

Community-Based Feminist Film Teaching in the 'Long Seventies'

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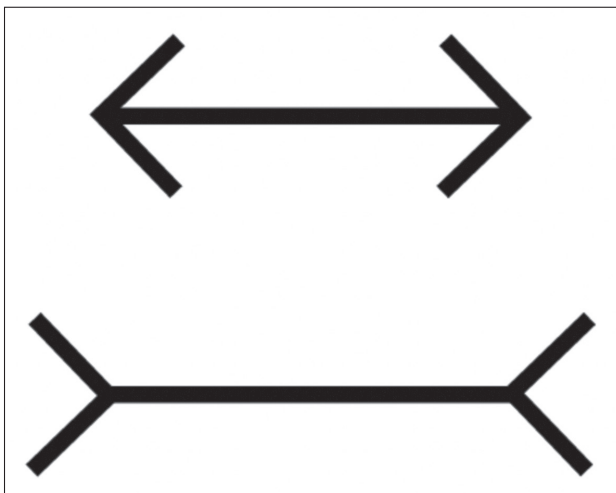
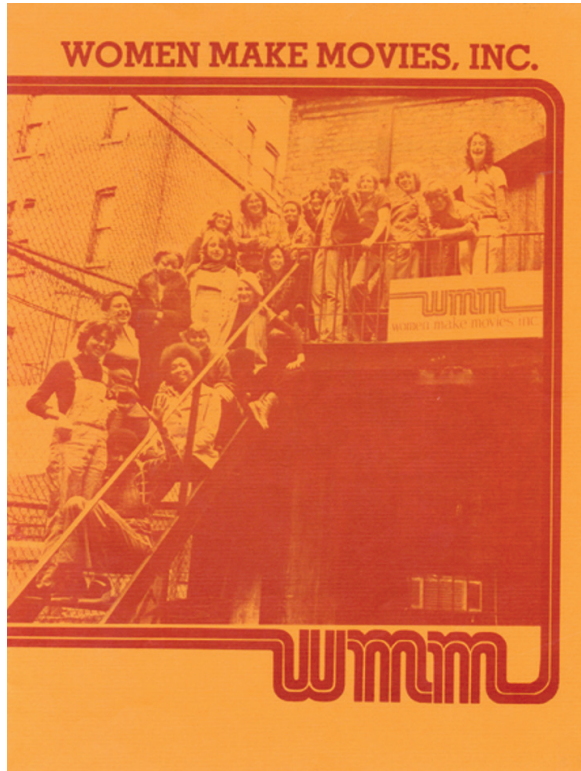
Community-based media and its teaching are global phenomena, really a movement. As a teacher-practitioner, I have been directly involved with and have observed this movement since 1969 largely in the U.S. While still in college, I used my newly learned film skills to teach kids in an after-school film workshop. One of the most dynamic leaders in this community-media movement, DeeDee Halleck, has created an interactive map marking where many different types of community-media efforts have cropped up around the globe.¹ My own early involvement with community media paralleled the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement. Participation in and exposure to the emergent feminist culture have framed my thinking as a filmmaker, teacher, and advocate of community media.

This essay – due to time and travel limitations – focuses on the girl/woman/lesbian-centred film teaching programmes that have cropped up in the United States since the late 1990s. I also look back at 1970s media initiatives for women. In one such programme, Women Make Movies, I was centrally involved. I have conducted scores of oral interviews with many of these organizations' founders, among others around these groups and a few funders. In conclusion, I present brief examples of community-media programmes in the global context and refer to a few media-policy efforts in other countries, an area where the U.S. lags dreadfully behind (fig. 1).

Visual perception in humans is our most developed, or heightened, sense. Babies see their world, recognize the important people in their lives, long before they formulate words. Heavy emotional lessons are visually absorbed if we see our father strike our mother. In a world where nearly all filmic images reflect the constructs of white, Western, male thinking, power relationships, and dominance, as well as masculine interactions and fantasies, to see views of women by women is radical and radicalizing (fig. 2).

1 Waves of Change global community-media map, <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?ie=UTF&msa=0&mid=1IsP9fVyndWihHTf3G3njf6jHO6g&ll=-10.338945349568741%2C25.844588841981327&z=2> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

- 1 Cover of the 1976 Women Make Movies, Inc. catalog. The 1975 photograph taken by Arlene Gottfried on the steps and balcony of WMM's hayloft workshop, shows the enlarged participation within the community film teaching organization. Outreach to the National Black Feminist Organization had occurred as WMM hoped to collaborate on a film with the group. Collection of Ariel Dougherty



- 2 The Muller-Lyer visual illusion dates back to 1889, when the German psychiatrist and sociologist first published an article in *Archiv für Anatomie und Physiologie, Physiologische Abteilung*. One line due to the placement of the arrowheads appears longer while in actuality they are the same

The Women's Liberation Movement

Cultural bias shapes our interpretation of what we perceive. Westerners tend to read the first line in the above graph as being longer. Those from cultures that do not use right angles (i.e. non-carpentered cultures) are not as easily fooled by such an illusion. A classic study by Segall et al. (1963) underscored these cultural perceptions.² Making films is not a panacea for all women's economic, social, and cultural ills. But the creation of cinematic stories that have women at their centre and show a fuller, more accurate engagement with women in society can have a large impact on the success of women's changing roles in a culture.

When the Women's Liberation Movement began to flourish in the early 1970s, all kinds of women-oriented teaching programmes emerged in the U.S. and especially at women's centres: auto mechanics, karate classes, and silk-screening, just to name a few. For those of us who were artists, teaching other women artistic skills was intuitively natural. Teaching the many art forms via new feminist cultural initiatives in existing venues where we had already been working came initially from conviction. Soon, however, it became clear that the need for women-designated spaces was paramount.

Among the many feminist cultural entities,³ the Woman's Building (WB) and its myriad of programmes are best known *because they are best documented*. A cadre of WB participants actively created histories – videos and books – about a decade ago in conjunction with Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles. A series of their testimonials on video are available on YouTube.⁴

WB initiatives actively used the early half-inch portapak to make videos as part of consciousness raising, a core component of their Feminist Studio Workshop's teaching. Taking video recordings of events was central to their work. Feminist art critic Lucy Lippard called the WB “the capital of cultural feminism, where the spiritual and political met and rowdily merged.”⁵

The actual teaching of video production in its own right came a bit later, in 1976, under a new, affiliated group, the Los Angeles Women's Video Center (LAWVC). LAWVC was founded by Nancy Angelo, Annette Hunt, and Candace Compton. Jerri Allyn joined the collective a year later, in 1977. Through 1980, video workshops were offered at the WB in summer and extension

2 Segall et al. (1963) cited in Simon Barthelme, “Culture and Perception, Part II: The Muller-Lyer Illusion,” in *International Cognition and Culture Institute*, 2009, <http://cognitionandculture.net/blogs/simons-blog/culture-and-perception-part-ii-the-muller-lyer-illusion/> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

3 In the early 1980s at Women's Studio Workshop, where I worked 1979–1987, we did a survey of the approximately 350 U.S. feminist cultural/media groups. Cf. <https://www.scribd.com/doc/139761091/A-Women-s-Arts-NEA-Early-1980s> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

4 Deena Metzger, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, “Woman's Building History,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52ZvbZNnMMI> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

5 Lucy Lippard, “Introduction,” in Sondra Hale and Terry Wolverton (eds.), *From Site to Vision: The Woman's Building in Contemporary Culture*, Los Angeles, 2011, p. 12.

programmes,⁶ as well as within the Feminist Studio Workshop, a college-accredited programme.

Some of LAWVC's video teaching centred around taping activist performances like *In Mourning and Rage*, a dramatically staged performance on the steps of Los Angeles's City Hall highlighting escalating violence against women, and *Record Companies Drag Their Feet*, an action against billboards and record covers depicting demeaning images of women. Various members participated with International Videoleters, a news and cultural exchange among feminist media groups largely from nine U.S. communities.⁷ Other productions, such as *Nun and the Deviant* (1976), presented a mix of autobiography, expansion of one's personae, and assertions of a new identity for women.⁸ During the period when the WB had contracts through the Comprehensive Educational Training Act, in 1978 and 1979, LAWVC produced several public service announcements that were considered far "too creative." Participants in LAWVC during this period also made three documentaries on different Los Angeles women's organizations.

Crafting the principles of feminist education was an essential development that evolved within and drove the WB programmes. In 1977 Faith Wilding, a multi-disciplinary artist and a founding member of the Feminist Art Program, the precursor to the WB, created this list:⁹

- 1) Consciousness raising
- 2) Building a feminist context and environment
- 3) Female role models
- 4) Permission to be themselves and encouragement to make art out of their own experiences

She later added:

- 5) Collaborative and collective work
- 6) Exploring the hierarchies of materials and high/low art practices, as well as recovering the positive values of denigrated and marginalized practices.

6 Extension programmes are university classes offered for community members interested in learning new skills or advancing their knowledge and are not directed towards a degree.

7 Ariel Dougherty's "Learn/View/Document" is an ever-evolving compilation of participating groups and currently known tapes that have survived of the experimental video-exchange project International Videoleters (1975-1977). Cf. <https://www.scribd.com/document/228461838/International-VIDEOLETTERS-Learn-View-Document-Study> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

8 A more extensive list of tapes from LAWVC with some short descriptions can be viewed in the 2011 presentation "Doin' It on Tape: Video from the Woman's Building." Cf. <https://www.alternativeprojections.com/screening-series/doin-it-on-tape-video-from-the-woman-s-building/> [accessed: 23.02.2022].

9 Marguerite Elliot and Maria Karas (eds.), *The Woman's Building and Feminist Art Education, 1973-1991*, Los Angeles, 2011, p. 40.

Such feminist pedagogy emerged from practice. Jerri Allyn emphasized: “We were so about form and content, like, looking at whatever you’re doing. What’s the most appropriate form? Where’s the most appropriate place? [...] especially based on who you want to reach.”¹⁰

About 350 videotapes existed when the WB closed in 1991. Having been housed for almost two decades in a member’s home, the tapes were literally out on the curb for trash pick-up when the final word came that the Getty Research Institute had accepted the WB materials into their collection. Not all of the 350 reel-to-reel, half-inch tapes survived the decades intact to be successfully transferred into digital formats.

The Women's Video Festival

In New York City in 1972, Steina Vasulka tasked Susan Milano with creating a women’s video festival.¹¹ As the female third of the founders¹² of The Kitchen – the hot spot where video-art exhibition first emerged in the U.S. – Vasulka was alarmed that women’s work was not getting shown. Men with their video works were rushing to present their visions in this new art form. Meanwhile, women seemed to be holding back their tapes. “By Steina Vasulka’s estimate at least a third of the people making video in the early seventies in New York were women.”¹³

Over the seven days of this first festival, all twenty-five of the works that had been submitted were presented;¹⁴ Milano felt a selection process to be superfluous.¹⁵ Among the attendees was Margot Lewitin, one of the founding members of the Women’s Interart Center (WIC), a multi-disciplinary arts spot located in the Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood, far west on 52nd Street. Lewitin snagged Milano to come and teach video at WIC. In her teaching, Milano underscored the “temperamental nature of the electronics [...]. You had to be very mindful of 1/2” videos quirks!” As a result, students in WIC video workshops did monthly equipment-maintenance checks (fig. 3). As Milano recalls:

In the first programme, we focused on atypical work situations for women. Lewitin joined the class. There was a woman who worked at TV Guide.

¹⁰ Ariel Dougherty, audio interview with Jerri Allyn, 11 November 2015.

¹¹ Ariel Dougherty, audio interview (via phone) with Susan Milano, 12 October 2016.

¹² Shridhar Bapat and Woody Vasulka, Steina’s husband, were the other two founders.

¹³ Alexander Keefe, “Aleph Null: Shridhar Bapat’s Undergrounds,” in *Bidoun*, 2010, <https://www.bidoun.org/articles/aleph-null> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

¹⁴ Catalogue of the September 1972 Women’s Video Festival, in *Electronic Arts Intermix*, <https://www.eai.org/webpages/1174> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

¹⁵ Dougherty/Milano, 2016.



- 3 Christine Noschese (left) and Susan Milano (right) run a test with the ½" video equipment prior to a production shoot in a video class at Women's Interarts Center, 1973, Photo by Ann E. Volkes

A number of that first group were feminist activists. Ann Volkes was also in that class, as was Tracy Fitz. Oh! And Carolyn Kresky.¹⁶

The Priest and the Pilot was the video they produced out of the first year's programme. The tape focuses on Jeannette Piccard and Helen Jost, who were each pursuing careers which were, at that time, considered unusual for women.

1976 was the last year in which Susan Milano taught video at WIC. All this time, she was organizing and curating the annual Women's Video Festival. The last was in 1980. Wendy Clarke, daughter of filmmaker Shirley Clarke, taught next at WIC. From her classes emerged a series of dynamic installations. Milano was emphatic:

What's on Tonight? was, in my opinion, the most wonderful installation ever put on in New York City, that only very few people ever saw. In 1975, during the festival, we screened the first set of International Videoleters.

¹⁶ Ibid. Carolyn Kresky did a great video taking one week of CBS News shows (circa 1973 or 1974?), editing the two and one-half hours down to just the segments that discussed women. It was very short! I have not seen this eye-opening piece emerge in any screenings of today.

At WIC, we held these monthly screenings for about two years. That was one of the most innovative, amazing video projects of the period.¹⁷

Milano and I have recently discussed how relevant much of this 1970s work is today. For instance, Rochelle Shulman's *Women Who've Lived through Illegal Abortions* (1973, 15m), shown at both the 1973 and 1976 Women's Video Festival, presents testimony by women in New York State, aiming to prevent the repeal of the newly liberalized abortion laws. Today, the U.S. Supreme Court could benefit from a screening. *Lesbian/Feminism* by Norma Pontes and Rita Moreira (1974, 30m), Brazilians who were living in New York, was shown at the festival in 1975. It offers a political synthesis of the Women's Movement in New York, exploring the relationship between lesbianism and feminism.¹⁸ Milano has retained dozens of these videos from the festivals because they were selected for tours in the period. She is actively working on their restoration and on future screenings.

Women Make Movies

From 1969 to 1972, in the first phase of Women Make Movies (WMM) – which we saw as a ‘production arm’ of the Women's Liberation Movement – Sheila Paige and I produced four films.¹⁹ We earned our livings through teaching youth filmmaking at the Young Filmmakers Foundation. A considerable perk was that we had access to the upright moviolas, used for film editing, on nights and weekends.²⁰ Especially with our quirky six-minute dramatic short *The Trials of Alice Crimmins*, we went out into neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens to reach the public. We set up a small screen on sidewalks and showed the film as people came home from work. When an educational distributor told us that “women are not an audience,” Sheila and I decided it was time to bring our media teaching to women and distribute to a national and international audience the films made by women that encompassed women's visions.

In incorporating WMM in 1972, Sheila and I had two purposes. One was to encourage a broad range of community women to tell their own stories in motion pictures. The second, because we knew feminism would not always be ‘fundable,’ was to establish distribution as a critical earned-income programme in order to sustain WMM over time.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rita Moreira, now back in Brazil, has posted this and other videos she made with Norma Pontes on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgp5NpFGmRA> [accessed: 20.09.2022].

¹⁹ Dolores Bargowski was a third founding partner in this early, pre-incorporation phase. She left New York City in October 1970, and her involvement with WMM ended. WMM's first film, *Mother America*, was released at the very end of that year.

²⁰ See the image halfway down in Chris Dresser, “Confessions of a Technophobe: Part 50,” <https://www.exotech.bm/confessions-of-a-technophobe/confessions-of-a-technophobe-part-50/> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

At WMM we worked with women of all ages – from youth workers to a retiree who had been a Women’s Army Corps ferry pilot during World War Two. For every three women who came into the workshop, one would stay to make a movie. When possible, we reached out to other venues within the community, like the mothers’ room at the local public elementary school, P.S. 33. With newly gained skills, our media makers worked with Stewardesses for Women’s Rights to create an educational training video for women who worked in the air.

Jean Shaw was a 29-year-old secretary at a local settlement house when she came to the WMM’s workshop. Raised in Oklahoma, she came to New York City to study acting. In her interview, she described the making of her short film *Fear* (B&W, 1973, 6m; fig. 4):

This was unique because it was something I had never experienced before, a real community, a real fellowship of women, a supportive environment, [...] it was a community of people working on a task together, to learn how to make a movie [...]. I was told, “well, the only requirement really to be involved is you have to commit to completing the film that you make.” [...] I had never created something out of my own experience and completed it.²¹

In 1975 WMM reached out to the National Black Feminist Organization²² to engage them in a film project, as we had done with Stewardesses for Women’s Rights. Structural changes within both parties, though, ended this collaboration. Sheila and I stepped down as co-directors in 1976, with bravery and naivete, handing the organization to the women we had taught. With the completion that year of *Healthcaring*, the first educational film, distribution became a larger focus. As the 1970s closed, teaching shifted to a series of skill-building workshops for a growing group of activist women with social media concerns who sought out WMM as a support base. WMM, too, like the WB and many operations throughout the country, had contracts through the Comprehensive Educational Training Act, a federal programme to provide jobs during the recession of the 1970s. Under the first contract, a tape on battered women, *Why Women Stay*,²³ and a video on older women, *Well, We Are Alive*,²⁴

21 Ariel Dougherty, video interview with Jean Shaw, 4 April 2014.

22 This organization was short lived. Cf. “National Black Feminist Organization (1973-1976),” in *BlackPast*, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-black-feminist-organization-1973-1976/> [accessed: 05.03.2022]. Some of its members would go on to found the now-better-known Combahee River Collective. Cf. “Black Feminist Organizations,” in *Black History in Two Minutes*, <https://blackhistoryintwominutes.com/black-feminist-organizations/> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

23 This tape by Jacqueline Shortell-McSweeney and Debra Zimmerman remains in WMM distribution. Cf. <https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/why-women-stay> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

24 A half-inch, reel-to-reel copy of this work is in the hands of one of its co-director, Greta Schiller. She recently transferred it to digital. In June 2022 I showed it with other WMM works in Taos, NM to a very enthusiastic audience. The transfer is brilliant.



- 4 Image from the Fall 1973 Women Make Movies, Inc. distribution brochure. Late 1972 production still from the final shoot in Jean Shaw's film, *Fear* (7m, B&W, 1973). Linda Fulhaber (left), Bill Stavers, and Jean Shaw (right) with hand on tripod. Photo by Susan Meiselas. Collection of Ariel Dougherty

were produced. A second contract, in 1979, called for the presentation of these and other women's media in the Chelsea neighborhood and other communities in New York City. By my tally, between 1970 and 1980 WMM was involved in launching forty productions, a remarkable record and body of work in feminist media-making. Representing a particular (and singular) theoretical genre of feminist media-making in the period, these productions combined offer a unique view into the lives, hopes, and visions of some women in the 1970s.

As a matter of economic survival, the WMM Board of Directors in 1980 voted to concentrate solely on distribution. The active filmmaker membership was soon dismantled. Celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in 2022, WMM is today the world's largest distributor of women's films and one of the most self-sustaining organizations to have emerged from the Second Wave.

As women artists, we did not know – while engaged in our nascent, dynamic, original, and often collective cultural activities in the 1970s – that we were joining an artist workforce whose proportion of women had increased at a rate of two and a half times that of women in all occupations of the U.S. civilian labor force. This radical cultural shift in the U.S. was unheralded! This significant

data, gathered by the National Endowment for the Arts Research Division²⁵ and still little cited, came just at the time when women's cultural funding was being curtailed at the federal level.²⁶ Women's funds failed to pick up the slack. The Ms. Foundation for Women, an early national funder of women's programmes, had established a policy in 1976 that would frame most feminist funding for decades: they declared they would not provide funds for women's media or feminist arts. They did not consider media or the arts "survival" issues.²⁷

Such a significant, historic cultural shift as three women to every man becoming an artist during the 1970s can never be duplicated – at least in the U.S. Where is all that art today? What groups have survived until now? Which ones have maintained a radical purpose and still do community-based teaching (fig. 5).

Feminist Media History

Sculptor and installation artist Janine Antoni, a MacArthur Foundation 'Genius' Grantee in 1998, was in graduate school in 1989 at the Rhode Island School of Design. When her professor noted that her performance work followed in the footsteps of Carolee Schneemann, Ana Mendieta, and Hannah Wilke, Antoni ran to the school's library; but there was nothing there, nothing on any of these artists.²⁸ I literally gasped when I heard her recount this experience as I watched an early edit of Lynn Hershman's documentary *!Women Art Revolution*. It was horrifying to hear that in 1989 – twenty-two years after the start of publications like *Heresies* – that women's cultural work was not included within major academic and educational infrastructures.

As a result, ruefully, over these decades some art curators and academics have gotten a lot of feminist media history wrong as a result, even attributing women-made works to men, or omitting the history altogether. Of course, there is regrettably a long history of this, centuries old, even! Aren't some Rodin sculptures actually the work of Camille Claudel? Too infrequently documented, feminist artist-teachers get short shrift because we are wearing so many hats: working on institution building as well as teaching, plus trying to do our own

²⁵ National Endowment for the Arts Research Division, note 4, 4 July 1983.

²⁶ Ariel Dougherty, "Testimony to Congress on Reauthorization of the Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1985." Cf. with analysis, "B. WOMEN'S ART and NEA Early 1980s," <https://www.scribd.com/doc/139763195/B-Women-s-Art-NEA-Early-1980s> [accessed: 05.03.2022], pp. 6–7. This shows a decline of support for women's arts organizations.

²⁷ Ms. Foundation for Women, "Are You..." brochure in the Ms. Foundation for Women Papers in the Sophie Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., ca. 1976, p. 1. Employment, healthcare, physical safety, childcare, and non-sexist/multi-racial school curricula were the only issues they defined as "survival issues."

²⁸ Janine Antoni recounts her experience in Lynn Hershman's film *Women Art Revolution!* at 1:06:22. Ariel Dougherty was a producer on the production and raised a single \$100,000 contribution for the film.



- 5 Mothers in the Mother's Room at Public School 33 in the first session of a Women Make Movie outreach video program the author taught in the Fall of 1972 into the Spring of 1973. Regretably a copy of the video, *La Muchacha Solitaria*, made in this program, has not been found. Photo by Lori Schwartzman. Collection of Ariel Dougherty

work, resurrecting women's lost histories. The old boys' reward system is too unifocal, lacking a wholistic view.

Women's Film Groups Today

Chica Luna (2002–2009) formed to give young Latina women filmmaking experience so that they could build a professional reel. It was 2006 when I was first exposed to their work. This was the media group that showed me there was a new trail of women film teaching groups. I was enthralled to learn that producing dramatic, narrative works was their focus. Through their processes, in pieces, I saw again my own film-teaching experience from the 1970s. Their signature, “F-Word: Media Justice Film/Video Program,” enabled Latinas, and other women of colour, to create their own film reels. They demonstrated professionalism all the way, but with a community commitment to justice.

“They did a lot of work around privilege and internalized oppression,”²⁹ Lillian Jiménez, the media-literacy teacher and later part-time director, reported:

Chica Luna’s stature rose in certain communities because of the very progressive stand that they took as feminists and feminists of colour. Excellent at promoting their work, they were the darlings of the funding community. A lot of young women went through that programme. The budget was approaching \$250,000. Then in 2008 the markets crashed. The funding dried up.³⁰

The once highly successful organization operation was forced, in summer 2009, to close. This is not just.

As the programme’s director, Karly Beaumont, told me: “Running through Chica Luna and running through the F-Word there was this sense of family and community. We were really, truly, truly there to empower women, to lean on one another. That was the fabric of Chica Luna.”³¹ Lillian lauded the impact that Karly’s film *I’m Not Here* had for the organization. A short film, just four minutes long, it is a heart-wrenching picture about child sexual abuse. It was part of the official selection at the 2006 New York International Latino Film Festival.

When I initiated a deeper study into the contemporary girl/women/lesbian-focused community film-teaching groups, at first I thought there were twelve or so. Today I have found twenty-six throughout the U.S. This is a movement. Just recently, I may have found a twenty-seventh! Already more than half of these groups have closed shop. But the films remain and are in need of archiving and preservation, processes that are way beyond the scope of my research. I do write about what I have been able to see. The films need to be collected, shown, *and enjoyed*. And studied, too. As well as cherished. New groups still emerge because the need remains. Sometimes, the groups are difficult to find because they are largely local, specifically serving their own communities. Yet their purpose is universal. Making a film, telling a story visually, is empowering. But the lessons girls are learning in these programmes are larger than making a movie. Girls learn leadership. They learn organizing skills, how to budget time and manage resources. Most of all, they learn collaboration and teamwork. These are vital skills they will carry into adulthood in any endeavour.

The challenges are many. They start with money. Support for all kinds of women’s and girls’ projects is presently at a miserable 1.6% of all philanthropic giving.³² Media funding barely exists, and forget any major support for teaching

²⁹ Ariel Dougherty, audio interview (via phone) with Lillian Jiménez, 12 February, 2017.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ariel Dougherty, audio interview (via phone) with Karly Beaumont, 1 March 2017.

³² This data comes from a recent campaign launched by Women Moving Millions, 2020; cf. <https://womenmovingmillions.org/get-equal-campaign/> [accessed 05.03.2022].

media in community settings. Leadership transitions in these groups is especially difficult because of the multiple hats a founder must wear. Finding an appropriate mix of skills and drive in a new leader is, indeed, tricky. Such leadership transitions were ultimately the demise of the Seattle-based Reel Grrls,³³ after nineteen years, as well as Beyond Media Education,³⁴ which had prospered in Chicago for fourteen years.

The successful impact of a project and the subsequent pressure from funders to scale up bring new difficulties. Various steps in development, outreach, and advancement and growth in a teaching mode are all factors that do not necessarily lend themselves to scaling up (fig. 6).

The operational pressure is huge – especially when the emphasis is primarily on *teaching*. Administering such organizations demands a complex set of skills, along with persistence *and capacity*. The stress when money is so unavailable is great. Such efforts, too, are compounded when unexpected responsibilities are added to regular tasks, as happened to Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media. This Brooklyn-based group had to take on a city-wide organizing and publicity campaign in support of the appointed principal of the first U.S. Arabic-language public high school.³⁵ The extra work for the staff caused burnout, and the organization closed in the wake of the effort. An added component for all these teaching groups is the dynamic of founders being artists – desiring to create their own work in addition to running an organization and teaching. It is very complex. This needs deep examination, and relief processes, like staff sabbaticals, should be put in place. This can only happen with vastly increased funding, more sensitive academic study, and visionary development processes. Last, the COVID-19 pandemic could put some of these groups out of existence, like what happened to Chica Luna after the market crash in 2008.

As in the 1970s with programmes like Les Insoumuses, Vidéo Out, Vidéo 00, Les Cents Fleurs, and Vidéa – all in France – projects exist today in many corners of the globe. Some have been temporary, like Global Crescendo. In 2008 the International Rescue Committee hired author and photojournalist Ann Jones to lead a four-nation series of photography workshops in Africa. The aim was to give voice to women and girls in conflict zones. Using digital still cameras, many visualized their concerns from their own points of view. In mastering technical

33 While the organization has folded, many of their videos are on YouTube; cf. <https://www.youtube.com/user/reelgrrls> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

34 Beyond Media Education founder and teacher extraordinaire, Salome Chasnoff, did a Zoom session with Media Burn on 29 October 2020. That session can be viewed here: <https://mediaburn.org/events/10-29-20-virtual-talk-with-video-activists-salome-chasnoff/> [accessed: 05.03.2022]. The collection will be housed at Media Burn.

35 One of only a few articles on Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media is Grace Smith, “Media Savvy Arab Girls Respond to the Mainstream,” in *Youth Media Reporter*, 2007, <http://www.youthmediareporter.org/2007/11/14/media-savvy-arab-girls-respond-to-the-mainstream/> [accessed: 05.03.2022].



- 6 Cover of the 2010–2015 report on the evolution of the project Girl Tech within New Mexico Media Literacy Project. It's a great summary of the development and success of the program. Unfortunately the mother organization closed and the project was not continued. Collection of Ariel Dougherty

skills and speaking publicly with their photographs, the women and girls gained stature in their communities.

A more long-term project is the Deccan Development Society (DDS) initiative in Pastapur, India. It serves poor, rural women farmers in a region considered by the Indian government to be especially backwards. When DDS started in the 1970s, its goals were sustainable development, inclusion, and participation. The organization's director, P.V. Sateesh, stated in a 2007 interview: "When later we analysed the impacts of globalization on the poor, we added [...] market autonomy and autonomy over media [...]. [W]e started using video and then radio".³⁶ (fig. 7)

To achieve media autonomy, the DDS women added the learning of film and radio skills to their craft-making. They began to carry their cameras with them into the fields and the markets. Making their own media allowed them to tell their own stories. Women at DDS collaborated on films to show where a canal should be constructed or about their millet cultivation. One young woman, Mayuri Masanagari, daughter of one of the DDS women, by age ten had already made several films about principles of farming, documenting her own unschooled elders. At age eleven, Masanagari travelled to Indonesia to present her documentaries to delegates from various countries gathered to discuss climate change and crops.³⁷ In 2019 the DDS women were honoured by the United Nations Development Programme for their contribution to ecology and their innovations in rain-fed millet production. Masanagari, who speaks English, attended the delegation in New York to serve as a translator.³⁸ The making of their films and radio programmes have given these rural women stature and improved their economic lives as they bring to a wider audience, through their media community, knowledge about their sustainable farming and bounty.

The Need for Media (Cultural) Policy

Cultural and media policies are vital to achieving equity for women. Patriarchy dominates within all mainstream institutions. The Global Media Monitoring Project in its Learning Resource Kit lists media-policy initiatives from Albania to Zimbabwe.³⁹ Through the efforts of the Women's European Audiovisual

³⁶ Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron, "Women of Pastapur," in *Communications for Social Change*, 2007, <http://archive.cfsc.org/photogallery.php%3Fid=390.html> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

³⁷ Prabalika M. Borah, "Cameraman Mayuri tho...", *The Hindu*, 2012, <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-metroplus/cameraman-mayuri-tho/article12541508.ece> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

³⁸ "Hyderabad: 10-yr US visa for 3 women awardees," in *Deccan Chronicle*, 2019, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/current-affairs/170919/hyderabad-10-yr-us-visa-for-3-women-awardees.html> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

³⁹ "Learning Resource Kit for Gender-Ethical Journalism and Media House Policy," in *Who Makes the News*, 2012, <https://whomakesthenews.org/3655-2/> [accessed: 05.03.2022].



7 Screen grab by the author from a Deccan Development Society film

Network, policy issues are being addressed in the European Union to assure women are awarded an equal share of all audiovisual funds.⁴⁰ Sweden has led in these efforts, including on the governmental level through the leadership of Anna Serner, CEO of the Swedish Film Institute, which launched in 2012 the “Fifty/Fifty by 2020” programme.⁴¹ In the Swedish private sector, Ellen Tejle started the programme A-Rating in 2013 based on the Bechdel-Wallace Test. The point was to raise consciousness about women’s roles in film. Today, this successful self-initiated model is practiced in ten countries and thirty theatres throughout Sweden.⁴²

In the U.S., the failure to struggle for media and cultural policy with a gendered lens might be the most glaring misstep of the women’s movement. As

40 Unidentified author, “Declaration on gender equality in European film industry adopted at conference during Sarajevo Film Festival”, on the Sarajevo Film Festival website, 12–19 August, 2019, <https://www.sff.ba/en/news/10231/declaration-on-gender-equality-in-european-film-industry-adopted-at-a-conference-during-sarajevo-film-festival> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

41 Unidentified author, “Toward gender equality in film production”, a chronology of press releases at events with pictures and or videos, published by the Swedish Film Institute, 2016–2022, <https://www.filminstitutet.se/en/about-us/swedish-film-institute/gender-equality/> [accessed: 05.03.2022].

42 The Bechdel-Wallace test: 1) Are there two named female characters? 2) Do they talk to each other? 3) About something more than men? Cf. <http://www.a-listfilm.com/> [accessed: 05.03.2022]. The same test has been applied to other marginalized peoples.

the U.S. has no cultural minister post, there is no centre point around which to address the myriad of media issues. Despite a cacophony of Hollywood women complaining about dire behind-the-camera numbers, the exhibition of existing women-directed works is far worse. In the U.S., only 2.75% of screens show women-directed films.⁴³ No national women's group or even coalition of groups exists to work on a national feminist media policy. This is indeed antithetical in a country where our major foreign export is commercial Hollywood cinema.

We must support and build our feminist institutions and nourish them with recognition and money, allowing them to flourish and prosper. We need to aggregate our strength through a network. A collective voice fortified with feminist visual, visionary imagery can shatter the patriarchy. Central to women's – and all people's – autonomy, self-determination, and liberation is our ability to control our own narrative, history, and future. As we dig deeper into our consciousnesses and intuitions and impact more girls at early stages in their development, women will be guided to a better-sustainable collective and just commons.

When feminists discuss artistic teaching in non-hierarchical ways, crafting teamwork and collaboration and evolving group consciousness, we must also examine the impact of the mainstream, dominant culture that promotes stars, the ranking of 'best,' competition models within capitalism, and how that mitigates all our efforts. The glorification of the individual over vital collective struggle needs serious examination. It is holding back the necessary change all oppressed people seek. Paromita Vohra, the Mumbai-based film teacher of the joint New York City–Mumbai project Gurlz Media Group, states: “It is about mutually finding a new language for us to express the complexities within – that mutuality is called conversation.”⁴⁴

A new generation of teacher-leaders – Madeleine Lim, founder and Artistic Director of Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project; Alicia Rascon, founder and Executive Director of Latinitas; and Tani Ikeda, a Reel Grrls graduate and now Hollywood camerawomen and founder of ImMEDIATE Justice – are bringing far more developed experiences and strategies to their programmes. Their efforts, and the films that come out of them, will impact more and more people. The combined effect of their students' films will create a tableau of feminist vision. This work, if widely seen, can be an impetus for change over the next decades. Our job is to ensure that these groups thrive – and that the works get widely seen. Vohra, as a sister feminist filmmaker and teacher from India, further explains: “[...] push for the unverifiable veracities of creativity. Art

43 Deb Verhoeven, “Redistributing Gender,” in *Kinomatics*, 2016, <https://kinomatics.com/redistributing-gender/> [accessed: 05.02.2022].

44 Paromita Vohra, “Separation Anxiety: The Schisms and Schemas of Media Advocacy,” in *Signs* 33/2, 2008, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/521059> [accessed: 05.03.2022], p. 20. (Paromita sent me a private copy of the article. As I do not have access to the online version, I use pagination from this printed, double-spaced version.)

becomes a meaningful political space only if it is emotionally viable to people – and it is so only *if it is a place where they can make meanings of their own* [my emphasis], instead of merely consuming those that they are given.”⁴⁵

Vohra continues: “We need to allow art to fill us with a sense of possibility, *the easier to imagine a different world and fantasize the details of how this world will be* [my emphasis].”⁴⁶ There is so much to teach. To create. And learn.

Background video material that is available online as examples of topics raised in this paper:

- 1: Dougherty clips, trailers, and compilations,
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIDBWTmFmH1kCDewLghEEmg>
[accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 2: DOMESTIC TRANQUILLITY director Harriet Kriegel (1973, 7m)
A Women Make Movies Production, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1hY5nTVGpA&t=12s> [accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 3: HEY THERE LONELY GIRL by the Middletown Girls Film Club
(1970, 8:25m), DeeDee Halleck, teacher, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2s189uGbh2w&t=101s> [accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 4: IN MOURNING AND RAGE, Woman’s Building, Los Angeles, directed
by Suzanne Lacy, Leslie Labowitz, and Bia Lowe (1977, 8:05m),
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idKo2tPdYVo&t=9s>
[accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 5: Women’s Video Festival catalogue 1976,
<http://www.vasulka.org/archive/ExhFest6/Women’sVidFest/WVF005.pdf> [accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 6: SHY GIRL by Girls Club of the Lower East Side (2017, 4:20m),
<https://vimeo.com/212807167> [accessed: 06.03.2022].
- 7: LAS MUJERES DENTRO DE MI / THE WOMAN INSIDE ME, director
anonymous (2013 4:54m), Girl Tech, a project of the New Mexico
Media Literacy Project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyOzBrGpTqQ> [accessed: 06.03.2022].

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴⁶ Vohra, 2008.