



# MOVIES THAT MOVE US

AND THE DIRECTORS THAT RISK IT ALL TO MAKE THEM.

BY KATE TREMILLS

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**PICK UP ANY NEWSPAPER; WATCH ANY ENTERTAINMENT SHOW. HEADLINES ABOUT MOVIES FOCUS ON THE BOX OFFICE TAKE AND THE DRAW OF THE STARS INVOLVED. WHILE GLAMOUR IS DAZZLING, FILM IS A GLOBAL MEDIUM THAT CAN REACH MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN A VERY SHORT SPAN OF TIME. ITS POWER HAS MORE POTENTIAL THAN JUST MAKING GOBS OF CASH.**

Directors like Catherine Hardwicke, Bronwen Hughes, Norman Jewison, and Rose Troche understand the impact of film. They create movies that entertain, but also inspire reflection and action. Their films move us to change our lives, understand a different viewpoint, and strive beyond the limits we've accepted in the world.

Rose Troche created big waves in the film scene with her first feature, *Go Fish*. The romantic comedy about lesbians won the Teddy Award at the Berlin International Film Festival, and was followed up by *Bedrooms and Hallways* and *The Safety of Objects*.

Troche wants to create films that challenge societal beliefs, particularly about women. "I found myself identifying with male characters rather than female characters," Troche explains. "This of course was because the male characters got to have all the fun. They were strong, compelling. They were what I wanted to be. So very early on I decided I wanted to make films that had strong female characters."

Despite making *Go Fish* on a shoestring budget, the film had a major impact on audiences. "Either someone would thank me for making a movie that they finally could see themselves in. Or they would come running up to me and say, 'I took my mom to see *Go Fish* and then I

came out to her at dinner.' And I would think to myself if it's a sin; I'm going to Hell in a heartbeat. The other great thing that came out of *Go Fish* was the number of people who didn't particularly like the movie, but thought, 'shit if they made that crappy, cheap-looking thing and got all that attention, then I'm gonna do it too.' So along came a surge of indie, no budget, personal stories."

Her stories are personal, but they always have a purpose. "I don't think we need more films in the world. I do think we need more fodder for thought and change, and I hope my films and television work do that."

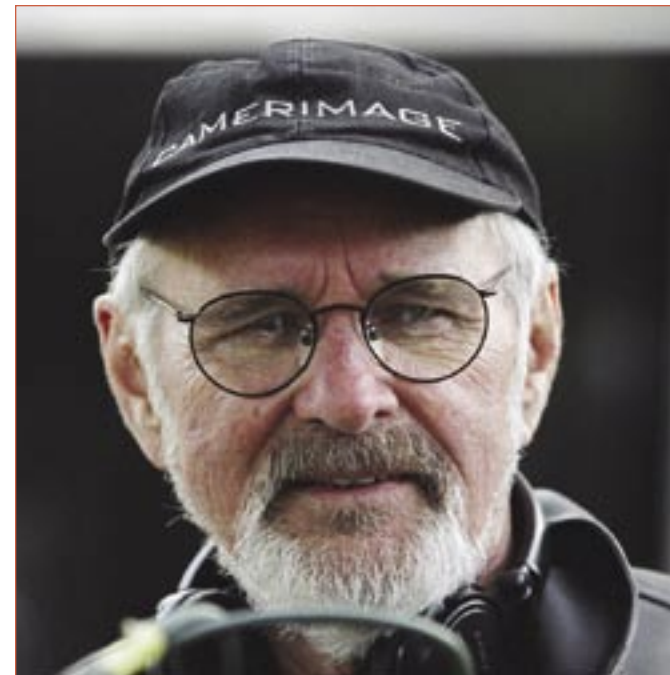
**YOU HOPE THAT THE TIMING IS RIGHT, THAT WHEN THE FILM COMES OUT, PEOPLE WILL STILL BE INTERESTED OR THINKING ABOUT THAT SUBJECT MATTER**

Norman Jewison's films have provided fodder for thought for over three decades. With brilliant work like *In the Heat of the Night*, *A Soldier's Story*, *Agnes of God*, and *The Hurricane*, Jewison has never shied away from making a statement.

"When you make a film that has something to do with social justice or politics or racism or paranoia," says Jewison, "you hope that the timing is right, that when the film comes out, people will still be interested or thinking about that subject matter. That's the chance that you always take when you're telling any story that deals with social ills."

Making films has never been easy, but Jewison remembers a time when the studio's priority was to back the director. "The policy at United Artists for many years, during the '60s and '70s especially, was that they went with the filmmaker. They went with Billy Wilder, they went with John Sturges. They put their confidence and faith in a filmmaker who they felt could tell a good story."

**DEFINITELY IT WAS DANGEROUS AND DEFINITELY IT WAS A PROFESSIONAL RISK. WHATEVER. THEY'RE ALL PROFESSIONAL RISKS**



Norman Jewison at work

"It's harder to make good films today. You're dealing with a corporation. They're doing all kinds of demographics. Unfortunately, the demographics are pointing towards a 14-year-old mentality. It's a kind of dumbing down of feature films. They're all starting to look alike. You're seeing a lot of remakes because they think if they remake something that was successful, it'll be successful again. They are trying to minimize the risks. But it's the people who take the risks that make the most interesting movies."

With studios more focused on corporate policy, Jewison believes "the better films right now are independent films and not necessarily Hollywood studio films."

Bronwen Hughes made the leap from studio to independent films to broaden her horizons. After creating the refreshing, romantic comedy *Forces of Nature*, Hughes wanted a change. She waited years for just the right project.

That project came along with the independent feature *Stander*. Andre Stander was a police chief-turned-bank robber determined to shock the system of apartheid. "The story really focuses on the white South Africans who grew up with a strange burden of not really suffering in an overt way during apartheid but not sitting well with it and not knowing what to do. There are a lot of people in America right now who are very ill-at-ease with what their government is doing and they're not rising up to change it - in big enough numbers."

Hughes' goal is to tell stories that entertain on the surface, but also inspire the audience to question. "What I think cinema does really well, and what I love to do, is to make films that are, on one level, the seduction. You come to see a bank robber because that's what interests you. But by the time the film is finished, a shift has occurred.



Bronwen Hughes on the set of *Stander*



Catherine Hardwicke Photo © Eric Charbonneau/BEImages

You come out with something extra that you never expected. And it didn't go down like a bitter pill. It went down like delicious dessert. It makes you think."

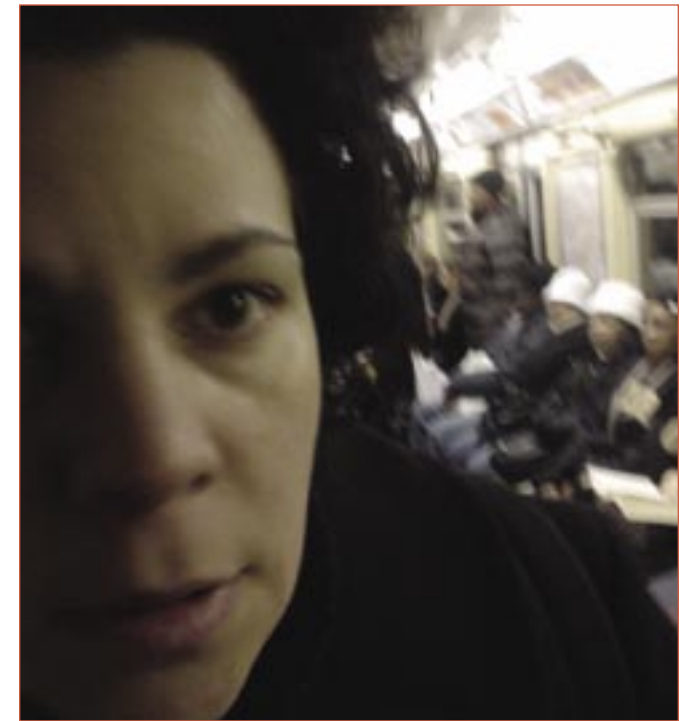
Shooting the film included living for a year in South Africa, a stipulation that caused other directors to turn down the job. "Definitely it was dangerous and definitely it was a professional risk. Whatever. They're all professional risks. Even what seems like a slam-dunk studio movie is a professional risk. So what the hell. May as well do something exciting."

Catherine Hardwicke is no stranger to professional risk. Coming from a successful career as a production designer, she exploded into the director's circle with her first film, *thirteen*. Hardwicke won the Director's Award at Sundance 2003 and is already in post-production on her second film, *Lords of Dogtown*.

She was inspired to make *thirteen* as a response to the problems her longtime friends, Nikki Reed (then 13 years old) and her mother were experiencing. "I wanted to find a way to help them and to start a discussion about a growing problem in our society: marketing teenage sexuality in the media. How that affects real people, not just target audiences."

The film was far from easy to get off the ground. "Every studio refused to make an R-rated film starring unknown teenage actresses going through a crisis. I had to overcome the same things everyone does when they make their first film: a huge amount of skepticism and negativity. Most everyone will say no, you can't do it that fast or for that amount of money or with those actors."

The rewards are obvious when Hardwicke speaks about the feedback



Rose Troupe being herself

she received. "It seems to have struck a nerve with kids and parents all over the world. Sad girls with multiple piercings tell me they've watched the film twenty times - they feel they are not alone. A fifty year old woman called her elderly mother and apologized for her behaviour as a teenager. Japanese journalists tell me horror stories about their problems with their teenagers. Thirteen-year-olds who email me sign off as Future Director. An Iranian girl told me she watched *thirteen* three times before entering rehab. The feedback is overwhelming on many levels."

**SAD GIRLS WITH MULTIPLE PIERCINGS TELL ME THEY'VE WATCHED THE FILM TWENTY TIMES - THEY FEEL THEY ARE NOT ALONE**

Shepherding any film through the financial gauntlet is tough, but championing a film that steps outside the box takes a person with vision extending beyond a unique camera angle. These directors have faced the challenges of budget, time, and studio resistance head-on. Motivated by personal experience and the desire to make a difference, they show us that, with a little compassion and determination, we all have the ability to change the world.