THE LIMITS OF EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN:
THE CINEMA OF STEPHANIE ROTHMAN AND THE TROUBLE WITH ARCHIVES

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communications and Media
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the role of gendered authorship in the U.S. film industry and focuses on how women’s directorial labor is represented in film history and its accumulated archives. Specifically, the project evaluates women’s labor in the cinematic paradigm of second wave exploitation films—films produced under the exploitation style from 1960 to 1980—and utilizes a case study of director Stephanie Rothman to articulate the lack of industrial, disciplinary, and archival attention paid to women’s directorial labor and the reverberations of this absence on gendered labor parity in the contemporary film industry.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not be possible without the unfailing support of my doctoral committee. I have been incredibly fortunate in working with this group of amazing scholars. Prof. Valdivia has been a tireless advocate for me, my work, and for all graduate students in the Institute of Communications Research. We all owe her a great debt. Prof. Hay’s consistent intellectual stimulation has been critical in my development, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity of being welcomed into the best restaurant in town. Prof. Rodriguez is a model of compassionate and unflinchingly progressive academic inquiry of which I can only hope to aspire. Lastly, Prof. Turnock’s mentorship, generosity, and camaraderie have been beyond invaluable. Her passion for her work and her voracious appetite for knowledge are inspirational. Thank you so much, Julie.

To my phenomenal network of Illinois friends, all the beautiful weirdos, you have been the best intellectual support and care system anyone could ask for. To those who made Champaign-Urbana home—especially Emily (who hates acknowledgements) and Meghan—thank you does not begin to suffice. For the past five years I’ve said that this project would not have been possible without the aid of amazing staff of the Communications Library and I will say it again: Nick and Erik, you guys are the best.

My gratitude to my parents is never-ending, who despite never being quite sure what I am talking about (except to know that I am doing it too loudly and quickly, which I am), support me unconditionally. Arnau and Martina: for life.

That’s it BD, it’s done.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“To ask why these women were forgotten is also to ask why we forgot them. For they were both overlooked by the first generation of traditional historians and not ‘recognized’ by the second generation of scholars.”

Standing in front a classroom full of undergraduate students, I ask a question: “Who is your favorite film director?” Shouts of “Tarantino,” “Scorsese,” “Anderson,” “Kubrick,” “The Wachowski’s,” and more volley back at me. The follow-up question—“Who is your favorite woman director?”—cultivates silence and confused looks. The less subjective question of “Can anyone name a woman director?” doesn’t fare much better. “The lady who did The Hurt Locker?” or “The Lost in Translation woman…I can’t remember her name” are the standard answers when one is hazarded. More representative, however, is the answer given to me by a student in 2014: “I never realized it before, but I can’t name a single woman director.”

This is not a phenomenon relegated to undergraduate college students; most of the public would be hard pressed to name a woman film director, and I would wager, would also be surprised by their inability to do so. The position of ‘director’ in public conception is regularly attached to with creativity, control, authorship, and singular personalities. The disconnection of the concept of the director from the material subjects that occupy that role obscures the sad truth: the overwhelming majority of film directors embedded in past and present cultural memories are male.

Unfortunately, the discipline of cinema studies has fallen into the same trap, as the history and contributions of women directors remains as elusive scholastically as it does popularly. To counteract that fact, and explore its origins and persistence, this dissertation examines the role of gendered authorship in the U.S. film industry and focuses on how women’s
directorial labor is represented in film history and its accumulated archives. Specifically, this project evaluates women’s labor in the cinematic paradigm of second wave exploitation films—films produced under the exploitation style from 1960-1980—and utilizes a case study of director Stephanie Rothman to articulate the lack of industrial, disciplinary, and archival attention paid to women’s directorial labor and the reverberations of this absence on gendered labor parity in the contemporary film industry. This introduction contextualizes the project’s approach to these issues by reviewing the gaps in knowledge it works to address, the scope and significance of its findings, the theory and methodology undertaken in the work, a definition of key concepts and terms used throughout, and finally, a brief review of the succeeding chapters.

Investigations into women’s directorial labor in second wave exploitation films immediately raise a particular scholarly problematic: both are under-examined areas in cinema studies. Angela Martin notes that the discipline overall “[…] is still largely concerned with male filmmakers.” Kaja Silverman comments that within the discipline, feminist film theory and criticism has “[…] manifested only an intermittent and fleeting interest in the status of authorship within the classic text.” Judith Mayne also finds the lack of interest in women’s directorial labor in feminist film theory noteworthy when she opines, “Even though discussions of the works of women filmmakers have been central to the development of feminist film studies, theoretical discussions of female authorship in the cinema have been surprisingly sparse.” The discrepancy Mayne is pointing to here is a critical one: although films made by women have been significant and influential texts in the development of feminist film studies, the authorship position and embodied labor of the women who created them have been notably overlooked.

The near invisibility around women’s directorial labor in feminist film study and criticism is attributable to a number of factors including “[…] theoretical frameworks in which
any discussions of ‘personhood’ are suspect [and] the peculiar status of authorship in the cinema," topics which will be addressed in detail in following chapters. The disparity in attention paid to women filmmakers across the breadth and depth of cinema studies has left a dearth of historical and archival information from which interested scholars can recirculate them into historical and industrial understanding." Scholars studying women’s historical participation in the industrial process of filmmaking are regularly confronted with “[…] the particular problem that many women have left few historical traces, their roles in film production or film culture obscured by more publicly visible or self-promotional male partners or concealed behind collective or collaborative practices.” This lack of archival and historical trace compounds their already precarious position as objects of study and analysis.

Similar issues are raised when considering exploitation films generally and second wave exploitation films specifically; neither has ever occupied a comfortable space within the broader industrial film complex or the academic study of film. Exploitation, like all film industries, has a history constituted through a variety of actors, institutions, and cultural shifts. However, their industrial history, content, aesthetic, style, and reach are prone to academic marginalization. This makes it difficult find scholarly work that considers the exploitation industry as a whole. Rather most scholars have instead chosen a piecemeal focus on either the production and/or economic logics of the style or on the films removed from their industrial context. Although there is a small group of scholars who have produced work aimed at a holistic understanding of exploitation as strain of, rather than foil to, classical film history, most of this work does not center around second wave exploitation nor on women’s industrial labor. Eric Schaeffer’s germinal work on exploitation constrains itself from the mid-twentieth century until the late 1950s. Elena Gorfinkel’s excellent work temporally grounds itself in the second wave exploitation period, but
narrows its focus to the space and place of grindhouse cinemas and sexploitation films. Andrea
Juno and V. Vale book’s *Incredibly Strange Films* is a key repository of information for films in
the second wave exploitation period, but its chronological scope is vast and it concerns itself
primarily with the filmic texts and their cultural lives, absent of their industrial histories. Theorist
Pam Cook’s brief investigation of Stephanie Rothman is the closest thing to an examination of
women’s filmmaking in second wave exploitation, but like Juno and Vale, this work focuses on
select filmic texts only, leaving any questions around women’s directorial labor unasked and
unanswered.

**Scope and Impact**

The result of the overlapping thinness of the historical and archival record around second
wave exploitation and women’s directorial labor creates the gap in knowledge this work attempts
to address. Therefore, this dissertation focuses on three interrelated research questions. First, I
historicize and establish the period of second wave exploitation film as a discrete filmic cycle
that provides untapped space for considering gendered authorship and the broadening of the
accumulated filmic archive. Secondly, I theorize how feminist film theory and study has only
gestured toward the issue of women’s directorial labor while also examining the repercussions of
the rhetorical language used to mark women’s filmmaking when it is discussed. This includes an
evaluation of the limiting effects this rhetoric has on broadening the scope of women and their
labor in film history and archives. This tactic demonstrates the need for alternative archives and
archival practices when considering women’s filmic labor, while emphasizing how feminist
archival intervention can revision a broader and more diverse spectrum of women in cinematic
history.

Lastly, I narrate the biographic and cinematic history of Stephanie Rothman through textual
and critical analysis of her films and career. I am utilizing a case study approach for several
reasons. A Rothman case study serves as a remedy to the tendency of feminist film studies to overlook women filmmakers in favor of examining their films. As Alexandra Juhasz theorizes, the rise of feminist film studies in the 1970s and 1980s and the overall academic turn toward theory in cinema studies was beneficial as it prompted a move toward the feminist. However, she continues, “[…] also had the effect of separating us from others who matter: those women who practice and engage with media-making outside academe.” As products of an industrial artistic system, films should not be separated from the labor and production conditions that birth them. The labor of someone like Rothman—a woman working in a primarily masculine profession and creating films in an overwhelmingly masculinized filmic paradigm—provides crucial historical data on the way women have participated in the cultural work of film production.

The Rothman case study also epitomizes the need for alternative archive constructions and methodologies when compiling film history. Rothman is a negligible presence in the traditional cinematic, archival, and historical records. Resultingly, the case study presented in this work is the result of four years of research guided by alternative archival methodologies. The outcome is the most complete primary and secondary archive of the director to date, as well as the first analytical consideration of her entire filmic oeuvre. The collection of materials I’ve assembled speaks to the necessity of alternate archival methods and the value in self-curated archival practices. This dissertation offers the biographic, professional, and filmic life of Stephanie Rothman as a practical and political feminist intervention in broadening the historical and cinematic memory of women in film and awareness around their cinematic labor. Therefore, foregrounding her authorship “[…] is not simply a useful political strategy; it is crucial to the
reinvention of the cinema that has been undertaken by women filmmakers and feminist spectators.”

Additionally, a focus on Rothman provides a critical link between the selective erasure of women’s directorial labor in film history and the continuing overwhelming disparity in gendered labor in contemporary film production. Rothman’s career and its industrial roadblocks illuminate the deeply entrenched and persistent sexism and discriminatory standards that define gendered employment in the present-day film industry. Exposing this systemic discrimination is crucial given contemporarily repeated calls for women’s increased participation in filmmaking as a panacea to gender disparity, a call which elides the deeply entrenched institutional barriers for gender parity, equitable working conditions, and safe working spaces. A Rothman case study exposes the hostile working conditions for women in the film industry in the 1960s and 1970s as the same ones operating today. This connection necessitates more than just an increased call for women’s participation in the industry to solve the problem—it requires a complete uprooting and reconstruction of discriminatory structures modeled as ‘best’ business practices.

This project works to close these gaps in knowledge through three specific interventions. Firstly, articulating second wave exploitation as a discrete filmic cycle contextualizes a new historical area of film production that, I argue, serves as a transitional industrial space connecting Hollywood and independent modes of production. The transitory space of second wave exploitation breaks down the boundaries between mainstream and marginal production, offering a paradigm that accounts for the practical fluidity of flows of labor, artistry, and filmic output in the film industry. Rather than set second wave exploitation in hard opposition to mainstream Hollywood filmmaking, I argue that its production paradigm was influenced by, and influential to, Hollywood filmmaking and the rise of foreign film distribution in the United States between
1960 and 1980. This process of influence accounts for the practical materiality and labor of film production while simultaneously opening up a new historical sphere in which to consider the contributions of female cinematic labor.

Secondly, I contend that the rhetoric used to mark female directorial labor in film history has led to the continued spectacularization of women as cinematic authors, de-normalizing their participation in film production and reinscribing the hegemonic maleness of film directors. This rhetoric, what I call the exceptional women paradigm, writes the history of women directors as expectations to the rule of male authorship rather than as viable and valuable equals. The limits of exceptional women paradigm, then, allows for the continued labeling of a token group of women directors as exceptions to the male authorship rule, maintaining women directors as outsiders to the normative creative structure in film production.

These limitations are codified and justified by the lack of women in the historical and archival records that attend to film study. To counter this, I propose the use of alternative archival methods and curatorial practices when studying women in film production as a specifically feminist intervention into the way women’s labor is constructed in industrial and cultural film history. Finally I offer a biographic, thematic, and analytic investigation into the life, career, and films of Stephanie Rothman as a practical alternative archival intervention as well as a space to highlight the persistent, systemic, and institutional barriers to women’s participatory labor in film production, both historically and contemporaneously. The timeliness of the study is, perhaps, prescient, as a new interest in Rothman has developed. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) restored a print of her film *The Student Nurses* and screened it at their cinema in February of 2014. In August of 2015 the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences recorded an oral history with Rothman, which will become part of their new Museum of the
Motion Pictures, opening in 2017. 2016 will see *The Student Nurses* as one of the opening films of a new art house cinema in New York City, as well as the film playing as part of a women directors film series at NYC’s Film Forum. Over forty years after the end of her career, Rothman’s recognition may be finally materializing.

**Methods and Theory**

To accomplish these multi-faceted goals I have employed a variety of methodological frameworks under the guiding infrastructure of Miriam Hansen’s promiscuous methodology, which contends that “[…] cultural configurations that are more complex and dynamic than the most accurate account of their function within any single system may convey and that require more open-ended, promiscuous, and imaginative types of inquiry.”xiv This approach guides my investigation of new research objects and questions across flexible media networks, histories, and archives. Here is it critical to establish the historical approach this project takes, which draws on broadly new cinema history and specifically on Rick Altman’s crisis historiography and Thomas Elsaesser’s construction of film studies as media archaeology. A new cinema history approach provides a historical method that complements traditional film history but also integrates into it conditions of production, organizational cultures, distribution and exhibition, and the flow and effects of financial networks.”xv This holistic approach is crucial when considering the interwoven factors of industrial production paradigms, labor, and cinematic output; one cannot be considered separate, or more important, than another.

Altman’s crisis historiography is particularly important for my consideration of second wave exploitation. Altman’s method, originally applied to the study of film sound and its technologies, assumes that the definition of an area of study is “[…] both historically and socially contingent. That is, the media are not fully self-evidently defined by theory components and configurations. They also depend on the way users develop and understand them.”xvi Second wave exploitation,
then, cannot be defined historically as it is defined today, nor can it be understood as simply an offshoot of classical exploitation or as a poor imitation of classical Hollywood style.\textsuperscript{xvi} Instead, it must be informed by the actors who worked in it and the multiple economic, production, distributive and exhibition networks that composed it.

Hence, the object of study must be understood within its own socially defined existence and through its own crisis identity, which Altman defines as composed of “[…] three separate but closely connected processes: multiple identification, jurisdicational conflict, and overdetermined solutions.”\textsuperscript{xvii} Considering multiple identification allows for the evaluations of overlapping production and artistic influences; jurisdicational conflict provides an understanding of how these multiple identities co-existed in an industrial and economic sense; and interrogating overdetermined solutions—in this case the traditional sense of where second wave exploitation lives in film history—aids in removing biases and simplistic determinations around the nature of the filmic cycle itself.\textsuperscript{xviii}

Influencing these historical investigations is Thomas Elsaesser’s approach to film history as media archaeology. Although explored substantially in chapter two, it bears a note here, as its conceptualization of historical time is critical to my overall methodology. Drawing not from the material focus of media archaeology but from its reconfigurations of historical time, Elsaesser advocates for film history as media archaeology as a way to disrupt standard boundaries between historical divisions.\textsuperscript{xx} This disruption allows for the integration of points of view, production models, industrial histories, filmic cycles, and artistic output that would have been siloed from one another under traditional film history. This temporal fluidity is critical when establishing second wave exploitation as transitory industrial space with omnidirectional flows of influence.
Rethinking time in this way also plays a significant role in this project’s feminist archival intervention and in the work of ‘doing’ women’s film history. Alternate archival usage and creation is critical in women’s film history as scholars engage in the “[…] search for new sources of evidence in the absence of traditional archives and utilize a diversity of innovative methods that open up new historiographic perspectives or questions.” This requires a tactile and affective engagement with the past as well as a willingness to see the connections between past, present, and future histories as circularly connecting through the archive. This enables scholars working in women’s film history to read the influences of the past in the present, and leverage contemporary issues and questions to introduce generative fissures in past accountings. Through this type of engagement, scholars undertaking the work of women’s film history:

[…] ask of their work questions they did not think to ask, their works may gesture to future conditions and perspectives different from those that constrained them. Thus in reimagining their career and recirculating their films, we enable their historical projects to continue in the present through our collaboration with the past.

Feminist archival interventions are theoretically and politically salient here. Although one cannot ascribe a specific feminist ideology to any given woman working in the film industry, that does not preclude a feminist interventionist methodology in studying women’s labor in the entertainment industries. Rather, feminist methodologies, working in the vein of feminist media studies, strive to highlight and address the systemic inequalities of power that are entrenched into our social, cultural, and economic systems. The intersection of feminism and cinema studies, then, provides “[…] new ways of seeing and thinking about the world […]”.

Understanding and articulating how gender is understood in a popular industrialized art such as film and its correlative labor practices, histories, and archives is a critical move in illuminating and potentially dismantling systemic inequalities. This includes the ways knowledge is built from archival preservation; the political economy that forms these systems under a
capitalist paradigm; and the practical functions of industry as the production mechanism that generates the material artifacts of film. This tactic pushes critical questions around how the creativity of women cultural producers and the materials that tell women’s stories have been dismissed or undervalued. As Kathryn Cirksena and Lisa Cuklanz remind us, “Feminist scholarship thus has redefined the notion of a valid text for scholarly study.”

The redefinition of textual validity in academic study is pivotal for scholars working in feminist archival practice and theory. Whereas texts produced by women, and the women themselves, have been treated by traditional filmic archives and history at best as token examples of exceptionalism and at worst as liminal traces, feminist archive studies pushes for a reconfiguration of textual validity, drawing objects of study from the historical ‘scrap heap.’ As Kate Eichhorn proclaims:

The scrap heap, then, is not a site of refuse/refusal but a complex site where the past accumulates in the present as a resource to be embraced and rejected, mined and recycled, discarded and redeployed. As such, feminism’s scrap heap is both a site of abjection—that which must be expelled but that which we cannot live without—and simultaneously a playground, a refuge, a scene on innovation, humor, hope, and longing. In every respect, feminism’s scrap heap is integral rather than superfluous, vital rather than stagnant.

Alternative archives, imagined in this project through feminist, queer, and affective models, provide the methodological rigor necessary for mining the scrap heap and reassessing normative, and restrictive, standards of curation and remembrance.

Definition of Terms and Chapter Landscape

Before proceeding further into the project a clarification of terms is necessary. First of foremost, what does this project mean when it speaks of exploitation film? Exploitation films have a difficult place within cinema history. They are variously understood as a genre, a production aesthetic motivated by scant economic resources, a calculated response to the growing divergence in audience types in the U.S. begun in the 1950s, and as spaces of independent production. Definitions of exploitation seem to encompass any, all, or sometimes
even none of these considerations in their employment by various authors. Generally, however, the term exploitation film has come to signify what Linda Williams summarizes as:

[…] low-budget filmmaking that ‘exploits’ particular sensational, shocking and taboo subjects (violence, perversion, drugs, cruelty, abnormality, sex and its perils) in genre feature film or pseudo-documentary format. Because exploitation films often excite the curiosity of the viewer or provoke active physical responses (lust, disgust, terror), these thrill-films (and their makers) have been seen as ‘exploiting’ the desire of audiences to indulge in guilty cultural pleasures.xxvii

Many of the traits Williams describes hold across definitions and interpretations, while some, including the root of the term exploitation, are contested. Eric Schaefer, whose book Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959 was a watershed moment in the study of the exploitation industry and its products, contends that the term “exploitation” derives from the aggressive and non-standard advertising practices undertaken by producers and distributors, which became key in the films’ success.xxxviii

Part of the difficulty in constituting exploitation films both within cinematic history and the public imaginary has to do, in large part, with the very label exploitation. There is an endemic pejorative power in the word that inherently marginalizes them. For example, when we invoke cinema we conjure art: experimental, avant-garde, powerful, emotive, and brimming with consciousness. When we call up movies, we hail the popular: multi-level Cineplexes, lavish award ceremonies, and summer blockbusters. When we summon exploitation films we recall: nothing. Confusion, perhaps distaste, a vague memory of a grainy image on late night television, a strain of the iconic theme song from Shaft (Gordon Parks, 1971). These are fragmentary remembrances, out of context and out of time, referents to a text that is at best illusive, and at worst, completely missing. Exploitation films are visual artifacts that line the outer edges of the frame of cinematic history and memory. They are films that have been traditionally defined
through and against a strict binary with mainstream film, constructing them through their lack rather than through their industrial, aesthetic, and narrative components.

Known for their low-budget aesthetics, sensationalist story lines primarily focused around vice and sin, and narratives that alternate between spectacle and monotony, exploitation films allow for an alternative approach to cinematic construction and interpretation.\textsuperscript{xix} Although they are encumbered with historical and cultural baggage, exploitation films have been a staple cinematic industry since the early twentieth century. Often referred to monolithically, they can, and in fact should, be separated into distinct phases that can be loosely chronologically bounded. These phases are fairly stable markers of the formulation and evolution of filmic narrative, content, marketing and advertising practices, target audiences, and cultural relevance of exploitation films. As such, exploitation films can be roughly divided into three phases: classical exploitation (1919-1959), second wave exploitation (1960-1980), and neo-exploitation (1979/80-present).\textsuperscript{1}

This work is concerned with the period of second wave exploitation films. Second wave exploitation films first began to evolve in the 1950s, as the independent production and distribution markets thrived in an open market. Second wave exploitation films were cheap to make; their short production time was able to capitalize on trends and fads; and as films catering to a growing population of suburban teenagers, they monopolized the thriving drive-in market of the 1950s and early 1960s, before moving to urban grindhouses in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Working with a stylistic pattern closely inspired by classical Hollywood cinema, second wave exploitation films

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\textsuperscript{1} Arguably, there is value in considering neo-exploitation from 1979/80-2000 as the heyday of exploitation on VHS and in home video markets and the period from 2000-present as a post-exploitation phase, where contemporarily produced exploitation films exists primarily on niche cable television networks and electronic delivery system like Video on Demand (VOD). It should be noted that past the classical exploitation phase, which was developed by Eric Schaefer, the subsequent phases are my own formulations.
exploitation films would bound moments of sensational spectacle with predictable narratives, creating films that were simultaneously shocking and predictable.

My goal here, however, is not to attempt to construct a penultimate definition for exploitation film and its iterations. It is futile, and I believe naïve, to attempt to disaggregate any of these definitions from one another, for undoubtedly they are all nodes on the definitional chain of exploitation films. I contend that rather than attempting to narrow the understanding of exploitation films into a strict genre based definition, they should be understood as a cinematic style which encompass various aesthetic, economic, and narrative conventions and inventions. Akin to the way in which film noir has been contextualized within cinematic history, formulating exploitation films as a style allows for a fluidity in construction and analysis that is critical to making sense of the various ways and forms these films have developed. Throughout this project, then, I refer to the ‘exploitation film paradigm’ or ‘exploitation style’ as terminology meant to signal the industrial, artistic, narrative, ideological, labor, distributive, exhibitive, and cultural networks that films labeled second wave exploitation were produced under.

Moving past exploitation, it is crucial to define my use of the term ‘woman’ in this project as well as why I’ve chosen to focus on women’s directorial labor specifically. In my work concerning gender and culture I find it essential to contextualize gender not as a natural phenomenon, but as socially constructed and defined category that organizes norms to force and mold behaviors. As separate and distinct from sex and sexuality, gender operates as a matrix of internal psychic determinations which drive outward behavioral expressions. In a Butlerian form of interpellation, gender operates as ideological subject formation, transitioning the individual from passive existence, to subjecthood, to a signified reference formed through language as ‘man’ or ‘woman.’ The formative language of interpellation, or hailing, forms the subject
while simultaneously highlighting the social order and power dynamics endemic to gendered signifiers under patriarchy.

Once subjugated to the gendered language of hailing, the subject is free to perform the normative aesthetic and behavioral traits associated with ‘man’ and ‘woman.’ For Butler, gender as performance is a cost of identification. When a subject identifies with categorized gender under social power regimes, they are held accountable to a set of norms that are not fully realizable. Therefore, there is a significant cost to the psychic and emotional life of the subject when forced into gender identification; the subject fails the norms and the norms fail the subject. This failure in identification becomes a failure in ideology. However, it would be incorrect to miss opportunities where this failure could be generative, working to subvert the overall process of gendered interpellation and opening spaces for alternative constructions. As Hilary Neroni notes:

Ideology works to produce clear gender distinctions in order to provide stable symbolic identities for both male and female subjects. Without this kind of coherence, identity loses its guarantees: male and female subjects begin to question, rather than invest themselves in, symbolic identities. This process destabilizes the social order, and popular culture often responds by producing cultural images that work through, contain, or expose, this destabilization. xxxi

Destabilization through the wielding of culture as a tool to break ideological conjunctures is, I contend, recognizable in second wave exploitation. I am, however, cognizant of the fact that when looking at specific historical moments and the artifacts associated with them—in this case, films—it is important to avoid simply mapping contemporary theoretical conceptions on gender directly on top of them. To do so runs the risk of performing bad historical and theoretical work. Rather, my goal is to understand how these artifacts enact and challenge performative gender within their specific temporal and spatial constructions.
It is within this performative frame that I’ve chosen to focus on women directors and their labor. The focus on the position of the director is not meant to elevate it above other aspects of production labor. The choice of focusing on directorial labor is strategic, utilized to find a publically familiar and recognizable path into broader discussions around gender parity in cinematic labor. The concept of the director has a conventional cultural cache attached to it, bred in large part by the public’s simplified understanding of who ‘creates’ a film. The singularity of film authorship in this sense has been bolstered by the continued reliance of public film criticism on auteurism, industry awards that recognize an individual creative talent as the author of a film, and the obscuration of the collaborative nature of filmmaking. Due to the fact that I have undertaken this work to serve as a theoretical and practical intervention into the awareness and destabilization of contemporary labor practices in the film industry, I felt it necessary to begin that process through publically distinguishable position.

This being said, I am keenly aware of the scholarly problematics around the concept of the director as author, an issue that is addressed in chapter three of this work. My use of the position of director is not meant to elide these problems in any way, or to promote an unchallenged and unquestioned positioning of the director as the embodiment of unchecked agency. Additionally, as Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight remind us in the introduction to the edited collection Doing Women’s Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future, the conceptual framework of individual authorship is often immaterial to the ways many women directors work. However, individual authorship is still a critical factor in the practical everyday of film production and employment dynamics, and as such cannot be overlooked simply because it may be academically outmoded. To do so would be to fall into the same division between academia and industry that Alexandra Juhasz pinpointed earlier in this
introduction. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, individual authorship was integral to the way Stephanie Rothman worked, and any case study of her work must interrogate why and how the position of author was an important node in her construction of her professional self as well as her films. With these definitional boundaries set, I now turn to an overview of the successive chapters of this dissertation.

The shape and flow of this project is such that the various theories and methods I utilize to address my research questions are introduced in the individual chapters that provide evidentiary support for my claims. Chapter two provides a historical and theoretical construction of second wave exploitation film while simultaneously advancing the call for temporal fluidity in historical configurations. This chapter also identifies the approach this project takes in distinguishing itself from other studies of exploitation film while advocating for scholastically untapped spaces like second wave exploitation as fertile ground for uncovering women’s cinematic labor. Chapter three reviews the theoretical field of feminist film theory and its hesitancy in focusing on women’s directorial labor. In this process, the rhetoric of the exceptional women paradigm is elucidated and its influence on the status of women directors in film history is traced. It then outlines the benefits of alternate archive creation in women’s film history using queer, affective, and orphan film alternate archives as models. This chapter concludes with an examination of my own alternative construction of the Rothman archive.

Chapter four begins my case study of Rothman, presenting her personal and professional biography while also providing an analysis of recurring themes, styles, and influences in her work. Chapters five and six, then, offer theoretical and textual analysis of her films while paying careful attention to the industrial and economic realities that shaped her time working in second wave exploitation film production. Finally, the concluding chapter leverages the Rothman case
study as a historical and archival model for clarifying the contemporary issues of gender parity in film industry employment. By reading Rothman’s history in the present, the chapter outlines the current hurdles facing women in film production and highlights the linkages between gendered labor past and present and its grounding in institutional and systemic discriminatory practices in the entertainment industries. To begin, however, I turn to my proposed industrial, cultural, and economic configuration of second wave exploitation film.

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1 Jane M. Gaines, “Film History and the Two Presents of Feminist Film Theory,” *Cinema Journal* 44:1 (Fall 2004): 113.
5 Ibid, 93.
6 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 6.


CHAPTER 2
NEITHER MARGIN NOR CENTER:
LOCATING SECOND WAVE EXPLOITATION IN U.S. FILM HISTORY

“As a film historian, I must be, first of all, not a historian at all. I am a natural and cultural being who has, for irrelevant biographical and psychological reasons, hardly apparent to myself, shaped a life in large part after the representation afforded to me in motion pictures, or rather, certain movies.”
-Dudley Andrew

Film historiography is necessarily fraught and often overwhelmed by the preoccupation of its own function. Is film history a cultural history, chronicling how film as a cultural product represents and reflects its particular time and space? Is film history a history of economics, documenting the flows and counter-flows of transnational capital, and assessing the implications of a global industry? Is film history rooted in technology, articulating the developments that fostered the evolution of production, consumption, and distribution? Is film history an artistic history, exploring how form, aesthetics, and ideology combine to create visual images as artistic practice? Surely, film history is all of these things, and more. The multivariate function of film history, however, disservices itself when it places these factors, more often than not, in opposition. The form of film history, then, has long been isolated variations of histories and counter histories, remaining separate but ostensibly equal.

The constructions of film historiographies also bear the burden of the emotional investment of their authors. As represented in the Andrew epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, film historians are often motivated in part by their affective attachment to film, by their own filmic consciousness. Acknowledging the dual construction of the film historian as both subjective film viewer and objective historian is critical in articulating how film histories are constructed. As Vivian Sobchack explains:
Indeed, the practice and writing of film history are bound irreducibly to our current consciousness of ‘history’ and its representation in general – and that consciousness has been complicated by our own historically-altered sense of what ‘being-in-time’ in relation to ‘the past’ feels like and what it means in a culture of pervasive mass-mediation and ‘present’ second-hand experience."xxxiv

The temporal relationships Sobchack references here are critical to understanding how complicated film historiography can be. When film allows for the preservation of visual images, accessible at any future point, it brings the past into the present in a way that collapses the distance between the two, allowing film historians to experience the past within the present as its own type of contemporary moment. This particular feature is one that makes film history both unique and complicated. If, as Paolo Cherchi Usai posits, “[…] moving images arise out of intent to transform into an object whatever is forgettable and therefore doomed to decay and oblivion”xxxv then each film in and of itself is its own micro-history, encompassing the variables of culture, economics, production, technology, and art in one defined spatial and temporal moment. In this sense, film history is one that connects these micro-histories into macro-formations narrating the overarching ontology of film.

I dwell on these more theoretical concerns to contextualize my own attempts at film history contained within this chapter. Indeed, to lay bare the links between female authorship, theories of the archive, and disciplinarity—and the ways the career and legacy of Stephanie Rothman exemplifies these linkages—it is first necessary to articulate the particular filmic circumstances Rothman worked in, and how they live within the multiple iterations of the U.S. film industry. To that end, this chapter works to establish second wave exploitation film as a discrete filmic cycle within the historical context of exploitation film as a whole, as well as within the broader U.S. film industry.
To accomplish this, my historical construction will be guided not by a teleological process, but one which draws from media archaeology, which has emerged as a method embedded in an “[...] epistemologically alternative approach to the supremacy of media-historical narratives.”xxxvi This is a process that draws deeply from a variety of theoretical positions including theories of nonlinear time, gender, postcolonial theory, visual anthropology, and more.xxxvii The goal is to develop a methodology for creating historical narratives that acknowledge the constant interchange of time, where the past reaches forward to the present, the present speaks back to the past, and where constructions of both temporalities are understood to function as genealogies rather than chronologies. Although the primary trajectories of media archaeologists like Wolfgana Ernst and Frederick Kittler focus on the material ephemera of media culture², I am particularly interested in using Thomas Elsaesser’s formulation of film history as media archaeology as a compass while advancing my own historical narrative of second wave exploitation.

In this method, Elsaesser advocates for film history as media archaeology to work in two stages, historiographic and ontological, as a way to disrupt divisions between historical stages and integrate points of view formerly deemed disparate. It is worth quoting Elsaesser at length here:

The project of a ‘film history as media archaeology’ is thus intended to liberate from their straight-jackets all those re-positioning’s of linear chronology that operate with hard binaries between, for instance, early cinema and classical cinema, spectacle versus narrative, linear narrative versus interactivity. Instead, film history would acknowledge its peculiar status, and become a matter of tracing paths or laying tracks leading from the respective ‘now’ to different pasts, in modalities that accommodate continuities as well as ruptures. We would then be mapping media-convergence and self-differentiation not in terms of either a teleology or a search for origins, but in the form of forking paths of possibility, i.e. as a determined plurality and a permanent virtuality.xxxviii

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² See, for example, Kittler’s Gramophone, Film, Typewriter (1999) and Ernst’s Digital Memory and the Archive (2012).
This plurality—of time, of space, of potentiality, and of directionality—is how I am attempting to ground my narrative of second wave exploitation film; a discrete filmic cycle that simultaneously flows from, into, around, and through other cycles that existed before it, alongside it, and after it. Indeed, Elsaesser identifies the specific challenge of attempting this type of work as being able to locate “[…] a place that is not fixed in respect to either position or direction, one that permits space to coexist and time frames to overlap.” As existing neither in the margins of the filmic spectrum nor center, I believe second wave exploitation offers this possibility. The consequences of this approach are such that it allows for a consideration of second wave exploration as a discrete entity, rather than merely as a remnant of classical exploitation or a poor imitation of classical Hollywood filmmaking, as previously scholarship has classified it.

To explore the historical time and space of second wave exploitation film, I will first review the literature on classical exploitation, a critical progenitor. I will then move to the evolution of second wave exploitation, its intersections with classical exploitation as its past, the rise of the foreign film movement in the U.S. as its contemporary, and its overlap with the rise of the Hollywood blockbuster as its future. In tracing this course, I will attend to the various aspects of the production of film as an industrial art, including content, production, economics, distribution, and exhibition practices. Second wave exploitation is often reduced to analysis through these individual elements in partitioned understandings, and my goal here is to map their intersections, creating a holistic portrait of the cycle.

Perhaps antithetically, my narrative construction will involve periodization. I do this not to divide time concretely. Rather, periodization aids in highlighting when in time each of the phases addressed herein were both ascendant and descendent, in essence mapping their flows and
nodes of influence. By incorporating periodization within the spectrum of a past, present, and future of second wave exploitation time can be used to signpost—rather than strictly divide—phases of development and evolution.

**The World of Classical Exploitation (1919-1959)**

Like all film, and indeed most cultural products, exploitation films did not arise in a vacuum. They were significantly influenced, through all phases of their development, by multiple factors: carnivals and burlesque, the prefilmic visuality of World’s Fair exhibits, social and political movements, and of course early film production, both fiction and non-fiction. Given this myriad of influences, as well as the numerous tributary routes that exploitation film followed through in its development, it is critical to note that the term cannot be constructed as a monolithic category across space and time. While many of the practices around production, distribution, and exhibition remained consistent over its evolution, there have been significant changes in content, function, style, audiences, and role in the industrial landscape as exploitation has shifted from phase to phase.

Specifically because the term maintains simultaneous consistencies and inconsistences, it is best understood as a series of connective phases rather than in a single, unified totality. As such, this section focuses on what Eric Schaefer defines as classical exploitation, a phase of exploitation film development he dates to 1919-1959, and which produced a number of practices and philosophies germane to future generations of exploitation. Schaefer’s work on classical exploitation cannot be underestimated. His 1999 book *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* was a watershed moment in the study of the exploitation paradigm and its products. Previous scholarly work on exploitation film was primarily focused
on its status as cinematic abnormality, one that was criticized and derided. Working
historiographically, Schaefer created a history that attempted—if not always successfully—to
move past the aesthetics and taste judgments that had previously plagued the minimal study of
exploitation film and constructed a history that worked to locate the exploitation paradigm in
time, space, and industry.

*Independence, Education, and Reform*

Classical exploitation operated as a type of shadow industry to classic Hollywood. The
films it produced were first and foremost identifiable by their focus on socially taboo content, the
major areas of which included “[…] sex, and sex hygiene, prostitution and vice, drug use, nudity,
and any other subjects considered at the time to be in bad taste.” In the late nineteen-teens and
nineteen twenties, when the growing Hollywood industry was coalescing into a vertically
integrated system where a handful of studios controlled all aspects of production, distribution,
and exhibition, exploitation films were decidedly independent. The term independence here is
being used in line with Matthew Bernstein’s general concept, which defines independent
filmmaking as any filmmaking that is not performed under the auspices of any major studio of a
given period. This type of independence positioned classical exploration producers parallel
their Hollywood counterparts.

The aura of independence surrounding classical exploitation films associates them closely
with what was known as “Poverty Row” studios. Poverty Row was a term inaugurated under the

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4 Vertical integration was a critical component in the stabilization and economic growth of the classical Hollywood studio system, which enabled the dominance of the Hollywood industrial complex both at home and abroad. The term studio system itself refers to the practice of a small number of Hollywood studios who controlled their own filmmaking with long term contracts for creative professionals, and dominated exhibition through ownership of distribution companies and theaters themselves. As such, these studios effectively controlled all aspects of mainstream filmmaking during what is known as the “Golden Age” of Hollywood (approximately 1927-1949). The primary studios during this time are commonly referred to as The Big Five (Fox, Paramount, Lowes/MGM, RKO and Warner Brothers) and the Little Three (Universal, Columbia, and United Artists).
studio system to refer to smaller independent studios that primarily made B-pictures. Yannis Tzioumakis notes:

These companies operated completely “independently” to the majors, producing their films in their own studios (or in hired soundstages), releasing them through self-owned distribution networks (or through the states rights system) and exhibiting them in small independent theater located mainly in the neighborhoods of big cities, small town and rural areas. These were lower tier studios that often closed and opened their doors with fair frequency. The freedom from the high overhead of the major studios allowed Poverty Row to produce some of the more risk-taking and cutting edge films of the time. Notable entries on this list include Republic’s The Quiet Man (John Ford, 1952) and Producers Releasing Corporation’s Detour (Edgar Ulmer, 1945).

Films produced in Poverty Row are primarily known as B-movies. B-movies were a staple of the classical Hollywood studio system in the 1930s and ‘40s. They were low budget films made for mainstream audiences, usually along genre lines; westerns and gangster films were particularly prevalent. They served a critical function, especially during the United States’ Great Depression, when moviegoers demanded a substantive return on their ticket purchase. In order to retain audiences during severe financial crisis, theatrical programming packaged multiple materials per screening. This often included a newsreel, a cartoon, the feature film, and a supporting film. In this way, the Depression gave rise to the double feature (often also called the double bill). Double bills became immensely popular; by 1935 85% of U.S. theaters offered them. The demand for double bills strained mainstream studios’ production schedules. More and more Poverty Row companies “[…] were formed to exploit those buoyant conditions and,  

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5 Some of the most successful and well known include Monogram Pictures, Republic Pictures, Grand National, and Producers Releasing Corporation.
along with the studios’ B units, supplied theaters with cheaply made films, mainly for the bottom half of double bills.”

B-movies earned their name because they appeared second to the Hollywood feature on the bill, although the name would eventually come to be closely associated with budget size rather than exhibition placement. Importantly, although the independent Poverty Row studios largely made B-movies, major studios also produced B-films. B-movies as a material product, weave through the spectrum of film production, connecting the parallel production paradigms of classical exploitation and classical Hollywood through the absolute independence of Poverty Row. 6

Although closely associated with Poverty Row, classical exploitation films were rarely—if ever—used as B-films, primarily because their hyper-focus on spectacle rendered them undesirable for the majority of exhibitors. One can perhaps think of classical exploitation films as those that were produced at the lower end of the Poverty Row production paradigm. Like Poverty Row films, classical exploitation was hallmarked by their shoestring budgets, and the corresponding visual aesthetic associated with small production funds. Independence heavily informed all aspects of the life of the films including distribution, exhibition in theaters which were not associated with the major Hollywood studios, the creation of a small number of prints, a lack of recognizable or “name” actors, and alternate systems of financing.

Perhaps nothing was more of a defining aspect of classical exploitation films than their content, something that distinguishes them from the wide rubric of B-films, particularly the studio produced B’s. In part, this content was heavily influenced by the mood of social

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6 As with many aspects of the classical Hollywood studio system, the Paramount decision in 1948 had a significant impact on B-movie production at the majors. With the forced obsolescence of vertical integration the majors lost very significant revenue streams. As a result, the amount of product that they put into the market was severely constrained—the money necessary to continue high volume production was simply not available anymore. In this schema, B-films were one of the first products to be laid by the wayside by studios.
progressivism in the United States during the early part of the twentieth century. The focus on reform, and the use of the burgeoning cinema to help foster those reforms, became the thrust behind many “social problem films” of the time. As Kay Sloan describes,

The social problem film originated in primitive melodramas made by filmmakers who actively sought social reforms during the Progressive era. [...] These films portrayed realistic characters who actually animated the social and political dilemmas of the Progressive Era and turned them into fairy tales of the day for popular consumption.xlvii Film such as Traffic in Souls (George Loane Tucker, 1913), which dealt with prostitution/white slavery, and Where Are My Children? (Lois Weber, 1916), focused around abortion, are examples of the genre. As a function of reform, these films had an aim to educate, which was taken up—at least in name—by classical exploitation. As Schaefer narrates, “Exploitation films, in turn, grew out of that reform impulse in which investigation and exposure of social ills were necessary to bring about the educational process required to achieve reform. The two of the hallmarks of progressivism—exposé and education—became foundational to the exploitation film.”xlvii

Building on the function of exposé and education gave classical exploitation films the rationale they needed to frame their films around shocking and scandalizing footage, simultaneously providing them with a nice marketplace. Education, to be sure, was not the aim of these films. Rather, producers used the films purported education functions to stay on the right side of obscenity law, as well as marketing tacit to draw in audiences. Notoriously, the Kroger Babb produced Mom and Dad (William Beaudine, 1945), a sex hygiene film, showed graphic footage of the results of venereal disease and the live birth of a baby, all in the name of ‘educating’ the public about the necessity for sex education amongst young adults.7 Mom and Dad screenings were often accompanied by an in-person lecture from a sexual health ‘expert,’

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7 Babb is known as one of the original “40 Thieves of Exploitation,” a name given to the group of primary classical exploitation producers/directors. Others in this group include Dwain Esper, David Friedman, S.S. Millard, and Louis and Dan Sonny.
usually an actor hired by Babb or the theater. The inclusion of the lecture legitimized the film’s claim to education through a connection to early non-fiction film exhibition, particularly ethnographic film, whose screenings would often be accompanied by an expert address.

_Sharck and Spectacle_

Narratives of classical exploitation films were built around shocking, graphic, and forbidden footage. Thus, classical exploitation film, with its focus on the spectacle, shares an important link with early cinema’s focus on novelty, or what Tom Gunning terms the “cinema of attractions.” Gunning’s cinema of attractions is one that “[…] directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in and of itself.” The cinema of attractions was particularly prevalent during cinema’s earliest days (approximately 1895-1904) and is best exemplified by the popularity of trick films, most notably those of George Méliès.

The gradual shift from attraction to narrativization began in approximately 1905, and by the early nineteen-teens, in Schaeffer’s periodization, the classical exploitation was beginning to formalize, the transition to feature filmmaking was in full swing. Always industrially liminally existent, exploitation films constructed themselves as a hybrid of attraction and feature, incorporating the narrative function of a feature around the spectacle at the core of the cinema of attractions. This focus on spectacle had a direct, and disruptive, impact on the style and narrative cohesion of exploitation films, positioning them in diametrical contrast to classical Hollywood films and traditional documentaries. While spectacle still existed in Hollywood films, such as musicals, its role was to advance the narrative and function within the filmic diagesis. In exploitation films, narrative was a pretense for spectacle, and more often than not spectacle would seep past narrative constraints, distorting the mise-en-scène and overall diachronic world of the film. This function of spectacle was such a tremendous audience draw and configured
exploitation films as drastically different from conventional Hollywood fare. As a result, there was little trouble differentiating the two filmic and aesthetic styles. For exploitation films, then, the “[…] reliance on spectacle as organizing principle forged their squalid style and resulted in an experience for the spectator that can best be described as delirium […] exploitation films could be ‘bad’ because there was no compelling need for them to be ‘good.’”

The emphasis on spectacle as an organizing force undergirded content, as well as production, advertising and exhibition; yet another way classical exploitation films differentiated themselves from Hollywood products. Counter to the rigid production mechanics of the studio system, exploitation producers worked under much looser conditions. They eschewed large staffs or long-term worker contracts; financing derived from earlier profits and other pre-advanced methods; they diligently avoided union crews and their associated fees; and the division of labor on the set was fluid, enabling as many job functions to be handled by as few people possible.ii

Shooting times were minimal, shot patterns that required complicated editing were avoided, and camera movement was basic. Schaefer highlights several production strategies that exploitation producers used to stretch their meager budgets as far as they could including: using stock footage, reusing characters, retitling films for multiple releases, using footage from older films in newer ones, padding films with quasi-sensical footage to give pretense to spectacle, producing “hot” and “cold” versions of films (the inclusion or exclusion of salacious material depending on the censorship laws of the exhibition location), and utilizing the “square-up.”iii The square-up was a statement at the beginning of the film that would forewarn audiences that they were about to see shocking material, and that they were being shown that material to help promote ‘education’ around the particular problem the film addressed. The square-up served several functions: it allowed films to circumvent many censorship laws, it instilled a sense of
excitement and titillation in the audience about what they were going to see, and it gave the viewing public an acceptable rationalization for seeing the film. According to David Friedman, a classical exploitation pioneer, the square-up could also function differently: the exhibitor would cut the offensive material from the film to avoid altercations with the police, show the film, and once the law had left for the night, show just the clipped material in order to “get square” with the audience that wanted the spectacle they were promised.

Exploitation films were powered by the audience’s desire to see exactly what they were told they shouldn’t. The expectation of spectacle was high for audiences, in large part because of the aggressive and hyperbolic ways in which the films were advertised. There were seemingly no limits to the advertising tactics of exploitation film, schemes that can trace their influence back to the ballyhoo of carnivals, vaudeville, and burlesque. Scandalous and salacious advertisements, films labeled as “adults only,” gimmicks and giveaways, advance men traveling town to town to hype the films, stressing the “necessary education” the audiences gained from the films, limited engagements, these strategies and more were used to lure audiences in. Of course, classical exploitation advertisements spotlighted “[…] not necessarily what the films actually showed on screen, but what the audience ‘might’ see if they paid for a ticket.”

In large part the advertising for classical exploitation films was driven by distributors, especially under the states rights distribution paradigm, one of the primary modes used by classical exploitation films. The states rights system is one that divided the country into a number of different territories, and within those territories operated distribution companies or exchanges. Companies bought the distribution rights of a film from the producers, usually for a period of three to five years. The distributor was then responsible for advertising the film, booking it into theaters, generating tickets sales, etc., in whatever manner they deemed necessary and
appropriate, or perhaps inappropriate in the case of exploitation films. The system required no upfront investment by the producer and allowed the distributor a percentage of the film’s grosses. While the producer would provide the basic outline of advertising materials, campaigns in different markets were primarily at the discretion of the distribution companies.

A less common alternate distribution method was roadshowing. Roadshowing was more similar to creating a limited run “event” than a long-playing engagement. These events could run the gamut from sophisticated—films with orchestras, printed programs, reserved seating—to the quick and high volume with a practice known as four-walling, which was when a producer would rent an entire theater for a contracted number of days, show the film continuously, and keep one hundred percent of the box office. Regardless of the technique used, these distribution practices were decidedly outside of the vertically integrated studio system. As a result, classical exploitation films played in independent theaters of all styles and levels of “respectability,” and were therefore heavily screened not just in cities, but also in smaller town and rural markets that did not have access to Hollywood-affiliated theaters. Their wide reach, combined with the emphasis on spectacle and sensational advertising techniques almost guaranteed an audience wherever the films played.

As classical exploitation film moved into the 1950s, the landscape began to slowly shift under its feet. The Paramount Decision in 1948 threw Hollywood into turmoil. Pioneering...
exploiters were passing away, censorship regulations were becoming slightly more lax, allowing Hollywood and B-pictures to creep into the content areas formally the province of the exploitation industry, the demographics of audiences were changing, and the rise of television began siphoning off members of the moviegoing public. In this fluctuating environment the once formulaic world of the classical exploitation industry and film was mutable and changing quickly. By the end the decade the classical period would be over, giving way to a new generation of exploitation film, one which would move closer to the mainstream than ever before, and leave an indelible mark on Hollywood for years to come.

**Riding the Second Wave of Exploitation (1960-1980)**

The 1950s is a decade of overlapping transition for the exploitation paradigm, a space where classical exploitation seeped into new audiences, new exhibition spaces, and new content areas to eventually emerge transformed as second wave exploitation. Schaeffer has little regard for exploitation films past 1959, and uses them as a straw man of sorts through which he authorizes and legitimizes classical exploitation as “outsider” cinema. Reflecting on film produced under the exploitation paradigm in the 1950s he notes:

> Though their budgets may have been closer to those of the classical exploitation films, their stories of juvenile delinquency, hot cars, and rock music were generally ever tamer than increasingly controversial movies released by the majors. For audiences, critics, and the film industry itself, it was becoming more difficult to make the distinction between exploitation and mainstream product that had been so clear as little as a decade earlier.iv

Rather than seeing the transformation in exploitation films during this time period as a break, I believe it is crucial to map the intersecting vectors that fostered this as a development of the exploitation paradigm. Therefore, an exploration for the transitions taking place in the 1950s and 1960s—understood as a spectrum of change—can work to contextualize how second wave exploitation is understood.

*Rock 'n Roll in the Passion Pits*
Popular cultural memory refers to the 1950s as the decade when the teenager was ‘discovered’ in the U.S. Less easily recalled is that researchers across multiple disciplines had been developing the concept of adolescence as a distinct phase in human physical, social, and cognitive development since the early 1900s. It wasn’t, however, until the 1950s when the idea of the teenager as the incarnation of adolescence reached contemporary everyday usage, promoted in large part by the growing counterculture teenagers were participating in, including embracing the new ‘fad’ of rock and roll. Thanks to a growing population—the product of a strong economy, the suburbanization of the United States, and the increasing emphasis on consumable luxury goods such as cars and television—the teenager became the target for retail and entertainment industries.

The teenager was not the only intrusive cultural force. The popularization of the television as a necessary home amenity grew with the suburbs, and the comfort and accessibility that came with in-home entertainment began to affect the number of people going to the movies in the 1950s and ‘60s. As Paul Monaco notes:

A high point for movie attendance in the United States was reached in 1946 when an average of 90 million admissions to movie theaters were recorded weekly, constituting a record 75 percent of the estimated ‘potential audience’ nationwide. During the next ten year, however, average weekly attendance dropped rapidly: in 1956 figures set weekly movie theater audience figures at 46 million; four years later, in 1960, that figure was 40 million; attendance plummeted to 20 million by 1970.

The cinema’s new teenager demographic were suburban kids with new found freedoms—facilitated by easy transportation and disposable cash—motivated towards leisure time and entertainment, preferably away from home and the prying eyes of their parents. Second wave exploitation films would come to be built, in large part, by catering to this audience.

The term exploitation, always fluid and dynamic, would metamorphose in the 1950s and beyond. Moving past the classical exploitation traits of narrative as the Trojan horse of spectacle,
exploitation film in the 1950s became the teenpic, which would evolve into second wave exploitation in the 1960s and 1970s. Teenpics of the 1950s were cheaply made films with topical or faddist bents meant to appeal strictly to the teenager market. These were films made within previously established genres, like science fiction and horror, or they were used to develop new generic iterations that spoke to topics contemporaneously popular with teenagers. As Barbara Brickman narrates:

As it develops from the mid-1950s to the early-1960s, the teenpic, often B-quality fare from independent producers […], exploited a number of topics or sensational issues. Hundreds of film appeared, with topics ranging from juvenile delinquency and rock n’ roll to teenage monsters and drag racing, which turned generic cycles of their own. Made for very little money, these films were produced quickly in order to capitalize on current situations and events […].

Leading the way in this transformation was the independent production and distribution company American International Pictures (AIP). AIP was formed in 1954 by Jim Nicholson and Samuel Arkoff, and was originally founded as the releasing corporation American Releasing Corporation. Over the years, AIP would go on to be one of the most successful independent production and distribution companies, based primarily on their takeover of the second wave exploitation film market of the 1950s and 1960s. Their first distributed film was The Fast and the Furious (John Ireland and Edward Sampson, 1954), produced by a man named Roger Corman. The film marked not only their foray into the market, but the company’s first deal with Corman, a partnership that would go on to last over the course of fifteen plus years and thirty-three films. Corman, now known as the “King of the Bs,” was a graduate of Stanford University’s engineering program who began working in the film industry after leaving the

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9 Assigning creative credit for any film involving Roger Corman is often difficult. Corman himself has an overriding tendency to call any movies he has ever come into contact with, even in the slightest capacity, “his” movie. As actual directors often came and went on Corman-related project fairly quickly, there are cases where screen credits, filmmaking records, and Corman’s own narrative tell radically different stories. Such is the case with the directorial credit on The Fast and the Furious.
Navy. Quickly disillusioned with the low-level studio jobs, he began producing and directing his own pictures. His contract with AIP to distribute *The Fast and the Furious* was a three-picture deal and he continued working with Arkoff and Nicholson until 1969 when, irate with cuts made to a film without his approval, he left to found his own company, New World Pictures.\[^{xi}\] Although Corman was certainly not the only person making second wave exploitation films, he was far and away the most successful, and has come to represent this phase of the exploitation industry.

Corman quickly developed a reputation for working cheaply and quickly, producing films that were financed on the profits of previous releases, much like the classical exploitation producers. His primary goal when producing films was to make them as economically efficient as possible, in order to reduce waste and maximize profits. His crews lacked a division of labor almost completely, actors would play more than one role in any given films, rehearsals were unheard of, most anyone who could point a camera could direct, nothing was allowed to run over schedule or budget, and above all, Corman retained ultimate control.

As a result of his utilization of untested actors and professionals, Corman films became a type of training center for a new crop of actors, directors, writers, and much more. What has gone on to be known as the “Corman School” produced some of the Hollywood insiders who would radically reshape the industry in the 1970s and beyond, including Robert Towne, Jack Nicholson, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich, Dennis Hopper, Martin Scorsese, Jonathan Demme, Joe Dante, Jonathan Kaplan, Allan Arkush, John Sayles, James Cameron, and Gale Ann Hurd.

The films Corman and company were producing were a different type of exploitation film from their predecessors, in content, style, and certainly in terms of their positionality within
the cinematic landscape. Opposed to classical exploitation, second wave exploitation was less concerned with individual moments of complete spectacle than it was with integrating smaller moments of spectacle into a larger, more formal narrative. It worked to move spectacle away from uniqueness and toward a commonplace filmic existence, thus reducing its very nature as pure spectacle. In this way, second wave exploitation films adhered more closely to the standard Hollywood norms of narrative and form—and as Monaco, Neale, and others note—can be understood as prefiguring contemporary high-concept blockbuster films and their emphasis on the totality of spectacle. That being said, these were still films primarily constructed around hastily written scripts, marginally talented actors, clumsy first-time directors, and above all, low budgets, similarities that tied them back to the tradition of classical exploitations. For Corman, exploitation films were:

[…] about something wild with a great deal of action, a little sex, and possibly some sort of strange gimmick; they often came out of the day’s headlines […] the whole idea was to tell an interesting, visually entertaining story that would draw young people to the drive-ins and hardtop cinemas, and not take yourself too seriously along the way.”

The education and exposé component from the classical era was dropped—no longer truly necessary to satisfy increasingly lax censorship boards or audiences—and replaced with an emphasis on frivolity and the ambiguous idea of ‘fun.’ Other differences between classical and second wave exploitation included larger budgets in the second wave (although nowhere near Hollywood size), different audience targets (broad vs. niche), and more conventional stories during the second wave.

One of the major differences between classical and second wave exploitation were their exhibitive spaces. In the 1950s and 1960s, second wave exploitation films became heavily associated with the drive-in theater, a phenomenon that originated in the early 1930s and achieved major popularity in the 1950s. As Randell Clark describes:
The first drive-in theaters opened in New Jersey in 1933, but did not enjoy any success. By 1941, there were fewer than 100 drive-ins in the country. But following World War II, when gas rationing ended and cars became more available, the drive-ins’ popularity increased dramatically. There were 400 such theaters in 1947 and 500 by 1948. That number doubled in a year, and by 1950 there were 2,200 drive-ins in America, with 7 million of the 60 million weekly moviegoers regularly attending drive-in theaters. There were 3,580 drive-ins by 1951, and by 1956 there were 5,000 drive-ins in the United States.\textsuperscript{lxiv} Richard Hollingshead, the man who created and patented the drive-in theater, visualized that they would be spaces that catered to families and individuals for whom hardtop theater seats posed accessibility issues: for example the disabled and the elderly, and those customers in rural areas who were cinematically underserved.\textsuperscript{lxv} However, the 1950s and ‘60s would see drive-ins primarily associated with the suburban teenager subculture and market. As a result, the idea of exactly who comprised the moviegoing public would shift significantly away from families and toward the fifteen to twenty-five demographic.\textsuperscript{lxvi} Drive-ins would court the teenager audience with spaces for dance floors, per car load (rather than per person) admission prices, late night double features, and plenty of dark spaces that helped to earn drive-ins a reputation as “passion pits.”\textsuperscript{lxvii} Second wave exploitation films would create their filmic content to cater to this group, as evidenced by such titles as \textit{Sorority Girl} (Corman, 1957), \textit{Motorcycle Gang} (Edward L. Cahn, 1957), \textit{I Was a Teenage Werewolf} (Gene Fowler, Jr., 1957) and \textit{The Diary of a High School Bride} (Burt Topper, 1959).

Drive-ins could be counted on to consistently book exploitation films. Reaching back to the double-bill tradition began in theaters in the 1930s, drive-ins provided a package of material for the price of admission. Double features were standard, built on the rationale that the longer the customer remained inside the theater park, the more concessions—the primary revenue source for theaters—they would purchase.\textsuperscript{lxviii} Once again, exploitation films became a valuable and affordable resource for filling screen time. Interestingly, drive-in double features were
usually not ranked in term of A and B pictures as they had been earlier in hardtop theaters. Rather, drive-ins tended to screen films on equal billing,\textsuperscript{lxix} which served as a micro repositioning of films produced under the exploitation paradigm within the mainstream cinematic landscape.

As audiences and exhibition spaces evolved in significant ways from the classical to the second wave era, tried and true methods of distribution remained. The stalwart states rights system continued as the most effective distributive practice, although contractual standards and terms between exchanges and producers would necessarily evolve with the market. Roadshowing became increasingly antiquated in favor of saturation booking, the practice of booking a film to open simultaneously in as many theaters as possible. This was a critical second wave exploitation distribution strategy, as it allowed films to quickly recoup their costs, generate profit, and avoid declining audiences for subsequent showings based on negative word of mouth.

The aggressive and lurid sensationalism attached to marketing campaigns would remain consistent across phases, and would play an increasingly active role in shaping second wave exploitation. Progressively, exploitation productions would concoct film titles and advertisements \textit{before} the movie itself, and then attempt to structure the film to fit into the campaign.\textsuperscript{lxx} More often than not the finished product and the campaign did not match; occasionally they came close. For producers the idea was to get people into the theaters; fulfilling audience expectations would be nice, but not necessary. After all, they had already paid their admission.

The push toward the teenager market as the regular and desirable demographic would be solidified in the 1960s. As movie attendance steadily dropped, especially in the once solid demographic of middle-aged women, the remaining moviegoing public would be represented by a constituency that was distinctly younger and progressively male.\textsuperscript{lxii} With this audience, second
wave exploitation films continued to flourish. Keeping with a faddist and topical bent, the 1960s saw exploitation films in new cycles such as beach movies like William Asher’s 1965 films *Beach Blanket Bingo* and *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*; motorcycle gang movies like *The Wild Angles* (Roger Corman, 1966) and *The Born Losers* (Tom Laughlin, 1967); and psychedelic movies like *The Trip* (Roger Corman, 1967) and *Riot on Sunset Strip* (Arthur Dreifuss, 1967).

As the 1960s wore on, and the teenager subculture turned into the hippie counterculture, second wave exploitation films increasingly became a place where the cultural zeitgeist was expressed and beamed out to the masses. More and more, significant social issues were creeping into exploitation films. After the phenomenon that was *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969), a film born from the exploitation industry but distributed by Columbia Pictures, Hollywood could not afford to marginalize the exploitation industry. Here again, the dynamic and flexible understanding of “exploitation” is highlighted. As Paul Monaco describes:

[…] the low-budget films of Roger Corman, producer/director at American International Pictures, best defines the directions in which feature films were going after the mid 1960s. Adolescents and young adults who had been raised in the American suburbs of the late 1950s and early 1960s favored eclectic and slightly rebellious films, ranging from horror to softcore sex movies to action-adventure films populated with characters whose screen presence invariable expressed some measure of alienation and existential angst.\textsuperscript{xxii} These changes wrought another evolution of the exploitation label: films were branded through a portmanteau algorithm which affixed a prefix to the word exploitation that served to describe exactly what aspect of culture or identity the film was focused on ‘exploiting.’ General second wave exploitations film turned into sexploitation, hippiesploitation, Blaxsploitation, nunsploitation, hicksploitation, and many, many more. This trend, and its implications, would come to define second wave exploitation films in the 1970s.

*Capturing Cultural Change*

The United States in the 1970s, a decade which bore the positive and negative fallout of the 1960s, faced massive social change: the normalization of birth control pills; the upward
growth in size of the anti-war movement and its correlative downward growth in effectiveness; the full-scale escalation of the conflict in Vietnam; the Stonewall riots and the beginning of the Gay Rights movement; the governmental suppression of Civil Rights groups and their leaders, including the indictment of Angela Davis; Watergate and Nixon’s impeachment; second wave feminism; the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, and much more.\textsuperscript{lxiii} These examples show a decade swirling around multiplicities of identities, and a decade where “[…] Discrete codifications of identity and of cultural energies came to dominate our lives.”\textsuperscript{lixiv} These codifications of identity became glaringly apparent in the exploitations films of the 1970s, whose narratives became increasingly focused the commodification of race, sex, and violence, almost to the exclusion of any other narrative organizational device. Exemplifying this, three types of exploitation film that would come to define the decade: the black action film (or Blaxsploitation film), the martial arts film, and the feature-length hardcore pornography film.\textsuperscript{lxiv} Martial arts films were primarily dubbed imports produced by the Shaw Brothers and other Hong Kong producers, which would appear both in theaters and on television. Blaxploitation, however, was reserved primarily for the theater going audience.

Blaxploitation films relied on “[…] historic and contemporary race, gender, and sexual mythologies to affect exhilarating sensationalist racial dramas.”\textsuperscript{lxv} They featured primarily, if not exclusively, Black casts; often took place in cities; positioned contemporary clothes, music, and language as part of the necessary cultural life of Black Americans; contained significant amounts of nudity, sex, drugs, and violence; espoused ideas and concerns germane to the Black population; and importantly, allowed Black men and women to play heroes. Independent producers spearheaded Blaxploitaion films, and early entries into the cycle include *Sweet*

\textsuperscript{10} The hardcore pornography film is a special case. Although it is not an exploitation film per se, it did have its roots in sexploitation films, and as such is connected to the history of exploitation film. It has however, had a separate and distinct trajectory and as such will not be considered at length in this work.
*Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971), *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Ivan Dixon, 1973), and *Black Mama White Mama* (Eddie Romero, 1973). Critically, a significant number of the early independent Blaxploitation films would be direct by Black filmmakers. Blaxploitation films had, and still have, a difficult reputation both within the Black community and the larger moviegoing public. For some they are a “[…] hotly contested site over the proliferation of negative black imagery” and for others they can provide a fantastical space for “[…] the reversal of the racial and/or patriarchal status quo, tapping into the social reality of racial oppression and racial tensions.”

Regardless of one’s position on the politics of Blaxploitation films, they exemplify the significant changes in content of second wave exploitation films in the 1970s, and the types of populations they were showcasing. Historically marginalized groups were beginning to find their voice in exploitation films and changing the types of narratives—and filmmakers—active within the exploitation paradigm. Women, like Black Americans, had been primarily relegated to one-dimensional stereotypes in second wave exploitation. However, the 1970s saw the apex of a the sexploitation filmic cycle, which contrary to assumption, helped to metamorphose and complicate the position of gendered and sexualized subjects in second wave exploitation by providing alternate representation of spectacularized female bodies and sexual agency, providing gradations of difference in representation.

Sexploitation films are heavily invested in the spectacularization of women’s lives and bodies, and presented this spectacle in simultaneously celebratory and uneasy ways. Produced primarily in New York and Los Angeles, exploitation films were a short-lived phenomenon appearing primarily in the 1960s and 1970 identifiable by their “[…] crude mise-en-scène, sensationalist narratives of sex and its discontents, and aggressively lurid marketing
strategies.” Women and their stories were the stars of sexploitation films. Narratives often concerned bored or unfulfilled women, usually housewives, who ventured into sexual curiosity and experimentation, including sex work, and were then brutalized by men as an extension of patriarchal punishment. While nudity was presented on screen, explicit sex always took place outside of the frame. However, the focus on women’s motivations, desires and bodies squarely positioned the defining factor of sexploitation films to be “[…] ‘problem’ of female erotic agency and subjectivity […].”

Sexploitation films were the evolution of prior attempts to integrate visible nudity and sex, rather than just their suggestion, on screen. Early ventures include the nudist camp film and the nudie cutie, both relatively tame exhibitionist fare. As these films grew in popularity, producers and directors yearned to increase their salacious content. Restrained by censorship regulations, more explicit nudity and sex was not an option. As a result, the films began progressively adding violence, transforming into “roughies” or “kinkies.” Roughies, inaugurated with Russ Meyer’s Lorna (1964), were equal parts sex and sexualized violence. Kinkies increased sensationalism by adding “perversions” into the formula. Central to the increase in violence was their: the modern city. Although drive-in theaters had boomed in the 1950s by the 1970s they were in steady decline. By the late 1960s and 1970s, the drive-ins as spaces of second wave exploitation exhibition were being replaced by urban grindhouse theaters: once

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11 Nudist camp films began in the 1950s and are true to name: some thin plot machinations would force the protagonist(s) to seek refuge in a nudist camp environment, and film would spend most of its time lingering over the bodies of nude men and women (primarily women) going through their daily activities in the nude. There was no suggestion of sex in these films, and no frontal nudity was shown below the waist. From the nudist camp film developed nudie cuties, films that moved nudity into the broader world. The first of these films is widely considered to be Russ Meyer’s The Immoral Mr. Teas (1959), which follows the eponymous character as he uses his x-ray vision to see under the clothes of women.

12 Although at this time censorship regulations were being actively challenged in the courts, and the challenges were by and large successful, it would not be until later in the decade that these restricts truly began to fall away.
mainstream theaters rapidly declining due to changes in the population and demographics of their locations, and screening taboo content in a last-ditch effort to keep their doors open.

Sexploitation film’s connection with urban space was deeper than just their exhibitive space in grindhouse theaters; city space became integral to their construction. Films were set in anonymous apartment buildings and showcased exteriors easily recognizable as New York City, and—as in Blaxspolitation films—the idea of ‘the city’ would come to play a critical role in character definition. The women of sexploitation films were those urbanites who had succumbed to the temptations and degradations of the city, rewarded for bucking traditional gendered roles with violence, debasement, rape, and often, death. The link with New York City, and in particular the seedy and dangerous spatiality of Times Square in the 1960s and 1970s, the literal and mythical center of the grindhouse exhibition circuit, would be endemically connected with sexploitation in terms of setting and exhibition.

Linking sexploitation to urbanity and the city can elucidate the ways in which female bodies were positioned in sexploitation films, and how the films themselves attempted to deal with the “problems” of female sexual desire and agency. Elena Gorfinkel contextualizes:

As a cinema inordinately preoccupied with the dangers posed by the sexual autonomy of women, particularly as they became unbound from domestic and reproductive space in a post-Kinsey era of the birth control pill, Helen Gurley Brown’s ‘single girl,’ and the stirrings of sexual liberation, sexploitation often capitalized on the trope of the small-town girl in the big metropolis and, in a moralistic, leering register, would entail the degradations that would inevitable befall the naive and the unwitting when caught in the grip of the ‘naked city.’

Superficially, these films may seem aggressively negative toward women as gendered and sexual being. However, sexploitation was not afraid to promise pleasure in spectacularized female bodies and then forcefully deny that pleasure to the audience, while simultaneously indicting their initial desires. The films of director Doris Wishman exemplify this.
Wishman got her start directing nudist camp films and nudie cuties in the 1950s and moved into roughies with *The Sex Perils of Paulette* in 1965. Although her story lines are standard for sexploitation films, her filming style is idiosyncratic and allowed her to rework “[...] the form to focus on modern femininity, even recasting the spectacle of the semi-nude women for female eyes.” Wishman’s films are exceptional not for what she shows on, but what she denies, screen space, hinting at an intentionally complicated politics of looking:

Unlike most exploitation genres, though, sexploitation almost exclusively depends on the compulsive, sexualized look, indicating that Wishman’s deflection of this gaze could be her key feminist impulse. But things are not so simple: she also privileges the female gaze and the feminine spectator, aligning the feminine look with the ability to move from detail to totality, the ability to integrate both in interpretation.

Wishman’s roughies are defined by bizarre cuts and visual juxtapositions that fly in the face of narrative continuity and common sense. As two women begin to make dispassionate love, she will cut away to a hairbrush on a dresser top, or an overflowing ashtray on a bedside table, filling the frame with the sad, ordinary, and mundane rather than with the spectacle of female bodies and sexuality. Her disjointed editing disrupts non-sex scenes as well. A couple’s conversation in a park, meant to convey plot, is interrupted with a cutaway to a squirrel as the conversation fades into the background. Wishman’s editing dares her audiences to be interested in the films she is making, and if their interest is sustained, she punishes them for it by denying them the climax of on-screen sex later. Wishman films become a masochistic cinema of unfulfilled desires, populated by bored and uninterested women who refuse to glamorize themselves or their sexuality for the audience.

Like fellow sexploiter Russ Meyer, Wishman focused compulsively on breasts, but positioned as sites of female power and of inverted desire rather than as fetish objects. Moya Luckett has discussed Wishman’s centering of power in breasts as a way in which she invites a
female gaze, capitalizing on women’s “[...] investments in looking at female bodies.” Indeed, women and couples were a viable sexploitation audience market by the late 1960s. Alternatively, Rebekah McKendry has examined two of Wishman’s later films—*Deadly Weapons* (1974) and *Double Agent 73* (1974)—starring Chesty Morgan. Morgan, an exotic dancer, boasted 73-inch natural breasts. The films Wishman made with Morgan centered on her enormous breasts as supposed sites of pleasure. However, as McKendry chronicles, her breasts are so large that they move from erotic to freakish. This transformation reinforced in the ways Morgan touches her breasts in the films, often massaging them not as erotic function, but to relive the pain they cause. Wishman has hyperemphasized the breast past eroticism, past the compulsion to look, and into a realm where the viewers actively want to look away. This inversion of pleasure—like her challenging editing style—turns around audience desire, and repositions the female body in sexploitation films as a much more complicated entity.

Sexploitation and Blaxploitation films alike signaled a new type of cultural narrative announcing itself in second wave exploitation in the 1970s. Indicators of rapidly changing sociocultural contexts, these shifts were felt across the broader cinematic landscape, reverberating through the mainstream Hollywood industrial complex. It would not be long, then, until Hollywood began to look at second wave exploitation seriously, particularly as an opportunity for economic cooptation and gain.

*Second Wave Exploitation as Transitory Industrial Space*

As previously noted, scholars like Schaefer and others have characterized classical exploitation as a necessarily separate industry from classical Hollywood. However, as I gestured to earlier, second wave exploitation had a much more fluid history of integration with the mainstream industry. Thus, I understand second wave exploitation to serve as an open and fluid transitory industrial space. This fluidity fostered an evolution of style, content, and distribution
strategies that positioned second wave exploitation films as a liminal space between the ‘outsider’ status of classical exploitation and mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Transitory multiplicities existed between the second wave exploitation industry and its mainstream Hollywood counterpart in various ways. Critically, artistic and creative professionals worked across both industries. Exemplified by *Easy Rider* and the rise of the cadre of professionals comprising the ‘New Hollywood,’ second wave exploitation served as a ‘training ground’ for up and coming Hollywood professionals.\(^\text{13}\) Corman began his career in the studio system, and prior to forming New World Pictures, would variously work with Hollywood studios to distribute a selection of his films. Although directors like Coppola and Scorsese came out of established film schools with ties to the mainstream industry, they found initial work in exploitation, an eventual springboard to mainstream success for both.\(^\text{14}\) Writer and director Peter Bogdanovich was an established film critic before working behind the camera for Corman. Actor Dennis Hopper made his film debut in two studio features, *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) and *Giant* (George Stevens, 1956) before being ensconced in second wave exploitation. The professional flow was not unidirectional; former Hollywood stars, whose advance in age or decline in popularity made securing mainstream work almost impossible, would end their careers in second wave exploitation. Former stars Vincent Price, Boris Karloff, and Joan Crawford would all find subsequent careers there.

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\(^{14}\) Second wave exploitation was an important workspace for this group; although they were trained and pedigreed, Hollywood’s ‘closed shop’ unions and cronyism in hiring made it difficult for new talent to break into studio work.
During classical exploitation, this type of crossover was virtually unheard of. As Maitland McDonagh notes, professionals “[…] might end their careers in exploitation, but exploitation didn’t parlay their experience into mainstream Hollywood careers. Once an outsider, always an outcast; to make films beyond the mainstream was to be tainted, slightly disreputable in a culture predicated on the image of respectability.” This trend would reverse itself during second wave exploitation as professionals fluidly crossed, and further blurred, the boundaries between the two industries. It is, however, critical to note that this fluidity was primarily accessible to male professionals; subsequent chapters will detail the difference in opportunity for a woman working in second wave exploitation.

Additionally, second wave exploitation films intersected with Hollywood through their simultaneous emphasis on the figure of the producer. This is perhaps an area where all three industries—classical and second wave exploitation and Hollywood—found commonality. Producers in exploitation phases were exceedingly important; the ‘talent’ came and went while producers held steadfast. They were the main drivers of production, distribution, and exhibition. The names most often associated with exploitation in both phases—Esper, Sonny and Friedman, Corman, Arkoff, and Nicholson—were first and foremost producers.

The classical Hollywood studio system had become increasingly producer driven, even as the classical period waned. As Bordwell et al. outline, the director-management system that dominated until early Hollywood would shift significantly to a producer-management system, standardized between 1930-1960. During this time, producers like David O. Selznick and Irving Thalberg were household names. The 1970s would see the rise of the Hollywood ‘super

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15 The producer-driven system of classical Hollywood served critical functions. It allowed for stricter economic control over individual films. The producer became the figure to which the studio executives could assign accountability—and correspondingly blame—for a film’s performance. The producer also served as the organizing point in the studio system’s strictly defined division of labor for all aspects of production, including pre- and post-production.
producer,’ exemplified by Paramount’s Robert Evans, corresponding with the mainstream peak of second wave exploitation.

Sharing artistic and creative professionals and the emphasis on the figure of the producer would not be the only association between the two industries during this period. Second wave exploitation would go on to provide a pivotal service to the film industry as a whole: replacing B-movies, whose production decreased with the correlative decline of the drive-in, the double-feature, and forced changes in the studio structure. Although the decision had been rendered in 1948, it took time for the studios to reconstruct their operative business models and for studios and the market to feel the full impact of divestiture. In the aftermath of the Paramount Decree, mandated divestment resulted in studios cutting ancillary production departments as a way to recoup a measure of the staggering profit losses facing them as a result of the elimination of distribution and exhibition from their business models. Tino Balio narrates:

The majors ceased producing B pictures, shorts, cartoons, and newsreels, and instead concentrated on making fewer and more expensive A pictures. The studio system that had supported the industry since the 1920s went by the boards as companies disposed of their back lots, film libraries, and other assets, and dropped producers, directors, and stars from their payroll.\textsuperscript{1xxix}

The phased closures of studio B-picture units slowly opened a product void in the marketplace. Although double features as an exhibition strategy had declined theaters were still needed product for their screens. As studio production decreased across the board, Poverty Row—and shortly after second wave exploitation producers—were poised to dramatically increase their business.

Independent productions companies, already on a steady rise, boomed. By 1958 fifty percent of films produced in the U.S. were by independent companies (up from one third in the 30s and 40s), and by 1960 there were 165 different independent production entities pumping films into the marketplace.\textsuperscript{xc} Unsurprisingly, a majority of these specialized in second wave
exploitation productions, solidifying them as viable film products shown in non-marginalized theatrical spaces to broader, more mainstream audiences. This positioned second wave exploitation as a critical node within the filmic landscape, and served to facilitate the professional crossover previously noted.

Critically, second wave exploitation’s move toward the mainstream was not solely economically motivated. The style and content of the film themselves were in high demand by audiences who recognized in the films their own complicated and rapidly shifting lives. Stylistically, second wave exploitation—unlike its classical progenitor—did not eschew Hollywood style and aesthetics, but rather worked toward its integration. The familiarity in style sparked recognition in audiences, and allowed the films to more easily exist alongside mainstream products in theaters. However, the second wave exploitation style was not a simply aping of Hollywood; and indeed there are crucial differences that constructed the films as simultaneously similar and disparate.

In their now canonical *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*, Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson outline classic Hollywood’s cinematic elements as separate systems of production, which therefore create an overarching style. Within this style, and its corresponding components, lie the organizing principles of any fictional narrative film: narrative logic, cinematic time, and cinematic space. These systems of norms—combining form, production, and narrative—allow for a flexible model of filmmaking based on standardization and differentiation. This permits enough filmic sameness to first construct, and then meet, audience expectations while also enabling differentiation through limited creative innovations.
The style, then, of classical Hollywood cinema, is one that would allow for the audience to assemble a consistent temporal and spatial universe in which narrative and action is presented. This system was fabricated through repetition, habit, and flexibility, and depended on logical narrative transmission cultivated through narrative patterns centered on characters, cause and effect relationships to actions, and importantly, continuity. Continuity in classical Hollywood cinema builds through time and space. Time in classical film manipulates story order and duration and “[…] involves what psychologists call ‘temporal integration,’ the process of fusing the perception of the present, the memory of the past, and the expectations about the future.”

Space as a function of continuity reinforces spatial orientation, provides verisimilitude, and as with time, orders and depicts narrative elements as clearly and logically as possible. Temporal and spatial continuity is therefore instituted and maintained through specific editing formulas, rationalized mise-en-scéné, idealized views of action, and consistent spatial orientation for on-screen action.

Classical exploitation’s overriding emphasis on spectacle rendered classical Hollywood filmmaking unnecessary; additionally, for these smaller producers it was simply too costly to apply the production values associated with classical Hollywood filmmaking. However, second wave exploitation’s move away from unadulterated spectacle and toward its integration as a normalized function of narrative enabled the integration of the classical Hollywood stylistic and aesthetic guidelines formerly summarized. This is, in part, a repercussion of the blurred boundaries between the two industries: to have worked—or to aspire to work—within a Hollywood studio required familiarity with and the ability to execute the dominant style of filmmaking. Although economic and experience limitations on second wave production have led scholars to characterize it as an “[…] impoverished imitation of mainstream Hollywood
filmmaking, it should be understood as a hybridized aesthetics and style, rather than solely an imitative one.

Drawing from the classical techniques and more modern stylistic practices, both self-created and integrated from different non-mainstream film types like foreign, art, and avant-garde films, second wave exploitation represented a hybrid cinematic style. Indeed, this type of stylistic experimentation would greatly inform the studio-produced work of the members of the New Hollywood who had trained in the second wave. This is not meant to generalize hybridity as the goal of all second wave exploitation films. It is meant, however, to call attention to hybridity as an alternative way of understanding the specific style and aesthetics of a significant number of second wave exploitation films, especially in the late 1960s-1970s. It was, in part, this hybridity in style that allowed for experimentation in narrative and spatial and temporal continuity and helped to set the film apart from conventional Hollywood fare.

As second wave exploitation drew stylistic cues from the mainstream, the mainstream reciprocated through content appropriation. Classical Hollywood cinema had been subject to a series of censorship codes, from non-industry groups like National Legion of Decency (founded as the Catholic Legion of Decency), as well as from city, and state censorship boards. To wrest control back in the industry’s favor while generating positive public relations cache, Hollywood created the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934 to enforce their self-created Motion Picture Production Code. The code played a pivotal role in content restrictions until 1968. Exploitation films of the classical and second wave period, as independent entities, largely ignored the code, which allowed them to focus on controversial topics. As the controversial topics of exploitation films became increasingly normalized through the 1960s, and as the 

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16 For two examples of the ways in which this hybridity works on the screen, see Roger Corman’s *The Trip* (1967) and a later entry, John Sayles *The Brother from Another Planet* (1984).
cultural tenor of the country changed, the code became outdated. The line between Hollywood and exploitation films grew progressively thinner. In particular, 1967 would be a turning point for the embrace of exploitation-like content by Hollywood, with the release of Cool Hand Luke (Stuart Rosenberg), The Graduate (Mike Nichols), and Bonnie and Clyde (Arthur Penn)—all significantly drawing on exploitation traits and tropes.

It was, however, the success of Blaxploitation films in the 1970s that convinced studios of the economic merit of second wave exploitation films, and they began their production in earnest. Studio-produced Blaxploitation films did not simply draw from their second wave counterparts; they coopted the film’s styles, narratives and ideologies wholesale. Indeed, many of the films remembered from that cycle, such as Shaft (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1971), The Legend of Nigger Charley (Martin Goldman, 1972), Cleopatra Jones (Jack Starrett, 1973), and Superfly (Gordon Parks, Jr., 1972) were produced by mainstream studios—MGM, Paramount, and Warner Brothers respectively. Critically, Hollywood’s incursion did not completely drown out independents: the AIP-produced Pam Grier films of the cycle like Foxy Brown (Jack Hill, 1974) and Coffy (Jack Hill, 1974) are still endemically connected with the history and legacy of Blaxploitation. Hollywood’s move toward second wave exploitation was not contained to Blaxploitation. Spurred on by the success of independent producers, and the replacement of the PCA by the rating system, major Hollywood studios began more and more toward exploitation and their audiences. As David Cook states:

[...] majors embrace[d] exploitation as a mainstream practice, elevating such previous B genres as science fiction and horror to A-film status, retrofitting ‘race cinema’ as ‘blaxploitation,’ competing with the pornography industry for the ‘sexploitation’ market share. Grindhouse-style gore was injected into seemingly conventional Westerns and gangster films, and four-letter works became obligatory in all but family rated genres (G and GP categories).
These content shifts offer further justification for the flexible boundaries between second wave exploitation and its mainstream counterpart.

Critically, second wave exploitation served as a transitory cinematic space not just in context with Hollywood, but within a larger industrial framework. The foreign film market, especially during its peak in the 1960s and early 1970s, is another useful cinematic space for understanding the curated, flexible, and positive liminality of second wave exploitation. Foreign films trickled into U.S. theaters, primarily in urban markets, in a haphazard fashion in the early twentieth century. Rossellini’s *Rome, Open City* stateside debut in 1946 made a significant impact on wider exhibition and public awareness of foreign films. The film, although associated with the now-canonical Italian Neorealist movement, was marketed similarly to exploitation films with the tagline “Sexier than Hollywood ever dared to be.” This would begin a trend that established foreign films as distinctly different from Hollywood production primarily based on their foregrounding of issues of sex and sexuality, much like second wave exploitation.

The emphasis on sex and controversial content was a major draw for U.S. audiences. Unlike Hollywood, but similar to second wave exploitation, foreign films ignored the PCA. Sex was played up in advertising in techniques freely adopted from the exploitation market, and as such “The line between art cinema and exploitation was often a thin one […]” Images of scantily clad women like Brigette Bardot and Sophia Loren would be the focus of advertising campaigns, emphasizing titillation and scandal much like exploitation films. Sex, obscenity, and foreignness were imbricated—often to the benefit of the U.S. distributors. Sex was critical to foreign and second wave exploitation films alike as a strategy for building and retaining audiences. “No one on either side of the Atlantic—or Pacific—wants to admit it today, but the fashion for foreign film depended a great deal on their frankness about sex.”
Further blurring the line between the two industries was the propensity for independent production and distribution companies to distribute foreign films in the U.S. Films like Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* (1960), Bergman’s *Cries and Whispers* (1972), among others, would be distributed in the U.S. by companies whose stock-in-trade was second wave exploitation.

Additionally, the role foreign films played in helping to dismantle legal film censorship in the United States would help facilitate the production of increasingly outrageous exploitation films.\(^{17}\)

Although foreign films and second wave exploitation shared a number of traits in common—including non-standard Hollywood aesthetics and style—foreign film would enjoy a greater and enduring place in the U.S. film market. This was in large part due to the cultural capital that was placed in foreign films and decidedly missing from exploitation.\(^{18}\) Foreign film would eventually become to be considered “high” art while exploitation would remain “low” or “trash,” in context with both the foreign and Hollywood industries. And as with Blaxploitation film, Hollywood would see the profits to be made in foreign film and quickly move into the market by the late 1950s, and would completely dominate distribution by the mid 1960s, using superior economic capabilities to cannibalize the exploitation industry.\(^{\circ}\)

\(^{17}\) One of most significant challenges to censorship through foreign film came in what is known as “The Miracle Decision,” which referred to a segment titled “The Miracle” in Rosellinni’s anthology film *L’Amore* (1948). The 1952 decision would find the Supreme Court of the United States authorizing the challenge of state and municipal censorship boards, opening the door for a succession of legal challenges. Several more foreign films would work to challenge legal censorship when finally, “Governmental censorship effectively ended in 1965 when the Supreme Court handed down a decision involving the Danish film *A Stranger Knocks*, which declare that the statues governing the New York Board of Censors were unconstitutional.” Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010): 279.

\(^{18}\) Foreign films quickly found viewers in what *Variety* termed the ‘Lost Audience,’ sophisticated and educated viewers who had abandoned theatergoing when U.S. productions began to focus on niche audiences within younger generations. Interestingly, just as second wave exploitation was targeting the niche teenager audience as part of their strategies for success, they were creating a “leftover” audience for foreign films to solicit in much the same ways. As the interest in foreign films began to generate a significant audience, the number of theaters showing these films, primarily art house theaters, began to grow exponentially. “In 1946 art houses were rarities outside New York; whereas by 1960 the number had risen to around 450. By comparison, there were approximately eleven thousand four-wall theaters and six thousand drive-ins operating in the United States.” Tino Balio, *The Foreign Film Renaissance on American Screens 1946-1973* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010): 79-81.
Conclusion

Exchange between these industries would eventually spell the end of second wave exploitation film, and perhaps more strikingly, the general viability of theatrically released exploitation film. Once New Hollywood gained access to the studio’s industrial complex, they were free to take the themes and content that had resonated with audiences to higher level of production, distribution, and exhibition that the second wave exploitation industry could ever offer. Historians like Thomas Schatz have suggested the point of rupture, when fluidity and consistently traversed boundaries transformed from generative to destructive for second wave exploitation, as one specific film: Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975).

*Jaws* was the epitome of a second wave exploitation narrative—a group of scantily clad teenagers being hunted by a killer shark, which can only be stopped through massive violence—run through the Hollywood machine. The marketing for the film, in particular the image of a teenage girl in a bikini tantalizing close to being swallowed by the eponymous Jaws, was a provocative image taken directly from the exploitation play book, and as Thomas Schatz notes, set new standards for film promotion.\(^1\) *Jaws*’ success, as the prototypical ‘high-concept’\(^2\) film, has also been largely attributed to its distributive model of saturation booking. A long-time standard of second wave exploitation, Hollywood studios tested the strategy with Spielberg’s film to enormous success. *Jaws* opened simultaneously in more theaters than any previous Hollywood film. Saturation booking quickly became adopted by Hollywood, rebranded as ‘wide release.’ Second wave exploitation films made for teenagers featuring killer monsters quickly transitioned from the ‘trash’ of exploitation to the ‘high concept’ or ‘blockbuster’ films of the Hollywood machine.

The success of *Jaws* was unstoppable, and its repercussions widely felt. Second wave exploitation saw its films produced on increasingly larger economic scales by Hollywood.
Unable to compete, the industry was irreparably damaged. Although second wave exploitation was still producing a significant number of films, they were not able to access enough screens to generate adequate profit. For, while independent features were about seventy-five of all U.S. productions in 1976, they only generated ten to fifteen percent of box office rentals, having been pushed off of screens by the new Hollywood blockbusters in wide release. No longer having controversial content to differentiate their films from the mainstream, second wave exploitation films soon moved primarily to television and the burgeoning home video market, and began the slow decline from widespread cultural relevance and memory.

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Ibid, 269

Stephane Dunn, “Bad Bitches” and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films (Urbana and Chicago:


CHAPTER 3

THE LIMITS OF EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN

“[...] we locate ourselves and orientate our own work toward a future in part determined by the nature and quality of our engagement with the past.”

-Bill Nichols

As the previous chapter theorized, film history can be interpreted as a process of overlapping micro-narratives—found in individual films, industrial changes, technological innovation, cultural resonance, etc.—combining to form the macro-narrative of film as an industrialized art form. In this sense, I visualize the concept of film history as a turbulent ocean. Each micro-narrative wave is influenced by dependent conditions that are mobilized independently within it, as multitudes of micro-histories move on a course determined simultaneously by their own trajectory and the trajectories of the histories that came before it, along side it, and after it. Together, the momentum of the micro-narrative waves, the factors influencing them, the impact they have on the histories around and after them, comprise the entirety of the living and ever-shifting ocean of film history. In an ecosystem so mutable and interdependent, how does one comprehend the value of one narrative wave?

For many film scholars and historians, one answer to this question has been found in archives. Commonly understood to function as repositories of critical historical knowledge, the process of institutional archiving has long shaped the construction of film history, through both the curation of specific historical records as well as the types of scholarly work fostered by the records available. Simultaneously with its goals of preservation, archives endanger cultural work deemed unfit or unnecessary for archival conversation; as will be discussed in following sections of this chapter, attempting historical work is quite difficult without archival support. This institutional archival neglect is particularly prevalent for second wave exploitation and the
cinema of Stephanie Rothman. Unfortunately, the same neglect holds true for most non-
normative or marginalized cultural producers, with unethical implications and untenable
ramifications. Therefore, this chapter demonstrates the need for alternative archival curatorial
practices and methodologies when considering marginalized cultural producers—in particular
women filmmakers—emphasizing how feminist archival intervention can envision a broader and
more diverse spectrum of women in cinematic history. To accomplish this I first trace the
tensions around feminist film criticism and female authorship, suggesting how the paradigm of
exceptional women limits the role of women directors in film history and archives. Positing
alternative archival creation a key node in expanding archival and historical knowledge, I
explore models of alternative archives as processes of scholarly disidentification.

Disidentification, a concept developed by José Esteban Muñoz, indicates the “[…] survival
strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere
that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the
phantasm of normative citizenship.” Disidentification is a way to disrupt those rules and
regulations that enforce normalization and restrict access to alternate identities. In my move
toward disidentification, I end the chapter with a review of my own alternative archival
curatorial efforts around Stephanie Rothmans.

Rethinking the ways scholars interact with archival information, and the function of the
archive in producing thought that engages with the past, present, and future acts as a critical
aspects of this endeavor. Again, invoking the fluid constructions of space and time assembled
within a media archaeological perspective provides a useful tactic in rethinking archival
interaction. Similar to Elsasser’s film-studies-as-media-archaeology, rethinking both historical
methodology and the concept of historical time provides advantages when considering archival
constructions and functions. Siegfried Zielinski’s deep time of media, and its methodological outcropping varientology, provides theoretical scaffolding for new approaches to the role of time in both history and the archive. Deep time of the media argues that “The notion of continuous progress from lower to higher, from simple to complex, must be abandoned, together with all the images, metaphors, and iconography that have been—and still are—used to describe progress.”

The progression of media, or media history, cannot be understood as teleological, but rather as a process of vivisection which finds the new in the old as well as old in the new. A reciprocal rather than singular process, the deep time of media history requires an alternative methodological inquiry, which Zielinski dubs varientology:

Instead of looking for obligatory trends, master media, or imperative vanishing points, one should be able to discover individual variations. Possibly, one will discover fractures or turning points in historical master plans that provide useful ideas for navigating the labyrinth of what is currently firmly established. In the longer term, the body of individual anarcheological studies should form a variantology of the media.

Variantology, then, works to defy standardization and linearity. In her edited collection *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History*, Vicki Callahan explores the potentialities of deep time as a way for feminist film historians to re-vision time, space, and historical narrative toward inclusivity. She understands the value in the deep-time methodology of media archaeology as a way to “[…] open the possibilities for film history and theory by envisioning temporality as a nonlinear, multidirectional flow of information rather than a singular reductive and evolutionary system of apodictic data.” Here, Callahan advocates for alternative understandings of historical time as a method for opening fissures in established film history, and how these spaces can be utilized as progressive feminist interventions into the archive and film history to expand the breadth and depth of memory around women in film.
This conceptual approach requires a rethinking of the function of the archive in its many invocations. To this end, I see a Rothman historiography as a type of generative archival disruption, one that asks us to challenge not only the concept and function of the archive as a repository of information but also necessitates a refocusing of how knowledge deriving from archives is created and used. As Charles Merewether contends:

The archive is not one and the same as forms of remembrance, or as history. Manifesting itself in the form of traces, it contains the potential to fragment and destabilize either remembrance as recorded, or history as written, as sufficient means of providing the last word in the account of what has come to pass.\textsuperscript{cix}

Rothman as cultural producer serves as a destabilizing trace, a breach in established film history that functions as a disruptive force. To position this disruption, I will address three imbricated topics in this chapter: the current existence of women in filmic archives as ‘exceptional’; the potentialities of feminist archival interventions and alternative archival practices; and the curation of my own Rothman archive as a study in the obstacles presented by traditional institutional archives and the possibilities inherent to alternative archive creation.

To speak of generative disruption, however, requires a brief review of the mode and function of traditional archives and archiving processes. What, exactly, is being disrupted? As Paul Ricoeur described, traditional archives “[…] constitute the documentary stock of an institution that produces them, gathers them, conserves them. And the deposit thereby constituted is an authorized deposit […].”\textsuperscript{cx} Archives, conventionally the province of institutions, are foundationally dedicated to multiple modes of knowledge preservation. Indeed the archival process is one “[…] by which knowledge becomes information, information becomes a record, and records become archives.”\textsuperscript{cxii} By choosing what information gets preserved archivists and the institutions they serve play a key role in determining what is sanctioned as both as knowledge, and as knowledge worth preserving. As such, archives are mechanisms through which
knowledge is legitimized through its inclusion, or delegitimized through its exclusion. The power associated with institutions and their bestowments of legitimacy forms a critical assumption about archival knowledge: that it is representative of knowledge worth saving. In this sense, knowledge external to the archive is assumed superfluous. This base assumption underlines several tenets—or what Diana Taylor terms “myths”—constructing the characterization of the archive’s function as legitimated knowledge curator:

One is that it is unmediated—that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself. What makes an object archival is the process whereby it is selected for analysis. Another myth is that the ‘archive’ resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation. Archives are not incorruptible, nor are they objective. The standards for selection and rejection cannot possibly exist objectively, nor can they sidestep prejudice in its multiple forms.

Archival knowledge formation will always be susceptible to the subjectivity of its curators. The archive as site of sanctioned knowledge, therefore, is necessarily subjective, an idea which early archivists rejected. In the 1990s, historians and other scholars/researchers attacked this objectivity and the assumption of the role of the archivist as mere preservationist. Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry contextualize:

As historians discovered that many groups seemed to be underrepresented in or excluded from archives, they begun to critique the very conception of the archive as an objective, neutral, and disinterested institution that housed historical documents and artifacts. The idea of archival objectivity and neutrality in the collection of primary sources had predominated since the mid-nineteenth century. However, as librarians and archivists now attest, the act of collection is a subjective matter involving a series of decisions regarding what to keep, what to discard, how to organize what is kept, and for what purpose. Scholars began actively arguing that archives were conscious creations, that the stories their materials told could be interpreted in multiple ways, and that archivists themselves were functional and subjective agents in curating archives.
Spurred on in part by the postmodern turn, scholars began to reorient the conceptual validity of the concept of ‘history’ and ‘archive.’ As Marlene Manoff notes:

Many scholars (whether or not they describe themselves as postmodernists) have come to understand the historical record, whether it consists of books in libraries or records in archives, not as an objective representation of the past, but rather as a selection of objects that have been preserved for a variety of reasons (which may include sheer luck). These objects cannot provide direct and unmediated access to the past.\textsuperscript{cxv}

Questioning the archive meant questioning the record, and therefore questioning the knowledge the record was built from and “[…] challenging the tired assumption that an archive is simply an immutable, neutral, and ahistorical place in which historical records are preserved.”\textsuperscript{cxvi} This deconstruction of assumed or sanctioned knowledge helped scholars to reframe the archive not as an objective record but rather as a site shaped by social, political, economic, and technological forces.

One of the most influential texts to question the traditional archive was Jacques Derrida’s 1995 \textit{Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression}, wherein he highlighted the archive’s political power, noting that those who control knowledge through its preservation, its sanctioning, and its dissemination, are unequivocally in a position of power. Indeed, he argued: “[…] there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”\textsuperscript{cxvii} For Derrida the archive is another way of maintaining hegemonic power through exclusion and erasure. Foregrounding the implicit structures of power in the archive reconstructs it as a necessarily subjective reformation of history representing limited perspectives, rather than a space for unmediated access to the past.\textsuperscript{cxviii} Reconstituting the archive demands the death of the concept of the immutability of historical fact as truth.

As a more nuanced understanding of the archive and the ways in which it narrowed history through subjective practices of inclusion and exclusion developed, the idea of the archive
as a physical space also changed. Where once the term had applied both to the physical location as well as to the materials themselves, the term morphed into a much looser signifier. This became especially true as researchers working around issues and populations traditionally excluded from the archives began to curate their own information, collected and preserved in multiple forms and fashions. Indeed the term archive “[…] became a metaphor capacious enough to encompass the whole of modern information technology, its storage, retrieval and communication.” The term also came to be applied to a particular set of texts a researcher was working with, cultivated often from an amalgamation of materials from traditional archives, personal and private collections, and ephemera. In this evolutionary sense, archives have come to exist on the micro and macro scale, ever mutable, and continuously open to questioning.

With this shift in the understanding, cultivation, and use of the idea of the archive, newly founded flexibility has enabled the production of work on individuals and populations who have been traditionally left out. This type of interventional archival work has been particularly salient to scholars working within the framework of feminist media studies, focusing on feminist interventions into popular culture as a mode of practical and progressive scholarship. I use this mode to approach a survey of how women have been traditionally represented in filmic archives, a topic to which I now turn.

**The Limits of Exceptional Women**

Exploring the construction of women in cinematic archives is not solely a historiographic concern, but a theoretical and practical one as well. In large part, the history of remembrance of women as cultural producers is linked to the development and usage of feminist film studies and criticism, a vital paradigm in contemporary film studies. This section traces the broad development of feminist film studies and its intersections with female authorship, and posits my
conception of the usage and problematics of the function of the category of ‘exceptional women’ when elucidating the considerations of female directorial authorship in film history.

Feminist film theory emerged in the late 1960s/early 1970s and quickly rose to prominence on the strength of several influential works, including Kate Millett’s book *Sexual Politics* (1969), Claire Johnston’s essay *Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema* (1973), and Laura Mulvey’s *Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema* (1975). Fairly rapidly major themes foregrounded the male gaze, gendered spectatorship, desire and pleasure, processes of subjectivity formation and identification, and female authorship. Scholarly journals like *Camera Obscura*, first published in 1976, explored tensions between traditional film theory, the screen image of women, and the lack of women in film production. The overriding impetus for this work was the need for an understanding of the role of women as gendered and sexualized subjects in film. Feminist analysis invested itself largely in the disarticulation of filmic texts produced by mainstream Hollywood and the operative modes that developed them. Christine Gledhill, writing in 1978, noted “[…] we cannot understand or change sexist images of women for progressive ones without considering how the operations of narrative, genre, lighting, *mise en scene*, etc. work to construct such images and their meanings.”

Although strongly indebted to Marxism, sociology, literature studies, and semiotics, the overwhelming theoretical influence on the emerging approach was psychoanalytic, both Freudian and Lacanian. As Annette Kuhn explains:

[…] feminist psychoanalytic film theory sprang from two rather different desires: to understand the nature of film, in particular its metapsychology, in relation to sexual difference; and to understand how gender informs the contents of films and/or how men and women relate to film and/or cinema. A psychoanalytic perspective exposed the patriarchal ideology inscribed in mainstream film. Feminist film theorists worked to unveil how those ideological meanings functioned for
spectators, the industry, and film as a cultural product. In this way, feminist film theory could “[...] make an intervention into both the production and distribution of films and the way they are understood and used by women at large.”

Following this mandate, early feminist film analysis and theory focused on the idea of ‘women’s films,’ a broad category resisting strict definition. Alison Butler contextualizes the usage and meaning of the term in her book *Women’s Cinema: The Contested Screen*:

> It suggests, without clarity, films that might be made by, addressed to, concerned with women, or all three. It is neither a genre nor a movement in film history, it has no single lineage of its own, no national boundaries, in filmic or aesthetic specificity, but traverses and negotiates cinematic and cultural traditions and critical and political debates.

Despite this wide-ranging scope, practically the term was used much more narrowly “[...] referencing a subtype of the film melodrama whose plot is organized around the perspective of a female character and which addresses a female spectator through thematic concerns socially and culturally coded as ‘feminine.’” Under this loose rubric, women’s films focused on themes relating to sexuality, marriage, family, and domestic spaces. However, even within these stereotypically ‘feminine’ topics, women’s films differed from traditional melodrama in their emphasis on women themselves as the nucleus of narrative and in the nuanced and careful way that these issues were explored in the films. Simply because women’s films focused on women’s issues and featured women in protagonist roles, they did not necessarily foster the false implication that women-centered narratives were predictable, stereotypical, or specific only to women. Rather, the films negotiated the theoretical and practical tension between two poles: women’s stories as stereotypical narratives of perceived ‘feminized problems’ and women’s stories as representations of the complicated real-world issues that women faced daily. Examples include *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945), *Stella Dallas* (King Vidor, 1937), *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), and *Letter from An Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948).
Women’s films illustrated the conventional wisdom that embedded in most stereotypes is a grain of truth and the complications arising around how that grain of truth is or is not exposed, examined, and narrated. The execution of women’s film, then, had the dual burden of representing women’s stories and women as both universal and singular. Early feminist film theory rotated significantly around dissecting these burdens, often looking to issues of representation and female spectatorship to delineate how well women on screen captured the realities and complexities of women’s real world lives. This raised several problematic issues, not the least of which was the reality that women’s lives are heterogeneous and varied, and cannot be connected through universal narratives without considering critical factors of difference like race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, citizenship, ethnicity, ability, and more. As Judith Mayne notes, the idea of women’s films:

[…] can also be used to suggest a kind of uniformity which, while obviously different from the femininity legitimated by the classical cinema, is rigid in its own way […] the plurality of perspectives can be a subterfuge, beneath which there remains the specter of femininity, ‘woman’ with a feminist infection perhaps, but no less problematic for that. The shift from the singular to plural is not necessarily an assurance of emancipatory diversity.

This friction around the flattening of what is contemporarily termed intersectional identity in service of a increased visibility and narrative focus constituted what Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, and Linda Williams (all early feminist film theorists) saw, in 1984, as a “[…] very real tendency in much contemporary feminist theory—a tendency to deconstruct and disavow all notions of identity, ownership, possession. The demand for the delineation of a female specificity is countered by the refusal to espouse an identity, any identity.” In terms of the practical and interventionist applications of feminist film theory, this put practitioners in what the scholars saw as a double bind. The feminist film theorist, then:

19 For particularly salient examples of this burden, see Douglas Sirk’s Imitation of Life (1959) and All That Heaven Allows (1955), and Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s All About Eve (1950).
[...] can continue to analyze and interpret various instances of the repression of woman, of her radical absence in the discourses of men—a pose which necessitates remaining within that very problematic herself, always risking a recapitalization of patriarchal constructions and a naturalization of ‘woman.’ The choice appears to be a not very attractive one between a continual repetition of the same gesture of demystification (itself perhaps mystified as to its methodological heritage) and a possible regression to ideas of feminine identity, which threaten to constitute a veritable re-mystification.

In part, the films that were being scrutinized through feminist film theory exacerbated this problem. The women’s films analyzed by early feminist film theorists tended to be products of the classical Hollywood studio system, which were exclusively the output of male directors and the patriarchal system under which they flourished. This created a sustained need for constant oppositional or recuperative readings of mainstream filmic texts to generate the critical analysis necessary to engage the spectator in the reciprocal production of meaning, forcing “[...] the spectator to participate in a dialectical process by which consciousness is formed and transformed.” While this process of ‘working within the system’ demonstrated the deep patriarchal constructs embedded in mainstream Hollywood films, it hampered potential paths of moving past the system itself by virtue of its embeddedness within it.

Recognizing this issue, feminist film theorists looked to women directors working in a counter-cinematic mode in an effort to move outside the system of patriarchal image production found in Hollywood filmmaking. Counter-cinema, perhaps more appropriately termed counter-mainstream cinema, offered a space for filmmakers of difference to work outside of the restrictive patriarchal mainstream Hollywood paradigm through experimental, foreign, independent, documentary, and art film. The work of Germaine Dulac, Yvonne Rainer’s *Film About a Woman Who…* (1974), and Jackie Raynal’s *Deux fois* (1968), as examples, became the texts around which discussion of women’s cinema as counter-cinema circulated. In addition to moving beyond the restrictive bounds of mainstream Hollywood filmmaking, this refocusing

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20 See, for example, Mulvey’s work around *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946).
around women filmmakers brought the issue of women’s authorship, and all of its complications, into the purview of feminist film theory.

_Femme Auteurs_

Questions and discussions of female authorship within feminist film studies have been surprisingly sparse. As Kaja Silverman notes: “Feminist film theory and criticism have manifested only an intermittent and fleeting interest in the status of authorship within the classic text.” Although seemingly contradictory to the goals of feminist film criticism, certainly as an interventional practice, the elision of female authorship has historical, theoretical, and political roots. The reluctance of feminist film studies to fully embrace female authorship speaks to the theoretical and practical debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism feminism and the evolving role of auteur theory in film studies. I will address each of these issues in turn, followed by their influence on what I deem the ‘limits of exceptional women’ in the construction of women’s directorship as authorship in film history.

Embedded in the political, social, and theoretical debates around and between feminists, the binary of essentialism and anti-essentialism significantly shaped the mainstream, second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, a movement that helped birth feminist film critics. At its base, essentialist feminism understands men and women to be fundamentally different, and as such there is a great ‘truth’ about women that has been buried by patriarchy in an attempted erasure of endemic ‘femaleness.’ Feminist film theory in this vein looked at how film could help women to work within the patriarchal system to reject their socially constructed roles and adopt new, more ‘truly’ feminine ones. Anti-essentialist feminists do not believe there is an inherent ‘femaleness’ to be excavated underneath the socially constructed subject of ‘woman.’ Rather, they understand the category of ‘woman’ to be integral to the ways in which patriarchy maintains its dominance. Theoretical work in this vein looked at counter-
cinema as one of the few options for a feminist cinema as it worked outside of the oppressive patriarchal Hollywood structure and embraced realism as a tool for dismantling dominant ideology.

The struggle around, and the push against, essentialist feminism became a significant hurdle for early feminist film theorists to overcome when discussing questions of female authorship in cinema. To emphasize women directors as inherently different in their filmic output trended toward essentialist discourse, while working through an anti-essentialist frame potentially allowed for the obfuscation of patriarchal oppression in the ways that the category of ‘woman’ does differ from that of ‘man.’ As Christine Gledhill noted:

Nevertheless, the specter of ‘essentialism,’ especially problematic for feminists where the whole question of gender definition is so loaded, compounds the post-structuralist refusal of representation and identification. We reject given social definitions of women or femininity as mere indicators of social construction at work. Assentation of our social difference—maternity, feeling, irrationality—seems only to make patriarchal equations: women as earth-mother, woman as other. On the other hand, construction of our culture-heroines as strong and powerful bring charges of male identification, or substitution. We seem trapped.

Stuck in a bind that had theoretical, practical, and political connotations, the threat of essentialism and the unenviable position it placed early feminist film theorists was seemingly inescapable.

Two additional issues compounded the problem: the reluctance to steer clear of the complexities between the categories of ‘woman’ (as singular entity, and in the case of authorship, ascribed to a particular person) and ‘women’ (as broader socially constructed and gendered populations that necessarily force complicated discussions of intersectionality). More often than not, this issue was sidestepped by avoiding ‘women’ in favor of the singular and by assuming that any connection between gender and authorship must necessarily be essentialist. It is worth quoting Judith Mayne at length on these interrelated issues:
The reluctance to speak of a ‘female tradition’ has perhaps been most influenced, however, by the fear of essentialism—the fear, that is, that any discussion of ‘female texts’ presumes the uniqueness and autonomy of female representation, this validating rather than challenging the dualism of patriarchal hierarchy. However, the act of discarding the concept of female authorship and of an attendant female tradition in the cinema as necessarily compromised by essentialist definitions of woman can be equally dualistic, in assuming that the only models of connection and influence are unquestionably essentialist ones. Central to a theorizing of female authorship in the cinema is an expanded definition of textuality attentive to the complex network of intersections, distances, and resistances of ‘woman’ to ‘women.’ The challenge of female authorship in the cinema for feminist theory is in the demonstration of how the divisions, overlaps, and distances between ‘woman’ and ‘women’ connect with the contradictory status of cinema as the embodiment of both omnipotent control and individual fantasy.

The conundrum of essentialism, its seeming over-determination around issues of authorship, and the categorical complexities of woman/women functioned as powerful motivators for circumventing discussions of female authorship or addressing it mainly through the category of ‘woman.’ Angela Martin explains: “[…] female or feminist authorship tends to be sought in what can be identifiably-linked to the filmmaker (as woman): a film’s autobiographical reference; a filmmaker’s actual presence in the film; the evidence of a female voice within the narrative (however located).” In this paradigm, a woman director who doesn’t foreground her womanhood, her gender identity, or her feminism in the film is passed over in discussions of authorship.

Additionally, the precarious place of auteur theory in film studies in the 1970s and during the development of feminist film theory also impacted the widening blind spot around women directors. Auteur theory emerged from France in the mid-1950s, advanced by critic André Bazin and critic/filmmaker François Truffaut (among others) as well as the work of the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Evolving from the *Cahiers politique des auteurs*, auteur theory foundationally considers the director as the author of a film and the film as a text that reflects the director’s personal vision.
Critic Andrew Sarris’ essay “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” constructed the theory through an U.S. viewpoint, passionately advocating for auteurship as the primary mode for film evaluation. While ascendant—although not unchallenged—as a primary method of cinematic evaluation in the 1950s and 1960s, by the 1970s and 1980s it was widely regarded as problematic for its de-emphasis on the collaborative nature of filmmaking and its overvaluation of the position of the ‘genius’ director. Contemporarily “[…] auteurism in rarely invoked, and when it is, it is more as a curiosity, as a historical development surely influential, but even more surely surpassed.” As such, the focus on authorship was waning quickly as feminist film theory was developing, offering yet another reason to decentralize women directors under the rubric of theoretical and critical work undertaken.

That being said, I do not mean to imply that female authorship was completely erased from feminist film theory; it certainly wasn’t. However, when it was considered it was done so the paradigm of what I term ‘exceptional women’: women filmmakers whose position is constructed as ‘exceptions to the rule’ of the accepted standard maleness of directors. Given the historical factors traced above, it is critical to examine exactly how the limited discussions of female authorship were undertaken through the lens of exceptional women, and the influence they had on the breadth and depth of women directors in accumulated filmic history.

The paradigm of exceptional women is how I understand female authorship to be constructed in both feminist and broad filmic history. Here, the term exceptional does not refer to the talent or skill of the directors, or the to success of their films. Indeed, any woman who has overcome the hurdles to feature film directing is, in the most positive sense of the word. However, the exceptionalism I posit here is not one of success but tokenism disguised as parity. ‘Exceptional women’ encapsulates the move for women filmmakers to be positioned as
exceptions to the rule of male dominance in directing, conveying aspirational status for present
and future female directors while simultaneously de-normalizing the very concept of women
directors. Exceptional women directors serve as limited token examples of a long and
unexamined history of women as cinematic authors. Usage of the term “exceptional women”
creates a multiplicity of problems. Firstly, it constructs a very small and fairly homogenous—
more often than not white, Western, and heterosexual—cadre of women directors as
representatives of the entire population of women directors. Secondly, the tokenized women
represent a narrow field of filmmaking styles, genres, and movements, primarily those who
produce films with high cultural capital: avant-garde or experimental, new wave, documentary,
classical Hollywood filmmaking, etc.—styles aligned with masculinized, and therefore
legitimated, filmmaking. One needs to merely look at a selection of the most tokenized female
names in film history to see these patterns: Maya Deren and Chantel Akerman
(experimental/avant-garde); Agnès Varda (French New Wave; documentary realism); Dorothy
Arzner (classical Hollywood). In this way, who gets remembered and how they are remembered
functions as a passive reinforcement of the value in working in filmic forms with high levels of
artistic or cultural cache.

The invocation of the rare filmmaker of difference—either through personal identity,
filmmaking style, or both—typifies how that difference necessarily forces them to work in
marginal spaces. For example, Lizzie Borden, a tokenized name often repeated in film history as
a lesbian with radical political ideologies, remains an example of counter-cinema filmmaking,
which of course she is. However, her primary association with counter-cinema not only describes
her career, but also reinforces that for a woman filmmaker of difference dedicated to telling

21 It should be noted that Arzner was herself a queer woman. However, in most of the historical scholarship around
her career, her queerness is quickly dismissed as an accepted fact rather than a factor in her work. Judith Mayne’s
scholarship around Arzner is an exception to this.
alternate stories about women’s lives and experiences, counter-cinema offers the only space for her work. In this sense Borden becomes a positive and negative token for future filmmakers, one which not so subtly implies that nuanced stories of women’s lives are possible in and only in counter-cinematic modes. Simultaneously, because counter-cinema was explicitly politically and ideologically constructed, it has gained traction as a rarefied cinematic space with high cultural cache, reinscribing the notion of women working in narrowly bounded filmmaking styles.

Thirdly, exceptional women as the operative mode of historical remembrance further entrenches the idea that women directors make films that deal almost exclusively with women’s issues. The films of women directors that are memorialized are more often than not those who deal almost exclusively with the lives of women. As a practical example, the 2015 Criterion Collection catalog of available films boasts a roster of eight hundred and sixty-one films, sixteen of which are directed by twelve different women. Nine of the sixteen films, or 56%, deal with women’s lives directly, while an additional three have women’s lives as central parts of their narratives. The Criterion Collection, as an established marker of ‘quality’ in the assignation of cinematic value and of historical importance, equation of women directors with women’s films further entrenches the idea that exceptional women directors are reducible to women’s films.

Lastly, the use of exceptional women as tokens in cinematic history elides the systemic and institutionalized prejudice and oppression facing women directors as industry professionals. Although this issue will be taken up in depth in a later chapter, it bears a note here.

Contemporarily, women filmmakers are constructed as overrepresented in either “female genres”

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22 The films are: Cleo from 5 to 7 (Agnès Varda, 1962); Le Bonheur (Agnès Varda, 1965); Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai de Commerce, 1080, Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, 1975); Harlan County USA (Barbara Kopple, 1976); Vagabond (Agnès Varda, 1985); Border Radio (Allison Anders, 1987); Sweetie (Jane Campion, 1989); Ratcatcher (Lynne Ramsay, 1999); An Angel at My Table (Jane Campion, 1990); Fat Girl (Catherine Breillat, 2001); Monsoon Wedding (Mira Nair 2001); Bergman Island (Marie Nyreröd, 2004); Fish Tank (Andrea Arnold, 2009); White Material (Claire Denis, 2009); and Tiny Furniture (Lena Dunham, 2010). It is also worth noting that of these twelve directors, only one is a non-Western woman of color.
like romantic comedies or again outside of mainstream production, working in independent
and/or documentary film production. Kathryn Bigelow becomes a rare example of a woman
making mainstream features outside of feminized genres or production models that will, and
already have been, earmarked for historical remembrance, something which again tokenizes her
exceptionalism.

The problematics of the paradigm of exceptional women can, unfortunately, been seen in
an array of contemporary scholarship specifically dedicated to remediating women’s narrow
history as cinematic authors. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, whose work investigates women
directors, appears to treat the lack representation of women’s authorship in cinema as mere
oversight rather than as a systemic issue. In the introduction to her 1995 book *Women Film
Directors: An International Bio-Critical Dictionary* she states “[…] in film scholarship, most
feminists were involved in criticizing films directed by men. They had, as I had, accepted the
assumption that women had not directed any films until the 1970s.” She continues her trend
toward generalization in her introduction to the 1998 volume *Women Filmmakers and Their
Films* when she states:

> Unfortunately, when the first surveys of film history were written, and when the first
> pantheons of directors and major players were drawn up, most of the accomplishments of
> women directors, producers, and scenarists were overlooked. Even feminists tended to
> believe that there simply were no women involved in the production end of early films
> […]

What Foster sees as mere oversight or forgetfulness must be critically interrogated as systemic
exceptionalism in the form of tokenism. Again speaking to the impact of unquestioned
exceptionalism, Alexa L. Foreman in her 1983 book *Women in Motion* caveats processes of
inclusion in her list of female industrial professionals by noting “Since I could not include all of
the women who have made contributions to film, I have attempted to list the most representative
women involved with the motion pictures from the birth of films to the present.” Foster uses a similar caveat in *Women Film Directors: An International Bio-Critical Dictionary*: “In this volume I have tried to gather some of the most important and influential women practitioners of the craft of cinema throughout its long history […]” The questions here must be: representative of what, and important and influential to whom?

There is yet another factor to consider here, that of the archives and the accessibility of information. Indeed, the authors mentioned above are as hampered by the archival failure around women filmmakers as they are by the limitations imposed by the paradigm of exceptional women. As Foster notes for her 1995 volume: “Filmmakers were chosen on the basis of availability of information.” The dearth of accessible archival information becomes a substantial hurdle in the process of constructing a history of women in film. As such, I move to a discussion of archival interventions and alternative archival practices that offer solutions to this barrier while working to move past the limits of exceptional women.

**Spaces of Possibility: Feminist Archival Interventions**

Feminist archival interventions can be understood as a version of the Recovery and Reappraisal methodology, which Lana Rakow constructs as a formal and theoretical practice that provides a framework for allowing feminist scholars to reconsider materials and authors that are deemed worthy of study and analysis. Although feminist archival interventions are ideologically grounded in the concept of recovery and reappraisal, materially they practice something closer to recovery and *appraisal*—as is the case with Rothman, who remains severely underrepresented in film history, analysis, and their associated archives. Recovery and appraisal feminist archival interventions bring to light what Antoinette Burton calls ‘small stories’: “[…] fragments of lives and dramas that we have only glimpses of but that serve as testimony to the fugitive work of gender and equally fleeting presence of women as subject across a vast
Feminist archival intervention turns those small stories into broader narratives, moving them from historical fragment into holistic construction, a process that works to rebalance the power differentials endemic to normative historical memory.

As such, feminist archival interventions can be understood as scholastic activism. In her book *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order*, Kate Eichhorn advocates for the appraisal of feminist histories and the beginnings of radical knowledge production in archival spaces. She notes: “The archive is where academic and activist work frequently converge. Indeed, the creation of archives has become integral to how knowledge is produced and legitimated and how feminist activists, artists, and scholars make their voices audible.”

Interestingly, both Eichhorn and Suzanne Hildenbrand argue that feminist archival interventions as activism is, in part, an outgrowth of the current climate of neoliberal postfeminism. Hildenbrand, tracking the institutional history and processes of women’s collection in libraries and archives posits:

> When feminism is weak, seemingly the vision of a few eccentrics or theoreticians, women’s collections are few in number and have a limited agenda. Preservation of even a portion of the record is a major goal in such times. Paradoxically, many major women’s collections of today can trace their origins to periods of low interest in feminism.

Eichhorn, drawing on Hildenbrand, make a more forthright conclusion, linking oppressive neoliberalism with the degradation of agency—political, social, identity-based, and so on. Eichhorn argues that this focus on the past should not be understood as a move to escape the present, but “[…] rather as an attempt to regain agency in an era when the ability to collectively imagine and enact other ways of being in the world has become deeply eroded.”

Working within an oppressive economic, political, and social climate is not the only challenge to advancing feminist archival interventions; practical and material barriers exist as
well. Writing in the mid-1980s, Ellen Gay Detlefsen noted the important issue of access as a key issue. She outlined four main roadblocks to feminist archival access:

1. Finding information regarding women in archives is difficult, as is finding information regarding feminists; the two cannot be conflated yet often they are.
2. Any approach to addressing women and feminists in the archive must be done interdisciplinarity, which is often overlooked.
3. There is no consistent terminology across the board; therefore archival searches are necessarily always incomplete.
4. A significant number of services and indexes for women’s are not machine-accessible.\textsuperscript{cxlix}

Years later, access to institutional collections remains a pressing issue. For example, the International Council on Archives (ICA), a transnational non-governmental organization that leads the way in archiving standards and practices, has specifically built standards around restricted access. The ICA’s “General International Standard Archive Description, Second Edition,” a document that provides guidelines for standardizing archives regardless of type or location, declares a stated motivation for access to materials as “[…] accessible at the proper time to all who have a right to access it.” That ‘right’ is set by each individual archive in service of itself, rather than the potential researcher. This design often makes accessing archives notoriously difficult and potentially prohibitively expensive, especially in the case of private archives, which often require access fees. Difficulty in access is exponentially increased if institutional employees, as information gatekeepers, look unfavorably upon the researcher’s stated project and the associated need to access their collection.

Institutional access is still a significant issue facing researchers, although the advent of digitization and online searches has been a significant help in making more archival material available. However, one must be careful not to slip into the rhetoric of digital utopia when considering the impact of new technologies on current incarnations of the archive. Digitization is a costly process, and is often only viable as a holistic option to archives housed in large-scale, well-funded institutions. Additionally, the cost of digitization, even for larger institutions, can be
prohibitive, which is particularly true for the digitization of film, a medium that has a unique and challenging archival life.

*The Archival Life of Film*

The earliest significant film archives emerged in the 1930s in Western Europe and the United States, established by large cultural institutions like the British Film Institute (BFI) and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). Hollywood studios and other commercial film production entities were largely uninterested in film preservation after initial distribution and subsequent theatrical runs primarily because there were no economic imperatives for preserving film. This changed in the 1950s with the introduction of television and the realization that commercial film production companies could repurpose their older films as television products, providing significant secondary economic value. Due to the late start of film preservation, it is estimated that “[…] fewer than half of the feature films made before 1950 have survived, and less than 20% survive from the 1920s […].”

Additionally, the chemical composition of early celluloid film stock negatively contributed to the evolution of film preservation. The nitric acid, and later acetate, that formed early film stock was highly susceptible to chemical decomposition, and could degrade to a point of extremely low ignition temperature, becoming highly explosive and unstable. The instability and significant safety risked posed by degraded nitric and acetate film stock—combined with the pre-1950s lack of economic imperative to preserve previously released films—led many commercial film producers to discard older films.

Archives that chose to preserve celluloid film utilized a technique called copy to preserve, wherein a film is duplicated using a continuous contact printer, after which the original print is discarded. Leo Enticknap historicizes:
[...] destruction after duplication remained standard practice for many commercial footage libraries (who did not want the risk and expense of maintaining large quantities of volatile material) and public sector archives (which could not justify the cost both of preservation copying and storing the originals). Even the advice leaflet on nitrate handling and storage issues by Eastman Kodak advised destruction until it was revised in 2002 to suggest that only elements ‘which have reached the third stage of decomposition or have no historical value’ should be disposed of.\textsuperscript{clv}

Although a positive step in preservation, copy to preserve prints degraded the image over time (as copies were made from copies), preserved discoloration and other imperfections in the print, and the copy print itself faced the same type of chemical instability challenges at the original. The process was also subject to institutional concerns, restrictions, and ideological constraints, which often play as prominent a role in archival composition as does the push for preservation. As Emily Cohen notes:

\textit{[...]} filmic images’ social lives persist through the advent of new reproductive technologies that require intensive labor. This embeds them in political, economic, and social relationships. In this sense, the film archive, unlike the museum archive, is more of a cloning bank than an archaeologist’s site.\textsuperscript{clvi}

Copyling to preserve in this sense functioned when institutionally supported, but acted as more of a stopgap for total loss than a sustainable preservation model.

In the 1990s film preservation took several critical steps forward. Film stock began to be produced on a polyester base, which is not susceptible to the same chemical degradation as nitric and acetate stock. Secondly, researchers developed controlled temperature and humidity storage protocols for celluloid that extended the life of nitrate and acetate prints for one hundred-plus years, effectively eliminating the dangers of print degradation and ignition potential. Indeed, these protocols have been so effective that the Science and Technology Council of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has continuously stated that celluloid film, properly stored, is far and away the most effective and cost-efficient preservation method.\textsuperscript{clvii}

The cumulative result of the archival life of film is such that the best options for preservation are based in maintaining the materiality of film prints. For researchers, however,
material prints compound issues of access primarily because the researcher needs the ability—both temporal and financial—to travel to film archives (often multiple times) across the globe to interact with their object of study. The materiality of filmic archives is the film historian’s boon and curse: the stability of new preservation methods have saved hundreds of thousand of films from destruction, but access to them—and by proxy study of them—is restricted by their physical location and the researcher’s ability to access that location.

Here, again, one must be careful not to turn to new technologies as a panacea for issues of preservation and researcher access. Digitization for celluloid prints, or what Giovanna Fossanti calls “film born” (films originating on and preserved through celluloid) prints is an extremely difficult proposition. Digitizing film born materials requires vast digital storage space. As Fossanti outlines, a single “[…] 35mm film with a running time of 90 minutes, once digitized, can reach 1.5 to 6 Terabytes and more of data, depending on the scanning resolution.” Additionally, the recurring costs for digitizing is extremely high. Data storage, lack of standardization in digital formats, the data migration and new purchases necessitated by rapid hard and software obsolescence, and the requisite training around digital preservation all contribute to the high economic cost of film archive digitization. Again, then, the materiality of filmic archives is primary, re-centering concerns around researcher access.

Ontological concerns surrounding the archival life of film compound the practical and material issues. As Fossanti bluntly states:

Caught up in everyday practicalities, film archivists rarely have time to reflect on the nature of film and on the consequences deriving from new technologies on the viability of film as a medium. On the other hand, researchers investigating the ontology of the medium theorize future scenarios at a much faster pace than practice can keep up with, often without considering the material and the institutional realities underlying the medium. This situation is leading to an increasing estrangement between theory and practice.
This lack of dialogue and the estrangement it engenders often results theorists and researchers working at cross-purposes in relation to the capabilities of archives. For example, as the study of adult film grows within cinema studies, researchers are finding themselves held back by the intersection of archival practice and cultural taste. As Eric Schaefer notes, any archival institution that receives any type of public funding is “[…] open to potential budget cuts or other retaliation on the part of those who feel adult films offend the common good,” thereby making the preservation of adult films an risky proposition. Exacerbating the problem of adult film preservation is its negative cultural reputation; they simply have not been considered important materials to preserve. These logics are very similar to the ones that led to the mass loss of exploitation film prints; the assumed cultural cache of the films simply could not justify the time, space, and expense required to preserve them.

Increased scholarly work in adult and exploitation film is attempting to turn the tide in regard to preservation, working with institutional archives to proactively shape not only the collections themselves, but also the cultural knowledge around the necessity for removing discriminatory judgments against certain film styles. Schaefer expounds: “It is the task of scholars and archivists working together to emphasize that one does not have to approve of, be an apologist for, or a champion of adult movies to recognize that they are a part of our culture and that they represent a legitimate area of scholarly interest.”

Given these challenges, what viable options remain to film scholars working within areas little-documented in institutional archives? An increasingly productive recourse is the construction of alternative archives, which can offer the option of working outside the confines of strict institutionality. This is the path that I have taken in my own curation of a Rothman archive, following a varied but successful group of models and curatorial philosophies.
Alternative Archive Creation

Archives, at their base, are necessarily exclusionary forms of knowledge creation. With the conceptual expansion of the archive and the understanding that archives are subjective rather than objective, scholars across disciplines have begun creating alternative archives to produce work on historically marginalized populations. To highlight the flexibility and potential in this practice, I will trace three examples of alternate archives, foregrounding the ways in which each has endeavored to stretch intellectual understanding through the reworking of archival curation and research.

Working in a queer/affective studies paradigm, scholar Sara Ahmed has created a conceptualization of the idea of the archive based on a reevaluation of how we understand and relate to objects and their emotional and affective resonance. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed advocates creating alternative archives through contact rather than materiality. She explains this as:

[…] a model of the archive not as the conversion of self into textual gathering, but as a ‘contact zone.’ An archive is an effect of multiple forms of contact, including institutional forms of contact (with libraries, books, web sites), as well as everyday forms of contact (with friends, families, others.) Some forms of contact are presented and authorized through writing (and listed in the references), whilst other forms of contact will be missing, will be erased, even though they may leave their trace. Germane to her idea of an archive of contacts is Ahmed’s understanding of the affect paradigm as the effect of the circulation between signs and objects—the more the two circulate the more affective value they generate as an effect of that circulation. Therefore, a sign’s affective value is dependent on how much, and how, it has circulated in the broader world. Importantly, this speaks to the role of the curator and/or archivist in creating alternative archives, and how their own affective interaction with the contents of the archive—both material and immaterial—form a critical addition to both archival construction and the ways in which the archive is utilized.
Signs, their objects, and their generated affective value combine to create objects of feeling. Objects are not static; they move and change as their signs circulate and their affective value grows. These objects have a ‘stickiness’ to them which “[…] tells us a history of the object that is not dependent on the endurance of the quality of stickiness: what sticks ‘shows us’ where the object has travelled through what it has gathered onto its surface, gatherings that become a part of the object, and call into question its integrity as an object.”

The stickiness of an object shapes our contact with it, and in turn these zones of contact generate affective resonance. An archive of contact, then, speaks to not only what we do with objects, but what those objects do to us, and how our own passive and active material and immaterial ‘doing’ creates the archive.

Ahmed’s construction of an alternative archive, then, is one where considered objects, their cultural life (read: stickiness), the affective current developed between curator and object and researcher and object, and the emotional resonance of ‘doing’ archival work contributes to the totality of the alternative archive itself.

Similar to Ahmed’s archive of emotion and objects are the archival creations of Anne Cvetkovich. In her books *An Archive of Feelings* and *Depression: A Public Feeling*, Cvetkovich strives to create alternate archives that speak to how emotions constitute an archive of the everyday. For Cvetkovich, the term ‘archive of feelings’ is a way of understanding cultural texts as depository of the feelings and emotions that are encoded in these texts and generated from their production, use, and reception.

The archive of feelings therefore holds many kinds of documents, both ephemeral and material. It has its own forms of unabashed sentimentality […] But it also documents those moments when it is not possible to feel anything and when something other than a familiar or clichéd scene is necessary to conjure sentiment. […] Sometimes the archive contains tears and anger, and sometimes it includes the dull silence of numbness. Its feelings can belong to one nation or many, and they are both intimate and public. They can make one feel totally alone, but in being made public, they are revealed to be part of a shared experience of the social.
The archive of feelings is necessarily tangible, intangible, and personal. The imbrications of feelings and emotions generated as a result of reception and use, the materiality of cultural texts, and their histories (often industrialized histories) of production allow for an archive that will vary with each creator, and even vary within creators. This is a particularly useful idea when thinking through the creation of alternative filmic archives, as it acknowledges that a significant part of the archival life of any given historical artifact is the cultural life it inhabits. Film, once released from the industrial production machine into the cultural world, develops its own life across space and time. This allows for developments in feeling, emotions, and experiences that evolve the conception of a singular object history into a multiplicity of histories, which aids in accounting for transformations in spectatorship, reception, exhibition, and memory as the film moves through culture.

As feeling, emotions, and use evolve across space and time, archives of feelings necessarily evolve along with them. Cvetkovich’s conception of an alternative archive is not meant to exist permanently; indeed it directly refutes long-term preservation beyond the materials that are curated at any given time. These materials then, like the text *An Archive of Feelings* itself, serve both as a product of the archive Cvetkovich has created, as well as a type of archive in and of itself. Evolving the archive of feelings concept, *Depression: A Public Feeling* works to turn the personal and private into the collective and public as a way of creating an archive of survival that looks to cultural texts to speak to varied affects and represent marginalized and necessarily heterogeneous subjects. Archives of survival are, then, exactly that.

Ideologically aligned with Ahmed and Cvetkovich are the alternative archival creations the orphan film movement. Begun in the early 1990s, the idea of the orphan film emerged “[…]
as the dominant metaphor within the moving image archival community for use in positioning film preservation as a legitimate enterprise on the national public policy cultural agenda.\textsuperscript{clxx}

Reiterated in the National Film Preservation Act of 1992, the term ‘orphan’ was bound up in legal distinctions of U.S. copyright laws, aligning orphan films with discourses of unpublished material, lapsed, non-renewed, or lost copyright.\textsuperscript{clxxi} However, the term took on a broader implication than one used to designate the loss of the copyright (read: parent). As Heidi Solbrig explains:

The orphan genre as a designator also tends to indicate that these were films that had been deemed, at one time or another, less valuable and disposable—ephemera in the timeline of culture. The orphan cinema movement has encouraged scholars to examine these films as cultural artifacts whose production, distribution, and exhibition—as well as the texts themselves—can tell stories about communities, institutions, governmental initiatives, and educational and social movements.\textsuperscript{clxxii}

Orphan films exist as a concept that works to account for “[…] any film whose future is in jeopardy—due to its diminished status in film history and its low priority in the usual operations of the archive […].”\textsuperscript{clxxiii}

Operationally, the orphan film movement exists within institutional and alternative archives, as well as temporal events. Rick Prelinger, an archivist and professor at the University of California Santa Cruz, founded one of the first repositories of orphan films in 1982. The Prelinger Archives, a “[…] collection of ephemeral films, including advertising, industrial, education amateur, and documentary films that depict everyday U.S. life and culture throughout the 20th century”\textsuperscript{clxxiv} was originally housed in New York City by Prelinger himself. After amassing over 60,000 films, the physical collection was obtained by the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division in 2002.\textsuperscript{clxxv} In addition to the Library of Congress archival space, the Prelinger Archives itself exits in San Francisco with 11,000 videotape and digital titles, all collected after the 2002 acquisition.\textsuperscript{clxxvi} Along with the
institutional archives at the Library of Congress and the alternative physical archival site in San Francisco, Prelinger also has made over 6,500 title available for free download and use on the Internet Archive, a non-profit library of free software, music, books, film, other cultural material.

Orphan films exist as a temporal archive through the biennial Orphan Film Symposium, in existence since 1999 and organized by Dan Streible, a professor and Director of the Moving Image Arching and Preservations program at New York University. The event mixes academic and archival practitioners as well as [...] media makers, curators, and technical experts, to screen and study previously forgotten or marginalized material. "The symposiums creates spaces for viewing and inquiry, furthering the broader goal of the orphan film movement to make “[...] films available to students, scholars, and the public through the institution of the archive […] not just a repository for the odds and ends of cinematic history, but part of a living record of the last century to be shared as widely as possible." This calls to mind Cvetkovich’s archives of survival operating in practice and reconfigures the symposium, as a discrete event, as its own impermanent temporal archive.

Philosophically, constructing the archive as an orphanage has the power to transform it from a specific site of sanctioned remembrance to a living repository of “[...] forgotten, abandoned images and texts." This expands the range of film history, combining studies in ideology and culture with representational analysis by looking at cultural histories of the ordinary or forgotten, rather than focusing solely on master works. The orphanage approach constructs something akin to Ahmed’s cultural political of affective circulation, offering new “[...] storytelling techniques that challenge traditional linear narratives by juxtaposing fragments aural and visual testimony of a time, people, and place." While the orphan film movement doesn’t negate institutional archives totally, it does understand that their usefulness cannot be all-
encompassing, and as such curating alternative archives both in philosophy, medium, and time allows for a more dynamic and generative production of film histories.

The examples outlined above demonstrate ways in which scholars have attempted to leave traditional archives behind, innovating new modes of analysis for understanding various aspects of cultural life. Importantly, most of these scholars have been forced into alternate archive creation because the traditional archive has failed to preserve the materials necessary for their work, particularly for the populations they are working for and from. These archives are spaces of scholarly disidentification. If traditional archives and the lines of scholarship they encourage serve as normalizing protocols of academic inquiry, then scholars working outside of the traditional archival paradigm engage in their own form of disidentification through anti-hegemonic knowledge production. “Disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology.”

Alternate archives, archives created to address the gaps and erasures of the traditional archive, and meant to impress the importance of the personal and impermanent, can act as this third way, generating not only new archives, but fundamentally altering what we understand the terms archive to signify at all. These examples, both in practice and ideology, inform a discussion of my own alternative archive.

**Curating the Rothman Archive**

My research into Rothman began in the fall of 2011. Working to accumulate both primary and second source documents I was struck with two early realizations: there was minimal published or archived information on Rothman, and what existed was contradictory.

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23 It is worth noting that Muñoz’s book offers a volatile and shifting archive of its own, an archive that purposefully rejects coherence as a way of allowing him space for theoretical and analytical thought.
The project quickly morphed into a three-year investigation into the life, work, and legacy of a director largely absent from institutional and disciplinary memory.

I hypothesize that this absence is a result of two determining factors: that Rothman was a woman director, and that she was directing in a filmic cycle considered then, and now, disposable. These factors were critical not only in guiding my overall project, but specifically in my drive to build my own Rothman archive. As a woman studying exploitation film in the academy, I feel an ongoing kinship with Rothman and her existence as an outlier. Exploitation, and by extension adult film, is studied by a small handful of academics, a scant number of which are women. Like Rothman, I work in an area with a masculinist reputation and have often experienced the burden of representation that comes with being one of the few women in the privileged space of men. Rothman’s history—or lack thereof—felt affectively familiar. The history, or rather lack thereof, of Rothman and other women directors, felt all too real in the present. This affective affinity pushed me forward, transforming my historiographic approach away from mining the archives for what was there and toward curating my own archive with what was missing. As Claire Johnston notes, “Memory, an understanding of the struggles of the past, and as a sense of one’s own history, constitute a vital dynamic in any struggle.”

My guiding principle in curating a Rothman archive was not simply to pull together the information necessary to wedge her into existing film history. Rather, just as important as explicating Rothman as a significant actor in the development of film, I sought to investigate the process of the construction of film history itself. “Merely to introduce women into the dominant notion of film history, yet another series of ‘facts’ to be assimilated into the existing notions of chronology, would quite clearly be sterile and regressive. ‘History’ is not some abstract ‘thing’ which bestows significance on past events in retrospect.” Part of my curatorial efforts, then,
was to use the Rothman archive to envision alternate modes of film history and its associated archives while simultaneously attempting to move past standardized operating practices and biases of institutional memory.

One outcome of these efforts resulted in letting go of the idea of finding ‘original’ versions of Rothman’s film. In the mode of Cvetkovich’s impermanent archives, I undertook collecting Rothman’s material output as a collection of the available now, rather than the static past. This meant eschewing the idea of original prints in favor of multiple filmic and material realities. Rather than being a detriment to curation, this more closely mirrored the life of the films themselves. As was noted in the previous chapter, exploitation films were, more often than not, exhibited in versions far from their original. Cut by censors and exhibited in hot and cold versions, the exhibitive lives the films inhabited were often quite different than their original form. If my goal was to understand these films and their influence as cultural products, conceptualizing them as iterative as opposed to fixed texts was crucial. The realities of exploitation film preservation are also important. Eric Schaefer explains:

In many instances with exploitation and sexploitation films, as well as early hard-core movies, only a handful of prints were struck—often fewer than forty. These prints may have circulated for five, ten, or more years—far longer than standard Hollywood film. These facts along—the small number of prints combined with the longevity of runs—would seem reason enough to make these movies a preservation priority. But because of the low status of such films they would have been the first to go when storage was a concern.\textsuperscript{clxxxv }

The lack of archival priority was clear when I began collecting Rothman’s films.

The most difficult Rothman titles to find were her early films. Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire was virtually unavailable publically. Eventually I found a copy—the only copy purporting to be the film itself—on a torrent website. The torrent was very obviously missing several scenes; large chunks of the film hastily edited out resulted in giant leaps in time and narrative. A fan edit of the film was found on the same site; this version had sections of hardcore
pornography sliced into the film but had also clearly been made from the previously discovered torrent, as it was missing the same sections of film. Interestingly both versions, although unhelpful in giving me a whole film, were contemporary representations of the historical exhibitive life of exploitation films: missing scenes, added sensationalism, and dubious distribution methods. They also mirrored the idea of object stickiness embedded in Ahmed’s affective archives—the edits, the missing footage, the illegal distribution and viewing illuminate the stickiness of cultural life that these products have accumulated as living material objects.

The search for *It’s a Bikini World* raised another issue that plagues the present-day distribution of second wave exploitation films. After finding the title available on several websites from various distribution companies, I investigated each company to verify, as much as possible, the quality and reliability of the DVD I would purchase. I chose a company with a seemingly good reputation and customer reviews. When the DVD arrived it, was a burned disc containing a version of the film that had been played on the cable station Turner Classic Movies. The film clearly had been edited—about 15 minutes of the later section of the movie was gone with no thought toward narrative or visual continuity—although it is unknown if this is how it played on the station (cut for time) or if these edits were made by company who sold the disc. Filmic alterations of re-released or re-issued films are more common than one may think.

Contemporary distribution companies who sell exploitation films often participate in altering the film with no warning to the buyer. Schaefer again explains:

[…] companies that are releasing material commercially may cut, add to, or alter a film to improve its sales potential, while making no mention of such alternations. At times films lacking titles or identification have had titles concocted to facilitate their marketing, creating potential confusion. The commercial video enterprises will often release a film regardless of condition. In many instances their offerings are washed-out, splicey dupes that were destined for the dumpster. More than a few films have been release with foreign language subtitles because they are the only prints that could be located. Indeed, prints
are often choppy, incomplete (based on censorship records, press-book synopses, or other accounts), or have reels in the wrong order.

Unable to find the film publically I had only one option: view the film at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), which happened to have a copy.

The UCLA Film & Television archive had copies of several of Rothman’s films. However, the process of accessing them speaks to a critical issue in the development of a Rothman archive, and more broadly to the feasibility of conducting scholarly research into marginalized filmmakers or filmic cycles: the economic cost of scholarship. Often ignored as a factor in research projects, the economics of archival research in cinema studies is a salient issue, particularly for junior scholars and/or scholars working with marginalized texts/films/filmic cycles, etc. As described earlier in this chapter, digitization and online archival processes for film do not guarantee universal access; physical access to archives is still a necessary component of film research. Therefore, the economic cost of archival research must be taken into account.

With the increased corporatization of the neoliberal university, funds to support research travel—in particular for junior scholars—are scarcer than ever. The American Academy of Arts & Sciences reports that between 2005-2015 “Spending for humanities research equaled 0.55% of the amount dedicated to science and engineering […]” and the numbers continue to drop.

The costs of archival research (travel and accommodations, access costs, funds for reproducing materials, etc.) for the research can be high indeed, with the potential to climb into the thousands of dollars depending on where the archive is located. The questions that must be asked are: at what point is the cost of archival research, especially junior scholars, too high? And when the cost of archival research continues to rise as the rate of funding decreases, how do we understand the economic impact of archival work in relation to foreclosing new and generative research?
These are not just issues that impact researchers, but also the institutions that house archival materials. For example, the UCLA archives held several of Rothman’s films on 35mm. However, for the films to be viewable they needed to be transferred from celluloid to tape. Due to both the cost of the transfer and the need to hold fast to established criteria to manage overall archival costs, the archive was only able to offer to transfer those films which were unavailable for purchase. Based on these criteria, the only films I was able to have transferred were two those that were the hardest to obtain: *Blood Bath* and *It’s a Bikini World*. The transfers were made from prints donated to the archives from MGM, who had obtained them from American International Pictures as ‘TV edit prints,’ meaning they had been edited for content and time. Traveling to Los Angeles from East Central Illinois was the only way I was able to see these films in as close to their entirety as possible. As for the other Rothman films the collection held, it remains to be seen what version they exist in; they did not pass the bar to bear the economic cost of transfer.

What I came to determine over the course and cost of three years is that the archive I needed would necessarily be an exercise in archival self-curation. Key to this process was identifying my own biases: I had to let go of any preconceived notions of Rothman’s films, her place in film history, her representation in the industry, and importantly, what I thought (assumed or hoped, perhaps) her ideological positions, particularly in relation to feminist thought. The material, and Rothman herself, must speak for themselves. In this regard, I took to heart Vivian Sobchak’s statement that “[…] feminist concerns are not necessarily (nor obligatorily) imposed from the beginning but rather emerge and take their particular and various forms and the research—not the dogma—dictate.”\textsuperscript{clxxxviii} I see my self-curated archive in the vein of Cvetkovich’s archives of survival: survival for Rothman’s career, her films, and for the idea
not only of female filmmakers but also of the potential for women to successfully exist and create in long-held masculinized spaces. As an archive of survival, the Rothman archive is also an archive of possibility.

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[cviııı] Ibid, 7.
[cxıııııııııı] Carolyn Steedman, “‘Something She Called a Fever’”: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust (Or, in the Archives with Michelet and Derrida),” American Historical Review 106:4 (October 2001): 1161.
[cxıııııııııııııııııı] Ibid.


Ibid, 93-94.

Ibid, 98.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


CHAPTER 4

STEPHANIE ROTHMAN DOES NOT EXIST

“The most bitter irony of Stephanie Rothman’s career is that the one woman filmmaker of the Seventies with a consistent and solid body of work—a body of work that expresses the possibilities of American society—seems to have a better future as a cause than as a director.”

Tucked in a far corner on a back shelf in the legendary (and now-defunct) Kim’s Video & Music in New York City, an image glared aggressively at me from the cover of a DVD. A White woman with long blonde hair and a Black woman with an Afro, both clad in hot pants and ripped chambray shirts, were struggling to pull what looked like a plow through a deep patch of ground, while a shirtless White man with a whip loomed menacingly behind them. In the bottom left hand corner, a muscled, shirtless, Black man stood with his foot on the neck of a Black woman. The title and tagline read TERMINAL ISLAND: WHERE WE DUMP OUR HUMAN GARBAGE, starring Tom Selleck. The film’s director, Stephanie Rothman, was a surprise and a mystery. After a speedy purchase I was on the subway home, ready to watch my first Stephanie Rothman film.

Terminal Island did not provide the second wave exploitation viewing experience I had come to expect. Of course it had similarities (low budgets, uneven acting, cleavage, hot pants, etc.) and it, like other exploitation films, was working to conveying a specific ideological message. Critically, however, it wasn’t a message buried beneath layers of degrading spectacle, requiring complicated patterns of recuperation to justify the pleasure in watching. This message, bluntly calling for complete social overhaul in service of equity and

Figure 1: Terminal Island DVD cover
equality, *was* the film. This immediately begged two questions: who was Stephanie Rothman, and why hadn’t I heard about her before?

That first screening, which at the time of writing was a decade ago, did not foreshadow the long, frustrating, and immensely enjoyable journey I would eventually take into the world of Stephanie Rothman. Rothman’s enigmatic status in film history became readily apparent. Early web searches turned up patchy and contradictory information. My first library databases were slightly more productive, importantly revealing Pam Cook’s brief discussion of Rothman in the 1970s. The trail, however, soon went cold. It would eventually take three years of research, culminating in interviews with Rothman herself, to finally begin to answer the two questions that undergird my work—who is Stephanie Rothman, and why doesn’t anyone know her?

Unraveling the Rothman mystery was particularly tricky because her career, and her historical legacy, has been primarily defined through other entities: producers, her husband, exploitations films themselves, her status as ‘woman’/unlikely professional in exploitation, and other directors. In the historical narrative of her own career, Stephanie Rothman as embodied subject is a marginalized figure. Examples of the multiple ways in which Rothman has been constructed as incidental in her own narrative are included below.\(^{24}\)

\(^{24}\) This chart is meant to give a brief overview of existing narratives around the way Rothman and her career have been narrated by others. Many of these issues will be specifically addressed in this and subsequent chapters.
In light of this troubling historical and archival trend, the focus of this chapter is to narrate the career of Stephanie Rothman through her own subjecthood. It is important to note that Rothman has always been invested in narrating her own story. As she communicated to me in an early email correspondence: “[…] I do want to author my own story, only because I don’t want it distorted.” In compiling Rothman’s personal and professional biography in this chapter then, I have consciously used her own words as much as possible to ensure that her voice, as marker of her subjectivity, is foregrounded in her story. This, however, does not negate my own analysis of her career trajectory, filmmaking themes, or analysis of her industrial position. Rather, the goal of this process is to blend Rothman’s voice with my own historical perspective and analysis to

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<th>Rothman and Subject Marginality</th>
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<td><strong>Narrating Rothman Through Producers</strong></td>
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| “He [Woolner] suggested to Corman […] that they coproduce a movie he had dreamed up called The Student Nurses […] Woolner made his Student Nurses film with Stephanie Rothman as director and her husband Charles Swartz, as producer.” cx
| Larry Woolner, New Line and Dimension producer, had an idea for a film about female nurses. Rothman conceived the story, cast, directed, and produced the film, here attributed as “his [Woolner’s] Student Nurses film.” |
| **Narrating Rothman as Unlikely Professional** |
| :“[…] except for Stephanie Rothman, exploitation-filmmakers were male […].”cxcl |
| The tactic focuses on Rothman’s ‘unlikely’ status in exploitation film, using the marker of ‘women’ to highlight her seemingly inappropriate space in the industry while simultaneously ignoring her as an embodied creative professional |
| **Narrative Rothman as Wife** |
| “Early in his career, Swartz collaborated with his wife on several features. He wrote and directed several B movies, including "It's a Bikini World" (1966) and "The Velvet Vampire" (1971).” cxclii |
| Rothman and Swartz shared most of the writing credits for their work, but Rothman herself directed all the films while Swartz served as her producer. Note that Rothman here is mentioned only as “his wife,” with no proper name given. |
| “He produced eight feature films, including ‘Terminal Island,’ ‘The Student Nurses,’ and ‘The Velvet Vampire.’ He is survived by his wife Stephanie Rothman.” cxcliii |
| Note there is no mention that Rothman was the director and co-writer of the films mentioned. |

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[101]
produce a narrative that contextualizes her space in film history. Holistically mapping Rothman’s career outside of the concept of subjective marginality can provide a model for interventional historiography when considering the legacy of women working in film production. To do this adjudicates Rothman’s career—her films, experience, labor, and minority industrial position—as its own narrative, rather than as a footnote to the histories of individual producers, production companies, other directors, or a now-extinct film form.

Who is Stephanie Rothman?

Stephanie Rothman was born on November 9, 1936 to Theodore and Shandel (Jean) Rothman in Patterson, NJ. Her father, a neuropsychiatrist, was the son of Jewish-Polish immigrants. Her mother Jean was a Jewish émigré who moved from the Ukraine to Canada as a young child. Jean’s professional trajectory, her desire for her own career outside the home, her dedication to education, and her pursuit of these goals outside of extemporaneous gendered social conventions set the template for Rothman’s own life path. Rothman recalls:

My grandfather didn’t believe in higher education for women, so he would give her no help going to college and so she entered nursing school because it was free. She wanted very much to have a professional career and some kind of professional training, and so she became a nurse. Then, when she came to the United States, she went to the New School for Social Research, took additional courses, managed to train herself sufficiently to qualify as a public health nurse and with additional course work and training to become a medical social worker. [...] she worked with Margaret Sanger in the 1920s on promoting birth control, particularly among immigrant groups.

In 1945, when Rothman was 8, her family moved to Los Angeles, settling first in the San Fernando Valley and later in Brentwood:

I grew up in the San Fernando Valley where my parents bought a home during World War II. Normally, I don’t think they would have moved into that neighborhood, but it was the only housing available so I went to school—grammar school, junior high school and the first year and a half of high school—with people who were from different backgrounds than my own. I was the daughter of an upper middle class professional, while they were lower middle class to poor. Their parents were generally people that had clerical jobs or worked in factories or as domestics or laborers, and they were mostly Mexican-American or children of Oklahoma migrants from the dustbowl who had come to California in the 1930s. Because of this difference in our backgrounds, I learned about
the struggles of people who I otherwise would not have met. My parents, who came from poor immigrant backgrounds themselves, thought this was a good education for me. Once I got into high school, I met some children who came from the same socio-economic background as mine, but I didn’t fit in with most of them. We had different interests and by then, different values. I was odd [laughs]. But as an only child, I was used to being alone a lot, so I read, I danced and I imagined. 

As a child Rothman spent a majority of her time with adults, often the artists, intellectuals, and musicians who composed her parent’s social circle. Always encouraged to pursue artistic endeavors, Rothman took up ballet at a young age. In high school, she was offered the opportunity to turn professional, something that her parents did not support. She recounts:

They didn’t have a very good opinion of people who had theatrical careers, whether as actors or as dancers. Not because they looked down on them, but because they thought it was too much of a struggle to make a living, and they didn’t want me to have to struggle to make a living. They wanted me to be educated and pursue a career, a career that would feed me rather than a career that would make me starve. 

As enriching as the emphasis on cultural activities was in the Rothman household, it also created a divide between Rothman and her classmates, often leaving her isolated.

There was a complete disconnect between the cultural activities in my home and the socioeconomic level of my home and the children I went to school with, and it isolated me […] after school I didn’t play games, I went home and I read and I did my homework, you know. That’s what I did. Other kids did go around and play and so forth, but I really didn’t. […] I was called a brain, and that was usually an occasion for hostility. […] I was always an outsider. I mean, I wasn’t teased or abused or anything, but I was […] just not part of the group.

Her penchant for education and the arts, her comfort amongst adults, and her relative disconnect from her peers led Rothman to consider the structure of her broader world at an early age, particularly the role of women within it. This was unusual for a girl coming of age in the late 1940s and 1950s particularly in light of the retrenchment of the nuclear family through rigid and prescriptive gender roles, a reaction to the number of women who had flooded the workforce during World War II. However Rothman, like her mother, was always career-oriented and independent-minded. “I observed from an early age that economic dependency bred a sense of
The drive for economic independence and career opportunities strongly influenced her views on marriage:

I looked around me and saw that women were paid less, that women who didn’t work described themselves as ‘just a housewife.’ I saw the attitudes that men had toward women and their capacities in the world at large, which were very demeaning in some instances, but in most instances were at least dismissive or in some way expressed a belief that women weren’t as good as men, couldn’t achieve what men could achieve. I had never bought into the belief that I was put on this earth to marry and reproduce and keep the home of a man, and be socially subservient and financially dependent on him.

Driven toward independence, she graduated high school in 1953 at the age of 16 and began her undergraduate education at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). She would stay at UCLA for two and a half years before transferring to University of California at Berkeley in 1955 to finish her degree. The same year she became engaged to a young medical school student. Although the engagement may seem incongruous with her statements on marriage, Rothman did not disavow the institution itself, merely the social imperative that forced women to choose either a career or a husband. Like her mother, she was determined to have both.

Importantly, it was during Rothman’s time in Northern California where the idea of filmmaking first occurred to her. After watching Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and Kubrick’s *Paths of Glory* (1957), both transformative experiences, she recalls: “It sort of occurred to me that it would be wonderful to make films at that time, but I did not think of it as a career goal because I had no idea how one could go about doing this.” She continued with her studies in sociology until her graduation in 1958.

Post-undergraduate work, Rothman entered the UC Berkeley Masters in Sociology program, where she studied briefly with Erving Goffman. A consummate pragmatist, Rothman would leave the program a year later after seeing the almost total lack of opportunity for women in higher education at that time.
I began to have grave doubts that I would even get an academic position. I look around again and I didn’t see many women doing it. […] I mean, it’s such a classic case of, if no hope is held out to you, if you look ahead of you and you see that there is no one left on the ladder, you just tend to give up. What’s the point?

That same year she decided she was too young to marry and broke off her engagement.

A graduate school refugee, Rothman returned to Southern California and in 1959 began working at Systems Development Corporation, which contracted with the United States Air Force on defense systems. Beginning as a technical writer, she would later be promoted to editor. It was this work, as unlikely as it may sound, that would eventually land Rothman in film school.

Still interested in filmmaking, Rothman began taking evening courses at the University of Southern California (USC) in basic camera, editing, sound, and screening writing. Her employer paid for the courses, ostensibly so Rothman could join their filmmaking division after her training. For Rothman, it was a way to test the filmmaking waters, her own creative ability, and her aptitude behind the camera. Rothman fell in love with filmmaking: “[…] I adored film. I absolutely—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.” She entered the USC graduate program in filmmaking as a full time student in 1962.

The decision to enter film school was not without doubt. She remembers worrying not about her ability to do the work, but acceptance by her male peers: “How am I going to do this? Also: Would I be accepted? Would they make life difficult for me? Would they sabotage my work? What would happen? But I decided to do it anyway.” Rothman’s fears, although understandable, were—for the most part—
unfounded. She remembers her time at USC as a primarily positive and productive one. As one of only two female graduate students in the program, she was strongly encouraged by the faculty.

Aside from me, there were only two other women there. Two graduate students, of which I was one, and one undergraduate. We were very rare indeed and we were treated very well and taken very seriously. I think that they tried, because we were so unique, to make us feel more welcome.

At USC, Rothman met her future husband and collaborator, Dallas native and Yale graduate Charles S. Swartz. They were professional partners for the entirety of their film careers.

Although intent on directing, Rothman also spent time absorbing film history, theory, and criticism, most notably as a teaching assistant for Arthur Knight. Tenacious, she bore down on absorbing her craft. “It was very important to learn how to be persistent until I accomplished what I needed to accomplish, even if it didn’t come easily at first, that I had to stick with it until I mastered it […]” Her first directorial credit came in 1963 on the student film We Look and See. A collaborative project between Rothman and her classmates, she helmed the film that the student’s described as “[…] a satirical view of children’s primers in which the seamier side of adult life is seen and described by a child.” Using the familiar ‘see spot’ formula from children’s books, the short follows a middle class family whose emphasis on public appearance and the performance of propriety veils the alcoholism, vanity, empty promiscuity, and vapid consumerism at their core.

Although Rothman narrates her time in film school as one free from bias, a group of documents from the We Look and See production book hint at a more nuanced experience. We Look and See exposed friction between Rothman and two male classmates, Eric Timmerman and Anthony “Chick” Fowles, both editors on the project. Disagreements over editing choices led to an initial scrapping of Fowles’ edit of the film, which was followed by a “lengthy shoot-out” between Rothman and Fowles. Both Fowles and Timmerman, in their post-production written
assessments of the project, deemed the film and the process a misuse of their time. Timmerman specifically highlighted Rothman as problematic:

"Only one unusual problem presented itself during production [...] I refer to a certain shall we say strong willedness, if there be such at term, on the part of our director. [...] If, as an editor, the film is assumed to have my approval after it passes through my hands, then I cannot do it the director’s way [...] several unique solutions to the problem were suggested. The one adopted goes something like this: live with it."

Disagreements between editors and directors are neither unusual nor unexpected on film sets, and frankly, neither is a strong-willed director. What Timmerman and Fowles hinted at in their production notes can be understood tension arising from the unexpected role of a woman in the position of power on a film set. The tension around the power dynamic between Rothman as director and these male colleagues would become explicit during the production of her seminar film later that year.

*Duet* (1963) was Rothman’s final student film at USC; she conceived the story, wrote the film, and directed it. The story follows two men: Loomis, a salary man at an unnamed company and Joe, the evening janitor. Although they’ve never met in person, they routinely leave each taped recordings for the other to listen to. These recordings form the basis of a friendship across class and collegial lines. The film opens with Joe cleaning Loomis’ office and listening to the latest recording that has been left for him. Loomis’ voice recounts a story about a former Army friend he was never able to say goodbye to, something he always regretted.

Joe’s response to the tape indicates the depth of the men’s friendship: he narrates the unusually long span of time between tapes from Loomis, and his intentions on following up to check in on him if he hadn’t received one that evening. Curious and worried about his friend’s well being, Joe wonders to Loomis what has kept him so preoccupied. The audience discovers the answer to Joe’s question in the next scene, while Loomis listens to the tape. His secretary
interrupts him, and the conversation between the two of them hints at duplicitousness on her part—in collusion with Loomis’ boss—to have Loomis fired.

Immediately following this confrontation, Loomis packs his personal effects and leaves his office. He rushes out into the hallway and knocks over a mop buckets being used by a janitor; unbeknownst to him the janitor is Joe. Loomis continues without acknowledging or apologizing as Joe angrily calls after him: “Hey! Why don’t you look where you are going! I should make you clean it up!” The film then cuts to Joe inside Loomis’ empty office; he rushes to the tape recorder on the desk. Joe plays the final tape, hoping to find an explanation for Loomis’ sudden departure. What he hears on the tape is an angry message from Loomis to his boss, and no message for himself. Disappointed and hurt at being forgotten—much like the old Army buddy from Loomis’ previous story—Joe turns and mournfully says to the tape recorder, “You could have said goodbye,” before angrily throwing a rag at it.

_Duet_ would be the first foregrounding of a consistent theme in Rothman’s _oeuvre_: socioeconomic class. She explains:

> […] one of the most important things about _Duet_ is the class difference between the two men. One is an office worker and the other is a janitor. They never meet because one works during the day and the other at night. The only way they make contact is by speaking to each other on a tape. And they discover they have something to say to each other. […] And the point I was trying to make was very simple: if we met each other, we might have a lot to say to each other. It wouldn’t necessarily be conflicting; it might be civil or loving. I’ve always believed that we all have a lot to learn from each other.

Issues of class play a critical role in most of Rothman’s films, but have been routinely overlooked in the films’ assessment and analysis, an issue that will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

The experience of making _Duet_ would serve as a template for her future career in a more pejorative way: it set the tone for the frustratingly limited options she would have as a woman filmmaker, both economic and interpersonal. The tensions simmering during the production of
We Look and See between Rothman, Fowles, and Timmerman reached a boiling point on Duet. Fowles and Timmerman, her editors for Duet, were openly harsh in their assessment of working under Rothman: “Shooting agonizingly slow” (Timmerman) and “A) Never trust the lab B) Ditto a female director” (Fowles). Both men served as unit managers and editors on the film; the final cut of Duet had scratches on the negative and incorrectly synched sound.

Reflecting on the incident, Rothman says:

He [Fowles] thought, or wanted to think when he was editing, that he would have complete control over how the film was cut. He wanted the director’s job to be over. When I saw his initial rough cut it was quite crude and I could see he needed more help than some of the other students. I had to teach him some basic techniques and he had to learn to accept the fact that I was the director and I had designed how the shots were to be assembled. That doesn’t mean, however, that I wasn’t open to suggestions. I was. […]

...he and his partner were the ones who scratched the film and misaligned the sound and picture! I never had the heart to look at Duet again after seeing how it was ruined and, of course, I was unable to use it as calling card for work.

Despite Rothman’s disappointment with the film, the quality of it was apparent. She became the first woman to ever be awarded the Director’s Guild of America’s student filmmaking award, although the decision to grant her the award was significantly debated by the award committee not, however, because of her work but because she was a woman.

There was a debate in the wardroom as to whether they should give it to me or the other candidates (who were all male) who were there, because they thought that it might be a waste to give it to a woman because she would never become a director. She couldn’t. There was no possibility of doing it, and so why waste the money, even though they agreed that I perhaps was the person who should get it.

In the end, Rothman’s work prevailed, and she was given a $1,500 award to make a thesis film. The film, a proposed documentary on a harpsichordist on faculty at UCLA, was never finished. Rothman was not allowed to supplement the award funds and realized that without additional monies she could not complete the film she envisioned. In 1964 she abandoned the film when she was offered her first professional film production job: Stephanie Rothman went to work for Roger Corman.
The Working Girl

Corman had a long history of reaching out to USC’s film school to find assistants. On the recommendation of Dr. Barnard Kantor, then head of Department of Cinema, Corman invited Rothman down for an interview. She was competing against a woman from UCLA, Julie Halloran, for the position. Rothman was hired, although Corman would eventually hire, and marry, Halloran. In 1964 Corman was working for Columbia and producing his own small films. Rothman remembers:

I was going to be to be his assistant, and since he had just gotten a contract to make some films at Columbia studios, it would mean reading script material for him, because he would be looking for his first project. It would mean doing any research for him that he wanted. But he also financed low budget films for his own little company, so he told me that, since I had won the Director’s Guild of America award and the faculty thought very well of my filmmaking abilities, that they had given me a very good recommendation in that regard, that he would like me also to work on the production of these films when I wasn’t engaged in any of his work at Columbia. He asked me if I would be interested, and I said, ‘Yes!’

Rothman worked for Corman in this capacity for two years before she would first see her name in title cards of a film. Corman had purchased a low-budget Yugoslavian film to repurpose for U.S. distribution. He turned the work firstly over to novice director Jack Hill. After an initial screening of Hill’s cut Corman, unhappy with the work, took the project away from Hill and gave it to Rothman. Using the original footage, Hill’s footage, and her own footage, Rothman transformed the film into Blood Bath/aka Track of the Vampire in 1966. Although she and Hill share directorial credit on the film, she does not consider it a film that she ‘directed.’ This work, however, would begin her professional directing career, as well as a curious and contentious relationship with Hill, which be explored in a following chapter.

Later that year Rothman made what she considers to be her first feature film, a beach party picture called It's A Bikini World (co-written by Rothman and Swartz/produced by Swartz), although it was not released until 1967. After the film, Rothman left Corman’s employ and
attempted to get work directing mainstream Hollywood films: “I just wanted to see if there were some other way I could make something more personal and more unusual.” Unable to find work, Rothman and Swartz—who had married in 1963—went back to work for Corman in 1969 as production executives on the film Gas-s-s-s (released in 1970). Scouting locations, negotiating land usage rights, storyboarding direction, and serving as production managers, the pair filled all necessary production holes; Rothman also shot second unit scenes. “Just everything about it was so interesting, so different, so challenging, and an adventure. I really enjoyed it.”

Still hopeful at breaking into mainstream Hollywood films, Rothman understood what Corman provided for her:

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. Roger made his career shooting films quickly and efficiently and he taught me how to do that. We would sit and discuss how to do things efficiently and to shoot quickly. We didn’t have endless discussions but we had a number of them. And I found it very useful obviously because I could get the film done on time and close to on budget. That is about the only thing Roger taught me. But that was very valuable. And he gave me these opportunities for which I will always be profoundly grateful.

Corman was aware of the talent and drive he had in Rothman and Swartz. In 1970 when he formed his own company, New World Pictures, he approached the pair to join him and they agreed. That same year Rothman directed New World’s first release, The Student Nurses (story by Rothman & Swartz/screenplay by Don Spencer/co-produced by Rothman & Swartz).

The Student Nurses was a success encompassed Rothman as a director, ideologue, and creative mind. As she recalls, this was in large part due to her professional uncertainty:

I deliberately wanted to work in a variety of styles and I deliberately wanted to introduce a number of provocative ideas, and I wanted to do it in that film because when I made it I thought, ‘this might be the only film I ever get to make, so I’ve got to cram as much into it as I can.’

The film was a success jump-started began the so-called “nursing student” story trend amongst other second wave exploitation producers. Interestingly, it wasn’t until she read a view of The
Student Nurses in Variety that she knew she was directing exploitation films. This realization profoundly affected her:

[…] it underlined that I was making films of no status that would not get any kind of serious recognition from reviewers, certainly not in the papers or in magazines. And it certainly would not be taken seriously in Hollywood in any way and it would not open up great employment opportunities for me in terms of the tools I would have to work with as a filmmaker. I recognized at that point that I was pretty much at an impasse, and that I was even lucky to have been able to make this kind of film because as a woman, nobody else was making anything else. There was one exception, Elaine May, who made a couple of films. But other than that nobody was. And I just realized at that point that the best I could expect to go on doing was more of the same.

Cognizant of her precarious professional situation, Rothman continued working with Corman.

The following year she directed The Velvet Vampire (co-written by Rothman, Swartz and Maurice Jules/produced by Swartz), a sun-drenched story of a female vampire seducing victims in the California desert.

The Velvet Vampire would be Rothman’s last film for New World Pictures and Corman.

Lawrence “Larry” Woolner, a distribution partner of Corman’s at AIP and a production partner at New World, asked Rothman and Swartz to join him in his new venture, Dimension Pictures. Parting amicably with Corman, the trio left New World in 1971 for the new company. Rothman and Swartz were small ownership percentage in Dimension and Rothman was given the title of Vice President; she was responsible for development of new film ideas, viewing pre-produced films for possible acquisition, and advising on re-cutting/shaping acquired films. Her primary responsibility, however, remained writing, directing, and overseeing pre-production on her own films. In 1971, less than a decade after starting her professional directing career, Rothman was in a key creative and management position of an independent studio and under contract to direct her own films.

Group Marriage (1972; screenplay by Rothman, Swartz, and Richard Walter/produced by Swartz) was the first collaboration between Rothman and her new studio. A comedy of
manners with a free-love twist, the film highlighted Rothman’s cinematic propensity for comedy and farce. It was followed by *Terminal Island* (written by Rothman, Swartz and Jim Barnett/produced by Swartz) in 1973, perhaps her most well known film. For Rothman, the film was constrained by content pressures from sub-distributors. Although she was regularly directing feature films and was installed in a high-level studio position, Rothman was still working in second wave exploitation, which easily bowed to the whims and wishes of the individuals and/or companies who would harness the films’ economic viability: the distributors.

*The Working Girls* (1974; written by Rothman/producer by Swartz) was Rothman’s last film with Dimension. A comedy undergirded with the dark reality of women’s unemployment and underemployment, it foreshadowed Rothman’s remaining time in the film industry. Pushed out of Dimension by Woolner in favor of a larger share of the company’s profits, Rothman and Swartz made another attempt at breaking into mainstream Hollywood. Rothman wrote a number of treatments and scripts and met constantly with studio executives, but to no avail. As she bluntly stated “[…] nobody wanted to hire a woman.” She recounted in 1999:

> […] everybody felt that because I was a woman there would be tremendous difficulty in getting me to direct a feature that they might produce. And they just didn’t think it was worth the effort. Because it’s so much effort to make a film. I mean, I heard this. I heard this from people. It was so much effort that they just didn’t think it was worth it. […] Creative Artist Agency […] tried to include me in a package that they might be creating for some of their own clients. But they could not get me included.

As with her previous graduate student experience, Rothman turned to her pragmatism as a guide for her future in filmmaking:

I could have gone on making exploitation films. This may have been my own fault, for not going on making them. I was *tired* of making them. I felt I had done everything I could in this genre, and said everything I could. I was tired of the obligations I had, to sex, nudity and violence. And so, I was approached by other people who wanted to finance exploitation films. But I just did not wanna go on doing it. I had tried to find work for ten years. After ten years I obviously took stock of my chances of finding work in another ten years […] I looked around at other people who had started at the same time I had and they had either gone on to great success or they had faded from the scene. And
at that time I was 48 and I said to myself, ‘I have all these years ahead of me, I might as well enjoy them instead of experiencing the continuing rejection and frustration and depression that this created.’

In 1984, after directing seven feature films and a three-year term as an independent studio executive, Stephanie Rothman left the film industry forever.

Rothman’s professional life after filmmaking was a one hundred and eighty degree turn from her previous career. Her first non-film job was working as a writer for an organization that served as an early union-like organization for professors in the University of California education system; she authored their newsletter. She held the position for several years until she began investing in commercial real estate, a career track that would define the remainder of her working life.

Swartz remained her steadfast partner. When Rothman made the decision to leave the film industry, he followed suit. “One day I just said to him ‘I’m finished.’ And a few days later he said ‘Well, I guess if you are I am.’” Although Swartz would leave film production, he would continue his association with the industry through his work in education. Working as a continuing education specialist for UCLA’s Extension Department of Entertainment and Performing Arts, he developed “[…] the largest and most comprehensive curriculum of digital media and entertainment management courses offered by any major university.” He later ran Charles S. Swartz Consulting, an entertainment strategic consulting firm, and served a term as the Hollywood president of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers.

It would be at his alma mater USC, however, that he would make his lasting mark as the Director and CEO of the Entertainment Technology Center, a research unit within the School of Cinema and Television. Under Swartz’s guidance the center Digital Cinema Lab “[…] became Hollywood’s de facto digital cinema forum, hosting and supporting the Digital Cinema
Initiatives work toward establishing digital cinema specifications.” He was also the author of the germinal textbook *Understanding Digital Cinema: A Professional Handbook* (2004). Swartz passed away in 2007 following a battle with brain cancer. In 2013, Rothman established the Charles S. Swartz Endowed Chair in Entertainment Technology at USC.

**The Rothman Guide to Filmmaking**

Although later chapters will analyze Rothman’s films individually in an effort to illuminate her thematic oeuvre and cinematic contributions, it is important to first articulate her formal and ideological filmmaking philosophy. Formally, Rothman was dedicated to working in multiple styles, often in single films; “[…] one of my greatest pleasures [was] determining how my style of shooting could enhance the content of a scene.” From documentary style achieved thru hand-held shooting and including naturally-occurring public events in the narrative of her film (*The Student Nurses*); to fast, kinetic editing (*It’s a Bikini World*); to classical Hollywood style (*The Working Girls*), Rothman maneuvered through styles as a method of control, particularly when required by distributors to film content she would not have normally included in her films. On her use of multiple styles, she recalls:

> […] perhaps the only restrictions I had in terms of executing any particular style that I wanted was being able to afford within the budget to rent film equipment that I might need to execute a certain kind of stylistic movement or whatever. By that I mean: It was too expensive for example to rent a crane, a camera crane. I could not rent very, very long lenses very often. Charles as the producer would budget one day in the shooting when a long lens could be rented - and that would be ‘long lens day!’

She also leveraged comedy as a way to reconcile what she considered the more exploitative elements of her films with her own viewpoints. She noted “Visual style and comic invention were my personal salvation […] to escape what troubled me about the exploitation genre.”

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25 Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI) is the consortium of the major Hollywood Studios (Disney, Fox, Paramount, Sony Pictures Entertainment, Universal and Warner Bros.) that is responsible for establishing the specifications of the electronic and procedural architecture for digital cinema distribution and exhibition.
Primary in her filmmaking philosophy was, however, was the combination of the image and narrative theme:

[...] I both loved the creation of images and the creation of...I loved making ideas concrete through storytelling. Abstract ideas. That’s how I would think of myself as a director. In other words, I was operating on two levels: on the level of the image and the other on the level of the abstract idea, which through storytelling I wanted to demonstrate and make clear.\textsuperscript{ccxxxvii}

Rothman describes herself as a controlled and yet collaborative filmmaker, especially in her relationships with her editors and directors of photography. I contend that this speaks to her understanding of herself as director as an artisan as opposed to an artist. Filmmaking for Rothman was a process of mobilizing her professional training as a skilled laborer to produce a craft product that both represented the industrial system it was made from as well as the creative artistry that influenced it. Her investment in collaborative creation with other laborers working across technical training and creative imagining, including editors and directors of photography, emphasize a style of filmmaking that acknowledges the formal process of film as professionalized and skilled as well as artistically expressive. I understand this to be a specific strategy that kept her professionalization and training front and center, a critical move when working in an organizational climate (read: Hollywood) who default assumption was that woman were not filmmakers. This emphasis on craft, and its associations with skilled labor, is underscored when she notes: “Other people can call you an artist if they want to, but you can’t call yourself an artist. As far as I am concerned, I was a craftswoman. And I was struggling to perfect my craft and advance it.”\textsuperscript{ccxxxviii}

Her focus on craft would strongly guide her working relationships. On her work with directors of photography:

Well I was very visually orientated, and I always worked very closely with the Directors of Photography. I would tell them where I wanted the camera angle to be, and what the action was going to be, and I would tell them what composition I would like to see in the
frame and what lens would best suit this. And I would also ask them, if they were good—and I had very good ones, I was very fortunate—’now, you tell me what you think it should look like. You set it up. I’ve told you all these things, I’ve given you lots of elements to work with, now show me what you think needs to be added.’ And mostly what they showed me was wonderful, and in some way enhanced what I had thought. And if it didn’t then we would readjust it. But I almost always took what they had to say, because they knew a lot, and they had a lot to contribute, and anyone would be a fool who didn’t take advantage of their skill and knowledge.cxxxix

Her usage of multiple styles, of comedic interventions to contextualize rather than ignore the more exploitative aspects of her film initiated by others, leveraging the skill and input of the professionals she surrounded herself with, and focusing on the combination of image and abstract idea worked as strategies both for overcoming the limitations she worked under and for proving herself as a skilled professional to the mainstream film industry.

The biggest restriction Rothman worked under was financial. Second wave exploitation film producers expected the films themselves to cost as little as possible in an effort to bolster net earnings. Rothman made films on a budget of $250,000 or (more frequently) less. This affected equipment rentals, shooting time, rehearsal options, locations, set design, etc. Second wave exploitation producers saw no need to hire union crews, so often times the majority of her filmmaking crew were green and untested in their positions.26 Although Rothman had a voice in casting, she was required to cast as many ‘beautiful’ people in her films as possible, regardless of performance abilities.

It was a requirement from Larry Woolner, from Roger Corman, and it was a requirement from the sub-distributors. Because there were no stars in them, they had to really look good. So, to my frustration, I sometimes could not hire people whom I would have loved to hire.cxxl

26 Although a strong supporter of unions, Rothman was never a Director’s Guild of American member; joining dues were $2,000 when she was working, and she simply could not afford it. She was, however, a past and current member of the Writer’s Guild.
The emphasis on beauty over talent and the lack of funds for rehearsals required Rothman to improvise basic acting pedagogy on set: “[…] I would have to help them with their line readings, and explain their characters thoughts and motivations to them.”

For Rothman, accommodations for stylistic, performative, and professional experience were always in service of demonstrating her abilities to the mainstream Hollywood community:

I hoped that by showing how much production value I could extract from so little money, how I could make a film look much larger and show by my technique - my use of the camera, my choice of lenses, my capacity to use images and color and texture and variation to add emotive force to what I was saying - would somehow communicate to professional filmmakers - not directors, but I’m talking about, now, producers and financers - and that they would be interested in hiring me.

Pushing past external limitations became the overriding motif in Rothman’s formal filmmaking as she attempted to prove her abilities to the mainstream industry.

“[…] Stephanie Rothman is the only woman director who makes exploitation movies with a message.”

As a woman with self-identified social conscience making films in a cycle known for its outrageous and controversial provocations, Rothman was determined to project her ethical identity in her work. As she explained in 1978:

A Stephanie Rothman film deals with questions of self-determination. My characters try to forge a humane and rational way of coming to grips with the vicissitudes of existence […] My films are not always about succeeding, but they are always concerned with fighting the good fight.

Rothman has consistently described herself ideologically as a social egalitarian, particularly concerned with fully articulating the potentialities of the human condition. She summarizes:

Basically, what I am an advocate for is a more fair and egalitarian society. I don’t think we have much fairness anywhere in the world. I would like to see a more equitable distribution of power and the possibility of realizing fully what one can be. I know these are noble sentiments and that everybody has them. But I, at least, have the opportunity to do it in a film.

The ethico-political social commentary that formed the intellectual and narrative foundation of Rothman’s films caused significant internal tension for the director as she navigated the demands of working in second wave exploitation. She recounts:
I was never happy making exploitation films. I did it because it was the only way I could work. While I do not object to violence or nudity in principle, the reason audiences came to see these low-budget films without stars was because they delivered scenes that you could not see in major studio films or more supposedly ambitious independent American films. [...] Exploitation films required multiple nude scenes and crude, frequent violence. My struggle was to try to dramatically justify such scenes and to make them transgressive, but not repulsive.

As a result of this struggle—one simultaneously ideological, artistic, and economic—Rothman developed a loose set of ‘rules’ or directorial principles that she applied to the more exploitative, and required, aspects of her films.

<table>
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<th>The Rothman Rules</th>
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<td><strong>Nudity: Equitable across the sexes</strong></td>
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<td>“I know as a woman that women are interested in the bodies of attractive men and have long wanted to see them on screen although it’s only recently that it has occurred. Also, I think it’s highly unfair just to do that to women. It’s a reflection of the inequitable distribution of power in our society. When a person is nude they are vulnerable. To have a dressed person with a nude one is to tell you immediately who is the vulnerable one. When both people are nude I don’t think there’s that kind of objectification and reduction into making one just a piece of flesh. You’re not making the same kind of statement. But I don’t want to do to men what I feel has been done to women. It’s not my intention to get some revenge in that regard.”</td>
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<td>“There is more nudity in my films than you find in the films of male directors. Eroticism in films has been traditionally conceived with the erotic interests of men while women’s interests have usually been ignored. Women have as much interest in men’s bodies as men do in women’s. As a woman, I naturally take a woman’s erotic interests into account.”</td>
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<td><strong>Violence: Cannot be eroticized and must be shown with its inevitable consequences</strong></td>
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<td>“I do not like to think that I may be showing people how to perform violent acts, or suggesting that one can perform them without creating serious and often tragic consequences for oneself […]”</td>
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<td>“I think it’s irresponsible to show violence as painless.”</td>
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<td>“[…] ‘I decided there would be no violent action without showing its ugly consequences. When violence occurred, it would not be free of the pain and mess of real violence. Sometimes this made the violence more graphic and upsetting, but that was my intention.’”</td>
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<td><strong>Rape: Would not show scenes of rape, but would allude to if required</strong></td>
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<td>“Rape was the only thing I ever refused to do in a film. In ‘Terminal Island’ I indicated that the women were forced to have sexual relations with the men, but I never showed it…”</td>
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<td>“[…] my bottom line was that I would not show scenes of rape […]”</td>
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Undergirding these principles was Rothman’s stated commitment to equality and her self-avowed feminist identity. Raised by her parents to be independent despite her gender—“They never told me I couldn’t do anything because I was a girl or that my role was to be only a wife and mother”—she was instilled early on with a deep belief in liberal meritocracy as the primary form of professional advancement. Even so, she articulated the challenges that faced her as one of the only women directors working in the film industry in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rothman in 1972:

I don’t know how many women have tried to be directors, but I doubt if they would get much of a sympathetic ear in many places. It may not be true in all places, but from attitudes I’ve heard expressed I don’t think there would be too much sympathy at this point in this industry.
Her lived reality in this regard influenced Rothman’s commitment to modeling success for other women looking to break into the film industry. In the limited press she received while she was working, she spoke about herself as an aspirational model for other women. She claimed particular investment in the idea that as a woman working in a male dominated field she could inspire other women to the idea that they too could work in film production, despite the seemingly overwhelming odds.

What I did encounter when I first started out were dire warnings from men who were film executives, but not filmmakers, that I would never be allowed to direct, and that even if I were, male crews would never work for me. I have always thought this was a veiled way, or what they mistook for a veiled way, of telling me that they didn’t want to see me progress. […] I feel that calling attention to the fact that I am a woman might suggest to other women that they too could become directors if they wished. It might make the possibility of accomplishing this seem a little less bleak. When I left film school eight years ago, I found that at least one woman, Shirley Clarke, was actively working in a field otherwise monopolized by men, was a source of reassurance to me that I might be able to do it too.

Her stated focus on mentorship and modeling transformed into personal action. Once she assumed her executive role at Dimension, she announced that the she would make a focused effort to hire as many women in production roles as possible. As she said in 1972: ‘That’s certainly the most important thing I can do for the Women’s Lib movement with regard to this industry—to show my sympathy in terms of my own deeds and actions.

Her commitment to serving as a model for future women film professional echoed in her emphasis on professionalism. She credited her discipline in filmmaking to her training as a dancer, and took seriously how her behavior on set effected the overall tone and energy of her cast and crew: “I never flagged, I never stopped; the most energetic person on a set has to be the director. The director sets the pace for everyone else.” She would emphasize the irrelevancy of gender to the act of directing when speaking to the press with comments like: “No special masculine or feminine qualities are required for this job.” Her public emphasis on
professionalism, her construction of herself as a craftswoman, and her emphasis on training and merit-based work can be understood as strategies to de-gender the idea of ‘director,’ working to normalize her role as a method of cultivating acceptance, and thereby, employment.

Although Rothman has regularly stated a personal and professional commitment to feminism, women’s labor empowerment, and equality, she had a complicated relationship to political second wave feminism. In part she attributes this to her age and her upbringing. When Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963 Rothman was 27 years old, married, and working in a male dominated profession. Indeed, she already embodied many of the ideal qualities and life choices the book laid bare as aspirational. As she recalls:

> I was already an adult […] it had no influence on me [laughs]. […] She had nothing to teach me. I had never bought into the belief that I was put on this earth to marry and reproduce and keep the home of a man, and be socially subservient and financially dependent on him. [laughs] I was happy that she came along, and gained the attention of large numbers of women who, by necessity or choice, accepted this subservient role.

As the movement crested in the late 1960s and early 1970s Rothman remained linked to the movement’s ideology, and was supportive of its aims and goals, although she never fully connected to its more public, collective activities:

> I had always been connected to it, even before it existed! [Laughs] I mean I had gone my own way. I had decided I was going to live my life in a way that did not conform to the standards of the 1950s. But did I join consciousness-raising groups? Did I know women who were suddenly making the discovery that they had been herded into or had willingly chosen very narrow possibilities for self-development? No. I really didn’t. I was more of an observer, an outsider, but I’ve been that way all my life. […] I mean it obviously brought about enormous positive social change and opened up many opportunities for women that were previously unavailable to them. But did I personally find it liberating or freeing? No. It really had very little to do with me.

Despite this, the press simplistically aligned Rothman as a product and symbol of the movement. As someone who was invested in narrating her own story, this was frustrating to Rothman, as indeed any simplistic public description of an artist may be for that individual. However, given her unique place in the industry, the type of films she made, and the inability for
any creative professional to fully control the public shaping of their image, the one-dimensional focus on Rothman a feminist is not surprising. However, it does bear scrutiny as she became uncomplicatedly (read: naively) constructed through unrefined understandings of the political, social, economic, and cultural implications of second wave feminism. In this sense, Rothman’s own subjecthood (director Stephanie Rothman) was supplanted by her value as blunt public symbol (Women’s Lib director Stephanie Rothman). Rothman did not fight this label, although she was careful to add to her own subjective marginalization:

I think everything I do has feminist undertones. Because I am a woman I’m not going to have a traditional male view of women. Nowadays this seems to be called ‘feminist undertones.’ I’m a feminist and proud to be one but if you mean that I deliberately always follow a strictly ideological feminist issue I don’t know. I leave that up to critics.\textsuperscript{cclxxi}

I sympathize strongly with their aims, I was conducting my own life in a style that women’s liberationists now advocate long before there was a movement. However, it was good to see that the dissatisfactions that women feel with her social and economic roles are at last being publically expressed. At least it is a first step toward correcting some of the numerous injustices that exist. I do not belong to any organized women’s liberation group. The only reason I can give for this that I am basically a nonjoiner, a lone wolf. However, I do try to help my fellow women get ahead when it is in my own power to do so.\textsuperscript{cclxxii}

Initially I had assumed that Rothman’s reluctant connection to the movement was a strategy she employed to remain legible to potential employers. Although her personal ideology was rarely in question, perhaps by supporting the political movement through more abstract statements she was hoping that future (male) employers would not consider her to ‘radical’ (read: difficult) to hire. However, she shared that this was never a concern or an obstacle for her in obtaining work:

First of all, I thought that when people saw my films they’d know what my convictions were. So, obviously, if they wanted to hire me they understood that this would probably seep out in one way or another. But beyond that, when I was interviewed for getting a job it wasn’t for anything that would ever display this kind of thought, never. It was never in anybody’s mind that I know of. So I wasn’t afraid that I would have to compromise anything because there was nothing to compromise! There was just...it was a completely different realm; the subjects that my films were concerned with were not discussed in films or on television in those days. So it didn’t matter.\textsuperscript{cclxxiii}
Her disconnect to the movement was simply that. Her age, the life choices she has already made, and her disposition toward solitude set her apart from the political movement she was clearly ideologically connected to. Of course, second wave feminism was not a political movement without faults. Indeed, it left many groups of women—women of color, queer women, trans* women, poor and working class women, women who actively chose the role of homemaker—out. So while it is not unique to find women who did not connect with it, it is important to consider Rothman’s tension with second wave feminism as a political movement.

Perhaps what bothered Rothman most about this simplistic symbolic alignment was the way it impacted the analysis, critique, and understanding of her films; in essence, what she considered to be her intent on the film wasn’t honored by those who received. While this is the rule rather than the exception when considering the cultural life and films and their receptions, it signals her desire to control her narrative as well as that desire’s impossible execution. When asked if she resented the press’ consistent and blunt construction of her as Women’s Lib symbol she explained:

Only when critics or reviewers saw my films and would say what a strong vein of feminism was in them, which delighted me but also dismayed me a little bit in the sense that it meant that they couldn’t just examine the material for what it was. There are many ideas in my films that have nothing to do with feminism and everybody always imposed this, well...interpreted it as mostly feminist. It is feminist. I am proud of that. I’m happy I was able to convey this message. But that’s not all it is. And sometimes I thought then, and I still think, that other things are lost in that one-note interpretation.

Indeed, the blanket label of ‘feminism’ is the one used most often to describe Rothman’s films. While it is not incorrect, it flattens the understanding of her films, as it assumes a universal, single definition of the concept of feminism itself while also obscuring the ways Rothman’s films speak to issues of gender equality as well as race, class, and sexuality. Which is to say, by applying the blanket label of ‘feminism’ to her films, what today we consider their intersectional nature—and the critical issues that an intersectional perspective bring—are obscured.
Conclusion

Rothman’s filmmaking aesthetic and ideological philosophy, her commitment to films that tackled ethical and political issues, her ‘rules,’ and her unique relationship to the tumultuous gender politics of the 1960s and ‘70s helped create Rothman as unusual from her contemporary second wave exploitation film directors. As such, articulating these various aspect of herself and her career are critical steps in establishing Rothman in film history through an acknowledgement of her own subjecthood and a re-centering of her voice in her own narrative.

Articulating what I contend were the intentionally strategic tactics Rothman wielded, specifically the focus on professionalization as a mode of de-gendering the role of director aid in establishing Rothman as the multi-dimensional filmmaker she is. As a result of the expansion of Rothman as an intentioned, passionate, and purposeful filmmaker—as opposed to parenthetical mention or historical footnote—engenders the serious critical analysis her films require. As such, now that Rothman has been established as a personal, professional, and ideological entity I will turn toward a detailed textual and critical analysis of her films.

cxcvi Stephanie Rothman, e-mail message to author, April 13, 2103.
cxcvii Stephanie Rothman, interview by Jane Collings, December 11, 2001, transcript.
cxcviii Ibid.
cc Ibid.
cci Ibid.
ccii Ibid.
cciv Stephanie Rothman, interview by Jane Collings, December 11, 2001, transcript.
ccv Ibid.
ccvi Ibid.
Girls, Gangs, and Guns Festival, Diskussion im Anschlub an den Virtrag von Stephanie Rothman/Post-Film Discussion, 11.28.1999

Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

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Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

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Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


CHAPTER 5

THE FILMS OF STEPHANIE ROTHMAN: THE CORMAN YEARS

“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. If they can be nuclear physicists, they can be film directors.”

The totality of Rothman’s cinematic output has yet to be considered by scholars through formal, thematic, and/or theoretical analysis. Although limited analyses of individual films do exist, most notably for The Student Nurses and Terminal Island, a consideration of her oeuvre is missing from scholarly cinematic study. Over the course of the next two chapters my goal is to take the first step in constructing a career-spanning study of Rothman’s work. This is a necessary step in reintroducing the importance of female directorial authorship beyond the bounds of the ‘exceptional women’ paradigm, allowing for a diverse history of women filmmakers to be written into cinematic history, which in turn can provide crucial models for increased diversity in present-day film production.

The consideration of Rothman’s work across two chapters is the result of multiple factors. First, her steady filmic output requires that any analysis aiming for a measure of substance much give each film its necessary space. Second, I contend that Rothman’s films can be understood as two separate and identifiable cycles that reflect her evolution as a filmmaker. The first cycle, or what I identify as the Corman years and will cover in this chapter, focus on her establishing her filmic style and her thematic interest in producing commentary on contemporary social issues. As I will demonstrate, the films made during the Corman years are products of a specific place and time (Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s) and can be understood as chronicles of that contemporary moment. The second cycle, identified as the Dimension years
and covered in the next chapter, moves past film-as-contemporary-chronicle and sees Rothman conceptualizing abstract themes as imaginative solutions for the social issues she tackled in her earlier work.

To be clear, this will not be an all-encompassing study of her seven films; that work cannot be substantively accomplished in this particular format. Rather, I intend to offer an entry point into conceptualizing her work film by film through a multi-nodal analysis that considers film form and style, thematic and ideological constructions, historical discourse concerning her work and role in second wave exploitation history, and the impacts of the industrial system she worked under.

The function of industrial production systems is particularly salient when parsing Rothman’s films. As an industrialized art, film has always been subject to the pressures, desires, directions, and opinions of those providing the capital necessary for production. This was especially true for second wave exploitation film, whose meager budgets drove many filmmaking decisions. Throughout the course of her career, Rothman’s films were heavily impacted by their financers, be it the production company she was working for, the subdistributors who agreed ahead of time to distribute the films, or both. Detailing influence and role of the production company in each of her career aids in contextualizing her films without isolating them from the system that produced them, working bridging the dual functions of art and commerce in filmmaking.

However, this concern for production does not come without complications. Rothman’s access to the filmmaking apparatus was, in large part, based on her films’ economic successes. This trajectory—each film being built on the success of the previous—forces the following two chapters into a chronological accounting. Alternatively, the role that Rothman occupied with the
production companies who financed her films played a part in how her style and thematic rubric evolved over the course of her career. Therefore, I’ve chosen produce a chronological rather than alternative temporal construction in the following chapters to accommodate the industrial—as well as the stylistic, historical, textual, and historical—variables that contributed to Rothman’s cinematic output.

This chapter, then, works to provide a historical, critical, and textual analysis of the films Rothman directed with she was working with producer Roger Corman under the banners of FilmGroup, American International Pictures (AIP), and New World Productions. These films are *Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire* (1966, produced by FilmGroup and distributed by AIP); *It’s a Bikini World* (1967, produced and distributed by AIP); *The Student Nurses* (1970, produced and distributed by New World) and *The Velvet Vampire* (1971, produced and distributed by New World). Although all four of these films will be addressed, *The Student Nurses* will occupy a lion’s share of the analytical attention, as it can be understood as the film that would set the stylistic and ideological template for Rothman’s successive work.

As noted in chapter two, American International Pictures (AIP) was founded by James (Jim) Nicholson and Samuel (Sam) Arkoff in 1954 as American Releasing Corporation. Riding the wave of the new teenager demographic, AIP became one of the most successful producers and distributors of second wave exploitation films, and one of their earliest and most successful collaborations was with Roger Corman. The beginning of the AIP/Corman partnership was in 1953 when Corman received funding for *The Fast and the Furious* (1954), which was bundled into a three-film deal with the company. As Corman recalls:

> We agreed to do three pictures, the first of which would be *The Fast and the Furious*. But Jim has to sell the pictures to subdistributors, or franchise holders, who were willing to advance money for the other film. So Jim, Sam, and I then flew to New Orleans, Chicago, and New York to arrange the backing from franchise holders. The West Coast
was handled out of Los Angeles. Jim and Sam had a great deal. I was providing the movies as producer/director and the franchise holders advanced the money—about $5,000 to $15,000 per distributor per picture depending on the size of his territory. My deal was that Jim and Sam had to raise all the money from the subdistributors or it was no deal.

The AIP/Corman partnership would continue for sixteen years and produce thirty-three films. It was during Corman’s time with AIP that Rothman began to work for him. Based on her film school reputation and her Director’s Guild Award, Rothman was quickly hired as Corman’s assistant; as he said “There was no way I could not hire Stephanie.”

Salvage Jobs and Beach Bunnies

The first film to bear the title card “Directed by Stephanie Rothman” is one Rothman does not consider a film she, in fact, directed. A significant function of her early work as Corman’s assistant was to take films he had purchased internationally and re-shape them for U.S. release. In this capacity she worked on projects colloquially termed ‘Iron Curtain salvage jobs’: films purchased by Corman from Eastern Europe and the then-USSR which needed to be edited, dubbed and ‘Americanized’ for exhibition to U.S. audiences. Rothman served as Associate Producer on Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet (Curtis Harrington, 1965) and Queen of Blood (Curtis Harrington, 1966), two films that were “[…] built around Soviet special effects extracted from, respectively, Planeta Bur (1962), Niebo Zowiet (1959), and Mechte Nevstruchi (1961).” These films emanated from Corman’s company FilmGroup, a production and distribution company he operated outside of his work with AIP. Before Rothman, FilmGroup’s resident salvage jobs expert was Francis Ford Coppola, who left the company after his first Corman-funded feature, Dementia 13 (1963). After Coppola left, “[…] Rothman had clearly established herself as his [Corman’s] resident expert in the field of international patchwork.”

Her reputation for revising-through-editing international films for the domestic market would
eventually lead to her ‘directorial’ credit on *Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire*, a film that took a circuitous route into Rothman’s hands.

The story of how a single Yugoslavian film became five separate films, one being *Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire*, is chronicled in a three-part series by journalist Tim Lucas in the publication *Video Watchdog* and has become the privileged text for the historical narrative of both the film and Rothman’s role in it. My interest in Lucas’ history is restricted to Rothman’s involvement in the film, the impacts of his historical accounting of her participation, and a contestation of Rothman’s created place in his, and successive narratives. Specifically, Lucas’ position of Rothman’s in his history has contributed to a broader construction of Rothman in second wave exploitation film history as a barrier to the work of fellow director Jack Hill, a reputation uneasily supported through the ellipses in the research and discourse of Lucas and others.

Lucas’ historical construction is highly dependent on interviews with the wide variety of people involved with the iterations of the film, from directors to actors to producers, with one notable exception—Rothman’s voice, point of view, or recollections are absent from the reporting. Rather, Lucas constructs Rothman’s participation through other players in the process. This absence discursively constructs of Rothman not through her own subjectivity, but rather as a foil to, and professional stumbling block of, Jack Hill.

Hill was a friend and classmate of Francis Ford Coppola’s at USC. Coppola would introduce Hill to Corman, which precipitated Hill’s first working relationship with the producer in 1962: salvaging *Operation: Titan*. Corman had entered into a deal with a Yugoslavian state-sponsored film studio on a film called *Operacija Ticijan/Operation: Titan* which gave him the acquisition rights in exchange for providing English speaking lead actors and a writer to provide
English dialogue for the film. Corman hired Coppola to provide the dialogue, sent a cast with him to Dubrovnik to complete the film. When Corman saw the film, he declared it unreleasable; he determined it did not contain enough ‘exploitable’ elements for successful stateside release.

Corman hired Hill to recut the film, who turned it from a thriller into a horror movie about a painter who murders his models. Using approximately three sections of the original film, Hill shot new characters, story, and locations around southern California and retitled the film Blood Bath. Corman was out of the country when the film was finished, so Hill showed it to Gene Corman, Roger’s brother and the person in charge when Roger was unavailable. Although Hill’s southern California locations in no way matched the Dubrovnik footage he had kept from the original cut of the film, Gene was hesitant to give the go-ahead for more money to fix the problem. Instead, the project languished in stasis at FilmGroup, and during that time Hill was hired to make another film at American General Pictures. His version of the film would never be released.

In 1964 Corman gave Rothman all the footage related to the film and asked her to see what she could make of it. Rothman gave her version of the film the working title Track of the Vampire and attempted to craft a unified whole out of the disparate footage she was given. The resulting film makes about as much sense as one would assume, which is to say very little. The film sat on a shelf for year until it was released as part of double bill, under the title Blood Bath, in 1966. Both Hill and Rothman were given director credits and Hill was listed as producer. When the film was prepared for release on television, additional padding scenes were added to lengthen it and its title switched yet again, reverting to Rothman’s preferred Track of the Vampire.
With so many hands crafting the film, it is unsurprising that Rothman disowns the film as her own directorial effort. However, *Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire* is an important moment in Rothman’s career because of how the history of the film shaped how she has been remembered in certain circles of film history, particularly those concerned with the legacy of Jack Hill, including Hill himself. Today Jack Hill is remembered as the man who ‘discovered’ iconic exploitation actress Pam Grier.\(^{27}\) He is a fairly well known outside exploitation circles, several books have been written about his career, and his films are still screened regularly on the festival and repertory circuit.

Part of Hill’s legacy includes chastisement of Rothman for ‘ruining’ *Blood Bath*, a reproach that has come from Hill and Hill scholars alike. Hill has most often taken issue with the narrative changes Rothman made to the film, with comments such as: “I think the footage I shot was pretty good, but for whatever reason, Stephanie was fascinated with vampires and she decided to make a vampire movie out of it. To tell you the truth, I felt like throwing up when I heard about it.”\(^{\text{cclxxxvi}}\) It is important to note that Hill was no longer working for Film Group or Corman when Rothman was given the film, and therefore was not involved in the conversations about the direction of the film, which destabilizes the historical overreliance on his voice to construct a narrative Rothman’s participation in the film. Hill’s attribution of agency to Rothman in the changes made to the film is presumptive, and that presumption forms his discursive position as one that ascribes blame to Rothman. However, when one balances Rothman’s account of her role in the film against the dominant history that excluded her voice altogether, a more complicated picture beings to emerge. Specifically, Rothman, narrates a more collaborative approach to the film after Hill’s departure:

I had to invent something, and working this way was so restrictive. What could I do with it? It had originally been an action murder mystery. Or actually, it hadn’t been, I think it had been a tale of smugglers and revenge, and then the Jack Hill version had been a story about a mad artist who killed beautiful young women. After suggesting several story lines to Roger he picked one of them, which was, why not turn this shadowy figure who was the mad artist in the second version that was shot into a vampire who stalks people? So that’s what I did. It was because it was the only way I could figure out, and Roger agreed, to make all this material comprehensible. I mean the only way to be able to do something with all this disparate footage was to have a character who looked completely different from the lead, and dressed completely different, and did things that were completely unrelated. And then to take these scenes and try to interweave them with the other scenes from the Yugoslavian film and what could be salvaged from what Jack had shot. Because we had to throw out, I had to throw out, a portion of that.

Adding Rothman’s voice to the conversation forces a historical expansion, disrupting the dominant narrative Hill and others have perpetuated. Indeed, while it is unsurprising for a filmmaker like Hill to defend their own work, scholars who research his career echo his vocal displeasure with the film and the aggressive tone of his comments. For example Calum Waddell, who authored a book on Hill, notes Rothman’s involvement in the film in discursive alignment with the director when he penned comments including: “Certainly, it is not difficult to see which parts of the movie are Rothman’s—with her ridiculous, not to mention infantile, vampire interlude largely disrupting the flow of the picture and featuring randomly in the plotline;”

“Still, if one can accept the preposterous vampire interludes […] and “[…] if Rothman’s vampire inserts were not bad enough […]”

Certainly, a criticism of the film by any scholar is part of the rigor of cinema studies. While the criticism itself isn’t inherently problematic, what is worth noting is the alignment of the tone of the comments between author and subject. This discursive and tonal thread continues throughout Waddell’s work, culminating when the statements of author and subject are difficult to distinguish from one another. For example, Hill comments on the film by saying: “I had more of a psychological thriller so I thought she just messed it up.” Waddell, who never saw Hill’s
version of the film, follows with a remarkably similar comment when he says: “[…] Rothman’s attempt to turn what might have been a fine psycho-thriller into a vampire flick.”

Beyond criticism of Rothman’s version of the film, one of the more puzzling issues around Rothman’s involvement is the defense of a film that Hill scholars have never seen. As previously noted, Hill’s version of the film was never released, and his footage was recut by Rothman; no copy of his version of Blood Bath exists. Although their lack of access to the film is not something Hill’s champions dispute, it is something they easily overlook, basing their complaints about Rothman’s involvement on what they assume the film would have been until Hill’s creative authorship.

Of Hill’s Blood Bath Tim Lucas pronounces: “[it] appears to have been more than a sum of its parts” and that “If fact, Rothman was responsible for most of the completed film’s worst footage […]” In reference to an individual scene that he says “[…] survives (more or less)” in the joint Hill/Rothman cut he asserts: “As originally directed and edited by Jack Hill, however, it may have been a tour de force […].” And certainly, it may have been, but prognostications of what Hill may have created move past film analysis into speculative fiction, a slippage I would contend is due to the lack of inclusion of Rothman’s perspective in the historical accounting. The Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire history provides a micro-example of the larger impacts of excluding the female authorial voice from film history as Rothman’s participation in the film is codified through assumptive discourse: Hill’s assumptions about how and why the film’s core story was changed, Hill scholars’ assumptions about the value of the work Hill produced, and assumptions surrounding Rothman’s unrestrained agency in the process.

When women’s voices are absent from film history, what trace of them that is preserved is often created outside of their own subjectivity and lived experience, constructing a flawed
accounting of their participation, labor, and influence. This process has significant reverberations. When women are not able to represent themselves, or when their voices are removed entirely from the historical conversation, their trace is either distorted or erased, leading to the re-codification of the idea that women do not direct films because there is no record of it in historical accounts. The assumptive historical discourse that was established around Rothman and Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire would be a recurring one, as her interactions with Hill would continue to shadow her career and her legacy as a director, something that I will return to later in this chapter.

The Last Beach Blanket Bingo

*It’s a Bikini World* is the film that Rothman considers her ‘first.’ AIP began producing ‘beach party’ films in 1963 to great success. Built on a simple formula of beautiful teenagers in bathing suits, harmless sexuality, popular music, surfing, and a total lack of adult presence, the films showcased Southern California beach life as an endless apolitical party of surf, sand, and fun. Notable AIP beach films include *Beach Party* (William Asher, 1963), *Bikini Beach* (William Asher, 1964), *Beach Blanket Bingo* (William Asher, 1965), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (William Asher, 1965), and *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (Norman Taurog, 1965). Perhaps best remembered from this cycle was the pairing of actors Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello, who appeared in several beach films together, as the reigning ‘king and queen of the beach.’ All in all, AIP’s beach party cycle would include 13 films between 1963-1967.28

*It’s A Bikini World* began production in 1965, although it would not be released until late in 1967. The delay in releasing the film had it debuting in theaters as the popularity of the cycle waned significantly. As a result of its late entry into the beach party arena, Rothman describes

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28 Although AIP would be closely associated with the beach party cycle, they were by no means the only studio producing these films. Other key entries into the cycle include Columbia’s *Gidget* series and MGM’s *Where the Boys Are*. 
The film as if not the last of the beach movies, then one of the last, and one that killed the cycle.

The film follows the story of Delilah (Deborah Walley), who has come to an anonymous Southern California beach to spend the summer with her friend Pebbles (Suzie Kaye). Delilah soon meets Mike (Tommy Kirk), the beach’s resident heartthrob. Mike immediately tries to seduce Delilah, expecting his reputation and charm to quickly win her over. Delilah is unimpressed and spurns Mike’s advances, telling him she prefers someone ‘serious.’ Mike takes this rejection as a challenge, and concocts a plan to win Delilah over, only to show her up and break her heart as revenge. Mike trades in his bare chest and bathing suit for a sweater, shorts, knee socks, glasses and a bowtie and calls himself Herbert, passing as Mike’s serious, scholarly, brother.

Herbert begins courting Delilah, while Delilah plans Mike’s comeuppance for his arrogance. Her plan is to best Mike—the resident sports star—at several athletic contests. Herbert helps her to train to beat his ‘brother,’ all the while beginning to develop genuine feelings for her. Luckily, a local dance club, Daddy’s Dungeon, has partnered with a new magazine attempting to cater to the teenager crowd, to sponsor a series of races to promote the latest teen fad: skate boarding. Daddy (Sig Haig) also uses the opportunity to hawk his latest product line: skateboardz, which follows in his line of other teen-fad related products such as kuztom kartz, cyclez, surfboardz, and discz. Mike beats Delilah in the race, but she refuses to give up, challenging him to contest after contest of various activities.

The climax of the film comes when Daddy announces a multi-sport race, the winner of which will go on tour across the country promoting his products and the nascent magazine venture. Right before the race, Delilah learns of Mike’s deception, and calls him out on his lies. Mike, having developed real feelings for Delilah, attempts to explain and apologize, to no end.
The two enter Daddy’s cross-country race and compete in a series of events: car racing, speed swimming, speedboat racing, long-distance furniture moving, motorcycle racing, long-distance swimming, running, camel racing, and skateboarding. Although during the race the lead oscillates between Mike and Delilah, at the end Mike feigns a foot injury, letting Delilah win. She realizes that he has put his pride aside to let her win, and he realizes that his relationship with Delilah is more important than his ego. The film ends with the two beginning their new romantic relationship complete with mutual respect and playful competition.

The film works within the standardized formula of beach party movies to both give the audience what they are expecting while simultaneously attempting to push the representation of gender politics in a slightly progressive direction. Scholar Winston Wheeler Dixon calls the film “[…] arguably the first feminist surf film […].” From the outset, Rothman presents Delilah as a woman whose affections require and deserve more than just a casual pick-up line from a stranger on a beach to be won over, unlike the amenable and interchangeable ‘bikini girls’ who normally populated beach party films. Her immediately disdain for Mike’s ego and presumptuousness are evident from their first conversation:

Mike: Why don’t you join the party?
Delilah: It’s nice to feel wanted.
Mike: There is a vacancy.
Delilah: There sure is. Right between your ears.

Indeed, when Pebbles asks Delilah why she is not interested in Mike, she responds: “He’s conceited and he’s got no right to be.” She then goes on to say that his reputation and athletic prowess does not make him automatically irresistible, nor does it excuse his intense narcissism and sense of entitlement to the women on the beach.

Much of the gender politics in the film is narrated through humor. When Delilah decides to enter Daddy’s first skateboard race, she and Herbert are in Daddy’s Dungeon to buy her first
skateboard. When Daddy asks her what color board she wants, she replies “fuchsia.” Herbert scoffs at her choice, patronizingly telling her he doubts skateboards come in that color, implying ridiculousness in her feminization of the sport and its equipment. Daddy looks at them both and replies “fuchsia #1, fuchsia #2, or fuchsia #3?” The punch line implicates Mike/Herbert’s regressive gender-based ideas around sport as the ridiculous aspect of the scene, rather than Delilah’s request. Rothman also uses supporting characters in a similar way. Pebbles, a seemingly stereotypical ‘blonde bimbo’ has a series of exchanges with her boyfriend Woody (Bobby Pickett) that function as stand-alone comic moments underscoring the film’s lightly-progressive ideology. One such exchange happens as the two are dancing at Daddy’s Dungeon:

Pebbles: Woody, let’s go to a movie tonight.
Woody: Can’t, left my discount card at home. How about having dinner instead?
Pebbles: Great!
Woody: Ok! What time will you have it ready?

[Pebbles rolls her eyes, exasperatedly pats him on the chest, and dances away, leaving Woody befuddled and alone.]

The comedy in these scenes matches the light-hearted tone of the film while simultaneously pushing its message. In this way, the film “[…] gives us a tantalizing peak at what might have been a less sexist and more egalitarian genre, in which men and women at play exist as equals, rather than rivals.” Certainly, while the trend of semi-assertive women was popular in mainstream romantic comedies at the time, like those of Doris Day and Rock Hudson, it was uncommon in the beach party cycle, providing Rothman with a ‘hook’ novel in the beach party films.

In addition to the progressive gender politics, the film also invests itself in a satirization of how adults at the time treated the youth market, perhaps in a sly comment on AIP’s own capitalization of the youth market through the beach cycle films themselves. Daddy’s partnership with Harvey Pulp (Jack Bernardi), the magazine founder, is the clearest example of
this. Pulp is invested in creating a magazine that appeals to the teenagers market, but has no actual knowledge of what that appeal may be. He turns to Daddy for partnership, banking on Daddy’s successful history of commercial capitalization on teenager trends to make his new magazine venture work. Daddy, like Pulp, is no teenager. However, his carefully crafted appearance (black turtleneck, beret, dark sunglasses) and casual but careful usage of ‘hip’ lingo positions him as the ‘cool’ adult leader of the community. He is so aware of the maintenance of his appearance as the key to his sway with the youth market that he refuses to be photographed without his sunglasses on, lest he ruins his credibility. He leverages that cultural capital to brand “Daddy’s” on all the products the teenagers buy from him, everything from skateboards to bathing suits, shameless acts of capitalist marketing obscured by his reputation in the community.

Rothman further implicates the apolitical nature of beach party movies with a short, but key, scene approximately half way through the film. Most beach party films of the time integrated performances from popular bands at the time, and It’s a Bikini World is no exception. Rothman had no control over what bands would appear in the film. As she explained: “We got an agent, a music agent, who told us who the hottest groups were at the time, whoever was top on the Billboard charts, the week we called. We got them.”\textsuperscript{cccv} She did, however, have control over how the scenes the bands appeared in were shot, and one in particular stands out as a nod to her interest in discussing class politics in her films. The scene takes place, as most of the musical interludes do, in Daddy’s Dungeon. The third musical set-piece in the film is by The Animals, who perform what would become their legendary ‘working man’s anthem’ of disappointment and frustration, “We Gotta Get Out of This Place.” As lead singer Eric Burden stands on stage in a button down plaid shirt and jean jacket—a distinct contrast to the bathing-suited, bare-footed,
teenagers in the audience—he emotes a powerful combination of smolder and boredom. This goes unnoticed by the audience, as do the actual lyrics of the song itself. As Burden sings lines like “Now my girl you’re so young and pretty, and one think I know is true, you’ll be dead before your time is due” and “Watch my daddy in bed a-dyin’, watched his hair been turnin’ grey, he’s been workin’ and slavin’ his life away,” Rothman cuts to the audience, smiling and dancing happily, oblivious to the song’s very obvious angst. The camera lingers on the dancers from the shoulders up, as opposed showcasing their entire bodies, emphasizing their placid smiles and obtuseness to the anger and despair present in the song. The dissonance between the song and the audience’s reaction to it is jarring. By aligning a song about the desperate struggles of the working class against the systemic oppression of capitalism with the blinding obliviousness of the audience to those struggles, Rothman is indicting the intentional apoliticalness of the beach party films while highlighting the capitalist exploitation of the demographic the films are aimed at.

Beyond the narrative, the use of comedy as social-message device, and an incrimination of the cycle’s blatant demographic pandering, the film showcases several formal techniques that set it apart from the others in the beach party cycle. As Rothman noted, “Most of these beach movies were made by elderly men who directed them in an antiquated style. They were cronies of Sam Arkoff [co-head of American International Pictures]. I just wanted to make it look like a contemporary film with some excitement.” A kinetic energy, the pace of which is set by the opening titles, defines the film. The title sequence switches between live-action scenes and static
animation title cards, with comic book-like word bubbles used to display credit information. The animation—seemingly inspired by Lichtenstein’s early 1960s work—directly references Pop Art, as does much of the mise-en-scène (the most obvious of which is a Warhol-esque ‘soup can’ print in Mike’s apartment). The emphasis on movement runs throughout the title sequence: as generic surf-rock plays, Rothman films beachgoers performing aerial stunts after being launched off a small trampoline, running playfully around the beach, and using taught blankets to toss each other up in the air.

Fast cutting to maintain the pace of the film, and Rothman uses several engaging techniques to set her film apart from the others in the cycle. For example, Delilah’s first appearance in the film is her image reflected in Mike’s sunglasses, providing an inventive visual for a beach movie while also connecting the two main characters from their first introduction. An innocuous and quick beach volleyball scene becomes more than background when the ball is hit directly into the lens of the camera, bringing the viewer in on the action, and the comedy sequences feature sped-up action, “[…] showing a Monty Python flair for the absurd.”

The film proved a major milestone in Rothman’s career; as she says, “Its main importance to me is that it proved I could direct a feature film.” As noted in the previous chapter, Rothman left Corman’s employ after making It’s a Bikini World in an attempt to break into mainstream filmmaking. Unable to do so, in 1969 she returned to Corman’s employ as a production executive on the 1969 film Gas-s-s-s. One year later, in 1970, Corman offered she and Swartz a chance to join him in a new filmmaking venture: New World Pictures.
Liberated Nurses and Sunny Vampires

After a dispute with AIP over the final edit of Gas-s-s-s,

Corman ended his partnership with Arkoff and Nicholson and formed his own company, New World, in 1970. New World itself was comprised of two entities: New World Production (production) and New World Pictures (distribution and acquisition).

Corman had originally wanted his brother Gene to head production at New World, but Gene was busy with his own projects, so Corman turned to Lawrence ‘Larry’ Woolner.

Woolner, and his brothers Barry and David, had started in the film business as the owners of several drive-in theaters across Louisiana. Seeing the potential profits in production, he and his brothers formed Woolner Brothers Productions. The company was headquartered in Rome, which allowed the Woolner’s to reap the benefit of the Italian government’s film subsidiary program for co-productions. Producing films both in Italy and in the United States, Larry Woolner first worked with Corman on Swamp Women (1956), with Woolner providing the production money and Corman directing. Several successful collaborations followed, and when Corman needed a partner in New World, Woolner was an excellent fit.

New World quickly became a hive of activity. In their first four years they produced and released twenty-two of their own features and distributed fifteen foreign and domestic acquisitions. Although their in-house produced films were strictly second wave exploitation fare, their acquisitions—specifically foreign acquisitions—were much different. In 1972 Corman acquired U.S./Canadian distribution rights for Bergman’s Cries and Whispers, which would go on to win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. New World also distributed René Laloux’s 1973 film Fantastic Planet, nominated for a Palme d’Or at Cannes, and Fellini’s Amarcord (1973), which won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film. The diversity in product was extremely
beneficial to the company, both financially and in establishing their reputation in the film community.\textsuperscript{cccviii}

Given the lack of options and their previous relationship with Corman, Rothman and Swartz were happy to join Corman in his new company. New World’s first produced film would be Rothman’s \textit{The Student Nurses}, made and released in 1970. Perhaps her best known film, \textit{The Student Nurses} would be critically influential in establishing Rothman’s directorial ideology and formal style, as well as in cementing New World as a formidable new contender in the second wave exploitation field.

\textit{“The Student Nurses…they could be your kind of women.”}\textsuperscript{cccxix}

There are, as there always seems to be, conflicting stories about where the concept for \textit{The Student Nurses} originated, and who should receive the resulting credit. Much like with the attribution of agency and participation on \textit{Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire}, the prevailing historical narrative was constructed without Rothman’s voice. Considering the film grossed over $1 million in rentals on a budget of $150,000\textsuperscript{cccxx}, put New World on the map as a production entity, and kicked off a highly profitable and much imitated cycle of ‘student nurse’ films, the issue of credit is neither lightly taken nor easily adjudicated. Additionally, the film is widely credited with jumpstarting New World, and Corman’s, thematic commitment to films that advance a progressive agenda, particularly feminism. Indeed, by 1974 New World was being touted as “[…] the only company producing films with a decided and committed feminist bent […]”\textsuperscript{cccxii} thanks in large part to \textit{The Student Nurses}. The generally accepted inception story is as follows: Woolner set about traveling the country, speaking with various distributor’s about what of film they would be interested in picking up or perhaps even contributing financing for.\textsuperscript{cccxii}

From these discussions, and on the strong performance of the 1969 film \textit{The Babysitter} (Don Henderson), Wooler thought a film about a student nurse would perform well. He took the idea
to Corman, who agreed, but thought the idea could be even better of the film were about four student nurses rather than one. With that concept in hand, Corman approached Rothman about making the film. Rothman relates:

 [...] they wanted a film that was sexy like The Babysitter. Their idea of sexy, of course, was to have nudity in it, because only recently American film had started to have nudity in them, and the films that had nudity in them were much more successful than the ones that didn’t. So that was required. But aside from that, I could do anything I wanted. Roger said that you know, ‘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.’

Using the briefest of concepts provided to her—along with the directions for ‘excitement, nudity, and an interesting story’—Rothman and Swartz sat down with long-time Corman employee Frances Dole (New World’s story editor) and spent a week hammering out the basics of the plot. The film had been given to them in February; shooting was slated to begin the end of April. With such a short turn-around there was no time for Rothman to write the film herself. She hired screenwriter Don Spencer, a cinema studies graduate student at UCLA, to put together the script under her supervision while she and Swartz found locations, hired a crew, cast the film, and all the other work necessary to get the film into production on time.

What emerged from this fast and furious process was a vibrant, contemporary, opinionated, political, and progressive film about the nuanced lives of four women in their twenties living in Los Angeles during the turbulent end of the 1960s. Although much has been made of Corman’s—and New World’s—production of second wave exploitation films with a ‘social message,’ it is important to tease out Rothman’s agency and influence in establishing this trend. This is especially true when one remembers that The Student Nurses was New World’s first production, one that would in many ways develop the template for the incorporation of progressive ideology into future films. This can be a difficult process given Corman’s incredible talent at self-mythology, as well as the emphasis on the role of the producer over the director.
and/or writer in both second wave exploitation and exploitation filmmaking as a whole. It is, however, a necessary process and one that helps to add Rothman’s voice to the prevailing historical narrative.

Rothman’s contribution to the narrative and ideological construction of the film was significant. Outside of the basic concept, she was given free reign on designing the film. From the beginning, her overriding goal was to craft a film that was aware of, influenced by, and responding to the social, political, and cultural upheaval the United States was embroiled in during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As she said: “I wanted to make this something that reflected the major concerns of the time, and was rooted in the conflicts of the time [...]” cccxvii

Outside of representing her volatile contemporary moment, Rothman was also putting her own socio-cultural ideological identity into the film: “Well, to be very honest with you, the reason those social situations were involved was because I was interested in them.” cccxviii

Demonstrating remarkable creativity under constraint, Rothman decided to use the dictated defining characteristic of the film—the fact that Corman required a story about student nurses—to upend expectations and explore the narrative and ideological themes she was invested in. Eschewing the conventional second wave exploitation impression of “student nurses”—nubile co-eds in revealing uniforms engaged in various hospital-based sexcapades—Rothman used the nursing profession as a way for the women, and the audience, to explore the world outside the hospital. She explains:

They were going to work in a hospital, they were going to be exposed to the various historical currents washing over all of us at that time, more so perhaps than many people who led more isolated and insular lives. [...] They were not frivolous. They were not looking for husbands. They were not obsessed with clothing, or their looks, or all the other disparaging associations that at that time were made with youth in women. They

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29 Interestingly, while Rothman does sidestep the successfully stereotype of the nubile student nurse, the trailer for the film uses it as bait for second wave exploitation audiences. The trailer contains, almost exclusively, the scenes of sex, nudity, and violence in the film, providing a marked contrast between the film and its marketing strategy.
were serious young women about to embark on adult life, and they had placed themselves in a very challenging place, a hospital, where there were a lot of grim realities that they were going to not be able to avoid, and which most of them openly embraced. cccxxix

Indeed, the focus on their profession serves as a handy vehicle for each woman to confront and overcome their own challenges, but it also serves to underscore Rothman’s commitment to the professionalization of women’s labor. As noted in the previous chapter, Rothman had an intense focus on professionalization in her own career, in part as a path to acceptance by the broader film establishment. A similar thread can be see in *The Student Nurses* where she establishes “[…] professional roadblocks for each woman throughout the film, making it clear that for her women to triumph, they must emerge at the end with the occupational goals fulfilled, with nursing diplomas in hand.” cccxxx Even Lynn, one of the nurses who plans to live a life on the run, makes a point to show up for graduation to finalize her professional status.

As Rothman described, incorporating these thematics into her film was something she and Swartz did outside of any requests from Corman:

I mean, would he have said to us, ‘I want something like this in my piece?’ No. He didn’t say that. But we had both known him for a number of years now, and we knew that he was very open-minded about these issues, and so we didn’t expect him to not accept them, and in fact that turned out to be true. I mean, he felt this was fine, this was interesting. It added richness to the plot, but it was nothing that he, in any way, would have wanted. That was not his selection. It was our selection. cccxxxi

Corman, perhaps unsurprisingly, recounts his role in crafting the ideological stances in the film differently. He has said that it was important to him that the film “have something to say” and that he “insisted each had to work out her problems without relying on a boyfriend.” cccxxxii These statements are contradictory both to how he has narrated the creation of the idea for the film as well as how Rothman has characterized his reaction to it:

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30 As a further testament to Corman habit of revising the history of his role in the films he produced—particularly the successful ones—in his biography he states that in *The Student Nurses* “One nurse was black, another was involved with street projects.” (Corman and Jerome, 181) There is not Black nurse in the film (as a main character or otherwise) and his presumable description of Lynn’s work in public health and neighborhood activism as ‘street
When he first looked at the rough cut of *The Student Nurses* he was a bit anxious about the freedom he had given me. But when it became a box office success, he decided it was the right decision and a good time to make more films with themes of social activism in them. When he first saw the rough cut, he told me he didn’t think it was ‘raunchy’ enough […] it concerned him that the girls were too intelligent. But he changed his mind when it did well in theaters.

The film follows four nursing students during their last days of training and internship; each woman’s story comprises roughly a quarter of the plot with various moments of overlap and transition. Phred (Karen Carlson), Sharon (Elaine Giftos), Priscilla (Barbara Leigh), and Lynn (Brioni Farrell) work, train, and live together in hospital-provided housing. They are introduced to the viewers during their last internship rotation before graduation; their rotation assignments serve as the catalyst for their storylines throughout the film. For simplicity’s sake, the general narrative trajectory of each woman is outlined below.

**Phred:** Phred’s last rotation is in gynecology and obstetrics. During one of her first shifts she accidently gives a patient an excessive dosage of medication, which bring her into first contact with Dr. Casper (Lawrence P. Casey) an OB/GYN who solves the situation. Phred and Casper begin a romantic relationship that eventually ends as a result of a series of disagreements. The first disagreement comes when Casper shares with Phred a story about having lost a mother and baby during delivery during his previous shift. Phred is adamant about excluding any talk of death or dying from her personal life, regardless of the fact that it is an inextricable part of both their professional lives. She is committed to confining herself to what she calls ‘clean’ areas of medicine, which she defines as ones where people rarely die. The second disagreement comes when Casper agrees to perform an abortion on Priscilla, which Phred is adamantly against. Curiously, Phred is more concerned about the procedure taking place in her bedroom—and thereby making it ‘unclean’—that she is about her ethical, political, or moral stance on the procedure itself. Phred leaves Casper for his roommate Mark (Paul Camen). After graduations she leaves nursing altogether to become a secretary in a psychiatrist’s office, which she has determined to be “a very clean area of medicine.”

**Sharon:** Sharon’s last rotation is in pediatrics. Here she meets Greg (Darnell Larson), an eighteen-year-old patient with terminal cystic fibrosis. Sharon attempts to befriend Greg only to be rebuffed by his aggressive and prickly manner and his obsession with his own death. Working hard to break through to him, Sharon makes headway by spending most of her time with Greg, reading to him, and taking him on excursions off the hospital’s grounds. As their relationship grows, so does Greg’s romantic interest for Sharon; she projects’ is tenuous at best. I would advance that his failure to accurately describe the film casts sufficient suspicion on his accurate attribution of agency in creating the film’s message.
does not reciprocate. Greg’s hurt over his failed romantic advances drive a wedge between the two, and Sharon is forced to learn how to care for a patient without that care extending into her—or their—emotional involvement or intimacy. At the end of the film Greg passes away while Sharon is in a different wing of the hospital. She is overcome by her grief of not being with him in his final moments. After graduation, she joins the U.S. Army nursing corps headed to Vietnam, a move that is strongly implied to be motivated by both her feelings of grief and failure around Greg’s death.

**Priscilla:** Priscilla’s last rotation is in psychiatry, and although most her narrative takes place outside of the hospital setting, her interest in the human mind and the process of experience largely informs her actions. Committed to the late 1960s principles of free love, chance encounters, living in the moment, and deeply experiencing life, Priscilla picks up a stranger at a café. The stranger, Les (Richard Rust) is a drug dealer who rides a motorcycle and extolls the benefits of treating the body like “a temple” by avoiding processed and preserved food. The two spend the day together before he disappears from her life for a number of weeks. They meet again at a love-in in MacArthur Park. Les works to convince Priscilla to join him in taking LSD on a nearby beach. Despite her rhetoric, Priscilla’s experience with the free love, drug-fueled counterculture is fairly limited. She agrees, and the two hallucinate while making love on the beach. She wakes up to find him gone and a few weeks later she discovers she’s pregnant. After being denied a therapeutic abortion by the hospital’s board of directors, she asks Casper to terminate her pregnancy. He performs a safe and effective, albeit technically illegal, abortion. Priscilla, confident and happy in her decision to terminate her pregnancy, goes on to a hospital position after graduation.

**Lynn:** For Lynn’s final rotation, she is assigned to work in public health. While on her way to an appointment she runs into a street theater group, Teatro Popular, dramatizing the brutality the Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant communities suffer at the hands of the Los Angeles Police Department. A fight breaks out at the demonstration and a man, Luis (Pepe Serna) is seriously injured. Lynn ignores the call for medical assistance, worried that if she provides aid outside of the hospital setting she could be held personally liable for the outcome. Victor Charlie (Reni Santoni), Luis’s friend, brings him to the hospital where Lynn is coincidently assigned to treat him under Victor’s reproachful gaze. While following up on Luis’s friend after he’s been released, Lynn runs into Victor again at the headquarters of his community activist group La Causa de La Raza. Victor challenges Lynn, whom he identifies as Mexican-American from her surname, on her lack of support for the Mexican community. She responds by working at La Causa, providing free health services. During her tenure at La Cause she begins to understand the crisis about affordable health services for the Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant communities. She all but disappears from her former life, dedicating herself to La Causa. One day while working at the La Causa building, Victor brings in a compatriot who has been shot by the LAPD. Searching for the man they shot, the police enter the building while Lynn is trying to save his life. A shoot-out ensures, with another La Causa member gunned down and Victor shooting an officer while he and Lynn attempt to escape. Although the officer doesn’t die, Victor understands that he must go underground to avoid prison and continue his work. Lynn makes the decision to go with
him. She rejoins the rest of the women long enough to attend graduation and reject a job placement offer at a local hospital. She begins her career a full-fledged nurse alongside the now-fugitive Victor and dedicated to providing free health services to a vulnerable and underserved population.

From these narrative overviews, it is clear that *The Student Nurses* is not a standard second wave exploitation film, where female characters were largely in service of advancing the narrative of the male protagonist and providing a vehicle for exploitable sexual situations. Rather, it foregrounded the stories of four women facing the political, ethical, and social challenges of a rapidly changing contemporary world, and doing so unencumbered by the stereotypical goals of gaining and/or pleasing a man, or advancing their place in the world through partnership or reproduction. As Michael Amedeo notes:

> Audiences who went to see "The Student Nurses" expecting sexploitation - or, clinical attachments - must have been greatly disappointed. Although Stephanie Rothman's R-rated film has its share of naked bodies going bump in the night, it plays fairly seriously - and fairly brightly - as a coming-of-age story about four independent-minded, sometimes hard-headed student nurses. In the genre world, this was perhaps the first class of women who weren't immediately graduating to marriage and family.

To strike the balance between the graphic elements Corman insisted on, and as Amedeo notes above that the audience would expect, what Rothman calls the “[…] unholy trinity of exploitation values: violence, sex, and nudity,” she crafted scenes that showcased violence, sex, and nudity while replacing their assumed function in the film. For example, the opening scene after the credit sequence finds Lynn entering the hospital room of a male patient. She attempts to prep him for treatment when he violently attacks her, throwing her down on the hospital bed and ripping at her clothes in an attempted sexual assault. Lynn vigorously fights off her attacker. During the attack the camera switches to an I-POV, aligning the audience with the attacker as the camera looks down at Lynn, focused on her struggling face. This switch in point of view focuses on her distress during the attack, deemphasizing the potential erotics in the scene in favor of foregrounding the violence in the attack.
The camera then cuts to a medium shot of the two bodies, the man’s on top of Lynn, his hands attempting to rip them off her white nurses stockings around her crotch centered in the frame. The viewer sees Lynn’s knee move swiftly up and into her attacker’s crotch, again upending the expected outcome to the scene; his genitals are violated, not hers. As the man doubles over in pain, Lynn runs from the room yelling for help, and returns with two male orderlies and a doctor. The orderlies pin the man to the bed, face down, and remove his pants, exposing his bare buttocks. Lynn assists the doctor with injecting a sedative into the exposed skin. The man emits a loud and protracted scream, something Lynn did not do during the attack. Not only has Lynn escaped a de-eroticized sexual assault under her own agency and assisted in subduing her attacker, but she has also avoided bodily exposure.

Critically, the first scene of nudity and violence is presented through a male body via a scene of nonvoyeuristic sexual assault. The male body itself is presented as so depersonalized—the character has no name, seemingly no motivation for the attack, and disappears from the film entirely after the scene—that he serves less as an instigation for the spectacularization of a female body in peril and more as a foil to the presumed modes of conveying sex, violence, and nudity in the film. By opening the film with this scene, Rothman is satisfying Corman’s demands as well as the presumed expectations of the second wave exploitation audience, albeit in a way neither may have expected. In this sense “A bargain is struck with the audience: you came for sex and violence, here’s sex and violence, now we’ll on to things that are more interesting (including political violence and nonexploitative sex).”

It is important to note that this bargain does not endemically include the exploitation of men or male bodies in service of the women’s empowerment or narrative trajectories. Rothman includes several scenes of nude male bodies that are lovingly presented and flow naturally with
the story, for example Les’ nude body while making love to Priscilla and Casper’s nude torso in several scenes with Phred. Rothman consciously includes these images in the film to foster a sense of equity: “While it was an ironclad requirement that I include scenes of sex and nudity, I tried to make sure men and women were equally nude equally often and the sex was not brutal but sensually evocative for both sexes.” Nudity—male and female—is presented in the film as a natural act of daily life, rather than as a spectacularized event. Phred, for example, is shown nude more often than the other characters, but it is a commonplace nudity. She is nude while having sex, changing her clothes, or conversing with Casper post-coitus. Her cinematic nudity mirrors real-life nudity, and this alignment transforms it from the spectacular to the ordinary.

With the requirements for sex, nudity, and violence met, Rothman was free to explore the broader themes she crafted into the film. Before the federal legalization of abortion resulting from *Roe v. Wade*, Rothman engaged with a woman’s right to dictate her own reproductive choices through Priscilla’s unintended pregnancy. Interestingly, she also weaves into this critique a subtle warning against the naiveté of the free love/hippie movement of the 1960s. Priscilla reads *Steppenwolf*, attends love-ins, believes nursing is “all about love,” and has a decidedly laissez-fair attitude toward her intimate relationships. She suggestively caresses Les’ motorcycle as an entre into conversation with him, shuns wearing a bra and is seemingly dedicated to expanding her consciousness and her experience by diving headfirst into the world around her. However, for all her posture, Priscilla is surprisingly naïve in the ways of the world. She has never tried hallucinogenic drugs (despite her penchant for hippie culture), agrees to unprotected sex with Les, and her initial answer to her unwanted pregnancy is a plan to live on the streets, using free clinics for healthcare. By creating a character whose social progressiveness is undercut

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31 It is worth noting that due to MPPAA restrictions, full frontal nudity and simulated sex from the waist down was prohibited from the film, leaving the remaining sex and nudity showcased akin to what is seen in most contemporary PG-13 films.
by her worldly inexperience, Rothman crafts Priscilla as a three-dimensional embodiment of the idealism, success, naivety, and disappointment that characterized much of the youth culture during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Once she decides to terminate her pregnancy, she is faced with a series of hurdles because, as she states, “If I have an abortion I want a legal one.” She consults Casper, who recommends applying for a medical abortion at the hospital where she trains. Her success will depend on if she can convince the hospital psychiatrist that carrying the fetus to term will threaten her mental health. The hospital turns her petition down; the board of directors is worried of running afoul of the District Attorney if it appears they are granting one of their students a special favor. The institution chooses to guard itself over a theoretical issue at Priscilla’s expense. As Lynn says: “What do you expect from a bunch of men? Give them a change to play inquisitor and it’s thumbs down on women every time”

Casper agrees to perform the abortion at the women’s home, despite Phred’s strong objections. Although Phred has a relaxed attitude toward sex, and indeed rebukes Casper judgment of her healthy sexual drive, her sex-positive attitude doesn’t extend as far as illegal abortion. When Casper comes to the house to perform the procedure, he and Phred have a heated encounter:

Phred: The abortionist, I presume?
Casper: That’s me.
Phred [blocking him from ascending the stairs]: You aren’t going up there. Nobody is getting their insides scraped in my bedroom.
Casper: Phred have a little sense.
Phred: You could lose your license if they hear about this!
Casper: Who’s going to tell them?
Phred [yelling up the stairs]: Pris, are you gonna let this bastard kill your baby?
Casper: Get the hell out of my way!
Phred: Not in my bedroom, not in my bed. You go do your butchering somewhere else!
Casper prevails and, in a remarkable move for any film in any time period, Rothman shows him performing the abortion on Priscilla while Sharon and Lynn attend. The women discuss the topic openly, Priscilla attempts a legal option but is callously thwarted, the term ‘abortion’ is used—rather than a euphemism, as is so often the case—the procedure is performed by a licensed physician who disagrees with his employers decision and makes his own ethical choice to participate, the procedure itself is shown, there are no physical or psychological side effects, and at the end of the film Priscilla announces how she happy she is with her decision to abort, which has allowed her to successfully move into the next phase of her life and career. Importantly, Rothman uses Phred to provide a counter viewpoint on the issue of abortion, which acknowledges the complexities and divisiveness of the topic, as it exists in the real world, and steers the film away from simplistic ideological posturing.

Perhaps one of the most radical storylines in the film belongs to Lynn. Her trajectory from rule-following student trainee to political activist epitomizes the way Rothman leveraged the dictate of ‘student nurses’ to showcase how the world outside of the hospital bled into, shaped, and contradicted, the sterility and regimentation of the hospital itself, the women’s training, and the black-and-white mindset it engendered. Lynn’s first encounter with political activism comes when she encounters a street theater group, Teatro Popular, while walking down to work. She stops to watch their guerilla-style performance. The scene begins with members of the group, and eventually some of the gathered crowd, chanting the slogan “Teatro Popular de la vida y muerte.” They begin to perform an allegorical story condemning the regularized and unchecked police brutality directed at their community.

The story is told through a narrator, speaking in Spanish, and an English translator. The U.S. government is represented as “that tyrant Sam,” who wields power through his “vicious
police department of dogs,” in this case the LAPD. During the course of the performance a fight breaks out between bystanders and theater members, and Victor Charlie makes his first appearance, calling for help for the injured Luis. When Lynn meets Victor again, during her first trip to La Causa, he is openly hostile toward her for not providing aid to Luis after he was injured in the fight, and demonstrates what he perceives to be her lack of empathy for her own community:

Victor: With a name like Verdugo and you don’t speak Spanish? You should be ashamed of yourself.
Lynn: How do you know my name?
Victor: Because it is spelled out in letters over where your heart is supposed to be.

Unintimidated, she questions his name—a reference to the U.S. military slang used to refer to the Viet Cong during the war in Vietnam—in return:

Lynn: How did you get a name like Victor Charlie?
Victor: Because I am the enemy.

The contentious relationship between the two continues throughout most of the film, but it is a relationship with equity. For example, Charlie exasperatedly educates Lynn about the lack of affordable health care for Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants, and assumes her indifference toward, and impotence in, combatting the problem. Lynn doesn’t shrink before this hostility. Rather, she sets up a free clinic at La Causa and begins spending most of her time there. His knowledge of the needs of the community coupled with her medical training combines to produce a vital community resource.

After Victor wounds a police office in the third act shoot out, he and Lynn are in hiding discussing his options. Since the officer did not die from his wounds, she encourages him to turn himself in and plead self-defense. He scoffs at her and responds: “If a man shoots a cop it doesn’t matter what he pleads. Especially…especially if he’s a dirty Mexican.” Lynn agrees to stay and help him. Interestingly, her acquiescence to living a life on the run with Victor is not
motivated by a romantic relationship entanglement. Although the end of the film hints at a growing intimacy between Lynn and Victor, two are never explicitly romantically linked. Their connection is first and foremost ideological, ethical, and activist. In fact, when Victor thanks Lynn for deciding to stay with him as he goes to ground, she responds: “Don’t thank me. I do it for La Causa.”

Rothman’s commitment to showcasing her contemporary moment has never included a whitewashing of society, or a denial of the multiplicities of races, ethnicities, and sexualities that comprise in. She explicitly commented on her inclusion of a Mexican-American narrative in *The Student Nurses* as part of this process of holistic world creation in her films: “Mexican Americans constitute a sizeable portion of the Southern California population, but are rarely shown in film. I grew up with them, and I don’t want to ignore a group of people whom I deeply admire and respect.” The foregrounding of Lynn’s story, her relationship with Victor and La Causa, and their successful escape at the end of the film are indicative of the way Rothman leveraged the ‘required’ elements of her filmmaking to craft nuanced, ideologically-based, and reflective stories for her characters.

Moving past narrative construction, Rothman inventively used film form to add nuance and dimension to *The Student Nurses*. The film is marked by a variety of styles, with each woman’s story aligned with a particular style. She notes:

That was part of my design, to make it a very dynamic film, and to give each of the nurses a very different character by varying the visual style as well as by varying the world into which they went […] it was my first chance to do something at all of an exploratory nature, since the first picture had been a beach picture. I wanted to try out every visual style I could. I had so much fun making this film in that respect, because I never was able to be that varied again, and the structure of it just welcomed that kind of exploration. It welcomed that kind of variation in style. It was a very conscious decision.
For Phred, whose primarily goal in the film was establishing a safe and controlled life for herself, most of her scenes are shot in the classical Hollywood style. Her story is temporally linear; her actions follow an evident cause and effect pattern; her scenes tend to follow classical continuity editing patterns\textsuperscript{32}; and her narrative comes full circle at the end of the film. Sharon is shot in a similar way, although whereas Phred’s story takes place both inside and outside of the hospital—as a way to signal her simultaneously quest for stability in her professional life and love and safety in her personal life—Sharon’s story primarily takes place inside the hospital itself or on its grounds. Her containment within the physical and psychological structure of the hospital spatially bounds her struggle in coming to grips with the fundamental nature of her chosen profession: life and death.

By containing Sharon’s story primarily to the hospital, Rothman is using location to highlight Sharon’s growing understanding of the reality of the emotional and psychic pain attached to nursing. Sharon’s scenes with Greg’s are shot in soft, warm lighting, with both characters usually centered in the frame together, facing one another, two formal constructions that add dimensions of romance, intimacy, and eventual tragedy that marks Sharon’s storyline. Interestingly, Rothman will use location again—albeit in name only—to signpost Sharon’s likely continued intersection with intimacy and tragedy: after graduation, Sharon’s headed to nurse soldiers in Vietnam.

Priscilla’s story, shot almost entirely outside of the hospital, is marked by “[...] languid long takes in sun-drenched picturesque locations, against an acoustic guitar soundtrack.”\textsuperscript{32} She is often shown in public spaces and interacting with strangers, a nod to her exploratory nature. Priscilla’s outdoor adventures give Rothman an opportunity to showcase contemporary Los

\textsuperscript{32} Classical Hollywood continuity editing patterns include opening a scene with an establishing shot, where after the camera moves into a medium shot. The character action in the scene follows a shot/reverse/shot pattern, and the scene often ends with a reestablishing medium shot.
Angeles and its inhabitants, giving the film a vital and realistic feel. Indeed, the love-in Priscilla attends in MacArthur Park was a gathering that already happened to be taking place in the park that day; Rothman simply took advantage of the vibrant social culture to give the film a tangible look and feel of 1970 Los Angeles. Priscilla and Les’ LSD-shrouded beach sex scene is a particularly effective example of Rothman incorporating her filmmaking influences into her work, particularly her art cinema influences.

As their trip begins, Priscilla stares out toward the ocean, watching the waves. The water begins to move in slow motion, the undulating waves changing color from blue to red and back to blue again. The camera slowly pushes in on her face, tracking up and into her pupil and the shot dissolves into an image of her nude on the beach, turning her head in slow motion to absorb her newly altered surroundings. Les and Priscilla carefully run their hands over each other’s nude bodies, exploring each other’s skin in a mode of tactile discovery. Indeed, the sex scene includes more caressing than intercourse. The image of their bodies double, and the double images dissolve into one another. As they join into one and intercourse begins, the camera focuses on her face as she begins to hallucinate an audience watching their act, including a policeman, her fellow student nurses, a family she had seen earlier on the beach, and a group of imagined surfers. As she feels their eyes on her, watching and judging, the camera pushes in for a close-up on her eyes as her voices intones “stop it, stop looking at me,” in a voice over narration. The hallucination ends and she wakes up on the beach alone.

The crowd Priscilla hallucinates watching her make love with Les is telling foreshadowing. Her fellow student nurses surround her the same way they will later in the film during her abortion procedure. The policeman alludes to the criminal action she will be forced to take in obtaining a technically illegal abortion; the family can be understood as the idealized
outcome of her coupling with Les (marriage and sanctioned reproduction); and the surfers represent the carefree lifestyle she is searching so desperately for. Rothman comes back to these themes during the abortion procedure itself. The anesthesia gives Priscilla flashbacks to her beach trip, and she again hallucinates a crowd watching her. These hallucinations also speak to her conflicting emotional and psychic state during these two events, a state which is highlighted when she visits the hospital’s psychiatrist to apply for a medical abortion. During the scene the psychiatrist is never shown; he is a disembodied male voice, the camera positioned over his shoulder and squarely at Priscilla. His questions and her answers are presented in a series of jump cuts, disassociating individual questions from their answers and creating more of a stream of consciousness from Priscilla that again emphasizes her attempts to come to grips with the type of person she is, the type she wants to be, and how she does and does not fit into the broader world around her.

Lynn’s stylistic associations are equally important to her character development and narrative trajectory. Like when shooting the love-in sequence, the Teatro Popular street theater Rothman incorporates into the film was a naturally occurring event outside of the shooting environment. The scene contains several people speaking Spanish, none of which is subtitled. Although the lack of subtitles is likely more easily attributable to insufficient funds to add them to the film, it gives the scene an even greater sense of realness, and showcases the Spanish dialogue as no different than its English counterpart, which falls in line with how Rothman sees the multiplicities of populations that make up Los Angeles. During the fight scene, Rothman uses a handheld camera to put the viewer into the middle of the action, creating a frenetic pace and a whirl of action as limbs, bodies, and voices, flail together en masse.
Most of Lynn’s scenes take place outside of the hospital and in and around the La Causa building and neighborhood. Their look is something closer to documentary or newsreel footage, with liberal use of natural lighting, quick cuts that create a sense of urgency, and a military-inspired color palate of black, tan, and army green. Indeed, as soon as Lynn begins working for La Causa, she drops her nurse’s whites for bellbottom jeans, a t-shirt, an old army jacket, and loose hair, unbound hair. In an aesthetic protest, she wears this outfit to her final nurses exam and to her graduation, bringing the real world she has been working in back into the hospital setting. In perhaps one of Rothman’s most subtle directing moves in the film, Lynn—who before working with La Causa was void of any expression of her Latina heritage and was admonished by Victor for not speaking Spanish—signs in to her final nursing exam by pronouncing her last name with a Spanish accent. It is a small gesture, but one which communicates volumes about the character’s growth and transition during the film.

Stylistic variation was not only an opportunity for Rothman to stretch her filmmaking wings, it was also a clever way to create a fully formed film on a meager budget. The reliance on her directorial skill to foster success under constraint would become one of Rothman’s hallmarks throughout her career. It would certainly become key in the construction of her next film for Corman, an unusual tale of a sunny California vampire and female desire.

Sun, Sand, and Fangs

In the summer of 1970, Corman was on his way to Ireland to direct his own film, Von Richthofen and Brown (1971). In his absence, he asked Rothman and Swartz to manage production at New World. Eager to have them craft another film as successful as The Student Nurses, he also asked them to work on a women in prison film he was planning. Corman had purchased a screenplay The Big Dollhouse, which Jack Hill has brought to his attention. Interested in the title but requiring a rewrite of the screenplay itself, Corman, Rothman, and
Swartz discussed improvements to the script and Corman suggested that Rothman, Swartz, Frances Doel, and Hill write a new storyline, from which Hill could draft the new screenplay. Corman added the caveat that if Hill could not agree with the team on the new story they were free to hire another writer. The collaborative process with Hill did not go well. As Rothman remembers: “He rejected almost everything that we had to say and he was really angry that I was part of this.” At an impasse with Hill, the three took advantage of Corman’s caveat and hired Don Spencer—the screenwriter on *The Student Nurses*—to rewrite the script.

Upon Corman’s return from Ireland and his green light for Spencer’s script, Corman approached Rothman to direct the film:

Roger returned and read it [Spencer’s script] and asked me if I would like to direct it and I said ‘no I wouldn’t, this is not the kind of material I would ever want to do. We created what you said you wanted. We gave the screenwriter guidance following your instructions: you wanted a women’s prison picture, and you wanted it to be violent, and sexy. But no, I would not want to work on something like this.’ I thought it was very demeaning to women and I had very ambivalent feelings about even having had to work on it. But that was my job, and I wanted to make other films so I couldn’t let Roger down.

Although Rothman turned down the directing opportunity, she and Swartz worked on the marketing campaign for the film:

[…] we supervised taking the pictures that were used in the film’s advertising for the theater one-sheets and newspapers. It showed them in their brief prison dresses and we worked with the photographer positioning them in their different poses. Roger asked us to do that because he really liked the picture that we had taken for *The Student Nurses* ads, so we went back to the same photographer and he took the *Doll House* pictures, too.

Corman hired Hill to direct the film, and after their marketing work was completed, Rothman and Swartz ended their association with the film.

However, Hill scholars narrate this history of the film as one in which Rothman tried to ‘steal’ the movie from Hill. According to Calum Waddell, the “film's genesis is far from smooth-with the original script being thrown out before shooting began and Hill's old *Blood Bath*
colleague Stephanie Rothman reportedly seeking to take over the movie." Rothman herself is keenly aware of how she’s been narrated into the story:

[…] there is the tiresome claim Jack has made through the years that I had a dispute with him about who would direct THE BIG DOLL HOUSE. This too is simply false. According to Jack, I instigated all of this. I contacted Roger Corman in Ireland and told him to take Jack off the picture because I wanted to direct it.

Indeed the story of ‘Rothman as would-be thief’ became so pervasive that she herself took the Internet to counter its persistence.  In 2010, in response to yet another iteration of the story, she posted a history of the film’s genesis on a popular exploitation/cult film blog, Temple of Schlock. She ended her post with her reasoning for finally responding to this decades-old rumor:

Why do I even care, since it was so long ago and both Jack and I are such insignificant figures in the long and rich history of film? Because once information is put on the Internet it stays there forever. I don’t know in how many interviews he has lied about me, and I may not find them all, but on occasions like this when I do, I will not let him defame me. I am silent when criticisms of my films are made because everyone has a right to their opinion. But I will not be silent when my character is falsely attacked.

In one sense, it is possible to characterize the issue between Rothman and Hill as a ‘he-said-she-said’ debate. However, it is worth noting that historical narrative that spawned the issue has excluded Rothman’s voice almost entirely. The ‘feud’ and Hill’s intense focus on Rothman—something that she terms “pathological”—is seemingly one-sided. For his part, Corman has never commented on the issue between the two directors. Whether this is tactic neutrality toward two former employees, a wish to stay above the fray, or a move to leverage the dispute continuation to generate more interest in the films he is still earning money on, one cannot say (but can certainly hazard a guess).

Despite the turmoil surrounding The Big Doll House, Rothman and Swartz were still interested in directing for Corman. They pitched him a vampire film tentatively titled Through

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33 When considering why Hill would be so concerned with the legacy of The Big Doll House, it is worth noting that the film gave Pam Grier her first starring role and helped launch her career, something that Hill has both taken and received credit for. Indeed, Hill’s persistence in film history is intrinsically linked with Grier, whose career has been much longer, iconic, and in many ways, more successful than Hill’s.
the Looking Glass. It was clearly a departure from The Student Nurses, and purposefully so.

Rothman narrates:

I in particular felt it was very important for me as a director to explore all types of films, not to restrict myself to any one—at least not at the beginning, before I discovered what my strengths and weaknesses were. So we thought what we would do would be a fresh approach to a traditional film genre, the vampire film, and that’s what we did.

Although an exercise in genre and a departure from her previous work, Rothman held true to her practice of taking re-visioning established cinematic expectations: “The only way that I could see to make this kind of film and to make it interesting was to reverse expectations, at this point. The obvious passivity of women in vampire films was both disturbing to me and rather boring.”

Rothman’s path to her intervention was through vampire herself, a sympathetic seductress named Diane.

Diane (Celeste Yarnall), a centuries old vampire, is introduced to married couple Susan (Sherry E. DeBoer as Sherry Miles) and Lee (Michael Blodgett) Ritter by mutual acquaintance Carol (Gene Shane) at a Los Angeles art gallery show. Diane invites the Ritter’s to her desert home for the weekend. Although Susan, jealous of Lee’s attraction to this mysterious new woman, is reluctant to go, the two travel into the California desert for a weekend getaway. Their car breaks down on a desolate road and they are seemingly stranded until Diane appears on a dune buggy to rescue them, bringing them back to her home.

Their first night in the house is marked by a shared strange dream. Susan dreams that she and Lee are in the middle of a desert, nude in a large bed with an ornate brass headboard, making love. Across from the bed is a large mirror, standing alone in the sand. As the couple makes love a mysterious figure in red (whom the audience recognizes as Diane but whom Susan later calls ‘a strange woman’) appears in the mirror and walks through the glass toward the bed. Diane takes Lee’s hand and pulls him away from Susan and out of the bed, leading him father into the desert
before she embraces him. Susan awakes with a cry of ‘no,’ jarring Lee from his slumber. Lee reveals that he had the same dream, expect in his version Susan was pushing him away from her, rather than being pulled away.

The following day the trio travel into the desert in Diane’s dune buggy, taking a tour of their surroundings. That evening Lee, assuming Susan is asleep, sneaks out of their room and finds Diane downstairs. Susan, who had been feigning sleep, follows Lee and sees he and Diane making love in the living room. Rather than interrupting them, she stands at the top of the stairs, watching. Diane sees her watching and smiles; Susan responds with a small smile of her own. After another shared night of dreaming, Susan confronts an unrepentant Lee and hints at her ability—and growing desire—to also sleep with Diane. Forced to stay another night when they car repairs are delayed, the Ritter’s again share the same dream, but with an important change. When Diane materializes out of the mirror she moves into the bed with Susan, leaving Lee standing on the sidelines.

The next morning Lee discovers Diane has sabotaged their car repairs. He confronts her, but Diane seduces and kills him. Later that afternoon, Diane seduces Susan and the two women kiss. As they are about the make love Susan discovers Lee’s dead body and runs from the house, eventually making her way back to L.A. with Diane in pursuit. With the aid of a number of crosses, a group of strangers, and sunlight on Diane’s exposed skin, Susan vanquishes Diane. She retreats to the home of her friend Carl, whom had originally introduced her and Lee to Diane. As she questions Carl about Diane, she begins to realize that Carl is also a vampire. The
film closes with Susan’s—and the audience’s—realization that her ordeal has come to its preordained end.

The film was shot in the winter of 1971 on a budget of $165,000 in the Mojave Desert and Los Angeles. According to Rothman, the desert location proved extremely challenging: “Equipment would get stuck in the sand and we’d have to push it out; the whole crew, everybody. I think there was a maximum of fourteen people on the crew, including the producer and director. So it was a hard film to shoot.” The film was released under the title *The Velvet Vampire*, a change driven by Larry Woolner. Rothman:

[...] the head of distribution [Lawrence Woolner] did not think that would be a very appealing title to audiences, and they tried to think about—His wife [Betty] actually came up with the title *The Velvet Vampire*, and he liked it, I presume, because it suggested sensuality—velvet—and yet it’s a vampire movie. Throughout the years the film has also appeared under the titles *Cemetery Girls* and *The Waking Hour*, although *The Velvet Vampire* remains its original title.

The film certainly contains tropes of, and homages to, the horror genre, outside of the obvious inclusion of a vampire. Lee and Susan stop at a far-flung gas station, the attendant at which is unhelpful yet clearly knows more about the elusive Diane than he lets on. The two become effectively stranded in an unfamiliar and isolated area with their soon-to-be attacker, and Susan’s story of a vampire killer is met with extreme doubt once she returns to the city. In nods to the vampire tradition, Diane’s last name is LaFanu (a reference to Joseph Thomas Sheridan La Fanu, who wrote the classic female vampire Gothic novella *Carmilla*), the art gallery she meets the Ritter’s in is the Stoker Gallery, the show they are exhibiting is called Night Visions, Diane is shown eating raw chicken liver and hearts, and she is vulnerable to crosses and the sun. However, there are a number of innovations of vampire lore as well. Diane does not sleep during the day, and indeed spends an inordinate amount of time in the desert sun, albeit well covered by
clothing, hats, and gloves. She is the most sympathetic character in the film, lonely, kind, and welcoming. Alternatively, Lee is an outright selfish boor and Susan is a persistent damsel in distress prone to temper tantrums. Although the film is generically a vampire film, it contains little bloodletting; it is much more concerned with the unconventional love triangle and the erotics between the three lead characters than it is with vampirism.

Rothman chose a vampire film specifically for the subject’s links to eroticism and sexuality, specifically female sexuality. She explains:

[… ] I started out with the intention of making what I thought was at the heart of all vampire films, which is an erotic tale. I always thought a vampire was a very erotic figure, and I wanted to make a highly erotic vampire who was very appealing and very seductive, and was a modern woman—seemingly a modern woman. By moving away from the Stoker-inflected model of a lovelorn and doomed male vampire searching the centuries for his true love at the expense of many other women and crafting a female vampire whose desire for companionship and blood is boundless in its fluidity, Rothman is satirizing “[…] contemporary sexual mores while reversing many of the expectations of vampire mythology.”

Female sexual desire is foregrounded in the film, and is coupled with a nuanced portrayal of the many incarnations sexual experiences can take. Diane instigates her physical encounters with Lee, and the only sex scene between Lee and Susan focuses on Susan’s pleasure from receiving oral sex, an act that she declines to repeat on him. Even the sex scene between Diane and Lee is about the shared pleasure of Susan and Diane. Both Diane and Susan experience sexual pleasure through voyeurism (Diane watches the Ritters make love through a hidden two way mirror), something neither one is ashamed by. Their attraction to one another is, in part, formed by this, but also through a shared understanding of the differences between male and female sexual pleasure. Diane makes this implicit understanding explicit when she asks Susan
why men envy women. Diane answers her own question by saying that they “envy the pleasure we have that only we can have.” Indeed, Lee’s adultery with Diane is met with little reproach from Susan, perhaps because it gives Susan allowance to act on her own desires for Diane. Sex in the film is honeycombed with desire, death, power, and powerlessness, creating a multifaceted and complex understanding of sexuality. As Rothman states:

Well, depending on the human being that is practicing it, sex can be dangerous, it can be safe, it can be warm and comforting, it can be cold and terrifying, it can be gratifying, and it can be painful and without any gratification. So there are many ways to approach the subject, and I never had any intention, during the time I was making films, to say only one thing about it.

Stylistically this is Rothman’s most surrealistic and avant-garde film, and indeed she admits she drew inspiration from Salvador Dalí, Jean Cocteau, and Georges Franju. The opening credit sequence and the first scenes in the film set the stylistic tone. The credit sequence opens with an ominous piano score, a blood red abstract image filling the frame. The image begins to slowly pulsate, and takes a form reminiscent of blood cells. The cell-like images undulate, as the colors red, orange, yellow, black and white slowly grow and dissolve into one another. As the title cards end, the last image on the screen is the cell-like shape in shades of black and dark red. The camera pulls back from the image and the dark colors dissolve into the background as a bright white cross—framed in a cloudless, bright blue sky—comes into focus. The camera pans down the cross, revealing its placement on top of a modernist church in downtown Los Angeles. It is a sunny day in the city, the fronds of the palm trees that line the sidewalk sway in the breeze, and a wave of cars travel down a busy street. The camera pans down to eye level and holds on a long shot of a large building. The shot holds as the sunny day fades into a dark night, the only illumination in the area coming from a lone blue light illuminated in the middle of the screen. Rothman achieved this scene through a thoughtfully
crafted lap dissolve. “Rothman chained the camera down on a scaffold, made the first part of the shot-a zoom and tilt down a cathedral spire to Wilshire Boulevard. Then, after sweating out a forty-mile-an-hour wind, returned at night to find the camera still in position and took the second part of the shot.” There is a simplicity to the shot that unbalances the viewer through foreboding mood while simultaneously constructing and particular spatial and temporal framework for the film’s narrative.

The image dissolves again and as at the camera focuses in on a new location: the exterior of a dark courtyard, lit only by three street lamps with a pool of water illuminated in the center of the space. The water in the pool shimmers red but the viewer is unsure how—the lamps casting light on it are fitted with white bulbs. The water in the pool is the first time the color red makes an appearance in the diegetic world; it will play an important role in the rest of the film. A woman walk into the frame from the right hand side, dressed all in red with white accents. She looks around her, surveilling her surroundings. In a typical vampire film, the audience would have just met the first victim. The woman stops short when she sees a motorcycle, sitting alone, in the yard. She quickly meets its owner when he attacks her from behind. Wielding a knife, he drags her to the ground and opens his shirt, making his intended sexual assault clear. He covers her mouth with his hand so she cannot scream, but she bites him. He draws his hand away and forcibly kisses her. She grabs the knife from him, stabbing him in the heart. Rising from the floor she appears nonplussed by the incident and calmly walks to the pool in the middle of the yard to wash the blood from her hands. This is no victim; this is Diane, our vampire.
Diane’s association with the color red will continue throughout the film; the color can be found in most all the film’s scenes. She is always wearing some shade of red—either in clothing, lipstick, or jewelry—and the color dots her home: red napkins at dinner, red pillows on her bed, red lipstick, red thread woven into decorative tapestry. The red accents in the house, which is otherwise adorned in neutral tones, wood, and light colored sandstone, serves as a reminder of Diane’s true nature amidst the modernist—a very California—milieu of her desert home.

In addition to the ‘California’ vibe of the house, Rothman chose it for its unusual construction. It’s multiple floor layout and oddly placed rooms give it a disorienting effect—the viewer is never sure which part of the house connect to others, or where characters are in relation to one another when they are in different rooms of the house. As Rothman notes: I picked the house that we used […] because it was built on three levels in the Hollywood Hills so there were a lot of stairways between rooms. Part of [the suspense is] the unusual shifting of levels that seem to take place as people go from one room to another.” Here again, Rothman demonstrates her innovation in the face on constraint, letting the locations she uses carry their weight in the development of the mood of the film. Natural as well as constructed locations also play an important role in the film. The Mojave Desert is, at first glance, an incongruous location for a vampire movie. Rothman shoots in a natural lighting, letting the camera linger on the sun-bleached sand, the dry and brittle flora, and the dark, sand bitten rocks. The desert, in its dryness, its constant thirst for water, its bareness, and its isolation perfectly reflect Diane’s vampiric existence. Indeed, it brings to mind

![Figure 7: Dali's "Remorse, or Sphinx Embedded in the Sand," 1931](image-url)
Dali’s “Remorse, or Sphinx Embedded in the Sand” painting—the image of a lone and timeless woman, trapped in the desert, alone save for a tower of silent rocks.

**Conclusion**

*The Velvet Vampire*, although not as successful as *The Student Nurses*, did well for New World. Rothman was establishing a solid track record as a resourceful, economically, creative, and successful director. Keen to continue their profitable working relationship, Corman proposed Rothman and Swartz stay on through the company’s second year. At the beginning of New World, the pair had been receiving small weekly salaries, plus a $2,000 bonus each at the completion of each film they made. Although Rothman’s films has made him a significant amount of money and established New World as a viable company, Corman’s proposal for year two was a significant decline from their first contract: he wanted Rothman and Swartz to continue at New World with no salaries and a combined $2,000 per film. The offer was simply impossible for Rothman and Swartz to accept.

Fortuitously, around the same time Larry Woolner, seeing how much money could be made in production and distribution, decided to strike out on his own. He split amicably from Corman to form Dimension Pictures, asking Rothman and Swartz to join him. As Rothman recalls: “Obviously we couldn’t live on Roger’s offer, so when Larry Woolner offered us a living wage, we accepted it. It was not a lot of money. But it enabled us to live in an apartment, and buy food, and have a car.” With Corman’s thanks and appreciation, the pair left New World for the newly formed Dimension. Rothman was about to embark on a new phase in her career; not only would she be one of the very few female filmmakers working in second wave exploitation or Hollywood in general, she was about to become something even more rare—a female executive.


Ibid, 22.


Ibid, 51-56.


Ibid, 22.


It’s a Bikini World, directed by Stephanie Rothman (1967; Southfield, MI: N/A), DVD.

Ibid.


Rothman 2.14 interview

The Animals, We Gotta Get Out of This Place, lyrics by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, record, 1965.


Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid.


The Velvet Vampire, directed by Stephanie Rothman (1971; Portland, OR: Cheezy Flicks Entertainment, 2007), DVD.


Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

Ibid.
CHAPTER 6
THE FILMS OF STEPHANIE ROTHMAN: DIMENSION AND BEYOND

“Rothman’s films are not so much a cinema of social problems as ones of social solutions.”

Rothman’s partnership with Corman had yielded several films that enabled the director to establish her stylistic and thematic interests while cultivating an established track record of success. As discussed previously, the films Rothman made during her ‘Corman years’ can be understood as broadly concerned with chronicling contemporary social issues, their reverberations on everyday life, and the evolving articulations of the ideologies underpinning them. After leaving Corman and moving to a production company where she had more influence and agency on projects, Rothman’s films take shape less as social account chronicles and more as speculative narratives that offer imaginative solutions to the ideological and political themes in her early work. This evolution offers a more nuanced filmmaking approach, where the director, having recognized and stated social problems she was concerned with in her early films, moves past signposting to conceptualizing solutions.

A significant part of this evolution was bolstered by her transition into a leadership role at Dimension Pictures. Formed in 1972 by Larry Woolner, Dimension installed Rothman as head of creative development with Swartz serving as head of production. The production company was significantly underwritten by Woolner’s partnership with Sam Pulitizer, the head of a clothing and accessories company called Wembly Industries. Woolner quickly announced a slate of five productions for the year at average planned budgets of $250,000 each.
Rothman and Swartz joined as minority partners, with a combined ten percent ownership of the company staked through their labor rather than financial investment.\textsuperscript{ccclxxxviii} Despite their investment in the company, their tenure would last only four years.

The industry trade papers variously listed Rothman’s executive title as creative development chief, head of project development, or vice president for creative development. Rothman clarifies her role in the company:

Basically, I had the title of Vice President and I was involved in the development of ideas for films. I also watched films for possible acquisition or that were acquired, gave my advice on how to recut them, what additional shooting might be necessary, or whether they were even worth acquiring. […] But my real, my most primary responsibility, was writing and directing and doing the pre-production on films that I made.\textsuperscript{ccclxxxix}

In this role, Rothman was a critical factor in the company’s productions and acquisitions. Here, she saw an opportunity to leverage her decision-making capacity to increase the number of women working in film production. As she outlined in a 1972 interview with \textit{The Hollywood Reporter}, Rothman pledged to make “[…] a concerted and unprecedented effort […] to locate and hire qualified women in areas of film-making in which they are rarely if ever found.”\textsuperscript{cccx} She added: “‘There’s no area I would not use them […]’. ‘Certainly, being in a position to employ women in a field that has employed them very little in jobs of responsibility, I want to help other women to gain employment in positions of responsibility […].’”\textsuperscript{ccxci} Her ambitions, however, did not work out as planned. Rothman: “I found it very hard to find women who had any crew skills at all. It was too early.”\textsuperscript{ccxcii}  

Production and acquisition release proceeded quickly at Dimension. By 1972, only five months into operation, two films had been completed, one was in production, and eight more

\textsuperscript{34} Per Rothman, Woolner owned 40% of the company. Wembly had the majority stake position at 50% and she and Swartz held the remaining 10%. (Rothman 10.14 interview).

\textsuperscript{35} Although she was not able to achieve this goal while at Dimension, Rothman did work with a woman sound mixer on \textit{The Student Nurses} and a woman art director on \textit{The Velvet Vampire}, both made at New World. (see Pyros, J. “Women on Women in Films.” \textit{Take One} 3:2 (February 1972): 14.
were slated. Following Corman’s strategy from New World, Woolner designed Dimension’s films for drive-ins and first run theaters. Within the first ten months of operations, Dimension had completed five films at a total investment of $1.5 million. By the end of 1972 Woolner announced his plans to form regional distribution exchanges in partnership with the company General Film Group.

Bypassing independent subdistributors and forming their own distribution network allowed the rapidly growing company to reap significant financial benefits. Subdistributors handled films from multiple companies and exercised total control over where, when, and for how long each film was booked. This control meant that smaller, independent films lacking star power would often be booked into less desirable theaters, therefore decreasing profits. Additionally, subdistributors were legendarily bad at caring for film prints, often rendering them damaged or unusable, and were equally poor at timely payment of rental fees to the production company. These were critical issues for a small, independent company like Dimension, so control over their own exchanges could be an incredible boon for their bottom line as well as their production capabilities—not least of all because rental fees from one film would be used to finance the next.

That same year, 1972, Rothman made her first film for the company, Group Marriage. She would make three films at Dimension, including Terminal Island (1973) and The Working Girls (1974). Although emblematic of her established filmmaking style, these three films are thematically quite different from her previous work. In many ways, the trio of films speak to Rothman’s ideological imaginings: the creating of alternate lifeworlds for the free expression of

36 The regional exchanges were planned for New Orleans, Charlotte, Memphis, Dallas, Minneapolis, and Salt Lake City and would only handle Dimension and General films. (Rich, Allen. “Joint Exchanges to Solve Distribution Woes.” The Hollywood Reporter, 12.1.1972.)
sexual desire in *Group Marriage*; establishing a utopic social imagining outside of the systemic oppression of hierarchy and patriarchy in *Terminal Island*; and in perhaps her most personal film, addressing the unemployment and underemployment of women in *The Working Girls*. To articulate the evolution of her narrative thematics I will address each in turn through a unique theoretical lens: queer world-making in *Group Marriage*, utopian and dystopian erotics in *Terminal Island*, and conceptualizations of gendered labor in *The Working Girls*.

**Queered Lives, Queered Worlds**

Although Rothman regularly integrated comedic moments into her texts, *Group Marriage* was her first full-fledged comedy. A combination of farce and a comedy of manners, the film takes its inspiration from George Feydau’s play *L'Hôtel du Libre échange* (known in the United States as *Hotel Paradiso*). Certainly, the exaggerated situations, physical humor, and broadly stylized performances of the film channel Feydau’s mobilization of farce. This mode of narrative and formal production set it—as with her entire oeuvre—outside of traditional second wave exploitation films, especially with its almost complete lack of sex; there is only one on-screen sex scene in the entire film. The film does contain several scenes with nudity, but as in *The Student Nurses*, it is de-spectacularized through its everydayness. One can imagine that was surprising to audiences who were attending a film about, well, a group marriage.

The film takes place in Los Angeles and follows the ostensible main character, Chris (Aimee Eccles), as she negotiates contemporary relationships. Chris, a mechanic and customer service agent at a car rental company, has been with her boyfriend Sander (Solomon Sturges) for several years, but his all-consuming dedication to his work and his growing sexual disinterest in her is beginning to wear thin. On her way to meet Sander after work one evening she meets

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A film version of the story, directed by Peter Glenville, was released in 1966. Paul Mazursky’s 1969 film *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* also serves as likely template for *Group Marriage*. 

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37 A film version of the story, directed by Peter Glenville, was released in 1966. Paul Mazursky’s 1969 film *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* also serves as likely template for *Group Marriage*. 

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Dennis (Jeffrey Pomerantz). Chris and Dennis become friendly, and Dennis joins the couple for dinner, staying the night at their home. That evening Chris propositions him and the two have sex.

When Sander discovers them in the morning, Chris reassures Sander that she can love him and like Dennis at the same time. The three begin to come to a mutual understanding.

Dennis invites Sander and Chris to dinner that evening to meet Jan (Victoria Vetri), his girlfriend. At dinner the quartet get along well, and Sander and Jan are immediately attracted to one another. The four return home to Sander and Chris’ house, where Sander and Jan plan on making love. Chris, not yet comfortable with the idea, forces the four of them to all sleep in one bed as she invents a series of excuses to interrupt Sander and Jan’s planned intimacy. The next morning, realizing her mistake, she apologizes to Sander, and by the end of the day Dennis and Jan have moved into their home.

The two couples begin to live life as a foursome. On an excursion to a local beach they meet Phil (Zack Taylor), whom Jan has sex with and brings into the relationship. Aware of the odd number of partners, Phil begins to search for a woman to bring into the house and the expanding relationship. Phil places an ad in a local underground newspaper, but almost immediately afterward meets Elaine (Claudia Jennings) while out jogging. He brings her to the house to meet the rest of the partners and she agrees to join them. At that moment, the ad Phil has placed and forgotten to retract begins to bare fruit, as all manner of man, woman, and animal
come to the home looking to join in. Although the respondents represent a plethora of sexual proactivity, the sixsome opts to stick with what they have.

With the six partners solidified, the group performs a symbolic bonding ceremony, sharing a single glass to wine to cement their group marriage. The harmony of their new collective life, however, is soon shattered. After seeing Phil’s newspaper ad, a local television reporter and camera crew comes to the house to interview the sixsome. Once their unusual relationship arrangement becomes public knowledge, a judgmental public targets the group: their house is damaged and vandalized, and Molotov cocktails alight their front yard and Chris’ car, which explodes into a ball of flames. Unwilling to be intimidated into abandoning their chosen lifestyle, the group decides to legalize their relationship through marriage. Realizing this will end in their immediate arrest, they plan on using their situation as a test case to advocate for juridical change to standard marriage laws.

Concurrently, Chris realizes that she is pregnant and Jan, feeling constrained in the group setting, leaves her partners. Their plans for marriage continue, and Judy (Jayne Kennedy)—Chris’ co-worker—joins the group as Jan’s replacement. The film ends with the group, just married, being escorted in police cars to the hospital so Chris can have her baby before their inevitable arrest.

Approaching Queer World-Making

Stylistically, Group Marriage is constructed in the classical Hollywood mode. It lacks the experimental/avant-garde elements of The Velvet Vampire and retains a single prevailing filmic style, unlike The Student Nurses. Like her previous works, Group Marriage is filmed in and around Los Angeles, and captures the city and its inhabitants in its contemporary moment. However, what stands out in the film is its foregrounding of an alternative, and as I will argue queer, collectivity through the group relationship arrangement, approaching a type of queer
world-making meant to satisfy the free expression of sexual desire through the rejection of strict heteronormative sexual and intimacy pairing.

My use of the term queer is modeled on Alexander Doty’s application of the term, which he uses to read popular culture as a way to imply ambiguity and to “[…] describe a wide range of impulses and cultural expressions, including a space for describing and expressing bisexual, transsexual, and straight queerness.” Doty leverages the term queer in this sense to “[…] challenge and confuse our understanding of and uses of sexual and gender categories while simultaneously signifying a specific and insistent difference around sexual and intimate marginality, radicality, and possibility. Group Marriage, to be clear, encompasses a type of straight queerness, one in which the queering taken place is not in relation to the group member’s sexuality—they only engage in opposite gender sexual activity—but one which reconceptualizes family, kinship, and intimacy through a project of queer world-making.

Queer world-making is a concept originated by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their article “Sex in Public.” Berlant and Warner think through the potentialities for queer sex unmediated by the public, not simply in regard to safe zones for queer sex, but also “[…] the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture.” Locating the space of the family as the node through which the public concretizes and understands the privatization of citizenship and sex in the United States, Berlant and Warner theorize familial intimacy—specifically the intimacy of the heterosexual couple—as constantly publically mediated, resulting in the re-inscription of heterosexual coupling as institutionally and ideologically normative. This process reinforces the privilege of the heterosexual couple while “[…] blocking the building of nonnormative or explicit public sexual cultures.”
A queer world-making project, then, challenges the public/private logics of compulsory heteronormativity and its focus on the familial couple while unsettling normatively accepted family and kinship patterns. It is in this sense that I contend Group Marriage approaches a type of queer world-making. I want to be careful when suggesting this. The film’s investment in how sexualities and relationship status can be molded into alternate models that foster a sense of social utopia works in the vein of Berlant and Warner’s concept. Queer world-making, however, is contemporary praxis mapped onto a historical text that existed outside a queer paradigm. I’ve chosen this theoretical lens to examine the film to position it as a proto-queer text, linking Rothman’s expansive concept of social egalitarianism and progressive social utopianism to a political project of contemporary queerness. This lets the text be understood as an important progenitor of queer cinema, adding to the growing archive of proto-queer and queer films.

Based on this, I use the term ‘approaches’ purposefully here, as the film lays critical ideological groundwork for successive queer cinema and world-making projects fully ensconced in queer theory and praxis while concerning itself with straight queerness. The members of the sixsome only engage in heterosexual sex, and do so in pairs, even inside their collective arrangement. In this sense, they are maintaining idealized heteronormative structures. However, their collective living arrangement, the partner sharing and trading amongst the group members, the joint professional and affective labor within the group, and the construction of their house as a shared living space disrupts the “rightness” embedded in publically constructed heteronormativity. The intense and violent reaction to the group’s public ‘outing’ reinforces this disruption.

The fluidity of members moving in and out of the group also pushes the text toward one of queer world-making. Berlant and Warner construct a queer world as “[…] a space of
entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies. Group members enter and leave the marriage based on personal desire, coincidence, and occasionally, direct recruitment. Each group member finds his or her own route into the collective situation, but the maintenance of the queer world is always foregrounded as primary. For example, when Phil wants to bring Elaine into the relationship, he brings her to the house. She meets the other members of the group, observes their partner and kinship dynamics, and is asked to make the determination if their arrangement would work for her or not. Despite Phil’s own sexual desire for Elaine, the sustainment of the group’s queer world-making project is primary, as Elaine is asked to accept living in their holistic world rather than simply accepting their sexual arrangement.

The focus on the totality of the world the group has created, rather than just on the logistics of their sexual activity is reminiscent of what Fiona Buckland calls lifeworlds: “[…] environments created by their participants that contain many voices, many practices, and not a few tensions.” Buckland developed the idea of the lifeworlds in her book Impossible Dance, which focuses on the ways that queer communities created queer, expressive spaces in clubs and on their dance floors. Lifeworlds rely on multiplicities constructed from the collective agencies of the individuals producing these sites and how those agencies interact, mesh, and disagree with one another. Within these interactions, lifeworlds open up potential for addressing various identity factors of difference—race, ethnicity, class, and gender—that are routinely silenced under heteronormative constructions. While it is notable that the character who initiates the group situation, Chris, is Asian-American, and the last member to join, Judy, is Black, the film does not explicitly address issue of race or ethnicity. It does, however, use the tensions and potentialities inherent in lifeworlds to discuss female sexuality and gendered labor.
Female sexuality and desire drives the collective relationship arrangement of *Group Marriage*. At the opening of the film, Chris is extremely dissatisfied with her relationship with Sander, particularly their sexual relationship. Sander has become increasingly focused on his work—he owns a business that capitalizes on the perceived failure of the counterculture of the 1960s by producing nihilistic bumper stickers\(^3\)—and as a result has been ignoring Chris and her sexual needs. Chris spends a majority of her time with Sander either fighting or fixing his car. As she tells him early on in the film: “I am more intimate with your car than I am with you.”\(^{cdxi}\) Sander seemingly feels little remorse for his treatment of Chris. Rather than address her needs, he mocks and judges them, calling her a nymphomaniac and an “oversexed grease monkey.”\(^{cdxii}\)

Chris, refusing to be silenced in her sexual dissatisfaction, calls Sander a “chauvinist pig” and tells him, sweetly, to “go fuck himself.”\(^{cdxiii}\) Resolute that her sexual desire not be cowed by Sander’s judgments, she takes matters into her own hands and seduces Dennis.

The first time Chris and Dennis sleep together is noteworthy in demonstrating the tensions between Chris’s sexual desire and Dennis’ initial reluctance to disrupt the normalized coupling between she and Sander. The first night Dennis spends at Chris and Sander’s home, Chris waits until Sander is asleep to sneak into Dennis’ room. She undresses and gets into bed with him, telling him, “I love Sander but I still wanted to come in here with you.”\(^{cdxiv}\) As she advances on Dennis sexually, he becomes increasingly nervous, trying to quell his desire and hers by incessantly talking about how much he likes Sander, what a great person he thinks he is, and how much he respects him. Dennis’ constant referencing of Sander is an attempt to diffuse the sexual tension between himself and Chris by reminding her of her normative pairing with

\(^{3}\) Sander’s bumper stickers contain nihilistically ironic phrases that poke at the utopic idealism of the social and cultural reformatory ideas of the 1960s counter culture, including: Have a Rotten Day; The CIA is Full of Spies; Support Mental Health or I’ll Kill Yo; Santa Claus is a Faggot; Support Your Local Police—Bribe ‘Em; Howard Hughes is on Welfare; and Stop Overpopulation—Cut Down on Sex.
Sander, her responsibility to the ‘rightness’ of that construct, and his respect for it. His focus on Sander, and the man in the relationship, also reinforces the inherent patriarchal gender dynamics of ‘rightness’ of heteronormativity—Dennis respects the relationship because he respects the man, rather than the man and woman, in it.

Chris’ response is to refocus the situation on her desire, rather than her pre-existing heteronormative relationship. She tells Dennis: “I don’t love Sander any less because I am here with you. Why does everyone think you can only care for one person? Look at parents, they can love ten children at the same time.” For Chris, love and sexual desire do not need to be directly correlative, nor do they need to be restrained to a single individual at a specific time. Chris is referencing here what Berlant and Warner would later terms border intimacies, which develop when people gain pleasure, eroticism, and self-fulfillment through relationships with strangers and/or acquaintance outside of the heteronormative couple form. In this moment, Chris’ desire is not about Dennis, Sander, or her affective love for either one. It is focused on her own sexual pleasure and her refusal to forgo the satisfaction of that pleasure simply because of the accepted bounds of heteronormative coupling.

For all of Dennis’ protests and his ‘deep respect’ for Sander, he cannot refuse Chris, and the two have sex. The next morning when Sander finds the two of them together, Chris is resolutely unapologetic for her actions, defiantly telling Sander “There’s nothing wrong with what I’ve done.” Although Sander is initially angry with Chris for what he sees as a betrayal, by that afternoon the two have come to an understanding that Chris’ actions have the potential to enhance rather than damage their relationship. Female desire will again play a constitutive role in advancing the group’s world-making process when Phil is brought into the relationship. Sander, Chris, Dennis, and Jan—now a foursome—take an overnight trip to the beach. While collecting
rocks Jan meets Phil, a lifeguard, swimming nude on his day off. Clearly turned on by his naked body, she slyly propositions him and the two have sex.

Afterward, she brings Phil back to the beach encampment where the rest of her partners are. He spends the night with them (platonically), and in the morning when his car won’t start and Chris can’t fix it, they give him a ride back to town. On the way he tells them about the divorce he is currently in the middle of, which has left him sleeping on friends’ couches. Chris and Jan prod Sander and Dennis into agreeing with them that Phil should stay at their house until he is able to get back on his feet. At Sander and Dennis’ agreement, the two women are visibly happy. They smile broadly at one another, giving each other knowing looks, and bouncing excitedly on the back seat of the car they are driving in. Their behavior clearly indicates that their offer of housing was less about Phil’s well being and more about the women’s sexual desire for him.

Once home, both women cling to Phil while walking into the house—one on his back and one on his side. Phil is quickly absorbed as the fifth partner in the relationship, thanks to the women’s desire. Jan’s desire will later bring about another change in the collective relationship—her exit from the group. After Phil catches her sleeping with another lifeguard, she confesses to the group that her sexual desire exceeds their arrangement; she wants to be able to have sex with whomever she wants, whenever she wants, without necessarily bringing them into the group itself. As she says “I got to be free.” Unable to reconcile Jan’s desire for complete sexual freedom with the maintenance of their shared lifeworld, the group and Jan agree that she must leave the arrangement. Again, this speaks to the power of female desire in the construction and deconstruction of the group, but also to the idea that the film approaches—without quite fulfilling—a complete process of queer world-making.
The gendered division of labor in the film also speaks to the ways in which the group’s constructed lifeworld interrogates issues of gender. All of the partners, with the exception of Jan, are professionally employed. Chris works at the car rental office and is the group’s resident mechanic, Sander has his bumper sticker business, Dennis is a parole officer, Phil is a lifeguard, and Elaine is a lawyer. Jan, who was formerly a flight attendant, does not work professionally; she is responsible for maintaining the home. She redecorates the formerly sparse space, tends to the yard and gardening, and cooks many of the group’s meals; her labor is the affective labor of home and family maintenance.

When Chris discovers she is pregnant, Jan is vocally upset. As the only person who works within the home, she believes the care of Chris’ child will fall primarily to her, which she is adamantly against. When Elaine assures her that the men will also aid in child rearing, she is extremely skeptical, and disavows Elaine’s notion that the entire group, not just her will help with the baby. She says: “Sure Elaine, that’s what you went to law school for, to learn how to change diapers.” Jan’s reasonable skepticism highlights the fissures in the group’s lifeworld—for all their attempts at alternative world-making, stereotypical assumptions of gendered responsibility are still firmly moored in traditional heteronormativity. These gender assumptions were also foregrounded in the conversation that ensues when Chris first announces to the group that she is pregnant:

Dennis: I would like to have a baby.
Jan: Maybe Chris doesn’t want it.
Dennis: Of course she wants it.
Elaine: Look, you can’t decide that. It’s her body, not yours.
Sander: Chris, what do you think?
Chris: I agree with Dennis. He should have a baby.

Initially conflicted, Chris decides to carry the pregnancy. Later, heteronormativity again rears its head when the men, playing basketball, wonder who the child’s biological father really is.
Although the conversation is quickly ended by the determination that it does not matter which one of them impregnated Chris, the fact that the question was raised demonstrates the limits of the group’s lifeworld outside of established patriarchal heteronormativity.

Although there are clearly tensions in the group’s alternatively created space, it is worth noting their dedication to its establishment and maintenance brings to the film—and its purposefully constructed lifeworld—a sense of utopia. Lifeworlds are not happenstance; they are purposeful and specific. As Buckland theorizes, “[…] a queer lifeworld is not a superorganic form. It is not a given, but rather, queer world-making in a conscious, active way of fashioning the self and the environment, cognitively and physically, through embodied social practices […].”

The creation of the group marriage structure, the boundaries they create around it, and its centrality to the organization of their lives exemplifies the type of practice Buckland theorizes. It also speaks to a theme of utopic world creation, which is understood as an outgrowth of Rothman’s deep commitment to egalitarianism. If, as Buckland posits, queer lifeworlds embody “[…] utopic imagination and power whereby queerness occupied the center, in which the heterosexual couple was no longer the referent of the privileged example of sexual culture,” Rothman’s construction of the group marriage and its egalitarian dynamics approaches utopic queer world-making and helps position it as a proto-queer text. While the film may only approach the all-encompassing queerness that Berlant, Warner, and Buckland envision, Rothman’s utopic construction, as proto-queer cinema, provides a noteworthy addition to the filmic archives of queer cinema.

In his book Only Entertainment, Richard Dyer thinks through the way entertainment produces utopia through affective codes that are specific to, and characteristic of, individual modes of cultural productions, in this case film. He uses the term ‘affective’ to delineate how
film presents how utopia would feel, as opposed to look. In this sense, Dyer sees the utopian sentiment in entertainment as having the capacity “[…] to present either complex or unpleasant feelings (e.g. involvement in personal or political events; jealously, loss of love, defeat) in a way that makes them seem uncomplicated, direct and vivid, not ‘qualified’ or ‘ambiguous’ as day-to-day life makes them, and without imitations of self-deception and pretense.”

The film reflects this tactic. While watching *Group Marriage* the viewer feels the ease when members decide to join the group. In fact, conversations about the surely complicated logistics of how the group works—partner pairing, financial obligations, sleeping arrangements, household chores, resolution of disputes, etc.—never take place on screen. Rather, the viewer is asked to assume those conversations have taken place off screen when the on-screen acceptance of a new group member takes place. The utopic world is felt and accepted, rather than explained and quantified. This uncomplicated process underscores the simplistic substitution utopic film uses to identify and solve persistent social tensions:

Instead of exhaustion, it promises energy; it replaces dreariness and monotony with an intensity, excitement, and affectivity of living; substitutes the manipulations of advertising, bourgeois democracy, and sex roles with transparency; that is, open, spontaneous, honest communications and relationships; and replaces the experience of fragmentation […] This substitutive process toward the development of contemporary utopic spaces is explicit in *Group Marriage*. For example, when the television news crew is interviewing the group and the reporter questions the logistics of their arrangement Dennis replies: “If six people can’t live together and get along, what hope does the country have?” The evasion of the question of details with the idealistic counter of ‘getting along’ again places the film in the long tradition of utopic entertainment.

If *Group Marriage* marks Rothman’s first concrete attempt expressing her egalitarian viewpoint thorough utopic thematics in her filmmaking, her next film, 1973’s *Terminal Island*,
would continue evolve that process by showcasing the dirty details necessary for social reformation and the interactions between pain, pleasures, and the natural world which forge social progression.

“Terminal Island: Where Living is Worse Than Dying!”

If *Group Marriage* was Rothman’s visioning of a contained lifeworld reconstructed to accommodate sexual, relationship, and intimacy fluidity, *Terminal Island* moves past localized world-making into an imaginative re-conception of social overhaul outside of hierarchical and patriarchal restrictions. Following *Group Marriage*’s emphasis on the role that bodies—and their desires—can play in offering solutions of social problems, it comes as little surprise that *Terminal Island*, her most violent and visceral film, would be organized around the ways that bodies have the potential to reconceptualize society through subversions of structural inequality. Importantly, by working the action genre, centering violent acts, and focusing on a universal story, Rothman is making a critical break from the paradigm of women’s films, positioning herself as a versatile and universal director.

A key feature of the film, set on an isolated island prison, is two conflicting camps: the main camp and the rebel camp. Utilizing the work of Gilles Deluze and George Bataille, I intend to demonstrate how Rothman’s construction of the two divergent camps can be understood to illustrate the oppression of hierarchy and patriarchy against the possibility of equality and lateral social order. These demarcations in juridical order and social creation are played out through the bodies of the women that populate *Terminal Island*. Therefore, I argue that these bodies of difference are essential to Rothman’s construction of alternate visions of social order created through utopic imaginings.
**Dystopian Pain**

*Terminal Island* takes place in an alternate but recognizable present where the United States Supreme Court has deemed the death penalty unconstitutional. As a result, the voters of California have passed an initiative in which individuals convicted of murder in the first degree are confined to the San Bruno Maximum Security Detention Center, otherwise known as Terminal Island. Terminal Island is an isolated area off the coast of the state where these convicted murders are sent to live out their days, or die trying. Once sent to the island, the convict is considered legally dead, as the state washes their hands of the responsibility of caring for the prisoners, with the exception of minimally stocked rations delivered intermittently. The viewer is first introduced to the island and its inhabitants through a narrative device: a television news crew compiling a story on the prison compound. This gives a quick exposition of the island and its inhabitants, handing the audience a roadmap to the multiple characters that will play key roles later in the story. Although the film is an ensemble piece, there is an ostensible protagonist—Carmen Sims (Ena Hartman), newly sentenced to the island.

Carmen, a Black woman in her mid-20s, serves as the stand-in for the viewer; the audience discovers the island and its own unique society through her. Carmen is immediately established as an aggressive heroine. She first appears in frame through the lens of the news team’s camera, as they capture footage of her leaving her sentencing trial for a crime that is never contextualized. As Carmen walks down the steps of the courthouse, the press harangues her: flashbulbs pop, questions are shouted at her, and television cameras are pushed into her face. She says nothing, but she does grab one of the cameras being shoved at her, throwing it to the ground. Later, when being dropped off at the island, she speaks her first line of the film. When the prison guard asks her to sign a form stating that she is legally dead she grabs the paper, stating, “I never heard of a corpse signing its name before,” and throws the paper into the
On the beach soon after, she is approached by one of the island’s current male occupants. She immediately pulls a hatchet out her rucksack, raises it at him, stating: “Stay there or I’ll kill you.”

These sequences establish Carmen as not only aggressive, but unwilling to situate herself as a victim either to the public (read: the press), the state (read: the prison system), or her peers (read: other convicts). Carmen’s associative violence is something we see in terms of her actions, and understand as part of her character. To be sure, her sentence to Terminal Island indicates her successful use of past violence. By embedding violence within Carmen, Rothman has created a liminal woman, one who has slipped through the heavily guarded boundary between male and female behaviors, much like Rothman herself in her role as second wave exploitation director. Carmen’s embodied violence is crucial in her gender liminality. Sharon Marcus notes that women are historically excluded from active participation in social violence, and this exclusion has therefore left them as perpetual victims. Carmen’s status as a violent woman, and her refusal of victimization, marks her body as different; she is out of bounds of the normative social code and its inscribed gender binary.

In her study of violent women in cinema, Hilary Neroni points out how violent women are required to be narratively over-determined; their violence must come with a rationale, as part of a job or in the name of self-defense, to be accepted and believable to the audience. In this way, Neroni notes that the “[…] the extraordinary lengths to which the narrative must go to explain or situate the violent woman reveals the trauma caused by her violence. In fact, the very existence of the violent woman as such testifies to ideology’s propensity for failure.” Rothman, however, refuses to bend to the hegemonic understanding of female violence, instead constructing Carmen without a back story that explains or situates her violence. As such, Carmen
is a dangerous female body, one who refuses subjugation to normative, oppressive, and divisive gender codes and whose refusal is actively violence. Carmen’s rejection of these codes is Rothman’s fulcrum upon which the idea of violence as a potentially generative force for utopic social creation turns.

After spending the night on the beach, Carmen ventures into the inner island, finding the main camp. As she descends a hill into the central square she is forced to walk past a line of other convicts, all men, who leer at her as she passes. This scene is an interesting mirror of the earlier ‘perp walk’ past the media after her sentencing trial, as in both instances Carmen’s ‘otherness’ as a violent women is wrought into existence by an oppressive gaze, be it the gaze of the media or the male convicts. Carmen is soon forced into a harsh realization: the camp is run by the tyrannical Bobby (Sean Kenney) and his henchman Monk (Roger E. Mosley). Bobby has constructed life on the island based around fear, violence, slave labor, and his own sadistic desires.

Carmen is immediately assaulted by Monk, who pins her head between the ground and his massive boot, while using her skull as a pivot. Later that evening Carmen meets the three other women in the camp: Joy (Phyllis Davis), Lee (Marta Kristen), and Bunny (Barbara Leigh). Joy informs Carmen that in addition to the forced labor Bobby requires of the women, they are also required to provide the men with sexual services. As Joy bluntly states: “We are the property of every man on this island.”

Carmen, incredulous, refuses to participate and declares her intent to break out of camp, only to see her plans eroded by days of backbreaking labor that leave her exhausted, bruised, and beaten. One evening, while getting her torn hands bandaged by Joy, Monk appears to assign the
women the names of the men they will service that evening; each women is assigned four to six men. Carmen asks “Don’t we ever get any sleep?” and Monk replies “All you gotta do is lie back and take it. Nobody says you have to stay awake.” This response articulates the men’s creation of the women as proprietary objects—less than people, merely receptacles to be used and discarded at their convenience.

These extreme behaviors, built along a strict gender binary, exemplify how Rothman creates the main camp as a type of sadistic satire of broader society that the violence bound in Carmen will help reform. Rothman leverages the sadism inherent to the construction of the dictatorial and systemically oppressive social relations within the main camp to skewer, and render absurd, normative constructions of society and its stereotypical gender delimitations. The extreme nature of the manual and sexual slavery is so ridiculous and gratuitous that it reduces the normative system of gender construction it is based on to indefensible grotesquery. A Deluzian understanding of sadism and a reevaluation of its roots in the literature of the Marquis de Sade illuminate these thematics.

For Freud, sadism was a perversion of fantasy as a sexualized violent encounter fostered by warped resolutions of the Oedipal drama. Working against Freud, Deleuze attempts to fashion sadism as a form of subject creation through the imbrications of fantasy and the law. In doing so, Deleuze severs sadism from masochism, which Freud couples, defining them as two distinct processes with separate implications and critical understandings of juridical subject creation. Deleuze uses the writing of the Marquis de Sade to provide distinctive models of desire, prohibition, and subject creation through law to illustrate his concept.

Deleuze understand the erotic fantasies of de Sade as a critique of law based on reason. For de Sade, law takes the form of an imperative, and this imperative is driven by the reason that
underpins it. As such, reason (as law) can be seen as a form of violence, as it bounds and immobilizes our actions. The logic of reason, as the logic of proofs, forces subjects under the law to agree with proof logic even when it leads to conclusions inherently felt as incorrect. Law, then, contains a compulsion toward violent reason, violence that forces subjects into a realization of that reason in the actions and structure of everyday life. For de Sade, the words of the law compel subjects into action, disallowing individual agency outside of the schema of the law.

de Sade’s protagonists parody the language and compulsion of the law through the demonstrative and repetitive language of sadism. This is the construction of the subject under the fantasy of sadism as a parody of the imperative of the law and its foundational reason. This is also the structure of the sadism Bobby has formed in the main camp. Legally compelled to exile and eventual death, Bobby’s curation of island society through sadism mirrors the inhumaness of a nation whose reasoned jurisprudence sentences it citizens, guilty or not, to a slow and torturous death. The imperative of the law and its associated violence are based on abstracted reason. Sadistic parody is found in reenactments of this abstraction through the repetitious language, acts, and the impersonal character of sadism. Deleuze sees de Sade’s articulations of sadism to act as a parodic form of law, a perpetual revolution in fantasy positioned against its stability and reason, advocating the perpetual motion and unsteadiness of the physical world.

Similar satirical moves are visible Rothman’s creation of the dystopic main camp as the stand-in for broader society. Bobby is a de Sade sadist par excellence, and has recreated life on the island as a magnified parody. If on the mainland there is a discrepancy in wages between men and women who perform the same work, in the main camp the men perform no work and reap all the rewards, while the women labor for nothing. If on the mainland there is a normative standard that wives should be dependent on and subordinate to their husbands, in the main camp
women are removed from subjecthood altogether and reduced to communal property. If on the
mainland there is democracy of multiple voices, in the main camp there is dictatorship. And
perhaps most interestingly, if on the mainland there is a movement of feminists calling for
women to speak up and demand equality (read: second wave feminism), in the main camp there
is a mute woman. Bunny, who killed her parents, has refused to speak since she committed the
crime. Bobby favors her, and when brought to him for sex, he demands she performs certain
tasks. He prefices these demands by saying “If you don’t want to, all you have to do is say no,”
knowing full well she will not speak. In Bobby’s sadistic dystopia Bunny as mute, impassive
object is the perfect woman. Using a Deluzian understanding of sadistic parody established the
social recrimination Rothman embeds in the main camp, positioning its eventual downfall at the
hands of utopian egalitarianism.

Utopian Pleasures

In contrast to the dystopic sadistic main camp is the rebel camp. Before Carmen arrived
on the island, a group of male inmates escaped Bobby’s tyrannical rule and disappeared into the
island’s wild, unoccupied areas. In fear of reprisal from Bobby, the group, led by A.J (Don
Marshall) and his second in command Cornell (Ford Clay), have been living on the run and
plotting to liberate the women. One day while the women are washing clothes in the river under
guarded supervision, A.J. and his crew attack, killing several guards, and absconding with the
women.

Incredulous that the men are too afraid of Bobby to oppose his reign, the newly liberated
women begin brainstorming ways to take the offensive on their own. Of the four women, Lee is
the most impassioned about attacking the main camp. Earlier in the film it was revealed that Lee
is a political radical and failed doctoral student. Threatening to blow up locations of a corporate
bank chain if they did not withdraw their funding of oppressive regimes in South America, she
accidentally killed a security guard and several employees with one her explosives, resulting in her confinement to the island.

Lee and the other women’s fervor for retribution convince the rebel men to join them in overthrowing Bobby. Recognizing the rocks in a riverbed as niter, Lee realizes that with the niter, charcoal, and sulfur the group will be able to make gunpowder. Simultaneously Carmen finds moonseed vine growing wild, and shares that it can be boiled down to make poison tips for arrows and darts. Quickly the group organizes and begins preparations for war.

During the preparations Rothman begins to sketch the type of society the rebels are fighting for. Men and women are equally valued amongst the rebels. They share in the decision making, the labor, and the women take the lead in the tactical planning for the assault on the main camp. Indeed as Cook notes “In this film […] the new social order is based on a division of labour that gives men and women equal but different roles, arguably questioning the patriarchal system in which women are seen as mirror images of the male.”

Sex also plays a key role amongst the rebels, albeit in a stark contradiction to the forced sexual slavery of the main camp. Within the rebels, the women, particularly Joy and Carmen, swap sexual partners according to the shifting paths of their desire. In these sexual pairings and re-pairings there is no language or actions around ownership or monogamy. “When making love or conversing with one man, it could just as easily be with another. There are no distinct couples formed in this film.”

There is one point where the sexual hierarchy of the main camp attempts to infiltrate the burgeoning utopic society the rebels are attempting to institute. Dylan (Clyde Ventura) attempts to force himself onto Joy, who vocally and physically resists him. She is saved by another one of the men who says to Dylan, “This ain’t right. You should ask her first if she wants to.” Joy vows revenge. Later, she lures Dylan into a secluded spot with the promise of sex, and in the
process rubs his bare buttocks with royal jelly, sending a swarm of bees after him. Dylan runs screaming into a nearby lake, while the rest of the group looks on, amused by his comeuppance.

The utopian society the rebel camp is striving to institutionalize in their re-creation of civilization on the island stands in stark opposition to the dystopic and sadistic main camp. Critical to the creation of this utopian world is the rebel’s connection to their natural environment, specifically through the women. Lee’s homemade gun power, Carmen’s harvesting of moonseed vine, and Joy’s use of the royal jelly and bees signify how the female inmates are capable of harnessing the violence of the natural world for their own purposes. Indeed, weaponizing the natural world in order to construct an equitable and just social world speaks to how the women are aligned with natural violence, and their leveraging of this connection allows them to topple the unnaturally patriarchal social world.

As the women and their utopian vision are aligned with the violent natural world, it is useful to analyze their role in the film through the theoretical lens of Georges Bataille’s construction of continuity and discontinuity, noting how the rebels world-making process mirrors his theorization around creation, violence, and natural order. Human beings create themselves, in large part, through and against the natural world that spawned them. For Bataille, to understand how humanity constructs itself simultaneously in collusion with and in opposition to the natural world, it is necessary to comprehend the ever-evolving environmental state. His natural world seethes, pulsates, undulates, and ruptures, constituting a circular structure of life and death. The intrinsic excess of the natural world creates and recreates itself through an “[...] orgy of annihilation [...]”. This produces the natural world as state of continuity who excess forms a continuous and undifferentiated flow of energy and movement: a plethora of life and death, the intermingling of the matter of production and the waste of reproduction. The contiguous natural
world, then, is one hypercharged by a churning mass of continuity. Life, death, energy, and excess are relentlessly colliding, absorbing, and merging, curating a living, breathing, and effervescent natural world. Our terrestrial megacosm is a “[…] trap set for the balanced order, […] instability and disequilibrium. Life is a swelling tumult continuously on the verge of explosion.”

It is against this violent and excessive continuity that humanity is poised to understand itself. Although leveraging the violence of the natural world for social change, Rothman complicated Bataille’s construction by positioning man-made violence as a reaction to the constructed social order rather than just the evolutionary natural world. By contrasting the annihilation in the social world—oppressive and tyrannical as it is to those who fail to submit to its hegemonic power—with the natural world of the island, the film can be understood to advance Bataille’s theory past subject creation and toward social creation. Violence, in both scenarios, remains a key component. Violence is a primary constitutive force for the inmates in terms of subjecthood and social construction. Humans recognize the violence in the natural world, and see a correlative violence constructed in their own social condition. To negotiate this violence, distance is necessary, which humanity created through an overinvestment in a specific alternative function: work.

Labor is a distinctive human endeavor. In this, I do not mean the labor of basic survival. Rather, the labor endemic to the human condition under capitalism is one of manufacture rather than primal survival; it is the instrumentalization of a relationship with the natural and social world through the means of production. “By work man orders the world of things and brings himself down to the level of a thing among things: work makes a worker a means to an end.”

The movement from natural subject to manufactured thing distances humanity from the violent
natural world. However, *Terminal Island* argues that work, specifically capitalist work, breeds the inequalities embedded in hierarchical social construction. Work must be understood as a solution and a problem. This is observable during the rebel’s preparations for war. They bow to their capitalist enculturation as they assemble their weapons through Fordist factory logics, with an emphasis on divisions of labor and assembly line production, but they enable their success by integration with the natural world.

The rebels win the war, and the film closes with the reconstruction of the island as a utopian society at peace, one where wealth, power, labor, and sexuality are constructed as shared and equal. As the rebels rebuild the main camp, their harnessing of the continuous world is represented in their weaving of fronds for hut roofs and in the clearing of the land for crops. Their social progression is embodied in their pardoning of Monk, Bobby’s primary henchman, and their care for him after he is blinded. The rebels have leveraged the procreative forces intrinsic to natural violence to best their enemies and transformed the oppressive violence of the social world into compassion. They are now both world creators and world nurtures, destabilizers of repressive patriarchal society, and producers of an imaginative utopia defined by equanimity and fairness.

**Working Women of the World**

If *Group Marriage* and *Terminal Island* evolve Rothman’s utopian thematics and reflect her deeply felt egalitarian ideology and hopes for social transformation, *The Working Girls* bring her focus toward more concretized, and immediately pressing issues: women’s employment and position in the public labor force. The focus on labor and work in the film was explicit from the start. As she said in 1977: “I am particularly drawn to the problem that the three main characters face, a problem shared by most young people: how to find work that will support them and
provide satisfaction at the same time. It is the last film she would make, and the only film that she wrote the story and screenplay for as well as directed.

Interestingly, The Working Girls brings together the impulses of both of Rothman’s film cycles, as the film stands as a chronicle of contemporary social issues that also attempts to offer solutions to said issues. In its focus on the unemployment and underemployment of women, it is difficult not to understand The Working Girls as Rothman’s most personally reflective film and perhaps her film only film that is openly pessimistic; she presents solutions to the issues she is addressing, but as I will argue presently, the belief in the viability of those solutions is particularly suspect.

In established Rothman fashion, the film revolves around a group of women: Honey (Sarah Kennedy), who is unemployed, homeless, broke, and recently arrived to Los Angeles looking for work; Denise (Laurie Rose), an artist by training and desire, she works as a commercial billboard painter and apartment building manager; and Jill (Lynne Guthrie), a law student working as a cocktail waitress, and later stripper, as a way to pay her tuition. Honey meets Denise on her first day in L.A., and Denise offers to let her stay with her and her roommate Jill until Honey can establish herself. Honey searches for a job to no avail. During her search she meets Mike (Ken Del Conte), a street musician; the two have a brief sexual encounter after which Mike begins dating Denise. Meanwhile, Honey begins a career as the paid (nonsexual) companion of a rich and eccentric entrepreneur, Vernon (Solomon Sturges) and Jill transitions from her job as a cocktail waitress at a strip club to an on-stage performer to earn more money. Jill is later promoted to club manager while her boss Sidney (Gene Elman) takes an extended vacation. As manager she meets Nick (Mark Thomas), a gangster who charges Sidney protection money; soon after they begin a relationship.
Concurrently, Honey is wasting her time as Vernon’s companion, putting in maximum hours for minimum wage. After she demands some type of workplace stimulation, Vernon charges her with finding a way to make him more money. Finding what she believes to be a profitable opportunity, Honey brings the opportunity to Vernon, who promptly fires her. Meanwhile, Denise realizes that Mike isn’t just a street performer; he is also a fence for stolen property. He is good at his criminal activity, so good in fact that Nick’s mob friends take notice and decide to punish him for not cutting them in on his profits and for setting up shop without their approval. Nick relays this information to Jill, who attempts to save Mike from harm. She fails, and Mike receives a savage beating from two mob enforcers. Jill, aghast at witnessing first hand the brutality of Nick’s career, seriously questions their relationship. Nick asks her to marry him and become his family’s lawyer, protecting their criminal interests. Not willing to give up her dedication to justice or her dream of becoming a judge, Jill declines the proposal and leaves Nick.

Soon after the women learn their landlord is selling their building, firing Denise from her job as building manager and evicting them all prior to the sale. The landlord is adamant that their ‘lifestyle’ will bring down the property value during the sale process. Soon to be homeless, the women prepare to vacate the building when Honey receives a package from Vernon containing $60,000. It is her commission from the business idea she brought him; he used her research to make millions. Honey plans to use the money to start her own business as a path to job creation for others. Realizing that she will need more capital than she has, she leaves a share of her profits for Denise and Jill, she sets off on her own to find Vernon. She is convinced that a combination of her ideas and his capital to make them both money, with her share eventually supporting the
The film ends with Honey going in search of Vernon, dedicated to forging her own economic opportunity.

The film’s intense focus on economic survival again emphasizes the ways in which Rothman used her films to comment on pressing contemporary issues. The United States in 1973 was experiencing its most severe recession in the post-World War II period. There was an overall decline in job creation, a rise in unemployment and double-digit inflation rates. Personal income growth was stagnant and high inflation increased tax rates, decreasing post-tax disposable income, and the reduction in oil supply as a result of OPEC actions dramatically increased the cost of food, gas, and other consumer goods. Simultaneously, recessions hit the global market, decreasing demand for U.S. exports. The combined factors impacted U.S. society across the board, but they hit women workers particularly hard.

Since World War II the number of women working outside the home had grown exponentially, and had become one of the most striking changes in the U.S. economy. The recruitment of women into the labor force during World War II and women’s continued postwar participation in the labor force continued resulted in a ballooning of women workers.

The development of women as a critical factor in the U.S. workforce was not without significant issues. Discrimination against women in hiring, promotion, and in day-to-day work life was such a persistent issue that it took the United States Supreme Court ruling in Reed v. Reed in 1971 to codify the unconstitutionality of gender discrimination in employment. Title IX of the Civil Rights Act (disallowing any educational program receiving federal funds to discriminate based on sex) in 1972 and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act (outlawing discrimination in credit transactions) in 1974 were also key legal
decisions aimed at solving problematic issues arising from women’s increased participation in the labor force. Outside of the legal arena, activist groups like Working Women United and the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion formed in the mid-1970’s to advocate for workplace sexual harassment laws.

The recession of the mid-1970s, with its combination of inflation leading to higher priced consumer goods and increased unemployment, forced the female workforce into a difficult position. Inflation necessitated the increased need for households to have two wage earners, increasing the supply of women workers. However, the only sector seeing job growth and creating a demand for women workers was the service sector, an area in which women were historically overrepresented. As a result, more women were looking for jobs and only finding them in an employment sector with the lowest wages and highest instability in continued employment. Simultaneously, the wage discrepancy between men and women was growing exponentially even as women’s educational levels—a key factor in compensation standards—expanded, with a growing number of women earning college and graduate degrees. As a result of these intersecting variables, “Women’s traditionally subsidiary position in the labor market left them highly vulnerable in the 1970s period of restructuring, as disadvantaged groups of workers bore the burnt of sudden, and often, wrenching, labor market transitions […].”

These issues burn bright in the film. Honey, educated with a Masters degree in mathematics, says of her job prospects, “Wherever I go there are too many applications and not enough jobs.” A montage sequence of her searching for employment sees her entering and existing a variety of interchangeable office buildings. Many of them are seemingly empty, their anonymous lobbies containing unoccupied chairs and empty escalators. Yet the city streets she

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39 Governmental policies and laws declaring sexual harassment to be sex discrimination, and therefore illegal, would not go into effect until the 1980s.
traverses are crowded with people, a visual cue indicating the discrepancy between the numbers of people the city contains versus the opportunities of employment open to them. The despondency is keenly felt and highlighted by the lyrics of the non-diegetic soundtrack to this sequence, a morose folk song that intones “[…] no where to go, no where to turn.” Similarly, a scene showing Denise painting a billboard in red, white, and blue that reads “Buy U.S.A” subtly comments on the country’s economic difficulties during the film’s contemporary moment.

Rothman inserts a number of these visual cues throughout the film as comments on the women’s precarious economic environment. Though the three women share an apartment there is only one bedroom and one bed; they each take turns sleeping in the bed and on the living room couch. On a bike ride, Honey and Vernon stand in front of a huge pile of construction rubble, the promise of spatial and economic development unfinished. Rothman swivels the camera one hundred and eighty degrees to show a pristine beach, framed by palm trees and bathed in afternoon sunlight, directly across from the unfinished constructing. The blight of interrupted urban and economic renewal contrasted with the promise of lightness, recreation, and disposable income associated with casual beach going foregrounds the sharp difference between the promise and reality of economic independence. The beach as space of leisure and prosperity is also disrupted when it become a temporary home for Honey, who after a disagreement with Denise and Mike over their new relationship, takes up residence on its shores when she has nowhere else to go.

To survive in this harsh economic reality many of the characters turn to illegal or socially disreputable solutions. For example, when the film opens Honey is walking down a street in L.A. and stops at a barbeque restaurant, where she eats a full dinner. When finished, she confesses to
the owner that she does not have any money to pay him. She offers to work off the cost of the meal at the restaurant but the owner refuses, offering an alternative solution:

Honey: There must be some other way I can pay you back.
Owner: [leering at Honey] Yeah there is.
Honey: [sneering at the owner] Oh yeah. There’s that.
Owner: Yeah. THAT. I close at nine, cutie pie.
Honey: [exasperated] Well, I can’t hang around that long so it’s now or never.

_Honey begins to take her clothes in front of the cash register, first stripping down to her bra and then beginning to remove her pants._

Owner: [flustered and embarrassed] Then it’s never!

_Honey tries frantically to redress Honey while she tries to continue undressing._

Honey’s willingness to trade sex for food and her refusal to see the exchange as shameful but rather as one of survival—as witnessed by her stripping in front of the cash register—demonstrate the depth of impact of her financial circumstances and social precariousness. Instead, her shame has been transferred to the restaurant owner—employed, prosperous, and well fed—and his lecherous request. Later, Jill asks her what she does to get by without an income. She replies: “Some conniving, a little petty theft, a little blackmail.” She relates to Jill that she used to feel bad about it, until her hunger got the better of her conscience.

Later in the film Honey places an employment ad that reads “I will do anything for money. Young woman, M.A. in math, Phi Beta Kappa, can solve your problems. Will work cheap.” Unsurprisingly, she gets a myriad of disreputable offers as responses. One response she follows up on leads her to a woman, Mrs. Borden (Mary Beth Hughes), who offers Honey $10,000 to kill her husband. Honey accepts, demanding $5,000 upfront. She takes the check from Mrs. Hughes, meeting her a few days later when she claims to have finished the job, and takes the second $5,000. For the second meeting, however, she also brings along an undercover policeman, who arrests Mrs. Hughes. Honey, who has not killed Mr. Hughes, has seemingly
done the ‘right thing’ by turning Mrs. Hughes over to the police. However, she still keeps the first $5,000 payment, effectively conning Mrs. Hughes out of a significant sum of money.

Although Jill does not engage in criminal behavior, she does find employment in a socially disreputable industry: exotic dancing. Taking a job as a cocktail waitress at a strip club, The Tiger’s Tail, Jill finds herself hustling hard for meager tips. After her first night waitressing she meets Katya (Cassandra Peterson), the club’s headline performer they begin to talk about the economics of exotic dancing:

Katya: You ever thought about being a stripper?  
Jill: Me?!  
Katya: You.  
Jill: No!  
Katya: You’d make a good one, you’ve got the looks  
Jill: But not the desire.  
Katya: You could make a lot of money.  
Jill: How much?  
Katya: Well, I get $400 a week, but of course I’m a headliner. To start you’d only get about $250.  
Jill: That much for going bareassed a few minutes a night?! There’s no justice.  
Katya: I can teach you a simple routine.  
Jill: Katya, can I ask you something personal?  
Katya: What do you want to know? The usual, like why am I a stripper instead of a social worker?  
Jill: Well, yes.  
Katya: The money. Why else?

Jill, desperate to make enough money to support herself and pay her law school tuition, doesn’t need much for convincing; she’s soon up on stage performing her first striptease (and, in perhaps a wink to her previous work, Rothman has Jill perform the dance in character as a nurse).

Although Jill’s work isn’t illegal, she is happy to pay protection money to Nick to keep the club—her source of income open—and date him as well, both indications that like Honey any ethical condemnation of criminal economies is secondary to her own survival.

For Honey and Jill, as women in desperate financial circumstances who survive through their own self-sufficiency, boundaries between legal and illegal activity are necessarily crossed.
Indeed, it is specifically because their interaction with illegality and socially disreputable work are seen as survival tactics that they are able to escape them; Honey thought gainful employment and Jill by moving up to bar manager and ending her relationship with Nick. This trajectory is in sharp contrast with Mike and Nick, two characters whose trade in illegal economies is presented as a choice as opposed to a necessity. Mike’s willingness to fence stolen property and his seeming unwillingness to find legal employment end with a savage beating, and Nick’s dedicated life of crime ends with a broken heart.

Honey’s foray into gainful employment is an unusual one. She meets Vernon through the employment advertisement she’s placed in; he is a multi-millionaire, having made his fortune on the stock market. He is eccentric to say the least. He works out of the back seat of his chauffeured limousine, often dressed in pajamas or worn jeans and t-shirts. He contends that he does this to maintain his privacy, his constantly mobile office making it difficult for anyone to find him. He hires Honey essentially to be his friend; she meets him at an appointed time and location and rides around with him all day, keeping him company and occasionally engaging in conversation or having a meal with him. For Honey this is a terribly boring job. Vernon rarely speaks and she spends most of her time reading the newspaper. For her time she is paid minimum wage but is expected to appear at Vernon’s beck and call, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Vernon is also extraordinary cheap. When Honey demands that the two actually do something together to break her boredom, Vernon promises to show her the city and take her to dinner; his city tour is a forced-slog of a bike ride and his dinner a stop at a grimy hotdog stand on a street corner.

Vernon’s overriding characteristics are paranoia, an obsession with making ever more money (and never spending it), and insulating himself from the real world he profits from. He is,
in many ways, the anthropomorphic embodiment of the abstract financial market the women in the film are struggling so hard to survive in. His mobility makes him a constant presence, but one impossible to mark in stable time and space. His isolation allows the world and people he profits from to remain illusory to him, the impact of his financial maneuverings figuring in dollars rather than tangible human impact. He is so out of synch with humanity that the only way he can negotiate interpersonal interaction is through a business relationship; hiring Honey to provide him with paid companionship essentially transforms her into another commodity product to be manage through the exchange of money. In fact, when he feels that the relationship between he and Honey has gotten too intimate—she develops the ability to predict his actions and thoughts after spending so much time together—he fires her to maintain the impersonal aspects of their so called personal relationship.

Interestingly, although she has a measure of success working in Vernon’s style, Honey doesn’t transform into the uber-capitalist Vernon models for her. As someone on the receiving end of the financial market’s cutthroat individualism and disregard for the real-world people it profits from, Honey is unwilling to participate in the financial exploitation of herself or others. Rather, she decides to take her profits to build a business under an alternative framework. As she explains: “I can start a business to give people jobs. And everyone could own equal shares and there would be no bosses!” As someone who has directly born the tremendous burden of supporting increased wealth for people like Vernon, Honey is unwilling to follow in his footsteps. Rather, she is focused on using the profits she made from the system—and perhaps the system itself if her plan to find and use Vernon to make for money for her endeavor comes to fruition—to challenge its dominance.
It is not difficult to see Rothman’s professional career trajectory and its associated hurdles reflected in the women in the film. For her part, Rothman describes the film as “[…] my favorite film, and it is the least known and least admired. It is most essentially me; that is the interesting thing about it.” Although Rothman constructs the film to have a lightness in attitude, it is a lightness that underscores rather than detracts from the seriousness of the issues of women’s unemployment and underemployment. There is an undercurrent of futility and defeat to the film, a sense that despite the best efforts of the women and their dreams for economic change, they are likely as professionally doomed as they were when the film started. Their light approach to it reads as the rational acceptance of their inability to best or escape capitalist financial oppression, a type of fatigued acceptance. As a result, the ending of the film refuses to position to women as better off than they were at the beginning—in fact, many things have gotten worse. Although at the end of the film the women have come into some money, it is a limited solution. Denise and Jill are soon to be homeless, and Denise has lost one of her jobs. Honey, despite her wealth, is back in the position of having no job and no place to place to live. As she beings to hitchhike across the city on the hope that she can find Vernon and convince him to help her make her collective business goal a reality, her prospects of success seem slim indeed. The last lines of the film, spoken by Honey in voiceover as she wanders down the Los Angeles freeway looking for a ride—“Something must be out here waiting for me. It’s just a matter of me finding it or it finding me”—are less hopeful than futile. This futility would be sadly prescient for Rothman, as *The Working Girls* would be the last film she ever made.

**Conclusion**

Although Rothman’s filmic contributions were key to Dimension’s early success, her guidance as vice president also helped foster success in acquisitions and distribution. Not including Rothman’s three films, during her time with Dimension the company released thirteen
films. The partnership between Woolner, Rothman, and Swartz has helped the young company flourish. However, Wembly, Dimension’s primarily fiscal sponsor, became unhappy when the company’s financial returns were not as fast or as large as what they had expected. Wembly wanted out. Swartz came up with a plan to move the company forward without them. As Rothman narrates:

Charles told Larry that this was a great opportunity to buy them out and to own and run the company together. Initially Larry doubted that it could be done. But Charles said ‘Well, let’s go and try.’ Before they did, Charles and Larry verbally agreed there would be a more equal split of the company ownership if the buy-out of Wembly was accomplished. Wembly was located in New Orleans, so the two of them went there. According to Charles, he did most of the negotiating and the break up was accomplished.

Rothman and Swartz had been working non-stop for years, and after the negotiations in New Orleans they took a rare vacation. When they returned, ready to get back to work in the newly liberated Dimension, they found a much different climate than the one they had left. Rothman:

When we returned, there was a different attitude toward us at Dimension. On the part of both Larry and his wife, who we suspected heavily influenced him. The papers severing the connection between Dimension and Wembley arrived. The agreement was signed between Wembley and Larry Woolner only, just as the original agreement to found the company had been. This meant that Larry was now the owner of 90% of Dimension. And at that point we were told by him that we would continue to own only 10% of the new company, not a greater amount as Larry had agreed to verbally with Charles. So, in essence, Charles thought of the idea of the buyout, prodded Larry to ask for it, mostly negotiated it, and then Larry wanted 90% of it for himself and his wife. In addition, Charles and I also had a contract to make films with Dimension Pictures that after three years was up for renewal and Larry suddenly did not want to renew it. So we left.

The break-up with Dimension was not as easy or convivial as their exit from New World had been:

[…] although they didn’t want to renew our contracts, they still wanted us to make another film. But we no longer trusted them and wanted to conduct no further business with them. I had already written a script called The Car Hops, while still under contract to Dimension, which they wanted to make. But since Charles and I were now unemployed, we asked to take it with us. Ultimately, they agreed to give it to us as severance pay and I was quickly able to sell it, but for not very much. It was above writer’s guild minimum, but not enough to live on—even for half a year.
Although no longer working for the company, Rothman and Swartz still retained their ten percent ownership stake, which unfortunately would not help them very much in the long run. As Rothman recalls […] we did sue them. And they did make a monetary settlement and in return we gave up our 10% ownership. It too wasn’t for very much, but the lawsuit cost them a substantial amount and took several years […] After Rothman/Swartz exited Dimension struggled. As Fred Olen Ray recounts:

Dimension continued on, presumably unhampered by the absence of two of its founding members, and moved into the area of black exploitation and martial arts, but the quality of the product never seemed to rise above mediocre. Their best releases had been their own in-house productions until Rothman and Swartz left. Dimension continued to announce a growing number of productions and releases, with many of them never coming to fruition. Of the eighty-nine films Dimension announced between 1974 and 1981, only forty-eight percent of them were ever made and/or released. Looking back on Dimension’s troubles after their exit Rothman contextualizes:

[…] in those years they were spending like crazy and they were making many terrible…they were making, at least in our opinion, many very poor commercial decisions. They were, first of all, choosing a few ambitious films that they didn’t know how to market, and secondly they were choosing poorly made exploitation films that were not successful. So, even though they had a few successes along the way, they eventually ran the company into the ground. In 1981 Dimension filed for bankruptcy and a majority of their films were acquired by 21st Century Distribution Corporation.

As outlined in chapter four, after her split with Dimension Rothman tried, in vain, to work in Hollywood, both in film and television. In 1984, ten years after leaving Dimension, twenty-two years working in film production, and seven successful commercial feature films, Rothman left filmmaking forever.

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cclxxvi Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

Ibid.


Ibid.

Stephanie Rothman, interview by Jane Collings, February 27, 2002, transcript.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid., xvii.

Ibid., 3.

Ibid., 4.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 5.

Ibid., 6.

Ibid., 18.

Ibid., 23.

Ibid., 385-403.

Ibid., 11.

*Terminal Island*, directed by Stephanie Rothman (1973; Glendale, CA: Code Red DVD, 2010), DVD.


Stephanie Rothman, interview by Alicia Kozma, October 6, 2014, transcript.

CHAPTER 7

READING HISTORY IN THE PRESENT

"When a woman makes a film, that is a radical act."

Rothman’s career, although laced with disappointment and unmet goals, is notable for its legacy of perseverance, a trait that defines the totality of women’s participation in the industrial production of film. Presenting the Rothman historiographic case study links her career to the role of women in present day film production. This aids in providing the necessary connective tissue around the interplay between film history, archives, and women’s past, present, and future cinematic labor.

Constructing these bonds also stresses the limits of the exceptional women paradigm in film history as one that constructs women directors as aberrations in directorial labor, resulting in their continued de-integration into film production. A Rothman case study, then, builds a more robust and comprehensive archive and filmic history around female directions as an intervention ‘into the system,’ working to normalize women’s participation as film directors.

Understanding how contemporary landscapes for gendered labor in film are constructed and the barriers that have led to an alarming lack of parity between men and women working in the industry is a critical aspect to the Rothman case study as an archival intervention. As such, this concluding chapter explores the contemporary status of women directors in Hollywood in light of the issues Stephanie Rothman faced more than forty years ago. By exploring present-day concerns, I reiterate how a case study of Rothman as an archival intervention implicates the lack of industrial and archival memory around women directors as a contributing factor to the ongoing deficit in labor parity for women working in the film industry. Following this, I restate the ways in which Rothman stands as challenge to the exceptional women paradigm and how a
Rothman historiography and its correlative archive can provide progressive interventions for women working in film.

**Persistent Regimes of Inequality**

Mapping the landscape of women’s labor in the film industry engages theory drawing on qualitative and quantitative methodologies that explore gendered labor patterns within professions represented as gender neutral. Within this paradigm, I utilize the theoretical concept of inequality regimes combined with a quantitative evaluation of women’s labor in the contemporary film industry, and a qualitative evaluation of the practical roadblocks facing women directors, to explicate the multiform factors impacting labor parity in filmmaking.

Joan Acker’s theory of inequality regimes was developed through an examination of multiple organizational structures, including banks and finance houses. Its explanatory findings, however, are productively applied across a variety of professional settings. Acker’s inequality regimes include a variety of interlocked practices and processes resulting in continuing inequalities in work organizations. Inequality regimes are intersectional and therefore highly dependent on differences in class, gender, and race. Because these are identity factors that manifest cultural differences, inequality regimes must also be understood as endemically linked to the society, politics, history, and culture within the work organization operates. Inequality regimes function as naturalized and accepted codes of behavior within organizational structures, their embeddedness often allowing them to function without interrogation. These behaviors include:

>[…] systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; in work place decision-making such as how to organize work; in opportunities for promotion and interesting work; in security in employment and benefits; in pay and other monetary rewards; and in respect and pleasures in work and work relations.
As such, understanding the form and function of inequality regimes requires an understanding not only of hiring practices, but the decision-making processes and work culture environments that compose practice everyday working lives.

In the United States, hiring practices and correlative discrimination in employment hiring has been countered in large part by federal law. Specifically, the 1977 United States Supreme Court decision in *International Brotherhood of Teamsters v. United States* saw the development of the concept of the ‘inexorable zero’ in relation to discriminatory hiring practices.\[^{cdlxviii}\] Although the exact juridical meaning of the phase has not been fixed\[^{cdlxix}\], practically it refers to discriminatory hiring procedures of federally protected classes of laborers.\[^{40}\] The inexorable zero, then, refers to any situation where an employer hires zero or a negligible number of workers from protected classes when at least some workers from those classes are available for hire. Companies or wholesale industries that demonstrate a pattern of inexorable zero hiring practices signal hidden attitudes and hiring practices that exclude protected classes from employment.

This is certainly the case in contemporary Hollywood, although its patterns of discrimination are far from hidden. The Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego University, a research center that focus on tracking issues of women’s representation behind and in front of the screen, has gone to great lengths to quantitatively document the inexorable zero facing women working in Hollywood. In 2015 the center released a report detailing the levels of employment for women working in both above and below the line labor positions in film production on the two hundred and fifty top grossing Hollywood films from 2014 with startling results. Of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers on these films women filled only seventeen percent of the roles.\[^{cdlxxx}\] The

\[^{40}\] Federally protected classes include potential laborers who may face potential discrimination based on their race, color, religion, national origin, age (40+), sex, pregnancy station, citizenship, familial status, ability, veteran status, and genetic information.
report also noted that this represented a steady decrease of women working in these positions since 1998. Women working in other behind-the-scenes positions were equally low, if not lower, especially in the case of technical positions, which can be seen in the table on the left.

Based on these numbers, it is not difficult to see Hollywood participating in hiring practices embedded in the inexorable zero. In fact, labor statistics have earned Hollywood the dubious honor as one of the industries that employs one of the lowest number of women workers, particularly in high-level positions. Contemporary Hollywood has a worse record of employment for women than traditionally male-dominated industries including the United States military, finance, government and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields.

When considering these facts it is appropriate to question if women are perhaps not choosing to work in film, and therefore are unavailable for hire in any measurable number. Data, however, contradicts this idea. The two top film schools in the country, University of Southern California’s School of Cinematic Arts and New York University Tisch School of the Arts are producing women graduates in almost equal number with male graduates: forty-three percent in the case of USC and forty-nine percent in the case of NYU. Women—particularly women filmmakers, writers, and producers—are also actively participating in professional mentorship and training programs in equal numbers to their male peers. A study undertaken by the Sundance Institute’s Women’s Film Initiative in collaboration with the University of South California found that between 2002 and 2013, forty-two percent of the individuals who took part

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Producers</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editors</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Producers</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writers</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supervising Sound Editors</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Directors</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual Effects Supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cinematographers</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound Designers</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematographers</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Effects Supervisors</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gaffers</td>
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<td>Key Grips</td>
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Table 1
in Sundance’s prestigious training labs were women, with the same number of women and men finishing the projects started under the labs’ guidance, as well as the same rate of submission acceptance into worldwide film festivals. If quantitative data supports the facts that women are training at the same rate as men, producing initial work at the same rate and men, and showing that work at the same rate as men, why are women so underrepresented in the Hollywood industrial system?

One traditional answer to this question may be the phenomenon of the glass ceiling: the invisible yet unbreakable boundary that keeps certain groups of workers from rising too high on the professional ladder. The glass ceiling, however, signals unseen and unacknowledged barriers. The obstacles women have faced in Hollywood are not obscured or unstated. In fact, as outlined below, they are normal business procedures. Additionally, the glass ceiling applies primarily to upper levels of the corporate ladder. Systemic gender-based employment discrimination is standard practice at all levels of the film industry. The state of gender-based employment in the film industry is much more insidious than the glass ceiling precisely because the industry has yet to realize that it should be ashamed of, and working to change, its hostile and drastically sexist employment politics rather than treating them as tried and true best practices. The concept of the glass ceiling is meant to illuminate the roadblocks keeping women from rising too high in the corporate food chain; the issue in Hollywood is getting women hired at all. Although this may seem like an extreme claim, the qualitative data and documented discriminatory practices detailed below transform these claims from intellectual outrage to devastating reality.

Shit People Say

In April 2015 a page on the popular social media site Tumblr began to garner national attention. The page, “Shit People Say to Women Directors & Other Women in Film,” is a scathing indictment of the standardized and accepted modes of treatment for women working the
in the film and television industry. Women anonymously post stories about their routinely horrendous treatment on film sets, in meetings, job interviews, and more. Sexual harassment, blatant employment discrimination, and openly hostile environments were reported by these women as common, accepted, and often promoted activities across the Hollywood work culture. Examples of the posts are included below for context:

“A white male Producer once asked me how I ‘broke into the business.’ I shared my story with him, explaining how I’d spent a year dropping off my writing samples to this same Writer (in hopes one day he would read something and enjoy it). One day that Writer actually did contact me, and we went to lunch. It went well and I was hired as an intern. The producer responded with, ‘Yeah, you’re lucky, you’re a hot girl so you can just smile and wiggle around and things happen.’”

“You’re just like a woman - you get stressed out too easily. I’m going to need you to be energetically invisible to me.”—Male Director to woman Producer

“The (male) Showrunner on a sitcom I was working for grabbed my butt with both hands and said ‘You’ve got a nice firm ass, I’d like to fuck you.’ When I complained to my Agent, he told me if I filed any kind of complaint I’d never work again. Then I realized this same agency also represented the Showunner. BTW this is a major Showrunner, on what was at the time a huge show.”

“Well, they ARE still hiring mid-levels, but they already have their woman.”—Said to me by an agent during 2015 TV staffing season

“I was a very senior film executive when my head crashed into the glass ceiling. I was told that women over a certain age (I was 47) did not make good executives. I had over 25 years experience and had good talent relationships and my films had made serious money for the studio. I was replaced by two younger people with zero life and work experience. Privately I was also told that the reason I was let go was that boss felt that the problem with women my age was ‘the smell of dried eggs.’”

The page received press attention almost immediately, as stories about it—and Hollywood’s terrible, often criminal, record in dealing with women professionals—were reported in outlets like Vanity Fair, The New York Times, Slate.com, Indiewire, and The Guardian. The incidents excerpted above were not rare examples; the creators of the site reported that in the page’s first week of existence they received enough content from women
working in the industry to update the site regularly for an entire year.\textsuperscript{cxlxxviii} In May of 2015, less than a month after ‘Shit People Say to Women Directors & Other Women in Film’ premiered on Tumblr and in the press, the American Civil Liberties Union’s (A.C.L.U) Southern California Chapter, in association with the national office, sent a letter to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requesting the commission “[…] develop and file Commissioner’s charges and initiate an investigation into systemic failure to hire women director’s in violation of Title VII at all levels of the film industry.”\textsuperscript{cxlxxix} The letter was also sent to the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing and the Labor Department’s Office of Federal Compliance Programs.\textsuperscript{cdxci}

In the letter, the A.C.L.U identified specific issues facing increased gendered labor parity in Hollywood informed by quantitative survey data as well as interviews with women working in the system; I will explore each issue identified briefly. The first was that “qualified women directors face a systemic pattern and practice of discrimination and exclusion from directing film and television”\textsuperscript{cdxci} and cited the San Diego University study quoted above as well as a survey done by the Directors Guild of America as their evidence for the claim. Here it is necessary to unpack why the A.C.L.U. was expressing a primary concern for women directors as opposed to all women film professionals. As explained in the introduction to this project, the role of the director has cultural cache and public awareness that many other positions in film production do not. As a result of the embeddedness of the public’s understanding of auteurism and the popular emphasis on filmmaking awards, the director is commonly understood as the singular creator of a film. Although this speaks to a fundamental misunderstanding of the collaborative process of filmmaking, it does offer an understandable public entry point to foster awareness of the issues of women’s employment in Hollywood. By focusing on the directorial role the A.C.L.U. was
strategically leveraging popular conceptions of the filmmaking process, much as I did using Rothman as my case study for this project, to create a the public will to intervene in overall discriminatory employment practices for women working in film.

Moving forward, the A.C.L.U. stated that “women directors face over disparate treatment and sex stereotyping, specifically in regards to the types of productions women are hired for. Women reported only being regularly considered for genres Hollywood considered ‘women-oriented,’ including romantic comedies, women-centered narratives, or television shows and commercials aimed at women and girls. This reiterates the long-held Hollywood axiom that productions for women should be made by women, but productions aimed at men or both women and men should be made by men. As a result, film genres and forms perceived as feminized—romantic comedies, documentaries, romance, and melodramas, among others—are considered the only appropriate projects for women directors, severely limiting their employment options and basing hiring decision in sex discrimination. This discrimination, however, appears to only work unidirectionally. As the A.C.L.U. noted, “Every woman we interviewed who mentioned gender stereotyping pointed out that the stereotypes only operate against women: plenty of men are hired to direct romantic comedies and commercials for ‘feminine’ products.”

Sadly, as in all other professional labor in the United States, women are paid less than their male counterparts for these jobs.

Thirdly, the letter noted that “implicit bias pervades the hiring process at many levels, specifically when dealing with evaluations of experience and the ability to attract production financing. Women directors are often considered hiring risks even when they come to the job with more experience than their male counterparts. This is especially true when the
production has a large-scale budget, as women are forced to convince male studios executives and film financers that they can be ‘trusted’ with their money. As one interviewee explained:

You have meetings about potential projects where studio executives say things like ‘well, it’s hard to have you direct it because it’s such a big budget film. You don’t have the experience.’ Instead of seeing that I’ve done five feature films. But a guy can be hired off of one feature film that’s low budget. . . . Women are ghettoized into doing these smaller films and then people think that’s all we want to do.

This form of discrimination again forces women into being disproportionally represented in specific genres and working on small independent film and documentaries. Distributors often relegate independent and documentary films to less lucrative markets than mainstream films, decreasing their reach and the general public awareness of women directors.

The hiring bias noted by the A.C.L.U. is exacerbated by applicant recruitment processes based not on merit or competition but instead on drawing employees from a closed system of personal relationships and networks; nepotism is not frowned upon in Hollywood. This practice is exemplified by hiring lists: short lists of directors, often created by the Director’s Guild of America itself, that studios and production companies use as a roster of available directorial talent. Women directors are rarely, if ever, represented on hiring lists, and therefore never considered for employment. Hiring lists are a catch twenty two for women directors: in order to be represented on them they need to have the network connections made from working on a feature film, but in order to work on a feature film they need to be represented on a hiring list, placement on which is often dependent on network connections.

Associated issues implicit in the A.C.L.U. letter, but which require explication, are the complications raised by the film and television’s production mode as project-based work ecologies. Film and television production, in particular film, are primarily project based. Teams of workers are assembled as freelance and/or temporary workers for specific projects; those teams are disbanded at the close of production. In project-based work ecologies, personal
networks become increasingly more important in hiring decisions. Since projects are undertaken in a short timeframe and budgets are usually tight, workers are recruited from personal networks or past employment relationships, rather than from an open candidate pool.\textsuperscript{cdxcvii} Additionally, project-based work ecologies often encompass non-standard working patterns: long working hours including nights and weekends, overnight shoots, location shooting requiring employees to be away from home for extended periods of time, and more. These conditions can disproportionately disenfranchise women film professionals who, like many women, have full time work responsibilities and are also primary caregivers for children, aging parents, and overall family units. In both of these instances, the overreliance on project-based work ecologies exacerbates labor inequalities in film and television production. Related to these hiring practices is the role of talent agencies as gatekeepers to hiring decision-makers and their demonstrated tendency to under-represent women for employment.\textsuperscript{cdxcviii} The A.C.L.U investigation found that leading talent agencies are reluctant to represent women because it is ‘too hard’ to get women hired and if they are hired they are paid less than their male counterparts, therefore decreasing the agency’s fee return for its services in both instances.\textsuperscript{cdxcix} Therefore, agencies are likely to represent fewer women than men on their client rosters.

Lastly, industry programs aimed at increasing women’s employment in film and television have proven not only ineffective but also significant in maintaining hiring discrimination. The basic contract agreement between the DGA and the Association of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) contains a diversity article that reaffirms a mutual commitment to non-discrimination in hiring and calls for the employer to “[…] work diligently and make good faith efforts to increase the number of working racial and ethnic minority and women […]” hired as directors, unit production managers, assistant directors, and associate
directors. The agreement also calls for each of the major television studios to “[…] establish and maintain a Television Director Development Program to expand opportunities for Directors in episodic television with an emphasis on increasing diversity.” Members of the AMPTP are required to submit diversity reports to the DGA at the close of each production to document their good faith efforts in increasing hiring diversity, including providing the gender and ethnicity of all laborers employed on a specific project. What is not specified in the agreement are the critical details that could make real impacts on increasing diversity: good faith is neither defined nor qualified, leaving those efforts entirely at the discretion of the studio/production company; there are no mechanisms for ensuring that submitted diversity reports are accurate; and—perhaps most importantly—there are no stated repercussions for not increasing diversity in hiring. The only repercussions outlined in the contractual article on diversity are for the late submission of the diversity reports. The DGA, the union responsible for advocating for all of its members, has created a false imperative around diversity, one that lacks any contractual or arbitrational ‘teeth.’ Indeed, the DGA’s own hiring statistics bear out is contractual inefficiently in relation to diversity.

The DGA has also worked with studios to create ‘shadow’ programs designed to give diverse workers experience on a film and/or television set as a path to employment. Effectively glorified unpaid internship programs, they are, like the diversity clause in the DGA’s basic agreement, more marketing ploy than measurable effort to substantively increase labor diversity. For example, Sony Pictures Diverse Directors Program (developed in 2014 presumably in response to the diversity clause in the DGA basic contract) has a mission of finding “talented directors of diverse backgrounds” to shadow a director on episodes of a television show. The program is open call, and from all applicants twenty semi-finalists are chosen. That group of
twenty is winnowed down to three individuals who shadow a director. As a result of the program one or more of the individuals “may be invited to direct one episode”\textsuperscript{iii} of the show they shadowed the following season. 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Fox has a similar program that is aimed at increasing “[…] female perspective and diverse voices […]”\textsuperscript{iv} in the industry. Like Sony, Fox offers an open call for participants, from which twenty people are invited to join their director’s lab. From this twenty, five are chosen to make a short film. From those five, one person will “[…] be considered to potential future employment […]”\textsuperscript{v} with Fox.

Both of these programs exemplify the deep systemic failures of the industry to increase opportunities for diversify in employment: they put on a good show with no practical results. At best Sony offers the promise of potential employment to three people; at worst one person, but realistically, no one. Fox’s program is worse in that the result of the one person who perseveres through the entire program has the chance to be considered for potential employment. These are programs, like the DGA diversity article, that pay lip-service to diversity while allowing studios and production companies to abdicate any responsibility or accountability for the rampant and promoted employment discrimination in their industry. Hollywood’s attempts to ‘right’ their gender imbalance provide them the public relations mechanisms to further entrench discrimination.

The A.C.L.U.’s letter has its desired effect. In October 2015 the EEOC announced its intention to investigate the issues outlined above.\textsuperscript{vi} Although the initial investigation is currently limited to women directors, the EEOC has said that as it collects evidence and testimony the scope may increase.\textsuperscript{vii} However, this is not the first time the EEOC has investigated employment discrimination in Hollywood. In the 1960s and 1970s the Justice Department investigated the industry and agreed that a pattern of discrimination existed and warranted litigation. To avoid
said litigation, the AMPTP and a number of unions, including the DGA, entered into agreements to increase diversity. Critically, those agreements did not include increasing women’s employment; there were too few of them in the Hollywood workforce at the time to warrant inclusion. The EEOC helped monitor compliance with these agreements until 1976 when the studios were left to their own devices. It is not difficult to see what the outcome of that lack of monitoring wrought for the diverse labor landscape in film and television.

**Reading History in the Present**

Given this dismal contemporary landscape, how does the in-depth case study of Stephanie Rothman presented aid as a progressive intervention for change? As argued early on in this dissertation, Rothman’s career is indicative of the contemporary gender disparity in labor practices plaguing the film and television industry. Rothman was relegated to working in a film style considered by the industry to be less legitimate than most mainstream film, much as women are relegated to romantic comedies, melodramas, and ‘women’s films’ today. Rothman faced the same incredulity around her abilities as a director as do women today, despite proving themselves again and again. Rothman struggled with the same ‘boys club’ mentality that kept her out of crucial employment networks and off hiring lists. Critically, although her experiences were over forty years ago, they echo presciently in the present-day landscape. Indeed, anecdotal information that speaks to the broadly hostile climate and discriminatory hiring practices as found on the “Shit People Say…” Tumblr page is eerily similar to comments made by women film professionals working the 1970s:

“Do you think all those guys on the crew are going to take orders from a woman? Besides, it’s a tough job—you have to concentrate and shut out everything else in your life—no appointments with the hair-dresser, no shopping, no dinner parties. What if you’re not feeling exactly terrific a few days a month?” (comments made to Eleanor Perry, screenwriter, by a male studio director in 1970)
“Location scouting today. I’m the only woman on the scout. The security guard stops me and asks ‘What do you do?’ I answer ‘I’m the director.’ He stops and asks without irony ‘But do they listen to you?’”

(posted by Rachel Talalay, director, on “Shit People Say…” Tumblr page, 2015)

“As a well known Hollywood Movie Executive told me what I put forward certain views about how one of our films should be released: ‘you’re too pretty to worry our head about that.’”

(Sylvia Anderson, television and film producer and writer, 1970)

“First day on the job… I was meeting with a group of male colleagues. First this one guy said (before even saying hi): ‘I would never date a girl from our field.’ Then the other guys were nodding and one of them said ‘Sorry, we don’t have tampons for you. Tampons are gross.”

(posted by Anonymous on “Shit People Say…” Tumblr page, 2015)

Understanding the systemic and deeply entrenched institutional gender bias in Hollywood must be done historically as well as contemporaneously; to ignore the these patterns of gendered labor discrimination is to accept false solutions and non-implementable policy, like the ones previously described. A weed cannot be removed by plucking its leaves; it must be uprooted from its base deep within the soil.

As noted in chapter three, a critical mode of this type of understanding is writing women into the archives and history of film. Transforming the traditional role of the archive as a repository of past into an active site of investigation for the present and future aids in explicating contemporary issues of women’s labor in the film industry. The archive as a variant site of knowledge formation is a crucial node in linking labor patterns across the past, present, and future, opening up spaces for understanding and progressive intervention. Unmooring the concept of the archive from history allows for a fluid construction of knowledge with the potential for feminist disruption as a form of scholarly activism.

In this mode this dissertation constructs a Rothman historiography as a challenge to the traditional role of the archive, its normative policies of inclusion and exclusion, and the ways in which archival knowledge can be used. The Rothman archive presented in this work—
biographical, thematic, ideological, and cinematic—functions as a model for active feminist archival disruption as well as a material alternate archive in and of itself. The chapters covering her life and films are constructed as practical interventions that exemplify the multiple forms alternative archival methodologies can take. The analysis of her films demonstrate how texts and their meanings, as archival objects, form and reform their affective and cultural value as they move through space and time. Narrating women in filmic styles where they are presumed absent, like second wave exploitation film, allows for an increase in the holistic understanding of women’s participation in film outside of the paradigm of exceptional women. Rothman’s connection with the contemporary issues faced by the women who post in the “Shit People Say…” Tumblr page, as well as the narrative of her career presented in chapter four, demonstrates the value of linking the trajectory of, and impediments to, women’s labor in film history to archives of feeling and archives of survival. The Rothman archive, curated for and contained within this dissertation, exemplifies the dangers of the lack of industrial and archival memory around women directors as a contributing factor to the ongoing deficit in labor parity for women working in the film industry.

Correlatively, the Rothman historiography demonstrates the deficits created by film history’s overreliance on the exceptional woman paradigm in chronicling women’s labor in the industry. The exceptional women paradigm is dangerous on multiple levels. It constructs women directors as exceptions to the rule rather than a viable labor and creative workforce. This spectacularizes the concept of the women director, placing them outside the bounds of normative film production. It necessarily creates a limited history of women directors—a homogenous group—as the representatives of all the variations of women filmmakers. The members of this group, tokenized as the exceptional few, represent a limited scope of styles and genres that
correspond with films that embody high cultural capital. This not only erases the history of women working in alternate styles, cycles, and genres, but also reinforces the contemporary stereotype that women are only interested, or only able, to make certain kinds of film, which leads to ongoing and increased hiring discrimination.

The trend toward conceptualizing exceptional women directors as primarily invested in ‘artistic’ modes of filmmaking is deeply entrenched in the contemporary industry. One needs only to look to comments made by *Jurassic World* director Colin Trevorrow in 2015 as an example of how these biases embedded in the exceptional women paradigm have become as naturalized, rather than recognized as historically and biasedly constructed:

> “Many of the top female directors in our industry are not interested in doing a piece of studio business for its own sake. These filmmakers have clear voices and stories to tell that don’t necessarily involve superheroes or spaceships or dinosaurs. [...] it involves a component that I think is rarely discussed—very high levels of artistic and creative integrity among female directors.”

Trevorrow’s back-handed positioning of women directors as ‘above’ studio production or blockbuster filmmaking is a result of his enculturation into a system that fosters processes of historical and archival erasure through displacement by exceptionalism. Underpinning the displacement is an emphasis on the memory of women directors as ‘artistic’ (read: non-commercial and non-studio), the reducibility of women directors to women’s films, and the unquestioned naturalization of certain genres of filmmaking modes as more suitable, appropriate, or desirable for women directors. The limits of the exceptional women paradigm raise issues as pressing in 2016 as they were in the 1960s and 1970s.

All women, not just those who have become the standardized representation of the exceptional token woman director, must be acknowledged as productive members of the filmic labor and creative workforce. To limit women’s directorial labor through the exceptional women paradigm contributes mightily to women’s exclusion from the contemporary industry. The issue
is one of selective breadth and depth; until the full scope of women’s contributions to the film industry are recognized beyond ‘exceptions to the rule’ their exclusion will remain normalized.

This Rothman case study is a feminist intervention into archival practices, speaking to the past, present, and future. Indeed, one of the modes of feminist archival intervention seeks not just to locate the archive as a conduit of the past, but to seize […] the archive as an apparatus to legitimate new forms of knowledge and cultural production in an economically and politically precarious present. Articulating the case study of Stephanie Rothman can be a valuable reminder of the role of women in the film industry given the increasing alienation of women in the contemporary industry.

This is particularly apparent in the state of women working behind-the-scenes in the contemporary film industry. Gender parity in the film industry is appalling, and yet, it has rarely be openly discussed or questioned. What has been challenged, however, is the representation of women on screen as a process of symbolic representation. The Representation Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to exposing and changing gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media and countering the real world implications of these stereotypes, has chronicled some of the more depressing ways in which devalued representations in gender in the contemporary media system function. For example, “Between 1937 and 2005 there were only 13 female protagonists in animated films, and all of them but one had the aspiration of finding romance…[and]…In 2011, only 11% of protagonists in film were female.

These disturbing ways in which women are, and are not, represented in the image and production of the contemporary media landscape has inspired groups like The Representation Project and the Women’s Media Center, among others, to call for more women to get involved in the production of media. This is, of course, a laudable and much needed effort, yet elided from
the call for participation is a deeper and broader understanding of the ways in which women have already participated behind-the-scenes in the film history and the systemic discriminatory barriers preventing that participation. It cannot be overstated how important this understanding is in light of the blanket call for participation. Women have been fighting to participate in the film industry for decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, Stephanie Rothman fought. In the 1980s directors like Penelope Spheeris, Amy Heckerling, Penny Marshall, and Mira Nair were working hard to crack the impenetrable Hollywood gender barrier. In the 1990s, Dee Rees, Kasi Lemmons, Kimberly Peirce, and Karyn Kusama joined the campaign. Today Debra Granik, Miranda July, Ana Lily Amirpour, Desiree Akhavan, Ava DuVernay, and Courtney Hunt wage the same assault.

These are the women who succeeded, who persevered. But there are many more who do not, not for lack of talent or desire. They are beaten down by a system designed to exclude them. How, then, can the reasoned answer to Hollywood’s discrimination against women be left at the feet of women themselves? Why are those victimized by the system held responsible for changing the system itself? Equitable labor is not only a feminist issue; it is a matter of economic justice, human rights, and progressive cultural development. This is why it is imperative that we understand the connections between historical labor and contemporary participation, the archival structures that do and do not maintain these histories, and the industrial system codifying these processes. These are the stakes of my intervention with this project, which Rothman herself sums up best: “It is very important for everyone to recognize that women can make films. It is important for social justice, for the sense of identity of all women and for the art of filmmaking.”


Ibid.


Ibid, 1215.


Ibid.


Ibid, 5.

Ibid, 6.

Ibid.

Ibid, 7.


Ibid.


di Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


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Ibid.


@colintrevorrow on www.twitter.com, posted August 21, 2015


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