 1980: 68.
- <sup>185</sup> Elaine Warren, "Nancy Walker and Her Gift of Courage," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 13 Oct. 1983: B1.
- <sup>186</sup> Robert Hofler 123.
- <sup>187</sup> A.H. Weiler, "Lee Grant Directs: Who's Directing? A Lady Named Lee Grant," *New York Times* 23 Jan. 1972: D11.
- <sup>188</sup> Lee Grant, interviewed by Henry Colman for Archive of American Television, Part 6 and Part 7, [emmytvlegends.org](http://www.emmytvlegends.org) 10 May 2000, 11 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/lee-grant>>.
- <sup>189</sup> A.H. Weiler, "Lee Grant Directs: Who's Directing? A Lady Named Lee Grant," *New York Times* 23 Jan. 1972: D11.
- <sup>190</sup> Lee Grant, interviewed by Henry Colman for Archive of American Television, Part 6 and Part 7, [emmytvlegends.org](http://www.emmytvlegends.org) 10 May 2000, 11 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/lee-grant>>.
- <sup>191</sup> "Women to Codirect CBS Comedy Special," *Los Angeles Times* 3 Aug. 1973: E19.
- <sup>192</sup> Mary Murphy, "TV Comedy Revue for Women Making Man the Fall Guy," *Los Angeles Times* 9 Oct. 1973: D1.
- <sup>193</sup> In interviews, Grant remembers getting a call from the Directing Workshop for Women after she had won her Oscar for *Shampoo* in 1976, but actually it was at least two years before that that she was enrolled in the workshop's pilot program, which launched in 1974.

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- <sup>194</sup> Lee Grant, interviewed by Henry Colman for Archive of American Television, Part 6 and Part 7, [emmytvlegends.org](http://www.emmytvlegends.org) 10 May 2000, 11 Mar. 2014  
<<http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/lee-grant>>.
- <sup>195</sup> Mary Murphy, "A Camera is Not Enough," *Los Angeles Times* 27 Oct. 1974: 92.
- <sup>196</sup> Susan Smith, "'It Changed My Life'," *Los Angeles Times* 13 Sept. 1979: 30.
- <sup>197</sup> "Godmothers Bow with a 'Riddle'," *Screen International* 19 July 1989: 6.
- <sup>198</sup> Judy Stone, "How the 'Godmothers' Brought 'Tell Me a Riddle' to the Screen," *New York Times* 14 Dec. 1980: 32.
- <sup>199</sup> Janet Maslin, "Film: 'Tell Me a Riddle,' Aged Pair's Love Story," *New York Times* 15 Dec. 1980: C13.
- <sup>200</sup> Kevin Thomas, "Simple 'Riddle': Death and Old Age," *Los Angeles Times* 13 Dec. 1980: 11.
- <sup>201</sup> Roderick Mann, "Welcome Praise for Director Lee Grant," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Dec. 1980: G1.
- <sup>202</sup> Lee Grant, interview with Barbara Kopple, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 25 June 2008. Emphasis made by Grant.
- <sup>203</sup> Roderick Mann, "Welcome Praise for Director Lee Grant," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Dec. 1980: G1.
- <sup>204</sup> Lee Grant, interview with Barbara Kopple, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 25 June 2008.
- <sup>205</sup> Peter Bart, *The Gross: The Hits, the Flops—the Summer that Ate Hollywood* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 85-86.
- <sup>206</sup> Lee Grant, interview with Barbara Kopple, Directors Guild Visual History Project, Los Angeles, 25 June 2008.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Radical Feminists: the Directors Guild of America*

This final chapter focuses on the formation of the Directors Guild of America's Women's Committee in 1979 and the political action this group—of originally six women—spearheaded within their Guild in an effort to change sexist hiring practices throughout the film and television industries. Chronologically, this chapter serves as a bookend with Chapter 1 to the study of women directors in 1970s Hollywood by focusing on the feminist reform that took place in the industry at the end of the decade by concentrating specifically on the relationship between the Directors Guild and its female members.

Chapter 1 examined the antidiscrimination efforts that took place in 1969 when the EEOC investigated employment discrimination within the film and television industry against predominately men of color in below-the-line jobs. Chapter 1 then went on to study the rise of feminist activism in Hollywood that took shape between 1971 and 1973 with the establishment of the women's committees at the Screen Actors Guild and the Writers Guild and the way in which those groups collected statistics on the low number of working actresses and writers, respectively, and released that data to the press as a way to expose the entertainment industry's institutional sexism. Finally, Chapter 1 concluded with a profile of the creation of the American Film Institute's Directing Workshop for Women in 1974, another example of the early 1970s' feminist reform efforts demonstrated by the program's goal to improve the percentage of working women directors by training a select group for the job.

This chapter recommences the historical trajectory established in Chapter 1 by focusing on the feminist activism that took place during the end of the decade within the Directors Guild. Chapter 4 studies the formation of the DGA's Women's Committee in 1979 and the political action the Committee organized within its union that attempted to change, not only the patriarchal culture of the DGA, but also the sexist hiring patterns rampant in the film and television industries. This chapter also examines how the Committee's advocacy for change was the catalyst for the antidiscrimination lawsuit, *Directors Guild of America, Inc. v. Warner Brothers, Inc. and Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.*, which the Directors Guild filed in 1983 against Warner Bros., on July 25<sup>th</sup>, and Columbia Pictures, on December 21<sup>th</sup>, on behalf of its women and minority members (hereafter *DGA v. WB/CPI*)<sup>1</sup>. Not only was this the first time in the DGA's history that the Guild had participated in a legal action of this sort, but never before had a case such as this one taken place within the industry. On August 30, 1985 Judge Pamela Rymer decided against the DGA and in favor of the two film studios. Chapter 4 concludes with a discussion of how the legacy of the DGA Women's Committee and the loss of the case impacted the Guild's efforts to improve diversity within the industry and the moderate increase, compared to the previous decade, in the number of working women directors that resulted.

There is no existing scholarship on *DGA v. WB/CPI*—in the field of film history or legal history—that provides a detailed analysis of the case, the events leading up to the suit, its failure in court, or its legacy within the Directors Guild and the film industry. In her book *Women Filmmakers: A Critical Reception*, Louise Heck-Rabi mentions the DGA Women's Committee's activism.<sup>2</sup> Published in 1984 her book was most likely at

the press at the time that the case was filed. Citing Heck-Rabi, Barbara Koeing Quart in her 1988 book *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* mentions in a footnote the Committee's reform efforts.<sup>3</sup> Mollie Gregory in her book *Women Who Run the Show* references the Committee's activism at different points within her text.<sup>4</sup> Rachel Abramowitz dedicates two pages to a discusses of the Committee's activism and the subsequent lawsuit in her book *Is That A Gun in Your Pocket*; and David E. James, in his book *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*, includes a paragraph description of *DGA v. WB/CPI* in the footnotes to his chapter "Minority Cinemas."<sup>5</sup> As outlined in the Introduction the reasons why women directors of the 1970s have been excluded from existing texts on this period is that they occupy an awkward place between the two dominate approaches to historical scholarship on this era: male-centric director studies and non-commercial feminist filmmaking. The Directors Guild lawsuit, as part of the history of this generation of women, falls into a similar position.

The omission of *DGA v. WB/CPI* from legal studies is due to the fact that the decision in the case was not published in an official, print source, court reporter, such as the hardcopy *Federal Supplement* series that includes cases decided in U.S. courts. When a judge makes her/his final ruling on a lawsuit she/he will write an "opinion" or "decision" on the case. In his article "A Librarian's Guide to Unpublished Judicial Opinions," law librarian Joseph L. Gerken describes the reason why courts decide which cases to publish. According to Gerken, "By far, the most prevalent criterion is the precedential value of the opinion. A case is selected for nonpublication when it simply reiterates established legal principles."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, if the court determines that the case

has precedential value and will be of worth for future attorneys to consider and cite in their legal briefs the court will publish the judge's decision. If a court finds that the judge's final ruling on the case is unremarkable and does not present any new approaches, outcomes or interpretations of the law—no new precedents will be set--the court may decide to not publish the case. Not only are the decisions on unpublished cases difficult to locate if not included in a hardcopy catalog such as the *Federal Supplement*, but due to their unpublished status attorneys are generally restricted from citing unpublished cases in their briefs due to those cases' lack of precedential value.<sup>7</sup>

The inherent limitations imposed on an unpublished case severely restrict the potential legacy of such a lawsuit. If the written account of a case is inaccessible, then other lawyers, judges, and court employees would not know of its existence to include it in their briefs or decisions, and as a result the details of the case would not circulate within the archive of court documents, which in turn are studied by legal scholars. In 1985 this was the fate of the *DGA v. WB/CPI* lawsuit and the reason why there exists no discussion of it in legal scholarship to date. Due to the advent of electronic distribution such as on-line databases like LexisNexis and Westlaw almost all court decisions, published or unpublished, can now be located. (Although the use of these on-line databases is through a paid subscription that are sometimes cost prohibitive to scholars creating yet another barrier to access.) However, the restrictions on citing unpublished cases still create an obstacle for the inclusion of *DGA v. WB/CPI* in other lawyers' court documents. Since 1985 only one U.S. case has cited *DGA v. WB/CPI* listed in a nondescriptive footnote with eleven other examples.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to its status in the court

archives as lacking precedential value this chapter argues that the DGA suit represents an important milestone in the legal history of employment practices in the film industry.

*DGA v. WB/CPI* was covered extensively by the press, particularly in the industry trade papers during the time this case was filed in 1983, and later when Judge Rymer filed her decision in 1985. Therefore this analysis of the case depends largely on information and insights conveyed by journalists, as well as the court documents accessed at the National Archives in Perris, CA, and interviews conducted by the author with those who were in some way involved or impacted by the lawsuit.

In addition to establishing the existing and, as in this situation, the non-existing literature on the DGA case the analysis of the lawsuit presented in this chapter is positioned within an industrial context. This chapter does contain a legal analysis of *DGA v. WB/CPI* that will include some references made to other lawsuits and judicial technicalities as a way to create a legal context. However, the value in studying *DGA v. WB/CPI* in the context of this dissertation on women directors in the 1970s is what the case and the events that led up to the suit reveal about Hollywood's culture of discrimination and the response by internal industry activism during the 1970s and early 1980s to sexist and racist employment policies.

As will be discussed in the following section the Directors Guild was established by a group of the most influential feature film directors in Hollywood in order to protect the "economic and creative rights" of arguably the most powerful position on a film: the director. In addition to the job of director, the DGA also represents other members of the "directorial team" that include the unit production manager (UPM), first and second assistant directors (AD), associate director, stage manager and production assistant.<sup>9</sup> The

Directors Guild—also known as a labor organization or union—has several functions in serving its membership. The Guild negotiates industry-wide collective bargaining contracts; and enforces its Basic Agreement (BA) that protects its members when working for companies that are signatories of the union’s labor contract (production companies, television networks, and motion picture studios). Under the terms of the Basic Agreement DGA members, according to their job categories, are afforded certain rights such as screen credits, working conditions, creative control of the filmmaking process, pay scale and residuals.<sup>10</sup>

### **1973-1975: The DGA Gets a History Lesson**

The Screen Directors Guild, eventually the Directors Guild of America, was founded in 1935 by thirteen men who had come together with the goal of protecting their financial worth and creative authority in Hollywood during a time when they felt increasingly vulnerable to a power loss. Threatened by the influence of studio executives to control directors’ salaries and choice of work, the Guild’s founding members followed the Screen Actors Guild and the Screen Writers Guild—both established in 1933--and organized their own union. The original members were Hollywood’s top directors, including Howard Hawks, Henry King, Lewis Milestone, Rouben Mamoulian, King Vidor, and William A. Wellman.<sup>11</sup> In an interview conducted in 1985, Mamoulian, one of the last remaining founding members of the Guild, explained the impetus for such an organization was not just to protect the salaries of the most wealthy filmmakers--all of the founding members--but to safeguard those who were not as powerful, both financially and creatively, within the studio system. Mamoulian emphasized that, more than money,



“The ultimate purpose was better films. We were thinking about the quality of films. The director who has no authority and gets a very miserable little salary cannot do what his idea of film is. Therefore, we felt that it was elevating the quality of films.”<sup>12</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction, by the early 1930s, the number of women directors had diminished significantly since the silent era when there were a considerable number of them making films. In 1938 Dorothy Arzner—as the only woman director in Hollywood—became the Guild’s first female in the director category to become a member; and in 1950 Ida Lupino became its second.<sup>13</sup> During the year 1960, the Directors Guild experienced its largest influx of female membership: one production assistant, nine associate directors, and eight television directors.<sup>14</sup> In 1967 Shirley Clarke became the DGA’s third female feature film director. She would never direct a union film and must have joined when her future aspiration turned toward Hollywood.<sup>15</sup> Elaine May, as the first woman to direct a studio film since Lupino in 1966, became the fourth woman in the feature film category to join the Directors Guild in 1969.<sup>16</sup> As this short list of women feature directors demonstrates, historically, the Directors Guild was a “boys club” of the most exclusive kind. Its founding *fathers* were many of the industry’s most wealthy and powerful employees, and they established the organization to protect their creative and financial dominance. A significant part of sustaining their power was to maintain the patriarchy in which it originated and flourished. This belief continued to thrive unchecked almost forty years later.

Between 1971 and 1973, SAG and the WGA established their respective Women’s Committees through which each guild’s female membership found a platform to voice their criticism of the industry’s imbalanced employment practices. Each of these

Women's Committees continuously collected statistics that they released to the press, exposing which production companies, studios, networks, and individual television shows failed to hire women writers, and in the case of actresses, pigeonholed those performers into demeaning, sexist roles. These guilds mobilized across constituents and attempted to build together an industry-wide feminist reform movement that would impact above- and below-the-line female employees. Present for many of these meetings were women members from the Directors Guild.<sup>17</sup>

In 1974 *Variety* reported that the DGA had formed a Women's Committee, "a special wing...to draw public attention to their creative presence in the film and tv [sic] fields."<sup>18</sup> At this time, organizing efforts within the Directors Guild against sexist hiring practices were still in their nascent stages. Giovanna Nigro-Chacon was one of a small group of women speaking up about the difficulties they were encountering getting work that they were qualified for and wondering what role their Guild—one of the most powerful and prestigious guilds in the industry—played in their professional lives. Originally from New Jersey, Nigro-Chacon had been one of three women out of a class of sixty-three to graduate from New York University's film department in the early 1960s. Working in New York, she joined the DGA on the East Coast in 1971 as a director of news for NBC. Nigro-Chacon moved to Los Angeles in 1974. As an accomplished writer-producer-director of nonfiction television with extensive technical training, she was confident that she would be able to find work in Hollywood. However, Nigro-Chacon found that within the industry, there was a strong degree of animosity amongst men towards the small yet gradual influx of women who, bolstered by the feminist movement, were making inroads. While the industry resisted hiring women, the

DGA reinforced those sexist attitudes by imposing its own unnecessary obstacles on female Guild members.

Although the New York and Los Angeles branches of the Directors Guild were part of the same national union, they had only merged in 1960, and the transition to a united Guild had not always been easy.<sup>19</sup> Historically the New York-based Radio & Television Directors Guild represented television and the Los Angeles-based Screen Directors Guild, film. By the 1970s, in regard to television, New York-DGA represented more television news members, while Los Angeles-DGA represented those working in sitcom and episodic series. Geographical separation created a cultural divide that added to an already existing gender prejudice. Now in Los Angeles, the Guild told Nigro-Chacon that she would have to be a member of the union as an assistant director, not the director category she had initially joined. But she couldn't join the union in that category unless she had a job as an AD. In order to be hired as an AD she needed to be a member of the union in that category. To be a member of the union in those different categories—as an assistant director, stage manager, or unit production manager—it was required that she had worked a certain amount of hours. “You can't get in,” the Guild told her. “You have to be an assistant director.” Nigro-Chacon went on to describe the exchange: “They made me wait six months. ‘If you have a job [you can get in].’ I said: ‘Why don't I get into the assistant's program.’ ‘No. You can't do that. You don't have the background.’ That's when it started, *then* I knew there was something not right.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1974 women numbered 163, or 3.9 percent, of the Directors Guild's total membership of 4,125.<sup>21</sup> These low numbers were evidence of a twofold problem facing women working in DGA categories. Making it difficult for women to become members

of the Guild meant union crews had a small pool of eligible female employees to hire from. In keeping the numbers low, the Guild helped to maintain a primarily male workforce and in doing so perpetuated sexist attitudes that women should not work in film and television production because they lacked the skills or were biologically unsuited for such employment. Nigro-Chacon was vocal about the Guild's role in preventing its female members from getting jobs. "I was always an agitator," she said in a 2012 interview, describing herself in the 1970s. "I said [to a small group of women]: 'We've got to sue the Guild. That's the only way it's going to happen for us. *We have to sue the Guild*. It's a class action suit.'"<sup>22</sup> But her peers, already in a precarious state trying to find work, were worried about being seen as troublemakers, so no aggressive organizing took place.

In Los Angeles in 1974, there were very few women at any DGA meeting, because there were so few female members. "You'd go to those Directors Guild meetings there's like sprinklings of [women]," remembered Nigro-Chacon. "I said, 'We've got to get together.'"<sup>23</sup> On behalf of a small group of women, she presented to the all-male Directors Council and to Robert Wise, who at the time was the Guild president, the idea of a women's steering committee to "explore ways of getting work." The men made her leave the room while they voted. Nigro-Chacon remembers Wise and film director Richard Donner being supportive of the women's concerns, but many of the other men in the meeting "just sat back." The group of voting members approved a Women's Committee. However, the Committee that was established in 1974 existed only to organize a tribute event at the DGA for seventy-four-year-old veteran director Dorothy Arzner.<sup>24</sup>

Five years later in the spring of 1979 a different faction of Guild women would form a new DGA Women's Committee that was established in an official capacity, "approved" by the Guild's National Board of Directors. Unconnected to the 1974 group, this Committee's "purpose" had explicit intentions "to investigate discrimination in hiring of women in all DGA categories and to increase employment of women members in all categories."<sup>25</sup> Unlike their predecessors' introduction of women directors' creative qualifications, the 1979 cohort was straightforward in its mission statement: calling out gender discrimination with a clear objective to correct that imbalance. By describing its objective as "To investigate," this Committee, as part of the Directors Guild, assigned itself the role of law enforcement whose function was to conduct an indictment of Hollywood's employment abuse. However, even with its placement on the front page of the DGA newsletter and the unequivocal feminist charge of its directive, the announcement--"Board Establishes Women's Committee"--was only two sentences long. With members who were ready for radical political reform, the Guild, as an institution, was just finding its way into the women's movement.

Between 1973 and 1975 women DGA members were initiating conversations about their status within the Guild and the industry. In 1973 the July-August issue of the DGA magazine *Action* was dedicated to a "Special Report: The Woman Director" (*Action* was available to the public *and* Guild membership). The issue used historical subject matter—women directors of the past and the exclusion of their accomplishments from film studies--to imply a correlation with the working conditions of contemporary directors. Documentarian and Guild member Francine Parker wrote lengthy profiles on the DGA's most accomplished female directors to

date—Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino. Nancy Dowd, who would go on to become a successful screenwriter and at the time was not a member of the Guild, authored a comprehensive overview of women directors during the silent era.<sup>26</sup> With attention paid to the past, the details of the present were accounted for in brief, innocuous statements. In a quarter-page introduction on the magazine's special topic, a quote from Alice Guy, at the turn of the 20th century, declared that directing was "more natural to a woman than to a man."<sup>27</sup> The introduction (written by an uncredited author, but presumably Dowd or Parker) reminds readers that the role of director has been male dominated for the majority of history; however, "[in 1973] that is changing."<sup>28</sup> Recognizing the Guild's growing female membership in all positions—director and first and second assistant director, especially in television--the introduction does not go into any details that would quantify this "change," such as statistical breakdowns or names of contemporary DGA members, nor did it provide a broader analysis of Hollywood's inherently patriarchal system.

In 1973 the DGA, and even its most outspoken feminist constituents, found the relationship between the Guild and its women members uncharted territory. Until recently, for the male-dominated Guild, female peers directing features had only been represented in singular terms: Arzner, the DGA's first female member, had directed her last film in 1943, six years before Lupino made her first feature in 1949. A generation or two later, Parker and Dowd, two politically outspoken filmmakers (having just completed the antiwar documentary *F.T.A.* that Parker directed and Dowd was one of the film's several screenwriters), strategically embedded in their study of the past a commentary on the status of contemporary women directors. As a "history lesson" the special issue of

*Action* provided an education for the majority of members who were unaware of the legacy of women directors. The introduction also served as an indication of the present “changing” times. “Hopefully, future histories will deal more accurately with the contributions of women to the art of the motion picture,” wrote Dowd, using the flaws of the past as a warning of how the future would demand something different. “Their work has been substantial and significant, and, with the growing awareness that the female point of view is worthy of attention, women film makers will be proving their art more and more.”<sup>29</sup>

Influenced by the feminist buzz within the industry that was beginning to surface amongst his own Guild members in 1974, for *Variety's 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Issue*, DGA president Robert Wise’s editorial “Directors Guild Broadens Scope” argued that “in ‘The New Hollywood’ ..., the Directors Guild of America has grown and diversified.”<sup>30</sup> The themes of growth and diversity were defined by female and African American male membership. The brief article foregrounded the union’s growing female presence of 163 women out of a total membership of 4,127. Wise quantified this low number as an indication of progress, marking it as an improvement from recent history when Arzner and Lupino had been the only working women directors in Hollywood. “Now with Liberation, women are steadily acquiring membership in the DGA, not just as directors but also as assistants and associates,” he reported. Six years would pass before the Guild, a latecomer to feminism, would be positioned as the movement’s loudest advocate.

## **Professional Legitimacy**

As the guild representing the most powerful and revered position on a film set—and by extension the film industry—membership into the Directors Guild was proof of not only an individual’s professional excellence, but also acceptance to a privileged sector of Hollywood. To become a member of the DGA meant a director was validated through their representation by such an esteemed organization. “It was the most thrilling thing that ever happened. I wanted to be a member of the Directors Guild. I remember taking the papers in my hand [to the Guild]. It was an honor,” recalled Lynne Littman. “It was about legitimacy.”<sup>31</sup> Littman joined the DGA as a director in 1974-1975 while working as a director-producer for a weekly news series on KCET, Los Angeles. She would go on to win an Academy Award in 1977 for her documentary *Number Our Days*, and in 1983 she directed the feature film *Testament* for Paramount Pictures.

Similar to Littman, Joelle Dobrow considered becoming a member of the DGA a measure of professional “legitimacy,” an acknowledgement by the establishment that she had officially become part of the industry elite. “When I joined the DGA, it was a thrill for me. It was like the pantheon of Hollywood.” Dobrow became a member of the Guild in 1973-1974, first in the stage manager category and then as an associate director, while working at KABC’s morning show *AM Los Angeles*; she became KABC’s first ever female AD/stage manager. In 1977 Dobrow would begin to direct Rona Barrett’s West Coast segments of *Good Morning America*.<sup>32</sup>

Women directors during the early 1970s were acutely aware of the gender inequities functioning within the industry and how joining the Guild meant an elevation in their professional status that would in turn (presumably) offer protection from the



sexism they experienced as females employees. Becoming a member of the DGA “meant you were not a man’s assistant anymore,” explained Victoria Hochberg. “We had become real professionals.”<sup>33</sup> Hochberg joined the Guild in 1971 while working as an editor for the PBS series *American Playhouse* at WNET in New York. To cover up for the inexperience of the male theater director hired to adapt live productions for broadcast, Hochberg was asked by her supervisor to rewrite the play’s script into screenplay format while also creating a shot list under the guise of “helping” herself in the edit room; these were all responsibilities of a show’s director, not the editor. When it came time to assign credits, her boss, Jac Venza, acknowledged her work as “co-director.” PBS, which had recently become a signatory of the DGA, attempted to follow through by giving Hochberg the appropriate screen recognition, but the Directors Guild, who balked at co-directing credits, rejected that title and instead she joined the union in the Assistant Director category.

Inclusion within Hollywood’s most prestigious guild also pointed out to its female members that the organization’s elitism was based not only on the craft it represented, but also the gender exclusion it perpetuated. “I was scared to go alone,” remembered Dobrow. “I had my roommate go with me. When I walked in [to attend a screening] I would be the only woman who had my own card. All the other women there were wives, girlfriends, mistresses.”<sup>34</sup> In 1967-1968, the number of women DGA members who were directors was 0.99 percent (twenty women).<sup>35</sup> In 1974-1975, the number of women directors had increased to 1.54 percent (forty-six women).<sup>36</sup> With the exception of Clarke, Lupino, and May these women were not feature film directors. They instead represented directors of television including not only episodic programs, but news (many

in local news), live shows and special televised events, as well as directors of educational and industrial films. The historical circumstances of the feminist movement produced for Hollywood a first generation of young women who were ascending the employment ranks and breaking out of jobs traditionally coded as female (assistants, secretaries, script supervisors). Simultaneously, Hollywood continued to maintain its patriarchal hierarchy. Resistant to and incredulous at the very idea of a woman director, the membership office initially listed *Victoria Hochberg* as *Victor A. Hochberg* when she joined.

The Guild's faulty representation of women mirrored an industry-wide animosity towards female directors. New York-based documentary and independent filmmaker, Nell Cox had moved to Los Angeles in 1976-1977 to pursue a career in feature films and episodic television when she had the epiphany that there weren't any women directors in Hollywood. In New York, being a woman had never overtly impaired Cox's career. In 1959 while in her early twenties Cox moved to New York City and was hired as an assistant editor for Drew Associates, then a subsidiary of Time Life Broadcast.

Working with D. A. Pennebaker and Richard (Ricky) Leacock throughout the 1960s, she became part of the New York City cinema verité and direct cinema community. In this style of filmmaking, the division of labor on a crew was not rigidly defined within the traditional film production hierarchy. Like her colleagues, Cox held multiple positions on any one project, such as editor or soundperson. "That was the theory: you go out in the field and then come back and edit. There was none of this divide and conquer; you go out and make your whole film, you weren't just the cameraperson."<sup>37</sup> The combination of positive professional relationships with male mentors in conjunction with the fluidity between the crew positions provided for Cox a

work environment that was only occasionally sexist. Putting into a wider context her experience working with these men, in particular Leacock with whom she collaborated on several projects, Cox explained, “I think the glass ceiling doesn’t kick in until you get to the ceiling. Or higher up. So as long as I was working to help them make movies, I didn’t experience [the glass ceiling]. They were always hiring me, that’s the main thing.”<sup>38</sup>

Cox’s experience of steady employment on an egalitarian production team changed drastically when she moved to Los Angeles. In 1969, with Leacock’s encouragement, Cox applied and received a \$10,000 American Film Institute Independent Filmmakers grant (similar to the grant received by Karen Arthur and Claudia Weill) to make *A to B*, a half-hour fictional film that she wrote and directed. Filmed in her home state of Kentucky with a skeleton crew—Cox, Robert Leacock (Ricky’s son) as soundperson, Peter Powell as cinematographer, and Cox’s sister, Mary Nash Cox—the short served as her Hollywood calling card for fictional content. The strategy was successful. In 1976 Cox was chosen as part of the KCET series *Visions*, at the time led by executive producer Barbara Schultz, whose impetus was to enlarge the pool of potential directors in Hollywood by producing feature films for broadcast on Los Angeles’ local PBS station. Cox wrote, produced, and directed the feminist-themed Western *Liza’s Pioneer Diary* (1977), a ninety-minute period piece shot on location in New Mexico for a total budget of \$191,000. Nominated for Best Writing by the Television Critics’ Circle, but the film was bested by the epic television miniseries *Roots*.<sup>39</sup> Encouraged by the achievements of her feature film and armed with an extensive resume in documentary, Cox was hopeful that her entry into Hollywood would be smooth. “I took out a full page

ad with a photo of me and the glowing reviews in *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*. ‘Here I am, call my agent!’ No one responded.”<sup>40</sup>

Sometime in 1977, Women in Film, an organization dedicated to creating networking opportunities for a membership comprised of accomplished above-the-line women working in the industry, asked Cox to set up a group for directors. “It was awful,” recalled Cox. “We would sit around and someone would say: ‘I went to CBS and they were so rude to me and this guy said, yeah, if you sit here for a year as an intern without pay we *might* think of hiring you.’ And everyone would come in with these distressing stories and we would just sit and cluck at each other about how horrible it was.”<sup>41</sup> Susan Bay, Dolores Ferraro, Joelle Dobrow, Lynne Littman, and Victoria Hochberg were also part of this informal group. All of them were highly qualified with ample professional experience decorated with the highest industry accolades, but none could get hired for the job they were trained to do: direct commercial film and television. Cox remembered standing up at one of those meetings and saying: “We are all doomed to stunted careers if we don’t get our act together.”<sup>42</sup>

Initially, no one in the group wanted to admit to a room full of their peers that they were not actually working. Eventually, prompted by the outpouring of shared horror stories about not getting hired, they confessed. “We all looked at each other,” recalled Hochberg. “*I’ll never forget that*. Somehow it happened that night, maybe it was Nell who started asking: ‘Are you working? No. Are you working? No.’ And it was like: ‘What? Unbelievable. We have to get together and talk about this.’”<sup>43</sup> This group of women had experienced their formative years coming of age during the civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements. Some had participated in consciousness-raising groups,

others had been involved in the feminist reform efforts that took place in the entertainment industry earlier in the decade. Dobrow, who came from a family of union organizers, was a member and on the board of Women in Film “when they were still an organization that was happening out of someone’s garage”<sup>44</sup> and had been a leader in KABC’s internal group, ABC Women, which was organized “to make the industry more responsible to women in the areas of programming and job opportunities.”<sup>45</sup> Several had worked on projects that reflected these social values. Cox had made the critically acclaimed female Western *Liza’s Pioneer Diary*; Hochberg had directed the documentary *A Simple Matter of Justice* (1978) about the Equal Rights Amendment and had been nominated for an Emmy for her work as director for the segment “The Right to Die” (1974) on the ABC News program *Close Up* about patient rights; and Littman’s documentary, *Number of Days*, a portrait of Eastern European Jewish senior citizens living in Venice, California, won an Academy Award in 1976. By 1979, as they shared the epiphany of themselves as Hollywood pariahs, embedded in their personal and professional lives was a commitment to social justice and the fortitude required to fight for their civil rights in the workplace. Important to their mobilizing was the realization that they were members of the Directors Guild. Entrance into the organization they each held with such esteem had marked what they understood to be their place amongst the highest echelon of industry employees. As their union, what responsibility did the DGA have in helping to rectify the groups’ unemployment status? As members of the most prestigious Guild in the industry, why were the women even in this situation?

Undertaking a similar course of action as the disenfranchised women of the Writers and Screen Actors Guild did during the early 1970s, the DGA group of six began

collecting data documenting the hiring of female directors in film and television. While it was clear to them that their inability to get hired was due to discrimination, in order to construct an argument in their defense—to whom they did not yet know—the group needed to track the pattern and source of bias. Statistics would not only provide hard evidence of the imbalance, but hopefully point fingers at the offenders. Harry Evans, who at the time was the DGA’s Assistant Executive Secretary, was their first important ally. In 1978 Evans gave Dobrow and Hochberg access to the deal memos each production company was required to submit to the DGA--short-term contracts mandatory for every television episode and feature film listing the director’s fee and residual payments. Having just recently computerized its record system, at the time the Guild still filed these memos in paper format.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of 1978, Evans was hired as the Guild’s “field representative, charged with enforcing the new film contract provisions.” With close to twenty years as a union organizer and contract negotiator, Evans had previously worked for the United Auto Workers and the AFL-CIO State, County and Municipal Workers.<sup>47</sup> Described by the women as an “old time labor guy,” Evans saw their situation as a labor issue, rather than just gender discrimination: they were qualified members of the union and the industry and were being denied the right to work. For him it was an obvious choice to help them build their case by giving the group access to the necessary documents.

For a year, the six of them delegated research assignments. Their synchronicity with one another was superb. Thirty-three years later, Dobrow described the group as “some of the most brilliant women I’ve ever met in my entire life. After my contact with [them], nothing—*nothing*—compared. And it meant so much to me. We had a shared

vision and a shared goal.” Hochberg, in agreement, remembered how compatible each of their skill sets were: “There was *never* an argument. Everybody understood what each person was good at, and we were each good at different things.” “And there was no ego,” echoed Littman.<sup>48</sup> What is important to emphasize in Dobrow, Hochberg, and Littman’s descriptions of their experience as part of this group in the late 1970s is that the camaraderie between these six individuals dispels a common stereotype that women cannot work together because they are too competitive with one another; and specifically that in the entertainment industry during this period there were so few opportunities for women that everyone was out for themselves. Many individuals interviewed for this dissertation did describe encountering other women in their field who purposefully did not extend common professional courtesy based on the fact that they were threatened by having another woman co-worker. While competition, and ruthless competition, is common between any gender configuration, what struck those interviewed as so shocking was that in the sexist climate of the 1970s film industry it seemed advantageous for women with similar professional experience and aspirations to join together in changing patterns of discrimination and cultural attitudes that were prohibitive to their success—as women--in the workplace. This is not to say that the DGA group of six got along so well because they were women, as that would suggest that all women are the same and that they will always get along with each other based on biology. As a disenfranchised group they knew that one of their most powerful assets was to join together as women, to represent women. Their success in working together was as individuals who shared a profound level of commitment and compatibility in their skills and worldview.

Their ability to rotate leadership and delegate responsibilities, making adjustments when somebody got busy with other obligations, enabled the group to plan and execute a massive research project: the first of its kind. Their scope was to track the employment history of women directors working in feature films and prime-time dramatic television over the last thirty years: 1949 to 1979. Some combed through the deal memos attempting to confirm the gender of directors hired on more recent productions. For older shows and movies, others fanned out to the Margaret Herrick Library at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, where they scoured industry trade papers for any mention of a woman director. The group's findings revealed that between 1949 and July 1979 the number of feature films released by major distribution companies totaled 7,332. Of these, 7 women directed 14, or 0.19 percent, of the films.<sup>49</sup> For television calculations, since 1949, a total of 22 women directed 115 out of approximately 65,500 hours of prime-time dramatic broadcasting. Of that 115, an estimated 35 hours were directed by Ida Lupino; of the 18 women who directed episodic programs, 6 were the producer and/or star of the series (e.g., Lucille Ball, Penny Marshall, Mary Tyler Moore, Meta Rosenberg).<sup>50</sup> The numbers were actually much worse than the 0.19 percent. The group counted androgynous first names such as Gene, Shirley, Kim, Frances, Dana, Jan as women, although they were most likely men. As Hochberg pointed out: "If they were women, we would have known them."<sup>51</sup> Largely unaccounted for were those women (and men) who directed live television such as sports shows, talk shows, political conventions, telethons. Deal memos for this kind of programming didn't exist.

Once the statistical research was completed, the final numerical calculations confirmed the reality the group was experiencing: women, and specifically female DGA



members, were not being hired to direct feature films and network television. However, it was still unclear who was responsible for the severe employment inequalities: the Guild or the industry? Undecided as to what their next move should be, the women consulted with lawyers A. Thomas Hunt and Walter Cochran-Bond, attorneys accomplished in class action and antidiscrimination suits, who at the time were working at the Center for Law and the Public Interest. These attorneys urged the group to ally themselves with the DGA. On their own they would have no muscle against the industry, but represented by one of the most powerful unions in Hollywood, this would become the Directors Guild's fight on behalf of its female members.

Convinced that approaching the DGA as an advocate might be the best tactic, the women still had reservations about their union's willingness to campaign on their behalf. Hochberg remembered the realization she had had at the first members' meeting she attended in 1977 at the Beverly Hills Hilton: "There were me and three other women. I'll never forget this. And I went into the lobby and called a friend and said, 'I'm never going to be able to do this here. They'll never let me in. They'll *never let me in.*' It was not because of the producers it was because of the *D—G—A.*"<sup>52</sup> While Joan Tewkesbury had described the *indescribability* of sexism during this time as something "you could never quite address because it was never overt, but there was this Chinese Wall," Hochberg, at the DGA meeting in 1977, was struck by the clear image of gender discrimination looking into a crowded room with only three women in attendance. White men dominated the Directors Guild membership, the organization's executive staff, and its board of directors. What differed for the six women organizing within their union during the late 1970s compared to the fifteen women making feature films throughout this

decade was that the Guild's function was to protect its constituencies' employment rights (contractually enforced by the DGA's Basic Agreement). If its female members were experiencing discrimination in the workplace it was the Guild's responsibility to advocate on their behalf. In this regard if the Guild itself appeared to represent a gender imbalance, by these same guidelines, it was obligated to take seriously its members needs and concerns. In contrast, outside of the Guild Barbara Peeters and Stephanie Rothman, working on non-union productions, had no choice but to comply with the demands of the exploitation market; Joan Darling was celebrated as "woman director" as a means for the studio to exploit her minority status and as a first time director was unaware of her rights as a DGA member; and Claudia Weill had to choose between enduring sexist harassment or losing a "hostile battle," which was too dangerous for her to ask the Guild to mediate, in order to make her film.

### **Hollywood Feminist: Michael Franklin**

A year later, armed with statistics and formulating a plan of action with insight from the lawyers, what the women needed was someone in a position of power at the DGA who would ally with them not only internally within the Guild, but also publicly as their industry representative. "[It] struck me, the amount of research [the group] had done. They laid it out very clearly that women were discriminated against," remembered Michael Franklin.<sup>53</sup> Franklin was the first Guild representative, apart from Harry Evans, who saw the completed employment data for women directors in the spring 1979 when the group of six approached the National Executive Secretary of the Directors Guild with their findings. Akin to their relationship with Evans, the women found in Franklin

another invaluable supporter. Essential to the initial phase of their mobilizing, Evans understood the importance of the discretion necessary to facilitate the clandestine nature of their early mission. In 1979 Franklin understood the importance of making the women's struggle the DGA's fight.

A Los Angeles native, Michael Franklin graduated from UCLA in 1948 and received his law degree from USC in 1951, after which he worked as an attorney for CBS-TV and Paramount Pictures. From 1958 to 1977, Franklin was the National Director of the Writers Guild before becoming the National Executive Secretary of the Directors Guild in 1978.<sup>54</sup> This was a surprising career move considering the adversarial relationship between the two guilds. In particular was the heated clash between writers and directors over the "possessory" credit. Franklin had been at the forefront of this conflict in 1967-1968 and again in 1977 shortly before he left the WGA to assume his post at the DGA. The dispute centered on screenwriters' argument that credits such as "A Film by..." suggested the director was sole author of a film, failing to acknowledge the essential role of the writer in creating the source material. In response, directors asserted that they were entitled to top billing because ultimately they were responsible for all aspects of a film required to transform the script into its final product. The DGA accused the writers of "eroding the role of the director." "When I go on the stage, for better or worse I am the boss," explained Directors Guild member Ronald Neame. "If I say I want a door to go up there, the door goes up there."<sup>55</sup> Responding to such claims, Franklin was adamant about the necessity of fairness in what he deemed a collaborative profession, pointing out, "What about the cinematographer, the costumes, the set designer, etc.? No one deserves single possessory credit."<sup>56</sup>

In January 1977, he and Robert Aldrich, then president of the DGA, traded insults in the press. Aldrich described the screenwriters' demands as "ludicrous," "egomaniacal," and "pompous." Justifying the directors' position, the Guild president ranked the two professions according to talent: "The reason the WGA wants to take that right away from us is that we have many prominent directors who can get that credit billing, but after [Gore] Vidal and [Patty] Chayefsky the WGA runs dry."<sup>57</sup> Franklin was unwavering about film's collective process, responding to Aldrich's attacks by accusing the DGA of "...spouting utter nonsense. Nothing could be further from the truth when they accuse us of infringing on their jurisdiction...we're standing firm on no possessory credits where a collaborative work is involved."<sup>58</sup> Demonstrating the mutual animosity between the two crafts over issues of creative authorship, this dispute also illustrated how the Directors Guild saw themselves as the pinnacle of the film industry's professional and artistic hierarchy. The DGA did not take well to having their status questioned by colleagues they considered in subordinate professions or, as the women of the DGA would soon find out, by peers within their own Guild.

A fierce union leader, Franklin was an ardent advocate for labor justice, never swayed or intimidated by artistic or corporate elitism. Well known to the industry was the friction between the two guilds and the fearlessness of the less "prominent" union's leader, who frequently charged the directors with acts of "pure unadulterated hogwash."<sup>59</sup> Aldrich was quick to see that this assertiveness would be better as an asset within his own organization rather than a quality to reckon with in a rival. "There's no love lost between the Writers Guild and the Directors Guild," laughed Franklin, recalling the frequent acrimonious exchanges between the two groups under his tenure. In 1977, during the

battle over screen credit, Aldrich contacted Franklin with a proposal. “One day I got a call from him,” remembered Franklin. “He was very flattering... He wanted me to do for the Directors Guild what I had done for the Writers Guild. He used the reference: ‘We want the bastard, but he’ll be our bastard.’ I had put in twenty years with the writers and enjoyed it, thoroughly, and he felt that the directors needed a little bit of a push and refreshing...”<sup>60</sup> By September 1977, Franklin had accepted Aldrich’s offer, and in January 1978 he assumed his new position as one of the leaders—and reformers--of the DGA.<sup>61</sup>

In this study of 1970s women directors the role of a male mentor or advocate has surfaced in different ways. In the patriarchal film industry—independent film communities and Hollywood—it could be assumed that a successful man—most likely a producer, director, or studio executive—would be able to use his power to create opportunities for a woman filmmaker. As has been detailed in Chapter 2 and 3 the results of this kind of relationship were inconsistent. Anne Bancroft was able to leverage the success of her husband Mel Brooks’ films at 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox to secure a deal at the same studio for her movie *Fatso*. Joan Tewkesbury was unable to combine her achievements as a screenwriter with a successful male producer, Robert Altman, to make her first film, a situation so many of her male screenwriting peers had accomplished. On the faith of prominent television showrunner Norman Lear Joan Darling got her first break directing sitcoms, which drew the attention of Paramount Pictures who then hired her to direct a feature. Barbara Peeters and Stephanie Rothman were prolific exploitation filmmakers when employed by “feminist” Roger Corman, but the low-budget films they

made with him did not hold the same currency as they did for their male peers when the women tried to transition into mainstream pictures.

As demonstrated by these examples powerful industry men could be a crucial asset to a woman director, but just as often they could be ineffective. According to Directors Guild's purpose—to protect its members' employment rights—the six women should have been able to approach the executive staff or board of directors with their concerns. Yet, in 1978 and 1979, the DGA represented a microcosm of the Hollywood patriarchy. Whether the six women's feminist reform agenda could have moved forward without Michael Franklin is difficult to judge. What is of larger importance is that his position as National Executive Secretary of the Directors Guild and his personal beliefs in employment equality provided the women with a powerful ally.

### **Redux: Women's Committee 1979**

On March 15, 1979, with Franklin's support, the women presented their statistics to the Western Directors Council.<sup>62</sup> Soon after they went before the National Board of Directors, that granted them official status as the Women's Committee of the Directors Guild whose purpose was to investigate gender discrimination in all Guild categories.<sup>63</sup> Assigned no budget, the group operated under the auspice of Franklin, who covered their meeting expenditures.

The DGA's reaction to the group's presentation was tentative. The Board and council members were receptive in that they did not wholeheartedly resist the women's demand for the union to take up the cause of antidiscrimination as its own fight. Eventually, the group would face opposition from individual Guild members and industry

producers. However, the fact that the original resistance from their union was minimal signaled an acknowledgement from those in power that, at the end of the 1970s, the DGA was long overdue to participate in the era's dominating social politics. The Guild's longstanding position as Hollywood's most prestigious professional union had allowed the organization to comfortably maintain an apathetic position without much criticism—internally from its members or externally from its industry peers. “The Guild in 1978 was really going through an institutional change...it was very informal, everyone knew everybody, and the leadership of the Guild felt that it needed to modernize,” remembered retired DGA Associate National Executive Director, Warren Adler. Hired by Franklin in 1978 as a “junior” associate general council, Adler, who retired in 2011, would be a key figure in establishing the Guild's evolving diversity programs for the following three decades. “For example, the Guild didn't have a legal department. It didn't have a department that tracked and policed residual [reports]. [The Guild] said, ‘We've got to change.’ That was when Mike Franklin was hired...[I]n every respect the Guild needed to be a more forward thinking institution. In a sense this was just the right time: the women had done this work, you had a Board that was just open minded to the idea that there were things the Guild should be doing. It was time.”<sup>64</sup>

Prior to the women coming forward, there had never been such a highly organized effort to address job discrimination from Guild members appealing to the Board and Councils or the Board and Councils acting on their own accord. Although they would meet with detractors within their union, as a cohort, the harmony they had generated amongst each other during the past year spent researching would continue to strengthen as they primed to go public—initially to the Guild and eventually to the industry--with

their case. In collecting the extensive data, their process had been meticulous and relentless. They were equally fastidious in preparing for the different stages of introducing their statistics: the group created detailed reports bound in plastic sleeves; and they practiced their presentations over and over again on each other, role-playing every DGA Board members' possible response. No detail went unnoticed, and no possible scenario was left to chance. As an institution governed by white, affluent men, established to protect their professional success within the industry, the Directors Guild had never had its status challenged by its own membership. "There were some [men]—two or three—that were supportive in the sense that yes, we would talk about this and what was on the agenda for the National Board," remembered Franklin. "But there weren't any that I can recall were gung ho and would say, 'By God, we should do something about this!' It just wasn't in their makeup."<sup>65</sup>

The women did find some support in what would become the "Co-ed Committee." Male DGA members such as Gil Cates, Jack Haley, Jay Sandrich, and Boris Sagal came together to act as the women's "buddies." Initially, the women's expectations were that these older, established male directors would operate as their advocates, and to a certain extent they did. Cates in particular, who in 1979 was one of the five DGA vice presidents and would be elected Guild president from 1983 to 1987, served as a representative to the industry and press in the coming years as the Women's Committee, with the support of the DGA, took their demands public. "You have to understand," explained Hochberg of the relationship between these veteran men and the upstart women in the context of 1979, "We were the first rash of women who said, 'Excuse me, you're not better than I am. We're your equal.' We were functioning like guys. We were



challenging them, and we were smart and were really well organized. There was no flirtation at all. They were running the Guild. And they were smart enough to see that we were on to something. They had to be on the right side of progress.”<sup>66</sup>

### **National Board Meeting: Mel Brooks**

The group stood out because they were anomalies at the Guild, not just as women, but as women openly fighting for equality. Some of the men must have also seen something of themselves in their younger, female peers. Both groups were members of the same exclusive professional union, sharing the same drive and focus necessary to succeed at their craft. They were all film and television directors in one of the most high profile and competitive industries. This commonality did not prevent the women from encountering varying degrees of support and disapproval from their male colleagues at the Guild. Their cause also ignited debates between the men themselves. Sometime in 1979, after the group had presented their findings to Michael Franklin and then to the National Board where they were granted Committee status, the women went back to the Board to request the formation of an Affirmative Action Committee. This committee would present industry representatives from the major film studios, television networks, and leading production companies with proof of their sexist hiring patterns, per the numerical data, and demand adherence to quota and timetable programs in order to remedy the situation. Failure to do so would be negligent and would result in the Guild taking legal action against those companies.

Hiring quotas and timetables were a highly controversial topic, and debate over whether to support the women’s next—public—step in addressing discrimination ensued.

Nell Cox remembers a heated argument between Board members Mel Brooks and Elia Kazan in response to the women's request. "There was one electrifying moment...Kazan got up and said, 'My wife, Barbara Loden, directed a feature film. 'She won the grand prize at Venice and then she came back to Hollywood and no one would speak to her...that's just crazy--that's just terrible, but I can't support this.'" While acknowledging the difficulty faced by his wife due to industry sexism, Kazan, a controversial, yet highly esteemed filmmaker, could not accept the Guild's role in enforcing quotas as a way to equalize even his spouse's opportunity to work. In response to Kazan's refusal of support, Brooks stood up and declared that his wife, Anne Bancroft, had just written, directed, and starred in her first feature and that the Guild should support the women's position. Drawing an historical parallel, Brooks accused Kazan of "sending these women back to the shit house just like you did at the House Un-American Activities Committee!"<sup>67</sup>--invoking the time when Kazan infamously "named names" during the McCarthy Hollywood blacklist almost thirty years earlier.

Victoria Hochberg also remembered Brooks's fervent advocacy for the women that day, but a little differently. In response to their proposal to form an affirmative action committee, African American director Ivan Dixon stood up in opposition to the women because the Directors Guild, a decade earlier, had resisted a similar request made by a group of African American male Guild members. At that meeting, Dixon's position was that the DGA should support its minority members, primarily represented by men, first before the women, who were primarily white. Hochberg explains,

I remember, Jud Taylor was the president at the time, and the Board was sort of going towards Ivan's point of view which was "you can't do it for them

when you didn't do it for us." And Mel Brooks stood up and started walking back and forth—filled with energy, like a lightning bolt was coming off his body, and he said, "You are nitpicking and petty fogging these women into the shit house! This is their time! This is their time!" at which point Jud banged his gavel and called for a vote. Right after Mel did that and they were all so stunned by what Mel Brooks had said that they voted in our favor. It was unbelievable.<sup>68</sup>

The Board accepted the proposal from the Women's Committee to establish an official Affirmative Action Committee that would be part of the negotiating process for the 1981 Basic Agreement, but curtailed their request to approach industry representatives at that time. Although the Guild had been somewhat receptive to the women's demands thus far, the National Board, despite the approval by some of its members, was not eager to get involved in an industry-wide civil rights battle, whether it be in support of its female or minority members. What appealed to the union was the opportunity to stall the women's plans of going public with affirmative action demands and avoid the DGA's role in having to threaten legal action against companies that did not comply. Holding the women off would also serve as a way to appease Dixon's complaint: postponing their plan until the following year could be justified as the Board giving the Ethnic Minority Committee time to organize and officially become part of the Guild's antidiscrimination effort initiated by the six women. On August 16, 1980, the Board approved the formation of the Ethnic Minority Committee; Dixon was its first chairman, organizing members were Wendell Franklin, Reuben Watt, and William Crain.<sup>69</sup>

## **Honcho Meeting**

On June 18, 1980, the Directors Guild called a meeting where the Women's Committee, joined by Guild vice president Gil Cates and Michael Franklin, presented their statistics and affirmative action demands to the leading producers, show runners, and executives of all the major studios, production companies, and networks. By then the six founding members of the Women's Committee had expanded its steering committee that now included assistant directors Janet Davidson, Cheryl Downey, Nancy Heydorn; and East Coast representatives Paula Marcus and Carol Smetana.<sup>70</sup> As per their usual preparedness, weeks prior to the meeting the women went over their plan for what they and the Guild nicknamed the "Honcho Meeting." According to the committee's meeting minutes, the "Honcho" agenda was as follows:

- "To ensure commitment to an on-going affirmative action on voluntary basis. Inform [industry representatives] that the DGA will monitor their efforts for full production year (reporting their hiring practices for women to Guild)."
- "Discuss what the law of the land is regarding discrimination and employment. Discuss the federal state union and industry obligation to equal employment in non-threatening terms. Indicate to honchos they are, according to statistics we have gathered, they are *very* vulnerable to serious legal attack."
- "Decision to inform honchos that employment statistics will be released to press the day after this meeting."
- "Consciousness Raising: describe how discrimination works against women in the industry. Statements will be made to the press about honcho meeting."

We will meet with them and *we will wait and see* if there are any evident changes.”<sup>71</sup>

The women and the Guild had decided to approach the industry directly in the spirit of peaceable negotiations and potential partnership, rather than taking an antagonistic approach and filing complaints with the labor representatives or legal departments at the studios or production companies. Also significant was that the DGA had gone straight to the companies with their grievances instead of appealing to federal antidiscrimination laws through the EEOC under the jurisdiction of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>72</sup> However, as could be gleaned from the minutes of the meeting, the Guild representatives did not shy away from invoking the law in an attempt to impress upon the industry the severity of the situation and executives’ and producers’ possible role in it.

The meeting was well attended. Present were thirty-two industry representatives, including Steven Bochco, executive producer, *Hill Street Blues*, MTM; James Brooks, executive producer, John Charles Walters Productions; Marcia Carsey, senior vice president, Primetime Series, ABC; Barry Diller, chairman Paramount Pictures; Norman Lear, TAT Communications; Alan Shayne, president, Warner Bros. Television; Ned Tanen, president, Universal Pictures; Grant Tinker, president, MTM; Claire Townsend, vice president, Production, 20th Century-Fox; Ethel Winant, vice president, NBC.<sup>73</sup> The proposed plan focused on episodic television where the majority of directorial hiring took place. Episodic TV was also thought of as a good training ground for directors who wanted to work on features or those who had “proven themselves” in other formats such as news, documentary, commercials, public television, and wanted to cross over; and for DGA categories such as assistant and associate directors, production and stage managers

who were interested in moving into directing. Cox presented the statistics to the room. “It was daunting, my knees were shaking.”<sup>74</sup> The Committee recommended that for every thirteen television episodes contracted, producers hire at least one woman director. At the meeting Hochberg emphasized that what they were suggesting was not quotas, “which were meant to keep people out,” but instead “affirmative action which is meant to let people in.”<sup>75</sup> Reporter Lee Grant (not to be confused with *film director* Lee Grant), writing about the “Honcho” meeting for the *Los Angeles Times*, had to convince those Committee members concerned with industry backlash to let her run a picture of them in the paper. Grant argued that to put names and faces to their fight would help ensure the seriousness of the situation. The women agreed, and Nell Cox, Lynne Littman, Susan Bay, Dolores Ferraro, and Gil Cates appeared in the paper with the caption, “Where Are The Women Directors?”<sup>76</sup>

As for the DGA’s conflict the previous year over whether to go forward with the women’s completed research and ready-to-implement strategy or wait for the Ethnic Minority Committee to organize, the Guild ultimately went ahead with the women for this particular meeting. Franklin explained to the press that while the meeting focused on “equity and fairness” regarding women, “in the very near future” the Guild would be addressing the discrimination against its ethnic employees.<sup>77</sup>

At the news conference held the next day at the DGA offices, the Guild’s press release described how “the atmosphere of the meeting was receptive and positive. Support for affirmative action efforts was voiced by some of the attendees.”<sup>78</sup> Echoing the Committee’s agenda, the press described the meeting in friendly terms as a gathering whose intention was to provide “information-gathering,” “consciousness-raising,” and

not to be “adversarial.”<sup>79</sup> As cooperative as the Guild presented itself to be, it also did not skirt the serious implications in the statistics and the conviction of the union in seeking equity for its female members. The *New York Times* quoted Franklin stressing how “this is a voluntary program of affirmative action.” However, “if the networks and the studios don’t comply, then we move to Title VII and that is not voluntary.”<sup>80</sup> For the Guild, negotiations were the ideal means of communication, but legal recourse was not yet off the table.

In the actual meeting, the reaction, as had become a typical experience for the women when presenting their case, was mixed. The gathering was held in a big room at the old Guild location. There were seven rows of industry representatives facing a large wooden table where the women sat with Franklin and Cates. Franklin remembered, “[The meeting] was very well attended,” however, “by and large the reaction of the upper echelon of the major studios was really nothing. They were not moved other than the regular [reaction] ‘Oh, yes. Right. We’ll see what we can do.’ That kind of attitude. But they did nothing that was a positive thing, as I recall and they weren’t moved. They didn’t care.”<sup>81</sup> Norman Lear, a television producer known for his socially conscious programs, experienced a cathartic moment after the presentation when he told the women that he “had always been sexist until this meeting.” Lear told a story about how several women were outside his office talking about something in the hall. “He came out and said, ‘Can you go somewhere else because you’re laughing and making noise and I can’t work,’” remembered Cox. “And one of the women turned to him and said, ‘Norman, this is the sound that women make.’ And it was like—and he teared up when he told this story! He confessed that there was something so deeply ingrained in men—‘we don’t like

the sounds, we don't like [women] laughing; it's like a bunch of hens cackling. We have all these negative ideas about it.”<sup>82</sup>

Not all the attendees were as reflective as Lear, who in the moment attempted to turn sexism into a journey of possible retribution. Angry at the women for challenging their approach to hiring, several men confronted them in front of DGA officials Franklin and Cates. Director and show runner James L. Brooks was particularly hostile towards the group. Littman remembered Brooks saying out loud at the meeting to her, ““You’ve got a lot of nerve. You’re clearly going to be successful. Why are you standing up here whining?” Now that’s what you call damning me with praise. I was devastated. This was the man who created *Mary Tyler Moore*. This is the man who put, presumably, the first ‘liberated’ female on TV and this was his response.”<sup>83</sup> The majority of the room did not respond with such strong disdain as Brooks. For the most part they did not respond that much at all. But their silence hinted at what eventually would be a lack of enthusiasm for the women’s proposal.

On June 20th, two days after the gathering, Franklin sent a packet to all DGA signatories, including those present at the “Honcho” meeting, that gave a detailed breakdown of the gender employment percentages for film and television by format (features, television movies, episodic, miniseries) from 1949 to 1979, as well as the worksheets that tallied the hiring ratio of women to men—directors, First AD, Second AD, and UPMs--on popular television by specific series and production companies.<sup>84</sup> Almost identical to the letter he sent out to the WGA signatories in 1973 accompanying the Writers’ Women’s Committee statistics, it also interrogated producers about their potentially sexist hiring policies. The questions invoked current civil rights legislation,



reinforcing the Guild's message during the "Honcho" meeting that legal recourse was not off the table if the companies did not actively try to improve the numbers. The letter also attempted to preempt familiar industry justifications for company hiring patterns by prefacing the questionnaire with a reminder that "existing state and federal legislation regarding [sex] discrimination...do not accept 'lack of intent' to discriminate as an excuse for the practice of discrimination." Questions from Franklin's correspondence included the following:

- Have you done anything subtly or directly to discourage women from seeking employment in any Directors Guild category on your projects?
- Have you ever communicated to an agent a preference for male directors over female directors?
- When interviewing DGA members do you include women before making a hiring decision? If not, why not?
- Is it possible that you have not hired a woman in any DGA category for an action or adventure film because you think women don't know how to work on "men's" stories? Do you feel the same way about hiring men to work on "women's" stories?
- Numerous federal and state laws have been enacted prohibiting employment based on sex. Do you believe that you conform to the spirit of these laws? Would your hiring statistics bear this out?

In his memo, Franklin also outlined the Guild's Affirmative Action Program that required, in no uncertain terms, the producers' participation. The program's goal was to increase job opportunities for women directors who were DGA members with an

emphasis on providing experience in episodic television for those trained in other formats. The objective was to ensure that a woman would direct at least one of every thirteen episodes of a series. To help facilitate this hiring, the Guild would establish a Resource Committee made up of members from the Women's Committee, DGA Director Volunteers, and representatives from the networks and production companies. The Women's Committee created a directory of qualified female directors so no company could claim that they did not know how to contact eligible employees; and the Director Volunteers, who were experienced male DGA members, would provide support to women preparing for a job. To ensure that these guidelines were being adhered to, the Guild requested that companies file reports with the DGA that tracked the number of female members interviewed and hired.

Attempting to act as an enforcer of civil rights law, the union originally intended to run its Affirmative Action Program from July 1, 1980, through June 1, 1981, assessing its progress throughout the year. However, not having involved a federal agency such as the EEOC, and having no legal authority of its own, the Guild functioned in an unofficial and ultimately ineffective capacity. For the next few months, women met with production company representatives, but eventually the envoys sent were from human resource departments—areas that had no knowledge of or authority to hire directors. When companies started sending their secretaries to meet prospective directors, the DGA understood that its Affirmative Action Program, as it had initially realized it, was being treated by the industry as a farce.

In October 1980, just four months into the plan, Franklin hosted a breakfast meeting at the Guild, inviting industry executives to discuss employment progress. Not

only did no one attend, but no one even paid attention to the formalities of cancelling and call to say they were not coming. Ten years later in a special edition of *DGA News* dedicated to the political action of the Guild's women, Joelle Dobrow interviewed Franklin about what would be named the "Danish Crisis" or "debacle" after the uneaten catering ordered for a meeting no one attended. "As I remember," said Franklin, "the executives' excuse [for not attending the meeting]—which they would deny—was that their legal people told them there was a problem for them to be participating in this ongoing program. This was their way of extricating themselves and leaving it in the laps of their labor people. Once that was done, they figured it was going to die a natural death."<sup>85</sup> By this time, as an organization, the Guild had too much invested in the effort to combat employment discrimination. Not only had it taken a very public position on the issue in June by calling the "Honcho" meeting and press conference, but if it did not hold the industry accountable, the possibility that its female membership would look toward the Guild as liable was a serious threat. The industry's response to the DGA's demands—not showing up to meetings, sending secretaries as production representatives to the Affirmative Action Program to discuss hiring prospects—illustrated how those companies felt about being told that they were behaving in discriminatory ways. Perhaps more offensive to the industry representatives being singled out was what Warner Bros. would later describe in a court document as an infringement on its (and by association the entire industry's) constitutional right to free speech. In what the studio labeled as a "First Affirmative Defense" the ability for a production company to hire at its own discretion without meeting quotas was "part of the creative process of making a motion picture or television production and thus represents a form of speech protected by the first

amendment to the United States Constitution.”<sup>86</sup> Echoing the industry’s defense in 1969 and 1970 when the EEOC conducted hearings on the same problem of job discrimination, but with a focus on below-the-line male minority employees, from the perspective of the company production was dependent on the unpredictable nature of the “creative process.”

### **Filing with the EEOC**

Frustrated with the industry’s behavior towards the Guild’s various attempts to negotiate affirmative action policies and programs over the last year, on February 25, 1981, the DGA filed discrimination complaints with the EEOC and the state Fair Employment Practices Commission. These complaints did not indicate a lawsuit, yet. Filing with the EEOC would allow the Directors Guild to take legal action against any of the companies under the jurisdiction of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act if the Guild ever decided to do so, which two years later it would. By involving the EEOC, the federal agency established to enforce the Civil Rights Act, the Guild conveyed the seriousness of its agenda to make the film and television industries address, in a meaningful way, their sexist and racist hiring patterns. By enlisting the EEOC the government would now be responsible—not the DGA—for making the studios, production companies, and networks answer to their low numbers of minority and female hires.

The complaints were submitted by the Guild on behalf of its female and minority membership against twenty companies, including networks ABC, CBS, and NBC; and studios Columbia Pictures, Paramount Pictures, 20th Century-Fox, Universal Studios, Warner Bros., and Walt Disney Productions. Also named were leading independent production companies such as Aaron Spelling Productions (*Vegas*); T.A.T.

Communications—Tandem, Norman Lears’ company--(*Archie Bunker’s Place, The Jeffersons*); MTM Enterprises--Mary Tyler Moore’s company with her husband Grant Tinker--(*Lou Grant, WKRP in Cincinnati*); Lorimar Productions (*Dallas*); and Nicholl-Ross-West Enterprises (*Three’s Company*).<sup>87</sup>

The industry responded defensively to the Guild’s accusations that they were responsible for a “‘pattern of discrimination’ in all DGA categories”; and for their uncooperativeness in working together to improve job numbers by “[u]nilaterally withdrawing...and terminating [their] involvement in the affirmative action program.”<sup>88</sup> Alan Horn, president of T.A.T. Communications, was surprised by the Guild’s decision, confessing that “...we freely admit not using women in a representative sense according to their numbers in the Directors Guild. We have been doing everything in our powers consistent with our existing commitments to hire more women.” Of T.A.T.’s twenty-four directing jobs, two women were hired to fill seven positions.<sup>89</sup> Grant Tinker, president of MTM Enterprises, was also taken aback by the legal action, explaining, “To my knowledge, there was a dialogue occurring.” He also admitted that his company did not have a history of hiring women directors: “The record has been dismal and something should be done about it. We’re going to use some ladies.”<sup>90</sup> Quoted in the *New York Times* as “questioning how many women were really qualified to direct a \$10 million movie,” Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, inadvertently boosted the Women’s Committee and DGA’s argument by stating “that women [should] serve an apprenticeship in television first.” Victoria Hochberg was quoted in the article responding to Valenti’s rationale with the analogy: “I’m at school and there’s a big exam at the end of the year that will be graded fairly. The only problem

is that only men are allowed into the library to study. Getting into the library is the equivalent of being allowed to direct episodes on television.”<sup>91</sup>

In December of 1982, the EEOC notified the Guild “That not a single production company had complied with the EEOC’s Request for Information...”<sup>92</sup> With the government unable to make any progress, in May 1983, the DGA received a “right-to-sue” letter from EEOC, which formally granted the union permission to proceed with litigation plans.<sup>93</sup> The Guild then sent letters to the networks and major and independent studios threatening a lawsuit if these companies did not agree to meet and negotiate some kind of policy to address the discriminatory hiring practices through the implementation of numerical goals and timetables.

During the next month, the press reported that all seven major studios and the majority of the leading independent production companies, including Lorimar Productions, MTM, and Aaron Spelling Productions, had agreed to meet with the DGA, but would not be following the affirmative action guidelines insisted upon by the Guild.<sup>94</sup> The DGA stood by the implementation of affirmative action plans, while companies, such as Columbia Pictures, also rejected goals and timetables.<sup>95</sup> On June 15th, *Variety* reported that the DGA had dropped the networks from its attack and was focusing only on the studios.

Showing signs of retaliation, the studios had filed their own grievances with the EEOC against the Guild, citing that if there were instances of discrimination, it was the DGA Basic Agreement contract that was partially at fault.<sup>96</sup> By July, talks between Warner Bros. and the DGA had completely broken down when, after one meeting, the studio refused to “accept ‘goals and timetables’ as a condition of bargaining.”<sup>97</sup> The core

of the studio's defense continued to be that they could "not allow our right to express ourselves creatively [to] be controlled by a numbers game."<sup>98</sup> As these companies had been adamant about for over a decade, affirmative action limited their creative rights, a freedom that was key to the functions of the film business.

### **Filing the Lawsuit**

On July 25, 1983, the Directors Guild filed a class-action suit against Warner Bros.; and on December 21, against Columbia Pictures. The Guild charged both studios with employment discrimination in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 1981 of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 (nineteenth century). The following DGA plaintiffs were named in the cases: (Warner Bros.) Joelle Dobrow, Luther James, Lorraine Raglin, Cesar Torres; (Columbia) Bill Crain, Dick Look, Sharon Mann, Susan Smitman, Frank Zuniga.<sup>99</sup> At the time of the filing, the DGA supported its claim against Warner Bros., citing their faulty hiring record: between January 1978 and June 1980 the studio had 233 directing jobs. Women filled 9, or 3.9 percent.<sup>100</sup> From April 1, 1982 to March 31, 1983, out of 177 directing jobs, none went to women, and 2.8 percent went to minority men.<sup>101</sup> Eight months later in November, talks between the Guild and Columbia fell apart. Columbia, like Warner Bros., balked at the DGA's affirmative action demands as an infringement on its creative rights and freedom. In a statement to the press, the studio explained that "despite Columbia's expressed willingness to continue negotiations aimed at achieving increased levels of employment opportunities for women and minorities...the Guild's position with respect to quotas essentially was that Columbia's only choice was either to accept quotas or to reject quotas and be sued."<sup>102</sup> Michael

Franklin responded to the statement, “In our judgment, Columbia’s hiring practices are in violation of Title 7 [sic] of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In our judgment, their hiring practices are discriminatory and unlawful.”<sup>103</sup> Between January 1978 and June 1980, of the 264 directors hired by Columbia Pictures, only 4 were women; from April 1982 to March 1983, of 83 directors hired by the studio, only 3 were men of color.<sup>104</sup>

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Los Angeles, and the randomly selected judge appointed to decide the case was U.S. District Judge Pamela Ann Rymer. A graduate of Stanford University, Judge Rymer was known for her strong conservative connections. In 1964 she served as the Director of Political Research and Analysis for the Goldwater for President Committee. At the time of the DGA suit, Ronald Reagan had just appointed her to the federal bench in February 1983, and the Guild’s complaint was one of her first major cases.<sup>105</sup>

The law firm of Taylor, Roth & Hunt represented the plaintiffs in the case, both the DGA and the individuals.<sup>106</sup> The firm’s lead attorney, A. Thomas Hunt, had acquired a reputation as a successful antidiscrimination lawyer, especially in the field of women and minority employment.<sup>107</sup> More importantly, Hunt had participated in the collective bargaining negotiations between the Directors Guild and its signatories (studios, production companies, networks) in the DGA’s 1981 Basic Agreement.<sup>108</sup> Negotiated every three years the Basic Agreement contract protected Guild members in all categories (director, UPM, First and Second AD, SM) with regard to such issues as pay scales, creative rights during production and post-production, and residuals. Also part of the Basic Agreement is the DGA’s maintaining and administering of its qualification lists that included all Guild categories except that of director. Qualification lists, also known



as roster lists (as discussed in Chapter 1) are a directory of union members organized by seniority. For example, when a production company is looking for a first AD to hire they could contact the Directors Guild and ask for a qualifications list of eligible candidates. Those with the most experience would be at the top of the list and would be the first considered for the job.

Hunt's reputation, however, was earned during the President Jimmy Carter and Governor Jerry Brown administrations and the liberal days of the EEOC. By 1983, President Ronald Reagan and Governor George Deukmejian of California had begun their appointments of more conservative state and federal judiciaries, which presumably would not be sympathetic to traditional labor union issues. As attorney Hunt remarked of this period, "We started losing civil rights cases that shouldn't have been lost. We also found it harder and harder to get decent settlements."<sup>109</sup> Arguably the implication of Hunt's comments was that a less conservative, more pro-labor judge than Rymer could have resulted in a victory for the DGA and the individual plaintiffs in their class-action suit. Joelle Dobrow, Victoria Hochberg, and Lynne Littman each agreed with the sentiment of Hunt's statement. They felt strongly that in 1979, when the National Board, under the guise of waiting for the Ethnic Minority Committee to organize, delayed the Women's Committee's first proposal to confront the industry, a window of opportunity was missed in the last year of the Carter administration when affirmative action plans were more widely accepted and enforced by the government.<sup>110</sup>

On March 5, 1985, after eighteen months since the two cases were filed, Judge Rymer made a "tentative" ruling against the Directors Guild and in favor of Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros.<sup>111</sup> The ruling was then handed down on August 30th of that

year.<sup>112</sup> The judge's decision was based on two findings. Firstly, the Guild could not be the "class representative" of the women and minorities involved in the case because it created a "conflict of interest" in that the DGA might, as a union, be guilty of discrimination, while also claiming to be victimized by the same prejudice. Secondly, Judge Rymer found that the DGA's lawyers, Taylor, Roth & Hunt, could not represent the plaintiffs in the case because the firm also represented the Guild, thus creating another conflict of interest.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, she ruled that the nine DGA plaintiffs could not act as representatives of a class for other women or minorities, as in the case of a class-action suit, but could sue the film studios as individuals for discrimination.<sup>114</sup>

### **Results of the Court's Decision**

In choosing to file its first legal challenge to discrimination in the hiring practices of the film industry, the DGA made a number of legal mistakes and encountered some political misfortunes. As discussed above, the political climate in California, as well as the random assignment of a conservative judge, were unfortunate developments that could not have been anticipated or avoided at that time. On the other hand, there were strategic legal decisions, which in hindsight were devastating to the outcome of the case. As became especially clear after hearing the judge's decision, it appears that it was a mistake for the DGA to serve as the plaintiff representative in the case, and the law firm of Hunt & Cochran-Bond should not have represented both of the parties. As the defendants were quick to point out, it was the DGA and not the studios that had devised and participated in the assembly of a discriminatory system, primarily through the qualification lists.<sup>115</sup> To get on the list an employee in one of the categories would have

had to work a certain amount of hours to “qualify.” The amount then determined one’s seniority on the list.<sup>116</sup> The defendants’ cross-complaint also alerted the judge to the issue that the attorneys for the plaintiffs were instrumental in negotiating the Basic Agreement, which arguably was the cause of many discriminatory practices.<sup>117</sup> As a result, attorney Hunt was singled out as potentially having an adverse relationship to the plaintiffs who were appearing as individuals. Shortly after the filing of the complaint, the defendants filed a cross-complaint against the Guild “which assert[s] that [the DGA] is wholly or partially responsible for whatever discrimination may exist against women and minorities as a result of its role as bargaining representative and acquiescence in discriminatory practices, if any.”<sup>118</sup>

Before there was any significant legal activity and without any substantive courtroom proceedings, Judge Rymer brought the entire action to a halt and pronounced a “death knell to the suit.” She announced to a very “glum” audience of plaintiffs that the case could not proceed until the DGA was removed as the class representative and the attorneys, especially Hunt, were forced to prove that they in fact represented the best interests of the individual plaintiffs.<sup>119</sup> The case never recovered from this decision. It was subsequently abandoned by the DGA and never successfully revived by any of the individual plaintiffs.

It is difficult to believe that the DGA and its attorneys did not anticipate the Court’s decision. The issues that were most convincing to the judge were quite clearly spelled out by her and should have been easily identified in the strategy meetings that preceded the drafting and filing of the complaint. The attorneys at Warner Bros. and Columbia anticipated the conflict of interest inherent in the Basic Agreement and planned

their defense and attack accordingly. Reflecting back to 1979, the women's original hunch—that the Guild was a guilty party—was correct.

The basis for Judge Rymer's rejection of the plaintiffs' case lies in the decision by the Guild to file a class-action lawsuit rather than an individual plaintiff's suit. In an individual suit, one or a few persons would allege discrimination on a set of facts specific to their particular situation. The advantage would come from picking an individual(s) with a very strong case and possibly on the strength of that case negotiating a quick settlement. In a class-action suit, allegations would have to be made by a class representative that there was widespread discrimination in the film industry that affected an entire class of individuals. Thus, in one comprehensive litigation, the court could determine both the existence of the alleged discrimination and if found, make a suitable award to compensate all the victims in the class.

The relevant rules on proceeding with a class action in federal court are very clear. In order to maintain a lawsuit as a class action, the plaintiffs must satisfy each of the four conjunctive criteria set forth in the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure as follows:

Section 23 (a): Prerequisites to a Class Action. One or more members of a class may sue or be sued as representative parties on behalf of all only if (1) the class is so numerous that joinder of all members is impracticable, (2) there are questions of law or fact common to the class, (3) the claims or defenses of the representative parties are typical of the claims or defenses of the class, and (4) the representative parties will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class.<sup>120</sup>

Judge Rymer in her decision established additional legal requirements recognizing that “before ordering that a lawsuit may proceed as a class action, the trial court must rigorously analyze whether the prerequisites of Rule 23 have been met. The class plaintiff bears the burden of establishing that the action may be maintained as a class action. Thus, the failure of plaintiffs to carry their burden as to any one of the requirements of Rule 23 precludes the maintenance of the lawsuit as a class action.”<sup>121</sup> As the class representative, the DGA had the burden of proving the existence of each of the four identified criteria. In a succinct statement before further explanation, Judge Rymer gave her decision: “Having considered the papers and oral argument, I conclude that the class cannot be determined at this time.”<sup>122</sup> As to the first requirement, often referred to as “numerosity,” there was no disagreement between the parties, and the issue did not play a part in the final decision.

With regard to the second condition known as “commonality,” the Guild had to allege that there was a class of women and ethnic minorities who shared a “question of law or fact common to the class” related to the discrimination they experienced in pursuing employment opportunities. According to the “commonality” requirement, the law expects the DGA to “present significant evidence from which it may be inferred that there is an identifiable pattern or practice affecting a definable class in common ways.”<sup>123</sup>

The purpose of this requirement is one of judicial economy so that the court can focus on an identifiable unlawful practice that is experienced in a similar way by every member of the class and can be attributed to the similar actions of any number of different defendants.<sup>124</sup> The defendants argued that hiring in the film industry and especially in the director and assistant director categories was essentially “decentralized,”

meaning that no one person had the responsibility of selecting applicants because each of the employers—studio executive or producers--used a different hiring procedure.<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, there wasn't one specific place a director could go to see a posted list of job opportunities with an exact list of qualifications to be met. In addition, the artistic nature of the subject matter made employment decisions a “highly subjective” process often dependent on word of mouth, personal chemistry and unique technical competence.<sup>126</sup>

The Directors Guild responded to the arguments by emphasizing the discriminatory nature of the hiring system expressed in the raw numbers contained in the defendants' own reports that had been provided in accordance with Section 15-301 and 15-401 of the DGA's Basic Agreement. “Non-Discrimination” Article 15 and its subsequent sections 15-101--15-604 were a major accomplishment for the Women and Ethnic Minority Committees during the negotiation process for the 1981 Basic Agreement. Article 15 outlined the Guild's non-discrimination policy stating that “the parties [the DGA and its signatories] mutually reaffirm their policy of non-discrimination in the employment or treatment of any Employee because of race, creed, age, religion, color, sex or national origin, in accordance with applicable State or Federal laws.”<sup>127</sup> Borrowing language from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Article made clear that it would defer to the government's authority over employment rights by including the mention of “State or Federal laws.”<sup>128</sup>

A direct outcome of the activism that had been taking place over the previous three years, Article 15 was a landmark addition to the DGA's Basic Agreement in its attempt to formalize within the union's contract a method for making signatory companies accountable for how many woman and monitories they did—or did not—hire.

Section 15-300, entitled “Reports,” required companies to submit to the Guild quarterly reports of the “sex and ethnicity of persons employed.”<sup>129</sup> These reports would then be aggregated forming the employment statistics that the DGA collects and circulates through the present day. Article 15 also institutionalized as part of the Basic Agreement many of the affirmative action efforts the Guild had attempted to establish with the studios and production companies, but to no avail. Negotiating the 1981 Basic Agreement had not been that much easier. Initially the DGA was hoping to include in the contract an affirmative action policy, but not surprisingly the industry representatives refused. Instead 15-200 of the Article specifies that signatories “shall make good faith efforts to increase the number of working ethnic minority and women” in the different Guild categories.<sup>130</sup> In the press Michael Franklin reflected during the contract talks that “It’s the kind of compromise that I’m not altogether thrilled about, and I’m sure some of our members won’t be [either].”<sup>131</sup>

On November 20, 1984, the DGA included in a memorandum to the Court statistics collected from the provisions listed in Article 15 to make its case that unfair hiring was taking place. According to those numbers, Columbia Pictures had hired 0 percent and Warner Bros. only 3.9 percent women directors.<sup>132</sup> The Guild argued that on the basis of these undisputable numbers, it was obvious that something improper was going on within the industry and it was characteristic of a system of unlawful discrimination.

Judge Rymer was not persuaded by the DGA’s arguments, however. She unequivocally concluded that “due to the decentralization of the industry and the subjective nature of the hiring process, plaintiffs have not demonstrated that this action is

susceptible to class treatment.”<sup>133</sup> In practical terms the Court determined that “In the motion picture industry...hiring decisions are vested in numerous individuals who act independently of each other....”<sup>134</sup> “Hiring decisions are made project-by-project by a variety of persons...who utilize different criteria which varies depending on the type of project involved...and under a variety of conditions.”<sup>135</sup> Based on this “diversity” of factors the Court found, “The existence of common questions of law or fact has not been demonstrated.”<sup>136</sup> Despite the Court’s rather detailed explanation for the plaintiff’s failure to prove “commonality,” it is unclear from the decision whether this failure *alone* would have been fatal to the success of the case.<sup>137</sup>

What was more devastating to the case was the Court’s analysis of the fourth criterion for “fair and adequate protection.” As stated in the decision, “this prerequisite has been called the most crucial requirement because of the preclusive effect a judgment will have on the rights of absent members.”<sup>138</sup> Specifically, the plaintiffs must show that their interests in the case are not antagonistic to those of the remainder of the class and more specifically that the interests of the DGA, the named representative of the class, did not conflict with the interests of the named (and unnamed) individuals in the class. In short, the Court was directly asking the Guild, “Whose side are you on in this dispute? The women and minority members of the union or the union as a whole that is comprised of a majority of white men?”

The DGA found itself in the position of essentially acting as the union representing its directors and its other categories. This was not an unusual relationship, and the Court noted that in such situations the issue of whether a union can adequately represent a class made up of its members was a question of fact to be determined on a



case-by-case basis. The Court described such relevant factors as a majority of women members, history of fighting discrimination in collective bargaining efforts, number of complaints filed with the EEOC, and lack of a cross-complaint against the union's own hiring practices.<sup>139</sup> This last factor was especially critical because the filing of a cross-complaint by the defendants would be the means by which they could raise the issue that the union as a class representative actually was responsible for the very discrimination about which it complained.<sup>140</sup>

Unfortunately, the DGA was hardly in a position to meet these criteria since 80 percent of the Guild's membership, as well as its officers and National Board, were composed of white males. Furthermore, there was no distinguished history in which the DGA had consistently sought equal employment rights for its members.<sup>141</sup> Since much of this information was not commonly known to the public, it became the purpose of the defendants' cross-complaint to bring these allegations of the DGA's own misdeeds to the attention of the Court in a powerful and convincing manner. Through the cross-complaint, the defendants argued that the DGA was not a victim of discrimination, but in fact had contributed to producing the kinds of disturbing statistics that formed the basis for their case. More importantly, the defendants argued that through their negotiating tactics, the DGA had contributed to any discriminatory impact in the hiring practices in the motion picture industry, including a demand for an unrepresentative qualifying list of candidates and a refusal to institute an affirmative action program suggested by the production companies.<sup>142</sup>

By the time the Court ruled on the question of whether there really was a class of individuals with a common complaint worthy of class certification, it appeared to have

accepted the defendants' point of view with very little analysis or critique and held, "The conflict of interest raised by the DGA's role is sufficiently concrete and immediate to preclude the DGA's representation of the class comprised of females and minorities. Accordingly, the DGA is dismissed as a plaintiff."<sup>143</sup> This rather dramatic outcome had the effect of not only removing the Guild's financial support for the individual plaintiffs in the case, but also left in place the defendants' cross-complaint. This was the worst possible result for both the DGA and the individual plaintiffs. The Court in effect decided that the case could go forward for the individual plaintiffs without financial backing and the defendant studios could pursue their cross-complaint alleging that the DGA was guilty of discrimination. As a result, if the case continued to go further, the DGA could conceivably find itself liable to *both* the plaintiffs *and* the defendants for any alleged discriminatory activity.

As previously discussed, this decision appears to have surprised the DGA attorneys, but it is difficult to imagine they did not anticipate the complications that eventually consumed the case. The Court made clear, using similar cases concerning labor unions representing a segment of their membership as a class, when this situation could work to emphasize why, for the DGA, it would not. For example for a union to adequately represent a class the majority of its officers would have to reflect the class (in this case women and minorities), and 70 to 80 percent of the total union's membership would also have to reflect the class.<sup>144</sup> In addition the Court observed in a footnote that "with the exception of one, every case which has considered union representation of a class in the face of a counterclaim alleging union liability has denied class certification."<sup>145</sup> It is difficult to believe that the experienced research attorneys at Hunt &

Cochran-Bond who prepared the DGA case did not realize the current state of the law was such that a class-action lawsuit with the DGA as the class representative was doomed to failure at the earliest stages in which the class needed to be certified.

The final blow to the plaintiffs was Judge Rymer's explicit reminder to the DGA attorneys of the obvious rule that they could not represent clients with conflicting interests, stating, "It is equally clear that the attorneys representing the individual plaintiffs, the law firm of Hunt & Cochran-Bond, may not represent both the plaintiffs and the DGA."<sup>146</sup> Following many of the arguments raised by the defendants in their cross-complaint, the Court admonished the DGA's attorneys for "potentially" violating their duty of undivided loyalty. Mr. Hunt was singled out for his role in leading the negotiations that resulted in the signing of the 1981 collective bargaining agreement, a document that the defendants alleged set up the resulting discriminatory hiring system.<sup>147</sup>

As discussed previously with regard to the state of the law concerning union representation in class-action suits, it is also difficult to understand how the conflict of interest question could have eluded the Guild lawyers and especially Mr. Hunt. Perhaps they were blinded by Walter Cochran-Bond's belief that "as a practical matter' his law firm (Hunt & Cochran-Bond) was the only one with sufficient experience in the issues covered by the suit" to pursue the case.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, as both the cross-complaint and the decision were quick to point out, Mr. Hunt was privy to many confidential conversations with the negotiators at the collective bargaining sessions and undoubtedly would have been called as a witness at the trial to describe how the DGA arrived at the complicated hiring system embodied in the Basic Agreement.<sup>149</sup>

In hypothetical terms, there could possibly have been a point in the trial where the individual plaintiffs would find themselves on the side of the production companies complaining about restrictive DGA membership policies, specifically the qualification list, and then in a sudden turn of events, these same individual plaintiffs would be siding with the DGA against the hiring practices of the production companies. Throughout all of this, A. Thomas Hunt would find himself in the uncomfortable position of being both supportive and then unsupportive of different parties and their shifting legal positions. It is simply not credible to believe that this very scenario was not raised and addressed by the DGA and the individual plaintiffs *before* the lawsuit was filed rather than waiting for Judge Rymer to wade into the conflict of interest question and essentially reprimand the attorneys--in front of their clients, as opposed to a private discussion in her chambers--for their lack of awareness about these professional responsibility issues.<sup>150</sup>

When viewed with the benefit of almost thirty years hindsight, it is obvious that the DGA case was doomed to fail; it was expensive, and ultimately the conclusion was irreversible. Even to an impartial observer, this was the wrong kind of lawsuit. It should never have been a class action, but instead an individual suit of selective, sympathetic plaintiffs, heard preferably before a pro-union judge. Instead, it presented the wrong plaintiff as class representatives for the DGA, before the wrong judge, and finally, with the wrong attorneys; the choice should have been a team without any conflicts of interest. The shock of the loss was so dramatic and the effect so powerful that no other lawsuit was attempted by the DGA to rectify the employment discrimination issue.

## Legacy of Case

The impact of this case is more apparent in the way its failure for the DGA has consequently been spun into a legacy of honorable effort by the Guild. It was the first time that the DGA, an influential and reputable guild, had taken legal action on behalf of its female and minority membership. Specifically, never had such attention been drawn to women directors within the industry, and it has yet to happen again.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, it was an uncharacteristic gesture made by an industry organization that was not known for taking overt political positions informed by potentially controversial issues such as feminism, sexism, and racism.<sup>152</sup>

As Lynne Littman said in the press before the case was lost: “The important thing about the action the guild is taking now is that it is being taken by the whole guild, not by the women’s committee. The guild is not a notoriously radical organization, and their support for us is a major advance.”<sup>153</sup> Although implicated by the Court’s decision in the employment discrimination of its minority and female members, the DGA began to refashion its guilty verdict as a sign of the organization’s progressive transformation. A decade after the filing of the suit, the Guild published a special “women’s” issue of its newsletter, *DGA News*, that celebrated the ten-year anniversary of the Women’s Committee and highlighted the accomplishments of its female membership. In the newsletter, film director Arthur Hiller, then president of the Guild, wrote, “It’s hard to believe, but some people question whether women are people too! But not at the DGA; we are one Guild and we are there for *all* of our members.” He goes on: “We set up plans and recommendations for raising the number of working women. We even filed lawsuits.”<sup>154</sup> Hiller, by not mentioning the outcome of the “lawsuits,” avoided a difficult

part of the Guild's history: what Judge Rymer stated in her decision—and what the women had suspected early on in their organizing—that the DGA played a significant role in perpetuating Hollywood's white-male-dominated directors' pool.

Focusing on the legal case as a noble effort in the Guild's commitment to “diversity,” rather than the suit's loss, is how the union has absorbed this chapter of its history. Prominent on the homepage of the DGA website is a link to “Diversity” that highlights the DGA's mission statement “...to increase and support diversity in the entertainment community through membership committees, networking opportunities and job training and mentoring programs.”<sup>155</sup> In the spring of 1979 six women presented their statistical findings on the status of female directors to a series of elected DGA officials arguing for the necessity of a formal Guild Women's Committee. In 2014 the Directors Guild promotes as part of its public and internal persona multiple committees: the African American Steering Committee (formerly the Ethnic Minority Committee), the Asian American Committee, the Eastern Diversity Steering Committee (represents African American, Asian, Native American, Latino, Arab-Middle Eastern Guild members located on the East Coast), the Latino Committee, and the Women's Steering Committee.

The legacy of the statistical model of the 1970s has also been absorbed into the Directors Guild's diversity persona. On the organization's website annual reports on employment data--now focused more on episodic television where the majority of directing jobs take place—are broken down by race and gender. Like the 1979 Women's Committee, the DGA continues the tradition of outing the production companies and programs that hire the fewest women and minorities with a list titled: “DGA's ‘WORST OF’ Lists.” As a measure of progress the site also includes a list of shows with better

employment records highlighted in the “DGA ‘BEST OF’ List.”<sup>156</sup> As a “DGA...List” the Guild assumes the role of a policing entity and any questions about the unions’ role in creating or perpetuating the low numbers are deflected.

In the “Diversity” section of the DGA’s website sidebar images and web links connect to profiles of the Guild’s racially, ethnically, and gender diverse membership. A link entitled “The Good Fight” features the 1980 photograph from Lee Grant’s *Los Angeles Times* article on the “Honcho” meeting of Cox, Littman, Bay, Ferraro, and Cates. The article, just like this dissertation, begins with Kathryn Bigelow’s Oscar win as an achievement made possible by the feminist activism of the 1970s. Now, almost thirty-five years later, that tense and hostile day is framed within the historical journey of progress and specifically the DGA’s diversity history. The article acknowledges the Committee’s groundbreaking research and deflects the intricacies of why the case was lost by quoting Victoria Hochberg’s assessment: “It was tossed out of court, that’s true, but it was a game changer nonetheless.”<sup>157</sup>

In actuality, the game changers were the six women and not the failed lawsuit. Without the men of the DGA who supported them such as Michael Franklin, Gil Cates, Harry Evans, the women would have had a more difficult time gaining support from their union, but they would have still found a way—through the press and civil rights’ attorneys--to generate attention to the statistics they had compiled. In 1979 and 1980 the feminist movement, and the last vestiges of a liberal administration before the election of Ronald Reagan, continued to be powerful in influencing discussions regarding workplace equality and a still prevalent interest in affirmative action policies would have generated for the group high-profile support in their fight. In contrast, *without the women* the Guild

would never have begun to look at discrimination with such detail and aggressive action. Until the women approached Franklin, the Directors Guild had missed the social politics of the 1970s. Interviewed by Joelle Dobrow in the *DGA News* anniversary tribute to the Women's Committee, Michael Franklin, who had retired from the DGA in 1988, reflected on the political action in which he had been so instrumental. Franklin described the impact of the case on the Guild in a positive light. "Prior to 1978, the Guild had an image of a gentlemen's club. It didn't make waves. The lawsuit improved the Guild's status because the industry recognized that not only did the DGA represent important creative elements within the industry, but it was a strong force for the positive improvement of society as well!"<sup>158</sup>

*DGA v. WB/CPI* was significant for the Directors Guild in that the case represented the culmination of the activism the Guild had partaken in since the spring of 1979 when the nascent Women's Committee first approached Franklin with its statistics. Although the case was a failure in how it indicted the DGA for the discriminatory behavior the union was itself trying to fight, the fact that it was trying to fight demonstrated a major shift taking place within the organization in its awareness of the needs of its membership. In 1981 Article 15 of the DGA Basic Agreement also demonstrated a significant change taking place at the union. Including a "non-discrimination" section in its contract—a document that defined the Guild—made the union's position on employment equity and equality official.

During the early and mid-1980s the Directors Guild experienced a newfound activism within the organization. However, altering the way directors were hired throughout the industry continued to be difficult. Similar to the situation in the early



1970s, during the early 1980s industry reformers encountered impasses that made impossible any official policy (i.e., legally enforced) to monitor discrimination industry-wide. As discussed in Chapter 1 the EEOC's efforts in 1969 and 1970 to address the well-documented disparity in the hiring of minorities were neutered by other fractions of the government that privileged the economic benefits of Hollywood as an industry over protecting the civil rights of the workers that made the industry possible. Mirroring the difficult and contentious dialog between the DGA and industry representatives between 1980 and 1983, the EEOC revealed a similar cycle of blame: the unions blamed the studios, the studios blamed the unions, and the employees blamed both. Unions upheld their use of qualification and roster lists as a way of facilitating work for its members and claimed the studios could choose from those lists minority and women members in a conscious effort to insure a diverse workplace. In turn studios accused the unions of perpetuating the dominance of white male employees by organizing their lists based on seniority. Finally, the studios claim that the creative process of making a film could not be beholden to affirmative action quotas and timetables; it was an unpredictable process contingent on many unique and uncontrollable variables such as individual relationships, personalities, and timing.

All of these issues that arose early in the 1970s reappeared during the DGA lawsuit. What also was consistent during this time span was the result of "good faith" agreements as a "compromise" for the disagreements between each party. In 1970 after the EEOC hearings a "good faith" agreement was issued by the Justice Department that the unions and studios would essentially promise to try harder to hire more women and minorities. But as the California Advisory Committee to the Commission on Civil Rights

showed in its follow up investigation published in 1978, not only had the unions and film studios not improved their membership and employees numbers in any significant way, the government agency designated to enforce the 1970 agreement, the EEOC, had failed to do so with any thoroughness.<sup>159</sup>

In 1981 Article 15 was an important step forward in improving the low number of women and minority directors, assistant directors, unit production managers, and stage managers. But as Franklin had said in the press during the contract negotiations it was a disappointing concession to a more binding and regulated hiring system that the DGA had tried to propose to the industry. For studios, production companies, and networks to “make good faith efforts to increase the number of working ethnic minority and women” left wide open the definition of what those “efforts” might entail. As a result companies could fall back on their justification that the hiring process—and the creative process on the whole—was unpredictable and therefore unregulatable.

Measured by the tepid and borderline hostile response at the “Honcho” meeting in 1980, the superficial impact of Article 15 in the 1981 Basic Agreement, and the defeat of the lawsuit that took place between 1983 and 1985 this period of feminist reform generated by the Directors Guild, both by its members and executive staff, is complex. These crucial years of activism are less about policies and official means of enforcement, which to the disappointment of those involved were not achieved, and more about the slow, painstaking process of changing the prejudicial attitudes embedded within the entertainment industry. Like the feminist reform efforts that took place during the early 1970s, such as the EEOC hearings, the work done by the Women’s Committees at SAG and the WGA, and the establishment of AFI’s Directing Workshop for Women, through

coverage in the press—newspapers, magazines, and the industry trade papers—and the presence of individuals who were outspoken about industry sexism things did begin to change for women, and in the case of this study, women film directors. In turn, the small, but increasing number of working women directors continued to alter perceptions of women’s creative and economic power throughout the entertainment industry.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Directors Guild of America, Inc. v. Warner Brothers, Inc. and Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc., CV 83-4764-PAR, CV 83-8311-PAR, 1985 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16325; 2 Fed. R. Serv. 3d (Callaghan) 1429 (C.D. Cal. Aug. 30, 1985). Hereafter DGA v. WB/CPI. Judge Rymer in her decision ruled on these cases together in one opinion; the press also began describing the suits as one case. For brevity it will be described in this text as the DGA case/lawsuit or *DGA v. WB/CPI*. As will be explained in the next few pages *DGA v. WB/CPI* was a nonpublished case therefore it has an unusual case citation. As an unpublished case the decision can be difficult to locate. It is accessible through the on-line catalog LexisNexis, which assigned the lawsuit case citation: 1985 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 16325. It is also available in the *Federal Reporter*, a print source that lists the case title, date of decision, and outcome. Because of these two ways to locate information on this case it has a “parallel citation”: both its LexisNexis and *Federal Reporter* locations.

<sup>2</sup> Louise Heck-Rabi, *Women Filmmakers: A Critical Reception* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1984) 246.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Koenig Quart, *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (New York: Praeger, 1988) 90.

<sup>4</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002) 159, 396, 401-402.

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That A Gun in Your Pocket* (New York: Random House, 2000) 141-142; David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005) 502.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph L. Gerken, “A Librarian’s Guide to Unpublished Judicial Opinions,” *Law Library Journal* 96.3 (2004): 480.

<sup>7</sup> The restrictions placed on unpublished cases vary as determined by the rules of individual states and courts. Gerken 478-480.

<sup>8</sup> See *State ex rel. Union Planters Bank, N.A., Relators v. The Honorable Larry L. Kendrick*, Judge of the Circuit Court of St. Louis County, Missouri, 142 S.W.3d 729 (2007). In the Opinion for this case footnote 10 included eleven cases that disallowed class certification based on attorney/client conflicts, one of them was the Directors Guild lawsuit.

<sup>9</sup> The following job descriptions are not meant to be complete, as each of these positions are much more complex than needs to be explained here. For the purpose of this dissertation the following definitions are meant to provide an understanding of how the DGA describes the “directorial team” hierarchy of a feature film. The director is the first

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in command delegating to the rest of her staff details during production. The UPM oversees and coordinates the preparation of the production, including budgets, locations, and crew. The First AD is responsible for breaking down the script and the shooting schedule; coordinating with cast and crew to ensure the flow of production; and works closely with the director to coordinate cast and crew for filming. The Second AD works under the First to manage scheduling with cast and crew; supervise extras; and coordinate background action during the filming of a scene. Stage managers and associate directors are usually jobs that function in television production. The Basic Agreement is negotiated every three years. Presently it is available from the DGA website as a downloadable PDF. In 1981 the contract was a booklet published by the Guild. "Definition of Employees Recognized," Basic Agreement of 1981, Directors Guild of America, Inc 4-7.

<sup>10</sup> "History: About the DGA," dga.org, 2011-2014, Directors Guild of America 1 Mar. 2013 <<http://www.dga.org/The-Guild/History.aspx>>.

<sup>11</sup> For histories of the DGA see: Douglas Gomery, *The Hollywood Studio System: A History* (London: British Film Institute, 2005): 191-193; David Robb, "Directors Guild Born Out of Fear 50 Years Ago," *Variety* 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1985: 21.

<sup>12</sup> David Robb, "Directors Guild Born Out of Fear 50 Years Ago," *Variety* 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1985: 21.

<sup>13</sup> "Legends: Dorothy Arzner" and "Ida Lupino" *DGA Quarterly* Winter 2006, 1 Mar. 2013 <<http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/Categories/Legends.aspx>>.

<sup>14</sup> "First 25 Women to Join the DGA," *DGA News* 15.4 (Dec. 1990/Jan. 1991): 33.

<sup>15</sup> *Directory of Members 1967-68* (Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1967) 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Directory of Members 1969-70* (Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1969) 199.

<sup>17</sup> "Ten Groups of Media Women Combine for Actions Improving Status of Women," *Media Report to Women*, 1 July 1975: 1.

<sup>18</sup> "Femme DGA members Form Special Wing," *Variety* 17 October 1974; Beverly Walker, "Fem Breakthrough Mostly Symbolic," *Variety* 29 Oct. 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Amy Dawes, "A More Perfect Union," *DGA Quarterly* Spring 2011, 11 Nov. 2013 <<http://www.dga.org/Craft/DGAQ/All-Articles/1101-Spring-2011/Feature-RTDG-SDG-Merger.aspx>>.

<sup>20</sup> Giovanna Nigro-Chacon, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Wise, "Directors Guild Broadens Scope," *Variety* 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1974.

<sup>22</sup> Giovanna Nigro-Chacon, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012. Emphasis made by Nigro-Chacon.

<sup>23</sup> Giovanna Nigro-Chacon, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Confirmed by Nigro-Chacon and by Dobrow, who was part of the 1974 Women's Committee. Joelle Dobrow, author interview, 11 Nov. 2012.

<sup>25</sup> "Board Establishes Women's Committee," *Directors Guild of America News* 3.5 (May 1979): 1.

<sup>26</sup> Dowd had received an MFA from UCLA's Film Department where she studied directing and made a couple of short films while a student. She was a screenwriter and assistant editor on the documentary *F.T.A.* (1972), directed by Francine Parker.

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<sup>27</sup> “Special Report: The Woman Director,” *Action Directors Guild of America* 8.4 (July-August 1973): 8. Guy quoted from “Woman’s Place in Photoplay Production,” *The Moving Picture World* 11 July 1914.

<sup>28</sup> “Special Report: The Woman Director,” *Action Directors Guild of America* 8.4 (July-August 1973): 8.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Dowd, “The Woman Director Through the Years,” *Action Directors Guild of America* 8.4 (July-August 1973): 18.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Wise, “Directors Guild Broadens Scope,” *Variety* 41<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Issue 29 Oct. 1974.

<sup>31</sup> Lynne Littman, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Joelle Dobrow, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Victoria Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Joelle Dobrow, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>35</sup> *Directory of Members 1967-68* (Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1967).

<sup>36</sup> *Directory of Members 1974-75* (Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1974).

<sup>37</sup> Nell Cox, author interview. 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>38</sup> Nell Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Cecil Smith, “TV Critics Name ‘Eleanor,’ Visions, ‘Roots,’” *Los Angeles Times* 18 Mar. 1977: G1.

<sup>40</sup> Nell Cox, author interview. 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Nell Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Nell Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Victoria Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012. Emphasis made by Hochberg.

<sup>44</sup> Joelle Dobrow, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>45</sup> “ABC Women Organize in Los Angeles, Begin a Newsletter,” *Media Report to Women* 3.4, 1 April 1975: 7. This information also confirmed by Joelle Dobrow, author interview, 11 Nov. 2012.

<sup>46</sup> In May 1978 the DGA member’s newsletter reported that “Within the next few months the Directors Guild will redesign and convert many of its office systems to computerization... This step was approved by the National Board at its meeting on March 4, 1978.” “Computers to Streamline Guild,” *Directors Guild of America News* 2.5 (May 1978): 1.

<sup>47</sup> “New Faces of ‘1978’ At DGA Hollywood Office,” *Directors Guild of America News* 2.2 (Feb. 1978): 2.

<sup>48</sup> Dobrow, Hochberg, and Littman, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012. Emphasis made by Dobrow and Hochberg.

<sup>49</sup> These seven directors and the number of features they made between 1949 and 1979 were Ida Lupino (7), Elaine May (3), Joan Micklin Silver (1), Joan Darling (1), Jane Wagner (1), and either Joan Rivers (1) or Claudia Weill (1) who directed independently produced features that had wide distribution. This number accounts for films produced and/or distributed in some part by a major studio, production, or distribution company; it does not include low-budget independent or exploitation films (see chapters 2 and 3).

<sup>50</sup> Letter to signatories from Michael Franklin regarding employment statistics. 20 June 1980, “DGA Clipping File,” Margaret Herrick Library. The original worksheets the

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group created to tally their statistical findings are available in this letter to the DGA signatories.

<sup>51</sup> Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012. Emphasis made by Hochberg.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Franklin, author interview, 10 May 2012.

<sup>54</sup> “A Talk With Michael Franklin,” *The Newsletter Directors Guild of America* 12.11 (Dec. 1987): 1.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph McBride, “DGA Hyphenated Get Work Orders—Even if WG Strikes,” *Daily Variety* 28 Feb. 1977.

<sup>56</sup> Gerry Levin, “DGA Threatens to Strike if Producers Accede to WGA’s Contract Proposals,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 20 Jan. 1977.

<sup>57</sup> Gerry Levin, “DGA Threatens to Strike if Producers Accede to WGA’s Contract Proposals,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 20 Jan. 1977.

<sup>58</sup> Gerry Levin, “DGA Threatens to Strike if Producers Accede to WGA’s Contract Proposals,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 20 Jan. 1977.

<sup>59</sup> Jim Harwood, “Franklin Switching From WGA to Become Chief of the DGA,” *Variety* 8 Sept. 1977.

<sup>60</sup> Franklin, author interview, 10 May 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Dates confirmed by Franklin in author interview. Also see Jim Hardwood, “Michael Franklin Switching Over to Become DGA Chief,” *Variety* 28 Sept. 1977.

<sup>62</sup> Declaration of Michael Franklin in Support of Motion for Class Certification at 4, *DGA v. WB/CPI* (Nov. 14, 1984), Box 675, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>63</sup> “Board Establishes Women’s Committee,” *Directors Guild of America News* 3.5 (May 1979): 1.

<sup>64</sup> Warren Adler, author interview, 10 May 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Franklin, author interview, 10 May 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Hochberg and Littman, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>67</sup> Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>69</sup> Zeinabu Davis, *Wendell Franklin*, Los Angeles: Directors Guild of America, Inc., 1995: 126. Crain, Franklin, and Watt all joined the DGA as ADs; Crain and Franklin eventually directed feature films. Franklin was the DGA’s first African American member—male or female—joining the Guild in 1960. Dixon began his film and television career as an actor in the late 1950s before becoming a prolific television director in the 1970s; he also directed some features during this time.

<sup>70</sup> Eunice Post Field, “DGA committee wants more women directing for TV,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 20 June 1980; Morrie Gelman, “DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs,” *Variety* 20 June 1980; Victoria Hochberg, “History of DGA Women’s Committee,” message to author, 13 May 2014. Email.

<sup>71</sup> Hochberg, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012. Hochberg read from the minutes of the meeting during author’s interview; no date for the minutes were provided.

<sup>72</sup> Morrie Gelman, “DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs,”; Eunice Post Field, “DGA committee wants more women directing for TV.”

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<sup>73</sup> Morrie Gelman, "DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs." Also see DGA Press Release "Directors Guild Study Reveals Dramatic Underemployment of Women Members," 18 June 1980, "DGA" Clipping File, Margaret Herrick Library.

<sup>74</sup> Nell Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011.

<sup>75</sup> Morrie Gelman, "DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs." Also see DGA Press Release.

<sup>76</sup> Lee Grant, "Where are the Women Directors?" *Los Angeles Times* 20 June 1980: G1.

<sup>77</sup> Morrie Gelman, "DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs."

<sup>78</sup> Morrie Gelman, "DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs."

<sup>79</sup> Morrie Gelman, "DGA Wants More Work For Women: Asks One Femme Director For Every 13 Television Segs."

<sup>80</sup> Aljean Harmetz, "Suit to Allege Sex Bias By TV and Film Makers," *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981.

<sup>81</sup> Franklin, author interview, 10 May 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Cox, author interview, 8 Apr. 2011. Reiterated by Dobrow, Hochberg, Littman, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>83</sup> In her biography of the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* author Jennifer Keishin Armstrong details how the series' creators, James L. Brooks and Allan Burns, did put "the first 'liberated' female on TV" and to do so hired a significant number of women writers to make sure their series conveyed a genuine contemporary female perspective. Ironically, in the seven years the program was on the air it appeared to have only two women directors, Joan Darling and Mary Tyler Moore. Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, *Mary and Lou and Rhoda and Ted: And all the Brilliant Minds Who Made the Mary Tyler Moore Show a Classic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

<sup>84</sup> Letter to signatories from Michael Franklin regarding employment statistics, "DGA" Clipping File, 20 June 1980. Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles.

<sup>85</sup> Joelle Dobrow, "Interview: The Man Behind the Women's Movement at the Guild," *DGA News* December 1990/January 1991: 20-21.

<sup>86</sup> Answer to Complaint and Counterclaim Against Plaintiff, 5, *DGA v. WB/CPI*, (C.D. Cal. Oct. 6, 1983), Box 674, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>87</sup> "DGA Law Suits Attack Sex Discrimination," *Directors Guild of America News* 5.3 (March 1981): 1, 5. Also see Lee Grant, "Directors File Charges of Sex Discrimination," *Los Angeles Times* 25 Feb. 1981 for television production companies and their show titles.

<sup>88</sup> Gail Williams, "DGA Files Sex Discrimination Suit vs. Networks, Prod'n Co's," *The Hollywood Reporter* 25 Feb. 1981.

<sup>89</sup> Elaine Woo, "DGA Files Sex-Bias Grievances," *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* 25 Feb. 1981.

<sup>90</sup> Lee Grant, "Directors File Charges of Sex Discrimination," *Los Angeles Times* 25 Feb. 1981: H1.

<sup>91</sup> Aljean Harmetz, "Suit to Allege Sex Bias By TV and Film Makers," *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981.

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<sup>92</sup> Declaration of Michael Franklin in Support of Motion for Class Certification, 8, DGA v. WB/CPI (C.D. Cal. Nov. 14, 1984), Box 675, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>93</sup> David Robb, "DGA Poised to Sue Industry Over Alleged Discrimination Against Femmes, Minorities," *Variety* 15 June 1983.

<sup>94</sup> Ray Loynd, "Threatened Suits Cue Production Firms to Begin DGA Minority Talks," *Variety* 31 May 1983; David Robb, "DGA-Industry Minority Talks," *Variety* 10 June 1983.

<sup>95</sup> David Robb, "DGA & Columbia Lock Horns Over Affirmative Action," *Variety* 9 Nov. 1983.

<sup>96</sup> David Robb, "7 Majors and larger Indies Agree to Talk with Directors Over Femme, Minority Hiring," *Variety* 15 June 1983.

<sup>97</sup> David Robb, "DGA Will Sue WB Over Minorities Talks Turndown," *Variety* 13 July 1983.

<sup>98</sup> David Robb, "Warner Bros. Says It'll Turn Tables in DGA Minorities Suit," *Variety* 30 Sept. 1983: 38.

<sup>100</sup> Henry Schipper, "DGA Files Suit Against Warners; Charges Race, Sex Discrimination" *The Hollywood Reporter* 26 July 1983.

<sup>101</sup> David Robb, "DGA Sues Warner Bros.," *Variety* 26 July 1983.

<sup>102</sup> David Robb, "Col Pix Blames DGA For End To Minority Talks," *Variety* 9 Nov. 1983.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Schipper, "Guild Points To Hiring Data As Discriminatory, Unlawful." *The Hollywood Reporter* 9 Nov. 1983.

<sup>104</sup> Michael London, "Film Clips," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Dec. 1983.

<sup>105</sup> Shortly after her decision in the case on August 30, 1985, Judge Rymer was appointed by President Reagan to the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, but her nomination was initially rejected by the Democratically controlled Senate, and it was only in 1989 that she was renominated by President Bush, Sr. and subsequently approved as an appellate justice. Rymer died in 2011. Dennis McLellan, "Pamela Ann Rymer dies at 70; judge on U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals," *Los Angeles Times* 24 Sept. 2011, 1 Aug. 2011 <<http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-pamela-rymer-20110924,0,702607.story>>

<sup>106</sup> A. Thomas Hunt and Walther Cochran-Bond were the lawyers that the women originally met at the Center for Law and the Public Interest. The third partner at the firm was Jay Roth who would become the DGA's National Executive Director in 1995, a position he still holds in 2014.

<sup>107</sup> For example, Hunt was instrumental in integrating the fire and police departments in Los Angeles: police department suit, *County of Los Angeles, v. Van Davis*, 440 U.S. 625, (1979); fire department suit, *Craig v. County of Los Angeles*, 626 F.2d 659 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1980). For a description of Hunt's legal work on antidiscrimination cases prior to the 1983 DGA lawsuits see: A. Thomas Hunt, "Fit to Practice," *California Lawyer* Feb. 2005: 2.

<sup>108</sup> Decision 9-10.

<sup>109</sup> A. Thomas Hunt, "Fit to Practice," *California Lawyer* Feb. 2005: 3.



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<sup>110</sup> Dobrow, Hochberg, Littman, author interview, 27 Aug. 2012.

<sup>111</sup> David Robb, "DGA Hiring Suit Against WB, Col Dealt A Setback," *Variety* 6 Mar. 1985: 1.

<sup>112</sup> DGA v. WB/CPI. Hereafter "Decision." The page numbers cited from the Decision correspond to the pagination found in the document when accessed through LexiNexis, not from the original court document available at the National Archives.

<sup>113</sup> David Robb, "Rule Against DGA as Minority Rep in Class Action Suits," *Variety* 13 Mar. 1985: 2.

<sup>114</sup> David Robb, "DGA Dropped From Hiring Suit," *Variety* 23 Sept. 1985: 1. Also see Decision for all of these points.

<sup>115</sup> David Robb, "DGA Hiring Suit Against WB, Col Dealt a Setback," *Variety* 6 Mar. 1985; "Fed. Judge Finds DGA Interest Clash," *The Hollywood Reporter* 6 Mar. 1985; Judith Michaelson, "Key Decision Withheld in DGA Suit," *Los Angeles Times* 6 Mar. 1985; David Robb, "Rule Against DGA as Minority Rep in Class Action Suits," *Variety* 13 Mar. 1985; David Robb, "DGA Dropped From Hiring Suit," *Variety* 23 Sept. 1985.

<sup>116</sup> For further details of DGA qualification lists see: Section 14-200 Qualification Lists, Basic Agreement of 1981, Directors Guild of America, Inc.: 109-117.

<sup>117</sup> Answer to Complaint and Counterclaim Against Plaintiff, 10-12, DGA v. WB/CPI, (C.D. Cal. Oct. 6, 1983), Box 674, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>118</sup> Decision 9.

<sup>119</sup> Judith Michelson, "Key Decision Withheld in DGA Suit," *Los Angeles Times* 6 May 1985.

<sup>120</sup> Steven S. Gensler, *Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Rules and Commentary*, vol. 1 (Eagan, MN: Clark Boardman Callaghan, 2013) 429.

<sup>121</sup> Decision 2.

<sup>122</sup> Decision 4.

<sup>123</sup> Decision 4.

<sup>124</sup> For example, an environmental class-action settlement like the 2010 British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon oil spill may claim that a specific act of negligence on the drilling rig caused the contamination of the Gulf shrimp population, which in turn damaged all the individuals in the Mississippi fishing industry. The famous *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) claimed that the state of Kansas denied the civil rights of all non-white students who were required to go to specific schools. In each instance, there was an identifiable act, which affected a specific group in a common way.

<sup>125</sup> Decision 5.

<sup>126</sup> See Decision (5) for discussion of "decentralized manner"; Decision (5-7) on Judge Rymer's summary of the defense's description of hiring process.

<sup>127</sup> "Article 15: Policy," Basic Agreement of 1981, Directors Guild of America, Inc 118.

<sup>128</sup> Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states that "it [is] illegal to discriminate against someone on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex." "Laws Enforced by EEOC," U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, [eoc.gov](http://eoc.gov), 3 Feb. 2014.

<sup>129</sup> "Article 15: Section 15-200 Employment of Minorities and Women," Basic Agreement of 1981, Directors Guild of America, Inc 118.

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<sup>130</sup> “Article 15: Section 15-200 Employment of Minorities and Women,” Basic Agreement of 1981, Directors Guild of America, Inc 118.

<sup>131</sup> Ray Loynd, “Directors, majors on the verge of complete contract settlement,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 29 June 1981: 1.

<sup>132</sup> Memorandum of Decision and Order Denying Summary Judgment, 8, *DGA v. WB/CPI*, (C.D. Cal. Nov. 20, 1984), Box 675, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Decision 8.

<sup>134</sup> Decision 7.

<sup>135</sup> Decision 7.

<sup>136</sup> Decision 7.

<sup>137</sup> Although the commonality hurdle is often difficult for a class-action suit to clear, up until the mid-1980s courts did provide some flexibility to plaintiffs who resubmitted their cases with either a more focused cause of action or an individual lawsuit. Melissa Hart, “Will Employment Discrimination Cases Survive,” *Akron Law Review*, vol. 37, (2004). Today, as a result of the Supreme Court decision in the well-publicized *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 131 S. Ct. 2541 (2011) case, it would be virtually impossible for a lawsuit involving an employer with a decentralized hiring system to receive class certification, the Court having effectively made an informal hiring system a complete barrier to a class-action suit. Robert Barnes, “Supreme Court blocks massive sex-discrimination suit against Wal-Mart,” *Washington Post* 20 June 2010.

<sup>138</sup> Decision 8.

<sup>139</sup> Decision 7-8.

<sup>140</sup> In an ironic twist, before its Supreme Court victory (*Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.*, 131 S. Ct. 2541 [2011]), Wal-Mart had lost its “commonality” argument before the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals on a 6-5 vote; the deciding justice who agreed that the 1.6 million female workers at 3,500 Wal-Mart stores over a 15-year period *all* had a commonality of interests was Judge Pamela Ann Rymer. It would seem that the judicial philosophy of Judge Rymer, which was not inclined to find commonality in hiring in the film industry, was more inclined to find it in the discount department store market.

<sup>141</sup> Decision 8.

<sup>142</sup> Defendants’ Cross-Complaint at First Counterclaim, 10-13, *DGA v. WB/CPI*, (C.D. Cal. Oct. 6, 1984), Box 675, Federal Records Center, National Archives.

<sup>143</sup> Decision 9.

<sup>144</sup> As a contrasting example, Judge Rymer in her decision cited *Social Services Union, Local 535 v. County of Santa Clara*, 609 F.2d 944, 947 (9th Cir. 1979) where the union was allowed to represent as a class its female members because the majority of its organization was comprised of women who also held the majority of officer positions. Furthermore, the Social Services Union had a historical record of consistently negotiating for its female members through its collective bargaining agreements unlike the DGA who had only taken this position in the recent years prior to filing *DGA v. WB/CPI*. Decision 7.

<sup>145</sup> Decision 9; footnote 2.

<sup>146</sup> Decision 10.

<sup>147</sup> Decision 11.

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<sup>148</sup> Judith Michelson, “Key Decision Withheld in DGA Suit,” *Los Angeles Times* 6 May 1985.

<sup>149</sup> Decision 12.

<sup>150</sup> Decision 10-11.

<sup>151</sup> During the mid to late 1990s filmmaker Jamaa Fanaka (1943-2012) filed multiple lawsuits against many of the studios, networks, and the Directors Guild for job discrimination based on race. Fanaka, who had written, directed, and produced several low-budget independent films starting in the 1970s with titles such as *Welcome Home Brother* (1975), and the successful *Penitentiary* trilogy (*Penitentiary* [1979], *Penitentiary II* [1982], *Penitentiary III* [1987]) in the 1980s, had joined the DGA in 1990; in 1993 he was one of the founding members of the Guild’s African American Steering Committee. His dispute with the studios, television networks, and the DGA were similar to those listed in the 1983 case, which he cited frequently in the construction of his own legal approach. Unable to secure an attorney to represent him in the suits, Fanaka spent years pursuing the cases representing himself, but to no avail. Although he was unable to gain traction within the court system, the DGA did take his accusations seriously as measured by the amount of correspondence the organization’s legal department conducted with Fanaka. Some sources claim that Jay Roth was hired as the DGA’s National Executive Director in 1995 to “expel Fanaka from the DGA.” These efforts suggest that not only did Fanaka’s accusations pose a real threat to the Guild, but that the DGA would do everything in its power to not be implicated in another discrimination suit. Source for Jay Roth see: Maria Giese, “After the Summit—Halfway There,” *Women Directors: Navigating the Hollywood Boy’s Club* 4 Mar. 2014, 30 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.womendirectorsinhollywood.com/about/>>. For information on Fanaka see: Jamaa Fanaka Papers, Special Collections, UCLA Film and Television Archive, UCLA.

<sup>152</sup> In his book, *The Hollywood Studio System*, Douglas Gomery establishes the nonpolitical position the DGA (originally the Screen Directors Guild) had taken since its inception by describing how, in 1936 when the Guild was first organized, the directors decided to not ally with the Screen Actors and Screen Writers’ Guilds, both of which had been founded a few years prior. “The decision was made that no such alliance should be formed. This decision was attributed to the fact that both of the other guilds had gained radical reputations, and the directors did not wish to commit themselves to such a stand. It is important to realize that the directors who formed the SDG were not interested in a revolution against the studio system” (191).

<sup>153</sup> Aljean Harmetz, “Suit Allege Sex Bias By TV and Film Makers,” *New York Times* 25 Feb. 1981.

<sup>154</sup> Arthur Hiller, “From the President,” *DGA News* Dec. 1990/Jan. 1991: 3. Hiller’s italics.

<sup>155</sup> “Diversity,” [dga.com](http://www.dga.org/The-Guild/Diversity.aspx), 2011-2014, Directors Guild of America 1 Mar. 2013 <<http://www.dga.org/The-Guild/Diversity.aspx>>.

<sup>156</sup> “DGA Report Finds Director Diversity in Episodic Television Remains Static,” 2 Oct. 2013, [dga.com](http://www.dga.org/The-Guild/Diversity.aspx), 2011-2014, Directors Guild of America 1 Mar. 2013 <<http://www.dga.org/The-Guild/Diversity.aspx>>.

<sup>157</sup> Lyndon Stambler, “The Good Fight,” Fall 2011, [dga.org](http://www.dga.org), 2011-2013, Directors Guild of America 1 Mar. 2013.

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<sup>158</sup> Joelle Dobrow, "The Man Behind the Women's Movement at the Guild," *DGA News* 15.4 (Dec. 1990/Jan. 1991): 21.

<sup>159</sup> *Behind the Scenes* 1978, 36-38.

<sup>160</sup> In 2014 Article 15, which is still part of the DGA's Basic Agreement, seems far less hopeful as it did thirty-three years ago. After three decades of "good faith" the number of working women directors is very low and continues to drop: in 2013 6 percent of the top 250 films made in Hollywood were directed by women down 3 percent from the number of directors working between 1998 and 2012; and in 2012 women directed 14 percent of episodic television compared to the 15 percent working in 2011. For statistics on film directors see: Lauzen 2; for statistics on episodic television see: "DGA Report Finds Director Diversity in Episodic Television Remains Static," 2 Oct. 2013, [dga.com](http://dga.com). In 2014 the legacy of the Women's Committee is most apparent in a resurgence of political action taking place within the Guild. Current members of the DGA Women's Committee are asking similar questions that their predecessors posed in 1979 about what role does their Guild, one of the most powerful in the industry, have in changing these dire employment conditions for its female members, and also what part does the DGA play in perpetuating them. For a 2014 analysis of gender politics taking place within the Directors Guild see Maria Giese and Heidi Honeycutt's website *Women Directors: Navigating the Hollywood Boy's Club*, ed. Maria Giese Oct. 2012; and Lexi Alexander, "No More Excuses: Hollywood Needs to Hire More Female Directors," [indiewire.com](http://www.indiewire.com) 15 Jan. 2014 <<http://www.indiewire.com/article/no-more-excuses-hollywood-needs-to-hire-more-female-directors>>.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Desperately Seeking Something: 1970s Perseverance and 1980s Progress*

Looking at 1980 from the perspective of the 1970s—as the end of the “breakthrough” decade—the five films released that year seem like a testament to the dire straits of the 1970s generation. All of the movies released in 1980 that were directed by women were the last features those filmmakers would make. Two were the first *and* last features made by Anne Bancroft (*Fatso*) and Nancy Walker (*Can't Stop the Music*); Barbara Peeters, who had hopes to transition from exploitation films to one-hour television dramas to Hollywood features, made her last movie: *Humanoids from the Deep*. Both Claudia Weill (*It's My Turn*) and Lee Grant (*Tell Me a Riddle*) also made their last films, although both of them have commented that it was more of a choice on their part not to continue to pursue more film work than the result of an obstacle imposed upon them. Weill moved into television exclusively in order to balance her personal and professional lives; and Grant felt that the most difficult parts of herself as an actress got in the way of her work as a director of narrative features. She went on to excel in documentaries and movies made for television.

While it is reassuring to hear a director say that she chose on her own volition to take her career in another direction, considering the two women's early experiences in Hollywood—Grant's inability to get a project with Jill Clayburgh off the ground and Weill's experience with Ray Stark on *It's My Turn*—their “choice” might have been one of self-preservation and protection. A career as a television director, which so many of the fifteen filmmakers had settled into during the 1980s, was a professional and economic

achievement. However, if some measure of progress had begun to take place over the last ten years, these women should have been able to make more films of their choosing. In 1980 the 5 named movies made up only 4 percent of the 125 studio and independently produced films made in the United States, suggesting that the legacy of the 1970s as a decade of great advancement for women directors was also rife with struggle and disappointment.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the 1980s, as a decade, was an improvement compared to the 1970s in the careers of women directors. During the 1980s I estimate that thirty-six women made approximately sixty commercially distributed films: a 50 percent increase from the previous decade (see Appendix 3). The work those fifteen women accomplished, the films they made, and the way their presence within the industry, incrementally, normalized the reality of women directors in Hollywood had resulted in opening the door a little bit more for the next generation. From this perspective, looking at 1980 as a starting point--the start of a *new* decade--five films by five filmmakers was an encouraging sign of what the next ten years would produce. Five movies by five directors was a 250 percent increase from the two films made in 1970, directed by Peeters and Stephanie Rothman. During the 1970s, with the exception of Joan Micklin Silver, Beverly Sebastian, and to a certain extent Elaine May, women had an impossible time sustaining a career in feature films. Arthur, Darling, and Grant were hired to make features in the 1990s, but all three women had bad experiences. Arthur clashed with the producer who changed the content of the movie against her wishes; Darling had disputes with her producer over his effectiveness in running the production; and Grant's conflict with her leading actors resulted in her being fired.

Producer Lili Fini Zanuck, who would win an Academy Award for Best Picture (as producer) in 1989 for *Driving Miss Daisy* and would direct one feature film, *Rush*, in 1991, described a discernable change—for the better—in the 1980s, specifically as a result of the Directors Guild’s political action. “The need for changes was being brought to everybody’s attention. When the DGA statistics came out [in 1980]...all of a sudden the reality that women were taking such a backseat was so clear...Men were very open to helping you. It was a good time.”<sup>2</sup> What also continued to open up the studio system to women directors was the number of female executives that increased noticeably during the 1980s. In 1980 Sherry Lansing became the first woman president of a studio when she was hired to head 20th Century-Fox; in 1981 Paula Weinstein was the president of the motion picture division at United Artists; Lucy Fisher was named vice president of production for Warner Bros. in 1982; Barbara Boyle was senior vice president of worldwide production for Orion Pictures in 1982; and in 1987 Dawn Steel became the president of Columbia Pictures.<sup>3</sup>

The growing number of female executives helped to normalize the idea of women in the upper echelons of male-dominated Hollywood. During the 1980s, male executives became acquainted with their female equivalent, and as a result they became increasingly familiar with the concept of women in power, whether it be a studio chief or a director of a multimillion-dollar motion picture. In an industry that ostracized women for not being men--or rather, for being women--some male executives saw value in what they perceived as a gendered difference. Interviewed for a 2005 *New York Times* story about the prominence of women studio executives Peter Guber, who was an executive at Columbia Pictures in the 1970s and in the 1980s an independent producer of films such

as *Flashdance* (1983) and *The Color Purple* (1985), reflected on the rise of female studio executives during those years. “Most men at the time, including me, just roughed people up, they had no governor on their testosterone. These women used their power elegantly. And it turned out they were right. That’s why they’re on top now [in 2005].”<sup>4</sup>

Whether it was the “elegance” in which women in power exuded to the admiration of their male peers or the building pressures of a decade’s worth of feminist reform within Hollywood that had begun to change attitudes throughout the film industry, the increase of women in positions of authority became noticeable in the 1980s. However, this improvement, on the one hand, did not mean that these executives were actually hiring more women directors. In a 1981 article on the “struggle” of women directors, Barbara Peeters observed that women executives were self-conscious about playing gender favorites. “They’ll bring up a woman director’s name a couple of times,” explained Peeters, “then they simply have to let it drop. Otherwise, they might be asked, ‘What’s the matter with you, can’t you work with a man?’”<sup>5</sup> A DGA Women’s Committee member, who in 1980 preferred to remain anonymous for an interview about the status of women directors, was adamant about the misperceived state of “progress” in Hollywood. “Suddenly there’s the impression that discrimination against women has vanished in Hollywood. Well, it’s a lie. For every Sherry Lansing there are 500 others who are being blacklisted—in every area from directing to costume design—simply because they aren’t men.”<sup>6</sup>

While the increase of women executives helped to shift Hollywood’s perception of gender—in different ways—what also impacted women directors were the growing options for how movies could be produced and distributed. Commercial filmmaking in



the U.S. during the 1980s can be defined by two kinds of filmic outputs. On one end of the spectrum were the studio-made blockbuster franchises (e.g., *Star Wars Return of the Jedi* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Back to the Future*). On the other end were a broad range of commercial independent films identified with small, compared to the studios and compared to their status today, but profitable distribution companies like First Run Features, Miramax, Orion Classics, the Independent Film Market, and the Sundance Film Festival.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1980s, no woman directed any of the big-budgeted franchises, but several did direct studio-financed pictures, including Amy Hecklering, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982, Universal), Barbra Streisand, *Yentl* (1983, United Artists), Lynne Littman, *Testament* (1983, Paramount), Randa Haines, *Children of a Lesser God* (1986, Paramount), Elaine May, *Ishtar* (1987, Columbia), Penny Marshall, *Big* (1988, 20th Century-Fox). Some of these films were box office successes, for example, Hecklering's high school teen comedy (made for under \$6 million, earned an estimated \$27 million)<sup>8</sup> and Streisand's period-piece musical (budget was an estimated \$14 million, earned \$40 million domestically) in which she starred and also wrote, directed, and produced.<sup>9</sup>

As independent filmmakers during the 1970s, Karen Arthur, Barbara Loden, Joan Micklin Silver, and Claudia Weill struggled to secure funding from private investors and limited monies that were available through nonprofit grants. During the time they made their films, distribution options were limited and securing worthy deals arduous. Ten years later the marketplace for "specialty" films—what independent producer John Pierson called "independent features" during the 1980s to separate them from the elitist stigma of being labeled "art films"—had not only expanded in the number of companies

ving for products, but the demand to buy those properties had become a lucrative and competitive business. The interest in these kinds of movies was so high that the studios—United Artists, Fox, Universal—established “classics” divisions where they could pick up for distribution small and cheaply made films, as was done by Warner Bros. with Weill’s *Girlfriends* in 1978.<sup>10</sup>

With a market that was more accessible to a range of films—in terms of content, filmmaker background, and financial resources—-independent women directors of the 1980s had more feasible opportunities to make a profit selling their work to a distributor and securing a theatrical release. The dominance of the home video market as an exhibition site ensured a second life for independent films and enlarged the profit margin, creating additional incentive for distributors and more exposure for filmmakers. Some of the notable independent filmmakers during this time were Kathryn Bigelow (co-directed with Monty Montgomery), *The Loveless* (1981, Atlantic Releasing), Susan Seidelman, *Smithereens* (1982, New Line Cinema), Lizzie Borden, *Born in Flames* (1983, First Run Features), Penelope Spheeris, *Suburbia* (1983, New World Pictures), Joyce Chopra, *Smooth Talk* (1985, SpectraFilm), Donna Deitch, *Desert Hearts* (1985, Samuel Goldwyn Company), Allison Anders (co-directed with Dean Lent, Kurt Voss), *Border Radio* (1987, International Film Marketing), Mira Nair, *Salaam Bombay!* (1988, Cinecom Pictures), Nancy Savoca, *True Love* (1989, MGM/United Artists).<sup>11</sup>

“I found you were either offered women’s movies or projects that were not terribly interesting,” reflected Joan Tewkesbury in 2011 on the tendency of producers to pigeonhole women directors. “The ones that really broke that paradigm—Susan Seidelman’s *Desperately Seeking Susan*—and Amy Hecklering with *Fast Times*, that

group, they were probably ten years younger or maybe even a little bit more, they came with terrific movies that had a really strong tone and sensibility that was definitely their own.” Tewkesbury saw in the examples of Seidelman and Hecklering what she had tried so hard to accomplish during the start of her career when attempting to direct her script *After Ever After*. Ten years earlier, even with the achievements of *Nashville* and the endorsement of a successful male director, she was unable to make any headway.

*Desperately Seeking Susan* was Susan Seidelman’s second film after the success of her independently produced comedy *Smithereens* (1982), about an ambitious punk rock girl trying to make a name for herself in the downtown New York music scene. Seidelman, who received her master’s from New York University Film School in 1977, began filming *Smithereens* in 1980. Like Weill’s experience on *Girlfriends*, the film took Seidelman a few years to complete as she raised the \$80,000 budget along the way. *Smithereens* was the first independent American film accepted into the competition at the Cannes Film Festival, where it premiered in 1982.<sup>12</sup> The independent New Line Cinema distributed the film that same year.

Soon after the success of Seidelman’s first film, Barbara Boyle, senior vice president of worldwide production of Orion Pictures, who--atypical of female executives’ reputations at the time--was actively trying to hire women directors, signed her to a three-picture deal.<sup>13</sup> Seidelman’s first project for Orion was *Desperately Seeking Susan*, a female buddy, screwball-caper that co-starred Rosanna Arquette and Madonna that charmed both critics and audiences. Not a screenwriter, Seidelman was particular about picking the script for her next project. “Since I don’t write my own material, it takes me a while to find a script that even has a kernel of an idea that would be something that I’d

want to spend the next two years of my life working on. When I got the script for *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the central idea was something that really appealed to me right from the start.”<sup>14</sup> The film’s 1985 theatrical release coincided with Madonna’s hugely successful second album *Like a Virgin*. Bolstered by the singer’s fame the picture, reportedly made for under \$5 million, within four months of its release had earned almost \$26 million at the box office.<sup>15</sup> In a 1985 interview Seidelman paid tribute to the directors of the previous decade. “I’m 32 years old,” she said. “I’ve reaped a lot of benefits that women 10 years older worked hard for. I’m not saying I take feminism for granted—I’m a feminist, glad to be a woman and have a female sensibility—but it was easier for me. I tend to think of myself as being a woman the same way I think of myself as a New Yorker and short.”<sup>16</sup>

Amy Hecklering also attended NYU film school in the early 1970s and then graduated from the AFI directing program in 1974. Her first feature, made for Universal, was *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, an R-rated teen picture that centered around a female protagonist. The film starred a cast of young actors including Jennifer Jason Leigh, Phoebe Cates, Sean Penn, and Judge Reinhold. The script was based on a book about teenagers in Southern California written by future film director Cameron Crowe, who at the time was a music critic. Hecklering had taken her time choosing her first project and settled on Crowe’s script on her own accord not coerced by producers or studio executives. Although she had to make some concessions to meet the ratings board’s objections over depictions of nudity, Crowe vouched for her experience on the project, “Amy made the film she wanted to make,” said the writer. “There were a lot of people willing to tell her their way to do it, but she certainly had her own vision.” Of the

experience, Hecklering said, “I tried to make a movie that was realistic, not some cartoon version of high school.”<sup>17</sup> The studio was unsure how to market the film, a comedy about teens that had a considerable amount of sex and drug use on screen. They opened it without much fanfare in Southern California; teenagers lined up to see the movie.<sup>18</sup>

Hecklering’s and Seidelman’s experiences of selecting their material and maintaining creative authorship of the project while bringing it to the screen was a common enough occurrence during the 1980s, distinguishing that decade from the previous one. A considerable number of women filmmakers were directing their own scripts or working on projects that they had chosen. Marisa Silver, daughter of Joan Micklin Silver, wrote and directed her first film, *Old Enough*, in 1984 at age 23; she made her second picture, *Permanent Record*, in 1988. “I had complete autonomy making the movie. I really made the film I wanted to make rather than a compromise,” she said at the time of the movie’s release. Unsurprisingly, history was not lost on Marisa. “It’s better than when my mother started working 15 years ago. Having seen the struggles she went through in her early films because she’s a woman and seeing my career taking shape with fewer walls, I feel that she and the generation of the 1970s paved the way for us.”<sup>19</sup>

What also had changed significantly from the previous era was the ability for a director to sustain a career and create a body of work over the course of several years, and in many instances decades (see Appendix 3). The majority of the directors in the 1970s did not have this experience, although almost all of them pursued projects after their last directing job, but to their great dismay, with no success. In 2011 Joan Tewkesbury explained the challenges of her “generation” in terms of gender by

comparing the points of access and expectation between her and her female peers with those of male directors of the same era:

I think what happens is that in the 1960s and 1970s the young men were the first ones to invade the bastion of older white men who directed movies. So because of Lucas, Coppola, Spielberg the girls were able to think—“OK, they kinda let the new guys into the club.” Then the women could sort of filter in, but only if you didn’t make too much noise and if you were in the same paradigm with movies that had gone before you. If you were going to work in the industry what you followed was the schedule of the feature film that had gone on before you. And in that your scripts were also tailored to fit a certain mold.<sup>20</sup>

Women in the 1970s found themselves constantly challenged by industry stereotypes of what a female director should be. They needed to act aggressive in working towards their professional goals and confident in asserting and defending their creative visions, not only because those were the accepted behaviors of a Hollywood director, and so they had to fit in, but as women they had to disprove stereotypes that they were too shy or insecure to command a crew; too physically weak to sustain the stamina required for a twelve-hour day on set; too sensitive to withstand the constant barrage of decisions and demands. As Tewkesbury pointed out, women must not “make too much noise,” or else someone might notice that they had gotten into the fraternity. To speak up was to threaten Hollywood’s male-dominated community.

Status in the industry had little impact on easing these challenges. In the late 1970s, when accomplished, veteran actress Lee Grant tried to generate interest in a

project she was planning to direct with A-list Hollywood star Jill Clayburgh attached, she met with disdain. “It was as if I had *betrayed* all these people who had loved me and had given me so many accolades and so many awards. ‘But you’re an actress.’ It was like I turned on them. I never got to do that movie. Well—there were a lot of movies I didn’t get to do.”<sup>21</sup>

The research for this project revealed several women who, like Grant, never got to do *their* movie. These women were prepared to direct, having signed development deals with studios, or were attached to projects scheduled to go into production. None of these situations were ultimately realized. In 1971 journalist Estelle Chngas, writing for the *Los Angeles Times*, reported that screenwriter Carole Eastman, who used the pseudonym Adrien Joyce, was scheduled to direct her own script for Warner Bros. starring French actress Jeanne Moreau. Eastman, whose screenplays included the films *Puzzle of a Downfall Child* (1970) and *The Shooting* (1971), had received an Oscar nomination for Best Original Screenplay for the movie *Five Easy Pieces* (1970). Chngas praised Eastman as a screenwriter for “[writing] one of the most arresting American films of the decade [*Five Easy Pieces*]” and acknowledged her feat in doing so as a woman in Hollywood:

But she’s even more rare than this: She’s about to direct a film, and you can count on the fingers of one hand women who do such things—Elaine May, Barbara Loden, Susan Sontag, Shirley Clarke. The fact that Adrien Joyce and the bare handful of articulate women writers in existence (notably Eleanor Perry, Harriet Ravetch and Edna O’Brien) have escaped being trapped in lightweight entertainment, “women’s films,” and bland, G-rated family fare, and have

managed to deal with a wide range of serious contemporary issues may be a sign that sexual barriers are crumbling.<sup>22</sup>

Like many journalists during the decade, Changas was aware of industry sexism and took the opportunity to call out Hollywood's tradition of inequality while championing the few women who were directing. Six months later the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Eastman was "rumored to be directing a Jack Nicholson film in the future."<sup>23</sup> At the time, Changas' hope that the "sexual barriers are crumbling" was too optimistic: none of Eastman's films were ever made.

Producer Julia Phillips, who was the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Picture in 1973 for *The Sting*, had tried for several years to direct the screen adaptation of Erica Jong's best-selling novel, *Fear of Flying*. Phillips, who participated in the Directing Workshop for Women's pilot year in 1974, had bought the rights, that same year, to what would become a popular women's (sexual) liberation novel. In 1975 Phillips was signed with Columbia Pictures to direct the film, and principal photography was set to start in February 1976. However, a legal battle between Phillips and Jong ensued over what the author claimed was contract violation on the part of the producer-director.<sup>24</sup> The lawsuit and problems in developing the script, mixed with some hesitation from Columbia over Phillips as a first-time director stalled the project indefinitely.<sup>25</sup>

In 1977 actress Dyan Cannon was reported to have signed a development deal with 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox to produce and direct a film "dealing with relationships" between a woman and two brothers.<sup>26</sup> Cannon had also participated in the DWW during the program's second year in 1976. The short film that she had made as part of the workshop, *Number One*, was described by journalist Gregg Kilday in the *Los Angeles Times* as a



“painful if humorous parable about childhood innocence encountering adult inhibitions.” In 1977 the movie received an Academy Award nomination for Best Short Film. Cannon told Kilday, “To me, films should be about the subtleties of life. I enjoy big adventure productions. But I want to do movies about the little things we all deal with, the things that drive us crazy.”<sup>27</sup> Cannon never directed the film for Universal. In 1990 she did write, direct and star in her first, and to date only directorial effort, the independently produced *The End of Innocence*.

Some women were offered the opportunity to direct by men in significant positions of power under conditions that seemed ideal. In her autobiography, *Then Again*, actress Diane Keaton describes how at the end of the 1970s Warren Beatty had encouraged her to start directing films. Keaton and Beatty had begun dating in 1978. By this time she had won an Oscar for Best Actress in *Annie Hall* (1977); and he was one of the most powerful writer, director, producer, actors of the decade. In 1980 she co-starred with Beatty in his historical epic *Reds* for which they each received Oscar nominations for Best Actor and Actress, respectively. The film was also nominated for Best Screenplay and Best Picture; and Beatty won an Oscar for Best Director. In a letter Beatty wrote Keaton around this time, he advised her to take advantage of her position in the industry:

You’ve made a lot of money for the movie business and your percentages for the profits haven’t been so huge that you should feel guilty about taking some of the industry’s money and making your own film. I think they’d be happy to do it. Stop messing around and do it. You’d do it better than anybody. You know more than anybody. Its rough edges would be

fascinating. I can set it up early. And either produce or get completely out of the way.<sup>28</sup>

Beatty was comfortable with his movie star status—as a performer and filmmaker and as a deal maker. In her book Keaton describes him affectionately as “The Pro” always brokering a deal, “It was impossible to drag him away from a phone, a restaurant, a meeting, a club, you name it.”<sup>29</sup> Insecure and unsure about how she felt as a prominent Hollywood actress, at that time Keaton did not feel she was ready to pursue directing even with the support of Beatty whom she “loved.” “I had a few healthy instincts,” she wrote in *Then Again* of the opportunities Beatty presented to her, “but I didn’t have the fortitude to prolong my moment in the sun. I preferred retreating.”<sup>30</sup> Keaton would eventually go on to direct two feature films fifteen and twenty years later, *Unstrung Heroes* (1995) and *Hanging Up* (2000). Beatty was not involved with either one.

Is it not uncommon in Hollywood for development deals never to yield completed projects. Similarly, like the difficulties many of the fifteen women directors experienced while in production on their movies—conflicts with producers and stars, going over budget and even problems caused by their own idiosyncratic creative visions—were not abnormal in the 1970s, meaning that male directors experienced such things frequently and their careers did not end because of them. As women they did meet with an additional risk that due to their gender their professional lives would be more difficult.

Returning to the beginning of this project with the example of Kathryn Bigelow who twenty-five years into her career as a feature film director became the first woman—and the first American woman—to win an Oscar for Best Director. In this description alone Bigelow is identified with three categories: an Oscar winning director, a woman

director, *and* the first woman director to win an Oscar. During the Oscar buzz surrounding Bigelow and her film on the Iraqi war, *The Hurt Locker*, which also won an Academy Award for Best Picture, the discourse was consumed with the subject of her as a “woman director.” Martha P. Nochimson, reviewing *The Hurt Locker* and Bigelow for Salon.com, questioned whether the filmmaker’s success was due to her taking on a traditionally masculine subject, genre, and cast of characters. To make her point Nochimson called Bigelow the “Transvestite of Directors.” “Looks to me like she’s masquerading as the baddest boy on the block to win the respect of an industry still so hobbled by gender-specific tunnel vision that it has trouble admiring anything but filmmaking soaked in a reduced notion of masculinity.”<sup>31</sup> For this reviewer a woman director could only excel in Hollywood and received the industry’s highest accolades if she were camouflaged as a man.

In contrast, Manohla Dargis, the chief film critic for the *New York Times*, praised Bigelow’s win as an event that “didn’t just punch through the American movie industry’s seemingly shatterproof glass ceiling; it has also helped dismantle stereotypes about what types of films women can and should direct.”<sup>32</sup> For Dargis Bigelow’s directing Oscar was not only an achievement for women directors as an historical “first,” but the fact that she won for a war film about male soldiers in combat dispelled the notion that women could and would only make films about women with conventionally feminine themes (Dargis cites romantic comedies and romantic vampire films). Dargis responded in her article to Nochimson’s sarcastic questioning of Bigelow as a “feminist pioneer or tough guy in drag?” defensively, but also acknowledged that such a response reflects the challenges faced by female filmmakers in being both directors *and* women. “It’s a bummer that

[Bigelow's] success elicits such an unthinking response [from Nochimson]," Dargis says remorsefully, "though it's also predictable because the stakes for women are high and the access to real filmmaking power remains largely out of their reach." According to Dargis women directors and actresses are frequently ghettoized in the genre of romantic comedy. Nochimson would counter that the "life-affirming situations of romantic comedy" are not taken seriously compared to the "death-saturated situations of war films."

This exchange between two contemporary critics, who have both written widely on women in film and television as journalists and scholars, demonstrates the perpetual question of biological essentialism not only in terms of what kind of movies women would want to make—romantic comedies or war films—but culturally and industrially what kind of films they are expected make. This debate also took place in the 1970s as Joan Tewkesbury reflected in her earlier remark that during this time women directors were offered women's pictures because there was an assumption that they would have a "female touch" when it came to female-centric narratives. More specifically, "women's films" were not valued as much within the industry and nor were women directors. Related more to the core inquiry of this dissertation, the debate between Dargis and Nochimson poses important questions about the category of "women directors" as historical subjects. Is there a need for a specific grouping based on gender? If the two critics had removed from their dialog the fact that Bigelow was a woman would a conversation about war films verses romantic comedies have sufficed? Is it possible to speak about Bigelow as a filmmaker without considering how her gender influences her perceived status in Hollywood? But removing the "woman question" avoids the

discussion of sexism in the film industry and the achievement of Bigelow becoming, after eighty-two years, the first woman ever to win an Oscar for Best Director.

In her book *Gender and the Politics of History*, Joan Wallach Scott describes the necessity and risks inherent in the category of “women’s history” or as she terms it “her-story” “[a]s the play on the word ‘history’ . . . to insist on female agency in the making of history.”<sup>33</sup> An advantage of the “her-story” approach is that it “establishes women as historical subjects.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, “[b]y piling up the evidence about women in the past it refutes the claims of those who insist that women had no history, no significant place in stories of the past.”<sup>35</sup> One of the risks of this historical method is that “her-story” “tends to isolate women as a special and separate topic of history, whether different questions are asked, different categories of analysis offered, or only different documents examined.”<sup>36</sup>

As discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation “women director” as an historical category is problematic. Existing literature on the American film industry during the 1970s excludes women commercial filmmaker *except* to categorized them as “women directors” and frequently this is done to emphasize how few of them there were. Separating these filmmakers disconnects them from the complete historical scope in which they were a part of and isolates their experiences during those years as something only applicable to their gender. In addition, grouping women directors together assumes that their creative output and professional experience is a homogeneous criteria, something this study has made clear it does not abide by. But because there were so few women directors during the 1970s, and due to the unique cultural influences taking place—the feminist movement—attention must also be paid to the fact that these

filmmakers were women and how their gender affected—or not—their experiences at that specific historical moment and industrial location. As has been reiterated throughout this project, these filmmakers were so often forced to experience their professional lives as women in a sexist industry instead of as directors in a highly competitive one. In fact they did both. Similarly, invoking both sides of this approach Dargis said of Bigelow: “she is very much her own woman, and her own auteur.”<sup>37</sup>

As female historical subjects these women’s biographies disclose the gender politics of the film industry specific to that era; as directors their filmographies exemplify the range of movies—their means of production and content and style—that define this decade of American cinema. Making movies during the 1970s was a unique time when the studio system and different commercial independent production communities overlapped in terms of filmic content, distribution, exhibition resources and the hiring of cast and crew. The era’s social movements not only influenced film subject matter and audience demographics, but they also impacted the culture in which movies were made. For all its potential, this era was particularly difficult for women. Male studio executives and producers who had never had female colleagues and fraternity-like unions that had never shared their ranks with female members resisted the changes taking place. For women directors in the 1970s the coinciding of the feminist movement with a shifting film industry allowed for a very small opening in which they began to squeeze through, something they did with equal parts determination and trepidation. In presenting the details of these fifteen directors’ biographies and filmographies, this dissertation argues that while there is a necessity, forced by sexism present in both historical events and the study of history, to consider the role gender played in their experiences making movies

during the 1970s, it is also of equal importance to evaluate how these women, as individual filmmakers, contributed to an important era of cinema history.

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<sup>1</sup> Joel W. Finler, *The Hollywood Story* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988) 280.

<sup>2</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002): 157. For detailed discussion of the generation of female executives that began to emerge in the 1970s and their male mentors see Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?* (New York: Random House, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002): 157.

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Hass, "Hollywood's New Old Girls' Network," *New York Times* 24 Apr. 2005: 13.

<sup>5</sup> Sally Ogle Davis, "The Struggle of Women Directors," *New York Times* 11 Jan. 1981: 72.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Beck, "Where are the women filmmakers?" *Chicago Tribune* 2 Mar. 1980: K1.

<sup>7</sup> For a study of the film and television industry in the 1980s see: Jennifer Holt, *Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation, 1980-1996* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2011). For texts that focus on the relationship between the 1970s and 1980s blockbuster era see: Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002); Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994). For histories of U.S. commercial independent filmmaking that include a discussion of the 1980s see: Jon Jost, "End of the Indies: Death of the Sayles men," *Contemporary American Independent Film: From the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Chris Holmlund and Justin Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005) 53-58; Geoff King, *American Independent Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); John Pierson, *Spike Mike Slackers & Dykes* (New York: Miramax Books, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?* (New York: Random House, 2000): 145.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?* (New York: Random House, 2000): 213; 216.

<sup>10</sup> Pierson 17.

<sup>11</sup> Kathryn Bigelow and Monty Montgomery's *The Loveless*, originally titled *Breakdown*, showed at the Locarno Film Festival in 1981, and at Filmex (the Los Angeles International Film Exposition) in 1982; and was picked up for distribution by Atlantic Releasing in 1984 (Todd McCarthy, "Atlantic's 'The Loveless' Grew Out of History, Myth," *Daily Variety* 25 Sept. 1984). Lizzie Borden's *Born in Flames* screened at the Berlin Forum for the Young Cinema (also known as the Berlinale Forum and the International Forum of Young Cinema), and at the London Film Festival in 1983 ("Born in Flames," *Variety* 16 Mar. 1983: 18; "London Film Festival: Controversial Feminist Films at the LFF," *Screen International* 19 Nov. 1983: 15; Pierson, 84). Penelope Spheeris' *Suburbia* was distributed by Roger Corman's New World Pictures, which at the time had become New Horizons (Richard Natale, "Escaping from limbo Spheeris' 'Suburbia' slated for L.A. release," *The Hollywood Reporter* 9 May 1984: 3). In 1985 Joyce Chopra's *Smooth Talk* screened at the Toronto Film Festival, and in 1986 at the

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Sundance Film Festival, which at the time was known as the United States Film Festival, where it won the Grand Jury Prize (“Smooth Talk,” *Daily Variety* 20 Nov. 1985: 3; Dan Abramson, “SpectraFilm Opens US Film Festival Grand Prize winner, Smooth Talk, in Salt Lake City,” *Screen International* 15 Feb. 1986). Donna Deitch’s *Desert Hearts* screened at several festivals including Locarno, Toronto, and Telluride (“Goldwyn Buys ‘Desert Hearts,’” *Daily Variety* 15 Aug. 1985; “Film Reviews: Desert Hearts,” *Variety* 28 Aug. 1985: 3; “Desert Hearts,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 10 Sept. 1985: 3). *Border Radio*, co-directed by Allison Anders, Dean Lent, and Kurt Voss, premiered at the American Film Institute’s Indie Film Festival on October 29, 1987 (“AFI Indie Fest Review: Border Radio,” *Variety* 25 Nov. 1987: 3; “Recap Film Reviews: Border Radio,” *Variety* 6 Sept. 1988). Mira Nair’s *Salaam Bombay!* screened at the Telluride and New York Film Festivals and won the Camera D’or award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1988 (Jane Lieberman, “Breaking From Past, Cinecom To Distrib Indian ‘Salaam,’” *Daily Variety* 25 Aug. 1988). Nancy Savoca’s *True Love* won Grand Jury prize in the dramatic competition at the Sundance Film Festival in 1989 (“MGM/UA Picks Up ‘True Love’ In U.S.,” *Daily Variety* 4 May 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Patterson, “An Interview with Susan Seidelman On the Making of *Smithereens*,” *American Cinematographer* (May 1983): 68.

<sup>13</sup> Janis Cole and Holly Dale, *Calling the Shots Profiles of Women Filmmakers*, (Kingston, ON: Quarry Press, 1993): 194.

<sup>14</sup> Janis Cole and Holly Dale, *Calling the Shots Profiles of Women Filmmakers*, (Kingston, ON: Quarry Press, 1993): 192.

<sup>15</sup> For budget: Richard Miller, “Susan Seidelman Directs ‘Desperately Seeking Susan,’” *Backstage* 30 Nov. 1984: 1. For grosses: “U.S. Box Office: June 30,” *Screen International* 6 Jul. 1985: 30.

<sup>16</sup> Julia Cameron, “Women in film: It’s ‘better’—It’s just not better enough,” *Chicago Tribune* 24 Nov. 1985: 8.

<sup>17</sup> Dale Pollack, “The Life and Times of ‘Fast Times,’” *Los Angeles Times* 15 Aug. 1982: 20, 22.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the studio’s trepidation as to how to publicize and release the film, as well as its success with the West Coast teen market see: Dale Pollack, “The Life and Times of ‘Fast Times,’” *Los Angeles Times* 15 Aug. 1982; Rachel Abramowitz, *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket?* (New York: Random House, 2000): 145.

<sup>19</sup> Annette Insdorf, “Women Film Directors Make a Strong Comeback,” *New York Times* 24 Apr. 1988: 20.

<sup>20</sup> Joan Tewkesbury, author interview, 27 Jan. 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Lee Grant, interviewed by Henry Colman for Archive of American Television, [emmytvlegends.org](http://emmytvlegends.org) 10 May 2000, Web 11 Mar. 2014. Emphasis made by Grant.

<sup>22</sup> Estelle Changas, “‘Easy’ Author on Cutting Edge of Lib in Films,” *Los Angeles Times* 2 May 1971: S1.

<sup>23</sup> “Credit Sheet for Women in Film, TV,” *Los Angeles Times* 7 Nov. 1971: H14.

<sup>24</sup> “Erica ‘Fear of Flying’ Jong Sues a Filmmaker Friend for Stealing Her Steaming Tale,” *People* 11 Aug. 1975: 12-13; “Filmmaker Phillips Talks to NATO in New Orleans,” *Boxoffice* 13 Oct. 1975; Doug Mirell, “Defense Responds to Jong Litigation,” *The Hollywood Reporter* 11 July 1975: 1, 12.



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<sup>25</sup> Phillips, who also co-produced *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), discusses these variables in her autobiography, particularly the way in which she felt out of place as a successful, i.e., aggressive, woman producer in 1970s Hollywood. Julia Phillips, *You'll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again* (New York: Signet, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Gregg Kilday, "Film Clips: Dyan Cannon's Shooting Star," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Nov. 1977: G19.

<sup>27</sup> Gregg Kilday, "Film Clips: Dyan Cannon's Shooting Star," *Los Angeles Times* 16 Nov. 1977: G19.

<sup>28</sup> Diane Keaton, *Then Again* (New York: Random House, 2011): 132.

<sup>29</sup> Keaton 133.

<sup>30</sup> Keaton 134.

<sup>31</sup> Martha P. Nochimson, "Kathryn Bigelow: Feminist Pioneer or tough guy in drag?" Salon.com 24 Feb. 2010, 2 Jan. 2013 <[http://www.salon.com/2010/02/24/bigelow\\_3/](http://www.salon.com/2010/02/24/bigelow_3/)>.

<sup>32</sup> Manohla Dargis, "How Oscar Found Ms. Right," *New York Times* 14 Mar. 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Joan Wallace Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 18.

<sup>34</sup> Joan Wallace Scott 18.

<sup>35</sup> Joan Wallace Scott 20.

<sup>36</sup> Joan Wallace Scott 20-21.

<sup>37</sup> Manohla Dargis, "How Oscar Found Ms. Right," *New York Times* 14 Mar. 2010.

**TABLE 1**  
**WGA WOMEN'S COMMITTEE STATISTICAL REPORT: 1974<sup>1</sup>**

Television Programming	Total	Men	%	Women	%
<b>NETWORKS</b>					
ABC	932	832	89.2	100	10.8
NBC	708	650	91.8	58	8.2
CBS	1,256	1,150	91.6	106	8.4
<b>Network Totals</b>	<b>2,896</b>	<b>2,632</b>	<b>90.9</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>9.1</b>
<b>NORMAN LEAR/TANDEM</b>					
<i>All in the Family</i>	105	99	94.3	6	5.7
<i>Good Times</i>	78	78	100.0	0	0.0
<i>Maude</i>	60	54	90.0	6	10.0
<b>Norman Lear Totals</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>95.1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>FEMALE FOCUSED SHOWS</b>					
<i>Little House on the Prairie</i>	22	13	59.1	9	40.9
<i>Marcus Welby, MD</i>	63	46	73.0	17	27.0
<i>Mary Tyler Moore</i>	72	58	80.6	14	19.4
<b>Female-Focused Totals</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>25.5</b>
<b>OTHER SHOWS</b>					
<i>Happy Days</i>	94	93	98.9	1	1.1
<i>Hawaii Five-O</i>	67	65	97.0	2	3.0
<i>Kojak</i>	87	87	100.0	0	0.0
<i>M*A*S*H</i>	23	22	95.7	1	4.3
<i>Odd Couple</i>	95	93	97.9	2	2.1
<i>Wonderful World of Disney</i>	24	24	100.0	0	0.0
<b>Other Shows Totals</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.8</b>
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3,686</b>	<b>3,119</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>8.7</b>

<sup>1</sup> Source: "Women's Committee Statistics Report," 7 Nov. 1974, "Internal WGA document," Writers Guild Foundation Shavelson-Webb Library, Los Angeles.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **WOMEN DIRECTORS: 1966-1980**

1. Karen Arthur
2. Anne Bancroft
3. Joan Darling
4. Lee Grant
5. Barbara Loden
6. Elaine May
7. Barbara Peeters
8. Joan Rivers
9. Stephanie Rothman
10. Beverly Sebastian
11. Joan Micklin Silver
12. Joan Tewkesbury
13. Jane Wagner
14. Nancy Walker
15. Claudia Weill

## APPENDIX 2

### WOMEN DIRECTORS' FILMOGRAPHY: 1960s and 1970s

This list accounts only for the feature films made by these directors leaving out their documentary and television work.

#### 1960s

*The Connection* (1961) **Shirley Clarke**  
*The Cool World* (1963) **Shirley Clarke**  
*Stranded* (1964) **Juleen Compton**  
*The Trouble with Angels* (1966) **Ida Lupino**  
*Blood Bath* (1966, aka *Track of the Vampire*) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*I Need a Man* (1967, aka *I Need*) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*It's a Bikini World* (1967) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean* (1967) **Juleen Compton**

#### 1970s

*The Student Nurses* (1970) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*The Dark Side of Tomorrow* (1970, aka *Just the Two of Us*) **Barbara Peeters**  
*Wanda* (1971) **Barbara Loden**  
*A New Leaf* (1971) **Elaine May**  
*The Velvet Vampire* (1971) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*Bury Me an Angel* (1971) **Barbara Peeters**  
*Group Marriage* (1972) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) **Elaine May**  
*The Hitchhikers* (1972) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*The Working Girls* (1973) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*Terminal Island* (1973) **Stephanie Rothman**  
*Bloody Friday* (1973, aka *Single Girls*) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*'Gator Bait* (1974) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*Summer School Teachers* (1974) **Barbara Peeters**  
*Hester Street* (1975) **Joan Micklin Silver**  
*Legacy* (1975) **Karen Arthur**  
*Flash and the Firecat* (1976) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*Mikey and Nicky* (1976) **Elaine May**  
*Between the Lines* (1977) **Joan Micklin Silver**  
*First Love* (1977) **Joan Darling**  
*Girlfriends* (1978) **Claudia Weill**  
*Starhops* (1978) **Barbara Peeters**  
*Moment by Moment* (1978) **Jane Wagner**  
*Rabbit Test* (1978) **Joan Rivers**  
*Delta Fox* (1979) **Beverly Sebastian**

*Old Boyfriends* (1979) **Joan Tewkesbury**  
*On the Air Live with Captain Midnight* (1979) **Beverly Sebastian**  
*Chilly Scenes of Winter* (1979 aka *Head Over Heels*) **Joan Micklin Silver**  
*Mafu Cage* (1979) **Karen Arthur**  
*Fatso* (1980) **Anne Bancroft**  
*Can't Stop the Music* (1980) **Nancy Walker**  
*It's My Turn* (1980) **Claudia Weill**  
*Humanoids from the Deep* (1980) **Barbara Peeters**  
*Tell Me a Riddle* (1980) **Lee Grant**

## APPENDIX 3

### WOMEN DIRECTORS: 1980s

The following is a list of directors who made their first narrative feature in the 1980s: this list represents both studio and independent films. Listed here is a span of their active years directing films followed in parenthesis by the number of features directed to date. This list only reflects their film work and not any television movies or documentaries they may have also directed; many of them are prolific directors of television movies and episodic series. This list is an *estimation* of the number of films directed by women in the 1980s. The following names and numbers have been identified over the course of much research so there is no one source.

1. Kathryn Bigelow: 1982-2012 (9)
2. Amy Jones: 1982-1996 (4)
3. Kathleen Collins 1982 (1)
4. Susan Seidelman: 1982-2013 (10)
5. Lizzie Borden: 1983-1994 (4)
6. Martha Coolidge: 1983-2006 (12)
7. Bette Gordon: 1983-2010 (3)
8. Euzhan Palcy: 1983-1992 (3)
9. Barbra Streisand: 1983-1996 (3)
10. Gillian Armstrong: 1984-2007 (7)<sup>1</sup>
11. Amy Heckler: 1984-2012 (9)
12. Marisa Silver: 1984-1991 (4)
13. Penelope Spheeris: 1984-2012 (12)
14. Joyce Chopra: 1985-1989 (2)
15. Donna Deitch: 1985-1994 (2)
16. Lisa Gottlieb 1985-2013 (4)
17. Randa Haines: 1986-1998 (4)
18. Sondra Locke: 1986-1997 (3)
19. Michelle Manning: 1986 (1)
20. Connie Kaiserman: 1988 (1)
21. Penny Marshall: 1986-2001 (7)
22. Evelyn Purcell: 1986-2013 (2)
23. Allison Anders: 1987-2012 (8)
24. Katt Shea: 1987-1999 (6)
25. Mary Lambert: 1987-2000 (6)
26. Catlin Adams: 1988 (1)
27. Janet Greek: 1988 (1)
28. Mira Nair: 1988-2012 (12)
29. Tina Rathborne: 1988 (1)
30. Geneviève Robert: 1988 (1)
31. Zelda Barron: 1989 (2)
32. Nancy Savoca: 1989-2011 (6)

**Directors from the 1970s who made films in the 1980s:**

- 33. Karen Arthur (1)
- 34. Joan Darling (1)
- 35. Elaine May (1)
- 36. Beverly Sebastian (3)
- 37. Joan Micklin Silver (2)

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<sup>1</sup>Australian director Gillian Armstrong made two feature films in Australia—*My Brilliant Career* (1979) and *Starstruck* (1982)—before directing her first Hollywood film *Mrs. Soffel* (1984, MGM). Subsequently Armstrong has directed several films for Hollywood studios, as well as international co-productions that were theatrically released by U.S. companies.

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