JENNIFER PETERSON

Barbara Hammer's *Jane Brakhage*

Feminism, Nature, and 1970s Experimental Film

ABSTRACT This essay analyzes Barbara Hammer's 1974 experimental nonfiction film *Jane Brakhage*. Both an homage and a rebuttal to the many films of Jane Brakhage made by her husband, Stan Brakhage, Hammer's film gives Jane the voice she never had in Stan's work. The article contextualizes *Jane Brakhage*'s production at a moment when competing strands of feminist thought took different approaches to the fraught topic of nature. Hammer's films were criticized as essentialist by feminists in the 1980s, but this essay argues that *Jane Brakhage* complicates that reading of Hammer's work. The film documents Jane's creative life in the mountains, but critiques the limitations of her role as a heterosexual wife and mother. By locating this short film within a larger genealogy of feminist and environmental thought, we can better appreciate the extent to which Hammer's films explore the feminist and queer potential of nature. KEYWORDS Barbara Hammer, essentialism, experimental film, Jane Brakhage, nature, Stan Brakhage

In October 1973, filmmaker Barbara Hammer typed a letter to filmmaker's wife Jane Brakhage, asking if she could visit her at home in the mountains of Colorado "to make a film of you, a woman looking at a woman" (fig. 1). At the time, Hammer was still a student in the MA program at San Francisco State University, and she planned to submit this film as her master's thesis. Jane responded with a handwritten letter saying "I guess," but also, "My feeling is that what I am—or anybody is—is like the electron. When you try to shine a light on it, the light beam knocks it away" (fig. 2). Hammer responded, "Electron or not, I want to try."[1] The short film that she completed one year later, *Jane Brakhage* (1974), took the form of a ten-minute experimental documentary. Shot on black-and-white 16mm, it presents a glimpse of Jane in her home and immediate surroundings in the Rocky Mountains: conversing with animals, explaining her ideas about domestic labor as a creative form, and describing her homegrown posthumanist philosophy of the world.

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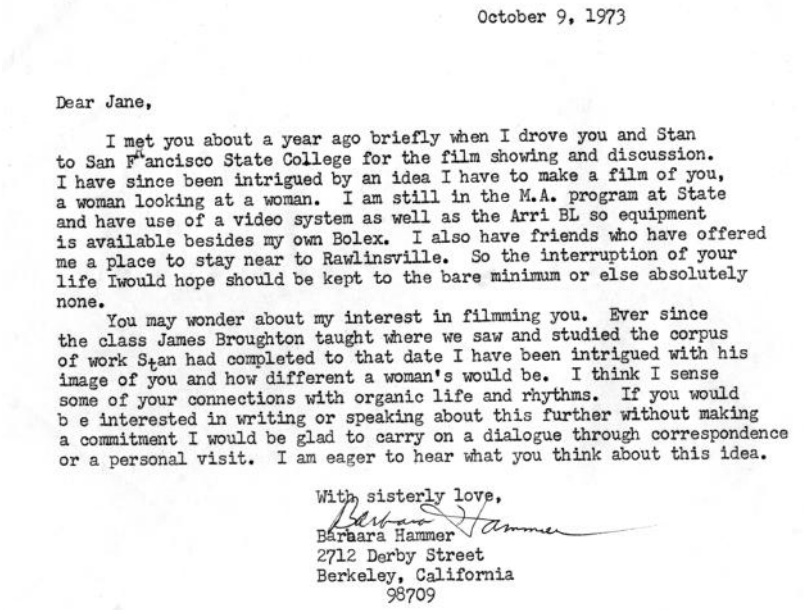


October 9, 1973

Dear Jane,

I met you about a year ago briefly when I drove you and Stan to San Francisco State College for the film showing and discussion. I have since been intrigued by an idea I have to make a film of you, a woman looking at a woman. I am still in the M.A. program at State and have use of a video system as well as the Arri BL so equipment is available besides my own Bolex. I also have friends who have offered me a place to stay near to Rawlinsville. So the interruption of your life Iwould hope should be kept to the bare minimum or else absolutely none.

You may wonder about my interest in filmming you. Ever since the class James Broughton taught where we saw and studied the corpus of work Stan had completed to that date I have been intrigued with his image of you and how different a woman's would be. I think I sense some of your connections with organic life and rhythms. If you would b e interested in writing or speaking about this further without making a commitment I would be glad to carry on a dialogue through correspondence or a personal visit. I am eager to hear what you think about this idea.

With sisterly love,

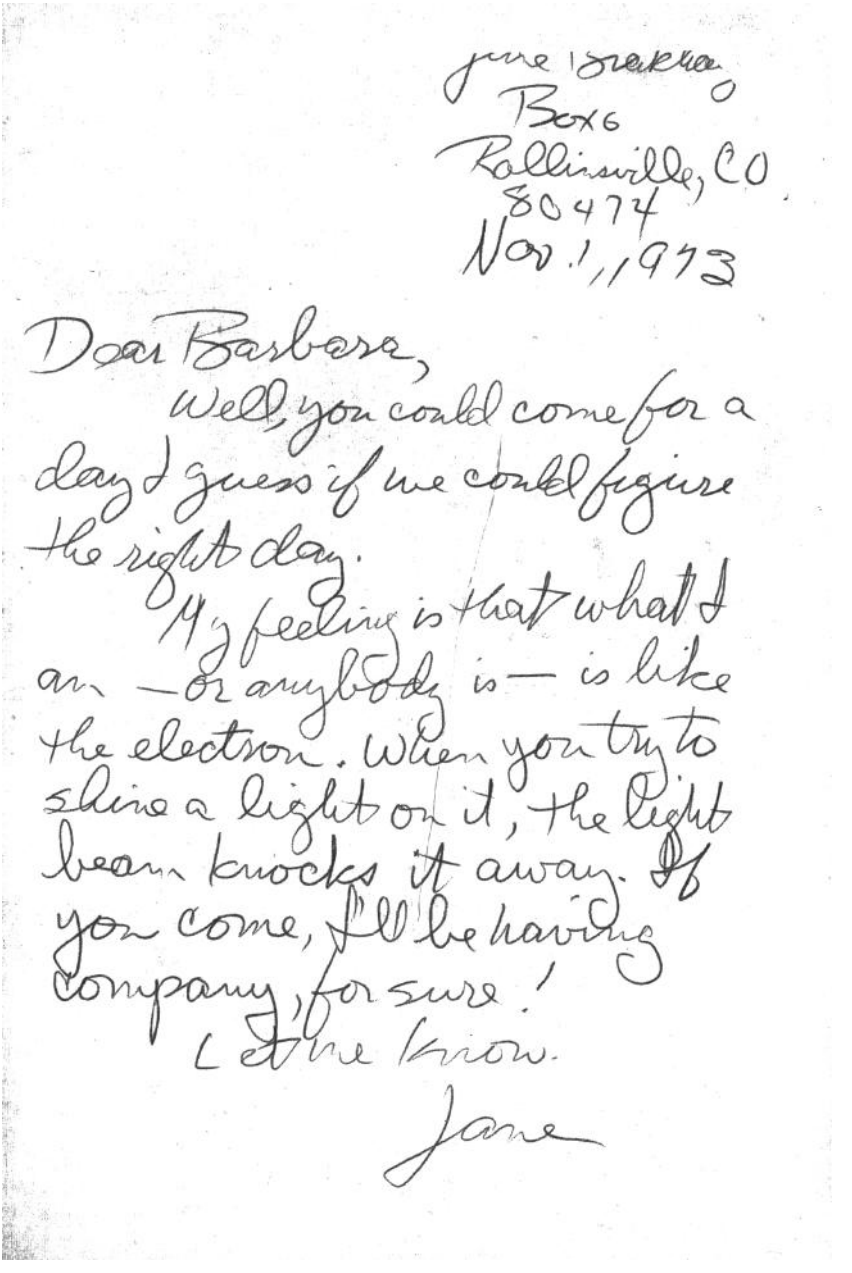
Barbara Hammer

Barbara Hammer
2712 Derby Street
Berkeley, California
98709

FIGURE 1. Barbara Hammer to Jane Brakhage, October 9, 1973. James Stanley Brakhage Collection, Norlin Library Archives, University of Colorado Boulder.

Hammer's *Jane Brakhage* is both an homage and a rebuttal to the many films of Jane made by her husband, Stan Brakhage, which relentlessly visualize her as a symbol of transcendent femininity, confined to the gendered roles of heterosexual lover, wife, mother, and birthing body. Hammer's film of Jane, one of many cinematic studies of women she would make over the next forty-five years, pursues a different set of ideas about femininity and a different kind of cinematic portraiture. It combines a feminist portrayal of Jane's domestic labor with an interest in Jane's deep connection to animals, plants, and nature. The film resonates with a tension between conflicting impulses, including a critique of Jane's role as a disempowered housewife and a veneration of her persona as a singular kind of earth mother. The finished film is an ardent and delightful portrait of Jane and Hammer together for a brief moment, and bears visual testimony to Hammer's own working through of 1970s feminist aesthetics and politics.

This essay offers an analysis of Barbara Hammer's *Jane Brakhage*, a film that gives Jane the voice she never had in Stan's films. I frame this moment in


Jane Brakhage
Box 6
Rollinsville, CO
80474
Nov. 1, 1973

Dear Barbara,

Well, you could come for a day I guess if we could figure the right day.

My feeling is that what I am — or anybody is — is like the electron. When you try to shine a light on it, the light beam knocks it away. So you come, I'll be having company, for sure!

Let me know.

Jane

FIGURE 2. Jane Brakhage to Barbara Hammer, November 1, 1973. James Stanley Brakhage Collection, Norlin Library Archives, University of Colorado Boulder.

Hammer's early career in the context of her admiration for Stan Brakhage's work, comparing and contrasting Brakhage's and Hammer's approaches to and places within experimental film in the 1970s. Drawing from part of an extensive research project I have been conducting on Stan and Jane Brakhage, what follows tells the story of *Jane Brakhage* the film, and also begins to tell a story about the person who once went by that name. Finally, I explore *Jane Brakhage*'s production at a moment when competing strands of feminist thought took different approaches to the fraught topic of nature. While goddess mythology had experienced a moment of popularity in the early 1970s alongside experiments in communal living and lesbian separatist communities, by the mid-1970s an influential form of social constructionist theory was beginning to emerge in which the category of "woman" was rejected outright. As Linda Martín Alcoff put it in a 1988 article framing the debate between cultural feminism (feminism as rooted in an unchanging, biological notion of femaleness) and poststructuralism, "Replacing woman-as-housewife with woman-as-supermom (or earth mother or super professional) is no advance."[2] In the 1980s Hammer's films came to be associated with cultural feminism, and were frequently criticized as essentialist. However, I argue that *Jane Brakhage* is alive to a range of potentialities for feminism and complicates a reading of Hammer's work as essentialist. Here I echo a line of argument recently made by Greg Youmans that calls for a reevaluation of Hammer's work from the 1970s as not naively essentialist but productively utopian and filled with a knowing, ironic humor.[3]

As we shall see, *Jane Brakhage* explores and documents the possibilities of living a creative life in the wilderness, but critiques the limitations of life as a heterosexual wife and mother. While it captures certain contradictory ideas about nature and women that were characteristic of early 1970s feminist thinking, the film also reaches for a utopian understanding of the ways in which feminism and environmentalism might work together. As theorists today rethink the category of nature while we witness accelerating forms of ecological collapse in the Anthropocene, new strands of feminist thinking are revealing the limitations of what Stacy Alaimo calls feminism's "flight from nature."[4] In this context, *Jane Brakhage*'s brief musing on the materiality of nature seems visionary, and the film remains remarkably resonant today thanks to Jane's compelling narration about animals, humans, and the planet. By locating this short film in its moment in experimental film history and within a larger genealogy of feminist and environmental thought, we can better appreciate how Hammer's work meditates on the possibilities of a feminist environmental

ethic. In this film, that ethic is voiced by Jane and intensified by Hammer's filmmaking, which visualizes a world in which nature is neither dominated nor dissolved, but holds vital power. In the world of *Jane Brakhage,* the human is intertwined equally with the more-than-human.

BARBARA AND JANE AND STAN AND THE CAMERA

Although she is best known as the first wife of renowned experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage, Jane Wodening (she changed her last name in the late 1980s) is a fascinating figure in her own right. Today, at age eighty-three, she is a published author of numerous books and nature stories.[5] Much earlier in her life, from the time they met in 1957 until their divorce in 1987, Jane appeared in many of Stan's films, including *Cat's Cradle* (1959), *Wedlock House: An Intercourse* (1959), *Dog Star Man* (1961–64), numerous films in the *Songs* cycle (1964–69), *Scenes from under Childhood* (1967–70), *The Machine of Eden* (1970), and *Star Garden* (1974). Stan filmed Jane giving birth to all five of their children; the first of these birth films, *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), is one of the best-known works in the canon of US avant-garde film.[6] For Stan, Jane served as inspiration, antagonist, and support system. She was an essential part of his construction of a transcendent mode of vision refracted through everyday life in their family home in the Rocky Mountains. Beyond appearing in his films, Jane was an important collaborator in Stan's work in many other ways.

As Hammer was well aware, the "Brakhage" persona in the early 1970s was made possible by Jane and the children. Jane helped Stan not just by appearing in his films but by operating the camera for certain portions of some of them.[7] Archival records show that she acted as a de facto publicist, distributor, and manager for Stan over the course of their marriage.[8] She also became friends with many of the numerous filmmakers, poets, and artists who passed through the Brakhage home. Most of all, Jane provided Stan with the stable base—a partnership and a family—that he seemed to need in order to make his art. In fact, it was Jane who brought them to live in Lump Gulch, Colorado, in the first place. In a 1994 interview Stan described their prior life together as "an unusually difficult living situation at nine thousand feet in the mountains, subject to eight months of winter for a man who grew up a city boy. . . . Despite it not being my kind of place, I had ecstatic moments up there."[9] But while Jane was a willing participant in this life as a wife, mother, and creative partner, her image, voice, and power were circumscribed by the mid-twentieth-century patriarchal structure of their relationship. Stan himself was deeply ambivalent about his

need for such stability—he begins his 1963 book *Metaphors on Vision* with a reflection on his marriage as a deviation from the mythos of the artist at mid-century: "A married artist was an incomprehensible thing to many friends."[10]

For Hammer, Jane was worthy of attention not just because she was Stan's wife, but on her own merits as well. Hammer met Stan and Jane when they visited San Francisco in 1972. Hammer was already a deep admirer of Brakhage's films, but she now became keenly interested in Jane. Hammer later wrote, "She was so interested in the world around her while Stan seemed caught up only in his ideas. She picked seed pods from trees and plants and told me she had written a lexicon of dog language. She was so much more complex than Stan's portrayal of her . . . that I decided to make a documentary on her for my graduate project."[11] When she made *Jane Brakhage*, Hammer was creatively working through the personal and political experiences of her own life. In the space of three years she had left her husband, come out as a lesbian, and returned to graduate school to study film (she had already earned an MA in English literature from San Francisco State in 1963). In later years, she described herself when she enrolled for this second graduate degree in 1970 as a "late bloomer of thirty."[12] As a developing artist, feminist, and out lesbian, Hammer was fascinated by Jane, who lived the life of a creative heterosexual wife—a life from which Hammer had only recently removed herself. The film, which has rarely been shown until recently, is important in Hammer's body of work, for it broadens our understanding of her artistic concerns at the earliest stage of her career.[13] Now that *Jane Brakhage* has been newly preserved and made available for screening, we can see how Hammer's commitment to feminism and queer art-making has always exceeded rigid boundaries of gay and straight identity.[14] *Jane Brakhage* allows us to appreciate the ways in which Hammer's films explore the feminist and queer potential of nature.

Unlike many of Hammer's better-known films from this era such as *Dyketactics* (1974), *Superdyke* (1975), *Multiple Orgasm* (1976), and *Women I Love* (1976), all of which explicitly depict lesbian bodies, sex, relationships, and communities, *Jane Brakhage* documents the life of a heterosexual woman, wife, and mother of young children, albeit one living an unconventional artistic life in the mountains. Although Hammer is most often described as a "lesbian filmmaker," and while her commitment to lesbian visibility is a crucial part of her legacy, there is also a way in which this label "reduce[s] her broad, complex investigations of the corporeal body to the relatively narrow realm of identity politics," as Ara Osterweil has argued.[15] Alongside her sustained exploration of

lesbian sexuality and female bodies in film, this article begins to explore the role of nature in Hammer's films, a consistent theme across her corpus of work. In *Dyketactics*, women frolic naked on the grass outside among the trees before a segment in which we see Hammer making love with her then-girlfriend, Poe Asher. *Women I Love* shows a series of Hammer's friends and lovers at home and in gardens alongside close-up shots of spherical-vaginal leafy vegetables (cabbage, lettuce, artichoke). *Multiple Orgasm* shows Hammer's vulva in close-up as she masturbates, then a close-up of her face as she climaxes, all overlaid with landscape shots of rock formations taken at Capitol Reef National Park in Utah. What interests me is the way in which nonhuman nature—the outdoors, flowers, grass, trees, insects, vegetables—serves not just as a backdrop for Hammer's portraits of women's bodies (in a traditional figure-ground opposition characteristic of a long tradition of landscape painting) but as a space of emancipation, pleasure, and potentiality for women. Indeed, Hammer's portrayal of lesbian sexuality explicitly links erotic desire to elements of nature. This veneration of nature as a space of freedom must be contextualized as part of the larger countercultural myth of nature in the 1960s and 1970s, along with the feminist exploration of goddess mythology popular at the time.

THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL IN 1970S EXPERIMENTAL FILM

US avant-garde film of the late 1960s and early 1970s has been analyzed for its preoccupation with bodies in all their unruly messiness.[16] But while both Stan Brakhage and Barbara Hammer found acclaim making explicit films about bodies, each faced different forms of criticism from the left: from other filmmakers and from feminists. Hammer's presentation of female bodies brought her some early-career success in the 1970s but disfavor in the 1980s, as critical frameworks for feminist film changed. Critical assessment shifted as well for other female filmmakers of Hammer's generation such as Carolee Schneemann and Chick Strand. Hammer made a deliberate shift from bodies to landscapes in the 1980s as a strategy to find a larger audience. As she explained in a 1991 interview, "My lesbian films were often rejected by avant-garde showcases across the country and in museums everywhere during the period I was actively and expressly engaged in making lesbian representation. It wasn't until I 'depopulated' my cinema, i.e. took the women out, that I began to get the invitations I had so long sought after."[17] This intentional refocusing of subject matter marked an important new phase for Hammer. In discussing her films *Bent Time* (1981) and *Stone Circles* (1983), she explained,

"The move from locating the film image in the body to the landscape is a move for me from intense interior-looking and identity-naming to a broad geography-claiming."[18] I do not have space to analyze these early-1980s landscape films in this essay, but *Jane Brakhage* demonstrates the degree to which Hammer's interest in nature and landscape was a component of her work from the beginning.

In its own way, *Jane Brakhage* is an intensely personal film. Beginning with an impulse of empathy and solidarity, Hammer made a kind of pilgrimage to the Brakhage home in Colorado. Like Jane, just a few years earlier Hammer had lived with her husband in a remote cabin in Northern California, where she was a frequent visitor at the nearby Wheeler Ranch commune in Sonoma County.[19] But, as she noted many years later, "I just wasn't happy being kind of an alternative housewife."[20] In filming Jane, Hammer was able to probe the potentialities and limits of this social role for women, and at the same time create an opportunity to visit the home of one of her most important artistic influences. For the duration of her career, Hammer emphasized how formative Stan Brakhage's films had been for her. In a 2012 interview she described how his work transformed her way of seeing the world: "I saw Brakhage's *Prelude: Dog Star Man* and was very impressed, as hundreds of us were, by the abstractions in the film, the personal 'heroic story' and the fact that he always carried his camera with him. When I left the cinema after *The Art of Vision* I saw the world differently: I viewed the world cinematographically."[21] Along with the films of Maya Deren, which she also encountered in her MA program, Brakhage's work defined the possibilities for avant-garde cinema that inspired Hammer in her early career: "In the '70s, the films just rushed out. I was in school, but I didn't make them for classes, I just made them for myself."[22] Indeed, although she had intended *Jane Brakhage* to be her thesis film, San Francisco State did not accept it as such. In a 1974 postcard to Jane, Hammer wrote, "'The Committee' did not approve *J.B.* for a M.A. film as, I suppose, they would not approve your mountain's name. Undaunted, I continue. 'Why didn't you make one of your personal films, Barbara?' they asked."[23]

It may seem ironic that as she was establishing her lesbian, feminist, activist filmmaking practice in the 1970s, Hammer should have been inspired by Brakhage, who was already a divisive figure in the experimental film world, seen by some as a masculinist, apolitical artist. But the two of them had more in common than a casual acquaintance with their work might suggest. When they met, Brakhage was an established midcareer artist while Hammer was just

starting out, but in fact she was only six years younger than him.[24] They shared a deep appreciation for Maya Deren and her work. Deren was a mentor for Brakhage, who published an essay on her films; Hammer also published an essay on Deren's work, and made a film homage in 2011 entitled *Maya Deren's Sink*.[25] Both Brakhage and Hammer produced films in which images of nature play a predominant role, although their engagement with concepts of nature moved in different directions. Most of all, while Brakhage was a pioneer of personal filmmaking, Hammer took his model of the personally explicit experimental film and developed it for different, socially engaged purposes. Hammer filmed her friends, lovers, and family members over many years, but unlike Brakhage, she did so for political as well as aesthetic reasons. While Brakhage is considered a luminary of the Romantic tradition in US avant-garde filmmaking, Hammer took that strain of Romanticism and translated it for her own creative purposes in which social and political concerns hold primary significance.

At the risk of oversimplification, another way to understand this would be to say that, as a white male heterosexual, Brakhage felt free and empowered to explore grand aesthetic questions about the poetic possibilities of cinema, and did not much concern himself with the social and political implications of his work; in contrast, as a female lesbian (who was also white), Hammer chose to treat the disempowered position of women and lesbians in society as the primary artistic concern of her career. I make this point not to endorse one artistic position over another—both are relevant and valuable (though both, I would argue, are political)—nor to reduce the work of these two filmmakers to their identities. Rather, in focusing on Hammer, I want to emphasize that her political commitment shaped not only the kinds of work she made, but also her work's reception within the larger filmmaking and cinema studies communities throughout her career. When Brakhage describes the great concerns of his work as "birth, sex, death, and the search for God," he might just as well be describing the lifelong concerns of Hammer's work.[26] (Though neither filmmaker was conventionally religious, "God" here can stand for a transcendent, spiritual realm.) Today, these filmmakers' shared ideals and divergent approaches are perhaps easier to perceive than they were in the 1970s. What Hammer's work of that decade reveals is a filmmaker who developed these monumental artistic concerns through a politically engaged perspective.

In the 1960s, a feminist critique of Stan's portrayals of Jane and their children emerged. Or, rather, several critiques emerged, not all of them feminist. Deren's response is the most legendary. As famously recounted by Jonas Mekas, after the 1959 New York premiere of *Window Water Baby Moving*

(at which Brakhage was the projectionist), "Deren came before the audience to declare, very emphatically, that giving birth was a very 'private matter,' and that it shouldn't ever be made into a public affair. 'Even the animals, when they give birth, retreat into a secret place.' I do not remember Stan replying to Maya," Mekas claimed.[27] Deren's comment might be understood as a reference to her own birth film—of a cat—made in 1944. In the twenty-two-minute *The Private Life of a Cat*, a collaboration between Deren and her then-husband Alexander Hammid, we see a cat couple sharing a tender moment on a windowsill before the mother cat removes herself to a box to give birth to five kittens, shown in a sequence of close-up shots.[28] Deren's cat birth film was likely an interspecies inspiration for Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving*: he praised *The Private Life of a Cat* as "one of the finest films that has ever been made."[29]

Many of the criticisms of Brakhage were more politically charged. Jonathan Rosenbaum wrote that the Romantic tradition he epitomized "reduces the universe to a list of male possessions: This is my wife, my child, my gun, my dog, my camera, my house, my car, my summer vacation, my life."[30] Amy Taubin wrote, "It's an ugly metaphor but I always think that Jane has no right, even if she wanted to, and I'm not claiming that she ever does, to close her legs."[31] These and other criticisms have been summarized elsewhere, and I am not going to rehearse them again here.[32] Brakhage was aware of these critiques, and for some years he tried to dismiss concerns about the way he used Jane and his children, claiming that his scratched signature "by Brakhage" referred to authorship shared by himself and Jane together.[33] (Later in life his authorial signature became a scratched "SB" on the end of the film, and by the age of sixty he said, "I'd like to inhabit with great humility the position of anonymous.")[34] He also discussed in more than one interview the questionable ethics of using his wife's image in this way.[35] But his aesthetic interests lay elsewhere.

While it is unclear if Hammer was aware of these critiques of Brakhage's work in the early 1970s, her artistic concern was precisely to reimagine women in film, and for this Jane served as an excellent, complex figure. Rebutting Stan's heteropatriarchal vision of Jane, she chose to portray Jane speaking for herself. *Jane Brakhage* is remarkable not just for its content, but for the way it is constructed around Hammer's own spectatorship of Brakhage's work. Indeed, it can be understood as a particularly accomplished fan film. It is impossible to watch a Brakhage film in which Stan argues with Jane, has sex with Jane, or shows Jane laboring at chores around the house—no matter how fragmented, visually dense, or symbolically charged those images may be—without wondering about his actual relationship with Jane. It is impossible to watch films that

show the Brakhage children and the family home—especially given how frequently he returns to these people and places—without wondering about his actual family life, no matter how much he was trying to ruminate on his own subjectivity or create mythopoeic images.[36] Because Jane is such a visual cipher in Stan's films, one wants to know more about her. Most viewers—this writer included—have strong and extremely personal responses to Brakhage's films. As both a fan and a critical spectator, Hammer acted upon the prurient curiosity we all feel upon watching a Brakhage film.

BARBARA HAMMER'S *JANE BRAKHAGE*

Jane Brakhage's charisma, eccentricity, and circumscribed social power were certainly of interest to Hammer when she first met Stan and Jane in December 1972. The Brakhages were visiting San Francisco on the invitation of filmmaker and poet James Broughton, who was Hammer's teacher at San Francisco State. Hammer picked them up at the airport, drove them to a lunch with students in Broughton's Brakhage seminar, and attended an unspecified number of the three Brakhage screenings that week.[37] Just over a year later (after the death of her mother), Hammer traveled to the Colorado mountains and made her film portrait of Jane at the Brakhage family home in Lump Gulch, outside the small town of Rollinsville, where they had settled in 1964. Although Stan was present when Hammer shot *Jane Brakhage*, Hammer chose not to include him, and his absence from the film is significant.[38] By showing her without her husband's all-powerful cinematic presence, Hammer's film grants Jane a freedom and a subjectivity that is never glimpsed in Stan's films. Using the techniques of the observational documentary—handheld camera, location shooting, sound recorded on-site—Hammer's film works within an ethic of truth telling, empathy, and witnessing. In the finished work, Jane is presented as an archetypal mountain woman living a harmonious life in the woods. Hammer shows Jane cultivating plants, communicating with wild and domestic animals, feeding her children, and engaged in creative tasks such as weaving, playing music, and dancing. But this portrait is ambivalent: even as Hammer positions Jane as a heroic figure whose life embodies creativity and environmental ethics, it also critiques her position outside of social power. Most importantly, while most of Stan Brakhage's films are silent, in *Jane Brakhage*, Jane's voice is heard throughout.[39]

The film is densely layered, with multiple superimposed images, asynchronous edits, and multitrack sound. The soundtrack mostly features Jane's voice-over as she and Hammer converse, but it also features bits of music

recorded during the trip and some voice-over recorded later by Hammer. Moving images alternate with still photos. The film begins with a title card featuring two cutout photos of Jane's head and the handwritten words "Jane Brakhage." As it opens, we hear musical notes on a recorder—which we later learn is Jane playing the instrument—overlaid with Hammer's voice-over narrating in the first person: "In January of 1974, I took a trip to Rollinsville, Colorado, to meet and film Jane Brakhage." We see Hammer and her Bolex as she films herself in a car's side mirror and then pans out to show the road, the snow, and the evergreen trees, followed by two shots of Rollinsville's main street. Jane's voice begins during these opening shots and dominates the audio for the duration of the film.

The images and soundtrack are mostly asynchronous, so that, for example, when we see the Rollinsville town footage, we hear Jane talking about wanting to name her mountain "Mount Jane," and Hammer laughing in appreciation of this audacious statement. Still photos of Jane dissolve over moving landscape shots as Jane continues talking, describing "taking lessons from this meadowlark" on how to play the recorder. Hammer's landscape shots, which are numerous in the opening section, portray the winter mountain scenery in a classic twentieth-century landscape tradition: from the point of view of a car driving on the road. Hammer pans across the snowy, tree-filled mountainside and plays with composition by framing the horizon line at various points in the middle, top, or bottom of the image. The sun beams, sun flares shooting outward in an image reminiscent of Stan Brakhage's films (fig. 3). This opening arrival sequence creates a sense of anticipation as we approach this home renowned within the small world of avant-garde film. Hammer never explains Jane's significance or mentions Stan; the film presumes an audience familiar with the Brakhage legacy, though such familiarity is not required to appreciate this portrait of a singular personage.

The film loads our minds with a different set of images of Jane than what we may have seen of her in Stan's films: Jane smiling broadly, sitting tall, standing tall, dancing with friends, rather than in the throes of childbirth or as naked, fragmented body parts. Hammer was of course not one to shy away from showing naked female bodies in her films, and thus her presentation of Jane fully clothed feels like an intervention in itself. More than just a simple documentation of what Jane happened to wear on the days when Hammer visited, by showing Jane clothed and articulating her own beliefs and experiences, the film presents a vision of her as an active agent in her own life. In fact, the viewer might easily become fixated on Jane's clothing, as she is shown in an array of

FIGURE 3. Lens flare in the Rocky Mountain landscape in *Jane Brakhage* (dir. Barbara Hammer), 1974. Courtesy the Estate of Barbara Hammer.

cold-weather outfits, including a leather lace-up shirt with collar and pockets (a ballpoint pen visible in one pocket) over a turtleneck, trousers, hoop earrings, drop earrings, a patterned blouse, and a thick white shearling sweater with a massive funnel neck when she goes outside to hang laundry in the snow (fig. 4). Jane talks about clothes and grooming at one point, saying, "I quit school because I was unpopular. I was not the norm, even though I really tried. I wore the right clothes, and I washed myself, I took baths and shaved my armpits, and—oh! The things I did. But it didn't work, none of it worked. I was just weird. I didn't say the right thing, I didn't look in the right direction. Out of it, I've always been out of it. I rather depend on being out of it." Despite her self-deprecating words, Hammer's camera makes Jane look competent at the center of her own life, and confers respect upon her not despite the fact that she is an outsider, but because of it.

One of the most compelling aspects of the film is Jane's articulation of what we might call a posthumanist view of the world. In a densely edited sequence, we hear Jane speaking the following words in two audio sections that were clearly recorded in separate moments and later edited together: "The more I know

FIGURE 4. Jane Brakhage in her white funnel neck sweater in *Jane Brakhage* (dir. Barbara Hammer), 1974. Courtesy the Estate of Barbara Hammer.

about plants, the more I don't separate animals and plants. And I *ferociously* do not separate humans and animals." Here we see three close-up shots panning across the plants in Jane's greenhouse, and a close-up of Jane's hands. The recording audibly shifts to a new moment, and Jane continues speaking: "Anyway, my view of the world is that it's a planet." On the word "planet," Hammer cuts to two shots moving through the needles of the fir trees outside the house. Jane's voice continues, "And so I'm really, like, having as much contact with the world, with my image of the world—that is, the planet—I'm really relating to the planet as strong as I know how." Hammer dissolves from the second moving shot of the fir tree to a still photograph of Jane sitting and smiling in her leather shirt with turtleneck, punctuating this important proclamation with an image of Jane that feels strong, even heroic. Jane's philosophy moves beyond popular trends of early 1970s environmental thought, in which conservation and an appreciation for "Mother Earth" often sound like the latest trend. Instead, her view of nature is not only ecological but anti-anthropocentric, decentering the human from its self-important place in the world. Jane's way of viewing all life forms as equivalent bears resemblance to contemporary thinking in feminist

posthumanism.[40] Jane studied zoology as a student (before dropping out of college, and before she met Stan) and remains keenly interested in science to this day, but hers has always been an eccentric, storyteller's view of human interactions with animals and ecosystems.[41]

Jane's voice-over continues, clearly recorded in a different moment in the conversation. "Oh, I have contact with the world. Here you are! How did you know about me?" Jane continues, this time with no break in the audio recording, her desire to shift the focus of the conversation audibly perceptible:

> But anyway, the goats—have a ritual of taking a walk with me. And I'm the leader, and the donkey has his style of coming along. And there's some ritual in that, I guess. There's a lot of ritual, or at least repeated gestures, in conversing with goats and whatnot. The goats, for instance, are conservative. Or like wearing the same outfit to talk to the chickadees. They're conservative. They recognize me in that outfit. They may think I'm somebody else when I'm wearing the other coat.

Jane's words seem to magically conjure a set of images as Hammer shows her setting out on a walk dutifully followed by her dogs, goats, and donkey (fig. 5). Jane's description of the goats recognizing her outfit extends the film's motif of

FIGURE 5. Jane Brakhage taking a walk with her dogs, goats, and donkey in *Jane Brakhage* (dir. Barbara Hammer), 1974. Courtesy the Estate of Barbara Hammer.

clothing in a delightfully weird interspecies direction. Hammer's observational style allows the audience to duly appreciate Jane's way of interacting with animals, and moves on in the final part of this sequence to show Jane's deep relationship with dogs. We see close-ups of Jane's dogs while she says, "I remember when I did this when I was a kid, and ran around with dogs. And I got so good at dog language that I was considering at one time writing a dictionary of dog language."

In contrast to her other early films of goddess-like women in nature, here Hammer's vision of a woman in the woods is more complex. While it edges close to pastoral myth in casting Jane as an archetypal mountain woman, Jane's own complexity resists oversimplification, and we can feel Hammer working through the contradictions of this myth as she confronts her, camera in hand. After the above sequence, Hammer asks, "Jane, do you consider yourself a housewife?" Jane's response is fascinating:

> I say I'm a housewife. I don't know, I think the word "housewife" is like—I don't know, it's one of those dirty words, like God, art—I think it's a great form. I can do what I want with it. I don't see why everybody's down on the word "housewife." Except maybe because of centuries of unimaginative women. What I *would* mind would be if my time were being taken up by having a job. A career. In society—I think it's extremely interesting, and very various, and you can actually bring in anything you want to bring in. I mean like donkeys, goats, chickens, guinea fowl, plants, a greenhouse on the roof.

At this point the soundtrack moves on to a different moment recorded in the conversation. For the minute and a half that she speaks these words, though, Hammer presents a montage of Jane weaving. These images seem to support Jane's claim that being a housewife can be "a great form," showing that creativity is possible in the domestic sphere. Hammer might have undercut Jane's words by juxtaposing them with images of domestic labor, but instead she chose to support Jane's assertion with the weaving footage. In a larger sense, however, while Hammer may have wanted to make Jane into a heroic earth mother, Jane's defense of the role of housewife clearly short-circuited that desire. The film's ambivalence in this respect might help explain why it was not considered one of Hammer's "hits" in earlier years.

Although the film does not contain any explicit discussion of feminism, Jane has maintained throughout her life that she is not a feminist. She said to me in a 2016 interview:

> I have never been part of the feminist movement. I've been sympathetic to it of course. And I thought it was horrible about getting smaller salaries. . . .

> And so, this point of contention about, was I a partner in Stan's work. Stan said so, over and over again, from the stage. And that's interesting. . . . So, I'll see what I can say, but what I'm speaking from is: I was working on the films. I was working on raising kids. I had a couple of dozen animals in the backyard and I was making cheese out of the goat's milk. And I was not concerned with women's rights.[42]

Even within the film, despite Hammer's visual affirmation that domestic life can be creative, we are shown enough detail to remain skeptical of Jane's claim that being a housewife is "a great form." Jane does the family laundry, and we see the impossibly large number of sheets she hangs outside to dry in the snow (fig. 6). We hear her talking about the physical burden of five sequential pregnancies: "My hair was getting shorter by itself; I was green, I was in terrible condition after weaning the fifth child, which was seven years of either pregnancy or nursing, without a moment's respite." Hammer responds, "Now why did you do that?" And Jane answers, laughing, "We were experimenting with birth control methods."[43] Clearly, this is a labor-intensive life that Jane lives, and within the feminist critique of women's domestic labor, it does not appear to be a life

FIGURE 6. Jane Brakhage hanging out the family laundry in *Jane Brakhage* (dir. Barbara Hammer), 1974. Courtesy the Estate of Barbara Hammer.

of freedom. But in the film, Jane says she is living the life that she wants. And as an observational documentary, the film resists simple judgment about Jane's life.

The question remains, however, whether Hammer's portrayal of Jane simply instrumentalizes her differently than Stan's films do; I argue that it does not. Because she neither venerates Jane as a goddess nor denigrates her as merely a housewife, Hammer is not just another filmmaker using Jane's image for her own purposes. *Jane Brakhage* remains more open-ended and less proprietary than Stan's portrayals of Jane. While she covers extremely personal details of Jane's life, Hammer preserves a distance between herself and her subject; her film does not proclaim, like one of Stan's films, "this is *my* wife," or even "this is *my* friend," but rather, "here is *a* woman." The difference is not simply that Jane is not sexually objectified in this film, nor is it even that she gains a voice. It's that she seems to have slipped free from an extraordinary cinematic cage for these ten minutes. Hammer includes images of herself in the film, reminding us of cinema's inherent constructedness as well as encouraging us to read this film's production as a kind of pilgrimage.[44] In one moment, we see her on the floor filming with her Bolex as Jane sits on top of the stove (fig. 7).[45] This image nicely sums up their relationship, which was cordial but not close.[46]

FIGURE 7. Barbara Hammer on the floor filming Jane Brakhage on the stove in *Jane Brakhage* (dir. Barbara Hammer), 1974. Courtesy the Estate of Barbara Hammer.

In refusing to reduce Jane to her biology and reproductive function, *Jane Brakhage* is an anti-essentialist film, especially when understood in the context of 1970s avant-garde cinema, when to refuse the visualization of women as primarily sexual and reproductive bodies was in itself radical. Hammer's rebuttal to Stan Brakhage's films of Jane anticipates the social constructionist argument that biological essentialism is dangerous for women. At the same time, *Jane Brakhage* anticipates the contemporary posthumanist move of turning away from anthropocentrism and toward the materiality of nature. Through the combination of Jane's thoughts about nature and Hammer's commitment to feminism, the film advocates an array of possibilities for a feminist environmental ethic. Jane embraces companion animals and celebrates interspecies communion, low-impact living, and growing one's own food. Jane advocates a blurring of the traditional divide between nonhuman nature and human culture, one of the cornerstone tasks of critics working in the environmental humanities today. More generally, the film portrays a life in which humans live differently with nature, learning about it and from it rather than trying to dominate it. The film respects and admires Jane precisely for her creative, anti-anthropocentric life in the mountains, even as it critiques her role as a heterosexual wife, mother, and circumscribed cinematic "muse."

RESISTING ESSENTIALISM, RECUPERATING NATURE

In the 1980s, Hammer's work was criticized by feminists for being essentialist—rooted in cultural feminism. According to Alexandra Juhasz, "When I was a graduate student at NYU in the mid-1980s, her work had been used primarily as an exemplar of what feminist film should *not* be: an exploration of an essential female body or sexuality, rather than images focused on *how* such a body and sexuality come to be known through the representational systems of culture."[47] Hammer's images of naked women frolicking in the grass do work a feeling of naive 1970s popular environmentalism, although as mentioned above, this can be interpreted as ironically humorous. In venerating women as goddesses, Hammer was picking up on a popular strain of goddess mythology that was influential at the time. When she formed a company to distribute her films in the 1970s, she named it Goddess Films. The essentialist thinking underpinning this myth can be glimpsed in Diane Stein's popular *The Women's Spirituality Book*, which declared in 1988, "Women's spirituality is a return to the goddess, to the female principle of creation that is uniquely women's own."[48] Of course, such proclamations can be used just as easily to argue for women's inferiority as for their creativity; the idea that there is a universal essence

that is uniquely women's own went quickly out of fashion in critical thought (though it survives in certain strains of commercial and popular discourse). Hammer later explained, "We feminists were studying ancient women goddesses at the time, hence the name. After a while it didn't interest me anymore and I left the goddess circles and dropped the name and logo."[49] Regardless of her reasons for abandoning goddess mythology, the utopian element in Hammer's films was never entirely reducible to essentialist politics. These films capture the joy Hammer felt at being freed from patriarchal sexual relationships and expressing her sexual desire for women. But Hammer was marked as essentialist, and this perception of her work exerted a negative effect on her career for decades.

The mid-1970s marked a pivotal moment in feminist critical thought, and the shifting concept of nature played a significant role in these formations. Second wave feminism in the late 1960s had popularized a form of identity politics founded on consciousness-raising about the patriarchal structure of women's lived everyday lives. This was the moment in which Hammer came out as a lesbian and started making films. Just a few years later, new forms of rigorous and theoretically grounded feminist thought began to emerge in academic scholarship. The year after Hammer completed *Jane Brakhage*, Gayle Rubin published her groundbreaking essay "The Traffic in Women," and Laura Mulvey published "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which transformed the nascent field of cinema studies.[50] At this point, it became the task of feminist film scholars and filmmakers to use methods derived from psychoanalysis and structuralist theory to call out and/or circumvent the phallocentric processes of audience identification that occur in mainstream narrative cinema. The preferred solution for avant-garde feminist filmmaking at this time was not a return to the personal; rather, feminist "countercinema" practitioners of this era—Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer, Laura Mulvey, and others—made films that were aware of and shaped by feminist academic concepts.[51] Against this changed framework, Hammer's films seemed rooted in politically retrograde notions of feminine essence.

While these new directions in feminist theory were being developed, the experimental film world (in the United States and Europe) was consumed with the emergence of structural film. An almost exclusively male list of filmmakers such as Tony Conrad, Hollis Frampton, Ernie Gehr, Michael Snow, Peter Gidal, and Malcolm Le Grice, among others, rejected not only fictional narrative but the entire tradition of film as representation, instead exploring the materiality of cinema through montage, looping, rephotography, and experiments

with flicker, pulsation, and rhythm. The dominance of this phase of experimental film in the 1970s meant that lyrical filmmaking such as Brakhage's and political filmmaking such as Hammer's seemed entirely out of step with then-current aesthetic preoccupations of the cinematic avant-garde. Structural film's evacuation of representation in order to focus on "pure" formalist abstraction made political cinema challenging, as some feminist scholars at the time pointed out. Constance Penley argued that structural-materialist film was just another form of fetishism: "Even if fetishism is basic to art-making, there are still degrees of it and the minimalist enterprise seems to offer a particularly pure and extreme example of the quest for an unproblematic center of significance, a unified and coherent subject, a position of pure mastery, a phallus which is not decomposable."[52] Indeed, stories and interviews from the era attest to the phallocentrism that flourished among male experimental filmmakers in the 1970s. In a three-way conversation featuring Hollis Frampton, Stan Brakhage, and Jane Brakhage published the year before Hammer made her film, for example, Jane barely gets a word in, except when the men discuss her image in Stan's films. Witness this small portion of the exchange:

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: Jane, you have to realize that, from the outside, you are presumably the most profoundly differentiated and individuated woman in the history of film—and, probably, one of the most completely differentiated *persons* in the history of art.

JANE BRAKHAGE: Hmm. You really think so?

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: You can look it up in the goddamned library, Jane. Of course you are!

JANE BRAKHAGE: Where? Who said that?

HOLLIS FRAMPTON: I said it. Then you cut your long hair off and fucked it up.

JANE BRAKHAGE: There, that's just what I mean . . .

STAN BRAKHAGE: I think that's probably why she cut off her hair.

JANE BRAKHAGE: That's *right*![53]

As demonstrated by this moment of sexist condescension published without comment in *Artforum*, it is worth reminding ourselves of the unyielding structure of masculinist entitlement that women such as Jane Brakhage and Barbara Hammer faced in the 1970s.

Rejected by two social spheres that mattered a great deal to her work—feminists and avant-garde filmmakers—Hammer seemed unfashionably essentialist and romantic. When she shifted her subject matter to landscape and "depopulated" her cinema in the early 1980s, this was a deliberate attempt to exit the political and aesthetic corner into which she had been painted. But it is important to understand that while both Hammer and Brakhage were criticized for their use of women's bodies in their films, these criticisms came from different places. Brakhage was taken to task (by some) for his heteropatriarchal use of his wife and family, while Hammer was held accountable for basing her celebration of lesbianism on a naive politics of essential female embodiment. These critiques both make sense in the context of their time. But we can also see how Hammer was held to a different standard than Brakhage, whose films have produced generations of analyses preoccupied with formalist and mythical concerns. These analyses seek to understand the films on their own terms, without considering the highly charged questions about gender, sexuality, and power they provoke. And this strain of critique in experimental cinema studies continues today; astonishingly, a 2019 article on the topic of silence in *Window Water Baby Moving* does not even mention that Jane's silence might have social implications or political significance for its viewers.[54] Hammer's work was already challenging such exclusively formalist perspectives in the early 1970s.

If in the late 1970s and early 1980s Hammer's films were perceived as essentialist, in the 1990s they could be appreciated within the framework of social constructionist and performative gender theories for the way they put female experience into discourse. Her feature films *Nitrate Kisses* (1992) and *Tender Fictions* (1996) used techniques influenced by the ideas of Mulvey and others to critique normative images of women and lesbians, and were critical successes. Hammer's work was appreciated and celebrated within her lifetime, and her end-of-life performance about her battle with cancer, *The Art of Dying* (2018), was widely influential.[55] It is worth mentioning, too, that Stan Brakhage wrote a letter to Hammer in 1985 expressing his appreciation for *Jane Brakhage*, and when I showed the film to Jane in July 2019 (she had not seen it in decades), she exclaimed, "Oh, I like it so much."[56]

Today, in the context of new directions in feminist ecological and anticolonial thinking, Hammer's "essentialist" fascination with nature and embodiment deserves a reevaluation.[57] An essentialist, I contend, misunderstands "nature" as an unchanging, inviolate concept. Essentialists (who are digging in lately) deny mutability and hold tight to an outmoded myth of nature as a static domain. In contrast, feminist posthumanist theory today is unafraid to contend with

the problematic category of nature. Rather than a retrograde conflation of women and nature, we can understand the discourse in *Jane Brakhage* as anti-anthropocentric: Jane's refusal to separate humans and animals is an extension of Hammer's own interest in blurring the lines between women and nature, both of which are multiplicitous and fluid categories. In this context, Barbara Hammer and Jane Brakhage can be seen as visionaries of posthuman feminist thinking. As Celia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti write, "Postnatural feminist lineages suggest that nature itself (as an unrecognizable category to which we ourselves belong) is articulate, literate and proliferate, which puts a completely new demand on feminist postdisciplinarity and skill sets."[58] In the twenty-first century, as we are forced to reckon with the realities of climate change, species extinction, and the collapse of ecosystems, the seemingly exhausted category of nature is ripe for reassessment. Perhaps *Jane Brakhage*, along with a reexamination of the history of feminist ecological thought, can help spark these dearly needed new skill sets and ideas. ■

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NOTES

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1. Barbara Hammer and Jane Brakhage correspondence dated October 9, 1973; November 1, 1973; and November 28, 1973, series I, box 17, folder 14, James Stanley Brakhage Collection, Norlin Library Archives, University of Colorado Boulder (hereafter Brakhage Papers).

2. Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 13, no. 3 (1988): 407.

3. Greg Youmans, "Performing Essentialism: Reassessing Barbara Hammer's Films of the 1970s," *Camera Obscura* 81, vol. 27, no. 3 (2012): 101–35. See also Greg Youmans, "Beyond Cultural Feminism: New Approaches to Barbara Hammer's Early Films," in *Evidentiary Bodies*, ed. Staci Bu Shea and Carmel Curtis (Munich, Germany: Hirmer, 2018), 78–81.

4. Stacy Alaimo, "Introduction: Feminist Theory's Flight from Nature," in *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*, ed. Stacy Alaimo (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1–23.

5. Wodening's books can be purchased at her website, https://janewodening.com/.

6. *Window Water Baby Moving* shows Jane's birth of the Brakhage's first child, Myrenna. Jane can be seen giving birth to their second child, Crystal, in *Dog Star Man* part IV (1964). *Thigh Line Lyre Triangular* (1961) shows Jane birthing their third child, Neowyn. Jane births their fourth child, Bearthm, in *Song V* (1964), and their fifth and final child, Rarc, in *Blue White* (1965). For an account of birth films by Brakhage and others see Shira Segal, "Home Movies and Home Birth: The Avant-Garde Childbirth Film and Pregnancy in New Media" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2011).

7. Jane operated the camera for portions of *Wedlock House: An Intercourse*, *Dog Star Man*, and *Window Water Baby Moving*.

8. Roles such as publicist, distributor, and manager are quite different for an experimental filmmaker than for a commercial filmmaker, of course, which is why Jane could serve in all these capacities as needed over the years. Archival documents in the Brakhage Papers and elsewhere, along with interviews conducted by myself and others, document the extent to which she collaborated with Stan on his films and supported his career during the thirty years of their marriage. While Jane "performed" in many of his films, she also handled much of his business correspondence and some of his personal correspondence. She managed some portion of the distribution of Stan's films from out of their home in Colorado (his films were also distributed by Canyon Cinema in San Francisco and the Film-Makers Coop in New York). She offered feedback on his in-progress edits (when asked). She made all the arrangements for his Alaska shoot of *Creation* (1979). Many tasks are unquantifiable: she listened endlessly to his ideas about art and cinema, did all the childcare and housework, and provided the home and children that he filmed for three decades. The nature of this creative relationship is complex. I am not claiming that Jane should be considered a coauthor of Stan's films, but her role as a collaborator between 1957 and 1987 should be acknowledged. After they divorced in 1987, Stan went on to make new, significant work without Jane until his death in 2003. When he remarried in 1989, Stan's second wife, Marilyn Brakhage, and their two children did not appear in his films. This was not because Marilyn forbade him to show her, as is often reported, but according to both Stan and Marilyn this was his own choice and following the evolution of his artistic practices and concerns.

9. Suranjan Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage: The 60th Birthday Interview," in *Stan Brakhage: Interviews*, ed. Suranjan Ganguly (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 79.

10. Stan Brakhage, interview with P. Adams Sitney, in Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision* (1963; repr., New York: Anthology Film Archives and Light Industry, 2017), 99.

11. Caption accompanying still from *Jane Brakhage* in Barbara Hammer, *Hammer! Making Movies Out of Sex and Life* (New York: Feminist Press, 2010), 66.

12. Barbara Hammer, "Maya Deren and Me," in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 261. A slightly shorter version of this essay was published in *Hammer!*, 234–37.

13. Hammer's films have been distributed by Canyon Cinema since the early 1980s. A quick scan of Canyon's inspection cards and database shows that *Jane Brakhage* was rented only twenty-two times between 1983 and 2019. Email from Antonella Bonfanti to author, November 19, 2019.

14. *Jane Brakhage* was preserved in 2018 by Electronic Arts Intermix and the Academy Film Archive through the National Film Preservation Foundation's Avant-Garde Masters Grant program and the Film Foundation. Funding was provided by the George Lucas Family Foundation. The new 16mm preservation print is now available for rental from Canyon Cinema, and has screened publicly on several occasions over the past two years.

15. Ara Osterweil, "A Body Is Not a Metaphor: Barbara Hammer's X-Ray Vision," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14 (2010): 187.

16. Ara Osterweil, *Flesh Cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014).

17. Interview with Barbara Hammer by Julia Hodges, Jamie Ramoneda, and Kathy Sizeler, *Art Papers* 15, no. 5 (1991): 4.

18. Barbara Hammer, "Change of Location: Bodies of Flesh to Bodies of Earth/Water," in *Hammer!*, 156.

19. Barbara Hammer, "Introduction," in *Hammer!*, 12.

20. Jamillah James, "A Conversation with Barbara Hammer," in *Evidentiary Bodies*, 63.

21. Élisabeth Lebovici, "The Screen as the Body: Barbara Hammer," *Mousse* 32 (2012): http://moussemagazine.it/barbara-hammer-elisabeth-lebovici-2012/. *The Art of Vision* (1965) is a different version of *Dog Star Man* (1961–64) in which all the superimpositions of *Dog Star Man* are shown separately. This longer version (running time 270 minutes) was more often shown in the 1960s and early 1970s, but *The Art of Vision* is rarely screened in this way today, especially now that *Dog Star Man* has been released on DVD (parts I–IV run at 78 minutes total).

22. Alexandra Juhasz, "Barbara Hammer" (interview), in *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video*, ed. Alexandra Juhasz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 81.

23. Postcard from Barbara Hammer to Jane Brakhage, July 11, 1974, box 17, folder 14, Brakhage Papers. In an April 21, 2016, interview with Sarah Keller, Hammer more fully explained what happened with her MA committee: "They expected a larger film, longer film for a master's thesis. And they weren't going to give it to me. So, I was like—here, I'd made 13 films for myself, or 12, anyway. . . . And so I learned how to be nice and to present the work in a way they could accept it. . . . And I would be happy to write a paper that was called, 'Feminist Phenomenology in the Films of Barbara Hammer in the 1970s.' . . . And they were relieved. They wanted to give me the MA, but the way I had pushed, I had come up against a wall." Many thanks to Sarah Keller for sharing this unpublished interview with me.

24. Hammer said in 2016, "I was very influenced by [Brakhage] because he carried his camera with him. At that time he was the big guy in film, and shows all over, and he always had his camera in a brown leather box over his shoulder so he could shoot on the go, whenever he saw anything. And he also told us that he'd made 100 films. And that became my goal, that I could be the female Stan Brakhage. . . . Attention would be

drawn to my work if I made enough work. And that was part of the impetus of being a woman filmmaker in a class of film production with all men, in a world where you were turned down by the Museum of Modern Art and other exhibition places because of the lesbian content in your work." Barbara Hammer interviewed by Sarah Keller, April 21, 2016.

25. Stan Brakhage, "Maya Deren," in *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers* (New York: McPherson, 1989), 90–112; Hammer, "Maya Deren and Me," 261–66, republished in slightly shorter form as noted above in *Hammer!*, 234–37.

26. Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, 114.

27. Jonas Mekas, "Recollections of Stan Brakhage," in *Stan Brakhage Filmmaker*, ed. David E. James (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 107.

28. *The Private Life of a Cat* is a popular film on the internet, where it is readily found on YouTube. In recent years it has been favorably contrasted with the many popular online cat videos. See Alexis C. Madrigal, "The Best Experimental Film about Cats Ever Made," *The Atlantic*, April 24, 2013, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/04/this-is-the-best-experimental-film-about-cats-ever-made/466107/.

29. Brakhage, "Maya Deren," 96.

30. Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Film: The Front Line* (Denver: Arden, 1983), 122, quoted in Nicole Brenez and Adrian Martin, "Serious Mothlight: For Stan Brakhage, 1933–2003," *Rouge* 1 (2003): http://www.rouge.com.au/1/brakhage.html. Rosenbaum later developed a more positive assessment of Brakhage's films, though I believe one can make this criticism and still appreciate the aesthetic accomplishments of the work.

31. Amy Taubin, "Discussion between Marjorie Keller and Amy Taubin," *Idiolects* 6 (1978): 29–30, quoted in Roxanne Samer, "Re-Conceiving *Misconception:* Birth as a Site of Filmic Experimentation," *Jump Cut* 53 (2011): https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc53.2011/samerMisconception/index.html

32. For a good summary of these criticisms and more see Samer, "Re-Conceiving *Misconception*."

33. The famous epigram in *Metaphors on Vision* reads: "'By Brakhage' should be understood to mean 'by way of Stan and Jane Brakhage,' as it does in all my films since marriage. It is coming to mean, 'by way of Stan and Jane and the children Brakhage,' because all the discoveries which used to pass only thru the instrument of myself are coming to pass thru the sensibilities of those I love. Some day these passages will extend thru the sensibilities of those I now can only imagine loving. Ultimately 'by Brakhage' will come to be superfluous and understood as what it now ultimately is: 'by way of everything.'" Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision*, 96.

34. Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage: The 60th Birthday Interview," 94.

35. See for example "Stan and Jane Brakhage (and Hollis Frampton) Talking," *Artforum,* January 1973, 72–79, reprinted in *Stan Brakhage: Interviews*, 29–50.

36. By his own estimation, approximately one-third of his films from this phase of his career focus on Jane and the Brakhage family, or as he calls it, "autobiography." Ganguly, "Stan Brakhage: The 60th Birthday Interview," 76. Brakhage articulates his idea of mythopoeic cinema in his book *Metaphors on Vision*; the concept is discussed extensively by P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943–2000*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 189–230.

37. "Schedule for Brakhages" (lists itinerary for December 13–17, 1972), James Broughton folder, series I, box 9, folder 1, Brakhage Papers.

38. Although Stan was often out of town for weeks at a time during their marriage, either showing his films or commuting to the teaching job he held at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1969 to 1981, Jane confirmed to me that he was present when Hammer shot the film. Author interview with Jane (Brakhage) Wodening, July 30, 2019. Hammer also told archivist Mark Toscano, with whom she worked closely on the preservation of *Jane Brakhage*, that Stan was present during the shooting, and she deliberately chose to exclude him. Email from Mark Toscano to author, November 14, 2019.

39. Almost all of Brakhage's films are silent, though Jane's voice can be heard briefly in one of his few sound films, *The Stars Are Beautiful* (1974); as one might expect, the main voice we hear in that film is Stan's.

40. See for example Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, eds., *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009); Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Richard Grusin, ed., *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

41. Author interview with Jane (Brakhage) Wodening, July 30, 2019.

42. Author interview with Jane (Brakhage) Wodening, May 25, 2016.

43. This is actually something that Jane told me a few years ago (before I saw *Jane Brakhage*), so it clearly became one of her signature lines: "We were experimenting with birth control methods and failing miserably. [*laughs*] Each time was a failure and a loss and well, here's another comin' you know." Author interview with Jane (Brakhage) Wodening, May 25, 2016.

44. These images of Hammer in the film are still photos taken by a friend who drove the car up from where Hammer was staying in Boulder, and who assisted with sound during the shoot.

45. According to close friend Don Yannacito, this was Jane's place to sit and listen. "She often used to sit on the wood-burning stove in the kitchen, called Alcazar, and she would sit on top of it with a piece of straw in her mouth." Author interview with Don Yannacito, July 31, 2019.

46. A year before her death, Hammer gave her outtakes and still photos from the *Jane Brakhage* shoot to filmmaker Mark Street, and asked him to make his own film out of these unused materials. Street's completed film, *So Many Ideas Impossible to Do All* (2019), includes some of Hammer's extensive video footage from the 1974 shoot. In the footage that Street chose to include, Jane says she had hoped that her letter (reproduced here as figure 2) would persuade Barbara *not* to come make her film. Jane displays a sense of unease in this footage that is not present in *Jane Brakhage*, and one wonders about the two women's desires and fears about each other in this moment, which are not fully articulated in either finished film. My thanks to Mark Street for providing me access to *So Many Ideas Impossible to Do All*.

47. Juhasz, "Barbara Hammer," 78.

48. Diane Stein, *The Women's Spirituality Book* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1988), 1.

49. Caption accompanying Goddess Films brochure in *Hammer!*, 76.

50. Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: On the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 157–210; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1975): 6–18.

51. For a good history of this period see Robin Blaetz, "Introduction," in *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, ed. Robin Blaetz (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–19.

52. Constance Penley, "The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary," *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 2 (1977): 24.

53. "Stan and Jane Brakhage (and Hollis Frampton) Talking," 41–42.

54. Justin Remes, "Brakhage and the Birth of Silence," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 58, no. 2 (2019): 71–90. Granted, the focus of Remes's essay is not politics but the aesthetics of silence in cinema. But this is my point: Jane's silence has more than just formal implications. Much ink has been spilled on the ever-provocative *Window Water Baby Moving*. For an account that considers the meaning of Jane's silence in the film see Robin Blaetz, "In Search of the Mother Tongue: Childbirth and the Cinema," *Velvet Light Trap* 29 (1992): 15–20. See also Lynne Sachs, "Thoughts on Birth and Brakhage," *Camera Obscura* 64, vol. 22, no. 1 (2007): 194–96.

55. Barbara Hammer, *The Art of Dying or (Palliative Art Making in the Age of Anxiety)*, performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, October 10, 2018.

56. Stan wrote to Hammer that the film "caught the feeling of those times beautifully." Stan Brakhage to Barbara Hammer, May 18, 1985, box 17, folder 14, Brakhage Papers; author interview with Jane (Brakhage) Wodening, July 30, 2019.

57. I discuss some of this new scholarship in my introduction to this issue of *Feminist Media Histories*.

58. Celia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti, "Introduction," in *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities*, ed. Celia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2018), 13.