In honor of Women’s History Month, I would like to talk about women’s history, particularly the history of the feminist movement in the Twentieth Century, through the lens of film history. I believe we can learn a lot about the successive feminist movements by looking to the history of cinema. There are many books on the history of women in film and then separate histories of the rise of feminism; yet, rarely are these histories perceived as related. For me they are deeply intertwined, and I hope to share this relationship with you today.

Some of you may not “get” the first part of my title – “Girls on Film.” It is not meant to be derogatory towards women, referring to them in sexist, infantilizing terms. Nor is my paper about actual girls on film, though many of us have been inspired by strong girls and young women on film; certainly right now many of you may be thrilled at the girl power of Katniss Everdeen, and, of course, before her, Lizbeth Salander, and
before her, Hermoine Granger. Indeed, Pixar’s next film is centered on a strong girl in
the appropriately named, Brave. These empowered girls and young women are
imaginable because of the feminist struggles that made such cultural icons possible. Yet,
these are not the girls on film I will be addressing.

Rather, “Girls on Film” is the name of a song released in 1981 by Duran Duran,
accompanied by a rather sexist MTV video. Long before Justin Bieber, there was Simon
Le Bon, and some of us were crazy about his frosted tips and eye-liner. As a girl in the
80’s, I was prey to teen crazes, I admit.

However, I also benefitted from the popularization of second-wave feminism. As a teen
in the 80’s, I was fortunate enough to live through an era when feminism seemed
common sense. This is less shocking than you might think; when I was in grade school,
I circulated a petition for the Equal Rights Amendment. For those of you who don’t
know—it didn’t pass. Women do not have equal rights in this country to this day.
Unlike the Civil Rights movement, the ERA was never ratified by the final states it
needed to become law; many of us still perceive this as an unthinkable tragedy, one connected to the endemic violence against and inequality with which are treated daily. In a country where women are not considered equal citizens, no wonder rape and domestic violence are hourly occurrences. Nevertheless, the broadly embraced feminist movement of the seventies led to changes in film and media that directly impacted my life. I was too young to experience second-wave feminism through the widely popular consciousness-raising groups and protests of the seventies. Rather, I came to feminist consciousness through the media—that supposed source of all things misogynist, according to many. Yet, I turned to the media to learn and develop my burgeoning feminist consciousness.

The *Roseanne* Show (ABC, 1988-97) tackled birth control, bisexuality, gay marriage *long before it made the neoliberal agenda*, abortion, riot grrl music, domestic violence, openly discussed feminism, workplace sexual harassment, shared domestic work, working class politics, the politics of poverty and indebtedness, and generational class politics.

*Murphy Brown* (Diane English; CBS, 1988-1998) Would it be made today?
Silkwood (Mike Nichols, 1983)—Meryl Streep was a union activist with a mullet & Cher was a lesbian. Many of the influential films and TV shows of this period addressed the intersections of gender, class, and sexuality while challenging capitalist exploitation.

Norma Rae (Martin Ritt, 1979). I still cry every time she raises the sign. I read this film as both a fictionalized story of unionization—one of the last pro-union films to date, and a figuration of women with signs around the U.S., demonstrating for the E.R.A.

We still do not have equal rights to this day.

These films, TV shows & celebrities made feminist issues and concerns commonplace, even relatively normal. As I have since learned, film and “newer” media has, from its origins, provided the ideological space for the complex representation of women. Yet, most critical attention to these images has been concerned with women as victims or vixens or other related stereotypes; however, I want to suggest that this limits our
understanding of the power and complexity of film and television. Historically, it is more than coincident that the origins of film coincide with the rise of feminism, particularly in the West. The question I want to address today is: what can we learn from these coincident histories? What can film tell us about feminism and the history of women generally, and how does women’s history shape the cinema?

EARLY CINEMA AND FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM

The birth of cinema, i.e., the very first film screenings, date back to 1894 or 1895, depending if you were in France or the U.S. Rather than rehearse this history, as many have, I want to point out that this occurred historically at the same time that the struggle for women’s suffrage was in full swing. As you know, suffrage, or the right to vote, was the key issue, though others were also involved, in the early feminist movement—or, the first wave of feminism. Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the language of the 19th Amendment in 1878, though this amendment was not ratified until 1920 in the U.S. and 1928 in the U.K. It should be noted that the last Western country to grant suffrage to women—a Swiss canton—did so in 1991!
While early feminism emerged in public discourse in the middle of the nineteenth century, by the turn of the century, the movement had grown exponentially and its tactics had become more radical in response to the apathy-- or worse-- of men in power. As those of you have seen the HBO miniseries *Iron-Jawed Angels* already know, women wrote letters, petitioned political figures, chained themselves to public buildings, picketed, were beaten and arrested. Such public battles, rhetorical and physical, instigated major changes for women. More and more women joined the workforce and pursued higher education when and where they could—there were only 105 co-ed colleges in the U.S. that allowed women to matriculate at the turn of the century. The vastly changing roles for women after the turn of the century were reflected in the cinema in complicated and conflicting ways. Yet, women themselves played a central role in the construction of these images.

Alice Guy Blachè (1873-1968)
Pioneer in early cinema.
Below: Lois Weber and film still from one of her films.
It might surprise you to learn that very early cinema was actually dominated by women! As Ally Acker points out in *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema*, the first narrative film was directed by a woman, and the highest paid director in the silent days was a woman. Even Helen Keller formed a production company to produce and star in her own film drama in 1918 (xvii). Before the film industry consolidated, that is, in its fledgling state, the doors were open to women. Indeed, more women worked in decision-making positions before 1920 than any other time in history. One of the first, indeed arguably the first, Alice Guy Blachè, made her first film in 1896, several months before George Méliès. She would go on to direct over two hundred films, in every genre, including a science fiction film, titled *In the Year 2000* in 1912, which imagines a time when women rule the world! She is recognized now for directing the first narrative film; yet in her long lifetime she, like most of her films, disappeared from public knowledge and film history. By the time women achieved suffrage, Guy Blachè was shut out of filmmaking by the consolidation of the film industry into the Hollywood studio system. As a French citizen, she was eventually recognized for her contributions to film history, and the French made her knight in the French Legion of Honor. Yet, when she died at 95 in Mahwah, New Jersey, the very state in which she produced most of her films, she died anonymous—not one paper carried her obituary.

While Guy Blachè was shut out by the studio system, another woman became the highest paid film director of the time—Lois Weber. She was the first woman to star, direct, co-author and produce her own film. She was a fundamentalist that used film to preach about a range of controversial topics—abortion, birth control, divorce, child labor, capital punishment and promiscuity. Her films were highly sensational, but often quite successful because of this. Yet, like Guy Blachè and many other women in nearly every area of film making, she was shut out once the film industry emerged as a
formidable institution, consolidating into the studio system. Yet, while women were being closed out of the film industry, they were none the less gaining power onscreen. Images of powerful women were quite popular in the cinema, images that conveyed the anxieties and thrills of changing roles and opportunities from women in the new century. As a character from Lois Weber’s *Sensation Seekers* sums up: “It is disconcerting to watch the young girl of today grow into manhood”—this was 1927.

☐ GENDER AND GENRE

*Matrimony’s Speed Limit* (Alice Guy Blachè, 1913). One of the two surviving films from the over 300 made by Guy Blachè. The preservation of the short silent comedy was financed by the Women’s Film Preservation Fund, and subsequently added to the National Film Registry.

While women were certainly acting on the changing roles for women behind the camera, the ideas of first wave feminism were also to be found on movie screens in engaging and dynamic scenarios, which thrilled and delighted spectators. About the time Rebecca West was trying to define feminism, in 1913, with her famous statement: “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat”—a cycle of films emerged that seemed to define feminism in similar terms. As Ben Singer argues, “Sensational melodrama was one of the prime vehicles through which the modern imagination explored a new conception of womanhood” (*Melodrama*...
and Modernity 221). These action-adventure films were known as serial-queen melodramas. A genre specifically focused on female heroics, they showcased the novelty of the New Woman, building narratives around “an intrepid young heroine who exhibit[s] a variety of traditionally ‘masculine’ qualities: physical strength and endurance, self-reliance, courage, social authority, and freedom to explore novel experiences outside the domestic sphere” (Singer, Melodrama and Modernity 221). The serial queen pursued her adventures far from the domestic sphere and in ways that rejected proscribed femininity.

Although “serial-queen” is no longer the term used, the genre’s particular focus on “the basically paradoxical nature of female experience” aimed at a “repudiation of domesticity,” replacing it with a “fantasy of empowerment…celebrat[ing] the excitement of the woman’s attainment of unprecedented mobility outside the confines of the home” continues as a central thematic feature of the popular genre film that is the action-adventure thriller when focused on a female hero (Singer, Melodrama and Modernity 258). Long before Ripley, Trinity, Charly Baltimore, Sarah Connor, Thelma and Louise or any Angelina Jolie film, there was The Hazards of Helen, the Pearl White series, The Adventures of Dorothy Dare, Ruth of the Rockies, and The Perils of Our Girl Reporters. These popular films overtly polemicized the issue of female independence and mastery through their thrilling adventures.
Women spectators had these models who explicitly transgressed proper femininity—throwing punches, jumping moving trains, shooting guns, fighting off attackers and the like. As Singer argues, however, “portrayals of female prowess functioned as a reflection of both real social change in gender ideologies and, paradoxically, of fantasies of female power betraying the degree to which traditional constraints still prevailed” (14). These popular films negotiated women’s changes roles, reflecting many of the issues and goals of the first wave feminists attempting to claim a space for women in the public sphere. Notably, these genre films conveyed these changes in the form of “peril”: women’s attainment of mobility outside the confines of the home was connected in these films to thrilling dangers conveyed in scenes of assault, abduction, torture, and intimations of rape that seemed to accompany the urban milieu. Still, they survived and conquered their attackers, with narratives of empowerment overcoming scenarios of imperilment.

About the time the 19th amendment was ratified, these films seemed to disappear from the screen. Interestingly, while women actually gained some substantive power to voice their desires, cinema began to transition to sound. One might speculate that the highly risky, and expensive endeavor of sound cinema—that is, converting actual physical movie theaters, changing studios into sound stages, the enormous costs of the
technology involved in the process—made profit-oriented studios hesitate to take such risks with the topics of their films. Indeed, only one woman director survived the transition from silent to sound cinema—Dorothy Arzner. Arzner didn’t just survive sound, she invented a key technology in its evolution, the boom mike, by attaching a microphone to a fishing rod! Arzner is a unique figure to trace the history of women and cinema through WWII, because she made several types of films over the years that reflect the different ways cinema dealt with the changes roles of women. Yet, what sets Arzner apart was her ability to take these popular narratives about women and put a spin on them that troubled the implicit sexism of to which these narratives leant themselves. For example, with the vote and the new possibilities for women it allowed, social anxieties about independent women arose. A new type of woman was on the rise—young, urban, career-oriented and sexually independent women became a type—the flapper. She smoked, danced, like to go to parties, and even had sex out of wedlock, made possible by Margaret Sanger and others who fought for women’s access to birth control. These independent women, epitomized by It girl, Clara Bow (and demonized in vamps such as Theda Bera—an anagram for Arab death) appeared frequently in the latter days of silent cinema and early days of sound.
Women’s sexuality was a cause of much anxiety as women gained more independence because if women had children out of wedlock, this threatened the cornerstone of capitalism—the patriarchal family, with the inheritance passed from father to son. Between 1920 and WWII, Hollywood cinema dealt with these tensions through a range of representations of women. The flapper figure was central to pre-Hayes code films because these films could deal more directly with sexuality, before the draconian measures of Joseph Breen’s office. However, in the hands of Arzner, such films often worked against expectation. For example, Arzner directed Bow in *The Wild Party*(1929)—her first talkie. The film portrays the lives of party girls at a women’s college and the dangers of this lifestyle for women—like the possibility of rape. Yet, Arzner turns her attentions to the women’s community this world makes possible, attending to the women’s intimate relationships and problematizing heterosexuality, showing it to be a threat to women’s intimacy. Arzner was assigned many such scripts—working girls in the big city, domestic melodramas of various sorts, and, what came to be known as “women’s films” more generally. Arzner’s import cannot be underestimated; she is a pivotal figure whose own life and work was the expression of the successes of first wave feminism and her recuperation from obscurity is the result of
the diligent work of second wave feminism.

Despite the extreme sexism prevalent in Hollywood, Arzner was able to establish what remains to this day the largest body of work by a woman director within the studio system. Nonetheless, she had been virtually ignored in most film histories. It was only with the emergence of the “herstory” projects of ’70s feminism that scholars began to reclaim women such as Arzner from relative obscurity. Feminist film historians, using feminist literary revisionary models established by women such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, rediscovered the oeuvre of Dorothy Arzner in their attempts to recuperate women from the past as part of the larger project of feminist film studies. Historians reclaimed the body of Arzner’s work in the name of adding women to the dominant canon of directors that had been instantiated with the auteur theory of the ’40s and ’50s by (male-centered) film critics. These feminist film critics were equally invested in establishing a canon of women filmmakers to argue that there existed a separate, identifiable female, or feminine, aesthetics of film. Despite the problems with such a project, the question of the relationship of film practice to gendered producers and receivers of films cannot be left behind. For one, as long as the paradigm of film analysis based on auteurism prevails, the study of women directors remains an important part of feminist interventions into canonical film studies.
1943 was the year Arzner made her last feature-length film; that same year another women director was making a film in a different part of L.A. Though geographically nearby, Maya Deren’s films were worlds away from Hollywood product, reflecting a radical break in history and the aesthetic paradigm shift this made possible. In the search for a women’s tradition undertaken by the radical and socialist feminists of the second-wave, the discovery of Deren’s films were of singular importance, particularly in the formation of women’s film festivals in the UK and the US. Maya Deren is often credited as the origin of the American Avant-garde; her films were short, silent, black-and-whites that were radically experimental and modernist, and nearly all were made for what Hollywood spent on lipstick. Her first film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), was made for $350. Deren’s work in the avant-garde, not only as a filmmaker, but also as a writer, activist, and organizer, can be read as an effect of, and response to, the historical conditions in which she lived. These historical conditions had everything to do with the
ideological struggles taking place in the middle of the twentieth century concerning the changing roles of (and for) women. As feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey has noted:

The conditions in which it was possible for women to make films arose through economic and technical changes that allowed a cinema to develop with an alternative economic base to the 35 mm commercial product. So far as women were affected, these changes allowed them to enter the world of cinema in considerably greater numbers than the previous drop in the ocean.¹

Yet, this oft-told history too narrowly confines itself to the parameters of technological "progress." To see this moment of the war and its aftermath solely in terms of the emergence of technologies (16mm cameras) produced by the demands of the war as the singular explanation as to why women began to pick up the camera fails to adequately acknowledge the complexity of such a claim. In other words, to understand the history of women in film, we must comprehend the technologies of gender that precede the technologies of cinema. Concomitant to this shift in the economics of technology was the larger ideological shifts in the structuring of gendered subjectivity. The profound shift concerning gender that took place in the decades following suffrage marked a high point in the manifestation of competing discourses concerning the 'liberation' of women. Such a progressive tenor was marked in dominant cinema by the upsurge in the generic form of the "Screwball Comedy" with its attendant "strong women."² These women also populated the "woman's film" such as Mildred Pierce (1945) and Stella Dallas (1937). Actresses such as Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn, and Barbara Stanwick exemplified the possibilities afforded by drastically changing gender narratives. This

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¹ Laura Mulvey, "Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde" in The British Avant-Garde Film, ² see segment on "Screwball Comedy" for the Public Television series, American Cinema; John Belton, Chair Coordinator of Research.
saw its pinnacle in the years during World War II: the explicit production of "Rosie the Riveter" as a proto-feminist cultural icon for which women were rewarded in terms of economic solvency and national identity--a reinvention of the "New Woman" for the mid-twentieth century. An outcome of the depopulating of men in the United States to fight abroad was the demand for new ideological positions, which encouraged and rewarded women for undertaking what was previously regarded as men's rightful place. This called for new types of women-centered social structures the likes of which had rarely witnessed been previously in U.S. history.\(^3\) Just one example of this would be Vanport City, one of the first planned cities in the 1940s, whose central paradigm was to build a livable environment for working women. So, although there was no feminist “wave” per se during this time, there was certainly a tectonic shift in gender codes, roles and expectations.

Although there were several contributing factors, Deren was empowered to pick up a camera because, during the war, not only were the lightweight cameras made and available, but also many women were doing work formerly done by men. The war years were characterized by a high visibility of women working in the public sphere, taking on jobs and occupations previously held by men. Yet, this ‘historical transition’ was tenuous, and quickly shifted after the war. Discourses on sexuality and the family emerged in the fifties to put an end to this historical seachange and guarantee men's uncontested access to the public sphere. This closure of a brief window of possibility for women is epitomized by the discourses of domesticity of the fifties, bombarding women with images of June Cleaver and Marilyn Monroe. Women filmmakers like Deren and Shirley Clarke struggled for grants and to make more films; however, male

artists and critics continued to shut them out and often denigrated their work. It was in the fifties and sixties that women filmmakers disappeared from written histories and cultural memory. It should be noted that of the key filmmakers I have discussed so far—Lois Weber, Alice Guy Blache, Dorothy Arzner and Maya Deren, all but Arzner died penniless and relatively forgotten. Fortunately, the sexual and gender repression of the fifties and sixties didn’t last; rather, it gave rise to what Betty Friedan named, “the feminine mystique”—and her book sparked the second wave of feminism just two years after Maya Deren’s premature death brought on by malnutrition. This early second-wave book articulated the psychological and emotional toll for women of a life limited to wife and mother. As one of the most influential non-fiction works of the 20th century, it laid the groundwork for the establishment of the National Organization for Women. It was quickly joined by Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, which introduced the feminist concept of patriarchy, Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuoch*, which provided the language of the women’s liberation movement, and Shulemith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, all published by 1970. These second-wave liberal, radical, and Marxist-feminists were at the forefront of a mass movement that provided a radically new worldview that continues to affect our lives to this day. Its central methodology of consciousness-raising may no longer be practiced in its original form, but continues on in feminist film practice.
The second-wave of feminism expressed itself primarily through the radical critique of Hollywood, following Deren’s model much more than Arzner’s. A large number of women, many of whom had seen Deren’s films at women’s film festivals, began to pick up a camera themselves—Chantal Akerman, Agnes Varda, Sally Potter, Barbara Loden, Laura Mulvey, Sara Gomez, Barbara Hammer, Su Friedrich, Marileen Gorris, the Circles film collective in Great Britain—the list goes on and on. I encourage you to peruse the Women Make Movies website to get a sense of contemporary feminist film production. However, it should also be noted that second-wave feminism also impacted Hollywood, giving rise to mainstream productions such as The Stepford Wives (the original) and Up the Sandbox—a Barbra Streisand film not many have heard of, much less seen. It also led to more indie fare like Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore, Looking for Mr. Goodbar, and Claudia Weill’s Girlfriends.

So, what does this all have to do with Queer Cinema? Well, in a way, I have also been mapping out the history of queer cinema through this history of women’s cinema. The Stonewall uprisings happened in 1969, following on the momentum of the anti-war, civil rights and women’s movements. Moreover, many women became lesbians or
came out as lesbians in the feminist movement, developing an entire body of knowledge and practices as lesbian-feminists that they then brought with them as they joined the ranks of the Gay Liberation movement. Following the model of the radical feminists, who looked back to reclaim a women’s history and tradition, lesbian and gay history became a priority in their movement as well, exemplified by Vito Russo’s *The Celluloid Closet*. Indeed, we can return to the birth of cinema itself to find the first images of lesbians and gays. We must recall that there was much panic about men’s and women’s roles with the rise of modernity. The threat of women receiving an education, being able to control their bodies and the like, pointed to the possibility of new forms of sexual and affective relationships. I will point to just one example-- On a winter day in 1892, in the broad daylight of downtown Memphis, Tennessee, a middle class woman named Alice Mitchell slashed the throat of her lover, Freda Ward, killing her instantly. Local, national, and international newspapers, medical and scientific publications, and popular fiction writers all clamored to cover the ensuing “girl lovers” murder trial. Lisa Duggan locates in this sensationalized event the emergence of the lesbian in U.S. mass culture; her book, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence and American Modernity* shows how newly “modern” notions of normality and morality that arose from such cases still haunt and distort lesbian and gay politics to the present day. That this happened within a few years of the first film screenings is not without historical import. The 1914 silent film, *A Florida Enchantment* tells the story of a woman who takes a seed to become a man and immediately starts flirting with all the girls, while still in women’s clothes. She eventually dresses as a man, changes her name, and goes directly to the bank to withdraw the monies she was not allowed to have as a woman; as soon as does, she proposes marriage to her best friend. Interestingly, this film was based on a novel that predates the Alice Mitchell case by a single year! In the novel, Lillian Travers becomes
and remains “Lawrence” and sails off with her bride; in the film, she “awakes” from her silly dream to return to her male fiancé.

Sydney Drew’s *A Florida Enchantment* (1914). Lillian/Lawrence Travers kissing all the girls, and the girls, and they return her/his affections. Is this what society feared suffrage and the “New Woman” would lead to for their daughters?

So queer images were part of the ensemble of ways cinema mediated the changing gender coordinates of modernity. However, since I am focusing on women’s history today, I will conclude by suggesting the ways women’s film history and feminist filmmaking is, in many ways, the history of queer cinema itself. One key figure in this history is once again Dorothy Arzner. Arzner’s films often produce a critique of and distancing from the heterosexual romance, and this narrative is frequently coupled with the alternative posited by the possibility of women’s community. In this respect, her identity as a visibly butch lesbian, something film scholar Judith Mayne has explicated in great detail in her work, may have allowed her a certain distance from and perspective on her on-screen heroines, while privately, she was often romantically linked to her actresses. Indeed, one highly apocryphal rumor is she quit filmmaking when she wanted to add a screen kiss between two women in her last film and Harry
Cohn put his foot down. And while she could not film the love between women, she lived it, spending her life with her spouse, choreographer, Marion Morgan. It is also important to remember that some of our favorite actresses were and continue to be beloved queer icons—Kathryn Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell. These actresses are numbered among many, like Barbara Stanwick, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo—who starred as strong women and were also rumored to have relationships with women, populating the imaginations of queer spectators.

We can also return to Maya Deren, who critiqued women’s place in patriarchy while valuing women’s community, both within her films and in her day-to-day activism for artists and filmmakers. In fact, her most well known experimental short, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, was critiqued not as feminist but as queer. Despite the altered social climate for women during the war years, *Meshes* was perceived as a threat to the sex/gender system by many critics. James Agee and Manny Farber wrote devastating reviews of this film; "Farber... went so far as to call Deren's films 'lesbianish'".\(^4\) Farber was correct in his assumption that some sort of refusal of heteronormativity was in effect in the film. Of *Meshes*, Farber wrote: "'This film, cluttered with corny, amateurishly arranged symbols and mainly concerned with sex, hops too confusingly from reality to dream.' At this point, on her copy of his review, Deren noted in the margin: 'This is exactly the point.'"\(^5\) Clearly, such responses reveal how the sexual content of the film was seen as a challenge from the days of its first public screenings. Jonas Mekas, the leading film critic in New York at the time of its first screenings (which Deren achieved by renting out a local movie theater), also awkwardly

\(^5\) ibid.
condemned the film under the heading, "The Conspiracy of Homosexuality," grouping her with other queer experimental filmmakers like Kenneth Anger. Mekas includes Deren in this "perversion of sex" because of her film’s conveyance of Woman "robbed of both her true spirituality and her unashamed carnality" which marks her as an adolescent film poet. It seems Deren did not represent women’s sexuality to Mekas’ liking; not surprising from a women whose marriage to men did not stop her from having affairs with the women she so admired.

These are of course only two exemplary figures. However, they, and others, provide a foundation on which not only feminist filmmaking of the second-wave and beyond have built a tradition, but also provided queer filmmakers images and themes that inform the films produced to this day. For instance, Todd Haynes—one of the first filmmakers to inducted into the canon of New Queer Cinema with his film Poison, has often cited Arzner as a central influence on his work; this is evident in his continuing engagement with the form of the woman’s film. However, I would also draw attention to his lifelong collaborator, producer Christine Vachon. In the tradition of Deren’s ardent film activism and organizing in support of independent filmmakers, Vachon has oversaw and fought for many of the most important films—feminist and queer alike. Just a partial list of her production resume gives you a strong sense of this little known but crucial figure in contemporary cinema: Boys Don’t Cry, Go Fish, HBO’s Mildred Pierce, I’m Not There—indeed, every Haynes film, Party Monster, The Notorious Betty Page, Savage Grace, The Safety of Objects, Happiness, Stonewall, Kids, Swoon, and the list goes on. A lesbian and a feminist, Vachon is dedicated to the production and proliferation of alternative films. And, I include her here so that she doesn’t disappear in history, like

6 Mekas 23.
7 ibid.
Lois Weber and Alice Guy Blache. This is part of the responsibility of feminist and queer history is to attend as well to the history of the present.

Yet, I also recognize that it is the images on the screen, more than the people behind them, which tend to grab hold of our consciousness. So I want to close with some screen images that speak to the power of feminism—that it gave rise to characters that refute heteronormative models of appropriate femininity while also queering my desires. That they are without a doubt our generation’s serial-queens, wielding guns and overthrowing oppressive and repressive regimes should not go unnoticed. They may never utter the word feminism or lesbian or queer, but they present fantasies of other ways of being, of other forms of embodiment that resonate with the revolutionary forces of second-wave feminism and the gay liberation movement, of queer theory and of gender subversion alike.
Above: Trinity and Switch from *The Matrix*; Left: Charly Baltimore from *The Long Kiss Goodnight*. The bottom shot has Charly setting ablaze a poster of a happy white patriarchal family as she kills her nemesis—and biological father of her child.
If men could get pregnant, abortion clinics would be like Starbucks.

There would be two on every block and four in every airport, and the morning after pill would come in different flavors like sea salt and cool ranch.