Liberating Hollywood

Women Directors & the Feminist Reform of 1970s American Cinema

MAYA MONTAÑEZ SMUKLER

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Dedicated to all the films that did not get made in the 1970s

and to all the women who tried their best to direct them.

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Liberating Hollywood

Introduction

On March 7, 2010, American filmmaker Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to win an Academy Award for Best Director.[1] The film she directed, *The Hurt Locker,* also won an Oscar for Best Picture. Accepting the award, Bigelow described to the global audience how "this was the moment of a lifetime." The presentation of this award was a crowning moment with historical roots in Hollywood and American culture that reflected the breakthrough decade of the 1970s.

Hollywood icon Barbra Streisand presented the Oscar for Best Picture to Bigelow, who earned her MFA from the film program of Columbia University School of the Arts in 1981 and directed her first independent commercial picture, *The Loveless*, in 1982. Streisand had begun cultivating her ambition to direct in the 1970s before making her directorial debut with the studio-made film *Yentl* in 1983.[2] *Yentl* won awards for Best Comedy/Musical and Best Director at the 1984 Golden Globes, and in 1992, Streisand's second feature, *Prince of Tides,* was nominated for Best Director at the Directors Guild Awards and for Best Picture at the Academy Awards. Although her output as a director received some of the highest acclaim of any filmmaker working in Hollywood, Streisand was never nominated for Best Director at the Academy Awards.[3] The historical significance of the 2010 Best Director award for both Streisand and Bigelow was emphasized by the enthusiasm with which Streisand announced the award: "Well, the time has come, [pause] Kathryn Bigelow. Whoahoo!"

As the music swelled and Bigelow arrived at the podium, she could be heard saying to Streisand, "I am so honored. I am so honored," while Streisand, as she handed Bigelow the statue, enviously joked, "Can I hold this?"

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

Women Directors in 1970s Hollywood

The 1970s was a crucial decade for women directors working in Hollywood. The activism of the feminist movement during that decade, in particular the feminist reform efforts taking place within Hollywood's professional guilds—the Directors Guild of America (DGA), the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and the Writers Guild of America (WGA)—led to an increase in the number of women directors making commercial feature films. *Liberating Hollywood* examines the relationship between the feminist movement and the film industry during the 1970s, specifically how the movement affected the hiring patterns and creative output of women directors working at that time. During the silent era, an estimated fifty-seven women were directing films.[4] In sharp contrast, from the mid-1930s through the mid-1960s, only two women filmmakers had careers as directors in Hollywood: Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino; in addition, between 1961 and 1966, two New York-based women, Shirley Clarke and Juleen Compton, were directing independent feature films outside of Hollywood (both are discussed in more detail in the prologue).[5] My research shows that, for the first time in almost forty years, the number of women directors began to increase beginning in 1967: between then and 1980, sixteen women made at least one feature film within the commercial U.S.-based film industry, either as part of the studio system or as independent filmmakers. These directors were Penny Allen, Karen Arthur, Anne

Bancroft (1931–2005), Joan Darling, Lee Grant, Barbara Loden (1932–1980), Elaine May, Barbara Peeters, Joan Rivers (1933–2014), Stephanie Rothman, Beverly Sebastian, Joan Micklin Silver, Joan Tewkesbury, Jane Wagner, Nancy Walker (1922–1992), and Claudia Weill (see the appendix for a list of their films).

Liberating Hollywood begins in the late 1960s, when a wide range of social movements and shifting cultural attitudes in the United States began to influence the film industry's approach to audience demographics, the content of its films, and its production practices, all of which affected women directors and their professional experiences throughout the 1970s. The study ends nearly two decades later with an examination of the landmark lawsuit filed in 1983 by the Directors Guild, at the behest of its Women's Steering Committee, on behalf of its female and minority members against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros. for employment discrimination (*Directors Guild of America, Inc. v. Warner Brothers, Inc. and Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.*).[6] This lawsuit serves as the symbolic culmination of more than a decade of feminist reform efforts within the film industry that affected women filmmakers, both directly and indirectly.

Within the time span of approximately 1966 to 1985, this study hones in on the years between 1970 and 1980 when each of these sixteen women (with the exception of Rothman and Sebastian who made their first movies in 1966 and 1967, respectively) directed her first feature film. These directors were not part of a cohesive group and in many instances did not know of one another. Rather, they are broadly connected by their gender, historical moment (the impact of second-wave feminism on commercial filmmaking during the 1970s in the United States), location, and a shared ambition to direct feature films. *Liberating Hollywood*'s focus is on the narrative films made by these directors that were intended for a commercial, revenue-generating marketplace and were screened in some form of movie theater for a ticket-buying audience. Although during the 1970s many women directors were working in documentary, experimental, or avant-garde filmmaking, I focus on commercial feature films, which I define as those that adhere to the regulatory standards set by the Motion Picture Association of America's letter rating system, specifically in terms of representations of sex and violence.[7] Pornography thus falls outside of *Liberation Hollywood*'s scope, thereby excluding the films of

Roberta Findlay. In a similar fashion, sexploitation cinema does not fit within this scope, and as a result the prolific, independent low-budget filmmaker Doris Wishman is not part of this study.[8]

Of the sixteen directors featured, some made only one picture during the decade, while others made as many as seven. Some directed television before directing movies; several worked almost exclusively in television *after* directing features. The manner in which their films were made and their career trajectories varied considerably. For example, some movies were produced or distributed by major studios, some were low-budget films made by minor studios, and others were independently produced and distributed by the filmmakers themselves.

The level of box office success achieved by their films also varied greatly. Some movies were successful on release, such as Joan Micklin Silver's directorial debut, the independent feature *Hester Street* (1975)—a period piece about Jewish immigrants coming to New York City in the 1890s. Made for an estimated $400,000, the picture was critically well received, earned approximately $5 million on its theatrical release, and garnered a Best Supporting Actress nomination for its star, newcomer Carol Kane.[9] In contrast, the studio-made *Moment by Moment* (1978, Universal), written and directed by Emmy winner Jane Wagner and starring two of the decade's most prominent performers, Lily Tomlin and John Travolta, in a May–December romance set in contemporary Malibu, was met with tepid reviews that reported audience walkouts.[10]

Not all of the directors profiled in this book began their careers in commercial filmmaking in Hollywood. Several started out in New York City as part of other artistic communities, such as improvisational comedy and documentary filmmaking. Some were performers or writers in film, television, or on stage before moving into the role of feature film director. While directing, many continued to shift between multiple careers, such as actress, writer, and producer. Frequently they combined their skills on individual projects. For example, Anne Bancroft—an Emmy, Oscar, and Tony Award–winning actress—starred in, wrote, and directed the film *Fatso* (1980, 20th Century-Fox); comedian Joan Rivers cowrote and directed *Rabbit Test* (1978), a film that she financed independently; and Stephanie Rothman directed and wrote or cowrote all seven of her feature films for the low-budget independent companies,

New World Pictures and Dimension Pictures. Half of these filmmakers, in spite of their best efforts, were only able to make one feature film during the 1970s: Barbara Loden self-produced and self-distributed *Wanda* (1970), and Joan Tewkesbury directed *Old Boyfriends* (1979, AVCO Embassy Pictures). Some who created bodies of work as directors in the 1970s found it impossible to continue to direct movies. After an acrimonious experience with Paramount Pictures on the film *Mikey & Nicky* (1976) that reinforced her reputation as a "difficult" director, Elaine May worked as a screenwriter and actress before directing her final film, *Ishtar*, in 1987.[11] In 1980 Barbara Peeters directed her fifth low-budget exploitation film, *Humanoids from the Deep*, after which she became an established television director of episodic, one-hour dramas. At the time Peeters had strategized that moving out of low-budget filmmaking and into television would lead to a career directing mainstream movies, but she found that, as a woman director, she was unable to make the transition from independent production to Hollywood and she has not made any additional features.[12]

All of the women who made feature films in the 1970s are white. That this is a white woman's history reflects the institutionalized gendered racism within the film and television industries during the 1960s and 1970s. African American men were able to gradually break through the white male-dominated directing ranks, at first in small numbers; yet they helmed more studio pictures, as well as profitable independent projects, than the white women who would follow them.[13] The first women of color to direct feature films began building their filmmaking careers during this era, but did not release their first features until later. For example, Julie Dash began making short films as a film student in the 1970s at the American Film Institute and UCLA; others, such as Maya Angelou (who is discussed in chapter 1), Kathleen Collins, and Jessie Maple, were then working as screenwriters, editors, and camerawomen. These filmmakers released their first features in the 1980s and 1990s: Jessie Maple, *Will* (1981, independently produced/distributed); Kathleen Collins, *Losing Ground* (1982, independently produced/distributed); Euzahan Palcy, *Dry White Season* (1989, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer); Julie Dash, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991, American Playhouse/Kino International); and Maya Angelou, *Down on the Delta* (1998, Showtime Networks/Miramax Films).

The Liberation of 1970s Hollywood

Still suffering from a postwar slump, the film industry in the 1960s and into the early 1970s was forced to reckon with the growth of a diverse and successful independent filmmaking community, the enduring dominance of television, and a changing audience demographic whose tastes were influenced by the many social movements of the era.[14] During these years, film culture in the United States thrived and its diversity increased, as the marketplace for non-studio-made pictures expanded, both inspiring a young generation of filmmakers and cultivating the tastes and purchasing power of a large youth audience. An influx of foreign films, with subject matter frequently contested by American film censors as being too explicit, screened in independent art house theaters; a variety of low-budget, independent exploitation films, or "B-movies," dominated drive-ins and grindhouse theaters, venues located in urban neighborhoods specializing in cheaply made genre pictures for inexpensive admission prices; and independent films, those made with neither studio nor big business financing, experimented with form and narrative conventions while utilizing grassroots modes of production, distribution, and exhibition.

In 1968 a new rating system by the Classification & Rating Administration (CARA) introduced lettered categories (G, PG, R, and X) to classify a film's suitability for certain audiences based on its content.[15] CARA, as an industry-created organization, allowed the studios to stay current with changing cultural tastes by creating a self-regulating classification method that sanctioned adult content in Hollywood films: the rating system enabled a range of "adult" content to be included in movies that ran the gamut of high-culture art cinema, low-budget exploitation pictures, and avant-garde films. The realization—achieved through the success of movies such as *Easy Rider* (1969), an independent production distributed by Columbia Pictures—that young directors might be those most adept at making films targeting the cash cow youth demographic, combined with CARA's evolving guidelines that allowed studio films to broaden their spectrum of "mature" subject matter, created a conducive set of circumstances for a new generation of Hollywood filmmakers.

These industry changes in audience demographics, modes of production, and marketplace regulation and distribution, as well as changing

economic conditions, prompted the studios to take more chances on the next generation of directors. Journalist Mel Gussow, writing for the *New York Times*, summarized the status of Hollywood in 1970: "Hollywood—the old studio system—is dead, but movies as a medium have never been more alive. Doors once locked by tradition, unions or inertia are wide open. Film students are directing features. Playwrights are writing original screenplays, and they are not being ground into studio formulas. No subject is taboo. . . . Studios are no longer the only places where movies are made, financed and distributed. The movie industry has fragmented into a million places. Power is decentralized."[16]

These industry and cultural conditions fostered a popular and romantic historicization of 1970s Hollywood as an era of extraordinary potential for young filmmakers. In *Lost Illusions: American Cinema in the Shadow of Watergate and Vietnam 1970–1979*, David A. Cook describes this period as "a time in the history of . . . the [U.S. film] industry [when] almost anyone with talent and the will to do so could become a film director."[17] Yet, even though this period in film history may have been exceptional in the opportunities it provided for a new generation of filmmakers, the open door for "almost anyone" to enter the ranks and direct feature films was entered primarily by white men.

Frustrated by their failure to get hired within the industry, six female members of the Directors Guild—Susan Bay, Nell Cox, Joelle Dobrow, Dolores Ferraro, Victoria Hochberg, and Lynne Littman—formed the Guild's Women's Steering Committee at the end of the decade, in 1979 (see chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion of their activism). Determined to assess the current employment status of women directors, the group spent a year researching who had actually gotten hired in Hollywood during the past few decades. They discovered that, between 1949 and 1979, 7,332 feature films were made and released by major distributors, of which women had only directed 14, or 0.19 percent.[18] Soon after completing the group's initial data sweep, the Women's Steering Committee, with the support of the Directors Guild's executive staff, released these numbers to the media. The activism and persistence of those six women at the close of the 1970s spurred the Guild's late enculturation into the politics of employment justice, of which the national civil rights and women's movements had been at the foreground for years.

Yet in various ways, the feminist movement had been trying to raise Hollywood's political consciousness since the early 1970s. On screen, the women's movement and its objective of female autonomy were represented by characterizations and narrative themes in several kinds of movies, including large-budget studio films directed by men such as *Klute* (1971, Warner Bros., dir. Alan Pakula), *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974, Warner Bros., dir. Martin Scorsese), *Claudine* (1974, 20th Century-Fox, dir. John Berry), and *An Unmarried Woman* (1978, 20th Century-Fox, dir. Paul Mazursky). Off screen, female industry employees had organized networking groups. In 1973, Tichi Wilkerson Kassel, publisher of *The Hollywood Reporter* from 1962–1988, founded Women in Film, a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization, to create opportunities for women who were already established in the field of film and television to connect with one another.[19] In 1974 the American Film Institute, created in 1967 as an organization dedicated to the preservation of American film culture, formed the Directing Workshop for Women, a hands-on program that trained individual women to become film and television directors (see chapter 3).

While the Directors Guild did not make a concerted effort to address the low employment numbers of its female directors until 1979, between 1974 and 1976 both the Screen Actors Guild and the Writers Guild had conducted statistical surveys that explicitly documented the disenfranchisement of its women members. These efforts, spearheaded by the two organizations' individual Women's Committees, were reported on widely by the press: the WGA documented the low number of women writers working in film and television, and SAG called for improved—in both quantity and substance—roles for actresses (see chapter 1 for a discussion of the work of SAG's and WGA's Women's Committees). Although the DGA was slower than SAG and the WGA to organize within its membership ranks around issues of employment discrimination, it was its Women's Steering Committee that pressed the issue in court. On July 25, 1983, the DGA filed a class-action lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California against Warner Bros., and on December 21 a case against Columbia Pictures, for employment discrimination against its women and minority members. (Initially filed separately, eventually the two cases would be joined together as one suit by the judge.) On August 30, 1985, Judge Pamela Rymer ruled in favor of Columbia and

Warner Bros. and effectively against the DGA. The loss in court confirmed that, after a decade of attempts at feminist reform of the industry, there was no reliable legal recourse against discrimination based on sex and race, specifically with regard to the position of director. Yet despite the sexist hiring practices uncovered by the committee's research, more women were directing feature films throughout the 1970s, and that number would continue to grow slowly during the 1980s. Progress was so miniscule it could be perceived as regressive, but the very existence of these sixteen directors of feature films working at different times throughout the 1970s meant some women were able to break through the barriers to advancement. How they were able to do so is *Liberating Hollywood*'s central question.

Women Directors in Hollywood: Guy Blaché to Bigelow

Kathryn Bigelow's 2010 win for Best Director, the first ever awarded to a woman, suggests that female directors have had a difficult relationship with Hollywood. Historically, however, women directors were not always such pariahs. During the silent film era, although they were by no means on parity with their male peers, a considerable number of women were making films. In 1896 Alice Guy, a twenty-three-year-old Frenchwoman, was one of the first filmmakers to develop techniques in narrative filmmaking while working as a secretary at the Gaumont Film Company in Paris. In 1907, Guy, by then married to Herbert Blaché, moved to the United States, and in 1910 she opened her state-of-the-art film studio Solax in New Jersey. Over the course of her career, Guy Blaché was involved in the making of about 600 short films, and she directed more than 20 feature-length pictures.[20] In early Hollywood, film production frequently took place in individual director units that were not supervised by company executives or a single producer. The "doubling in brass" tradition, borrowed from the theater, where above- and below-the-line employees performed double duty, created fluidity between jobs.[21] The leading lady might be in charge of hair, makeup, and costumes, and the actress might also be the picture's screenwriter. This system discouraged the establishment of labor hierarchies and the gender segregation associated with later stratifications in the studio system; women, as well as men, had

opportunities to gain a broad range of experience, which was accepted as the norm. Lois Weber had her own movie studio and in 1916 was hired to direct Universal's biggest feature to date, *The Dumb Girl of Portici*. At the time she was ranked as one of the industry's top ten directors, along with D. W. Griffith and Thomas H. Ince.[22] Frances Marion, head writer for MGM, directed a handful of films, including *The Love Light* (1921), which starred her best friend Mary Pickford. Former actress Dorothy Davenport took up the megaphone after the death of her husband, famed actor Wallace Reid. As a tribute to her deceased spouse, Davenport was listed in her directorial credits as Mrs. Wallace Reid. Lillian Gish directed one feature starring her sister Dorothy; comedian Mabel Normand directed numerous movies, some including Charlie Chaplin; and Nell Shipman made independent action adventure films on location in the wilds of Idaho in which she performed all her own stunts.[23]

The cultural legitimacy that women had given to the film industry in the 1910s was supplanted by the end of the 1920s by financial legitimacy as dictated by masculinized Wall Street.[24] Production eventually became structured around the centralized producer system, which limited the flow of collaboration among crew positions. The establishment of craft unions further diminished women's employment opportunities by containing them within sex-typed jobs, such as secretaries and assistants, which wielded less creative and economic power. During the classic studio period, women were almost entirely locked out of directing films. From the mid-1930s through the late 1960s there was never more than one woman director at a time working in commercial films: Dorothy Arzner was employed as a studio director from 1927–1943, and Ida Lupino directed movies for her own independent production company between 1949 and 1953 before making her last and only studio-produced and distributed film, *The Trouble with Angels* for Columbia Pictures, in 1966.

By the late 1960s, coinciding with the mobilization of the feminist movement on a national level, a few more women were working as directors in the film industry. Stephanie Rothman was pursuing a master's degree from the University of Southern California's (USC) School of Cinematic Arts in 1964 when she met and began working as an assistant to the successful low-budget film director-producer Roger Corman. This was her entrée into writing and directing exploitation films, all of which she made in collaboration with her husband Charles Swartz. Rothman

directed her first film, *Blood Bath,* also known as *Track of the Vampire,* in 1966. Director-producer-writer Beverly Sebastian collaborated with her husband, Ferd Sebastian, on several low-budget exploitation films, their first being *I Need* in 1967. Other filmmakers such as Joan Tewkesbury and Barbara Peeters began honing their directorial skills as students of theater and dance before moving into film production. Tewkesbury attended USC's School of Theater in 1958 and directed plays and acted in television commercials before working with director Robert Altman as the screenwriter for his films *Thieves Like Us* (1974) and *Nashville* (1975). She directed the feature film *Old Boyfriends* in 1979 before becoming a successful television writer-director-producer. Peeters attended the theater program at the Pasadena Playhouse in 1964. She began working in low-budget B-movies in the late 1960s and wrote and directed several films, some for Roger Corman's New World Productions, before becoming a prolific television director. She made her first film, *Just the Two of Us,* in 1970.

Crossover between the television and film industries was a significant factor in the careers of many of these women. Karen Arthur directed two independent feature films, *Legacy* (1974) and *Mafu Cage* (1978); in 1976 she began directing television shows as a way to earn a living while developing her film projects. Joan Darling and Nancy Walker were well-known actresses and television directors before they made feature films—Darling's *First Love* (1977) and Walker's *Can't Stop the Music* (1980)—after which they returned to television. Jane Wagner had already won two Emmy Awards for her work as a television writer with her creative and life partner Lily Tomlin before writing and directing her only feature film, *Moment by Moment* (1978). She then returned to television and the theater as a successful writer-producer. Academy and Emmy Award–winning actress Lee Grant made *Tell Me a Riddle* (1980) while continuing to act in film and television; after *Riddle*, she began a productive career as a director of documentaries made for television, in addition to directing scripted content. Joan Rivers was a popular comedian who appeared frequently on television and in successful one-woman comedy shows. In 1978 she cowrote and directed the film *Rabbit Test*, a comedy starring Billy Crystal as the first pregnant man.

Independent filmmakers, working outside of the studio system, came from various backgrounds to make feature films in the 1970s. Joan Micklin

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

As gleaned from this introductory sketch, these women's careers were diverse and, in many instances, different from each other. I describe these directors as a figurative "generation," because although they shared the same era professionally, they were of different ages: Nancy Walker, the oldest, was born in 1922; Claudia Weill was the youngest, born in 1947. I refer to them as a "group," although they did not work together or make films collectively: in fact, as mentioned, several of them did not even know each other. Instead of by age or acquaintance, they are "grouped" together by their mutual historical experience. Although the content of their work and how it might relate to the choices they made and the opportunities they were offered are discussed in my examination of their industry biographies, textual analysis is not the framework for the project as a whole. Instead, *Liberating Hollywood* privileges a comprehensive look at these individuals' biographies and filmographies as a way to investigate a crucial historical juncture during the 1970s when industrial and cultural factors led to the increase in the number of women directors, despite their continued marginalization. This is not a study of feminist filmmakers, although some of the directors profiled may identify as such; nor is it a study of feminist films, although some of the movies may be read as such. Rather, this book is an examination of the relationship between the fem-

inist movement and the commercial film industry as it affected women directors. This is not a study of "women's films"[25]: it is a study of the women who made feature films in the 1970s.

Straight from the Source's Mouth: Methodology and Materials

Scholarship on Hollywood during the 1960s and 1970s favors male filmmakers and is dominated by the auteur theory as an historical framework.[26] Academic studies of women directors in Hollywood during the 1970s tend to be sweeping histories of these filmmakers with generic scopes.[27] Women working in commercial cinema during this decade occupy an awkward place in feminist scholarship, which emphasizes noncommercial production communities that often rejected Hollywood conventions and production models and instead mobilized experimental, avant-garde, and documentary filmic modes, with a focus on European artists.[28] Somewhere in between these different approaches lie, in limbo, the women who made feature films in and around Hollywood during the 1970s. Their absence from the prevailing scholarship has also meant that these filmmakers are missing from archival collections. *Liberating Hollywood*'s methodological intervention literally gives a voice to its historical subject. The most personally rewarding components of my research are the substantial oral histories that I conducted with women directors and their colleagues during this era. Delving into material omitted for decades from the historical record, these interviews give *Liberating Hollywood* a unique perspective on 1970s American filmmaking. My long-form interviews complement existing oral history and interview collections that have been invaluable in assembling my subjects' biographies, including those in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Visual History Program, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation's Archive of American Television, the American Film Institute's Harold Lloyd Master Seminar, the Directors Guild Visual Oral Histories, and UCLA's Center for Oral History Program.

Journalistic sources play a key role in *Liberating Hollywood*. Reporters such as Charles Champlin, Linda Gross, Mary B. Murphy, and Kevin

Thomas writing for the *Los Angeles Times*; Sue Cameron, Arthur Knight, and Will Tusher for the *Hollywood Reporter*; and Gene Moskowitz and David Robb for *Variety* were witnesses to the unfolding of these directors' careers and championed their work by paying special attention to their talents as filmmakers, while acknowledging the struggles they faced as women in often unfriendly territory. Molly Haskell and Marjorie Rosen came of age during these years as two of the most prolific and outspoken feminist film and cultural critics. In 1973 they published two of the first histories of women in Hollywood: Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream.* Both writers grappled with the influence of the women's movement, which was unfolding before them, on audiences, filmmakers, Hollywood, and sometimes even themselves.

Contemporary journalist-historians Rachel Abramowitz's *Is That a Gun in Your Pocket? Women's Experience of Power in Hollywood* (2000) and Mollie Gregory's *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood: 1973–2000* (2002) are two of the most detailed books on women working in a variety of crafts in the film and television industry from the late 1960s through the early 2000s. Both authors' main source materials are the interviews they conducted with their subjects. And both books have been invaluable to this study for their sheer quantity of information on women working in the contemporary film and television industries—subject matter and individuals who are rarely privileged in academic or commercial film histories.

To understand the feminist activism within the professional unions—the DGA, SAG, and WGA—I relied not only on press coverage of their activities but also on the publications each produced. During these years, each guild published either an internal newsletter available to members only or a magazine for purchase by the public that served as a publicity mechanism for the organization and its members. While in-house documentation was not always easily accessible, the guilds' newsletters provided valuable insight both into their internal dialogues and the way they presented themselves to the public. In 2010, I reconstructed the 1983 DGA lawsuit in part by reviewing the complete court documents located at the National Archives at Riverside, located in Perris, California. In 2011, these

five boxes of paper materials were deemed unimportant by the archive administration and destroyed without any electronic copies made. Except for what the attorneys involved in the suit may have retained, my research here is the most complete source material on the case.

To contextualize the historical relevance of this "generation" of filmmakers and the intricacies of their careers, *Liberating Hollywood* situates this group within the industrial, sociopolitical, and legal circumstances that created the momentum for change in the late 1960s and into the early 1980s necessary to boost the number of working women directors. The book is organized chronologically. Chapter 1 establishes the context for the debates over equal employment opportunities for women and minorities in Hollywood, examining first the government intervention by the Justice Department in 1969 and then the feminist activism taking place in the early 1970s by the professional guilds, SAG and the WGA. Chapter 2 profiles directors who were making films during the first part of the decade primarily in two independent film communities: the art house commercial feature and the low-budget exploitation film. Chapter 3 picks up the narrative from 1977 until 1980, examining Hollywood's trend of "New Woman" films and the way women directors during the second part of the decade were relegated, under various circumstances, to making films that perpetuated certain social perceptions of gender. Chapter 4 continues the discussion started in chapter 1 of feminist political action by historicizing the Women's Steering Committee of the Directors Guild and its fight against biased hiring practices that led to the 1983 class-action lawsuit it filed against Columbia Pictures and Warner Bros. for employment discrimination against its women and minority members.

The goal of *Liberating Hollywood* is neither to rewrite the history of American cinema during the 1970s nor to construct a separate history of women directors of commercial films during that period. Instead, this study is an *expansionist* and *integrationist* film history: my objective is to *expand* the existing historical narrative of the 1970s film industry and to then *integrate* within it the contribution of women directors during this period. These women have not yet been lost: many of their films are not widely available, but are accessible; many of these individuals are not privileged in film history, but they are still very much alive, in some cases still working and enthusiastic about contributing to the record of their historical legacy. Paltry numbers, of films and filmmakers, do not exclude

subjects from my study, but rather qualify them. The "exception to the rule," the virtually absent, and the parenthetical are the main subjects of this book.

History Looks toward the Present

The historic moment of Kathryn Bigelow as the first—and still only—woman in eighty-two years of Oscar history to win an Academy Award for Best Director underlines how the struggle for parity for women directors persists to this day. Rigorous discourse regarding Hollywood's lack of meaningful inclusion and representation—in front of and behind the camera—has dominated award shows and headlines over the past few years. The effectiveness of the #OscarsSoWhite campaign in 2015 in pushing the Academy to an almost immediate response—opening up its voting membership to more women and constituencies of color—demonstrates the power of social media as a tool of aggressive activism in infiltrating even the privileged and glamorous hierarchy of Hollywood. Earlier, in 2014, the vulnerability of the film industry was exposed by the Sony hack. It divulged, through illegal means, confidential information describing the company's business practices—including the pay gap between female and male executives and stars—thereby forcing Hollywood into a transparency that it had not prepared for. Incriminating emails revealed a culture of sexism and racism protected by corporate culture elitism; their content was disseminated by the press, social media platforms, and peer-to-peer file-sharing networks. The studio threatened lawsuits, but much of the stolen material had already been absorbed into the vacuum of the Internet. According to Martha Lauzen's annual report, "The Celluloid Ceiling," in 2017 women directed 11 percent of the top 250 films, a proportion that had never been exceeded for the preceding eighteen years.[29] In 2015, the American Civil Liberties Union requested state and federal officials to investigate discrimination against women directors. To date, these claims remain under investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 2017, massive allegations of sexual harassment against men of power—studio executives, writers, directors, and performers—were made by hundreds of women and some men. The entertainment industry responded quickly by firing and suspending those accused. Against this contemporary landscape, *Liberating*

Hollywood provides an historical context for understanding how the continued fight for gender and racial equality in the media industry has its roots in the 1970s.

Will You Last?

In the early 1980s, Joan Tewkesbury began developing a project she had written called *Saving the Rainbow,* about the period when Atlantic City was being demolished so that Donald Trump could rebuild it. “I loved the way Airstream trailers looked,” Tewkesbury remembered. “So I envisioned this woman owned a trailer park of Airstream trailers that was right in the heart of—enough square feet of the mega real estate people who were trying to buy her out. And her thing was all about retired people, but her retired people would be Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly—you know all those good folks.” Tewkesbury imagined Katharine Hepburn as the lead in this group cast of luminary Hollywood seniors. She secured a meeting with the legendary actress at her home in New York City to talk to her about her participation in the project. “So we talked and she said, ‘I think this is a lovely idea, dear, but I don’t do ensemble work,’” Tewkesbury laughed, remembering the conversation. “At the end of the meeting she looked at me and said, ‘It’s wonderful dear. Do you think you’ll last?’ and I said, ‘What do you mean?’ and she replied, ‘As a director . . . I’ve worked with [Dorothy Arzner] and she would have been wonderful and do you think you’ll have staying power.’ I said, ‘Yes, I will.’ And then she said, ‘Well that’s good dear.’”[30]

Tewkesbury found humor in the story as she told it some thirty years later, but at the time she was speechless: “I thought, ‘Huh.’” Indeed, how should one answer such a blunt question about one’s professional fate, especially when asked by an iconic actress known as the embodiment of female independence? Tewkesbury has since made good on the answer she gave Katharine Hepburn: the challenges she faced as a film director in the 1970s gave way to a prolific career writing, directing, and producing television movies and episodic series for several decades.

Whereas Hepburn wondered in the 1980s about the survival rate of women directors, the question that drives *Liberating Hollywood* is how this generation of women directors emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. What compelled these filmmakers? Who encouraged them or, as the case

may be, discouraged them? What makes them representative of the cultural zeitgeist of that era? How did the social and political momentum generated by the feminist movement infiltrate the seemingly impenetrable, sexist, and exclusive culture of the film and television industries? Linked together by their shared moment in history, industrial location, and their professional skills and aspirations, these women, their biographies, and the scope and challenges of their professional lives as directors of feature films reveal a history of filmmaking that deserves to be told.

Prologue

Before There Was 1970s Hollywood, There Was New York City in the 1960s

Before the women's movement began to infiltrate Hollywood in the 1970s—in the years between Ida Lupino's reign as the film industry's only woman director during the early 1950s and the hiring of Elaine May in 1968—there were two New York City-based, independent filmmakers: Shirley Clarke and Juleen Compton. Clarke, born in 1920 in New York City to a wealthy family, began her artistic work as a dancer. In the 1950s, using a Bolex camera she had been given as a wedding present, she began making short experimental films that explored the relationship between dance and cinema. Clarke and her peers—Willard Van Dyke, D. A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock, and brothers David and Albert Maysles—were part of the New American Cinema movement that emerged in New York City during the late 1950s and 1960s. This group was influenced by the approach to realism and the tradition of social relevancy in American documentary, cinema verité, and the growing popularity of European cinema, such as Italian neorealism and the French New Wave films. In 1958 Clarke and her male peers established Filmmakers Inc., a co-op that served the production and networking needs of the independent film community in New York. Two years later, she and fellow filmmaker and film activist Jonas Mekas and some twenty other filmmakers founded the New American Cinema Group, an informal collective organized to encourage independent commercial films.[1]

In 1961 Clarke made the transition from short experimental films to feature endeavors when she directed *The Connection*, a screen adaption of a play by Jack Gelber. *The Connection* is a scripted and edited narrative film about a cinema verité crew making a documentary about a group of drug addicts awaiting their "connection." In its dialogue, characterization, and camera and editing work, the movie projects the Beat and jazz aesthetics that permeated popular culture at the time. The film is also provocative in its subject matter, portraying with some degree of realism the squalor of a junkie's tenement apartment filled with cockroaches and syringes. In a 1962 interview, Clarke explained her philosophy on filmmaking: "Right now, I'm revolting against the conventions of movies. Who says a film has to cost a million dollars, and be safe and innocuous enough to satisfy every 12-year-old in America? . . . I just want to pick up a camera and go out and shoot the world as it really is."[2] *The Connection*'s explicit depiction of a drug addict created conflict with the New York State censors, and the ensuing legal battles helped generate publicity for the picture.[3] The movie screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961, where it received much praise including the French Society of Film Authors award.[4] Writing for *Variety*, Gene Moskowitz described Clarke as a "tour de force," complimenting her picture as an example of how "America can make its own art films."[5]

Clarke's next project, *The Cool World* (1963), based on the novel by Warren Miller, is the story of an African American teenager faced with challenges associated with living in Harlem in the early 1960s: drugs, violence, and crime. Clarke, now divorced, collaborated on the project with her boyfriend Carl Lee—she as director, he as an actor—and they adapted the story together. Like her previous work, the film was independently produced, financed, and distributed. Praised for its authenticity, Clarke's approach continued to be informed by issues of realism; the film was rooted in a cinema verité tradition, but in a fictional narrative form marketable for a commercial release. The topicality of its subject—the impact of urbanization on race, class, and young people—and its being filmed on location in New York City, with a cast of predominantly nonprofessional actors and accompanied by a jazz soundtrack, continued to place Clarke's cinematic style within contemporary bohemian culture. *The Cool World* had a theatrical release in New York City and showed in some cities around the country; it screened at the Venice Film Festival in 1963.

By the end of the 1960s, the camaraderie experienced during the formative years of the New American Cinema movement had begun to dissipate. An innovator of independent filmmaking that served as an alternative to mainstream cinema, Clarke came to want the greater financial sustainability and access to a broader audience that Hollywood made possible. In the mid-1970s the filmmaker recalled an economic epiphany she had after making *The Cool World*: "I never thought about the money situation until, one day, I realized there *was* a situation: I had made two successful films and wasn't able to get money to do another."[6] In 1968 Clarke came to Los Angeles to play a version of herself in Agnès Varda's *Lion's Love*, a fictional film about a New York independent filmmaker trying to make a movie in Hollywood. By 1975, Clarke was living out that movie, as she actively strove to make films in Hollywood. That year the New Yorker shared her experience of being a woman in Hollywood with an audience of students at the American Film Institute: "People ask me why I haven't made Hollywood films. I reply, 'If I were a man, I might have tried to be Orson Welles.' But, as a woman and an artist, it's impossible. Producers think of us in childlike terms, as cute, or sweet, or cunning. During a meeting it's always 'honey' or 'sweetheart' . . . they don't take us seriously."[7] Lodged between industry sexism and the different value systems underlying Hollywood's (profit-making entertainment) and New York's (the artist as filmmaker) approach to filmmaking, she was frustrated by the experience.

Clarke acknowledged that she was a latecomer to the women's movement and the perspective it might have engendered for women directors—both in their work and their efforts *to* work. After reflecting on her experience of being part of Varda's film, she became involved in the feminist movement. "I became active in women's groups and found out where other women were coming from. Before, I didn't even know other women filmmakers." Although her formative years occurred during a period of radical transformation for cinema, Clarke recalled the detachment she had experienced during that time:

> As I got more into the women's movement, I realized how I had let myself be brainwashed. I never felt my films were as worthy as men's, and I never felt women were as important. For years I'd felt like an outsider so I identified with the problems of minority groups. I used

Fig. 1. Shirley Clarke in *Lions Love (. . . and Lies)* (dir. Agnès Varda, 1969)

> all kinds of standins [*sic*] for me in my films because I didn't think anyone was interested in my personal life, as a woman. I thought it was more important to be some kind of goddamned junkie who felt alienated rather than to say I am an alienated woman who doesn't feel part of the work and who wants in.[8]

Clarke was a pre-liberationist. Her self-critique is harsh, because the feminist movement was still young and inaccessible enough that Clarke was not able to benefit from its ideology, language, and peers to help comprehend, in a cultural context, her experience as a woman. The majority of the directors I interviewed for this project spoke of their admiration for Shirley Clarke, even before I could ask them about her. Her career may not have reached its full potential, but the next generation repeatedly acknowledged the importance of her work. Nell Cox, who began her career working for Leacock, Pennebaker, and the Maysles brothers in the mid-1960s, described Clarke as an "extraordinary woman." "It was so heartbreaking that she could not get anywhere [after moving to Hollywood]," recalled Cox. "She said she would scream and holler and practically faint on the floor and grovel and they wouldn't hire her after all those wonderful features that she made."[9] Barbara Peeters remembered meeting the director in the early 1970s at the Canadian Women's Film Festi-

val, at which Peeters's low-budget biker film, *Bury Me an Angel*, was screening with Clarke's *Portrait of Jason*, her documentary released in 1967. Worried that her exploitation picture might be out of place at such a serious feminist event, Peeters found solace with Clarke and the actress Viva. "We all ended up in the balcony with a pint of gin!" she recalled.[10]

Clarke continued making films, but was never able to do another narrative feature. Instead, she shifted her focus to documentaries. Collaborating with Robert Hughes, together they made *Robert Frost: A Quarrel with the World* (1964), which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; she followed that with *Portrait of Jason* (1967) and *Ornette: Made in America* (1985). In 1978 she bought the rights to Joan Didion's novel *A Book of Common Prayer*, but claimed that "no studio considered it possible to turn the book into a film."[11] She was never able to produce the project independently. Always an innovator, Clarke had begun to work with video in the early 1970s; in the 1970s and 1980s she taught film and videomaking at UCLA. She died in 1997.[12]

Unlike Shirley Clarke, Juleen Compton did not begin her career in the avant-garde film world of 1950s New York. Instead, she cut her teeth as an actress in the city's equally innovative theater community for a decade before she would write, produce, and direct two independent feature films, one in Greece—*Stranded* (1964)—in which she also starred, and the other in the United States: *The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean* (1966). In 1988 she made her last film, *Buckeye and Blue*.

Compton was born in 1933 in Phoenix, Arizona. Her father left the family when she was a child, and her mother married her stepfather, a lawyer and prominent member of the Mormon community, when she was around eight years old. "I was a real little Mormon girl," recalled Compton affectionately of her childhood in Phoenix. "[I was] taught to be polite—'a penny saved is a penny earned,' 'to be seen and not heard'—real Americana ethics of that period," she laughed. "To *defy* the church, because we went to church three times a week, when I was about fourteen I went to the corner drugstore and had a cup of coffee, because Mormons don't drink coffee."[13]

Compton's mother, Julia, encouraged her daughter from a young age to pursue her interests and to define her self-identity on her own terms. Julia had aspired to be a doctor, but as a woman and a mother of three during the Depression, her personal goals were unrealistic within the

expectations of her generation. She became a high school home economics teacher and eventually completed a doctorate in child psychology. Julia was not shocked by her daughter's precociousness, a trait that Compton exhibited at an early age. When Compton, still in grade school, questioned the existence of God, her mother explained, "Well darling, everybody worships in their own way." "She was very philosophical about it," said Compton. "She was a *really* extraordinary and wise woman." Julia's advice to her daughter was to "decide what you want. And if you try hard enough and long enough, you'll get it." Compton smiled while remembering her mother. "And then later in life she said to me, 'I was very, very young when I told you that. I should have said, 'within your limitations.'"[14]

Compton, with her mother's continued encouragement, moved to New York City by herself when she was seventeen to study ballet, but was informed soon after her arrival of her inadequacies. "I got there and I went to a line up for an audition, and they said, 'You can't be a ballet dancer, you're too little,'" remembered Compton of her first weeks in New York City. "I was 5-foot-2. [George] Balanchine liked girls to be at least 5-foot-8 or 5-foot-9."[15] Abandoning her aspirations to be a dancer, she soon settled into the role of a popular ingénue in New York's theater community. During her first year in New York she was cast as Little Red Riding Hood in a Children's World Theatre's production, playing opposite Jason Robards as the Wolf. Other roles followed: in 1955, she played the maid in the Fourth Street Theatre's production of *The Cherry Orchard*; in 1956 she was hired by Margo Jones's theater company in Dallas for its winter stock company; and in 1957 she costarred with Roddy McDowall and Zero Mostel in the short-lived Broadway production of *Good as Gold*.[16]

During the 1950s Compton juggled two careers—one as an ingénue on the stage and the other as an emerging real estate magnate. In the early 1950s, a friend had introduced her to the prominent real estate developer Norman Winston. Winston became an important mentor to the young woman, bringing her into the field of interior and exterior design where she excelled as a colorist (an expert on color design). By 1955 she had established herself in this profession, in part by working on a government contract to redesign military bases in Dayton, Ohio, and Limestone, Maine.[17] Meanwhile, as part of the tight-knit theater community in New York City, she was close friends with playwright Clifford Odets and stud-

Fig. 2. Gary Collins and Juleen Compton in *Stranded* (UCLA Film & Television Archive)

ied acting with Lee Strasberg; her teacher recommended that she take acting classes with Harold Clurman, theater director, critic, and cofounder of The Group Theatre. In 1961 Compton and Clurman were married.[18] Eventually, Compton came to understand her limits as an actress: "I realized, 'I'll never be a leading lady.' I didn't have this big voice. I wasn't tall. So I thought, 'You know what, I want to direct. Forget about acting.'"[19]

In contrast to her acting career, her work in interior design and real estate was expanding. In 1961 Compton purchased a four-story red brick school building in Greenwich Village for $256,000 and invested another $250,000 in transforming it into the Village Centre, a theater multiplex housing four stages and a theater school.[20] Her success in real estate and as a colorist provided her with the financial resources for her next artistic venture: directing movies.

In 1964 Juleen Compton was in production on her first independent feature film, *Stranded*. She wrote, directed, produced, and starred in the picture, which was filmed primarily in Greece. The filmmaker had made her first trip to Paris in 1950 and since then had traveled frequently to Europe, where she would eventually own real estate and live part-time.

Stranded is her autobiographical story of a young American woman (played by Compton) traveling through Greece with her American lover (Gary Collins) and her gay, French best friend (Gian Pietro Calasso). Shot in multiple European locations, Compton used a Greek crew and completed postproduction in Paris. The film screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1965 and had a theatrical run in Paris.[21]

What is surprising about *Stranded* is the freedom that Compton's protagonist, Raina, enjoys throughout the movie. Reporting for *Variety* from Paris two months before the Cannes Film Festival, Gene Moskowitz described Compton's character in the film as a "heroine [that] may get caught up in some spicy and even equivocal goings on in Europe, but has a buoyant morality of her own that keeps her a truly innocent character and gives what she hopes is a zest to her film without pontificating or moralizing."[22] Raina partakes in several love affairs, travels around Europe following her own whims and at her own expense, and rejects marriage offers for no other reason than that she likes her life the way it is. Compton, as writer-director, never makes her onscreen alter ego suffer the punishments often imposed on similar types of female characters in films during this era: Raina's sexual freedom is neither stigmatized as promiscuity nor punished by sexual assault, nor is her female agency contained through marriage. Compton's drive to make her first movie without any formal filmmaking training was similar to Raina's unrestrained curiosity and confidence in pursuing her interests and living life on her own terms. The filmmaker recalled that she made the picture for less than $300,000, investing her own monies into the project. "I acted in my first movie because I thought, 'That's how I'll get into movies. I'll make my own movies and then I'll make movies in Hollywood.'"[23]

In 1966 Compton returned to the United States to make her second feature, *The Plastic Dome of Norma Jean*. Written and directed by Compton and coproduced with Stuart Murphy, the film features a clairvoyant teenage girl, played by Sharon Henesy, who is taken advantage of by a boy band fashioned after the Beatles when they exploit her powers as part of a hoax religious revival. Filmed in the Ozarks, it had a cast of young and unknown actors (twenty-five-year-old Sam Waterston costars in his first film appearance), and included a musical score by the then already accomplished French composer Michel Legrand. The narrative's focus on the struggle of a teenage girl to resist romantic temptation and manipulation