The Cinema of Stephanie ROTHMAN

Radical Acts in Filmmaking

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Chapter 1

RADICAL ACTS

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

—AVA DUVERNAY[1]

Standing in front of a classroom full of undergraduate students, I ask: "Who is your favorite film director?" Shouts of "Tarantino," "Scorsese," "Anderson," "Kubrick," "The Wachowskis," and more volley back at me. The follow-up question, "Who is your favorite woman director?" sits in silence and confusion. The less subjective question, "Can anyone name a woman director?" doesn't fare much better. "The girl who did *The Hurt Locker*?" or "The *Lost in Translation* woman . . . I can't remember her name" are answers when answers are hazarded. More representative, however, is when a student said, befuddled: "I never realized it before, but I can't name a single woman director." This is not a phenomenon relegated to college campuses. Many in the general public would be hard pressed to name a woman film director, and, I would wager, may be equally surprised by their inability to do so. As an exercise, ask yourself: When was the last time you watched a film directed by a woman? How many films by women directors does your local movie theater, mainstream and independent, regularly offer? Film students, how many films by women directors do your professors screen in your classes? Professors, how many do you program? And, perhaps most critically, have you noticed women directors are often missing?

The position of "film director" in the public consciousness is regularly attached to ideas of creativity, control, authorship, and the cult of personality. The disconnect between the concept of "the director" and the embodied subjects that occupy that role often obscures the unhappy truth: the overwhelming majority of film directors embedded in past and present cultural consciousness are male. Public-facing cinephilic rankings reinforce this. For example, the "American Film Institute's 100 Years . . . 100 Movies," which lists the organization's 100 "greatest" US movies of all time, includes only films

by male directors. *Sight and Sound*'s "Greatest Films of All Time" has two women directors represented in the list of ninety-three films. In the ninety-plus years of the Academy Awards, only seven women have been nominated for Best Director, and only three have ever won. "Director" is synonymous with a "male" in the public consciousness. Intellectually this is an obvious statement—a fact, not a great revelation. My interest, however, is in how this statement works in practice; the consequences that stem from a lack of industrial, disciplinary, and archival attention paid to women's directorial labor, and interventions that can reinsert women into film histories, archives, and public consciousness. To answer these questions, this book offers a case study of second wave exploitation director Stephanie Rothman. Second wave exploitation films were produced in the United States under the exploitation style from 1960 to 1980; second wave exploitation served as a transitory space that linked alternative and mainstream filmmaking practices and, in many ways, as a template for contemporary Hollywood. Rothman, the first woman to win the Directors Guild of America student fellowship, was a screenwriter, productive executive, story editor, and director; she made seven films between 1966 and 1974, and remained in the industry in minor capacities until 1980.

The Rothman case study is the fulcrum on which turns a set of interrelated argumentative positions and corresponding interventions embedded in this project. First, I contend that traditionally understudied filmic production cycles provide untapped spaces for discovering women's directorial work. In support of this assertion, I historicize and establish the period of second wave exploitation as a discrete filmic cycle that provided a transitory space for the industrial development of contemporary Hollywood while opening up opportunities for women practitioners. I build on this claim by narrating the biographic and cinematic history of Stephanie Rothman. Second, I posit *how* women have been written into film histories and archives deeply affects whether or not women's directorial labor is or is not understood across scholarly and popular frameworks. Here, I use my Rothman case study to examine the strictures of the rhetorical language used to mark women filmmakers and their labor in film histories, tracing the imbrications of the historical archive and current labor practices. Of course, there is a long history of excellent feminist scholarship constructed to highlight—and force recognition of—women's directorial accomplishments. Lastly, I advance how methodological diversity, including alternative archive creation and case studies, opens multiple parallel and intersecting interventional paths to advocate against the problematics, and highlight the successes, of the historicization of women's directorial labor industrially, academically, and publicly.

This tiered examination structure yields my specific interventions. Articulating second wave exploitation as a discrete filmic cycle contextualizes a new historical area of film production that, as transitory industrial space, 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 reciprocal influence accounts for the practical materiality and labor of film production while simultaneously opening up a new historical sphere in which to uncover the contributions of women's cinematic labor.

Following, I contend that the rhetoric used to mark women's 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 discourse, what I call the *paradigm of exceptional women*, writes the history of women directors as exceptions to the rule of male authorship rather than as viable and valuable equals. This allows for the continued labeling of a token group of women directors as exceptions to the male authorship rule, maintaining women directors' role as outsiders to the normative creative structure in film production. These historical limitations are underpinned by traditional archival practices. To counter this historical lack, 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 the first comprehensive biographic, thematic, and analytic investigation into the life, career, and films of Stephanie Rothman as a practical alternative to 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.

My inclusion of a case study follows Vicki Mayer's contention that stories of labor can illuminate larger lessons around the relationship between the economics and production of culture.[2] Using the micro history of Rothman's career to articulate the macro-level connections between gender, labor, and Hollywood grounds the positions and interventions contained within this project in practice and possibility. 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. Her 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 and its historical threads is crucial given repeated calls for women's increased participation in filmmaking as a panacea to gender disparity, a call that elides the deeply entrenched institutional barriers for gender equality, 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. Safiya Umoja Noble notes that industries often label women's missing labor as a "pipeline problem,"[3] yet there is no lack of women ready to work in Hollywood. Rather, there must be explicit linkages made between the lack of women laborers and the discriminatory structures modeled as "best" practices in the industry. The solution requires a complete uprooting and reconstruction of hiring, employment, and labor systems within Hollywood.

Accordingly, my 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.[4] This turn, 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."[5] As products of an industrial artistic system, films should not be separated from the labor and production conditions that form 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.

A Rothman case study also epitomizes the need for alternative archive constructions and methodologies when compiling film history. As is the case with many others, Rothman is a negligible presence in traditional film histories. Therefore, the case study presented in this book is the result of four years of research guided by alternative archival methodologies. The outcome is the most complete primary and secondary chronicle of the director to date, as well as the first analytical consideration of her entire filmic *oeuvre*. The collection of materials I have assembled speaks to the necessity of alternate archival methods and the value in self-curated archival practices. This book 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.

PROMISCUOUS METHODS FOR A PARA-INDUSTRY

This project employs 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 modes of investigation."[6] This approach guides my investigation as I tackle questions of labor and gender across the para-industry that is Hollywood's flexible media networks, histories, and archives, combining production studies, historiography, and feminist archival and rhetorical interventions. John T. Caldwell's work structures the idea of Hollywood as a para-industry, where the production of film as an industrialized art form exists as:

> an economic and cultural-industrial interface woven together by socio-professional media communities, through trade narratives, ritualized interactions and conventionalized self-representations that viewers and scholars must wade through before they can find a primary text or featured on-screen content.[7]

Hollywood as a para-industry removes its veil of self-mythology, forcing us to understand filmmaking as the production of labor instead of "movie magic" so often invoked by studios and press.[8] Magic doesn't make movies, bodies and labor do. Critical to highlighting the too-often overlooked place of labor in film production is to remove the mythos and public structure of Hollywood as a monolithic industry and understanding it as an amalgam of micro-industries, organizations, actors, and processes that make up an ever-changing whole. Refocusing, then, on the parts as well as the whole, Miranda J. Banks's tactic of oral history as a mode of reinserting the personal into production is foundational to my Rothman case study, which is informed by conversations with the director herself.[9]

With this industrial roadmap of Hollywood's para-industrial structure grounding my Rothman case study, I approach film history as new cinema history, specifically drawing on Rick Altman's crisis historiography combined with Thomas Elsaesser's construction of film studies as media archaeology.

A new cinema history approach provides a historical method that complements traditional film history while integrating its conditions of production, organizational cultures, distribution and exhibition, and the flow and effects of financial networks.[10] This holistic approach is crucial when considering the interwoven factors of industrial production standards, 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. His method 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."[11] Second wave exploitation 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.[12] Like all film, it must be informed by laborers within it and the multiple economic, production, distributive and exhibition networks that composed it. The object of study must be understood within its own socially defined existence and through its own crisis of identity, which Altman defines as comprising of "three separate but closely connected processes: multiple identification, jurisdictional conflict, and overdetermined solutions."[13] Considering multiple identification allows for the evaluations of overlapping production and artistic influences; jurisdictional conflict provides an understanding of how these multiple identities coexisted in an industrial and economic sense; and querying overdetermined solutions—where second wave exploitation exists in film history—aids in removing biases and simplistic determinations around the nature of the filmic cycle itself.[14]

Underpinning my historical investigation is Thomas Elsaesser's approach to film history as media archaeology, which draws not from the materiality of media archaeology but from its reconfigurations of historical time. Elsaesser advocates for film history as media archaeology, disrupting standard boundaries between historical divisions,[15] and allowing 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 multidirectional 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 what Christine Gledhill and Julia Knight call 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."[16] 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 annals. Alterative records enable 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.[17]

Feminist archival interventions are theoretically and politically salient here. One cannot ascribe a specific feminist ideology to any given woman working in the film industry, but that does not preclude a feminist interventionist methodology in studying women's labor in the entertainment industry. Instead, I orientate this work through 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."[18]

Feminist methodologies strive to highlight and address the systemic inequalities of power that are entrenched into our social, cultural, and economic systems.[19] The intersection of feminism and cinema studies, then, provides what Vicki Callahan terms "new ways of seeing and thinking about the world."[20] 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 historical 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 about how the creativity of women cultural producers and the materials that tell women's stories have been dismissed or undervalued.

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 records and history at best as token examples of exceptionalism and at worst as liminal traces, feminist archival studies push 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.[21]

Alternative archives, imagined 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.

WHY DIRECTORS, WHAT EXPLOITATION

Stephanie Rothman was a screenwriter, story editor, production executive, and director. My focus on Rothman primarily as a director is not to promote the unchallenged and unquestioned positioning of the director as the embodiment of unchecked agency, nor to elevate the position of director above other facets of production labor. Rather, it's a strategic move in service of three goals. First, I leverage the public's awareness of directorship as a strategic pathway to reengineer it, decoupling directorship from maleness. The public interest in, and knowledge around, film directors is outsized compared to their colleagues and peers. The classroom anecdote that opened this chapter would be a much different, and likely fruitless, endeavor if I had asked students to name their favorite (or any) screenwriter, cinematographer, costume designer, or editor. The concept of the director has a conventional cultural cachet attached to it, bred in large part by a simplistic narrative around who creates a film, the privileged position mythologized as the charismatic leader valiantly leading his troops in the execution of his creation vision. The rise of auteur theory in the United States—the idea that a director is the author of a film and therefore the film and director

are necessarily reflections of one another—in the 1960s quickly fell out of academic favor but has held strong in the public consciousness. The singularity of film authorship is bolstered by the continued reliance of public film criticism on auteurism, industry awards that recognize individual creative talent, and the obfuscation of the collaborative nature of filmmaking. To be sure, those who work in or study the film industry know the idea of singular authorship is untrue; filmmaking is a collaborative endeavor carried out by hundreds of workers of which the director is just one. It would be impossible for a director to achieve a cinematic vision if the unit production manager was not ensuring bills were paid or craft services was not feeding cast and crew alike. Even so, the director is broadly familiar and recognizable in the public sphere as a singular author. The director is a useful and recognizable entry point into divorcing naturalized maleness from directorship.

Second, I focus on Rothman as director to expand filmic histories and archives that have disregarded women directors, despite their regularized contributions to cinema over its evolution. Beyond a doubt, film studies is primarily interested in male filmmakers.[22] The inconsistent analysis paid to women filmmakers across the breadth and depth of cinema studies has left a dearth of historical and archival information, impeding scholars working to recirculate them into historical and industrial understanding.[23] This distortion compounds their already precarious position as subjects of study and analysis. The excellent work scholars have done despite these limitations has aided in reversing said precarity. Yet this work is often concentrated in one of two time periods: the early development of the entertainment industries in the United States and the particular history of women in silent film (roughly 1895–1930)[24] or contemporary work (1990s–present) on women working today.[25] Focusing on Rothman as director begins to fill in some historical gaps as a starting point for building a continuum of women's filmmaking across time rather than in discrete moments.

While feminist film theory and criticism has taken up the broad role of women in film, Kaja Silverman observes that is has "manifested only an intermittent and fleeting interest in the status of authorship within the classic text."[26] Judith Mayne also highlights the lack of interest in women's directorial labor in feminist film theory: "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."[27] The discrepancy Mayne points 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 directed these films, and others, has been

notably overlooked. The exemption of women's directorial labor in feminist film study and criticism results from a number of factors including "theoretical frameworks in which any discussions of 'personhood' are suspect [and] the peculiar status of authorship in the cinema."[28] While avoiding discussion of women directorships in feminist film studies has the benefits of sidestepping the essentialism vs. anti-essentialism arguments of the 1970s and 1980s, it unintentionally forecloses wide-ranging discussions of women directors. The impacts of this are critical, and fully addressed in the following chapter. Undeniably, the industrial focus on the director remains a critical factor in the practical everyday of film production and employment dynamics and cannot be overlooked because it is academically outmoded. To do so furthers the divide between industry and academia that production studies works so hard to overcome. Additionally, the idea of personal authorship *was* integral to how Rothman worked and how she understands her own career. Any study of her work must interrogate why and how said authorship functioned as a critical node in the construction of her professional and filmic self. Foregrounding her authorship—or, as Mayne contends, any women's 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."[29]

A continuum of women's labor does more than intercede into exclusionary histories; it undermines the idea that Hollywood, in its current incarnation, can be a willing and productive home to women directors. Of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers involved with the 500 highest-grossing US films in 2019, women filled only 23 percent of these roles.[30] Women working in other behind-the-scenes positions were even fewer, particularly in the case of technical positions. For example, 99 percent of these films had no women working as special-effects supervisors.[31] Only 14 percent of said projects were directed by women.[32] This disparity is compounded for women directors of color; the ratio of white women directors versus women directors of color helming films in 2019 is five to one.[33] Rothman's career, while laced with disappointment and unmet goals, is notable for its legacy of perseverance, a trait that defines the history of women's participation in the industrial production of film. This Rothman historiography links her career to the role of women in present day film production, providing necessary connective tissue around the interplay between film history, archives, and women's past, present, and future cinematic labor. Building these bonds also stresses the limits of the film histories that construct women as aberrations in directorial labor, resulting in their continued de-integration into film production. The Rothman case study presented here

builds a more robust and comprehensive archive and filmic history around women directors as an "intervention into the system," helping to normalize women's participation as film directors.

Investigations into women's directorial labor through second wave exploitation has its own particular scholarly problem: both are under-examined areas in cinema studies. While I addressed women's directorship previously, I map the same explanatory attention to second wave exploitation films. Exploitation films have a difficult place within cinema studies. 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 US begun in the 1950s, and as spaces of independent production. Definitions of exploitation seem to encompass any, all, or sometimes none of these considerations in their employment by various authors. Generally, 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.[34]

Many of the traits Williams describes hold across definitions and interpretations while some, including the root of the term "exploitation," are contested. Eric Schaefer's book *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True! A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959*, a watershed moment in the study of the exploitation industry and its products, contends that the term "exploitation" derives from the aggressive and nonstandard advertising practices undertaken by producers and distributors, which became key in the films' success.[35]

Part of the difficulty in placing exploitation films within cinematic history and the public imaginary has to do, in large part, with the very label "exploitation." The endemic pejorative power in the word inherently marginalizes exploitation films. When we name *cinema*, we conjure art: experimental, avant-garde, powerful, emotive, and brimming with consciousness. When we think of *movies*, we see the popular: multi-level cineplexes, lavish award ceremonies, and summer blockbusters. When we invoke *exploitation films*, we recall little, a vague memory of a grainy image on late night television or 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 bordering 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 contributions and components.

Known for their low-budget aesthetics, sensationalist storylines primarily focused on vice and sin, and narratives that alternate between spectacle and monotony, exploitation films allow for an alternative approach to cinematic construction and interpretation.[36] Although they are encumbered with historical and cultural baggage, exploitation films have been a staple of the cinematic industry since the early twentieth century. Often referred to monolithically, they can, and in fact should, be separated into distinct phases. These chronologically bounded 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 (1980–present).[37]

This book is concerned with the period of second wave exploitation films that first evolved in the 1950s, as the independent production and distribution markets thrived in an open market. Second wave exploitation films were cheap to make, and their short production time allowed them to capitalize on trends and fads. 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 bound moments of sensational spectacle with predictable narratives, creating films that were simultaneously shocking and rote.

My goal here, however, is not to attempt to construct a single definition for exploitation film and its iterations. It is futile and naïve to segregate any of these definitions from one another; they are all nodes on the definitional chain of exploitation films. 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 encompasses 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 under which films labeled second wave exploitation were produced.

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 to find scholarly work that considers the exploitation industry as a whole. Most scholars have instead chosen a piecemeal focus on either the industrial production and economic logics of the style or on the films themselves, albeit primarily 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 a 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 to the period from the mid-twentieth century until the late 1950s.[38] Elena Gorfinkel's[39] excellent work temporally grounds itself in the second wave exploitation period but narrows its focus to the space and place of urban 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. Its chronological scope is vast; it primarily concerns itself with filmic texts divorced from their industrial histories. Theorist Pam Cook's[40] brief investigation of Stephanie Rothman is one of the closest examples of an examination of women's filmmaking in second wave exploitation. But like Juno and Vale, Cook focuses on select filmic texts only, leaving questions around women's directorial labor unasked and unanswered. The result of the narrow historical and scholarly record around second wave exploitation and women's directorial labor creates the gap in knowledge this work addresses.

Indebted to these foundations, this manuscript is divided into two sections. Section one addresses the academic and archival conditions that combine to obscure the breadth and depth of women's directorial labor while advocating for exploring alternative spaces like second wave exploitation as a corrective to restrictive conceptions of our collective cinematic past. To establish the problematics around the integration of women's directorial labor into film histories and archives, chapter two explicates the paradigm of exceptional women—the idea that a narrow and repetitive group of women directors are positioned as representative for all women's cinematic labor,

existing as exceptions to the rule of the naturalized maleness of directorship—and details how said exceptionalism imparts a series of destructive impacts on the realized potential of a plurality of directorial identities. By privileging homogeneity in personal and artistic identity, and evading the regularized disrespect granted to women's directorial labor, the paradigm of exceptional women advances tokenism cloaked as equity. Alternative archival and queer and feminist interventions, however, offer a reparative, and I demonstrate how these practices work to envision a broader and more diverse spectrum of women in cinematic history. Lastly, I close the chapter with an account of my own alternative curation via the Rothman archive.

With traditional histories and archives closed to most women directors, where does one find them? In chapter three, I argue one rich space is second wave exploitation. To substantiate, I illuminate the historical and theoretical construction of second wave exploitation as an industrial and filmic paradigm while arguing for temporal fluidity in historical configurations to open up critical gaps through which women's filmic labor can materialize. Following a brief review of the extent configuration of the classical exploitation period of 1919–1959, the bulk of the chapter makes the case for understanding 1960–1980 as a discrete period in the exploitation style, and thereby critical to understanding Rothman's industrial milieu. Indeed, this project distinguishes itself from both other studies of exploitation film and women directors by advocating for scholastically untapped spaces like second wave exploitation as fertile ground for uncovering women's cinematic labor. Shifting from the filmic paradigm to a practitioner within it, section one closes with chapter four's personal and professional biography of Rothman. This biographical account is coupled with an evaluation of her directorial personality and major filmic philosophies. In doing so, I inspect Rothman's *oeuvre* holistically, mapping consistent themes, stylistic approaches, and ideological underpinnings across her seven films. This includes a discussion of what I term the "Rothman Rules:" a set of formal and informal guidelines Rothman set to negotiate the tensions between her convictions and beliefs and the content demands of second wave exploitation.

Part two of the book is invested in the praxis of intervention, providing in-depth textual, thematic, and stylistic evaluations of Rothman's films as explicitly political intercessions into film histories. The cinema of Stephanie Rothman documents the complications of contemporary life while simultaneously offering resolutions to its persistent conflicts: patriarchal control, repressed desire, and unfulfilled ambition. Grounding her films in a specific time and place—Los Angeles in the1960s and 1970s—Rothman incorporates the multifaceted energies of the city, its diverse populations, and its shifting

social and cultural mores. While Rothman's films cannot be separated from their industrial conditions of production, and her shifts between companies, distributors, and business partners play a key role in the genesis of her filmography, her work is most effectively considered thematically, rather than chronologically. Rothman's seven films—and one unrealized project—offer their most substantive reflection of her directorship and their industrial home in second wave exploitation when considered as thematic couplets, rather than teleological products.

These chapters are deeply indebted to textual and formal analysis, yet they retain an industrial through line. Chapter 5 begins by examining the set of her films that firmly embed Rothman in the industrial milieu that is second wave exploitation: *Blood Bath/Track of the Vampire* (1966) and *It's a Bikini World* (1967). Critically, it is *Blood Bath*, a film she does not consider her own, that is the catalyst for an extended historicization of the director in film histories outside of her own subjectivity, voice, or narrative. Chapter 6 tackles *The Student Nurses* (1970) and *Terminal Island* (1973), perhaps Rothman's only widely known films. Both films highlight women's struggle against patriarchal control, albeit in distinctly different ways. Between the liberal individualism of *The Student Nurses* and the anarcho-communitarianism of *Terminal Island*, Rothman attempts to map pathways into a post-patriarchal future. Chapter 7 draws inspiration from the changes wrought by the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, uncovering the women's shifting desires and social expectations in *The Velvet Vampire* (1971) and *Group Marriage* (1972). Traversing through polyamory, fetish, collective living, and queer world-making, these films are speculative imaginings of the possibilities of women's realized desires, sexual and otherwise. Finally, chapter 8 closes the volume with Rothman's most personal film, *The Working Girls* (1974), and an unproduced adaption of Philip K. Dick's novel *The Man in the High Castle*, representative of the unfulfilled potential of her career. As a chronicle of un- and underemployment, *The Working Girls* roils with the frustration of talented women forced to abandon their goals; capitalist subsistence, stability, and mobility are always just out of reach. It's a telling insight into the director that narrativizes the limits of optimism. It's fitting, then, that the film would be Rothman's last, as she struggled for years to materialize her take on Dick's uncanny, alternate America onto screens to no avail.