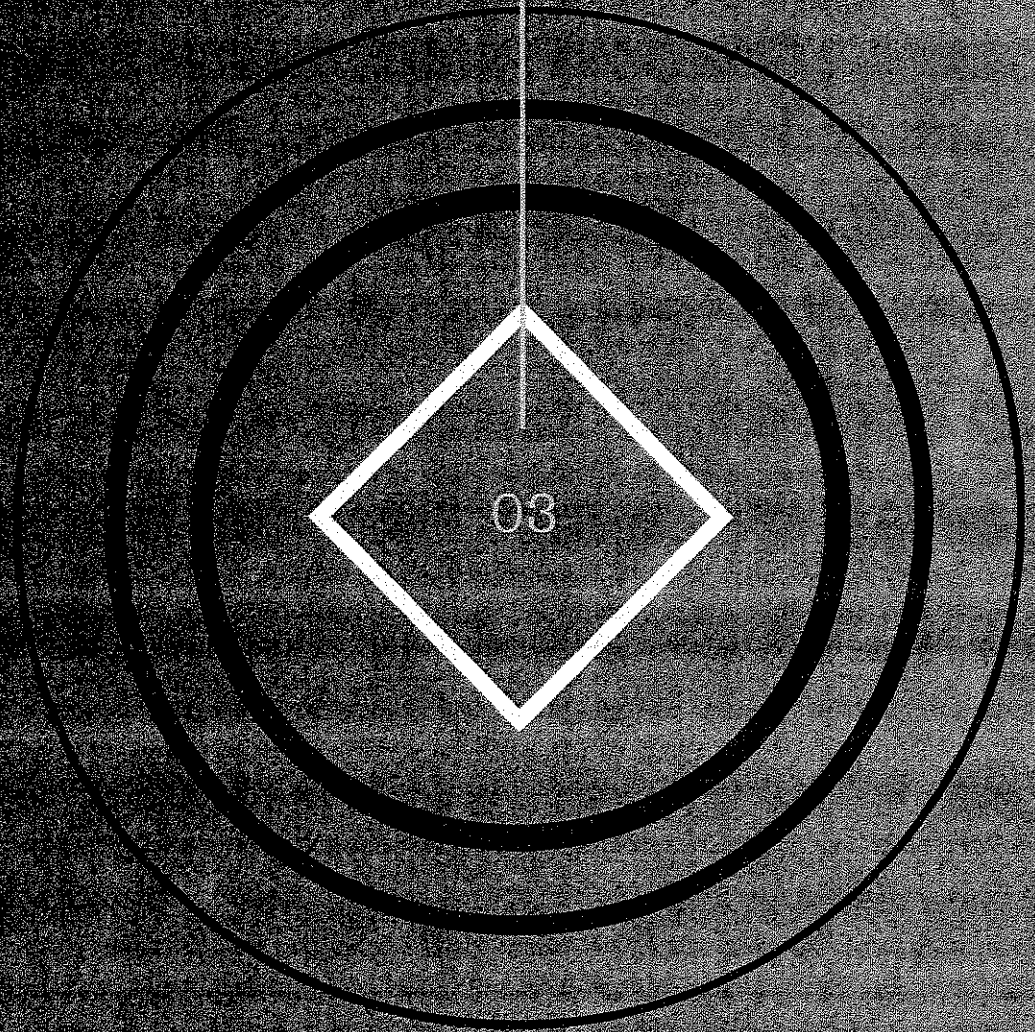


Another Gaze

A feminist film journal



THE WORDS

Caro- lees



BY ALEXANDRA JUHASZ

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1. *In an article in the* *Arts* *after I wrote* *this reflection, I also* *mentioned her last* *year IFC award* *Jubast, Agnès Varda* *with Alexandra* *Jakobs', Brooklyn* *Rail, Apr 2017). I* *have added two of* *her most relevant* *reflections to this piece* *as epigram and coda.*

2. *For my documentary* *Women of Vision: 18* *Histories in Feminist* *Film and Video* *(images opposite,* *1998). Available for* *free at snagfilms.com.*

3. Brooklyn Rail.

4. *Alexandra Jakobs,* *The Ms. Q&A:* *Feminist Artist* *Carolee Schneeman* *Looks Backward* *and Forward, Ms* *Magazine, Jan 2018* *(Online).*

As an artist I refuse to be in despair. If we can share emotions, visions, a way of showing life that can be acceptable, agreeable, we could reconcile them with the world—the image of the world. Agnès Varda, 2017¹

Within the space of a fortnight in March we lost Carolee Schneemann² and Barbara Hammer, two beloved figures in our small and intimate feminist film world. I interviewed³ them both in the 1990s, and then again in 2017, on the occasions of their triumphant⁴ and much-deserved retrospectives in New York.⁴ As they aged, they both reached a larger audience beyond the feminist, lesbian, queer, avant-garde or experimental scenes where they were at once nourished

and to which they contributed so much. In my published conversations with them last year, they frankly discussed how they had long wanted and then took real delight in their growing prominence – and they both reflected on why this only happens for women artists in old age. That is of grave interest. But here, I reflect on their loss as fellow participants in scenes in which all of us who care to engage are known to each other; on two women who wanted to know and be known by colleagues, admirers, students, mentees, and friends. Our mutual and communal recognition is a significant part of the generative vitality found and used within feminist film worlds. After decades of contributions, in their last years these two pioneers did something new and important yet again; they made good use of our communal platform to prepare for and share the burden of death – as well as the pleasures of attention and care – as part of our larger feminist media project.

I have sat with the bad news, revisiting decades' worth of interactions with these powerhouses. And yes, a few of these happened in person. But

more often my encounters with these prominent figures were with their films, writing, and artwork. Because of their generosity and my interest, I had much to grapple with and reflect upon. But, try as I might, I have not felt sad about these losses. Rather, I find that I take real sustenance from the final encounters we shared, two face-to-face conversations from which I will build the homage that follows, as well as my own memories gained from two more recent public encounters. Barbara and Carolee stayed engaged until the last. I saw Barbara's performance at the Whitney in October 2018, 'The Art of Dying, or Palliative Art Making in the Time of Anxiety', and was in the audience to enjoy Carolee's participation in a panel discussion following another 2018 screening curated by Barbara called The Hammer Mix at the IFC Center, "lady-made movies that inspired her prolific career". I still hear the sounds and syncopations of their lively words in my head. I contemplate their active bodies and enduring joy in other people. I remember our intense and scintillating conversations. I feel the warmth and splendour of their unique domestic spaces and ways of living. I look for these women within myself and find little sadness but instead strength, solidarity, solace.

Why? Because, as they lived through the experiences of ageing and illness, these are the responses that Carolee and Barbara requested and inspired. They prepared us for their deaths because, in their lives and their work, they had the courage, wisdom, and curiosity to engage with this last stage of life and its processes and politics⁵, as part of their ongoing and multimodal practices within

our community. Our feminist media worlds were as receptive, scared and supportive as were these artists whom we cherished and were preparing to lose. When they asked, we were ready to encounter and hold them.

I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing both Barbara and Carolee twice – my interviews occurred when they were in their fifties and then as they both approached eighty – for no reason other than that I asked. While each one was a singular, larger-than-life character in her own right – something I could detail here, but will not, as their voices below

will reflect that – they also shared many capacities and interests. One of their inspiring common traits was a hunger to interact, an infectious energy fueled by interest and conversation and curiosity for life, including all the other people who make up a world, as well as its food, sex, art, politics, and for Carolee, cats and nature, and for Barbara, lesbian and queer community. If you humbly requested to

6. *Alexandra Juhasz, MS Magazine*

7. *Alexandra Juhasz, Brooklyn Rail*

engage with them, they would invite you over, with relish, and share of themselves in a way that was sustaining, entertaining, and captivating. I am lucky to have had this now, I know.

The mash-up that follows is created from the interactions that I enjoyed last year with both women (one published in the *MS* blog⁶ the other in *The Brooklyn Rail*), in which their focus was on a stunning, late-in-life process of creating strength, solidarity and solace, through interaction and introspection, and within a passionate community. By sharing it now, I hope others – those within our community and others who are interested in the sustaining possibilities of intimate art worlds – will receive some of their, and our, solace and strength, joy and passion, as I first encountered it.

I

Barbara Hammer: There's something that sticks in my mind, an Instagram post by a talented artist – Emily Roysdon – who writes, "Why are all these old women getting their retrospectives now?" Judith Bernstein, Carolee Schneemann, Carmen Herrera at the Whitney, and myself at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art. Why now? Roysdon supposes that it's because we are post-menopausal and a non-threat to the patriarchal powers that be. That because we're no longer as we were, as young, energetic, sexy...

Alex Juhasz: You're still energetic and sexy, Barbara. You're *not* a threat?!

8. *The Documentary and Book series my + theories with three low-women and 18 others were first published in the no. 7, 2001a*

BH: Why does everything come through for women late in life? I'm 79. A retrospective isn't going to further my career. What if I had been recognised for some of the drawings, writings, paintings, collages, earlier? How might

that have broadened my work?

AJ: In *Women of Vision*, Carolee is pretty bitter.⁸ She mentions that by that time in her life all of her peers – the men of her generation, of her movement – had already had retrospectives, she still hadn't. Retrospectives allow for more attention, more support, and thus more work. And when I interviewed you then, you said "I need to grow into owning what I'm owed: respect, a place in history, a chance to tell my history, support to publish my autobiography, and to go into those journals."

BH: Oh my...

AJ: Yes, look at that.

BH: That has all been accomplished! Every bit of it in 20 years. That is amazing. I feel very gratified. So, I don't mean to say that I'm not happy to have a retrospective that shows more than my moving image work. But I don't know...

AJ: We must hope that your acclaim today produces a new condition whereby future women artists will get this kind of support as soon as they actually earn it.

BH: In their thirties, in their forties, in their fifties.

AJ: There's another approach to Emily's thought puzzle. I think in some ways older women are the *biggest* threat.

BH: Yes, we can say anything we want to.

AJ: And we're at the height of our power. Don't you feel like you're at the height of your power?

BH: Yes, and I don't have to play nicey-nice; I don't have to go by social rules. I can wear anything I want, say anything I want, charm or be disagreeable according to my mood.

We've done bad girl, cunt, clit, maternity. Today, underneath everything, there's this vicious, crazed, hyper-masculine reactionary stance: an underlying monstrosity that brought us to the political position that we are in right now.

II

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said something much more complex about your motives: "I was negotiating a universe that denied me authority as an authenticating voice, and denied me the integrity of my own physicality. This declivity, 'No Pronoun, No Genital', became the tripod upon which my own vision would be balanced." So it seems that the genital has been given to you, but the pronoun perhaps not.

Carolee Schneemann: Yes, but both of them were conflicted. The genital was definitely a marginalised, hyper-feminised aspect of what I could show and bring forward. The problem there had to do with a certain feminist critical determination where all the genital work was considered prurient and playing back into male hands. It was quite a while until it became okay to be a feminist-centralist. I was said to be lacking so many things: the abjections, the masquerade, Marxism. So the work was highly suspect in many feminist domains where I'd felt it would be accepted and of use. That was very painful. I was used to the macho stuff, but I was always astonished at the punishing exclusions of a lot of feminist criticism.

My whole age group is dealing with death. Like half of us are gone. The party is spoiled. All of our events have this sense of terminus and we are very concerned, like little animals, for one another.

AJ: You talked about that 20 years ago. But feminists are embracing you now.

CS: Well, the larger questions that have always been central to my work – about gender, ecology, and militarism – have increased in our world. They are bigger, and more monstrous, and more suppressive, and also more diverted in this culture of consumerism and confusion. While there is now a plethora of women working with the body, and many of them young female artists, that's not enough now. We've been there. We've done bad girl, cunt, clit, maternity. Today, underneath everything, there's this vicious, crazed, hyper-masculine reactionary stance: an underlying monstrosity that brought us to the political position that we are in right now.

III

AJ: I wonder what has changed across this back-and-forth over time. For instance, in the interview I did with you years ago now, you said to me: "There's often danger involved in my films. I like to take risks because I feel that it's part of lesbian filmmaking. Being a lesbian was risk-taking, at least when I came out." Is it still risk-taking for you to be a lesbian and a lesbian filmmaker?

BH: Um, no, it's not.

AJ: Isn't that exciting?

BH: Yeah, it is, to see the change in my lifetime. I'm so happy.

AJ: Congratulations! To us all!

BH: The biggest risk I'm taking right now is with health.

AJ: That's the same courage you had to be an out lesbian representing your experiences before it was allowed or seen, and also the courage you had as a woman artist. But you also have your needs. 20 years ago I asked you what you wished for, and you said, "I hope that before I die, I can start a Barbara Hammer Fund for lesbian filmmakers who use experimental form in their work and do not replicate the 'status quo.'" [Hammer laughs] You laugh because...

BH: Because I did it! I can't believe I said that 20 years ago!

IV

AJ: You say to me that, as a girl growing up, as a young woman and well into your career, you weren't allowed to see and you needed to see. Do you think one of the legacies of your work is the permission to see?

CS: Yes, absolutely. Just go absolutely where they tell you you *should not be*, but protect yourself because you are always prey. Always.

AJ: That's how they're going to continue to attack our psyche, and they can.

CS: And it's being systematised in our government. It's becoming even more suppressive and hostile. The first things that Trump did was to take away the rights to Planned Parenthood, to birth control, and on and on, down to wages and job availability

and of course he's in line for having raped a 13-year-old at a party!

V

AJ: Then, "I would love to have a larger budget. I would love to share the load. I have to do everything myself."

BH: The Wexner Center [for the Arts at Ohio State University] is sending me an editor next week to help me finish my first three-channel film.

AJ: Hoorah! "I wish for health. As you age you see more and more friends with AIDS, breast cancer, chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis. I wish for health because that will give me the energy to continue."

BH: I have been blessed with 12 years of living with cancer.

VI

AJ: Earlier you said that part of your project – to own and manifest your own sexuality – gets turned back on you even by the people who love you the most. In this way, by only acknowledging you through your sexuality, you are minimised.

CS: No, not by the people who love me the most. The people who love me ambivalently.

AJ: This is such an important insight about your feminist work and legacy; and a very painful one. Is it possible to not diminish or simplify that part of the project, the body work, the representation of female sexuality, which is so essential to your work and so essential to the needs of women?

CS: It is as variable as women's experience. There are aspects of sexuality that I've always had to fight for that are not available erotic experiences for lots of women. There's just so much variation that I cannot represent more than the area that I know well.

AJ: Much hasn't changed, but many things have. For instance, today women can see. There's been so much good work by women preceding them. You said, in our previous interview, that you were looking for "historical precedents": the women who had seen before you. And now, young women come into a culture where that's visible to them because of you. You wanted the appreciation when

I spoke to you 20 years ago.

CS: What did I say?

AJ: I said, "I would like to talk to you about the legacy of your work: I want to know what we owe you".

CS: Oh! I love that part!

AJ: You respond: "You owe me the vulva. You owe me bestiality. You owe me the love of the presence of the cat as a powerful companionate energy. You owe me heterosexual pleasure and the depiction of that pleasure. And you owe me 30 years of lost work that's never been seen. That's what you all owe me. I guess what I'm also owed is a living, an income. I am owed the chance to produce the work that I have envisioned, that I have never been able to do. I am owed the chance to preserve the work that already exists. I am glad that you asked. No one has ever asked me. And you can see, I'm fuming underneath." Carolee, now all that has happened. But it seems the outcome is not exactly what you had anticipated or wanted.

CS: I'm thrilled. I'm grateful. I've had wonderful assistance and amazing teams at the museums: the confidence, the devotion of the institution. It is just amazing. But part of me isn't there. Part of me is like, "What happened? I can do *anything* and they like it now? *This matters?*" I'm very divided.

VII

AJ: 20 years ago I asked you what is your place in feminist film history, and you were around 55 (the exact age I am now), and you said, "I hope that work will be seen as a progression of sophistication and development as it traces one lesbian's life in the second half of the twentieth century. This is a space now filled, where before there was a lack, a void. Now I have sisters and brothers around me in queer cinema. I want to keep working with my eyes open, learning from others, going to see new work, trying to do the best I can to develop my visual language further." What have you done since then to further your visual language?

BH: My retrospective brings in all the different branches of my work, from performance to photography to installations to journal-keeping to writing, and of course to 16mm film, Super 8 film, digital film, and videotape. That's the language:

a diverse one that can move in any direction according to the idea or emotional motivation. I think many youth currently in art school are brought up with that language. They don't define themselves as filmmakers as we were taught to do. So maybe we've arrived at the time when a young artist in art school begins from a place where everything is available.

AJ: Because of your work and courage young artists can now find and build their voices with permission to cross into lots of places. The complexity of their gendered, sexual, raced, class, health position is part of what they get to play with, and you really did give us a vocabulary and permission to do that, as well as to move across media.

BH: Thank you, Alex, for your appreciation and for seeing me after twenty years.

VIII

AJ: You said that your life as a woman and an artist has always been about not having what you needed and having to make do. You said, "I'm trying to get a computer. I still work with a typewriter. My friends are saying you have to get a fax, you have to do this, you have to get a this and a that. But, I do it with the bare bones because the culture does not support my work. I don't have a gallery now, so it's a case of the missing \$400." The \$400 was what you would have needed to have bought a camera. Do you still feel that missing support? We are circling around how suddenly having support has altered your experience of yourself as an artist.

CS: Yes! Having support is completely an utter bewilderment and amazement! Also having the experience of being ill so I can't just take the bus to New York City and move around freely, because I'm too fragile for that. So Lilah has to remind me, or I remind myself, that we have to hire a car to go to the city, but that's really expensive. Lilah thinks I should get rid of this old broken couch. I don't want to be one of those weird eccentric old people who have everything broken down all around them and their clothes don't smell fresh. I have to think about the old-age aspect of everything. Propping myself up and getting my disguise organised so that I can go to my public. So that they think that

I am forever vibrant and present.

AJ: Do you think you need to do that for your public?

CS: Absolutely.

AJ: Why does the public want that? That's another abusive relationship to old women, another form of...

CS: No, no, no, that's okay! It's fair enough. My whole age group is dealing with death. Like half of us are gone. The party is spoiled. All of our events have this sense of terminus and we are very concerned, like little animals, for one another. Seeing another lose the physicality that we thought was theirs forever.

AJ: I talked about this with Barbara Hammer⁹ in another recent interview about her retrospective also recently up in New York - 'Evidentiary Bodies' at the Leslie-Lohman Museum. Your work, her work, other work of woman of your generation has permitted a visuality and visibility of female sexuality. Seeing women's sexuality is now permitted. But other bodily experiences of women of your generation, including illness, aging, not yet so visible or so permissible. Everyone ages and everyone gets ill.

CS: Barbara was able to work with it.

AJ: Yes, Barbara has produced several bodies of work around her cancer, for example, *A Horse is Not a Metaphor* [2009].

CS: I have a big cancer work, the video installation *Plague Column* (1996). It works with a whole realm of imagery from medieval church depictions. They are very fierce; the women depicted are witches and their breasts are being stabbed with swords by righteous Christians. That work has not been carefully examined and looked at.

AJ: What you model is the uncontained power of being a woman who is constantly being diminished by male violence and who nevertheless stays the course. Yes, everything in patriarchal culture is trying to suppress the power of our female bodies and intelligence all the way through our lives. Your work shows it over and over and over again, and yet you continue.

CS: Well, I am allowed to lie down. I have to take a lot of naps.

AJ: That's why I said, "Perhaps it's okay for you not to have to put on the costume".

CS: My costume is to wake up to see how much pain I'm in, and what I can do about it. My costume is to take the bowl beside the bed that I have to pee in several times in the night and empty it so that I don't share it with anybody who's coming in or out. To get in the shower, that's wonderful and amazing, to get washed. Not to examine my deformed body so much. To get dressed. Only then am I in my costume. I don't feel that I'm at an obvious disadvantage getting older in my costume.

AJ: I understand.

CS: That's why I'm so happy with the exhibit at PS1 because it's full of a variety of work that includes but goes way beyond just depictions of physicality, which was essential to do in those early years when we had no real body to see whatsoever. It was only Barbie and pornography.

AJ: We don't want to miss that aspect of your work – your courage and pleasure and power in depicting your own body and sexuality – even as we don't want it to be the only way to understand your work. But, your work always did, and always will, return to your female body and your experience as a thinking, passionate, political person who sees through that body.

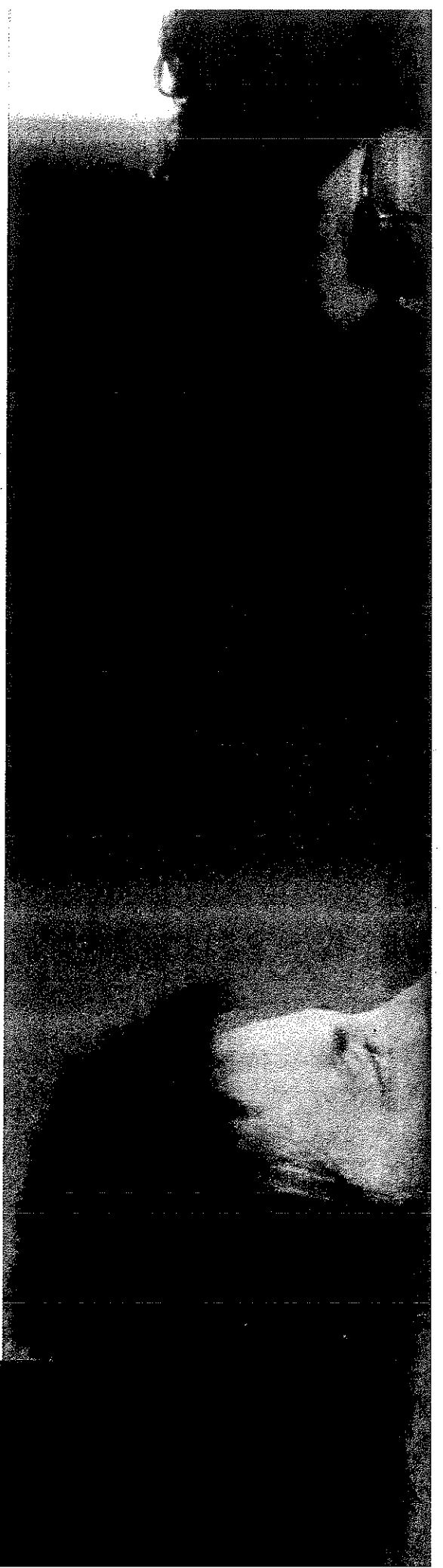
CS: I've already worked so much with the body, now I need to continue with the very remarkable things I can do with kinetics which I started in the '60s. It's funny, this request to go back to the body. It's kind of like, 'I did that, I've been there'. I no longer need to depict the daily physicality, but I still need to make something that I've never seen before.

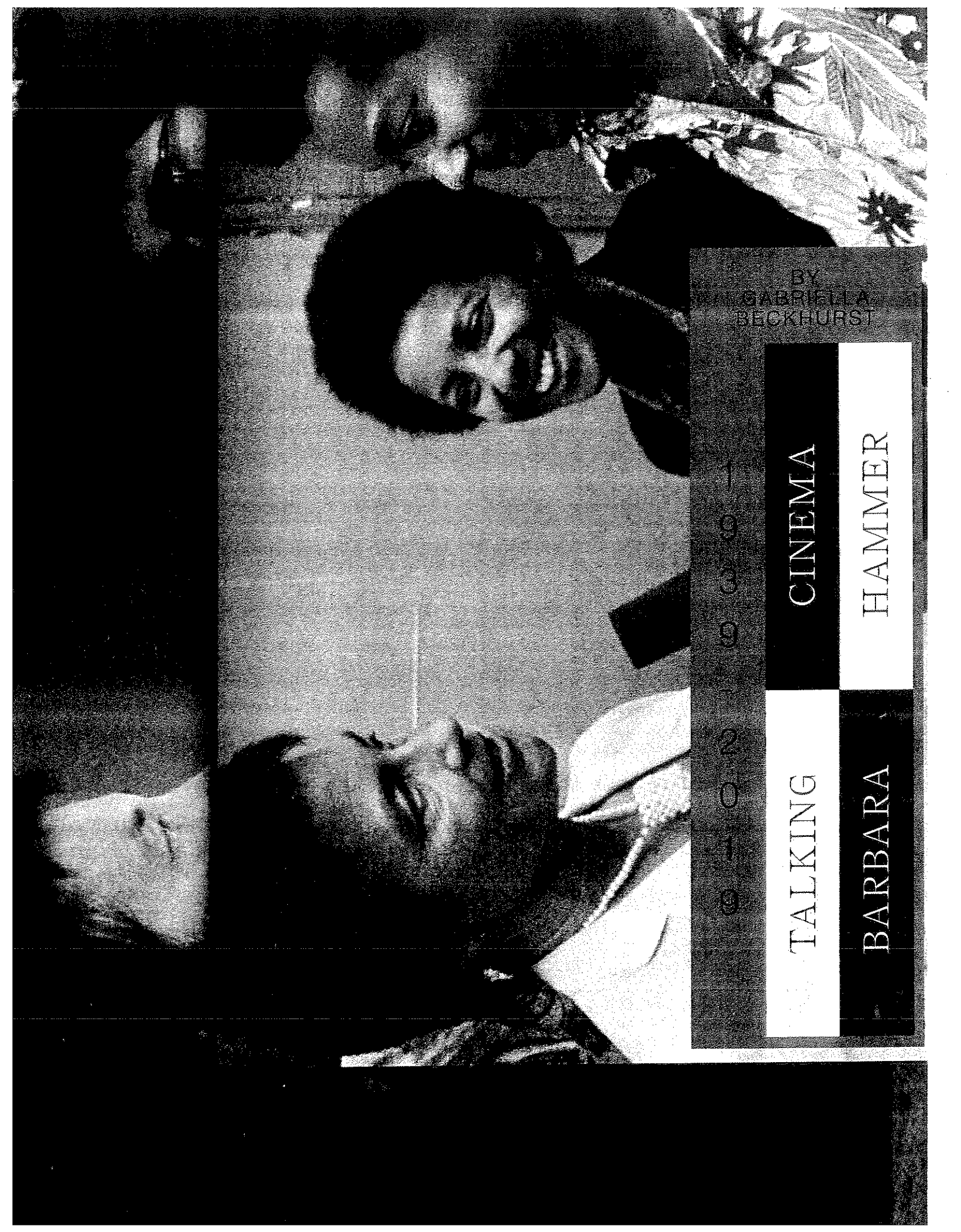
Coda:

I love to age. I now have bad legs, bad eyes, so my body is leaving me, abandoning me, but I can work and I love to work. I like that I have been through a lot of age, a lot of pain, a lot of joy, a lot of encounters; and I'm still here—a witness of my time.

—Agnès Varda

Varda's films, art, conversations, writing, friends, and community will carry that work of witness of her time for us now. Thank you, Agnès and Barbara and Carolee.





BY
GABRIELLA
BECKHURST

C O N T E N T S

CINEMA

HAMMER

TALKING

BARBARA

"I've never shown ten of my films in chronological order before. I'm going to be sitting there with you and seeing where I was and maybe getting an idea of where I'm going."¹

1. Barbara Hammer
addressing the audience at a screening in Audience, 1981.

Late last year Barbara Hammer embarked on a tour of four locations across the United States to present 'The Art of Dying' or (Palliative Art Making in the Age of Anxiety)', a performance lecture that brought together films from her formidable back catalogue with insights into five decades of artmaking. Hammer set well-known works such as *Dyketactics* (1974), *Sync Touch* (1981) and *Sanctus* (1990) alongside two films that revolve around the body's negotiation of living with late-stage cancer: *A Horse Is Not A Metaphor* (2009) and *Evidentiary Bodies* (2018). "I'm not fighting cancer; I'm *living* with cancer" says Hammer early on – a statement which serves to clarify the language around dying. 'Palliative' derives from the Latin *palliare* ('to cloak') – a telling description of the peripheral space end-of-life care occupies in Euro-American cultures. Hammer navigates metaphor and representation in 'The Art of Dying' with characteristic generosity and wit, underscoring the links between this project and the thinking that drove her earlier works. By encouraging us to think about death and dying, Hammer opens 'palliative art making' out to a broader, and perhaps a more public, circulation of the term. Hammer described the lecture as a riff on Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, a record of written correspondence between Rilke and an aspiring writer seeking guidance and critique. It's easy to find the comparison with Hammer herself in the act of imparting wisdom to a younger generation, but the significance doesn't end there. Rilke advises the poet to "write about what your everyday life offers you; [...] A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity."² Herein lies the crux of 'The Art of Dying'. In addressing the need to offset the exposure of art making and social advocacy with care, Hammer shows us that the personal was always at stake. During the lecture at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Hammer's tone became momentarily conspiratorial. "Guess what," she said, "the art of the dying is the same as the art of the living."

2. Rainer Maria Rilke, Stephen Mitchell (trans.), *Letters to a Young Poet*, Scribner Press, 2001, p. 6.

3. Barbara Hammer, 'The Politics of Abstraction', in Martha Gever, John Greyson and Pratibha Parmar (eds.), *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, Routledge, 1993, p. 75.

Hammer made her first film in 1968 and didn't stop for another 50 years. Her work parallels the enormous cultural and theoretical shifts that took place from the tail end of modernism to the present day. Hammer's art draws on the liberation movements of the 1970s, early 20th-century gay and lesbian histories, poststructuralist, Marxist and psychoanalytical theories, and her own auto-ethnography: as such, it is a body of work that defies unity. As Hammer noted, "there is not a feminism, but feminisms, not a lesbian cinema but lesbian cinemas, and there is not abstraction but multiple manifestations of abstraction."³

4. The term 'herstory' gained traction in the second-wave feminisms of the 1970s and 80s, particularly in an American context. The reframing of history (his story) to herstory (her story) displaced a historically masculinist perspective within the making of history and centre the stories of women and feminists.

This stress on plurality is crucial for revealing the wider stakes of her projects. Her films unpack celluloid worlds populated by lesbian, queer and gender diverse subjects, erotic, comfortable and changing bodies. They press visual paradigms that have expunged or else appropriated such representations. In films from the 1980s onwards, queer world-making, organising and 'herstory' come into contact with ecological politics and human rights issues.⁴ Attempts to categorise Hammer's work often leave out these migrations, and yet they are a powerful record of her unerring commitment to intersectional thinking. As an artist Hammer was incredibly prolific – her movement across film and video, performance, sculpture, drawing and collage makes this clear. Her filmography consists of more than 80 works in Super-8, 16mm and video, but enumerations of it have been known to shapeshift: for example, the early experimental *Aldebaran Seas* (or *Seas* depending on

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where you look) is available to watch online but is curiously absent from the filmography listed in her rollicking memoir *HAMMER! Making Movies Out of Sex and Life*. This isn't an anomaly; Hammer's films continue to bubble to the surface. A set of previously unfinished films will screen at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio in September, following Hammer's invitation to the filmmakers Lynne Sachs, Deborah Stratman, Mark Street and Dan Veltri to work on the films under her supervision. This isn't collaboration in a straightforward sense: the conversations begun in her work will unfold in parallel visions. Such an endeavour emphasises the folly of trying to appraise her work through a comprehensive study, while also pointing to the ways in which archives like Hammer's are wilfully shaped beyond a lifetime.

Hammer used the title *Evidentiary Bodies* for both a film and an exhibition at New York's Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art over 2017-18, which was remarkably the first retrospective of a living lesbian artist to be held at the gallery. In these contexts, to be *evident* is to affirm rather than be *easily seen* or *clearly understood*. Hammer used the term to locate visibility beyond the social and medical paradigms that mediate illness and age. In the wider narration of Hammer's archive, *evidence* designates a site of self-fashioning and auto-visibility as opposed to epistemological truth. Hammer's films self-consciously register the privileged topos of the archive as a space of validation and negation – one which is so often, as Catherine Lord put it, "a symptom of privilege – generally white, generally Western, ponderously male, tediously heterosexual."⁵ While programme notes for screenings and film festivals chart a cultural cartography of recognition (although this often arrived later than for her male peers), it is the alternative modes of narratology and textuality in Hammer's archive – letters, snapshots, annotations and scraps of paper – that provide the most vital traces of her world. Such artefacts teach us a valuable lesson about the ways that *evidence* revolves around accretive *ephemera*. Diligent requests to return letters and photocopies attest to Hammer's commitment to amassing such a collection. "The archive has always been a *pledge*" Derrida remarked in *Archive Fever*, "a token of the future."⁶ Guiding this 'pledge' is Hammer's enduring interest in the archive as an active site: "I want future generations to have access to these materials, to use them as a resource."⁷ Conversations in print, and crucially, in and around film, are imperative to this effort.⁸

My idea is that if an audience can take responsibility for seeing the picture... they are encouraged in some way to take responsibility for political decisions in their lives.⁹

In *Would You Like to Meet Your Neighbor? A New York Subway Tape* (1985), Hammer sets herself the task of enlivening a notoriously speech-resistant audience by asking passengers what they read on the subway. Donning a map-covered boiler suit and mask, Hammer approaches the subway with superhero bravado. This is a far cry from the taciturn intensity of Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977). More often than not those that appear in the film are overcome by Hammer's openness and guards momentarily drop down. "I'm reading a book about Chihuahuas", one woman offers. Others make anxious parallels: "Did you ever want to meet people on the subway?", Hammer asks an older woman. "Many years ago" she replies, "but not any longer... times have changed. We can't trust people." *Would You Like to Meet...* demonstrates Hammer's interest in exploring what an active cinema might accomplish, but 'reactive' might best describe how she approached talking in her filmmaking elsewhere.

In an earlier and better-known work from 1981 Hammer developed her proposal for a

5. Catherine Lord, 'Their Memory is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes Toward a Calligraphy of Rage', in Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (eds.), *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 440-457, p. 442.

6. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, in *Diacritics*, vol. 25, no. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63, p. 18.

7. Barbara Hammer, *HAMMER! Making Movies Out of Sex and Life*, New York: Feminist Press, 2010, p. 261.

8. Not forgetting how Hammer found herself having to talk around imposed censorship by programmers and projectionists over the years, both to prevent them from destroying her film in-situ and encourage them to turn the projector back on following complaints. See: Auto Italia interview with Barbara Hammer and Stuart Comer, 2012 [Part 1] (autoitaliasoutheast.org).

9. From a letter written by Barbara Hammer, dated 1984.

talking cinema. *Audience* is a film comprised of encounters with majority women audiences in Toronto, London, Montreal and San Francisco. Hammer uses the film to query the ways her audiences interact with the screen, accosting them in lobbies, backrooms or sometimes the queue outside the cinema to ask for their thoughts on her work. There is much rhapsody, of course, but also frank criticism and direction. One group discusses the issue of single-sex screenings, but finds no consensus. Others offer formal advice: "I would have liked to have seen something more languishing with the bodies". Such proximity to the filmmaker combined with the opportunity for redress is not often granted. Even more striking is Hammer's impish joy – she clearly relishes the contact this performative mode of address permits.

Where Q&As have become a requisite form in the delivery of screenings, *Audience* points to a radical imperative for self-exposure. The result is a document of lesbian and feminist transatlantic cultural consciousness at a time of limited on-screen identifications. A few years after the film was shot Section 28 would enshrine discrimination against LGBTQ people into UK law. But it's hard not to take delight in *Audience* – in London, audience members find Hammer's golden West Coast a tonic to the British triad of chips, bad weather and economic depression. In Montreal, a woman clearly already acquainted with Hammer waxes lyrical about the city. "Girls, believe me" she says, "it's wonderful here." *Audience* provides a crucial record of queer visibility during this period, as well as of cultural geographies and film cultures beyond the mainstream. Hammer's paper archive also points to her investment in the

10. With the proceeds of the sale of her papers to Yale University, Hammer initiated the Barbara Hammer Lesbian Experimental Filmmaking Grant, an annual grant designed to support moving image work by lesbian artists. Hammer has allocated financial aid to another annual award supporting queer filmmakers at San Francisco State University.

11. Hammer, HAMMER!, p. 66.

12. Hammer, 'The Ephemeral Archive', in HAMMER!, p. 263.

social life of film. She lists first encounters with feminist figures such as Faith Wilding and Babette Mangolte in a filmography for Arlene Raven, while preview questionnaires make for subjective, sometimes fiery reads. One commentary on *Menses* (1974) – a satirical take on the cotton-candy depiction of periods – reads: "A personal statement about the female condition as oppressed by Tampax. It works for me." Others are detractors, childish, yet their inclusion suggests Hammer's interest in the broadest sense of an audience and not just those that are gracious or familiar.

Other ephemera in her archive – acquired by Yale in 2017¹⁰ – compress decades-long conversations into communiqués: in particular, a letter from Stan Brakhage thanking Hammer for her portrait of Jane Brakhage from 1975. While studying, Hammer was sent to collect the pair from the airport and deliver them to a talk Stan was giving in San Francisco. Seeing "so much more than Stan's portrayal of her in *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959),"¹¹ Hammer was galvanised to film Jane for her graduate project. Brakhage's letter is dated 1985 – a decade later. The letter serves as a reminder as to how impressionistic archives can be. In Hammer's archive, few conversations are sustained in dialogue; we are unable to locate her letter from Brakhage within a chain of correspondence and are left to speculate on the letter's mysterious insignia. Although Hammer was a thorough archivist, she knew that archives couldn't reveal everything. In 2001, when the collection was still in her care, she wrote "suppositions can be made but not declared."¹² She was thinking about where her archive would go next.

It is tempting to read the wily nature of Hammer's personal archive apropos José Esteban Muñoz's statement on the contingency of queer archives: "Ephemera, as I am using it here... is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things." Muñoz draws on Raymond Williams's oft-cited 'structures of feelings' in his articulation of how ephemera hold onto feelings and urgencies long after their lived experience. Hammer was interested in how film activates an audience through 'textural' layering and

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juxtaposing frames, and saw this as a way to push against the directives of narrative cinema. She similarly resisted Derrida's ideas about the impossibility of archiving, turning to Maya Deren's notion of verticality for a philosophy of cinema that served to accommodate its affective traces. As a form of visual stacking, verticality enabled Hammer to foreground emotional complexity: 'specks' which open out through non-sequitur arrangements; 'residues' of histories that retain their partial status; and dancing images that 'glimmer' when

projected. Aside from a personal commitment to building a history through artefacts, Hammer amplified the role of the archive as a political toolkit in her work. Her first documentary film *Nitrate Kisses* (and the first of her 'history' trilogy, 1992-2000) sequences marginalised representations that include older lesbians, couples from multiracial backgrounds and SM play, layering them with scenes from *Lot in Sodom* (1933), one of the earliest queer films in the US. *Nitrate Kisses* is one of Hammer's most discursive films and text plays a significant role; she includes citations from French philosophers as well as extracts of the Hays Code which saw exclusionist censorship laws extended over American film between 1930 and 1966. In *Nitrate Kisses*, bodies moving together underneath the scrolling text neither eliminate nor confront it directly but work to nullify the violence of its language. On working with remnants of minoritarian history, Hammer remarked that "one needs the present to understand the past".¹³ In this case, appropriate reading undercuts writing as doctrine.

In 'The Art of Dying', Hammer makes a political address. She advocates for right-to-die legislation for terminally ill patients; "everyone has the right to die when she wishes" she says, "we don't have the right to choose our birth, but we should be able to determine the time of our death should we wish to." She describes how artmaking can come from a place of rage, but also allow release. Drawing a parallel with David Wojnarowicz's indictment of government inaction and hostile media in the early years of the HIV/AIDS crisis. Just as members of ACT UP New York protested at the Whitney for their institutional failure to connect Wojnarowicz's work to current HIV/AIDS realities and urgencies, Hammer draws attention to the necessity of resisting canonisation where life meets politics.

For her performance at the Whitney, Hammer flipped the usual Q&A format into an 'A&Q', picking on friends in the audience to probe the immediacy of the experience and how they in turn consider death. She reserves her last question for Florrie Burke, her partner of 30 years. "What would you say is the most difficult thing about me? And the most wonderful?" Having initially waved her away, Florrie responds with little delay: "You're a Taurus and you're really stubborn and bull-headed." And the wonderful? "This was extraordinary. And yes, it was very hard. I so admire you and your strength and your willingness to be open to all these wonderful people, and to share what's very, very personal. Because it needs to be shared." As with *Audience*, Hammer takes rhetorical formats beyond obligation. Barbara Hammer's cinema is a talking cinema in its most disarming sense: talking about cinema, talking with cinema, learning how to talk.

13. Hammer, 'When a Kiss is Not a Kiss but Nitrate', in HAMMER!, p. 204.